A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF NIGERIA'S PEACEKEEPING MISSION IN LIBERIA AND THE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

Nigeria presented itself, on the one hand, as a regional stabilizer in Africa dedicated to humanitarian intervention and Pan-African solidarity. On the other hand, the mission revealed shortcomings in Nigeria's foreign policy implementation, specifically its incapacity to convert military victories into long-term opportunities. The intervention also highlighted Nigeria's missed opportunities to strengthen regional multilateralism, as ECOMOG's reliance on Nigeria exposed the vulnerability of West African collective security. Resulting from this, the study conducts a historiography of Nigeria's peacekeeping efforts in Liberia, evaluating both the achievements and the opportunities lost in the process. The study was anchored on the theory of Manifest Destiny and adopted qualitative research design. The study revealed the that Nigeria's intervention in Liberia was critical in preventing state collapse and the following recommendations were advanced: that Nigeria align future peacekeeping engagements with clearly defined economic and strategic interests, ensuring that national sacrifices yield tangible benefits. Specifically, post-conflict reconstruction contracts should prioritise Nigerian companies for key roles as compensation for losses incurred during interventions. Additionally, Nigeria should establish structured frameworks to formally link its international peacekeeping contributions to measurable domestic development gains and ensure these frameworks are consistently monitored and reviewed for effectiveness.

Keywords: ECOMOG, Liberia, Manifest Destiny, Peacekeeping and Reconstruction.

Introduction

Amidst severe political, social, and humanitarian crises, the Liberian conflict continues to rank among the most catastrophic civil wars in West Africa (Williams, 2002). The war rapidly deteriorated into widespread violence, ethnic killings, and the breakdown of state institutions, starting in December 1989 with an uprising against President Samuel Doe spearheaded by Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Power struggles in the region, rival warlords, and access to natural resources like diamonds and

timber all contributed to the lengthy conflict. After starting as a rebellion, it quickly descended into a full-scale humanitarian crisis that left millions of people displaced and hundreds of thousands dead throughout West Africa (Gilbert, 2014). It is estimated that over 250,000 were killed in this conflict, amounting to around 8% of the population at the time (Bondo, 2021). These deaths and their far-reaching effects on the Liberian state prompted Nigeria to intervene in the conflict. Nigeria played a humanitarian and strategic role in Liberia's peacekeeping efforts. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and a regional power, led the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) when it was established in 1990 in an effort to show leadership in West Africa. Because it supplied the largest troop contingent, substantial financial support, and continued operations even when other ECOWAS members faltered in their commitment, Nigeria played a crucial role in resolving the conflict in Liberia (Oshewolo, Azeez, Adesanya, Oladipo, Olaleye & Ade-Ibijola, 2024).

Although Nigeria's intervention saved Liberia from complete collapse, the history of its peacekeeping mission highlights significant lost chances. Nigeria faced challenges with coordination, neutrality, and long-term political settlement despite its military victories. Claims of human rights violations by ECOMOG troops, inadequate logistical support, and weak international support damaged the credibility of the mission. Furthermore, the inability to enforce long-lasting peace agreements and fully disarm warring factions prolonged instability and sparked doubts about the efficacy of Nigeria's leadership (Raddatz, 2016). Nigeria also suffered significant financial and human losses during this time, losing troops and spending billions of dollars on what seemed like an endless war. Both political scientists and historians have argued that Nigeria's involvement in Liberia demonstrated its internal conflicts and its desire to establish regional dominance. Nigeria presented itself, on the one hand, as a regional stabiliser dedicated to humanitarian intervention and Pan-African solidarity. Conversely, the mission revealed shortcomings in Nigeria's foreign policy implementation, specifically its incapacity to convert military victories into long-term political solutions (Mohammadi, 2024). The intervention also highlighted Nigeria's missed opportunities to strengthen regional multilateralism, as ECOMOG's reliance on Nigeria exposed the vulnerability of West African collective security. In light of this, the study conducts a historiography of Nigeria's peacekeeping efforts in Liberia, evaluating both the achievements and the opportunities lost in the process.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

This study used a qualitative research design, drawing on textbooks, academic journals, completed research projects, and unpublished materials. To offer a more comprehensive perspective on the topic, a significant portion of the material was also drawn from reputable online journals. The gathered data were thoroughly analysed and interpreted before being used in their raw form. Both historical and descriptive methods were used in the analysis, allowing for the clear description of patterns, the tracing of historical events, and an explanation of their results. This method ensured the results were clear and well-supported.

