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NEO-REALISM VERSUS NEO-LIBERALISM IN WEST AFRICA'S REGIONAL SECURITY: ECOWAS AGE OF RETROGRESSION

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to deliberate upon the decay, the decline, and the weakness in the vitality of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the area of collective regional security management in the 21st Century of the new millennium. Comparatively, the regional organization has clearly lost its security vitality of the 1990s that once depicted the application of the theory of neo-liberal institutionalism into practice. This is the reality today that came about as a result of the predominance of many significant factors. ECOWAS has gradually lost ground to neo-realist power politics, giving way to many extra-regional powers to find easy loopholes to encroach upon the institution's regional sovereignty and weaken its efficiency in West Africa. Military coups, ECOWAS-unsanctioned penetration of indirect extra-regional powers like Russia in Mali, several European forces in Niger, unilateral actions of new local political leaders, the startling increase in the collapse of national security in several of its most prominent member states particularly Nigeria, all contribute to the marginalization of the organization in the field of political and military events in the region. It is well observed that the West African neo-liberal regional institution stands hopeless vis-à-vis the "invited" violation of its regional sovereignty, as well as the increasing unilateral dependency of some of its member-states on outside powers to take charge of their regional security affairs. It is worth mentioning that this article focuses on the situation of ECOWAS prior to the military coup of Niger Republic that took place in July 2023. That is because that event was of an international sensation and needs an article on its own.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Military coup, Neo-liberalism, Neo-realism, Pan-Africanism, Regional Organization.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the new millennium entered its second decade, many political and security events have cropped up, shading light on the steady decline of ECOWAS' efficiency in dealing with regional issues. Security threats of all sorts of economic, political, social, and military dimensions have increased

in the West African region and the regional organization has lost its momentum in coping with them.

It is worth noting that ECOWAS was established in 1975 based on neo-liberal principles. Its member states are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Mauritania withdrew in the year 2000 before signing an associate membership in 2017. In the whole continent of Africa, it had been regarded as the most active African regional institution. It was chattered as a neo-liberal institution, where regional governments believed cooperation was the threshold for championing West African regional interests through economic prosperity. To achieve the goal of uplifting the overall condition of every member-state, peace and security had to be the catalysts upon which every other development is to be built. For example, in the past, frequent military coups, civil wars in states like Liberia and Sierra Leone among others, needed to be addressed as priorities. Those main objectives were to be attained through exhaustive neo-liberal cooperation among all the states within the region. At that time, military security was identified as the utmost regional threat. Eventually to address this threat, ECOWAS had provided military, mediation, and peacebuilding support to its member states (Leonie, 2022, p.1).

Over time, the optimism and resilience that once characterized this organization have turned into conspicuous pessimism and impotence that jeopardize the very sovereignty, thrust, and past regional ambitions of ECOWAS. Despite the fact that it appears to continue to function officially as per normal walking towards its objectives, the actuality remains unimpressive. Most people and governments seem dispassionate to the operation of ECOWAS without much concern about the expectations and hopes once invested in it. As a result, West African states concentrated more on their individual situations than they did on developments in the region (Adeboye, 2020, p. 26).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the article "*After the Coup d'Etat*", Klatt has highlighted the point that even though Mali has a civilian government, the role of the military that staged the coup of 2020 remains strong as the actual runner of the country. Instead of encouraging sanctions already imposed on the country by European donors, the author has suggested rather more constructive policy of engagement for the long-term stability of Mali. The article does also point to the fact that hope among the population of Mali is high despite the increasing activities of armed insurrection in the north and the center of the country. The overall discussion by Klatt is beneficial for the students of West African political paradigms. That is because the article gives a general historical background to the current political crisis in Mali. However, the article does not make recommendations on how to end the armed rebellion in the country.

