



The Fall of Muammar Gaddafi and the Contemporary Security Debacle in West Africa: An Examination of Interconnectedness

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Abstract. West Africa is a home of seventeen countries which are divided by colonial alienation. The region has three principal divisions i.e. Lusophone, Francophone and Anglophone and this imperial division dictates the direction of social and political events in the region. In terms of security architecture, the region is one of the most volatile areas of the international security concerns; and such security is dictated by exogenous issues. One of these exogenous issues is the fall of Gaddafi's Libya in 2011 and the attendant itinerant soldiers in the Sahel region of West Africa. Thus, this research examines the connection between the fall of Libya and the contemporary security challenges in the West Africa sub region. It seeks to discuss the role of Sahel region's seeming anarchical situation with the current security complications in West Africa sub region. In conducting this research, the theoretical precept of Regional Security Complex (RSCT) is employed to unravel the interconnectedness of the insecurity wave in the region. In addition, the research employed the use of latent content analysis to mine data from relevant sources.

Keywords: Security, Sahel, Libya, West Africa, Muammar Gaddafi

1. Introduction

The sub-region known as West Africa today is a continuum of spatial expanse of African plate. The division of Africa into sub-regional entity is an imperialistic ambition as there is no serious geographical obstacle that limits the mobility of people within the continent. With the exception of Sahara Desert, the largest of its kind in the world, which poses serious challenges to the movement of people from the southern part to the Mediterranean world, Africa had always been a singular entity before the introduction of colonialism. Dividing the continent along this line was a convenient mechanism

on the part of Europeans to map out strategy to dominate the entire continent. In this case West Africa is designed rigidly to include seventeen countries with the exception of Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Gabon, most of which share the same affinity with West African states. In this scenario, the so-called West Africa sub-region is a colonial design to perpetuate their hegemony within the regional space. Today, Spanish, Portuguese, French and British cultural milieu dominate the socio-political terrain with attendant serious structural deficiencies for meaningful development. The manner with which the region is designed makes it susceptible to the intricacies of international security outfits. The West Africa region by design shares borders with Horn of Africa (the haven of Al-Shabab Terror Group), North Africa (the region with many terror groups sourcing for hideouts elsewhere) and Gulf of Guinea, the haven of pirates. With this in view, it is expected that the region is open to all security complications in Africa. Worse still, the Sahel region, which is shared between West, North and East Africa is particularly an anarchical atmosphere where states are incapacitated to maintain law and order (Alfred, 2020). It needs to be stressed here that most states that are located in the West Africa region are structurally weak to contain exogenous security issues. This is particularly true of Niger Republic, Chad Republic, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauritania. Of all states in West Africa, only few like Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana and Ivory Coast have routine security architecture to respond to issues outside their borders (Bach, 2007; Hamman & Omojuwa, 2013). Most countries in the Sahel parts of West Africa are very weak and fragile to confront marauding bandits and terror groups coming to the region through their territories. This is particularly true of Mali, Niger Republic and Chad Republic who are at the frontier section of the region (Hagberg & Körling, 2012). They serve as connecting link between Northern and western part of

Africa. Besides, they also link to the Horn of Africa which is another strategic area where West Africa receives unwarranted drifts of bandits and terror groups. The weakness of these frontier West African states aptly captures the connection between the fall of Libya and the contemporary security debacle in the West African sub-region. The question now is: How are these states affect the security dimension of West Africa sub-region? This question guides the focus of this research Thus, this research is divided into sections. The first section provides background introduction to the research. The second section connects the research with the theoretical precept of regional security complex while section three discusses Sahel and Sahara region during the time of Muammar Gaddafi. The fourth section discusses the collapse of Libya regime and Security issues in West Africa, most especially the Tuareg uprising in Mali. The last section concludes the research and provides useful alternatives to guarantee the territorial integrity of states in the sub regional space.

