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African's sub-regional bloc's challenges in coordinating collective security amidst the influence of external state powers in African security governance: The case of ECOWAS and the roles of Nigeria, France, and the UNSC in the civil wars of Liberia and Mali

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This paper analyzed regional collective security cooperation and ownership challenges under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) vis-à-vis regional organizations' responsibilities as outlined in the UN Charter. The paper situated these challenges in the conflicting interests of Nigeria, a sub-regional hegemon or aspiring hegemon, France as an extra-regional counter-hegemony, and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as an arbiter. The research employed neo-realism and counter-hegemonic theories as analytical lenses. Qualitative methods, specifically desk review and interviews, were utilized. The research found that, on the one hand, Nigeria influences ECOWAS for cooperation internally and externally during interventions in Liberia and Mali to enhance ECOWAS' ownership of sub-regional security in line with the UN Charter. On the other hand, France has undermined sub-regional security cooperation in Liberia and ownership in Mali. Paris opposed Nigerian-led ECOWAS security actorness in the former with its indifference to the UNSC and manifested state-centrism under the cover of multilateralism in Mali, backed by UNSC decisions. It is recommended that, in the short run, a continental united front is needed at all times at the UNSC on African peace and security issues, and more resources should be allocated to Regional Economic Communities (RECs), particularly the African Union (AU). In the long run, Africa needs to continue its call for a reformed UNSC, and Nigeria needs to get its domestic politics right and maintain its political will to lead the sub-region and continent.

Key words: ECOWAS, AU, UNSC, collective security, cooperation, ownership, Liberia, Mali.

INTRODUCTION

The West African sub-region is the most volatile in Africa, characterized by civil wars, coups, and terrorism (Aning and Bah, 2009). This necessitated the incorporation of security into the mandate of ECOWAS in its 1993 revised treaty (Okon and Ojakorotu, 2022). The move was meant to bring about collective security to address the limitations of individual member states politically and materially in dealing with their internal security. ECOWAS has since

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become the most developed and complex Regional Economic Community (REC) in Africa, especially concerning collective security (Francis, 2009). However, ECOWAS' collective security efforts are not without challenges. The main challenge emanates from the geopolitical dynamics of the sub-region, specifically the lingering Anglophone/Francophone divides and the hegemonic contest between Nigeria and France. While Nigeria is the most influential West African member state and seeks to diminish extra-regional states' influence in the sub-region, France is the most influential extra-regional actor in West Africa and aims to maintain the status quo. This makes the interaction between these two states pivotal in determining, and detrimental to, the security politics of the sub-region. The discussion is in light of the relevance of regional bodies in their respective regional peace and security. For instance, former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stated, '… regional action as a matter of decentralization, delegation, and cooperation with United Nations' efforts could not only lighten the burden of the Security Council but also contribute to a deeper sense of participation…' (Alagappa, 1998 p.3).

The paper's significance, therefore, stems from the need to find a lasting solution to the antagonistic sub-regional lingual divide and power struggle for a more united, resourced, and trusted front in sub-regional security cooperation in fulfillment of the UN mandate. As such, the paper is situated in a body of literature on extra-regional disregard for African capacity in multilateral engagements on African states' security. For instance, Denis Tull found in his work that Malian expertise was ignored by external actors during the 2013 intervention (Tull, 2019 p.415). Similarly, according to Habibu Bappah, the European Union's (EU's) security collaborations with Africa permit extra-regional states such as France to manifest state centrism in African security governance (Bappah, 2022). However, the role of the UNSC as an arbiter has not been adequately addressed in the academic literature relative to the sub-regional geopolitical challenge. This paper thus analyzes the challenges facing ECOWAS in coordinating sub-regional collective security cooperation and ownership vis-à-vis France's state-centrism and the role of the UNSC. Collective security cooperation means, first, the ability of ECOWAS member states to speak in one voice and act in unison on sub-regional security. Second, it involves the ability of ECOWAS to gain the support of the UNSC for legitimacy, resources, and ownership for sub-regional security efforts. Collective security ownership, on the other hand, means dealing with West African security challenges from within, or, where necessary, doing so in collaboration with external actors (state or non-state), without compromising on sub-regional endogenous approaches.

The question then is, to what extent does the UNSC support ECOWAS' sub-regional collective security ownership amidst Nigeria's hegemonic pursuit and France's counter-hegemony? The article addresses this question by assessing the roles of ECOWAS, the UNSC, Nigeria, and France in ECOWAS' interventions in Liberia and Mali in two sections. In the first section, it is argued that while the Nigeria-led ECOWAS intervention in Liberia manifested hegemony, albeit weak, and sought cooperation among ECOWAS states and between ECOWAS and the UNSC, it faced challenges in both. It is also shown that these challenges were largely attributable to France's counter-hegemony, as it did not facilitate cooperation with ECOWAS among its ally Francophone states. Second, France failed to use its influence in the UNSC to foster cooperation with ECOWAS. Both factors weakened the intervention, as ECOWAS initially experienced legitimacy crises and encountered limited resources.

Nevertheless, it is concluded that ECOWAS acquitted itself well under the circumstances and maintained ownership through leadership, achieving some considerable successes. In the second section on Mali, it is argued that cooperation challenges were mainly limited to ECOWAS/AU and the UNSC, relative to France's state centrism. It is demonstrated that, on one hand, Nigeria remained consistent in offering hegemonic leadership through ECOWAS but was weak from a material power and diplomatic perspective. On the other hand, France also remained consistent in its counter-hegemony but in a more active manner. It is shown that France's counter-hegemony was supported by key UNSC decisions. The conclusion is drawn that ECOWAS' attempt to own the intervention by leading the process was compromised by France's state centrism.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative-based, in contrast to quantitative, given the nature of the topic, as there are fewer potential participants. Thus, desk-based research relying on secondary data and interviews was adopted for triangulation purposes. Triangulation involves using different sources of data to check the authenticity of information (Heale and Forbes, 2013). For instance, documentary data was cross-checked for authenticity or possible distortions by comparing secondary documents with primary documents. Additionally, both primary and secondary documents were compared with interview transcripts, and vice versa, to validate the authenticity of interview data. In other words, weaknesses in one source were compensated for by the other to ensure validity (ibid). Regarding reliability, the triangulation process, alongside transparency in the data analysis process, ensures the reproducibility of conclusions. Information such as resolutions and communiques on the topic under study were sourced from the websites of ECOWAS, the AU, and the UN, as well as academic journal articles. Aside from the rich information from these sources, documentary data is also convenient yet does not compromise on quality, as it allows for data collection in a vast research area like West Africa without the need for extensive travel (Johnston, 2017).

