WEST AFRICA: SECURITY CRISIS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A SECURITY FRAMEWORK.

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ABSTRACT

The first mental picture that strikes one's brain at the mention of African politics is whether wars, ethnic conflicts, political corruption, dictatorship, military coups etc. Famine and poverty could be added when it comes to the general perception of a layman especially non-African who depends upon the media to know about the continent. And it is a known fact that the media plays a significant role in the proliferation of such perceptions as it always exaggeratedly highlights the dark side of African political situation and ignores its positive achievements. Nevertheless, it is indisputable truth that there is a serious security problem in the African continent. The study of security today no longer focuses upon the narrow perspective of military factors as the only determinants of national, regional, or international security. Rather, economic, political, social, and even cultural dimensions are taken into consideration to understand any nation's security. As such, from this spectrum it is perceived that almost all African countries despite their diversities confront similar security problems that constituted a dilemma right from independence from direct European rule in the 1950s and 1960s till the present post-Cold War era.

West Africa, made up of Anglophone and Francophone states, constituted an active region in terms of interstate relations. It is the grouping of sixteen of these states that forms the regional organization the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). There has not been any major war between its states although there were and are still several latent border disputes. For example between Nigeria and Cameroon, (the latter is not a member of the Community), Niger and Benin, Ghana and Togo (after independence), Burkina Faso and Mali, Senegal and Morocco, with the latter four countries' disputes escalating to military clashes at one time. However, the most serious security problems faced by the region in the last four
decades were authoritarian regimes, military coups, civil wars, and economic stagnation among others.

West African security crisis has surfaced on the international arena in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War. This new political dawn has raised several security questions at a regional level when a civil war broke out in Liberia and later in Sierra Leone. That conflict had political, military and social spillover that called for the intervention of ECOWAS Military Observer Group known as ECOMOG, supported by other non-West African states as well as the UN in the region.

Apart from the civil wars in the two states mentioned above, there had been and continues to be critical security instability of other dimensions in the post-Cold War during the process of democratization and multipartism in several West African states. Political violence and manipulation during elections and military intervention in politics have all continued to undermine the regional stability of ECOWAS. For instance, Nigeria during the reign of General Ibrahim Babangida and his successor General Abacha, the military coup d'état in Niger by General Ibrahim Mainassara and his assassination two years later, the ousting of Gambian president by the army as well as the overthrow of the elected government in Sierra Leone, the political crisis in Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) in 1999 prior to the election of 2000, and the bloody short war in Guinea Bissau. All these factors constitute a security dilemma for ECOWAS.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

ECOWAS was founded as an economic grouping with an agenda that would lead to gradual regional economic integration for the sake of dignified welfare for the populace. It is in conformity with the objective of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that intends to create an African Union similar to that of Europe. Considering
the security problems mentioned earlier among ECOWAS members alone, leaving aside similar ones in the other regions of the continent, how can the region deal effectively with such kind of security problems in a manner that would help materialize its goals of economic and political integration? What are the best strategies to be adopted in order to curb military intervention in politics? Ethnic problem is one of the most serious destabilizing factors of African national security, and it is common among almost all African countries. In fact, tribalism or ethnic differences have been politicized to the extent that they turned to be a political doctrine in the minds of the intellegetia as well as the common masses. That always results in social unrest that might lead to anarchy as had been demonstrated in Liberia, or to state failure like the case of Somalia. The European Union (EU) which is presumably the model for African Union (AU), is in sharp disparity if its security situation is compared with that of ECOWAS or even the whole continent of Africa. Can there be any measures to be taken so as to eradicate or at least mitigate the factors of instability and underdevelopment in West Africa so that the African dream can be realized? The ECOWAS of course continues to make serious attempts to respond to these kinds of social, political, economic, and military questions. Nonetheless, the region remains insecure and susceptible to the recurrence of similar threats at any time in the future. Eventually, there is an urgent need for a security framework to address such perceived security threats that continue to linger every now and then.
OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to highlight the most critical causes of insecurity in all its dimensions that stand as formidable challenges to ECOWAS objectives of economic integration and sustainable prosperity. These are namely, security, political, economic, and social dimensions. Since as stated earlier, the continent of Africa in general faces the same security crises, West Africa as a region will be a case study, the proposed security framework of which could be applicable on other parts of the continent to achieve a common security goal. However, the continent’s utmost goal of establishing the AU in the model of European Union in the near future is questionable. That would be substantiated by expounding several security issues that ECOWAS faces as a case study. The endeavour is intended to help achieve stability as well as to make suggestions that would lead to better chances for West Africa’s survival as a more cohesive region in this new millenium. Such desired objective if materialized, would grant West Africa a significant leverage in the African continent and among the international community.

