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National Stability in West Africa: Deductive Lessons from Southeast Asia

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Abstract
West African and Southeast Asian states have many similar historical characteristics. Both regions went through Western colonial control for decades. They both gained independence years after WWII. They were impoverished and had to embark on various national projects to create sustainable social, economic, educational, military and political systems that would enable them to ensure national security and stability. Moreover, almost all of them went through hard times with armed insurgencies and local conflicts that endangered their national integrity. Nonetheless, Southeast Asian nations were able to secure their national survival and unity, while most West African states continue to face difficult challenges and threats to national stability, ranging from poor economic and technological performance, ethnic and tribal conflicts, as well as military intermingling in political and democratic experimentations. Thus here, some lessons can be derived from certain Southeast Asian states that may serve as milestones for West African countries.
Keywords: National Stability, Inequality, West Africa, Southeast Asia, Modernization, Armed Forces, Military Intervention

Introduction

Of the tangible colonial legacies left behind in countries like Malaysia and Brunei, for example, was of positive outcome on the processes of state and nation-building. In Malaya, for instance, the British for reasons related to colonial interests did not resort vehemently to the policy of divide and rule between the different semi-independent sultans of the Malay traditional regions (states) who in the past constructed more than one unified nation. However, they did apply the same colonial policies on the Malays and other ethnicities. The British and Japanese policy had manipulated the Malay and Non-Malay ethnic insecurity. The Malay had viewed the Non-Malay as the greater threats at that time. Although the British and the Japanese could have control over ethnic relations in the country during their era, the feeling of suspicion and discontent still exists (Khairul et al., 2015: 139).

The British did not undermine the traditional historic basis of mass loyalty and homage bestowed on Malay traditional rulers. Upon independence, the British colonial administrators played the major role in the creation of the present Malaysian federation and the rotation of the office of the Yang di Pertuan Agong(Malaysian King) between the different sultans of

Malay states. That system has preserved the role of the sultans with full legitimacy in the sight of the common Malay masses in a more unified and modernized fashion. With this legitimacy, it was possible to foster a foundation upon which a strong modern state was to be established. Thus, the state as a whole was erected on a solid foundation, and its relation with the common masses was harnessed in line with its traditional political and social legacies. Nonetheless, the role of the Malays on one side seems to be contested presently. There were questions on the privileges of the Malays, Islamic affairs and the powers of the Malay Rulers that began to be disputed in a manner that threatened national stability. There are many posts on blogs and websites discussing these issues. Historically, the Malays did have sacrificed much and contributed to the development of the country, the Chinese and Indians are no less important, also contributed significantly (Khairul, Jessica and Ahmad, 2015: 142). For that, the successive governments have been able to maintain the fabrics that keeps national unity intact.

The scenario in West Africa was rather different. Among the four former British colonies in that region, (Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Gambia, and Ghana) comparatively with Malaysia and Brunei, only the northern part of Nigeria had relatively a similar political structure. Among the Muslims of the north, the traditional legitimacy of the sultans has been maintained with the sultan of Sokoto State acting as the spiritual traditional head of the other sultans due to his role as a custodian of the Islamic culture of the north. That had created similar relationship like the one in Malaysia between the ruling elite, the bureaucracy and the common masses who once, venerated their traditional rulers. But on the other side, this phenomenon is found only in the northern side of Nigeria because of the federal political system of the country. Consequently, this reality has created sharp contrast in the social, political, cultural, and ideological make up of Nigeria as a nation, as the south and the east are of different political and religious orientations.

Regional political competition in Nigeria has always been one of the consequences rooted in the past, as each region struggles for political dominance on the national level with strong allegiance to tribal and regional ties. This has created a seemingly insurmountable crisis to the Nigerian political authorities in promoting national unity and maintaining state-building efforts in the country since independence. In reality, this is a common trend in many African states as the post-independent Africa has been characterized by a decline of interstate conflict, an increase in intra conflicts, as well as civil wars with states becoming increasingly the source of insecurity of its citizens (Palik et al., 2020: 6).

