

A Perspective on Collective Security and Regional Stability in the West African Region

By

Elizabeth Aishatu Bature, Ph.D

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna

Email: lizaishatu@gmail.com , Tel: +2348036970008

Abstract

The promotion of peace and security in Africa necessitates security cooperation between states and collective security remains a way to pursue it. The centuries of experiences so far in the international efforts for finding global peace shows that the traditional concepts of security do not provide adequate solutions for the current challenges of inter-state conflict and regional instability. The paper, which is qualitative and analytical in approach, sourced data from secondary sources analysed through content analysis. Anchored on the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver, it revealed that West Africa is confronted with a surge of complex security challenges, with terrorism and insurgency being the most devastating in recent times. Since, the emerging security complexes are by nature geographical, individual states cannot solve them on their own, thus requiring regional efforts and cooperation. This necessitated ECOWAS Member states to adopt comprehensive strategies and initiatives. It concludes that while prospects for implementation of ECOWAS strategies abound, it equally faces several challenges, which can be surmountable. It recommends, amongst others, that regional responses will require a commitment by the leadership of member states to harmonise policies and work together in spite of their varied national interests and resource gaps.

Keywords: Collective- Security, Security, Regional- Stability, West – Africa, Region

Introduction

The pursuit of security involves much uncertainty for states. Most countries find it difficult to promote their national security, by acting alone (Booth 1987: 303). States, therefore, often work together towards improving their security. According to Booth (1987: 261), "the absence of credible defensive alliances can leave the international system at the mercy of the aggressive". Modern states have in pursuance of security, not only relied on alliances and coalitions, but also on the rules-based system of collective security. The UN's successful collective response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (1990) created optimism that collective security could become the international norm in the post-Cold War era (Snyder 1999: 108-109).

This optimism was, however, short-lived with the ineffective UN responses to crises in Somalia, Rwanda and the Balkans, as well as the inept nature of multinational UN peace operations. As a result, the permanent members of the UN Security Council in the West started to rely on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to address security issues in Europe, while regions with less strategic importance, including sub-Saharan Africa, were largely avoided in terms of peace operations/deployments (Coleman 2011, p.533). This effectively devolved much of the responsibility to deal with conflicts in Africa to regional and sub-regional organisations. The role of regional security institutions, therefore, became

more prominent to deal with instability in Africa (Snyder 1999, p.109). Collective security had been designed mainly at the global level, but has become a prominent concept for regional and sub-regional security. Collective security was intended to deal mainly with interstate conflict, yet most armed conflicts since the Cold War have been intrastate in nature (Vogt 2009, p. 252-253). African countries have, therefore, adopted collective security principles to manage security dilemmas as it arises.

Conceptualizing Security

What characterized the traditional International Relations approach to ‘security’, especially during the era of almost unchallenged dominance of Realism was the focus on the state as the referent object of security. Even though the preferred term was ‘national’ security, this was thus a misnomer when applied globally and only appropriate in those exceptional cases where nation and state happened to be (almost) coterminous (Moller 2000, p. 3). In attempting to re-conceptualize the definition of security, Buzan and Weaver (2003) defines security as a situation where survival of the referent object (which is reason behind securitization process) is at the forefront of security agenda which necessitates the adoption of emergency measures and actions within the political sphere.

Here, securitization as opined by Sedivy (2004, p.461) is the discursive process through which an inter-subjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat. Furthermore, as argued by Buzan and Weaver (2003), a security threat is an issue that is posited (by securitizing actors) as a threat to the survival of some referent object (nation, state, the liberal internal economic order, the rain forests), which is claimed to have a right to survive. Since a question of survival necessarily involves a point of no return at which it will be too late to act, it is not defensible to leave the issue to normal politics. While equally illustrating the sectoral model in their work “Security: A New Framework for Analysis”, Buzan et. al (1998) identifies military, political, societal, economic and environmental areas as the key spheres that interact to form security dynamics, with sectors a way of ordering priorities and reducing complexity to facilitate analysis. Furthermore, Baldwin (1997) defines such sectors as distinct areas for discourse that produces a variety of divergent values that can be the focal point of power struggle. He differentiates between these sectors and their referent objects so as to unveil the securitization process. According to Baldwin (1997) in the military sector, state appears as the referent object which has to be saved urgently; in the political sector sovereignty of the state is carried to the top of the agenda; in the economic sector, it is the existentially threatened national economies; in the societal sector, nations and religions emerge as the object for whom the securitization takes place; and lastly in the environmental sector, types of habitat, species etc. can be considered as the referent objects.

However, one should not neglect the fact that the units integrate the sectors both in their policymaking processes and in the way they relate to each other (Baldwin, 1997: 196). The nature of security complexes is so interlinked that in order to combat threats to regional stability and ensure maximum security across the wider region, it is imperative that states cooperate and coordinate their relationships in a harmonized manner as far as such threats needs to be wholly mitigated. This sets the foundation for the securitization process which

central idea is that threats are treated equally by all parties involved as a mutual concern that requires mutual actions. As argued by Buzan and Weaver (2003: 46), all the states in the system are to some extent enmeshed in a global web of security interdependence. But because insecurity is often associated with proximity, this interdependence is far from uniform. Anarchy plus the distance effect plus geographical diversity yields a pattern of regionally-based clusters where security interdependence is markedly more intense between the states inside the complex and those outside it.