Similarly, Devermont in "*Guinea: The Causes and Consequences of West Africa's Latest Coup*" gave a detailed exposition of the root causes of the military coup in Guinea-Conakry against president Alpha Conary. That ranges from political despotism, economic mismanagement, and manipulation of democratic rule to secure a third term by the ousted president. It was due to these factors that the military took over power under the leadership of Doumbouya who vowed to reform

the security, political and social course of the nation. According to the article, Mali's European partners paid no attention to the country's political and security crises as they geared their efforts towards dealing with the increasing influence of China and Russia in West Africa. The article is a good historical record. Nevertheless, it falls short of important critical analysis particularly on the historic conflict that ensued after the coup between Mali and its former colonial master France. In "*Burkina Faso: Second Coup of 2022*", Louise, traces the history of military coups in this West African country from independence in the 1960s to the present. The major causes of the recent two coups have been linked to security problems caused by violent armed groups that have displaced millions of people. The article explains the reactions of ECOWAS, the AU as well as the EU that condemn the coup despite the fact that all of them have accepted the transition period of two years before returning to civilian rule. The author has made some critical analyses and predictions on the future security scenario, as well as the potential for further unrest. The most important of the academic contribution is the prediction suggesting that Burkina Faso will likely become a failing state. This prediction seems to be falsified by the current military trends in this West African country, that continues to rise up as a local military power capable of encountering its own security challenges.

Mills' article, the "*effectiveness of ECOWAS in mitigating coups in West Africa*" is essential in understanding the origin of ECOWAS and its role in West Africa. It demonstrates the challenges the regional organization faces in addressing and curbing military coups in its region. It continues to support leaders who violates its democratic principles by coming to power via military coups, or by amending and manipulating the constitutions of their respective countries. The important part of the article is that it has suggested some steps to enhance the effectiveness of the regional grouping apparatus in order to cope with future challenges.

All the articles reviewed above, do not foresee the downtrend that ECOWAS follows which might lead to its demise in the near future. There are many trends indicating the fact of ECOWAS losing its historic neoliberal momentum, giving way to neo-realist tendencies to take over the course of events across the West African region.

3. METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to analyze the decline of neo-liberal collaboration among West African states that paved the way to neo-realist preeminence in the region. It is also to highlight the decline of ECOWAS in dealing with regional security issues in the new millennium. Whereas its significance lies in the fact that analytical critical studies on the West African region is essential as the region is undergoing remarkable sociopolitical, military and strategic events in the present time. The study will as well adopt a qualitative approach in its analysis of the contemporaneous ongoing events in West Africa. In order to fulfill this objective, a theory consuming case study of some of ECOWAS member countries will be dealt with to highlight the rise of neo-realism on the account of neo-liberalism in the region.

4. THE THEORY OF NEO-LIBERALISM AND NEO-REALISM

Neo-liberalism in international studies of peace and security is rather distinct from "economic" neo-liberalism that focuses mainly on economic development relatively-free from government

intervention. “Before 1980, neo-liberalism was an esoteric term, used scarcely, and then, only by economists. Since then, it has become one of the most widely used terms across many social science disciplines (Mammadov & Hasanov, 2016, p. 292). In international relations, whilst it correspondingly gears its focus towards economic progress, it does so with perception of national security as a preponderant linchpin in sight. It is of the view that national security and survival in the current global system could better be crystalized through neo-liberal cooperation between particular states. By reason of this political prudence, many regional “security” institutions surfaced in the international arena, such as the EU in Europe, ASEAN in Asia, the Caribbean Community (Caricom), the Organization of American States (OAS), ECOWAS, League of Arab States (LAS), to mention a few. For the reason that security ought to be holistic. That means economic, political, social, and cultural aspects had to be added to the military strategy once viewed as the cornerstone for national survival.

It has been said of old time that “no man is an island”, as goes the proverb. On the basis of this adage, states since time immemorial had realized that unity is strength. It is essential to harness collective efforts to address each other’s national interests for the good of all through regional cooperation. This is what neo-liberal institutions aspire to achieve via collaborative initiatives. According to neo-liberal institutionalists, “even when anarchy constrains the need of the states to cooperate, they still can work together, with the assistance of international institutions, which is also a way of managing anarchy (Joseph, 2020, p. 2). That in turn establishes commonality to circumvent war.

