



## WEBINAR SPEAKERS' NOTES

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### Exploring the Interface Between Coups, Violent Extremism and Poor Governance in the Sahel

Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa (SIGLA, Stellenbosch University)

&

Center for Gender and African Studies (CGAS, University of the Free State)

Date: 26 January 2023 Time: 14:00 – 16:30 GMT+2 Platform: MSTEAMS

#### SPEAKER'S NOTES

Prof K. Aning Kofi - KAIPTC

**Abstract:** A critical discursive question that needs to be explored relates to the possible interconnections between poor governance, violent extremism, and the resurgence of coups d'état in the Sahel. These challenges are not only present in the Sahel, but there is a disconcerting continuous downward instability towards the coastal states of West Africa. An arc of ever-increasing instability and challenges to state authority not experienced since the 1990s is occurring in these regions. In this discussion, I focus my attention on the resurgence of and continuing upheavals in coastal states of West Africa and the Sahel and locate my arguments on four key issues; (a) the nature of the challenge; (b) underlying and mutating factors contributing to coupism; (c) possible wider geostrategic implication with the new emerging coups; and (d) ECOWAS, norm development and compliance. I conclude my discussion by making some informed suggestions about the stability of these states in the coming months in 2023.



**Prof A. Esterhuysen - Stell Univ**

**Abstract.** Coup d'états, and attempted coup d'états, seem to be on the rise in West Africa and the Sahel regions of Africa. In 2021, there were six coup attempts in Africa, four of them successful. 2022 saw two military takeovers in Burkina Faso and failed coup attempts in Guinea Bissau, Gambia and the island nation of São Tomé and Príncipe. Overall, and from a broader perspective, Africa has experienced more coups than any other continent. Yet, the overall number of coup attempts in Africa remained remarkably consistent at an average of around four a year in the four decades between 1960 and 2000. The Sahel region, in particular, is more prone to coups than any other region in Africa. How should these military takeovers be understood; how can it be explained? Moreover, how should Africa and the world in general respond to these trends. The discussion will attempt to highlight a number of key variables in considering these questions.

**Prof D. Kotze - UNISA**

**Abstract.** French and Arabic speaking states together with the Muslim faith hold real or lingering fault lines. In addition, the theocratic state model challenges the model of a centralized and secular state. The protection of the state remains the military's responsibility and a matter heeded as a general principle by international actors. In this mix, French security practices are more focused on military, semi-military (gendarme) traditions than civil policing. The military and militarized police are therefore used for domestic security and not primarily or exclusively for transnational purposes. Strong presidentialism, weak parliaments and weak political parties don't provide political alternatives for unpopular governments while the military is often regarded as a state institution with most capacity.

**Prof T. Murithi - Stell Univ, UFS & IJR**

**Abstract.** The resurgence of coups as a response to violent extremism is a consequence of unethical and predatory governance, that privileges and perpetuates the legacy of private accumulation of post-colonial political and business elites. Since 2020, there has been a spate of military coups and attempted military take-overs. This suggests that the continent is at a tipping point and requires urgent peacebuilding interventions to mitigate and prevent this scourge of incipient coups. At the core of these military-driven uprisings is the failure of governance systems to function in the interests of their citizens. Specifically, this relates to the failure of governance to deliver basic services health, education, housing, infrastructure to enable local communities to activate and leverage their entrepreneurial and industrial abilities to improve their livelihoods. The instrumentalization of identity politics and the politicization of religious dogma for the purposes of the pursuit of state power is an anathema to the trend across the continent. At a fundamental level the arduous challenge of operationalizing peacebuilding interventions to



surface the underlying causes and drivers of discontent in these countries needs to be amplified at the regional, national, and communal levels. In addition, the recurrence of violent conflict in several African countries points to the need for deeper processes of societal transformation. Ultimately, peacebuilding interventions can only succeed if they are localized and driven at the communal level, with national and regional actors providing the necessary policy and resource support. The African continent can turn the tide of military coups and push-back against the scourge of violent extremism if all citizens and stakeholders recommit towards sustaining carefully designed and implemented peacebuilding interventions.

