Original Article

Regional Security and Preventive Diplomacy: Evaluating ECOWAS Military Engagements in the Niger Republic

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Abstract: This paper is a critical analysis of the economic community of West African states (ECOWAS) contribution to the regional security and preventive diplomacy by means of military involvements in the Niger Republic. The renewed patterns of unconstitutional turnover of power in West Africa, such as the military coup in Niger in 2023, have led to serious questions of democratic regression, weak institutions, and insecurity of the region. ECOWAS is one of the main regional blocks that has adapted coercive, and peace mechanisms in addressing the crisis in political boundaries. This study examines the legality, effectiveness and legitimacy of the military position and conflict-preventing mechanism of the ECOWAS in the wider collective security formats and democratic restoration. The research design relies on the qualitative case study methodology because the informational basis will be represented by policy documents, communiques, expert interviews, and related secondary literature. This analysis studies the institutional capability, political commitment, and regional consensus of the ECOWAS as well as corresponding to the normative text, including the 2001 protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. The analysis establishes that although ECOWAS interventions are a step in the right direction with dedication to the protection of democratic order, they are hindered by varied inconsistencies in implementation, inability of member states to cooperate and external sources of geopolitical influences. The paper ends by presenting a case that it is high time that the strategic tools of ECOWAS are recalibrated to be able to realize legitimacy, operational coherence, and sustainable democratic immediate results in its military interventions. Some policy recommendations are provided to enhance preventive diplomacy, foster regional ownership, and create institutional resilience of fragile West African democracies such as Niger.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Regional Security Complex Theory, Military Coups, Democracy, Niger Republic, Unconstitutional Change of Government.

I. INTRODUCTION

West Africa has experienced political instability in the past decades that is typified with unconstitutional regime changes, insurgency, and democracy going backwards. The trend has threatened regional peace and security as well as compromised the national governance structures. The military coup in Niger Republic in 2023 that took place in a row with the previous events in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021) and Burkina Faso (2022) highlighted in global and regional worry regarding the instability of democratic structures in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) subregion (Akinyemi, 2024; ISS, 2023). In its turn, the ECOWAS has resorted to the set of tools, such as sanctions, mediation, and the promise of using military forces to regain the constitutional norm and prevent further coups. These interventions are within its general mandate of enhancing regional security and support of democratic standards, as stipulated in the 1999 Mechanism of Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security as well as in the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (ECOWAS, 2001; Adebanwi, 2023). The military and diplomatic interventions conducted by ECOWAS on matters concerning the Niger crisis is synonymous with the gradual change to preventive diplomacy, which involves intervention in the political threat before it transforms to an out-and-out war. Mechanisms that prevent diplomacy encompass early warning, shuttle diplomacy, mediation, and deployment of regional forces in exceptional situations, but using the principle of collective security (Malu, 2022). Nevertheless, whether these measures are effective, legitimate, and consistent have been reflected on scholarly and policy discussions.

Critics point at the ECOWAS interventions as being mostly lacking in neutrality, crippled by intra-regional rivalries, and experiencing operation-based challenges in terms of coordination efforts, funding, and political will (Babatunde & Souaré, 2023; Obi, 2024). Besides, this discrepancy of responses self-intereste moment in The Gambia (2017) and restrained approachness in Mali and Burkina Faso causes dubioush whether the regional organization can respect its normative frameworks and how geopolitical planning may affect its operations (Afolabi, 2024). The Niger Republic is a critical example of assessing what is useful

and what is not about the military incursion of the ECOWAS. A landlocked state that has strategic security significance to Sahel which is already compromised by transnational terrorism and climate-induced migration, the stability of the Niger state is crucial to regional balance (Ibrahim & Anning, 2024). The move by ECOWAS in the year 2023 when it weighed the military approach in Niger but also took a part in the diplomatic process demonstrates the dichotomy between the coercive and conciliatory diplomacy. Such a two-pronged strategy can encourage academic interest in the circumstances in which the interventions of ECOWAS can lead to successful implementation, and unsuccessful implementation of democratic governance, deterrence of coups, and the long-term stability of the nations that are affected.