Conversely, neo-realism confides in the premise that state’s survival entirely depends on carrying out foreign policies that serve its own self-centered national interests. Cooperation with any other state has to plainly safeguard its security-oriented national interests and policies if it is to survive. This is in line with Hobbes’ state of nature maxim, whereby everyone struggles for one’s own survival in an anarchical environment characterized by severe competition. This constitutes an obstacle on the way to neo-liberal cooperation because “a focus on gaining more power rather than developing capabilities through coordination can undermine collective efforts between states” (Ahmadi, 2021, p. 3). The Neo-realist ideology heavily depends on the theory of biological evolution and its natural selection precepts. It is the animal kingdom that dictates the tenets of survival for the fittest, the sufficiently egoist. National sovereignty takes on a heading role in the formulation of foreign policies. That is to say, it goes hand in hand with the intent of preserving and safeguarding one’s own egoistic national interests without tolerance to foreign intervention. On view of this “self-reinforcing and self-centered responses of states could well lead some to doubt the continued utility of certain conceptual tools that are commonly used to facilitate our understanding of international relations and international capabilities” (Ahmadi, 2021, p. 3).

Certainly, as neo-liberalists surmise that cooperation is in itself a mechanism for security exaltation, neo-realists vitalize cooperation in as much as it strengthens the nation-state’s unfettered self-interests. Therefore, the state has to necessarily choose the right partner to maximize its chances for survival. It is geopolitically prudent to ally with such a partner long as the state’s security and national survival are consequently warranted, in lieu of relying on a feeble

next-door neighbour. If the nation-state's foreign policy is merely directed towards domestic affairs like trade, environment, and democratic principles to the detriment of security issues, the state will be placing its very national existence to peril. Nations depending on the moral good will and ethical benevolence of foreigners are headless because altruism is not an absolute value in inter-state international relations. "Placing neorealism next to any of these perspectives seems peculiar since it was precisely the absence of ethics in neorealism that, in many respects, prompted their development in the first place" (Lundborg, 2019, p. 231). Based on this neo-realist perception of international politics devoid of altruistic ethics, states might regard it fit to disavow their commitment to cooperation with others whenever the contrary alternative offers more promising self-centered gains. Notwithstanding, classical realists, indisputably approve some forms of ethics in international relations, such as Hans Morgenthau's "prudence and lesser evil", and Max Weber's "ethics of responsibility". But of course, "neorealism is no different from classical realism in this respect since both approaches reaffirm the state as the primary unit that needs to be secured against outside threats" (Lundborg, 2019, p. 232).

5. PAN-AFRICANISM

It is of paramount importance to provide a brief account of Pan-Africanism because of its remarkable impact on neo-liberalism on the African continent. The foundation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that was replaced by the present-day African Union (AU), as well as other African regional organizations like ECOWAS were all guided by the Pan-African movement that started in the Western hemisphere since the eighteenth century among blacks of African ancestry. The dissection of the African continent into its multitude of present states has always been disdained by Pan-Africanists. That is why since the dawn of political independence from the yoke of European colonial rule, they ventured and rallied relentlessly behind the notion of unification of all African states under the banner of African brotherhood. The ideology of Pan-Africanism "...emphasizes the brotherhood of the black people wherever they are. Its advancement is everyone's affair whether male or female, within Africa and the Diaspora" (Epochi-Olise & Monye, 2021, p. 46).

Hence, this ideology expected contemporary African states to conduct foreign policies advantageous to the whole continent in the spirit of neo-liberal cooperation. The pursuit of sheer egoistic neo-realist self-centered national interests is rather foreign-looking for African regional groupings inspired by Pan-Africanism. The ultimate objective of the movement was and still is to ascertain African liberation from any Western domination and imperialism. When ECOWAS was formed in line with Pan-African principles, it was made incumbent upon all signatory member-states to collectively struggle against the presence of foreign military forces on the African soil, and work for the economic integration and security stability of the whole West African region. As mentioned above, Pan-Africanism's main objective was to liberate Africa and its populace. At its center, there was a need to ensure the political and economic independence of African countries (Komega, 2019, p. 422). Consequently, the regional organization was to patronage and to monitor the foreign policies of its member states for the purpose of serving the interests of every individual member.

It was due to such view that during independence, the countries that gained political liberation from European colonialism regarded their independence short of completion without every corner of the African continent being liberated. Although independence was generally attained one state at a time, the states that gained political independence provided resources for liberation movements from other African countries (Malisa & Nhengeze, 2018, p.5).

