

# Pangs of peacekeeping in an internal strife

TO some, large parts of Africa are still uncivilised. This perception is largely due to their ignorance about that continent and because of chronic instability, emanating from both natural and manmade sources. Ever since the de-colonisation process of the continent began in the 1960s, most of the African countries have been marred by either natural disasters like famine, drought, flood and so on or by manmade disaster like civil war, violence and the never-ending power struggle. Such instability has retarded and, at times, destroyed the continent's development. In the age of globalisation, such instability hardly limits itself within a country's given territorial boundary. Such situations call for international involvement.



United Nations peacekeepers at work...

At present the UN, according to its Charter, cannot intervene in the internal affairs of any of its member-countries. But it can enforce peace only under the Security Council mandate. This has complicated the process and suggestions have been made to amend the charter in the following manner that 'except in case where genocide becomes part of a country's policy towards its citizens or minorities.' There is a danger that the UN would stagnate if it did not find a way of reforming easily. It was clear from the situation in Kosovo that it was being bypassed by regional organisation that could claim they were frustrated by its lack of action.

situation has deteriorated in nearly a decade-old civil war. Living condition of the citizens is going from bad to worse everyday and is creating a large number of refugees. Fighting in Sierra Leone has been dubbed as Africa's First World War because of the involvement of neighbouring countries. It has shown all signs to spill over. In addition, the conflict was getting protracted and despite the presence of the UN peacekeepers, the rebels were making and simultaneously violating the peace treaties. One might see that these symptoms are more or less common in many African countries, but they do not have UN troops stationed there.

The reasons for UN's pro-active presence, as explained by some, as the mission's prestige issue because the UN itself brokered the peace deal and the same was violated in the presence of United Nations troops. Moreover, if the UN mission in Sierra Leone unravels, it will be another black eye for the organisation, reeling under reverses in Rwanda, Angola and Bosnia. However, the factor that triggered the incident was abduction and killing of the UN troops.

### Problems in peacekeeping

Abduction and killing of the UN peacekeepers has once again raised the question of restructuring the UN. Some point out that the vulnerability and lack of proper knowledge about the situation on the ground among peacekeepers has lured the warmongers and the recent incident in Sierra Leone has strengthened that allegation. The efficiency of the UN troops in protecting themselves and

their weapons has also come under question. The point cropped up when a large number of peacekeepers were taken hostage in Sierra Leone and the RUF forces seized several armoured personal carriers, adding considerably to their capability. Moreover the reluctance of the permanent members of the Security Council to contribute or to risk their troops has contributed doubly to the ineffectiveness of the peacekeepers.

Regarding conflict prevention, the UN-brokered and hastily done Lome Accord has come under criticism from the human rights groups on the ground that impunity of Foday Sankoh from past atrocities encouraged further abuses. In other words, they view the UN-brokered treaty has been made only to be broken. So the rebels wasted no time in regrouping themselves and in obstructing UN peace efforts in that country. Thus the inadequate and imprudent UN involvement allowed the situation to rot. In this connection, role of the world powers also came under criticism.

Many conflicts have been resolved through external intervention. But some argue that crises like those in Somalia, Rwanda, Congo or Sierra Leone are not like that. These are fundamentally internal wars, which can only be resolved internally: either by one combatant securing supremacy, or through a compromise in which each party recognises a settlement. It has been found that bogged settlements only delay, and often prevent this resolution. Either the force brought into monitor them packs up at the first sign of trouble, or it

gets dragged into a long-term commitment, in which its own role is compromised, and its costs escalate - not least in lives.

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An ECOWAS communiqué has asked that the mandate of the United Nations mission in Sierra Leone be toughened from 'peacekeeping' to 'peace enforcement', and that its command should be given to a West African officer. There seems to be a convergence between the US and the ECOWAS on that point. The US was in favour of a peace enforcement group under the Nigerian leadership. This was not a new idea put front but in fact it was the continuation of the ongoing trend. In East Timor Australia as the regional power took the lead and in case of Kosovo it was NATO, the regional organisation. Supporters of this idea argue that regional powers are more familiar and are better equipped to undertake the task. But critics have pointed out that the regional power(s), though work-

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... so are the Sierra Leone government troops

For years, Sierra Leone, a country little known in international politics, has been drawing international attention due to its prolonged civil war. Civil war and subsequent events have somewhat necessitated UN intervention in that country. But after the incident of rebels taking UN Peacekeepers hostage, the question about the effectiveness or the legitimacy of UN military intervention in the internal affairs of its member states have arisen once again, writes ABM Ziaur Rahman

ing under UN resolution might pursue their own mandate. There is a dark suspicion that the Nigerian forces supplied the force's Indian commander with misinformation, exaggerating the imminence of danger to Freetown. In addition, there are indications that the Nigerians functioned beyond the UN mandate. Moreover critics are suspicious of the hegemonic attitude of the regional powers.

There are criticisms, even in Nigeria itself, on the West's continual emphasis on empowering the Nigerian army to intervene in the Sierra Leonean affairs. "There is an underlying racism to what is going on," said one Nigerian with close ties to the military. "The impression we get is that a white man will not sacrifice himself for a black cause."

