



## **The Influences of Hegemonic Powers and the International Order in West Africa**

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### **Abstract**

*International system has been an arena for political contest and domination for centuries. This is especially true of states within the European international system who had been dominating, through colonialism and imperialism, the global political system for three centuries. Such domination reflects, in the current global system, in the manner some developing countries of the south are continually needing the assistance of the developed states of the North. Thus, the article examines the role of great powers in the international order of West Africa in the post-colonial era. The study employs the use of hegemonic stability theory to examine the role of external powers in the maintenance of order in West Africa. The overall assessment of the involvement of these external state powers in the West Africa sub-region indicates that national interests of each state is the most important variable that propels them to intervene. In addition, the reluctance on the part of states within the region to respond swiftly to regional problems is attributable to global powers' intervention. In conducting the research, we employed the use of qualitative content analysis to mine data from all available data sources.*

**Keywords:** Great Powers; Order; West Africa; Security

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### **1.0 Introduction**

The management of international order, regional order and local order is a very complex one. The management and maintenance of order in any political space demands conscientious and proactive measures; and in the quest to do these resources are committed to it. Europe, Asia and Africa are continents that are inextricably connected from the earliest period, and the nature of order has been determined by the prevailing socio-political atmosphere of the time. Africa like other continents received overwhelming European attention and presence between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

nearly all corners of African space have been explored and colonized. The process of colonization has its far-reaching impact on the continent after the exit of colonial masters in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. With the facial demise of colonialism in Africa some political and social issues came to the fore and some of these problems have proved difficult for Africans to navigate successfully. It is as result of the failure of the states and multilateral bodies in Africa to maintain political and social decorum that propelled the erstwhile colonial masters to continue to involve in the regional order of Africa (Ate, 2011). In doing this, various measures are put in place by some of these



colonial masters to ensure political tranquility is maintained in Africa. West Africa is a very complex sub-regional space in the continent. This is because of the socio-political and geographical landscapes of the sub-regional space. German, British, French, Portuguese, Spanish and the U.S, are important colonial masters that have in the past dominated the affairs of the sub-regional political, social and economic terrains. It should be stressed here that only Britain, France and Portuguese later left an indelible political and social impact in the West African sub-region as the languages and cultures of the three main colonial masters predominate the sub regional system. It is therefore natural that some of these colonial powers would swing to action anytime there is issue that stands to upset the sub-regional order. Britain and France are particularly outstanding in this process with sterling cooperation from the global hegemony, the U.S. Maintenance of regional order in West Africa has always been an issue and this explains the major social and political debacles being experienced in the region. As great powers could not fold their arms and watch the regional sub-system descends to anarchy, intervention becomes a necessity. How such intervention has been taken place therefore is the focus of this research. Scholars of international order have written extensively on various regions as well as on states within the global system. Scholars like Vincent (2015), Ruggie (1982), Tinbergen (1976) have written on the maintenance of international order through multilateral institutions and the focus is outside West Africa. Scholars tend to see foreign policies' literatures of most of these great powers in relation to Africa as the reliable texts in studying the international order of West Africa. This should not be so. Thus, the focus of the

research will be on these two erstwhile colonial masters and the current global hegemony, the U.S; the role and activities of these three state actors in the maintenance of order in West Africa will be examined. In a similar vein, the approaches and methods adopt by each actor in their engagement with West Africa sub-region will be pinpointed to establish a pattern in the maintenance of sub-regional order by these externalities.

## **2.Literature Review**

This section discusses relevant literatures in relation to the current research. It attempts to review research works that are relevant to the study. In this way, literatures on the U.S. and West Africa, France and West Africa and Britain and West Africa are considered in this section.

### **2.1The United States and West Africa**

The international linkage between West Africa and the U.S was less important, most especially before and during the Cold War era, with possible exception of oil interest in Nigeria (Bach, 2007). The U.S has not been so concerned about the West Africa affairs like the French and the British; and this can be attributed to many factors: firstly, the region is not within the global power-matrix; secondly, it was a region colonized by the U.S. allies and therefore within the ambit of western control most especially France and Britain; thirdly, the region did not pose any instant threat to the U.S. geo-strategic calculation like Asia pacific and the Middle East and lastly, the U.S. seemed to be complacent with West African countries as natural allies because of the Atlantic connection of slave trade that brought most of black people from West Africa to the U.S. (Measheimer, 2013). The apathetic nature of the U.S. to the issue of West Africa has no doubt changed dramatically and this is due to the instability in the Middle East and the



Gulf region, most especially after the energy crisis of 1970s. The U.S. has since been sourcing for alternative energy sources in the West African sub-region which ultimately coincides with the China's.

