

## THE NIGER COUP: GEOPOLITICS AND FOREIGN POWER RELATIONS

Awaisu Imurana Braimah<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Department of Political Science Education, University of Education, Winneba (Ghana)  
ORCID I.D.: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9107-9903>, Email: [baimurana@uew.edu.gh](mailto:baimurana@uew.edu.gh)

### Abstract

The illegitimate enterprise of military takeovers from democratically elected governments in Africa has been rising steadily in recent times – examples include Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, and Sudan. The latest coup d'état in Niger has seen a multiform of geopolitical and international propulsion to restore democracy despite the fierce resistance from the military junta to acquiesce. The Niger coup has attracted geopolitical and international interests because of its geographical and relevant resource mix in the global system. The purpose of this study was to examine the recent resurgence of putschists in the African continent, analyse the intransigence of the Niger military junta to cede power, and the implications of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) threats of military intervention in the Niger political morass. The study adopted a qualitative study approach and drew on the perception of eighteen anonymized Niger military officers using a semi-structured interview guide to solicit information and data. The selection of participants was done via snowballing. To achieve the objectives of the study, three key research questions were denudated: ((a) Why is there a resurgence of military coup d'états in Sub-Saharan Africa? (b) Why are the putschists adamant about reinstating the ousted democratically elected Nigerien government? (c) To what extent could the political deadlock in Niger be resolved? The paper concludes and argues that an ECOWAS military intervention in Niger would have dire security, economic, social, and political consequences in the West African sub-region and *ipso facto*, Africa, and the rest of the world. The paper recommends a series of, and a combination of diplomatic methods as the basis of resolving the political deadlock in the Nigerien coup menace.

**Keywords:** Coup d'état, Democracy, Geopolitics, Migration, Refugee.

### Introduction

Recent years have seen a re-militarisation of states around the world, with the military making a comeback on the political scene in sub-Sahara Africa in particular (Basedau,2020) The enterprise of military coup d'états succeeds and flourishes in much of Black Africa than in Latin America, Asia, and North Africa (Bukari & Braimah, 2023). Democracy and military coup d'états have been found as conjoins since the withdrawal of colonialists from the African continent in the 1950s. The toppling of democratically elected civilian regimes or administrations by the military

is experienced in almost 47 (e.g., Sudan, Burundi, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Comoros, Benin, Nigeria, Mali, Guinea-Bissau Togo, Republic of Congo, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Guinea, Ethiopia, Central Gabon, African Republic, Uganda, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo, Algeria, Liberia, Madagascar, Lesotho, Ivory Coast, Libya, The Gambia, Tunisia) countries out of the 54 nation-states (Powell & Thyne, 2011; Braimah, 2023; Braimah & Forson, 2023). The highest attempts, failures, and successful coup d'état epidemics since the 1950s occurred in twelve (12) of these countries in Africa [e.g., Sudan (17), Burundi (11), Burkina Faso (10), Ghana (10), Sierra Leone (10), Comoros (9), Guinea-Bissau (9), Benin (8), Mali (8), Nigeria (8), Niger (8), Chad (7)] (Powell & Thyne, 2011). Of these countries, half of them are currently experiencing military rule (e.g., Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Chad, Gabon). Altruistically, these coups have reinvented the wheel of the democratic fever (i.e., the third wave of democratization) and its consolidation in much of Sub-Saharan Africa.

The toppling of democratically elected governments by the military has been a major feature of post-independence Africa. The first four successful coup d'états in Niger passed off in 1974, 1996, 1999, and 2010 (<https://www.aljazeera.com>). The latest coup in Niger (my focus) which occurred on July 26, 2023 – the fifth successful coup d'état since independence from France in 1960 – has attracted geopolitical interest as well condemnation around the world [e.g., African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)], and some foreign powers (e.g., France, the United States, Germany, Türkiye, United Nations). Despite the mounting international pressure on the coup plotters to reinstate the deposed democratically elected government to the pre-coup condition, the military rulers have thus refused to relinquish power and return to the barracks. Instead, the coup plotters justified their action on the ever-worsening insecurity situation in the country. According to the Army spokesperson, Colonel-Major Amadou Abdramane in a statement broadcast on a state-run television channel stated among others:

the defence and security forces ... have decided to put an end to the regime you are familiar with... this follows the continuous deterioration of the security situation, the bad social and economic mismanagement ([aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com))

Inferring from the statement of the coup plotters, the current Niger coup d'état was necessitated by three key factors. First, rising insecurity affecting the people of Niger; second, abject poverty and misery of the masses; third, economic mismanagement, corruption, fraud, cronyism, and exploitative nature of the West African country by foreign powers. These justifications for toppling democratically elected governments (i.e., insecurity, corruption, mismanagement, and poverty) have been a rhyme of putschists since the postcolonial epoch to contemporary Africa's coup leaders (Adekoya, 2021). While corruption, poverty, and resource mismanagement feature prominently in postcolonial civilian governments in Africa, military intervention in politics has never been a guarantor to salvage the ills levelled against the democratically elected civilian governments (Braimah & Forson, 2023; Ardigo et al). The Military coup plotters are the worst elements of corruption and mismanagement whenever they accidentally find themselves in the saddle of political power and governance. (Carbone, & Pellagata, 2020; Asekere & Braimah, 2021; Issah & Braimah, 2022; Braimah, 2016).

