

Understanding the Sahel Intervention Failures

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Abstract

The Sahel region of West Africa forms a major part of Africa's belt of instability. The Sahel has witnessed a significant rise in terrorist activities, with jihadist groups exploiting, unresolved historical grievances, weak governance, ungoverned spaces, and social vulnerabilities to advance a politico-religious cause. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2023, "The Sahel region in sub-Saharan Africa is now the epicentre of terrorism, with the Sahel accounting for more terrorism deaths in 2022 than both South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) combined. About 70% of all terrorist attacks between 2012 and 2019 in Africa occurred in the Sahel regions of West Africa. There have been several interventions, using both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches. It is clear that the efforts, in both the kinetic and non-kinetic realms, have tended to be most effective at bringing about short-term operational successes but, generally, not strategically successful in the long-term, in view of which a rethink of broader foreign engagement towards the Sahel is needed. This paper provides an assessment of intervention counter efforts in the Sahel region and proposes strategies for improvement.

Keywords: Sahel, terrorism, counter-terrorism, jihadism, community security.

Introduction

The Sahel is usually defined as the region in West and Central Africa with the Sahara to its north and the savanna to its south. It includes parts of ten countries in its definition: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal.

The Sahel has become synonymous with instability, and the governments of at least, five Sahelian countries Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – struggle to control wide expanses of territory, characterised largely by, remote areas and historical routes connecting sub-Saharan Africa to the Maghreb. The problems of the Sahel have been exacerbated by the congregation of many terrorist groups in the area, making the area the most insecure in Africa.

Several interventions have been experimented, notable among which are the Pan-Sahel Initiative, a US-led programme that sought to assist Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad to ward off terrorists; Operation Barkhane a French-led intervention involving a roughly 3,000-strong French force, stationed in N'djamena, Chad; The Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and the G-5 Initiative. The latter two had great promise. MINUSMA was a UN peacekeeping mission in Mali, which had, as part of its mandate to stabilize the region, but faced numerous challenges and ultimately withdrew from Mali in 2023. The G5 Sahel initiative, was a regional, intergovernmental organization formed in 2014 by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, with the aim to promote regional security and development by strengthening cooperation among member states. The G5 Sahel created the G5 Sahel Joint Force in 2017 to combat armed and violent extremist groups and improve the security situation in the region. Incidentally, none of the afore-mentioned programmes yielded any positive results,

rather, the situation in the Sahel keeps deteriorating, exacerbated not only by the uptick in activism of Jihadists and extremists, but also by the spate of military coups that has bedeviled the region lately.

The Sahel Countries



Source: The New Humanitarian

The Problem with Terrorism in the Sahel

The Sahel has seen the most rapid growth in violent extremist activity of any region in Africa and the world, especially since 2012. The region is also a nexus of criminal networks and illicit trafficking and has experienced a rise in farmer-herder violence. The Sahel now accounts for 43% of global terrorism deaths (Global Terrorism Index-2022)

The United Nations Security Council (2020) report states, among others that, since July 2019, the West African sub-region has experienced a “devastating surge in terrorist attacks against military and civilian targets, with alarming humanitarian consequences” (UNSC, 2020). In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, deaths from terrorist attacks jumped five-fold from 2016 to more than 4,000 in 2019, with the geographic focus of attacks shifting eastwards from Mali to Burkina Faso, increasingly threatening West African coastal States (UNSC, 2020). In Burkina Faso, casualties surged from about 80 in 2016 to more than 1,800 in 2019, the number of displaced persons rose 10-fold to about 500,000, and an additional 25,000 sought refuge in other countries (UNSC, 2020).

Addressing the UN Security Council July 24, 2023, Omar Alieu Touray, President of the Economic Community of West African States Commission, said that from 1 January to 30 June 2023, the Sahel region recorded 1,814 incidents of terrorist attacks, which resulted in 4,593 fatalities. By end of April 2023, half a million refugees were recorded in the region. The continued loss of territory to terrorists and armed groups has led to new waves of displacement. (SC15635/ 25, July 2023)

So why is the Sahel region particularly vulnerable to terrorism? Many are quick to blame ethnic and religious conflict made more destructive by the growing availability of small arms and light weapons

(SALW) from outside the region. But there are other contributing factors that are fueling deeper stressors and frustrations within and between communities. The Sahel region has long faced severe, complex security and humanitarian crises. Since gaining independence in the 1960s, many countries in the Sahel have experienced violent extremism due to the confluence of weak and illegitimate governance, economic decline, and the worsening effects of climate change. Weather extremes, unpredictable growing cycles, desertification, and diminishing arable land and complicated by lack of political and social space all contribute to the sense of declining economic opportunity that many feel—especially the region's youth. Instead of using their authority to resolve disputes and build inter-communal understanding, many political leaders, armed with social media, appear all too ready to exploit these pressures for their own political gain. It's also interesting to note that there have been seven coup attempts (four of them successful) in the region just since 2021. Violence, conflict, and crime have surged over the last decade, transcending national borders and posing significant challenges to countries both in and outside the region. Sahel countries are consistently ranked high on the Fragile State Index. This volatile security situation has attracted much global attention and has drawn in the United Nations, the European Union, France, and the US to roll out intervention programmes, aimed at ensuring security in the Sahel, which, unfortunately, have yielded little results. While the EU had focused on non-kinetic approaches in helping to bring development and good-governance, the US and, particularly France, had tried to combine kinetic and non-kinetic approaches, primarily to halt violent extremism and/or terrorism as well as assist in governance and development agendas. By 2022 the intervention troop levels from France/EU and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) exceeded fifteen thousand (15,000).

