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Coups, Regional Security Complexes and the Impact of Nigeria's Peacekeeping in West Africa, 1960–2022

Abstract

Over the years, Africa has continued to experience conflicts caused by civil wars and the tussle for power through military coups. Despite having the Mediation & Security Council within ECOWAS, it has been unable to create sustainable peace within the region. The many porous borders between the countries further exacerbate the complexities of its regional security. The consequences of these problems usually affect neighbouring countries, thereby resulting in regional security complexes and the consequent challenges of peacekeeping operations. This paper uses historical, descriptive and comparative analysis by focusing on coups as precursors to security challenges in the region of West Africa and the resulting peacekeeping operations by countries such as Nigeria. Based on the premise of ECOWAS, it introduces some conflicts caused by coups; the challenges of Regional Security Complex in West Africa and the examination of Nigerian Peacekeeping efforts. Furthermore, it offers some recommendations towards sustainable regional peace. Results show that there is a need for the African Union (AU) to do more to secure the continent. Reliance on non-African countries to support its internal security problems has become counterproductive. It recommends that Nigeria should temporarily suspend its peacekeeping operations and channel its resources towards addressing its internal security challenges; that the AU must establish a standing army as a quick response force to address the various continental crises before they become exponential threats and that ECOWAS should implement its common currency plan. Finally, the African Union must develop best practices that can alleviate poverty and guarantee security in line with the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: Nigeria, ECOWAS, peacekeeping, region, security complex

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"Just weeks after gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria deployed its first contingent of peacekeepers to the Congo. Since then, hundreds of thousands of Nigerian military, police, and civilian personnel have served under the UN flag across 41 operations worldwide [...] You have shown exceptional bravery, dedication, and professionalism, and we are grateful for your service and your sacrifice."

Matthias Schmale, United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria²

Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established on 28 May 1975 under the signed *Treaty of Lagos*. It is the regional bloc upon which fifteen West African countries (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Burkina Faso and Cape Verde) collectively pursue a common political, economic and peace agenda towards self-sufficiency and development within an area of 5,114,162 km² (1,974,589 sq mi) and an estimated population of 424.34 million.³

ECOWAS relies on the fundamental principles of cooperation, solidarity, equity, non-aggression, interdependence, promotion of human rights and social justice. These principles are also projected towards achieving regional security.

*During the 1950s and 1960s, a coup or attempted coup occurred every 4 months in Latin America, every 7 months in Asia, every 3 months in the Middle East, and every 55 days in Africa.*⁴ These coups resulted in conflicts and threatened the political, social and economic security of neighbouring countries.

Regional security complex theory (RSCT) on international relations, as developed by Buzan and Wæver, states that: "Simple physical adjacency tends to generate more security interaction among neighbours than among states located in different areas, a point also emphasized by Walt [...] Adjacency is potent for security because many threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones."⁵

When related to the security challenges in the West African region, this theory is further justified, because there are some similarities of security problems in this region. Such problems usually start in one country and gradually permeate into the socio-economic and political fabrics of neighbouring countries through security interactions as a result of proximity. Records show that the region has been beclouded by military coups, terrorist activities, power struggles and citizen discontentment with the government. I believe that interest in corporate matters is a luring pull for soldiers to seize power with barrels of guns in order to be involved in politics.

When coups and other conflicts occur, it rapidly affects other countries within the region, resulting in loss of lives, economic hardship, instability and the exodus of refugees. Apart from the proximity of the countries, the situation has become

² UN Nigeria 2023.

³ See: www.worlddata.info/trade-agreements/ecowas-west-africa.php

⁴ BERTSCH et al. 1978.

⁵ BUZAN-WÆVER 2003: 6–20, 41–47, 77–82.

more precarious because of the agreed freedom of movement, the 1998 regulations on Transhumance⁶ between ECOWAS member states and their many porous and undelineated borders.



Figure 1: Map of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
 Source: www.euractiv.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/03/ecowas_map.jpeg

West Africa, Central Africa and the Sahel region have experienced nine coups since 2020. In all of these coups, the people thronged the streets to celebrate the fall of governments which had either been in office for too long and/or been a source of artificial poverty to the people. The 16 West African countries, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte D'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo, have all been involved in various conflicts which affected the entire region. Some of the consequences of these conflicts led to international interventions, which applied the machineries of diplomacy, sanctions, military interventions or peacekeeping. In most cases, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its erstwhile military formation known as ECOWAS Military Operation Group (ECOMOG) have also carried out the military interventions in the West African region.⁷ However, these interventions continue to affect the economic resources and political stability of the region.

⁶ ECOWAS Official Journal 1998.

⁷ About ECOMOG as a viable solution see MOLNÁR 2008.

As of 2024, seven countries in Africa are under military rule. Apart from Sudan, six of such countries are in West Africa and they came into power through coups – Gabon, Guinea, Burkina-Faso, Niger, Mali and Chad. The history of these countries shows the interconnectedness, the consequences of conflicts and how these conflicts affect the others.