On the other hand, in the other three former West African British colonies, namely the Gambia, Ghana, and Sierra Leone, traditional rulers were left out without significant political power in the political affairs of these nations. In this respect, they are similar to French West Africa where traditional leaders have lost their historical traditional political influence in the affairs of their people. The policies of colonial France in the rest of the West African states had totally undermined the role of traditional rulers in politics. That means most of the past historical indigenous efforts by African leaders aimed at state and nation-building have been replaced by new political systems left behind by colonial France after independence. No doubt the legacies of the French colonial policies of “Assimilation” and “Association” largely sustained the fraternity up to independence (Ayaji and Olu-Ademeyi, 2015:93). However, the French colonial masters did not forge the same kind of post-colonial allegiance between the traditional rulers and the ruled as has been the case in the Malaysian and Brunei contexts. Rather, in West Africa, the fragility of masses allegiance and lack of confidence in the new

modern ruling elite, and at the same time their strong identification with tribal and regional ties continue to weaken national unity in the countries of the region.

One of the major socio-political contributions to highlight here is the utmost significance that lies within the fabrics of traditional leaders' role in both the Southeast Asian and West African regions. States like Malaysia, Brunei, and Thailand who have maintained the prestigious traditional roles of their monarchical systems that stretches out to many centuries in the past, continue to contribute in the preservation of social, political, and cultural national order. Contrary to that, although a large segment of the African masses still continues to revere with passion what is symbolically left of their traditional kings, the latter have no any meaningful assigned political role except during election campaigns when they are often exploited as mere pawns in the propaganda game of political parties.

Therefore, several lessons can be derived from the Southeast Asian region that would definitely benefit state and nation-building in West Africa, provided sincere effort is put in place to make them work.

Inequality for Stability in Malaysia

As a result of the strong social unity between the traditional Malay rulers, the new political elite, and the populace, the Malaysian state had been able to convince the other non-Malay races that the indigenous Malays have the right to economic and political development without annulling the rights of the former to enjoy the same prerogatives. But since the Malays were left behind the wagon of economic and professional development during the early years of independence, special dedication had to be geared towards them in order to uplift their statuses so that the society would coexist in a more egalitarian and harmonious relationship. That was the rationale which justified the policy of differential rewards in the distribution of political and administrative powers in favor of Malays. On this strategy lie the fundamentals of state and nation-building in Malaysia. For the sake of nation-building, the numerous policies Malaysia has put in place, none has been more debated, and arguably endured longer, than the affirmative action program officially known as the New Economic Policy (NEP). This policy, put in place by then Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein in 1971, was in response to unprecedented racial riots that have since been seared into the Malaysian national consciousness (Thillainathan and Kee-Cheok, 2016: 52).

It was believed by many Malaysian architects of the NEP, that national unity could not be attained out of equitable balance between Malaysian ethnicities. Moreover, the policy's emphasis on the need to stress on economic equality for the indigenous Malays (*Bumiputras*) is in conformity with human rights values, asserting affirmative action programmes in favour of disadvantaged entities in many parts of the world.

If this policy is adopted at good will as a lesson from the Malaysian social, economic and political experience, it would certainly serve many West African countries diffusing many of their tribal problems created by economic disparity. Although understandable from the standpoint of post-colonial nations in which colonial governments sought to favour one group over the other, or adopted the policy of divide and rule, this runs counter to the general perception of affirmative action being targeted at a discriminated minority (Thillainathan and Kee-Cheok, 2016: 52).If the Malaysian socio-political models of nation-building were able to bring together three distinct races, religions, and cultures to co-exist in such national harmony over more than five decades, they would certainly serve as strategic models for some West African countries that are composed of the same one biological race, different only in tribal and religious affiliations. That is because social security is about to sustain traditional patterns

of language, culture, religious and national identity within acceptable conditions (Khairul et al., 2015: 137).

However, since the African demographic situation is rather different as no one ethnic group is considered an immigrant in the society, then African political leaders can adopt the Malaysian policy of differential distribution of economic wealth with slight modification. That can be achieved by directing their effort to uplift the most underprivileged in the society before others. This connotes that every ethnicity in a given West African country is no doubt a *bumiputra* (*borrowed from Malaysian name for indigenous people*). But these African *Bumiputras* should be treated unequally in order to achieve real equality. Alternatively, misguided policy or denying opportunities to youth for short-term political gain will fuel discontent, extremism, and conflict (Grant, 2017: 6).

