

ECOWAS AND MILITARY GROUP (ECOMIG): FORCE TO RECKON WITH IN PEACE ENFORCEMENT AND STABILIZATION OPERATIONS IN WEST AFRICA: A CASE OF THE GAMBIA 2016-2017 POLITICAL CRISIS

Temitope Francis Abiodun (Ph.D)
Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria
Phone: +2348033843918

Oluwasolape Onafowora (Ph.D)
Department of Political Science
Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
Phone: +2348033655364

Adetunberu Oludotun (Ph.D)
Institute for Peace, Security and Governance
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria
Phone: +2347034198400

ABSTRACT

Efforts at minimizing the barrage of security problems in West African states still remains a serious challenge facing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and despite the forthright initiatives of the Organization in regional integration and maintenance of peace and security, incidents of violent conflicts appear persisting in various West African states. The bane of the study however, examines the effectiveness of the ECOWAS using its military group (ECOMIG) that was briefly put up in January, 2017 in maintaining peace and stable security in political crisis in the Gambia, a West African state. The theoretical framework employed for the study is elite theory. The study thoroughly examines roles of the ECOWAS and its military group (ECOMIG) in restoring peace and security in the Gambia

during and after the post-election crisis that rocked the state. A documentary research design is used for the study. Findings in the study indicate that: the ECOWAS and ECOMIG played significant roles in resolving the political crisis and reducing the spate of violent conflicts that could have engulfed the Gambia during the recent political crisis and West Africa at large; and for the ECOWAS to be truly effective in peace and security maintenance through its military tool (ECOMIG), efforts must be geared towards making member states comply with the Organization's directives; that it has to be fully ready to solve problems and; that it has a built-in ability to become an efficient player in peace and security maintenance in West Africa but faces unbending challenges which can only be decimated with extensive external support. The study concludes that the major challenge of the ECOWAS in maintaining regional integration with peace and security in West African region, is to prove that West Africans are capable of resolving their own inadequacies.

Keyword: ECOWAS, ECOMIG, Peace, Security, Post-Election Crisis, The Gambia, West Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was founded in 1975. The objective for the formation of ECOWAS was to champion trade and economic cooperation among member states and also facilitate the free movement of peoples, services, and capital (Chambas, 2007). Pursuant to the external threats to the Organization's peace and security in the Cold War era, the *Protocol on Non-Aggression* and the *Protocol on Mutual Assistance of Defence* was adopted in the years 1978 and 1981 respectively. The Community's effort of peaceful settlement of disputes among member states remained the ideology that engendered the 1978 Protocol, in reaffirming the prohibition of the use of force enshrined in Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter (Goodridge, 2006). The position of ECOWAS was informed by three considerations to adopt the security mechanism in the early years of its coming into being and they include: "One, the responsibility in maintaining regional peace and security; two, the aspiration of ECOWAS' leaders for security, stability, development and integration; and three, exploiting its collective powers for its own defence (www.ecowas.int).

However, the Protocol on the *Mutual Assistance on Defence* adopted in 1981 made provisions for a multinational ECOWAS defence force, and it pointed the need to provide mutual aid for defence against any external aggression or threat (ECOWAS PCASED, 1999). The desire to enhance regional security and the attempt to champion military cooperation in the Community was informed by the need to maintain the territorial integrity of the Community (Obi, 2009).

Besides, internal political crisis in member states during the post-Cold War era which resulted to civil conflicts made the Community to redefine its mission and objectives to include the management of violent conflicts among member states (Francis, 2009). This brought about the revision of the original treaty of ECOWAS in 1993 to include the new roles. The revised treaty, known as The Cotonou Treaty of 1993 gave birth to new mechanisms, with regard to issues of maintaining peace and security; and strengthening the existing Organization's institutions. In addition, a number of additional protocols were agreed upon and also ratified to have a more direct relationship with peace, security, governance and democracy and constitutional issues (www.ecowas.int).

