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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA
بِوَسْطَةِ رِضْوَانِي إِسْلَامِيَّةً أَنْبَارًا رَجِيًّا مَلِيًّا

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION
IN WEST AFRICA: THE CASE OF ECOMOG IN
LIBERIA (1989-1997)

ALIEU K. JAMMEH

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY
MALAYSIA

APRIL 2000

In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most gracious

"On that account; We ordained for the children of Israel that if any one slew a Person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be As if he slew the whole people: And if any one saved a life. It would be as if he saved The life of the whole people. Then although there came to them Our messengers With clear signs. Yet, even after that, many of them continued to commit excesses in The land."

Surah Al-Ma'ida, 32

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION
IN WEST AFRICA: THE CASE OF ECOMOG IN
LIBERIA (1989-1997)

BY

ALIEU K. JAMMEH

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KULLIYAH OF ISLAMIC REVEALED
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

This study examines and analyses the causes of the civil war in Liberia in West Africa from 1989 to 1997. The study argues that intervention of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Liberia, through the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), was most justified. It explains how ECOMOG helped to resolve the conflict. Finally, it speculates on the future of ECOMOG and on the prospects of having it as a model for other sub-regions in Africa and the world at large.

The data for this analysis come from mainly written works on the subject matter, such as literature on issues of conflict in general, material on the causes of the Liberian civil war, and on the role played by ECOMOG in it in order to bring it to an end.

An examination of the political history of Liberia shows that ethnicity accounts, more than any other thing, for the outbreak of the civil war and its deterioration into the total collapse of the Liberian state. The study also finds out that ECOMOG, although a strange form of peacekeeping, was the best to have happened to Liberia. Nonetheless, it finds out that ECOMOG lacked certain facilities that had complicated its operations in Liberia. For a possible replication of the ECOMOG experience in Liberia, the study suggests how the weaknesses and strengths of ECOMOG's involvement in Liberia can be avoided and adopted respectively.

ملخص البحث

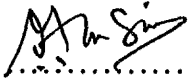
هذه الدراسة تحلل أسباب الحرب الأهلية في دولة ليبيريا في غرب إفريقيا من العام ١٩٨٩ حتى العام ١٩٩٧ م . وتحاول هذه الدراسة أن تبرهن أن تدخل جماعة وقف إطلاق النار والمراقبة التابعة لمجموعة بلدان غرب إفريقيا الاقتصادية كان تدخلا مبررا، وتشرح الدراسة كيف أن هذه الجماعة ساعدت في حسم الصراع، وأخيرا تتأمل الدراسة في مستقبل هذه الجماعة، ودلائل النجاح في وجودها تشير إلى أنها صالحة لأن تتخذ مثالا للأقاليم الأخرى في إفريقيا والعالم بأسره.

المعلومات المعتمدة في هذا التحليل أخذت أساسا من المخطوطات حول الموضوع، مثلا، مخطوطات حول قضايا الصراع عامة، ومواد عن أسباب الحرب الأهلية في ليبيريا والدور الذي لعبته الجماعة في وضع حد للحرب .

تحليل التاريخ السياسي لليبيريا أظهر أن عامل العرق كان السبب الرئيسي في اندلاع الحرب الأهلية وتدهور حالة ليبيريا إلى حد الانهيار الكامل. ووجدت الدراسة أيضا أن جماعة وقف إطلاق النار والمراقبة التابعة لمجموعة بلاد غرب إفريقيا الاقتصادية كان أحسن تشكيل يمكن أن يحدث في إفريقيا، لكن البحث وجد أيضا أن هذه الجماعة تفتقر إلى عوامل معينة ونتيجة لذلك تعقدت عملياتها في ليبيريا وللنظر في إمكانية الاستفادة من خبرة هذه الجماعة في ليبيريا، فإن الدراسة اقترحت كيفية تقوية نقاط قوة تدخل هذه الجماعة في ليبيريا وكيفية تجنب نقاط ضعفها؛ لكي تكون أداة فعالة في مستقبل إفريقيا .

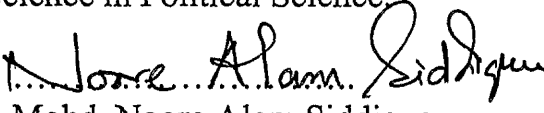
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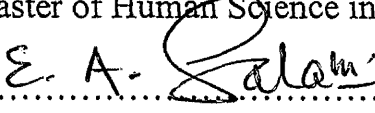
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Dean
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Knowledge & Human Sciences

Date: 11/4/2000

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

Name: Alieu K Jammeh

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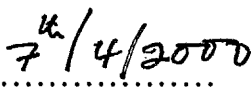
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TO

My father, Hon. Kebba Tamba Jammeh, who passed away on the 17th February 2000, the day I completed writing the first draft of this study, to my Mum, whom I have missed for so long, and to my brothers and sisters.