The balance necessary for the operation of political institutions cannot be sustained unless full democratic citizenship is accorded to all groups who feel brushed aside. This gives rise to the problem of the convergence between economics, politics, and society. Social and national stability cannot be established long as political gains are not accompanied by equal economic improvements. Failure to do so would create a large pool of youth who lack opportunities and are potentially susceptible to radicalization (Grant, 2017:1), which would in turn increase national instability. Therefore, equality in social and economic improvements can be materialized in the provision of public services and facilities on regional rather than ethnic bases. If every distinct region within every West African state is developed gradually commencing from the most underprivileged, then that will reduce the ill trust of particular ethnicities concentrated in particular regions towards the political authorities. And that section is to be accorded a temporary status of a *bumiputra* until it is uplifted to a better economic position.

For instance, Nigeria has been suffering from rebellion, sabotages of its oil pipelines by elements of the east where the Nigerian oil is concentrated. The populace of that region feel alienated and impoverished by the political authorities for many years. Today, the worst scenario has been manifested in the atrocious terrorist activities attributed to some astray Fulani ethnic elements that continue to wreak havoc in the north of the country.

If such socio-economic political strategy is adopted from the Malaysian experience, it could appease these kinds of disenchanted citizens. Eventually, the attention of the masses could possibly rally around the central government as a symbol of national unity since it would necessarily appear to them as an ally rather than a foe.

As has been stated, the African race is one race. Nonetheless, the exaggeration of tribal and religious differences leads to inimical relations between the masses on the one side, and between the political elite themselves on the other. The tribal schisms underlying government's political structure which is marked by tribal distrust and suspicions prevent the authorities from finding rational solutions to the problem. That in turn perpetuates the already ill relationship between the government and the masses. As a matter of historical fact, these developments have resulted in populations that are increasingly dissatisfied with being excluded from politics and the benefits of economic growth that many countries in the region have seen. Populations have grown increasingly impatient for change and for a more equal distribution of resources (Kwesi, 2021: 13).

On the contrary, the government of Malaysia is closely tied to its masses. It has managed to contain ethnic conflicts since its early experience after independence. That has been achieved through genius political schemes with good intention based on tolerance and mutual respect for the three distinct cultures and ethnic groups. Obvious in this political context is that every

party looks after its own community, contains the more extremist members, and formulates cultural prerequisites within the context of multi-racial society. The national leaders are seriously concerned with this matter as they are of the view that national security and solidarity among ethnic groups is the main agenda for the country's development. Basically, Malaysian citizens feel the importance of having good relations between their ethnicities (Khairul, Jessica, and Ahmad, 2015: 142).

The lesson here for West African authorities intends to encourage them to adopt this strategy to ensure that every region in the country is fairly represented in the government. It is a policy that can be adopted by any West African state, federal or unitary (Nigeria is the only federal state in West Africa) for the sake of national stability. But if the present form of democracy is maintained in West Africa, whereby the government is representing the majority and that majority disregards voiceless ethnic groups or particular regions, then the problem of unequal political representation will continue, perpetuating thereby the crisis of economic inequality, which in turn perpetuates instability and weakens national cohesion. Therefore, the protection of minority groups' rights could be observed through representation in the legislature. Once that is assured, the different entities within each West African state will relate to the political center rather than to a marginalized periphery. Once the strategy of focusing on proportionate development of each region beginning from the most underprivileged is adopted, the government needs to also adopt strong punitive measures against dissents that will work against the regime for narrow reasons and biased tribal or other ethnic interests. Again here, the major contribution as well as motivation is expressed in the bold proposal that the most underprivileged has to be given priority in economic improvement even though many self-interested groups may oppose it. This policy has worked to a great extent in several Southeast Asian states. Therefore, it will surely stand as an important solution to many West African crises caused by the same root causes.

The Importance of Rural Development

There is another important area where strategic lessons can be driven from individual ASEAN countries like Malaysia and Thailand. That lies in the relationship between urban and rural development which is indispensable for sustainable national stability. It is a hard challenge of significant social ramifications that has been identified long ago by most Southeast Asian states. For example, one of the factors once feared to pose a threat to the Malaysian state was communal division which has been tackled successfully by the authorities. For this reason, the Malaysian and Thai authorities have invested tremendously in the development of rural areas that today almost all remote villages in these countries are provided with at least the basic necessities of life. Rural areas and rural people have been centrally implicated in Southeast Asia's modernisation. Through the three entry points of smallholder persistence, upland dispossession, and landlessness, this element offers an insight into the ways in which the countryside has been transformed over the past half century (Jonathan, 2020: 1).

