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Abstract

The world Political Order literally could be seen as the dominant political systems and ideologies that are in practice. With the collapse of communism in 1991, President Bush announced that 'a new world order is on the horizon'. Frances Fukuyama writing in the 80s argued that Western liberal ideas have now become the dominant one in the world. He further reiterated that all countries will soon take on the 'global Western model', in recent times, most scholars have asserted that the 'Bipolar Cold War model of individual relations is now being replaced by a model based upon competing civilization.. The paper however is concerned with the bipolar world that was well entrenched from the late 1940s. Its thrust will be to examine the interaction between the West Africa States and great powers. The paper will go further to examine the policies of the West African government vis-à-vis these external powers. An attempt will be made to discern the role of West Africa States in the non-alignment movement.

Key words: West Africa, Political order, Bipolar, Cold War

Introduction

West Africa states at independence

For lack of better alternative, West Africa accepted the improbable political boundaries drawn by the German Kaiser in 1885, which their independent states gave new names in the hope of creating nations and enshrined those divisions in the first commandment of the organization of Africa Unity: "Do not fiddle with boundaries". To an increasing extent, political sovereignty can only be so sovereignty if the states in question are economically self-sufficient or economically independent. This position was lacking among West Africa States at independence.

The 1960s marked the decade of political independence for the African continents in general. The process of independence was a small incident in a much larger and complex process. How can they develop their economies? Should they continue with the pre-independence relationship with their erstwhile colonial master? Or should they seek new relationship with the outside World? These were the questions that the West African nations had to provide immediate answers to. Some resorted by giving their countries new



names such as Gold Coast, Ghana, Upper Volta, Burkina Faso, etc., while others had widespread diplomatic representation.

Political independence however could not be declared effective because the institution to make West Africa states self-government; self-managing and free of external intervention would take years to create and in the meantime the former colonial powers as well as interlopers were able to exert a great deal influence over West Africa politics. The world political order by 1960 was Bipolar, the free world made up of Britain, France, United States and all other democratic and capitalist states on the one hand, the communist states on the other hand. Thus, these young West African States had the opportunity of aligning with any of these great powers to obtain economic aid for the much sought after political independence via economic development. A lot of them went to both sides. In Nigeria, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the opposition in government made an early statement on this subject. His statement conveyed a sense of urgency and determination to achieve growth and private investment to facilitate it. He was of the view that "Political independence and economic spoon-feeding does not go well together". In other words, political self-determination if it is to be worthwhile, real and not illusory must go hand in hand with its twin brother economic self-determination.¹ Nigeria has in a sense according to Rivkin "stolen a march on other emergent states by anticipating independence and staked out its claim for external assistance". This urgency for economic development among West Africa states was interwoven with the need for rapid recognizable results that the new leaders were seeking.

President, Senghor of Senegal at independence was also of the view that economic self-sufficiency was a necessity for political independence. He not only wanted economic aid but sought for a relationship with France that to an increasing extent would undermine Senegal's political independence, "the need for Europe-Africa cooperation derives from the fact that an underdeveloped country which has achieved nominal independence cannot acquire real independence if it remains underdeveloped. It must obtain external aids. Its solution can be found in the entry into a large ensemble, in the form of confederacy."² He further asserted that "long contained political and economic relations... have created link which would be catastrophic to break."³ Leopold Senghor's assertion is reflective of those West Africa states that remained in the French community at independence. However, there West Africa States name Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Burkina Faso broke away from the French community and achieved independence outside the community.

However, Houphouët-Boigny, the President of Côte d'Ivoire favoured direct and close economic ties with France and has since led to the establishment of the Conseil de l'Entente bank to the community. Sierra Leone also took the same position as Nigeria at independence, seeking economic aid from the commonwealth established by Britain for its erstwhile colonies. Ghana, Mali and Guinea, the three foremost socialist states in West Africa at independence took a radically different stance. The dynamic labour leader,

¹Rivkin, A., (1962): Africa and the West. New York: Fredrick A. Prager Press.

