

Admission of Morocco into ECOWAS: Implications for Nigeria's National Interests, ECOWAS, and EU.

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the theoretical constructs under which the Moroccan membership within the ECOWAS demonstrates and poses tension, rivalries, leadership supremacy and challenges in the West African region. The puzzle in the context of this paper is to offer theoretical views and examination of key concepts, such as national interests, and foreign policy that are critical to the perspectives of the dynamics of state actors in the international system and how these are relevant to the Moroccan foreign policy in ECOWAS, Nigerian national interests and the European Union (EU).

Keywords: Hegemony, Leadership supremacy, Migration, National interests, Regional power, Strategic interests.

Introduction

After thirty-three years of absence from the OAU, following the formal recognition by that body of Western Sahara (Daily Trust, 2017), the Kingdom of Morocco, was readmitted into its successor, the African Union, on the 30th January 2017, and subsequently formally submitted its application to join the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) during the 51st Ordinary Session of its Heads of State and Government, held in Monrovia, Liberia, on the 4th June 2017 (Fabiani, 2018; Fafowora, 2017; Abati, 2018). At this meeting, the Heads of State decided to grant the Moroccan application for ECOWAS membership in principle (Odinkalu, 2017). Morocco had strong economic and political reasons for ECOWAS

membership, as it aimed to strengthen and consolidate multidimensional forms of cooperation between the Kingdom and the ECOWAS (Khattabi, Hidaya and Karim 2018: 105), as well as consolidating its strong economic ties with the EU (Naji, 2017). This paper aims to investigate the strategic implications of the recent admission of Morocco into ECOWAS, Nigerian national interests, and the European Union.

To proceed, this paper makes use of a neo-realist and liberal internationalist theories to investigate the condition under which different states in the state-system are pursuing their national interests, and how these interpretations validate the implications of the Moroccan membership in ECOWAS, the EU/Moroccan relations, and the Nigerian national interest in the West African sub-region.

Theoretical Clarifications

Structural Realism (Neo-Realism) and the International System

Waltz argued that the international system as the third image of the international political system is inherently conflictual and anarchical. The international system constitutes the basic unit of analysis of state behaviour within the system. The state also constitutes the basic black box in the international system in which internal or domestic factors such as the role of individual and social actors affect foreign policy outcomes (Dougherty and Robert, 2001: 64). The structure of the international environment affects all foreign policy decisions and the distribution of material capability (Lamy, 2008: 126). As previously pointed out by the classical realists, the causes of war or conflicts among states in the international system may be attributed to human nature, Waltz argued that the causes of war among the states within the system could be found in the state system and not the nature of man (Waltz, 1995: 6). Keohane and Nye supported Waltz's arguments that there are three basic assumptions which define states' behaviour in the systemic level. First, states are predominant actors and they behave as coherent units within the anarchical system; second, that force is a usable and effective strategy and instrument of foreign policy; third, the "*high politics*" of military security dominates the "*low politics*" of economic and social interactions amongst state actors in the international system (Keohane and Nye, 1987: 310).

Based on this view, Waltz noted that the use of force and violence characterises the relations between states in the systemic level. All statesmen depend on the effective use of the military instrument and capability to pursue their national interests, and the recurrent use of force and threats of violence differentiate the systemic structure from national politics (Waltz,

1979: 102). The lack of an overarching or sovereign body to regulate states' behaviour in the international system usually leads to anarchy. Given this, the state, as its own judge inevitably rely on and make use of violence or threats of violence to implement its policies (Waltz, 1959: 160). Ultimately, this often leads to a security dilemma between states in the system (Viotti and Kauppi, 1987: 49). Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler argued that the anarchic environment where no central political authority operates to check the behaviour of states leads to a condition of permanent insecurity amongst different states (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 2). Charles Glaser notes that in the international system, states protect their own interests and not the interests of other states if the adversary is capable of having its security reduced. In such a structure, the rival's response will, in turn, curtail the state's security (Glaser, 1997: 174).

Applying this to international power politics, the Hobbesian postulation says that, given the anarchy, misperceptions, and uncertainty of individual actors' strategic motives, security-seeking states will inherently and strategically pursue hostile policies leading to conflicts and war. The urge of security would motivate the conflicts between two states, a defensive consideration, not aggression (Kydd, 2005: 13), hence a perpetual security dilemma emerges as the main feature of the state system, where the stronger states advance their interests at the expense of the weaker states. Glaser criticizes this theoretical position, however, because it fails to consider factors such as the adversary's greed, motives beyond security and the adversary's pre-emptive knowledge of the state's motives, which all influence the level of the security dilemma (Glaser, 1997: 174). It may be valid to assert that, despite this criticism, a security dilemma concept remains valid to explain the intricate levels of interactions amongst states in the international system. It gives a realistic analysis of the dynamism of the urges and perceptions of states to pursue hegemonic power and security at the expense of other states.

