

NATIONAL INTEREST AND NIGERIA'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS: AN ASSESSMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 has brought about a more dynamic posture in international relations and has impacted positively on the pursuit of international peace and security. Article 1(1) of the UN Charter has as mandate that it attempts to maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of peace. Also, to bring about by peaceful means and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations this might lead to a breach of peace.”¹ Subsequently, the UN has been involved in numerous peacekeeping efforts in crisis-ridden countries, thereby, bringing back hope to some of them.

Countries that are members of the UN are expected to contribute funds for the administration of all her organs. In like manner, Article 43(1) of the Charter of the UN calls on member states to “contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. Also, to undertake to make available to the Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining peace and security.”² Many member countries of the UN have answered this clarion call by contributing troops and other essentials to support peace initiatives. Since the attainment of her independence in 1960, Nigeria has remained an active contributor to UN peacekeeping operations (PKO), both by providing troops and funding. The country has also been involved in PKO in Chad and is currently involved in peace keeping Sudan under the African Unity (AU) and Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) operations in Liberia and Sierra-Leone. In fact, Nigeria is the largest African troops and civilian police contributor to UN missions and overall third in the world.³

Despite its achievements, however, any assessment of Nigeria's participation in PKO will reveal that she has, and is yet to reap the benefit of her contributions due to some problems. These include lack of an institution for

1. Article 1 (1) Charter of the UN, p. 5

2. Ibid, Pp. 28-29

3. UN DPKO Monthly Returns, February 2003 in Hassan II, Col.

the training of troops, thereby affecting peacekeepers training, the absence of an effective organization that can coordinate peacekeeping operations, prevent improper accounting and make effective use of reimbursements. The question of national interest in Nigeria's participation in PKO is, therefore, problematic. In contrast, from briefings, readings and interaction with officers, one notes that Bangladesh's participation in PKO has been a rewarding experience for both the Government and the Armed Forces.

AN OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

In appraising Nigerian Armed Forces participation in PKO from 1960 to date, this paper will assess the foreign policies of seven different regimes. This, hopefully, will bring to focus what motivated successive governments to contribute troops and funds to the peace keeping efforts of the UN and regional and sub- regional bodies.

1960-1966

Nigeria attained its independence on October 1, 1960 and joined the UN on October 7, 1960. Nigeria's foreign policy in the First Republic was pro-British and pro-Western. This is understandable since Nigeria attained its independence from Britain. Nigeria remained a loyal member of the Commonwealth throughout Balewa's regime. Its foreign policies were guided then by the usual desire of a country to protect its sovereignty and pursue a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. Therefore, its relationships with other African countries were cordial. This policy helped bring about the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963.⁴ As if to confirm its policy of assistance to African states in search of solution to their problems, Nigeria contributed troops to the Congo under the UN, that is, Operation Des Nation Unies Congo (ONUC) from 1960 to 1964. Major General JTU Ironsi was appointed the Force Commander for the operation. Nigerian contingents were also sent to Tanganyika, (now Tanzania) in 1964 under the auspices of the OAU.

Nigeria's participation in PKO at this infant stage of her independence could be attributed to its bid to make itself a force to be reckoned with in the region and internationally. However, this foreign policy initiative of Nigeria generated a lot of criticism and controversies at that time, even though it laid a solid foundation that all successive governments could build on.

4. Ibid, p. 78

1966-1975

The Belewa government was toppled in a bloody coup d'état on 15 January 1966. Subsequent counter coups led to a lot of political tension in the country which eventually climaxed in a civil war that lasted from 6 July 1967 to 13 January 1970. The civil war ended on 13 January 1970. The most remarkable achievement for Nigeria during this period was using her wealth from oil to propagate her foreign policy objectives. The government supported nationalist struggles in Africa by providing both human and material resources. It was at this period that Nigeria also laid the foundation for the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). However, Nigeria's participation in PKO during this period was scaled down due to the civil war at home and the recovery and reconstruction efforts necessitated after the war.

