NIGER MILITARY CRISIS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR PROLIFERATION OF ARMS: DRAWING LESSONS FROM LIBYA

OLAGOKE OLUWAFEMI AWOTAYO
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, OSUN STATE UNIVERSITY, OSOGBO, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA
olagoke.awotayo@uniosun.edu
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9768-8910

SEGUN LAKIN ODERINDE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, OSUN STATE UNIVERSITY, OSOGBO, NIGERIA
oderindesegun@yahoo.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3572-8363,

KAYODE WAKILI OLAWOYIN
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, OSUN STATE UNIVERSITY OSOGBO, NIGERIA
kayode.olawoyin@uniosun.edu.ng
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3384-9492

OPEYEMI ISAAC FASIPE
UNIVERSITY OF ILESA, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA, opeyemi_fasipe@unilesa.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT
This article analyzes the Niger military crisis and its potential implications for the proliferation of arms in the region, drawing lessons from the aftermath of the Libyan civil war. By examining the linkages between insecurity, arms trafficking, and regional stability, the article explores how the ongoing crisis in Niger may exacerbate arms proliferation. Drawing from Libya's experience, it highlights the urgent need for preventive measures, regional cooperation, and international support to address the underlying drivers of arms trafficking and prevent further destabilization in the West African region. Qualitative sources such as newspapers, the internet, and scholarly works were used to examine the situation in Niger Military Crisis and the Implications for Proliferation of Arms. The study finds out the Arms Proliferation in the Sahel strengthen terrorism and Banditry that threatened the region. The study further noted that while security responses are needed, containing arms proliferation demands tackling its underlying drivers of instability. Vast socio-economic disparities, ethnic tensions, and lack of inclusive governance fuel grievances

that militant and criminal networks exploit for recruitment across the Sahel should be addressed.

Introduction

The Niger military crisis has threatens regional security through its potential to increase arms flows in the Sahel (Singer, 2022). A coup overthrew the democratically elected government, installing military head of state. The recent coup in Niger has sent shockwaves through the country, the region, and the global community. On 26 of July 2023, the Niger government was overthrown, and President Mohamed Bazoum was taken hostage, leading to a series of events that have had far-reaching implications. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) issued an ultimatum to the coup leaders, threatening military intervention if Bazoum was not returned to power. This has led to ECOWAS member states suspending relations with Niger and closing their borders with the country. The neighboring countries of Mali and Burkina Faso, both led by military coup leaders, also issued a joint statement warning of potential military responses (Gilles Yabia, 2023). The main coup leader, General Abdourahamane Tiani, outlined a transition roadmap in a televised address, calling for a period of no more than three years and an inclusive national dialogue. He also emphasized that Niger would defend itself in the event of military intervention. The crisis has drawn international attention, with France being accused of destabilizing Niger and the United States closely monitoring the situation due to its military presence in the region.

Gilles Yabia (2023) noted that Niger's strategic importance, despite its low economic and social indicators, is underscored by its geographical position at the crossroads of North, West, and Central Africa, its rich mineral and oil resources, its potential for renewable energy development, and its strong demographic growth. These factors explain the keen interest of medium and large powers in the crisis and its potential implications on the wider region. In analyzing the various perspectives surrounding the Niger coup, it is important to consider both the positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the coup leaders have put forward a roadmap for a transition period and national dialogue, which could potentially lead to a more inclusive and stable government in the future. Additionally, the crisis has brought attention to the strategic importance of Niger and the Sahel region, potentially prompting greater international engagement and support for development efforts. However, there are also negative aspects to consider. The coup and its aftermath have created political instability and heightened tensions in the region, with the threat of military intervention looming large. The accusations against foreign powers and the potential for further conflict raise concerns about the security and stability of the country and the wider region. Looking towards the future, it is crucial for all parties involved to prioritize dialogue, reconciliation, and a peaceful resolution to the crisis. The international community can play a constructive role in supporting efforts towards stability and development in Niger, recognizing the country's strategic importance and the potential for positive change in the aftermath of the coup. Niger coup has had an outsized global impact, with implications that ripple through the country, the region, and the world. By considering the historical context, key figures, and influential individuals involved, as well as the perspectives and potential future developments, stakeholders can work towards a peaceful and sustainable resolution to the crisis.