Literature Review

Conflict

The term conflict is derived etymologically from the Latin verb confligere (to clash, engage in a fight). It refers to a confrontation between individuals or a group resulting from opposing or incompatible ends or means (Adeniji & Agaba, 2011; Halidu & Abdullahi,

2021). Therefore, conflict occurs when human relations exist. This occurs because man is naturally selfish and will go to any length to achieve what he deems fit for his survival. Furthermore, in the view of Ray & Esteban (2017), conflict occurs across economically similar, rather than different groups. He further posited that conflict is over resources that are explicitly and directly contested: a limited pool of jobs (e.g., natives versus immigrants), the same customers (business rivalries across organised groups), or scarce land. This view of conflict is apt, but it fails to capture how a power struggle fuels conflict. Power struggles are conflicts that arise from competing interests, differing priorities, or leadership dynamics (Kawarsky, 2025). Power struggles that lead to conflict are often politically related. That is why Grzegorzek (2025) argues that power is central to all human interactions, from the personal to the political. Nonetheless, a power struggle can escalate into a full-blown conflict if not properly managed.

Peacekeeping Operations

The United Nations and other regional organisations champion peacekeeping operations. The initiative is made to quell conflict through the use of third-party countries. It is a concept that considerably reduces the global future risk of conflict (Hegre, Hultman, & Nygård, 2019). The core function of peacekeeping operations is thus conflict management, focusing on the classic security dilemma: peacekeeping operations increase the amount of information the parties have about each other's preferences and behaviour (Heldt & Wallensteen, 2004). There cannot be a peacekeeping operation without a prior conflict situation. Peacekeeping operations are undertaken to address conflict. The concept of peacekeeping operations cannot be examined in isolation, as it involves the specific missions it performs. These missions include: preventive deployment to conflict zones; verifying ceasefire agreements, safe areas, and troop withdrawals; disarming and demobilising combatants; clearing mines; and providing security for humanitarian aid and peacebuilding efforts (Malek**, 2013**).

Furthermore, peacekeeping has unique strengths, including legitimacy, burden sharing, and an ability to deploy and sustain troops and police from around the globe, integrating them with civilian peacekeepers to advance multi-dimensional mandates (United Nations, 2025). The United Nations continued by arguing that peacekeeping operations should be guided by three principles: the consent of the parties; impartiality; and the Non-Use of force except in self-defence and in defence of the mandate. In other words, before peacekeeping operations should occur, the participatory countries must seek the consent and approval of the conflicting sides as mediators, that the peacekeeping force must be neutral by not supporting any of the conflicting sides; that in peacekeeping operations, the participatory countries should not engage directly in the conflict except when the lives of the peacekeepers are endangered or the cause of the mission is in jeopardy.

Nigeria's Involvement in Peace-keeping Operations

Nigeria's involvement in peacekeeping operations began with its contributions to the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) in 1960, its first international deployment (Adedara & Adetifa, 2022). Since the country's independence, Nigeria has assumed leadership in regional interventions, most notably providing the core of ECOMOG in Liberia (1990–1997) and Sierra Leone (1997–1999), shaping West African peacebuilding (Adebajo, 2002). From 1960 to the present, Nigeria has participated in some forty-one UN, AU, and ECOWAS missions and reportedly deployed over 200,000 troops, police, and

civilians, reflecting a sustained and costly commitment (Liman, 2025). Through peacekeeping operations, Nigeria has been credited with stabilising fragile states, while warning of overstretch, logistical strain, and political motivations that have complicated operations (Obi, 2008). Financially, Nigeria has spent heavily on peacekeeping operations. In the Liberian conflict alone, President Olusegun Obasanjo reported that Nigeria spent, indicating that, in the 1990s alone, it spent US$ 13 billion over 12 years on peace support operations (Sapezo, 2018). Nigeria's record in peacekeeping operations is one of regional leadership and sacrifice; its peacekeeping legacy has transformed regional security practice, even as it imposed heavy domestic burdens and contested diplomatic trade-offs. On this note, Nigeria's peacekeeping experience continues to make it a standout among its peers. It has made tangible contributions to world peace, representing a country that, despite its domestic challenges, has striven to set an example for a safer, more equitable global order. Below is a list of peacekeeping operations with Nigeria's participation:

