

The Cause of Diplomatic Failure in the Sahel Region and the Rising Coups

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the reasons of diplomatic failure amid the rising coups in the Sahel region. Five countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Chad, Niger and Gambia) are currently governed or ruled by military juntas after the regional actors for instance, ECOWAS (Economic Committee of West African States) and AU (African Unity) have failed to explore any successful diplomatic strategy to annex the situation. Reasons accounting for the rising coups in the region are different depending on the country, generally, they include, lack of leadership and political will, historical legacies, weak institutions and governance, the abundance of resources, mistrust, economic hardships, unemployment, inadequate basic amenities and many others. The region currently is experiencing a combination of climate, food insecurity, armed conflicts, and demographic shocks with significant socio-economic consequences, and according to Plan International for West Africa, an NGO (Non-governmental organization), indicates that, more than 9.7 million people are food insecure in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, as of December 2022, and 600,000 children are already suffering from acute malnutrition (Harsch 2017). Diplomacy in Africa (Sahel) has experienced some of its failures due to a convergence of factors such as: the quality of diplomacy and mediators; the ubiquity of conflicts; the continent's lack of international influence; Africa's dependence on external actors and; subsequent lack of assertiveness and the inability to stand up to errant leaders within the region whose actions threaten good governance and regional security. Therefore, the article will further detail the cause of rising coups in the Sahel region and recommend sustainable diplomatic measures to the regional actors.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Leadership, Governance, Insecurity, coup

INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy takes a wide coverage since it involves both internal and international affairs from economic, political and humanitarian issues, therefore it operates depending on the issue or problem available. The forms of diplomacy is either through; negotiation, discussion, bargaining and various approaches. Some other forms may include digital diplomacy (the use of internet services), economy diplomacy (activities to improve economic growth), and intermediary (the use of third party) (Bos and Melissen 2019). Diplomacy is conducted through bilateral or multilateral means, secret or open and negotiators can opt for either round table or shuttle diplomacy based on the conditions under which negotiations are conducted (Huda and Muchatuta 2022), the Sahel region of Africa which stretches across several countries including Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, for almost a decade has experienced a series of diplomatic failures and rising military coups. These developments have posed significant challenges to regional security stability and hindered efforts to address the underlying issues affecting these countries. The latest country in the region facing a coup is the republic of the Gambia, and this is sending signals to other neighboring countries, the shaking up of security (military) system by the President of Cameroon, Mr. Paul Biya recently in reshuffling the country's military and also, Rwanda government took to retire a number of the military officers amid the coups. One of the key diplomatic failures in the Sahel region has been the inability of both African and

international regional actors, including ECOWAS, AU and the United Nations and various Western powers, to effectively address the complex security and humanitarian challenges in the region. Despite the deployment of several peacekeeping missions, such as ECOWAS military, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the security situation has continued to deteriorate. One of the primary reasons for this failure is the limited understanding of the local dynamics and complexities of the region (Jooji, Okwara, and Momoh 2023). The Sahel is characterized by porous borders, widespread poverty, weak governance, and the presence of multiple armed groups. The international community's approach has often been focused on military solutions rather than economic, social and political issues, which has always resulted to coups in the region significantly, there is the need for a paradigm shift in the comprehension of peace and conflict (Adetula, Murithi, and Buchanan-Clarke 2018). Some of the key factors influencing the success of diplomacy in this region include: Multilateral Diplomatic Efforts: There have been several multilateral initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges in the Sahel region, such as the G5 Sahel (a joint military force) composed of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger (Rupesinghe 2018). These joint efforts have provided a platform for countries to collaborate and coordinate their actions, ensuring greater effectiveness in addressing the Sahel's challenges though a lot still have to be done to end occurrence of military rule. Another is Regional Cooperation: Regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) have played crucial role in facilitating diplomatic efforts (Ajayi 2008). Their involvement in mediation, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping has helped to bring conflicting parties to the negotiation table and find peaceful solutions to the region's challenges.