The Failure of Strategy

The uptick in recent times, of terrorist activities in the Sahel and the succession of coups d'état in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger not to mention the tension between the governments of Mali and France, that had led to the withdrawal of French troops from Mali and Burkina Faso, if anything, are indicative of the failure of strategy in the Sahel. It is clear that the efforts, in both the kinetic and non-kinetic realms, have tended to be most effective at bringing about short-term operational successes but generally not strategically successful in the long-term, in view of which a rethink of broader foreign engagement towards the Sahel is needed. The multiplicity of various initiatives aimed at helping to remedy the security, political, and humanitarian issues present a challenge in coordination, ownership, and inclusion. Emphasis on international cooperation and euro-centric military strategies as counterterrorism solutions have no empirical success stories. According to the Bin Hassan and Pereire (2006), success or victory in the fight against terrorism cannot be attained through military means alone as the acts tend to fuel resentment, anger, hatred and serve to escalate the threat globally. Some Scholars have suggested that such interventions may equally amount to state terrorism'. In fact, addressing the vexed question of state terrorism, Ruth Blakeley argues that scholars of terrorism have focused too greatly on the terror perpetrated under the fascist and communist regimes of the twentieth century at the expense of investigation into the practices of liberal democracies that apparently mirror those of terrorist groups. Blakeley stresses that Western counterterrorism operations can be understood as state terrorism, a fact that undermines democracy and the respect of human rights. (Blakeley2009).

More plausible would be a model of tailored strategies that emphasize community engagement, education, and economic empowerment as critical components of counterterrorism efforts. The engagement being

suggested here would see a continued foreign assistance/intervention in both kinetic and non-kinetic counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel but also involve a greater understanding of the socio-historical and cultural ecosystems or specificities of the Sahel region.¹ Such interventions are essential for addressing the root causes of terrorism and building resilience against extremist ideologies.

One basic problem usually dismissed and/or overlooked is the lack of policy coherence and the discord between policy and on-the-ground realities. This is the biggest of all the challenges of foreign interventions in the Sahel. For example, successive efforts have resorted to collaborating with non-democratic regimes, whose buy-in for intervention programming is all that is needed. Particularly for the US, it is a resetting of engagement with Africa, after its seeming knee-jerk withdrawal after the Cold War; this time, drawing Africa into the so-called War on Terror. But this is where some mis-calculations seem to have been made. Currently, America's rekindled interest in Africa, is seen not only as an orchestrated attempt to co-opt African countries into the so-called War on Terror, but also an attempt to spread Western values. In reality, this has been problematic to some segments of the African population. One school of thought in the region sees this as a veiled but unfortunate military and political posturing to wage war against Islam by the West. Reminiscent of Africa's role during the Cold War, there is a pushback that Africa should no longer be drawn into a proxy war involving radical Islam and the West, its culture and way of life, what Samuel Huntington has aptly described as the '*Clash of Civilizations*'. The implications of this association of Africa with Muslim fundamentalism have been far-reaching and catastrophic. Radical fundamentalist Muslim terrorists like Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) and Al-Shabab have pillaged, bombed and destroyed lives and property in the guise of their hatred for Western education and values in some African countries with sizeable Muslim populations, the Sahel, particularly being no exception. Moreover, unable to penetrate the defenses of Western countries, these ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates or sympathizers have resorted to bombing and destroying what appear to be soft targets like international hotels, malls, public buildings and bus stations in Tanzania, Kenya, Mali and Nigeria, respectively.

Terrorism is often framed by dominant global powers, leading to Western-centric narratives that marginalize non-Western resistance movements. The U.S. designation of certain foreign groups as terrorist organizations is frequently influenced by geopolitical interests rather than an objective assessment of their activities (Richard, 2007). It must be noted that, the concept is dynamic, with interpretations varying across legal, cultural, and geopolitical contexts.

The EU and France have continually resorted to collaborating with non-democratic African regimes, whose buy-in for counterterrorism programming has often been either minimal or who have used such assistance from the EU or France for personal or regime-sustaining purposes. When such Sahel governments have used counterterrorism assistance for personal purposes, they have often pushed their citizens toward—not away from—the very groups that such efforts have sought to combat. Simultaneously, groups associated with terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and/or the Islamic State can point toward collusion between the United States, the EU or France and repressive governments to justify their existence and encourage citizen recruitment.