Table 1: Nigeria's Participation in Some Selected Peacekeeping Operations

S/N	Mission	Region / Country	Years	Organisation
1	United Nations Operation in Congo (ONUC)	Congo (DRC)	1960–1964	UN
2	United Nations Security Force in West New Guinea (UNSF)	West New Guinea	1962–1963	UN
3	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	Lebanon	1978–1983	UN
4	Operation Harmony I	Chad	1979	Bilateral
5	OAU Mission Intervention Force in Chad (Operation Harmony II)	Chad	1981–1982	OAU
6	United Nations Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG)	Iran–Iraq	1988–1991	UN
7	United Nations Angola Verification Mission I (UNAVEM I)	Angola	1989–1991	UN
8	United Nations Angola Verification Mission II (UNAVEM II)	Angola	1991–1992	UN
9	United Nations Angola Verification Mission III (UNAVEM III)	Angola	1992–1995	UN
10	United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG)	Namibia	1989–1990	UN
11	United Nations Mission for Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)	Western Sahara	1991–present	UN
12	United Nations Iraq–Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM)	Iraq–Kuwait	1991	UN
13	United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)	Kosovo	1991	UN
14	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)	Cambodia	1992–1993	UN
15	United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I)	Somalia	1992–1995	UN
16	United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II)	Somalia	1992–1995	UN

17	United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR)	Yugoslavia	1992–1993	UN
18	United Nations Operation in Mozambique (UNOMOZ)	Mozambique	1992–1995	UN
19	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL)	Sierra Leone	1998–present	UN
20	OAU Monitoring Group in Rwanda	Rwanda	1992–1993	OAU
21	United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1993	UN
22	United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR)	Rwanda	1993–1995	UN
23	United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia (UNCRO)	Croatia	1995	UN
24	Nigeria Peacekeeping Force in Tanzania (TAPKM)	Tanzania	1994	Bilateral
25	United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT)	Tajikistan	1994–2000	UN
26	United Nations Aouzou Strip Observer Group (UNASOG)	Libya–Chad	1994	UN
27	United Nations Preventive Deployment in Macedonia (UNPREDEP)	Macedonia	1995–2000	UN
28	United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slovenia (UNTAES)	Croatia	1996–1998	UN
29	United Nations Observer Mission in Prevlaka (UNMOP)	Croatia	1996–2000	UN
30	United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA)	Angola	1997	UN
31	ECOMOG Operation in Liberia	Liberia	1990–1997	ECOWAS
32	ECOMOG Operation Sandstorm in Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone	1997–2000	ECOWAS
33	United Nations Civilian Police Support Group (CPSG)	Croatia	1998	UN
34	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC)	DRC	2000–present	UN
35	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET)	East Timor	2000	UN
36	ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL)	Liberia	2003	ECOWAS
37	African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS)	Sudan	2004–present	AU
38	United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)	Haiti	2004	UN
39	UN–AU Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID)	Sudan (Darfur)	2007–present	UN/AU

40	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO)	DRC	2010–present	UN
41	United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA)	Sudan/South Sudan	2011–present	UN
42	United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)	South Sudan	2011–present	UN
43	UN multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)	Mali	2013–present	UN
44	UN multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in CAR (MINUSCA)	Central African Republic	2014–present	UN
45	United Nations India–Pakistan Observer Mission (UNIPOM)	India–Pakistan	1965–1966	UN

Source: Nna-Emeka (2010) cited in Chigozie & Ituma (2015).

