

Economic Community of West African States and the Gambian Crisis: Building Cooperation and Resolving Conflict

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of ECOWAS in building cooperation among the states of the West African sub-region through enhancing the political stability of member states and effective conflict resolution in Gambia between 2016 and 2020. The paper seeks to identify the role of ECOWAS in establishing cooperation, resolving conflicts and enforcing legal measures in the Gambian crisis. Anchored on neoliberal institutionalism theory and using descriptive design as a for analysis, the paper reveals that ECOWAS played a prominent role in building cooperation among member states and resolving the political crisis in the Gambia through the use of diplomacy and military actions to effectively restore peace and order in the Gambia. The work recommends, among other things, that the Gambia government should amend the country's constitution to specify the number of terms for an elected executive in order to avoid authoritarian administration that would violate the polity's democratic process and to offer the true dividends of democracy to the Gambian people.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Regional Cooperation, Conflict, Political Instability, Conflict Resolution

Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established as a sub-regional organization on May 28, 1975, by the Treaty of Lagos, with its headquarters located in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory. The primary aim of the organization was to promote economic integration, regional cooperation, and monetary union in order to drive growth and sustainable development across the West African sub-region (Mbah, 2013). ECOWAS was initially composed of Anglophone (English-speaking) countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and The Gambia; Francophone (French-speaking) countries including Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Niger, Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mauritania; and Lusophone (Portuguese-

speaking) countries such as Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (Ndoh, 2003). Hence Adedeji (1997) on the Entente Cordiale- the Nigeria-Togo initiative on a different platform narrates:

In 1972, the initiative that culminated in the establishment of ECOWAS was launched by Nigeria and Togo. Three years after, on May 28, 1975, the treaty establishing ECOWAS was signed in Lagos by

Fifteen (15) Heads of State and Governments (Mauritania signed shortly after). Barely, five days after this historic event, I was on my way to Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) to take over as executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (p.33).

As of January 29, 2025, the composition of ECOWAS has undergone a significant shift due to the official withdrawal of three Sahelian nations; Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Governed by military juntas following coups between 2020 and 2023, these countries accused ECOWAS of failing to adequately support their efforts against terrorism and of being swayed by external influences, particularly in its imposition of sanctions (Al Jazeera, 2024). In response, the three nations formed a new bloc the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) to assert their sovereignty and coordinate security initiatives independently (Radio France Internationale, 2025).

This geopolitical shift could present both challenges and opportunities for the sub-region. In particular, regional integration becomes even more critical for collective development, especially as many West African nations remain limited in terms of population size, geographic scope, and economic strength. Nigeria, however, stands out prominently among the member states, serving as a regional economic powerhouse with a population exceeding 225 million people as of 2025 (World Bank, 2025). Its large

domestic market, resource base, and political influence make it a pivotal actor in the future trajectory of ECOWAS and West African integration at large.

The signing of the ECOWAS Treaty was as a result of concerted efforts to respond to the series of recommendations by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), a subsidiary organ of the United Nations, stressing that sub-regional cooperation is necessary as a means of fulfilling the aspirations of developing countries (Mbah, 2013). Regional aspirations, as shared by West African statesmen, intellectuals, and citizens alike, reflect a general desire to break free from the confines of the nation-state, as well as a rejection of all that divides the region, including multiple barriers to the free movement of goods and services, people, and capital among countries, as well as differences in legal, governmental, and educational structures.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, authoritarianism and militarism in West Africa resulted in serious political crises and civil wars. Low-intensity violence developed in Nigeria's Niger Delta, the Sahelian zone of Niger and Mali, Casamance in Senegal, and Guinea Bissau, while fratricidal civil wars began in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and, later, Côte d'Ivoire (Ibrahim, 2011). The restoration of democracy in the region in the 1990s, on the other hand, led in a reduction in tensions and the restoration of political stability. Despite the return of democracy and election-related crises, structural tensions and political instability exist in the region.

