

Olonisakin, Funmi. Reinventing Peacekeeping in Africa: Conceptual and Legal Issues in ECOMOG Operations. The Hague/London/Boston: Kluwer Law International, 2000.

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Volume 21, Number 2, Winter 2001

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs21_2br04

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Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-5673 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Turack, D. C. (2001). Review of [Olonisakin, Funmi. Reinventing Peacekeeping in Africa: Conceptual and Legal Issues in ECOMOG Operations. The Hague/London/Boston: Kluwer Law International, 2000.] *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 21(2), 157–159.

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In December 1989, civil war erupted in Liberia. The ensuing carnage due to blatant violation of the rules of war and the humanitarian law of armed conflict demonstrated that traditional peacekeeping models utilized during the Cold War, were outmoded in an intra-state conflict. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the regional institution formed with an economic focus, was required to develop a significant military security dimension when faced with the Liberian crisis. A clear legal framework needed to be devised as a guide for peacekeeping and peacemaking. ECOWAS created an ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which was endowed with the task of arranging and supervising a ceasefire, and subsequently to establish and sustain an interim government until democratic elections would be held within a period of 12 months. ECOMOG was considered an ad hoc force, led by the strongest sub-regional military power, Nigeria. A radical approach was adopted to deal with the Liberian situation, and the envisaged one-year ECOMOG plan lasted seven years until the resultant successful elections in Liberia on 19 July 1997.

Before the 1990s ended, however, more than a million lives were lost in African internal armed conflicts. The ECOMOG operations in Liberia did indicate serious problems in need of urgent address, such as internal mandating, command and control, financial and material contributions. More broadly were questions of general relations among ECOWAS, the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations. Civil war broke out in Sierra Leone in March 1991 that lasted until 1996, when elections were organized by the international community. But the instability in Sierra Leone also led to Nigerian-led ECOMOG military intervention.

It is these events that stimulated the author to look at the devised new peacekeeping concepts under the vernacular of “second generation peacekeeping,” “wider peacekeeping,” “peace support operations” and “strategic peacekeeping,” advanced by other scholars and of course, to put forward his own conceptual formulation. Olonisakin’s theoretical thesis involves the strategy of peace creation which combines peacekeeping with peace enforcement to control the conflict, and to bring about an atmosphere of peace. One follows the evolution of peacekeeping, first outlined by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in 1956 throughout the Cold War era, until the traditional peacekeeping decline in the post-Cold War which energized the search for a new concept.

The reader is taken on an excursion of both the United Nations peacekeeping operations in inter-state and intra-state conflicts, and in a synoptic fashion, the experiences of regional bodies in responding to conflicts in their areas of primary concern during the Cold War era. In a logical sequence, the reader then encounters the challenges confronting the peacemakers in the post-Cold War period through the author’s analysis of the Liberian civil war. All aspects of the history, events and conduct of the Liberian civil war are stressed once the east-west ideological rivalry ended. This analysis includes the political, legal and financial circumstances involved in the creation of the force, and an assessment of how it carried out its mandate. ECOMOG’s change of role during its

operation, and its effectiveness during each of the phases is appraised with great care. To this reviewer, the most innovative part of the book involves the author's analysis of the military aspects of the ECOMOG operational approach. He relies on the situation in the field via assessment of command, control, logistics and training within the force. As a civilian, the author relied on data obtained largely from ECOMOG, interviews of its personnel who served in various stages of its operation, as well as official documentary evidence. Politics surrounding the ECOMOG operation in Liberia, and, to some extent, in Sierra Leone are also analyzed.

Discussion of the military issues pursues two separate channels: the planning and nature of the operation during the different phases that focus on operational difficulties; and, ECOMOG's organization which reveals problems of command and control, such as differences in training, military doctrine and logistics that necessitated evaluation of field research. Success by ECOMOG involved cohesion among the different contingents that comprised the multinational force. Hence the impact of the sociological dimensions of ECOMOG are explored as they affected its ability to create peace. Commonalities and differences throughout the force influenced its operation. These aspects and the organizational politics are shown to expose weaknesses and strengths of ECOMOG.

Subsequently, the Heads of Member States of ECOWAS agreed in October 1998 to the establishment of an ECOWAS Conflict Resolution Mechanism that included a Mediation and Security Council, empowered to authorize military support missions. The former ad hoc ECOMOG has become an institutionalized ECOWAS stand-by force. These changes are not considered.

In the author's conclusion, the reader revisits what the earlier chapters addressed, but where the author extracts the salient points to reinforce his advocacy of the conceptual thesis presented. For the future, the reader will find the author's required set of conditions before peace creation could be employed. The author's questionnaire, submitted to members of the ECOMOG force, from which information was gathered and evaluated, is included.

This study adds to the literature on regional peacekeeping, and is worthy of reading to ascertain whether the conceptual model will remain purely an academic exercise or one that can be put into practice.

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