Thus, the regional level of security has become increasingly autonomous based on the assumption that territoriality is a central feature of international security dynamics. Given the fact that certain security threats within regions are localized and so intertwined that resolving them would be difficult without due consideration for other units that exist within the dynamic complex, the central idea remains that substantial parts of the securitization and de-securitisation processes in the international system will manifest themselves in regional clusters (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 44). Lending credence to this concern of regional security complexes, Buzan (1991b: 432) identifies a regional security complex as a set of states with a paramount and distinctive network of security relations that give the members a high level of interdependence on security.

Understanding Collective Security

Between the end of the Napoleonic wars and the early 1900s, European countries formed part of a balance-of-power system (Papp 1997). This is a system in which states pursue security within an anarchic context by joining alliances in order to prevent a single centre of power (a particular group of states) from dominating the international system and becoming expansionist (McLean 1996). Within a balance-of-power system states can change alliances to promote equilibrium between centres of power (Papp 1997). The balance-of-power system, however, failed with the outbreak of the First World War and as a result of its horrific nature and aftermath, collective security was pursued through the League of Nations. One of the flaws of collective security is that one or more states may refuse to act when another member state is being attacked. This weakness contributed towards the outbreak of the Second World War, when several states invaded other countries, without any action being taken. This was the case during the invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) by Italy in October 1935, as well as the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. It is important to have conceptual clarity on the meaning of collective security for two reasons.

Firstly, some literature on collective security uses the term alliances to describe 'collective security'. For example, Rappard (1946: 195) defined collective security as "the protection which so-called 'sovereign states' have sought to attain in their alliances against aggression". Secondly, the meaning of concepts such as collective security and alliances are often misused and distorted, especially by politicians (Booth 1987: 259). Booth (1987: 259), with particular reference to alliances, argued that such distortion of concepts often occurs where an impression of cohesion is created for very loose agreements for cooperation. Collective security is however different from an alliance. While an alliance confronts a particular threat, collective security deals with a potential aggressor. Also, Collective Security seeks to regulate the relationship amongst its members, while an alliance negates the external threats. In reality, Collective Security and an alliance might be incompatible in some

scenarios as the indivisibility of peace principle does not grant exceptions since most states must rally against any aggressive state or non-state actor either as a friend or foe. Collective Security promotes impartiality, as the concept applies to all states within the system without prejudice, although it can be partial when identifying an enemy. The system identifies both aggressors and victims, and also issues out appropriate sanctions. Collective Security is a means of preserving the safety and interests of states within the system and jointly working together against an aggressor (Bolaji,2010).

The term “collective security” has been cited as a principle of the United Nations, and the League of Nations before that. Immanuel Kant presented this idea in his book towards the end of the 18th century “Perpetual Peace”, in which he states that the “the law of nations will be based on one federation of free states”. By employing a system of collective security any member state is dissuaded from acting in a manner likely to threaten peace, thereby avoiding conflict. While member states within a Collective Security System should be willing to engage jointly in its fight against any aggressor, the organisation must be open to prospective member states who are ready to accept the organisational obligations and faithfully adhere to it.

According to Rourke (2008), collective security has three basic tenets. The first is that all countries forswear the use of force except in self-defence; secondly, they agree that peace is indivisible and that an attack on one is an attack on all; they pledge to halt aggression and restore the peace by supplying to the UN or other IGOs whatever material or personnel resources to deter or defeat aggressors and restore peace.

The UN Charter enshrines the principle of collective security in Chapter 7, Article 48, by stating that: “the action required to carry out the decisions of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security shall be taken by all the members of the United Nations or by some of them, as the Security Council may determine; and that such decisions shall be carried out by the members of the UN directly or through their actions in the appropriate international agencies of which they are members”(The United Nations, 2007).

The rationale behind this principle is that any member state that contemplates aggression against another State would have to contend with the other Member States within the collective system that is bound to make the needed sacrifice to defend and preserve the victim state. Collective Security is a system of power or crisis management, which seeks to preserve peace, in case of any war or aggression against any state by the other Member States. Collective security regulates the use of force through a universally acceptable agreement by all countries within the system. It addresses the potential threats and any act of aggression based on the collective principle that any use of force is forbidden and any country that flouts this rule will be collectively sanctioned (Claude, 1992). Collective Security comprises the following elements;

- a. It accepts that wars and aggressions are characteristics of international relations, and that violation of the security of a nation is bound to happen;
- b. A mutually agreeable treaty organizes the decisions of the international body;
- c. All states agree to renounce war as a policy instrument except when defending self;

d. All states plead to come to the aid of any victim state against an aggressive state.