A semi-structured interview was chosen because it allows for the solicitation of detailed information through follow-up questions, unlike other types of interviews (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The research aimed to target interviewees with expertise in the subject of the paper, with the expectation that such individuals would provide accurate information. Therefore, an 'elite' interview approach was adopted, where 'elite' primarily refers to interviewees with access to accurate and in-depth information due to their current or past positions (Burnham et al., 2008). Consequently, leading members of

entities dealing with sub-regional peace and security, such as the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP), the Ghana Armed Forces Command and Staff College (GAFCSC), and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Centre (KAIPTC), along with government officials specializing in foreign policy and national security, and academics in fields such as Peace, Security, and International Relations were interviewed. Respondents were selected through non-random purposive sampling to target suitable participants. Due to the challenges in securing respondents, partly because of the sensitive nature of the topic, a snowballing approach was adopted, where one respondent directs the researcher to another (Dragan and Isaic-Maniu, 2013). Nine (9) respondents were interviewed on a face-to-face basis.

The paper employed the three-step approach of Corbin and Strauss to thematically analyze data. The first step is open coding, which involves categorizing words, sentences, and paragraphs to identify and narrow down themes for further analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Accordingly, documentary and interview transcripts underwent this procedure, teasing out several themes. This was conducted alongside data collection to enable constant monitoring for new themes. The second step is axial coding, which involves connecting identified themes or what Miles and Huberman refer to as data displaying or reduction to give meaning to data for drawing conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1984). The themes from the first stage were compared, reduced, and related ones connected. Key themes that emerged at this stage included hegemonic aspirations, counter-hegemony or power struggles in state actorness, and global and regional multinational weaknesses as actors. Other themes were strong extra-regional influence in West African security governance, sub-regional divisions, and weak national economies. The final stage was selective coding, which entails the selection of major or central phenomena from the second stage (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The selection was based on issues considered prominent in the analysis process. Hence, the paper focused on sub-regional collective security cooperation and ownership challenges, as each of the above themes is related to international cooperation. Upon further pairing, the central themes were juxtaposed with the power struggle between Nigeria and France with a focus on their respective influence in ECOWAS and UNSC. This explains the choice of neo-realism and counter-hegemony theories to explain the limitation of international organizations as actors amidst competing state actors.

CASE SELECTION

This study employs an exploratory multiple-case design, and the selection of cases is based on their uniqueness. Several reasons, including uniqueness, justify the choice of cases (Yin, 2013). Regarding the Liberian case, it represents the initial ECOWAS military intervention, offering a historical perspective on the research problem that no other case(s) can surpass. Conversely, Mali, being the most recent, provides a contemporary viewpoint compared to other cases. The selection of these two cases aligns with another crucial consideration, making them even more unique. One is Anglophone, and the other is Francophone, providing a balanced understanding of Nigeria and France's attitudes toward crises within and beyond their respective linguistic divides or spheres of influence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article is grounded in the neo-realist theory, which is

utilized to elucidate the challenges faced by ECOWAS in ensuring cooperation among its member states and the cooperation challenges between ECOWAS and the UNSC, attributed to France. Neo-realists posit that the global system is anarchic, and international organizations rely on states to function as actors (Waltz, 1979; Brown et al., 1995). Scholars such as Joseph Grieco argue more assertively that international organizations reflect global power distribution and the interests of great powers (Grieco, 1997). Neo-realists, therefore, conclude that cooperation between states is virtually impossible due to inherent distrust, leading to constant competition (Schmidt, 2005). According to John Mearsheimer, some states engage in competition with the hope of achieving hegemonic status to dominate others (Mearsheimer, 2001). For Mearsheimer and other realists, hegemony implies coercive power dominance and the ability to win all wars militarily (ibid).

However, Gramsci interprets hegemony as the application of smart power, involving the use of soft power, ideas, and persuasion alongside hard power, such as economic and military power, to secure the consent of the less powerful (Martin, 2006). This article aligns with the latter understanding of hegemony.

Hegemony, regardless of one's understanding, especially in the realist notion, leads to counter-hegemony. This dynamic elucidates the competing hegemonic positions of Nigeria and France. The theory or concept posits that whenever hegemony emerges or there is an aspiration for it, it simultaneously triggers counter-hegemony. This entails resistance from states within or outside the region against regional hegemons or aspiring hegemons. Drawing on Cox's neo-Gramscian explanation of counter-hegemony, John Moolakkattu argues that the ultimate goal of a counter-hegemon is to take over hegemony. He clarifies that the counter-hegemon produces ideas and forms complex and opposing approaches to the status quo (Moolakkattu, 2009). Similarly, according to Agnew, '...the enrollment of others in the exercise of your power by convincing, cajoling, and coercing them to believe that they should want what you want [will] never [be] complete and [is] often resisted...' (Agnew, 2005, p.2). Likewise, Ali Balci quotes Ernesto Laclau as arguing that espousing a position of hegemonic dominance 'can only mean repressing possible alternatives' (Balci, 2017, p.471).

