Nigeria's Leadership Role and Conflict Resolution in West Africa

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ABSTRACT

With her large population and abundant human and natural resources, Nigeria assumed leadership role in West Africa immediately after her independence from Britain in 1960. After independence, Nigeria embarked on radical, but progressive leadership roles in West Africa from her early pre-occupation with decolonization to peace keeping and enforcement and all the way to the development of pan-African mechanism for good governance. This conceived leadership role gave impetus to the Afrocentric principle of Nigeria's foreign policy. This leadership role is visible in Nigeria's continued provision of assistance to countries in distress in West Africa as a measure to strengthen the democratic rule, reduce conflict and thereby promote security, peace and development in the sub-region. Nigeria is committed to Africa, especially the West African sub-region, and it is by this commitment that the country has earned a respectable place in global politics. Nigeria's leadership role anchored on her Afrocentric foreign policy posture can also be understood against the background of the regional security problem, especially in the West African sub-region. She considers West African security as germane to her foreign policy pursuit. Successive governments in Nigeria had donated enormous human and material resource in the promotion of peace and security in West Africa through conflict management and conflict resolution. The country has always intervened whenever there was conflict in the sub-region. This paper will examine Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa and her role in conflict resolution in the sub-region. The paper will also investigate the causes of conflicts in West Africa.

Keywords: *Conflict, Conflict resolution, Leadership, Security, Foreign policy*

INTRODUCTION

NIGERIA AND LEADERSHIP ROLE IN WEST AFRICA

Nigeria's leadership role in Africa generally and West Africa particularly has never been in doubt. In the eyes of members of the international community, Nigeria is a nation blessed with both human and material resources and thus, has the advantage of leading other African states, especially those of them in the West African sub-region. (Chibuzor, 2006). In his declaration at the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970, Yakubu Gowon, the then Head of State stated that:

Nigeria is fortunate in having the resources potential in men, material and money to lay a solid foundation for a socio-economic revolution in black Africa. The uncompromising objective of a rising economic prosperity in Nigeria is the economic independence of the nation and the defeat of neocolonialist forces in Africa (Gowon, 1970:67)

Otorofani (2010) is of the view that Nigeria's size and natural resources have placed on her shoulders leadership responsibility in Africa since independence, "as no other nation had the wherewithal to play that role or otherwise compete with her as Africa's pre-eminent nation." He further elaborated on the progressive evolution of Nigeria's leadership role from her early pre-occupation with decolonization and later peacekeeping and enforcement.

She was instrumental to the development of a Pan-African mechanism for good governance through the Peer Review Mechanism which is seen as a prerequisite for the socio-economic transformation of the African continent. Olorofani (2010) sees Peer Review Mechanism as a programme designed to put the governments of African states on a sound democratic footing.

It allows member states of the African Union (A U) to intervene directly in the domestic affairs

of one another in order to check the activities of those states whose actions fall short of the ideals of the organization.

Nigeria is the chief proponent and promoter of the Peer Review Mechanism, and has at various times intervened in the activities of some African states, especially states in the West African sub-region anytime the actions of their leaders fell short of the democratic ideals and principles enshrined in both the ECOWAS and A U charters which all the member states subscribed to. Acting on the platform of the Peer Review Mechanism, Nigeria spearheaded the restoration of democratically elected government in Sao Tome and Principe, the condemnation of military intervention in the Republic of Guinea and the expulsion of Niger Republic from ECOWAS over the undemocratic manner its leader, Manadou Tandja seized power. According to Olorofani (2010:21), "Nigeria's leadership in Africa in general and West Africa in particular is therefore real, universally acknowledged and consequently unquestionable in general terms."

It is this conceived leadership role that gave impetus to Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy thrust. This Afrocentric foreign policy orientation assumes that an unstable Africa is dangerous and will inhibit Nigeria's ability to foster progressive political and socio- economic developments (king, 1996). Thus, the country's leadership role in West Africa boldly demonstrates her Afrocentric foreign policy thrust.

In this direction, Nigeria has continued to provide assistance to needy states in West Africa as a measure to strengthen democratic rule through conflict resolution, promotion of peace, security and development in West Africa.

Using her huge revenue from oil, Nigeria has been at the forefront in promoting and sustaining regional integration. After the Nigerian civil war, under General Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's leadership role in the West African sub-region was more pronounced through generous donations and assistance to other West African states from oil boom revenue (Adebayo, 2008). Even though the oil boom diplomacy ended during the administration of Ahaji Shehu Shagari, Nigeria continued to command great influence in the West African sub-region. She was frequently providing humanitarian assistance and technical aid through her Technical Aid Crops (TAC). Under the Technical Aid Programme, Nigeria

deployed many Nigerian experts to many West African states at the request of such states. This is why Akinyemi (2005:35) was quick to state that, "Nigeria still assumed important roles like in the stoppage of civil wars in West Africa, provision of loans for African nations and sending of technical staff to aid West African countries in certain areas."