Conceptual Clarifications

Foreign Policy and National Interests

Joseph Frankel conceives of foreign policy as a unique interplay between domestic and external environments. The persons involved in this interplay usually occupy certain official positions of trust and importance that empower them to act on behalf of their society (Frankel, 1969: 81). Frankel's assertion on foreign policy depicts a critical illustration of state leadership in the management of a country's foreign policy in a manner that reflects an objective reality of societal interest. In short, foreign policy may be described as a set of decisions made on

behalf of the masses by a state actor aimed at achieving specified national interests. The national interests serve as guiding principles in the conduct of foreign policy in the international environment. Ultimately, this thesis examines the objectives of Nigerian foreign policy and national interests since its return to democracy in 1999. The analysis is concerned with the projection of Nigeria's foreign policy in the promotion of peace, security and democracy through its membership in the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and participation in and interaction with multilateral institutional bodies such as the United Nations, the European Union and the Commonwealth.

Morocco and its Membership in ECOWAS

Morocco's interest in ECOWAS membership gained prominence following the realization by the Maghreb region to revitalize its age-long ignored foreign policy towards the African countries. For example, Algeria had intensified efforts towards reviving traditionally neglected economic relations with the African countries, through robust bilateral and commercial exchanges, particularly with the countries of East Africa. Similarly, Tunisia has recently been granted observer status in ECOWAS and had expressed its readiness to join the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) (Abderrahim and Aggad, 2018).

After the ascension to the throne of King Mohammed VI, in July 1999, Morocco's African foreign policy has been towards enhancing, deepening and facilitating socio-economic and political engagements on the continent. In West Africa, Morocco's main desire and strategic foreign policy had been to strengthening and expanding its economic ties in the region (EI-Katiri, 2015: 1). For example, Morocco has provided 25,000 tonnes of fertilizer to Guinea and Nigeria to boost agricultural productivity, food security and promoting rural development. Morocco has an equally established fertilizer plant in both Guinea and Nigeria. The country had also reiterated its commitment to launch the Africa Atlantic Gas Pipeline project with Nigeria to facilitate easy transportation of natural gas from gas-producing African countries to Europe. It had trained 300 Malian imams, while thirteen countries in the region had shown similar interest in its religious foreign policy (Wainscott, 2018; The Economist, 2018). Morocco's economic investments on the continent in the last decade had witnessed a 40 percent increase, particularly from mining, construction, and telecommunication (Messari, 2018: 2). However, Morocco's membership in ECOWAS represents a strategic shift from the Maghreb to an African ideal. Its approach contradicts its constitutional stipulation of Arab-Islamic

identity and its African identity, which also appears to be tilting towards the later rather than the former (Messari, 2018: 5).

Morocco's admission is surprising on at least four accounts. Firstly, the Abuja Treaty of 1993 specified that the ECOWAS was one of the five regional economic groups (Northern, Western, Central, Eastern, and Southern regions) in Africa, whose membership should be limited to all the fifteen member states. Also, Morocco is not within the geographical description of ECOWAS, as specified by the Lomé Convention of 1975, and by extension, its geographical location in North Africa disqualified it from ECOWAS membership. The Arab Maghreb Union of which Morocco is a member constitutes the best platform with which to form the economic ties with the ECOWAS (Fafowora, 2017).

Secondly, although, as Khattabi and Karim observe, Morocco had participated in ECOWAS meetings as an observer and had also provided humanitarian assistance in the area of peace and stability, particularly in Ivory Coast and Guinea (Khattabi and Karim, 2018: 105), the Moroccan involvement in Western Sahara is at odds with Nigeria's efforts towards full decolonisation and democratisation. Western Sahara, otherwise called the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, was a former Spanish colony, and was annexed by Morocco in 1975, and has since been the subject of international tension in efforts to resolve Morocco's territorial claims and the aspirations of the indigenous Saharawi people (The BBC, 2018). Despite UN Security Council Resolutions and resolutions by the African Union on the recognition of the SADR, the Kingdom of Morocco has failed to recognise Saharawi self-determination, refugees, territory, human rights and the conditions under which its people live (Zoubir, 2010: 85-86). This is in contravention of Article 4 of the AU Constitutive Act, which stipulates several principles, including "sovereign equality, respect for borders of members of the Union, peaceful settlement of conflict amongst members, prohibition of the use or threat of use of force, non-interference in internal affairs, and respect for democratic principles and human rights." (AU Constitutive Act, 2001).