Also, although the EU and France try assiduously to avoid them, sometimes counter-terrorism operations have led to civilian casualties, thus giving credence to the anti-imperial narratives of African jihadi groups associated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. And since the local armies are mostly involved, they incur the hatred and wrath of the citizens, who may see the Islamist groups as comrades and saviours, rather

than enemies. The Burkina situation is a typical example and explains why vast territories were easily captured by the jihadists that rapidly between 2016 and 2019.

The standard EU/French solution to mitigate the presence of terrorist groups in the Sahel region has been to empower African states to extend their writ into their states' rural peripheries. This, unfortunately, exacerbates the center-periphery tensions. This approach often fails to see African jihadi actors and groups as simply local politicians and powerbrokers who have succeeded in leveraging discourses of jihad to articulate widespread citizen grievances against abusive, authoritarian African states. Meanwhile, the focus on insurgent groups' connections to al-Qa`ida or the Islamic State can overlook local grievances and why these groups have achieved legitimacy in their various communities. For Example, Ansarul Islam, the group behind much of the violence, which often is portrayed as tied to jihadists elsewhere in the Sahel, is, first and foremost, a movement challenging the prevailing social order in Soum province, in Burkina's Sahel region.

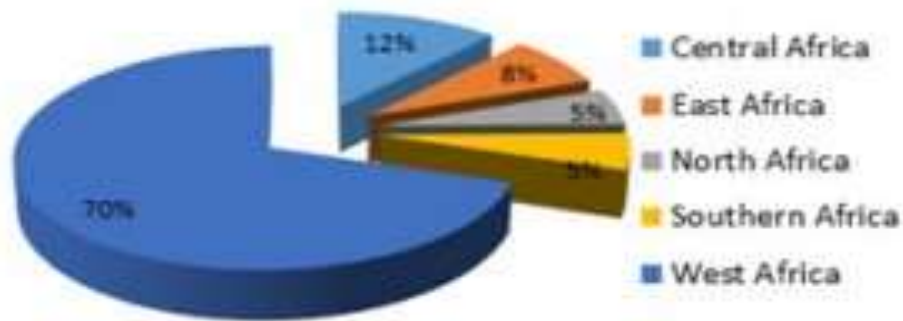
As Dougherty & Robert, (1996) note, terrorism occurs in the context of wider political struggles, in which the use of terror is one strategy among other more routine forms of contentious actions to achieve some objective. Violent extremist groups thrive in areas where the state is absent (also known as ungoverned spaces), or sovereignty is contested (Bala, 2021). In societies characterised at once by mounting tensions over access to arable land and pasture for grazing and demographic dynamism, terrorism fans the flames of social and political conflict, while paradoxically imposing a very rough and crude social order (Bala, 2021). Thus, rather than serving as proxies for the so-called global jihad, violent extremist groups in the Sahel are essentially products of local and regional dynamics and operate essentially in that milieu. This is reflected both in their recruitment of marginalized communities and in their operations against state institutions they perceive as fundamentally illegitimate

The non-kinetic, approaches to improve political, economic, and social conditions have yielded little appeal, because of the disregard for local specificities – socio-cultural and historical. Ethno-centric approach to issues of democracy and good governance only help to lessen the appeal in ways that have, directly or indirectly, served to increase the appeal of al-Qaida- and Islamic State-affiliated groups for African populations. Lamentably, therefore, the EU/France/US involvement in the Sahel counterterrorism efforts, has arguably, exacerbated the problems that they seek to address.

Flawed Approaches

We may, therefore, come to one indubitable conclusion; that the fundamental *understanding* of the counterterrorism problem set in Africa and, particularly, in the Sahel is often flawed. It must be noted that the centre of terrorism in Africa is in West Africa as the diagram below depicts and an improper misreading of the antennas would cause more insecurity situations in the whole of Africa.

Figure 1: Terrorists attacks by Region



Source: UN

The Sahel, it must be noted, is vulnerable to violent extremism. There are drivers of violent extremism that disaggregate levels of analysis and distinguish between “*push factors*,” i.e., structural conditions or characteristics of the societal environment that are alleged to push vulnerable individuals onto the path to violence, and “*pull factors*,” or individual motivations and group-level dynamics that underscore the importance of human agency in the process of radicalization

The structural conditions that increase the risk of violent extremism are particularly prevalent in the Sahel. These include underlying economic conditions, most notably poverty, underdevelopment, and unemployment, and political drivers such as corruption, impunity, and poor governance. The distant relationship between state and populations in the Sahel region also fuels the crisis. The contrast between the northern portions of the Sahelian countries’ economic potential and the lack of infrastructure feeds a sense of abandonment amongst its population, in which sense, Jihadism becomes part of political contestation. Most typical in this sense, was the rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria. Divisions between masters and subjects, rulers and ruled, ancient and modern provide the base, upon which extremism thrives in the Sahel. Local communities in the Sahel see state representatives and security forces as strangers, trying to enrich themselves, as they serve foreign interests rather than as state agents responsible for providing services. A recent UNDP Report is eloquent on this saying: ‘These latest developments in the widening ‘belt’ across the Sahel, West and Central African regions underscore the need to better understand the underlying socio-economic drivers of this rise and pathways for redressing themⁱⁱ¹. No wonder that, in the midst of all this there is an attendant coup epidemic in the Sahel region of West Africa.