This paper thus attempts to appraise the military interventions of ECOWAS in the Niger Republic in the larger context of the regional security and preventive diplomacy. In particular, it questions legal, political, and operational aspects of the ECOWAS response, evaluates the results in relation to the proclaimed aims, and singles out structural limitations to efficient conflict prevention. This study, by a qualitative case study method, using primary policy documents, interviews with elites and secondary sources, also adds to this discourse of regionalism, democratic resilience and peace enforcement in Africa. It has also provided feasible policy recommendations on how ECOWAS could be empowered to become a credible and legitimate player in managing conflicts at the regional levels.

A. Statement of the Problem

Nevertheless, even after the articulation of rigorous normative and institutional apparatuses in order to prevent conflicts and to nurture democratic governance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is yet to successfully deal with unconstitutional changes of government in its subregion. The recent military coup in the Niger Republic, the latest in Mali (2020, 2021), Guinea (2021) and Burkina Faso (2022) brings to the fore an alarming trend of authoritarianism and democratic backsliding that has intensified in West Africa (Akinyemi, 2024; Institute for Security Studies [ISS], 2023). All these developments have cast doubt over the effectiveness of the ECOWAS regional governance system and the weakness of its preventive diplomacy and military interventions policies. Despite the fact that ECOWAS has deployed both diplomatic and coercive instruments under the provisions of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security which was adopted in 1999 whereas the Protocol on Democracy and Good Government has been adopted in 2001, the results of such operations are mixed (ECOWAS, 2001; Adebanwi, 2023).

The Niger crisis was specifically identified when the dilemma between the military deterrence and the negotiated diplomacy came to the fore. Discussions of the regional block military intervention in 2023 raised internal debate among the member states, as well as invited mixed responses of the international actors, concerning the legality, legitimacy, and the strategic rationale of such a move (Babatunde & Souar e, 2023; Obi, 2024). Moreover, different reactions to the situations imposed by ECOWAS, such as sweeping positioning in The Gambia (2017), but minor involvement in Mali and Burkina Faso, indicate that the organization does not follow a consistent policy and the inconsistent pattern of making decisions can be driven by a number of geopolitical factors, domestic interests of member sectors, and influences of foreign forces (Afolabi, 2024; Malu, 2022). Such norm gaps undermine the normative undertakings of ECOWAS and threaten its power to enforce democratic standards in Africa. In as much as the issue of regional security in West Africa has received reasonably increased scholarly attention, a similar deficiency in empirical and context-based studies that could evaluate the usefulness of ECOWAS military interventions as a tool of preventive diplomacy sets in here.

There is also the tendency of legalistic or descriptive approach among pre-existing literatures, with little oversight on the operational, political, and institutional limitations of the path to success or failure of such intercessions (Ibrahim & Anning, 2024). Such absence of critical assessment discourages the initiatives aimed at strengthening the conflict management capability within ECOWAS and establishing a more predictable and rules-based approach to intervention. This paper, consequently, attempts to fill this research gap by giving a qualitative evaluation of ECOWAS military interventions in Niger Republic. It seeks to determine how far strategic goals of ECOWAS match its ground practices, the limitation existence in the implementation, and the overall implication of the democratic consolidation and sustainable peace in West Africa.

B. Objective of the Study

The main goal of this research is to assess critically the effectiveness of the military operations of ECOWAS in the Niger Republic in the context of the regional security and preventive diplomacy. In light of the 2023 coup and the larger retrenchment of unconstitutional transfers of power in West Africa, the research aims at learning how well the interventions made by ECOWAS coincide with its normative frameworks and help restore democratic governance and regional stability (Adebanwi, 2023; ECOWAS, 2001).