²Arnold, E., (1962): A Handbook For Occupational Health Visitors, M. M. West. Pp. 180.

³Arnold, E., (1962): A Handbook For Occupational Health Visitors, M. M. West. Pp. 180.

SekouToure of Guinea in 1958 informed President de Gaulle of France that Guinea preferred "Freedom in poverty to riches in servitude".⁴ President Nkrumah of Ghana was also anti-capitalist. He is of the view that "Capitalism was too complicated a system for a new independent nation. Hence, the need for a socialist society based on social justice and a democratic constitution."⁵

President Modilbo Keita of Mali also broke ties with France at independence and sought for economic aid from the communist bloc, which he got, but Mali retained its economic and technical assistance with France. It is clear that the decade of independence, West Africa leaders attached a high priority to economic growth. They wanted to justify their presence in government achieving results for their states and as such, majority of them were attached to their erstwhile colonial masters for these aids. While they sought assistance from the free world, they were prepared to accept help from elsewhere if it was not forthcoming from the free world. These needs for assistance brought about overt and covert relationships in West Africa. Overt arrangements were designed to achieve continuity with past practice, as when French and British personnel were hired on contracts to help maintain independent governments. In other cases, arrangements were made to facilitate a break with the past just like, as Ghana, the United States and the Soviet Union were the interlopers in West Africa affairs. Richard Bissell is of the view that the lack of real political independence was also seen in the covert relationship between African states and the wider world. According to him, "Africa was one of the most open environment for covert operations since the pre-1914 Balkans. West Africa and the Free World Of all the capitalist states, France influence and control covered the widest region in West Africa in the period under review.

The French Empire was one of the greatest exploits of France's history. France's control over its erstwhile colonies in West Africa in particular and Africa in general was crucial to its claim to global power. De Gaule became France ruler in 1958 and decides to turn over political power authority to a generation of African leaders who had represented their territories in the French national assembly. Except for the conseil-de-entente, whose leader was SekouToure of Guinea, the other West Africa French colonies acceded to independence within the French community. Such Francophone leaders like Leopold Senghor of Senegal and Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast had strong attachment to France. France's political dominance over its erstwhile colonies no doubt was achievable because of the fundamental roots its policy of assimilation had laid in West Africa. It was thus possible for Naomi Chazan, et al., to remark thus "culturally, economically, military and thus politically, the newly independent Francophone states remained bound to the metro pole and successive presidents since De Gaulle have cultivated and even extended this sphere of influence."⁶

⁴Morrow, H.J., (1968): *The First American Ambassador to Guinea*. New York: Brunwick, Rutger University Press, 1968.

⁵Arnold, E., (1962): *A HANDBOOK FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH VISITORS*, M. M. West. Pp. 180.

⁶Chizan N., (1992): *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*. Boulde: Lynn Reinine Publishers, 2nd ed.

As has earlier been asserted, political independence is only maintained to an increasing extent by economic self-sufficiency and this was lacking in not only French West Africa but in the entire West Africa sub-region. France's relationship with her erstwhile colonies was entered on 'La cooperation', which assured that flows of French goods into these markets are protected for the region for France capital investment. Also, by supporting a common currency, (the CFA), France and Paris assured light financial link with the periphery. Guinea and Mali tried to establish their own money but sought admission into the France zone. Military coups that took place yielded insignificant change in relation to France. France supplied the imports to France West Africa and had since then maintained an atmosphere of "club and family that has offered prestige to the elites of the Francophone states".⁷