Active Extremist Organizations in the Sahel

| Organization | Description |
|---|---|
| Jama’at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) | JNIM is a coalition of the following militant Islamist groups, founded in March of 2017 and led by the leader of Ansar Dine, Iyad Ag Ghaly: |

| | |
|---|---|
| Ansar Dine | Founded by Iyad Ag Ghaly, after he failed to become leader of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which pushed for secession in Mali in 2012. The group operates in the region around Kidal. |
| Macina Liberation Front (FLM) | Founded in 2015 by Amadou Koufa and operational in the Mopti region. The group is believed to include former members of Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). |
| Katiba Serma | Led by Abu Jalil al Fulani and operational in the Serma region between Gao and Mopti. The group is a semi-autonomous subgroup of FLM. |
| AQIM Sahara | Branch of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) led by Djamel Okacha (a.k.a. Yahya Abu al Hammam) (deceased). The group is active across Mali and the southwest corner of Niger. |
| Al Mourabitoun | Led by Hasan al Ansari (deceased) after co-founder Mokhtar Belmokhtar went into hiding or was killed. Al Mourabitoun was a merger between Belmokhtar's Those Who Sign in Blood and MUJAO. The group is most active in the region surrounding Gao. |
| Ansaroul Islam | Founded in 2016 by Malaam Ibrahim Dicko (deceased) and based in the Soum Province of Burkina Faso. The group expanded its operations further south of the country in 2018. |
| Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) | Founded in May of 2015 by Abu Walid al Sahrawi, former member of the MUJAO faction that became al Mourabitoun. The group's activity stretches out from the shared borders of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. |
| Katiba Salaheddine | Founded by Sultan Ould Badi, former member of AQIM, and co-founder of MUJAO in 2011. Badi allied himself with ISGS's al Sahrawi, a colleague from his days with MUJAO, in 2016. |
| Unaffiliated | Active militant Islamist groups who either could not or have chosen not to claim responsibility for attacks. |

Source: Compiled by author from various sources.

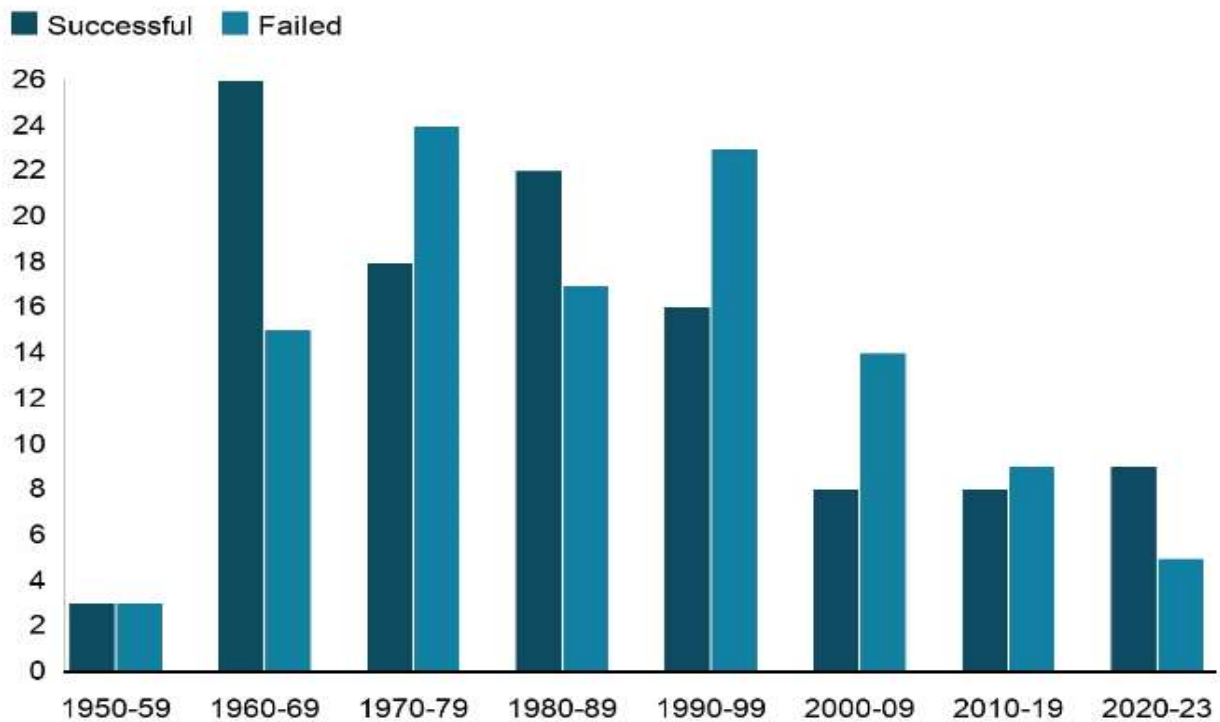
The Coup Epidemic in Africa

In the midst of the efforts to combat extremism and terrorism has appeared a coup epidemic in West Africa. A coup may be defined as a conspiratorially, illegal and overt attempt by the military - or by other civilian officials - to topple sitting leaders.

