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## Abstract

Niger has checkered civil-military relations history with five coups d'états and multiple coup attempts. The latest coup d'état occurred on July 26, 2023. The coup leaders cited rising insecurity and a lack of economic growth as their reasons for ousting President Mohamed Bazoum. The coup was met by condemnations and sanctions from the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), United Nations (UN), and Western powers such as France and the United States. This policy brief analyses the factors that contributed to the coup d'état in Niger and provides some options for multi stakeholder engagement towards re-establishing democratic rule. It argues that the resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa has wider implications for democratic stability in the region. Constructive dialogue should be the way forward in resolving the political crisis. ECOWAS should intensify negotiations and mediation efforts and be centred around a shorter transition period to constitutional rule. ECOWAS must be proactive in dealing with internal governance crises that create fertile grounds for coup d'états in the region.



## Introduction

On July 26, 2023, a military take-over took place in the Nigerien capital, Niamey. The commander of Presidential Guard, General Abdourahamane Tchiani proclaimed himself the leader of a new military junta, National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland (CNSP). The coup leaders cited rising insecurity and a lack of economic growth as their reasons for ousting President Mohamed Bazoum, who is being held captive despite calls from the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), International Organisations such as the United Nations (UN), and Western powers such as France and the United States for his release.<sup>1</sup>

According to the UN Human Development Index (2022), Niger ranked 189th, among the world's poorest countries. Though the country is rich in uranium and other natural resources, yet it is largely underdeveloped. It also faces security challenges from violent extremism which has disrupted livelihoods and created a humanitarian crisis. It shares borders with seven countries (Mali, Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, Chad, Burkina Faso, and Benin)<sup>2</sup> in both the Sahel and Saharan regions affected by security threats such as violent extremism, transnational organised crime, and multi-nature localised conflicts. Armed groups such as *Boko Haram*, Islamic State of Iraq, and West Africa (ISIS-WA), Islamic State of Iraq in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), and *Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* operate in the country heightening the insecurity.<sup>3</sup>

This policy brief analyses the factors that led to the coup d'état in Niger in July 2023 and provides some options for multi stakeholder engagement towards re-establishing democratic rule. Following this introduction, this paper explores the underlying issues and causes of the coup, and implications for security in the Sahel, West Africa. It also proposes some options for engagement and resolution to the crises. It argues that the resurgence of coup d'états in West Africa has wider implications for democratic stability in the region. Constructive dialogue should be the way forward in resolving the political crisis. ECOWAS should intensify negotiations and mediation efforts and be centred around a shorter transition period

to constitutional rule. ECOWAS must be proactive in dealing with internal governance crises that create fertile grounds for coup d'états in the region.

## Underlying causes of Coups d'états

The crisis of governance has been a principal destabilising factor in Africa. Governance deficits have resulted in political violence often ending in destructive intra-state conflicts and peacekeeping missions. While issues of underlying challenges such as underdevelopment, social cleavages, poverty, and economic challenges have been principal causes of political crises in the region,<sup>4</sup> violent extremism and the lack or inability of governments to deal with the rising violence have provided another layer of excuse for military interventions in politics. From Mali, through to Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger, coup leaders have cited a lack of progress in counter-terrorism efforts. In some cases, as in Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, the military seems to have taken advantage of citizens' frustrations with civilian political ineptitude to seize power. These coups were met with wide support from the civilian populations. However, coups do not provide quick fixes to governance crises.<sup>5</sup> In Mali and Burkina Faso, extremist violence has actually become worse under the watch of military regimes because the regimes and their military establishments remain ill-equipped to address the complex challenge of violent extremism.

Civil-military relations of contemporary West African countries are influenced by their colonial and post-independence experiences.<sup>6</sup> It is clear that militaries in these countries are yet to fully embrace civilian control and democratic oversight of the armed forces. While there have been efforts at transforming the military from praetorian forces to professional institutions, the results have been uneven. In some cases, militaries have resisted reforms, curbing the effectiveness of oversight and accountability mechanisms. A lack of strong security sector oversight institutions and mechanisms has therefore hampered efforts to improve military professionalism in the region. This has contributed to the creation of politicised and corrupt defence and security officials and hobbled defence and security forces with

<sup>1</sup>The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project [ACLED] (2023). Military Coup in Niger. Available at <https://acleddata.com/2023/08/03/fact-sheet-military-coup-in-niger/> Accessed on August 25, 2023.