These new protocols include the: *1999 Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security* and the *Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance* in the year 2001 which formed the framework for managing the sub-region's security and governance related matters (Obi, 2009). The new roles in maintaining peace and stable security among the West African states resulted in the establishment of a syndicate between security and development. The 1999 Protocol mandates ECOWAS, among other things, to deal with various threats posed to its peaceful co-existence and security. Also, the *2001 supplementary protocol* gives ECOWAS the oversight responsibility to intervene in member states and impose sanctions in case there is unconstitutional change of government and where there is evidence of massive violation of Human Rights in any member state (www.ecowas.int). Aside the humanitarian and the political conflicts that besiege the continent at large, the West African sub-region, in particular, has also been the scene of the various political instabilities aftermath the post-Cold War era. There are forceful change of government, sit-tight syndrome and post-election crisis in various West African states and Africa at large.

A number of factors led to the massive political change and instability in Africa (www.thoughtco.com). The failure of African elites and various governments to fulfill the various political pledges made to the people, structural adjustment and economic recovery programs that the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and other development partners of Africa initiated to rectify Africa's economic woes, most especially, Africa's debt crisis rocked democratic reforms across the continent. However, the growth in the number of unemployed and uneducated youth in the continent and calls for constitutional changes has positively impacted on the clamour for democratic reforms (Okolo, 1985). Eventually, Western nations and donor agencies made democratic reforms one of the conditionalities before rendering economic assistance to African states. The conditionality has nearly made numerous states in

West Africa to have undertaken some form of political transition to constitutional governments. Though the results appear mixed as many states such as: Botswana, Ghana, South Africa, Senegal, Cape Verde, Benin Republic, Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia have smoothly transitioned to multiparty rule. In the same vein, Nigeria, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Burkina Faso experienced civil imbroglios and other forms of political crisis before their transition to democratic rules (Osadolor, 2011).

A number of states in the West Africa still experience political crisis in form of: ethnocentrism, political violence, coup d'états, sit-tight syndrome on the part leaders and post-election crisis like it occurred recently in The Gambia (BBC News, 2017). This necessitated the ECOWAS military intervention. In the Gambia after Yahya Jammeh ceased power in a nonviolent coup in 1994, he was re-elected as President in 1996, after which he consolidated his hold on power. Jammeh was also re-elected in 2001, 2006, and 2011, though the elections fell far below international standards of free, fair and credible elections. After the defeat by his opponent, Adama Barrow, Jammeh accepted defeat and openly pledged to peacefully transfer power to the winner but days later, rejected the election results making excuses that there were electoral abnormalities (BBC News, 2017). This turn of events got total condemnation from the international community and ECOWAS. Therefore, ECOWAS, using its Protocols, took swift steps to restore democracy and stability in the country. After the initial attempts at mediation failed, the regional organization resulted to the threat of use of force. The role played by the Organization, in terms of consistency in resolving the political crises brought about this study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the study is elite theory. Elite theory is a theory that seeks to describe and explain power relationships in contemporary society. The theory is espoused in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Robert Michels (1876-1936) and Max Weber (1864-1920). The theory posits that a small minority, consisting of members of the economic elite and policy-planning networks, holds the most power – and this power is independent of democratic elections (Wikipedia, 2019). The basic characteristics of this theory are that power is concentrated, the elites are unified, the non-elites are diverse and powerless, elites' interests are unified due to common backgrounds and positions and the defining features of power is institutional position.

Pareto postulated that that in a society with truly unrestricted social mobility; elites are those most adept at using the two modes of political misrule, force and persuasion and enjoying

advantages of state health and connections (Pareto, 1923). It is submitted that even when entire groups are clearly and completely excluded from the state's traditional networks of power (historically, on the basis of arbitrary criteria such as nobility, race, gender or religion), elite theory recognizes the "counter-elites" frequently develop within such excluded groups (Wikipedia, 2018). However, negotiations between such disenfranchised groups and the state can be analyzed between elites and counter-elites. A major demerit, in turn, is the ability of elites to co-opt counter-elites.

