

West Africa's Coups are Instruments of Western Colonialism

Since the coup in Niger on 26 July 2023, a lot has transpired, throwing up a number of issues, from the anti-colonial and pan-Africanist rhetoric from the coup regimes to ECOWAS intervention and the dissenting views against it. There are also many players involved in the arena; regional players like Nigeria, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea. But the most significant detail is the discourse swirling around foreign countries and the influence they exert on the issue. The primary focus is on France, that has been most vocal in opposition to the coup, followed by the US and Russia.

This indicates that it is truly an international issue not just a regional incident. The world powers have a great interest in how it plays out and this sets the framework of understanding the factors surrounding the events. At the root of it is the great conflict between the Western powers for securing material interests. A historical contextualization will explain the origin of this struggle and its destructive impact on Africa.

Its origin can be traced to the post WW2 period. The European powers were in tatters after the devastation caused by the war; France, recently liberated from Nazi Germany's invasion and four-year occupation was in a dire need of aid and reconstruction. Britain was barely in a better shape. In this destroyed landscape, the United States of America strode onto the world stage displacing Britain as the leading world power, eventually and effectively ending *Pax Britannica*. Prior to this, the US was largely isolationist in its worldview, preferring to let global events move along without interference, only intervening if its interests would be served abroad, like in WW1. After WW2, America shifted towards permanent international engagement, purportedly propelled by 'Manifest Destiny' but more conceivably impelled by the vista of opportunities that opened up before it. America is a capitalist nation like its European cousins. Secular capitalism is an ideology that has material avarice at its core. The impetus that drove Britain and France to colonise the world was the same force that impelled the US to seek to replace them globally. Thus, this required jettisoning them from their global holdings and taking over their colonial assets. America set about this task by promoting the call for independence in European colonies, especially in Africa, and supporting various groups, political or otherwise, to achieve this end. America coupled the call with creative means to accomplish this. Coups were ideal instruments to these ends.

The West has deployed coups repeatedly as instruments of international intervention to attain targeted objectives. The US, which dominates South America through the Monroe Doctrine, has carried out coups 41 times from 1898 – 1994 to install governments favourable to its interests. Largely through its policy of *Françafrique* France has militarily intervened 50 times in Africa alone, since 1960 to maintain its colonial interests. This is the backdrop on which we should view the spate of coups happening in West Africa.

Mali: This coup took place on August 18th, 2020 against President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita who was supported by France. Colonel Qasimi Quetta, presented himself as the head of what he called the "National Council for the Salvation of the People" in Mali. The Mali Transitional Council included military and civilians, an indication the coup was prepared with civil society organisations' cooperation. Then the US envoy to the Sahel

region, John Peter Pham, tweeted after the coup that “A decision on whether to formally describe what happened recently as a coup must be issued after a legal review”, a sign of tacit approval from the US. This is similar to its position regarding Sisi’s July 3rd, 2013 coup in Egypt where the US refrained from labelling it a coup because it was behind it. Whereas, France, the influencing power, was blind with rage over the incident. France’s Foreign Minister at the time, Le Drian said, “France condemns in the strongest terms this dangerous incident”. An ECOWAS delegation meeting expecting to last an hour and a half, only lasted 20 minutes indicating the coup leaders would not be moved. In January 2022, the military regime expelled the French ambassador then followed by a French military mission, Operation Barkhane in August of the same year severely curtailing French influence in the country.

Guinea: When the coup took place against Alpha Conde on September 5th, 2021, the US was furious because he was its agent. It demanded his restoration, condemned the coup and threatened to reduce support for Guinea, demanding adherence to the constitution, the democratic path and the rule of law. France, on the contrary, issued a weak and vague statement after the coup. It did not demand the return of President Conde to power, and did not threaten the coup makers with penalties because Colonel Mamady Doumbouya was its agent. Doumbouya studied at the Paris War School and was in the French Foreign Legion where he served France’s interests in various theatres of conflict. Guinea is the world’s largest producer of bauxite, and it has the world’s largest untapped reserve of iron ore. It is also the seventh-largest miner of gold in Africa and has 30m to 40m carats of diamond reserves. The coup firmly put these vital resources in the hands of France.