<sup>2</sup>Soumahoro, M. (2021). Niger Conflict Insights, Peace & Security Report, April, Institute for Peace and Security Studies, University of Addis Ababa.

<sup>3</sup>World Factbook (2023). Niger. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/niger/> Accessed on August 25, 2023.

<sup>4</sup>Aning, K, et al (2020), West African democracies are in reverse, but the solution must come from within. 15 September. Available a. <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/west-african-democracies-are-in-reverse-but-the-solution-must-come-from-within>

<sup>5</sup>Birikorang, E. & Saliu, N. (2020). Revisiting the Trajectory of Regime Change in Africa – The Case of Mali. KAIPTC Policy Brief 8, October.

<sup>6</sup>Saliu, N. (2021). West Africa: Civil–military Relations from a Colonial Perspective. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1930>

compromised cohesion and effectiveness.<sup>7</sup> Civil-military relations remain precarious in most countries and the francophone zone especially. Since 1990, about 78% of the 27 coups in sub-Saharan Africa have occurred in Francophone states.<sup>8</sup>

The resurgence of coups in the francophone zone in West Africa has coincided with increasing anti-French sentiments and popular protests in West Africa. All forms of French presence (primarily, military, as well as diplomatic and economic) are being questioned and rejected by the populace. Examples range from the October 2022 attacks on the French Embassy in Ouagadougou and the French Institute in Bobo-Dioulasso; to regular demonstrations in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger protesting France's presence in the region; and ransacking of French-owned businesses in March 2021 in Dakar, to the countless invectives spouted at French politicians.<sup>9</sup> The anti-French sentiments are attributable to the neocolonialist, condescending, paternalist and exploitative policies that have characterised post-independence Franco-African relations.<sup>10</sup> The relationship between French political leaders and their allies in Africa is often fraught with corruption, creating a powerful and wealthy elite at the expense of African citizens.<sup>11</sup> The nature of the relations, therefore, positions France on the frontlines against populations that are either experiencing a sharp deterioration in security order or significant economic and developmental inequalities.<sup>12</sup>

## Niger's Strategic Importance of the West

The recent coup in Niger did not come as a surprise to critical observers. The country has a history of 5 coups and constant threat of coups since independence in 1960. When President Bazoum was elected president in 2021, there was a coup attempt barely 48 hours before his inauguration.<sup>13</sup> The peaceful democratic transition from the government of Mahamodou Issifou to Bazoum in 2021 was the first in the political history of

the country. In the wake of deteriorating relationships between France and the Malian and Burkinabe ruling military juntas, Mohamed Bazoum's government emerged as a "new privileged partner" for Western allies.<sup>14</sup> This fits into the geopolitical calculus of France in the region. France and other Western allies, have a significant interest in Niger because it is a key ally in the fight against terror in the Sahel. It hosts military bases in France, the US, Germany, Belgium, Canada, and Italy and they are all linked to the creation of the Special Operations Command (COS). Germany took steps to construct and finance a new special forces training centre in Tellia which hosts tactical and technical qualification courses including certification of Special Operation Forces (SOF) units. The Belgian special forces have been in charge of training, together with the Nigerien counterparts. The US, France, and Germany have been noted to provide lethal and non-lethal military equipment to the battalions they train, and these include vehicles, personal equipment, weapons, and ammunition.<sup>15</sup>

