

The United Nations' Peace Observation Mission and The First Liberian Civil War

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INTRODUCTION

The post-Cold War era has witnessed a precipitous increase in the number of civil wars across the globe—Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. For example, by the end of 2007, 26 civil wars had occurred in various countries.¹ Significantly, these conflicts posed major challenges to global peace and security. One of the conundrums has been the flow of refugees and the resultant impact on the social and other services of the “host states.” Particularly, in the African region where most of the states are trapped by the malaise of the crises of social and economic underdevelopment, “host countries” usually lack the requisite resources to deal effectively with such an influx. Consequently, the resource deficit lacuna often generates tensions and conflicts between the locals in the “host countries,” on the one hand, and the refugees, on the other hand. In many cases, these conflicts have escalated and threatened to expand into much larger sub-regional or regional conflagrations.

Given these realities, the United Nations has increasingly assumed the role of what Yilmez (2005:14) calls “the pre-eminent third party intervener.” That is, because among third parties, the UN has a special place due to its mission of being the “grand guardian” of international peace and security (Yilmez, 2005: 14). Thus parties in conflict oftentimes expect more from the UN than any other third party that may have an incentive to exploit their issue (Yilmez, 2005: 14).

Against this background, the primary purpose of this article is to assess the dynamics of the UN's peace observation mission, and their resultant impact on the creation of propitious conditions for the resolution of the first Liberian civil war. In other words, did the UN's intervention in the conflict through the use of the peace observation variant of peacekeeping help to create a conducive atmosphere for the undertaking of the requisite peacemaking activities that were indispensable to the resolution of the war? Additionally, as a derivative, the article draws some lessons from the UN's peace observation mission, especially their utility for conflict management in Africa.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

Literature Review

Since peace observation is a form of military intervention, it is important to locate the phenomenon within the broader scholarly literature on both intervention (military), and its specific peacekeeping genre. However, given the fact that the scholarly literature on intervention and peacekeeping is voluminous, it is not possible to undertake a comprehensive literature review in this article. Instead, I will examine few of the studies that have been done on traditional military intervention, humanitarian intervention, and classical peacekeeping. Then, I will locate the peace observation model within the literature on intervention (military) and peacekeeping by mapping out its major contours.

Intervention (Military)

Drawing from the scholarly literature, there are two major genres of intervention (military): traditional intervention and "humanitarian intervention." In the case of the former, Rosenau (1969:150) defines it as "[state] behavior that is both 'convention-breaking' and 'authority-oriented' in nature. 'Convention-breaking' implies change in the normal pattern of behavior between the intervening state and the target state. The change in behavior on the part of the intervener must be intended to affect the authority structure of the target in some way." As for the latter, "humanitarian intervention," Holzgrefe(2003:18) conceptualizes it as "the threat or use of force across state borders by a state (or group of states) aimed at preventing or ending widespread and grave violations of fundamental rights of individuals other than its own citizens, without the permission of the state within whose territory force is applied."

Ramsbatham et al (2008) traced the origins of "humanitarian intervention" to former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's admonition to the international community to develop new international norms ostensibly designed to militate against the carnage, especially the wanton killing of civilians in various armed conflicts. At the core of "humanitarian intervention" is what Ramsbatham et al (2008:283) call "just intervention." Drawing from the "Just War Doctrine," "just intervention" is premised on the postulation that the international community has a moral right to intervene in a state for the purpose of either suppressing or ending violent repression and vitriolic human rights abuses.

Finnemore (2000:3) contends that "humanitarian intervention" is not some single isolated impulse nor does it consistently produce identical effects. Thus, she suggests that "humanitarian intervention" by itself never provides a satisfactory explanation of intervention. As an analytic

solution, she suggests that in order for “humanitarian intervention” to be properly analyzed, it must be placed within the broader crucible of norms and values.

Using the American intervention (traditional military) in Iraq as a case study, Kurth (2005) posits that the military intervention has contributed to the dwindling propensity of the international community to undertake “humanitarian interventions.” He observes that the American military action reflects the difficulty that attends the debate in the international community concerning the designation of a particular intervention as a “humanitarian one. Accordingly, he suggests that regional organizations now provides the best option for undertaking “humanitarian interventions” because they are not constrained by the “big power squabbles” that are commonplace in the United Nations.

