

New Wave of Military Interventions and the Development of West African States: An Assessment

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Abstract

The study assessed the new wave of military coup d'états some Sahel African Countries and its implications for the development of these countries, the sub-region and Africa. The historical and descriptive research technique was adopted, thus drawing relevant data from secondary sources. Data generated were analysed using the qualitative method. The study adopted the theory of contagion; and proposed the following questions to guide it: first, what factors are responsible for the new wave of military coups in francophone West Africa? Second, what challenges are imposed on the sub-region by the wave of military coups and the response by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)? Third, to what extent has this scenario in West Africa ignited the scramble for Africa by the two ideological blocs of Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact? The study argues that the new wave of military coups in the sub-region is as a result of the failure of democratically elected governments to tackle the teething problems of poverty, insecurity and socio-economic development. Furthermore, it was revealed that socio-economic relations between these West African countries and France as well as the West have contributed to the growing tension. The study recommends among others, good democratic governance by African governments.

Keywords: Military coup d'état, Development, Sahel, Good governance, ECOWAS.

Introduction

Military incursion in politics has been the rule rather than exception most especially in developing societies. However, military coups became the prevailing trend in most newly independent African nations in the 1950s and 60s. It is in the light of the above that Giles (2019) succinctly averred that Africa is the epicentre of coups in the sense that out of the 476 global coup attempts since 1950, Africa share a whopping 206 which some were successful and others unsuccessful followed by South America's 95 attempts. Sadly, the recent coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have added to the list. The first military coup occurred in Egypt in 1952 and as Kazeem (2017) noted, the four decades between 1960 and 2000 were the 'golden decades' of military coups and each of the four decades witnessed at least 40 coup attempts. In country terms, Sudan (15 attempts, 5 successful) and Burkina Faso (11 attempts, 7 successful) have the highest number of attempted coups. Other countries with a high number of coup attempts include Nigeria (8 attempts, 6 successful), Ghana, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Chad, etc. (Eshiet, 2022)

Glaringly, with Africa featuring prominently in matters relating to military intervention, the evolution and accompanying impediments of such interventions cannot be ignored.

Also, with Africa being at the centre of post-Cold War military interventions, the continent is thus not immune to intervention dilemmas and these dilemmas are not unconnected to the perceived influence of the two ideological blocs (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact) as well as the consequences of the interventions on political, legal and socio-economic well-being of African States. Moreover, the efforts of regional and sub-regional organizations in Africa such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in checkmating the ugly trend of military disruptions of democratically elected civilian government in Africa and West Africa respectively is probable and thus, need to be copiously examined. In view of the aforesaid, it should be noted that this paper shall probe the interface between leadership pathology in regional and sub-regional organizations such as ECOWAS as well as at the national level of each of the affected states; and the recent waves of coups in some Sahel States in Africa namely, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger with emphasis on proposing possible solutions to the crises.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Coup d'état Studies of coups d'état in Africa reveal a myriad of factors influencing the occurrence of military coups. In a simple parlance military coup d'état refers to a sudden and often violent or illegal seizure of political power or government control by a group of individuals, typically within the military or other influential factions of a country. Most coups in Africa involved a violent toppling of constituted authorities while few occurred through non-violent means. However, Powell and Thyne (2011) describes a coup d'état as an illegal and overt attempt by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive. This attempt could be successful or unsuccessful. Coups d'état are a type of political instability that involves a sitting ruler being overthrown by his or her own military or other elite within the state apparatus.

