POWER MONGERS AND INSURGENCY IN LIBERIA

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism and insurgency are two variables from which the world has been suffering since the early human civilization. Even in our contemporary situation, they continuously disturb the peaceful atmosphere of human societies. The most alarming issue is the human beings are the architect of such unwanted phenomena. Africa and most especially the western part of Africa are equally the victims of insurgency. Such West African countries include Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Burkina Faso to mention but a few. Therefore, this paper tends to discuss how struggling over the possession of power in Liberia resulted in destruction, loss of lives and properties, and even evolved to insurgency operations and conflict of power among other social upheavals. Both primary and secondary sources of data collection will be used while developing the paper. Such include books, journals, and materials to achieve an oral source, and so on. However, the researcher will apply the historical research methodology by using available techniques for data corroboration to ensure clarity of information. The paper also established that it was the menace of power-mongering that put the country into a state of anarchy and chaos and at the of the Liberian Civil War several lives were recorded lost. However, the paper concludes that the crisis in Liberia was put to an end through the intervention of the regional peacekeeping monitoring group the ECOMOG. The paper also intends to draw the attention of African states to heavily consider the crisis in Liberia and quickly adopt preventive measures in their various countries. Hence Liberian crisis is among the most catastrophic conflicts that Africa had ever experienced. The paper also finds out that, even after the possession of powers by the power mongers still the conflict continues to flourish. Meanwhile, one of them retain power within a short, and the second one lost his life whereas the third one ended in fifty years sentence imprisonment.

Introduction

Before the intervention of any peace-broking process, there must be an existence of violence or conflict. However, peacekeeping theories include physiological, economic, structural, biological, psycho-cultural, prostration, and realistic theories, among others. Conflict theory is realistic when it comes to the struggle for power within a given community, state, or country. In the process, conflict may occur, and if care is not taken, that may result in broke out of insurgency in that particular country. However, in the course of resolving such a conflict, a set of methods and processes should be put in place, depending on the gravity of the conflict before it manifests into total insurgency. The belligerent or warrant parties may decide to embark on confrontations, arbitration, effective communication, compromise and dialogue, and so on. Each of the above techniques has its degree of application and conditions. As such a very good care has to be taken because sometimes misappropriation of techniques will end up turning the issue from bad to worse. Generally, the insurgency operations in Africa were more or less the product of political and economic upheavals.

The struggle for power in Liberia eventually started in about 1971 when the first American Liberian, in the person of William Tolbert, emerged as be Liberian president. In 1980, Sergeant Samuel Doe took power and killed Tolbert brutally and installed himself as president. From the emergence of Doe until the resignation of Taylor in 2003, Liberia had suffered from a series of insurgencies, as we shall see in this paper. The paper explores the need for African states to learn lessons from Liberia to avoid unnecessary involvement in a similar crisis in their countries, to also understand the need for peace and order in any given community for their growth and development. African countries should take advantage of unity, not separation, among other problems.

However, the main idea here is to give special consideration to the Liberian Crisis, which metamorphosed into total insurgency as a result of the struggle over the possession of political power between Doe, Johnson, and Taylor. And at the end, none of them emerged to be as triumphant despite the rampant killings of the innocent Liberian citizens. This case should also be an important lesson to other West African Nations and the rest of the world in general. For a better understanding of the discourse, some relevant concepts need to be clarified this including power monger and insurgency. Power Mongers: These are the polar opposite of real leadership, who use coercion as a basic tool to get what they want. They also use deception to gain power; they see themselves as elite and superior over the other lower beings, as opposed to seeing themselves among the fellow citizens as a benevolent leader would. Insurgency: This is a violent rebellion against authority and those in high positions in government, in the process of snatching power from them.

An Overview of the History of Liberia

Liberia is a country on the West African coast. It is bordered by Sierra Leone to its northwest, Guinea to its north, the Ivory Coast to its east, and the Atlantic Ocean to its southwest. It covers an area of 111,369 square kilometres (43,000 square miles) and has a population of around 4,900,000. English is the official language, but over 20 indigenous languages are spoken. The country's capital and largest city is Monrovia (Staff Writers, 1985). Liberia began as a settlement of the American Colonisation Society (ACS), which believed people would face better chances for freedom and prosperity in Africa than in the United States. The country declared its independence on July 26, 1847. While the US did not recognise Liberia's independence until February 5, 1862, during the American Civil War, during which free-born black people and Afro-Caribbeans were relocated to the settlement.[7]

Liberia was the first African republic to proclaim its independence and retained its independence even during the scramble for Africa. By about 1970–1980 political tensions due to power struggling between Samuel Doe, Charles Taylor, and Yormie Johnson resulted in terrorism and insurgency; that was when the then-president William Tolbert was assassinated. Thus, marking the beginning of year's long political instability; fine years of military rule by the people redemption council, and fine years of civilian rule by the National Democratic Party of Liberia. These also followed by a series of insurgent activities coupled with the first and second Liberian civil wars, which led to the loss of lives of about 25,000 people, i.e. about 8% of the population, and the displacement of many more, and shrank the Liberian economy by about 90% (The Economist, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The researcher in this respect intends to use conflict theory as first proposed by Karl Marx, that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources. Conflict theory holds that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather the by consensus and conformity. According to conflict theory, those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless. It is to this effect that power mongers wanted to establish themselves more authoritatively, as in the case of Liberia. Thus, they decided to resort to violence through the possession of weapons and foreign support to antagonise one another in the process of acquiring power.