Therefore, Nigeria's engagement in peacekeeping operations demonstrates its long-standing commitment to regional stability, international security, and multilateral collaboration. As demonstrated in Table 1, Nigeria has contributed to missions in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Caribbean, and Europe, displaying geographical reach and diplomatic adaptability. The table shows a high concentration of deployments in Africa, particularly in conflict-ridden countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sudan. This is consistent with Nigeria's foreign policy, which focuses on African solidarity and collective security. Furthermore, Nigeria has regularly supported UN-led operations, with the majority of its missions listed under United Nations mandates, demonstrating its reputation as a dependable global peacekeeping partner.
Nigeria's participation in ECOWAS and OAU/AU missions emphasises its leadership role in West Africa and continental security frameworks. Notably, bilateral operations such as the mission in Tanzania and Operation Harmony in Chad demonstrate Nigeria's willingness to intervene directly when regional stability is at risk.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the theory of Manifest Destiny. The theory of Manifest Destiny, first articulated by O'Sullivan (1845), held that the United States was divinely ordained to expand across North America. Its proponents argued that territorial expansion was both inevitable and justifiable, rooted in notions of national duty, providence, and civilisational superiority (Agaba, Obiageli & Idagu, 2018). According to Madsen (2010), Manifest Destiny is rooted in the concept that the United States was divinely ordained to increase its territory and political influence. According to Forough (2022), Manifest Destiny has been "repackaged" into modern exceptionalist foreign policy, especially in the post-Cold War period. President Bush's plan for exporting United States democracy/liberty is a product of the Manifest Destiny doctrine (Cunningham, 2021). With this, the United States has continued to spread and sell the idea of liberal democracy worldwide.

Applied to Nigeria's peacekeeping mission in Liberia, the theory helps explain Nigeria's sense of duty to intervene as the "giant of Africa," carrying the burden of restoring peace and order. Importantly, Nigeria's actions in earlier peace-support engagements-such as its role in the

UN Operation in the Congo (1960–1964), participation in a bilateral agreement in 1964 to replace British commandos in Tanzania after the country gained independence, and also in Namibia under the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), which was instrumental in the country's transition to independence in 1990, and mediation efforts in the Angolan and Chadian conflicts-had already positioned the country as a regional hegemony prior to the Liberia crisis. These early interventions-built Nigeria's identity as a stabilising force in Africa and laid the foundation for its leadership role in ECOMOG. However, there has been a growing criticism that the "manifest-destiny status" allocated to Nigeria risks overstating its capacity and disregarding systemic problems that hinder its objectives. As noted, Nigeria's so-called "natural mandate" to lead Africa hinged on assumptions about its size and oil wealth, which have been drastically weakened over time by economic challenges, internal insecurity, and a high rate of domestic corruption (Ghali & Kabir, 2018). I agree with this critique because, while the "manifest destiny posture" helps justify Nigeria's leadership ambitions

In championing African affairs, it is important to note that, without internal stability and institutional capacity, such ambitions risk being symbolic rather than transformational.

The Liberian Civil War from a Historical Context

The legacy of Liberia's establishment as a settlement for formerly enslaved Americans in the 1820s has had a significant influence on the country's modern history. The result was a society run by a minority elite of Americo-Liberians who imposed an exclusionary system on the indigenous majority and mirrored the social and political structures of the antebellum United States (Wegmann, 2010). Future upheavals were made possible by the persistent resentment and inequality caused by this structural imbalance. Discontent with Americo-Liberian rule had escalated to a critical level by the late 1970s. The so-called "Rice Riot" broke out in 1979 amid civil unrest over a plan to raise rice prices, a staple food in Liberia. Perceptions that the price increase would benefit the Tolbert family and their inner circle propelled the protests, which soon descended into violence. The Protests were violently put down after security forces opened fire on protesters, killing more than 50 people and injuring hundreds more (Sherman, 2012). The legitimacy of the Tolbert administration was weakened by this ruthless response, which also increased public unrest. After 133 years of Americo-Liberian domination, a coup led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe took place the following year, in 1980. A significant shift toward indigenous rule was signalled by President Tolbert's assassination and the prompt execution of important officials in his government (Lau, 2019). However, Doe's regime soon demonstrated authoritarian tendencies, characterised by repressive tactics that alienated significant portions of the populace and ethnic favouritism, particularly toward the Krahn ethnic group (Molemele, 2015).