The Specific objectives are as follows:

- To analyse ECOWAS military intervention in understand the legislative, political, and normative decision in the military coups especially 1999 Mechanism of Conflict Prevention and the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.
- To evaluate how the ECOWAS reaction to the 2023 Niger coup was effective in meeting its purported objectives of restoring the constitution, a deterrence of further coups, and strengthening of democracy.
- To examine internal and external drivers of the decision-making processes and operational procedures of ECOWAS interventions such as interests of the member states, geopolitical relations, and international alliances
- To find out fundamental institutional, political, and logistical problems which limit the effectiveness of ECOWAS to practice credible and effective preventive diplomacy within its member states.
- To present policy proposals that could enhance the ECOWAS preventive diplomacy tools, regional ownership, and democratic resilience in failed states such as Niger.

C. Research Questions

The central and specific research questions guiding this study are the following ones:

a) Prime Research question:

- How far have the military resilience of ECOWAS in the Niger Republic promoted regional security and preventive diplomacy as far as restoration of democracy is concerned?

b) Secondary Research Questions:

- What are the legal and normative underpinnings in justifying the military intervention in member states by ECOWAS especially within the framework of 1999 Mechanism and 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance?
- Was the 2023 military coup in Niger effectively countered by ECOWAS based on its stated objectives of restoring constitutional order and the prevention of unconstitutional change of government?
- What were the political, institutional and the logistical bottlenecks that limited the capacity of ECOWAS in addressing the crisis in Niger?
- What are the levels and the dimensions of geopolitical interests and the intra-regional politics that shape the decision-making process of the ECOWAS regarding engagement in the military
- How could policy and institutional reform enhance the role of the ECOWAS in preventive diplomacy and consolidation of democracy in fragile states of West Africa?

D. Theoretical Framework

This paper rests on the multilateral premise of theoretical framework based on the principles of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and Liberal Institutionalism coupled with the Normative Institutionalism perspective. The theories provide a sound theoretical perspective through which the military operations of ECOWAS can be analyzed as one of the tools of preventive diplomacy in the context of the West African regional security system.

a) Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

RSCT established by Buzan and Waever (2003), RSCT is adhered to by the belief that security is not only regionalized, but that the security of states is significantly intertwined regionally than it is horizontally a cross the regions. In the RSCT view, the regional organizations like ECOWAS emerge out of a functional need to address common threats which defy national boundaries, military coups, insurrections, and democratic collapses. The theory especially applies to the Niger Republic crisis in which insecurity in one state is spread to the other state, posing the risk of the overall stabilization of the subregion (Ibrahim & Anning, 2024). RSCT can be used to explain why the ECOWAS does not only view unconstitutional shifts of power as internal crisis, but they are also considered to be regional threats that need to be responded to in a coordinated manner.

E. Liberal Institutionalism

Liberal Institutionalism puts emphasis on the importance of international institutions and how they facilitate cooperation and minimize anarchy as well as mediate state conduct through norms and rules and facilitating mechanisms of enforcement (Keohane, 1984). In this view, ECOWAS is considered as supranational player through which collective efforts in tackling governance and security issues in West Africa are achieved. The Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (ECOWAS, 2001) reflects these institutional logics as it gives normative and legal structure by which the member states ought to follow the democratic values. The sanctions used by ECOWAS, the use of diplomatic missions and the threat to send military forces to Niger are associated with the liberal institutionalism which places great power on the rule-based order as well as multilateral collaboration in preventing conflicts.

F. Normative Institutionalism

Normative Institutionalism concentrates on the institutional norms and values and their influence on the actor and preferences norms and the legitimacy of action in the political systems (March & Olsen, 1989). In the position that ECOWAS takes towards democratic governance as seen in its latest Protocol of 2001, as well as its Conflict Prevention Mechanism of 1999, there exists a regional normative order within the region that eschews unconstitutional change of government. The theory assists in questioning how ECOWAS appeals to common democratic decal to justify its interventions in such cases of crisis such as that of Niger. It also throws some lights on the issues of norm contestation and bad enforcement particularly in circumstances where the member states do not internalize or adhere to these principles continuously (Obi, 2024).