Collective Security can be suitably implemented at a multilateral level rather than at a unilateral level, as member states are to conform with the ethos and ideologies of the group for it to be functional. Member State cannot regard unilateral action as collective security irrespective of the involvement of multiple states or endorsement by an international organisation. The principle of Collective Security is therefore based on its collectiveness and not on the convergence of individual interest.

The Collective Security System implies that decision-making has to be a joint effort between all parties rather than a few members making independent decisions, and any decision reached must be on agreed principles. Collective Security works on the principle of indivisibility of peace (Finkelstein and Finkelstein, 1996). An act of war is a global threat to peace, and all states are required to prevent any act of aggression whenever and wherever it occurs. Indivisible peace implies that any unilateral use of force is unacceptable and cannot be justified since it affects the entire global community. Wars are illegitimate as no state has the unilateral rights to threaten global peace to further its interest. Hoffmann (1981) posited that the only time the use of force is legitimate is when a state is defending itself or for non-selfish multilateral purposes.

Collective Security employs a means of punishing any state or non-state actor that uses force as a political, economic, or socio-cultural instrument regardless of its merit. There is no distinction between a good and bad purpose for threatening global peace. Consequently, the aggressive state or non-state actor actions has no consequence for its objectives for the disturbance of public peace, but for violating the acceptable code of conduct. It does not matter if the aggressive state or non-state actor is either a dominant or weak entity; the principle remains upheld, as the threat to global peace is the same, even though the level of effect in global stability might be different (Ahmed 2021).

In Collective Security, all wars are the same within the context of the generic principle of Collective Security, and all states are encouraged to pursue collective security by mutual interests rather than selfish motivations. For the operational mechanism to work, any enforcement action sanctioned by the collective security body must involve at least one state who would not have acted if the system was not in place (Wolfers, 1962). The functional justification of the collective security system assumes that countries that are not a party to a particular dispute get involved in such disputes and, as such, can offer practical and unselfish support and resources to a victim state. Wolfers (1962), in support, buttressed that most countries will support a collective security system over its traditional security mechanism if there is an expectation of more robust security protection. The principle of indivisibility of peace opposes the concept of neutrality, as it is quite impossible to maintain a neutral position in conflict since all disputes should be of concern to all states as it threatens global peace. (Liska, 1962).

Why Regionalism?

Traditional International Relations theory holds that the global system is comprised of individual units that all possess the same power to affect systemic dynamics. It is for this reason that anarchy defines the relation among the units and that war is an ever-present

reality. However, this is no longer strictly the case and, since World War Two, an array of multilateral institutions has emerged and sought to reject the Clausewitzian notion that war is a continuation of politics. The underlying aim of these organisations has been the collaborative pursuit of rendering war an unappetizing mechanism for action within the international system (Ahmed 2021). Furthermore, a significant trend in the development of multilateral and intergovernmental groupings over the past five decades is that they have been initiated and conceptualised at a regional level. Security interdependence is more intense on a regional scale than it is on a global scale. This is grounded in the fact that the majority of the world's 193 sovereign states generally lack the ability to project power much beyond their own regional sphere. It is for this reason that the regional level, as a distinct level of analysis between the national and international level, has become progressively significant and has emerged as one of the key perspectives through which to view the post-Cold War security environment (Shardam, 2021).

The importance of theorising about the regional level “is made necessary by the argument that regions are not just micro-versions of the global system” but that these two levels are innately different and incorporate their own dynamics. Regions are not strictly “natural, objective and ontologically given spaces. Instead, regions are spatial and temporal constructs contingent on a variety of interests and agendas.” The regional level is bound within a historical and geographical context and thus the elements of proximity and familiarity intensify the nature of interactions between actors within regional groupings. While the materialist elements of defining regional parameters are crucial, this does not mean that the region is necessarily fixed as a permanent subsystem. It is important to note that regions are not impermeable and, unlike the global-level system which is inherently closed, the regional system can change as “even regions that seem most natural and inalterable are products of political reconstruction and subject to reconstruction attempts.” (Ahmed, 2021).

The regional level of security has become increasingly autonomous based on two foundational assumptions; first, that territoriality is still a central feature of international security dynamics and, second, that in the post-Cold War era the regional level is a necessary feature of any coherent analysis of international security. The latter may be illustrated by the rise of multilateral institutions in regional settings as regionalism has become an increasingly popular means of organising comprehensive security mechanisms for many actors. As noted previously, and as the logic that links the previous two assumptions, “most types of threats travel more easily over short distances than long ones.” Consequently, regionally coherent security subsystems “stem from the simple mechanism by which threats, particularly political and military ones, are most strongly felt when they are at close range.” (Moller, 2000).

As a result, certain security threats tend to be regionally localized and become so intertwined that they cannot, for the most part, be wholly resolved or analysed in the absence of considering the other units that exist within the dynamics of the complex. It is for this reason that the central idea remains that substantial parts of the securitization and de-securitization processes in the international system will manifest themselves in regional clusters and that these clusters are both durable and distinct from global level processes (Afolabi, 2009). This reality has facilitated the acknowledgement of security interdependence for many governments and has been the key driving force behind regional projects.