Hence, France whether under Gaulle, liberal or socialist government has been committed to an active role in not only French West Africa but also to its other colonies in Africa. In return, the French West Africa States have reserved an open door for French influence. But not all states in West Africa have been drawn to French. Nigeria has been most suspicious of France aiding the Biafra succession. It viewed French influence in West Africa as a threat to its national integrity. Due largely to its economic strength in the period under review, Nigeria pressed the ideas of a West Africa common market as a lever to reduce France influence in the sub-region. It embarked on a sustained diplomatic offensive to create the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS). This offensive according to Naomi Chazan implicated Lagos in matters beyond economic cooperation.⁸

Despite Britain's involvement in colonial Africa, it has played a declining role in African affairs since 1960. The commonwealth has been its favoured instrument for the management of postcolonial relations and its erstwhile colonies are beneficiaries of commonwealth Africa assistance programme. Like France, Britain policy in West Africa was channeled in ways that would least undermine its own investment and trade. Thus, despite an active campaign for Biafra in England, the British government supplied large quantity of arms to Lagos in order not to jeopardize its commercial preeminence there. Also, because of its trading interest, the British government left the infamous Ian Smith regime in Rhodesia to carry out its apartheid policies. Thus, from 1965 to 1980, British policy was shackled with the Rhodesia issue. In the 70s Nigeria, no doubt was the regional power in West Africa. Under Obasanjo, Nigeria exerted its political power most directly by nationalizing British Petroleum assets on the eve of 1979 Commonwealth Conference in Lusaka that was to formulate a policy on Rhodesia. This aided Robert Mugabe's front to power. Had Nigeria been very poor, it would have been difficult to stand up to France and Britain in Africa affairs. This further strengthens the premise that economic viability to an increasing extent determines political independence.

⁷Brissell, E.R., (1984): "An Introduction to its New Africa Era" in Ed. Richard E. Brissel and Michael, S. Radu, Africa in the Post Decolonization. New York: Brunicks, Transaction Book.

⁸Chizan N., (1992): Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa. Bouldre: Lynn Reinine Publishers, 2nd ed.

By 1960, the United States knew little of the West Africa sub-region. This is because at the highest level of government in the United States, Africa was a 'low priority.'⁹ It observed the passing of colonialism in the continent with a mix of approval and comprehension. Approval in the sense that it was in line with its objective of freedom of people to rule themselves anywhere in the world. But was apprehensive of the fact that the spirit behind nationalism was an unpredictable force that could lead to communist government in the sub-region. This apprehensiveness was well-founded because Ghana being one of the first countries to gain independence proclaimed itself a Socialist State. Rather than wholeheartedly support independence across the continent, "U.S. Policy leaned towards damage limitation."¹⁰ In most of the periods reviewed, the United States refrained from substantial involvement in West Africa so long as French or Britain influences appeared adequate. When the Nigeria Civil War erupted in 1967, U.S. Secretary of State frankly declared that this was Britain's sphere of influence.

However, through normal channels of diplomatic, commercial relations and through aid programme and food exports, the U.S. acquired a minimal foothold on the sub-region. In the period under review, grain imports to the region increased dramatically. Nigeria's grains import approached \$1 billion dollars by 1980 with more than one third coming from the United States.¹¹ West Africa States experienced its greatest food needs in the 1970s and the United States led the world in supplying food to the sub-region. These two trends guarantee that West Africa's economic and political future will rest more heavily on U.S. policies.

Communist Influence in West Africa

Guinea provided the first opportunity for the Soviets to extend their sphere of influence in West Africa. The abrupt expulsion of Guinea from the French fold in 1958 rendered it particularly needy for external support. Thus, in the 1960s, the Soviet supplied arms and economic credits to Guinea. SekouToure, a trade union leader and also president of Guinea was invited to Moscow, where he declared, "we are fighting imperialism and are therefore allies of the world that we have the chosen freedom and a place for all nations".¹² To the Soviets on the onset of the 1960, Guinea appeared to be a vanguard country ushering in an era of revolutionary change. However, Guinea-Soviets relationship soured after a brief honeymoon. The Soviet shipment of Snow-plow to tropical Conakry was major factor for this brief relationship. SekouToure brusquely expelled the soviet diplomats when he became disillusioned with soviet intervention with domestic affairs and the quality of soviet aids and trade.