However, the coup's destabilizing impact may extend far beyond Niger's borders due to pre-existing arms proliferation challenges in the region. The Sahel suffers from porous borders and the presence of militant groups which exploit weapons availability (Boas & Torheim, 2013). Chadian and Libyan stockpiles destabilized following their internal security crises, enabling the emergence of Boko Haram and al-Qaeda linked factions (Williams, 2016). Their unfettered access to arms challenges legitimacy of governments and fuels both intra and inters conflict situations in the Sahel (Boas & Jennings, 2007). Meanwhile, the G5 Sahel joint military force that is meant to counter these security menace is struggling against resource constraints despite international support (Hudson, 2019).

The 2011 conflict in Libya epitomizes how the loss of state control over arms can create an

increased violence. The deposition of Gaddafi led to his estimated 150,000 tons of weapons becoming dispersed and uncontrollably in circulation. (Kirschner, 2018). These weapons contributed greatly to conflict in Mali, and also fueled arms trafficking routes and strengthened the militant capabilities (Patriota, 2020). A similar scenario risks emerging from the Niger crisis without prudent policy. Coup leaders have sought to consolidate power through military appointments and decrees restricting protests (Bachir, 2022). However, they face challenges maintaining troop loyalty given the military's ethnic diversity (Dabiri, 2022). Defections or clashes could enable arms diversions from state stockpiles like those of neighboring Mali in 2012 (Boas & Torheim, 2013). Even without large-scale diversions, instability risks empowering criminal and militant networks to acquire weapons on the black market. Regional and international actors must urgently address this threat. While condemning the coup, they should prioritize stability through diplomatic engagement rather than isolation (Diallo, 2022). The targeted sanctions alone risk further destabilization without accompanying support for the effects of those sections. It also noted that most previous targeted sanction has not be able to reduce or stop the proliferation of arms (Williams, 2016). The lessons from past peacekeeping efforts emphasize the need for holistic, long-term support mechanism to addressing socio-economic drivers of conflict alongside security issues (Bellamy et al., 2010). They should work with ECOWAS to implement a monitoring mechanism over Niger's stockpiles and borders control (Bellamy et al., 2010). However, partners like France which has a military presence in Niger could support this through intelligence sharing (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). The Stockpile management training for security forces will go a long way to help maintain control during political transitions (Small Arms Survey, 2018).

Conflict Theory and the Niger Military Crisis: Implications for Arms Proliferation

The Military Crisis in Niger provides insight into how theory of conflict can explain the dynamics of power, resource competition, and socioeconomic grievances that help to create conditions for armed conflict. Stemmed from the foundation established by Karl Marx and Max Weber, conflict theory states that societal unrest emanates from deep-seated inequalities and the competition that exists among different classes for access to scarce resources. In this instance, large disparities in power and economy in Niger continue to raise tensions. Lund (2006) highlights that such struggle for the appropriation of resources such as land, minerals, and access to trade routes normally makes inequalities transform themselves into conflicts. This is aggravated by existing grievances among the marginalized classes, leading to instability and eventual violence. The Niger crisis saw various groups struggling to gain mastery over these resources, just as in Libya, where the collapse of state authority occasioned a large-scale arms proliferation, thereby precipitating conflict. Coser (1956) suggests that conflict is disruptive, but also potentially has a functional role to play in focusing attention on necessary adjustments and changes in society. In Niger, the military crisis can trigger essential talks over governance, resource management, and equitable sharing of wealth. The way one addresses the basic causes of conflict might bring in the reforms that will stabilize the region over the long term. But managing conflict constructively, avoiding its further escalation and proliferation of arms, remains the challenge. Recent analyses, such as those by Johnson and Owen (2018), demonstrate that International conflicts are often also very strongly based on economic interests intertwined with the struggle for power. The dynamics of the Niger crisis equally reflect this, whereby external actors may take advantage of the situation for their geopolitical gains, thus further complicating efforts toward conflict resolution. The crisis has been facilitating a massive flow of arms in this region, which is very dangerous not only for Niger itself but also its neighbors, similar to what happened after the civil unrest in Libya. Smith (2020) emphasizes the role of resource competition in exacerbating conflicts, as it is observed that the pursuit of economic gain may trigger violence. In Niger, competing claims over key resources by various groups raise the potential for armed violence that makes urgent policy action to resolve their root causes all the more imperative. Military crisis in Niger in the light of conflict theory helps to underscore the complex interrelationship between power imbalance and unequal economic distribution through resource competition. Understanding these dynamics is important for policymakers desiring to reduce conflict and prevent arms proliferation. This could be a pathway toward the stabilization of the region, taking lessons