**Prof S. Geller - Indiana Univ**

**Abstract.** After peaceful transitions from colonial rule to independence, all Sahelian states except for Senegal experienced military coups. In most cases, heads of the coup established authoritarian “civilian” regimes marked by political repression, declining legitimacy, and poor governance characterized by corruption, cronyism, incompetence, lack of accountability and impunity from justice which eventually led to their demise. Despite common traits of military coups, it is important to note the diversity of causes, degree of popular and external support for, and outcomes of military coups and differences in dealing with insurgencies and civil war. Some examples. The 1983 coup led by Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso was highly popular and led to major reforms. A 1991 military coup in Mali ousted Moussa Traoré through a military coup and restored civilian rule. France often supported military coups

**Prof H. Solomon - CGAS UFS & SIGLA Stell Univ**

**Abstract:** Poor and malevolent governance lies at the heart of the current crisis plaguing the Sahel states. It denies governments legitimacy, hollows out state structures, results in the marginalization of certain groups and fuels rebellions, insurgencies and extremism. The ouster of civilian political leadership, as inept and often corrupt they are, will only serve to delegitimize the state further whilst the military juntas often in power have scarcely been able to defeat militant insurgents despite this often being their stated aim. Meanwhile, neither ECOWAS nor the AU have been able to decisively respond to the challenges posed whilst the plethora of international players has merely served to reinforce regime security at the expense of human security.

**Prof T. Mandrup - RDDC Denmark & SIGLA, Stell Univ**

**Abstract:** The armed forces in West African have once again become a visible factor in politics. The number of military and unconstitutional changes of governments in West Africa has been on the rise in recent years and once again highlighted a problematic civil-military relationship in several West African states. The coups speak to the lack of entrenched democratic values, healthy civilian control, and oversight over the armed forces. However, the coup makers, the military



leaders, increasingly refer to previous military leaders like Thomas Sankara and argue that the recent series of coups should be seen as an attempt to reform and change the societies that have been corrupted and controlled by narrow elites. From this point of view, the coups could be seen as a part of a democratization process, albeit a periodical but needed step back, where the military takeovers are a way to remove and change existing power structures and open up the possibility for real democracy to be introduced. This paper will scrutinize the role and objective of the armed forces in these recent coups in the Sahel and ask to what extent the coups should be seen as a reformist move, part of democratization, or part of a reactionary tendency of rolling back and resisting democratic reforms.

**Dr G. Segell - Haifa Univ**

**Abstract:** Amid the deteriorating military and humanitarian situation on the ground in the Sahel, there are also rising political tensions outside the region. The Big Questions that this paper will pose for example are what if anything will individual states such as Germany and France decide on their future military deployments and stabilization operations in the Sahel? With other external state powers like Russia and China reportedly moving in and with an increase in Islamic Fundamentalist franchises satellite to Middle East movements, can the European Union, the United Nations and even NATO really afford not to become more involved in the future stability of the Sahel? For all of these they have analyzed and stated repeatedly that the Sahel is not isolated from the world and what happens there has direct significance for European and Global security – especially that of North Africa that is also the Southern Mediterranean – notably in migration. This paper will give some insights into developments on the ground, and how other states, the European Union, the United Nations and NATO are looking to future engagement in the Sahel.

**Ms S. Madonsella - UNISA**

**Abstract:** Contemporary research on environmental degradation has sparked great interest in the contribution of climate change to violent conflict. It is acknowledged that climate change exacerbates socioeconomic tensions such as weak governance, poverty, injustice, social insecurity, and violence. Perhaps this can be seen nowhere more so than in the Sahel region where climate change is evinced in greater desertification- fueling conflicts between pastoralists and herders. This conflict often takes on an ethnic and religious dimension which is compounded by exclusionary state policies in countries like Mali. Tired of the notable failures of their political leadership in their countries, soldiers seize power only to find that governance is more complex than they envisaged.