Despite the gross incompetence of Africa's coup leaders over the years, a cross-section of the populace will normally lend support to military takeovers with the mistaken belief that the military is a better option to break the string of poverty and underdevelopment facing their respective countries despite putschists consistent incompetence in the saddle of governance and policy failures in the past. The objectives of this paper, therefore, were: to explore the resurgence of military takeovers in modern Africa; examine the Nigerien military junta's intransigence posture to cede power despite the mounting geopolitical and international denunciation pressures; and find out the appropriate mechanisms to resolve the political conflict in Niger. Based on the stated objectives, the following research questions were denudated as a guide to directing the substance of the research: (a) Why is there a resurgence of military coup d'états in Sub-Saharan Africa? (b) Why are the putschists adamant about reinstating the ousted democratically elected Nigerien government? (c) To what extent can the political deadlock in Niger be resolved?

This paper draws on the perception of eighteen (18) anonymized semi-structured interviews (i.e., face-to-face) of serving military officers of the Nigerien armed forces. The participants for the study were reached utilizing the snowballing approach – a phenomenon where an informant directs a researcher to another until the information and data needed get to the saturation point. The breakdown of respondents comprised 14 males and 4 females. A qualitative study approach was considered appropriate for this kind of inquiry. This is because it does not require a large sample of respondents to make a case for the entire population. It involves an in-depth inquiry from respondents with 'adequate' knowledge or expertise on the subject matter under investigation. A qualitative research approach emphasizes "quality" rather than "quantity"; that is, social meanings rather than the collection of numerate statistical data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Brewer, 2003). The interviews were conducted with the assistance of a Niger-based journalist who directly interviewed the combat-ready officers between August and September 2023. It is significant to state that the participants declined a request to do an audio recording of the interview sessions. However, the researcher or interviewer was permitted to take field notes. Also, it is necessary to state that 56 military Officers utterly declined to participate in the research ostensibly for fear of victimization from superior Officers. This emphasized the point that participants had the free will to either participate, decline, or withdraw from the study (Brammah, et al, 2018). Again, participants were not in any way induced or coerced to participate in the study. The primary information gathered from the interviews largely underpinned the discussion and analysis of key issues that relate to the Niger coup and its political and security implications. This source of information was complemented by secondary data which aided the understanding and analysis of the recent coup d'état in Niger and the general coup d'état epidemics in Africa. Data and information collected were subjected to further scrutiny, discussed, and thematically analysed.

### **The French in Modern Africa.**

France's withdrawal from its former colonies in sub-Sahara Africa is largely ceremonial and a legal fiction of sovereignty and political independence. Politically, economically, and socially, the former colonies are development-dependent and also rely mainly on the largesse of their historical

colonial master for ‘survival’ (e.g., Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Togo) In return, the former colonies remain the source of raw materials (e.g., raw cocoa beans) and other minerals (e.g., uranium, gold, crude oil) for the French industrial hub. In addition, the former colonies served as satellite markets for manufactured goods and services from France and its surrogates. This asymmetrical relationship is *ab initio*, creates wealth and employment opportunities for the French economy; while its former colonies and population are wallowing in abject poverty, misery, insecurity, and a high unemployment rate. In effect, the French still have ‘enormous’ control and direction of its former colonies in Africa (Gathara, 2019). The mechanism for control and direction of its former colonies is orchestrated by supporting the election and installation of puppet governments and financing a huge proportion of the annual budgets of former colonies. Hence, the epidemic of military coup d’états in much of French former colonies is an ample demonstration of attempts by these putschist states to take control of their nations and redefine their ‘second independence’. The neocolonial policies of France in modern Africa are being challenged root and branch to the extent that French troops and diplomats are accosted by citizens of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger among others to leave. These undercurrents or developments show that all is not well with France and her relations with its former colonies

In the unique case of Niger, both the French and the United States have military bases in the landlocked West African country in the Sahel region. Yet, the remnants of Al-Qaeda, Islamic State (ISIS), and Boko Haram (BH) terrorist groups are operating gleefully in the region with impunity – intermittent attacks on the local population and security personnel are a widespread phenomenon. It is argued that the military bases of the French and the US were established in Niger for the protection of the formers’ national interests - the extraction of gold and uranium and other minerals in Niger remains the preoccupation of the French and its key allies in Europe and the Western world. This ‘propaganda’ machinery of Niger putschists, the press, some civil society organizations, and victims of provinces where the armed bandits regularly attack got mired in protests of the ‘French troops must leave’ mantra to the extent that, the French Ambassador to Niger was expelled in the process.