from what happened in Libya by addressing root causes and making a call for fair resource distribution.

Insecurity and Vulnerability to Arms Trafficking

The Niger military coup threatens to deteriorate security conditions and create vulnerabilities exploitable by arms traffickers. Political transitions often coincide with instability enabling criminal exploitation (Williams et al., 2017). Coup leaders in Niger have struggled to establish full control, facing protests and the potential for factionalism given ethnic divisions (Dabiri, 2022). Such instability strengthens non-state actors seeking to profit from arms flows. The insecurity situation provides opportunities for traffickers to transport illicit weapons with fewer impediments. Weakened border controls during unrest allow for increased cross-border movement of goods, including arms bound for militant groups (Small Arms Survey, 2018). Niger shares borders with seven countries i.e Algeria, Republic of Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Lybia, Mali and Nigeria. These countries continuously experiencing instability. Longstanding arms trafficking routes from the lawless Libyan and Nigerian borders risk intensification (Williams, 2016).

Arm traffickers also exploit governance gaps arising from political crises. Coup leaders' priorities lie in consolidating power rather than addressing development issues (Bachir, 2022). Remote border regions experience reduced state presence and oversight during unstable periods. Arm traffickers capitalize on this to discreetly transfer weapons along porous borders (Boas & Torheim, 2013). They develop new smuggling routes that are difficult for under-resourced security forces to monitor (Patriota, 2020). Most African countries are littered with vast ungoverned space that are heaven for terrorism, bandits, organize crime and arms traffickers Weak governance and absence rule of law enables traffickers to operate with impunity. Corruption persists as a challenge in Niger even during stable periods (Transparency International, 2020). Political upheaval risks worsening corruption as oversight decreases. Traffickers can bribe officials to turn a blind eye to arms shipments or fabricate false export documentation (Small Arms Survey, 2018). They establish illicit arms bazaars near borders beyond government control (Bachir, 2022).

Heightened insecurity crises fuel arms demand which encourage arms trafficking. Civilians seek weapons for protection during unrest while non-state actors arm for offensive purposes (Williams et al., 2017). Coup leaders may divert state arms to arm loyalists (Boas & Torheim, 2013). Increased circulation of loose weapons perpetuates cycles of violence and crime that destabilize the region (Kirschner, 2018). Traffickers exploit this demand through weapons supplies. The Niger crisis exacerbates vulnerabilities that traffickers have long exploited in the Sahel. Political instability, falling state, poor governance and porous borders facilitate illicit arms flows which further deteriorate security. There is need for an urgent action to stem these trafficking threats that endanger stability across the region.

Lessons from Libya's Experience

The 2011 Libyan civil war provides stark lessons on the dangers of state collapse and uncontrolled arms proliferation for regional security. As dictator Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year rule ended, the death of Gaddafi created a power vacuum that allowed Libya's arms stockpiles and proliferation networks to wreak havoc across the North and West Africa (Boas & Jennings, 2013). Niger and the wider Sahel region have since then grappled with the destabilizing impacts of Libya's weapons outflows, however, most states in the Sahel has not demonstrated the needed prudent policy to prevent a similar scenario that may emerging from the current Niger crisis. Libya possessed enormous arms reserves as Gaddafi extensively militarized the country (Kirschner, 2018). NATO-backed rebels seized control of these stockpiles but lacked the capacity for oversight as fighting continued (Patriota, 2020). An estimated 150,000 tons of arms went missing including huge quantities of small arms, ammunition and even heavy weapons like surface-to-air missiles (Kirschner, 2018). With borders porous and proliferation networks intact, these weapons began spreading rapidly beyond Libya.