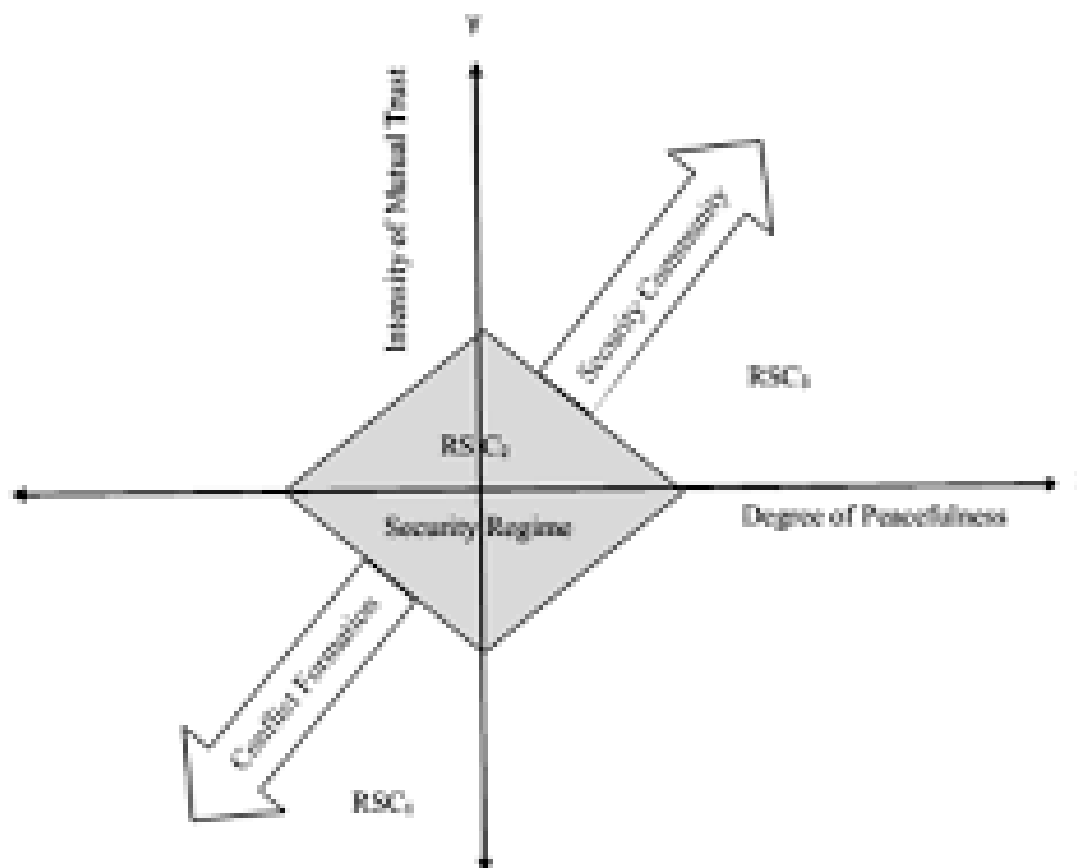
Regional Security Complex Theory – A Framework of Analysis

This paper is anchored on the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver in 1983. The theory was modified in 1998 and 2003. The latest version of the theory is much less state-centric and in tune with the post-Cold War notion of security and regional security complexes (Buzan, 2003). In their work, "Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security (2003)", they argued that international security should be examined from a regional perspective. They also posited that the relationship between states and other actors within the international system reveals regular and geographically clustered patterns. Thus, regional security complex, as a term coined by Buzan and Weaver, describes such structures or "sets of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization or both are so inter-linked that their security problems cannot be reasonably analyzed or resolved apart from one another" (Buzan & Weaver, 2003; Buzan, 1991 p.188). They are defined by durable (but not permanent) patterns of amity and enmity, taking the form of sub-global, geographically coherent patterns of security interdependence (Wapmuk, 2021).

The RSC theory is hinged on the interdependence among the key national security interests of a geographically compact group of states. The intrinsic interdependence of the security of states under the RSC theory is generated in several dimensions, such as common and conflicting interests, interdependent behaviours, and interconnected perceptions. The major elements at the basis of any RSC are three sets of dichotomies, in addition to power distribution among actors: anarchy versus integration (polarity), amity versus enmity (relations among units), and securitization versus de-securitization (processes of threat construction). The security complexes represent the way in which the sphere of concern that any state has about its environment, interacts with the linkage between the intensity of military and political threats, and the shortness of the range over which they are perceived. Because threats operate more potently over short distances, security interactions with neighbours will tend to have first priority. The relations within RSC are determined not only by the geographic proximity of the states involved. It is also determined by the anarchic nature of the international political system (Wapmuk, 2021). The mutual perception of amity/enmity is the key to the dynamics of the security relations within RSC. Buzan (2003) also affirmed that "regional security subsystems can be seen in terms of patterns of amity and enmity that are substantially confined within some particular geographical area." The RSC theory offers various types and forms of regional complexes: The general typology distinguishes between standard and centred RSC.