The theory also opposes pluralism, a tradition that assumes that all individuals, or at least multitude of social groups have equal power and balance each other out in contributing to democratic political outcomes representing the emergent aggregate will of society (Loftin, 2017). Elite theory however, argues that either that democracy is a utopian folly, as it is traditionally viewed in the ousted Gambian government of Yahya Jammeh; this is true in the sense that the former president rules for decades, clamping down on all other oppositions, affirmation of a religion practice, sit-tight syndrome in leadership, embossment of personal image on the nation's currency notes and others in the state. Conceiving politics in this manner implies the valorization of power, an acceptance of the view that this perspective to politics that breeds political instability and violent conflicts in the West African, The Gambia (Hartmann, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design of this study is the documentary research design. The method of data collection is accordingly the documentary method of data collection. Both published and unpublished materials were utilized. The materials had to do with the activities of international organizations; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU); as such activities relate to conflict resolution. These materials, which included newspapers and unpublished academic works, were mainly sourced from public libraries. Internet sources, which in some instances also included official documents that were available on the internet and various speeches and interviews that are relevant to the study, as also available on the internet, were utilized for the study.

OVERVIEW OF THE GAMBIA AND THE 2016-2017 POLITICAL CRISIS

The Gambia

The Gambia is a unitary presidential republic and a small West African state, bounded by Senegal, with a narrow Atlantic coastline with Mandinka, Fula, Wolof Serer and Jola as national languages. The state is practicing Islam (at 96%), Christianity (3%) and African traditional

religions (at 1%) (Wikipedia, 2019). The Gambia is known for her diverse ecosystems around the central Gambia River. The country is blessed with abundant wildlife in its Kiang West National park and Bao Bolong Wetland Reserve which includes monkeys, leopards, hippos, hyenas and birds. The capital city of the country is Banjul and nearby Serekunda that offers access to beaches. The monetary currency of the Gambia is known as Gambian dalasi (Akwei, 2017).

The 2016/2017 Political Crisis

In the Gambia after Yahya Jammeh ceased power in a nonviolent coup in 1994, he was re-elected as President in 1996, after which he consolidated his hold on power. Jammeh was also re-elected in 2001, 2006, and 2011, though the elections fell far below international standards of free, fair and credible elections (Akwei, 2017). A constitutional crisis in the Gambia started after the presidential elections on 1 December 2016. Sequels to announcement of the election results, opposition supporters widely celebrated the surprise victory and were stunned by Jammeh's concession of defeat. Thousands of people celebrated in the streets of Banjul. However, some expressed caution about what Jammeh might do next – suggesting that he could still try to retain power despite what had happened. People have already known him to be a sit-tight leader who would never wish to relinquish power as they were not hopeful seeing him leave the state house. He still controlled the army at will and unilaterally (Paul, 2017).

A few days after the election, 19 opposition prisoners were released, among who are: Ousainou Darboe, also the leader of Barrow's United Democratic Party, Darboe, who had been arrested in April 2016 and sentenced to three years in prison, and whose arrest led to Barrow's candidacy. Interviewed shortly after the election, Barrow thanked the Gambian people, including those outside the country, and appealed to them to put aside their differences and work together for the development of the Gambia (BBC News, 2017). He made it known to the citizenry that he knew they (Gambians) Gambians were in hurry but not everything was going to be achieved in one day. I would therefore appeal to all Gambians and friends of the Gambia to join us and help move this great country forward. I don't want this change of regime to be a mere change. I want it to be felt and seen in the wellbeing of the country and all Gambians. So we are calling on all Gambians and friends of the Gambia to help us make the Gambia great again (The Punch, 2017).