Arms trafficking routes through the Sahel that Gaddafi had turned a blind eye to for profit suddenly faced little obstruction (Williams, 2016). Non-state groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Tuareg separatists armed

heavily from Libyan sources (Boas & Torheim, 2013). This empowered militant capabilities and exacerbated unrest, such as the 2012 Tuareg rebellion in Mali enabled by heavily armed returning fighters (Lacher, 2012). Proliferated arms also strengthened criminal networks like Boko Haram, worsening insecurity across the Lake Chad region (Williams & Alpaslan Ozerdem, 2019). The destabilizing impacts continue being felt years later. Weapons from Libya have been intercepted as far as the Philippines, fueling conflicts globally (Kirschner, 2018). In the Sahel, their widespread availability perpetuates cycles of violence through rampant crime and militancy that challenge governments (Kirschner, 2018). Terrorist attacks rose sharply across the region following the post-2011 arms diffusion (Williams, 2016). Border communities suffer arms-related human costs like violence and displacement on a massive scale (Fabre, 2018).

These consequences demonstrate that containing arms proliferation must be a priority during political crises to prevent conflict regionalization. Had international actors focused on securing Libyan arms depots and intercepting trafficking networks earlier, some impacts could have been mitigated (Patriota, 2020). Instead, short-term security efforts took precedence over longer-term stockpile management (Kirschner, 2018). Valuable lessons show governance, development and arms control must work in parallel from the Niger crisis' outset. The immense destabilization from Libya's uncontrolled arms proliferation underscores the urgent need for proactive policy to contain proliferation risks from Niger's instability. A comprehensive, holistic approach with regional coordination offers the best chance to avert conflict regionalization through cross-border weapons flows.

Impact on Regional Stability

The destabilizing impacts of arms proliferation transcend national borders in West Africa due to regional interconnectivity. Weakened governance in Niger risks enabling spill-over effects as conflicts regionalize through cross-border arms and militant flows (Williams & Alpaslan Ozerdem, 2019). Spikes in violence have occurred when instability in one state empowered non-state groups to access new weapons and recruits (Fabre, 2018). Increased arms availability fuels new conflicts and intensifies existing ones. Mali's 2012 rebellion emerged amid a proliferation-driven "perfect storm" of instability across borders in Libya and Algeria (Lacher, 2012). Armed violence rose across Liptako-Gourma, a tri-border area of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso as militant and criminal networks took hold (Williams, 2016). The proliferation-violence cycle risks worsening as more weapons enter this fragile borderland.

Militant safe havens also threaten to become hubs exporting instability. Conflicts risk crossing borders as groups gain strength from arms and operate across porous frontiers with impunity (Bachir, 2022). Boko Haram expanded its reach from Nigeria into the Lake Chad region with Libyan arms (Williams & Ozerdem, 2019). Al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates have gained footholds in the Sahel exploiting state weaknesses (Hudson, 2019).

Arms Trafficking Networks and Actors

Arms trafficking networks in the Sahel region utilize a diverse array of actors working together in complex and shifting illicit alliances to sustain conflict through weapons proliferation (Small Arms Survey, 2018). Understanding the dynamics between these groups is crucial to developing multi-pronged interventions that can effectively disrupt their activities. Transnational criminal organizations with experience smuggling other contraband play an important facilitating role in arms trafficking operations. As Williams et al. (2017) note, they leverage established transport routes and market connections to move weapons shipments. However, their primary motivation is financial rather than political, distinguishing them from militant factions.