In the standard RSC, which has a relatively balanced power structure, the participants are more autonomous when it comes to establishing bilateral relations. In the centred RSC, on the other hand, these relations are de facto regulated by the central actor either with the help of the classical use of force or through institutional mechanisms, while the participants remain de jure independent. In the centred RSC, the dynamics of security relations are determined by one power found in its centre. The proponents go on to identify three forms, depending on the specifics of the central actor, of this type: centred on a great power Russia in the post-Soviet space; on a superpower the United States in North America; and, finally, on an institution (institutional RSC) the European Union. Both types (standard and centred) are anarchic albeit to different degrees (UK Essays 2018).

The Internal Dynamics of a Regional Security Complex



Source: Safal, (2018).

One of the key theoretical approaches for analyzing the structure of international security in the post-Cold War era has been from the regionalist perspective. As groupings of contiguous states rooted within shared historical and geographical mapping, the security interdependence of regions is particularly intense given the fact that threats, whether political or military are more threatening when at close range (Buzan 1991). It is on this note and the centrality of regions to world politics that Barry Buzan developed a conceptual framework to explain the unique dynamics that occur at regional level and institute an analysis of the regional level as a subsystem with distinct features that is durable and independent of the global level spectacle. RSCT like neorealism places its central 13 arguments on security with a much widened scope of analysis that incorporates a wide range of sectors- economic, societal and environmental as important facets of security. It also has the security interdependence driven by either amity or enmity cuts across a spectrum in the internal dynamics of a security complex.

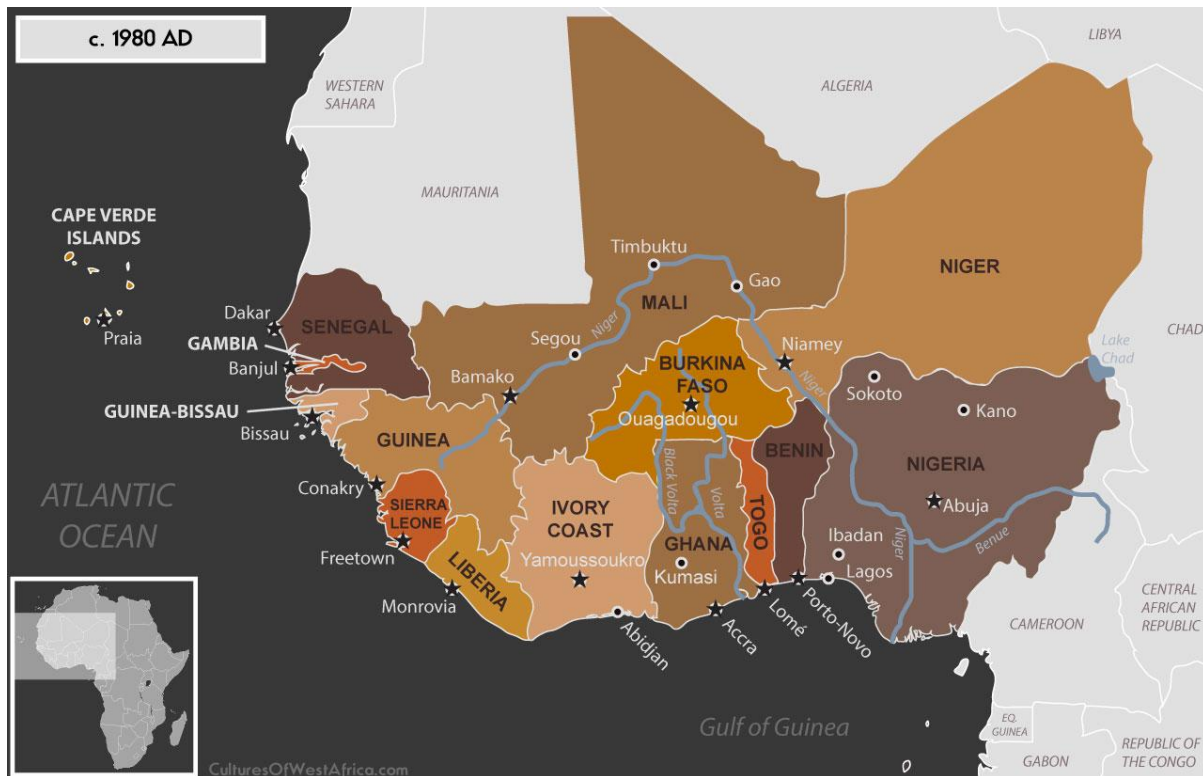
At the negative end lies conflict formation, where interdependence is borne out of fear, rivalry and mutual perceptions of threats to coexistence of states. At the middle lie

security regimes, where states attempt to reduce the tension and security dilemma among them tendency of referring to units rather than states and acknowledges the important roles of agencies other than the state in safeguarding security (UK Essays, 2018). Due to the fact that most threats have the tendency to circulate within a short time over a specified geographical location, security interdependence is thus regionally based clusters called security complexes. Thus, it is presumed that it is at the regional level that an interplay between national and global security occurs and the interaction between these levels must be understood independently. Buzan and Weaver based their analysis about security and defence on the prism that indeed, geographical proximity breeds common interests between countries, and that geography plays an important role in international relations dynamics from which comprehending the dynamics of security and defense in the post-Cold War era is difficult without considering regionalization (Stone, 2009).

