

The Role of Nigeria in the Chadian Civil Conflicts

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Abstract

The year 1960 remains remarkable in the African/European colonial relationship. It was the year that most African States under colonial rule gained independence. Chad was one of such African countries. She was colonized by France and gained independence on August 11, 1960. Shortly after independence, the civil war began between the Arab Muslim).north and the Sara (Christian) south, over the control of the .central government. The various factions involved in the Chadian (conflict were determined to gain advantage over one another. As a result, *each* employed the services of external powers to outwit the other. The external powers included France, Libya, Zaire, Nigeria, the US, Soviet Union and of course the OAU Peacekeeping Force. Soon, it became obvious that these external interveners, had their various reasons for their involvements in the Chadian war. While some reasons were humanitarian and moral, others were diplomatic, strategic and economic. This paper therefore examines the roles each of these external powers, •Deluding the OAU Peacekeeping Force, played in the Chadian conflict with emphasis on, the role of Nigeria on the conflict.

Keywords: War; Peacekeeping; Reconciliation; Mediatory; OAU.

Introduction

One of the central challenges of most African states since the post-colonial dispensation, has been the endemic and protracted political conflicts (Nass). These eruptions have noticeably deepened the misery and underdevelopment of the continent of Africa as they inflict human sufferings through death, destruction of human livelihoods, constant displacement and insecurity.

Chad represents one of the African countries that has been politically convulsed by brutal conflicts. Imobighe noted that Chad's immediate post-independence period, was enmeshed in a political imbroglio between the Arab Muslim North and Christian dominated South in a conflictive relationship that manifested in violent outbursts and armed conflicts for many years.

Considering the proximity of Nigeria and the warring Chad as neighbouring countries, Nigeria intervened in order to effect peace and order in Chad, which became a desideratum. The extent to which Nigeria's neighbours are safe and in peace, is to an appreciable degree, the extent to which Nigeria can talk of her national security. In other words, the desire for peace in Chad was catalyzed by her strong desire to avoid the spillover effects of the African Chadian war on the nation.

Nigeria Mediatory Roles in Chadian War before the OAU Peacekeeping Force

Nigeria, being a neighbouring country that shares common boundary with Chad in the NorthEast flank, her mediatory interventionist role in the Chadian civil war was a welcome development. This common boundary phenomenon undoubtedly buttressed the fact that her involvement in the management of the Chadian civil war was borne more out of her foreign policy consideration on African socio-political and economic affairs at independence in 1960. In his independence address, Alhaji (Sir) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was quoted by Adeniran (8) that:

1. Nigeria would work with other African States for the progress of Africa, and would assist in bringing all colonial African States to a state of responsible government.

2. Nigeria would adopt a policy of fostering the **closest** possible ties with other African countries with a view **to** ensuring mutual intra-African cooperation and development

The above, among other considerations, or guiding principles ("Nigeria's foreign policy, knitted into a whole, underpins Africa as the cornerstone of her foreign policy. Nigeria's motivational urge to play leading mediatory roles to ensure peace in Chad must have derived from her foreign policy agenda for Africa.

In addition to the above considerations, was the perceived fear that any crisis of war magnitude in a close neighbouring state, such as Chad, would no doubt, have a negative spill over effect on both internal security of that country, and also, such recipient country would be forced to contend with the problems of refugee immigrants from the warring state (Imobighe).

Right from the beginning of the civil wars in Chad, Nigeria played mediatory roles at least to ensure peace, law and order. In all the peace conferences held at various times in various countries in Africa to discuss the Chadian crisis, Nigeria played very prominent and remarkable roles. Apart from being the convener of most of the peace conferences, it also encouraged the OAU to initiate moves to end the civil wars in Chad. Such peace conferences included: The First and Second Kano Peace conferences held in March and April 1979 respectively and the Lagos Conference held in May 1979. Nigeria also took part in all the OAU convened peace conferences held to discuss the Chadian question; Through the peace talks, Nigeria promoted a little-known civil servant, Mahmat Shewa Lol, as a compromise head of a coalition government. Vogt (1981), however observed that Lol's perceived status as a Nigerian puppet led to mounting opposition that bedevilled his short term (29 April to 3 September, 1979) as President in 1979.