A study by two US researchers, Jonathan Powell and Clayton Thyne, has identified over 200 such attempts in Africa since the 1950s. About half of these have been successful.

In 2021, there were six coup attempts in Africa, four of them successful.

Military coups in Africa over the decades

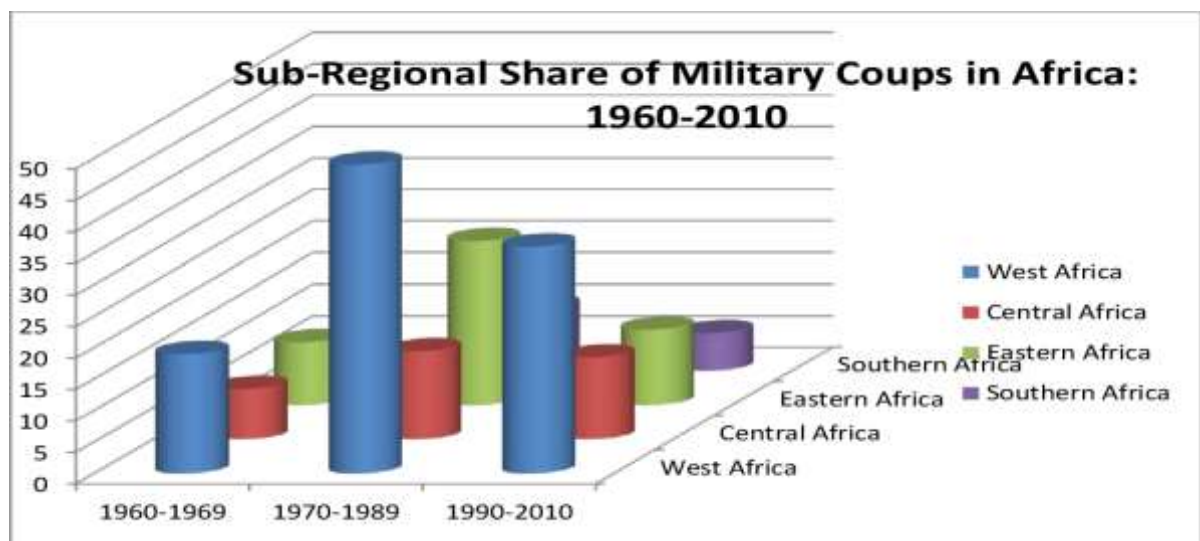


Source: Research by Central Florida and Kentucky Universities

BBC

For the past few years, one military after another in West Africa has overthrown its democratically elected leaders without garnering too much attention abroad. First came Mali, then Chad, then Mali again, Guinea, and Burkina Faso. The coup in Niger was different. It set off alarm bells in the region's remaining democratic regimes, particularly Senegal.

Military coups were a regular occurrence in parts of Africa in the decades after independence. Obviously, West Africa is noted to have had the most of coups in Africa, since independence.