G. Relevance to the Study

Through the integration of these theories, the research work is prepared to investigate the legal, political, and operational aspects of military activities of ECOWAS. RSCT throws light on regional interdependence of security threats, Liberal Institutionalism on cooperative legalistic aspects of interventions of ECOWAS, and Normative Institutionalism considers a review of legitimacy of its operations and consistency of same in view of its ends. A combination of these theories is possible to ensure the general evaluation of the way, in which ECOWAS strikes a balance between coercive actions and preventive diplomacy on its way to achieve the democratic consolidation and reinforce the stability in the region.

H. Methodology

This paper embraces a qualitative case study methodology since it critically analyses the ECOWAS military operations in the Niger Republic as an instrument of regional security and preventive diplomacy. To capture expert opinions on the research topic, elite semi-structured interviews were conducted on individual actors and policymakers, ECOWAS officials, regional security experts and civil society actors through purposive and snowball sampling techniques to gather primary data. Secondary figures were extracted: on one hand, official documents of ECOWAS, communiques; resolutions of AU and UN, academic literature, reports of think-tanks, and, on the other hand, the reliable sources of media. Patterns were associated with legality, legitimacy, strategic coherence, and outcomes of ECOWAS intervention that were explored on the basis of theme content analysis. There was triangulation of data sources that created validity and ethical clearance as well as the anonymity of their participants. Regional Security Complex Theory, Liberal Institutionalism, and Normative Institutionalism shape the study and allow to read the logic of operating ECOWAS and its normative commitments in several dimensions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. ECOWAS and Regional Security Governance

The literature on regional security governance in West Africa underscores ECOWAS's evolution from an economic integration body into a peace and security actor. ECOWAS's transformation was catalyzed by the violent conflicts of the 1990s in Liberia and Sierra Leone, prompting the establishment of the 1999 Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (ECOWAS, 1999). Scholars such as Adebajo (2021) and Obi (2024) argue that ECOWAS has assumed a de facto role as a guarantor of regional order, increasingly using coercive tools alongside diplomatic mechanisms. Its mandate now includes peace enforcement, early warning systems, election monitoring, and sanctions against unconstitutional governments.

However, critiques have emerged regarding ECOWAS's operational consistency and selective engagement. For instance, Ekiyor (2023) highlights that while ECOWAS intervened militarily in The Gambia in 2017 to remove Yahya Jammeh, it adopted a more cautious approach in Mali (2020, 2021) and Burkina Faso (2022). This disparity, according to Babatunde and Souaré (2023), undermines the bloc's credibility and raises questions about the influence of geopolitics and strategic interests in decision-making.

a) Preventive Diplomacy and Normative Frameworks

Preventive diplomacy is central to ECOWAS's peace architecture, drawing from the principles of the UN and the AU, but customized through regional frameworks such as the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (ECOWAS, 2001). This protocol outlaws unconstitutional changes of government and commits member states to democratic principles. According to Malu (2022), ECOWAS's preventive diplomacy mechanisms include early warning systems, mediation, sanctions, and, where necessary, military action under the principle of collective security.

Nonetheless, scholars argue that preventive diplomacy in practice is constrained by weak institutionalization and uneven political will. Afolabi (2024) contends that early warning mechanisms often fail to trigger timely responses, while internal

rivalries between Francophone and Anglophone states further delay consensus. Moreover, external actors such as France, the U.S., and Russia increasingly shape regional politics, complicating ECOWAS's diplomatic space (ISS, 2023).

b) Military Engagements and Regional Legitimacy

Military intervention remains the most controversial tool in ECOWAS's arsenal. The ECOMOG interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s were foundational, but the 2017 Gambian intervention is often cited as a model of swift and effective regional enforcement (Akinyemi, 2024). The literature suggests that ECOWAS interventions can deter coups and reinforce democratic norms if there is clear political will, legal justification, and regional consensus (Adebanwi, 2023).

