



THE MILITARY COUP IN NIGER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON NIGERIA-NIGER BORDER SECURITY

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Abstract

This position paper examines the consequential effects of the military coup in the Republic of Niger on the Nigeria's bid to end armed banditry. It has made an evaluation of the bi-lateral truce entered into between some states in North-west Nigeria namely Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina and regional government of Maradi in Niger Republic and how the threat of the military action and enforcement of the economic sanction may likely affect the success of the fight against insurgency. It has also made an extensive evaluation of the factors responsible for the military coup in Niger and what the Nigerian government should avoid. It has adopted mixed research methodology of literature review and filed interview to ascertain the extent at which the coup can affect Nigeria-Niger Diplomatic relations.

Keywords: Crisis, Principle, Margin of Lead

Introduction

One of the most controversial political development which characterized the Africa's cries to sustainable democracies is the military coup against the civilian government of the Republic of Niger led by President Mohamed Bazoum. The coup did not only succeed in generating tension within the country but also attracted regional and global condemnation especially at the wake of the serial number of successful military coups in across the continent of Africa. On the 26th of July 2023 the Presidential guards in Niger launched a coup and detained President Mohamed Bazoum and his family. senior officers from the various branches of the defense and security forces (FDS) formed a junta, named the national council for the safeguarding of the homeland (CNSP) and announced the seizure of power on a televised broadcast.

The aftermath of the coup resulted to the outbreak of serial unrests as citizens of Niger argued that the coup is capable of intensifying domestic unrest, moved the republic of Niger into regional conflicts especially with its neighboring countries, rises the chances of uprising of militancy, democratic backsliding, economic backwardness and restriction of citizen's freedom and liberty (Sanusi 2023).

Not only the internal uncertainties, the extent of the condemnations of the military junta by the international community especially the

regional association ECOWAS has raised a palpable fear that many believed the coup in the republic of Niger may end up causing a major regional and indeed international war hence the chances of forming alliances in support and those against the military incursion is very possible. As reported by (Acled 2023) the coup has been largely condemned including by key stakeholders such as the United States, France, the European Union and ECOWAS during a summit in Nigeria's capital Abuja. ECOWAS largely threatened to institute military option against the coup plotters and enforced serious economic sanctions that would serve as timely pressure for the military junta to reinstate President Mohamad Bazoum with an ultimatum of one week. The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) imposed immediate sanctions and froze Nigerien state assets (Acled 2023). Despite this development countries neighboring the republic of Niger such as Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali have declared their support for the Nigerien junta and declined their deliberate lack of readiness to imposed any sanctions on the republic of Niger.

Sadly, indeed, while stakeholders condemned out rightly the decision of the ECOWAS especially the sanctions imposed and the military options threatened to be applied against the republic of Niger, others believed the coup in Niger and the position of the ECOWAS may have a grave consequence on the Nigeria-Niger border security management especially at the wake of the risen

spates of armed bandit activities and other militant uprising in the neighboring countries of Chad and rest. The growing rate of armed bandit activities along Magamar Jibya the borderline between Nigeria through Katsina and the Republic of Niger and that of Illelar Amarawa through Sokoto for instance has been a source of concern to both the people of the region of Maradi and Katsina, Zamfara and Kano states in the Republic of Nigeria. The arguments have been that if the military options against Niger as threatened by the ECOWAS succeeded, there is likelihood of having sporadic rise in the armed bandit attacks and difficulties in having the required synergy between the two countries to abort these attacks and also succeeded in controlling the movements of the armed bandits and small and lighter weapons along the borderline communities.

The Nigeria-Niger regional agreement on security entered into by the governments of Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina may suffered serious setback if the military options and economic sanctions were formally enforced. Part of the agreements signed by the Governor of Maradi, and his colleagues from Sokoto, Katsina and Zamfara in fighting jointly the border security against armed bandits and illegal flow of small and light weapons may likely suffered hence the possible war may help portray each border states between Nigeria and Niger as enemies and jealously take advantage of the war to strengthen the illegal operation of the bandits and smuggling of illegal weapons.

The objectives of this position paper is to assess the impacts of the military coup in Niger on the Nigeria-Niger regional border security and also make an extensive analysis of the possibility of how the economic sanctions enforced on the republic of Niger as well as the possible military options may influenced the rise of the armed bandit's insurgency as well as flow of small and light weapons along the border states.

The paper adopted mixed research methodology of field interviews and review of the existing literatures to be able to ascertain facts scientifically and also came up with some recommendations that may help proper solution and sustained the Nigeria-Niger bi-lateral agreements along their border states working for the betterment of the two countries.