The uranium-rich Niger has faced international threats after a coup by the presidential guard on 26 July 2023, which overthrew democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum. Thereafter, on 16 September 2023, “Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, three West African Sahel nations ruled by military juntas, signed a security pact [...] promising to come to the aid of each other in case of any rebellion or external aggression”.⁸ Such an inter-state cooperation is also the proof of a functioning regional security complex. For overthrowing democratically elected governments, these countries were sanctioned by ECOWAS. As a consequence of the sanctions, food smuggling through porous borders has increased.

In the aftermath of coups and other conflicts, the deployment of peacekeepers was necessary to restore normality. Since 1960, Nigeria has participated in at least 41 peacekeeping operations within and outside the African continent. The missions are usually done in conjunction with the United Nations, ECOWAS or the African Union. Examples of such operations include the United Nations Operation in Congo (ONUC) 1960–1964, the United Nations Security Force in West New Guinea (UNSF) 1962–1983, the United Nations India–Pakistan Observer Mission (UNIPOM) 1965–1966, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) 1978–1983, Chad Operation (Operation Harmony I) Bilateral 1979, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Mission Intervention Force in Chad (Operation Harmony II) 1981–1982, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone 1999, the ECOMOG Operation Harmony in Liberia 1990, the UN Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) 1990–1997, the United Nations Iraq–Kuwait Observer Mission (UNIKOM) 1991, the OAU Monitoring Group in Rwanda 1992–1993, the African Union – United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) 2007, the United Nations Multi-Dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) 2013, the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) 1993–1995, Nigeria Peacekeeping in Somalia, 2021, the ECOWAS mission in Guinea Bissau (ECOMIB), 2020, 2022, et cetera. These operations were necessary for Nigeria due to its interest for international peace and security. These interests are based on the legal backing and the concepts of Nigeria's peacekeeping operations.

Regional security complex in West Africa: coups and conflicts

When there are crises in a country, it affects the region due to demographic proximity or *physical adjacency*. Barry Buzan, through the Copenhagen School of security studies, developed an academic thought, which placed emphasis on the non-military

⁸ Reuters 2023.

aspects of security.⁹ Patterns of regional security show that the interconnectedness of countries with close borders shows underlying links (Figure 2).¹⁰

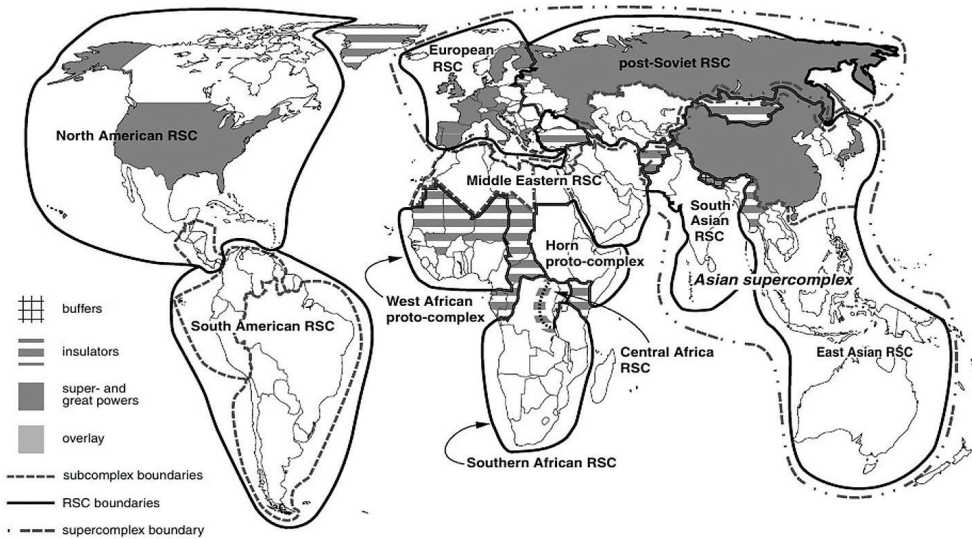


Figure 2: Patterns of regional security

Source: Buzan–Wæver 2003

If related to the exodus of refugees in times of conflicts, this notion becomes relevant. As non-military actors, undocumented refugees could pose security risks and socio-economic challenges to host communities.

In their book, Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde consider military/state, political, social, economic and environmental issues as new sectors of security.¹¹ While Buzan examined the sectoral, Wæver conceptualised securitisation where state actors should transfigure national political discourse into affairs of security as existential problems that need to be addressed. Therefore, when this transfiguration is lacking, it gives way to insecurity. They further defined Regional Security Challenge (RSC) as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national security cannot realistically be considered apart from one another”.¹² African leaders conduct foreign policies and “securitise” a range of external and domestic challenges as part of efforts to guarantee regime and state survival.¹³ In the light of this, the statement by the African Union Peace and Security Council becomes very relevant. It states that coups often originate from “deficiencies

⁹ COLLINS 2016.