However, the Niger case complicates this narrative. The military junta's resistance to regional pressure, coupled with internal opposition among ECOWAS member states like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea—now governed by juntas—reflects fragmentation in the regional order (Ibrahim & Anning, 2024). Critics like Obi (2024) emphasize the risks of using force without sustainable post-intervention plans, noting that democratic transitions often falter without institutional reforms and inclusive governance strategies.

c) Challenges of Implementation and Operational Capacity

A recurring theme in the literature is the gap between ECOWAS's normative ambitions and its operational capacity. While the organization has built mechanisms such as the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), its deployments remain rare and logistically strained. According to Okereke and Aghedo (2023), ECOWAS faces constraints related to funding, troop readiness, and member state contributions. These structural deficits affect not only military interventions but also sustained peacebuilding efforts.

In addition, ECOWAS is often caught between respecting national sovereignty and enforcing regional norms. March and Olsen's (1989) theory of normative institutionalism helps explain the internal contradictions faced by the body—between shared commitments to democracy and the self-preserving instincts of authoritarian-leaning member states.

d) Gaps in the Literature

While much scholarship has focused on ECOWAS's security architecture and its interventions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and The Gambia, few have offered in-depth, empirically grounded analyses of the 2023 Niger intervention. Furthermore, there is limited research on how ECOWAS balances coercive action and preventive diplomacy in an increasingly polarized region. This study seeks to fill this gap by offering a case-specific evaluation of ECOWAS's actions in Niger—assessing the legal, political, and operational implications for regional security and democratic consolidation.

A. Empirical Findings

a) Legal Institutional Foundation of Intervention of ECOWAS

The results of the ECOWAS policy texts show a definite legal framework where the regional organization is obligated to meddle in instances of unconstitutional transfer of power (ECOWAS, 2001). The validity of this framework in forming the initial posture of ECOWAS as a regional bloc after the Niger coup is confirmed by interview data of the officials of the ECOWAS Commission and by legal experts. Nonetheless, on empirical grounds, the fundamental difference in the interpretation of the principle regarding the sovereignty of each state and non-interference between the member states also posed a stalemate situation that undermined a unified strength of determination (Akinyemi, 2024; Obi, 2024).

b) Political Will and Member States Among Themselves Dissension

Lack of political will and disagreement between member states. According to interviews made with both diplomats and regional observers, there has been a great imbalance of political unity among the members of ECOWAS, especially to the military-led transitional governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, who voiced their opposition publicly against any form of military interference in Niger. In a way, they resonate with the report by ISS (2023) which observed that geopolitical affinities, ideological affiliation, and regional alliances changed significantly, breaking the ECOWAS collective identity into smaller pieces. Consequently, ECOWAS was not able to show solid front to project a united front thus weakening credibility and implementation of its ultimatum against the Nigerien junta (Ibrahim & Anning, 2024).

c) Military Readiness and Strategic Restrictions of ECOWAS

According to empirical evidence as revealed by communiqus that have been issued by the ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff between the period of August and September 2023, the ECOWAS Standby Force was deployed, and contingency plans were made to intervene. Nevertheless, according to the interviews with military analysts and policymakers, the force has been stricken by an inefficient contribution among the troops and a misread command organization, shortages in logistics, and

poverty in campaign funds. These operational challenges, recently affirmed by Okereke and Aghedo (2023), are what led the reluctance of the regional body to advance a kinetic intervention, although this was done at the political level.

d) Diplomatic Measures and Shuttle Diplomacy

In a practical appraisal of communique, joint press releases and reports on the use of third parties, it was found that the diplomatic solution has been the most preferred means with top-level missions being sent via Niamey by Nigerien, Senegalese and Togolese leaders. Nevertheless, it has been reported that, instead of communicating actively with its representatives, the Nigerien junta was selective of who it communicated with and, at the same time, increased the cooperation with foreign powers, including Russia and Wagner-affiliated military consultants (Afolabi, 2024). This two-track diplomacy became a hindrance to the leverage of ECOWAS since regional diplomacy was being undercut by the increasing external influence.