The reappearance of the historical pattern of authoritarian ruling incumbents or their families openly refusing to surrender power when the time

comes is one part of the post-return to democracy conundrum. When Togo's President Gnassingbe Eyadema died in 2005, his son just took power without respect for the constitution, and it took a lot of pressure and threats from ECOWAS, led by President Olusegun Obasanjo, to persuade him to step down and hold elections (Ibrahim, 2011). In the Niger Republic, after President Tandja completed his two tenure in office in 2010, he refused to step down, causing severe political unrest until being forcibly ousted from power in a coup d'état (Ibrahim, 2011).

The refusal of governing cabals to transfer power democratically is at the heart of the escalating tensions caused by elections and political instability. Because of the disputed December 2016 Presidential Elections; this was plainly visible in Gambian domestic affairs. Former President Yahya Jammeh rose to power as a youthful military officer in a bloodless coup in 1994; he was elected President in 1996, and his reign and grasp on power were solidified. He was re-elected in 2001, 2006, and 2011, despite the fact that these elections were not conducted in accordance with the norms of free and fair elections (Ali and Crocker, 2017).

Despite Jammeh's claim of a reformed true democratic, his government was characterized with no respect for the rule of law, oppression against women, suppression of opposition parties and abuse of fundamental human rights occurred rampantly in his administration (Ali and Crocker, 2017). The violations and heinous actions towards the citizens led to the introduction of the coalition party (prior to the 2016 elections) that consisted of seven different political parties that merged into one with the sole aim of ending the dictatorship of Jammeh.

On December 1, 2016, Jammeh lost the presidential election to Adama Barrow, the coalition party's

leader, in what was largely seen as a free and fair election. In an unexpected turn of events, Jammeh, who had previously accepted the election results, now rejected them and accused the electoral authorities of manipulating the results. Jammeh's unwillingness to step down caused delegates from regional and international groups such as ECOWAS, the African Union, and the United Nations to call on Jammeh to recognize the results of the election and give over power to the winner. The military intervention from ECOWAS- codenamed "Operation Restore Democracy" was in place to settle the breakdown of internal order in Gambia, if diplomacy fails (Ali and Crocker, 2017).

Against this backdrop, this paper explores the role of ECOWAS as an apparently decisive regional actor in building cooperation and crisis resolution in the Gambia, the extent to which conflict impacts human existence being defined by human capacity to limit, manage, or resolve it.

Literature Review

Perspectives on Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation refers to structured collaboration among geographically proximate states to address shared political, economic, and security interests. Keohane (2005) identifies key regional characteristics: geography, intensity of contact, shared identity, and agency. Russett (1998) and Thompson (1969) highlight physical proximity, cultural similarity, and sustained interaction as defining features, while Ahmed and Potter (2017) emphasize that regions are socially and politically constructed around shared communal identities.

Baylis, Smith, and Owens (2017) categorize regional cooperation into five types: functional (e.g., health,

energy), economic, political, deep integration (e.g., European Union), and security-oriented, as seen in ECOWAS. They argue that cooperation enhances communication, fosters development, and supports collective problem-solving across member states. Supranational organizations like the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Southern African Development Community (SADC), African Union (AU), and ECOWAS reflect this global trend toward regionalism based on mutual interests (Aja, 2001).

Adedeji (1997) critiques ECOWAS's integration efforts, noting the legacy of colonial divisions especially the Anglophone-Francophone divide and ideological rifts that undermine horizontal cooperation. Despite ECOWAS's goal of economic and political integration, these historical and structural challenges persist.

The Concept of Conflict in a State

Zartman and Rasmussen (1997) define conflict as a struggle between groups over power, resources, or values, often marked by incompatible goals. Conflicts may occur at interpersonal, national (intra-state), or international (inter-state) levels. Root causes include ideological differences, unequal resource distribution, or divergent cultural beliefs (Adedeji, 1997). These dynamics can escalate into violent or political conflict, especially where power and identity are contested.

