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French Foreign Policy In Africa And The Ecowas Dream

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Abstract
The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is one of the milestones of Nigeria's foreign policy. The organization was established in 1975 to promote economic cooperation with the goal of achieving "collective self-sufficiency" amongst member states. Indeed, the essence of this bold initiative was to lessen French influence in West Africa. However, despite some political and military gains that have been recorded, ECOWAS region still contains some of the poorest countries in the world. In other words, Nigeria has failed to actualize the economic goal of creating a common sub-regional market that triggers prosperity. The major reason is that a rival backed Francophone organization, the Communaute Economique de' l Afrique de l'Quest (CEAO), whose members were all part of France currency zone has been strongly competing with ECOWAS for sub-regional pre-eminence. This paper examines Nigeria's lead role in the formation and sustainability of ECOWAS and its modest achievements after 40 years of its existence as well as how the French hegemonic disposition toward her former colonial possessions in West Africa has undermined the actualization of the ECOWAS dream. It suggests that Nigeria should demonstrate more commitment to the organization since she is the most naturally endowed country in the sub-region to provide the desired leadership. The paper concludes that integration is imperative in a region that poverty thrives. It adopts a descriptive and historical methodology.

Introduction

Since independence, Nigeria has been pursuing certain foreign policy objectives such as: enhancing Nigeria's image and status in Africa and the world at large; respect for the sovereignty and non-interference in the internal policies of other states, promotion of the unity as well as the total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa.[1] Nigerian leaders also encouraged sub-regional groupings in Africa and believed that African unity could be achieved through practical steps in economic, educational, scientific, industrial and cultural cooperation. Subsequently, the country has always sought to achieve the above policy objectives both bilaterally, through contacts with other countries, and multilaterally, through her dealings at the sub-regional, regional and global levels. However, practically, Nigeria at independence preferred sub-regional approach towards African integration. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is one of the most important sub-regional multilateral organizations that have pre-occupied Nigeria's relations since 1975.[2]

Indeed, the signing of the Treaty of ECOWAS goes down in history as the first major successful effort in the sub-region's quest for collective self-reliance. On the 28th of May, 1975, the Heads of State and Governments of 15 West African nations appended the document in Lagos, Nigeria's former capital city. These countries were: Liberia, Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Ivory Coast (Cote d' Ivoire), Guinea, Gambia, Benin, Niger, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal and Mali. Since signing, Cape Verde has joined as the sixteenth Member State.[3]

ECOWAS is a manifestation of the desire for cooperation among the peoples of West Africa. It is the structural embodiment of the people's belief in a collective will against the enduring challenges of underdevelopment in tropical Africa. The 15 African countries stretching Mauritania to Nigeria and bounded on the north by the Sahara Desert, are countries with varying levels of development with different historical and cultural backgrounds, speaking different languages (apart from - English, French and Portuguese - but also the multiciplicity of indigenous African languages).[4] The people wanted help out of the valley of poverty in which they enmeshed, in fact it was a search for economic emancipation through cooperation that transcends all barriers.

With a population of about 120 million people[5] in 1975, the World Bank Annual Report indicated that the per capita Gross National Product (GNP) of the countries was very low compared with other regions of the world. Moreover, the mainstay of the economies was agriculture whose export was and is still primary commodities dependent on foreign trade. In addition, as part of the colonial legacy, the countries of the sub-region belonged to multiple currency zones - the sterling area and the franc zone. The Anglophone countries were protected under the Commonwealth system, while the Francophone nations were associated with the European Economic Community (EEC) under the Yaounde Convention , in Liberia, the US dollar is the official currency, while the Guinea Bissau is linked with the currency of Portugal.[6] Based on the above scenario, the need for the states of West Africa to cooperate among themselves, in the hope that, through concerted efforts, and pooled resources, they would be able to pull themselves up, and enjoy the benefits of expanded markets, joint ventures and even syndicated international finance amongst other issues became apparent.[7]

Obviously, since the inception of ECOWAS in 1975, Nigeria has remained the unchallenged leader of the community. The country has deliberately pursued the integration project through the adoption of some strategies such as the benevolent, big brother, Father Christmas, and "spraying" diplomacy.[8] Despite the achievements so far recorded by ECOWAS, its main vision of economic integration has not been realized due to the influence of France.