SIGNIFICANCE

The framework that would be suggested as a solution to the ECOWAS security problems is the significance of this paper. Because many studies have been conducted on African politics and others, but few serious suggestions have so far been provided as solutions. Besides, most of the security issues that had exhausted the continent’s energy, mind, and time, continue to persist until now. Despite the hopeful expectation of Africa’s future by many, the majority of political researchers on African affairs believe that things are always getting from bad to worst in black Africa. Thus, it is about time that more serious attempts be made to objectively analyze such a
METHODOLOGY

This work will rely on primary sources such as political statements by leaders of the member states of ECOWAS, policy statements by the leaders and officials of the organization as well as periodical reports and journals issued by ECOWAS secretariat. Similarly, the work will also draw on other secondary sources such as press statements, reports in economic and political magazines as well as academic works on ECOWAS and the West African sub-region.

HYPOTHESIS

"More objective evaluation of some West African issues before and after the Cold War will lead to the conclusion that African Union can’t be successfully modeled after the European Union”

LITERATURE REVIEW

A significant number of writers and political scientists has written and continue to write on the predicament that African countries face. That is in a macro-level as these writers highlight the continent’s economic, political, social, and military crises beginning before colonial time to the present. Although many findings diagnosing Africa’s security crises had been arrived at, yet they failed to work as a practical remedy to change such a scenario. However, these academic works are still relevant to this contribution. Therefore, here is the literature review of some of them:

Pierre Etienne Dostert’s book “Africa 1991” is very important due to its comprehensiveness in dealing with all aspects of African affairs, especially, military, political and economic problems. Furthermore, it is inclusive of all African’s countries organized into regional areas to highlight the problems encountering groups
that live closed to each other in a certain region. The author highlighted that many African nations are not governed democratically in the sense of the word. Because as he said: "some countries are run by military men, many of whom have changed their power only through the muscle of the armed forces". That is very significant because it means that since democracy is to lead to economic development and political stability. Therefore, Africa is deprived of such vital democracy. He also emphasizes the inefficiency of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It is consisted of 50 member states but with all the financial privileges it enjoys, it failed to lead Africa to any significant economic, political, or social development. The major emphasis of his work lies in his description of African situation on page 7, that: "Although tons of relief food continue to pour in from all over the world, officials have a difficult time with distribution. They are hampered by civil wars, poor roads and a shortage of tracks, as well as internal corruption of politicians." Both foreign relief organizations and African governments face great difficulty in carrying out relief works due to these obstacles.

A. T. Grove has deliberated thoroughly upon some of the important problems that Africa encounters. That is in his book "The changing Geography of Africa", which was reprinted in 1991. The most important of these problems is famine, which is a formidable obstacle before many African states. Though environmental factors like drought and desertification play an active role in Africa's security instability, yet human systems and man made disasters take the greater part of this role.

On the political aspect, most of the governments of Africa find national unity to be very difficult a task to achieve because of lack of common origins and aims amongst different ethnic groups, and often disrespect for the national government's legitimacy. Ethnic as well as religious differences makes it difficult for Africans to agree on
common government form and laws. In Nigeria for example, federalism fails to strengthen national unity and stability. Liberia which has an American form of presidential system, also has also failed to an example for other African states to follow. This in turn negatively affects the foundation for regional integration, as Nigeria which is the most vital country in West Africa could not have stable foundation that might allow it to play the expected important regional role befitting its status in the region.