Electricity, water supply, food, security, important house items, and others have all become available to the masses everywhere. In addition to this, sufficient schools, teachers, medical care centers, offices for the provision of needed government services like legal documents, paved roads have all been extended to rural areas. This is the reason why there is sufficient automatic control on people's movement and migration from rural to urban areas. The common people in the rural areas have no dire need lacking in their hometowns or villages that obliges them to search better living by migrating to big towns.

Today, this remains one of the real problems that all West African states without exemption continue to encounter. Almost all investment in domestic development is invested in towns, and more particularly in the capital cities. This is so in French West Africa where almost all villages as well as many towns are left remote and isolated from the rest of the society, despite the fact that the majority of the population are normally farmers living in rural areas. These remote villages are in total lack of electricity, water supply, medical facilities, even means of transportation that is expected to connect them to other neighbouring villages and towns. Moreover, degraded environments are less able to provide crucial ecosystem services like water filtration and soil fertility, compounding food insecurity and poverty, and contributing to patterns of migration and conflict (Grant, 2017: 12).

There is total lack of means of communication for the dissemination of information like telephones and television. That has left most villagers isolated from the daily affairs of the rest of the country, let alone the government's activities. In brief, even big towns including most West African capital cities lack necessities like electricity and adequate water supply, drainage system, sewages, and medical facilities. These trends continue to weaken government's ability to foster the development of the strong communities required for the emergence of important civil societies. This scenario is very much different from that of most Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei. It is obvious that a rural view allows an alternative lens for theorising and judging Southeast Asia's modernisation experience and narrative. The view argues that if we are to capture the nature – and not just the direction and amount – of agrarian change in Southeast Asia, then we need to view the countryside as more than rural and greater than farming (Jonathan, 2020: 4). West African authorities as well as common cultured classes need to take this motivation constructively because without taking such contribution into consideration, the states in that region will continue to bask in its mire of desperation.

Singapore has also succeeded in fostering the deep feeling of strong loyalty of its citizens towards the political authorities based on its ability to look into their daily demands and needs. Its policies for mobilizing people's support are based mainly on the premise of material well-being. The Singapore state has gone beyond the mere provision of the basic necessities of life to its citizens. It has gone to the stage of providing higher welfare to them. That plays the major role of solidifying their attachment to the state and the nation. Singapore is no doubt a genuine role model because the Singapore Cooperation Programme has trained almost 120,000 officials from more than 170 countries in areas such as disaster management, education, health, water, and human resource management (Singapore report, 2018: 2).

West African states have to look seriously into the needs of their increasingly impoverished people. Southeast Asian countries in particular Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Thailand being at one time equal or even less developed than some West African states, yet succeeding in achieving their present social, economic, and political progress is worthy of serious consideration. Although Singapore's population is small as well as its land space, yet it has been able to strengthen national unity simply by working earnestly for the well-being of every racial, religious or cultural entity in the society. That falls within the recommendations that the Southeast Asian regional community stresses in the area of human rights to achieve more solid national stability within each state. The recommendations, for instance, asserts the right of all people from each ASEAN member to a multitude of aspects such as the right to life, right to development, right to education, right to peace, and more (Putra, 2019: 43).

In West Africa, several states like Guinea Bissau and Gambia are also geographically small and have even much smaller population than Singapore. Yet, they failed to meet any of their

basic needs as a result of many factors that would be highlighted shortly. Uplifting the underprivileged by treating him as a *bumiputra* with extra rights and privileges, and at the same time focusing on developing rural areas or at least providing them with the basic necessities of life, as has been achieved by the successful Southeast Asian members, have to be adopted as a top strategic lesson by West African states to attain more sustainable national stability. Because notwithstanding some of the dynamics and changes in security landscape, many African countries continue to use traditional approaches to address these security threats. For Africa and its security leaders to effectively deliver sustainable security to their citizens, there is a need to move away from the "business-as-usual" approach to more proactive and strategic approaches (Luka and Joel, 2021: 1).

The Military & National Stability

As has been expounded already, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore are made up of distinctly different races, mainly Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Thais. They are made up of mainly four different religious affiliations, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. This is in addition to the three distinct cultures adhered to by each entity. It is natural that such kind of different tsocio-biological grouping could succumb to various conflicts from time to time. But these noted Southeast Asian states were able to contain numerous social, economic, and political conflicts that occurred in the past, and continue to safeguard the integrity and national stability of their countries. Beside the political, economic, and social measures adopted to ensure such harmonious co-existence, another measure has also been adopted to maintain the hard-attaiend harmonious status quo and national stability. That refers to their well-organized military and police forces. Over the years, we have seen a remarkable increase in the defense spending of individual ASEAN members (Putra, 2019: 41).