Sometimes a transition team is formed to conduct of elections for a successful handing over power to a democratic elected President. Diplomacy has been instrumental in preventing conflicts and resolving existing ones in the Sahel (Zoubir 2020). Diplomatic efforts have led to peace agreements, such as the Algiers Accord (2015) in Mali, aimed at ending the insurgency and promoting political stability. Mediation efforts by regional and international actors have also helped de-escalate tensions and establish dialogue between rising tension and conflict zones, especially places where there have been unsuccessful coups in the region. (Hansen 2021). Also, modern technology have also done more harm in the cause of conflicts in the region, the digitization system paved way for the use of social media platforms like face book, Instagram and others, usually, terrorist groups succeed in winning favor or sympathy from the general public which eventually helps in propagating their operations sometimes and also cause tension which trigger's conflict (Bos and Melissen 2019). The Sahel previously have a long standing credible relationship with the French (France), precisely their colonial masters and as a result of issues of securitization, the Wagner group (Russian base military) now paved its way into the region to intervene and offers security support to them especially the Malians, Burkina Faso's and Niger (Mehta 2023). The presence and establishment of the European Union training mission in Mali (EUTM), increasing reliance of European, France and US in Niger for some time now posed a high risk of coup uprising in the Sahel, since all have their established bases in the region (Analytica 2022) and the Sahel are closing their relationship with the French and building a new contracts with the Wagner group. During the covid-19 pandemic, the unions of the region including ECOWAS and AU could not address that diplomatically but only closed some African borders and never thought of closing small immigrant boats to Spain and Italy which later led to the bankruptcy of many economies and deteriorating humanitarian situation (Ioniță 2021). The Sahel is not able to have a working counter terrorism policy to curtail the terrorism situation, in the case of Mali in 2012 it failed to implement a counter terrorism policy despite considerable expertise by Bamako-based US diplomats (Orellana 2017). Corruption is another cause of rising coups in West Africa and the Sahel region, leaders must be seen fighting and punishing culprits and not protecting them, citizens who feels neglected and betrayed by their leaders and also does not see the returns of taxes paid in most cases takes the law to themselves and finally, coups are what we expect to respond appropriately (Kraus 1983) and another is the ill verification of allegations (Atuobi 2007). The rising coups in the region relating to the non-performance of governance creates a chance for African leaders to instill proper mechanism to respond to the call from its citizens in the form of insecurity and socioeconomic frustrations (Mbara and Graham 2023). The withdrawal of France

from some nations in the Sahel region followed with other European countries suspending their troops and bases in the region have since posed a threat since 2012 (Cohen 2022), meanwhile the region engages itself to ascertain the military engagements of external forces that have been successful in contributing to peace and security situation (De Coning and Freear 2013). The security situation in the Sahel is estimated to have risen by about 50 percent in 2022 to nine thousand as a result of conflicts (Wudil et al. 2022), although, UN and democratic countries including the West African Union failed to come up with a strategy to contain the coups as the International crisis group put it “Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger show no signs of beating back stubborn Islamist insurgencies. Western leaders, whose military involvement over the past decade has done little to stem violence seem at a loss on how to respond to coups in Burkina Faso and Mali” (Chivvis 2016). France and some other European nations have been accused of financing, providing arms, intelligence and supporting the Islamist militants groups in Africa and the Sahel and as a result, in August 2022, the Malian President wrote a letter to the UN Security Council (Curtis and Karacan 2002), there is a possibility that ECOWAS may face obstacles talking to the Jihadits groups in the Sahel region because they prefer to stay in camera and even reaching out to them is sometimes non-negotiable (Thurston 2018).

The diplomatic efforts including, negotiations, interventions and discussions usually happens on a round table to come up with the identified problems, and the possible conditions to offer leadership to enable redress the situation (Kelman 1992). In the case of the coup in Niger the leaders proposes a three year transition power team before returning back to democratic rule, same like the case of Burkina Faso and the rest (Engels 2022), there must be a regional dialogue to find lasting solutions to coups in the region, to have a paradigm shift in order to liberate the success of democracy which previous leaders fought for, also portray a good picture to growing nations (economies) (Inglehart and Welzel 2009). The Sahel faces numerous conflicts including inter communal clashes, insurgencies by Jihadits groups giving rise to tensions in the region over utilizations of resources, diplomacy plays a vital role in resolving these conflicts since they forms the bases for coups in the region (Harmon 2016), food insecurity, humanitarian assistance, displacement and limited access to basic amenities are tragic results of coups in the region (Sartori and Fattibene 2019).