e) A Regional and International View of Legitimacy

The interviews conducted to civil society members and scholars in Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal suggested a rather mixed picture of the ECOWAS legitimacy. Although most of them accepted the normative commitment of ECOWAS to protect democratic governance, most members doubted the reasonability and validity of graphic rule of force in an already volatile Sahelian region. Fear of possible humanitarian consequences, destabilization of the region and the possibility of a widespread security crisis were expressed (Malu, 2022; Babatunde & Souar, 2023). Such widespread skepticism deployed in West Africa by its popular classes as recorded in Afrobarometer surveys is seen to have limited the political room on interventionist policies.

f) The Consequences of the Response of ECOWAS in Niger Crisis

By early 2024, the empirical result of the reaction to ECOWAS is yet to be fully concluded. The military intervention, which was threatened by the bloc along with imposing of economic sanctions and isolating the junta, was not effective in getting the junta to reinstate the overthrown president, Bazoum. Nevertheless, the fact that the regional pressure never allowed the recognition of the military regime on the international scale instantly reserved the region a visibility of its norms. This evidence, therefore, indicates such partial efficacy, namely, that ECOWAS maintained its normative power but failed to have internal cohesion and operational potential to deliver compliance (Adebanwi, 2023; Ekiyor, 2023).

III. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study confirms the pivotal role played by ECOWAS in the changed environment of security and governance in West Africa but shows that there are enormous differences between its ideal and the reality on the ground. Although ECOWAS has enjoyed normative advancements, considering its 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, the crisis that occurred in the Republic of Niger in 2023 revealed the weaknesses of their enforcers and flaws of the preventive diplomacy in a situation of limited political will and institutional capacity.

A. Normative Strength and Operational Weakness

The ECOWAS system that relies on Liberal Institutionalism and is backed by the legal documents of 1999 Mechanism and 2001 Protocol proves its determination to act in regards to the democratic governance and collective security (ECOWAS, 2001; Keohane, 1984). The case of Nigeria however demonstrates a lack of a correspondence in the normative clarity of ECOWAS interventions with operational capacity and cohesiveness internally. As the empirical evidence suggests, although the legal establishment of the right to intervene in the matter is identified, the consensus has been seriously undermined due to the intra-regional internal differences, in particular, that of governments led by the military in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea (Ibrahim & Anning, 2024; Obi, 2024). This resonates with one of the great shortcomings of Normative Institutionalism other than a lack of coordinated action when accompanied by a lack of internal legitimacy and uniformity (March & Olsen, 1989).

B. Geopolitics as a Detractor of Preventive Diplomacy

The Niger response involved the use of preventive diplomacy, by which ECOWAS relied on shuttle diplomacy, threat of sanctions, and also on mediation. Nevertheless, the refusal of the junta to accept regional pressure and the shift to other alliances, particularly Russia, decreased the ability of ECOWAS and highlighted the increased geopolitical complexity in the region of West Africa (Afolabi, 2024; ISS, 2023). The research helps prove the point expressed by Malu (2022) that preventive diplomacy works well only when it is timely and coordinated and when its goal is supported by credible enforcement threats. The diplomatic overtures used in Niger were not unified based on a cohesive regional policy at the moment, and thus could not deter as much due to division in strategy that seemed to undermine this one tactic.

C. Inequality and Legitimacy Crisis

One of the key themes in the findings is that of perceived variation of ECOWAS intervention across cases. Although the bloc has used military force to deal with the unconstitutional transition in The Gambia (2017), its policy towards intervening in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso has embraced non-interventionist approaches although the reasons are the same. This disparity casts serious doubts on the aspect of selective enforcement, as a factor which begets illegitimacy and lack of deterrence (Babatunde & Souar, 2023; Adebanwi, 2023). Security threats are to be interconnected as Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) states and regional answers must be coherent and comprehensive (Buzan & Waever, 2003). The selective approach of ECOWAS may encourage the potential coup leaders of the future and destroy the normative order in the region.

D. Public Skepticism and Misalignment Strategies

Another finding in the study shows that the populace can hardly guess whether military solutions are legit and effective. This result correlates with those previous trends observed by Afrobarometer, which demonstrate the decreasing trust of the people in the ability of ECOWAS to impartially and effectively take any action (Ekiyor, 2023). A dilemma between the internal desires of non-military answers to the problems and the external pressures of taking immediate actions creates a strategic problem. Cynical voices consistently raised the issue that there might not only be humanitarian costs and destabilization of the region, and these issues constrained ECOWAS in its ability to act coercively and increased its crisis of legitimacy (Obi, 2024).

