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**Nigeria and Conflict Resolution in Mali: A Focus on Specific
Contributions**



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Nigeria and Conflict Resolution in Mali: A Focus on Specific Contributions

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Abstract

Purpose: This study focuses on the conflict in Mali and the specific contributions of Nigeria towards its resolution. It draws its data from the secondary sources such as textbooks, journals, articles, and the likes from the University of Abuja library, Abuja, the researchers' libraries as well as the internet.

Methodology: The study employs a qualitative method based on content analysis in analyzing the data collected. Also, the study adopts the theory of realism as a framework to provide explanation for Nigeria's engagement in the conflict.

Results: From the findings, it is cleared that Nigeria contributed significantly to the resolution of the Malian impasse, being the leader of the continent where Mali is located and having a clear foreign policy principle that promotes Africa centeredness. And more importantly, as a way to ensure her own survival since the dreaded Boko Haram set was reported to have established link with the terrorist group in Mali.

Unique contribution to theory, policy and practice: Thus, some of these contributions were statement of condemnation, cash donation, personnel contribution and the initiation of peacekeeping mission among others. Some recommendations have also been made in the paper. Accordingly, Countries within the sub-region of West Africa should cooperate with and support Nigeria when necessary to chart a new course that will guarantee durable peace and stability in Mali; The Malian government and the rebel groups should always embrace dialogue as a way out of their conflict rather than resorting to violence; The Malian authority on its own acknowledged Nigeria's crucial contribution towards the stability of Mali. This should be commended as the gesture will go a long way towards encouraging Nigeria to do more for others.

Keywords: *Nigeria, Conflict, Mali, Conflict Resolution, Realism*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The role of Nigeria in the restoration of peace and security across the West African Sub-region cannot be overstated. Throughout the periods of conflict in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Togo and Niger, Nigeria was deeply involved. In each of these, Nigeria adopted several approaches, including diplomacy, sanctions and military to ensure the return of peace and Security to those states. Nigeria's actions are usually predicated upon her foreign policy principle of Afrocentrism, which places Africa at the centre of Nigeria's foreign policy. Thus, anything that concerns African continent is given utmost attention first while dealing with world affairs. Also the realization that the continuous existence of the Mali conflict could be a direct threat to Nigeria's existence prompted her involvement in the Malian conflict, which commenced in January, 2012 when the coalition of rebel groups led by the National Movement for the Liberation of the State of Azawad (MNLA) seized the three major northern cities of Kidal, Gao and Timbuctu and proceeded to declare the entire region as state of Azawad (Francis, 2013:3). The inability of the then Malian Government to provide military equipment for the Armed forces to rescue these three cities from the rebels and stop them from advancing towards Bamako led to the March 22, 2012 coup d'état (Mann, 2012; Caparini, 2015) which the coup leader claimed was meant to secure the independence and territorial integrity of Mali. Unfortunately, the junta could not achieve the goal of securing Mali as the Islamist elements like Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) the Ansar Dine, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) operating with the Tuareg's MNLA at the early state of the conflict took over the conflict, thereby bringing in a terrorist dimension to the fight.

The outcomes of these unfortunate developments were enormous as insecurity, hunger, loss of lives and property became common. More so, the humanitarian needs of the displaced people of Mali both within and outside of the state were issues of serious concerns. In addition, the conflict threatened the survival of democracy not only in Mali which had practised it for two decades and was seen as a model for its peers but also the entire West African Sub-region. Several countries as well as organisations responded in various ways towards the resolution of the conflict. Nigeria, on her part, worked in conjunction with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), and United Nations (UN) etc. to bring an end to the conflict. Unfortunately, many researchers have concentrated more on the roles of ECOWAS, AU, the UN (Tardy, 2013; Better World Campaign, 2015; Nadin, 2013; Look, 2012; Diop, 2013; and Oluwadare, 2014); the Malian neighbours (Ingerstad and Lindell, 2015) ; France (Skons, 2016; BBC, 2018 and Taylor, 2015); etc, without paying adequate attention to the crucial roles by Nigeria in addressing the conflict in Mali. This apparent lacuna is being filled through this study as it reveals the various vital roles Nigeria has played in resolving the Mali conflict, which also have been appreciated by the Malians themselves.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Theory of realism