National resilience has been much supported by the presence of these two important government institutions. In turn, this strategic security policy has also led to better prospects in regional resilience and cooperation enabled by the stability attained in each of some of the Southeast Asian countries. But it should be held in mind that the focus of this deliberation here is on Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia, still with some reservations on the latter.Although Singapore is categorically small in terms of size, it shows a magnificently empowered military capability. Meanwhile, Indonesia still lags behind other ASEAN countries in terms of military spending despite its great population and land area (Putra, 2019: 42).

The intended motivation and contribution here is to reiterate with great emphasis to the West African authorities the importance of building morally disciplined and dedicated armed forces. Many experiences have revealed the inefficiency of West African armed forces who run for their lives with their tails between their legs while confronting insignificant bunch of bandits with light arms, or cooperate with armed criminals to commit various acts of crimes against innocent civilians. Nigerian armed forces are famous in that, whereas in Mali this phenomenon was one of the major factors leading to the military overthrowing of the government May last year 2021.

The inefficiency of West African armed forces

In addition to exposition above, the West African police and military institutions remain inefficient in ensuring national stability in most of the countries of this region. In most cases they are involved in exacerbating the crisis of national stability. As most West African authorities continue to be indulged in administrative corruption, the army follows suite. Right from the dawn of independence, the military has always been convinced that politics are too

crucial to be left freely to politicians. Although today the number of military and quasi-military regimes has declined since the third wave of democracy, the military's ambition and capability to exert influence to take office and rule a country lingers in many West African countries. (Wangge, 2017: 138). Nonetheless, the armed forces continue to perform poorly in their most sacred duties of maintaining law and order in the society. Rather, they did not differ from civilian leaders, and literally succumb to political manipulation, high-degree corruption, favoritism, coups and assassinations.

Worst of all is the inability of military governments to ensure domestic security and curb violent armed movements and prevent them from growing into rebellions that threaten national integrity. As a result of such malaises, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Gambia, all suffered from military intervention and threat to their national stability.

Although West Africa is the fastest growing economic region on the continent. Yet over the past five years, West Africa has also seen armed conflicts, leaders seizing power through unconstitutional means … and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Overall, national security sector institutions remain weak (Johan and Adriana, 2015, 1). The main reason behind this weakness of West African governments to safeguard domestic security and ensure regional stability is the weakness in their armed forces. Only few of them, like Niger and Mali, somehow had previously succeeded in temporarily ending ethnic dissent by resorting to political compromises since they are militarily weak to attain the same objective. Although as mentioned earlier, in Mali, the situation worsened and led to a military coup this year.

For instance in the case of the ethnic problem in Niger and Mali, the Tuareg were the first ethnic group to challenge the sovereignty of the two states. Numbering about 8 percent of the total population, the Tuareg are linguistically and physically different from the majority of Nigeriens and Malians. The major bond that ties them with the rest of the people is religious, which in some way mitigates political and ethnic hostilities to a certain degree. In the case of Niger, calling for a Tuareg state of their own in the north of the country, they have frequently formed armed rebellions that constituted serious problems to national stability. Whereas in the neighnouring Mali, they, seeking independence, started a rebellion against the Malian government in January 2012, inflicting serious losses on the soldiers in the north. The anger and dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of the government's response to the uprising of Tuareg tribes led to the coup on March 22, which forced President Toure into exile (Ajayi and Olu-Ademeyi, 2015: 98).

Even presently, neither Mali nor Niger is able to resolve its Tuareg problem unilaterally or in concert with the other at present. Many years ago in September 1990 the governments of those two countries along with Algeria and Libya established an "interministerial committee" on the Tuareg question (Richard, 2014: 226). Still in Niger and Mali, as well as Nigeria and Burkina Faso, several more armed groups emerged and threaten national stability, the most famous of which are the current armed fighters moved by religious zeal, or by banditry for financial gains. The military forces of these states are characterized by their inability to successfully put to rest these crises of national threat, the matter that created loopholes for extra regional military intervention in West Africa by some major powers like France and Russia.