### **Niger in the Community of West African States**

The Republic of Niger is a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and *ipso facto*, a member of the African Union (AU). Military intervention in politics has been pervasive in Africa since the 1960s until some semblance of recession in the late 1990s. The resurgence of military takeovers in recent times (e.g., Burkina Faso, Chad, Central African Republic, Guinea, Mali, Sudan, Gabon, and the constitutional coup in Tunisia) has been roundly condemned by the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In the eyes of the AU and ECOWAS members, the cyclical military takeovers are mind-boggling and defy the logic of contemporary international law on governance. The supranational organizations (i.e., AU and ECOWAS) at the regional and subregional have normally imposed economic sanctions on coup plotters in an attempt to compel the various military juntas in the African continent to cede power to whacked democratically elected leaders

to restore democratic governance. In the case of the fifth successful Niger coup, the reaction of AU and ECOWAS besides the usual coterie of condemnation and economic sanctions on the military junta, there is a potential threat of external military intervention in Niger by ECOWAS to restore democracy and attempt to reinstate the deposed president. The standpoint of ECOWAS to use military force to restore the democratically elected government has also, attracted geopolitical, global, and political interests from the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), African Union (AU), and foreign powers such as the United States, France, Germany, Russia, and other petit states. The United States and France have pledged their support to ECOWAS while the military junta in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, and Mali supports the Niger junta. The Russian-sponsored Wagner mercenaries who are already operating in the Sahel region are likely to solidly offer their support to the Nigerien junta should ECOWAS intervene militarily. This makes the Nigerien coup a geopolitical internationalized conflict with its ruinous upshots on the population and the wider ramifications on the international security architecture.

The military junta's response to the threat of military intervention from ECOWAS was to first, cut off any diplomatic efforts by denying the UN, AU, and ECOWAS delegation entry (i.e., August 1, 2023) into Niamey to discuss a possible dialogue and negotiation for the military junta to cede power. Second, the junta closed down the Nigerien airspace and land borders in protest of the crippling economic sanctions and threats of military invasion of Niger in the wake of the coup. Finally, the military junta is in alliance with Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Mali to provide essential goods and services to ameliorate the suffering of the masses premised on the economic sanctions imposed on Niger's military junta by ECOWAS. The junta's posture shows they are not amenable to any immediate diplomatic means to restore the ousted democratically elected government as demanded by ECOWAS. Technically speaking, there is a searing deadlock on the pathway to put democratic governance back on track in Niger. The threat of ECOWAS to intervene militarily in Niger is a dead duck as some member-states of ECOWAS are opposed to that idea (e.g., Algeria, Mauritania). How then can the international community resolve the Niger coup situation while working to safeguard the lives of Nigeriens? The next section of the paper explores the various options available to Nigeriens, AU, ECOWAS, and other interested states beyond the shores of Africa in resolving the Niger enigma without bloodshed. In addition, the section delineates, or showcases broadly, the various forms or dimensions of coup d'états around the African continent.

### **Restoring Democracy in Niger: Which Way Out?**

Member-states of ECOWAS including the African Union (AU) are gripped with the fear of the recent spate of coup d'état epidemics across Africa. The mechanisms and processes to prevent the coup d'état menace are equally troubling and complex. The democratic culture in Africa is fast taking a backslide owing to a catalogue of pervasive bad governance, political and bureaucratic corruption, bribery, creedal, prebendal, mismanagement of national resources through underhand deals with domestic cronies, international smuggling cartels or the 'looting brigades', autocratic tendencies, and the failure of democracy to yield the fruits of capitalism in Africa (Braitham & Forson, 2023; Mattes, 2019; Braitham et al, 2014; Attina, 2012). In place of the ethos of liberal

democracy, military coup d'états, authoritarianism, and manipulations of the presidential term of office to cling to power incidences are growing exponentially in Africa. In principle, there are broadly four types of coup d'états in Africa: rebel movements, military adventurism, constitutional manipulations, and invisible hands of foreign power exploitations in Africa.