The study adopts the theory of realism as its framework of analysis. As an international relations theory, realism, among other things, views the actions of the states- the dominant actors in the international system – in terms of interest defined as power (Morgenthau, 1975). In other words,

states' decisions at the global scene are propelled by their individual national interests. According to Donnelly (2000:4), "realism emerged gradually through the work of a series of analysts who have situated themselves within, and thus delimited, a distinctive but still diverse style or tradition of analysis". While its intellectual root is being traced to the Thucydides' classical account of the Peloponnesian war in the fifth century BC, (Dauda, 2013:19; Ibrahim and Yahaya, 2014:8-9), it was not until about 2,500 years later when the study of international politics was institutionalized as an academic field of study that modern realism emerged for the first time in the newly established field (Pashakanlou 2009).

The emergence of realism as explains by Tunde Adeniran, was due largely to the failure of idealism or law to prevent the second world war, and that its arrival within this period caused a shift in emphasis to other issues such as imperial expansion, struggle for hegemony, the impacts of Nationalism, the national culture and influence of geography on the state' external relations. (Adeniran 2003:3). Today, its fundamental view about the world as a place dominated by anarchy and power struggle, where states seek to defend their sovereignty and national interest rather than a place of moralistic legalism (Alkali, 2003:7) has continued to dominate global political discourse.

Realism has different strands such as classical realism, neo-realism and neo-classical realism. However, we shall focus only on the first two - classical and neo-realism because of their dominance. The classical realism evolved through the works of some eminent scholars such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Morgenthau, (Dauda, 2013:19; Ibrahim and Yahaya, 2014:8-9). For instance, Thucydides, in his book *The History of the Peloponnesian Wars* fought between Anthen and Sparta towards the end of the fifth BC, shares some elements of realism when he argues that strong States should rule the weak as they have the power to do so. He treats themes such as "security dilemma", "balance of power" and the place of "justice and morality" in the international system (Ibrahim & Yahaya: 2013:6). Also, Niccolo Machiavelli, a 16th Century Florentine diplomat, historian, theorist and a playwright in his major work -*The Prince* published in 1513, advises rulers to use deceit and violence as tools against other states. Moral goals are so dangerous, and that to act morally will bring about disaster. He also gives advice about how to defend one's homeland (Sparknotes Editor, 2010). Similarly, Thomas Hobbes, through his *Leviathan* in 1651 in the usual realist tradition writes, "in the nature of man we find three principal causes of quarrel; firstly "competition" secondly "diffidence", and thirdly "Glory" (Donnelly 200:12). Also, his idea about the state of nature incorporates some main realist principles, such as the state of anarchy. He states that even the "weakest has strength to kill the strongest either by secret machination or by confederacy with others" (Ibrahim & Yahaya 2014:6-7). Then J. Hans Morgenthau, an American refugee from Nazi Germany, describes by Donnelly (2000:13) as one of the leading realists of the 1950s and 1960s and perhaps the purest as well as the most self-conscious apostle of realism and the single most important vehicle for establishing the dominance of the realist paradigm in the study of international relations in the US. As a realist, Morgenthau is known for real *politik* as he continuously maintains any state that shuns real *politik* will "fall victim" to the power of others (Rourke and Boyer, 2004:16).

The main tenets of classical realism could be summarized as follows:

- i. History teaches that human beings are by nature sinful and wicked;

- ii. The world is a harsh and dangerous place. The only certainty in the world is power. A powerful state will always be able to outdo and outlast the weaker competitor. The most important and reliable form of power is military power;
- iii. A state's primary interest is self- preservation; therefore, state must seek power and always protect itself;
- iv. Moral behaviour is very risky because it can undermine a state's ability to protect itself;
- v. The possibility of eradicating the instinct for power is a utopian aspiration;
- vi. That international system itself drives states to use military force and to war;
- vii. International organizations and laws have no power or force; they exist only as long as state accepts them and;
- viii. That if all states seek to maximize power, stability will result from maintaining a balance of power lubricated by a fluid of alliance system. (Saleh 2013:21-22; Sparknotes Editors 2010).