The coup and the unfolding political crisis in Niger have a significant impact on peace and stability in Niger and the entire Sahel region. The country is located at the crossroads between the two main terrorist hotbeds in the Sahel and the Lake Chad regions. It has a central role to play in containing terrorist groups' expansion. Therefore, further deterioration of its political and security situation risks worsening the arc of instability that terrorists exploit.<sup>16</sup> Niger became central to the counter-terrorism efforts in the Sahel region following the breakdown of relations with the Malian junta. International support for Niger has increased significantly in recent years. For instance, the EU allocated over EUR 500 million to improving governance, education, and sustainable growth in the country between 2021 and 2024. A 27-million-euro military training mission (EUMPM Niger) was launched in 2023.<sup>17</sup> In addition around 1,500 Barkhane troops are stationed in Niger. France has provided the

<sup>7</sup>Kuwali, D. (2023). Oversight and Accountability to Improve Security Sector Governance in Africa. *Africa Security Brief*, No.43, African Center for Strategic Studies.

<sup>8</sup>Mbulle-Nziege, L. & Cheeseman, N. (2023). Niger coup: Is France to blame for instability in West Africa? August 6. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66406137>

<sup>9</sup>Guiffard, J. (2023). Anti-French Sentiment in West Africa - A Reflection of the Authoritarian Confrontation With the "Collective West" January 1, Institute Montaigne. Available at <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/anti-french-sentiment-west-africa-reflection-authoritarian-confrontation-collective-west>

<sup>10</sup>Mbulle-Nziege, & Cheeseman (2023). Op. cit.

<sup>11</sup>Guiffard (2023). Op. cit.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>BBC News (2021). Niger 'coup' thwarted days before inauguration. March 21. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56589168>

<sup>14</sup>Afrinews, (2022). Two French ministers in Niger, a new privileged partner in the Sahel. Available at <https://www.africanews.com/2022/07/15/two-french-ministers-in-niger-a-new-privileged-partner-in-the-sahel/>

<sup>15</sup>Wilen, N. (2022). The impact of security forces assistance in Niger: meddling with borders. *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 98, 1405-1421. <https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/98/4/1405/6628398>

<sup>16</sup>Demuyneck, M. & Böhm, M. (2023). Unravelling the Niger coup and its implications for violent extremism in the Sahel, August 4. Available at <https://www.icct.nl/publication/unravellingniger-coup-and-its-implications-violent-extremism-sahel>

<sup>17</sup>European Union Commission (2023). Niger [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/niger\\_e](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/niger_e)

country with around EUR 120 million in development aid in 2022.<sup>18</sup> The US has over 1,100 troops deployed in Niger, had announced in March 2023, USD 150 million in direct assistance.<sup>19</sup>

In related developments, Niger also benefits from natural resource investments for example, Algeria, Nigeria, and Niger on July 29, 2022, signed a memorandum of understanding regarding the construction of a natural gas pipeline through the Sahara Desert from Warri, Nigeria, and ends in Hassi R'Mel in Algeria, where it will be connected to existing pipelines into Europe. The goal of this project known as the Trans-Saharan project is for Europe to have alternatives about its gas sources. With an estimation of \$13 billion, this gas pipeline which spans around 4,000 kilometers is expected to send 30 billion cubic meters annually of supplies to European nations.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, there is another important investment concerning the Niger-Benin crude pipeline, representing phase two of the Agadem oilfield development, commissioned in 2021 which has the capacity of producing 90,000 barrels per day. It is about 1, a 980km cross-border crude oil pipeline that connects Agadem Rift Basin (ARB) in Niger, through to Port Seme Terminal in the Republic of Benin.<sup>21</sup>

There are anti-French reasons behind the ousting of President Bazoum who was seen as a puppet for French interests. Bazoum's myopic acceptance of France into Niamey misread the earlier mentioned tensions in the region and sealed the fate of his government. The large number of foreign military troops and bases in the country has not been well received by the military.<sup>22</sup> Following the expulsion in 2022, of troops from France and other European allies in Mali, Bazoum was quick to invite them to Niger to boost its security. The decision was not widely accepted within Nigerien military leadership who believe this undermined them. The presence of foreign military troops and bases throughout the