Power Mongering and Insurgency in Liberia

William Tolbert was the 20th president of Liberia from 1971 until 1980 he was assassinated in a bloody coup d'état organized and masterminded by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe. He was a trained civil servant who entered the country's House of Representatives in 1943 and later was elected vice president to William Tolbert in 1952 and served in that position until he becomes president following Tolbert's death in 1971. Upon becoming president, he

initiated some reforms that led to critics on his government for failing to address the deep economic disparities between different sectors of the population, most especially favoring the Americo-Liberians who had dominated the country since independence over the various indigenous ethnic group that constituted the majority of the population (Africa South of the Sahara, 2003). Appointments to the economic policy were tainted with an allegation of Nepotism, this is a nature of African politics when a person from a given community emerged on the power that family and relative came closer to him and use the opportunity to establish themselves, the term which political scientists referred to cabalism. However, the indigenous of Liberia were accusing Tolbert of establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba and supporting the US during the Vietnamese war. Between 1965 and 1977 over 100 murders occurred in Maryland County by Harper in which many were killed in ritualistic ways due to the mutilation and removal of body parts.

This couples with the disappearances of 14 people without a cogent reason for their missing. However, the rice price increase in 1979 also led to a demonstration in Monrovia where about 70 demonstrations were killed[10]. In March 1980 Tolbert ordered the banning of some opposition political activities and most of the political organization leaders were arrested on charges of treason which was politically unwise because democratic dispensation allows people to involve in opposition. Those killings of demonstrators in the Maryland County and so on, Tolbert was suspected by the indigenous Liberians with full hand in the massacre. Thus in the early hours of April 12, 1980, 17 non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Armed forces of Liberia led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe launched a violent coup d'etat. The group entered the presidential palace and assassinated Tolbert, whose body was dumped into a mass grave together with 27 other victims of the coup. Many of the cabinet members had been put on trial and sentenced to death publicly at a beach near the Barclay training center in Monrovia. The only minister of finance in the person of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf survived the coup (Johnson, 2009).

The saddest thing here was most of the cabinet members who were killed were aged and the target was their heads. Including Tolbert who was shot three times on the head. With the emergence of Samuel Doe as a new Liberian leader who served first as a military leader and later as a politician. He established the People Redemption Council which made him a real de facto head of state assuming the rank of General. Doe suspended the constitution and headed the country's military junta for the next five years. He removed his Khaki and organized an election which makes him the 21st president of Liberia, the election was full of malpractices and fraud. He belongs to the *Krahn* ethnic group who were supporting him 100% he attempted to legitimize his regime with the passage of a new constitution in 1984, but proved abortive because he began to be challenged by the

opposition most especially after the 1985 elections, which were declared to be fraudulent by most foreign observers; but political reason yet the US continued to support him (Encyclopedia Britannica retrieved 2019).

For that Doe decided to decimate whoever was opposing his administration as many people were killed while a hundred were imprisoned. It was this situation that antagonized one of his ministers to establish a camp in the jungle and began to launch a military revolt against Samuel Doe. The leader of that revolt was Charles Taylor who establishes an insurgent militant called the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Charles Taylor, a former ally of Doe, crossed into Liberia from the Ivory Coast and wage a guerilla war against Doe which resulted in the loss of lives and properties most especially among the Krahn and Manu Giotribes. Some few months later, there was a rift between Taylor and Prince Yormie Johnson who deserted and established the independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). With this development, now Liberia and the people of Liberia were divided into three main camps, and each was attacking the other.

When the situation became worse, it was therefore mandatory for ECOWAS to intervene and resolved the issue. They, therefore, met General Babangida of Nigeria and finally decided to send ECOMOG under general Quinoo to Monrovia to have a dialogue with the warring parties. Charles Taylor decided not to honor the invitation which Doe accepted with good intention. As Doe was given all certainty to assume his safety from rebels, he came at the early hours of the meeting to the ECOMOG headquarters in Monrovia; he also left most of his team of aides and guards waited outside. Johnson insurgents group surprised everyone by suddenly arriving on the scene uninvited and heavily armed, and started shooting by annihilating the entirety of the Does team. This was on September 9, 1990, when the rebels under Johnson entered the ECOMOG headquarters and shot Doe on his leg, and captured him. It was a brutal massacre but unfortunately, none of the ECOMOG personnel were shot in the carnage. When the dust settled, over 80 of Do's men lay dead. Doe was later taken to Johnson's military base and tortured before killing him and exposed naked in the street of Monrovia where they spilled dirty water on his head. It was reported that some parts of his body were removed including his ear, tongue, fingers, and hrivate parts (Vick-Karl, 2003).

