

ECOWAS Management to Burkina Faso's Crisis

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West Africa had long witnessed several political crises, some of which led to the collapse of political regimes while others threatened the national unity of other countries. In all cases, the common denominator between such crises is that they are all internal with regional dimensions; represented in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the coups in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mali, Guinea Bissau and Gambia, and the coup attempts in Cote D'Ivoire which was followed by the civil war upon 2009 presidential elections, not to mention the crisis of the occupation of armed groups to North Mali in 2012 and the recent Burkina Faso's crisis on October 30/31, 2014, among others.

Such kinds of crisis led the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) to establish a sub-regional mechanism, entitled "ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in order to face the regional peace and security threats. It is worthy to mention that the ECOWAS system allows the intervention in some crises for special purposes. Such intervention can take place in five cases:

- 1- An aggression against or a threat to a member state.
- 2- Conflict between two or more member states.
- 3- Internal conflict, if such conflict might lead to a humanitarian catastrophe or might threaten the regional peace and security.
- 4- A blatant violation to human rights or to the rule of law.
- 5- A coup or a coup attempt against a democratically elected government.

The ECOMOG had previously interfered in the first Liberian civil war; 1989-1996, under the leadership of Nigeria. It had also interfered in Sierra Leone's civil war in the 1990s, in Guinea Bissau and in Cote D'Ivoire during the 2009 crisis. In this vein, such forces is not the only mechanism for the ECOMOG in its peaceful tasks, as there is also the Mediation and Security Council which has a diplomatic and security nature and is comprised of nine states, in addition to the Defense and Security Council which works under the supervision of the Mediation and Security Council. Furthermore, the ECOWAS possesses an early alert system that monitors the cases that might

predict crises, in an attempt to prevent the eruption of disputes or the smuggling of weapons or of drugs, in addition to the trans-border crimes. This system has four bureaus distributed among various areas; each of which includes a number of states.

There are several ECOWAS charters on realizing stability and peace; salient of which are “The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework” whether this conflict is internal or among states. There is also the “Protocol on Good Governance” which commits the member states to adopt procedures that lead to stability. At the same time, it prevents states from adopting procedures that might lead to conflicts or might contradicts the principle of good-governance; including the amendment of constitutions or of electoral laws short before the time of the elections. The Protocol stipulates that reaching power should take place through free, fair and transparent elections. According to such protocol, the ECOWAS applies the election monitoring missions system in the member states. In this respect, it becomes clear that the ECOWAS applies two methodologies in facing crises that threaten peace and security; i.e.; the diplomatic methodology which includes mediations and good offices and the military methodology which requires the use of

the rapid intervention force “ECOMOG” in certain cases.

Burkina Faso’s Crisis (October 30/31, 2014)

It is noticeable that, since its independence, Burkina Faso had witnessed various coups that led to constitutional amendments and uprisings; the case in any coup that takes the country to a vicious circle. Burkina Faso gained its independence 54 years ago (1960-2014), 48 years of which (1966-2014) were under military rule. Five presidents reached office during this period, each with a different ruling period; the longest was Blaise Compaore’s era that extended to 27 years (1987-2014).

Compaore took over after the assassination of Sankara and ruled the first four years without being elected, then he was elected for four terms; 1991, 1998, 2005, and 2010, he then tended to alter the constitution, as usual, in order to remain in office in 2015 elections, but the people resisted such change.

Thereupon, a popular uprising, some calls it a revolution, erupted on October 30/31, 2014 due to the accumulation of crises, mostly were political ones. In this respect, the era of the former President Compaore, which started with the assassination of Thomas Sankara in 1987 and ended with a popular uprising in October 2014, was stained with various bloody events; including the as-

sassination of the former president and of the Journalist Norbert Zongo and his three colleagues on December 13, 1998, in addition to the continuous constitutional amendments in an attempt to remain in power, however, his last attempts of altering the constitution failed, thus ending his political life.

Reasons behind the Crisis:

Bloody Crimes in the 1990s

This includes the impunity from the assassination of Norbert Zongo and his three colleagues in 1998 because of Zongo's article that pointed to the involvement of the President's family in the assassination of the driver of the President's brother. Thereupon, an independent investigation committee had been formed to determine the perpetrator of such a crime. However, matters became more complicated with the investigation committee issued its report lacking clear-cut evidence convicting the accused; 6 presidential security members, at the time when a rumor got around that the president's brother is involved in the crime.

Corrupt Practices

This is represented in the Constitutional amendments to remain in office. Compaore, like other African presidents, held on to power until his people dethroned him. He did not learn the lesson from the former president of his neighboring country (Niger) Mamadou Tandja in 2010

who altered the constitution of his country to remain in office, ignoring the advices of his friends and the opposition of his people to this step, thus leading to his ousting with the intervention of the army. Afterwards, presidential elections had been organized in 2011 and the civil president Mahamadou Issoufou came to office.

It is worthy to mention that Compaore started his term of office by privatizing the projects which Sankara had previously nationalized.