country contributed to the tension between Bazoum's government and the military.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the increase in foreign forces in Niger, insurgent attacks have continued. However, the figures which seek to portray an increase in attacks need to be interrogated. Some of these figures present inaccurate accounts of threats of violent extremism to justify increasing foreign presence in the Sahel. Within this narrative, security force assistance programmes have been targeted in particular ways that do not support the operational needs of the recipient states. There is increasing citizens' frustration and dissatisfaction against the foreign military presence. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Nigerien population cheered the putschists while denouncing the French. Some locals accuse the former colonial ruler of interfering in their affairs. Some military deals with France dating between 1977 and 2020 have since been revoked by the military junta.<sup>24</sup> These military deals were part of bilateral agreements between France and Niger, they include France's deployment of about 1000-1500 soldiers to three bases in Niger. These bases are located in Niamey, Ouallam located in the northern part of the country, and to the border with Mali, Ayorou.<sup>25</sup> Diplomatic relations with France have deteriorated as the regime has asked the French ambassador in Niamey to leave. Paris in a desperate attempt to maintain a foot in Niamey has refused to recall its envoy claiming it does not recognise the military junta.

Niger has significant uranium mines providing about 5% of world mining output from Africa's highest-grade uranium ores.<sup>26</sup> A natural resource essential to the operation of French nuclear power plants, uranium mined in Niger has been exploited for over four decades by the French nuclear fuel cycle group Orano (formerly Areva). This multinational company which is 90% owned by the French state, operates

<sup>18</sup>Aksar, M. & Balima, B. (2023). Niger loses aid as Western countries condemn coup. Reuters, July 27. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/niger-loses-aid-western-countries-condemn-coup-2023-07-29/>

<sup>19</sup>Carra, A. (2023). How the Attempted Coup in Niger Could Fuel Extremism Across West Africa. Time, July 27. Available at <https://time.com/6298718/niger-attempted-coup-extremism/>

<sup>20</sup>Chikhi, L. (2022). Algeria, Niger, and Nigeria sign MOU for Saharan gas pipeline. Reuters. Accessed on September 5, 2023. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/algeria-niger-nigeria-sign-mou-saharan-gas-pipeline-2022-07-28/>

<sup>21</sup>NS Energy (2021). Niger-Benin Crude Pipeline. Accessed on September 5, 2023. Available at <https://www.nsenergybusiness.com/projects/niger-benin-crude-pipe>

<sup>22</sup>Ajala, O. (2023). What caused the coup in Niger? An expert outlines three driving factors. The Conversation, July 31. Available at <https://theconversation.com/what-caused-the-coup-in-niger-an-expert-outlines-three-driving-factors-210721>

<sup>23</sup>Ibid

<sup>24</sup>Leonard Mbulle-Nziege & Nic Cheeseman (2023)

<sup>25</sup>Isilow, H. (2023). Niger's junta cancels military cooperation with France. Anadolu Ajansi. Accessed on September 5, 2023 Available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/niger-s-junta-cancels-military-cooperation-agreements-with-france>

<sup>26</sup>World Nuclear Association, (2023). Uranium in Niger. Available at <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-g-n/niger.aspx>

three mines in Niger.<sup>27</sup> The first mining code of 1993 put in place an unbalanced fiscal regime that gave substantial advantages to private companies. The companies were exempt from paying duties and taxes both during the initial exploration period and the actual extraction process. This 1993 Code led to a proliferation of mining projects carried out by multinational firms driven to get their hands on Niger's massive quantities of uranium.<sup>28</sup> For instance, Areva/Orano has previously been accused of not paying Niger a fair rate of tax.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, France's huge investments in Niger's uranium mining sector are another reason for its interest in the security of Niger. Ironically, Niger supplies about 20 per cent of France's uranium needs and 24 percent of the EU's uranium stock, which is required for powering nuclear plants that generate electricity.<sup>30</sup> Yet, only 26 per cent of Nigeriens are connected to the country's national electricity grid (NIGELEC) in 2022.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the underlying causes, the immediate trigger for the coup in Niger is attributed to President Bazoum's plans to reform the military high command and remove General Tchiani from his position into retirement.<sup>32</sup> The military remains a missing link in the democratic process and ensuring civilian control and oversight. A shallow understanding of democratic control of the security sector also contributes to coups. While most democratic constitutions provide for the subordination of security agencies to civilian control, military and civilian authorities do not always understand the extent and limits of this control. Attempts at exercising democratic control and oversight are at times misinterpreted by some elements of the military who see it as victimization or political meddling.<sup>33</sup>