One of the principal objectives of Nigeria's foreign policy since independence in 1960 is to assume regional and continental power, which, like Morgenthau (1973) states, is the objective of most ambitious states in the international system. Nigeria's commitment to African affairs has earned her a respectable place in international politics. Saliu (1999) and Akinyemi (2005) reflect on this important aspect of the country's leadership role. While both scholars agree that Nigeria, by her economic and cultural diplomacy is a leader in Africa, Akinyemi (2005) observes that the country's leadership status is compromised as a result of the activities of corrupt, decadent, reactionary and ethnically divisive governments.

Seeing Nigeria's leadership role from another perspective, Bukarambe (2000) argues that Nigeria's leadership position in West Africa is considered to be earned due to her natural endowment. This, according to him, made Nigeria to arrogate to herself the responsibility of catering for the well-being of Africans anywhere they may be. This buttresses Saliu's (1999) argument that the well-being of the African continent is intricately tied to Nigeria's, justifying the country's swift response to the Congo crisis in 1960, a few months after independence; her intervention in Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire etc . Under her Afrocentric foreign policy thrust, Nigeria had, immediately after independence, declared that her independence would be meaningless as long as another African state was under the yoke of colonialism.

Nigeria's leadership role can also be better understood against the background of the regional security challenges facing the West African sub-region. Security in West Africa is considered germane to the pursuit of her foreign policy objectives. All the identified problems facing states in West Africa are well appreciated by successive Nigerian governments since independence, and these reflect in their interactions with these states. These successive governments had made regional peace and security their cardinal foreign policy objective

towards these African states. The high point of Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa was her intervention in the Liberian and Sierra Leone conflicts. This began in 1990 at the start of the Liberian conflict when she championed the establishment of ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for peace enforcement. After the war was over in Liberia, Nigeria led the negotiations that resulted in the conduct of general and presidential elections which saw the emergence of former rebel leader, Charles Taylor as president.

The Liberian war generated its own ripple effects in the West African sub-region. According to Howe (1997: 166) "besides constituting a threat to the security of the regional neighbourhood by way of inspiring other local or civil conflicts, it had also led to the emergence of rebellious elements in other parts of the region." Howe observed that the worst hit was   Liberia's neighboring state, Sierra Leone whose domestic peace, according to him came to abrupt end with the outbreak of conflict in April, 1991. A rebel group in Sierra Leone known as the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone led by Foday Sankoh was literally backed by Charles Taylor of Liberia.

In trying to maintain peace and stability in the West African sub-region through peace-keeping, conflict resolution and mediation, Nigeria has achieved much through the instrumentality of ECOWAS. This is a demonstration of her leadership role in the sub-region. The pursuit of the objective of promoting peace and economic development in the West African sub-region was also taken seriously by successive Nigerian governments. Throughout Nigeria's diplomatic history, the country's successive governments have played an active and vanguard role in African affairs, especially on the twin issues of racism and apartheid in Southern Africa, and conflict resolution and democratic consolidation in the West African sub-region.

Confirming Nigeria's leadership role in the area of peace and security, and promotion of democratic values in Africa, Asobie (2010) contends that:

Nigeria has played a key role in restoring civilian rule, after a coup d'état in Sao Tome and Principe. She adopted a similar tough pro-democracy stance in 2005, when President Gnassing be Eyademe of Togo died and the military took over power. The AU and ECOWAS, with the strong support of Nigeria, intervened and ensured that elections were held and civilian rule was restored in Togo. In general, Nigeria has participated actively in monitoring and supervising elections in a number of African countries, including Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan, (Asobie, 2010: 19-20)

NIGERIA AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN WEST AFRICA

Meaning and Nature of Conflict

Conflict, according to Francis (2007), is the pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different groups. "Armed conflict is the resort to the use of force and armed violence in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interest and goals." (Francis, 2007 cited in Best, 2007:20). Conflict is an inevitable product of cohabitation or co-existence of individuals or group of people in the society struggling for limited resources. Individuals or groups in any society have goals or interests different from goals or interests of other individuals or groups in the society or societies outside theirs. Conflict may arise, or sometimes becomes inevitable when there is a confrontation between these individuals or groups in the process of achieving these goals or interests. Lukman (2013) sees conflict as "a state of interaction which emerges when two or more persons, groups or states seek to possess the same object, occupy the same space, play incompatible roles, and pursue conflicting goals or undertake mutually incompatible means of achieving their purpose." (Lukman, 2013:169). There is occurrence of conflict when two or more parties with different objectives interact.