Aside participating in these Peace Conferences, Nigeria and Chad entered into a joint patrol agreement on the Lake Chad region. It is instructive to note that there had been border clashes between Nigeria and Chad on the Lake Chad region resulting in the embarrassment and gruesome killing of Nigerian fishermen and

soldiers by the Chadian gendarmes. It was for this reason that the joint patrol operation was launched to put an end to the border clashes (Sunday Times, June 5, 1983). In February 1979, Nigeria under General Olusegun Obasanjo invited President Felix Malloum of Chad and his Prime Minister Hissene Habre who were arm-locked in armed confrontation over the leadership of the country, for a peace talk. The invitation was sequel to the concern shown by Nigeria over the fresh outbreak of clashes between the two leaders resulting in killings and destruction of property (Uwechue 1991).

According to Vogt, in March 1979, Nigeria hosted the OAU Conference on Chadian Reconciliation to discuss ways to find a lasting solution to the multi-pronged conflict in Chad. By this gesture, Nigeria demonstrated that African problems can be solved by Africans. As the influx of Chadian refugees into Nigeria could not be avoided, a number of them including Nigerians displaced in Chad as a result of the war, found themselves in the Maiduguri region of the country. The refugees were of two categories, namely those who were skilled workmen and those who were unskilled. Those refugees who possessed the needed skills proved to be very hard workers and employers of labour preferred them to their Nigerian counterparts. So, the presence of the skilled Chadian refugees did not cause the perceived refugee security tension. The problem was with the unskilled refugees who found it difficult to secure jobs. Joblessness no doubt, forced many of them to resort to begging and prostitution to make a living. Many of the unskilled Chadian refugees became ready instruments in the hands of dissident elements that were used to cause havoc (Dafe).

In the course of caring for the refugees, a Federal Relief Committee chaired by Alhaji Kachalla Barko was formed, and the Federal Government approved the sum of ₦1 million for the maintenance of the Chadian refugees. The maintenance allowance was divided into two:

those refugees staying with their friends and relatives in Maiduguri were paid maintenance allowance while those in refugee camp were fed by the Federal Relief Committee three times daily (Vogt 1981). It should here be stated in clear terms

that the Federal Relief Committee did not differentiate between skilled and unskilled Chadian refugees in their maintenance programme for the "unavoidable visitors" **from** Chad.

In November 1981, an OAU peace meeting on the Chadian question was held in Paris, France. As part of the decisions reached (Paris Accord), Nigeria was nominated among other African countries-Zaire, Senegal, Guinea, Togo and Benin Republic to contribute troops to the OAU Peace Keeping Force (*Times International* (1982)). At the OAU's Heads of State meeting held in Nairobi on November 27 and 28, 1981, the OAU stipulated that contributing countries should be responsible for their troops in Chad and that they would be reimbursed for the expenditure when the OAU takes over those expenses. Ironically, the OAU was able to raise only four hundred thousand US dollars. All other contributing countries failed in their promises to the Peace Keeping Mission in Chad. *Times International* (February, 1982), put it clearly that Nigeria bore most of the brunt for the operation and was spending about five million dollars a month for the upkeep of Nigerian troops which were three battalions initially. All fuelling of OAU vehicles and aircraft as well as those of other contributing countries were borne by Nigeria. At a point, Nigeria had to feed starving Senegalese troops for ten days until their resources arrived.

Nigeria, being a big regional neighbour needs Chad, and a peaceful Chad was more beneficial especially to Nigeria than a Chad that was torn by violence. As a landlocked neighbouring country, Chad got most of its economic necessities such as consumables from Nigeria. Therefore, Nigeria did not play any role that was likely to sustain the crisis in Chad.

The OAU Peacekeeping Force in Chad/Nigeria's Involvement

In accordance with Article I (4) of the OAU Charter which stipulates peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration, Elaigwu (1984) observed

that the organization was constantly on its toes to ensure that peace return to Chad. All the initial peace conferences convened or caused to be convened by the OAU to find a lasting solution to the Chadian crisis, are sufficiently familiar as discussed above. It is instructive to note that the OAU had to convene subsequent peace conferences as a result of the failure of previous accords to solve the Chadian problem. The OAU also championed the formation of the OAU Peacekeeping Force whose contributing member countries included Nigeria, Zaire, Senegal, Guinea, Togo and Benin Republic. The first OAU attempt at peacekeeping in 1980 ended about two months after it began (*Times International*, 1982). This peacekeeping operation failed to solve the Chadian problem, between the two major factional leaders, Goukouni and Habre, resumed in March thus effectively ending the ceasefire brokered in Lagos at the famous Lagos Conference. Nigeria, seeing peacekeeping as a viable option for managing the military challenges in Chad, prompted a second OAU attempt at peacekeeping. This operation lasted a bit longer than the first, from December 1981 to June 1982. Initially there was high hope that the OAU which had long been accused of being a "toothless bulldog" with its peacekeeping force would achieve the desired objective for which it was formed (ending the civil war in Chad). Unfortunately, the OAU peacekeeping operation in Chad turned out to be a total failure. It did not only fail to bring an end to the fighting in Chad, but also paved the way for the successful overthrow of the "legal authority" in Chad (New Africa, 1982).