ECOWAS' COLLECTIVE SECURITY COOPERATION AND OWNERSHIP CHALLENGES IN THE LIBERIA AND MALI CIVIL WARS: THE ROLES OF NIGERIA AND FRANCE, ECOWAS AND THE UNSC

The Liberian case

The role of Nigeria

The Liberian civil wars exemplify the challenges faced by

ECOWAS, primarily in coordinating sub-regional collective security. These challenges can be attributed to internal and external factors that mutually influence each other, supporting the neo-realist position that cooperation is hindered in the international system due to distrust. Internally, the Anglophone/Francophone divides in the sub-region created challenges for cooperation because of the distrust between Francophone states and Nigeria. For example, when the then-Liberian President, Samuel Doe, sought assistance during rebel attacks, Abuja advocated for an ECOWAS-led intervention in Liberia (Tuck, 2000; p.4). Nigeria objected to unilateral action and expressed the view that inaction by ECOWAS would undermine 'Pax Nigeriana' (Akpotor and Nwolise, 1999). 'Pax Nigeriana' represents Nigeria's notion that it must be accepted as a West African hegemon (Warner, 2016). Nigeria feared external powers exploiting inaction in a region it led, as expressed by President Ibrahim Babangida, who stated, 'Nigeria cannot fold its arms and stand back while the Liberian crisis continues to claim more lives and becomes an excuse for foreign intervention in African affairs...' (Akpotor and Nwolise, 1999, p. 104). Nigeria's proposal for the intervention ignited a sharp divide along the colonial line. Whilst the Anglophone side of the sub-regional Standing Mediation Committee (SMC)[i] voted in favour of military intervention, the Francophone side objected (Suifon, 2019). The Francophone minority in the committee and other leading Francophone states such as Ivory Coast openly opposed the Nigerian-influenced move (Carment and Draman, 2003: p. 8).

The development was not in the security interest of the sub-region. This is because the division left the sub-region weakened in their effort to end a conflict that was destabilizing the whole area. Crucially, the decision to intervene, despite the original mandate of the SMC being fact-finding (Sambo et al., 2017: p. 52), was made due to the deteriorating situation (Mortimer, 1996). The Francophone states' pushback against Nigeria's leadership was untenable for two reasons. First, they accepted the ECOWAS project of collective self-reliance by agreeing to be its members. Secondly, no state in the whole sub-region at that time could lead at the expense of Nigeria. The reason is that Nigeria is by far the most dominant power economically and militarily in West Africa (Tella, 2022, p.1279). Nigeria is also the brain behind the ECOWAS project, and more importantly, it has consistently shown a willingness to lead its agenda. For instance, an interviewee stated, 'Nigeria's drive to lead is demonstrated by its willingness always to put the troops on the ground...the money, the logistics, everything that is necessary for us [ECOWAS] to succeed' (Field interview).

Yet, another way to view Nigeria's attitude toward the Liberian civil war, which does not discount the bigger benefit that Nigeria's leadership brings, is that it was an attempt to push its national interest. This is true because Nigeria brought about the idea of ECOWAS, partly to project Pax Nigerian. It, therefore, ought to see the

ECOWAS project succeed by showing leadership. This gives credence to the neo-realist view that powerful states would seek to use international organizations they belong to their advantage. However, it is worth stressing that leadership was needed urgently in the Liberian case. The reason is that it was novel to the sub-region in terms of its security governance. It was novel because, before the Liberian case, the security protocols of ECOWAS were the 1978 Non-aggression Protocol (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2001) and the 1981 Mutual Assistance Protocol (ECOWAS, 1981). Both of which focused on peaceful co-existence among member states and assistance to a member state facing external aggression, respectively (Odobo et al., 2017). None of these could address an intra-state conflict as was the case in Liberia. Besides, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), did not also have an established security mechanism to handle the crisis. For instance, only in June 1993 did the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution of the OAU come into being (Murithi, 2012). At this point, it was not even incorporated into the organs of the OAU until July 2001 (Williams, 2009). Worthy of note is that the conflict in Liberia preceded these processes hence the dominance of ECOWAS, unlike in Mali, where the AU featured prominently with its mechanisms alongside ECOWAS, as the next section will show.

The lack of security mechanisms at the time was both an 'opportunity' for Nigeria to manifest hegemonic leadership through ECOWAS, but more importantly, the sub-region stood to benefit more. In other words, a successful Nigerian leadership was intended to raise Nigeria's leadership credentials both within the sub-region and beyond, but it was also going to simultaneously bring about stability in Liberia and the sub-region. Critically, that had the potential to prevent subsequent conflicts in the sub-region because of the fear of a united and effective West African reaction or deterrence by the unity of purpose. It also had the potential to bring an end to external interference in West African security governance in the long run.

However, Nigeria's statements were interpreted as indicating that Abuja intended to ignore dissenting states. This fear was particularly fueled by Nigeria's Monroe Doctrine Declaration in West Africa. According to the pronouncements from Abuja, the doctrine implied that Nigeria had the right to go to war in the sub-region without any restrictions from foreign powers, considering West Africa as its domain of influence (Adebajo, 2012: p. 44). Additionally, Nigeria, being a member state of ECOWAS, argued for military intervention, especially given that President Doe was an ally to President Babangida (Jemirade, 2021). Francophone member states presumed that Nigeria wanted to intervene militarily to support its ally. Central to the disagreement was also Ivory Coast, the most powerful ally of France in the sub-region (Pickett, 2017), opposing President Doe and favoring Charles

Taylor, the rebel leader (Shaw et al., 1996, 36).

In a situation of distrust toward Nigeria and a scenario where the Francophone states were far less powerful relative to Nigeria, as well as the sub-region's susceptibility to intra-state conflicts such as coups and counter-coups (McGowan, 2005), a reasonable explanation for the Francophone states' opposition was fear of Nigeria's possible interference in their internal affairs under similar circumstances, using ECOWAS as a vehicle if the Liberian intervention was allowed. This may have been a valid fear, but it was certainly inimical to sub-regional stability. It was a case of putting national interest ahead of collective sub-regional peace and security. This is because, whereas the deteriorating situation in Liberia was real, the fear of Nigeria was based on conjecture.

The situation was a compelling reason why ECOWAS member states ought to have supported Nigeria's position on intervention. It could also have been used to test the real motive of Nigeria for West African leadership to guide their future attitude. In other words, another way to have looked at Nigeria's move was an attempt by Nigeria to put into practice ECOWAS' motto of collective self-reliance (ECOWAS, 1993: p. 7) to safeguard sub-regional ownership of its security governance. Therefore, Nigeria's proactive position could only have garnered external support for sub-regional efforts without compromising regional ownership. This is because the call for ECOWAS to act was in tune with the responsibility placed on regional organizations by the UN.