It is imperative to state that it is not all conflicts that are a threat to peace as conceived by many in the society. It is only the negative action taken to resolve the conflict that becomes a threat to peace. "The term 'negative' connotes action that entails injuring other people or destroying their property in the attempt to resolve the conflict, for example, the use of arms (armed conflict) to resolve the conflict in one's favour may result in mass killings, murder or even genocide of innocent and unarmed civilians" (Bakus, 2007:67). On the other hand, we have what Aja, AkpuruAja calls functional or constructive conflict. He states that:

Conflict is functional or constructive when it improves the quality of decision; it stimulates creativity and Innovation; it encourages interests and curiosity among group members; it provides the medium through which problems

can be aired and tension released; it fosters an environment of self- evaluation and improvement (Aja, 2007:17).

The existence of scarce resources in societies often generates to fights over the distribution of these resources, and the fact that different interest groups in social systems pursue different goals and hence often had to vie with one another results to conflict. Conflict may occur when states try to pursue their national interest from incompatible positions. Conflict can also occur when a particular group in a state or a nation state demands for territorial right or right to control the resources in the state. Any attempt by a nation-state to impose military, religious, political or economic control over alien populations may also result to conflict. Conflict involves two or more groups or states over divergent interests that are mutually antagonistic. Conflict comes to an end when a party to the conflict withdraws its demands or induces the other party to collaborate and compromise with it or when the other party is compelled to submit through threats or military action. International conflict may find its way through domestic rebellion which attracts outside intervention. Two or more parties are usually in involved in this type of conflict. These are the domestic government and the rebellious faction, and two or more outside powers intervening to support either of the parties or look for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Conflict, according to Dokubo (2011), can be viewed and analysed from two perspectives. In the first perspective it refers to an "incompatibility in a multi-party or multi-issue situation," a state of affairs in which two or more irreconcilable views or options are posited towards the solution of a particular problem. From the second perspective, conflict refers to the violent expression of this incompatibility or irreconcilability. Even though these two perspectives overlap, it is in the second perspective that the concept of conflict is used within the context of this study.

Due to the fact that conflicts differ from each other as a result of the combination of factors that give rise to them, and also because they are social phenomena that involve human beings, and are not given to rigid scientific explanations, scholars have encountered difficulties in establishing precisely the exact causes of conflict. Stedman (1993), however, posits that conflicts in Africa, especially at the

national and sub-national levels, can be seen to revolve around the four important issues of identity, participation, distribution and legitimacy. Identity, according to him, "involves the self-conception and self- definition of an individual with respect to his/her membership in, and allegiance to a particular community which can be defined in social, political, economic or territorial terms" (Stedman, 1993). He want further to argue that the issue of identity will determine the extent to which an individual sees himself or herself as being a member of a community. The perception of identity also sets parameters to the extent of sacrifice that individuals and groups will make for the benefit of the community. He sees the issue of identity as a major cause of violent conflicts in Africa.

The issue of participation is seen by Stedman (1993) as voluntary actions and choices that are open to citizens in a state for making their demands from the government and expressing support for government policies. Conflict can arise from the issue of participation when individuals or groups in the state act in such a way that others are excluded from participating meaningfully in the political process of the state. The issue of distribution, he avers, refers to the differential spread of, and access to values and resources in society. Stedman (1993) argues that if politics can be defined in terms of "who gets what, when and how," then the allocation of values and resources may be said to be at the very heart of politics. The criteria used for the distribution of values and resources in the state or society determine the amount of justice, fairness and equity that are attributable to the government. This is related to Gurr's (1974:105) argument that "conflicts that develop as a consequence of perceptions of inequality and relative deprivation are linked to the manner in which values are distributed in society." Going by Gurr's argument, it can therefore, be stated that the crisis experienced in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria few years ago can be attributed to the perceived and actual inequality in the distribution of Nigeria's revenue from oil, the bulk of which comes from that region.

Again, Stedman (1993) sees the issue of legitimacy as the citizen's belief in the rightness of the rules governing political competition within a society. The extent to which a government is seen as acceptable or not, either by opposing groups or the population at large is determined by the issue of legitimacy. Under the issue of legitimacy, for conflicts to occur, either

between groups or against the state, there must be deep-seated perceptions that the configuration of power within the state is unacceptable (Stedman, 1993). Another scholar, Adekanye (2007) believe that economic decline is strongly associated with violent conflicts. The argument by Adekanye is that the nature of politics that is associated with dwindling economy tends to be conflictual than the politics that is associated with a growing or buoyant economy. Thus, competition for increasingly scarce resources tends to be highly conflictive and violent (Adekanye, 2007).