An insight into Morocco's admission into ECOWAS, therefore, represents a threat to Nigeria's and ECOWAS's commitment towards the AU's Constitutive Act. In recognising Morocco, ECOWAS and its leaders would appear to have neglected the struggle of the Saharan Republic to self-determination. Besides, accommodating Morocco into ECOWAS also potentially limits Nigeria's regional influence within the regional organisation (Gbonegun, 2017). For example, Nigeria had been noted as one of the ardent supporters of the Polisario

Front and has often expressed its backing of the South Africa-Algeria-Nigeria axis assistance to the group. Surprisingly, after King Mohammed VI's diplomatic visit to Nigeria on 1-3, December 2016 and ratification of bilateral economic relations on 30, December, Nigeria seems to be backpedaling on the territorial conflict (Bennis, 2017).

Thirdly, on the economic level, as was previously discussed in the chapter, the establishment of ECOWAS was to address the economic challenges facing the West African countries at that time (Jaye; Garuba and Amadi, 2011: 1). The emergence of the regional economic grouping also stemmed from the desire of the region to record large scale accelerated economic growth and development, and market expansion, capable of attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) of firms, as well as competing favourably in the international markets, through industrial investments and opportunities (Maiyaki, 2012: xxv). Morocco is a member of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), especially the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). The EPA is a trade agreement which facilitates free movements of goods and services between its members without any barriers (Abati, 2018). As argued by the former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Professor Charles Chukwuma Soludo, "the basis of the EPA is to preserve the EU's economic interests and undermine our economic development," (Gabriel, 2017). If the Kingdom of Morocco is granted membership into ECOWAS, the West Africa region potentially becomes a dumping ground for manufactured goods emanating from Europe into Morocco since member states have access to the free movement of goods within the region (Salau, 2017). However, the underlying motive of a state in the international system is to protect its national interest and its survival (security). Ultimately, since Nigeria's economic survival and national interest are paramount, Nigeria has withheld assent to the European Partnership Agreement (EPA), citing the need to protect local industries and reducing the levels of unemployment in the country (Giles, 2018).

Fourthly, although, Morocco had shown strong commitment, particularly in managing the migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe through the legislation of African migrants which had migrated illegally (ISS Today, 2017)), the Moroccan admission into ECOWAS will inevitably encounter some challenges and demonstrate the resultant effects of the limit of its West African foreign policy, especially which centers on migration (Messari, 2018: 4). For example, the Moroccan cordial existing ties with the EU at the level of immigration thus make it the *gendarme* of European border authorities. As a gatekeeper for Europe, Morocco often cooperates with the European powers, notably the Spanish governments to prevent the illegal entry of migrants across Europe. (Messari, 2018: 4). However, the full Moroccan membership

in ECOWAS would mean that members' states migrants could now have access to unfettered control to migrate from the region to the Moroccan closest cities – Ceuta and Melilla – to the city of Gibraltar, which is Spain's south coast. Since the free movement of persons within the ECOWAS group is the most fundamental objectives of its integration (ECOWAS Commission, 2008), it is doubtful if Morocco could continue to maintain and sustain its commitment to effective and tight border controls with the European authorities. Ultimately, Moroccan strategic policy and membership in ECOWAS also implied that Moroccan stricter legislation and cooperation to curbing illicit entry to EU would be relaxed, thereby prompting EU to employ stricter or harsh diplomatic actions against Morocco. For example, the unlawful movement of 1,100 of sub-Saharan African migrants from Morocco to Spain in February 2017 after the Court of Justice of the EU pronouncement to halt agricultural trade with Morocco, significantly highlights the indispensable role of Morocco in managing migration to Europe through the border control (ISS Today, 2017).

Conclusion

From what has been discussed in this paper, it is clear that the Moroccan membership in ECOWAS will cause hegemonic and leadership supremacy within the regional organisation. As argued in the paper, the ascension of Morocco into ECOWAS potentially limits Nigeria's regional power and influence in the international community, especially in ECOWAS. Focusing on Morocco's strong economic power and its vast investments in West Africa, Morocco gains the relative ability to establish its stronghold in the region thereby wittingly down Nigeria's regional influence, particularly at the level of ECOWAS, the AU and UN. Also, its membership in the West African regional body is at odds with Nigeria's commitment towards total decolonisation and democratisation in Africa and does not seem to favor ECOWAS economic advantage, as the Economic Partnership Agreements (E.P.A) to which Morocco had signed with the EU will give it leverage over ECOWAS to flood the region with substandard products from EU. Similarly, its continuous full membership in ECOWAS will further heighten high levels of illegal movements of sub-Saharan African migrants through the Mediterranean region to Europe.

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