2. Regional Security complex theory (RSCT) and West Africa

The RSCT is a form of subaltern security discussion in the global security architecture. During the Cold War global system, the global structure was the predominant approach adopted in security studies (Ayooob, 1991:259). As a sub-system, region has become a useful mechanism in defining the contemporary international security which is seen as a step towards achieving global peace and security. The importance of regions as the basic unit of security analysis appeared in the 1970s when some states were coerced into the Cold War rivalries between the two superpowers. The only unified mechanism adopted then was non-aligned movement, which most developing countries adopted in resisting the Cold War influence (Ayooob, 1995).

Thus, some regional organizations were formed in the heydays of Cold War, which tried to curb the incidence of local rivalries within regions. Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN), Organisation of African Unity (OAU), Economic community of West African states (ECOWAS) and Organization of American States (OAS) were formed during this period. The focus of RSCT is that states who share the same borders are normally locked in a security dilemma. In terms of definition, RSCT is regarded as a situation whereby "local sets of states exist whose major security perceptions and concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national security perceptions cannot realistically be considered apart from one another" (Buzan,1986: 8).

The theory posits that the security of states within a region or sub-region is defined by the geographical contiguity. It maintains that the security and safety of each state within a region cannot be isolated from the happenings in the neighbouring states. The focus of the theory therefore rests on the basic assumption of the need to ensure that the regional security is collectively pursued by states that make a regional security complex. There are basic features defining the RSCT. These are anarchy, geographical proximity, interdependence and rivalry, and independence (Lake and Morgan, 1997:11).

The RSCT is defined in terms of anarchy, which pervades the sub-regional political structure of the region (Adler & Barnnet, 1996:65). The states that make up the regional system are locked up into regional security, which they cannot extricate from. In this process of anarchy, it may be possible to contrive a regional mechanism to address such security complex, which may be "standard or centred" (Buzan & Weaver, 2011). Regional security complex is standard when the region is bipolar or multipolar in nature while the centred regional security is a unipolar system. The conception of RSCT is that regions are anarchical in nature, characterized by rivalries among contiguous states. RSCT also relies on the geographical proximity of states within a certain region (Buzan, 1986). It posits that states within a certain geographical setting with shared boundaries are inextricably locked together in terms of security. The position is that for the theory to hold, two or more states must share geographical proximity which may makes it difficult for each other to escape from the security threat of the adjacent states (Nwokedi, 1985:198). RSCT is also characterized by interdependence and rivalry among the constituted states. The regional arrangement renders the need for interdependence in some areas inevitable while in some cases states may engage in rivalries in terms of dominating the regional complex. According to Buzan (2003) "the nature of security interdependence, national threat perceptions, and quest for autonomy are some of the crucial factors affecting the prospect for collaboration within regional security complexes". This theory aptly captures the current situation in West Africa subregion. The security of the entire region is inextricably connected that what affects a state in the region will resonate immediately to other parts. This explains the movement of marauding bandits and terror groups in the region. The case of Boko Haram terror group is particularly important here. Boko Haram terror group started its local operation in the Northeastern part of Nigeria with no indication of having any branch outside the shore of Nigeria.

Today, the Central African Republic, Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Mali are suffering from the scourge of the terror group. This is possible because of geographical contiguity as advertised by RSCT. Again, in 2011, the Tuareg group in Northern Mali became a formidable terror group that terrorized the Sahel region of West Africa. Their operation was initially limited to Northern Mali which later extended to neighbouring territories of Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal. The RSCT states that the regional and sub-regional spaces security architecture is connected and such demands the cooperation of all states within a regional space. But the case of West Africa is quite different. As opined by the theory, the security architecture of West Africa sub-region is centred as it is dominated by Nigeria. But the picture is more complex than being centred. As explained above, the theory guides the conduct of the research and it unravels how the security architecture in West Africa is interlinked.