The paper is structured in specific parts. The first part is the introduction, the second part offers conceptual clarification of foreign policy, the third part examines the French colonial enterprise in West Africa, the fourth parts assesses integration antecedents in West Africa, the fifth part looks at Nigeria's role in the establishment and sustainability of the ECOWAS, the sixth discusses the implications of French foreign policy towards the realization of the ambitious dream while the seventh part is the conclusion.

Foreign Policy: Conceptual Clarification

According to Rosenau, foreign policy can be conceptualized from three perspectives: as a cluster of orientations; as set of commitment to, and plans for action; and as a form of behaviour. Viewed as a cluster of orientations, foreign policy refers to the general tendencies, attitudes, perceptions, values and principles that underlie the conduct of states in international affairs (e.g. "Nigeria's non-aligned posture", the United States isolationism in the 19th century; "Soviet-expansionism etc.).[9]

Secondly, foreign policy could be viewed as the concrete plans and commitments for promoting or preserving situations abroad in a manner consistent with their basic orientations. For instance, immediately after World War 11, Western European countries under the leadership of the United States of America formed a military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), thereby committing member states to alliance principles that an attack on any one of the signatories would be considered an attack on all of them.[10]

Thirdly, conceptualized as behaviour, foreign policy pertains to the external behaviour of states, or to the concrete steps that officials of a state take with respect to events and situations abroad. It is

"what individuals representing the state do or do not do in their interactions with individuals, groups and officials elsewhere in the world".

Having considered the three conceptions of foreign policy, it is important to distinguish between rhetoric (what is said) and behaviour (what is done). The conventional wisdom is that foreign policy embodies what a country does or has done rather than mere statements of moral principle and declarations of public philosophy. Policy makers usually try to ensure that the policy of a country is goal-oriented. In other words, it seeks to advance the country's national interest.[11]

French Colonial Enterprise: The West African Experience

French West Africa was the largest political unit governed by France in Africa. It covered an area larger than the present day United States of America, and had a population of more than 12 million people at the time of its occupation by France. It also covered vast tracts of desert in the north and dense forest in the south. Its population was diverse in the extreme.[12] Most French West Africa was conquered by French between 1880 and 1900. However, in Senegal, the French had settled in St. Louis and Goree as early as the seventeenth century, and the mid-nineteenth century. In her administration of the tiny colony of Senegal in the nineteenth century, France pursued a policy of assimilation. Inspired by the ideals of the 1789 French revolution, the French Senegal had proceeded on the assumption that all men were equal and that non-French men could be assimilated into French cultural life. Thus, the Senegalese sent a Deputy to the French Chamber of Deputies, had their own elected municipalities on the same model as the metropolitan municipalities, and a Consul-General, similar to that of metropolitan French colony, who lived in the four Communes of Dakar, Rufisque, Goree and St. Louis, were French citizens and exercised same political rights as French metropolitan citizens, this was about as far as assimilation went.[13]

In the Senegalese Protectorate and other colonies that constituted French West Africa, the Africans were not citizens but *sujets* (subjects). The system of administration used to govern them was at one time called association. The French used the policy to govern and to economically exploit West Africans, who were un-equal partners. By 1945, Africans had no say in their government, and most of France's economic and political decisions during the period, 1900-1945, benefited the metropolitan France rather than Africa.[14]

The Africans had no policy making role, not even at the local government as the chiefs had in the Native Authority system in British West African Colonies. Before 1945, less than 500 Africans had been assimilated. It should be noted that French West Africa, created as a single political unit in 1895, consisted colonies of Senegal, Sudan (now Mali), Guinea and Ivory Coast (Cote d'Voire), which were being supervised by a Governor-General in St. Louis, who was at the same time the Governor of Senegal. The colony of Dahomey (now Benin Republic), remained independent of the group. The other colonies were brought together under the Governor-General, who was responsible for their political and military direction, and coordination of the activities of the Governors of the constituent territories since these had little effective power except in Senegal.[15]