Regional Changes and the Double Regional Role of the Previous President Compaore:

From the most prominent changes in this respect is the Senegalese popular uprising against the attempts of their previous president to amend the 2012 Constitution, in addition to the end of the Libyan President's rule; who used to have special relations with Compaore. On the other hand, despite the fact that Compaore played the role of an honest mediator in various crisis, such as the one that took place in Cote D'Ivoire between Gbagbo's regime and his dissidents and the crisis of the armed groups' occupation to North Mali in 2012, yet there is an obscure side in his regional role that led to a rumor that Compaore had played a negative role in destabilizing some states. Although it is hard

to prove that such rumors are correct, yet they created a negative image for him both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, France's stance against him during the era of President François Hollande had changed, as the apparent political discourse of the French president indicates a discouragement to remain in power for long non-constitutional periods.

All these accumulated reasons had provoked the people against the successive constitutional amendments. It is worth mentioning that it is not the first time for the Burkinians to revolt against their regime, as the regime of the first Burkinian President had collapsed as a result of a popular uprising. Moreover, Compaore's era was full of crises, especially during the 1990s.

ECOWAS Management to the crisis:

At the Beginning, A committee had been formed from the presidents of three states: John Dramani Mahama of Ghana and the ECOWAS executive president, Macky Sall of Senegal and Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria. They reached Ouagadougou, the Capital on November 5, so as to hold talks with the other effective parties in order to find a solution for the current crisis based on the transition to a civil rule. A day before, the African Union had issued a statement asking

the army to transfer the rule to a civil authority, and the African Peace and Security Council decided that such a transition should take place within 15 days, or else sanctions will be imposed. *President of the African Union, Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz* had paid a visit to Mauritius so as to facilitate solving the problem. Thereupon, the military leader expressed his readiness to transfer power to civilians as soon as possible. Moreover, on November 3, the African Union appointed a special envoy to address this crisis. On November 6, 2014, the ECOWAS held an urgent summit in Accra, Ghana, to hold talks over this crisis and selected the former Senegalese foreign minister Ibrahima Fall as a special envoy to facilitate the dialogue and solve the problem.

On the other hand, France had also played a role in these events, as the French President *Francois Hollande* wrote to Compaore advising him not to amend the constitution. He also mentioned later that he asked Compaore on the second day of the crisis (October 31); the day of Compaore's stepping down, to take suitable decisions; leaving power.

In this vein, the ECOWAS, with other African bodies, interfered to prevent the escalation of the crisis, to determine the transitional period with a civil leadership and to

restore the constitution and the state institutions. Such efforts led to understandings that prevented the country from entering into disputes or civil wars.

Conducting Dialogue for Applying a Charter for the Transitional Period

Neither the opposition political forces nor the civil society accepted the rule of the army to the transitional period, thus creating tensions between both sides. The army thus accepted conducting dialogue with the other parties, with the help of regional forces.

Thereupon and within two weeks, an initial charter had been issued that determines the features of the transitional phase. After taking the observations of the military leaders into consideration, the final charter, according to its preamble, was issued to be a complementary to the 1991 Constitution. The most important transitional rules in such charter are represented in: the body in charge to appoint the interim president is formed of 23 members, where 5 political parties, 5 civil society organizations, 5 defense and security members and 8 religious and traditional leaders are represented. The interim president should be a civilian. He should not make any amendments to Article 37 of the Constitution. No official in the current government should run the fol-

lowing 2015 elections. The transitional phase should be for one year only.

Due to the absence of the parliament, a national council under the name of the “National Transitional Council” which is formed of 90 members; of which 30 represent political parties, 25 represent civil society organizations, 25 represent the defense and security forces and 10 represent other parties (according to Article 12) had applied the constitution.

In this respect, such concordance among the effective powers in Burkina Faso, in addition to applying the charter and selecting an interim civil president were all regarded the least acceptable settlement for the ECOWAS so as neither to impose sanctions nor to suspend Burkina Faso’s membership in the organization.

Notifications over the Application of the Transitional Phase Charter

Undoubtedly, the Burkina Faso’s people addressed this crisis positively. In this respect, the transitional phase charter was issued to appoint the diplomat Michel Kafando as an interim president. In general, this charter is fairly fine; however, certain notices over its application can be detected as follows:

- It contradicted the rules of 1991 Constitution which stipulates

that in case the president is temporarily or constantly unable to perform his tasks, the prime minister then acts as a president until a new president is nominated for the rest of the transitional period, while the constitution stipulates that the chairman of the senate acts as a president in case the post of the presidency is vacant or the president is unable to perform his tasks.

- The status of the defense and security forces in the authorities mentioned in the charter indicates the dominance of such forces, whether in case of appointing a president, in the National Transitional Council, or in the government, especially that the role of the army and the police is deep-rooted in the history of Burkina Faso; the matter which do not guarantee a real democratic transformation as the people inspire.
- The legislative authority in the charter is formed under the name “National Transitional Council”. Not only is this name

incompatible with the Constitution, but also the army and the police occupy around 28% of its seats; 25 members out of 90.

- Practically, interim President Michel Kafando appointed the military Prime Minister Lieutenant Colonel Isaac Zida who took-over power upon the popular uprising and the stepping down of Compaore; thus enhancing the belief that the army is the actual ruler of the transitional period.
- The accumulation of posts in one hand raises many questions; Kafando, the interim president is also the minister of foreign affairs, Zida the prime minister is also the minister of defense. Furthermore, the three ministers of the interior, of mines and of sports are army men, thus keeping the army as a political power in the transitional phase; the matter which enhances the viewpoint that believes that the army is still dominating the executive authority of the transitional phase.