

When Interventions Flounder II: An Introductory Note on the Socio-Economic Consequences of Foreign Intervention in Liberia

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Abstract

Foreign interventions in African States most recently are laced with lack of consent. The ‘international community’ arguably intervened in troubled states once it could reasonably establish that the rights of citizens have been violated or threats to it imminent. Embattled regimes are most often removed in preference for ‘international community’s’ backed opposition groups. The aftermaths of such interventions negatively destroy any foreseeable roadmap for sustainable peace in intervened states and consequently the host region. Using the realist theory of international politics, the study argued that foreign intervention in Liberia failed to sustain peace in the country in 1997 and 2003 because most states involved pursued their national interests. Based on a survey research design, the study shows the linkage between the pursuit of national interest and failed intervention in Liberia. It negatives the outcome of foreign intervention in Liberia identifying socio-economic consequences of foreign intervention in Liberia with the conclusion that foreign intervention in Liberia has its own cost. It recommends the construction of local post-intervention peace-building regime to create enduring peace in war ravaged states.

I. INTRODUCTION

Liberia was greatly helped by international friends and regional allies to overcome its devastating crisis from 1989-2003. In fact, most Liberians admitted the country could not have fixed the problem timeously the way it did but for foreign supports and international involvements in the crisis. Joseph Pratt, a valuable interviewee, put foreign assistance in resolving the Liberian conflict in range given his assessment of how some countries role proved helpful and how other did not. Whatever foreign supports Liberia got during the war drew on her relations with the intervening states. The states too each weighed their actions against their national interests before committing themselves.

Thus, it was the rule within the realist scope to understand why some close allies of Liberia including the United States kept their distance but would continue to give unofficial backings to some warring parties to the crisis. Even among states committed to intervention in Liberia, there were conflicting interests from rule of engagement; timeline of operation, groups with whom sympathy lied and the ECOMOG command's leadership (Vogt, 1992).

Part of the reasons adduced for international involvement in the crisis was skewed as its possible sub-regional and global consequences. Though, others have argued that the crisis caught the attention of the international community because of the potential effect of the crisis towards destabilizing the entire sub-region and even beyond going by the negative effect it was already exerting on their immediate neighbours (Nwolise, 1992).

Looking back on the kind of relations Liberia had with selected states involved and the influence of such relations on the crisis, the study has shown how such support helped or worsened the course of resolving the crisis particularly its socioeconomic impacts on Liberia and the entire West African sub-region. The reasons for international involvement have continued to multiply but the effects are twice the latter. Most African conflicts have not been adequately curbed by foreign intervention than the way it facilitated the spread and ignited similar conflicts in neighbouring states in and outside the sub-region. Ekwe-Ekwe (1990, p.133) described neighbours to a crisis state as contiguous states; not only are they seen as external parties in intervention but also as determinants of the extent of intervention in civil wars.

The issue of neutrality on the part of most intervening troops and the aloofness of others greatly impaired the peace building process such that trust which is a vital ingredient of any peace building efforts was often shattered. The West African sub-region not only contributed but suffered accruable conflict negativities. Akpuru-Aja (2014, pp. 330-331), identified the losses on the part of an intervening state (Nigeria in particular) to include dead soldiers brought home and buried without honours and no adequate care for the injured; a debatable estimated cost of operation on Nigeria to the tune of US\$10billion; poor welfare scheme for soldiers on peacekeeping mission which dealt a blow to their morale and professionalism...each personnel was paid as low as US\$150 per month as monthly take home, to mention a few.

II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

i) REALIST THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

II. SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

The social impacts of foreign intervention in Liberia were the changes in human relations as a result of conflict intervention by foreign powers. This embraces the social cost of war in Liberia such as loss of life and damage to critical infrastructure, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, as well as family, women and children.

i. LOSS OF LIVES AND PROPERTY

Soldiers and military installations by the rules of engagement should be the primary targets of conflict parties not civilians whom at worst are “collateral damages”. The Liberian casualty experience was different. Rather than protect civilians, they were used to shield, settle, facilitate and accelerate the process of peace in Liberia. An account of the Liberian peace process stated how “... violence in Monrovia were carried out in various forms primarily through either indiscriminate shelling of the city, mostly by the rebels, or targeted and random violence by gangs and militia in the streets of the city” (Hayner 2007, p.13). The targeted attacks were particularly severe in government-controlled areas, by militia aligned with the Government. It was also reported that extensive looting took place in most rebel-controlled areas. A human rights organization reported 15-20 people dying in Monrovia each day, during the worst of shelling (Hayner 2007, p.13).