In 1902, the Governor-General began to gain control of the Federation. Between 1902 and 1904, a series of decrees gave the Governor-General increased control over the local administration of the constituent colonies. The Governor-Generalship was separated from the Governorship of Senegal, and the seat of government of the Governor-General was transferred to Dakar. The Governor-General related directly with the minister of colonies in Paris, he sanctioned all requests for approval of major policy decisions. He also nominated the entire administrative service of the federation, had control of vital federal services of post and telecommunications, public works, sanitary services, including medical services and agriculture. All custom revenue was controlled by him. Indeed, the 1902 federation arrangement in French West Africa existed until its dismemberment in 1957 by the Loi-Cadre.[16]

West African Regional Integration Antecedents

Close commercial relations between separate nation-states as a prerequisite to the economic development of the area concerned is not a new phenomenon in history of the growth of nations and of the world economy. For instance, in Europe, the economic unification of Britain in the 18th century and German Zollverien of 1834 were indispensible foundations for the early development of these countries. They were isolated, yet important instances of economic integration, which preceded the commencement of the free trade movement. The formation of the European Free Trade Area ushered into scheme of economic integration, which were to be emulated first in South and Central America and later in other parts of the world, including West Africa.[17]

However, considering "integration" as several stages of close economic and political relations between defined states within a geographical region, historical evidence abounds, narrating unification attempts of West Africa during the pre-colonial period. In fact such Negro Empires such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Kanem Bornu, Oyo and Benin, individually fought wars of expansion which resulted in most cases in the integration of the conquered territories of the vassal states.[18] According to Bassey, the genesis of functional economic cooperation and integration among the states of West Africa dates back to the colonial period. This was the era when the metropolitan authorities, especially Britain and France, pursued a deliberate policy of harmonization. The harmonization policy covered economic matters such as currency, banking, marketing and judiciary. The West African citizens themselves had sought regional integration through the establishment of organizations like the National Council of British West Africa (NCBWA) and the West African Students Union (WASU).[19]

The National Council of British West Africa which was founded in 1920, and sought to achieve pan-West Africanism. Another early organization that attempted to unify, or rather integrate the West African sub-region was the West African Students' Union (WASU). A cursory look at the objectives of (WASU) would reveal that the body advocated for the integration of West Africa using education (as a spring-board). Indeed, its activities were largely centred on West Africa as a political entity. Its vision of integration informed its call for "self-help", unity and cooperation among the West Africans at home and abroad, students or working-class professionals and politicians". The WASU journals provided an early literary outlet for many West Africans especially the student members of the Union who later became leaders in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Gambia.[20]

There also existed the West African Currency Board (WACB) and the currency union embracing the English-speaking countries of West Africa during the colonial period. The Board which was founded in 1912, with headquarters in London had branches in each of the four Anglophone countries countries.[21] For the French-speaking countries, they had a monetary known as the West African Monetary Union., under the arrangement, all French speaking countries except Guinea, used the same currency. For this purpose, a Central Bank called the Banque Centrale ex Elate de l' Afrique Occidenlate (BCEAO) was established.[22]

Other colonial institutional arrangements for cooperation apart from the financial organizations in the English-speaking countries included the West African Court of Appeal (WACA) whose

jurisdiction covered the four British colonies, West African Air Transport Authority (WAATA), West African Airways Corporation (WAAC), West African Institute for Oil Palm Research (WAIFOR); the West African Frontier Force (WAFF); West African Council for Medical Research (WACMR); the West African Institute of Economic and Social Research (WAISER) and the West African Cocoa Research Institute (WACRI). Within the French-speaking countries, *Air Afrique* was established to improve and harmonize air transport mainly in the Francophone countries of West Africa.[23] The organization still remains one of the important symbols of unity in the French-speaking West African countries.