As argued by the neo-realist theory, Nigeria, as the most powerful state in West Africa, succeeded in getting ECOWAS to act in line with its sub-regional vision. Accordingly, Nigeria showed leadership aimed at fostering sub-regional cooperation and ownership of the intervention. For example, being aware of the opposing positions within the sub-region, it opted for the application of soft power rather than coercive power, using its economic leverage (Idowu and Ogunnubi, 2018). Beyond economic leverage, Nigeria's decision to use ECOWAS when it could have acted alone also demonstrated soft power. This is because acting alone would have been a legitimate basis for the kind of distrust shown by the Francophone states of ECOWAS. Nigeria's preference to act under ECOWAS was, consequently, significant for two related reasons. First, Abuja was calling for cooperation under ECOWAS. Second and more importantly, in terms of causing cooperation, Abuja had deferred supra-national authority to ECOWAS to enable it to take up its regional responsibility under the UN Charter.

The intervention started in August 1990, and the first group of states that contributed troops to the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) comprised predominantly Anglophone states (Gberie, 2003). Nigeria catered to virtually all the logistical and financial needs of ECOMOG. It contributed the most troops to the mission, with more than 60% of ECOMOG forces from 1990 to 1993 being Nigerians (Olawale, 2015:

pp. 193-4). Similarly, as of February 1995, of the 8,430 troops in Liberia under the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), Nigeria's share was 4,908, which was more than 50% (Ahmed, 2018: p. 875). The sheer dominance of Nigeria in the intervention in terms of troop contribution and logistics made the intervention synonymous with Nigeria (Adeboye, 2020). An interviewee indicated that Nigeria went to the extent of paying for the allowances of participating troops from smaller countries such as the Gambia to give the intervention a sub-regional character or encourage cooperation (Field interview).

However, the cooperation challenges exposed Nigeria's hegemonic weakness. For instance, its material contribution was insufficient without contributions from the Francophone states and states outside of West Africa at the initial stages. ECOMOG consequently faced logistical constraints before the UN got involved (Adeboye, 2020). In a tacit admission of hegemonic weakness, Nigeria later requested the UN to pay back some of its expenses (Olonisakin, 1996). Beyond that, another hegemonic weakness of Nigeria was its inability to influence the UNSC to support the Nigerian-instigated ECOWAS initiative. This was another manifestation of the neo-realist positions that relatively less powerful states have no influence in international organizations as much as the most powerful states. The sub-regional challenge in this regard is further elaborated in the next section.

The role of the UNSC

The division within the sub-region at the beginning left the UNSC divided, and vice versa. This caused ECOMOG's initial legitimacy crisis and resource deficit as it did not promptly receive UNSC support (Ahmed, 2018). Ironically, the UN's reluctance made it difficult for ECOWAS to fulfill its responsibility under the UN Charter during a regional crisis. The UNSC remained adamant despite frantic efforts by ECOWAS to secure its endorsement. For instance, during a UNSC discussion to retrospectively approve ECOMOG, the Liberian representative at the UN stated the following: '…seven months ago we made efforts to have the Council seized with the deteriorating situation in Liberia, which efforts were not approved…' (UNSC 1991: p. 3). Legitimacy was particularly needed because it was one of the reasons for the disunity at the sub-regional level. There may have been other national motives, but all of that would have been superseded by a UNSC endorsement. For instance, when the mission was later endorsed in 1992, there was expanded sub-regional and continental participation (Ahmed, 2018: p. 875). This made the intervention a success to a larger degree. According to Francis Adeboye, ECOMOG ''…imposed a lasting cease-fire; disarmed warring parties; protected and evacuated civilians; and created an environment conducive to free and fair elections'' (Adeboye, 2020: p. 28).

The success was, however, short-lived because another

civil war started in 1999. ECOWAS took up its responsibility yet again through diplomatic efforts led by Nigeria. The result of which was a peace agreement signed in Accra, Ghana. This did not stop the war, leading to an intervention by the UNSC to help implement the ECOWAS-Sponsored Accra Peace Agreement (UNSC, 2003). The early authorization by the UNSC and perhaps, a realization that Nigeria was right in its call for sub-regional and global support for the first intervention made the second intervention less contentious (Oshewolo, 2019). Despite limited material strength, Nigeria remained consistent in its material support for the intervention. It continued with its efforts to give the mission a sub-regional character for sub-regional ownership. For instance, in response to the UNSC's authorization of the UN Mission for Liberia (UNMIL), (UNSC, 2003), Abuja deployed an initial 300 troops in Liberia under ECOMIL. When the number of ECOMIL forces came up to just over 3000, Nigeria's contribution stood at 1500 (Oshewolo, 2019: p. 266). These forces were on the ground waiting to be incorporated into UNMIL. An interviewee argued in a field interview that no state, both within and outside of West Africa, provided as much support as Nigeria did regarding the Liberian civil wars (Field interview).

The role of France

This section proceeds on the basis of powerful states having leverage over international organizations more than weaker states. It is argued that Nigeria's limitation was chiefly because it did not have the support of a permanent member of the UNSC. That is to say, France's support was crucial to securing UNSC backing for ECOMOG. This is in view of its status and the fact that it shares power with other permanent members. The political differences in the sub-region and the indifference of the UNSC relative to the Liberian crisis were thus exacerbated by the French factor. Paris countered Nigeria's leadership in Liberia facilitated by its influence among the Francophone states of ECOWAS and at the UNSC.

First, it was clear that Francophone states of West Africa acted on behalf of Paris with their opposition to Nigeria. This assertion is based on the significant influence that France wielded over its West African former colonies at the time, not least in the area of their economies (monetary control over the CFA franc) (Taylor, 2019) inter alia. In other words, most likely an endorsement by France to ECOMOG would have caused the support of its allies in the sub-region for ECOMOG. Second, and more importantly, the French factor also explains the strained relationship between ECOWAS and the UNSC. France took advantage of Nigeria's limited influence beyond West Africa and Africa and did not exert its influence at the UNSC in favor of ECOMOG. This was a counter-hegemonic measure given that Nigeria needed the support of the UNSC the most. The attitude of France, therefore,

did not give West Africa and external partners a united front at the start to collectively deal with the Liberian crisis under Nigeria's leadership.