National Development The concept of national development has no universally accepted definition. Views and opinions emerged on the term 'National Development'. However, we shall handle it briefly the Marxist tripartite perception of the term. According to Rodney (1973, p.1), development in human society is a many sided process. At the level of individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, self-discipline and responsibility and material well-being. Some of these are virtually moral categories and very difficult to evaluate depending as they do on the age, in which ones' live, one's class origin and one's personal code of what is right and what is wrong, while at the level of social group therefore, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationship. Examining development from Rodney's perspective, it signifies that development exist when people have the freedom to make decision, capacity to use available resources for survival, creativity in the sense of initiating ideas and alternative of providing prompt solution to emerging problems, general discipline to respect the formal regulations and informal societal values, norms, cultures and behaviours. National development therefore, refers to the ability of the country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people, for example, by providing social amenities like quality education, infrastructure, medical care and social services. However, it is the lack of the aforementioned basic amenities that is the root cause of political instability especially in West Africa which in most cases, culminate in coups. Good governance Good governance entails the effectiveness and fairness in the operation of a country's government. It is a truism that there is a nexus between military coups most especially in Africa and quality of governance thus, the quality of life of the citizens and functional institutions of

government have been identified as vital factors that indicate the good governance of a country. On this basis, Hyden and Court (2002) identified six fundamental dimensions of governance: First, the socializing dimension: This refers to the way rules are constituted to channel participation in public affairs. Second is the aggregating dimension; which refers to the ways political system is organised to facilitate and control the making of public policy. It deals with how ideas and interests are aggregated into specific policy proposals. Third, the executive dimension; government do not just make policies, they are also responsible for creating environment in which people enjoy relative peace and security. What rules, formal and informal do government put in place to meet popular expectations of freedom from fear and want? These are system concerns for which government is ultimately responsible. The fourth dimension is managerial; Policy formulation and implementation is expected to people-oriented, result oriented in other words, the ideas that rules must be legal national and logical sometimes makes such rules and policies to lack human face which should not necessary follow in governance. In democratic governance, rules and procedures tends to influence how people perceive political system at large. The fifth dimension expresses the regulatory dimension. It explains that in governance, state institutions are often created to regulate the economy. That is the norms and institutions put in place to regulate how corporations operate as well as how capital may be transferred and trade conducted are all important aspects of governance. The six and the final dimension is the adjudicatory function. Here, each political system develops its own structures for conflicts and dispute resolution. How such institutions operate has a great bearing on popular perceptions of regime performance (Hyden & Court 2002).

Theoretical Framework

The notion of military intervention in politics has attracted theoretical schisms and assumptions from scholars, writers and commentators of political discourse overtime. For the purpose of this paper the contagion theory shall be adopted in order to explain and understand the rationale behind military intervention in Africa's politics as well as its impact on the development of the region. Arguably, Powel and Thyne's coup dataset on Africa (1950-2023), cited in Geopolitical Futures (2023), reveal West Africa as the region with the most rapidity of coups. It is followed by East Africa and then Central Africa, while Southern and Northern Africa have witnessed comparatively fewer coups than these other regions. For example, between 1960 and 2010, West Africa recorded 108 coups; East Africa, 48 coups; Central Africa, 35 coups; and Southern Africa, 16 coups (African Development Bank, 2012). The above occurrences suggest a contagion trend in military intervention in Africa's politics. The contagion theory as exemplified by Fossum (1967) entails that if there is any coup interdependence, it should operate between neighbouring states to a greater extent than between non-neighbors. Glaringly, the recent coup in the three Sahel states of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are in tandem with this theory. Conversely, the contagion theory does not give an in-depth analysis on the ostensible factors that trigger coup in terms of economic, political and socio-cultural dynamics in a particular society at a time but only seeks to explain the rationale behind series of military interventions in a given region. Notwithstanding, the contagion theory explains the proliferation of military incursions most especially in the Sahel in recent times and its attendant consequences on Africa's development aspirations.

Methodology

This study is basically descriptive and qualitative. The descriptive method seeks to unravel

the major elements and characteristics as regards to the extent to which the two ideological blocks led by the United States and Russia have contributed to the increased cases of military interventions in Africa as well as the failure of regional and sub-regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in checkmating the menace while qualitative method is used to gain a variety of insights so as to discover and identify decision problems and opportunities. The study relies heavily on the use of secondary sources, particularly documentary evidence, records from government agencies, books, journal articles conference papers and other relevant materials derived from and the Internet. The data were analyzed qualitatively using the narrative analysis technique.