Peacekeeping

There are two major models of peacekeeping: Classical and “robust or the new.” However, for our purpose, we will focus on the former. Rotberg (2000:1) postulates that the central purpose of classical peacekeeping is to “prevent people from killing other people.” Operationally, according to Rotberg (2000), the classical peacekeeping model is only appropriate to use when the warring parties have agreed to a ceasefire. This is because in the absence of the cessation of hostilities, the peacekeepers would be unable to perform their functions.

Treading on the same path, Bennett and Oliver (2002) argue that in classical peacekeeping or the military interposition model, an intervener, an external third party—country or countries, international organizations—may intervene either in an international or domestic war. The primary objective, however, is not to defeat an aggressor but to prevent fighting, act as buffer, keep order or maintain a ceasefire (Bennett and Oliver, 2002:156). Also, peacekeeping forces are generally instructed to use their weapons in self-defense (Bennett and Oliver, 2002: 156).

Ziring and Riggs (2005) draw an important distinction between the military interposition model or classical peacekeeping and peace observation. Under the military interposition of classical peacekeeping model, the peacekeepers are normally armed, while in the peace observation variant, the peacekeepers are not armed (Ziring and Riggs, 2005: 214). Accordingly, given their military posture, the principal function of the peacekeepers under the peace observation model observe is to report breaches of a ceasefire agreement.

The Peace Observation Model

Based on the nature of the UN’s intervention in the first Liberian civil war, the peace observation model provides the appropriate framework for examining the action. Drawing from the literature, the peace observation model is a specimen of both “humanitarian intervention” and classical peacekeeping. It is based on several pillars. First, a third party usually an international organization—the United Nations, regional or sub-regional—intervenes in either an international or civil conflict. Often, the observation mission is composed of military, police and civilian personnel.

Second, the intervention takes place either with the consent of one or more of the parties to the conflict. In other words, the intervention is predicated upon the willingness of one or both or all of the belligerents in the conflict, rather than an imposition by the intervener. The rationale is

that the “consent” proviso is indispensable to the garnering of the cooperation of the conflicting parties.

Third, a ceasefire is a *sine qua non* for the intervention. That is, the belligerents must cease all hostilities either temporarily or permanently prior to the deployment of the peace observation mission. This is necessary because a ceasefire is the epicenter of peace observation. In other words, the observation is only relevant, when there is a ceasefire to monitor.

Fourth, peace observation entails the undertaking of various interrelated low level military and other activities such as the monitoring of human rights abuses. The crux of the military activities is the patrolling, monitoring and supervision of a ceasefire—what Mats Berdal aptly refers to as “the passive observation of truce and ceasefire agreements” (Berdal, 1993: 43). The ultimate objective is to create an enabling environment for the undertaking of peacemaking activities, by deterring and discouraging the belligerents from violating the ceasefire agreement (Sandifer, 1967:1527).

THE FIRST LIBERIA CIVIL WAR: AN OVERVIEW

The first Liberian civil war was the outcome of the perennial and chronic failure of the Liberian state to cater to the needs of the majority of the country’s people. During the settler phase of the Liberian state (1847-1926), the indigenes representing sixteen ethnic groups and the overwhelming majority of the population, were marginalized by the small Americo-Liberian settler stock consisting of repatriates from the United States. For example, the 1847 constitution, which served as the fulcrum of the polity, denied citizenship to the members of the various indigenous ethnic groups for about one hundred years. The rationale was couched in the insidious “superior-inferior myth” that has its antecedent in slavery and its racist ideology. In other words, the settlers or the “Americo-Liberians,” who were previously subjected to the vagaries of slavery and its associated dehumanizing dynamics in the United States based on the racist mythology about their inferiority, used a variation of this ideology to discriminate against the members of Liberia’s various indigenous ethnic groups. As George Brown notes, “[the settlers had] a slave psychology” (Brown, 1941: 10). Interestingly, despite the fact that the members of the various indigenous ethnic groups were not considered citizens of Liberia, the settler state coerced them to pay taxes and to perform an assortment of duties.

During the neo-colonial phase, which commenced in 1926, with Liberia’s formal incorporation into the world capitalist system, and has continued since, class replaced ethnicity as the dominant determinant of access to the state. Under this arrangement, a class system evolved consisting of a ruling class with both local—consisting of state managers and entrepreneurs—and external wings—comprising the metropolitan-based owners of the businesses that controlled the Liberian economy—and subordinate classes consisting of the petit bourgeoisies, workers, farmers, the unemployed and the *hoi polli*. The resultant class relations were shaped by political, economic and social asymmetries between the ruling class, on the one hand, and the subordinate classes, on the other. Consequently, the bourgeoisies or the members of the ruling class cornered a disproportionate share of the dividends from the production process. For example, in 1980, the members of the ruling class comprising 4% of the population owned and controlled 60% of the national wealth (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs,