The other strand of realism is neo-realism also known as structural realism. It is championed by Kenneth Watz (1979) (Meierding, 2010:2) and John Mearsheimer (2001) (see Kaplan, 2012). These proponents shared many things in common with the classical realism, but differ when it comes to the cause of conflict in the international system. Thus, while the classical realism speaks of the "nature of man" or the "human nature" as the main cause thereby locating its explanation at the individual level of analysis, neo-realism argued that it is the international anarchy, where there is no central or overarching authority/ government to regulate the activities or actions of states rather than the evil side of human nature (Dauda, 2013:25) accounts for the conflict. In other words, neo-realism focuses on anarchic nature of the international system based on competition among sovereign states rather than on human nature as the factor that shapes the world politics. (Saleh 2013:22). They believe that international system has no higher authority to provide order and security and sovereign states are not answerable to any authority on their daily operations. This results to a self-help situation where each state relies on its own resources in order to survive.

The common assumptions of Neo-realism as known as structural realism are as follows:

- i. States operate in an anarchic global system;
- ii. All states possess at least some form of offensive military capability
- iii. States can never know the intention of other states
- iv. The primary goal of all states is survival and;
- v. States are rational actors (UWC Costa Rica, n.d:10).

Realism has, however, received a lot of criticisms. For instance, the neo-liberalists have criticized the realist's notion of international system as an arena characterized by power politics, competitions and without cooperation. They argue rather "that states do cooperate with one another, because it is in their interest to do so." And that "states can use institutions to facilitate the pursuit of their mutual gain" (Glodstein cited in Dauda, 2013:12). Also, the conception of states as the primary actors in the international system by the realism has been criticized as non-state actors have equally been involved in shaping global politics.

In applying the theory of realism to the subject under consideration, the paper argues that Nigeria was driven purely by interest for survival as a rational actor in the international system to intervene in the Malian conflict. This is hinged on the fact that the existence of the Malian conflict threatened her own survival at home as Boko Haram insurgency has been reported to have established link

with the members of the Al Qaeda operating in Mali. So, in order to survive Nigeria had to contribute to the course of peace in Mali. Also, Nigeria's contribution to the resolution of the Malian conflict could be seen from her interest to remain the leader of African continent as captured in its foreign policy principle of Afrocentrism. Thus, throughout the conflict Nigeria has demonstrated strong leadership, whether in the area's mediation, financial commitment, troop deployment, etc, - all in a bid to see that the conflict was resolved.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study is based on qualitative model with data drawn mainly from the secondary sources. These include: textbooks, articles, newspaper reports, journals, etc. sourced from the University of Abuja library, Gwagwalada, the researchers' personal libraries as well as the internet. Purposively sampling technique has been utilized in selecting the data bearing in their relevance to the subject matter. The study also adopts historical-descriptive research design in order to gain more insights about the emergence of the conflict in Mali as well as Nigeria's key contributions towards its resolution and then present them to the reading public in a manner that is clear and understandable. And since the data are derived from secondary (or documentary) sources, content analysis, which is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (Krippendorff cited in Bell, 2010:132) is deployed in the analyse of the data.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Conceptual Clarifications

Conflict

Conflict as a concept, generally, describes a wide range of human activities, including hostility between people, organizations, communities and countries. Berconvitch in Wani, (2011:105) defines conflict as a "situation which generates incompatible goals or values among different parties". Pia and Diez (2007) view conflict as a "struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals". Similarly, the US Army cited by Rexford (2007) sees conflict as "an armed struggle or clash between organized groups within a nation or between nations in order to achieve limited political or military objectives". Segal (2019:1) opines that "conflict arises from differences, both large and small, it occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perception, ideas or desires". Conflict is also said to occur in a situation when one's concerns, desires, preferences and/or goals differ from those of the other person (Effective Conflict Resolution Strategies, ECRS (2014:6). Katz and McNulty (1994:1) have also provided more insights on the concept. Thus according to them "conflict situation exists when there are: at least two parties involved who are interdependent, who are experiencing strong emotions, who seemingly hold incompatible outcomes or beliefs, and at least one of the parties recognises the incompatibility and perceives this to be problematic".