In the period under review, West Africa states were in flux. New candidates for soviet honours, such as Modibo Keita of Mali and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana pursued radical reforms, so that the soviets could do no more than establish a

⁹Chizan N., (1992): Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa. Boulde: Lynn Reinine Publishers, 2nd ed.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

diplomatic presence of the widest scale possible, which was expanded with working relations with Senegal, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia. In this context, the "soviets had little choice but to back leaders who professed socialism in order to establish their own credibility as actors in West Africa affairs.

The civil war in Nigeria in 1967 saw Nigeria appealing for arms and the Soviet Union quickly responded by supplying the arms. Thus, throughout the 1960s, the Soviet Union had relatively little to show for its efforts. In the 70s, the Soviet Union established itself as the world's leading arms dealer in sub-Saharan African. From 1975 to 1983, the Soviet Union supplied arms worth \$7.4 billion to the region, but it was mainly to Angola and Ethiopia, thus, Soviet presence in Africa was the least felt in West Africa. Marxist ideology developed roots in West Africa in the early post independence period because it was anti-imperialist by nature. However, its widespread influence was shortened because in practice, it differed from Africa socialism.

West Africa's Role in the Non-alignment.

In the period under review, the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) was the principal means by which West Africa states and other countries in the third world brackets sought to achieve a voice in international decision-making. It was established in 1961 at the initiative of President Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, and it focused its attention upon the dangers of the Cold War and nuclear testing. The charter of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 committed the member's states to a policy of NAM. This increases the number of African states in NAM. The NAM was also instrumental in creating the other major vehicle of collective Southern diplomacy i.e. the Group of 77. West African Diplomats have since played a key role in sustaining the group 77 activities. Such diplomats like Kenneth Dadze of Ghana and Akporode Clark of Nigeria have provided leadership within the group. Thus, it was through such vibrant leadership that the member of NAM and the group of 77 put pressure on the United Nation to persuade industrialized countries to give serious attention to its demand for global economic reforms. These pressures bore fruits with the Establishment of a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the mid-1970s. NIEO met the rhetorical needs of West Africa states and other members of the Group of 77. Its issues include among others developing countries, debt relief and the attempt to control activities of Multinational Corporation in developing nations. But the NIECO failed to achieve its objectives because the West saw it as a "reparation process, as though the West were entirely responsible for Africa economic ills".¹³

Conclusion

The problems besetting the countries in West Africa are multifarious. Its origin no doubt stems from the dependent relationship it has with both the West and the East. However, much of the blame can also be placed on the leadership

¹³Radu, S.M., (1992): "Ideologies, Parts and Foreign Policy in Sub-Sahara Africa" in Ed. Richard, E. Brissel and Michael, S. Radu. Africa in the Post Decolonization. New York: Fredrick A. Pragen Press.

qualities of its leaders at independence who were in a hurry to achieve recognizable results for their new states. Most of the socialist states at independence put structure in place that could not facilitate economic growth and development in order to safeguard their political sovereignty. Politics whose obvious failures were made clear by experience in Africa and elsewhere was consistently repeated because their political merits were deemed more important than their economic cost. For instance, Guinea's attempt to improve state control over the rural distribution network failed completely by 1968, as did the collectivization programme of the same period (Michael Radu 1992). On the other hand, the capitalist states in West Africa received aids and loans from the West that had not met the much sought after economic development. These loans have only led to an increase in foreign debts of these states and a greater dependence on the West for its survival. The NIECO was a clear indication that the West is not willing to assist third world. It is the express opinion of the writer of this paper that political independence via economic development for the West Africa sub-region can only be achievable through trade relations with those countries that have wriggled out of this vicious circle of poverty such as Malaysia and Singapore, for it is only by so doing, that they can reduce the dependent relationship they have with the West.

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