1985). When the military coup occurred on April 12, 1980, the subalterns were hopeful that the new regime of Samuel Doe would have democratically reconstituted the neo-colonial Liberian state, including the inequities in the distribution of income and wealth. Regrettably, with Doe's ascendancy to the position of the "new spokesperson" of the local wing of the ruling class, the peripheral capitalist state and its maladies, including mass social and economic deprivation remained the *regles de jeu* of the local political economy. For example, by 1985, only 35% of the population had access to health care (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, 1985). During the same period, the ruling class constituting 5% of the population accounted for 68% of the national income, and 70% of the national wealth (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, 1985).

Significantly, with the Liberian state severely weakened by the sclerosis of chronic failure, the Doe regime, despite its repressive proclivities, became vulnerable to armed insurrection. Against this background, the Charles Taylor-led National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) took advantage of the age-old legitimate grievances of the Liberian subaltern classes and launched an armed rebellion against the Doe regime. The characteristic response of the Doe regime plunged the country into a bloody civil war that led to the deaths of over 250, 000 people over a period of about eight years (Human Rights Watch, 1998).

THE UNITED NATIONS' PEACE OBSERVATION MISSION: THE NATURE AND DYNAMICS

The Mandate

Under the terms of the Cotonou Peace Accord, which it helped broker, the United Nations agreed to participate in the ECOWAS-led peacekeeping operation in Liberia. Accordingly, the Security Council authorized the establishment of a United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) under Resolution 866(1993). The Mission's tenure was initially established at seven months, but was later on extended to four years (September 1993-September 1997). The observation mission's mandate consisted of two components: military and civilian. In the case of the military dimension, the mission had both exclusive and concurrent functions. In the case of the former, the mission was charged with the responsibilities of monitoring and verifying compliance with the ceasefire by all of the warring parties—National Patriotic Front of Liberia(NPFL), ULIMO-K, ULIMO-J, the Liberia Peace Council(LPC) and the Lofa Defense Force—and the embargo on the delivery of arms and military equipment. The concurrent functions were the disarming, encampment, and demobilization of the combatants in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), the peacekeeping force of EOWAS, the sub-regional organization (United Nations Security Council, 1993).

In terms of the civilian component, the mandate included the performance of human rights functions. Specifically, the mission's civilian observers were charged with the responsibility of monitoring and investigating human rights abuses (United Nations Security Council, 1993). This included the killing, torturing and maiming of civilians, and the commission of sexual violence and related acts against women.

The Composition of the Mission

Initially, the mission comprised a total of 652 military and civilian observers (303 armed military observers), during its establishment in September 1993(United Nations Peacekeeping Department, 2008). The observers were drawn from 22 members states of the United Nations spanning the various regions of the world—4 observers from African states, 7 from Asian states, 9 from European countries, and two from South American states. Importantly, the national and geographical diversity of the observers was designed to underscore and reflect the centrality of the neutrality norm in peacekeeping operations.

However, by late 1996, the number of military observers was reduced to 92(United Nations Peacekeeping Department, 2008). As will be discussed later in the article, the substantial reduction was rationalized as a reflection of the emergent improved domestic security environment. That is, the United Nations claimed that against the backdrop of the progress that had been made in the peace process, especially as reflected in the preparations that were then underway for the holding of national election, the determination was made to set into motion the transition from the military aspects of the mission to its electoral assistance dimension.

The Activities of the Mission

Background

This section of the article examines the military and related activities of the observation mission—the monitoring of the ceasefire agreement, the monitoring of the implementation of the UN’s arms embargo against Liberia, particularly, the various warring factions, the disarmament, demobilization and encampment process that was jointly undertaken with ECOMOG, the peacekeeping force of ECOWAS, and the monitoring and investigation of human rights abuses.

The Monitoring of Compliance with the Ceasefire Agreement

One of the major responsibilities of the observation mission was to develop the appropriate modalities that would help enable it to monitor the warring factions’ compliance with the ceasefire agreement that was a cornerstone of the Cotonou Peace Accord. Accordingly, the mission used the establishment of monitoring sites as the linchpin of its observation function. By 1994, UNOMIL had established 29 monitoring sites throughout Liberia. However, the number of sites was inadequate. This problem was symptomatic of some of the broader limitations of the observer mission. First, given the small number of military observers—303 when the mission initially began, and a paltry 92 in late 1996—vis a vis the combined number of about 60,000 fighters (Berdal, 1996: 47) for the five warlordist militias—National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), ULIMO-K, ULIMO-J, the Liberian Peace Council (LPC) and the Lofa Defense Force —, it was difficult for the observer mission to engage in an effective policing of the ceasefire. The related problem was that the size of the mission also hamstrung its capacity to cover Liberia’s territorial expanse.