1975-1979

During this period, Nigeria had strained relationship with Britain and the United States of America (USA) on the issue of the independence of Angola. While Nigeria supported the Popular Movement for Liberation of Angola (MPLA), Britain and USA supported the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA). South Africa, on the other hand, supported the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) to perpetuate its white racist regime. Nigeria went on to contribute \$20,000,000.00 to the MPLA government, an amount that included military hardware. It got involved in another diplomatic struggle after the conversion of Shell-British Petroleum to African Petroleum when the government found out that the British oil company had broken the oil embargo placed on Rhodesia. The government pursued this policy to aid the liberation effort of Zimbabwe. In addition, the government hosted an anti-apartheid conference.⁵ These efforts contributed in no small measure to the liberation of some of the African countries. It was during this period that Nigeria contributed troops to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) from 1978 to 1982. All these initiatives were undertaken to promote world peace and enable the liberation of Africa from colonial rule.

1979-1983

Subsequently, the government continued with its aggressive nationalist foreign policy posture of liberating all African states that were under colonial rule or control. This effort helped Zimbabwe gain her independence on 17 April 1980. During this period, the Nigerian contingent that was deployed in Lebanon continued its assignment and came back on completion of its term in 1982.

5. Ibid. p. 84

Nigeria also participated in peace efforts in Chad undertaken under bilateral arrangements and the OAU mission carried out between 1979-1980 and 1982-1983 respectively.

1984-1993

The period from 1984 to 1993 witnessed three military regimes. The first two years of this period were led by General Buhari and the subsequent years by General Babangida. The Buhari government's foreign policy was termed "concentric circle." At the centre of the circle, the government felt, was the national economic and security interest of its people. The next circle for it was the regional states of ECOWAS and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU). The last circle that it concentrated on was the relationship with international organizations such as the Commonwealth and the UN. In contrast, the Babangida regime adopted a foreign policy that centered on economic diplomacy.

The most significant of the regime's foreign policy initiative was the PKO. This operation manifested itself in interaction with the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990 as a result of the war that broke out in Liberia in 1989. This period witnessed Nigeria's highest contribution to regional and international peace efforts. Nigerian troops were in Namibia (1989-1990), Somalia (1989-1995), and Angola (1989-1997); also, in Rwanda (1992-1994), Bosnia-Herzegovina (1991- 1995) and Liberia (1990 - to date). These efforts were pursued either under the UN or regional peace initiatives.

1993-1998

Babangida handed over power to an interim government headed by Sonekan, but this was a short-lived affair as General Abacha soon took over power. Atoyibe states that "under Abacha, Nigeria became a pariah state in the international system."⁶ This was so because of the spate of human rights abuses. These included the detention of Abiola, the winner of the annulled presidential elections, and the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Agoni eight. These developments made the European Union (EU) impose an arms embargo and suspend all funded development projects to Nigeria. In addition, it withdrew EU ambassadors. The UN too imposed sanctions and suspended Nigeria from participating in its activities.⁷ The death of Abacha on 8 June 1998 brought in General Abubakar. Although Nigerian troops remained in their locations in support of peace efforts in other nations, the foreign policy of the regime remained hostile to international communities.

6. Ibid, p. 88

7. Ibid, Pp. 88-89

Nigeria's foreign policy under Abubakar's regime was based on a three-pronged strategy and principle of reconciliation, redress and renewal.⁸ The sincerity of this regime was demonstrated when it handed over to a democratically elected government on 29 May 1999. Meanwhile, Nigerian troops continued their peace efforts, this time mainly in the sub region of Liberia and Sierra-Leone.

1999 to Date

On assumption of office on 29 May 1999, President Obasanjo ushered the country into the league of democratic governments of the world after sixteen years of military dictatorship. Under this regime, Nigeria's external relations changed from that of hostility to one of friendship. President Obasanjo's renewed efforts brought Nigeria into the fold of international organizations. The country now hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government and Ministers at Abuja. Other contributions of this administration were the transformation of OAU to AU and the formation of the New Economic Partnership for African's Development (NEPAD). In addition, the government was able to transform the ECOMOG in Sierra Leone into the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). It was at this period also that Nigeria sent its troops to Cote D'Ivoire under the ECOMOG to assist it in restoring peace. Furthermore, in pursuit of ensuring peace in the continent, the President personally went to Sao Tome to broker peace with the dissidents that had taken over power, in the process helping to reinstate that government; the same approach was applied to Guinea Bissau. Nigeria's contribution of troops and the spearheading of negotiation to help AU peace efforts in Darfur, Sudan have been unprecedented. These efforts are continuing and the assistance of the UN seems to be desirable to bring relief to the people of Darfur.