In December 1989, Former government minister Charles Taylor, now on the run, led an armed uprising against Doe's government from the nearby Ivory Coast. The First Liberian Civil War was brought on by his insurgency, which attracted other groups like Prince Johnson's splinter group, INPFL, and unleashed ruthless, ethnically motivated violence throughout the nation (Akiba, 2020). The war claimed a terrible number of civilian lives through massacres, widespread looting, forced relocation, and atrocities like the July 1990 Monrovia Church massacre, in which about 600 civilians were murdered by government troops (Achvarina & Reich, 2006). The conflict then gradually became fragmented. Nigeria led ECOWAS's deployment of its peacekeeping force, ECOMOG, to stabilise the country (Ojo & Adedayo, 2022). The war tore through years of shaky truces and provisional administrations until Charles Taylor was elected president in 1997, but at a terrible human and financial cost; more than 150,000 people died, and millions were displaced before the war came to an end (Benson, 2021).

Taylor's presidency offered no long-term peace. By using Liberia's natural resources-timber, diamonds, and rubber-he strengthened his hold on power and caused instability in Sierra Leone by aiding the RUF (O'Connell, 2004). In 1999, the Second Liberian Civil War was the result of long-simmering tensions. Taylor was the target of concerted campaigns by rebel organisations such as the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and later MODEL, which besieged Monrovia. It ultimately forced his resignation and exile in 2003 (Akhaze, 2015). The failure of post-conflict processes to maintain peace was brought to light by the second war, which claimed tens of thousands of lives and further uprooted communities. Thus, structural injustice, elite dominance, ethnic tensions, and contested governance were the leading causes of Liberia's plunge into two successive civil wars. Rebellion was encouraged by the

Americo-Liberian legacy, harsh repression, and poor leadership. Crises like the Rice Riot exacerbated socioeconomic divisions, and Doe and his successors' inability to establish inclusive systems led to a violent trajectory in Liberia that continued until his overthrow. Liberia was traumatised, fractured, and in dire need of genuine reconciliation and reconstruction as a result of the protracted and agonising legacy of those wars.

The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group Intervention in Liberia

The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) intervened in Liberia in 1990 as a regional rapid-deployment force authorised by ECOWAS to curb extensive violence, enforce ceasefires, safeguard civilians, secure critical communication routes, and establish conditions for humanitarian aid and political resolution (Carment & Draman, 2003).

ECOMOG's mandate, which was primarily based on Nigerian contingents, included enforcing peace, authorising strong measures to disarm warring factions, escorting relief convoys, and stabilising the country. The force also supervised disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration activities and enabled political talks that led to transitional agreements (Jobarteh, 2014). As new armed factions arose and ceasefires were routinely violated, ECOMOG's presence evolved from a stabilisation mission to a complex peace-enforcement role. The force's operational objectives had to be expanded beyond early containment to include securing major urban centres, reopening humanitarian channels, and preventing the Liberian state from disintegrating entirely (Abild, 2010). Its existence forced opposing factions to negotiate, even if none trusted the other parties.

Nigeria's Leadership Role and Strategic Engagement through ECOMOG Activities in Liberia

Nigeria’s leadership in the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia sprang from necessity and ambition. When Liberia was plunged into civil war in late 1989, Nigeria, the most populous and powerful state in the region, took over the role of peacekeeper. It led ECOWAS's first significant sub-regional peacekeeping effort and provided the organisation with the majority of its troops, logistical support, and funding (Belmakki, 2005). At the height of ECOMOG’s anti-NPFL “peace enforcement” phase around early 1993, the force numbered approximately 11,956 troops, of whom nearly 9,000 or about 75 per cent were Nigerians (Adeboye, 2020). The majority of important command and staff positions in the force were occupied by Nigerian officers, demonstrating the nation's deep involvement in operational direction and decision- making. For example, from 1996 to 1998, Nigerian officer Major-General Victor Malu took full force command in Liberia and oversaw operations to remove land mines and reestablish warlord-controlled areas (Bøås, 2001). Nigeria's broader strategic stance of outward-looking regional leadership, grounded in a Pan-African commitment, was embodied in the deployment. It was closely related to its foreign policy objectives, which placed stability in Africa above purely domestic issues.