Contending Issues in the Resurgence of Waves of Military Interventions in Africa

Military incursion in politics is not alien to Africa's political terrain as almost all African States except few have their own fair share of the crises. Hence, as Shraeder (2004) observed, only six African countries: Botswana, Cape Verde, Eritrea, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa have never experienced military coup plots. The reasons for resurgence of military coups in Africa are not different from the usual cause overtime. These reasons are reflected in the works of Pye, 1966; Huntington, 1968; Welch, 1970; Janowitz, 1964; Finer, 1962; Levy, 1966 and Bell, 1968 etc. Historically, as pointed out by Eshiet (2022), Africa's newly independent nations had deemed it prudent to adopt the political culture and institutions of their former colonial masters, hence their embrace of the democratic system of governance. However, as she maintained, this political culture was 'alien' to Africans and so they needed time for learning and adapting to the system. Conversely, military intervention in politics most especially in developing societies such as Africa tends to be one of the symptoms of failure of Africa's democratic institutions in promoting and sustaining good governance in the region. Studies of coups d'état in Africa reveal a myriad of factors influencing the occurrence of military coups. Nevertheless, despite their divergent explanations, they are all unanimous in situating the causes of military coups within the structural inequities that characterise African states, which often provide motivation for the military to take over power. It is a truism that independent African states had emerged from former colonies that were creations of European colonial administrators. Consequently, such colonies were arbitrarily created without regard to the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the people. Thus, the colonies comprised people with diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds who were held together by colonial might. Such cultural pluralism has remained one of the causative factors of military intervention in Africa. The submissions of Coleman (1960), Deutsch (1961), Kuper and Smith (1969) and Jackman (1978) when they argued on the causes of military intervention in politics that competition among different ethnic and religious groups and the presence of a dominant ethnic group in a culturally plural society often lead to conflict, crisis and political instability, thereby motivating the military to intervene in order to defend against such threats to national security; lend credence to above fact. Conversely, the recent waves of coup in Africa unlike the past go beyond mere cultural and ethnic factors to much more complex dynamics. For instance, Fatola (2022) observed that before the January 24, 2022 coup in Burkina Faso, different protests and mobilizations (violent or non-violent) had arisen due to leadership pathology that inflicted unbearable economic hardship on the citizenry. The coup was led by Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba that ousted the government of Roch Marc Christian Kabore. Similarly, in 2010, the army overthrew the then-President Mama-dou Tandja of Niger Republic after he tried to unlawfully extend his term in office

a third time. The above suggest that the resurgence of military coups in Africa points to the failure of democracy in the continent.

Ostensible Causes of Recent Waves of Military Intervention in West Africa

Most scholars especially from the Marxist flank have attributed military intervention in Africa to underdevelopment. However, the following are the perceived causes of the recent coups in West Africa (a) *Poverty and Corruption*: Economic problems are major trigger elements of military coups in West Africa. The region has seen widespread struggles with poverty, unemployment, and inequality—problems that are frequently made worse by mismanagement and corruption (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011). This has sparked public unrest and rallies, which the government has occasionally suppressed. For instance, following demonstrations against the government's handling of the Tuareg uprising and economic crises, the military in Mali torpedoed the then government through a coup in 2012 (Lecocq & Raffestin, 2015). Also, in 2010, protests against President Mamadou Tandjas attempt to consolidate and extend his control resulted in a coup by the military in Niger (Bøås & Hagberg, 2016). (b) *Weak Institutions*: Military coups in West Africa can also be caused by weak institutions and ethnic tensions. Ethnic groups may experience conflict and anger when they believe they are excluded from political power or marginalized. In certain instances, ethnic groups may feel marginalized or excluded from political power, which can lead to resentment and conflict. Weak institutions can also make it easier for the military to seize power because there may be little resistance from other branches of government or civil society. In Mali, for instance, the military staged a coup in 2020 in response to protests against President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta's handling of corruption and insecurity (Lecocq & Raffestin, 2021). Therefore, weak institutions can facilitate military coups.