Yahya Jammeh's main political opponent, Adama Barrow submitted in his early priorities which include helping the agricultural sector and the mineral resources in the country would be

fully harnessed. About his plans for judicial reform, he planned to bring up a free and independent judiciary whereby nobody can influence the judiciary. And as well put laws in place to protect those people running the judiciary. Barrow also pledged adequate job security and to reduce the powers of the President respectively (The vanguard, 2017).

Outright Rejection of Election Results by Yahya Jammeh

On 9 December 2016, Jammeh appeared on Gambian State Television to announce that he had decided to reject the outcome of the recent election due to what he termed to be serious and unacceptable abnormalities during the electoral process (The Vanguard, 2017). He vowed that a new election would be held under "a god-fearing and independent electoral commission". In total dismay of the Gambians, the military of the Gambia was deployed in key locations in Banjul, the capital on 10 December, 2016, and set up sandbagged positions with machine guns, searching the citizenry through the checkpoints (Akwei, 2017). Troops were also deployed in Serekunda, the Gambia's largest city. The Guardian's African correspondent speculated that the prospect of prosecution under a new government might have led security and military leaders to back Jammeh. An attempt by (ECOWAS) Chair and President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to negotiate a resolution to the dispute failed when Sirleaf's plane was not allowed to enter the country (Wikipedia, 2019).

Jammeh's party, the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), said it would follow up Jammeh's statement by petitioning the Supreme Court to invalidate the election results, meeting a 10-day deadline established by law for contesting an election (Reuters, 2017). There is currently a Chief Justice of the Gambia, but there has not been an active Supreme Court in the country for a year and a half (since May 2015), and it was thought that at least four additional judges would have to be appointed in order for the Supreme Court to convene to hear the case. According to human rights groups interviewed by Reuters (2017), Jammeh wields considerable influence over the courts. Of the three Chief Justices between 2013 and 2015, one was jailed; another was dismissed, while the third fled the country after acquitting someone whom Jammeh had wanted to be convicted. Alieu Momarr Njai, the head of the elections commission, said that if it went to court, they would be able to show that the final tally was correct (The Punch, 2017).

On 13 December security forces took over the offices of the election commission and prevented the Chief of the Electoral Commission and its staff entering the building. The APRC submitted its appeal seeking the invalidation of the results (Paul, 2017). Meanwhile, the four regional leaders sent by ECOWAS met with Jammeh but left without an agreement. The military ceased its occupation of the electoral commission's offices in late December and the government said

that its staff was free to return to work. It said that the occupation was intended to prevent an attack on the building. It also called for calm and said that daily life should continue as usual. In his 2017 New Year address, Jammeh furiously criticized the position taken by ECOWAS, saying that it was totally illegal as it violates the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states and is in effect a declaration of war and an insult to our constitution". He vowed that he was ready to defend this country against any aggression and there will be no compromise (BBC News, 2017).

Domestic Reactions that Trailed the Yahya Jammeh's Actions

On the same day as Jammeh's rejection of the results, Barrow said that Jammeh did not have the constitutional authority to nullify the vote and call for new elections, arguing that only the Independent Electoral Commission could do that (Paul, 2017). Barrow said he had moved to a safe house for protection. According to supporters protecting Barrow's residence, the police and military of the Gambia had declined to protect the President-Elect. The third candidate in the election, Mamma Kandeh, also called on Jammeh to step down, telling him his swift decision earlier to concede defeat and the subsequent move to call Adama Barrow to congratulate him was lauded throughout the world. We therefore prevail on you to reconsider your decision (Loftin, 2017).