¹⁰ BUZAN–WÆVER 2003.

¹¹ BUZAN – WÆVER – DE WILDE 1998.

¹² BUZAN – WÆVER – DE WILDE 1998.

¹³ CLAPHAM 1996: 267–274.

in governance” along with “greed, selfishness, mismanagement of diversity, mismanagement of opportunity, marginalization abuse of human rights, refusal to accept electoral defeat, manipulation of constitution[s], as well as unconstitutional review of constitution[s] to serve narrow interests and corruption”.¹⁴

Since the first African coup d'état, which took place on 13 January 1963 in Togo with the alleged support of the French government, subsequent conflicts that led to peacekeeping had elements of military coups.

For every coup that took place in West Africa, it threatened the stability of neighbouring countries in two ways. First, when a coup succeeds and the people pour out to celebrate, the presidents of neighbouring countries become nervous that their soldiers will do the same. For example, immediately after the 2023 coups in Niger and Gabon, President Paul Biya of Cameroon¹⁵ and President Paul Kagame of Rwanda¹⁶ were so gripped by the security complex that they quickly reshuffled their cabinets and retired some of their top military personnel. Both presidents have been in office for 41 and 23 years, respectively. They knew that their long time in office was a cause for concern for their people.

Second, every conflict or coup poses the danger of the influx of refugees to neighbouring countries. On the other hand, the influx consequently poses security challenges to the host countries because the biometric details and backgrounds of the refugees are usually not checked. Security complex is further worsened by the many porous borders in many African countries. For example, though Nigeria has 17 land borders, five maritime borders and 84 approved border controls, *there are over 1,400 illegal routes into Nigeria – 1,316 more than the approved number of border control posts*.¹⁷ These porous borders give rooms for irregular migration and the smuggling of lethal weapons across countries.

Every conflict leads to exodus of refugees. For example, the 1989 Liberian war resulted in at least 750,000 civilians fleeing Liberia as internally displaced persons and refugees to the neighbouring countries of Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, Mali, Ghana and Gambia. Some of them left the African continent.¹⁸ Such exodus put social and economic pressure on the receiving countries. The mass exodus also made it difficult to determine the movement of terrorists and dangerous weapons, because the backgrounds and biometrics of the refugees were mostly unchecked. The war in Sierra Leone also became interconnected with the war in Liberia, because some Liberians were masters of the Sierra Leone conflict. In February 2012, Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia (1997 to 2003) was jailed by the International Criminal Court in the Hague for the role he played in the war in Sierra Leone.¹⁹ According to the court, *Taylor gave orders to Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in the 11-year civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone that killed about 50,000 people*.²⁰

¹⁴ African Union 2014.

¹⁵ TRT Afrika 2023.

¹⁶ Rwanda's Kagame fires slew of military officials in big shake-up 2023.

¹⁷ Business Times 2014.

¹⁸ PALMISANO–MOMODU 2013.

¹⁹ For more details see MOLNÁR 2009.

²⁰ Al Jazeera 2012.

It was also difficult to ascertain how many of such refugees returned home because many of them lost everything and had to start all over again. In sharp contrast with the number of Liberian refugees that left the country, the United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees (UNHCR) was only able to repatriate 155,000 Liberians 23 years after the civil war.²¹

The Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) insurgencies introduced a new wave of terrorism across West Africa with links from Libya, Niger and Syria. The fight against terrorist groups created new alliances of cooperation between Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, even as refugees fled from the same countries to safe regions within these countries. Some of them were suspected to have joined in the farmers-herders clashes, which occurred in Benue and Plateau states of Nigeria.

Former president Buhari of Nigeria claimed that the weapons used by these terrorist groups mostly came from Libya. "These gunmen were trained and armed by Muammar Gaddafi of Libya. When he was killed, the gunmen escaped with their arms. We encountered some of them fighting with Boko Haram."²²

Every coup has impact on regional security complexes as it sends jitters to neighbouring countries. Examples of how conflicts and coups in some West African countries resulted in regional security complexes, will suffice.

Nigeria experienced various coups in 1966, 1975, 1976, 1983, 1985, 1990 and 1993. She also fought a civil war between 1967 and 1970, which destabilised the region and attracted foreign interventions. *During the two and a half years of the war, there were about 100,000 overall military casualties, while between 500,000 and 2 million Biafran civilians died of starvation.*²³ Over 3 million persons were displaced, and refugees moved to neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Benin and beyond.

The northern region of the Republic of Benin has endured an increasing number of attacks by Islamic militias since 2018. This is because a stretch of land connects Benin, Niger and Burkina Faso, which are countries in conflicts. This situation continues to aid uncontrolled transit of weapons, people and goods across the porous borders.