In the post-colonial era, Nigeria commenced concerted efforts towards achieving collective self-reliance in West Africa in November 1963 with a conference on industrial harmonization in the sub-region which was held in Lagos. This was followed, in Niamey, Niger Republic by a conference on economic cooperation in October 1966. During another conference in Accra, Ghana in April 1967, an agreement on the Articles of Association of a proposed economic community in West Africa was signed. Under this framework, an interim council of ministers was established with the task of preparing a draft treaty for the proposed community. The Interim council held its first meeting at Dakar, Senegal, in November, 1967, when it was agreed that the inaugural meeting of the proposed community should take place at the level of Head of States of Government.[24]

Earlier in the same month, the four Heads of State of the Organization of Senegalese River States met at Bamako and agreed to extend their cooperation through the creation of a regional group embracing the whole of West Africa and accordingly mandated the President of Mauritania to communicate this intention to the Heads of State of the other West African countries. As a consequence, the Heads of State met at Monrovia in April 1968 and signed the Protocol establishing the West African Regional Group. The meeting instructed Guinea and Nigeria to prepare priority studies on areas of cooperation, while Liberia and Senegal were asked to prepare a draft treaty and protocol for a Custom Union.[25]

Later in the year, officials of the governments of Nigeria and Guinea met to prepare the studies which were submitted to the then 14 West African States pending the consideration by the Interim Council of Ministers. Unfortunately, this body never met. Consequently, neither the priority studies nor the draft treaty and protocol on the Custom Union were considered nor adopted. This was the scenario which West Africa found itself until April 1972, when the Head of State of Nigeria and Togo decided to revive the process of achieving economic cooperation in the sub-region and accordingly mandated their ministers and officials to work out the framework and strategy of such cooperation. Proposals embodying the principles that guided the April 1972 meeting were later submitted by the two governments, in November 1973 to a meeting of ministers representing 15 West African countries at Lome. The proposals were considered and embodied in a draft treaty which was considered at another ministerial meeting held in January 1975. A third ministerial meeting was held in Lagos just before the summit meeting to finalize the Treaty.[26]

The Economic Community of West African States (1975-2015)

The summit of the West African Heads of State and Government or their representatives held in Lagos on the 28th of May, 1975, was the grand finale of all summits and conferences organized by Nigeria for the purpose of establishing an economic community. Eleven Heads of State and four plenipotentiaries representing 15 West African countries attended the summit. They signed the draft Treaty submitted to them by the council of ministers. In a communiqué, the signatories affirmed their determination to make the ECOWAS "a pragmatic, dynamic and effective institution which will take into account the realities prevailing in the member states".[27]

With the signing of the Treaty, Nigeria accomplished her dream of creating an economic community that embraces both the Anglophone and Francophone countries in West Africa. The Treaty formally came into effect on the 23rd of June, 1975, when the required minimum of seven member countries ratified it. It contained 65 Articles arranged in 14 chapters. While Article one deals with establishment and membership, Article two spelt out the aim and objectives of ECOWAS.[28]
The aim stated thus:

> It shall be the aim of the community to promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity particularly in the fields of industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial questions and in social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its peoples, of increasing and maintaining economic stability, of fostering closer relations among members and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent.[29]

The Lagos Treaty aimed at the gradual elimination of custom duties and qualitative and administrative restrictions on trade over a period of 15 years. The establishment of common custom tariff, free movement of persons, labour and capital, and the harmonization of agricultural, economic, industrial and monetary policies. Articles 5-12 contains details of the establishment, composition and functions of the institutions of the community, such as (a) the Authority of the Head of States and Government, (b) the Council of Ministers, (c) the Executive Secretariat, (d) the Tribunal of the Community (e) Technical and Specialized Commissions and (f) External Auditor of the Community.[30]
However, Bassey has noted that the documents were not only weak, but also omitted some vital issues, like not making express provision for political cooperation, regional peace and security, the absence of binding effects of the decision of the Authority and Council of Ministers on member states, absence of ECOWAS Parliament similar to that of the Legislative Assembly of the East African Community or the European Union to exercise advisory and supervisory powers over the organs of the organization, the fuzzy nature of the Treaty on the central issue of economic integration, proposal to create a free-trade zone favouring the more-developed member states at the expense of the less-developed ones, issues that relates the provision on free movement of persons and lastly the accusation that the Nigeria was bound to exercise hegemonic disposition over the rest of the countries.[31]

In a bid to streamline the issue, a few years after the establishment of ECOWAS, Nigeria started to negotiate with other member states for the revision of the Lagos Treaty. Consequently, a *Revised Treaty* was adopted in Abuja by the 14th Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government on the 6th of July, 1991. The *Revised Treaty* is more strengthened than the old one.[32]