Interestingly, the mission sought to address these deficiencies by pursuing two strategies. The mission incorrectly assumed that it could seek and secure the cooperation of the various warring factions. Accordingly, it pursued a “confidence-building” strategy with the various warlordist militias. However, the strategy suffered from some major flaws. First, the mission did not use the

history of the unreliability of the warring factions, especially the NPFL, as a lesson. That is, the warlordist militias, particularly the NPFL, had recurrently demonstrated that they did not honor agreements as evidenced by the breakdown of one peace agreement after another—there were 13 failed accords prior to the Cotonou Agreement. Second, the mission failed to consult with ECOMOG, the lead peacekeeping force. For example, contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the Cotonou Peace Accord, UNOMIL made separate arrangements with the various warring factions in the performance of its peacekeeping function. That is, without consultation with ECOMOG, the peacekeeping force, UNOMIL proceeded to establish monitoring sites around Liberia and to deploy observers, based on the assurances received from the warring factions. The action conveyed to the warring factions that UNOMIL neither trusted nor respected ECOMOG. Thus by extension, the warring factions could follow suite. The other strategy was the rotating of the military observers around the country. However, the limited time which they spent in the various locations militated against regular and consistent monitoring.

The resultant “monitoring deficit” provided the warring factions with *carte blanche*. For example, the various warring factions continued to commit myriad violations of the Cotonou Peace Accord. For example, in mid 1994, there were several instances of fighting between and among the various warlordist militias in contravention of the ceasefire provision. In one case, ULIMO-K made a bold attempt to capture Gbarnga, the administrative headquarters of the NPFL’s so-called government. The resultant effect was a “military tug and pull” between the NPFL’s forces and those of ULIMO-K. Ultimately, ULIMO-K did not succeed in its military campaign. Also, the NPFL-Central Revolutionary Council (NPFL-CRC), a self-styled “break-away faction” from the NPFL, formed an alliance with some of the other factions with the ostensible goal of neutralizing the NPFL’s military capacity, and eventually marginalizing Charles Taylor, the militia’s leader. However, the effort did not succeed. Consequently, the NPFL undertook a series of military operations against its rivals. Clearly, the recurrent fighting and subsequent breakdown of the ceasefire agreement demonstrated that the various warlordist militias were not committed to the peace process. As Butros-Butros Ghali, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, observes, “The factions [did] not show the political will required for the implementation of the Cotonou Agreement” (Secretary-General of the United Nations, 1994: 2).

Moreover, the warring factions were emboldened to attack the observation mission based on the latter’s limited capacity. For example, in September 1994, the NPFL, the major warlordist militia, detained 43 UNOMIL military observers in violation of the Cotonou Peace Accord. Additionally, the warlordist militia seized communication equipment and trucks from the observers (Secretary-General of the United Nations, 1994: 2). The looted equipment and trucks were subsequently used to help further the militia’s war efforts. Similarly, during the same period, the NPFL fired upon a United Nations helicopter in Harper City, Maryland County, in southeastern Liberia, when efforts were being made to rescue the detained UNOMIL observers.

Significantly, the unreliability, and the lack of integrity demonstrated by the warring factions coupled with their propensity to recurrently violate the terms of the ceasefire agreement created a precarious and dangerous security situation. In turn, this undermined UNOMIL’s capacity to perform its peacekeeping function. However, characteristically, instead of working with ECOMOG in determining an effective strategy for dealing with the actions of the NPFL, the United Nations threatened to withdraw all of its observers, if the peace process was not accelerated. With

the deteriorating security situation, the UN made good on its promise. Initially, it reduced the number of monitoring sites from 29 to 21 (Secretary-General of the United Nations, 1994: 3). This was followed by the closure of all of the remaining 21 monitoring sites except the few that were in the capital city region (Secretary-General of the United Nations, 1994:3). To make matters worse, the number of military observers was reduced to 90 as “an interim measure” (Secretary-General of the United Nations, 1994:3).