The nature of conflicts in West Africa has become attributable to what Kamrava (1993) sees as discontinuities and lack of coherence in the political culture of most third world countries. Kamrava states that:

Fundamental political principles are never agreed upon and thus, major differences in political orientations and beliefs continue to persist under such circumstance, parochial loyalties maintain supremacy over national ones, often to the extent that the central government is unable to gain widespread popular legitimacy. There is also lack of widely accepted and operative civil procedures for goal attainment and conflict management, thus increasing the likelihood of political violence, unreconciled conflicts and repressive politics (Kamrava, 1993:139).

Commenting on the prevalence of conflicts on the African continent, Oche (2006:1) asserts that:

Although conflicts are taken to be inherent aspect of human relations, whether at the group, national or international levels, the prevalence of conflicts on the African continent in contemporary times has assumed the dimensions of a scourge, indeed so serious an issue has the problem become, that it is arguably the greatest impediment to any meaningful form of development in the African continent today.

West Africa has witnessed numerous conflict situations which have led to the loss of millions of lives, widespread displacement of persons and frequent human rights abuses. Discussing the nature and consequences of conflicts in the West African sub-region, Skard (2003) observes that the civilian population is directly involved in all the conflicts in West Africa. He states that in the past, before the 1990s, very few civilian casualties were recorded during conflicts, but today they have risen to over 80 percent, with children accounting for about 50 percent of the total number of casualties. During conflicts in Africa, women and children have often become targets for warring groups. "Maiming, rape and massacres have become part of war tactics. Nobody is spared or protected. Nothing is held sacred. The war is Sierra Leon became notorious for its brutality, and children suffered on an unprecedented scale. In addition, mutilation became systematic" (Skard, 2003:21). Furthermore, on the nature of African conflicts, Mathiasen (2006:1) identifies the fact that "conflicts are spread all over the continent and there are no regions without conflicts".

Conflict in Theoretical Perspectives

Many theories and conceptions abound that seek to explain the origin, causes and dynamics of conflicts in all societies. These theories also explain the impact of conflicts on the political, social and economic life of states characterized by conflicts. This study will attempt to review some theories of conflict propounded by scholars for the understanding of conflicts; causes of conflicts and mechanism for their resolution.

One such theory is the Realist Theory of conflict. The theory attributes the causes of conflict in any society to the selfish nature which is inherent in man. It exposes the weakness and individualism inherent in human nature. Hans Morgenthau is a leading exponent of the Realist theory. The theory believes that competition between actors defined as states is "the natural expression of conflict by parties engaged in the pursuit of scarce and competitive interests" (Deutsch, 1973 cited in Best, 2006:45).

The theory according to Koestler, (1967) cited in Best, (2006:45) has three components parts:

Descriptive Realism which sees the world as an arena of conflict; Explanatory Realism which seeks to show that there are genetic defects which push humankind into behaving negatively and that wars become inevitable because there is no mechanism to stop them from occurring; and Prescriptive Realism which builds on the arguments of Descriptive and Explanatory realisms to say that decision makers (individuals, groups or nations) have a moral justification to defend their basic interests and ensure self-preservation using any means necessary.

Morgenthau and his fellow realists argue that conflict is rooted in forces that are inherent in

human nature. They believe that "human nature is selfish, individualistic and naturally conflictive; that states will always pursue their national interest defined as power, and that such interest will come into conflict with those of others leading to the inevitability of conflict". This theory justifies the presence of conflicts in the international system, and the militarization of interactions among nation-states. The theory has been criticized for laying much emphasis on power to the extent of elevating power and the state to the status of an ideology (Best, 2006).

Another theory of conflict that this study will look at is the Marxist theory of conflict. The theory which was propounded by Karl Marx contends that the root cause of conflict in all societies is "man's exploitation of man by man". Marx, in this theory maintains that the social inequality or wealth disparity that exists between two classes of people in the society - the affluent and the poor creates lines of conflict. The Marxist theory "presents conflict as inevitable means of revolutionary change because the property class is not just in affluence and luxury but controls the government and its policies against the less privileged" (Aja, 2007:19).