Burkina Faso: The quick succession of coups in this country within one year truly highlights the struggle taking place between the Western colonialists in West Africa. After eight months, a coup against a coup took place! The earlier coup of Paul-Henri Damiba on January 24th, 2022 was overturned by that of Captain Ibrahim Traore on September 30th, 2022. Suffice to say, Traore used the same pretext Damiba used for his coup – deteriorating security conditions. Damiba took refuge under French protection and later went into exile in Togo. Traore proceeded to curtail French influence in the country directing the French Sabre task force to vacate their bases in January 2023. This is a similar move by the Mali military regime that expelled the French military mission, Operation Barkhane in August 2022.

Niger: As the latest in the series of coups, the foreign instigators behind this episode remain obscure at the time of writing. What is evident is the continued level of sustained interference in the region by foreign powers chasing colonial interests. The visit by Victoria Nuland, US acting deputy secretary of state, to the junta is a case in point. Nuland is experienced in bending countries to America’s will. She was entangled in the Ukrainian issue in 2014 as America vied with both the EU and with Russia for influence in the country. She is famous for using a rather crude expletive to describe the Europeans who were hampering the US. Her presence so early in Niger may indicate the importance the US attaches to this latest coup.

Russia: Despite the open support for Russia in some quarters where the coups took place like Mali and Burkina Faso, welcoming the Wagner Group – in some cases replacing expelled French troops – this does not indicate Russia has an independent

influential role as that of France or America. Russia makes its presence felt in the region through the Wagner Group that recently exposed the weakness of Putin domestically with an open rebellion. Since the Mali coup is firmly under US auspices, the entry of Wagner into Mali can only be construed with permission from the US. This is the case with Wagner/Russia in Syria and Libya because Russia in Mali agrees to diligently serve American interests.

The Way Forward for Africa

Africans calling for a restoration of democracy in West Africa must understand the powers that are behind these coups only view democracy as a flexible tool, resorted to only when it aligns with their interests. From the colonialist's perspective, democracy is no different from a coup; they are two sides of the same coin. This is evident from the conflicting French and US positions and the support they give their agents in the West African series of coups and counter-coups.

The scramble for Africa's mineral and resource riches by the colonialist West is ancient and the struggle and the clashes amongst them is just as old. The competition between Britain's George Goldie's Royal Niger Company and France's Commandant Mattei of the *Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Equatoriale* in 1882 heralded the bitter contests for territory between the colonial British and French governments that continued well into the middle of the 20th Century. Democracy only became a facet of the struggle in the 1950's when the US vied with Britain and France for influence over Africa's fortunes.

Their fights and struggles will continue unabated as long as there are resources for them to plunder and as long as there is no force to deter them from doing so.

America's fierce competition with Europe in Africa, which recently saw it clashing with the French repeatedly, is aimed at extending its political influence to further plunder the continent's resources with ease. The progress of African countries is never a real consideration for the colonialists. The ruse of spreading democracy and its values are ostentatious supplements to assert their cultural presence to enable the infiltration of society. Where this does not yield ample results, it is shelved and force is deployed – as is the case in the last few years.

The surge of coups in Africa is not a regional but an international conflict that will continue to rage. Africa's lack of a single, ideological purpose that drives towards progress is the primary cause behind its vulnerability. The Khilafah (Caliphate) is an ideological state based on the Revelation of Allah (swt) that will end the hegemony of colonialists all over the world. Unlike colonialism, the spread of Islam comes with infinite mercy, as witnessed by its history. ﴿وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَفْرَحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ * بِنَصْرِ اللَّهِ يَتَّصِرُ مَنْ يُشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

“And that day the believers will rejoice * In the victory of Allah. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful” [Ar-Rum: 4-5].

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Salim Mohammad