Monitoring Compliance with the UN Embargo on Arms and Military Equipment

Under UNOMIL’s mandate, it was given the responsibility of monitoring compliance with the UN Security Council’s resolution that prohibited the sale and transfer of arms to all of the warring factions in the Liberian civil war. The Security Council’s resolution was anchored on the belief that the prohibition of the flow of arms and military equipment would pressure the conflicting parties to accept and comply with a peace settlement. Against this backdrop, UNOMIL was to develop and implement the requisite modalities for the monitoring. However, the limited size of the peace observation mission vis a vis the size of Liberia militated against UNOMIL’s capacity to effectively perform this crucial function. Consequently, as the UN Secretary-General lamented, “UNOMIL did not make progress in monitoring the flow of arms” (Secretary-General of the United Nations, 1994:3).

Significantly, the inability of UNOMIL to effectively monitor the embargo on arms and military equipment provided an opportunity for the various warring parties to violate the prohibition with impunity. For example, the NPFL was able to transport new supplies of arms and military equipment from neighboring Cote d’Ivoire to its bases in the southeastern sections of the country. Clearly, the uninhibited access to arms and military equipment helped to convince the NPFL that it could win an outright military victory in the civil war. Accordingly, the warlordist militia played the role of the “spoiler” in the various peace agreements that were negotiated. That is, the NPFL engaged in the perennial practice of accepting the terms of various peace accords, including signing them, but then later on reneging on them. The underlying reason for the warlordist militia’s attitude was that it used the various peace agreements as, inter alia, opportunities for creating the propitious conditions for the acquisition of new supplies of arms and military equipment. In other words, each of the failed sixteen peace accords occasioned significant reduction in fighting. In turn, this created the enabling environment in which the NPFL acquire new supplies of weapons. Then once the acquisition process was completed, the NPFL would then renounce the peace accord. Ultimately, this became cyclical. This was because the international community was willing to pander to the warlordist militia on an endless basis. Hence, a “reneging-new peace accord chain” ensued.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Encampment of the Combatants

After sixteen failed peace accords, the Abuja II Peace Agreement finally succeeded in terminating the first Liberian civil war. The major reason for the “success” was that the leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) led by the Nigerian autocrat, General Sani Abacha, decided to award Charles Taylor, the leader of the NPFL, the Liberian presidency (Interviews, 1998a). That is, hamstrung by “humanitarian fatigue,” especially the increasing human, financial and material costs of the ECOWAS peacekeeping operation, the organization made the determination that awarding Taylor the presidency would provide an effective “exit strategy” for the

organization. Accordingly, election was quickly organized for July 1997, with the new Liberian President assuming office in August 1997. Importantly, the core of the “awarding of the presidency to Taylor strategy” revolved around ensuring that the “electoral playing field was not leveled.” This would then work to Taylor’s advantage, since he had amassed tremendous amount of wealth during the civil war from the plundering and pillaging of Liberia’s natural resources. The wealth would then be used to finance his campaign, against the background that the other contending political parties lacked the financial means both singularly and collectively to compete with Taylor. The other dimension was that ECOWAS would allow Taylor to keep his military and administrative apparatus in tact even during the disarmament process (Interviews, 1998a). Having established control over about 90% of the country, this again was clearly to Taylor’s advantage.

Having crafted its “exit strategy,” ECOWAS then worked with UNOMIL in designing and implementing the modalities for the disarming and demobilization of the combatants.

The disarmament and demobilization exercise lasted for a total of 72 days (November 26, 1996 to February 7, 1997). However, the exercise was plagued by several major problems. First, all of the combatants were not disarmed: Of the estimated 60,000 fighters in the various warlordist militias (Berdal, 1996: 43), only 21, 315 (Human Rights Watch, 1998:1) were disarmed. The related problem was that the fighters that queued in the demobilization centers were not the factions’ more reliable troops (Tanny, 1998: 137).

Another problem was that the combatants that were disarmed were never encamped. Hence, the disarmament and demobilization processes became a “revolving door” through which the combatants simply turned in their weapons as a façade of their respective militias’ commitment to the peace process, but then some of the so-called “disarmed and demobilized combatants,” especially from the NPFL, returned to “battle ready posture”(Interviews, 1998a). Particularly, this posture was Taylor’s “insurance policy,” in the event that the ECOWAS “exit strategy” did not go according to plan (Interviews, 1998a). That is, Taylor kept the “command and control structures” of his militia intact, so that if he did not “win” the presidential election, he could simply re-start another war (Interviews, 1998a).