The rationale behind the RSCT is to explain why states cooperate and reciprocate in their relations with one another. As postulated by its proponents, the RSCT emanated either from the anarchical relations that exists among states and urge for balance of power, or from the pressures that arises due to geographical proximities (Cardoso, 2010). In particular, the RSCT sets to evaluate the relative balance of power of and mutual relationship between regionalization and globalizing trends, and its central idea is that since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 56). Therefore, the theoretical foundation for regional security complex is premised on the assumption that a group of states must possess a greater degree of security interdependence which is sufficient both to establish them as a linked set and to differentiate them from surrounding security regions (Buzan and Weaver, 2003). The basic criteria of membership in an RSC as outlined by Buzan et. al (1998: 15) are: (a) They are composed of two or more states; (b) These states constitute a geographically coherent group; (c) The relationship among these states was marked by security interdependence which had to be significantly stronger among them than others; (d) The patterns of security interdependence had to be deep and durable although not permanent.

More so, as buttressed by Fuccille and Rezende (2013), the theory aims at making a distinction between the interaction level of the great powers, which are capable to transmit their power through long distances, and the smaller ones. The smaller powers in this context refer to —those powers whose power transmission capability and whose security dynamics remain restricted to the region in which they are inserted. The RSCT has emerged to offer a practical framework for security analysis by prioritizing a lower level of analysis (regional level) more than other abstract systemic theories. It also incorporates a social construction in its approach and has the potential for accommodating change in security dynamics and structures in the international system (Soltani et. al, 2014). Although the RSCT takes into account the anarchical structure of the international system that projects the toggle for power and security capabilities by states even at the detriment of others, RSCT also recognizes the character of a RSC as being defined by independent variables such as the distribution of power and patterns of amity and enmity within the geographic security interdependence of states (Buzan and Weaver, 2003: 49).

The West African Region in Perspective



Source: Maps of the world. <https://www.mapsofworld.com/africa/regions/western-africamap.html> (Accessed 20th June 2021)

The West African region is made up of 16 states namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. These countries, with the exception of Mauritania, which opted out are members of the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that was established on May 28, 1975 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2012). The history of West Africa is a series of conflicts: Most of the states have seen civil wars (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Nigeria), coups d'état (Gambia, Niger, Guinea, Nigeria) as well as ethnic and religious clashes (Benin, Nigeria, Mali) since gaining independence.

Moreover, poverty, political despotism, corruption and foreign interference have turned 'the dreams of an economically integrated and politically united West Africa into a living nightmare for most of its citizens' (Adebajo, 2002: 39). The complexity of the region of West Africa is typified by its "affluence and affliction" (Onuoha and Ezirim, 2013). West Africa is endowed with oil and gas, precious and strategic natural minerals, including gold, uranium, diamonds, and titanium and fertile land for agriculture. Despite its resource endowment, most West African countries are poor and confronted with different levels of security, governance and development challenges. Insecurity in West Africa often takes the form of conflicts between different ethnic, religious and communal groups for control of the state power, resources and influence. The expectations of the people that in post-colonial era, the leadership in West African states, will promote the good life remain a dashed hope. Many leaders have failed to strengthen national unity and would rather promote ethnic and religious



division to further their selfish interests. These are complicated by the porosity of national borders, the uncontrolled movement of violent non-state actors (VNSAs) and the proliferation of illegal arms and weapons (SALWs) that increases the risk of spill-overs from conflicts in neighbouring states. For example, in West Africa, the emergence of the Boko Haram has led to the escalation of violence in the North eastern part of the country, spreading to neighbouring countries, and leading to destruction of lives and properties including the kidnap of school children for ransom.

Similarly, cross-border crime is an enduring threat to the security and livelihoods of civilians. In the border areas of the Sahel, criminal gangs continue to endanger the lives of civilians. West Africa experienced multiple wars and a succession of conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Gulf of Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. These conflicts have not been restricted by state borders. The complexity and depth of ties between countries whose boundaries were drawn in an arbitrary fashion means that it is almost inevitable that conflict will spread other countries within the same region. In some cases, countries share the internal dimensions of a conflict and are therefore exposed to the same stresses. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, for example, deteriorating economic performance in the 1980s experienced under authoritarian governments resulted in decline in income, healthcare, education and productivity. In other cases, cross-border linkages and porous borders make neighbour states vulnerable to the bushfire effect of conflict events (N'Diaye 2011).