The United Nations Secretary-General Annan (1999, p.6) also noted that the impact of wars on civilians worsened because they were internal in nature... and as the most frequent type of armed conflict...it typically takes a heavier toll on civilians than inter-state wars since combatants increasingly make targeted civilians a strategic objective. The TRC Report (2009, p.121) indicts the NPFL militias for going on a killing spree even in the presence of foreign peacekeepers. The Report maintains that, “The NPFL militias, mostly ill-trained and trigger happy, were part of a band of a force less inclined to respecting the values of human rights but more inclined to blaming every individual not a member of their fighting forces for their malady”. The NPFL deployed not less than 180 “special forces” into its mission and each special force deployed, had under his command a personal army of not less than 200 men who were unleashed on the civilian population. With limited supplies, they lived off the labour and sweat of civilians in an unequal relationship that saw the population massively victimized, killed and properties looted; entire villages and towns were burnt and other times abduction, and many times forcefully displaced. Massacres, rape, torture, children recruitment into their rank were pervasive as ethnic cleansing and ethnic profiling became standard practice. This was the case at each of the hundreds of checkpoints of the NPFL (TRC 2009, p.121).

The Liberian civil war would best be remembered for the several thousands of lives destroyed which remained one of the sordid points of the country’s checkered history; the carnage and sheer brutality that characterized the war. The horror of the Liberian civil war remained abhorrent to the sensibilities of all and intolerable as collateral or inevitable consequences of war. Many Liberians and Africans generally believed this happened because, an ally with a war-chest –the United States on account of her interests –failed to intervene and by so doing allowed insurgents to develop into warlords. In the end, what comes of it is aptly summarized in Stephens Ellis summation that: “the

Liberian conflict topped and surpassed all other wars in form and character, in intensity, in depravity, in savagery, in barbarism and in horror” (TRC Report 2009, p. 136).

Human fatality and casualty accompany foreign intervention. Civilians are killed by peacekeepers from poor target to strategic plan to weaken the support base of government and rebels. Peacekeepers are also prone danger in course of operation; Nigerian peacekeepers lost their lives in Liberia (Akpuru-Aja, 2014). ECOMOG initial mandate to keep the peace exposed troops to fatality as they were not mandated to shoot when attacked.

ii. PROLIFERATIONS OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALWS)

This was a social impact of foreign intervention in Liberia. SALWs originated outside Africa. Somehow, the denuclearization of the World after the Cold War saw to the rise and use of SALWs in Africa but the Liberian crisis provided easy access to such weapons. Hired mercenaries did not participate in disarmaments and demobilization but were trigger happy as they journeyed back to their countries with arms and ammunition as war trophies and souvenirs. As Oche (2000, p.79) argued, “the arms supply lines that were established during the Cold War era...continued to exist which as a consequence made possible the availability of small arms which resulted in ever more vicious and deadly conflicts. The ECOMOG and UNMIL at different phases of intervention in Liberia disarmed and demobilized combatants with caches of arms recovered. The ECOMOG phase of disarmament based on the Abuja Accord (1996) began November 22, 1996 and (grace period) ended February 7, 1997 (Dennis 1999, p.8). The weapons recovered from the disarmament process as stipulated in the Abuja Accord was marked for destruction. The Liberian Government, ECOWAS and UN Peacekeepers agreed that the destruction of weapons on land on the slated date of July 26, 1999 would enhance the condition of peace in Liberia. The reasons for destruction include: “It will formally mark the end of ECOWAS and UN Peacekeeping mission in Liberia; to finally lay to rest the suspicions and fears built around the continued presence of the weapons in the country; to fully assure all former warring factions and civil society groups that all the weapons and other warlike materials collected at the end of the disarmament exercise on February 7, 1997 have been completely destroyed under international supervision; Certified the GOL that it has rid itself of all arms and ammunition collected during the civil war; and to ensure confidence and peace building in the country long after ECOWAS and UN terminate the peace keeping role in Liberia (Dennis 1999, p.11).