It should be noted that internal and external economic factors motivated Nigeria's leading role in the quest for the integration and linkage of the West African sub-region. The internal economic motivations, was occasioned by the fact that Nigeria had by 1975 become the dominant economic power in the sub-region, with a population of about 70 million by the time ECOWAS was formed out of a population of 120 million in the ECOWAS area.[33] In addition, Nigeria is abundantly endowed with natural resources ranging from petroleum, iron ore, tin, gold, manganese, coal limestone and so

on. Nigeria realized that regional trade was a stimulus to a balanced economic development. This also means that an economic union was a pre-condition for the expansion of mutual trade within the region.[34]

Another internal economic motivation was the rising industrial status of Nigeria. With the increase in crude oil production and planned expansion in refinery capacity as well as the proposed iron and steel industry at Ajaokuta, Nigeria looked up to the West African sub-region as the immediate market. The country also expected to export automobiles Peugeot and Volkswagen cars, Leyland and Mercedes trucks – assembled in the country, to other nations of West Africa. It also intended to invest directly in the production of raw materials, food and even secondary industries in other countries of the sub-region. For example, Nigeria sought to invest in the ore enterprise in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea in order to supplement her local need of iron ore for the country's iron and steel industry.[35] Thus with the establishment of ECOWAS Nigeria thought that she would not only export her manufactured goods to other West African countries, but also invest directly in their economies.

The third internal factor related to the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil war. For security and economic reasons, the Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon after the Civil war made Africa the pivot of Nigeria's foreign policy. A striking aspect of the policy was the good neighbourliness posture in West Africa. This was sequel to the various activities of a number of West African states that supported the secessionist Biafra thereby working against Nigeria's national interest during the period of the crisis. For instance, Ivory Coast recognized Biafra and declared her support for her. Moreover, France used Cameroon and Benin Republics to supply the arms and relief materials to the rebel enclave. This clearly revealed the lack of grip of Nigeria of her neighbours and called for immediate action in that direction.[36]

As noted by Bassey, Nigeria also embarked on the economic integration project in order to project her sub-regional leadership which would consequently bring about the erosion of France's political and economic influence in the area. This was because there post-civil war oil boom in the country provided the wherewithal for the sub-regional integration scheme. Moreover, the advent of indigenous national and transnational "emergency contractors and entrepreneurs"[36] at the end of the Nigerian Civil War, who agitated for indigenization of foreign enterprise operating in Nigeria was another external motivation. In addition, the quest to use ECOWAS as an institutional framework to provide the much needed infrastructure in the country thereby promoting trade and development in the sub-region also contributed.

ECOWAS has recorded some remarkable achievements since its inception. First the organization has successfully established a protocol as early as 1979 that allows the free movement of its more than 308 million citizens across the sub-region. The legendary women traders of West Africa have taken advantage and acted as motors of regional integration, while 68 per cent of West Africa's international migrants remain in the sub-region, enjoying one of the world's most impressive mobility rates. Also, ECOWAS – under the leadership of Guinea's Lansana Kouyate – established the continent's first sub-regional security mechanism in 1999. The mechanism, built on the lessons of the Nigerian-led ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) peacekeeping interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s in which more than 2,500 West African peacekeepers died so that both countries could live. Sub-regional peacekeepers have subsequently been deployed to Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bisau and Mali.[37]

Moreover, ECOWAS other achievement is the creation of a governance protocol - under the leadership of Ghana's Mohammed Chambas - in 2001, which helped with some of the difficult democratization challenges in Guinea, Niger and Togo. Contrary to the autocratic days of sub-regional "big men" who sought to cling to power with iron fists, after the end of the Cold War, - the change of regime from one ruling power to another - has occurred in Benin, Ghana, Senegal and most recently in Nigeria. The organization has played an important role in Burkina Faso's democratic transition following the toppling of the 27 years autocracy of Blaise Campore in October 2015. The other important achievement of ECOWAS is the creation of an innovative community levy in 2000 to help fund the organization. Although the levy is irregularly paid; other African regional bodies could learn lessons from this scheme to reduce their dependence on the vagaries of external funding.[38]