Between 1960 and 2023, there has been 8 successful coups (1966, 1974, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1987, January 2022 and September 2022) and 5 attempted coups (1982, 1989, 2003, 2015, 2016) in Burkina Faso. In 2014, there was an uprising in response to the attempt by the government to change the constitution to make way for President Blaise Compaore to continue in office after 27 years in power. This led to several killings and the destruction of infrastructure. One of the consequences is the uncontrolled movement of suspicious persons across the region. For example, Fulani herdsmen reportedly crossed national borders with their cows and dangerous weapons, and later terrorised the countries they migrated to. Former President Buhari of Nigeria claimed that terrorism worsened in Nigeria because some persons got weapons from Libya after the demise of Gaddafi. Instead of taking proactive measures to arrest the situation, in December 2019, Buhari declared *issuance of visa*

²¹ Al Jazeera 2012.

²² OGUNDIPE 2018.

²³ American University 2017.

*at the point of entry into Nigeria to all persons holding passports of African countries with effect from January, 2020.*²⁴

In the case of Cape Verde, though it has enjoyed political stability, the 1980 coup in neighbouring Guinea-Bissau affected the political alliances between both countries.

The First Ivorian Civil War occurred in 2002, 2004 and 2007. The military coup of December 24 1999 was followed by the removal of the coup leader, Robert Guei and the election of Laurent Gbagbo. The conflicts continued into a civil war in September 2002. Foreign countries such as Belarus, Russia, Bulgaria and Burkina Faso, got involved in the crises through their supports for various interests. Further conflicts in 2008 led to the internal displacement of 45,000 persons. By 2011, the number rose to 30,000 who fled to neighbouring countries of Liberia, Togo and Ghana. *Overall, it is estimated that at least 160,000 Ivorians fled to nearby West-African countries.*²⁵

Gambia experienced two successful coups in 1981 and another in 1994. Due to the proximity in the region, people also suffered from the conflict in Senegal known as the Casamance conflict which began in 1982. It resulted in the death of at least one thousand persons.

The Konkomba–Nanumba conflict in Ghana, also known as the Guinea fowl war, which began as a tribal war in 1994 over land dispute, resulted in an estimated 2,000 deaths, a displacement of 150,000 people, some of whom fled to Togo. The coups in 1966, 1972, 1975 and 1979 also unsettled Ghana. Jerry Rawlings seized power in 1979 and ordered the execution by firing squad of eight military officers, including General Kotei, Joy Amedume, Roger Felli and Utuka, as well as the three former Ghanaian heads of state; Acheampong, Akuffo and Akwasi Afrifa.²⁶ This action sent shock waves throughout the western region of Africa and beyond. The allies of the victims also fled to exile.

Guinea experienced coups in 1984, 2008 and 2021, and the ensuing security complex affected neighbouring countries. The coup led to an emergency summit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Accra in which it decided to freeze the financial assets and impose travel bans on the members of Guinea's junta and their relatives.

In Mauritania, coups were experienced in 1978, 1979, 1980, 1984, 2005 and 2008. Two other coup attempts were made in 1981 and 2003. Whenever there is a coup, regional blocks and the international community usually interfere. The interference is, in itself, an evidence of security complex.

Coups in Niger began in 1974 through 1996, 1999, 2010, 2021 and 2023. In the coup of 26 July 2023, soldiers from the country's presidential guard deposed President Mohamed Bazoum, and it drew the wrath and condemnation of ECOWAS, AU, UN, US and the European Union.

Togo experienced coup in 1963, 1967 and a failed attempt in 1986. Conflicts revolved around marginalisation and the desire for elongated tenures in office.

²⁴ NUHU 2019.

²⁵ ANING 2021.

²⁶ NUGENT 2009.

The non-military intervention in democratic matters have helped in stabilising Senegal over the years. However, regional crises have led Senegal to participate in various peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations as a way of preventing escalation in their territory and to maintain international peace. For example, in October 1980 and August 1981, a coup attempt was stopped in Gambia. In August 1989, in conjunction with the Gambian military, the Senegambian Confederation was dissolved. In 1992, they participated with ECOMOG peacekeeping group in Liberia. They also participated in peacekeeping in Rwanda, 1994, in Guinea-Bissau, 1998, in Central African Republic, 1997 and in Gambia, 2017.

On 16 July 2003, there was a coup d'état in São Tomé and Príncipe. The intervention of Nigeria in the coup was very timely. The coup was successfully launched as led by Major Fernando Pereira against the government of President Fradique de Menezes who was on a visit to President Olusegun Obasanjo in Nigeria. President Obasanjo called and negotiated with the coup plotters to return power to Menezes and the negotiation succeeded with a promise to grant amnesty to the plotters. The military held on to power for 7 days in São Tomé and Príncipe.

In Niger, ensuing conflicts were also connected to coup d'états. There were coups in 1974, 1996, 1999 and 2010, and an attempted coup in 2021. On 18 February 2010, there was a coup in Niger led by squadron leader Salou Djibo against President Mamadou Tandja who was kidnapped and replaced with the leader of the opposition.