However, Grove tries to free foreign colonialism altogether from responsibility in the crisis. But the fact is that, before the European intervention in the course of African countries' historical development, Africans, and particularly West Africans were in the process of state formation and regional development. But colonial intervention had brought that process to a halt. Various different ethnic groups and religious entities had been brought by colonial governments to live under one central government, for which many of them failed to accord national legitimacy. The alienation of the masses from their governments cripples successful nation building in the present apathetic phenomenon was unknown prior to European colonialism. The political ideologies, explained by Grove, adopted by African governments are very strange. The centralization and control of every aspect of people's daily activities by the government has contributed tremendously to Africa's underdevelopment and instability. For example, socialism and single-party systems. Weak state structures, negligence of agriculture, political and administrative corruption have prospered under such forms of authoritarianism. As such, the military finds a pretext to intervene in politics from time to another with the excuse of ridding the state of corrupt politicians. Therefore, the military remains in power in a way or another although in most cases it did not prove itself better the previous regimes.
Tony Chafer's article published in Foreign Affairs (1992), 91, 37-51 under the title "French African Policy: Towards Change", highlighted that the main interest of France towards its former colonies in Africa is not economic. But rather, it is political and strategic. This interest is significant for the maintenance of French status as a major power in Europe and in the international arena. To realize this, France before decolonization had formulated policies that would preserve most of its colonial interests in black Africa. For instance, logistic assistance treaties, and the monetary Franc Zone. Foreign aid given to Francophone countries is not aimed at enhancing their self-sufficiency. Rather, in practice it is to design the model in which Africa is expected to reflect French international prestige and status. This is further strengthened by many Francophone African leaders who want French intervention in African internal affairs because of different reasons. That is why even in insignificant sectors Francophone African dependency on France is clear. For instance, to have a colour television project, Burundi relied on a loan it required from France for that. Likewise, Gabon had to seek the same for an advanced technological institute. France is gradually withdrawing from its traditional economic policy in Africa because of the burden it feels from its financial assistance to its former colonies. Some French elite has raised the probability of benefiting more if France invests in a better lucrative region in the world like in Eastern Europe after the new developments beginning in 1990s. Consequently, France's world importance has tremendously decreased following the end of the Cold War, which was the main political and strategic factor that permitted it to maintain significant influence over its former colonies. It can no longer play any influencing role independent of other major powers, particularly after
the economic and political breakdown of number of its ex-colonies like Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire, whose economic need has increased significantly.

"Africa in Transition" published in 1972, by B.W. Hodder and D.R. Harris, despite its old publication has emphasized some of the most significant impacts British and French colonialism had left in the African continent. According to them, underdevelopment appeared to be indirectly attributed to Africans rather than colonialism. For example, much stress has been put on the different kinds of crops introduced by Europeans in Africa, the railroads built, modernization and urbanization of African way of life all are due to colonial positive efforts. Politically, it was European colonialism that modernized African administrative systems. However, it is a historical fact to testify that kingdoms and states formed prior to European arrival to West Africa had more efficient economic, social, and political systems suitable to the African needs and way of life. Due to the destruction of those African historical achievements and the inheriting of colonial legacies, all modern African activities of all aspects are underdeveloping instead of developing. Currency, economic, social, administrative, and educational systems all failed in Africa. West African countries encounter contemporary problems especially in economic and realms. Their national sources of income are inadequate and always form a barrier to substantial economic progress and so to political development and stability. The real cause of the problem can partially be attributed to colonization. Nevertheless, the new governments of the post-colonial era in West Africa are also responsible for their inefficient ability to adequately respond to the situation. The dependence of African states on a few export products as sources of economic income is vulnerable. These few crops face continuous crises of pests, soil deterioration, as well as local market policy, and price
fluctuation and demand in the international market. Moreover, population consideration may merely accounts for a country's influence in the international arena. But it can not be a pretext for underdevelopment and inability to reach self-sufficiency at least in basic human needs. It is enough to say that many rich and industrial countries of Europe are of small population. There is also the problem of dependence over the imports of manufactured goods by African states. A number of steps were taken to limit this dire shortcoming. Several small industries like textile, cement, meat canning, flour milling, and car assembly plants were established. However, the outcome of such industries is not really significant as a sign of development. As a matter of fact, today most of them have recently deteriorated because of many factors like inefficient administration and corruption.

Trade between West African countries as a region is also very meager due to weakness in purchasing power. A major reason for this is poor transportation and communication. African states have realized this weakness and have agreed to take measures to address it. Nonetheless, realization of such objective proved unpractical until today. There is also the currency problem. There are basically two monetary systems in West Africa, the Franc and the Sterling. The first is tied to the French economy that Francophone countries have never been able to break loose from because of economic dependence on France.

There is no geographical division in the world with so many independent states similar to Africa. African countries have similar economic crises and lack sufficient economic leverage for an independent political existence. Several of them are landlocked and have to depend on their neighbors for foreign trade, like Niger, Mali,
Burkina Faso, Zambia, Lesotho, Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and Burundi.

This explains the urgent need for inter-states cooperation, and the move towards regional integration.