Summary

In summary, as at the end of 2004, Nigeria has participated in twenty-five of the fifty-one UNPKOs, two AU peace arrangements, three ECOMOG operations and one bilateral mission in Tanganyika (now Tanzania).⁹ The foreign policy objectives of Nigeria clearly portrays a country that is all out to promote and support peace in the world. This has been demonstrated by its numerous contributions to PKOs in many countries of the world and reconciliatory efforts undertaken to bring about peace to many nations in the region.

8. Akinterinwa, B, Nigeria's Foreign Policy Under General Abubakar, This Day, Lagos, 23 May 1999, in Gbor JWT, Maj Gen, Pp. 15-16

9. Agwai ML, Lt Gen, The UN and Regional Dimension of Peace Support Operations: Nigeria's Perspective, in Gbor JWT, Maj Gen, p. 103

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NIGERIA AND BANGLADESH

In this section, a comparative study of Nigeria and Bangladesh will be undertaken to see how national interest in relation to foreign policy has been used by the two countries for participating in UNPKO and other peace initiatives. Areas covered include the image of the countries in the international arena, the national context, and the impact on the organizations.

In the International Arena

The issues to be discussed under international arena include projection of the countries in the world forum and diplomatic relations. How the two countries have participated and projected their images in UNPKO and other regional peace efforts will also be examined.

Projection of the Country in World Forum

The UN, AU and ECOWAS are major and reputable world organizations recognized and respected by all member nations. Nigeria has been and will continue to be a strong supporter of these bodies. By the end of 2005, Nigeria had participated in twenty-seven of the fifty-one UNPKOs, two AU peace arrangements, three ECOMOG operations and one bilateral mission in Tanganyika (now Tanzania).¹⁰ Moreover 19 Nigerian Army officers were appointed Force Commanders by the UN, AU, ECOWAS and other bilateral missions. Therefore, the image of Nigeria has been projected prominently as a result of its enormous contribution and support to peace initiatives of these organizations and the world at large. This is felt particularly at the regional and sub-regional organizations and countries. A more recent development was the appointment of Major General LN Yusuf as the Commander of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) by the Liberian President Mrs Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. He was given the responsibility of restructuring and reorganizing the AFL. This is in recognition of Nigeria's contribution to bringing back peace in Liberia and the installation of an elected President.¹¹ Benefits of this nature and others should always be attached to any contribution Nigeria should make in the future.

A high-ranking military official has confirmed that Bangladesh started participating in UNPSO in 1988. At the initial stage, the country's contributions to UN PKO took mainly the supply of observers. This practice changed from 1992 as when the country started to contribute large number of contingents to UNPKO. Currently, Bangladesh has the largest number of troops (with over

10. Ibid, Op Cit.

11. Nigerian Army's Website, www.nigrianarmy.net.

ten thousand) participating in UNPKO, thereby, contributing substantially to global peace efforts.¹² A brief on Bangladesh's support to the UN states that "Bangladesh's response to most of the UN request provided a diplomatic leverage and for a poverty-stricken developing country like Bangladesh, not very many avenues are open for its exposure to the international forum. Participation of our military in UNPSO has significantly contributed in projecting our country and the Army to the world community."¹³ This has increased prospects of diplomacy as the country has written its name in gold in the area of the support of peace initiatives globally. This is truly an image that will continue to impact positively on the overall diplomatic standing of the country.

Economic Gains

The issue of economic gains has not been the main driving factor behind Nigeria's contributions to the UNPKO or that of AU and ECOWAS. That is why probably the amount of money the country makes from UN reimbursement has never been made public and seemingly too, not used judiciously for the benefit of the contributors (the military). This is further confirmed by Hassan when he states that Nigeria has realized substantial money from the UN since its first experience with it in the Congo in 1960. However, unlike Ghana, Kenya, India and other peacekeeping nations that plough back UN reimbursement into the replenishment of Contingent Owned Equipment (COE) and self-sustenance, and the modernization of their armed forces, Nigeria does not follow any of these two practices.¹⁴ Another area of great concern is the shouldering of most of the expenses of the ECOMOG operations which runs into \$10.06 billion. No wise nation in the world should invest so much with no clear benefits accruing to her.