In internal conflicts, often, if not always, helping civilian populations that live in the territory controlled by the adversaries almost automatically seen as assisting the enemy. The longer the conflict lasts, the more difficult it becomes for humanitarian agencies and indeed for peacekeeping operations to preserve their impartiality and to be seen to be operating in an impartial manner. So, besides peace enforcement UN is now focusing on conflict prevention, the software side of conflict resolution. Though criticised, some of UN's best achievements have been through preventive action.

The New World order has been termed as an environment without ideologies and the circumstances of war are far more driven by self-interest or the perception of self-interest. In this changed situation the UN would find it difficult to enforce/maintain peace which hampers the interests of the Powers. In case of Sierra Leone, despite the pro-active involvement of UK, UN is unable to stop the neighbouring Liberian leader Charles Taylor from selling diamonds of the Sierra Leonean rebel's mines, partly because the US was not interested to alienate its 'black American preserve'. Thus the use of peacekeepers is likely to be futile without a proper embargo enforcement system.

The war in Sierra Leone has been described as a war 'to make money', while some goes to the extent of describing the war free of ideologies and at this point, all about making money. It has been pointed out that making money and making war have long been related activities. Rebels, governments and even peacekeepers have fought for diamonds, minerals and timber in recent wars in Sierra Leone. Prolonged internal violence in countries with rich natural resources but corrupt or weak governments may best be understood as battles for money or resources, suggests a report published by International Committee of Red Cross. The war in Sierra Leone is caused a large part by corruption and banditry. Violence provides a cover for the extraction of and smuggling of resources, and armies, either private or national, give the means to control workers, transport and territory. Such participants may continue to exploit a war rather than to win it and end it. UN needs more international support in curbing such 'war for money'.

Some fear that the long-term commitment by the international community would involve the imposition of a new colonialism enforced by the armies of industrial states. They fear all this is almost a re-colonisation of Sierra Leone by Britain. One person who certainly does not object is Mr. Kabbah, who has been regarded by most Sierra Leoneans as a weak leader dependent on international support to stay in power. This leads to a second doubt.

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Over half of all the professional staffs in the UN's peacekeeping department are 'seconded' military personnel. There are widespread concerns these 'gratis' officers, aided by and answerable to their own armed forces, not to the UN, may at times press national agendas rather than the international one. Their frequent rotation means that the indispensable linkages in peacekeeping missions between military staff and civilian programs have to be constantly relearned. Annan will have to generate enough administrative savings elsewhere if he is to be able to recruit military advisers on a genuinely 'international' basis.

### After Sierra Leone

After the Sierra Leone experience, it is thought that no one would want to send the United Nations into war zone alone any time soon. The debate of the

last few weeks was a horrifying picture of a series of post-cold-war United Nations peacekeeping disasters dating back to Bosnia in 1993. None of these was entirely United Nations' fault. As already mentioned, the world body has few resources and no mandate to form its own combat force. It has been argued that the UN Security Council members, especially the US, do not want to beef up the UN because they fear it might infringe on their sovereignty. Nor do they want to risk their own soldiers' lives in United Nations efforts far from home.

Peace processes are delicate, dynamic and risky. It is difficult to persuade the international community to prepare effective contingencies until it was too late. Meanwhile, people continued to live in misery while the international community prevaricates. The responsibility lies with the

United Nations member states, particularly those in the Security Council, to provide operations with sufficient resources to reduce the risks, including strengthening of the peace agreement in the first place.

From the above discussion, it seems evident that the whole process of UN peacekeeping operations and the Charter needs a rethinking. But the apparent failure of the UN in some operations does not call for the disbandment of the operation. The changing nature of war can be seen as a consequence of some success in the UN's original raison d'être. The problems that it is experiencing with internal conflict are a reason to make stronger efforts in a reformed manner - with active support from its member states, especially the Security Council members - rather than to disengage.

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## Revenge clashes with pragmatism

Rod Mac-Johnson writes from Freetown

### Sierra Leone



Sierra Leone's Foday Sankoh: 'Hang him, hang him'

"HANG him, hang him" Hurling the graffiti scrawled on walls and buildings around Freetown. The slogan, and others in the same vein, signifies the degree of anger the name Foday Sankoh generates in Sierra Leone today.

Tens of thousands of amputees and rape victims blame him and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels he led for nine years for their plight.

Now he is a prisoner of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah's government, having been

Much media attention on the crisis in Sierra Leone is focussed on the role of British, West African and UN troops in preserving the fragile peace.

Domestically, however, another heated debate is taking place - over how to deal with rebel leader Foday Sankoh. Gemini News Service listens to the arguments.

captured in mid-May, apparently after being spotted and turned in by a Muslim cleric on his way to morning prayers. He is held in a secret location.

At first glance, it seems obvious: Sankoh should be tried as the leader of a rebellion accused of the death, mutilation and rape of more than 100,000 people, the torching of houses and schools and the wrecking of the economy.