iii. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) AND REFUGEES

One early social cost of the civil war in Liberia was the mass movement of people from one place to another. This exodus produced two categories of vulnerable people; internally displaced persons and refugees. IDPs were trapped within the Liberian territory out of their homes which were no longer safe as the war raged. The refugees were Liberians who fled to neighbouring countries including Cote d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria. They lived in camps designated as refugee camps and lived on aid and humanitarian supplies sent by Non-governmental organization through the coordination of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Ajibewa (1997, p.42) advanced the following factors as possible causes of the refugee crisis in the West African sub-region: "...breakdown of law and order, the total collapse of discipline among the soldiers, the increasing level of social and economic hardship and the escalating insecurity of life and property". The surging and influx of refugees before the first phase of intervention in Liberia by ECOMOG were huge. Figures from UNHCR as at February 1990 confirmed that about 300,000 Liberian refugees were already in Guinea, 120,000 in Cote d'Ivoire, 80,000 in Sierra Leone and 141,000 in Nigeria (Ajibewa 1997, p.42). ECOMOG presence did not stop the influx of Liberians into other countries. The TRC Report (2009, p.130) held that "the burden carried by states in hosting up to 700,000 refugees from Liberia became apparent when thousands of Liberians seeking refuge in April and May 2003, on a poorly equipped vessel, the 'Bulk Challenge' remained trapped on high seas as no West African country would accept the vessel to dock in their waters" until the intervention of the US Government leading to the eventual acceptance by Ghana.

On the plight of IDPs, ECOMOG Headquarters later housed them. Insecurity was on the rise and safe areas were on the decrease. Records show that on average, ECOMOG base was a source of refuge for another 20,000 civilians who also sought refuge in offices at Mamba Point in Monrovia, relief warehouses, and hospitals; after being rendered homeless, diseased, lost properties and suffered hunger (TRC Report 2009, p. 130). IDP camps were not safe areas in Liberia. The capture of President Doe at the ECOMOG Headquarters tells the tale of insecurity and inadequacies of foreign intervention in Liberia.

The Liberian refugees got better treatment once they crossed the Liberian border into their country of refuge. In Cote d'Ivoire for instance, Tonia King, Son-in-law of former President Tolbert himself a refugee provided sanctuary in that country for Liberian refugees who were dissidents (TRC Report 2009, p.117). The TRC Report stated that due to AFL counterinsurgency operation which targeted Manos and Gios in Nimba County, killing citizens en masse and burning of villages, over 160,000 civilians fled to Guinea and Ivory Coast between January and May 1990 (TRC Report 2009, p. 119).

The plight of IDPs was just also serious as refugees yet they were least considered for humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation needs. Women and children were more in number in IDPs camps; they bore the brunt of neglect and abuse. As TRC witnesses testified, the camps were used as a place for forceful recruitment of children into armed militias or warring factions. Reports of sexual exploitation by aid workers who demand sex for food and other humanitarian assistance were not infrequent (TRC Report 2009, pp. 221-222).

iv. FAMILY, WOMEN AND CHILDREN

In all the hostilities that characterized the Liberian civil wars, the suffering and persecution of the local population was always merciless. Economic hardship, rising unemployment and inflation, family break up or displacement imposed further strains on familial relationships having devastating impact on children, young girls and women (TRC Report 2009, p.135). Education opportunities were lost or diminished as school closure meant loss of fees paid.

Throughout the conflict period, the traditional roles of women shift remarkable to being major-bread winners. Recall that in conflict situation, men were natural targets of advancing, occupying or resisting arm factions and, were therefore in hiding for the most part of the crisis. The absence of menfolk redefined social roles in crisis Liberia. Women performed household chores, traded and sold consumable items across factional lines, provided food, secure shelter, medical needs and clothing for the family. Women also maintained farm, bore children and cook for the family in the midst of war, violence and massive atrocities against the unsuspecting general population. They were also caught up in intractable state of victimization that dehumanized them and sought to deprive them of their womanhood in which case oftentimes the perpetrators succeeded (Pratt 12:01:2019).

