

Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau.
Adekeye Adebajo. Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002. 192 pp.

In this occasional paper for the International Peace Academy, Adekeye Adebajo takes a look at the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the attempts to build peace in the internal conflicts of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau. His aim is to come to an evaluation of the military interventions in the said three cases and the ECOWAS security system in general. Adebajo, who is the director of the Africa program at the IPA and a renowned specialist in West African politics, personally interviewed some of the key figures in the events detailed in the book and even managed to get access to some hitherto unpublished government documents from various nations.

He starts his analysis with a chapter on the political development of West Africa since independence. According to his view the events in this region can only be understood with regard to the development of the relations between the francophone bloc of nations (Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, Niger, Burkina Faso, Togo, Senegal, Guinea), their former metropolis France, and Nigeria, the regional economic and military powerhouse. The conflict or convergence of interests of these key players shaped the political landscape of West Africa and influenced the way ECOWAS was formed and subsequently acted. Far from fulfilling the hopes of West Africans, Adebajo concludes, the political leaders of the region failed to create strong democracies and vibrant economies. These failures took on tragic proportions in the cases of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau.

The first case study of the present book deals with the civil war that ravaged Liberia from 1990 to 1997 and has recently flared up again. Adebajo gives a concise overview of the course of the war and its major events before analysing in more detail why no fewer than twelve consecutive peace agreements failed. He explains that peace in the end could only be achieved for three reasons: (a) Charles Taylor, the leading warlord of Liberia, had been weakened by his enemies, which made him more amenable to peace overtures, (b) Taylor and the Nigerian president Obasanjo achieved a rapprochement that made a negotiated solution of the conflict possible, and (c) ECOWAS gave up its efforts to strengthen the role of civil society in post-war Liberia and caved in to the demands of the warlords. Adebajo concludes this chapter with a glum outlook for the future of Liberia. The fighting between the new rebel organisation LURD and Taylor's government forces leaves the country devastated and drives thousands of Liberians from their homes. According to Adebajo, Taylor's failure to perform the change from warlord to statesman is the main reason for this new escalation.

In the second case study, Adebajo analyzes the conflict in Sierra Leone. He sees the roots of this conflict in the misrule of Siaka Stevens and Joseph Momoh which created an atmosphere of unrest and upheaval. In March 1991 Foday Sankoh, with the help of Liberian warlord Charles Taylor, launched an insurrection that sparked a decade-long war. As was the case in Liberia ECOWAS tried to pacify the situation by sending a peacekeeping force. Understaffed and poorly equipped, the ECOMOG (ECOWAS Cease Fire Monitoring Group) forces attempted to restore law and order in Sierra Leone. Only in 1999 when Nigeria, the main contributor to ECOMOG, threatened to withdraw its forces completely, did the UN react. The UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was created and political pressure on Taylor and other parties to the conflict intensified. Eventually a peace deal was struck that again favoured warlords over civil society. Adebajo comes to the conclusion that the ECOMOG forces were hampered by internal dissent in ECOWAS. Their effectiveness was further reduced by a shortage of military material and funding.

The civil war that raged in Guinea-Bissau between 1998 and 1999 is the third case study of the book. Since this conflict is little known outside the region, Adebajo relates in some detail the

background of this war and the flow of events. He explains that the trigger for this civil war can be found in the personal conflict between President Vieira and General Mane. When Vieira tried to push Mane out of office, the General used his command over the armed forces to instigate a coup against the President. Senegal and Guinea intervened ostensibly to keep the peace, but also with their own political agendas in mind. ECOWAS members later declared their approval of the intervention, but hesitated to give the mission financial or logistical support. The UN once more showed little interest in West Africa and reacted with forming the UN Peacebuilding Support Office for Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) that with only eighteen employees was decidedly understaffed. Although a successful attack of Mane's forces ended the civil war and led to new elections, Adebajo gives a bleak prospect for Guinea-Bissau's future. The new President Yala has inherited an economically and structurally weak country that is ridden with internal strife. External help is hardly to be expected. Furthermore, Yala has embarked on a dangerous course of awarding high offices only to his ethnic group.

In the last part of the book Adebajo tries to draw some lessons from the past interventions of ECOWAS. He evaluates the reform of the ECOWAS security mechanism and discusses the idea of a West African rapid reaction force. His main doubt concerning the effectiveness of such a force deals with the notorious shortage of money and supplies. Nonetheless, Adebajo sees the attempts of the ECOWAS to install a security mechanism in its own subregion as an important step in the development of West African nations. The moves to integrate West African economies and to create stabilizing security institutions might lead to more healthy economies and more vibrant democracies.

Adebajo's book is a detailed and interesting study of the interventions of ECOWAS into the civil wars in its subregion. The author very skilfully combines a narrative of major events with an in-depth analysis of problems, causes and possible solutions. *Building Peace in West Africa* is a highly recommendable read for all students of African politics.

Dieter Janssen
Peace Research Institute, Oslo Norway