In the energy sector, ECOWAS has recorded progress in the implementation of its three major energy programmes namely: the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP), the West African Power Pool (WAPP) and the ECOWAS Initiative on Access and Energy Services. The (WAGP), including the laying of a pipeline from the Niger Delta region in Nigeria to Ghana, is 100 per cent complete with the first quantities of gas delivered in April 2009 to the Takordi thermal plant in Ghana with the assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). However, in 2009, the pipeline has suffered supply disruptions due to unrest in the Niger Delta, which has prevented further gas deliveries.[39]

Since telecommunications impacts on all sectors of the sub-regional economy, inter-state telecommunications links were identified to form a Regional Broadband Backbone Infrastructure that will facilitate the connection of all ECOWAS states to the international network. A commitment worth 55 million Dollars was made for interconnecting all African capitals and major cities with ICT broadband infrastructure by 2012 and extending to all African villages by 2015. Currently, private telecommunications Global Satellite Systems (GSM) Companies such as MTN, Z, and Glo among others are operating and playing key roles in some ECOWAS countries thereby helping them attain the telecommunications objectives. Already it is possible to carry out MTN or Zain recharge cards bought in Nigeria to load and use in Ghana, Benin Republic and Burkina Faso.[40]

According to Adebayo, despite the progress, ECOWAS has also suffered some key failures. Between 1960 and 1990, West Africa was most coup-prone sub-region, accounting for 37 of the 72 successful putsches. The culture of militarism remains rife in Mali, Guinea-Bisau, Niger, Gambia and Togo. The other level of failure involves the penchant of its leaders to engage in bouts of political alchemy and their inability to build sub-regional institutions. West African leaders have dreamed up schemes such as trans-regional highways, railways, factories, a power pool, a gas pipe-line, and monetary union, most of which have failed to materialize. Despite progress in the movement of persons.[41]

While Nigeria's hegemonic ambitions in West Africa is not in doubt, the results of its numerous economic and diplomatic initiatives in the last four decades in its goal of using ECOWAS as an instrument to reduce the dependence of Francophone West African States on France have not been totally successful. Three decades after ECOWAS sought to establish a Custom Union, informal trade (smuggling) within West Africa outstrips formal trade; the sub-region's resourceful traders continue to exploit porous borders and largely unconvertible currencies to their advantage. Despite plans to create a common West African currency, the continued existence of a Francophone currency zone tied to the euro (formerly the French france) is perhaps the clearest sign of the division that still frustrate regional integration within ECOWAS and the achievement.[42]

cement, cotton, sugar molasses and cosmetics.[48] In view of this statistics, it is necessary for Nigeria to consolidate its trade links within the ECOWAS territory.

French Foreign Policy and the ECOWAS Dream

Developed countries, including France, base their foreign policies on the appreciation of their well-defined and clearly articulated national interests.[49] Through a vigorous foreign policy of "grandeur" manifested by well-defined economic, political, military and cultural relations, France managed to keep intact its domination over its former colonial territories.[50] France under successive governments, regardless of ideological differences, has always put the greatness of her nation at the centre-point of her policies and this has become an issue that is above party politics. As an illustration, one can note the constancy with which different governments have pursued broadly the same policies, whether in relation to major powers, or to the weaker countries, of the world.[51]

When Charles de Gaulle, the grand architect of the French policy of "grandeur" established the basic structure of the French community in Africa in 1958 as well as the institutional mechanism to consolidate the network of Franco-African co-operation after decolonization of French West Africa and equatorial African states, he was animated by the conviction that a Franco-African community would, ultimately, transform France into a major global power. The economic expansion, as a basis for world status led to the deliberate process of maintaining the former African possessions within the orbit of France. The goal of national economic expansion was linked to the policy of decolonization. Under de Gaulle, it was to retain exclusive influence over the colonial territories as sources of raw materials. These also would provide a stable basis for heavy capital investment but it was thought inexpedient to secure this advantage by continuing to maintain costly control over the colonies. Decolonization, after all, would involve drastic re-adjustment in the colonial relationship while economic interest could be safeguarded by signing accords and enforcing political - military actions, if necessary. Such subsequent actions by France in uranium-rich Niger and Chad as well as other Francophone states have been guided by these economic calculations.[52]