There are also ethnic-regional fault lines surrounding the legitimacy of Mr. Bazoum, who comes from the Arab ethnic minority in Niger. Bazoum's *Awlad*

*Suleiman* Arab tribe is influential due to wealth and presence in public affairs but does not have political clout, unlike his predecessor Issoufou who belongs to the dominant Hausa ethnic group and has considerable influence on the military.<sup>34</sup> The armed forces of Niger is not a homogenous entity in terms of its regional or ethnic composition, it is, however, dominated by Hausa and other allied ethnic groups.

## The Foray of Russia

Russia, through its proxy paramilitary group, Wagner, has become a security provider in some African countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Central African Republic (CAR). Russo-African relations have a long history dating back to the 18th century. During the Cold War era in particular, the Soviet Union supported its allies on the continent in diverse ways including military-technical, financial and diplomatic assistance to national liberation organizations and movements fighting against colonialism and racial discrimination.<sup>35</sup> Although Russia's growing interest in Africa has been noticeable since the mid-2000s, the Russia-Africa summit held in Sochi in 2019 in which 43 of Africa's 54 national leaders were present, pointed to a new urgency in Russia's strategy to deepen ties with Africa. Russia is on a charm offensive in Africa and seeks to position itself as a strategic alternative to America's global hegemony.<sup>36</sup> In this vein, Moscow has positioned itself as the torch bearer of anti-Western, and especially anti-French, sentiments in West Africa.<sup>37</sup> The involvement of Russia has actually emboldened the Malian junta to call off the bluff of ECOWAS since the coup in 2020. There are allegations that the junta in Niger is seeking Russian/Wagner support.<sup>38</sup> The death of Wagner leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and some of his top lieutenants on August 23, 2023, leaves the future of the group in limbo.

<sup>27</sup>Maad, A. (2023). How dependent is France on Niger's uranium? *Le Monde*, August 4. Available at <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2023/08/04>

<sup>28</sup>Aidara, I. (2014). Why does AREVA refuse to pay a fair rate of tax in Niger? *African Arguments*, February 20. Available at <https://africanarguments.org/2014/02/>

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Leali, G. (2023). Niger coup sparks concerns about French, EU uranium dependency. *Politico*. July 31. Available <https://www.politico.eu/article/niger-coup-spark-concerns-france-uranium-dependency/>.

<sup>31</sup>Tuki, D. (2023). What does the population in Niger think about a military government? *Households in Conflict Network*, Working Paper 400, August.

<sup>32</sup>Issoufou, IT. & Fleming, L. (2023). Niger coup: President Mohamed Bazoum in good health, says France. July 28. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66324875#>

<sup>33</sup>Kuwali (2023). Op. cit.

<sup>34</sup>TeleSUR/ OSG (2023). Niger: The Ethnic and Economic Background of the Conflict. July 31. Available at <https://www.telesuren-english.net/news/Niger-The-Ethnic-and-Economic-Background-of-the-Conflict-20230731-0019.html>

<sup>35</sup>Tass (2023). History of relations of Soviet Union, Russia with African countries. July 26.

<sup>36</sup>Ukonne, C. (2020). The Dynamic Evolution of Russo-African Relations. *The Republic*, 4(3), August-September. Available at <https://republic.com.ng/august-september-2020/dynamic-evolution-of-russo-african-relations/>

<sup>37</sup>Ibid

<sup>38</sup>Mednick, S. (2023). Niger's junta asks for help from Russian group Wagner as it faces military intervention threat. *APnews*, August 6. Available at <https://apnews.com/article/wagner->



## ECOWAS's Response

The coup appears one too many to ECOWAS leaders, being the 6th in the region within 3 years. Characteristically, ECOWAS sprang into action by condemning the coup d'état and calling for the restoration of democracy in Niger. ECOWAS' responses are situated within the normative frameworks on democracy and good governance in West Africa. Notably, the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999); and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001). In line these regional norms on zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes in government, ECOWAS imposed several sanctions including suspension of membership, a no-fly zone, severed financial transactions and has threatened the possible use of force to restore democracy.<sup>39</sup> Nigeria which chairs the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of States and Government, cut electricity supply and closed borders with landlocked Niger, blocking much-needed imports to one of the world's poorest countries. Similarly, the AU suspended Niger and imposed sanctions.