Insurgent groups like Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara directly oversee trafficking to support operational goals. Cherkaoui (2019) explains they derive significant funds through taxes and direct involvement to enrich their organizations and increase arms availability, exacerbating conflict. This allows them to amass resources for attacks while deepening local control. Meanwhile, independent traffickers conduct business for profit, occasionally cooperating or competing with militant networks in pragmatic, shifting illicit alliances (Dabiri, 2022). Small Arms Survey (2018) observes networks leverage remote border areas with limited governance to establish routes. Bachir (2022) notes youth may be drawn

to participate due to lack of socio-economic opportunities.

Complicit officials also play an important facilitating role through corruption or intimidation (Williams et al., 2017). They provide logistical support like falsified documentation and early warnings of patrols in exchange for bribes according to the UNODC (2021). Addressing this complicity is key to containment efforts. Overall, these diverse actors cooperate where interests align despite occasional competition as no one group aims to fully undermine the broader arms trafficking industry (Small Arms Survey, 2018). A nuanced, multi-pronged approach must systematically address factors sustaining diverse network components through targeted security efforts, social and economic programs, and regional cooperation. With committed, long-term action, proliferation threats can be contained.

Preventive Measures and Regional Cooperation

As the complex dynamics sustaining arms proliferation across borders involve factors transcending national boundaries, a cooperative, comprehensive regional approach holds the greatest promise for containment (Bellamy et al., 2010). Information sharing between bodies like ECOWAS and the G5 Sahel must be strengthened to holistically monitor evolving network activities. Targeted intelligence can help coordinate enhanced border security through increased patrols, surveillance technology, and control points along high trafficking routes (Small Arms Survey, 2018). However, these efforts require adequate, sustained funding and training support to effectively monitor remote regions. Developed countries could play an important capacity building role through bilateral partnerships (Bachir, 2022).

Law enforcement actions must disrupt key network components through targeted sanctions and operations against trafficking kingpins (Williams et al., 2017). Regional cooperation is crucial to map illicit financial flows and trace arms shipments across porous borders. Joint investigations can dismantle routes and weaken networks by arresting high-level actors (UNODC, 2021). Yet non-kinetic measures are equally crucial. Alternative livelihood programs must accompany security crackdowns to reduce local incentives for participation (Dabiri, 2022). Development aid can bolster state authority and service provision in under-governed border areas through education, infrastructure and economic opportunities (Williams, 2016). This helps diminish militant influence over vulnerable populations.

Regional arms control regimes also require strengthening, such as harmonizing regulations and training local officials in stockpile management, marking and tracing techniques (Kirschner, 2018). Coordinated DDR initiatives facilitate the reintegration of at-risk youth, reducing recruitment pools (Bellamy et al., 2010). Regional cooperation ensures former combatants do not merely transit borders to continue involvement. A holistic "three D" approach of deterrence, development and dialogue offers the best framework. National ownership and sovereignty must be respected, with international partners playing a supporting role (Bachir, 2022). Only through committed, multifaceted and regionally coordinated action can the complex threats posed by proliferation across porous Sahelian borders be sustainably contained over the long term.

Addressing Root Causes of Insecurity

While security responses are needed, containing arms proliferation demands tackling its underlying drivers of instability. Vast socio-economic disparities, ethnic tensions, and lack of inclusive governance fuel grievances that militant and criminal networks exploit for recruitment across the Sahel (Williams et al., 2017). Niger suffers from widespread poverty, with over 40% of the population living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2020). Remote communities have limited access to basic services, healthcare, education or livelihood opportunities. This breeds discontent that armed non-state actors channel into violence (Dabiri, 2022).

Political systems also face legitimacy challenges. Coups reflect popular frustration with unrepresentative leadership failing to improve lives (Singer, 2022). Marginalized groups question the distribution of power and national resources between ethnicities that do not always coincide with state borders (Bachir, 2022). Militant narratives portray the state as corrupt and oppressive, pushing youth towards radicalization absent counter-messaging (Williams, 2016). Criminal networks similarly prey upon socio-economic vulnerabilities in the

absence of governance (Small Arms Survey, 2018). Lasting stability demands holistic reforms addressing community needs.