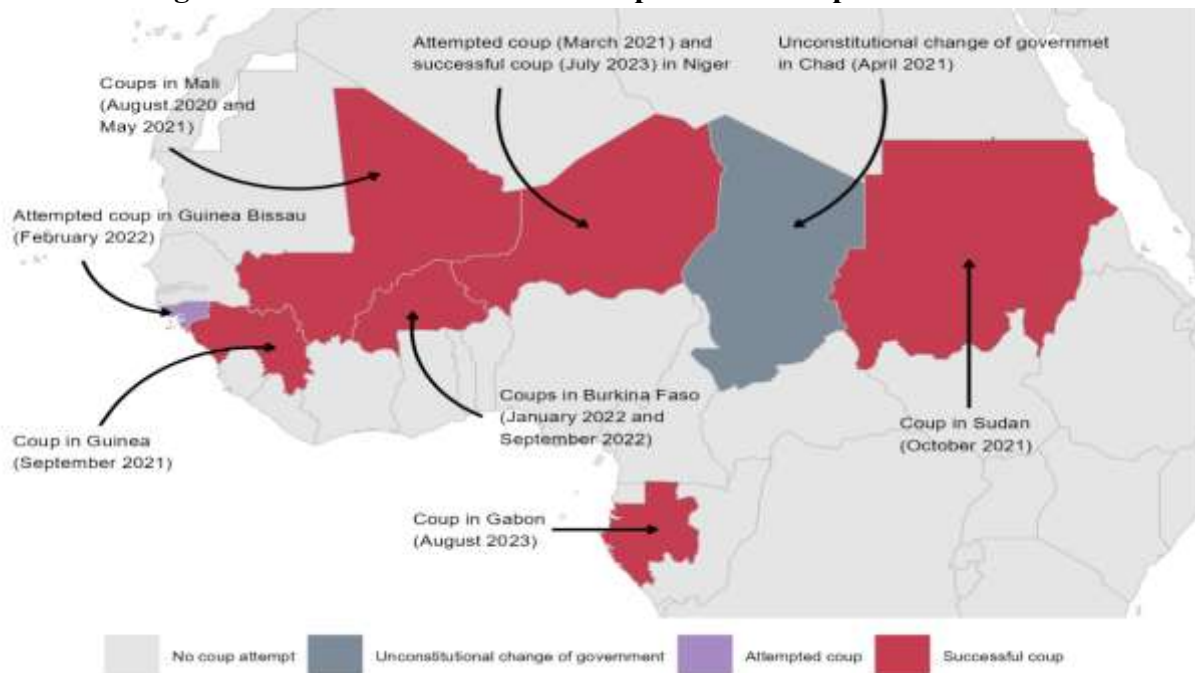


Source: Research by Central Florida and Kentucky Universities

BBC

And since 2012, and as already indicated, coups have occurred thrice in Mali and once each in Guinea and Burkina Faso, and recently also in Niger. In the wider African setting, Gabon has also seen a successful coup, while two attempts failed in West Africa – Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone respectively in 2023. The world cried and called it a backsliding of Democracy in Africa. It should be noted, though, that Mali and Niger (during the rule of Tanja) were once touted as the new beacon of democracy in Africa. And the whole world lauded the nascent democracy in Niger with the election of President Mohammed Bazoum in 2019.

Fig. African Countries that have Experienced Coups since 2020



Source: International IDEA

Unresolved historical grievances and the outfall of the fall of the Qaddafi regime in Libya were the catalysts to Mali's coup in 2012. The French intervention that year helped in halting the take-over of the country by Tuareg militants. The stalemate created fertile grounds for various Jihadi groups to settle in various parts of the country and various parts of the Sahel region.

The two other coups that followed in 2021 and 2022, with similar ones in Guinea and Burkina Faso had something in common. While military takeovers in Africa are nothing new, the *coups* of the past four years have taken on a new dynamic. Unlike the traditional *conspiratorial* coups, these coups were *systemic* in nature. Clearly, there was state failure in all the three countries. The insecurity ramifications could be anybody's guess had the various armies not intervened. In these instances, the only institution capable of bringing some modicum of stability has always been the military and they rose to the occasion, granting the circumstances. Conspiratorial coups are coups that are usually undertaken by young officers and/or non-commissioned officers, most of whom are platoon mates at training or in camps. Such coups were rampant in the 1960s and 70s and were fueled and mostly master-minded by the Cold War patrons and are known to be violent and/or bloody. Systemic coups, a common feature of modern coups in Africa, on the other hand, represent interventions by the military, usually led by top Generals. Invariably, such coups save the respective countries from imminent implosion and are very popular with the masses (Mali,

Guinea, Niger, and Gabon are veritable examples). Such coups have also proven to be less bloody or, most at times, bloodless.

The thorny issue, usually, rests with the transitional processes. As usual, the regional body (ECOWAS) suspended and sanctioned the respective countries. ECOWAS had indicated that, the coups run counter to the letter and spirit of ECOWAS Protocol on good governance and democracy, whereby unconstitutional change of governments is prohibited. The African Union (AU) equally condemned the coups and asked for a rapid return to constitutional rule.

For the crafters and drafters of the African Union's (AU) Constitutive Act, particularly the Addis Ababa Charter and the Lomé Declaration of July 2000 and the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy, the novel idea was to provide a regional, sub-regional, platform of support to democratic governments and also deter any forms of unconstitutionality. However, recent events have put to the test the political capacity of the AU and ECOWAS to uphold the sanctity of the normative framework and the protocol supportive of democratic processes. A negation of the AU's Normative Frameworks relating to constitutionalism and democracy was the outburst of revolutionary movements in the north African region (the so-called Arab Spring). Likewise, in the case of the ECOWAS, there were myriads of problems that tested the organisation's democratic credentials. For instance, Guinea Bissau experienced two coup d'états in two years (2009 and 2012), Guinea in December 2008; Niger in March 2010; and Burkina Faso in 2015. And now Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger are all being led by military juntas. Thus, both the AU and ECOWAS have been challenged and pulled along by two parallel but not equal forces: the need to ensure respect for the principle of total rejection of unconstitutional changes of government, and the necessity to recognise the reality on the ground and this has provided a platform for a thorough assessment. Indeed, ECOWAS finds itself in a serious quandary: Mali stuck to her guns of managing its own transitional process and so did Niger. ECOWAS was unable to treat Burkina Faso the way it treated Mali or Niger (the latter with biting sanctions and suspension from the organization, the former with only suspension) Niger was slapped with sanctions and an ultimatum to, within seven days, return power to the government of President Bazoum or face the use of force. From all indications, this was a mere threat, a bluff that couldn't have materialized by any imagination. ECOWAS does not have what it takes to mobilize rapidly. It may take, in the minimum, six and, maximum, nine months to be able to have any meaningful mobilization. It would make sense, if the ECOWAS Stand-by Force were in place already. The difficulty in establishing the Stand-by Force to act as a rapid response force has been the bane of ECOWAS in circumstances such as unfolding within the West African sub-region.