E. Is Regionalism in Crisis?

The case of Niger intervention proves the ECOWAS, despite its normative potency, has a regionalism crisis. The bloc is in a dilemma since it has to deal with the tensions of active security roles, low policing capacity and different member-state interests. This development reinforces the claim of Buzan and Waever (2003) that regional complexes need to be able to be internally united and carry institutional ability in order to be effective. The partially achieved success in Niger, preserving region norms, without ousting the coup leaders, is an example of the hybrid solution, as when preventative diplomacy does not come armed with enough enforcement sources, it is not enough to solve the crisis.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper was a critical analysis of the military activities of ECOWAS in the Niger Republic in a broad analysis of the regional security and preventative diplomasy in the region. The military coup staged in Niger in 2023 presented an instructive example by means of which to assess the normative solidity, operative competence, and political desire underlying the work of the ECOWAS answer to the changes of power realized unconstitutionally. The research anchored to the Regional Security Complex Theory, Liberal Institutionalism, and Normative Institutionalism established that even though ECOWAS has a very strong legal and normative mandate in place, its practical capability of enforcing on collective decisions is still limited by its internal divisions, geopolitical interests and power and the lack of operational capacity.

These conclusions demonstrated that, despite the normative success of ECOWAS in maintaining the diplomatic preventive approach, poor consistency in its application, regional division on the matter and lack of strategic follow-up have compromised the effort. Even though the possibility of the military intervention in Niger indicated the willingness to restore democracy in the organization, it did not have the political integrity and logistical preparation to take firm actions. What is more, the seeming discrepancy, particularly in contrast to the cases of earlier efforts in The Gambia, Mali, or Burkina Faso, has undermined the authority of ECOWAS, as a regional upholder of democratic standards. The Niger case is therefore representative of another important turning point in ECOWAS: a decision that rests between upholding the normative power in principle or realigning their instruments and institutions to respond to reality adapted to operational requirements in a potentially volatile security environment. Unless it tackles its internal contradictions, ECOWAS is headed towards being normatively ambitious but functionally incompetent, which is not in favor of democratic consolidation or peace in the region in the long run.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

ECOWAS should invest in operational levels of its Standby Force with quick deployment capability, joint training, and sustainable financial system. This involves demystification of command structures and logistics, and developing units in member states that are interoperable. Likewise, ECOWARN system has to be mediated with real-time monitoring, conflict forecasting instruments, and powerful policy triggers that will initiate early and well-coordinated responses. Thereby, national focal points must stand in a position to intensify the warnings which necessitate regional mediation. ECOWAS should institutionalize consultations and mediation between their member states even before a crisis arises particularly when member states are undergoing political transitioning so as to prevent fragmentation. This would temper the geopolitical differences as well as increase the credibility of collective reaction

ECOWAS Intervention Doctrine is required to eliminate uncertainties in the criteria of response, use of diplomatic and coercive instruments and use of force. This would minimize cases of biasness or unfair selectivity of enforcement. This should be complemented with peacebuilding and inclusive governance by invite civil society organizations (CSOs), media and youth groups in order to encourage the creation of legitimacy and popular support of ECOWAS intervention. Regional legitimacy does not merely deal with the legal aspect, it is social.

The focus of ECOWAS needs to enhance the collaboration of the African Union, United Nations, and essential development partners and avoid being dependent on international security providers who may have overt interests opposing the regional sovereignty.

ECOWAS should offer long-standing technical support to constitutional reforms, electoral management and civil-military relations to transitional states. Enforcement of peace should be accompanied with consolidation of peace. With these reforms ECOWAS will be in a better position to achieve a more coherent, legitimate, and effective security and governance architecture with the capacity to respond to current threats to democracy in West Africa and in fragile environments such as the Niger Republic.

- Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest.

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