6. THE PRESENT POLITICAL AND SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Neo-realist approach has obviously become the political trend of ECOWAS member-states in the conduct of foreign policy formulations. In many situations this tendency is at loggerheads with many principles and agreements of ECOWAS' regional security. The undaunted revival of military coups episodes and the overthrowing of democratically-elected governments shade light on this phenomenon. Both ECOWAS and AU strongly condemn and outlaw unconstitutional seizure of political leadership by the barrel of the gun. In the past, ECOWAS was famed for standing up against military leaders coming to power by such means. At times, daringly threatened to intervene, or in a literal sense, did intervene militarily to restore civilian leaders to power in a member-state like Sierra Leone in the 1990s. The regional institution, as such, adhered to its neo-liberal principles with the goal of safeguarding the security of its region. Nonetheless, currently, several military officers ventured to defy the surveillance of their regional organization and succeeded in holding on to political power on their own terms, disregarding any threat of imposition of sanctions.

On regional and security stability, the several ECOWAS member states have been gravely destabilized by the widespread of intra-state violent armed insurgencies. In the past, one of the cardinal reasons that compelled the regional institution to create its armed wing ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was the exigency to militarily intervene in its member countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Conakry, and Guinea-Bissau in order to restore peace and order, and save lives. Cumulatively, hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives, and more than that sum were displaced within and without their respective countries. Guided by the principles of neo-liberal cooperation, it was the West African political leadership of the member states that were not directly affected by those destructive conflicts that took the initiatives for intervention. The notion of national sovereignty violation did not construe a rational political argument to hinder political and military intervention by ECOWAS that acted on the Pan-African values of African brotherhood. Aided by other member states like Senegal, Gambia, and others, Nigeria and Ghana championed the neo-liberal course of events for over a decade in West Africa. Nigeria had always been the main actor, aiming at preserving ... stability and peace in the continent as exemplified in her acclaimed exploits with ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra-Leone (Adeboye 2020, p. 14). It had always been perceived by ECOWAS that instability in any country would necessarily affect the region in its entirety. Therefore, for the preservation of regional interests, the West African community had to collaborate in consensus to stabilize the national stability of each and every one of its members.

The irony of it is that today, as a result of violent armed rebellious insurgencies, instability has engulfed a series of states in West Africa. ECOWAS appears powerless to exercise similar

leverage to actively intervene to stabilize the region, as it did in the past. The twist of fate is that the most predominant patron of the regional organization, Nigeria, has been hit by the worst armed violence that destabilizes and threatens its national integrity. That paved the way for extra-regional military forces to encroach into the West African region.

Similarly, one of the significant strategic pronouncements of ECOWAS was against the intervention and presence of extra-regional military forces in West Africa. Despite its staunch opposition to this occurrence, several governments in the region have invited and stationed foreign military forces in their respective countries. Not only extra-regional military presence of major countries like France, the US, and Germany is witnessed in the region, but even the internationally ill-reputed mercenary fighters of Wagner have planted a strong foot on the soil of ECOWAS territory. The cases that follow shade more light on the current situation of ECOWAS decline in regional control, and the ascendancy of neo-realism over neo-liberalism.

7. MALI

The political crisis of 2010 in Ivory Coast between the two presidential rivals, Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Outtara, was another serious challenge to ECOWAS in dealing with grand regional issues. Rather diplomatically only, the regional institution was fully engaged in the violent power struggle between the two, which was solved by the military intervention of French forces on behalf of Outtara, who is currently the Ivorian president. This relative peaceful relief for ECOWAS was interrupted in August 2020, when, this time in Mali, Colonel Assimi Goita overthrew the democratically-elected government of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. The new military leaders declared their goal as primarily to prevent Mali from slipping into chaos, denouncing Keita's inability to tackle overlapping violence, a disputed parliamentary election, corruption, and economic grievance (Axelrod & Kwesi, 2020, p.1).