Several conflicts have erupted due to the following factors: "Frustration, dissatisfaction with the status quo, unhealthy rivalry or competition, oppression by the ruling class, lack of respect for human rights, poverty, tribal hatred, prejudice, insecurity, fear, deprivation, ethnic domination, racial segregation, loss of territory or land, desire to secede or overthrow foreign rule,

misconception, suspicion, misunderstanding, class struggle, and inequality, or unjust distribution and allocation of amenities or post by ruling elite” (Adeyemo, 2000:5-6). In 2011 the former Deputy President of the International Crisis Group, Grono Nick, identified conflict drivers that would continue drive conflict in the next two decades. These drivers include:

- “Weak State with low capacity
- Tension between authoritarian regimes and popular demands for greater political space
- Competition over scarce resources, exacerbated by climate change
- Extremist religious movement seeking violent political change
- The growing reach and power transnational organised crime networks” (Grono, 2011)

Although some believe that not all conflicts are negatives or bad, research has shown that their negatives impact on society usually dwarfs those of the positives. According to UNESCO (2015:20), “the tragic human cost of...conflicts is starkly visible in the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons. By the end of 2013, 51.2 million people had been forcibly displaced-the highest number in the post-World War II era. While in 2011 violent conflicts forced some 14,000 people worldwide from their homes every day, in 2013 this number escalated to 32,000”. In spite of all these, it is important to stress that conflicts can be resolved provided all the parties involved are committed.

Conflict Resolution

Due to the devastating effects of conflict on humanity, many have advocated for a quick resolution where it has occurred and prevented where it is brewing. This now brings us to the concept of Conflict resolution, which according to Wani, (2011:105) is an “Umbrella term for a whole range of methods and approaches for dealing with conflict: from negotiation to diplomacy from mediation to arbitration, from facilitation to adjudication, from conciliation to conflict prevention, from conflict management to conflict transformation, from restorative justice to peacekeeping”. Wani, (2011:105) explains further that conflict resolution as a “defined specialist field” emerged following the height of the cold war in the 1950s and 1960s “when the development of nuclear weapons and the conflict between the super powers seemed to threaten human survival”. For instance, Mitchell and Banks (1996:21) define conflict resolution as: “An outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is naturally acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and productive of a new positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries; and process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved”. According to Boule (1996), the processes of conflict resolution are many and at the same time varied. It could be seen in form of collaborative, participatory, informal, non-binding processes-such as mediation, conciliation, third party negotiation- or adversarial, fact oriented legally binding and imposed decisions that arise from institutions such as court and tribunals. Similarly, Golwa cited in Amao and Okeke-Uzodike (2015:3) has argued that the process of conflict resolution has to do with the “limitation, litigation, and containment of violent conflicts though the use of both forcible (coercive) and non-forcible (non-coercive) instruments to stop the occurrence/ resurgence of humanitarian emergency situations.” It is interesting to note that Nigeria adopted different approaches to ensure the Malian conflict was resolved as soon as possible. These approaches included: An outright condemnation of the military coup, non-recognition of the government headed by the military junta, consultations with ECOWAS and African Union member states on how best to resolve the conflict after joining

them to reject the declaration of Mali's Northern region as the state of Azawad by the rebels, imposition of sanctions, mobilization of supports for the return of democratic governance, cash and material donations as well as the deployment of troops for peacekeeping.

Nigeria and Conflict Resolution in West Africa and Beyond

To begin with, Nigeria is a federation of 36 states, 774 Local Government Areas and a Federal Capital Territory in Abuja. It is located in the West Africa sub-region and shares land borders with the Republic of Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroun in the east, and Niger in the north. The country occupies a total area of 923,768 Square Kilometers (Dauda, Adie & Nwokedi, 2018:125 and Momah, 2015:64). The area stretches "from the coast of Atlantic Ocean and the forest lowlands of the south, through the Arid Savannah plains of the middle belt, the rocky hill and the plateaus of the southeast to the wide expanse of territory bordering the Sahara Desert to the north" (Balogun, 2011:19). According to Achebe (2012:41), the British took control of the area known as Nigeria today and went on to exert its colonial authority over it up until 1960 when the country was granted independence. Since then Nigeria has played tremendous role in the resolution of conflicts both in Africa and the world at large through use of "forcible" (such as peace enforcement) and "non-forcible" (like diplomatic mediation) "instruments". According to Momah beginning from the "Congo crisis in 1960 to the New-Guinea, Tanzania, India-Pakistan, Lebanon, Chad, Iran-Iraq, Iraq-Kuwait, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Western Saharan, Cambodia, Sudan, Somalia, Yugoslavia, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d' Ivoire", (2015:6), Nigeria was involved as it deployed its troops to prevent further escalation of conflicts in those states. This crucial role is based on Nigeria's foreign policy objective on the promotion global peace and security, and has stood her out among its peers globally as it said to have contributed over 200,000 soldiers to peace operations and across the world since independence (Ojatorotu, and Adeleke, 2017:1)