Guinea-Bissau experienced coup d'états in 1980, 1999, 2003, 2010 and 2012. On 1 April 2022, there was an attempted coup led by Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto and the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army, Antonio Ndjai. The head of the military was arrested after the failed coup which witnessed the brief arrest of the prime minister.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, there has been various coup d'états and conflicts which led to several peacekeeping operations. Five failed coup attempts were made at various times in 1966, 1968, 1972, 1987 and 2011. Three others succeeded. On 14 September 1960, Mobutu Sese Seko overthrew Patrice Lumumber. On 25 November 1965, Mobutu Sese Seko overthrew Joseph Kasa-Vubu and on 16 May 1997, Laurent-Désiré Kabila overthrew Mobutu Sese Seko which led to the First Congo War.²⁷

In Mali, they have also experienced five coup d'états in 1968, 1991, 2012 (attempted), 2020 and 2021. The aftermath of the 2020 coup, which overthrew President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, received global condemnation especially from the African Union, the United Nations and the European Union. The United States of America took a step further by cutting off military aid to Mali.²⁸

Though there has been no peacekeeping mission in the West African country of Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), the country witnessed 14 coup d'états between 1966 and 2022. Ten of them succeeded.²⁹ Such coups pose security challenges, disrupts developmental agenda of predecessors and derail the socio-political and economic stability of the country. These disruptions account for why Burkina Faso is considered

²⁷ Britannica 2024.

²⁸ DIALLO-ROSS 2020.

²⁹ January 3, 1966; February 8, 1974; November 25, 1980; November 7, 1982; October 15, 1987; September 18, 1989; September 17, 2015; October 30, 2014, January 23, 2022 and 30 October 2022.

as one of the poorest countries in the world, as it ranks 144th among 157 countries in the World Bank's Human Capital Index. Since 2015, the situation of the country has been worsened by terrorist attacks, leading to population displacement. There were 50,000 internally displaced persons in the country in January 2019. By January 2022, more than 3,000 schools (13% of educational institutions) were closed because of the insecure environment.³⁰

The crises that rocked Liberia were mostly precipitated by coup d'états. Though there was a historic occurrence when the Liberian people deposed President Edward James Roye on 26 October 1971, the two coups of 1980 and 1990 destabilised the country. On 12 April 1980, Master Sergeant Samuel Kanyon Doe overthrew President William R. Tolbert, Jr and on 9 September 1990, Prince Johnson overthrew Samuel Kanyon Doe. Charles Taylor's militia overthrew the regime of Samuel Doe in 1989. The upheaval plunged the country into a 14-year bloody civil war. By the end, 200,000 were killed in the fighting and more than half of the population became refugees.³¹ On April 26 2012, the United Nations-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), sitting in The Hague, found former Liberian president, Charles Taylor guilty of abetting horrific war crimes, rape and mutilation in Sierra Leone.

Five coup d'états took place in Sierra Leone on 21 March 1967, 19 April 1968, 29 April 1992, 16 January 1996 and 25 May 1997. From the coup of 1992, Sierra Leone was already in chaos. However, the Jonny Paul Koroma coup of May 25 1997, launched on the platform of the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), overthrew President Ahmed Tejan Kabba and set the tone for the bloody war, which lasted 11 years and reportedly left over 50,000 persons dead.

In Chad, three successful coups took place: on 13 April 1975, 7 June 1982 and 1 December 1990. Three failed coup d'états occurred on 16 May 2004, 14 March 2006 and 1 May 2013. Several rebel factions waged the 1965–1979 Civil War in Chad against two governments. There were outcries against high level corruption, authoritarianism and nepotism. The renewed war that began on 18 December 2005 was also a result of the same agitations, especially by Muslim northerners and Christian southerners who attacked each other whenever the other was in power.

A wider overview of coups in the African continent shows that of 492 attempted or successful coups carried out around the world since 1950, Africa has seen 220, the most of any region, with 109 of them successful.³²

³⁰ UNICEF 2022.

³¹ History 2018.

³² DUZOR–WILLIAMSON 2023.