Nye (2009) links socioeconomic rights to political stability, arguing that unmet basic needs can fuel tensions. As societies evolve, shifting political, social,

and economic realities continually reshape the nature and triggers of conflict.

Perspectives on Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution involves peaceful methods like negotiation, mediation, and peacekeeping aimed at addressing root causes and achieving lasting solutions. Burton (1990) and Fisher (2009) stress the role of inclusive, non-coercive processes, often facilitated by impartial third parties.

Miller (2003) distinguishes between proactive and reactive approaches. Proactive strategies focus on prevention through trust-building, good governance, and inclusive dialogue (Ero, 1995). Reactive strategies on the other hand include: **Negotiation** – direct dialogue between disputants (Aning, 2009); **Good Offices & Mediation** – involvement of third-party facilitators; and **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** – culturally grounded, cost-effective, and relationship-preserving methods; offer ways to manage already escalated conflicts.

Philosophical perspectives also shape resolution methods. Idealists like Woodrow Wilson favor diplomacy and cooperation (Bullington, 2008), Marxists advocate for equality and class resolution (Carver, 2009), while realists emphasize power and coercion (Kapust, 2010).

In summary, the literature highlights regional cooperation as both a strategic imperative and a politically intricate process. In West Africa, ECOWAS serves as a key institutional framework for fostering unity and resolving conflicts, despite enduring challenges linked to historical legacies, ideological divides, and structural differences. This

study positions the Gambian crisis within this context, analyzing ECOWAS's role in promoting peace and stability in a volatile political landscape. Conflict resolution, as discussed, involves a range of approaches dialogue, compromise, and institutional engagement aimed at transforming adversarial relations into lasting peace.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to critically examine the role of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in fostering regional cooperation and resolving the Gambian political crisis between 2016 and 2020. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Assess the extent of ECOWAS's cooperation efforts in managing the Gambian political crisis, including its legal and diplomatic engagements.
- ii. Analyze the key strategies and mechanisms employed by ECOWAS in its intervention during the Gambian crisis.
- iii. Evaluate the major challenges encountered by ECOWAS in its conflict resolution efforts within the West African sub-region.

Theoretical Perspective

This paper is guided by the Neoliberal Institutionalism theory, as its theoretical framework. According to neoliberal institutionalism theory, institutions are created by states to maximize shared interests, because security is a shared responsibility among member states and lack of security in one state has a strong negative effect on another state (Maximilian, 2017). Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye, Robert Axelrod, Ronald Coase, and Volker Rittberger are some of the most well-known proponents of the neoliberal

institutionalism theory. The idea was first proposed in 1970. Simply expressed, neoliberal institutionalism theory regards institutions such as the United Nations and ECOWAS as redefining state duties and acting as arbitrators in state conflicts. Although international institutions are powerless to prevent anarchy, they can influence state behaviour by altering the international environment. International organizations do so by using a number of incentives for collaboration. Such as preferential trade status or financial help, as well as disincentives, such as sanctions (Maximilian, 2017).

In a nutshell, Neoliberal Institutionalism is a doctrine based on the following assumptions:

- i. Every actor (states and multinational actors) is a rational, profit-seeking egoist.
- ii. The world is anarchic, bounded by state dependency.
- iii. Absolute gains are attainable in the allocation of power and goods, which is not a zero-sum game.
- iv. The actors' interests may shift; the structuralism motivation is the resolution of their animosity (Maximilian, 2017, p.70).

ECOWAS and the Political Economy of Conflicts

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) member countries were largely an artificial by product of the colonial scramble of 1884/1885 prior; they were born out of the rivalries and geographical strategies of European imperial power and as such some of the countries were too small to be economically viable. Generally, their artificiality constituted the greatest obstacles to the achievement of a more stable and dynamic statehood.