But political reality is more complex, and opinion is divided about how best to deal with the country's most wanted man. For many he is the least wanted - and deserves to die. Others also do not want him - but favour his rapid despatch to another country. Some do not want him, yet are prepared to put up with him in the hope that his continued participation in the country's troubled politics would inhibit the rebels from resuming hostilities. And some, presumably, support him, since he has given them a purpose, power, guns, excitement and loot.

The government is cautious, caught between conflicting demands, ministers embarrassedly explain that trying Sankoh in a court of law "is not all that easy".

President Kabbah has said that a trial in Sierra Leone would exorcise the past and act as a deterrent to future rebels, but the London-based fortnightly bulletin, *Africa Analysis*, has suggested that "privately, he fears the short to medium-term fallout from a trial". It also points out that providing a secure detention for Sankoh would not be easy.

There are many factors to be considered and we have to listen to the international community on the issue," Information Minister Julius Spencer said in an interview with a local radio station. "We would then have the best way out."

But even the "international community" is divided - just as they were last July when a peace agreement was signed in the Togolese capital, Lome. The pact was designed to end the war, with the rebels disarming, giving up all economically important areas under their control, such as the diamond towns in the east, and working within a government of national unity.

Some voice warned that to welcome people responsible for atrocities into government would be unforgivable and against natural justice. The pragmatists insisted it was the

best way of healing the wounds of war.

The pragmatists turned out to have a weaker understanding of reality than they thought. The RUF was given four Cabinet posts and, most controversially, Sankoh was made Vice President and Chairman of the Strategic Mineral Resources Commission. Yet violence continued. The incident which broke the camel's back occurred in May when Sankoh's bodyguards killed 22 anti-RUF demonstrators. In the melee, Sankoh disappeared for 10 days until his capture.

Today, foreign countries with interests in Sierra Leone still offer conflicting advice. There is speculation, for example, that members of the West African military force (ECOWAS) that played a key role in ending the fighting view Sankoh as a potentially useful bargaining counter in future negotiations with RUF rebels.

Nevertheless, domestic public opinion, as expressed through the media, seems to favour a speedy trial - and execution - for Sankoh.

The Sankoh issue is like the Top 10 in the record chart," says commercial radio executive Pasco Temple. "He is public enemy number one and many people are calling for his blood."

Social welfare worker James Vincent is a typical voice. He described a proposal by the West African peace-keeping force for Sankoh's removal to a neutral country as "detestable". A man who has created so much misery to so many people should stay here to face the music.

Insisted businessman Tamba Allieu. "Sankoh is the enemy within and he must be within and not go anywhere else."

Government must ensure that he is held here and not in any other country," agreed hawk Alusine Koroma. They believe that sending Sankoh abroad would enable him, in the words of one phone-in caller, "to plan further problems while living in splendor and affluence". The daily *Democrat* scornfully editorialised that "ECOWAS leader would not feel squeamish in sitting in the same room with Foday Sankoh, a mass murderer, a man who amputated babies and disembowelled pregnant women. These leaders see such atrocities as normal". Many MPs back a trial. "We

are angered over the delay," fumed parliamentarian Issa Couthe. An opposition leader, who asked not to be identified, claimed "the government has yet to demonstrate a popular courage, ability and resources in putting the interest of the people first, the leaders second and foreign influence last."

Further support for a trial comes from the non-governmental Civil Society Movement. "We urge the government, the international community and human rights institutions not to sacrifice justice on the altar of political expediency" - and the National Forum for Human Rights. The latter considers that "all violations and abuses committed by the RUF actors, including Sankoh, since the signing of the Togo Peace Agreement should not go unpunished."

Paramount Chief Momoh Soloku, who heads the Council of Paramount Chiefs could hardly hide his anger when he commented in an interview. "Sankoh should be brought to book. He should be taught the bitterness of war."

Freetown lawyer Maxwell Johnson considers that a domestic trial is necessary for the credibility of the judicial system, and would reassure the public about the state of national security.

Fellow jurist Fred Askott agrees that "if justice is to exist in Sierra Leone, there should be no reason why Sankoh and all those now in the dragnet should not be tried. We have had too much of Sankoh and his mad waves, it must end now."

But a sizeable minority calls for caution. Businessman Pesseli Karmara warns that "to try Sankoh would mean an escalation of the killing and maiming of civilians living in the countryside by cocaine-filled rebels. I fear very much."

Oil tanker driver Alusine Bainbay has similar concerns: "Taking action against Sankoh will aggravate an already volatile situation."

Nervousness is natural for people are all too painfully aware of the ruthlessness of the rebels. Decisions on Sankoh - whether there should be a trial, where it would be held - are not theoretical matters: wrong decisions could mean yet more death and maiming.

The author is a Sierra Leonean journalist living and working in Freetown. He formerly worked for the Sierra Leone News Agency.

### Notice

Owing to unavoidable reasons, there will be no Entertainment page today.

— Management.

### Reasons that prompted UN intervention

In the ongoing conflict, it is important to find out the rationale for UN involvement. The reasons can be roughly summed up as follows.

The region's law and order