From the fall of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and the widespread of the Arab Spring in 2011, Mali had been overwhelmed by multilayered security crises. That ranged from the spread of armed insurgencies, political corruption, social dissatisfaction, internally-displaced people, to the Tuareg ethnic group's declaration of the independent Republic of AZAWAD in the northern and central parts of the country. The regional organization, ECOWAS did not play any mentioned role to assist Mali in its internal destabilization, even though the security crisis in the country spread to its neighbours Burkina Faso and Niger in the form of refugees and armed insurgencies. It was only in the aftermath of the August military coup d'état by Goita that it made appearance on the scene, whereby it, that is ECOWAS and AU demanded a restitution of a civilian government (Axelrod, 2020, p. 3). As the new military leadership refused to back down, harsh financial, economic, commercial, social, and political sanctions have been imposed on the country. Air and land blockade are instituted on Mali, and all its financial assets frozen in West African banks.

These sanctions have heavily impacted on the civilian populations of Mali, augmenting thereby their hardship to the maximum. In a way, this seems more of an inhumane punitive application of the neo-realist law of the jungle in the state of nature whereby the Malian people have clearly become directly targeted and victimized. It goes beyond the once proclaimed neo-liberal spirit of Pan-

Africanism that gives priority to the well-being of Africans, rather than the rigid focus on ideological rhetoric like democracy and constitutional rule. Since the imposition of the sanctions to the present, the situation in Mali has deteriorated further as the common masses suffer its economic and human security consequences, to the indifference of the regional institution, as well as the continental African Union. ECOWAS sanctions continue to worsen Mali's instability and economic conditions. As of early 2022, U.N. agencies estimated that some 7.5 million Malians were in need of humanitarian assistance; nearly 363,000 Malians were displaced internally and nearly 163,000 more were refugees. This appalling condition pushes disenfranchised Malians into the bosoms of armed groups (Alexis, 2022, p. 2).

Facing perceivably treacherous punitive measures by its regional organization, the military leaders resiliently resorted to neo-realist approach for survival. Seemingly losing confidence in ECOWAS and western aid donors, and breaking away from the former colonial master, France, they turned to look to the east to forge military and economic alliances with extra-regional powers. Russia has been the best alternative especially that it has the popular support of the Malian mass population. Consequently, Wagner's reported entry into Mali has fueled U.S. and European concerns about Russia's regional influence and the role of unaccountable Russian PMC forces in regional conflicts (Alexis, 2022, p. 2).

8. GUINEA-CONAKRY

For decades, Guinea has been one of the ECOWAS' members characterized by violent political and social unrest, ranging from human rights abuse, corruption, and authoritarian exercise of political power. It has so far had several unconstitutional changes of power. Moreover, it is poverty-stricken and has always been categorized as one of the world's poorest countries with repressive military violence towards civilians. Guinea has considerable agricultural, water and mineral resources, but poverty remains widespread (Lonel, 2021, p. 1). Yet, the regional guardian of West Africa did not initialize any constructive policies to mitigate Guinea's manifold national crises, in the spirit of the acclaimed African brotherhood and neo-liberal cooperation. It is significant to bear in mind that ECOWAS, at least in the past, had always emphasized the importance of assuring the political and security stability of its member states as a vital strategy for progress and development. Nonetheless, the hardship and precarious security, political and economic situations that Guinea has been encountering goes on unnoticed by ECOWAS. The best that it could or indeed has done was to verbally condemn some actions of its member states. There are many factors behind this noticeable indifference of the regional institution. One is the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of its members. This automatically gives way to neo-realist approach in the conduct of relation between states in which every country is left to struggle for its own survival in the international anarchical order of things among countries. That is why, even though all ECOWAS members are signatories to the protocol of good conduct, some are failing to adhere to these stipulations (Leonie, 2022, p. 1). In turn, the member states themselves seize this opportunity of regional political nonchalance to carry out their internal policies in the manner that suits them even if that means violation of human rights and abuse of political power. It is this obvious national liberty in the conduct of domestic policies of ECOWAS members that gives the courage to some military officers to stage a coup d'état in Guinea in September 2021. As

a result of that unconstitutional change of political power, Colonel Mamady Doumbouya came to power after forcefully removing the democratically-elected Alpha Condé. This move was in direct conflict with ECOWAS' regional policies. Although in most cases, ECOWAS turns a blind eye to many unsanctioned acts of its member states, here it ventured to take a stand against the military in Guinea. In accordance with its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, it has established sanctions for unconstitutional changes of government, consisting mainly of the suspension of the country in question from these bodies (Lonel, 2021, p. 2). Consequently, Guinea's membership has been suspended until return to civilian rule.