Although, some scholars like Buzan and Weaver (2011) and Mearsheimer (2013) might have been tempted to assume that Africa occupies a lesser strategic calculation in the U.S foreign policy. In fact, despite its low profile in the West African affairs, the U.S. has been making its presence in West Africa through Liberia and Sierra Leone from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The established pattern of relations between the U.S and the countries of Mano River states (Guinea, Cote d' Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone) could be traced to the pre-colonial times as 5 percent of Liberia population originated from free-slave descent from the U.S. (Sesay, 1998). It is this cultural and political connection that makes the countries of Mano river area more special to the U.S. than other parts of West Africa. But it needs to be stated that the energy crisis of 1970s with attendant importance of Nigerian oil to the U.S. endeared the West Africa richest country to the political orbit of the global power (Iheduru, 2011). Nigeria since the late 1970s has been a primary supplier of oil (with low Sulphur content) to the U.S. energy market. It is therefore both historical antecedents and economy factors that propel the U.S. to have a stake in West African affairs. This is particularly noted in the wake of Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars where the U.S. responded through the United Nations (Omojuwa et al., 2013). The attendant problems of post-conflict reconstruction thus forced the U.S. to respond to the call.

It needs to be stated here that by Year 2003 Sierra Leone has been designated as the poorest country in the whole of West

African sub-region with the attendant result of average life expectancy of 36.9 years (Erhd et al., 2012). In terms of Human Development Index (HDI), Sierra Leone's position is one of the most affected states within the global system. It was on this basis that the U.S. responded in 2003 with \$58.79 million aid to the country and such assistance represented 205 percent of all official assistance received (Alden et al., 2008).

Similarly, due to high rate of poverty in the country, signifies by high HIV/AIDS prevalent, malnutrition, unemployment and high mortality rate, it was difficult for such aid to have any impact on the country. Apart from Sierra Leone, the U.S. has also proved its financial mettle and assistance in other part of West Africa. In order to ensure international orderliness in West Africa, Liberia became a test case between 1989 and 2003-a year aptly described as "West African debacle" (Gbila, 2008). The half-hearted manner with which the conflict is handled and responded show the low-profile of West Africa in the U.S. foreign policy agenda. Nevertheless, the need to contain excessiveness of wars, consolidate democracy, promotion of human rights and emergence of terrorist threat in the region has attracted the attention of the U.S., most especially the rise of al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram group in recent years in the West Africa (Alfred, 2020). The U.S. discovered the rise of Boko Haram and AQIM in the region as a potential threat to its broadly-defined national interest, most especially in relation to oil and market. In this case, the U.S. has been responding to many of the security issues that may serve as threat to its own national survival.



The fallout of this is the creation African-US Command (AFRICOM) and other bilateral security agreements with countries in the region (Oladimeji, 2019). It needs to be stressed here that the U.S. only responds and intervenes in West Africa security and social challenges when its interest is at stake. The recent mobilization of a Naval Special Warfare group in the U.S. popularly addressed as SEAL Team Six to rescue an American held hostage by the terrorist group in Northern Nigeria and Niger is a demonstration of the continual aspiration on the part of the U.S. to respond to issues whenever its national interest is threatened (Alfred, 2020). In all, the response of the U.S. to the plight and problem of the region is comatose when compared to other parts of the globe. Despite the insignificant contribution of the U.S. to West African problems, it was the largest importer of Nigeria crude oil among all developed countries. It was only recently overtaken by India, Spain and the Netherlands. Similarly, the intervention of the U.S in West Africa aided the financial capacity of ECOWAS to respond to Liberia and Sierra Leone civil wars. It is on record that the U.S. assisted the sub-regional peacekeeping efforts with \$95 million to suppress conflicts in both countries (Rotchild & Emmanuel, 2017).