Within the West African Sub-region, Nigeria contributed greatly towards the resolution of some conflicts in sub-region. Prominent among these were the Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau conflicts. In order to find a reliable solution, Nigeria spear-headed the formation of the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and contributed large troops to the mission (Akpuru-Aja, 2009:169). Speaking further on this, Ajayi cited by Ojatorotu and Adeleke (2017:47) argue that:

The contribution of troops alone by Nigeria tells the story of its enormous input vis-à-vis other member nations. After the formation of ECOMOG in 1990, for example, Nigeria provided 5000 out of the 6000 troops needed; this represented 84 per cent of the total troops. Between 1991 and 1993, Nigeria accounted for 10,000 out of the 12,000 troops for ECOMOG, representing 80 per cent contribution. In 1995, 1996 and 1997, Nigeria contributed whopping 75 per cent, 85 per cent and 82 per cent of troops respectively, to the intervention force.

Besides, Alli (2012) reveals that during the 2003 operation, Nigeria had to lift its troops and those of Gambia and Guinea for the ECOMOG operation Liberia. In terms of cost, it has been estimated that by 1999 Nigeria was said to have spent over 13 billion dollars on peacekeeping operations in West Africa (See Alli, 2012:26) with that of Liberia (1987) and Sierra Leone (1998) gulping 10billion (Momah, 2015:162). Nigeria conflict approach does not stop at peacekeeping but also extends to mediation, for instance, it has reported that Nigeria, under Ibrahim Babangida's regime,

intervened in the border conflict between Mali and Burkina Faso, and settled the strained relationship between Liberia and Sierra Leone (Ezirim, 2010:7). In the 1980s the Commonwealth appointed the General Obasanjo among the first three members of the International Eminent Personalities to address the South Africa political crisis. Consequently, the group visited Nelson Mandela in his Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison in Tokai, Cape Town, South Africa in 1986, and Obasanjo, a Nigerian, was the only one allowed to see Mandela to explore opinions and the possibilities for negotiations to ending apartheid and releasing Mandela and other prisoners (Ezirim, 2010:7 and Ojakorotu, and Adeleke, 2017:40). Also, Nigeria helped in restoring peace and stability in Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Saotome and Principe following the military coups in those states (Ebegbulem, 2011).

Similarly, the sterling contributions of Nigeria to the course of peace in Sudan have been well documented. For instance, Ebegbulem noted thus: Since the advent of the civil war in southern Sudan in the early, Nigeria has been engaged in the search for peace in the country". It did this by hosting "series of Peace talks in Lagos, Abuja and Kano in the late 1980s and early 1990s" all in bid to end the conflict. And that the "seeds that have now germinated in the signing of a comprehensive Peace Accord between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) were sown in those Peace Talks (Ebegbulem, 2011:74). From the foregoing, it is clear that Nigeria has been a lover of peace and security, and has championed several peace processes sometimes at the detriment of its citizens such as the total acceptance of the ICJ verdict on the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsular and other engagements that yield no economic benefits to her in return.

An Overview of the Malian Conflict

Generally speaking, Mali as a country had seen four different conflicts since it obtained its independence in 1960. These include 1963-1964, 1990-1996, 2006 -2009 and finally, 2012 to date (Buyoya, 2015). The 2012 conflict started on the 17th day of January, 2012 when a group of rebels comprising the Tuareg minority organization – National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Ansar Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) under the leadership of Iyad Ag Ghali (ICG, 2012:16) attacked government forces in the city of Menaka and later extended to Tessalit, Ahuelhok, Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao, leading to the declaration of the entire northern region as the state of Azawad by the MNLA on the 6 April 2012 (Riepman, 2016:19). Justifying their action, the then Tuareg rebel group, the MNLA who championed the attacks claimed they did it in protest against the inclusion of the state of Azawad region as part Mali in 1960 without the Tuareg consent; general atrocities committed against the north during each rebellion; negligence on the part of the government of Mali to alleviate the sufferings of the Tuareg during the years of droughts as well as government corruption and collusion that endangered the existence of the Azawad people (Riepman, 2016:19).