On 12 December, 2016, the Gambia Bar Association held an emergency meeting. They called Jammeh's rejection of the election results "tantamount to treason" and passed a unanimous resolution calling for the resignation of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Nigerian judge Emmanuel Oluwasegun Fagbenle, for gross misconduct, saying he had shown a lack of independence and impartiality by campaigning for Jammeh and inappropriately interfering with decisions made by judicial officials (Akwei, 2017). The Gambia Teachers' Union also called Jammeh's action a recipe for chaos and disorder which could undoubtedly endanger the lives of all Gambians. The Gambia Press Union, the University of the Gambia, and the country's medical and Supreme Islamic Council also supported the view that Jammeh should step aside and allow Barrow to assume the presidency (The Gambia Union of Teachers Report, 2018). On 20 December, twelve (12) serving Gambian Ambassadors sent a congratulatory letter to Adama Barrow and called on Yahya Jammeh to step down from power. In his response, Jammeh's new Information Minister, Seedy Njie said on 10 January 2017 that the twelve (12) ambassadors had all been fired and relieved of their appointments (ibid).

On 10 January, the date on which the Supreme Court was scheduled to hear the APRC's appeal of the election results, Chief Justice Emmanuel Fagbenle said the foreign judges that had been

appointed to hear the case would only be available in May or November, so the hearing of the case needed to be delayed for several months (www.independent.co.uk). Fagbenle said "We can only hear this matter when we have a full bench of the Supreme Court", and officially adjourned the session until 16 January. Onogeme Uduma, a Nigerian who was intended to act as the president of the court, was reported to be unavailable until May. It was also reported that one of Jammeh's top ministers, Sherriff Bojang, had resigned in protest over Jammeh's refusal to accept defeat, although state television reported that Bojang had been sacked (www.independent.co.uk).

Fagbenle suggested that mediation would be the best way forward to resolve the impasse. However, Jammeh appeared on state television and declared that he will stay in office "to ensure the rule of law is upheld" until the Supreme Court makes a decision on his appeal, which is not expected until at least May 2017 ((Tim, Emma, and Carley, 2017)). He slammed the stances of the United Nations, the African Union, and ECOWAS as foreign interference in The Gambia's affairs. Yahya Jammeh filed a request for an injunction trying to prevent Chief Justice Fagbenle from swearing in Barrow as president. However, Fagbenle said he would not consider the new case, as the planned injunction if pronounced, would affect himself in his own capacity as the Chief Justice of the Gambia. Justice Fagbenle eventually recused himself from hearing the case. In the same vein, a lawyer for Jammeh's party later conceded that obtaining such an injunction to prevent Adama Barrow from being sworn in would not be possible at that stage any longer (Tim, Emma, and Carley, 2017).

Crackdown on Media by Yahya Jammeh's Military Junta

On 1 and 2 January 2017, three private radio stations, Taranga FM, Hilltop Radio, and Afri Radio, were all shut down indefinitely under orders from the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) (Loftin, 2017). However, on 3 January, 2017, Mr. Alieu Momar Njai, the Head of the Electoral Commission, left the Gambia and went into hiding due to concerns about his own safety (Tim et al, 2017). In a New Year message, Chief of Defence Staff, Ousman Bargie affirmed that Yahya Jammeh had the unflinching loyalty and support of the Gambia Armed Forces. The National Assembly of the Gambia approved the state of emergency along with a resolution denouncing foreign interference and an extension of its own term, due to end in April, 2017 by extra three (3) months. It then approved an extension of Yahya Jammeh's term for three months (Tim et al, 2017).

ECOWAS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS' ROLES IN MAINTENANCE OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE GAMBIA

Yahya Jammeh's action was condemned by the governments of the US, Senegal and other states in the global community. The African Union (AU) also declared that Jammeh's actions were null and void (Paul, 2017). After Senegal called for an emergency United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting, the UNSC declared in a unanimous decision that Yahya Jammeh must peacefully hand over power to the rightful winner of the election (Paul, 2017). However, it later was deliberated that a powerful delegation of four West African Heads of State planned proceeding to The Gambia on 13 December, 2016 in a bid to persuade the defeated Yahya Jammeh to accept the results of the election and step down (UN Affairs, 2018). The delegation included the President of Liberia and the then Chair of ECOWAS, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf; the Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari; the then (outgoing) President of Ghana, John Mahama, and the Sierra Leonean President, Ernest Bai Koroma. In the same vein, the African Union (AU) scheduled to send a negotiating delegation to The Gambia, to be led by the Chadian President and Chairman of the African Union (AU), Idriss Deby (Paul, 2017).