3. West Africa's Sahel region during Qaddafi Era

The competition for political space in the south of Sahara desert started apace in the 1960s (Ate, 2011). Most Maghreb states at the time were interested in Niger, Mauritania, Chad and Mali (Virginie, Amal, & Dylan, 2021). There was stiff competition for allies particularly among Morocco, Algeria and Libya. It needs to be stressed here that there was no serious formal economic relationship between the Sahel region and the countries in the Maghreb. What was obtainable in the 1960s was skeletal transaction along the Sahara zone by private individuals, most importantly the Tuaregs in Northern Mali and Niger with Maghreb states (Thurston & Lebovich, 2018)

One of the most prosperous states in the Maghreb region is Libya under the over-ambitious leadership of Muammar Gaddafi. Libya's foreign policy under Gaddafi was based on its own unique brand of pan-Africanism and socialism. Under the regime of Gaddafi, its political role was coupled with massive economic and financial investments in West African and Sahelian states (Boas & Utas, 2013). However, Libya's attempts to reinforce the position of Africa at the international level was closely associated with its frequent interference in the internal affairs of neighbours and its contribution to instability through its support of rebel movements. The functional relationship between Libya under Gaddafi and Sahel region of West Africa could be dated to 1960s. Because of the nature of the Sahel region which is prone to drought, famine and encroaching desertification, most Tuaregs are prone to economic malaise which has eventually led to frustration on

several occasions. Such frustration has led some Tuaregs to believe that government has completely neglected them to fend for their survival (Bencherif & Campana, 2016). Such position endeared some Tuaregs to abandon their traditional system of rearing livestock, pastoralism. In this quest some of them migrated to Libya from various countries of West Africa, most importantly Niger, Mali and Mauritania.

The Libya's large hydrocarbon revenues meant that the state could provide financial assistance to its Sahel neighbours and use its many sovereign funds and investment portfolios to finance infrastructure projects and other economic ventures in various sector. The engagement of Gaddafi's Libya with its Sahel neighbours was volatile and ambiguous. It was part of a wider foreign policy towards the African continent based on Gaddafi's long-standing ambition to unify African countries under his leadership. The establishment in 1998 of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)—a regional integration framework that initially brought together Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Niger and Sudan—was largely the result of Gaddafi's efforts (Ben Yahia, 2019). Spearheaded by Libya, where its headquarters are located, CEN-SAD supported programmes focused on food security, environmental protection and rural development in Sahel countries. Since many of these programmes were financed by Libya, CEN-SAD largely served to increase Libya's influence in the Sahel. Gaddafi also played an important role in the creation in 2000 of the African Union (AU), although his original plan was to create and lead a highly integrated 'United States of Africa' (Huliaras & Magliveras, 2011). Libya acted as a driving force of the organization, contributing to its institutional development, pushing for greater integration and providing it with financial resources.

However, there are two sides to the influence of Libya under Gaddafi in the Sahel: at times it contributed to destabilizing its southern neighbors, while at other times it played a prominent role in mediating Sahel conflicts. Perhaps the most conspicuous example of this ambivalent disposition was Gaddafi's interference in Chad, where he played an important role in peace negotiations between the government and the opposition from 2003 despite Libya's repeated military interventions in Chad in the 1980s and its plans to annex parts of northern Chad (Sesay, 1998). Even though Libya was widely suspected of stirring up trouble and supporting the rebels, including during the 2006–2009 Tuareg rebellion, Gaddafi helped broker a peace agreement between the Tuareg rebels and the Nigerien and the Malian governments in 2009 (Molenaar, 2018). The

Libyan-sponsored peace agreement brought an end to the fighting between the Nigerien Government and the Nigerien Movement for Justice (Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice, MNJ), created in 2007, and between the governments of Mali and Niger and the Malian Democratic Alliance of 23 May 2006 for Change (Alliance démocratique du 23 Mai 2006 pour le changement, ADC) (Alexander, 2014). Under this agreement, the Nigerien Government granted amnesty to Tuareg rebels on the condition that they disarmed. The Tuareg leaders largely accepted the deals brokered by Gaddafi. Nigerien presidents Mamadou Tandja (1999–2010) and Mahamadou Issoufou (2011–21) also demonstrated the willingness of the state to integrate members of the Tuareg communities. These include Rhissa ag Boula, a former rebel who has occupied several political functions since 1997 included as presidential adviser to President Issoufou, and Brigi Rafini, who has been prime minister since 2011 (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2013). In contrast, the Malian Government continued to rely primarily on security-based approaches without making any significant progress in the implementation of peace agreements.