It appears that the new Guinean military leadership is determined to rather pursue its own course for what it perceives as beneficial for its national interests. Obviously, there is less confidence in the neo-liberal policies of ECOWAS in Guinea, as neither the military nor the civilian entities turns to the regional organization to suggest constructive solutions to the nation.

9. BURKINA FASO

Since the foundation of ECOWAS, Burkina Faso has been one of its actively dedicated member. In 2014 it had its first literally-elected president Roch Marc Christian Kabore. However, as a result internal social, economic, and security instability, he was ousted from power by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henry Sandaogo Damiba in January 2022. ECOWAS condemned the coup that violated its regional principles and called for the restoration of the overthrown government, or the quick return to civilian rule. The military junta justified its action under the pretext of safeguarding its own national integrity threatened by formidable Islamist armed insurgencies that wreaked havoc across the country particularly in the north and east. Damiba formed and became head of the military-led Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR) that replaced the government (Louisa, 2022, p. 1).

In a way, the military security claim was rather correct. Because during Kabore's rule, many Burkinabe soldiers were killed along with civilians. Dissatisfaction with the civilian government's performance by both soldiers and civilians was tremendous. There were reports that security forces at a military base in Intana had run out of food in the weeks before they were attacked by an armed group in November 2021. Forty-nine military police officers and four civilians were killed in the attack (Al Jazeera November, 2021).

The measures adopted by ECOWAS in dealing with the junta were principally rhetorical in the form of strong condemnation of the unconstitutional seizure of power. Nonetheless, it resorted to diplomatic initiatives to pressurize the junta to return to a democratic rule by July 2024, to which the latter yielded. The military coup was popular and supported by the common masses, the matter that softened the regional organization's coercive clout vis-à-vis the illegitimate removal of democratically-elected leaders by force. Ironically, ECOWAS regional authority has dwindled drastically compared to its glorious past, to the extent that its deterrence policy in the form of selected embargo on the military and political leadership of its member states are no longer effective. For in the same year that Damiba staged his coup, in defiance to its strict hostile stance against such actions by military officers of its member countries, Captain Ibrahim Traore took over

power through another military action in September 2022, causing Damiba to flee to Togo. The new de facto military patron had to legitimize his move by organizing a national forum of 300 delegates that voted him as an interim president to set the scene for elections in July 2024. Like Damiba's coup, Traore's one received a wide national support because the Burkinabes desired security in their country, and opted for the state to regain territory under the control of Jihadist groups (Louisa, 2022, p. 2).

The above-expounded political and military events, demonstrate the ascendancy of the neo-realist alternative over ECOWAS regional neo-liberalism. Both Damiba and Traore chose to defy the regional organization by acting solely on what they perceived as strategically essential for the preservation of Burkina Faso's national integrity. ECOWAS which presumes to guarantee the security of West Africa through collective neo-liberal consensus did not strive in action to assure security stability and peace in Burkina Faso that was on the verge of collapse as a result of violent armed insurgencies. The country's educational system, health services, movement of people, food and human security were awfully paralyzed. As of mid-2022, over 1.5 million Burkinabè (about 7% of the population) were internally displaced, and about 29,000 had fled as refugees, according to U.N. data. Over 4,000 schools were shuttered due to insecurity, affecting over 700,000 children. Most of the country's northern and eastern districts were facing "crisis" or "emergency" level food insecurity. As of September 2022 ... Insurgent groups have besieged towns ... reportedly causing severe shortages of food and medicines in areas struggling with high levels of displacement. Insurgents also have attacked gold mines, threatening a major economic sector (Congressional Research Service, 2022, p. 4).