In the same vein, Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, issued a statement saying that the European Union had also requested Yahya Jammeh to respect the outcome of the election and step down, and any attempt to reverse the decision, carries the risk of serious consequences (UN Affairs, 2018). Accordingly on 14 December, United Nations (UN) officials roared that Yahya Jammeh would not be allowed to remain the President of the Gambia and would be made face strong sanctions if he continued trying to do so after his term expired. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the United Nations Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel argued that, for Mr. Jammeh, the end was here and under no circumstances could he continue to be president and he would be required to hand over to Mr. Barrow (UN Affairs, 2018). When asked whether the U.N. would consider military action to force Jammeh's departure, Chambas did not rule out the possibility. In the same vein, Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, out rightly condemned that the refusal to accept the election results was an outrageous act of disrespect of the will of the Gambian people.

In its reactions on 16 December, 2016, ECOWAS issued a statement saying that the President-Elect, Adama Barrow must be sworn in, in order to respect the will of the Gambian people, and that the Organization shall undertake all necessary actions to enforce the result of the election. In pursuant of this mandate, ECOWAS appointed the Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari as its Chief mediator for the dispute, and also appointed John Mahama, Ghana's President, as Co-mediator (UN Affairs, 2018). The matter, on 19 December, 2016 got attention of the African Union (AU) with expression of full support to the position taken by

ECOWAS. This is evident when Mr. Idriss Déby, Chairman of the AU, called ECOWAS's position a principled stand with regards to the situation in The Gambia.

But despite pressure from regional leaders, Yahya Jammeh, while speaking on television on the evening of 20 December, that year vowed he would not leave office at the end of his term in January, 2017 unless the Supreme Court of the Gambia upheld the results (Loftin, 2017). He again insisted that a new election was necessary: and he would never accept being cheated. Yahya vowed that justice must be done and the only way justice could be done was to reorganize another election so that every Gambian would re-cast his/her vote. Roaring a defiant tone, he rejected and condemned any foreign interference and declared he was prepared to fight (UN Affairs, 2018).

Moved by the terrible situations in the Gambia, the ECOWAS, on 23 December, 2016, announced that they would send in troops if Yahya Jammeh failed to step down. The President of the ECOWAS Commission, Marcel Alain de Souza, vowed that the deadline was January 19, 2017 when the mandate of Jammeh would end. The military intervention would be led by Senegal. The ECOWAS submitted that if Yahya Jammeh did not step down, a force was already on alert, and the force would intervene to restore the will of the people (BBC News, 2017).

ECOWAS AND ITS MILITARY TROOPS (ECOMIG) IN RESTORATION OF PEACE AND STABILIZATION OPERATIONS IN THE GAMBIA

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in January, 2017 briefly set up its military troops (ECOMIG) that was composed of the troops from Senegal, Nigeria and Ghana and decided to intervene militarily in the Gambian constitutional crisis that occurred as a result of Gambian President Yahya Jammeh refusing to step down after losing the December 2016 Presidential Election, and the Organization set 19 January 2017 as the date the troops would move into the Gambia if Jammeh continued to refuse to step down (The Punch, 2017). The operation was codenamed *Operation Restore Democracy*. ECOWAS forces were amassed around the borders of the Gambia, and Mr. Marcel Alain de Souza, the President of ECOWAS, in his statement submitted that by land, sea and air, Gambia had been surrounded. It was made known that a total of 7,000 military men would participate in the mission to restore democracy in the Gambia whereby in contrast, the entire armed forces of the Gambia was just numbered only about 2,500 troops (Akwei, 2017).