Furthermore, women suffered abduction. They were accused of being enemy spies on espionage missions because they dare venture out when no one dared to; for which they were raped, and compelled to be house or bush wives for armed men who were accused of supporting opposing 'rebels' from the opposing faction. They were also accused of being enemies for cooking for and serving the 'enemy' while in captivity as servants, slaves and 'infidels' or 'kaffli' (Willet 12:01:2018). Women were rejected by their own when liberated from captivity and returned home; husbands, children and relatives were condescending and suspicious; lacking in self-actualization and low morale after years of abuse and a sense of inferiority, begging and prostitution becoming inconvenient realities. War produced the kind of Liberians which "...moral was not a strong point" (Akpuru-Aja 2014, p.331). A number of Nigerian personnel took advantage to unprofessionally marry foreign women, besides reproducing many children, it was against professional conduct in the Armed Forces to marry foreign women, a development the Nigerian Army Headquarters frowned at and in some quarters insisted that those foreign women be sent back (Monsigia 12:08:18). Children begotten from illicit relationship – the "rebel baby", "ECOMOG children", "OTC children", "bastards", "orphans", "child without back or front" – were ostracized victims of stereotyping, stigma and a perfect target for recruitment into the marauding armed gangs (TRC Report 2009, p.136).

'Child soldiers' syndrome also characterized the Liberian crisis. There were reports of child-soldiers recruited as combatants into various warring camps. This was common practice across various theatres of conflict in Africa where children were used to augment the fighting forces in warring groups (Oche in NJIA 2000, p.80). Charles Taylor, one of the rebel leaders accused of recruiting child-soldiers admitted there could have been cases of underage persons involved in the war as combatants but most of them were strayed minors who entered the war after losing parents...they were not recruited to fight as most child soldiers followed their combatant brothers and assisted in carrying their supplies and also rendered personal duties (Charles Taylor, Channels TV 2006). The National Museum in Monrovia exposed in greater detail, the level of involvement of child soldiery in the Liberian conflicts. There are also documentaries which captured child-soldiers in actions during the crisis (See Photos).

The phenomenon of "child-soldiery" featured in many African crisis: Angolan, Somali, Liberian, (the Democratic Republic) Congolese, and the Sierra Leonean crises recruited under aged children as combatants. Apart from young boys being used as soldiers, young girls were also held, some against their will, as bush wives and abused sexually (TRC Report 2009, p. 122). One social effect

of the crisis was that it depleted family income along with food stock. More families in course of the war were separated, blood ties broken and young girls became targets of armed fighters. Some young girls with no clear sources of survival got “involved” with fighters (in some cases became combatants) and prostitutions became a way of life till the end of the conflict (TRC Report 2009, p.122).

III. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

Economic consequences of the Liberian crisis were untold. The duration of the crisis recorded huge economic deficit for the country as resources were not only diverted to fund war but territories rich in natural resources fell into the hands of warring camps. For instance, Firestone Rubber came under Greater Liberia paying rent to the NPFL which further emboldened the latter and encouraged its quest to conquer the rest of the country during the first of the crisis (1989-1997). Of interest was the fact that as the war raged, Charles Taylor’s plan was to exploit Liberia’s natural resources haven been introduced to French and European interests. Such illicit dealings in timber, rubber, gold and diamonds, including diamonds from neighbouring Sierra Leone, proved crucial to sustaining Taylor’s war efforts and prolonging the conflict (TRC Report 2009, pp. 122-123). Other warlords had their areas of concern. The INPFL led by Prince Yomie Johnson controlled major source of transportation and communication. Since the Free Port of Monrovia – fell under Prince Yomie Johnson’s INPFL- the camp has controlled imports so that the GOL led by President Doe swapped foods for ammunitions with them. The Government under Doe resorted to pocketing state resources too. Aid money was lost perpetually to corrupt officials under Doe, so that aid did not get to citizens for whom it was intended. Even Doe openly professed that he did not trust his own people. Though President Doe sought foreign technical expertise from the US, he did not cooperate with US accounting experts sent to assist so that under the Brook’s Amendment, aid to Liberia was suspended and later resumed but never up to pre-1985 level (Kimble 1990, p. 1; TRC Report 2009, p. 116). In one breath, the TRC Report summarized, “In Samuel Doe’s Liberia, the national treasury was transformed into a personal vault to be plundered by Doe and his accolades” (TRC Report 2009, p. 117). Even the US Congress took notice of the Government financial recklessness and feigned at it: “In the US Congress, the House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations was particularly concerned. They felt that the Doe Government had a history of financial mismanagement and corruption as well as abuse of human, political and civil rights. They believed the project would indicate a close relationship with a government which did not share US value. They further believed that the project purposes were too optimistic and that the experts would have little chance of changing Liberian institutions or ways of doing business. The administration defended its proposal aggressively and in the end the Subcommittee reluctantly went along. They did, however, placed a condition on their approval which was that funding would only be for one year after which the project would have to be reviewed by them again” (Kimble 1990, p. 4).