Also, as part of their post-election strategy, most of the weapons that the various warring factions turned in during the disarmament process were not serviceable (Bah, 2006: 6). That is, most of the weapons that the various warlordist militias surrendered to ECOMOG and UNOMIL were no longer useful. The reason for this action was that the various warring factions decided to keep arsenals of their best weapons as their “insurance policies.” This was in view of the fact that the various warlords, who were opposed to Taylor becoming the President of Liberia, made the determination that a Taylor presidency would put their own security in peril. Accordingly, they needed to keep caches of their best weapons in the event that Taylor became president and decided to “eliminate them.” Importantly, the fact that the various militias did not turn in all of their weapons was evidenced by ECOMOG’s discovery of caches of weapons hidden in the home of Alhaji Kromah, the leader of the ULIMO-K warlordist militia, in July 1997 (African Research Bulletin, 1997:12751). Unfortunately, no punitive measure was taken against Kromah. In fact, he was allowed to organize a political party and contest the presidential election. This “policy of appeasement” helped to undermine the disarmament process by giving the appearance of acquiescence to the warlordist militias’ strategy of “hiding weapons.”

Monitoring and Investigating Human Rights Violations

The repository of evidence shows that UNOMIL did a poor job in the critical area of monitoring and investigating human rights violations. Accordingly, the various warring factions were unrestrained in the vitriolic commission of myriad human rights violations ranging from the raping of women to the unprovoked killing of innocent civilians (Human Rights Watch, 1990; Human Rights Watch, 1991; Human Rights Watch, 1992; Human Rights Watch, 1993; Human Rights Watch, 1994; Human Rights Watch, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1996; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 1998). Several cases were instructive. Hundreds of people were massacred in Carter's Camp on the Firestone Plantations Company. Initially, UNOMIL failed to investigate the massacre of the innocent civilians. However, it subsequently took sustained domestic and external pressure to get the UN to institute an inquiry. But, after the investigation, the culprits were never brought to justice.

Similarly, scores of other civilians were killed in Paynesville City, a municipality located outside of the capital city of Monrovia, including the burning of the bodies of the victims (Human Rights Watch, 1998). Additionally, nation-wide, thousands of others were murdered throughout the interior (Human Rights Watch, 1998). In these cases as well, UNOMIL failed to investigate these atrocities that were clearly in violation of international humanitarian law. The failure of UNOMIL to perform one of the major functions under its mandate helped to create a "culture of impunity" in which the various warring factions committed myriad war crimes and crimes against humanity throughout the country without any fear of being held accountable by the United Nations. As Paul Koulen, the former Acting Representative of the United Nations Development Program in Liberia, laments, "...The most important question [was] whether the [United Nations] ha[d] done any meaningful human rights work in Liberia. I think the answer is no" (New York Times, 1995:A3).

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PEACE OBSERVATION MISSION

The United Nations did not perform well in the crucial and principal area of helping to resolve the civil war. First, the United Nations did not demonstrate significant interest in helping to resolve the war. This was reflected, among other things, in the very limited amount of resources the organization committed to the peace-making and peacekeeping dimensions of its conflict resolution activities in Liberia. For example, the United Nations Military Observer Mission had one helicopter to cover the entire country. Clearly, this was woefully inadequate to patrol the territorial expanse of the country, and to monitor the various warring factions' compliance with the military-security provisions of the Cotonou Peace Accord. In fact, this was one of the major factors that hamstrung the U.N.'s ability to effectively perform its peace compliance and ensuring the respect for human rights' roles.

Second, the United Nations spent more money on the provision of allowances, salaries and the comfort of the members of its peace observation mission than on the peace-making efforts that were designed to stop the war. For example, the monthly maintenance tap for the peace observers stood at \$5 million. A lecturer at the University of Liberia summarized the inefficient use of resources by the United Nations during the first Liberian civil war thus:

The bulk of the limited money in the trust fund was spent to buy air conditioned jeeps, and to rent luxurious hotel suites for the United Nations observers. If that money had been spent on the disarmament process, we

would have gone a long way in ending the war. Clearly, the United Nations had no interest in helping to end the war. Its token presence was designed to placate the Liberian people, and to silence the critics of its policy of neglect in Liberia (Interview, 1998b).