In addition, the U.S contributed \$1.5 million to quell the tide of war in Cote d' Ivoire. It should be noted that the interest in promoting and maintaining stability in Africa has been and continues to be the main determinant of US Africa policy. Therefore, it is no coincidence that recent administrations have stressed such core objectives as promoting regional stability and conflict management, encouraging Africa's economic development and international trade, strengthening state structures to prevent terrorism and criminal

activities, and furthering democracy and human rights. In the fight against Terrorist groups in West Africa, the U.S supplies intelligence information to West African governments. The provision of such intelligent information is usually based on request from concerned governments. It needs to be stressed however that the national interests of the U.S. is the determining factor in its relationship with West Africa and this explains the continual U.S. meddling in the affairs of the region. Thus, there is no prospect of U.S. disengaging from West Africa' affairs soon.

## **2.2 France and West Africa**

The international order of West Africa is also influenced by France. The West African region is dominated by francophone countries. The region is a home to 16 countries and 11 of them are French speaking states. In this case, in terms of territorial control, France has the upper hand. Throughout most of the Cold War period, France was determined to surrender its sphere of influence to the western ideological camp in which case peace was maintained and economic and political structure were aligned with that of France (Akinterinwa, 2004). This scenario has made it difficult to evolve a unified regional structure to accommodate the diverse interests of states within the region. The French influence in the post-independence Africa has been tremendous leaving no space for newcomer powers to displace its domination in Africa. The West African region is the largest area of French global domination in terms of culture, economic and political contacts.

Despite the colonial disentanglement, the French government still holds sway to their domination in West Africa through regular economic and political interactions. It may be impossible for some time for West



African countries to disentangle themselves from the grip of French post-colonial domination which goes on through many methods and means. Also, it may be argued that because of the way the internal socio-political aspects of the francophone West African countries had been structured it may not be possible to reduce the influence of French in that part of the world. This entanglement persists until Cold War period and survives and intensifies in the post-Cold War global system. The alliance of the France with the NATO members during the Cold War automatically made some of these countries pro-West in their foreign policy orientation with the exception of Guinea under Sekou Toure (Wapmuk, 2012). Such western alliance made it possible for the French government to make sure that the region was free from the communist ideological orientation. In the quest to achieve this, military and economic ties were tailored towards the western countries. This arrangement made the local insurgencies very rare as most West African leaders had military alliance with France and any attempt for local militias or insurgency to rear its head up was met with stiff opposition, most especially during the Cold War period (Sesay, 1998).

Thus, the French influence in the region is noticeable as political and economic activities are dominated by it. Financial, economic, monetary and technical assistance were assured by France in order to perpetuate its hegemony in West Africa (Nwoke, 2005). Several factors may well account for the French close-mark socio-economic and political domination of its erstwhile colonial enclave in West Africa. The eight countries that make up the francophone countries were susceptible to the control of other powers like Union of Soviet Socialist Countries (USSR), Britain,

the U.S. and most importantly Nigeria during the Cold War era. The latter regional power is the most feared by the France. In terms of spatial dimension Nigeria has better chance of dominating this part of Africa than France. Thus, in terms of cultural affinity and sociological pedestal, Nigeria naturally stands a better chance of having upper hand in West Africa than France. And wresting the control of this part of Africa from France by Nigeria means that they will be automatically within the orbit of Britain.

The French government was quite aware of this imminent development as it immediately after independence entered into obnoxious agreement of all sorts with these francophone African countries (Wright, 1998). In fact, the region was tied to the monetary and fiscal policies of French government. With the demise of Cold War, signified by the dissolution of USSR in 1991, France had already well-established connections in this part of Africa and in this case, it is very difficult for other powers to penetrate the region with slight exception of Nigeria, the natural hegemon in the region (Bach, 2007). With the demise of Cold War, the latent conflict that had been kept under minimal control during the Cold War reared its ugly head up. In fact, both intra and inter-state conflicts began to resurface immediately after the Cold War (Iheduru, 2011). The reason for this may be located in the manner by which the U.S. and France interests dwindled after the Cold War as there is no threats coming from the communist camp anymore. This resulted in reduced financial and political interest in the region. Although, French still maintains its domination after Cold War period but less sustained with heavy military and financial assistance as it was obtained in the Cold War period with the exception of the ongoing French military operation in Mali.