The Liberian crisis also destroyed critical infrastructure in Liberia. The psychology of most Liberians was to do whatever it takes to unseat the Government while the AFL and pro-Government militias were doing all they could to bring the situation under control. One statement credited to Madam Ellen Johnson Sir-leaf was quite disappointing all in a bid to unseat President Doe who had been ducked in the Executive Mansion for days. Madam Sir-leaf publicly admonished the NPFL (in face of a stalemate) to end the war and sufferings, raise the mansion

down that will proverbially be rebuilt in three days (TRC Report 2009, p. 121). The Executive Mansion was the seat of power in Liberia and as symbolic as it was, a frontrunner and an eventual two terms President of Liberia could so publicly called for its destruction only to get rid of Doe?

The pillaging of Liberia's resources was equally internationalized. Warlords exchanged Liberia's resources with foreign partners who served as proxies for arms procurement. The practice of lending support to insurgent groups against legitimate governments encouraged shadowy economy and illicit trades in certain solid minerals like gold and diamonds; the primary source of funding for small arms and light weapons (SALWs) (Pugh and Cooper, 2004). Individual peacekeepers were equally involved and so bolstered the shadow war economy of Liberia. Akpuru-Aja (2014, p.331) reported how loss of professional sense of duty made some Nigerian military personnel involved in illegal mining of diamond and illicit trading activities.

Overall, a vicious cycle of debasement, violence, crime against human rights violations, economic sabotage continued beneath different phases of foreign intervention in Liberia without notice, suspects or acknowledgment and accountability until the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission whose findings exposed some of the above socio-political and economic inanities of the conflict and intervention in Liberia.

IV. CONCLUSION

The facts are there to show that foreign intervention or humanitarian intervention conceived as peace enforcement mechanism has its attendant costs. Socio-economically, the effects of foreign intervention in Liberia were visible because of the realist perception that states unrepentantly pursue their national interests. And though, foreign intervention secures ceasefire and armistice, it leaves the process half-way. Oftentimes, foreign intervention does not end in peace. Where it appeared peace will be achieved in the wake of a ceasefire or armistice, a wearied intervener quickly exiting the process leaves the fragile national government to deal with it. That was the case in 1997 where ECOMOG had supervised a 'special election' in Liberia which produced Mr. Charles Taylor as president. By 1999, Taylor and the ECOMOG commanders were already debating where the authority of each other ends. In 2000, when the LURD emerged, ECOMOG presence in Liberia if it existed at all was rarely felt.

Thus, an abandoned peace-building project has produced socio-economically, loss of lives and property, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, upsurge of shadow economies, surging displacement of internally displaced persons and refugees, untold human suffering which mainly affected families, women and children which as well internationalized the local conflict and birthed sub-regional peace initiatives like ECOMOG, ECOMIL and UNMIL in Africa. Though the latter being a plus to Liberia's experience with foreign intervention, however, does not take wholly the credit for the enduring peace in the country which is more of construction than enforcement. War ravaged states should thus look beyond foreign intervention and construct post-intervention peace-building regimes where domestic parties to the crisis resolve the causes of conflict by themselves.

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