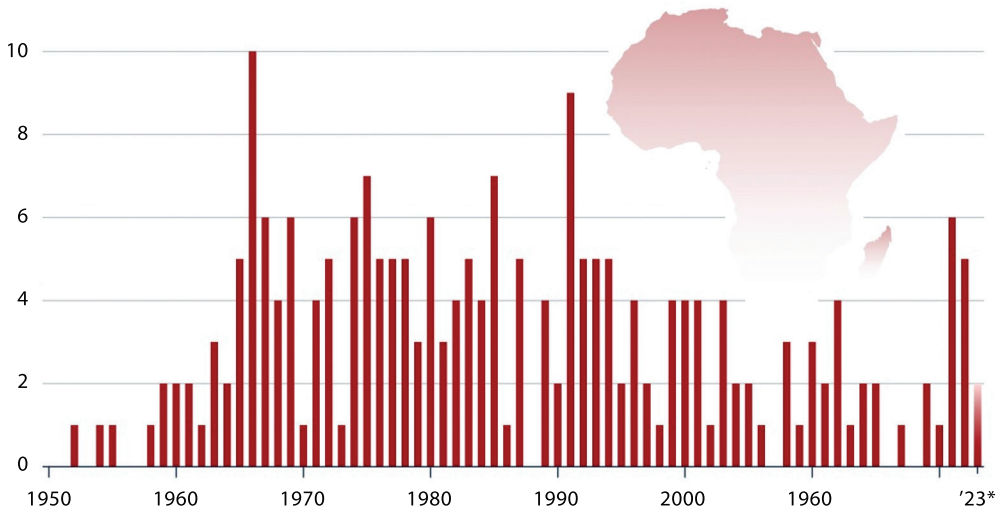


Figure 3: Number of coups d'état (successful and unsuccessful) per year in Africa between 1950 and July 2023

Source: POWELL–THYNE 2011; Statista research; DUZOR–WILLIAMSON 2023

Examining Nigerian peacekeeping

The concept of Nigeria's participation in peacekeeping lies on its commitment to promote and protect its foreign relations. This is in line with Section 19 of the 1999 Constitution, which states the objectives of Nigeria's foreign relation and lays the foundation for the country's peacekeeping concept, theory and practice. Two aspects of related foreign policies are the *promotion of international cooperation for the consolidation of universal peace and mutual respect among nations and elimination of discrimination in all its manifestation*. The other part is *respect for international law and treaty as seeking settlement of the internal dispute by negotiation, mediation, conciliations, arbitration, and adjudication*.³³ In both situations, Nigeria uses negotiation and force to implement its policies as enumerated in this research.

As a member of the United Nations since 1960, Nigeria is, to a larger extent, obligated to respect the Charter of the United Nations. Chapter VII mandates the body to take *action with respect to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression*. This chapter is usually invoked as a legally binding force when approving the deployment of UN peace operations. One of the structures built by the Nigerian government to enhance the framework for participation in peacekeeping is the Nigerian Police Peacekeeping Office. The office was established in 2005 with the aim of engaging in meaningful research and for the training of officers for global deployment in support of operations. The office also equips personnel with the skills and capacities needed

³³ See: <https://foreignaffairs.gov.ng/about-us/foreign-policy/>

for complex peace support operations in all environments, towards professional and international best practices.

"In 1960, the Nigerian police deployed the first ever contingent of Individual police officers (IPOs) to UN mission in the Congo led by ACP Louis Edet while the pioneer Formed Police Unit (FPU) of 120 officers and men were deployed to Liberia in 2004 under [...] over twelve thousand personnel to various UN/AU and ECOWAS peace support operation."³⁴ The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) was formally established as a *department of the UN Secretariat in 1992, has nearly 122,000 personnel, with 118 countries contributing military and police to 16 different DPKO-led missions around the world.*³⁵

Despite the huge domestic security challenges, Nigeria has participated in at least 41 peacekeeping missions, out of which six have been commanded by Nigerian senior military officers (in Congo, Angola, Lebanon, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Chad). The financial cost of peacekeeping in Chad (1979–1982) was borne by Nigeria under the auspices of the OAU. On the other hand, Nigeria has occupied the chair position of the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations since 1972. In 2020, Nigeria was re-elected, for the 48th time, to chair the United Nations Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations – regarded as the UN's most strategic committee, which is also known as C-34. This special committee, which consists of 147 member states and focuses on peacekeeping operations, was established in 1965 by the General Assembly, and it reviews and provides crucial recommendations on United Nations peacekeeping operations.³⁶

Though Nigeria has participated in several peacekeeping operations, its role in peacekeeping in West Africa has its loudest expression in terms of the financial commitment and the high deployment of human capacity. Nigeria has also intervened in various ways in the coups and conflicts that took place in West Africa.

In August 1990, Nigeria led ECOMOG to contain the civil war in Liberia until peace was restored in 2003. Apart from the fact that the war was a regional threat, Nigeria was also keen on rescuing its citizens in Liberia where at least 3,000 Nigerians reportedly lived and were entrapped by the war. After the restoration of peace and the conduct of elections, the Nigerian troop continued to be stationed in Liberia for 15 years until the last batch departed Liberia in February 2018. During that period, with the support of the UN, they were able to restore peace, train the soldiers and supervise the electoral process. Throughout its presence in Liberia, Nigerian military claimed that it spent \$8bn to restore peace in Liberia.³⁷ Human Rights Watch cited, that in September 1997, when the new Zimbabwean high commissioner to Nigeria was presenting his credentials, he paid tribute to Nigeria's leadership in ECOWAS and described the end of the Liberian war as *a classic in the history of peacekeeping in the world.*³⁸ Nigeria's role in the war in Sierra Leone, which started in March 1991, was also very substantial. Effective mechanisms were put in place for sustainable

³⁴ See: www.npf.gov.ng/info/peace_keeping.php

³⁵ See: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en>

³⁶ Business Day 2020.