West African Countries Currently Under Military Rule



Source: Research by Central Florida and Kentucky Universities

BBC

The contention is in the type of sanctions and the transitional process. While the regional body (ECOWAS) tried to stampede the Malian government to quickly transit to civilian administration, the latter drew a 5-year timetable. Niger indicated that, it would have a transitional process that would span three years. All the others indicated their own timelines for a return to civilian rule.

Drury (2001) investigates how sanctions interact with the nature of military regimes and discusses their effectiveness in promoting democratic change. He argues that sanctions can be counterproductive in authoritarian regimes, as they allow the ruling class to consolidate power, rally nationalist sentiment, and blame external forces for internal failures. Escribà-Folch (2013) finds that sanctions have mixed results in promoting democratic reforms. While sanctions may create short-term economic strain, they seldom lead to long-term constitutional governance or regime change. Authoritarian regimes usually survive sanctions by changing their strategies, using repression or diversifying their international partners.

Drury and Li (2006) also explored the relationship between economic sanctions and political regime change. They conclude that while sanctions may weaken the target regime temporarily, they are mostly ineffective in fostering constitutional governance or democratisation. Furthermore, Bapat and Kwon (2015) argue that sanctions are typically ineffective in promoting constitutional governance because they do not target the key political structures that sustain authoritarian regimes. Instead, sanctions often strengthen the grip of authoritarian leaders by galvanising support from elites and the military and by providing them with a justification to crack down on opposition. Sanctions do not operate in a vacuum.

The question arises, whether *the ballot can forever stop the bullet*. Does a quick return to civilian rule address the fundamental hiccups that led to the coup? That is, what if constitutional governments subvert the constitution? In all these, ECOWAS seems to feel a guilt of having nothing per the protocol to avert coups.

Community Security

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), as espoused by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, identifies a group of states whose key national security issues are so tightly interlinked that they cannot be isolated or discussed independently. The theory considers defence interdependence as a key element in the

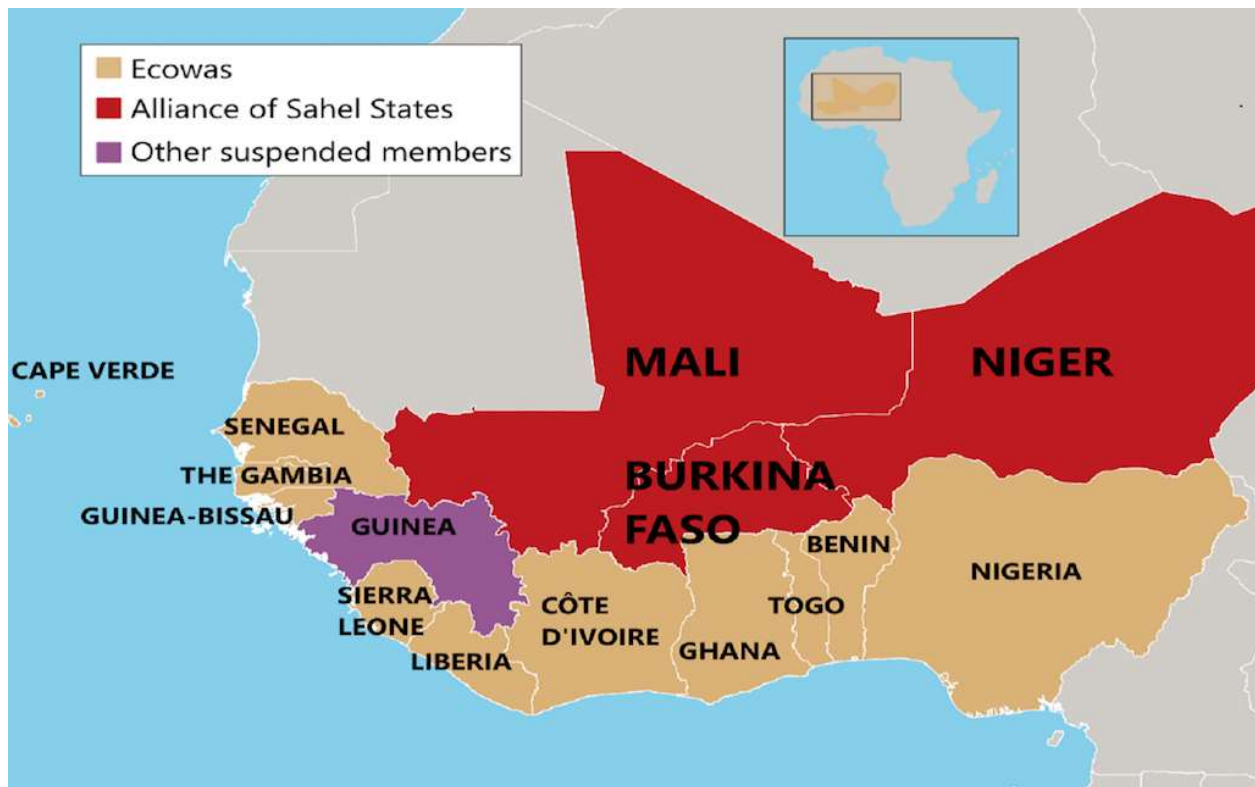
development of regionally dependent clusters (Buzan & Waever, 2003). The theory posits the presence of national sub-systems as protection research subjects and offers a theoretical context for coping with these. Such a structure is intended to illustrate the relative autonomy of regional security partnerships and places them in a unit (state) and program-level perspective (Buzan, 2000).