The less privileged class are oppressed, repressed and traumatized into a revolutionary behaviour and action which leads to conflict. The conflict arises as they try to seek liberation from man's exploitation of man by man. "From this standpoint, conflict goes beyond resource control struggle to one that creates a commune, egalitarian society that makes labour the producer, controller and manager of the wealth of the nation" (Aja, 2007:20).

The Marxist theory of conflict has its orientation from the structural conflict theory which posits that conflicts occur because of the exploitative and unjust nature of human societies. Exponents of this theory like Friedrich Engels, Vladimier Lenin and Mao Tse Tung bring conflict on the doorsteps of capitalism. They believe that the exploitation of the lower class by the upper class in the society under capitalism creates conflict. Thus, they see capitalist societies as being exploitative and such exploitation is a cause of conflict.

Presenting a mechanism for conflict resolution, Marx and the other structural conflict theorists contend that conflict "will be resolved through a revolution where the bourgeoisie will be overthrown in a socialist revolution led by workers, bringing about the establishment of a socialist order led by the working people" (Best, 2006:42).

The Frustration-Aggression theory is another theory of conflict that analyses the cause of conflicts in the society. The theory was initially developed by John Dollard in 1939 and modified by scholars like Leonard Berkowitz (1962) and Aubrey Yates (1962). The theory is built on the assumption that conflicts stem from the inability to fulfill needs. The theory explains that aggression which leads to conflict is the outcome of frustration. In a situation where an individual is denied his or her legitimate desires as a result of the way the state or the society is structured will lead to expression of anger which may consequently lead to conflict.

In a situation where the expectations of the people in any given state or society do not meet attainment, there is always the tendency for such people to confront those they perceive as being responsible for frustrating the attainment of their legitimate desire. This is similar to Robert Gurr's Relative Deprivation theory which argues that "the greater the discrepancy, however marginal, the greater will be the chances that anger and violence will result" (Gurr 1970:24). The Niger Delta crisis in the South-South region of Nigeria is a perfect example of the way frustration can lead to aggression which consequently results to conflict. Stephen Ademola summarizes the cause of the Niger Delta conflict thus:

After waiting and peacefully agitating for what the people of the region considered a fair share of the oil wealth that is exploited from their land, youths now take the law into their own hands by vandalizing oil pipelines, kidnapping oil workers for fat ransoms and generally creating problems for those they believe are responsible for their predicaments (Ademola cited in Best 2006:48).

Similar to Frustration-Aggression Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory, the Human Needs Theory posits that all humans in all societies have basic needs which they seek at all times to fulfill. The demand of these needs or access to fulfill them by any group or individuals may lead to conflict. "Basic human needs in this sense comprise physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs. In essence, to provide access to one (e.g. food) and deny or hinder access to another (e.g. freedom of worship) will amount to denial and could make people to resort to violence in an effort to protect these needs" (Ademola, cited in Best, 2006:51-52). The

deprivation of these needs, according to needs theorists causes conflict. Burton identified a link between frustration which forces humans into acts of aggression and the need on the part of such individuals to satisfy their basic needs. He argues that individuals cannot be taught to accept practices that destroy their identity and other goals that are attached to their needs and because of this, they are forced to react against the factors, groups or institutions that they see as being responsible for threatening such needs (Burton, 1979).

Like Gurr's thesis on relative deprivation, Max Neef believes that "the tension between deprivation and potential are main issues addressed by human needs theory because when important needs are not sufficiently satisfied, economic and political problems will continue to grow" (Neef, 1991 cited in Best 2006:52). Even though human needs theory identified a wide range of human needs, some of which are considered basic humans needs, the fact remains that the frustration of these needs or access to them militates the actualization of the potentials of groups and individuals which will subsequently lead to conflict.

In summary, even though the proponents of the various conflict theories this study has reviewed, see conflict as multidimensional, the way of explaining it is also multidimensional. The several similarities which exist among the various theories show that they are in agreement in many areas. "One of such areas is that all of them recommend approaches that recognize the needs and interest of both sides, strategies that are non-confrontational and those that remove feelings of bitterness in the process of settling disputes between individuals, groups or nation" (Ademola cited in Best, 2006:56).

THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF CONFLICTS IN WEST AFRICA

Internal Dimension of Causes of Conflicts in West Africa

Intra-state or interstate conflicts "mostly stem for a wide range of ideological, demographic, religious, ethic, economic, social and political conditions" (Kegley and Wittkopt, 1995 cited in Eminue, 2013:174). According to Eminue (2013:174),

Armed conflict irrespective of its nature (inter or intra-state) arises from incompatible aspirations over tangible material interests or less tangible issues as ideas, values or beliefs.