External Influence and the Recent Wave of Coups in Africa

The junta in Niger publicly accused France which has some 1500 troops in Niger of trying to destabilize the country. The junta in Mali as well fingered the French as the purveyors of political unrest in the country. From an economic point of view, French energy provider Areva, specializing in nuclear energy, has several mining sites in Niger. Their loss would account for 20% of all French Uranium imports, which in return provides for around 85% of France's energy (Sergei and Schuurmann, 2015). The above suggest that the French has been benefiting more from economic relations with Niger and this could make them not to spare any means in continuing to lay a strangle hold on the Nigerien economy. The French capital market heavily suffers from a total loss of control of Malian resources after the coup, Mali holds copper and silver depots that are far from being exploited, and international syndicates, where even German or British companies hold stakes, are doing their best to win the scramble for Mali's resources.

In the light of the above realities, the scrambling for Africa's rich resources remains a pivot through which political unrest and most cases of military incursions in Africa's political milieu revolves. In the same vein as espoused by Pereira (2019), internationally, the threat of or defeat in war, foreign political and military assistance, trade relations and an enabling international environment such as military rule in neighbouring countries and international recognition of military regimes, can facilitate coups. Military coups being contagious, the successful takeover of government by the military in a neighbouring country tends to instigate the military in other countries to do same. This is visible in the West African sub-region that has had the most rapidity of coups. Similarly, superpower

competition between the two dominant ideological blocs was a major contributor to the proliferation of military regimes in Africa during the Cold War era although such cannot be said in the recent coups in Africa. Military assistance from the United States and the Soviet Union did strengthen military capacity within allied or 'client' states. Thus, the assertion by Wiking (1983) and the confirmation by Pereira (2019) that "Since the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, there has been a marked decline in direct involvement of the superpowers in military intervention in Africa" lend credence to the decline of superpowers involvement. In other words, the level of influence of the two ideological blocs led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led by the United States and the Warsaw Pact led by Russia as regards the coup plot cannot be ascertained in the recent resurgence of coups in Africa unlike in the cold war era.

The ECOWAS Influence There has been a significant deterioration in democratic rule throughout most of Africa, and West Africa in particular. This is demonstrated, among other things, by the underdevelopment of the economy and the failure of leadership. It has been observed that these problems explain why the military has interfered both historically and more recently. As a result, it becomes extremely difficult for ECOWAS member states to criticize the issues that they themselves face. In an article headlined The Return of Military Coups to Africa, This Day Newspaper (2022) stated that while it is generally believed that even the worst form of democracy is preferable to the best military rule, military dictatorships are not a realistic alternative to democratic governance. But in the grand scheme of things, it is undeniable that the leadership of the ECOWAS and African Union (AU) has greatly contributed to the recurrent coups and unconstitutional government changes in many countries by continuing to fail to act pro-actively and preventively in responding to these threats to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

The majority of ECOWAS member states lack democracy, which makes it difficult for the organization to respond to the region growing number of coups. The military justification for meddling in politics stems from these regimes lack of democracy. According to surveys, most West African nations from the 1990s onward have extremely low democratic ratings (Maiangwa, 2021). Therefore, if any significant attempts are to be made to address the frequent coups, ECOWAS must confront the issue of the deteriorating state of democracy in the wake of the coups that occurred in 2020 and 2022. In reaction to the coup in Niger, on 30th July, 2023, ECOWAS imposed sanctions against the military junta and gave it a oneweek ultimatum to reinstate President Bazoum or face military intervention. On 1st August same year, Burkina Faso and Mali both ruled by military juntas warned ECOWAS that they would consider any military intervention in Niger as a "declaration of war" against them. This whole scenario would have been averted if ECOWAS has put more effort by being proactive in tackling factors that instigate coups in the region such as corruption and abuse of power by democratic elected authorities in the sub-region rather than being reactive when everything has fallen out of place.