May Allah (s.w.t) give me inspiration in my faith to strive to make my family continue to live by Islam and to be a source of strength for other people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Any task carried out successfully cannot be attributed to an individual alone. Some other people may have assisted either directly or indirectly. It is therefore my wish to extend my utmost gratitude to any individual or individuals, whose names I have not mentioned here, for investing their precious time and energy to help me present this study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Freed American slaves founded Liberia in 1847.¹ The slaves who arrived in 1822 essentially colonized the country, creating a class of "Americo-Liberians" that ruled until 1980, when an illiterate 28-year-old master sergeant named Samuel K. Doe toppled the government in a bloody coup. Originally hailed as a liberator, Doe quickly turned into a brutal tribalist who ran up one of the worst human rights records in Africa.²

Tribalism and ethnicity have been a common theme of political manipulation for almost the entire history of the country. The pre-war (1989)³ Liberian State officially recognized sixteen different ethnic groups as well as the Americas⁴. Ethnicity began to play a major role from the inception of the republic in 1847. The society became polarized between the politically and economically dominant Americo-Liberian elite and the mass of the indigenous population. Making up just two per cent of the population, the Americo-Liberians constituted a ruling oligarchy, with a complete monopoly of political, social, and economic power.⁵ They succeeded to maintain this position by exploiting the country's ethnic division through an uneven distribution of economic and social rewards, and through

¹ Eric Ransdell, 'The new Africa vs. the old', *U.S. News & World Report*, 11/23/92, Vol. 13, Issue 20, p. 54, on-line, <http://www.epnet.com/hosttrial/login.html>.

² Ibid.

³ 1989 was the year of the start of the civil war that lasted for about seven years and was fought between rebel forces of Charles Taylor and the forces of the government of former President Doe. The war later expanded to include other factions that eventually turned the conflict into an ethnic-based struggle for dominance.

⁴ Quentin Outram, 'It's terminal either way: An analysis of armed conflict', *Review of African Political Economy* September 97, Vol. 24, Issue 73, p. 355, on-line, <http://www.epnet.com/hosttrial/login.html>.

⁵ Adeleke Ademola, 'The Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking in West Africa: The ECOWAS Operation in Liberia', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.33, No.4, December 1995, p. 572.

political coercion based on a strategy of recruiting troops from one ethnic group for deployment against others.⁶ With such policies in place for over a century and other similar policies that helped to keep the mass of the inhabitants in abject poverty, ethnicity inevitably became the only factor for group identification and social mobility.⁷ In the early 1960s, ethnic identification took on a sharp and meaningful turn, when there emerged educated natives who returned to their various social bases for support in their struggle for socio-economic space compared with their American counterparts.⁸

The stage for political violence was already set in 1971, when William Tolbert, the last of the American-Liberian Presidents, inherited from Tubman a highly corrupt and manifestly oppressive political system. Some scholars referred to this system as "black imperialism" or "black colonialism"⁹.

Such was the political scenario of Liberia that helped to hasten the *coup d'etat* of April 1980, thereby introducing 'the Doe factor' into Liberian politics. It was a period of conscious awareness on the part of the natives who started to make demands on the state for fair treatment. On the other hand, the American-Liberians, who formed the crux of most of the institutions of the state, made a desperate attempt to cling on to power. The indigenous population initially proclaimed Doe

⁶ Ibid., See also Clement Adibe, *Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Liberia*, (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 1996/32), p.4-5.

⁷ Adeleke Ademola, *The Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking in West Africa: The ECOWAS Operation in Liberia*, p. 572.

⁸ Clement Adibe, *Managing Arms in Peace Processes: Liberia*, p.5.