Over-view of the Military Coup in the Republic of Niger

The military coup in Niger took place on the 28th of July 2023 when the head of Niger's Presidential guards, General Abdourahmane Tchiani, declared himself head of state after the military seized power. The reasons for the military coup against Mohamad Bazoum are enormous but principal among them include: rising insecurity and lack of economic growth. as argued by (Olayinka 2023) despite the increase in the foreign forces especially from the U.S and France and military bases in Niger, the leadership has been unable to stop insurgent attacks. There are several insurgent groups such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic affiliates as well as Boko Haram operating in the country. In addition to the growing insecurity some school of thoughts argued that the ethnic legitimacy of the President Mohamad Bazoum has always been in question having the suspicion that he is always of foreign origin (Sulaiman 2023). Bazoum in the opinion of (Olayinka 2023) is from Niger's ethnic Arab minority and has always been labelled as having the foreign origin. The ethnic originality of the President

Bazoum did not sit well with within the military circle which is predominantly composed of the larger ethnic groups even though Bazoum got about 56% of the votes and is from same party as former President Mahamadou Issoufou, there has been a lot of emphasis on the ethnic military composition in the country.

Another factor that triggered the military coup was the presence of the large number of foreign military troops and bases in the country which has not been well received by the military. They believed this undermined them. Niger in the view of (Hassane 2022) is a key ally of western countries in the fight against insurgency in the region, France huge investments in Niger's mining sector are another reason for its interest in security. Evidences had also shown that, in 2019, the US opened a drone base in Niger despite the facts that there was a massive protest by the citizens of Niger especially with the fear that, the establishment of the drone could make Niger a target for terrorists and increase instability in the country. Added to this development, (Hassane 2022) argued, France and other European allies withdrew their forces from neighboring Mali, Bazoum was quick to invite them to Niger. The Nigerien military leadership and some influential individuals in the country denounced the increase in foreign forces.

There are other school of thought that agreed that the failure of the ECOWAS and the African Union to take a definite and firm stand against the coup and military seizure in Mali and Burkina Faso is of added advantage for the Niger coup plotters. In the views of (Hassane 2022), in the last four years, there have been seven coup d'états in the region. Three were successful. Leaders of ECOWAS and the African Union have threatened sanctions on these three countries but nothing much has been done to deter other opportunistic military leaders. These plus growing rate of unemployment, poverty, political instability and foreign pressure trigger the anger of the military to overthrow the government Mohamad Bazoum.

Armed banditry and Nigeria-Niger connection

Armed banditry has been one of the most critical social phenomenon that caused serious security challenges not only in the seven states of the North-Western Nigeria namely: Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina and Jigawa but spread across the border lines to affect some states and regions in the neighboring Republic of Niger (Maryam 2022). Many factors are believed to be responsible for the emerging growth of armed banditry in Nigeria in the opinion of (Hassane 2022) degradation of pasture due to disrupted rainfall pattern has compromised herders' livelihoods and with population increases, farming lands have progressively encroached on grazing areas and transhumance corridors over stepping the distribution of land by national regulation. This raises the risk of the conflicts between herders and crop farmers and the desperation faced by herders.

At the beginning of 2017 the region of Maradi has been affected by the growing expansion of armed bandit activities emanating from the activities of organized armed bandits in Nigeria. (Hassane 2022) argued that armed criminals operating from Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina in Nigeria across the border at night on motorcycles to attack locals before retreating to wooded areas and Babban Rafi forest straddling the two countries.

Statistics has shown that in 2021 Le Souffle de Maradi region recorded (2,735) cases of stolen animals, (91) victims of abductions, and payment of (51) Million CFA francs (over 77,5500

Euro) in ransom by hostages' families (Hassane 2022). Another survey by the Niger's Protection Cluster the national chapter of a global network of humanitarian actors reported that, in 2022, (76) incidents of armed bandit activities were recorded in the Maradi region alone and among the incidents include rape, assaults, and cattle theft as well (29) cases of kidnapping. These incidents in the views of (Maryam 2022) were mostly carried out by the network of armed bandits operating along Katsina-Zamfara borders with the Maradi region of the Niger Republic.

The spread of this armed bandit activities along the Nigeria-Niger borders had resulted to loss of livelihoods by the locals mostly from Nigeria who decided to fled to safer places in the neighboring Niger Republic. By April 2021, the United Nations officer for the coordination of the Humanitarian Affairs counted over (25,000) internally displaced Nigerians in the region. They had fled their homes for better protected towns such as Sarkin Yamma, Gabi, Madarounfa and Maradi (Hassane 2022). The report added that "they were joined by over (81,000) Nigerians who had fled from Katsina, Zamfara and Sokoto to seek refuge in Niger. Some internally displaced people are hosted by extended family but most refugees from Nigeria are grouped on sites with limited food aid, shelter and poor access to basic services.

The catastrophic effects of the activities of the armed bandits resulted to Nigeria in collaboration with the Niger Republic particularly the Governor of Maradi region to develop a template aimed at ensuring coordinated fight against armed banditry along borders of the two countries. In the opinion (Hassane 2022), in 2020 Niger launched Operation Faraoutar Bushiya or hedgehog hunting in Hausa and over (1,000) personnel from the army, gendarmerie, police and national guard are deployed along the border with the Nigeria. The operation's capacity was increased in August 2021 after President Muhammad Bazoum visited the region. This timely intervention had helped reduced the menace of armed bandit activities along Nigeria-Maradi border to a reasonable extent even though evidences have shown that some villages of Niger Republic that are along the Nigerian borders had continue to suffer in the hands of the bandits.