This study, is determined to bring out the possible and potential causes of diplomatic failure within the Sahel region, determine which diplomatic instrument is recommendable to manage affected nations, ensure the safety and security of the citizens, economic stability, reduction in unemployment and equitable distribution of resources. Thus diplomacy is a critical aspect of international relations and plays a significant role in resolving conflicts, promoting peace and fostering cooperation's between nations (Flink and Schreiterer 2010).

METHODS

The resources which served as basis for this research were mainly drawn from electronic data bases. These different digital search engines for this literature are Google scholar and Harzing's Publish or Perish. Some keywords (Diplomacy, Leadership, Governance, Insecurity and coup) were used separately at first and then combine later. After the raw and systematic extraction of 250 publications linked to the- keywords used, the research focused on the purification of these publications in order to obtain the desired results relating to the study of this research. To do this, inclusion, elimination and exclusion criteria were applied. Inclusion considered all publications related to mapping, assessment and monitoring of the parameters including; the relationship between the citizenry and the state, the economic viability of the region and the coup history in the region. Then, the following rules were developed for the manual exclusion of publications and studies superfluous to this research.

1. The elimination of studies focusing only on diplomacy.
2. Elimination of coups focusing on leadership role.
3. Exclusion of case studies focusing on governance

4. Elimination of work carried
5. Exclusively on the cause of rising coups in the Sahel region
6. Elimination of the effects of coups.

Notably, not all countries within the Sahel are experiencing coups but there is a possibility that, continues coups may spread even beyond the region. The data was drawn covering from the three main hot spots in the region including Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali.

Data analysis

The metadata such as author, article title, publication year, publication journals, publisher and other citation metric elements were exported into the excel 2019 spreadsheet from the different search engines using publish or perish software 8. Also, the data is organized according to the four themes of this study. After filtering the different duplicates, the geographical origin of each publication was identified. The processing took special account of publications produced within the Sahel region and that of those of other origins.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The initial literature searched retained 250 publications and later after refinement which considered articles that had the search terms in the title, abstract and keywords and later retained 120 articles. To be concise, the number of articles were reduced after a several consideration and reduced to 45 articles.

Reasons for rising coups in the Sahel Region

Several reasons account for the coups in the region and there is a possibility the numbers may rise base on the data analyzed from the articles reviewed.

Lack of leadership and political good will: Many of the respondents hold the opinion that African leaders (Sahel) does not prioritize the citizens and country, instead individual self-interest over the collective good. This often results in a lack of political will to address regional challenges and establish effective diplomatic solutions (Mindzie 2015). For example, Head of states of Cameroon, Gambia, Togo and Ruwanda continues to serve as President for over two decades, monopolized by a single family (Van de Walle 2002), these long serving Presidents have a high potential of facing military coup.

Historical legacies: The continent's history of colonialism and arbitrary borders has left a legacy of deep-rooted ethnic, religious, and territorial conflicts. Some of these head of states succeeded from their fathers (family lineage) and are currently nursing their children to also lead, a classical case is the President of the republic of Togo, Faure *Gnassingbé*. Who succeeded his Father to become the President since the year 2005 up to date? What this means is that, the *Gnassingbé* family has ruled Togo for about 50 years and as time goes on, there is that possibility of a coup that may put to an end of the 'Gnassingbe dynasty' (Charbonneau 2022). Another is the President of Gabon who is currently under house arrest as a result of coup. Mr. Ali Bongo's family has ruled Gabon for almost 63years and these are some of the exemplary explanations. These historical divisions can impede regional diplomacy efforts as parties prioritize national interests over regional cooperation (Major 2008).

Resource competition: Africa is rich in natural resources, which often leads to competition and conflicts over their control. Resource-driven conflicts can undermine diplomatic efforts and exacerbate tensions between neighboring countries (SÁNCHEZ-ZAPATA et al. 2007).