Considering the landlocked nature of Niger, sanctions have contributed to rising price of imported foodstuffs and the interruption of power supply.<sup>40</sup> However, sanctions affect ordinary people much more than the regime. Sanctions have been ineffective so far in the region in altering behaviour of military regimes and political elites. Interestingly, some ECOWAS member state like Benin has reopened its borders with Niger. All the deadlines or ultimatums given by ECOWAS for the junta to reinstate Bazoum have long elapsed. The Nigerien military regime has been defiant and initially rebuffed diplomatic overtures by ECOWAS and AU. The CNSP has consolidated its position within the Nigerien armed forces and expanded its popular support in urban areas, mostly due to economic sanctions and the threat of external military action.<sup>41</sup> General Tchiane has since appointed a former economic minister, Ali Lamine Zeine, as prime minister. A three-year transition period proposed by the junta has been rejected by ECOWAS. ECOWAS

still maintains its earlier call for a swift return to constitutional order and the release of President Bazoum. In the words of ECOWAS Commissioner for Peace and Security, Musah Abdel Fatau, "we are not going to repeat the experiences of Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso, where ECOWAS found itself in a trade-off with the military regimes, haggling over the duration...some of them are still thinking of unilaterally extending the transitions in their conditions."<sup>42</sup>

The critical question is whether ECOWAS has followed its own rules and practices in the approach to Niger? ECOWAS approach to dealing with a political crisis such as coups d'état has been marked by inconsistencies. For instance, in the case of Mali and Guinea, ECOWAS condemned the coups d'états, suspended their memberships, and imposed sanctions. Again, in Burkina Faso, ECOWAS condemned the coup d'état, and suspended membership, but it not imposed sanctions. The reason behind the differing approach is not entirely clear but may be partly based on Burkina Faso's struggle with violent extremism since 2015. Why is Niger being treated differently, especially with a threat of use of force? The perceived ineffectiveness of ECOWAS with earlier military juntas has created a legitimacy crises for the regional body and has emboldened military juntas in the region.

ECOWAS' treat of use of force to restore democracy has been met with mixed reactions bordering on the *jus ad bellum*, the real motive and the operational capacity of ECOWAS and its member states to pull off such an intervention. The repercussions of such adventurism on human and regional security have been widely articulated. Some have pointed to an unseen hand of France and other Western interests in ECOWAS' responses to Niger.<sup>43</sup> Military governments in neighbouring Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso have promised to treat any military intervention in Niger as a declaration of war on them, hinting of possible support from Russia. A military intervention in Niger could devolve into a proxy war between military juntas and the elected governments of West Africa.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup>ECOWAS, (2023). Final communique – Extraordinary Summit of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government on the political situation in Niger, July 30.

<sup>40</sup>Meddy, P. (2023). Niger coup underlines challenge to democracy across West Africa. Chatham House, August 18. Available at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/08/niger-coup-underlines-challenge-democracy-across-west-africa>.

<sup>41</sup>Sow, D. (2023). ECOWAS must look beyond the use of force in Niger. ISS Today, August 9. Available at <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ecowas-must-look-beyond-the-use-of-force-in-niger>.