³⁷ Punch 2023.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch 1997.

peace. Nigerian government started by giving the coup plotters an ultimatum to relinquish power.

Thereafter, it started to shell the base of the coup plotters by using the tactics of "containment", which was all about using force. Some other countries did not support the use of force. However, diplomatic resolutions by multinational groups and the UN were later reached, and it led to the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire on 30 November 1996. Since peacekeepers left Sierra Leone, it did not return to war. "A critical factor in Sierra Leone's stability is the complex interaction of domestic, subregional and external actors, which is crucial to the success of conflict management and conflict prevention processes."³⁹

Between 2016 and 2017, there were constitutional crises in which the sitting president, Yahya Jammeh refused to relinquish power to Adama Barrow, the winner of the election. When negotiations failed, a military force by West African states superintended by Nigeria, Ghana Togo, Mali and Senegal entered into Gambia. Jammeh escaped, went into exile, and power was handed over to Barrow.

The Nigerian president was holding the position of the chairman of ECOWAS when the coups in Niger and Gabon occurred in 2023. They understood that if action was not taken, it could lead to regional crisis. Therefore, in conjunction with other West African leaders, the chairman spearheaded the imposition of sanctions against the juntas that forcefully took over power from democratically elected presidents. The economic, political and social sanctions were geared towards isolating the countries and muzzling their economic strength as a way of coercing them into agreeing to mutual diplomatic resolutions that could restore democratic rule. The sanctions imposed on Niger included the freezing of all its enterprises and parastatals in commercial and Central banks in all ECOWAS member states; closure of land and air borders; declaration of ECOWAS no flight zone to all commercial flights to and from Niger; suspension of all commercial and financial transactions; freezing of all service transactions including energy transactions, state enterprises and parastatals in commercial banks; suspension from all financial assistance and transactions with all financial institutions, and the imposition of travel bans on the military officials and the families of the coup plotters.⁴⁰

In the case of the 2023 coup in Gabon, the African Union's Peace and Security Council immediately suspended the participation of Gabon in all activities of the AU.⁴¹

Nigeria's role in peacekeeping has been consistent and exemplary due to its commitment to burden sharing, its ability to navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace, and the ability to swiftly deploy troops and police officers from among the 14 other countries involved in the operation anywhere in the world. Data from the UN Peacekeeping Department classified Nigeria as among the world's 15th largest troop contributor to UN Peacekeeping operations and the eighth in Africa. For example, in 2016, Nigeria contributed 2,170 peacekeeping personnel composed of 403 policemen and 46 military experts.⁴² In the course of these operations, there were

³⁹ ADEBAJO 2021: 345.

⁴⁰ Sahara Reporters 2023.

⁴¹ Al Jazeera 2023.

⁴² Al Jazeera 2023.

ongoing internal conflicts in Nigeria, which the world did not seem to be concerned about. Between 2015 and 2023, when retired army general Buhari was president, 63,111 Nigerians were killed by non-state actors.⁴³ No tangible support was received from the international communities.

Due to international cooperation and the instrumentality of the United Nations within the past two decades, more civil wars have ended through negotiations and diplomacy, than it did in the previous 200 years.

However, some of the conflicts in Africa – especially coups – had backings from foreign countries. Their aim is to have their stooges in offices where they could exploit the resources of such countries. Having at least 13 countries having military presence in Africa, with about 11 foreign military bases in the Horn of Africa,⁴⁴ does not help matters. Africa must decide her future through an AU standing force, while Nigeria must focus more on solving its internal crises before participating in peacekeeping operations in foreign countries. Trade and prosperity could be achieved through the interdependence of countries without setting up military bases in foreign countries. However, there must be individual liberty, which forms a strong ingredient of peace and security.⁴⁵

When charity starts from abroad

Though it is said that charity starts at home, it seems to come from abroad when Nigeria addresses the problem of conflicts. While serious security challenges were mostly left unaddressed by the Nigerian government, it spent so much in securing and stabilising other countries.

For example, in 2021, when Nigeria was busy participating in peacekeeping in Somalia, various conflicts and other serious security challenges were going on in the country.

A recorded number of 6,895 Nigerians were reportedly killed in 2021.⁴⁶ Out of this number, 844 of persons killed were state security officers and 6,051 were civilians. While at least 2,002 persons were abducted in 2020, at least 5,663 were in 2021. Analysis of the demographic spread of terrorism in Nigeria shows that in 2021, when a Nigerian troop was sent to Somalia, five states in the northern part of the country was experiencing over 57.3 per cent of abductions. 4 of the 5 occurrences were in the North-West and the last was in the North-Central. Of the 5,663 abductions, at least 3,246 were recorded in the North West in 2021. 1,225 of these had occurred in Kaduna state, just barely more than the at least 1,169 abductions that took place in Zamfara State. Around 1,522 abductions occurred in the North Central. Within this number, Niger state had the highest number of 1,127 abductions.