First, rebellion against the state and its officials to overthrow democratically elected civilian government is one of the mechanisms of usurping political power in Africa since the 1960s to the early 2000s from the people (e.g., Algeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Liberia, Chad, Mozambique, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan, Angola, Uganda, Libya). These militia or rebel movements and their warlords have been a source of destabilization and dissipation of national resources until the dawn of the third wave of democratization in Africa in the late 1980s. It is instructive to note that, the incidences of warlords in Africa have receded in recent times even though, the scourge of such destabilizations is indelible on the national consciousness of the affected states. Second, military adventurism in politics and Africa's decolonization processes were probably born identical twins. This is because military takeovers from democratically elected civilians have become a cyclical *dejeuner* across nation-states in Africa. There has been a rhythmic power alternation between the pugnacious military and its civilian counterparts since post-independence. Whenever the civilian elected governments exhibit signs of incompetence in the management of the national economy, corrupt, inept, and moribund, the military intervenes to seize political power. In the same vein, when a military regime becomes super incompetent in the saddle of governance, corrupt, and becomes a domestic and international pariah, they return the country to a civilian administration through democratic elections. Hence, there has been a power struggle between the democratically elected civilians and militaries in Africa since the end of the Cold War (Asante, 2015; Kuehn, 2016; Braimah, 2014). The power struggles coupled with bad governance in the continent constitute the bane of Africa's underdevelopment. Third, the constitutional coup epidemic has become the 'new normal' in most African states since the late 1990s. This is orchestrated through a cussed constitutional amendment to extend the presidential term limits to cling to political power (e.g., Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Rwanda, Republic of Congo, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe). This kind of political obsession and manipulation of the national constitution tend to stoke tensions within the state and erode societal cohesion, nation-building, and political alienation of the citizenry. This usually paves the way for military intrusion in politics with the gadfly insaneness. Finally, the most dangerous dimension of coup d'état in the African continent is the seemingly 'invisible' neocolonial 'state capture' by foreign powers. By foreign powers, I refer to developed countries, metropolitan states, and former colonialists and their surrogates. Foreign powers control African economies through a labyrinth of multiple channels – skewed investments (i.e., zero-sum game) in African rich mineral resources (e.g., oil, gold, uranium, manganese, timber); foreign aid; establishing military bases in Africa; unbridle export to Africa by developed countries while limiting imports from Africa to European and Western markets; low price index for African primary commodity exports (e.g., cocoa, rubber, cotton, coffee) to European markets; unsustainable and programmatic debt-ridden loans advanced to African states via the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF); international

trade with Africa is benchmarked along Western and European currencies among others (Fearon, 2005; Ake, 1996). In effect, African states are used as satellite markets for European and Western commodities, dollarisation of African economies, reliance on import commodities from abroad, development-dependent, high unemployment rates, misery, migration to Europe in search of a better life, insecurity, and abject poverty within and among the multitude of African populations amidst rich and abundance of natural resources. Any of the various categorizations of the coup d'états in Africa inhibit national development and also arouses citizens' discontent toward political leadership and the governance structure - blaming the slow pace of development and the wanton dissipation or the mismanagement of natural resources on democracy, and the machinations of neocolonial forces operating in the African continent (Bakonyi, 2020; Dukhan, 2020; Flinders & Geddes, 2020).

Restoring democratic governance in Niger almost immediately after the coup may not be an easy task or venture. In other words, it is "extremely, highly unlikely" that the military junta would cede power and return to the barracks in the coming weeks or months (Collinson et al., 2023; Braimah & Mbowura, 2018). It is in light of this frustration that ECOWAS threatens to intervene militarily as a result of the junta's scoffing at the various diplomatic engagements to reinstate the deposed government and return the country to constitutional rule as soon as practicable. In addition, the regional bloc desires to make military coup d'états in Africa a zero sybaritic and repulsive force or enterprise to engage. In the unique case of the Niger coup, ECOWAS is facing two major dilemmas -- the use of diplomacy or force to reinstate the ousted president (Mohamed Bazoum) and his government. A delay in returning Niger to the path of democracy in the view of ECOWAS tends to give credence or legitimacy to the scofflaw of a military resurgence in politics around the African continent (e.g., Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Sudan). The coup d'état epidemics in Africa risk "spiraling out of control" to other member-states. Military intervention in the Nigerien situation would be a recipe for chaos in a continent that is struggling to recover from the combined effects of the Covid-19 pandemic disease crisis, and the Russo-Ukrainian war that is/are accompanied by global economic dystopia (Braimah, 2020a; Braimah, 2020b). While dialogue, negotiation, and consensus peace-building are key to resolving problems of an international nature, the process admittedly, takes a considerable time frame to achieve. ECOWAS needs to continuously nudge the military junta closer to a round table discussion to cede power. In terms of avoiding humanitarian crises, destruction of critical infrastructure, the incidences of creating Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugee movements, state failure or collapse, underdevelopment, and abject poverty, dialogue with the Niger military junta is the first step towards restoring democratic governance. The use of military force has the propensity to destabilize the West African sub-region and the African continent as a whole – European states are extremely likely to receive more desperate migrants from Africa if there is ever-increasing insecurity coupled with a further meltdown of economic activities in the Sahel region. The next section of this paper thematically discussed the Niger coup crisis and pivoted around the research questions posed in the introductory part of the study.