<sup>42</sup>France24, (2023). ECOWAS commissioner says 'not discussing' transition with Niger junta. September 9. Available at <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows>

<sup>43</sup>Aljazeera, (2023). France backs ECOWAS push to reverse Niger military coup. August 5. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/5/france-backs-ecowas-push-to-reverse-niger-military-coup>

<sup>44</sup>Raube, S. (2023). An International Law Assessment of ECOWAS' Threat to Use Force in Niger. Just Society, August 16. Available at <https://www.justsecurity.org/87659>

## Options for Engagement

It is obvious the call for the reinstatement of the President by Bazoum will not be heeded by the military junta. The sanctions imposed will not work entirely to coerce the military regime to cede power. Despite the initial refusal by the junta, there have been some mediation efforts following the brief visits by two teams sent by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu of Nigeria. The first was led by the Former Emir of Kano and spiritual leader of the Tijaniyya Islamic sect in Nigeria, Lamido Sanusi on August 9, 2023. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, former President of Nigeria led the second delegation in the company of the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III and the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Dr Omar Aliou Touray on August 19, 2023. These missions may not have yielded the desired outcomes in the short term. In the wake of the political impasse, the Nigerian military junta accepted Algeria's offer of mediation to resolve the political crisis in October 2023.<sup>45</sup> However, both the Algeria government and the Nigerian junta are yet to make clear the extent of the agreement on mediation, as they disagree on a basic element: the duration of a transition process. Algeria proposed a 6-month transition while the junta is proposing a 3-year duration.<sup>46</sup> This offer also raises further legitimacy crisis for ECOWAS as the regional body rejected the junta's proposal. We argue that constructive dialogue should be the way forward. Negotiations should be intensified and centred around a shorter transition period to constitutional rule. The current sanctions regime should be reevaluated to ensure that smart sanctions target only military junta leaders and their allies.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

The resurgence of coups d'états in Africa is a threat to democratic consolidation and human security. These coups are the direct consequences of democratic governance deficits and external factors. Citizens' support of the coupists pointed to their dissatisfaction with the ineptitude of governments and frustrations against former colonial powers such as France and the lop-sided nature of their security force assistance programmes which do not support

the operational needs of the recipient states. However, military takeovers do not provide quick solutions to governance crises. Military juntas do not always provide better governance than the civilians they deposed. They are also not the antidote to anti-colonial sentiments in Africa. Coups d'états have contagion effects on neighbouring countries that share similar realities and are therefore under the same pressures. To curb such undemocratic changes in government, regional institutions require a fundamental shift beyond prescriptive policy interventions focusing on targeted sanctions and condemnations to tackle the root causes of the problem. Governments in the region must note that curbing illegal seizures of power depends largely on the effectiveness, sustainability and reliability of democratic institutions and the system of governance that is put in place.

## Recommendations

- ECOWAS needs to reconsider its stance on the threat of force in Niger;
- Constructive dialogue must be intensified towards a swift return to constitutional rule in Niger, as well as Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea;
- ECOWAS must be proactive in dealing with internal governance crises that create fertile grounds for coup d'états;
- ECOWAS must be proactive in the monitoring and evaluation of member states' adherence and commitment to democratic principles.
- France and other Western powers need to reevaluate their engagements with former colonies to be anchored on mutual respect and win-win situations;
- Development partners need to reevaluate their approach to security force assistance to respond to the needs of the recipient states;
- Holistic defence and security sector transformation is required to ensure strong and effective democratic oversight of the military; and
- There should be continuous and robust policy dialogues on civil-military relations and capacity-building programmes for security and defence sector professionals to instil democratic norms and cultures in them.

<sup>45</sup>Reuters, (2023). Algeria says Niger accepts its mediation in resolving the political crisis. October 2. Available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/algeria-says-niger-accepts-its-mediation-resolving-political-crisis-2023-1002>

<sup>46</sup>Camissa, K. & Charles, D. (2023). Can Algeria Help Niger Recover From Its Army Coup?. October, 5. United States Institute of Peace. Available at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/10/can-algeria-help-niger-recover-its-army-coup>

<sup>47</sup>Ajala, O. (2023). Niger coup: ECOWAS must do these 3 things to break the stalemate. The Conversations, September 4. Available at <https://theconversation.com/niger-coup-ecowas-must-do-these-3-things-to-break-the-stalemate>

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