Consequent upon the unending civil wars in Chad, the OAU convened another round table peace conference among the eleven factions at Addis Ababa scheduled for January 9, 1984. Sanda (2013) observed that most of the delegates attended the conference except Hissene Habre who reacted very negatively to what he regarded as Mengistu's covert support for Weddeye. Weddeye had indicated that he would only attend the conference if he was invited as the legitimate leader of Chad. In the alternative, he (Weddeye) insisted that he and Habre be invited as leaders of factions on equal status, to the conference. The talks once again

failed and thus continued the search for peace in the Chadian unrest as it became more internationalized

On why the OAU Peace-keeping force failed in Chad, Sanda (2013) opined that "the OAU Peace keeping force was doomed to fail abinitio because the OAU as a body undertaking such an enterprise for the first time, had no previous experience of its own to draw on, and had to rely on whatever guidelines there were at its disposal". To compound the OAU problem, France and US that promised to send aid to the OAU if only it could get Libya to withdraw its troops from Chad, failed in their promises after Libyan troops had been withdrawn. Furthermore, the instruction to the peace keeping force to remain neutral, in other words, should not take on any of the warring factions in hostilities, rendered the role of the force ambiguous. Goukouni could not imagine the OAU asking his mentor (Libya) to leave Chad without providing essentially the same services and assistance. These and other reasons made the OAU peacekeeping force effort a colossal failure.

Nigeria and other Foreign Powers involvement in the Chadian Conflict

All the foreign powers be they from outside or from within the African continent that got involved in one way or the other in the Chadian civil wars had their peculiar reasons or objectives for their involvement. While some intervened on moral grounds (e.g. Nigeria) to make peace, others were delicately diplomatic and strategic. It is a common knowledge that Chad was colonized by the French imperialists during the period of the European scramble for, and partition of African states (late 19th century) (New Nigeria). While the southern Sara nationalities in Chad welcomed the French as protectors against the northern (Muslim) slave raiders, they equally embraced the French culture which included the Christian religion and the Western education. In the north among the Muslims however, hostility to the French was extremely fierce where fighting continued sporadically from 1901 to 1902 (*Sunday Concord*). After the French had effectively occupied Chad, the country's ethnic groups continued to differentiate

themselves in their reactions to French colonial rule. The Sara however, who had proved receptive to the education, culture and religion brought by the French colonizers, were those who later benefited from colonial rule., and in the course of time they began to rise in the administration.

Beside assuming to be godfather to the Sara of southern Chad for being receptive to them (French), the French had an investment on the production of cotton, and this was considered a venture that needed to be guarded jealously. This might have informed the French interventionist role in the Chadian crisis. It was therefore not a misplaced priority that, having established an economic empire in cotton production in Chad, the French would stop at nothing to have it protected. This might have explained why the French honoured the Tombalbaye's call for military assistance to fight the FROLINAT (Front for the National Liberation of Chad) and re-establish his authority in Chad. At other times when the struggle for supremacy became fierce between General Felix Malloum and Hissene Habre, according to Nigeria Standard of May 6, 1986, the neo-colonizers (French) pressurized Malloum to arrange peace with Habre, a peace talk that later produced Habre as Prime Minister. In 1978, the French also approached Nigeria to assist in Chad's quest for peace and stability. No doubt, these were diplomatic measures employed to protect the French economic interest in Chad. The availability of uranium and manganese in Chad must also have influenced the French intervention in the Chadian crisis.

France needed these minerals for her defence plans, although Libya claimed the location of the minerals as its territory. France therefore supported Hissene Habre against Goukoun Weddeye/ Libyan troops in order to edge out Libya's claim on the minerals strip. France thus had more than economic and ideological reasons for intervening in the Chadian crisis.

France also got involved in the Chadian crisis; for strategic reason. She considered N'Djamena the capital of Chad as the most conducive strategic location for offensive interventionist operation by its forces. It should be recalled that France airlifted troops into NDJemena for the overthrow of Emperor Bokassa of Central

African Republic on September 20, 1979 while he was in Libya (Eliagwu).