## Discussion and Implications

The persistent jarring out of democratically elected civilian governments by African military saps is synonymous with democratic practice in Africa. The peak of the military intervention in politics occurred in the early 1950s to late 1980s. However, the incidences of putschists receded in the 1990s ushering in the third wave of (re) democratization of Africa in the early 1990s despite some states experiencing rebel movements, insurgencies, and civil wars encapsulated in ethnic mobilization and politics of identity. In the last three years (i.e., 2020 to 2023) alone, there have been seven (re)militarisation of states in Africa. These shockwaves of military disruptions of established constitutional governance based on the rule of law, periodic multiparty elections, and adherence to freedom of speech, free press, and assembly, create a sense of déjà vu of military adventurism in African politics. To put the discussion in the context of the Niger coup, there is a need to examine the resurgence of putschist activities in sub-Saharan Africa. In this perspective, the research respondents were asked: why is there a general resurgence of military takeovers from democratically elected civilian governments in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Respondents generally understood the substance of the question. They provided a wide range of reasons that account for the recent spate of coup epidemics across the African continent. These causes have been categorized into a five-fold schema: incompetent political leadership; bribery and corruption; impoverished populations amid abundant natural resources; reliance on raw materials for export; and zero-sum neocolonial and harmful investments in Africa. According to the respondents, the litany of Africa's problems is not about inadequate or lack of rich and naturally endowed mineral resources, the problem is hinged on incompetent political leadership. Generally, African political leadership has failed to use their naturally endowed resources to transform and better the living conditions of the masses. Instead, their natural resources have been mortgaged or 'gifted' to multinational corporations on shady and doubtful terms and conditions while their citizens wallow in poverty with their dependents. A few privileged individuals close to the corridors of power live opulently. Again, bribery and corruption are pervasive in the African continent. This social canker is anti-development and deprives citizens of employment opportunities, better healthcare, industrialization, weak state institutions, misery, and needless conflicts. Bribery and corruption are both local and international. It can be found at the state level involving state officials, institutions, and their cronies. Bribery and corruption are also found between state actors and their international collaborators in the areas of rich mineral resources (e.g., gold, uranium, oil, manganese). In the words of one respondent:

*Majority of African leaders are despotically, puppet leaders with their puppet governments. They are sponsored financially by one or two developed states in elections. Once they win the elections and form the government, the sponsors return to scoop resources in the periphery with shady deals that only benefit the former. The affairs of the state are controlled and directed by another state. Are African states sovereign? There is a legitimate need for Africans to rebirth or assert their independence. The present political leadership in Africa has been compromised and cannot lead the true African independence. Until Africans assert their independence, the menace of coup*

*d'état may stay with us a little longer. The military only steps in to seize power, and depose democratically elected civilian puppet governments when the mood of the citizens calls for it.*

The feelings of despondency, despoliation, and alienation by the masses in Africa (i.e., citizens) have given rise to military takeovers and subsequent support from the youth to putschists whenever the phenomenon occurs. The support is usually a desperation by the suffering masses depending on the state to escape from poverty and its related ancillaries. Once the democratically elected civilian government fails to meet the aspirations of the masses, they find solace in military takeovers or putschists even though there is a paucity of data, evidential value, or literature to support the case that, military juntas in Africa have outperformed democratically elected civilian administrations.

The second research question was specifically interested in finding out the perception of respondents on why the putschists are adamant about reinstating the ousted democratically elected Niger government? The respondents were of the view that reinstating the deposed government means a return to the ambiance of corruption, insecurity, bad governance, high unemployment rates, abject poverty, puppet government, incompetence, neocolonialism, and the dissipation of national resources with the connivance of developed nations and multinational corporations. The first step to return the country to the path of democratic rule is to clear the mess that has been created by President Mohamed Bazoum and his puppet government. According to the respondents, the French and all other foreign troops must withdraw from Niger. It is therefore not surprising that the putschists have declared the French Ambassador, *persona non grata* and have since ordered the French troops to leave the country. In the words of one of the respondents,

*We have no immediate plans to return the deposed government to power, and neither do we have the intention to return the country to multiparty democracy this year. Diplomacy and/or negotiation for political settlement will have to wait for three years. The military will have to work with the masses to ameliorate their suffering by guaranteeing their protection and enhancing national security. We want to take control of our country and its resources from the French and its surrogates. Niger is our country and we will fight fiercely to resist any attempt of invasion by ECOWAS.*

The discussion above suggests that the putschists are bent on staying in power so long as they deem fit. The support from the Niger population including some civil society organizations (CSO) is making efforts to return the deposed government to pre-coup conditions extremely difficult. It makes the threat of military intervention by ECOWAS nonsensical to a large extent. The question that is begging for an answer would be, in whose interests will ECOWAS intervene militarily in Niger? Even though there are moderate citizens in Niger who are opposed to the military intervention, there is the majority of the citizens who overwhelmingly support the actions of the putschists. Hence, the diplomatic mission from the international community (e.g., UN, AU, ECOWAS) with the military junta to reinstate the ousted government is fast-waning at an

exponential rate. The Niger's junta signed a security pact a couple of weeks ago with Burkina Faso and Mali. It is a further testimony that the Niger putschists have no contiguous plans to either reinstate the deposed government or return the country to the path of democratic governance. Where do we go from here with this political deadlock?