The enthusiasm with which ECOWAS was established was such that at least two Heads of State arrived in Lagos with their countries' instruments of ratification of a treaty they had not yet signed. By July, 1986, the five protocols called for under Article 62 of the ECOWAS Secretariat in Lagos, working closely with the ECA and the International Monetary Fund. These protocols were then submitted to the first meeting of ECOWAS Council of Ministers, which was held in Accra in July 1976. The five protocols were:

- i. Contributions of member states to the ECOWAS budget
- ii. Re-exportation of products purchased from third-world states inside ECOWAS
- iii. The Cooperation, Compensation, and Development Fund;
- iv. Assessment of revenue losses suffered by member countries as a result of collective trade liberalization;
- v. Definition of the concept of products to Nigeria from participating states (Adedeji, 1989).

Thus, the optimism that accompanied the formation of ECOWAS in May 1975 soon began to wane, as the realities of regional integration exposed several underlying challenges. One of the most significant issues was the half-hearted commitment of member states to the goals of economic cooperation. While the rhetoric of unity was strong, actual political will and consistent follow-through were often lacking. Additionally, there was an overreliance on creating formal institutions, with insufficient attention given to their effective operation and implementation. Compounding these structural weaknesses was the

exclusion of key stakeholders such as business leaders, industrial actors, and financial institutions whose involvement was crucial for meaningful regional economic engagement. Moreover, the limited scope and authority granted to the community's organs hindered their ability to enforce decisions or coordinate policy effectively across member states (Adedeji, 1989, pp. 288–289).

Unfortunately, the political commitment that had been built up during the three year period of negotiation of the ECOWAS treaty (1972-1975) weakened because of the failure to address the sub-region's sectors. The failure was captured most poignantly by Joseph (1990, p.30):

So far, the West African integration process has been such that attention has been focused on the selection of the institutions required for integration, relegating the actual business of building the community to the background. Instead of asking with whom, in what context, and under what conditions integration might be possible, attention has been focused on the institutions to be established and the measures to be promoted. Prioritizing the identification of institutional arrangements fully diverts attention away from the critical work of identifying socioeconomic objectives and priorities.

In the keynote address delivered to the West African conference on Economic Development and Environmental Sustainability, Adedeji (1990), declares:

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) exhibits more common characteristics of underdevelopment and environmental degradation than diversity. The multifaceted political economy of the sub-region in its economic, political, social and environmental essence manifests the dominant common features of profound structural disarticulation deep sectoral distortions, excessive external dependence and a bewildering confusion of values and institution... these are reflected most graphically in the asymmetry between production and consumption patterns, disproportionality between agriculture and the rest of the economy severe rural-urban dichotomy and persistent political instability that is basically a crisis of legitimacy. These have been and continues to be tragically exacerbated by inter and intra-country strife (p.35).

In an attempt to understand and explain contemporary warfare in the sub-region, it might be necessary to state that, violence appears to have become a significant feature of the political discourse in many parts of West Africa. The classical representation of this phenomenon is the so-called internal crisis that now blights the landscape of the sub-region.

Antecedents to the Gambia Internal Conflict

Prior to the 2016 general elections, the Gambia was also subjected to a twenty-three (23)-year dictatorship under President Yaya Jammeh, who governed from 1994 to 2017. Jammeh suppressed press freedom and independent political activities, incapacitated the Gambian economy, brought about democracy deficits and frequent rights abuses in the Gambia (Wabuke, 2019). In 2013, he withdrew the membership of the Gambia from the Commonwealth of Nations and described it as an 'extension of colonialism' (Telegraph, 2018).

Few could have guessed that the Gambians' election on December 1, 2016, would be a watershed point in their country's political history. Power had never been passed through elections in the 50 years since independence, and President YahyaJammeh's dictatorial authority had shown no signs of collapse (Wabuke, 2019). On the contrary, even the most obvious traces of independent political activity were prohibited under Jammeh, and opposition leader Mr. Ousainou Darboe was imprisoned alongside 19 other politicians in April 2016 for simply taking part in a march pushing for political change (Wabuke, 2019).