⁴³ Vanguard 2023.

⁴⁴ ISILOW 2023.

⁴⁵ DUNNE-SCHMIDT 2001.

⁴⁶ EROMOSELE 2022.

Students were not spared either. Over 1,000 Nigerian students were kidnapped between December 2020 and September 2021 in northern Nigeria,⁴⁷ particularly in the mass kidnaps that took place in Kaduna, Kebbi, Niger, Zamfara and Katsina state – which is the home state of Muhammadu Buhari, the then President who, as a retired army general, was expected to have the professional experience to secure the country. His failure became ridiculous because during his campaign for election in 2015, he promised to end terrorism within six months of resuming office.

It can be stated that Nigeria has technically been at war due to the internal armed conflicts since 2022. Not all wars are between states. When an armed conflict passes the threshold of 1,000 battle-related deaths during one calendar year, it is considered a war.⁴⁸

Boko haram has caused huge security challenges within the region. Between 2011 and 2023, it was responsible for thousands of deaths in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Nigeria is the country most affected by terrorist group attacks. States in the North-East register the highest number of deaths. Borno is by far the most threatened state, in that, Boko Haram has caused over 38,000 deaths in this area.⁴⁹ Figure 4 shows details of death per 1000 people to the ratio of annual percentage change from 2015 to 2023.

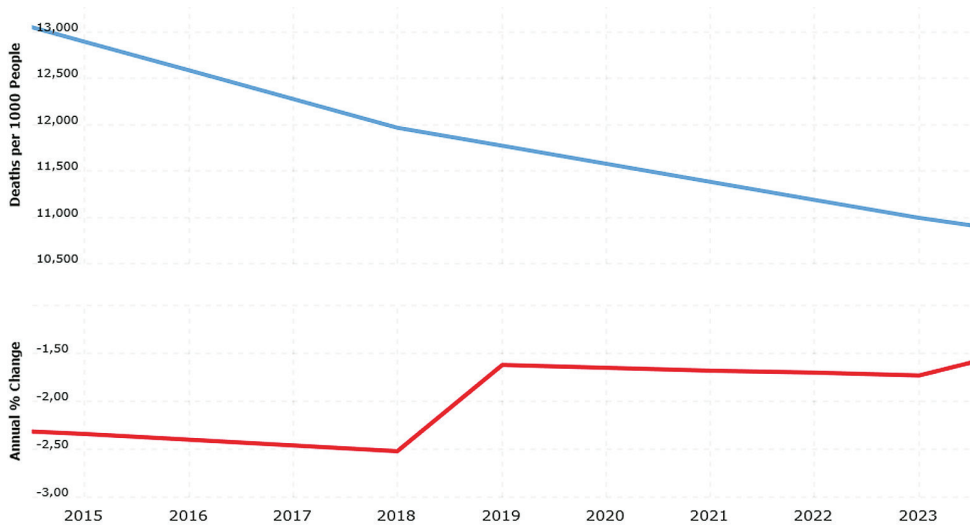


Figure 4: Nigeria death rate 2015–2023

Source: www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/ranking/death-rate

However, death by ritual killings, kidnapping, secessionist, political and mob attacks worsened. With such deaths that ought to have been prevented, it was ironic that

⁴⁷ ASADU 2021.

⁴⁸ Arolsen Archives 2022.

⁴⁹ See: www.statista.com/statistics/1197570/deaths-caused-by-boko-haram-in-nigeria

a country that should have been strengthening security on its own territory was sending troops to ensure the security of other countries.

Conclusion and recommendations

All the conflicts, which have negatively affected the West African region are results of coups and other conflicts. Regional security complexes are reflected by the interconnectedness of countries within the region these times. The relationships between these countries are in terms of proximity, porous borders and other political and economic ties. These conflicts are mostly caused by coups, struggle for power or marginalisation, which are consequences of the dissatisfaction, which arises from the distribution of public wealth. Some of the coups are allegedly sponsored by foreign powers who mostly have military bases within some of the African countries. Their goals are allegedly geared towards exploiting mineral resources and to interfere in the internal political affairs of such countries.

Based on the findings of the study, my recommendations are as follows:

1. The African Union should explore the possibility of establishing a standing army as a quick response force to address the various conflicts threatening the continent. This could also be actualised when the AU creates deeper working relations with the UN for multilateral and more collaborative peacekeeping operations. Such collaborations should include the incorporation of African countries as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

2. Nigeria should temporarily withdraw its peacekeeping troops from other countries and use its manpower to end internal conflicts and terrorism before returning to peacekeeping operations.

3. ECOWAS should actualise the common currency goal, as it will help to foster more economic, social, political and security cohesion.

4. Finally, the AU needs to set up measurable strategies that could prevent the overthrow of democratically elected governments through military coups. Such models should align with international standards – such as the practical actualisation of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals – geared towards improving the security of the people and the drastic reduction of poverty.

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