Finally, the third research question of the study sought to find out from the respondents the extent to which the political deadlock in Niger could be resolved. The respondents proffer various resolution mechanisms that could be employed to resolve the Niger political crisis. The perception of respondents included but were not limited to the following: ECOWAS must lift the economic sanctions it has imposed on Niger; withdraw the foreign troops especially that of the French in Niger; cessation in meddling of the internal affairs of Niger; cease demands of reinstating the deposed puppet government; respect for the laws of Niger; suspension of export of uranium and other minerals to Europe until further notice. The military junta may reconsider its decision not to cede power if ECOWAS and other foreign partners soften their demands on the military junta to return to barracks without resolving the root causes of the coup d'état. According to a respondent:

*The Niger coup was necessitated because of the government's inability to provide the right military accruements to combat terrorist groups, the insecurity and killings of the Nigerien population, bad governance, corruption, exploitation of foreign entities, serious economic malaise that characterizes the Niger economy, high unemployment among the youth, abject poverty, misery, and hopelessness. The military needs to tackle these retrogressive issues, and thereafter, return to the barracks in peace.*

Interaction with the respondents shows the willingness of the putschists to negotiate on condition that the multiple sanctions and demands from ECOWAS and other international bodies ease as a pre-requisite to negotiate the political crisis. It is sufficient for ECOWAS to dwell more on a negotiated settlement for the Niger coup conundrum. The threat of an ECOWAS military intervention even though relevant as a gunboat diplomatic action, the Niger situation must be treated with the utmost caution. The unbridled support the military junta is enjoying from Nigeriens makes it complex to implement the military intervention option. This study suggests a three-fold approach to resolving the complexity of the Niger coup. These include the following:

(a). *Resolution Dialogue*. It involves the facilitation of communication between or among persons of diverse backgrounds whose interest clashes. Resolution dialogue is one of the effective tools for resolving conflict without the use of instruments of violence. Dialogue is one key step to resolve the impasse between ECOWAS and Niger's military junta.

(b). *Negotiation*: This is a scale-up of dialogue. In negotiation, the parties in conflict work to arrive at a decision that is acceptable and mutually beneficial. It is a consensus peacebuilding approach that requires the parties in conflict to recalibrate their original demands or positions to ensure peace. The proposition of the Niger's military junta to return the country to the path of democracy in three years can be negotiated. ECOWAS and other relevant bodies seeking to get the putschists to cede power earlier than the proposed timeframe may have to engage the military junta further

to either cede power in the shortest possible time or form an inclusive government to oversee the transition to democracy or restoration of pre-coup condition to resolve the Niger political mire.

(c) *Peace-making*: This is the application of a wide range of diplomatic (including gunboat diplomacy), judicial, or conciliation initiatives, the use of good offices, mediation (or a third-party mediation with all its dilemmas), negotiation, sanctions, military action, or peace enforcement with the sole aim of achieving a peaceful settlement or resolution of conflict (Beardsley, 2011; SIPRI, 1998). The combination of these conflict resolution mechanisms in a political mire like the Niger coup is to reinforce the weaknesses of each of the methods to ensure successful conflict resolution.

In sum, diplomats and/or mediators need to apply the most apt conflict-resolution mechanism to specific conflicts and contexts. In the Niger coup phenomenon, military intervention or the use of force may not be the ideal step towards peace-making. The posture of major powers, non-state actors, and supranational institutions across the globe (e.g., EU, AU, ECOWAS, France, U.S., Russia, Wagner Mercenaries) risks triggering security and humanitarian crises around the world. In other words, the use of force to reinstate the whacked government of Niger will have dire security, political, economic, and social implications for the nation, subregion, African region, and the wider world. The next section of this paper critically examines the implications of ECOWAS's military intervention in the Niger coup with its ruinous upshots on the political stalemate.

### ***Implications of ECOWAS Military Intervention***

This section sought to examine the economic, political, and security implications of the ECOWAS military intervention in the Niger political stalemate. This paper envisages migration crises; insecurity in the West African sub-region; proliferation of small and light weapons; and state failure among others.

First, attempts by an ECOWAS military intervention in Niger may complicate the already deteriorating security situation in the Sahel region. The disturbances of war, the violence of gun battles, the destruction of critical infrastructure during the war, shortages of food, medicine, water, electricity, and the death of unarmed civilians will not be confined to the geographical ambit of Niger. Still, they will have wider geopolitical ramifications with an extremely, and highly likely to unfold in Europe and the Western world (e.g., desperate migration or refugee movements around the world). As succinctly captured:

*Conflicts are not tidy and do not always remain within borders. They spill chaotically across borders, cultures, nations, and societies, and there must be regional and sub-regional mechanisms to build and maintain transnational cooperation. Such regional mechanisms do exist but vary widely in their interests, efforts, abilities, and resources* (Dress, 2005, p. 132).

ECOWAS's military intervention in Niger will extremely stoke humanitarian crises, human rights abuses, and general crimes against humanity around the world. Economically, African states are yet to fully recover from the combined effects of the Covid-19 global economic meltdown, Russo-

Ukraine imbroglio, staggering debt-servicing, escalating food prices, job losses, high unemployment rate, and inflation spiral among others. Hence, ECOWAS needs to do an appraisal of the implication of military intervention in Niger on the rest of the continent. Technically speaking, African states would struggle to cope, and cannot afford to add the management and needs of the influx of refugees from Niger to their national menu.