The Gambia in December 2016 was thus an extremely unusual setting for the incumbent to be defeated in presidential elections. On December 2, 2016, the Gambia's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)

declared opposition candidate, Adama Barrow the election winner, surprising almost everyone (Hartmann, 2017). Barrow had succeeded Darboe as leader of the opposition United Democratic Party (UDP), and had won support from the majority of the opposition's fractured parties. Barrow earned 43.3 percent of the vote, Jammeh 39.6%, and Mamma Kandeh of the Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC) received the remaining 17% under the plurality electoral system (Wabuke, 2019). Jammeh's immediate response surprised everyone. He accepted defeat and congratulated Barrow on his victory in a broadcast speech even before the official results were announced. On television, he also declared that he would not appeal the results and that he would return to his farm "to eat what I grow and grow what I eat" (Hartmann, 2017). While many people in Banjul welcomed Barrow's victory, the drama was far from done (Strachan, 2018).

Jammeh declared a week later, on December 9th, that he no longer trusted the electoral process and that he would not only contest the Electoral Commission's results, but would also request new elections under a different electoral administration, citing irregularities in aggregating results from one region. For Jammeh, the panel recalculated the votes cast on December 5th, reducing the number of votes each of the three candidates received but ultimately confirming Adama Barrow's victory (Strachan, 2018).

Troops were stationed on the streets of Banjul on December 10th, indicating that Jammeh retained control of the security system. The Electoral Commission's offices were held by the army on December 13th, preventing personnel from entering the premises. Jammeh no longer looked to be dedicated to handing up power to the elected

president by the 18th of January 2017, the legal end of his tenure (Nathan, 2017).

ECOWAS Role in the Gambia Crisis

When President-elect Adama Barrow was sworn in as the third President of the Republic of the Gambia on January 19, 2017 in the Gambia's embassy in Senegal's capital (Dakar), he was simultaneously recognized by major actors, while the European Union announced the imminent resumption of support to the Gambia, which had been suspended due to concerns about human rights violations (Ali and Crocker, 2017). And the world community acknowledged his administration as the sole legitimate one. ECOWAS immediately voiced grave worry over the Gambia's political instability (BBC News, 2017).

The updated ECOWAS Treaty (1993), the Protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention (1999), and the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) explicitly incorporate the organization's commitment to promote democracy and good governance, as well as the notion of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Loftin, 2017). This principle of R2P, as endorsed by the United Nations, empowers ECOWAS as a regional entity to interfere in a state's affairs when a state fails to fulfil its obligations to its population (Mbah, 2013).

In its framework, ECOWAS lists the protection of a state's democracy as a valid justification for taking responsibility to protect action. According to the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, ECOWAS can engage in pro-democratic actions as

part of its regional mission. This refers to initiatives that raise the likelihood of people being ruled in a political system and by individuals of their choosing (Mbah, 2013). The treaty also includes a list of 12 fundamental principles. This involves gaining power through free, fair, and transparent elections, as well as having zero tolerance for power earned by unlawful methods (Loftin, 2017).

As a result, ECOWAS is required by its 1993 amended treaty and 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to monitor elections in its member countries, of which Gambia is a signatory. The ECOWAS Commission, the African Union Commission, and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel Commission (UNOWAS) all congratulated Yahyah Jammeh on his initial capitulation to Adama Barrow. The election was deemed transparent, free, and fair in accordance with the stipulations of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the African Union Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (Hartmann, 2017). When Jammeh later reversed his position, ECOWAS reacted quickly, urging the Gambian government to "abide by its constitutional responsibilities and international obligations," adding, "It is fundamental that the verdict of the ballots be respected, and that the security of the president-elect, Adama Barrow, and all Gambian citizens be fully ensured" (Hartmann, 2017).

