

Emerging New Political Order: Niger's Military Coup d'Etat and Its Implications for Africa

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The latest political situation unfolded in Niger, the unexpected removal of democratically-elected President Mohamed Bazoum late July and the deepening differences in perception across Africa explicitly shows Africa's level of political illusions and, practical reality towards attaining unity dimension in Africa.

In a nutshell, Africa remains sharply divided. Tracking down the Africa's unity propagated by the Big Six politicians including Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere etcetera, during the time of their struggle for political independence and the creation of an organization for Africa. More than 60 years, the important question of continental unity has been pursued with with great fanfare.

The Telegraph notes that

“the removal of Mohamed Bazoum has completed a coast to coast corridor of African nations under military rule running across the continent's Sahel region. Niger's turmoil follows coups in Sudan, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso in the past few years, sweeping away governments that were often already struggling against jihadist violence and some of the world's worst poverty.”

The rapid overthrows have alarmed African democracies, but also Western countries who had been attempting to help subdue the jihadists, and boost economies to stem northward migration, according the newspaper's article published early August.

We can also look at the situation in another perspective: The French-speaking military leaders have raised multiple complaints over the dominance of neo-colonial tendencies, particularly against France for exploitation of natural resources, for their gross under-development and the abject economic poverty these several years after political independence.



A billboard in Niamey criticizing Niger's pro-western, pro-French attitude (2019) (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

The English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking are similarly also talking about the United States and Europe. Most of them have increasingly acknowledged widespread terrorism and insurgency jihadist attacks as key reasons for the removal of their civilian governments.

Ultimately the situation is also developing in the Horn of Africa, it is rapidly deteriorating due to frequent militant attacks and terrorists' pressures in the region. Across Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Uganda, the crisis poses a huge critical challenge for governments and regional organisations as well as the African Union.

Seemingly it's largely the battle for influence, the scramble for resources too. Africa is now the focus; it becomes the focal point for the emerging world order as players are bolstering campaign to edge out Western influence in the region.

The African Union, the organization which primarily coordinates the continental political and economic as well as the socio-cultural activities, observes the new trends as military rule spread in the West African region. There must be an extensive political awareness among the people in the Sahel region to focus on democracy, development, security and stability.

That however, on July 26, 2023, the African Union officially informed of an attempt by certain members of the military to undermine the stability of democratic and republican institutions in Niger, which is tantamount to an attempted coup d'état, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, strongly condemns such actions by members of the military acting in total betrayal of their republican duty.

Further urging them to immediately cease these unacceptable actions, the Chairperson calls on the people of Niger, all their brothers in Africa, particularly in ECOWAS, and around the world, to join their voices in unanimous condemnation of this coup attempt, and for the immediate and unconditional return of the felon soldiers to their barracks.

Writing in the media, Khalid Cherkaoui Semmouni, Specialist in Political and Security questions in the Sahel, explains that popular support for the military in Niger which followed that of Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea endangers spreading to more countries in West Africa, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and others countries in the region. The evolving situation has the possibility of changing the regional order in the Sahel.



Gathering of Islamic State fighters on the Mali-Niger border in July 2021 (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)

Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali and Niger, these landlocked West African states with an impoverished population, face increasing isolation from the international community over their political power grab. Even as the African Union (AU), the continental organization, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the regional bloc, both suspended their memberships.

ECOWAS Sanctions Against Niger

Reports indicated that Niger's self-declared new leader would not bow to pressure to reinstate ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, intensifying a standoff with the West African bloc, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The bloc has struggled to contain a democratic backslide in West Africa and had vowed that coups will no longer be tolerated after military takeovers in member states Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea and an attempted coup in Guinea-Bissau in the last two years.

As already known, the United States, France and the European Union have suspended financial assistance to Niger. According to the executive order, ECOWAS imposes eight (8) stringent sanctions. The decision was taken at an extraordinary session of the Authority presided over by President of Nigeria Bola Ahmed Tinubu in Abuja. Below is a list of Economic Sanctions placed on Niger Republic:

1. Closure of Land and air borders between ECOWAS and Niger.
2. Institution of ECOWAS no flight zone to all commercial flights to and fro Niger.
3. Suspension of all commercial and financial transactions between ECOWAS member states and Niger.
4. Freeze all service transactions including energy transactions.
5. Freeze assets of Niger Republic in all ECOWAS Central banks.
6. Freeze all Niger State and the state enterprises and Parastatals in commercial banks.
7. Suspension of Niger from all financial assistance and transactions with all financial institutions.
8. Impose travel bans on the military officials and their families involved in the coup attempt including anyone who accepts to take a position in the military government.