Both Taylor and Johnson did not succeed in taking over the government. But they continued leading their insurgence activities by erupting full-scale civil war and escalating mass killing and brutal massacre all over Liberian and its environs. This led total involvement of ECOMOG through contribution of capital and military by Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia Guinea, Mali, and Sierra Leone. A new scale of insurgency metamorphosed between the rebellion camps of Johnson and that of Taylor which led to a change of ECOMOG commanding ship to Nigeria permanently. However, ECOMOG took over the affairs of the leadership of Liberia for the time being. It

was said that after the death of Doe and before the establishment of the interim government, thousands of corpses were found around Monrovia and in the forest where the rebellion hideout is located. However, it was due to such rampant clashes and killings that several Liberians indigenous were affected by the catastrophic disease from the odor of those corpses (United Nations, 2007).

Between November 22, 1990 - March 7, 1994, an interim government of National unity was established under a Liberian politician and academics in the person of Dr. Amos Sawyerwho was voted in by35 leaders representing seven political parties and eleven interest groups. This was necessary because immediately after the assassination of Doe, both Johnson and Taylor made claims on the presidency. His leadership was extended for four years during the civil war fought against rebels and largely by Taylor, Johnson, and David Nimly. In 1994 Sawyer was forced to step down as a part of the peace process, and subsequently, the role of official leader of Liberian was not by the president, but the chairman of the council of the state. From 7th March 1994 until 1st September 1995 during the height of the first Liberian civil war, David Donald Kpomakpor who was a politician also served as Liberian ruler and chairman council of state. He was also replaced by Wilton Sankawulo a politician and author who ruled between 1995 and 1996 and later succeeded by Ruth Perry from September 3, 1996, until 2 August 1997. By 2nd August 1997 Charles Taylor was elected as 22nd president of Liberia until his resignation on 11 August 2003 (Ofeibea, 2003). The above development of shifting the presidential power from one person to another within a shortage period signifies how despite the people of Liberia are in terms of application of measures for peace restoration, and it also indicates their readiness to accept peace missions in place of violence.

The struggles for power that were planted in the mind of Charles Taylor by any means had actualized in 1997. Some scholars attributed that it was because of fear of continuing killing of Liberians by themselves resulted to voting Taylor in the presidential position, but unfortunately, those killings and other violence were not put to an end. Taylor was formally served in the government of Samuel Doe, he was said to have been removed for embezzlement and he later went to Libya, where he was trained as a guerilla fighter. He was one of the most prominent warlords in Africa.

During his stay in power, Taylor was accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity as a result of his involvement in the Sierra-Leone civil war (1991 – 2002), domestically opposition to his government, culminating in the outbreak of the second Liberian civil war (1999 - 2003). In a nutshell, Taylor had lost much of the countryside and was formally indicted by the special court for Sierra Leone. By 2003 he resigned as a result of growing international pressure and went to Nigeria for exile. This was part of decisions taken by ECOWAS and Taylor was accommodated in Nigeria. In 2006 the newly elected president

Ellen Sirleaf formally requested his extradition. He was detained by United Nations authorities in Sierra Leone and then at the penitentiary institution Heaglanden in Hague, awaiting trial by the special court. He was found guilty in April 2012 of all eleven charges levied by the special court, including terror, murder, and rape to mention but a few. In May 2012, Taylor was sentenced to 50 years in prison; while reading the sentencing statement, presiding Judge Richard Lussick said thus;

"The accused has been found responsible for adding and abating as well as planning some of the most heinous and brutal crimes in recorded human history"

The above statement implies how Taylor was charged with some inhuman acts and the violation of Humanitarian Law which led to his 50 years imprisonment despite his previous position as president of Liberia. This is to serve as great lessons for African leaders and politicians who wanted to emerge themselves in power by all means.

Conclusion

From the discussion in this paper, one can deduce that a power monger doesn't recognize God-given right or rather constitutional rights, but only the privileges that he decides to grant, usually to those likely to return political favors like money, votes, and support. A power monger can coerce at any level from family relationships to international connections, but those with an appetite for power generally seek it over a larger and larger cycle of underlings. A power monger doesn't avoid chaos but rather purposefully create chaos as an opportunity to cause more people to succumb to the desire for protection and a false sense of security, which they will offer. A power monger out of selfishness and service to self could energize any form of social vices ranging from insecurity, trafficking, terrorism, kidnapping and even skyrocketing the split of insurgency as basic tools for attaining his political gains (Ellis & Stephen, 2007). In Africa for instance Liberia is a victim of insurgency created by the power mongers and which continue to exist even by acquiring the powers by some of them. However, Liberia unlike Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo where the Civil war evolved as a result of an attempt by one region to secede from the other, its case doesn't involve any form of secession. Meanwhile, Nigeria resolved its crisis by herself or through indirect support from outside but the Liberian crisis was resolved through direct support from the International peacekeeping operation spearheaded by the ECOMOG. However, it was observed that military junta and the activities of the power mongers did not help in any way towards resolving the Liberian crisis, rather it even add more salt to the wound. But fortunately enough the establishment of democratic administration has contributed and currently, the people of Liberia are witnessing the impact of peace and order.

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