Third, the United Nations helped to undermine the peace process in several ways. It made a concerted effort to take control of the Liberian situation, and to be credited for the resolution of the war, even though it was the Economic Community of West African States that intervened to save Liberia, when the United Nations showed no interest in the plight of the country. For example, the United Nations' public education program in Liberia stressed the need for the various warlordist militias to trust the United Nations, by inference not to trust ECOMOG (Africa Confidential, 1993:3). This kind of petty posturing by the UN played into the hands of the Taylor-led NPFL that had an adversarial relationship with ECOMOG from the advent of its intervention in Liberia. Specifically, it lent credence to the NPFL's claim the ECOMOG was a partisan force initially designed to save the Doe regime, and subsequently to prevent the NPFL from seizing state power in Liberia. Similarly, United Nations personnel held discussions with the leaders of the various warring factions, without consultation with ECOWAS, and its peacekeeping force. In other words, there were instances in which the United Nations pursued its own peacemaking efforts, without collaborating with ECOWAS. This situation, among other things, sent mixed messages to the belligerents. This was because while ECOWAS was making efforts to induce compliance from the various warlordist militias with the numerous peace accords both through peace-making and peace-keeping, the UN was placating the warlords. Ultimately, the lack of coordination between ECOWAS and the UN helped embolden some of the warlords, especially the National Patriotic Front (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor, to become even more intransigent. That is, the various warlords became cognizant of the fact that amidst the use of divergent approaches by ECOWAS and the UN, the warlordist militias could continue to violate and flaunt the various peace accords with impunity. Another way in which the United Nations undercut ECOWAS' efforts was reflected in the fact that the personnel of the United Nations Observer Mission (the UN peacekeeping force) were deployed, and established monitoring centers around Liberia without consulting with ECOMOG, the peacekeeping force, which had ultimate responsibility for security matters under the Cotonou Peace Accord. Instead, in setting up the various monitoring centers, the United Nations' observer force elected to negotiate security arrangements with the respective warring factions, actions that were clearly outside of its authority. Again, the lack of coordination in such a critical security area between ECOWAS and the UN helped to undermine the resolve that was required on the part of the international community to pressure the various warring factions to comply with the peace accords, and to ultimately end the war.

Fourth, the performance of Trevor Gordon-Somers, the first Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General, did not help to enhance the efforts to resolve the civil war. For example, his practice of holding discussions with the various warring factions without consultation with ECOWAS and its peacekeeping force helped undercut the latter's effectiveness. Particularly, it emboldened the warring factions, especially the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, to flaunt ECOMOG's directives. Also, as was previously discussed, the linking of Mr. Somers to the

fraudulent effort to give the National Patriotic Front of Liberia greater leverage, undermined his and the United Nations' credibility, especially in the eyes of the Liberian masses.

Fifth, the United Nations' performance in the human rights area was dismal. For example, the United Nations did not take concrete steps to help bring to justice those who committed various acts of war crimes and crimes against humanity in contravention of international law. Throughout the first Liberian civil war, there was a repository of evidence that the various warring factions had committed vitriolic human rights violations.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS' INTERVENTION FOR THE RESOLUTION OF THE FIRST LIBERIAN CIVIL WAR

The UN's intervention in the first Liberian civil war had several implications for the ultimate resolution of the war. First, the UN's decision to pursue parallel peacemaking and peacekeeping activities helped to convince the warring factions, especially the NPFL, that they could ignore ECOWAS and its peacekeeping force (ECOMOG). In other words, since the core of the UN's conflict management activities was to placate the warring factions, the NPFL made the determination that the UN was better to deal with than ECOWAS. Ultimately, this helped to embolden the various warlordist militias in their refusal to comply with the terms of the various peace agreements. That is, given the UN's approach, the various warring factions were convinced that they could continuously flaunt the various peace accords because the UN was ready to capitulate to their demands. The resultant was the creation of a cyclical dynamic of the warring factions violating a peace accord; then they were placated; then the warlordist militias violated the new peace accord; then they were placated; and so on. Importantly, this helped to prolong the war, evidenced by the fact that sixteen peace accords were violated by the warring factions.

Second, the UN undermined ECOMOG's effectiveness by encouraging the warring factions to work with its peace observation mission because the latter was "neutral." By inference, the UN was making it clear to the various warlordist militias that ECOMOG was partisan; hence, its edicts should be disobeyed. The fact that the Taylor-led militia demanded and got the UN to bring peacekeeping contingents from outside of West Africa (Uganda and Tanzania) to disarm its militia attested to the fact that the "world organization" was complacent in undermining ECOMOG's neutrality.

Third, the UN's failure to help mobilize financial resources to help fund the ECOWAS-led peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts in Liberia helped to constrain the latter's efforts. For example, inadequate financial resources were at the foundation of ECOWAS' incapacity to establish a larger peacekeeping force, in view of the fact that the totality of the Liberian state had disintegrated. Hence, the peacekeeping force needed to be quite sizeable, in order to provide security around Liberia. Ultimately, this situation contributed to ECOMOG's incapacity to help prevent the warring factions from committing sundry atrocities against the civilian population, especially in the interior of Liberia.