Compared to some Southeast Asian states like Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia, such kind of serious threat to national stability and integrity, have so far been contained respectively by these countries, since the epoch of their military and political victories over communist insurgents. In Malaysia this success is widely accredited to the Malaysian police

force in the past. And until today, the force has been successful in ensuring maximum security against threats of national magnitude. Apart from what can be called normal daily crimes related to normal human behaviour, organized crimes are well-tackled by the police in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Brunei. Thanks to their well-organized armed forces, they have built up their military capacities, especially their navies and air forces. This armament has not brought them conventional military superiority but (frequently asymmetrical) military capacities intended to curtail the freedom of movement and strategic options of perceived enemies (Felix, 2017:6).

The secession question is basically the more hazardous challenge to some African authorities from independence to the present. Neither the army nor the police have played constructive role in diffusing these kinds of threats as did some Southeast Asian states, where the army remains under the control of civilian governments (with some reservations of Thailand and Indonesia). Military-civilian relationship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei, emerged peacefully from British colonial rule and London transferred control to designated or elected successors (Paul and Napisa, 2017: 152).

Moreover, quite often African armies complain of lack of efficient training, and of being left with ineffective military equipment. The Southeast Asian states have always continued to modernize their armies thanks to their success in economic development. More importantly still, the arms purchases effected by the countries in this phase reveal a change in procurement. Military doctrines, which had previously been directed almost exclusively at defending the country against internal enemies (counter-insurgency), now increasingly focused on conventional national defence. As a result, there were extensive and often very expensive modernization programmes for armed services branches which had previously been relatively neglected, such as the air force and navy (Felix, 2017: 7-8).

African Armies & The Thirst for Political Power

In West Africa, the military always comes to power under the pretext of saving the nation from corrupt politicians and restoring law and order. In certain contexts this claim is true, as many civilian governments prove themselves incapable of guaranteeing sustained economic growth, national security, and political stability. But the army itself is a real factor of national instability and lack of domestic security. It is instructive to note that the military juntas did not fare better in office. In fact most of them left their states worse than they met them. (Ajayi and Olu-Adeyemi, 2015:92).

The explanation for the survival of many West African civilian governments despite the continuous military intervention is the political shrewdness shown by some civilian leaders. The contrary can be detrimental, that is the lack of political skill, the manipulation of elections, may lead to the army removal of the government. Of course, the division of labor between the military and political leadership is also more coherently and centrally guided. In short, unified civil–military relations encourage concerted action between the political and military leaders (Evan, 2017: 352).

History always continues to repeat itself. For decades ago, it comes to memory that in its attempts to end the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent an army under its military wing, the ECOMOG, to that country but its efforts were curtailed because of its economic and logistic inefficiencies. As one Nigerian official admitted, one of the reasons for ECOMOG's failure to protect Freetown was the lack of military equipment like helicopter gunships and M1245 (Bangura, 2000: 576). Without the financial and logistic support extended by US and UN to

the peace initiatives in the two West African states, ECOMOG would not have been able to carry on for several years.

Today, the situation is even evidently worse than it had been in the past. Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, all remain unable to safeguard their national security and stability from armed insurgencies without depending on extra regional powers and direct intervention. And the lack of adequate military equipment pretext resounds over and over again. Indeed, the characteristics of weak and failed states—including corruption, poor governance, and insecurity—breed terrorist threats by providing safe havens for perpetrators, avenues for profitable illegal activities, and opportunities to recruit disaffected individuals (Grant, 2017:4).

Singapore is a very good example of military capability management and modernization that is worthy of taking lessons from. Civil–military relations in Singapore, threat perception, and diversity have helped in four developments –strategic assessment, defenceand development, procurement researches, distinguished policies for personnel, and education and training. The civil–military fusion under the People's Action Party (PAP) -led government since the country's founding moment has been providing coherent and consistent strategic guidance, political support, and financial capital, allowing the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to continuously innovate in response to high levels and diversity of threats (Evan, 2017:348). Even in time of peace, that have been important in shaping SAF's capability and endeavour on regular innovation. Singapore's ability has leaped from a simply defensive stance in the 1960s to an advanced technological Revolution in Military Affaires (RMA) ready military power today. It is undoubtedly too costly for armed forces to be static in their nature and capability, as a general exposition of military history proposes.