France rather unsuccessfully opposed the placing of an arms embargo on Liberia by the UNSC when the world body eventually endorsed ECOMOG. Paris insisted that such a move should also be applied to ECOMOG because, from the view of France, ECOMOG was a warring faction (Lowenkopf, 1995, p. 98). Similarly, during the second intervention, Paris was reluctant to support an ECOWAS-led intervention at the UNSC. For instance, France did not openly support UNMIL and did not oppose it when it was being voted on at the UNSC. Of the 15 member states of the Council, 12 supported UNMIL's authorization. There were also three (3) abstentions, of which France was one (Oshewolo, 2019, p. 266). One plausible explanation for France's failures at the UNSC despite its standing in the council was its indifference to the crisis, and yet the situation got to a point where the UNSC could no longer ignore it.

Although the position of France did not prevent the subsequent endorsement of ECOMOG by the UNSC and the later approval of UNMIL, it hindered effective cooperation. This is because France was neither in favor of a regional (ECOWAS) nor global (UNSC) role in Liberia. This was contrary to the position of ECOWAS and illustrates the neo-realist argument that international cooperation is virtually impossible. These differences made it unlikely for France to support the Nigerian-led regional effort, and, for this reason, there could be no cooperation. For instance, according to Tony Chafer, France was a bystander in the effort leading up to the intervention in Liberia and the intervention itself (Chafer, 2013: p. 244). It is important to state, however, that France may have been a bystander concerning putting boots and resources on the ground, but it was not a bystander concerning the politics of the war, which further showed a lack of cooperation. For example, France's counter-hegemony was manifested in its support for the war economy of the rebel faction. French companies kept doing business with Charles Taylor during the first intervention. They exported rosewood from rebel-held areas and claimed they had no control over their private companies (Clapham, 1996: p. 255). With this, France violated Article 5 of the ECOMOG authorization document by having sided with a faction. Article 5 states: 'The Committee appeals to all members of the international community not to assist any of the warring parties in any manner prejudicial to the maintenance of the ceasefire...' (ECOWAS, 1990: p. 3).

The French support for the war economy of a rebel faction worsened ECOMOG's financial and logistical constraints in the following ways. Paris may not have been involved directly in terms of financial and logistical support to the rebels, but its business engagements served the same purpose. Second, France's attitude prolonged the war as the rebels were empowered logistically to challenge

a 'neutral' ECOMOG to provide the basis for sub-regional forces to be accused of taking sides, as indicated earlier. For instance, according to Tijjani Ahmed, 'Charles Taylor's rebels attacked the ECOMOG forces…this, unfortunately, led to the application of force to repel the attacks. So, an observer group was compelled to respond with force' (Ahmed, 2018: p. 876). Lambert Edigin and Collins Edigin support the position of ECOMOG's 'neutrality' on two grounds. First, President Doe, who was seen as a friend to Nigeria, later opposed ECOMOG when he noticed its neutrality. Second, after Doe died, ECOMOG continued for many years to bring about peace (Edigin and Edigin, 2010: p. 5). Indeed, ECOMOG stayed longer to monitor the situation after the national elections of 1997 (Murphy, 2004). The French's anti-Nigerian campaign in the Liberian mission and the challenges it brought about explain the argument of Lansana Gberie that: 'Regional rivalries and differences promoted mainly by France, a long-standing hegemonic rival of Nigeria... complicated the mission...' (Gberie, 2003: p. 148).

Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, ECOMOG was a success despite the initial cooperation challenges but not without the subsequent support of the UNSC. This further establishes the potential consequences of the attitude of France. The success means ECOWAS was able to own the intervention as it was an ECOWAS leadership in ECOWAS-initiated interventions. It was also considerably funded by ECOWAS states before external help came. On the leadership of the mission, Nigeria's forces in the first intervention led the command throughout except for the first commander who was a Ghanaian and importantly, a West African (Brown, 1999). Besides, many of ECOMIL's force commanders were also West Africans and mostly Nigerians (Oshewolo, 2019: p. 266). Sub-regional leadership of the mission continued in UNMIL when ECOMIL was later incorporated (UNSC, 2003 para. 1). Throughout UNMIL, which comprised states such as the UK, the US, and France (UNMIL 2020), Nigerians held several key positions, including Force Commander (three times) and Chief of Staff (Uba, 2016). An additional claim for ECOMOG's success is that it served as a credible model for future interventions. As such, ECOWAS subsequently got involved militarily in other ECOWAS states such as Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and Ivory Coast, inter alia (Mboya, 2002).

The case of Mali

The roles of Nigeria and France as well as ECOWAS and the UN

At this point, Nigeria's vision for the sub-region, especially with respect to ECOWAS being the conduit for its military leadership, was achieved. The sub-region had a foundation to build on, having intervened in Liberia and others under ECOMOG, later known as the ECOWAS

Standby Force (ESF). More importantly, there was consensus on the urgency with which the crisis in Mali needed to be resolved. This was unlike other divisive cases, such as the recent proposal for military intervention in Niger. Consequently, the Malian case did not ignite disagreement among ECOWAS member states. With the issue of sub-regional cooperation challenges seemingly out of the way, ECOWAS took up its responsibility under the UN Charter. Following the 2012 coup, ECOWAS was the first to respond. There was an immediate extraordinary summit on the crisis, resulting in a sub-regional condemnation of the coup and the suspension of Mali from ECOWAS. The sub-regional body also threatened further sanctions and military intervention, if need be, as a last resort (ECOWAS, 2012).