⁹ Ibid., See M.B. Akpan, 'Black Imperialism: American-Liberian rule over the African peoples of Liberia, 1841-1964', in *The Canadian Journal of African Studies* (Toronto), 7,2,1973,p.217-36; Stephen Hlophe, *Class, Ethnicity and Politics in Liberia* (Washington, DC, 1979); and Amadu Sesay, 'Societal Inequality, Ethnic Heterogeneity and Political Instability: the case of Liberia', in *Plural Societies* (The Hague), 11,3, Autumn 1980, p.15-30.

and his People's Redemption Council (PRC) as 'heroes' and 'redeemers'¹⁰, but that euphoria quickly evaporated as symbolized by a popular slogan by 1984, which justly summarized Doe's Liberia as the 'Same Taxi, New Driver'.¹¹ Doe did not turn out to be different from his predecessors as he adopted the same system of political manipulation and favoritism as administered by the Americos. To keep himself in power, he also began to play off one ethnic group against the other. His own ethnic group, the Khran, was to form the bulk of the army, which became an instrument of oppression and suppression of political dissent.

During a decade of brutality and political drama, Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe transformed himself into a democratically elected President on the platform of his National Democratic Party of Liberia in the October 1985 elections. Other political parties vehemently contested the results of these elections and it was just a matter of time before Doe's Liberia exploded into anarchy and political disorder.

In 1989, a group of about 200 men attacked Liberia from Ivory Coast in a revolt against the military based regime of Samuel Doe. Charles Taylor, an exiled former cabinet member in the Doe government, led the men who became known as the National Patriotic Front for Liberia (NPFL). The revolt soon turned into a tribal conflict when in retaliation, Doe's army (the Armed Forces of Liberia-AFL) which was largely composed of members of the Krahn and Mandingo tribes, targeted civilian members of the rival Gio and Mano tribes who formed the bulk of Taylor's

¹⁰ Adeleke Ademola, *The Politics and Diplomacy of Peacekeeping in West Africa: The ECOWAS Operation in Liberia*, p.572-573.

¹¹ Outram, Quentin, *It's terminal either way: An analysis of armed conflict*, on-line, <http://www.epnet.com/hosttrial.html>.

followers. In August 1990, the emergence of a second rebel faction further complicated the confusion and uncertainty and threatened the fabric and viability of Liberia as a state. This new rebel faction led by Prince Johnson, known as the Independent National patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), began to fight both Taylor and Doe. Soon after, other factions erupted that became ethnically based: the Mandingo-based United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO/K); ULIMO/J, a Krahn-dominated splinter group; and the Liberian Peace Council (LPC), another Krahn-based group.¹²

Before long, pandemonium, senseless and rampant killings became commonplace, consequently pushing over half a million Liberians as refugees into other West African states. It had become a social and moral burden on people who could not stand by to witness barbarism as was the case in Liberia then, without standing up to it. Despite the extensive coverage and report about the devastation of Liberia's natural, human and material resources, large number of refugees and blatant human rights abuses caused by the conflict, the wider international community, especially the United Nations and United States, failed to act to stop the conflict.

In the absence of such action, and in the face of a crisis that had the potential to destabilize the West African sub-region, ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) and its most powerful member state Nigeria, stepped up and sought to bring peace to Liberia. ECOWAS then created and deployed ECOMOG (ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group) to try to bring peace to Liberia.

¹² Jennifer Morrison Taw and Andrew Grant-Thomas, 'U.S. Support for Regional Complex Contingency Operations: Lessons from ECOMOG', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol.22, No.1, 1999, p.56.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the basic structure, mission and nature of ECOMOG's operation in Liberia. In brief, the study is concern with the following:

- i) To analyze the ethnic conflict leading to civil war in Liberia.
- ii) To examine ECOMOG's structure and mission of operation in Liberia.
- iii) To identify the conflict resolution mechanisms used by ECOMOG to bring about peace in Liberia.
- iv) To evaluate the ECOMOG mechanism of conflict resolution and to explore the possibility of its use in future operations.

PROBLEM JUSTIFICATION

The years after the end of the Cold War were greeted with high expectations of a world at peace with itself. International conflict that was mostly reflected in proxy intrastate conflicts was thought markedly to subside, if not cease completely. Surprisingly though, such conflicts have persisted in various forms and degrees. Therefore, this requires further efforts in justification for management of such conflicts and their resolution. Although international conflict has become minimal in degree, intrastate conflict or civil war has gained momentum. It is this later type of conflict that has proved far more devastating and difficult to resolve or end.

In West Africa, like most parts of Africa such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo-Kinshasa, Somalia, Uganda, and Sudan among others, rebellion, civil and political violence have become the frequent scenario. With the unbearable costs of such situations, such as the rampant displacement of people, disruption of

democracies, retrogression of development, coups and counter-coups, it has become fundamentally and monumentally prudent to chart pragmatic courses to the termination of such conflicts.