It is worthy emphasizing that Southeast Asian countries are fully aware of the importance of technological adaptability and modernization in terms of military equipment. They keep pace with the continuous changes needed for enhancing and modernizing military capabilities in the rapidly changing world of today. Means of rapid deployment by land, sea, and air, advanced means of communication, advanced modern weapons, and training continue to be updated to enable the armed forces to deal with challenges to national security and stability in an effective way at any given time. For instance, in the past, Indonesia, because of a threat perception that located security risks primarily inside the country, Indonesia had strongly neglected its navy and air force for decades (Felix, 2017: 9).

The rationale behind the fact that some small Southeast Asian states such as Singapore could achieve successful military innovation notwithstanding their geographical size and regime type, substantiates its importance of being worthy of exploring profoundly in future strategic and strategic studies in West Africa. Its military education programmes and comprehensive security perception, within and without, serves as a motivational contribution for other countries that lag behind in this domain.

Check, Balance, and the Modernization of the Military in West Africa

Many lessons can be deducted from some Southeast Asian countries in containing military interferences and intervention in politics. Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei's political strategies are very constructive in curbing military ambitions. Their impressive economic performance and mature political behaviour leave no vacuum for the army to jeopardize civilian rule. Singapore's strategy of compulsory national military service and the continuous presence of military reserves contribute in weakening the army as the only trained institution to monopolize the use of fire arms. While the Malaysian strategy of having a paramilitary in

the form of police force distinctly separate from the military serves as a check on the latter's political ambition and influence.

The Singaporean strategy can be adopted as a model by West African states only when they have achieved similar economic and political maturity. We must add that the military's monopoly of the instruments of coercion and its nationalistic affectations were also strong pre-disposing factors. Thus an institution that was thought to be apolitical began to play leading role in the politics of West African states (Ajayi and Olu-Ademeyi, 2015: 95). Nevertheless, since West Africa is still incohesive in terms of ethnic, tribal, and regional orientation, training every citizen as a reserve soldier might be detrimental and tempting as an opportunity for secessionists and dissidents to exploit out of national law and order. But the strategy is relevant in the future to limit the influence of the army that keeps on intermingling with democratic processes in West Africa, like the recurrent scenario in Myanmar, where the military permeates all of the country's main state institutions, the economy and society and that despite the 2011 elections, it remains firmly entrenched, exercising the role of "guardian of the political order", protecting its interests "from a position of strength" (Paul and Napisa, 2017: 122).

The Malaysian strategy of a paramilitary force is much more relevant as a contributing motivation and hope for the desperation in which civilian political government often find themselves vis-a-vis the military usurpation of political power. The police force is given more power and is separated from army control, since the police is normally closer to civilian governments. This diminishes the influence of the army and reduces its confidence by being psychologically aware that it is not the only institution possessing the knowledge and ability to use force against civilian governments and common masses. The nation at large is aware of the Malaysian armed forces main significant role as formidable forces entrusted to protect the nation's sovereignty and maintaining peace and stability (Burhanuddin, 2020: 1), rather than wreaking havoc with the course of democratic and political processes.

Conclusion

Until today, West African stands on a brink of precipice because of tribal, regional, and religious cleavages. In addition to that, economic disparity across every country within the region pose formidable obstacles to national stability. The role of the military is more often than less a factor in perpetuating insecurity therein.

As has been seen, the armed forces of West African countries lack the dynamism necessary for keeping their militaries equipped with modern technologies. At times rebellious movements that seem insignificant in magnitude, like in Mali, Niger, and Nigeria appear to possess advanced weapons that startle government forces. Small rebellious groups threatening national integrity survive long in the region because the armed forces are in shortage of rapid means of air, and land transportation, in addition to the lack of good roads linking towns and villages together necessary for the rapid transportation of the armed forces to the affected areas. Consequently, their effectiveness in keeping regional stability through peace-keeping missions is curtailed. It is essential not to neglect these important prerequisites if West African armed forces are to perform their duties more efficiently. It is essential to learn from some Southeast Asian national experiences in this domain for the significant part that it plays in keeping national security, stability, and curbing domestic crimes and other sources of instability. The lessons deliberated upon need to be taken seriously by West African as well as other regions within the continent. That is because they stand as relevant motivational contributions from the Southeast Asian region that had once shared

the same historical colonial destiny, threats to national security, and economic impoverishment. Yet this same region has been able to change its destiny in a manner incomparable to the states of West Africa.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with regard to this research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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