It should be noted that the close relations between Gaddafi's Libya and the Tuareg of Mali and Niger have constituted a factor of both stability and instability in the Sahel region. In Libya, the Tuareg not only cultivated nationalist and revolutionary ambitions, but they also acquired military training and experience. The conditions of their return to their countries of origin exacerbated existing tensions with the central governments of Mali and Niger. While the Nigerien Government encouraged Tuareg to return to Niger in 1989, they eventually ended up in refugee camps, living in difficult conditions (Haysom, 2014). This aggravated discontent and created conditions for instability and revolt. Whereas contacts between the different Tuareg communities were limited before 1980, exile has reinforced a strong feeling of injustice, and exclusion from their respective states has strengthened community sentiment based on a common language and social ties. In the early 1990s, rebellions in Mali and Niger were triggered in part by the precarious economic and social situation and the return and marginalization of exiles from Algeria and Libya, some of whom had served in Gaddafi's Islamic Legion (Lee, 2014). Unresolved problems and intra-Tuareg tensions resulted in the resumption of violence and the eruption of the third Tuareg rebellion of 2006–2009 in Niger and Mali. The fragility of political and social reconciliation with Tuareg in Niger and Mali continued until the collapse of Libyan regime under Muammar Gaddafi. Such fragility came to the fore which further worsened the security situation in the Sahel region. Tuareg

migrants from Libya dispersed all over Sahelian part of Africa and constitute a threat to most states in West Africa. In this scenario, Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Senegal suffered the worst terror attacks believed to have connection with the marauding Tuareg in the Sahel part of West Africa.

4. The Collapse of Libyan Regime and West Africa Security Concerns

The collapse of the regime of Qaddafi in mid-2011 has catastrophic consequences for the West African states south of Sahara, most importantly Mali, Niger, Chad, and Nigeria. The Libyan civil war led to the return of thousands of armed and unarmed Tuareg to the extreme North of Mali (Human Rights Watch, 2020). This also included members of armed radical groups such as Al-Queda in the Maghreb (AQIM) and Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) which added to the poor living condition of the northerners compared to the Southerners. Though, the Third Touareg Rebellion officially came to an end in 2009, Ibrahim Ag Bahanga and his followers had refused to abide by the peace accords which led to taking shelter in Libya under the protection of Gaddafi (Ben Yahia, 2019). Bahanga is believed to have involved in the illegal arms trade looted from Libya after Gaddafi's demise. Thus, they came in contact with other veterans of the 1990 rebellion who neglected the adoption of the National Pact and joined the special elite units of the Libyan Army, Col. Ag Najim included. Since the arrival of Bahanga in Libya early in 2009, he began convincing Ag Najim and other Tuareg in the Libyan armed forces to think of the establishment of an independent Tuareg state in Northern Mali and Niger as the relationship between Gaddafi and the Touaregs did not base on ideological devotion, but rather self-serving and opportunistic (Molenaar, 2018).

It should be noted that Bahanga was not the only Tuareg committed and hoping to initiate uprising in northern Mali. In November 2010, a meeting, largely attended by northern Tuareg was organized in Timbuktu and ends with the creation of National Movement of Azawad (NMA) which primarily rejected violence but called for display of solidarity from Azawadians inside Mali and beyond the country's borders (Heisbourg, (2013). NMA was a clear political organization whose core objective was to obtain independence for northern Mali called Azawad. Moreover, MNA presented itself as a political movement of Azawad which had to defend and promote policy specified to achieving the legitimate objectives and claiming all the historical rights of the deprived people of Azawad. This

movement is dominated by Tuareg and as of 2011, played significant role in northern Mali uprising. This eventually led to near-state collapse in Mali in 2011.