Through ECOMOG, Nigeria sought to forestall regional spillover of conflict, protect its national interests, and demonstrate a stabilising presence. Beyond just using military force, Nigeria had a strategic interest in Liberia. It bore almost all of the cost. Other regional powers have not been able to match the estimated $12 billion it spent on

operations in Liberia and neighbouring Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2003 (Rodriguez, 2015). Subsequently, former President Obasanjo confirmed that Nigeria spent about $8 billion on its seven-year involvement in Liberia alone, emphasising the extent of its sacrifices (Richards, 2001). Although it is challenging to determine the precise number of deaths, it was believed that hundreds of Nigerian soldiers had died in operations in Liberia (Afaha, 2016). Nigeria also made a strategic contribution to logistics. It reinforced the idea that, in practice, ECOMOG was a Nigerian-led operation that used its own military infrastructure to support a multinational force. A succession of Nigerian field commanders held operational leadership. Nigeria maintained command over strategic direction and tactical execution under Maj-Gen Joshua Dogonyaro, Maj-Gen Ishaya Bakut, Brig-Gen Tunji Olurin, and Maj-Gen Victor Malu (Adebajo, 2002). The table below shows how Nigerian officers dominated the ECOMOG force Command.

Table 2: ECOMOG Force Commanders Dominated by Nigerians

Rank	Name	Headquarters	Period	Nationality
Lt. Gen	Arnold Quainoo	Freetown/Monrovia	August–Sept. 1990	Ghana
Maj. Gen	J.N. Dogonyaro	Monrovia	Sept. 1990–Feb. 1991	Nigeria
Maj. Gen.	R.N. Kupolati	Monrovia	Feb.–Sept. 1991	Nigeria
Maj. Gen.	J.I. Bakut	Monrovia	Sept. 1991–Sept. 1992	Nigeria
Maj. Gen	A.I. Olurin	Monrovia	Oct. (1992).–Oct 1993	Nigeria
Maj. Gen	J.N. Shagaya	Monrovia	Oct.–Dec. 1993	Nigeria
Maj. Gen.	J.M. Inienger	Monrovia	Dec. (1993).–Aug. 1996	Nigeria

Source: Olawale (2015).

Table 2 showed that from 1990 to 1996, Nigerian military officers held a significant majority of the command of the ECOMOG peacekeeping force in Liberia. The leadership changed almost entirely to Nigerians after the first Ghanaian commander, Lt. Gen. Arnold Quainoo, took office in September 1990, with Maj. Dogonyaro. Due to Nigeria's overwhelming military and political influence in the ECOMOG mission, all subsequent commanders, including Kupolati, Bakut, Olurin, Shagaya, and Inienger, were Nigerians until August 1996. This, therefore, illustrates Nigeria's pivotal role in maintaining regional peace initiatives in Liberia. Nigeria's strategic posture also extended to hybrid military roles. This is why both the Nigerian Navy and Army were present in Liberia.

The Nigerian Navy assisted with the sea lift for troops and the transportation of refugees. In addition to the sea lift of troops from other ECOWAS contributing countries, the Nigerian Navy had deployed some naval assets to support ECOMOG operations. They included: Two (2) Fast Attack Craft Missile, (One (1) Landing Ship Tank (LST), Two (2) Mine Counter Measure Vessels (MCMV), One (1) Tug, Three (3) Merchant Ships, and One (1) Oil Tanker (Hope, 2014). The Nigerian Navy used these elements of sea power to control the waterways and coastline within the operational area of the Peace Support Operations during the ECOMOG operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Hope, 2014). Sector deployment later focused on urban security in Monrovia, supported by ground task forces and mobile brigades along major highways (Duyile, 2020).

Nevertheless, Nigeria's dominance also carried consequences. Its heavy control raised concerns about neutrality, as humanitarian and political trust in ECOMOG wavered. Allegations surfaced of favouritism toward certain factions, arms sales, looting, and partisan conduct, all of which eroded the force's reputation for impartiality (van Walraven, 2006).