The West African sub-region is experimenting on such a course. Nevertheless, are they using the best tools and techniques to ride on such rough surfaces for peaceful outcome? Even if they are, at least to the situations at hand, can they still adopt other tools and techniques to add to their existing ones for more effectiveness? These and other areas of concern are the major guiding contours of this research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the light of the questions that have been raised in the statement of the problem, the main objectives of the study are as follows:

- i) To show the causes of conflict in Liberia.
- ii) To identify and explain the forces that led to the formation of ECOMOG and shaped its structure and design.
- iii) To identify and analyze the mission, objectives of ECOMOG and strategies adopted by it in achieving this.
- iv) To assess the effectiveness of ECOMOG's strategies in terms of achieving lasting peace in Liberia and examine if ECOMOG can be a model for other regions.
- v) To explore and suggest other alternatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most conflict management and resolution theorists have looked at interstate conflicts, their causes and ways and methods of ending such conflicts. However, very few have examined intrastate, civil and political levels of conflict. I will refer to these as the macro and micro levels respectively. For theorists who have examined the micro level conflicts, most emphasized only on how the key protagonists involved in the conflict behave, depending on how each of these protagonists perceives the outcome of the conflict in consideration of the costs, time, and casualty rate involved. Still other theorists emphasize on the importance of the recognizing cultural differences in applying principles and techniques of conflict management and resolution to different situations, societies and areas. Two types of analysis are therefore evident within the micro level of conflicts: the perceptions of the protagonists and the cultural differences of parties involved in a conflict.

This research reviews the conflict theories of all three groups and addresses how conflicts can be ended or resolved from the perspective of each group. The objective is to add and argue for the method practiced in West Africa under the auspices of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). Conflict is generally a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other but not both.... Each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal or a desired object or situation and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal.¹³

¹³ C.R. Mitchell, *The Structure of International Conflict* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981), p.15.

The first group of theorists includes C.R.Mitchell. In his well-written book, *The Structure of International Conflict*, he notes the difficulty of ending or terminating conflict. He argues that one paramount problem for parties employing coercive or persuasive strategies in a conflict, is when to give up. He says that the familiar problem of how to “make peace” or of “arriving at a decision to compromise through negotiation”¹⁴, is indeed difficult. According to him, there are three basic sets of circumstances for parties bent on ending conflicts; of perceived success, of perceived stalemate and of perceived failure. However, since parties enter into conflict as a result of the incompatibility of the goals they want to pursue, it becomes difficult for one of the three possibilities to be accepted openly by any of the parties, thus leading to settlement. Moreover, there is a high possibility for intra-party rivalries, which can make conflict settlement between parties also cumbersome. For example, according to Mitchell, cleavages and factionalism within groups are evident impediments to decision-making. Differences within groups regarding when to give up the conflict situation or to proceed with conflict will have a significant impact on the possibilities of settlement of the conflict.

However, such complications can be minimized when parties abandon the process of long-range bargaining as their main strategy and send representatives to engage in face-to-face bargaining over a negotiating table. Again, since parties involved in a conflict have incompatible goals that put them into conflict in the first place, resolving their differences by themselves alone becomes very difficult. In fact, at the international level, negotiations for a settlement involve a third party not committed in the conflict separate from the rival protagonists. In many cases, the

¹⁴ Ibid., p.165.

use of mediators, conciliators, arbitrators and other forms of intermediary, underlines that the business of ending conflicts often becomes a triangular process, involving some third party with an interest in bringing the conflict to an end.¹⁵ It is this third party involvement that is used in this study to justify the presence of ECOMOG in Liberia.

My second categorization of theorists in conflict studies focuses on intrastate or civil conflict. These theorists have drawn up suggestions and hypotheses regarding the causes of conflict and how conflict can be ended. In his article, *A Conjunctural Model of Political Conflict*, Kurt Shock examines the impact of political opportunities on the relationship between economic inequality and violent political conflict. He emphasizes that in a society, both the political context in combination with economic inequality influences the form and level of political conflict. Political context in this regard refers to the political environment, which either limits or enhances political participation. He argues that those coercive actions taken by governments to suppress dissident protest tend to instigate violent confrontation...and that coercive responses by political authorities to illegal but non-violent collective action lead to an escalation of protest from non-violent protest to violence.¹⁶ The major assumption on economic inequality is that, the greater the degree of economic inequality, the greater the discontent experienced by individuals and groups. The more intense and widespread the discontents, the more likely those grievances will become clear and will somehow be translated into violent political conflict.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.250.