This recent intervention in Mali also needs to be noted. In the absence of viable government in Mali in 2012, signified with the occupation of northern part of the country by Tuareg rebels, France government deployed his troops to maintain peace in Mali and also to curb the growth of terrorism in the Lake Chad region and northern part of the continent which is very close to Europe. The France response to West African issues has been dictated by economy, politics and security. As the region represents the largest possession of France, it may be difficult to see the dwindling presence of France in the maintenance of sub-regional security edifice (Oladimeji, 2019).

The intervention of France in West Africa affairs has brought some benefits to the region as whole. The West Africa multinational joint force, established for the purpose of combating terrorism in the region has continually received military and technical assistance from French government. France assisted Mali in 2013 in waging intense war against the AQIM who left war front in Libya in 2012. The security threats in the region have made French government to establish military bases in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Chad. These bases were intended to be used not only for French military reasons but also in order to guarantee the security of the African countries against external and internal threats. It needs to be stated here that some of these military bases undermine the sovereignty of African states and French government has been accused severally of meddling and interfere in the internal affairs of Francophone states. In addition, the presence of France in the region undermines the capacity of Nigeria to advance its national interests in the region as most

French speaking states recognize the supremacy of France over Nigeria.

### **2.3 Britain and West Africa**

Britain is one of the earliest European states that first established its contact with West Africa (Clapham, 1996). The pattern of British relations with West African countries, especially during the colonial period, was different from that of French as the latter wanted their colonies to be an extension of their metropolitan government. Policy of assimilation and association was the French guidepost in its relation with West Africa while the British care less about holding tight the socio-political terrain of the region. Britain on the other hand allowed a measure of autonomy in its territories in West Africa and this may explain why the decolonization process started earlier in Anglophone west African states as compared to Francophone's. The residue of this pattern of relationship continued unabated in the post-colonial period. After the eventual decolonization process in the 1960s, the sole aim of the British in the West African region was basically commercial and strategic in nature (Oladimeji, 2019). In the case of France, the government of all francophone African countries still owed their allegiance to Paris in some strategic issues namely monetary, financial and political issues. The Cold War era made the British to intensify effort at making the region an important commercial hub for its manufactured goods given the competition from communist economies of the Eastern Europe and Asia. But the post-Cold War era occurred dynamism in Britain's relations with West Africa as most problems were identified as chronic. In order to solve some of these problems (poverty, democratic deficits, insecurity and human rights abuses) the Department for International Development was established



in 1997 to respond to some overseas challenges in the developing nations (Kandeh, 2008). It needs to be said that the pattern of African relations changed under new Labour government after the Cold War and in this case the West African region becomes a priority most especially on the issue bordering security and democracy.

The Labour party which ruled until 2010 appreciated the need to collaborate with multilateral institutions to solve African problems as it does not want to engage in unilateral military operation in West Africa (Ate, 2011). In fact, in attending to the problem of poverty, security, and democracy, Britain resulted to act through partnership with sponsoring of Heavily-Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiatives which aligned with Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in Africa. It is under these initiatives that Britain continues to assist West Africa for developmental purpose. The establishment of British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATTS) is a response to insecurity problems in Africa and the branch of this force has been located in Accra, Ghana (Wapmuk, 2012). Thus, the intervention of Britain in most cases took three dimensions i.e. unilateralism, multilateralism and bilateralism. The first one was employed in Year 2000 in Sierra Leone when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) reneged on their promise and attacked UN and ECOWAS forces (Adebajo, 2008). In response, British government deployed 650 paratroopers to assist the UN and ECOMOG forces in Sierra Leone (Adigbuo, 2005). Apart from this singular example, the British government has not been engaged itself in a unilateral military operation in West Africa. Because of the peculiar nature of the West African

region as the axis of both francophone and Anglophone elements, the British government decided in 1998 to enter into bilateral agreement with France in order to harmonise their policies in the region and also to push a political decorum in European Union (EU) (Alden et.al., 2008). The collaboration between France and Britain in West Africa could be seen as a way to ensure that most problems bedeviling the region are bilaterally attended to given the competitive nature of France and Britain in the region. Some of these issues therefore have received adequate attention as it is important to European security given the proximity of the region to Europe. In this way, Saint-Malo Declaration of 1998 between France and Britain became an important mechanism to discuss and proffer solution to all these imminent problems. From the above it can be seen that the British impact in the international order of West Africa is immense and the response has been mixed by employing multilateralism, bilateralism and unilateralism to solve the sub region's teething problems.