Issues that cause conflict may include, disputes over territory, desire by a group to effect change of government, conflict over economic-related issues, ethno-nationalism, religious and ideological beliefs, the need to redress long-term marginalization by a group within a state and many more socio-political and economic issues.

Individuals, groups or states have goals and interest which may not be the same. Sometimes conflict becomes inevitable when these groups confront each other in the process of achieving their goals and interests. Garber (1998) observes that all human societies experience conflict at one time or another in the process of their regular interaction. He went further to state that "conflict can occur within a group and between groups within a family and between families, as well as inter-personal relationships" (Garber, 1998:7). Deutsche (1974:484) views conflict as "existing whenever incompatible activities occur. Such incompatible actions may prevent, interfere, infuse or in some way make the parties involved less likely or less effective. Such incompatible actions involve individuals, groups, societies, states and their communities".

Conflicts often erupt in any society or state where government acts as an instrument of group domination and where there are no channels for articulating demands. Frustration, unhealthy competition and oppression by the ruling class may lead to conflict. The way societies are structured sometimes causes conflicts, as certain groups may try to control others through coercion. In other words, the multi-communal compositions of a society also give rise to protracted conflicts. An important factor which gives rise to the multi-communal compositions of the societies in West Africa is the colonial legacy. The introduction of the divide and rule policy of the colonialists in many parts of West Africa resulted in artificially incorporated multitude of communal groups with different ethnics, religious, linguistics or other cultural identity into a state. The denomination of a state by a single communal group or a coalition of a few communal groups that is unresponsive to the needs of other groups in the society results in inter-communal struggle which eventually breeds conflicts.

Poor or lack of good governance or what Adekanye (2007) describes as the discord over access to political power has been identified as a major cause of conflict in West Africa. Adekanye observes that minority groups in the

West Africa sub-region are marginalized through exclusion from participation in the political and economic process of the state. He is of the view that if the leadership of West African states makes frantic efforts to recognize this, and politically and economically accommodate the minority groups in their various states, then discord over the distribution of resources, which often brings conflicts could be managed positively.

Scholars like Sessay (1999) and Atuibi (2007) have described peaceful power succession as one of the highest index of human development and civilization. Sessay (1999) notes that "whereas it takes a simple process to institute, elect, or replace a leader in the developed nations of the world, such processes require guns and thanks in many underdeveloped countries." This may partly explain the inability of peaceful power succession in West Africa which has often resulted to major conflicts. Political leadership in the West Africa sub-region is characterized by frequent violation of the constitution, lack of accountability and poor governance. The leaders employ all forms of manipulations to remain in power at all cost . Nothing is spared as long as they achieved their aims. (Sassey, 1999)

The art of self-succession has also been a source of conflict in West Africa. Many leaders in the sub-region have at various times tried to succeed themselves through the manipulation of the constitution or through dictatorial means. Nigeria's General Abarcha's bid to succeed himself is a clear example of this art of self-succession. Another example is the late Gnasingbe Eyadema of Togo. Eyadema assumed power in Togo in 1967 after a successful coup d'tat. He promulgated a new law in December 1979 that gave him undue advantage over his political opponents and he continued in power as the president of Togo.

Corruption is another cause of conflict in West Africa. Corruption in the sub-region has a deep corrosive effect on trust in government, and it contributes to crime and political instability. In linking corruption to bad governance which in turn leads to conflict in the state, Stedman (1993) observes that corruption undermines democracy and good governance by flouting or even subverting formal processes. He contends that "corruption in legislative bodies reduces accountability and distorts representation in policy making; corruption in the judiciary compromises the rule of law; and corruption in

public administration results in the unequal distribution of services." At the extreme, "unbridled corruption can lead to state fragility and distributive conflict can plunge a state into anarchy and violence" (Atuobi, 2007:108). For over two decades, there has been severe disruption of social and economic developments in West Africa due to internal conflicts which have devastating spillover effects. In most West African states that have experienced one conflict or the other, the state seem to loose legitimacy and link with the people who see it as an alien awkward institution which offers nothing to them. Peter Egbese and George Kieh capture quite cogently this attitude when they observe thus:

The typical African state is noted more as a repressive, brutal, corrupt and inefficient entity than as a mechanism for the promotion of the collective wellbeing of its citizens. Consequently, the modern state remains largely irrelevant to the needs, interests and aspirations of the people. A telling evidence of the vote of no confidence in the African state is the fact that even the African leaders who serve as the custodians of the state have little faith in its ability to cater for their wellbeing (Agbese and Kiel, 2007:8).

This disaffection with the state as the structure that has failed to live up to the expectations of the people can certainly be seen as part of the causes of conflicts in West Africa.