¹⁶ Kurt Schock, "A Conjunctural Model of Political Conflict", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.40, No.1, March 1996, p.104.

In another well-written article, *How Civil Wars End*, T. David Mason and Patrick J. Fett show the process by which parties involved in a civil war opt for a negotiated settlement rather than continue fighting. They argue that whether parties involved in a civil war “will agree to a settlement rather than continue fighting will vary depending on each party’s estimate of its probability of victory, its expected payoffs from victory versus those from a settlement, the rate at which it absorbs costs of conflict, and its estimate of how long it will take to achieve victory. Any factors that (1) reduce both parties’ estimate of their chances of victory, (2) increase the rate at which both are absorbing costs, (3) extend both parties’ estimate of the amount of time required to achieve victory, or (4) increase the utility from a settlement relation to the utility from victory, will make them both more willing to agree to a negotiated settlement rather than continue to fight in the hope of achieving victory.¹⁷ In this studies, I have shown how ECOMOG’s intervention in the Liberian civil war benefited from these variables by ultimately bringing a negotiated settlement between the warring parties.

The third and final group of theorists of the classification emphasizes the importance of understanding culture in conflict resolution mechanisms. In their meticulously written article, “*The Culture Question and Conflict Resolution*”, Kevin Avruch and Peter W. Black, vividly illustrate the relevance of accepting both the level of variation and invariation in human characteristics in conflict resolution. They argued that this is essential in order to be able to comprehend how parties conceptualize conflict, how they know it when they see it, what meaning does it have to them and

¹⁷ T. David Mason and Patrick J. Fett, “How Civil Wars End”: A Rational Choice Approach”, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.40, No.4, December 1996, p.549.

what expectations do they have for conflict behavior. They refer to this as the local "common sense" about conflict.¹⁸ If we are to apply this to intrastate conflicts, it will be evident that, at times, rebel groups or guerrilla movements have their cultures, which they believe in and which need to be understood and studied. This understanding helps to answer questions as to what their interests, needs and values are. It is therefore proposed that it is crucial and essential for ECOMOG to understand and know the idiosyncrasies of the people they are dealing with.

In another article, "*Conflict Resolution in an Islamic Context*", Mohammed Abu Nimer, throws more light on the importance of knowing the traditions and cultures of a group before applying models of conflict resolution on them, especially those models that are not oriented on the beliefs of the group in focus. He draws his argument from analyzing the Middle East vis-à-vis Western conflict resolution models. He argues that scholars and practitioners should be aware of, investigate and understand the existing procedures of conflict resolution, which are implemented in the local community. Therefore, in the Middle East, this means accepting and recognizing the fact that Islam and Islamic societies contain beliefs, customs, attitudes, and a history, which can serve as a rich basis for identifying constructive conflict resolution framework and processes.¹⁹ This gave weight to my suggestion that it is time that Africans took the responsibilities of shouldering the task of resolving their own conflicts, because people intervening from outside can only impose solutions that will never provide a cure to the malady.

¹⁸ Kevin Avruch and Peter W. Black, "The Culture Question and Conflict Resolution", *Peace and Change*, Vol.16, No.1, January 1991, p.31.

¹⁹ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution in an Islamic Context; Some Conceptual Questions," *Peace and Change*, Vol.21, No.1, January 1996, p.24.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter Two of the thesis provides a global analysis of conflict and the various ways of managing and resolving it. It explores what the types and causes of conflict are, with particular reference to Africa. The political and ethnic causes are emphasized as the contributing causes of the Liberian conflict. Third party intervention to resolve it in the form of negotiation and mediation suggest the employment of methods of conflict resolution. The intermittent use of force that was exhibited by the third party in resolving the conflict signifies the necessity of the existence of firm legal basis of intervention. International principles on the sovereignty of states and on the non-interference in the internal affairs of states is only valid when there are no pre-existing legal provision that can sanction the involvement of external actors into the conflict situation of states.

Suffice to mention here that in a larger perspective, and in the context of Africa and West Africa in particular, a theoretical proposition will suggest the need for third party involvement in resolving conflicts either through negotiation or mediation for negotiated settlements. Self initiated and direct intervention to stop violent political and social upheavals in other countries is most justifiable and should be a moral duty in order to eradicate its contagious effect on other countries. The philosophical underpinnings support the view that Africans themselves have a better local orientation as to what the immediate position and requirements of their fellow Africans are.

Such a proposition for others to emulate and a justification for ECOMOG's role in the West African sub-region exhibits that the decision, efforts and commitment to