After several diplomatic efforts failed, and the situation deteriorated as territories were taken by the terrorists, the sub-region could not act timely on its threat of intervening militarily (Addaney, 2016). For instance, even after there was authorization by the UNSC for what was termed an African-led International Mission in Mali (AFISMA), the delay continued. The inability of ECOWAS to act with alacrity is attributed to two factors. First, it was a decision by ECOWAS to adhere to the UN's principle of exhausting all non-combatant means in any regional peace process. Second, and the main reason, was ECOWAS' material capacity challenges, and by implication, Nigeria's hegemonic weakness. Knowing this, the UNSC's approval of AFISMA took into consideration the material challenge of the sub-region as well as sub-regional and continental desires to own the intervention. For instance, as the acronym suggests, there was a need for global resource mobilization to augment Africa and, more specifically, West African resources for AFISMA to be fast and effective. This was a significant step toward addressing the challenges of cooperation between ECOWAS and external actors on the ground. This is because the responsibilities of ECOWAS/AU and extra-regional actors were spelled out. It was particularly necessary because Nigeria has not proven powerful enough to deter its extra-regional competitors to guarantee sub-regional ownership of interventions, more so in Francophone states of the sub-region. Consequently, in January 2012, the African Union (AU) organized an event to solicit support from the international community to support AFISMA deployment without further delay (Boutellis and Williams, 2013).

Notwithstanding Nigeria's hegemonic weaknesses in material terms, it met what may be termed as the minimum sub-regional hegemonic threshold. As the dominant power of the sub-region and, as was the case in Liberia, Nigeria made the highest material contribution than any other African state at the fundraising event. It committed about $34 million towards AFISMA. In addition, according to the then President of Nigeria, '900 combat soldiers and 300 Air Force personnel are already on the ground in Mali as part of AFISMA' (Agande, 2013 para.2). While this is way less relative to Nigeria's contribution to past interventions

such as Liberia, contributing the highest reflects the fact that it remains the biggest economy in West Africa. Crucially, it remains willing now, as shown in the Mali case, as much as it was in the past, as shown in the Liberia case, to lead the sub-region and Africa diplomatically, economically, and militarily. States outside of Africa also made significant contributions to AFISMA. For instance, France, the USA, and Japan contributed $63 million, $96 million, and $120 million, respectively, among other states (Maru, 2013).

However, as the neo-realists argue, competition for power or influence, as has been the case of Nigeria and France in the sub-region, hinders cooperation. The hope of effective cooperation with the international community on the terms of the sub-region was consequently not realized. There were serious cooperation challenges between ECOWAS/AU and the UNSC as well as France. With Mali being a Francophone state unlike Liberia, the issue of ownership of the mission was at the forefront, as expected, given France's continued strong ties with its former colonies in West Africa, which is only seeing a decline in recent times, as will be shown subsequently. In other words, given the power tussle between Nigeria and France in the sub-region and guided by France's response to Nigeria's dominance in Liberia, it was obvious that France's attitude in its former colony would be a confrontation with Nigeria and ECOWAS' attempt to own the Mali intervention. France was not willing to stand aloof for Nigeria to expand its influence through ECOWAS on the Francophone section in line with Nigeria's interest in diminishing France's role in the sub-region.

France manifested counter-hegemony in Mali too by taking advantage of Nigeria's limited economic power and, by implication, ECOWAS' limitations. For instance, as AFISMA prepared to intervene, France intervened at the invitation of the Mali government (Stigall, 2015: p. 23). This was justifiable because it was within international law to intervene when invited (Visser, 2020). Besides, France justified its action on the deteriorating situation, arguing that it was in France's and Europe's interest as much as it was in the interest of Mali to act quickly to prevent Mali from becoming a haven for terrorists to target Europe (Daneshkhu, 2013). While the justification is valid, it was a recipe for poor cooperation between France and ECOWAS as it was an act of sidestepping AU/ECOWAS. This is not to downplay France's role with the support of Chad but to highlight the fact that the French move defeated its claim, according to Théroux-Bénoni, that it was opposed to France's long-term state-centric role in Mali in favor of a multilateral approach (Théroux-Bénoni, 2014).

According to Chafer and Cumming, France has claimed to have shifted from acting unilaterally in Africa 'Yet older style unilateral interventionism has never been too far from the surface' (Chafer and Cumming, 2020 p.4). The point being made here is that the achievements of France in Mali could have been chalked by sub-regional forces if France

limited its role to logistical support in line with the original idea of AFISMA to enable it to act more quickly and effectively. This position is corroborated by Alexis Arieff as he asserts: 'Given the extremely limited ability of West African states to project military force, donors would presumably provide airlift, surveillance, equipment, and training to regional troop contributors' (Arieff, 2013 p.11). The approach of France was, therefore, a duplication of efforts that contributed to AFISMA's delayed intervention. France did not consult with AU/ECOWAS after the Mali invitation. This was contrary to the UNSC's request that all external actors should consult closely with AU/ECOWAS (UNSC 2012).

The neo-realist argument that states remain the most powerful international actors showed in France's unwillingness to adhere to multilateralism in Mali. For instance, it decided to keep an independent force in Mali even after AFISMA was deployed. This was facilitated by the UNSC when the resolution that brought about AFISMA allowed for France's bilateral support for AFISMA. France did not consider the provision to be limited to logistical or financial support to AFISMA. As such, France opted for a parallel approach to AFISMA as a counter-hegemonic measure. This threatened AU/ECOWAS ownership of the mission and supported the notion by some scholars that France has a penchant for militarily intervening in Africa (Recchia, 2020; Chafer and Cumming, 2020). For instance, Paris sought international support for its state-centric role in Mali. This was duly granted by states such as the UK, Germany, and the USA, although these states ruled out troop contributions at the time (Arieff, 2013 p.1). With the benefit of the history between the two states, specifically about the case(s) of Liberia, Nigeria's leadership in Mali was not acceptable to France, hence its parallel role.

Accordingly, the French-led command alongside the Nigerian-led command under AFISMA cooperated but only briefly. AFISMA supported France in repulsing the rebels from northern Mali. The commander of AFISMA, a Nigerian, corroborated the initial cooperation as he asserted: '[t]here has been a lot of cooperation, and I am sure that is going to be continued because the important thing is that we have a common mission to free northern Mali, and that is their mission, too' (African Heritage, 2013, para. 9). This kind of cooperation was in the interest of Mali and the Sub-region given the successes chalked up when the two commands worked together. However, given the distinct interests of Nigeria and France, it was predictable that the success by way of cooperation could not stand the test of time.