On the 25th of March 2022, the Governors of Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto looking at the complexity of the armed bandit operation along the Nigeria-Niger borders of Maradi decided to seal it up with the Governor of Maradi where a memorandum of understanding was executed aimed at pursuing a coordinated action plan to end banditry along the borders of the two countries (Anka 2022). Up till today, and as a result of the memorandum of action entered into there is evidence of successes recorded between the two countries in their regional efforts to clamp-down at the armed bandits in order to secure their citizens.

Consequences on the Nigeria-Niger fight against banditry

There have been opinions trailing on various media platforms that any military action against the Republic of Niger by either ECOWAS or any country may have resulted to serious spills over to Nigeria being one of the countries that shares multiple but porous borders with the country.

However, the number one consequences of the coup in Niger is that if any military action is instituted against Niger neighboring states in Nigeria from the poor north may likely suffered hence the

borders are both porous and in-secured. As argued by (Shehu 2023), when ECOWAS attacked Niger Republic as threatened the military junta may likely be supported by the other military juntas to launch counter attack on the poor states of the North West and North East. The military action will also allow for massive influx of indigent people from Niger Republic most of who will not find jobs in Nigeria and might therefore become an easy tool for recruitment by the armed bandits.

Added to this negative development (Marwan 2023) argued, the deteriorating economic conditions of Nigeria was among the factors responsible for the growing rate of armed banditry in the country and the impacts of the economic situation in Nigeria is already biting harder on the chances of the economic survival of the Niger Republic. If the military action is instituted against Niger as threatened added with the economic sanction already enforced and closure of the Nigeria-Niger borders, the high rate of unemployment in Niger will rise higher and above and that will serve as a motivating factor for the residents along the border to accept banditry as a means of survival. Another consequences of the current development in Niger is that trans-border economic activities are one of the most vibrant economic development indicators that fetch the government of Niger money in excess and also provide job options for thousands of its people. The current border closure may significantly have influenced these thousands of youths rendered jobless to have a psychological shift toward venturing into illegal deal on small and light arms which may be one of the most dangerous trend that will further fuel fire into the banditry enterprise. Already proliferation of small and light weapons has been one of the most dangerous illegal activities promoted significant number of youths taking advantage of the border connectivity between Niger, Chad and Libya to be smuggling weapons for the armed bandits operating in the North Western Nigeria.

(Munnir 2023) argued that the coup and actions of the ECOWAS may likely have consequential effects on our democracy considering the facts that, whenever the option of military engagements is applied our democracy may be forced to be under serious threat hence the threat by the International community demanding for the Nigeria to put its act together and create comfortable system to serve as a model will be emphasized. As argued (Yahaya 2023), it is not our business as a nation to "spread democracy", let alone go about this by force. The failure of the powerful United States in its many interventions in the world is enough lesson for us in the developing countries. He added that, "in our copycat mentality and delusion of grandeur as the "giant of Africa" we tend to adopt the tools of global hegemons. We want to humiliate the military of another country by given it an ultimatum and by enforcing sanctions which have no justification.

Lastly it has been argued that for Nigeria to hide under the burner of a club called (ECOWAS) to continue to enforce a threat against a sovereign nation like Niger is just a deliberate attempt to exposed the nation's frustrated military operatives to embarked on a full blown war even when they have failed in their bid to secure Nigeria in the hands of the illiterate bandits. (Marwan 2023) argued, the number of the Nigerian military is very insignificant and coupled with the internal conflict of both the Islamic militants and the armed bandits the Nigeria army who are seen as the last hope of the Nigerians have failed openly to secure the nation and make it safer in the hand of the democratic leaders for more than a

decade now. Dragging the Nigerian army into another war in Niger will expose Nigeria's military weakness and further strengthen the mighty of the insurgents and bandits to further strengthen their tears and continue to kill and abduct innocent Nigerians for ransom.

Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it is evident that the military coup in Niger has a grave consequence on the Nigeria and its people. More or less, with the steps taken by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) of enforcement of economic sanctions and possible military actions, Nigeria stands to lose greatly from the aftermath of the coup because of its strategic border location and the economic relationship between the two countries. The arguments as to why Nigeria is trying to champion the return of democracy remains suspicious especially considering the fact that the country has been having its serious socio-economic problems as well as the internal war with militants and armed bandits which it has failed to championed.

The development as it relates to the fear people have about the excessive role played by the Nigerian President who doubled as the President of ECOWAS Bola Ahmad Tinubu remain a chain of disconnection as to why is Nigeria interested in restoring political sanity in Niger when it has failed to restore peace and political stability in its home. The arguments as to the cluelessness of the Nigerian democratic leadership to draw a line of separation between power and independence of a sovereign states and the power of the ECOWAS as a loss association remain one of the unverified political hypothesis that required further scientific probes.

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