Only after ECOWAS members prepared for a military invasion of the country and, following Barrow's inauguration as new president in the Gambian embassy in Dakar on January 19th, when some Senegalese troops effectively surrounded the country and began marching towards Banjul to make this threat credible, could Jammeh be persuaded to accept

exile in a final round of negotiations. Jammah eventually left The Gambia on January 21st, and five days later, on January 26th, Barrow returned to Banjul from Dakar, where dignitaries and officials greeted him on the tarmac (Hartmann, 2017). However, Adama Barrow's victory as the first democratically elected President of The Gambia in 2016 is considered as a sign of the Gambia's return to democracy, good governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and judicial independence.

ECOWAS Protocols and Conflict Resolution Framework

The collaboration of West African states and international actors in the Gambia crisis enabled the removal of a reviled leader whose actions dissolved a long-standing democratic constitution, banned political parties, tortured, arrested, and killed those who spoke out against the government, and brought the country to the brink of economic collapse. President Jammeh's flip of position was unacceptable and jeopardized peace not only in Gambia but across the West African sub-region.

According to Hartmann (2017), it was important for ECOWAS to act to forestall any type of crisis that may have catastrophic effects not just in the Gambia but also in other states within the region. While endorsing the ECOWAS Revised Treaty in July 1991, the Authority of Heads of States and Governments issued a declaration of political principle to enhance mutual cooperation on defence and security problems (Mbah, 2013). In December 1997, an exceptional ECOWAS meeting in Togo developed a "Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, and Security." This was followed by a conference of Ministers of Defence, Interior, and Foreign Affairs in Yamoussoukro in March 1998, and a ministerial and

expert meeting in Banjul (Gambia) in July 1998 (Mbah, 2013). The statement, which intended to institutionalize institutions and processes that would enable dialogue and collaborative management of regional security challenges, was eventually agreed and ratified by the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Governments at the Abuja Summit in August 1999 (Loftin, 2017).

The ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council works similar to the United Nations Security Council at the sub-regional level, meeting at the ambassadorial, ministerial, and Heads of state level. It makes decisions on all problems concerning the sub-regional peace and security on behalf of the Authority of Heads (Mbah, 2013). The council has the authority to authorize all types of intervention, including the decision to send political and military missions, notify the UN and the African Union of its commanders, and so on. As a result, the Council can, among other things, appoint a special envoy as mission head, nominate a force commander, and deploy ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group).

The regional body's supplemental policy on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), which created the groundwork for implementing the United Nations' "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) concept, stated unequivocally: "concerned also about the increasing incidence of conflicts caused by religious intolerance, political marginalisation and non-transparent elections;" In the case of the Gambia, ECOWAS did not act as an entity on its own. Senegal's President made a plea on behalf of ECOWAS. The United Nations authorized this proposal in Resolution 2337 (Strachan, 2018). This appeal was made in order to get UN authority to intervene in the Gambia conflict. The UN permission

was used to invoke the decision of ECOWAS in implementing the additional protocol on democracy and good governance. This guideline stipulates "zero tolerance for authority earned or maintained by unlawful methods" (Strachan, 2018). ECOWAS also invoked Article 25 of its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security, which authorizes military intervention when "democracy is abruptly brought to an end by any means or there is massive violation of human rights in a member state," as was the case in Gambia (Strachan, 2018).

The Article 25 of ECOWAS mechanism is in accordance with African Union (AU) Convention setting up the AU Peace and Security Council under Article 7; that disallows government from taking power through 'Unconstitutional Change of Government' (UCG) (Dersso, 2016). As expressed in the AU Convention, Unlawful Changes of Government (UCG) takes various structures these include: Military Overthrows, Mediation by Hired soldiers, evacuation of majority rule state run administrations by furnished agitators, and refusal of an officeholder to give up power (Dersso, 2016). President Jammeh is at legitimate fault for the last type of UCG. AU reinforced the assents through UCG against any government or administration view very much blameworthy by suspending them from African Union activities.