France scaled down its role after the success of Operation Serval (Spet, 2015), and it became clearer that the ill-supported AFISMA was struggling to maintain the gains in northern Mali, hence the need from the perspective of France for AFISMA to be re-hatted (Théroux-Bénoni, 2014). France accordingly called on the UNSC to replace AFISMA with a fully UN-owned mission (Caparini, 2015: p.

10). However, the request was superfluous because logistical challenges were the main reason for AFISMA's difficulty in sustaining the gains. It was also an indictment on France given the special role it was offered to augment AFISMA's efforts for effectiveness. The French move triggered cooperation challenges between ECOWAS/AU and the UNSC. This threatened the success of the intervention as AU/ECOWAS reacted strongly against the development, manifesting a distrust between France and what was supposed to be its continental partners, ECOWAS, AU, and Nigeria. Nonetheless, the proposal was accepted reluctantly, hoping that the reservation might prevent the materialization of their fears. For instance, the acceptance was based on a set of conditions set out in a communique issued by AU during its 358th meeting. Keen on continental ownership of the mission, the communique centered on the need to prevent a change of leadership to the mission when the UN takes over. Paragraph 13(i) of the communique stated, 'the need for such a Mission to be provided with a robust mandate…defined in consultation with Mali, the AU, and ECOWAS' (AU, 2013b: p. 3). Paragraph 13(ii) of the communique was more explicit regarding the desire of ECOWAS, through the AU, to maintain ownership of the mission manifested by being reserved the right to lead the mission. For instance, it stressed as follows:

The need for the UN to consult closely and adequately with the AU and ECOWAS throughout the proposed transformation process of AFISMA into a UN operation, as well as the appointment of the future Special Representative of the Secretary-General who will lead the planned Mission in a spirit of continuity, about the leadership of the Mission and the contingents (AU, 2013b: p. 3).

At the sub-regional level, ECOWAS did not hide its desire to own the Mali intervention. The sub-regional body reiterated the demands of the AU. It specifically asked the UN to let the mission's command remain in West Africa. For ECOWAS, this would be a recognition of the sub-region's track record in handling similar crises in the past (ECOWAS, 2013). The relative success of ECOMOG in Liberia and others formed the basis for ECOWAS' confidence that it could handle the Mali crisis with adequate external support, having had the needed experience. Accordingly, and as noted from the beginning, ECOWAS, knowing it had capacity challenges, welcomed any form of support from outside the sub-region but was unwilling to compromise on ownership through leadership. Moreover, it was a case of ECOWAS seeking to honor its responsibility under the UN Charter by addressing or owning the security concerns of its domain. Bossuyt puts it clearly, as he further explained ECOWAS' reasons for wanting to lead or own the Mali case:

In the case of Mali, the ECOWAS Commission was of the view that according to the principle of subsidiarity, it is up to the REC[ii] to lead the response, for reasons of proximity, knowledge of the context, and direct interest in restoring political stability. In this view, the AU and the UN should be supportive actors (mainly in terms of resources), respecting regional leadership and prerogatives (Bossuyt, 2016: p. 25).

However, with the asymmetric power relations between Nigeria and France at the UNSC and given the different positions held by France and the continent, AU/ECOWAS did not have its way. In other words, the sub-regional wish to retain leadership was not met when what became known as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) replaced AFISMA (AU, 2013a).

Despite the conditions that AU/ECOWAS gave concerning the French proposal, AU/ECOWAS found the terms of MINUSMA not favorable in the end. In furtherance of France's state-centric posture from the onset rather than multilateralism, MINUSMA made it possible for the status quo to remain. For instance, UNSC resolution 2100 authorized MINUSMA to assign a supporting role specifically to France. It states, 'Authoriz[ing] French troops…to use all necessary means, from the commencement of the activities of MINUSMA until the end…to intervene in support of elements of MINUSMA when under imminent and serious threat…' (UNSC, 2013, para.18). France's influence within the UNSC was, therefore, highly evident in Mali, both in what the world body gave to France – namely the ability to participate militarily independent of UN-sanctioned multinational missions - and what it took from Nigeria and ECOWAS – namely operational leadership or ownership of MINUSMA. Hence, while Nigeria has used its leverage in AU/ECOWAS to ensure strong intra-sub-regional support for sub-regional cooperation and ownership of the mission, it was not able to show the same leverage at the level of the UNSC. For instance, MINUSMA came with its first leader outside of West Africa (Rietjens and Dorn, 2017: p. 204) to the displeasure of AU/ECOWAS and, by implication, Nigeria.

The AU issued another communique lamenting what they considered to be a lack of pre-deployment consultation. The AU was particular about what they also viewed as the UN's failure to take into consideration the foundation laid by the stakeholders of the African continent that spearheaded the ECOWAS-led mediation process. It concluded that '…the resolution does not take into account the concerns formerly expressed by the AU and ECOWAS and the proposals they constructively made to facilitate a coordinated international support for the ongoing effort by the Malian stakeholders…' (AU, 2013a, para.10). The UNSC thus failed to support regional efforts in a regional crisis by denying it ownership of a regional intervention to satisfy a more influential member state (France) but contrary to the dictates of the UN Charter.

It is important to point out that the ECOWAS initiative may have been brought under AU (Tchie, 2023),

ECOWAS' lead role was recognized hence, the focus on ECOWAS. For instance, UNSC resolution 2085, paragraph 10 states: 'Requests the African Union, in close coordination with ECOWAS…to report to the Security Council every 60 days on the deployment and activities of AFISMA…' (UNSC, 2012). Similarly, the AU recognized ECOWAS' leadership in their correspondence with the UNSC on AFISMA as shown earlier. Besides, David Francis referred to AFISMA as 'the ECOWAS-led African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA)' (Francis, 2013, p.3). ECOWAS was thus regarded as a key decision-making body on the operations of AFISMA.

Given Nigeria's desire to lead, especially in a Francophone state to assert sub-regional hegemony and ownership through ECOWAS, Abuja was angered by the attitude of the UNSC. It felt the UN-backed French approach to Mali was consistently in conflict with the collective sub-regional position of ECOWAS/AU. Competition-induced cooperation challenges, as the neo-realist would argue, emerged as Nigeria reacted strongly and withdrew a significant part of its forces from MINUSMA.