Previous AU and ECOWAS Positions

The African Union has made some attempts in resolving the crisis.

Moreover, in the immediate term, the increasing proliferation of military coups and the attempts to take power through force of arms, has to be addressed swiftly and firmly in order to halt the further erosion of the authority of the AU Executive Council along with the Peace and Security Council. The AU founding documents and protocols categorically prohibit military coups. It is up to the leadership of the AU to develop means to implement these regulations.

Besides these measures to maintain relative control on members in the West African region, African Union and ECOWAS have to jointly ensure its previous decisions. For instance, in March 2021, the ECOWAS Commission held a one-day workshop on the modalities for implementing the Silencing the Guns agenda in West Africa, a flagship programme of the Africa Union's Agenda 2063.

That workshop was organized through the ECOWAS Directorate of Political Affairs in collaboration with the African Union Commission's Silencing the Guns Unit. The objective of the workshop was to further discussions on an ECOWAS strategy and approach to the regionalization of the 'Silencing the Guns Agenda' in West Africa and in coordination and alignment with the African Union.

As we understand, the meeting was considered highly relevant to the determination of ECOWAS to increase cooperation and enhance synergy in addressing conflict at its roots and to develop robust response approaches and mechanisms across the region. In our assessment, next to nothing has happened to these series of fanfare meetings.

Long before that, an Extraordinary Humanitarian Summit and Pledging Conference held on May 27 and 28 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, by African leaders to address the current humanitarian challenges and problems facing Africa. It categorically stated to find root causes, and besides natural disasters and climate change, the frequency of military is creating additional problems on the continent.

At the conference, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, stressed the significance of the gathering and highlighted details of some of the causes, and increased demands for humanitarian support.

Moussa Faki Mahamat, in his speech, illustrated figures and statistical data drawn up and compiled by the United Nations specialised agencies, based on the general trends that emerge in the five regions of the continent, there are 15 most affected member States, 113 million people urgently waiting for emergency assistance in 2022. These are refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons in Africa.

In his speech, Macky Sall, Chairman of the African Union and President of Senegal, pointed to emergencies linked to climate change, natural disasters and terrorist attacks which have become endemic in certain countries but also emergencies linked to armed conflicts.

Macky Sall passionately called for laying down military arms, to engage in dialogue to settle our differences peacefully, the culture of rejection to embrace care that repairs social fragilities by relieving those who suffer from hunger, disease and poverty, emphasized access to power by peaceful means and to agree on spaces for dialogue and consultation for a peaceful exercise of power, and an inclusive development, following the principles of social justice, so that each citizen feels heir to a part of the national resources.

“We cannot dream of a better future when the poverty of some leaves others indifferent. The state must constantly serve as a lever to give confidence to those who think they are right to doubt and lose hope. In return, the State and the institutions that embody it deserve respect and protection from all”, the Senegalese leader Sall stressed.

When the state is in danger, when it is destabilized in any way, the foundations of living together falter to make way for chaos. The scourge of terrorism calls for a more substantial mobilization of member states, according to new methods of intervention, transcending traditional peacekeeping operations which have shown their limits.

Almost in all speeches at the conference, emphasis was laid on frequency and the new waves of military takeovers, particularly in West Africa. It, therefore, seriously reviewed the

Malabo Declaration on Terrorism and Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa.

Several experts have been discussing the situation, both inside Africa and foreign media are dominated by the latest development in the continent. Concerns are actually skyrocketing while much is partly blamed on African leaders.

Some Expert Analysis

Dr Mohamed Chtatou, a senior professor of Middle Eastern politics at the International University of Rabat (IUR) and Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco, has explained on several occasions that some components and elements of the emerging new world order, and positions taken by a number of African states threaten Africa's unity.

According to this well-experienced academic professor, regional integration of the continent has been a dream of many African leaders and led to the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. This organization later transformed into African Union.