The Costs and Achievements of Nigeria's Intervention in the Liberian Conflict

The cost of Nigeria's peacekeeping involvement in Liberia's civil wars was enormous. According to official statements from Nigeria's leadership, the mission cost the country about US $8 billion over its seven years, during which it deployed a peak force of

15,000 troops, most of which were financed and maintained by Nigeria alone (Okoroafor, 2021). About 500 troopers were either killed or reported missing during the conflict (Obi, 2008). Ordinary Nigerians paid a higher price for the country's commitment to peace; many lost loved ones, and the national treasury incurred both financial and human costs. At strategic intersections, such as between Monrovia and NPFL-controlled areas, Nigerian forces established buffer zones and created humanitarian corridors, enabling relief organisations to reduce the strain on civilians. In 1992, there was some stability during the brief period of institutional reconstruction provided by ECOMOG's deployment under the Geneva Accords, as courts and election bodies were established and the University of Liberia reopened (Sesay & Ukeje, 2009).

Notwithstanding the threat of fresh offensives, these humanitarian efforts helped maintain society's fundamental operations amid chaos. Nigeria also made notable military gains, despite difficulties. Under the leadership of Brigadier General Tunji Olurin (1992-1993) and Major General Ishaya Bakut (1991-1992), Nigerian-led ECOMOG forces exerted constant military pressure on Charles Taylor's NPFL, forcing rebel factions to engage in negotiations (Olawale, 2015).

These measures protected capital during periods of relative calm and effectively restrained Taylor's expansion. ECOMOG's assertive approach pushed key factions toward ceasefires and peace despite claims of partiality and favouritism (Domson-Lindsay, 2000). The military actions further helped tip the scales in favour of future political changes by gradually altering the balance of power. Nigeria's involvement in Liberia demonstrated its capacity to oversee complex regional operations, though the results were mixed. It showed that Nigeria was prepared to support military endeavours with both financial resources and strategic leadership. The mission assessed Nigeria's institutional capacity, identifying areas requiring reform in logistics, troop welfare, and long-term stability planning, while also highlighting the country's strengths in mobilising and maintaining operations.

The Lost Chances for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Political Settlement of Nigeria in Liberia

A pivotal moment in post-conflict reconstruction and political settlement was Nigeria's peacekeeping effort in Liberia, led by ECOMOG under ECOWAS auspices. Nevertheless, despite its scope and aspirations, Nigeria's engagement lost important chances to establish long-lasting peacebuilding. Nigeria's highly militarised intervention frequently overshadowed reconstruction efforts. ECOMOG's mission was unclear and unbalanced; it reflected Nigeria's desire to win quickly without the support of other ECOMOG elements, but it was a disastrous failure. Stated differently, the Nigerian Armed Forces had to bear the brunt of the fighting (Audu, 2017). This ambiguity hampered the establishment of inclusive political structures capable of maintaining peace.

Furthermore, chances to combine military operations with humanitarian reconstruction were missed. Although ECOMOG prevented Liberia's state from collapsing immediately, it made no concerted effort to rebuild social services, infrastructure, or governance institutions. Communities remained divided, economic activity had collapsed, and the nation's infrastructure was still in ruins (Shilue & Fagen, 2014). When ECOMOG began withdrawing, Liberia had weak institutional foundations because Nigerian-led efforts failed to transition from security enforcement to structured reconstruction.

More so, regional cooperation failed. Nigeria and the other ECOWAS members were unable to develop a cohesive plan that would have included governance reforms, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR). The lack of enforcement mechanisms and the failure to address spoiler incentives caused many peace accords to fall apart (Reiter, 2016). Despite being successful at first, the Abuja II Accord was not followed through on in terms of integrating all factions into a stable political order and enforcing compliance. Remarkably, ECOMOG was heavily reliant on Nigeria's leadership, as it provided about 80% of its troops and funding (Ikomi, 2007). However, Nigeria's pursuit of national interests and negotiations with influential faction leaders occasionally compromised the impartiality of the Taylor peace settlement. This further reduced the opportunities to create genuinely inclusive political institutions. There was a glaring absence of a strong post-conflict reconstruction and institution- building strategy. Liberia struggled to rebuild after the war ended until programs like GEMAP, which were implemented much later with international partners to embed financial controls and institutional reforms, were introduced (Nyemah, 2009).