THE LESSONS

What are the lessons that can be learned from the UN's intervention in the first Liberian civil war? First, it is counterproductive for the UN and a regional or subregional organization to pursue parallel peacemaking and peacekeeping activities in the same conflict. Such an approach, *inter alia*, leads to the waste of financial and logistical resources. The alternative is for the determination to be made regarding whether the UN or a regional or subregional organization is advantageously positioned to lead the conflict management activities in a particular civil war. Once such a decision is made the requisite financial and logistical support should be mobilized to support the "lead organization." Additionally, the other members of the international community can play a supportive role. While this lesson runs counter to those who suggest parallel intervention by the UN and regional organizations (Matrak, 2008), it is important to recognize that the use of the "parallel approach" would promote needless inter-organizational squabbles, thereby detracting from the central focus of creating propitious conditions for the resolution of a civil war.

Second and related, irrespective of whether the UN or a regional or subregional organization is playing the "lead role" in a particular civil war, it is imperative for the "lead organization" and the rest of the international community to adopt a common approach toward the conflict. This is important because it helps to minimize the problem of "sending mixed messages." As the first Liberian civil war showed, the "sending of mixed messages" by the UN and other actors in the international community can help to embolden the belligerents in flaunting ceasefire agreements and broader peace accords. This is particularly critical when a major player in a civil war sends a signal to the warring factions that it is prepared to pander to their demands, no matter how preposterous and incessant they are. The resultant cyclical effect can prolong a civil war.

Third, while accommodation and compromise are essential mainstays of the conflict management tapestry, their recurrent use in a civil war, especially against the backdrop of intransigence by a warring faction or factions, can give the latter the incentive not to cooperate in ending the war. Alternatively, the international community would have to use compellence in a civil war, especially when it is clear that a warring faction or factions is not interested in the termination of the war. In other words, at particular times in a civil war—when the various avenues of accommodation and compromise have been exhausted—the international community would need to demonstrate resolve in pressuring the various warring parties to comply with the terms of a ceasefire agreement, the contours of a larger peace agreement, and the overall trajectory for the termination of the war.

THE RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE BROADER LIBERIAN CIVIL CONFLICT

Although the first Liberian civil war officially ended in July 1997, under the aegis of the Abuja II Peace Accord, the underlying civil conflict remained unresolved. The crux of the Liberian civil conflict is that the neo-colonial state has generated multifaceted crises of underdevelopment—cultural, economic, political and social. However, various governments have failed to address these crises of underdevelopment. For example, the Taylor regime (1997-2003) failed to democratically reconstitute the neo-colonial Liberian state and to address the perennial problems, including class inequities and political repression. Clearly, this set the stage for the second Liberian civil war which commenced in 1999. Again, the war visited carnage on the country. After almost four years, the war

ended in 2003 under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Two years later, multiparty elections were held, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected the new President of Liberia.

Importantly, in order for Liberia to end the cycle of warfare and build a peaceful, democratic and prosperous country, the underlying civil conflict—the multifaceted crises of underdevelopment must be addressed. The approach would need to transcend simply the liberalization of the “political space.” Instead, it would require the use of a comprehensive approach that would seek to address the crises of underdevelopment in their totality by, among other things, addressing the enduring legacy of authoritarianism, class inequities, the exploitation by multinational corporations, and the sordid history of injustice.

CONCLUSION

The central conclusion of the article is that the UN’s intervention in the first Liberian civil war through the use of the peace observation model did not help to create the enabling conditions for the termination of the war and setting into motion the process of resolving the underlying conflict. This was principally because the UN’s peace observation activities undermined ECOWAS’ efforts to keep the “peace” by, inter alia, holding the warring parties accountable. The UN’s behavior can be attributed to the troubling “turf battle in search of the credit for success.”

Clearly, if the international community is to play a meaningful and effective role in conflict management, especially against the backdrop of the burgeoning tide of civil wars, the UN must work with sub-regional and regional organizations in an honest, frank and supportive manner. This would mean, among other things, that the focus should be on supporting the organization that is well positioned to help manage a conflict.

NOTES

ⁱ The data on the incidence of civil wars in the international system was compiled from Ekaterina Stepanova, "Trends in Armed Conflicts," SIPRI Yearbook, 2008, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-29.

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