The transformation from inter-state to intra-state conflict from the latter part of the 20th Century in West Africa brought a number of its economies to near collapse. As a result, the sub-region's security environment has often been viewed as one that continues to be precarious and unstable. Although conflicts are not always violent, those that have plagued West Africa at community, state and regional levels have been characterized by violence (Afisi 2009: 59–66). For decades, countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau were crippled by conflicts and civil strife in which violence and incessant killings were prevalent (Afolabi 2009: 24). While violent conflicts are declining in the sub-region, recent insurgencies in the Sahel region affecting the West African countries of Mali, Niger and Mauritania sends alarming signals of the possible re-surfacing of internal and regional violent conflicts. More critical to add is the low intensity conflicts surging within notably stable countries such as the Casamance conflict in Senegal, the intermittent Dagbon chieftaincy crisis in Ghana and the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria to name a few (Olonisakin 2011). These conflicts have resulted in the 'destruction of lives and property, the internal displacement of people, a region-wide refugee crisis, poverty and disease, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, human and drug trafficking, illegal exploitation of natural resources and banditry' (Afolabi 2009: 25).

Nevertheless, over the years, states, the ECOWAS, Civil Society groups and the International Community have taken measures to resolve and end violent conflicts in the sub-region. Examples can be cited of ECOWAS' timely response to the violent civil wars that erupted in Liberia and Sierra Leone in 1989 and 1991 respectively through the deployment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) (Jaye et al 2011: 1–7). Despite these efforts which have achieved some appreciable success, the cradle of peace and stability in the sub-region remains brittle and the possibility of a resurgence of seemingly ended conflicts is high. The outbreak of violent conflicts and civil strife in West Africa has led to several actions and interventions played by different actors. These actors

include civil society organizations (CSOs), ECOWAS, the African Union (AU) and the international community.

At the sub-regional level, ECOWAS' involvement and efforts in addressing critical security challenges have achieved some noticeable success. In Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire, the deployment of peacekeepers through ECOMOG and the key mediatory role played by the sub-regional bloc helped salvage peace and stability, bringing an end to the violent conflicts (Olonisakin 2011). Additionally, the involvement of ECOWAS can be witnessed through its lead on the process of drafting and signing numerous peace agreements that resulted in the attainment of peace in several countries in the sub-region (Aning et al 2010). These include but are not limited to the Linas-Marcoussis, Accra II & III, and Pretoria Agreements on Côte d'Ivoire; the Accra, Cotonou and Abuja Peace Agreements on Liberia; and the Lomé Peace Agreement on Sierra Leone (Aning et al 2010). In terms of mediation, ECOWAS was involved in recent conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Guinea-Bissau to ensure that stability is restored. For instance, during the 2012 coups d'état in Mali and Guinea-Bissau, the ECOWAS Heads of State and Governments appointed H.E. Blaise Compoare of Burkina Faso and H.E. Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria as mediators for the respective countries (ECOWAS 2012). The ECOWAS has furthermore been collaborating with civil society organizations to implement its Early Warning Mechanism (ECOWARN) which seeks to prevent and monitor conflicts in the sub-region. For instance, for the past eight years since the operationalisation of ECOWARN, ECOWAS has been working with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) to monitor elections in Ghana, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Conakry and other countries on the continent (WANEP 2011). (ECOWAS 2008; ECOWAS 1999).

The efforts of civil society and women's groups within the sub-region cannot be ignored. Throughout the various violent conflicts and civil strife that West Africa has experienced, these groups have played a pivotal role in building lasting peace within communities and states. The initiatives of groups such as WANEP, West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI), Mano River Union Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), and Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), among others, have brokered peace and ended violent conflicts in West Africa. For example, to end the Liberian war WIPNET, through its advocacy campaign, 'We want peace, No More War' forced Charles Taylor and the warlords of the LURD to attend the peace talks in 2003 resulting in the signing of the Agreement on Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities on 17 June 2003 (Jones 2011: 165). In a similar action, an advocacy campaign by MARWOPNET in 2001 brought together the presidents of Liberia (Charles Taylor), Sierra Leone (TejanKabbah) and Guinea (Lansana Conte) for a peace talk (Jones 2011: 166). This action marked the first time the three leaders had come together to discuss insecurity and peacekeeping along their borders (Jones 2011: 166). Other regional civil society affiliated institutions, like the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Ghana (since its inception in 2003), have trained various military, police and civilians in conflict prevention and peacekeeping. The KAIPTC has also created avenues for dialogue among civil society groups and other regional bodies on peacekeeping, peacebuilding, mediation and negotiation, and post-conflict reconstruction.

At the continental and international level, the AU, UN and other bilateral and multilateral actors have taken several initiatives to support the consolidation of peace in West Africa. The African Union for example was instrumental in ending Côte d'Ivoire's post-electoral violence that occurred in 2010–2011. The continental body, among other initiatives, formed a five-member mediation group including Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga, Presidents Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Jacob Zuma (South Africa), Goodluck Jonathan (Nigeria) and Mohamed Ould Abdel (Mauritania) to broker peace

between the two disputing factions (GNA 2011). Also in response to the April 2012 coup d'état in Guinea-Bissau, the AU at its 318th Council meeting placed a ban on Guinea-Bissau from participating in any AU activities until constitutional order and peace was restored.