Regretfully, Nigeria's initial endeavours failed to establish comparable structural foundations. Because of this delay, corruption and poor management continued, undermining confidence and delaying Liberia's recovery. In addition, Nigeria missed opportunities for civilian reintegration. Although ECOMOG took on security duties, it did little to implement DDR initiatives or community reconciliation procedures. Programs for humanitarian reconstruction, such as repairing clinics, schools, and infrastructure, were not systematically incorporated into the peacekeeping effort. When ground-level rehabilitation was finally implemented, it was fragmented and inadequately funded because it was mostly left to outside parties.

Therefore, the authors believe that Nigeria should have benefited more directly from the post-war reconstruction process, given that it had borne the majority of the financial and human costs of restoring peace to Liberia. They maintained that, as restitution for the sacrifices made, Nigerian construction firms should have been given significant contracts to repair Liberia's damaged infrastructure. In addition to helping Nigeria recover some of its losses, such an agreement would have improved bilateral economic relations. One example was the United States' proposal for Ukraine, in which negotiations for financial and military assistance against Russia took into account America's access to Ukraine's mineral deposits. In that case, the assisting power assisted while ensuring that its economic and strategic interests were protected. However, even with the tremendous sacrifices, such as the deaths of soldiers, the disappearance of others, and the enormous financial outlays, Nigeria saw minimal real economic gain from the intervention. Even though Nigeria's leadership role in restoring peace improved its international reputation as the "giant of Africa," this created domestic concerns about a wasted endeavour.

Discussion of major findings

The findings show that Nigeria's intervention in Liberia was critical in preventing state collapse, although both substantial accomplishments and considerable limitations defined the outcomes. Nigeria absorbed the vast majority of ECOMOG's financial, logistical, and staffing deployments, reinforcing its long-held desire to serve as West Africa's hegemonic stabiliser. Militarily, Nigerian-led operations limited key rebel forces' territorial advances, safeguarded Monrovia throughout critical phases, established humanitarian corridors, and allowed essential institutions to reopen. These actions provided temporary circumstances for ceasefires and political

discourse. However, the mission also exposed severe weaknesses in the peacekeeping operation. ECOMOG's dominance by Nigeria created charges of favouritism, while coordination problems among participating governments limited the efficiency of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration efforts.

Furthermore, inadequate attention to post-conflict rehabilitation left government structures unstable, permitting repeated violence and extending instability. Despite significant financial sacrifice and human loss, Nigeria received few strategic or economic gains, resulting in wasted opportunities for diplomatic influence, rehabilitation contracts, and the consolidation of regional leadership. In all, the intervention demonstrates Nigeria's ability to conduct large-scale peacekeeping operations. However, it also emphasises the importance of clear objectives and a long-term post-conflict strategy when intervening in another country's affairs.

Conclusion

Nigeria's peacekeeping effort in Liberia highlights the paradox of military victory without long-term peacebuilding. Nigeria missed important opportunities to convert battlefield victories into lasting reconstruction and political reconciliation, even though the intervention prevented the Liberian state from completely collapsing. Liberia was exposed to recurrent instability due to unclear mandates, poor institutional reconstruction, and insufficient disarmament and reintegration plans. Trust and inclusivity in peace processes were weakened by perceptions of partisanship stemming from Nigeria's dominance in ECOMOG. In the end, inadequate post-conflict planning postponed real recovery and made room for foreign actors to assume responsibility for post-war infrastructural reconstruction. These lost chances show that in future missions, Nigeria and ECOWAS must strike a balance between institution-building and security.

The study therefore recommended that:

1. Nigeria should align future peacekeeping engagements with clear economic and strategic interests to avoid one-sided sacrifices.
2. Post-conflict reconstruction contracts should prioritise Nigerian companies to compensate for national investments and sacrifices in conflict regions of Africa.
3. Stronger frameworks must be established to balance Nigeria's international image with tangible domestic gains from peacekeeping operations.

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