President-elect Adama Barrow requested ECOWAS as a regional entity to intervene in the Gambia's growing conflict. A resolution issued to the United Nations Security Council declared "an appeal made today by President Adama Barrow to the international community, particularly ECOWAS," to intervene in the Gambia conflict. Thus, on these arguments, ECOWAS was not undermining Gambia's sovereignty

because they had been invited to intervene by the recognized head of state, Adama Barrow (Strachan, 2018).

Despite the fact that the UN Security Council regarded Barrow to be the rightful president of the country, no approval was provided to employ military troops to remove Jammeh, instead opting for diplomacy. Despite this, ECOWAS was able to restore democracy in the country by threatening to use force. The African Union and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) also backed ECOWAS, lending credibility to the organization's policies.

Use of the Military and Threat of Force by the ECOWAS in the Gambian Conflict

If diplomatic discussions failed, ECOWAS intervened militarily as a precautionary measure. Combat troops from Senegal, Nigeria, Mali, Ghana and other West African countries were already stationed at the border to jointly enter the country on air and by land in an operation to thwart any hostilities or breach of law in the country (Akwei, 2017). The Gambian involvement falls under conflict resolution and democratic concepts (particularly the preservation of human rights, peace, and security) in the case of the 1999 and 2001 policies, as well as the ECOWAS declaration in 2017 (Nathan, 2017). Because the belief that national stability is more essential than the state, it is the state's role to maintain democracy and good governance in all member nations. To fulfil its mission and commitment to establishing a democratic constitution in The Gambia, ECOWAS relied mostly on its policies. The analysis of the progression of ECOWAS highlighted its emphasis on their collective

responsibility to protect its population under any circumstance.

The policy on Mutual Defence and Assistance was used in intervention to defend the Gambian people during the crisis, led by Nigeria and Senegal. The intent was to gather military forces from member states and collectively deploy them to the Gambia to restore democracy which is in contrast with the 1999 policy that focused on mechanism to combat or intervene in the conflict (Strachan, 2018). The policy on conflict resolution was the most used in the intervention, due to Jammeh's breach of the organization's laws on "free and fair" elections. It was implemented as a collective approach to security, promotion of human rights protection and constitutional governance. And democracy could only be restored if Jammeh peacefully steps down (Nathan, 2017).

As a member of ECOWAS, Gambia as state is obligated to take ECOWAS directive. In this case, the 1999 policy relating to peacekeeping mechanism (which demands the losing candidate to concede defeat) and if the policy is not followed then the organization must intervene to restore stability in the state.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is important to note that the purpose of the qualitative, explanatory work was to investigate the strategic tools used by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in relation to their regional cooperation among member states in conflict resolution efforts to maintain perpetual peace in the Gambia. The prompt pro-democratic intervention by ECOWAS in the Gambia has set a precedent that other African regional

groups, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community (EAC), may choose to follow as they expand their mandates to deal with political stability, peace, and security in their various regional blocs.

Finally, this paper concludes that international law rules requiring non-interference in a state's internal affairs and barring the use of non-defensive force remain valid and should be largely followed. However, there are times when governments or international organizations may feel morally obligated to intervene in a state in order to protect morality and justice; Gambia was one of these instances. A number of claims of human rights violations under Yahya Jammeh's twenty-two (22) year administration, as well as his unwillingness to resign after losing the 2016 elections, pointed to his desire to remain in power indefinitely. Mr. Adama Barrow, the election winner, was equally unwilling to submit to Jammeh's despotism, and the disaster that may have ensued in the coming months if ECOWAS had not intervened is better imagined than experienced. The ECOWAS intervention was legal since it prevented Gambia's democratic and political crisis from growing into a full-fledged human rights violation and international catastrophe.

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