As fighting progressed the rebel groups that formed an alliance with the Tuareg MNLA mentioned earlier, became more powerful, drove the MNLA, took charge of the struggle and made it an all Islamic affairs as they went on to replace the secular Malian state law with the Sharia laws in the northern region (McConnell, 2013). Frustrated by the turn of events especially the continued killing of soldiers in the north by the rebels and government poor commitment in the provision of the necessary weapons to confront the dissidents, the military under the banner of "*The National*

Committee for the Reestablishment of Democracy and Restoration of the State (ICG, 2012:18) overthrew the government of Amadou Toumani Toure in a coup d'état on 22nd March, 2012 (Buyoya, 2015:64) with promise to restore normalcy to Mali.

While the Malians were praying and hoping for an end to the conflict, the impacts became more glaring and were felt in all fabrics of the Malian society. For instance, in the sub-sector of the nation's economy such as tourism, report has it that "the historic town of DJENNE, a world heritage site famed for its mud-brick architecture, has been devastated by Mali's political turmoil. Its tourism industry has been destroyed, almost all of its hotels and restaurants are shut down, and its guides are unemployed" (York, 2013). Politically, "the coup derailed the election and set the country on a precarious course that included losing patrol of the vast expanse of the territory, first to separatists in the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), and then to the Militant Islamists such as Ansar Dine, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWO)" (Wing, 2013:2). Also, according to the report of United Security Council Report on Mali (2013:6):

The conflict in Mali has taken an acute toll on civilians. The recruitment of child soldiers, sexual violence and the extremely strict implementation of Shariah law, including amputation and stoning are but some of the horrific crimes perpetrated against the civilian by the terrorist groups, transnational criminal organizations, and other armed opposition groups that have occupied the northern region of Mali.

Additionally, the conflict is estimated to have produced "... more than 169,000 refugees with another 311,000 internally displaced persons with 1.3 million people needing immediate food assistance in the north" of the country (Diop, 2013). In response, the international community rejected the rebels' claimed of the north as a new independent state of Azawad and condemned the military in Bamako. The French responded by deploying its Operation Serval on January 11, 2013 (Skons, 2016:163). What followed a week later was the deployment of AFISMA, an ECOWAS' African-led International Support Mission in Mali which coming under the UN Security Council Resolution 2085 of December 20, 2012 was billed for September, 2013 but due to the urgent security need was hurriedly deployed. And on 1st July, 2013 the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was finally deployed to Mali in accordance with the UN Resolution 2100. In all these Nigeria was deeply involved.

Rationale for Nigeria's Involvement in the Conflict in Mali

A lot of questions have been raised concerning Nigeria's involvement in the Malian conflict especially at the time she equally was facing internal security challenges occasioned by Boko Haram insurgency. It is normal for people to pose critical question such as this, for charity, they said, "begins at home". Be that as it may, the underline motive of Nigeria's involvement in the Malian conflict like other conflicts in the continent could be gleaned from her long-held desire since independence in 1960 for a greater interest in the affairs of African states. To this end, Nigeria through one of its central foreign policy principles- Afrocentrism- has placed Africa at the centre stage of her engagement with other countries of the world. By this stance, Nigeria has taken it upon herself to deal with all matters that affect the continent and its peoples as though they were direct or personal to her. This is also supported by the size of her population and economy both of which qualify her to lead the African continent. Within the West African sub-region, it has been argued, thus: "Nigeria possesses all attributes of a regional leader; population, natural resources,

financial means, and military capabilities. Consequently, the nations have been instrumental in both regional conflict management and shaping the West African Security architecture at large (Alli, 2012:2) Therefore, one can say that Nigeria was in Mali to exert her leadership role which she is known for in Africa.

Also, Nigeria was in Mali to ensure peace and stability in the sub-region for as once noted by the former Nigerian Military Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida regarding the Liberia conflict which also applies to the Malian situation:

[In] a sub-region of 16 countries [now 15] where one out of three West Africans is a Nigerian, it is imperative that any regime in this country should relentlessly strive towards the prevention or avoidance of the deterioration of any crisis which threatens to jeopardise or compromise the stability, prosperity and security of the sub-region....We believe that if [a crisis is] of such level that has [sic] the potentials to threaten the stability, peace and security of the sub-region, Nigeria in collaboration with others in this sub-region, is duty-bound to react or respond in appropriate manner necessary to ... ensure peace, tranquility and harmony (Adibe, 1990:12).