The French have often justified their post-colonial behavior in Africa on the basis of a residual colonial obligation. In order to secure these territories firmly within its influence, France had felt the need to provide them with economic, social and political support, although such support is often presented as a continuation of the civilizing mission of the French Empire, through a post-colonial cooperative framework. When decolonization appeared inevitable, de Gaulle worked out the policy of co-operation to maintain the Francophone states. The strategy known as the policy of co-operation, has been the foundation, as well as the context, of France's relations with Francophone African countries since the last few decades. Since then, this strategy has been the foundation, as well as the context of France's relations with Francophone African states.[53] These states have continued to serve the transnational interests of France with the ruling elite consciously or unconsciously encouraging dependence by mortgaging themselves to France in order to maintain their hold on power.

The "policy of co-operation" was expressed through a series of bilateral "accords" between France on the one hand and each of the new states on the other. These accords have been used as instruments of preserving the organic links which the "union" and the "France-African community" had provided. The agreements cover all aspects of the state and government: economic policy, defence, diplomacy, monetary policy, political systems and culture.[54]

According to Otubanjo and Davies, in the economic sphere, there are three strings which enable France to exercise control over African countries. First, 12 African countries are members of the France Zone. All international transactions by France Zone countries are carried on through the

French France; the foreign currency obtained from their exports is deposited in the French treasury. This, in combination with French credit, gives France *de facto* control over monetary matters, in consequence of which French companies operating in Africa can freely repatriate their profits. The companies have been instrumental in safeguarding French economic interest, particularly those relating to the supply of strategic raw materials including petroleum and uranium.[55]

Secondly, France dominates the economies of Francophone countries by offering them substantial aid. There are two principal agencies: "Fonds de Aide et Co-operation" (FAC) and "Classe Centrate de Coopertion Economique" (CCCE) through which French aid is canalized.. FAC is a state budgetary fund which is offered for economic and social development, it accounts for approximately one-fourth of the amount of the total budget of the Ministry of Co-operation. FAC is an autonomous public financing body run on commercial lines. Active all over Francophone Africa, it offers credit to companies for development projects.[56]

France has also the major trading partner of its former colonies. Even after independence, their exports to and imports from France form more than 60 per cent of their external trade.

The role of the French military in Africa needs to be understood in the context of the magnitude of French economic interests as well as the sustained political understanding between France and Francophone African states. In order to consolidate and defend its political interest, France offered to guarantee the stability of moderate regimes through military aid at their request. It has also sought to upgrade the training of armies in Francophone countries by providing military training facilities for the soldiers.[57]

Undoubtedly, the continuing ubiquitous and negative presence of French neo-colonialism in West Africa greatly undermines the sovereignty of West African states and the ECOWAS dream. As noted France had sought to break up Nigeria during the Civil war in order to reduce the country's potential influence on the sub-region eight Francophone countries. It also encouraged Francophone countries to form rival trade blocs that contradicted ECOWAS' integration goals. At present, the currency of these countries is still tied to French-backed euro, while Paris maintains 3000-strong military presence in Mali, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal; as well as an air force and drones in Niger. French companies also continue to dominate many of the strategic sectors in these countries, though there is a growing Chinese presence in the sub-region.[58]

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the deliberate constraints put in place by the French government beginning from the colonial era to control the fortunes of West Africans. Put differently, the enduring French foreign policy takes its roots from the French colonial policy in Africa. France still believes strongly that the "umbilical cord" tying her African territories to herself must never be broken. This explains why one form of association was experimented after the other. For instance, in 1946 the French Union came into being, when Guinea dared opt for independence in 1958, she was heavily punished for it.[59] Although West Africa is a sub-region endowed with enormous natural resources, it has some of the poorest populations in the world and many of these countries have little or no industry, energy, cash crops or minerals.

The countries have thus relied heavily on custom duties for much of their government revenues. There remain no less than ten mostly unconvertible currencies within ECOWAS, making intra-community trade and in-ward investment difficult. Sub-regional exports are also competitive rather than complimentary, and colonial trading partners with the West have remained largely intact. Furthermore, there are serious infrastructural difficulties in transportation and communication.

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