In such a desperate security situation, Burkina Faso had to act as an individual state to guarantee its national integrity, even though its neo-realist actions contradict ECOWAS neo-liberal principles. Staging military coups against democratically-elected civilian governments is not the only neck-racking concern for the regional body. But uncertainty over the possibility of the domino effect of Burkina Faso following the footsteps of Mali is worrisome. Falling into the temptation to also invite more foreign military presence into the West African region was equally a looming threat for ECOWAS. This move is a serious retrogressive leap that would further devalue ECOWAS past determinism of keeping its region free from the appearance of foreign military forces on its land mass. That dreadful threat was triggered by Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin, who praised Traoré's seizure of power in a statement (Congressional Research Service, 2022, p. 1). Rinaldo Depagne, the West Africa project director at the International Crisis Group, told Foreign Policy magazine that "Russia is certainly closer to now cut a deal with Burkina than ever, certainly than they were with Damiba (Gbadamosi, 2022, p. 1). For the time being, it stands to see whether the Burkinabe military junta will honor its pledge to ECOWAS to hold elections in 2024, or it will rebel against its regional patron and pursue sovereign national policies out of consideration for its own neo-realist national interests.

10. FACTORS BEHIND THE RISE OF NEO-REALISM IN WEST AFRICA

The current trend in the disintegration of unity among ECOWAS member states, and the rise of neo-realism over neo-liberalism can be attributed to two main factors. The first factor is the

withering away of the intellectual, spiritual and moral sentiment that once characterized Pan-Africanism and African brotherhood across and beyond the African continent. Before and right after the era of direct European colonialism, that sentimental spirit did indeed influence African leadership as renowned intellectual academic writings and movements led by people of African descent spread in the Western Hemisphere and Africa. It was that social, political, and ideological orientation that guided African leadership to work in line with neo-liberal cooperation for the betterment of their respective national, regional, and continental wellbeing. For the intent to revive a continent that was marginalized and exploited for centuries owing to slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, destabilization, oppression, war and hunger, poor governance and socio-economic development, it has become a mantra for policymakers in Africa (Potgieter, 2021, p. 1). It of a tantamount importance to remember that it was this ideological orientation that led to the formation of the Organization of African Unity in the 1960s. To attain their higher objective of unity and prosperity, African states established regional organizations like ECOWAS and others.

In consequence, during the 1990s when civil war broke out in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and later on in Guinea and Ivory Coast, ECOWAS supported by the AU obliged themselves to find African solutions for African problems. Despite the political divergent views between the governments of that era, consensus was reached to help bring stability in the affected countries. Thus the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS were used to act in a novel but very bold manner to save lives and properties (Adeboye, 2020, p. 22). Therefore, most of ECOWAS regional initiatives during those days were heavily altruistic notwithstanding the existence of relative state national interests. Nonetheless, the withering away of that neo-liberal cooperation guided by Pan-Africanism and African brotherhood has become conspicuous in this new millennium.

The second factor is the absence of a regional hegemonic state in West Africa in the Twenty-First Century. All the way starting from the 1970s until the first decade of the new millennium, Nigeria had been the leading and the most ambitious regional state in West Africa. Nigeria was definitely in the fore-front of the fight against racial discrimination and colonization between 1960 and 1979. Those years definitely constituted the golden age of Nigerian's foreign policy triumphs (Adeboye, 2020, p. 16). The main political ideology in Nigeria was the importance of it becoming the regional leader of ECOWAS with the objective of economic unification that would in turn enable it to fully be an industrialized nation. As the country did not pose any military threat to its regional neighbours, it preferred to adopt a neo-liberal approach to interact with them for mutual progress and development. It was through that mild political strategic regional foreign policy that Nigeria ushered the creation of ECOWAS. Therefore, despite some rivalries with Ivory Coast and the persistent of French interference during the ending decades of the Twentieth Century, Nigeria was able to gain the confidence of most of its regional members. The Golden Age of ECOWAS, as such, was within that era when Nigeria, led by the drive of Pan-African neo-liberal principles, played active roles for stabilizing the West African region. These prominent role and contribution of Nigeria to Africa qualifies it more to be a regional hegemon among other contenders in the continent (Dauda, et al. 2019, p. 138).