Libya was one of the external powers that contested for supremacy in the Chadian conflict, precisely because of its claims to the Aouzou strip where she maintained some number of Soldiers, Libya's claim to the mineral (uranium and manganese) rich Aouzou strip goes back to 1973 when Gaddafi sent troops into the area claiming that it rightfully belonged to Libya. He predicated his argument on the basis of an unratified agreement between France and Italy signed in 1935 (Eliagwu), He built an airbase at Aouzou, set up a civil administration and issued maps showing the strip as Libya's sovereign territory. It was this strip Gaddafi used as a forward base for deeper involvement in Chad. The fact is that Gaddafi's Libya was unwavering in its claim to the Aouzou strip because he needed the uranium and manganese for nuclear research. The desire to protect his claim on the Aouzou strip must have catalyzed his intervention in the Chadian crisis on the side of Goukouni against General Mallourn (Sanda).

Adewuyi observed that religious factor has also played an uncommon role in Libya's intervention in the Chadian crisis. History has it that the Muslims in northern Chad were Islamized by members of the tightly regulated Sanussiyya Brotherhood from Libya. It is against this background that scholars have described the revolutionary manner by which Gaddafi spread Islam in Africa as not only fanatical, but a demonstration of religious radicalism. Besides, Gaddafi had ambitions to continental leadership and he believed that Chad could provide him with an opportunity to establish a southern sphere of influence. This was why Libya supported the various insurgent groups in northern Chad before the eventual overthrow of President Tombalbaye. This historical background among other things influenced Libya's attitude in the Chadian crisis.

Zaire, a neighbouring state to Chad was also involved in the Chadian crisis. It supplied Hissene Habre one Hercules transport, three Macchi MB326 counter Insurgent Planes and three Mirages (Eliagwu, 1984). It has been opinionated that Zaire's action was motivated by her Security concern. Zaire feared that Libyan

penetration into Chad might provide Gaddafi more opportunity to promote his Islamic revolutionary movement. Thus, the earlier everything possible was done to ambush Gaddafi's perceived plan¹ the better for Zaire.

The United States of America was not left out on the list of foreign powers that got involved in the Chadian crisis. The US came in to support Habre against other contestants for power and control of the central government. The Reagan administration in 1983 was said to have assisted Habre's government with ten aid package. A week later six C-141 Starlifter of the US Air Force began lifting jeeps and other like Redeye Anti-air Craft missiles into N'Djamena. America also extended similar gesture of twelve million dollars aid to Nigeria, Senegal and Zaire for the OAU Peace Keeping Force in Chad (*Africa Today*). American concern in this regard was both diplomatic and economic. Her interest to intervene was motivated by the activities of France and Libya in Chad. America therefore considered its involvement in the Chadian crisis as an opportunity to demonstrate to her African friends, particularly Egypt, the Sudan and Zaire that she can challenge Libyan Islamic revolutionary adventurism in Chad.

Furthermore, American economic interest in the Chad region cannot be underestimated. There was an American Oil Company, the Conoco, which had been engaged in drilling of oil in Western and Southern Chad, so that any measure that would bring the civil wars in Chad to an end, for the prospect of the oil company must

The African Diary (1975) writing on Chad, debunked the Soviet Union claim, that it did not have any interest in the Chadian crisis, and that it was for the peaceful settlement of conflicts between countries of Africa. However, practical evidence has shown that the Soviet claim was not true. It was strongly believed that the Soviet Union was covertly behind Libya's activities in Chad. Or how does one explain Gaddafi's supply of Soviet Union military weapons to support Weddeye in his struggle for power in Chad and still profess non-involvement because, according to her, there was nothing to protect.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it became obvious that apart from Nigeria, whose involvements in the Chadian crisis was motivated by moral justification for peace, other foreign powers especially Libya, France and USA, were motivated by their peculiar interests that were strategic, economic, diplomatic and political. It must be stated unequivocally, that the involvement of foreign powers helped to sustain the crisis. Their activities were greatly responsible for the long duration and intensity of the crisis. What was a supposedly domestic strife in Chad was intentionally blown out of proportion and magnified into a full blown war by the foreign powers involvement in the crisis. However, considering the likely security implications of the Chadian conflicts on Nigeria, which is the crux of Nigeria's role in the Chadian crisis^ Nigeria as a neighbouring state to Chad observed that in an internal conflict or civil war in a neighbouring country, the negative effects of such conflict are very likely to have a spillover effect on any of its neighbours. As a result, Nigeria perceived this danger hence, her countless efforts to ensure that peace and stability was restored in Chad.

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