In the area of economic gains, Bangladesh involvement in UNPKO has been termed as invaluable because of the foreign exchange earnings that have resulted. As of June 2002, the country earned \$284 million, representing reimbursement claim for COE and \$283 million as troops' allowances. Together with other payments, the country has earned over \$568 million.¹⁵ Mohammad confirms that earnings from the UN contribute substantially to the Bangladesh national budget, as income from this source stands at over \$220 million annually.¹⁶ This has assisted in raising the national economic index of the country. Also, out of these earnings the Armed Forces have been able to contribute substantially to

12. Structured Interview with Brig Gen Golam Mohammad, DMO, AHQ, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

13. Brief Bangladesh Support to the UN, p. 7

14. Hassan II, Col, Peacekeeping Policy for the Nigerian Armed Forces in the 21st Century, p. 85

15. Ibid, p. 10

16. Structured Interview with Brig Gen Mohammad.

the defence budget which has assisted in the maintenance of military equipments and procuring other basic necessities. This can be seen in the neatness of infrastructure in barracks and in the manner in which old machines are still being put to operational use.

While the two countries have earned substantial amount of foreign exchange as a result of participation in UNPKO, Nigeria's earning cannot be ascertained unlike that of Bangladesh. Also, in Nigeria, reimbursement for COE is barely used for the improvement of Armed Forces equipment, which is not the case with Bangladesh. Nigeria's case becomes more worrying as she has contributed substantially (\$10.056 billion) to support the peace initiatives of the AU and ECOWAS without any clear benefit to its national interest. It is therefore necessary for the leadership to take stock and draw up a clear policy that will make Nigeria reap the dividends of her contributions to the UN, AU and ECOWAS peace initiatives.

Image of the Military

Of the 45 years of Nigeria's independence, the military has been in power for a period of 30 years. Despite the excellent contribution the military has made to world peace and security through the UN, AU and ECOWAS, its role was never appreciated by the majority of Nigerians. This is because the substantial amount that had been spent to undertake some of these operations have not been used for the development of the country.

The Bangladesh Armed Forces, on the other hand, enjoy the overwhelming support of the people due to its heroic participation in its war of liberation. Since the Army's involvement in the peace mission after the Iran-Iraq war and her subsequent participation in the Gulf war, this image has transformed into an 'international good'. The excellent ventures of the military in support of world peace has been acclaimed and have been widely covered in the media.¹⁷ Today, soldiering is a respected profession in Bangladesh. This can be seen in the career of their officers still being appointed to political offices when the country's situation worsens and needs corrective measures.

Summary

The contribution made by the military of the two countries as a result of their participation in UNPKO, AU, ECOWAS and other bilateral operations have been praised. These efforts have truly projected and placed the two countries in the

17. Ibid, p. 7

world map. The political leaderships of these nations are the major beneficiaries of the image-building mechanism provided by their militaries. While national interest has been the main driving force of the Bangladesh government in allowing its military to participate in UNPKO, the Nigerian case is different. This assertion can be made as a result of the non-transparent reasons behind Nigeria's intervention and benefits that accrue to it at the end of operations. That is why though over \$9 billion have been spent in AU and ECOWAS operations, the country has nothing to show for its enormous contributions.

Bangladesh participation in UNPKO has brought about substantial dividends to its economy as a result of the reimbursements and the allowances paid to troops. This is well appreciated by all and sundry. That is not the case with Nigeria as reimbursements from the UN are not clearly accounted for and are not being used judiciously to improve the training and equipments of its military. Bangladesh military's image, in contrast, has been built and the armed forces are well-respected by the people. Nigerian situation is one where the people see the military as a wasteful organization that has spent over \$9 billion, lost hundreds of lives and equipment with no returns while a majority of them languish in poverty.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING NIGERIA'S FUTURE PARTICIPATION IN PEACEKEEPING/SUPPORT OPERATIONS

Nigeria has come a very long way in her participation in the UN, AU and ECOWAS peace support operations and must not be contented with the current benefits that it enjoys. There are still numerous benefits the country is yet to grasp. This can only be possible if the following strategies are put into place:

1. A policy document on peace support operations must be implemented like the ones in Bangladesh, United State of America (USA), Ghana, Pakistan and India. With this document and with the political will of policy implementers, the military will be adequately equipped, and administrative and logistics shortcomings noted will be taken care of. When this is done, the benefits of Nigeria's participation in global peace and security efforts will be realized.
2. Training is the bedrock of efficiency and future policy on training must also form a major part of the document. The completion of the Peacekeeping Wing at Infantry Corps Center and School (ICCS) is imperative together with the course programme at Armed Forces Command and Staff College (AFCSC) for tactical and operational levels. The National War College (NWC) training programme should continue with its strategic mission. It is necessary to provide essential training aids in order to make

these training programmes effective for benefit of future peacekeepers in the country and the continent.