International Support and Counterterrorism Cooperation

International cooperation has an indispensable role to play through capacity building and technical assistance (Bellamy et al., 2010). Partners must avoid short-term security fixes and instead commit long-term development support coordinated through bodies like the UN and African Union (Williams, 2016). Targeted counterterrorism initiatives require regional intelligence sharing and operations against high-level militant leaders (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Developed nations can leverage assets like surveillance technology to strengthen border controls if respecting sovereignty (Hudson, 2019).

Coordinated training bolsters the capacities of security forces in stockpile management, investigations, and human rights-compliant operations (Kirschner, 2018). Partnerships with INTERPOL and EUROPOL facilitate tracing illicit arms and disrupting trafficking routes across Africa (Small Arms Survey, 2018). International actors should condition aid to democratic reforms and good governance rather than solely counterterrorism metrics (Williams et al., 2017). Community defense groups require oversight to prevent human rights abuses and radicalization (Bellamy et al., 2010). Holistic development must address unemployment, education and community relations. While security assistance has a role, development must receive sustained, adequate funding prioritized over military responses (Bachir, 2022). Only through coordinated, locally owned efforts applying lessons from Libya and Mali can West Africa build resilience against instability (Patriota, 2020). International support remains pivotal if applied judiciously with African leadership.

Methodology

This research is a critical review of the Niger military crisis and its implications on arms proliferation in the region, drawing lessons from the aftermath of the Libyan civil war. A descriptive analytical framework was adopted to establish linkages between insecurity, arms trafficking, and regional stability. These data were collected from various qualitative sources: newspapers, scholarly articles, and internet publications. This was meant to provide a multi-faceted approach for a detailed look into the crisis in Niger as it unfolds and how it has the potential to contribute to arms proliferation. The tool of content analysis was utilized to analyze the data that was collected on especially root drivers of instability, and implications for security in West Africa.

Discussion on Findings

The results of the study show that the military crisis in Niger contributes significantly to the risks of arms proliferation in the region, with various similarities to the experiences in Libya following the civil war. The research underlines that the present crisis can reinforce terrorism and banditry, which already threaten stability in the region. This analysis therefore points out that while necessary, immediate security responses are imperative for effective containment of arms proliferation, tackling the root causes of instability remains crucial. The study further stresses that vast socioeconomic inequalities, ethnic tensions, and the lack of inclusive governance should be addressed to contribute toward removing those factors of grievance that militant and criminal networks exploit for recruitment across the Sahel. The conclusion of the study called for urgent prevention, regional cooperation, and international support in an effort to reduce risks of arms trafficking in the West African region, and such efforts would spur stability in this region. Basically, addressing the core issues is crucial in providing a robust security framework that would face up to the challenges posed by the crisis at hand.

Conclusion

The Niger military coup threatens to exacerbate insecurity and arms proliferation risks across West Africa's porous borders, as demonstrated by Libya's still unfolding consequences. If left unaddressed, these threats endanger stability through conflict regionalization, rising violence, and militant safe havens. However, the analysis shows lasting solutions lie not in security responses alone, but in tackling the underlying political, economic and social grievances fueling radicalization in Niger and the wider Sahel. Only through addressing needs in marginalized communities and strengthening inclusive governance can state

authority and resilience be built. Preventing unchecked proliferation demands a cooperative, multi-pronged approach respecting national sovereignty. Information sharing, targeted security efforts, and law enforcement actions must work in parallel with socio-economic programming, arms control regimes and development aid bolstering weak border regions. International partners play a supportive role through sustained cooperation, capacity building and funding prioritized over short-term military interventions. Regional bodies like ECOWAS are well-placed to coordinate holistic strategies applying lessons from past crises. If the right preventive measures are taken, with continuous long-term commitment from African nations and the international community, further destabilization of West Africa can potentially be avoided. By comprehensively addressing root instability drivers and containing cross-border arms flows, states like Niger may build stability and counter the cycle of violence facing the Sahel.

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