President Jonathan also confirmed this when he stated that: “we believe that if we stabilize northern Mali, not just Nigeria but other countries that are facing threats will be stabilized” (Farge, 2013). Moreso, her involvement in the conflict could be explained based on the discovery that the terrorist group, Boko Haram, operating in the Northern part of Nigeria has links with the international jihad networks, especially the AQIM which is one of the terrorist groups disturbing the peace and stability in Mali (Campbell, 2013). With this claim, Nigeria has no option than to fully support the deployment of AFISMA as further explained by (Francis, 2013:11): “Nigeria’s leadership of ECOWAS to deploy AFISMA forces in Mali is therefore a preemptive intervention to crush Islamist extremist in Mali, and to deny them access to and prevent them from providing support to Boko Haram in Nigeria”.

Economic consideration was also another possible factor for Nigeria’s involvement. This is so because as a country that controls 55 percent of the region’s economy (see Farge, 2013) for that to be sustained Nigeria needs peace, because as Nwogwugwu and Kupoluyi (2015:1) have argued: So long one cannot be assured of one’s physical security or safety, everything else becomes meaningless. Finally, it was to confirm to the world Nigeria is no longer in support of any government that is not by a democratic process, especially coup. Buttressing this, the Senate President, Mr. David Mark, when debating the motion regarding the coup in Mali noted: “Coup used to be the order of the day....Every country in Africa then felt that its military should be in charge of governance. But now I think they have learnt their lessons that military coup is not only unwanted, but it is an aberration” (Premium Times, March 27, 2012).

Nigeria’s Contributions to the Resolution of the Conflict in Mali

Nigeria’s contributions to the Malian peace were in various ways ranging from condemnation, consultations, mobilization for supports, troops deployment to cash and material donations. With regards to condemnation, Nigeria took the lead to condemn in strong terms the coup that ousted President Amadou Toure. President Jonathan, who was at the helm of affairs at the time of the coup, described the military takeover of the government in Mali as “an apparent setback to the consolidation of democracy in Mali in particular and Africa in general” (Premium Times, March

22, 2012). He refused to recognise the new military government in Mali for its unconstitutional change of government, and called on ECOWAS, African Union and United Nations to do same. He also asked the coupist to respect the electoral process already in place for the election of new president and to avoid bloodshed as well as to protect the properties and lives of foreign nationals living in Mali (Premium Times, March 22, 2012). Similarly, the Nigerian Senate, through a motion, condemned the coup and called on the leader of the junta to vacate office within 7 days or be prepared to face military action. The then President of the senate, Senator David Mark, while referring to the coup as “an aberration”, warned thus: “they should leave, and if they fail they can be forced to leave. Whatever they call it, coup, mutiny or insurrection; all we want is for the military to vacate” (Premium Times, March 27, 2012). All these pressures and condemnations coming directly from Nigeria and indirectly through ECOWAS and African Union culminated in the quick transfer of power to the Speaker of the National Assembly on April 12, 2012 by the coup leader, Captain Sanogo (Adie, cited in Dauda, Adie and Nwokedi, 2018:134)

In terms of consultation, Nigeria provided an avenue for major consultations on how to restore democracy and stability in Mali. Abuja, the Nigerian seat of power, played host to delegates from the sub-region in trying to find appropriate ways to resolve the Malian impasse (Premium Times, August 15, 2013). Even before the France deployed its Operation Serval in 2013, the President had to consult the Nigeria President (Musili and Smith, 2013:28). All these helped towards the course of peace in Mali.

Furthermore, Nigeria took advantage of the consultation it had with leaders of Africa both at the regional and continental levels to drum support for the deployment of troops and other relief materials to Mali by taking the lead. For instance, at the end of the Donor’s Conference organized during the 20th Ordinary Session of the AU Summit in Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, the then Nigerian President Jonathan told the audience that:

Nigeria has commenced the deployment of 900 combat soldiers and 300 Air force personnel to Mali as part of AFISMA. Nigeria has so far provided about \$32 million for the immediate deployment and logistic support for the troops. Prior to this Nigeria dispatched relief and humanitarian relief and supplies amounting to US\$2million and has undertaken the reconstruction of and refurbishment of a number of clinics in the military barracks of some of the Malian Defence and Security Forces as part of the Security Reform (SSR) intervention to the tune of US\$5.5million (Agande, 2013).