External Dimension of Causes of Conflicts in West Africa

Even though West Africa was not severely affected by the Cold War politics compared to East and Southern Africa, it did not prevent the powerful states in the world from pursuing aggressively their own strategic and economic interests in the West African sub-region. The former colonial powers, including the United States of America impacted the nature, evolution and outcome of various conflicts in the West African sub-region in the process of pursuing their Cold War objectives in the sub-region.

Commenting on the role of external actors in conflict in West Africa, Ero and Jonathan (2004) assert that external actors physically supported (through arms transfer and financial backing) some of the most repressive regimes in the sub-region. They argue that the support from these external actors contributed much to the ingredients of conflicts in West Africa.

According to them, one particular aspect of the role of the external powers that is directly related to conflict is that, "foreign actors had initially helped to widen state-society gaps in Africa when their aid encouraged particular regimes to believe that, because of foreign backing, they were capable of imposing their will on society" (Ero and Jonathan 2004:104).

Speaking for the continent of Africa, the former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan convincingly stated that "undemocratic and oppressive regimes supported and sustained by the competing super powers in the name of their broader goal, but when the Cold War ended, Africa was suddenly left to fend for itself" (UN Report, 2006). West African states were left to manage conflicts in the sub-region on their own, often without any serious attempts by major powers to help in any tangible way.

Another scholar who contributed scholarly on the external dimension of conflict in West Africa is Peter Schraeder. Schraeder pointed out that when the September 2002 conflict started in Cote d'Ivoire, France, a former colonial master of Cote d'Ivoire intervened under the pretext of protecting French citizens in Cote d'Ivoire, but ended up obtaining a UN Security Council mandate to position forces between the belligerents and pursue efforts to end the conflict. While acknowledging France's role in the conflict, Schaeder argued that her presence on ground and her diplomatic efforts contributed to exacerbating and prolonging the conflict. It was suspected by all parties to the conflict and some observers that France had hidden agenda which was to her interest, considering her record of pursuing her interest to the detriment of those of her former colonies. According to Schraeder, "when the Licorne forces opened fire on unruly and threatening young Ivorians in November 2004, the external dimension of the conflict was spotlighted" (Schraeder, 2004).

The role of funding institutions is another external dimension of conflicts in West Africa. Through Structural Adjustment Programmes and other interventions, the World Bank and the International Monitoring Fund (IMF) have impacted on socio-economic conditions of the states in the West African sub-region. Eboe Hutchful has argued that:

The neo-library ideology inspired imposition of severe budgetary cut of military budgets inspired by Western donors as the Cold War ended has to hallow out many states' security sectors, making them susceptible to, and unable to meet the challenges posed by armed groups. This has accelerated West Africa's security crises and its attendant conflicts (Eboe, 2004:53).

Similarly, the devaluation of CFA currency in the French controlled monetary zone in 1994 was a contributing factor to the weakening of the economy of many francophone states. This has indirectly sown the seeds of conflicts in these states. The Ivorian conflict is a good example.

Nigeria's Role in Conflict Resolution in West Africa

Since Nigeria got her independence from Britain in 1960, Africa has been the centre-piece of her foreign policy. This is evidenced in the enormous human and material resources successive Nigerian governments had devoted in the prosecution of this cardinal foreign policy objective. Within the West African sub-region, Nigeria has sought to manage inter-state relations under the framework of the ECOWAS and other bilateral arrangements with her immediate neighbors. In this connection, she has made the promotion of peace and security the primary consideration, based on the conviction that economic development and regional integration cannot be superimposed on an unstable region. Relative peace and democracy recorded presently in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Sao Tome and Principe to mention a few examples, would not have been possible without the determined fight put up by Nigerian peacekeepers at huge human and material costs under the framework of OAU (now AU) and ECOMOG.

While Nigeria has not been immune to the conflicts in Africa, having herself fought a devastating civil war, suffered bad oppressive governance under successive military regimes for most of her post-independence history and currently battling with Boko Haram bombings and killings in the Northern part of the country, she has not wavered in her commitment to conflict prevention and resolution in Africa in general and West Africa in particular. Successive Nigerian governments, whether military or civilian democracy, had' devoted enormous human and material resources to the prevention and resolution (of conflicts in Africa.

Having championed the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, Adebayo (2005) maintained that Nigeria remains at the forefront

of conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. According to him, the country pushed for the prevention and resolution of devastating conflicts that engulfed many countries in the West African sub-region in particular and the African continent in general. It is not in doubt today that Nigeria was at the forefront in the creation of ECOWAS; Cease Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which facilitated the resolution of the Liberian and Sierra Leone crises and the restoration of democracy in both countries.