Over the years, many other institutions have been created in different parts of Africa. But on the whole they have noticeably done little to improve the basic development needs of the estimated 1.4 billion population in the continent. In many cases, many of them still continue to have the most extensive relationships with their former colonial powers. Despite that the main focus has to be on utilizing resources for necessary development across Africa.

The record of regional integration in Africa is so far poor, and many regional alliances are characterized by uncoordinated initiatives, political conflicts, and little intra-regional trade. However, analysts note that some of the external and internal factors that have hindered Africa's integration in the past have abated somewhat in recent years, and there is therefore reason for cautious optimism, Professor Chtatou maintained in his academic paper at a scientific conference.

Today, both the Western world: The United States and Europe, and its Eastern counterpart: China, India and Russia have eager eyes on Africa under the excuse of helping develop the economy of this part of the world, but, in reality, it is just another manifestation of the Scramble for Africa. These powers are interested in minerals and rare earth's metals that are in Africa.

Still discussing and assessing the developing situation today, Africa is rich in rare earths and minerals that are highly desirable for many industries, including electronics, renewable energy, and defence. As a result, many great powers, including China, India, Europe, the United States and Russia, are highly interested in securing access to these resources.

However, it is important to note that while the presence of valuable resources can be a source of economic opportunity, it can also lead to exploitation, corruption, and political instability. It is essential that African nations have the ability to manage their resources in a sustainable and equitable way, to ensure that the benefits of these resources are shared by all citizens and that their extraction does not come at the expense of the environment or human rights.

Solution Pathways

It beholds, therefore, on our leaders to find effective concrete solutions to the present crises that are also essential in fostering political stability, continental unity, sustainable

development and genuine sovereignty in the years ahead.

How can Africa develop itself away from the greed of some developed nations? There is no easy answer to this question, as it is a complex issue that involves many different factors. However, there are some steps that Africa can take to promote sustainable development and reduce the influence of developed nations:

Promote good governance: African nations should work to establish transparent and accountable systems of governance that promote the rule of law, protect human rights, and combat corruption.

Invest in education and human capital: Developing the skills and knowledge of the African people is crucial to building a sustainable and prosperous future for the continent. Investing in education, health care, and other social services can help to build a strong and healthy workforce.

Support local industries: African nations can promote economic development by investing in local industries, rather than relying solely on exports of raw materials. This can create jobs, generate income, and promote sustainable growth.

Foster regional integration: African nations can work together to promote regional integration and reduce dependency on external actors. This can involve developing common trade policies, investing in regional infrastructure, and promoting cooperation on issues of mutual interest.

Encourage foreign investment on African terms: African nations should strive to attract foreign investment on their own terms, by negotiating fair and equitable deals that benefit both the investor and the host country. This can help to promote economic development and reduce dependency on aid.

In view of its abundant resources, its ambitious youth, its vibrant society, and its geo-strategic potential, Africa needs to achieve unity and full integration, at once, to face the immense greed of the developed world and to defend its interest in the best possible ways.

Within the context of geopolitical changes and complexities, African leaders have to absolutely rethink and take strategies to save their straddling economy. Several years have elapsed after the United Nations declared Africa's political independence. It was precisely on May 25, 1963, more than 60 years ago but Africa is still far away from attaining its economic freedom despite the huge natural and human resources there. The resources are still untapped, development remains shabby while about 60% of the population impoverished.

In addition, rhetorics are not only ineffective in terms of conflict resolution but also may, in fact, be aggravating tensions and violence. Instead, African leaders require comprehensive development-oriented policies combined with good governance, these are the best solutions, at least, to minimizing social conflicts and economic disparities, ultimately ensure long-term peace and harmony in the continent.

Nevertheless, African leaders have to adopt progressive policies and, at the same time, deal with the dangers of neocolonial tendencies perpetrated, and the scramble for resources in the continent. The crucial challenges and priority tasks obviously require working towards the provision of sustainable development and that is line with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

At this stage of Africa's development, it is necessary to examine thoroughly how the geopolitical changes are influencing Africa's unity and development, how it is impacting on African countries across the continent. The time has really arrived to look at the development processes and review obstacles, determine the level and extent of participation of foreign players and specific roles in emerging new world order, as well as taking cautious steps in understanding the implications for Africa. The rising neo-colonial tendencies should be considered as the highest challenging task for all African leaders, the regional organizations and the African Union.

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