3. Reimbursed UN funds should be utilized to fully equip units, since this will bring in more funds and help equip the Armed Forces as is being done in Bangladesh. Where these funds are not readily available, government should support funding, even if it is going to be a loan, since the UN will surely reimburse the country.

FINDINGS

No doubt, Nigeria has been and will remain a major player in global peace and security missions internationally, regionally and in the sub-region. Her contributions to the UN, AU and ECOWAS peace support operations have been enormous and well appreciated by these organizations and benefiting countries. The study has confirmed that funds contribution to the Chad, Liberia and Sierra Leone's operations amounted to over \$10 billion. Also, the operations' deaths are in hundreds; there are, however no actual records to confirm the exact figure.

Nigeria's support to the UNPKO is meeting her obligation as a member of the organization. This has helped in improving the image of the country in the international arena. Its interventions in the continent's areas have prevented the destruction of lives and properties in affected countries. In addition, it has been able to stop or minimize spillover effects of these situations into her territory. Playing the big brother role in the continent has been applauded but the rewards in real terms cannot be easily quantified. The study has tried to seek answers to the reasons why Nigeria has not fully reaped the dividends of her contributions to global peace and security.

In international diplomacy, the fact remains that there are no permanent friends and self interest. The study confirms that Nigeria is yet to fully apply this principle of international diplomacy to her enormous contributions to world peace and security. There is therefore, the need for a change of attitude by relevant organizations in the country so that Nigeria can reap the benefits of her participation in UN, AU and ECOWAS peace support operations.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the national interest of Nigeria in relation to her participation in peace support operations of the UN, AU and ECOWAS. It has confirmed that the country has been and will continue to be a major contributor to peace initiatives in the world, the region and the sub-region. From 1960 to date, Nigeria has participated in thirty-one peace support operations of the UN,

AU and ECOWAS with the approval of the regimes that were in power. In addition, it has committed much of its resources in terms of funds and human lives. Over \$10 billion has been spent to support the Chad, Liberia and Sierra Leone operations. Many lives have been lost.

A comparative study of Nigeria and Bangladesh's national interest in relation to their contribution to UNPSO was also undertaken. The results confirmed some similarities in the projection of the image of the countries to the international community and in enhancing their diplomatic relationship with other nations. Areas of differences are in the economic gains where Bangladesh clearly has benefited; and transport records kept in the country confirm this assertion. Nigeria instead, has contributed over \$10 billion to support the AU and ECOWAS PSO. The accounted records of what the country has got as reimbursement have not been made available, even for documentation purposes. Another area of concern is the image of the military at home. Bangladesh's military is highly respected but this is absolutely not the case of Nigeria due to its long venturing into governance. In addition, while Bangladesh's military administers its troops very well, for example in the areas of timely payment of allowances and adhering to the schedule rotation of troops, this is not the case with Nigeria's military. On the whole, Bangladesh appears to be well-organized and focused, hence, benefiting it because of the contributions from the UN PSO. Nigeria could learn about some of the problem areas in its operations from Bangladesh's records.

An assessment of Nigeria's participation in PSO confirm that the country has demonstrated great commitment to the realization of peace and security internationally, continentally and regionally. She is, however, yet to reap fully the dividends of these enormous contributions. It is imperative that the Ministry of Defense (MOD), and the Defense Headquarters (DHQ) of Nigeria develop a policy document that will guide the Executive and the National Assembly in taking decisions in the future about Nigeria's participation in subsequent PSOs either under the UN, AU, ECOWAS or bilateral arrangements.

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Interview

25. Brig Gen Golam Mohammad, Director of Military Operations, Army Headquarters, Dhaka.

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