Despite the lack of endorsement of military action by the UNSC, Senegalese armed forces entered the Gambia on the same day, along with some forces from Ghana, with air and sea support from the Air Force and Navy of Nigeria. Gambia was placed under a naval blockade

(Burke, 2017). In the early hours of the offensive, clashes took place near the border village of Kanilai, the home town of Yahya Jammeh, between Senegalese and pro-Jammeh MFDC forces, and Senegal reportedly took control of the village. Senegal halted its offensive in order to provide a final chance to mediate the crisis, with the invasion planned to proceed at noon on 20 January if Jammeh still refused to relinquish power (Hartmann, 2017).

According to a statement given by the United Nations Refugee Agency on 20 January based on estimates provided by the government of Senegal, around 45,000 people had been displaced and had fled to Senegal, and at least 800 more people had fled to Guinea-Bissau (Amnesty International, 2017). More than 75% of the displaced people arriving in Senegal were children, with the remainder being mostly women. Jammeh, however, refused to step down even after the deadline passed. The deadline was extended to 16:00 GMT which too he missed. Mauritania's President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, President of Guinea Alpha Condé and United Nations' regional chief Mohammed Ibn Chambas tried to persuade him to step down. Gambia's Army Chief, General Ousman Badjie meanwhile pledged allegiance to Mr. Adama Barrow and stated that the Gambian Army would not fight ECOWAS (Burke, 2017). Adama Barrow and a Senegalese official later stated that Jammeh had agreed to step down. Diplomats meanwhile stated that Senegalese troops would remain deployed at the border in case he reneged on the deal. A deal was later announced for him to leave the country for exile, and a short time later he announced on state television that he was stepping down. After he went into exile on 21 January, 2017 (initially going to Guinea and then to Equatorial Guinea), ECOWAS announced that about 4,000 of its troops would remain stationed in the country for ensuring security (Amnesty International, 2016).

Inauguration of Barrow as President of the Gambia

As a result of the intervention, Yahya Jammeh was forced to step down and he went into exile two days after the initial military incursion. After his departure, about 4,000 ECOWAS troops were positioned at strategic location in the Gambia to maintain order in preparation for Adama Barrow's return and to consolidate his presidency (Hartmann, 2017). Five days later, Mr. Adama Barrow returned to the Gambia. In a grand style, Mr. Adama Barrow, who had been staying in Senegal due to fear for his safety in the Gambia, was sworn in as President in the Gambian Embassy in Dakar, Senegal on 19 January, 2017. Immediately President Adama Barrow was sworn in, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously approved UNSC Resolution 2337 on the same day, which expressed support for ECOWAS efforts to negotiate the transition of the presidency, but requested the use of political means in the first instance without endorsing military action (Connolly, 2018). And if we take a critical

look at the personal backgrounds of those West African leaders who tried to convince Yahya Jammeh to step down, it is conspicuous that few of them felt solidarity with the former Gambian leader. Most of them got elected as Presidents when contested as opponents against their incumbents via a functioning electoral process and strong regional democratic reforms (Abatan and Yolanda, 2016).

Despite the lack of endorsement of military action by the UNSC, Senegalese armed forces entered the Gambia on the same day, along with some forces from Ghana, with air and sea support from the Air Force and Navy of Nigeria. Gambia was placed under a naval blockade (Connolly, 2018). In the early hours of the offensive, clashes took place near the border village of Kanilai, the home town of Yahya Jammeh, between Senegalese and pro-Jammeh MFDC forces, and Senegal reportedly took control of the village. Senegal halted its offensive in order to provide a final chance to mediate the crisis, with the invasion planned to proceed at noon on 20 January if Jammeh still refused to relinquish power. On 26 January, 2017, President Adama Barrow returned to the Gambia, while about 2,500 ECOWAS troops remained in the country to stabilize it. He eventually requested the troops to remain in the country for an additional six months (Hartmann, 2017).