Nigeria's national interests informed its protest, other than sub-regional security, at least in the short term. This is because its response tended to compromise the security interests of Mali. Yet, this was expected from Nigeria because, first, the consistency with which AU/ECOWAS opposed the UN-backed changes that were not heeded to called for a response from Nigeria as the sub-regional hegemon or hegemonic aspirant. Moreover, the UN's actions could be viewed as an affront to Nigeria's Afro-centric foreign policy, as sub-regional ownership of the mission was seen to have been taken away. Nigeria also felt disrespected. For instance, Senator Iroegbu, a Nigerian security analyst, argues that Abuja's reaction was to the French grip on the intervention backed by the UNSC. For him, it sought to undermine Nigeria's sub-regional influence, and Nigeria felt; '…aggrieved, cheated, and disappointed, to say the least…it is an issue of…feeling that Nigeria should not be made to feel powerful' (Powles et al., 2015: p. 198).

Nigeria also wanted to show its impact to salvage the sub-regional ownership quest in the long run amidst its unending power struggle with France in West Africa. And one of the ways was to create a vacuum to show its indispensability in sub-regional military actions to the international community. The consequence of Nigeria's action is that after a decade-long presence of MINUSMA, it was adjudged as less successful by the Malian military junta. They cited serious security challenges the country is still facing (UNSC, 2023). This explains why Bamako called for the immediate withdrawal of MINUSMA (ibid). This can be interpreted to mean a weakening French influence on Mali and other Francophone African states such as Burkina Faso and more recently Niger. These states have downgraded their relations with France by expelling their forces (Faye, 2023).

However, Mali and the other Francophone states' tense relations with France have not yet benefitted the quest for sub-regional reliance. They have entered into an alliance with another extra-regional great power – Russia (Droin and Dolbaia, 2023). This is another manifestation of the hegemonic weakness of Nigeria or its declining influence in the sub-region, contrary to its aspirations. In other words, though Nigeria remains committed to sub-regional leadership, it is not recognized commensurately. The reasons are its limited hard power (economic and military) as well as limited soft power attributes such as its domestic security and governance challenges (Nwagboso, 2018).

Conclusion

This article analyzed ECOWAS' collective security cooperation and ownership challenges vis-à-vis the competing interests of state actors. The analysis is done on the back of the responsibility placed on regional organizations by the UNSC to handle regional security challenges. The paper specifically chose two cases – the Liberia and Mali civil wars and studied the roles of ECOWAS with Nigeria as the most powerful and influential member state and the role of the UNSC with France as a permanent member and simultaneously the most influential extra-regional state actor in West African security governance.

It has been demonstrated that Nigeria sought to project hegemony by offering leadership and resources to sub-regional collective security under the auspices of ECOWAS in both cases. It has also been shown that Nigeria's hegemonic projection proved to be weak in terms of material power and leverage at the UNSC. However, it is concluded that Nigeria met the minimum threshold of a sub-regional leader because it almost single-handedly handled the Liberian case and played a key role in the ECOWAS-led AU intervention in Mali. Both of these were efforts to enable ECOWAS and later AU to take up its responsibility under the UN Charter.

On the other hand, it is shown that France's actions and inactions, or what is termed in this article as counter-hegemony largely backed by the UNSC negatively affected cooperation in both cases and negatively affected ownership in respect of the Mali case. France largely showed indifference as a counter-hegemonic measure in Liberia. While France's indifference did not deny ECOWAS ownership of the intervention because ECOWAS maintained leadership, it hampered cooperation between ECOWAS and its Francophone states/France and between ECOWAS and the UNSC. This, for a while, denied ECOMOG global legitimacy and critical resources to lessen the burden on Nigeria.

Concerning Mali, the paper has shown that France's counter-hegemony was direct and smacks of double standards. Whereas France has stated a shift in policy (from unilateralism to multilateralism) in its engagement

with its former colonies, its approach was that of unilateralism under the guise of multilateralism. In other words, while France's roles were useful, it was a case of taking advantage of Nigeria's hegemonic weakness to manifest a state-centric approach in Mali to support what was supposed to be an internationally supported ECOWAS-led African intervention. Ironically, France's state centrism had the backing of the UNSC notwithstanding ECOWAS/AU opposition or attempts to own the intervention. This led to Nigeria's withdrawal from a mission largely adjudged as a failure.

Recommendations

In the short run, the African Union and RECs need to collaborate more effectively on sub-regional security to avoid conflicting continental positions at the UN. In other words, the continent needs a united front, as demonstrated in the case of Mali. For the continental unity to be meaningful, Africa needs to push further for reforms to the current UNSC structure to include an African state as a permanent member of the council, with Nigeria as a possible representative. This will enable the continent to advocate African positions with influence on decision-making. This is one of the ways through which sub-regional or continental collective security cooperation and ownership can be guaranteed in the face of great power interest in African security governance.

In the meantime, Africa needs to monitor the activities of extra-regional great powers, especially emerging ones such as China and remerging ones such as Russia in Africa. The AU must ensure that their security pacts with African countries take into account the supra-nationality of the AU and its security architecture to ensure African ownership of its security governance.

The AU and RECs must also do more on security funding. As a continent with several flashpoints, the NATO model of dedicating a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of member states to the AU peace fund could be considered. This will limit the influential roles of great powers stemming from resource commitments. It will give meaning to Africa's desire for self-reliance and ownership of its security governance.

In all of these, Nigeria needs to position itself properly to enhance its hegemonic aspiration, as that will enhance its soft power. First, it needs to maintain its commitment to leadership in Africa and West Africa in terms of resource commitment and ideas. Second, Nigeria needs to address its domestic security and governance challenges, such as corruption. The latter will enable Nigeria to allocate resources to support the former, deterring extra-regional great power interferences.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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[i] The SMC was established to find measures to address the crisis and it comprised The Gambia (Chair of the Committee), Mali, Ghana, Togo, and Sierra Leone.

[ii] Regional Economic Communities