Beyond the borders of Africa, the UN and the European Union (EU) have also been key contributors to the consolidation of sustainable peace in West Africa. The UN for example has been deploying peacekeepers into violent conflict territories in West Africa for decades. Currently, the global body has peacekeeping missions in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and Liberia (UNMIL); however, its mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) ended in 2005 and was replaced with the UN Integrated Office for Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL). Through these peacekeeping activities, the UN helps protect civilians; disarm, demobilize and reintegrate ex-combatant; support post-conflict reconstruction processes; and establish peace and stable environment in these conflict zones. More recently, the global governance body has also been supporting ECOWAS in addressing the crisis in Mali and Guinea-Bissau. For instance, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for West Africa, Said Djinnit, participated in the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council meeting on Mali and Guinea-Bissau which took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on 19 May 2012.

In addition, the establishment of the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) in January 2002 has assisted the region to address, inter alia, issues of human rights abuse, election violence, cross-border insecurities, security sector reforms, drug trafficking and organized crimes as well as provide funding for the implementation of state and regional programmes. The EU on the other hand, have been, among other activities, funding and supporting election observation and monitoring programmes across the sub-region. Since 2000, it has deployed 78 Election Observation missions worldwide including missions to 10 West African countries - Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Ghana, Togo, Guinea Conakry, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Senegal. Through these missions, EU has been working with local communities and state institutions to monitor, prevent and resolve election-related violence in the sub-region.

Apart from the institutional reforms which are now putting ECOWAS on a much stronger footing, the West African region has benefitted immensely from the fruits of the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which compels political best practices in respect of presidential terms of office as well as the zero tolerance for unconstitutional seizure of power. Other laudable achievements of the ECOWAS are: the conclusion of the review of the Sahel Strategy document and its action plan to boost regional security; free Movement of goods and persons boosted with the adoption of the ECOWAS Biometric Identity Card to facilitate mobility and promote security in the region. Also, the Drafting of a Regional Border Management Manual for use in immigration/security training institutions in order to maintain and strengthen the actions undertaken to consolidate peace and security in the region. The regional peace and security architecture provide for conflict prevention, management and resolution, as well as early warning System.

The latter allows ECOWAS to analyse human security issues and anticipate political crises, food shortages, health problems and disasters. ECOWAS is now poised in the coming years to intensify efforts aimed at sustaining peace and political stability already achieved, in order to create the best conditions for the development of the region (ECOWAS, 2016).

Concluding Remarks

The paper examined the issues of collective security in relation to West Africa and the recurring threats of terrorism and insurgency. It also assesses the challenges of a regionalized

approach in the context of the ECOWAS. Taking into account the arguments put forward by the RSC theory, it argued that West Africa is confronted with a situation in which the security concerns of states are deeply interconnected to the point that one state's security needs cannot be realistically considered without taking into consideration the security needs of the other states. It notes the surge of security challenges, of which terrorism and insurgency have emerged as the most devastating in recent times. West Africa plays host to, and serves as theatre for, extremist groups and terrorist cells; conflicts, political instability, collapsed states and presence of rebel groups; and the vast Sahel region, with little or no law enforcement, which has become an "ungoverned space" and haven for terrorists and insurgents. Despite the signing and ratification of a number of joint and common policies in the areas of defence and security- some of which are also applicable to the fight against terrorism and insurgency, insecurity in the region has not abated. Apart from violence between and within countries, there are so many non-military threats to humans such as energy crisis, environmental pollution, diseases and sicknesses, poverty, pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). These non-military threats pose a serious threat within a country, a region, a continent, and the world at large.

Close to three decades of continuous existence, the ECOWAS project is a mixed grill of achievements, mis/fortunes and challenges. Several decisions and protocols have been endorsed relating to the progressive elimination of custom duties and charges; the abolition of quantitative and administrative restrictions on trade among the member-states; the establishment of common custom tariff and commercial policies; the removal of obstacles to the free movement of people, services, and capital; the harmonization of the economic and industrial policies of member states; the elimination of disparities in the level of developments; the harmonization of monetary policies; and the establishment of a fund for cooperation, compensation and development. Unfortunately, their observance have either been predominantly in the breach or in their implementation have faltered. Although it has failed to consummate some of its socio-economic mandates, in a twist of fate, the Community has been very successful in re/defining the parameters for political and security issues and relations within the sub-region, which was, for much of the 1990s, the theatre of prolonged armed conflicts, civil wars and complex humanitarian emergencies

The challenges facing collective security throughout the world are changing in their manifestations, and West Africa is not immune to these global challenges. In the past years, irregular migration, environmental degradation, and violent extremism were not threats to collective security in West Africa. However, today, these phenomena come with their associated threats not only to the ECOWAS Member States but also to the African continent at large. The various challenges faced by ECOWAS in the area of Collective Security have raised the questions of whether the Organisation has been able to sustain peace through its Collective Security Mechanism. ECOWAS interventions have promoted collective security in the sub-region. Though its achievements might not be laudable in comparison to other International Organisations like the United Nations and the European Union, its efforts in maintaining regional and global peace cannot be underemphasised.

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Brief bio-data of the Author

Dr Elizabeth Aishatu Bature is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science and Defence Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, Nigeria.