Recommendations

The study came up with recommendations to make ECOWAS and ECOMIG more relevant as follows:

- i. The ECOWAS with its military group (ECOMIG) has indeed put in commendable mediatory efforts into resolving political disputes and reducing the number of violent conflicts that could have engulfed the Gambia. The Group must be regularly well-coordinated, financed and empowered in order not to derail in its future operations.
- ii. For the ECOWAS to be truly effective in maintenance of peace and security, it must be able to make the member states comply with its decisions in the region.
- iii. The ECOWAS has to develop and equip its military unit, ECOMIG to braze up for more future security challenges in West Africa.
- iv. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should develop an in-built ability to become an efficient player in peace and security maintenance in the region and Africa at large.
- v. The ECOWAS needs to brazen up the more to suppress various constraints being faced with in order to overcome security threats among member states.
- vi. Efforts should be geared towards other international organizations like UN, AU, EU and others for instant ratifications of its planned peace and security maintenance

operations in West Africa when the need arises.

Conclusion

This study has examined the pervasiveness of conflicts in human relations, the spread of such conflicts in West Africa, and the role of the ECOWAS and its military group (ECOMIG) played in the resolution of such political crisis in the Gambia. And if we take a critical look at the personal backgrounds of those West African leaders who tried to convince Yahya Jammeh to step down, it is conspicuous that few of them felt solidarity with the former Gambian leader. Most of them got elected as Presidents when contested as opponents against their incumbents via a functioning electoral process and strong regional democratic reforms. Finally, it is concluded from this study that the greatest challenge of the ECOWAS in peace and conflict maintenance in West Africa, is to prove that Africans are even capable and ready to solve their own problem.

References

- Abatan, E. and Yolanda, S. (2016). African Solutions to African Problems? The AU, R2P and Cote di Vioire, in: *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 23, 1, 21-38
- Akwei, I. (2017). "ECOWAS issued an Order for Military Intervention in The Gambia to oust President Yahya Jammeh at the stroke of midnight": retrieved from www.africanews.orgBBC News, 5 June, 2017
- Burke, J. (2017). Exiled Former President Yahya Jammeh "stole \$11.4m" from The Gambia, in: *The Guardian*, 23 January, 2017
- Chambas, M.I. (2007). The Role of ECOWAS in Achieving the Economic Integration of West Africa
ECOWAS Plan of Action for the Implementation of programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED), March 1999.
- Francis, D.J. (2009). Peacekeeping in a Bad Neighbourhood: The ECOWAS in Peace and Security in West Africa. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*
- Goodridge, R.B. (2006). The ECOWAS in Economic Integration of West African Nations: A Synthesis for Sustainable Development. International MBA Thesis, National Chen Chi University
- Hartmann, C. (2017): ECOWAS and the Restoration of Democracy in The Gambia. In *Africa Spectrum*. ISSN:1868-6869
- Obi, C. I. (2009). ECOWAS on the Ground campaigning Peacekeeping in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Cote di voire. *African Security Review*, 2.2-3.

- Okolo, J.E. (1985). "Integrative and Cooperative Regionalism: The ECOWAS International Organisation. 39.1. 121-03
- Osadolor, O.B. (2011). The Evolution of Policy on Security and Defence in ECOWAS, 1978-2008. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*.
- Paul, D. W. (2017). A New African Model of Coercion? Assessing the ECOWAS Mission. Retrieved from: www.the-globalobservatory.org
- Simon, C. (2017)" The Gambia State of Emergency and What It Means for tourists: all questions answered" The UK Independent News, 19 January, 2017.
- Tim, C., Emma, F. and Carley, P. (2017) "Gambian Yahya Jammeh finally agrees to give up power and go into exile". UK Independent News paper
- Simon, C. (2017)" The Gambia State of Emergency and What It Means for tourists: all questions answered" The UK Independent News, 19 January, 2017.

www.ecowas.int

www.independent.co.uk

© GSJ