Another implication of ECOWAS military intervention in Niger is the tendency of the political deadlock to metamorphose or transform from a localized conflict to an internationalized war of attrition involving foreign powers (e.g., France, the United States, Germany, Italy, Russia/Wagner mercenaries, European Union, geopolitical interest). For example, the United States of America and Niger's former colonial power, France, each have an established military base in Niger. The two foreign powers are war hawkish in the Niger coup dilemma. They (i.e., the U.S. and France) have declared their preparedness to support ECOWAS military intervention to restore democracy in Niger – the nature of the promised support to ECOWAS is not immediately known. But it is fair to say that, access to modern military accretions and financing of the war are the key components of support that may be advanced to ECOWAS by the U. S., France and the European Union (EU) should ECOWAS embark on its military mission in Niger. Meanwhile, there are other foreign powers interested in the Niger coup and the Sahel region (e.g., China, Russia/Wagner mercenary group) who have not publicly declared their support to the putschists, but are highly likely to do so should there be foreign military intervention in Niger. In a released statement, the Russian foreign ministry warned that military intervention in Niger would lead to a “protracted confrontation” (Seddon, 2023). This is where African leaders must be wary of the possibility of triggering a new “proxy war” or ‘Russian-Ukrainian-like war’ in Africa with its destabilizing effect, and catastrophic upshots on states. Geopolitically, some member-states of the African Union (e.g., Algeria, Chad, Libya) and ECOWAS (e.g., Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Guinea, Mali) are opposed to the use of violence to restore constitutional rule in Niger. There are other ‘powerful’ countries within the West African sub-region (e.g., Nigeria, Ghana) whose legislators or senators strongly oppose any attempts to intervene militarily because of consequential spillover effects on neighbouring states and the rest of the African continent. Accordingly, the threat of ECOWAS military intervention in Niger has no widespread support from citizens across the West African sub-region and the rest of the African continent.

In furtherance, ECOWAS military intervention in Niger would have far-reaching security implications on the activities of terrorist groups operating in the Tillaberi province. Violent extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, and Islamic State (ISIS) have caused many deaths, disruption of the economic activities of law-abiding citizens (e.g., farming, trade), and mass displacements of Nigeriens. The focus of tackling these insurgencies would dramatically change since the putschists would pay more attention to the ECOWAS threat to oust them (i.e., the military junta) from the saddle of political power than the terrorist groups. In this case, the Jihadists may capture more territories of Niger and potentially, expand their nefarious activities within the corridors of the West African sub-region and the rest of the African continent. Niger is already a fragile state in the Sahel region, and cannot withstand any kind of gun battles or the

*battle of ipsus*. In this case, Niger risk becoming a failed state if ECOWAS intervenes militarily to reinstate the ousted democratically elected government. The struggle between ECOWAS forces and the putschists will create a security vacuum for the jihadists to unleash mayhem and seize control of large territories where natural resources are endowed (e.g., gold, oil, uranium) to recruit and fund terrorist activities around the world. Evidence abounds to show that, external or foreign military intervention in other states has not always yielded the desired outcome (e.g., U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Vietnam; France's invasion of Libya; Russia's invasion of Ukraine; Israel's occupation of Palestine). Instead, the aftermath of foreign military intervention in states is tinged with humanitarian crises, increased activities of terrorist groups, general insecurity, collateral damage, shortage of essential commodities for survival, unemployment, abject poverty, misery, and death, (e.g., Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Somalia, Syria) among others. Closely linked to the above implication is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons that would be made available to jihadists and other unauthorized gangsters in the aftermath of political conflict and violence. These unaccounted weapons would encourage the activities of terrorists and armed bandits who will later use these instruments of violence to kidnap, terrorize, kill, or maim innocent people and whole societies. The proliferation of arms occurs in conflict situations when individuals (mostly the youth or reservists) choose to fight alongside a particular faction *ipse dixit* as is the situation in the Niger coup menace – the youth have shown the willingness to join forces with the regular security apparatuses to defend the motherland against ECOWAS's aggression. Under these circumstances, the putschists will arm the youth to the teeth to engage in gun battles with ECOWAS forces to defend their survival to cling to power. Retrieving weapons from individuals in the aftermath of a conflict has always been an arduous task achieved by state and non-state actors, The main purpose of retrieving weapons in circulation in communities is to ensure the safety of citizens and reduce domestic and transnational crimes and terrorism (Braithwaite & Mbowura, 2014; Zovatto, 2014; Basuchoudhary & Shugart II, 2010)