Buzan and Wæver (2003) argue that the security complexities of states depend primarily on the pressures that derive from geographic proximity, the interplay between the anarchic structure and how power balances in the system play out. They perceive the universe as consisting of geographically regional clusters, thus magnifying defence complexities within those clusters (Ibid). Buzan and Wæver further explain the core ideas put out for RSCT and explain that because most risks move more quickly over shorter distances than longer ones, defence interdependence is usually into regionally dependent clusters known as protection complexes. The securitization process, that determines the degree of protecting interdependence, tends to be more severe among actors within these complexes than between actors inside and outside the complex.

While the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) has provided valuable insights into understanding security dynamics within specific regions, it has also faced criticism and generated debates within the field of international relations (Sadurski, 2022). Some critics argue that RSCT places too much emphasis on state-centric security dynamics and overlooks the influence of non-state actors, such as transnational corporations, non-governmental organizations, and insurgent groups. This criticism suggests that a more comprehensive understanding of security requires considering a broader range of actors. Other, critics argue that RSCT tends to place too much emphasis on regions as self-contained units, potentially oversimplifying the complexities of global security dynamics. Some argue that this regional focus may neglect the influence of external actors and global forces on regional security.

The above notwithstanding, the theory would hold well for the establishment of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1989 that successfully intervened in Liberia and Sierra Leone, but, even though the situation is equally similar and calls for a similar form of intervention, the nature of the 'terrain' is totally different. Then, it was interventions in civil wars (through the inception of ECOMOG) generated by insurrections, which Festus Aboagye (2018) describes as a 'nascent community security.' Today, the Jihadists' variable in the equation in West Africa, global geo-politics, economic weakness of possible troop-contributing countries, and also the political fragilities of said countries, singly and/or in concert, would make it difficult to have a sense of community security in West Africa that the theory calls for.

This absence of community security must have spurred the three countries Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, to finally decide to leave the ECOWAS and form their own organization – the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). This is 70% of the land mass of ECOWAS hived off. Whether or not ECOWAS succeeds in talking them in and back to its fold, remains to be seen.



Source: Premium Times

African Countries-Failed & Successful Coups

Source: Research by Central Florida and Kentucky Universities

BBC

Conclusion

Certainly, the democratic deficit and conflict are the most determining factors for terrorism and coups in Africa. The main canvass for terrorism in Africa is conflict, while the democracy deficit engenders coups. The trend of activities of modern extremists and terrorist groups in West Africa and the continent at large is cellular (Antwi-Danso, 2016). This explains why terrorist groups such as Boko Haram have cells established in Chad Republic, Cameroun, Niger, and Benin. It is pertinent to note that, if measures are not taken, they will continue to spread to other parts of West Africa. A more collaborative and all-inclusive measure, orchestrated as a region will result in more effective efforts towards preventing and countering terrorist attacks from spreading in the West African sub-region.

It is, therefore an imperative that regional security be insured only via a collective ECOWAS security measure and/or framework. It must be recalled that, the primary mandate of the G5 force was to secure the bloc's common borders and fight "terrorist" and criminal groups. But success never came because the rest of the region was not involved. Back in 2020 the UN had reported that:

'The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its member states have sought to increase security cooperation to stem the expanding terrorist threat and support the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel)' (UNSC Report 2020)

Ethno-centric approaches to resolving the complexities of problems within the Sahel region are bound to fail, since they are always morphed in the politico-security calculus of the benevolent countries and/or organizations. The ineffectiveness and/or failure of the French, US, and EU interventions is eloquent

testimony to the aforesaid. The specificities of the Sahel- - socio-historical, and socio-cultural - will always be indispensable variables in any matrix for a solution

Endnotes:

' An examination of some of these structural drivers, would find that persistent insecurity, stagnant growth, and exclusionary economic governance - as well as low development indicators - are associated with higher coup risk.

ii. The Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), for instance, drew criticism for its lack of attention of underlying regional economic problems and local political struggles, the conduct of partner governments against those suspected of being "terrorists", and for indirectly radicalizing certain groups living in or near the Sahara. See: David Gutelius, "US creates African enemies where none were before" *Christian Science Monitor*, July 9, 2003.

iii. See: UNDP, (2023), 'Soldiers and Citizens: Military coups and the need for democratic renewal in Africa' <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/soldiers-and-citizens>

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