Weak institutions and governance: Many African countries are faced with weak institutions, corruption, and poor governance practices. These challenges make it difficult to establish and maintain diplomatic processes

and enforce agreements, leading to tension and conflicts internally and externally (Rupesinghe, Naghizadeh, and Cohen 2021). It was realized that, the manual way of conducting governance business was the main channel of creating loot and share and instead of adopting the digital way of addressing issues to enable check corrupt practices instead.

The effects of coups in the Sahel Region

Already, the Sahel region is one of the deprived and poorest in the African continent and the world according to the UN refugee agency with more than 4.2 million people been displaced out of the region in 2023, 3.7 million people internally displaced in the region in 2023, and more than 10 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022 (Buettner 2022). This is evident that coups definitely will worsen the situation in the Sahel region.

Rising hunger and poverty: It is on record that about 7.7 million children under age 5 are expected to suffer from malnutrition, meanwhile 1.8 million are severely malnourished already and should the aid operations are not scaled up the number could rise to 2.4 million by the end of the year (Cockburn 2012). Coups and conflicts are partner in the cause of the rising hunger and in some cases, the hungry youth takes advantage of that and cause troubles and tensions in the affected arears continues.

A threat to cross-border development projects: The Sahel after series of coups may suffer a cross-border developmental projects because developmental agencies will feel unsafe to invest in the region. An example is US\$25 billion Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline, one of the most ambitious projects in West Africa. It aims to connect gas producers in Nigeria to various West African countries, ultimately reaching Morocco and Europe and another is the Trans-Saharan road which is a major trade route to six African countries. (Jézéquel 2015).

Weakening of the regional body: The ECOWAS block which is the main mouth piece for the region may continuously be weakened as coups sends bad signals to the general public. And the shared division and hypocrisy among the West African nations, an example is the recent military junta taking over power in Niger as some other countries declares support to defend them even when ECOWAS threatened with the military intervention, a possible anti-West African pro group maybe formed going into the future (Singh 2022).

A shift in power relations and more global confrontations (alliances): Foreign and International dominance is another reason for the proliferation of security interest in the Sahel region. The Western powers and France are the main suppliers of weapons and ammunitions to West Africa and in recent times there is an ongoing shift in alliance to the Wagner group of Russia who is claiming a humanitarian abuse of the Sahel region and inadequate development (Nadzharov and Entina 2023).

A future counter coups across the Sahel: The continues shift of alliance among West African nations either to Russia, France or the Western powers may trigger a confusion between neighboring countries within the Sahel region. For example, Niger shares borders with seven countries which is a critical player in security initiatives in the region and so a coup there gives rising tension to other countries (Elischer 2019).

Lower the standard of education: The affected coup countries are challenged with low standard of education because at that moment every sector in the previous administration is dissolved and interrupted including the constitution. Already, the Sahel region faces a developmental gap compared to other regions and a continuous coup is a receipt of disaster in the region (Chaumet-Riffaud et al. 2017).

The success of diplomacy in the future

Diplomacy in the Sahel region requires a strong collaboration and cooperation among the countries, focus should be on promoting peace, stability and addressing the root cause of conflicts in the region

(Westermann-Behaylo, Rehbein, and Fort 2015). After all these interventions, there is a possibility of a future success in curtailing the rising coups in the region.

Also, the region requires a substantial support from the international community to counter the various security, socio-economic, and political challenges facing the region (Keita 1998). Further engagements with the regional organizations like the ECOWAS, AU and UN to provide a partnership support like resources and expertise to always be the first point of contact to start a diplomatic negotiations anytime conflict or coup starts.

Coups and conflicts must also be prioritized in the region before any item is put on the table for a discussion. Prioritizing would attract enough attention, investments and resources to enable the region champion a good cause (Devermont and Harris 2020). Here grievances of different nations or communities and ethnic groups are submitted for an immediate redress before waiting for an escalation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed at investigating the cause of diplomatic failure in the Sahel region and the rising coups, including the effects afterwards of coups. Definitely not all the 10 countries in the Sahel but the main hot spots including Burkina faso, Mali and Niger. Meanwhile, the articles reviewed covers a series of diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy, leadership, governance and all manner of important articles.

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