Apart from contributing 1,200 troops and the huge cash donation, President Jonathan also stated how he personally visited Mali at the political level as co-mediator on October 19, 2012 to facilitate a national consultation and dialogue in Bamako. It should be noted also that Nigeria produced the AFISMA force commander in person of Major General Shehu Abdulkadir ECOWAS (2013). Also from Nigeria, was the contribution of Nigerian First Lady, Patience Jonathan, who through her NGO, the African First Ladies Peace Mission donated relief materials to alleviate the sufferings of the Internally Displaced Persons occasioned by the conflict in the country. The “16 plane-load of relief materials” were said to have landed in Bamako with: “food items, clothing, drugs, beddings and other essentials” (Premium Times March 29, 2013). Nigeria stood firmly behind Mali throughout the country’s most challenging times. President Jonathan was resolute in terms of commitment and promised that “...until democratically elected people take over government of Mali; we [referring to the Nigeria troops] will not pull back” (Farge, 2013). And so was it.

It was in recognition of these enormous contribution of Nigeria that the Malians through their acting President, Diacounda Traore, decided in 2013 to bestow on President Jonathan the “Highest Cross of the National Order of Mali” (Grand Croix de L’ordre National du Mali). At the occasion which took place at the Presidential Vila, Abuja. President Traore stated:

I transmit the greetings and gratitude of the Malian people, greetings and gratitude of the Malian People to the Nigerian people, who have shown themselves in solidarity in the Malians course. Greetings and gratitude to yourself, President Jonathan, for your engagement to our fight since the beginning of the security crisis; crisis which has also been political and humanitarian, which shook Mali from January 2012 and for many months.... We know how much Nigeria has needs of its troops, of her soldiers and all the soldiers at her disposal to ensure internal security against forces of evil, who have continued to attack innocent citizens. However, in spite of this internal need and pressure, your country has not hesitated to put at the disposal of Mali her soldiers and logistics....Today. We come to thank you for the solidarity you showed to your neighbour...Today, Mali has found peace again....It is this Mali which has found itself again and which is very grateful which has sent me today Mr. President, to tell you that it will never forget what you have done for it. To tell you of the light which you lit in her way when everything was dark and sombre (see Premium Times, August 15, 2013)

5.0 CONCLUSION

The paper looked at the various roles played by Nigeria as part of her contributions towards the resolution of the conflict in Mali. It noted that the country got involved based on her foreign policy towards Africa which claims the continent as a centre piece of her foreign relations and engagements. The discovery of the link between the Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb operating in Mali also accounted for Nigeria’s intervention in the conflict as a strategy to ensure her own Survival back home. Consequently, Nigeria took several decisive actions ranging from condemnation, consultations, mobilization for supports, troops deployment to cash and material donations to ensure that peace and stability return to Mali. The Malian government has reciprocated this gesture by honouring the President Jonathan while in office with the country’s highest national honour. This act of gratitude as noted by President Jonathan, lies in the fact that “...our substantial financial, military and material contributions, including supreme sacrifice paid by tow Nigerian Air Force pilots [and other soldiers] have all not been in vain.” (Premium Times, August 15, 2013). The contributions of Nigeria towards the stability of Mali should be seen as a demonstration of true leadership by example. Nigeria has played such role in different conflict situations in Africa and beyond. This stands her out among her peers in the comity of nations and must be commended.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Efforts should be made by Nigerian leaders to sustain her leading role in conflict resolution credentials in the sub-region with beneficial effect to the country and its citizens.
2. Countries within the sub-region of West Africa should cooperate with and support Nigeria when necessary to chart a new course that will guarantee durable peace and stability in the region.

3. The Malian government and the rebel groups should always embrace dialogue as a way out of their conflict rather than resorting to violence.
4. The Malian authority on its own acknowledged Nigeria's crucial contribution towards the stability of Mali. This should be commended as the gesture will go a long way towards encouraging Nigeria to do more for others.
5. Nigerian Senate had responded in a very swift and direct way in its condemnation of the coup in Mali. This shows how committed and vital the senate is in a democratic society. This should therefore be sustained by successive senators to help preserve democracy in West Africa and beyond.

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