Besides this seeming dissatisfaction of Tuareg with Governments of Mali and Niger, the death of Gaddafi shifted the position of most Tuareg to becoming middlemen in the illegal arms trafficking across the Sahara to West African states. Such activity led to the illegal movement of small and light weapons across the Sahara which landed in the hands of various terror groups like Boko Haram, AQIM and Tuareg rebels. The contemporary proliferation of Bandits and similar armed groups in Northern Nigeria, Mali, and Niger is reminiscent of the collapse of order in the Sahel region, which is worsened by the state collapse in Libya. The Gaddafi regime by proxy had been the core actor maintaining order in the anarchical part of Sahel and Sahara parts of Africa. Such order maintenance collapsed as soon as Gaddafi regime faded away. In a way, the worsening security situation in the contemporary West African region has its link with the collapse of Libyan regime.

Boko Haram, an Islamic terrorist group operating mainly in Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon is believed to have links to AQIM and reportedly also obtained weapons from Libya. According to a UN report, some governments believe that Boko Haram is also active in Niger and its militants from Nigeria and Chad were trained in AQIM camps in Mali in 2011 (Huckabey, (2013). Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo said that the toppling of the long-time Libyan dictator, the events in Mali and the US consulate attacks in Libya are all interlinked and added that the Libyan civil war produced many uncontrolled trained and armed militants who continue to fuel violence in the region, including the atrocities committed by Boko Haram in Nigeria (Onojeghen, 2019)

In August 2012, Minister of State for Defence, Mrs. Olusola Obada confirmed speculations that Libyan weapons had found their way into Nigeria. She said that some of the looted weapons, including surface-to-air missiles, were transported to Nigeria and thought to be included in Boko Haram's stockpiles (Eray, 2012). The government of Nigeria blamed Libya for empowering Boko Haram, saying that most of the group's weapons come from Libyan stockpiles. Abba Moro, the Nigerian Minister of Interior, said the "[g]overnment believes that part of the problems that we have today, the challenges of internal security stemmed from the activities in Libya" (Owete, 2013). The Minister further lamented that "It is indeed an open secret that even though, we did not share

common border with Libya, arms and weapons have found their ways into Nigeria from that North African country" (Owete, 2013). Such declaration from governmental quarters points to the frustration of Nigerian government on the issue. In this case Sahel region has been a transit point in the illegal arms trade and movement to all parts of West Africa.

5. Conclusion

The fall of Gaddafi not only resulted in the return south of heavily equipped and well-trained Tuareg ex-combatants from their Libyan exile but has also deprived West African countries of important economic resources through the Libyan Investment Authority (e.g. interest-free loans to Niger). The collapse of the state and the civil war in Libya have debilitated a once pivotal and influential actor in the region. This has left Algeria and Morocco rivalling each other as regional powers, mobilizing their respective diplomatic, political and economic resources to exert influence in the Sahel. While Morocco has increased its religious and economic reach into Sahel countries through investments in a variety of sectors. The fall of the Libyan leader and the collapse of the state in 2011 deprived the Tuareg of protection and of important economic support. The Tuareg's association with Gaddafi's regime meant that they became frequent targets when his regime collapsed. The dynamics of this unrest have been largely reminiscent of the 1990s rebellions in that former Tuareg fighters left Libya for Mali and Niger, bringing with them weapons and arms from Libya's stockpile that triggered another round of violence in the Sahel. Such Tuareg debacle has radiated to other parts of West Africa as weapons looted from Libya military arsenal proliferated West Africa's political and social space. Many bandits and terror groups have unprecedented access to arms and weapons; a situation that has worsened the security complications in the region. As theory of RSCT postulates, the possible way to mitigate the effect of Libya's collapse on West Africa region is through multilateral approach. Although, ECOWAS intervened in Tuareg uprising in 2012 but there is need for proactive and consistent policy direction on the part of UNO, AU, ECOWAS and other concerned multilateral agencies. The region needs consistent actor that will rescue it from the imminent total collapse. The region, as discussed in the theoretical section, is a centred political domain; dominated by Nigeria. Nigeria as a state is not well equipped to respond to the need of countries in the Sahel as it battles on all fronts the menace of bandits and terrorists in its border. The credible lasting solution to the impending anarchical situation in the Sahel space

of West Africa is through forceful multilateral efforts backed by strong political will.

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