The prominent fourteenth century Muslim thinker Ibn Khaldun's theory of rise and fall of nations manifested rapidly in the case of Nigeria. That is because right from the start of the twenty-first century, the ECOWAS regional leader started to decline in all spheres of domestic stability. Politically, power struggle, military coups or attempts to stage coups, and administrative corruption has become the country's trademark. Economically, poverty, unemployment, and high rise of cost of living have eroded its past national progress. Socially, tribal rivalries, conflicts, religious intolerance, hatred, and calls for secession from the Nigerian federation system have been on the rise. The country promotes manipulation of religion to achieve political and economic objectives, social inequality and hatred (Aleyomi & Abu Bakar, 2018, p. 293). In terms of security, the country has been overwhelmed by amounting spread of violent armed groups in different parts of the country. These groups have succeeded in destabilizing the country compelling it to desperately look inward and withdraw from active regional initiatives. In brief, the fundamental factor dampening Nigeria's image is a failure of leadership and irresponsible followership resulting from corruption, diplomatic frailties, lack of political will to ensure dignity and integrity, among other manifestations (Aleyomi, 2018, p. 287).

Because of all the above, neo-liberalism has sharply dwindled in West Africa and ECOWAS members have to look to other alternative for their survival. It is in this context that it has been observed that disunity and indifference among these members has become predominant and each state conducts its domestic policies free from organizational commitment and restrictions. This has given extra-regional powers the opportunity to encroach into West Africa with policies detrimental to the region's collective interests. Even though the region's countries are typically rich in natural resources; however, their conversion of these resources to economic prosperity remains elusive. Member countries either have failed to tap this potential source of wealth or have squandered it, and thus generally remain poor and in need of development and humanitarian assistance (Adeboye, 2020, p. 25).

11. CONCLUSION

The neo-realist trend of pursuing diverse national interests in West Africa is on the rise. Cohesion among ECOWAS members has been waning away steadily. It is evident that ECOWAS has lost its momentum as an effective regional organization capable of overseeing its members' political conduct as neo-liberal cooperation has decreased tremendously. As all the states within the region encounter various internal problems, ECOWAS has been unable to usher in constructive measures to ease up its members' economic, social, political, and security concerns. In this situation, there is no other alternative left for each state but to bring into play neo-liberal options ineluctable for national survival. It is always necessary to remember that neo-liberalism is of the view that cooperation in international and regional politics is possible. On the other side of the scale, neo-realism focuses on self-help based on Hobbesian egoistic philosophy in pursuing one's own national interests as the only means to cope up with others in the current state international anarchical system. This scenario portrays the present ECOWAS as an altogether distinct entity from the ECOWAS of the 1990s. The old Pan-Africanist ECOWAS was young, active, vital, and ambitious in seriously pursuing regional neo-liberal policies advantageous to its members. The present ECOWAS is rather slow, old, stagnant, and rhetorical in its pronouncements. This torpid

stance makes its members neo-realistically inwardly-looking, individually turning to look to other extra-regional partners for more productive engagements.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

As has been deliberated, it is apparent that neo-liberalism has been giving way to neo-realism in the direction of ECOWAS' members. In other words, things are falling apart and the need to make amendments is indisputably crucial. As such, the few basic recommendations below are essential.

1. Pan-Africanists academicians, intellectual writers on African political affairs, and ambitious head of states need to reinvigorate their focus on reviving the spirit of African brotherhood and continental resilience.
2. More research on the relevance of neo-liberal cooperation in accordance with African values of African brotherhood needs to be conducted and propagated.
3. The combination of neo-realism and neo-liberalism is important and has to be emphasized since every state naturally pursues policies that are fruitful to its national development. However, that should be in line with the spirit of Pan-Africanism whereby African states on both regional and continental levels need to work collectively for the common good of all.
4. ECOWAS treaties, protocols, agreements, and regulations need to be revised. That is because recently there is an ongoing debate on its legal jurisdiction over the political conduct of its members.
5. The application of ECOWAS sanctions on its members needs to be revised. For instance, the imposition of various sanctions on Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea because of military coups in these countries has caused serious hardship on innocent civilian populations.
6. The principle of national sovereignty often clashes with some of the recent policies of ECOWAS over certain members. The extension and limitations of its jurisdiction that collide with states' national sovereignty needs to be clarified since recently hot debates over this matter have widened political divergences the West African region.

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