Finally, the implication of a military intervention by ECOWAS risks turning Niger into a failure state. In the event of military intervention, the armed forces of Niger may lose grip in the fight against the jihadists that are operating in the Sahel region. This will empower the terrorists to annex and control more territories of Niger and the wider security implication for the whole of the West African sub-region. Before the July 2023 coup d'état, Niger has been a 'fragile' or 'weak' state. It struggles to protect and control its territories from insurgence (Al-Rodhan & Kuepfer, 2007; Francois & Sud, 2006). In this paper, a fragile state is conceptualized as a state that cannot provide for the basic needs of its citizens or population. Such states are widely characterized by insecurity, chronic ethnic or social tensions, humanitarian crises, exploitation by foreign powers, violence, armed conflicts, underdevelopment, and weak state institutions. Hence, ECOWAS's threat of military intervention has the potential to push Niger from a fragile to a failed state. In this phenomenon, the state cannot provide the necessities or needs of its people (e.g., food, protection, shelter) as well as having total control of its territories. It is therefore necessary for continuous dialogue between the military junta and AU/ECOWAS to cede power and return to barracks without firing a single bullet.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

This study established the link between democracy and military coup d'état in Africa since post-independence. The latest Niger coup is the fifth of its kind since 1960 after it gained self-rule status from France. The sudden overthrow of democratically elected governments is not solely limited to military adventurism in African politics. There are other facets of the illegality that includes the activities of rebels or warlords, state capture by foreign cartel, and persistent manipulations of national constitutions on presidential term limits by serving the political class to cling to power. The resurgence of the coup epidemic in Africa is borne out of several factors including inept political leadership, pervasive political and bureaucratic corruption, mismanagement of state resources, cronyism, clientelism, high levels of unemployment among the youth, abject poverty, rent-seeking, underdevelopment, food insecurity, and weak institutions that are not responsive to the needs of the African populations. The blame for misery, underdevelopment, insecurity, and abject poverty amid abundant natural resources in Africa is attributed to the activities of former colonialists and their surrogate foreign cartels who gaslight African governments with shady deals or contracts that take away the chunk of their livelihoods (i.e., rich mineral resources with impunity). This is where the military takes advantage of the phenomenon by toppling democratically elected governments in Africa.

In the unique case of Niger, the military and the activities of jihadists remain the most dangerous threat to democratic consolidation. Despite the presence of foreign military (e.g., the U.S. and France) bases in Niger, the insurgents regularly attack the Niger population without the expected protection from the Niger's government. This fuels the speculation among the people of Niger that, the foreign forces in their country are protecting their interests in the exploitation and export of uranium, gold, and other resources to Europe and the Western world. This is the propaganda that is driving Nigeriens to demand the withdrawal of foreign troops. This also explains the reason for the unwillingness of the putschists to cede power and return to the barracks despite appeals to the military junta to reinstate the deposed, and the democratically elected government from the international community. The putschists' posture and response to ECOWAS, AU, EU, and the UN to restore the deposed government, to say the least, is disappointing. The military junta's proposal to restore democratic governance in the next three years presupposes that the deposed Niger president and his government may not return to power after all. But military intervention in Niger is equally not appropriate because of its dire consequences to humanity. The pathway to restoring democracy in the context of the Niger crisis or political stalemate is the use of a variety of diplomatic methods regardless of how sluggish the process might take. The next section of the paper examines the practical solutions to de-escalate the incidences of military adventuring in the political landscape of Niger and *a fortiori*, the African continent.

## Recommendation

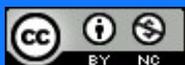
The Niger coup crisis needs to be resolved through diplomatic optics. Military intervention to restore the deposed government would create dangerous security and humanitarian crises across the African continent. It will further chisel or lurch away Niger's democracy, weaken its

institutions, human and material resources. Technical speaking, the African continent is suffering from a “democratic deficit”. Hence, there is an urgent need for African leaders, civil society organizations with a focus on democratic governance and civil liberties, and supranational organizations (e.g., ECOWAS, AU, EU, UN) to collaborate for rebirth and foster democracy despite the inadequacies of the promised wealth creation and transformation of the economies of Africa. The underlying root causes linked to the pugnacious military intrusion in African politics and governance lie squarely in Africa’s political leadership. The thematic areas that need improvements to address the persistent military adventurism in the African political landscape are the style of governance (i.e., a change from ‘bad’ to ‘good’ governance); tackling the pervasive political, and institutional bribery and corruption; judicious use of national resources for the benefit of the African people; embrace all-inclusive government (i.e., equal opportunities for all citizens); respect minority rights; halt arbitrary arrest and torture of political opponents and ensure even distribution of development projects across provinces – political correctness is core to uprooting the ills of democratic governance in Niger and Africa in general. Africa’s political leadership must work towards the stabilization of the continent by being responsive to the concerns of its citizens (Taylor, *n.d.*). The demand for political reforms is germane and central to the maintenance of peace and security in the African continent. It is only when African political leadership including Niger (my focus) intentionally and consciously addresses the governance challenges stated above that the menacing of coup d’états would be eliminated or reduced to the barest minimum. It will further pave the way for the consolidation of democracy and its principles in Niger and the rest of Africa.

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