Under the sub-regional hegemony of' Nigeria, according to Akinbobola (2000) the ECOWAS Cease Fire Monitoring Group was formed and deployed to some of the conflict zones as regional peacekeeping and intervention force. ECOMOG's conflict resolution mechanism has mostly involved multidimensional peacekeeping i.e. traditional peacekeeping through monitoring implementation of peace agreements reached between conflicting parties. In addition to her role in ECOWAS' efforts in resolving conflicts in Africa, Nigeria has also been instrumental in most of the conflict mediation, diplomacy and peace settlement agreements in almost all the recent wars in West Africa (Gana, 1989), Furthermore, scboLars like Gambari (1983) and Guba (2007) believe that Nigeria has played a prominent role in the West African sub-region through the commitment of her substantial military capacity, notably in supplying the leadership and the majority of troops for ECOMOG, the ECOWAS sponsored peacekeeping force in Liberia. That operation was viewed as success, with armed conflict halted and elections held. During Abacha's administration, Nigerian troops were stationed in Sierra Leone to protect the country's borders from incursion of Librarian rebels. Nigeria also confronted a Sierra Leonean military junta that overthrew an elected civilian government. This action however is considered as ironic by Mazrui (2006) given the origin of the Abacha regime.

Nigeria exerted efforts to ensure that democratic governments were restored in Guinea-Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire and Sao Tome and Principe, after the military take-over in those countries. It has been speculated that Nigeria has so far spent over US$10billion in peace campaigns, not to mention the large number of men and women of the Nigerian Armed Forces who paid the supreme price in the course of peace in the region (Imobighe, 2010).

Onyisi (2011) observes that Nigeria's intervention in these troubled areas in West Africa was facilitated by various protocols endorsed by Heads of State and Government which provided' effective institutional framework for the resolution of disputes. According to him, these are the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, the Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED, 2002), the Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Dcfence (MAD) (1981), and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). All these are mechanisms for the resolution of both domestic and regional conflicts. Some of these mechanisms created the grounds for Nigeria's intervention in: some of the conflicts in West Africa, such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire (Ronald, 2003). By early 1990, there was real possibility that Liberia would slide into anarchy. With the refusal of the United Nations, the United States and the rest of the International Community to intervene, it was left to ECOWAS at the instance of Nigeria to quickly act to stem the threat to lawand order not only in Liberia, but also across other parts of the West African sub-region (Adeola, 2002).

Given her contributions in conflict resolution in West Africans demonstrated in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe and Cote d'Ivoire to mention just a few, it is therefore not out of place to conclude that Nigeria is a hegemon in the West African sub-region. The country has been responding to these conflict situations in the West African sub-region the way she does, because Nigerian leaders saw the noble role the country was playing in ending conflicts in the sub-region as a way of reasserting her influence and showing indispensability which she hoped might persuade the international community to appreciate her leadership role in the sub-region.

According to Osaghae (2010), the strategy worked fairly well in order to show the international community, initially reluctant to get involved in the complex West African conflicts that, no matter how bad the situation was in Nigeria, her role in West Africa and Africa could not be ignored.

CONCLUSION

As a result of her rich endowment in both human and natural resources, Nigeria has had the advantage of playing leadership role in

Africa, especially the West African sub-region since her independence in 1960. After independence, Nigeria witnessed a progressive evolution of leadership roles from her early pre-occupation with decolonization to peace making and enforcement and all the way to the development of pan-African mechanism for good governance. The country's leadership role boldly demonstrates the Afrocentric thrust in her foreign policy.

This is visible in Nigeria's continued provision of assistance to countries in distress in West Africa as a measure to strengthen democratic rule, reduce conflict and thereby promote security, peace and development in the region. The country has been playing crucial role in sustaining the speed of regional integration. Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa anchored on her Afrocentric foreign policy posture can also be understood against the background of the regional security problem. The high point of her leadership role in the West African sub-region was the peacekeeping and enforcement in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Nigeria has always been at the forefront of conflict management and resolution in West Africa since independence. The country has provided desired leadership in the West African sub-region in conflict and crisis situations through the instrumentality of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It is however widely believed that Nigeria's leadership role and her interventions in conflict situations in West Africa is not anchored on any clearly defined national interest, but derived largely from a poorly conceptualized notion of "manifest destiny" and the ambition of many of her leaders over the years.

In clear terms, there is no strong national consensus on the utility of Nigeria's leadership role in West Africa, considering the magnitude of leadership failure at home.

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