Resurgence of Military Coup and Development of West Africa

Evidently, military coups cannot be attributed to the low development conditions of developing nations most especially in West Africa. Nevertheless, economic sanctions on erring nations have reaching consequences on the development aspirations of the WestAfrican sub-region. For instance, the economic sanctions placed on Niger and other junta states by ECOWAS as a result of the 2023 coup severed economic ties between Niger and its neighbouring States. This had far-reaching consequences on development although

the sanction seemed to have affected ECOWAS much more than the sanctioned States. According to the International Organization for Migration, due to border closures, nearly 7 000 African individuals discouraged from migrating to Europe from Algeria or Libya were stranded in Niger on their return to their countries of origin. Also, The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is notably involved in the construction of an oil pipeline from Niger to the port of port of Sèmè-Podji in Benin, which before the coup was expected to deliver up to 110 000 barrels a day from January 2024. Sadly, the Niger coup stalled the project and this has far-reaching consequences on the region. Arguably, military coups are end product of leadership failure and bad leadership breeds underdevelopment. The above is exemplified in words of Eshiet (2022) when she succinctly pointed out that “as long as Africa continues to suffer from poor socioeconomic development, military coups will be inevitable.” In other words, military interventions in Africa have been direct consequences of the poor state of development of the region and not necessarily the cause of underdevelopment rather it further sustains it.

Results and Discussion

The paper eyeballed the interface between the recent resurgence of military intervention in Africa and its attendant consequences on the development of the region. From the foregoing, findings from the aforesaid reveals as follows: firstly, that the recent wave of military incursion in Africa’s political milieu has far-reaching consequences on the development of the region. This can be gleaned from the perspective of economic sanctions placed on military juntas in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso which affected economic ties most especially among ECOWAS member-states. Secondly, leadership pathology marked by high rate of poverty, unemployment, corruption, etc., contributed in fuelling the crises. Thirdly, economic ties with France contributed in a significant extent to the uprising in the Sahel most especially in Mali which in extension culminated in military incursion. Lastly, that the poor state of Africa’s development is not necessarily an end product of military intervention rather, military intervention sustains it.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

The prosperity and failure of any nation depends largely on the quality of leadership in that nation. Based on the strength of the above analysis and findings, it can be deduced that the recent wave of military interventions in Africa were as a result of the region’s weak institutional framework ranging from the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to the internal institutions of government in the respective affected African States. The above could be as a result of the weak level of integration of African States unlike its European counterparts. Also, if Africa’s underdevelopment persists military intervention in politics will not only continue but a return to military rule will be inevitable, unless the African Union moves beyond its current stance of merely sanctioning military regimes that usurp political power and starts to monitor the internal policies of member states in order to enforce the AU Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good governance.

However, in the light of the above realities, this paper recommend as follows: (a) Countries of West Africa should rededicate themselves to democratic practices and norms in all ramifications. Sit-tight syndrome should be jettisoned completely and manipulation of the electoral process should not be entertained anywhere. (b) A democratic ECOWAS should be much more proactive in checkmating coup d’état in Africa rather than reactive. They should monitor internal policies of member states such as the issue of abuse of power,

corruption, poverty, unemployment and other vices which are symptoms of leadership failure. The sub-regional body should not wait till these issues give rise to coups before responding with sanctions. (b) West African countries should reinvigorate their collaboration in intelligence gathering and sharing in the fight against insecurity in the sub-region. (c) Relations between West African countries and former colonial masters and developed countries of the West should not be conducted in exploitative manner to the disadvantage of West African countries.

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