The British engagement with West African states, most importantly with Anglophone states, are borne out of the desire to maintain close rapport with erstwhile colonial territories. Under the umbrella of Commonwealth of Nations, British government has extended technical and economic cooperation with the region. Under the technical assistance programme, scholarships are awarded to deserving West African students as well as giving training to military personnel from the region (Porteous, 2010). Like other major powers, the British government provides intelligence information to the governments in the region in relation to the activities of child traffickers, drug traffickers and terrorist



groups. In 2012, Britain in collaboration with France intervened in the movement of terrorist from Libya to West Africa which eventually prevented the spillover effect of Libyan war in the region (Davidson, 2013). It needs to be stressed that most of the activities of the British in the region is to guarantee its hegemonic presence in the region and to ensure the balance of power is not upset. There are ongoing rivalries between Britain and France in the region in relation to markets and allies. The China's aggressive economic and political inroads in the region has endeared Britain to intensify its efforts in the region to make its presence felt. This therefore suggests that the activities of Britain in the region is to promote its national interest.

### **3.Methodology**

This study adopts comparative study approach to analyze the concepts of international order and global powers in West Africa. A comparative study is a thorough evaluation of contemporary phenomenon to demonstrate ability to examine, compare and contrast subjects or ideas (Roger, 2008). It is a methodological approach to show how two or more subjects are similar and different. This study evaluates data relating to international order and major powers. Also, the study includes evaluation of connection between international order and West Africa. The study further examines the pattern of relationship that exists between the two concepts through the evaluation of relevant theoretical literature. The literature includes the U.S. and West Africa, France and West Africa, and Britain and West Africa. The hegemonic stability theory which explains the domination of international system by the most powerful states guides the theoretical orientation of the study.

Also, in the research, a descriptive research design was used as it assumes a prior knowledge of the research questions and problems before the research began. In addition, descriptive research design allows for diverse method of data collection that ensures an adequate process and procedure in obtaining extensive information regarding the research questions (Seaman, 2008). An advantage of comparative study method is that it enables the researcher gain a deeper understanding of nexus between the maintenance of international order of West Africa and great powers. Thus, the review of published scholarly works, and other documents alike, provided a reliable source for analysis. The research method is qualitative in nature. The qualitative method is used because details from the data generated, for the purpose of analyzing the relationship between international order and regional powers cannot be quantified and also, because qualitative method tends to be more flexible (allows for broader range of utilization) —" range of techniques" (Roger, 2008).

### **4.Conclusion**

The maintenance of order within the global system has always been the duty of great powers. The theory of hegemonic stability clearly establishes this position. Since the emergence of the U.S. and other great powers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, international order has become their preoccupation. The global powers' intervention and interference in West Africa's regional order is premised on the assumption that the states within the region are not well committed in responding to most of the problems bedeviling the sub-region. The spillover effect of such issues may affect the flow of commercial activities and free movement of people across borders. The intervention is based on the premise that





regional and national problems can easily radiate to any parts of the world and most of these global powers intervene to nip crisis in the bud to prevent spillover effect to their own territories. As the world is increasingly globalized through revolution in technology, transportation and communication, problems in the remotest part of the world cannot be ignored anymore. This explains the ubiquitous nature of the U.S. and other global powers in all corners of the world. In fact, the contemporary Covid 19 global pandemic narrates the interconnectedness of the world better. The Covid 19 pandemic shows that movement across borders is difficult to prevent. At a point in time between March and June 2020, most countries close their borders from immigration and emigration. But it needs to be stated here that in a normal circumstance, such is not allowed in international law. International law and World Trade Organisation permit the freedom of movement of people and commercial activities across border without discrimination. Under such circumstance therefore, problems in a region or state can be easily felt in other parts of the world. This, and some other issues discussed, has dictated the rationale behind the intervention of the West and other great powers in the affairs of weak states to prevent the collapse of the international order which could be imminent for free flow of economic and commercial activities. Thus, the research has outlined the role of great powers in the stability of West African region, with concentration on Britain, the U.S. and France. Other researchers can consider the role of other global powers like China, Russia, Germany, and Japan in the maintenance of international order in West Africa.

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