MEDIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: PRESIDENT TINUBU'S APPROACH TO ECOWAS CRISES

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Abstract
West Africa continues to grapple with persistent political instability, characterized by military coups, insurgencies, and governance challenges. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has historically intervened through diplomacy, sanctions, and military actions to restore constitutional order. Since assuming the ECOWAS chairmanship in 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has played a central role in conflict resolution, particularly in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. His approach, blending diplomatic engagement, economic sanctions, and the threat of military intervention, has sparked both support and resistance across the region. This study examines the effectiveness of President Tinubu's mediation strategies in addressing ECOWAS crises. Employing a qualitative research approach, it relies on secondary data sources, including ECOWAS communiqués, policy documents, and expert analyses. The research is grounded in the regional security complex theory, which explains how security dynamics in one West African state affect the entire region. Findings reveal that while Tinubu's diplomatic efforts have facilitated dialogue, his firm stance on military intervention has generated significant controversy and resistance among some member states. The study underscores the need for ECOWAS to refine its conflict resolution mechanisms by adopting a more inclusive and sustainable approach. It concludes that lasting peace in the region requires a balanced strategy that integrates political dialogue, economic incentives, and security assistance. The study recommends that ECOWAS prioritize multilateral engagement, enhance its early warning systems, and promote regional stability through long-term governance reforms and economic development initiatives.
Keywords: Mediation, Conflict Resolution, Crisis, Conciliation, Arbitration

Introduction
West Africa has faced a growing wave of political instability in recent years, marked by unconstitutional government changes, civil unrest, and the rise of violent extremism[1]. Between 2020 and 2023, several countries, including Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger, experienced military coups that led to significant democratic setbacks and governance crises[2]. These disruptions have not only threatened national stability but have also posed serious challenges to regional peace and security.

As the principal regional organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has historically played a crucial role in managing such crises through diplomatic engagement, economic sanctions, and, when necessary, military intervention[3]. Its responses have varied, depending on the severity of the situation, but the objective has consistently been the restoration of constitutional order and the preservation of regional stability.

Upon assuming the chairmanship of ECOWAS in July 2023, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu inherited a region grappling with deep political uncertainty. His tenure has been defined by a strategic mix of diplomatic mediation, economic sanctions, and, in some cases, the consideration of military intervention, most notably in Niger[4]. His leadership has sparked debates over the effectiveness and implications of ECOWAS's crisis management strategies under his watch.

This article critically assesses President Tinubu's approach to handling ECOWAS crises, evaluating both its achievements and shortcomings while exploring potential future directions for regional conflict resolution.

Conceptual Clarifications

In the realm of international relations, mediation, conflict resolution, crises, conciliation, and arbitration represent distinct but interconnected concepts used to manage and resolve disputes. These terms often overlap in practice, yet each has its own particular function and significance in the broader process of peacemaking and diplomacy. Understanding these concepts is crucial for grasping how political actors, such as state leaders, diplomats, and international organizations, navigate and address conflict. Below is a nuanced exploration of each term, highlighting their differences and interrelations.

Mediation:

Mediation is a process in which a neutral third party assists two or more conflicting parties in reaching an agreement[5]. Unlike arbitration, where the third party imposes a decision, mediation is non-binding and relies on facilitating communication and building understanding between the parties involved. The mediator does not take sides but works to help the parties explore solutions that are mutually acceptable. This makes mediation a preferred tool in many international conflicts, especially in sensitive political situations. It provides the parties with an opportunity to air grievances and discuss potential compromises without the pressure of having to accept a third-party decision. In ECOWAS's approach to crises in West Africa, mediation has been used to great effect in countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, where military coups and political instability have threatened regional peace[6]. The goal is to create a space where both sides can negotiate terms that restore stability without the need for violence.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is a broader and more comprehensive concept than mediation. While mediation is typically a dialogue-oriented process, conflict resolution encompasses a variety of methods and strategies aimed at addressing the underlying causes of a conflict, rather than merely alleviating its symptoms[7]. Conflict resolution is concerned with not only ending the immediate hostilities but also fostering long-term peace and reconciliation. This approach often involves a mix of diplomatic engagement, economic aid, governance reforms, and, in some cases, military intervention. The ultimate goal of conflict resolution is to transform the relationships and structures that sustain the conflict, creating a more sustainable peace through cooperative agreements and systemic changes.

In the context of West Africa, the ECOWAS framework for conflict resolution includes mediation, peacekeeping missions, sanctions, and reconstruction efforts to tackle the multifaceted nature of crises. ECOWAS has used these strategies to address complex situations such as the Liberian Civil War and the Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, where a combination of military intervention, economic diplomacy, and political negotiation was essential to bring about lasting peace. In the words of Zartman (2008), conflict resolution is not only about stopping the violence but also about addressing the "root causes" of conflict, such as inequality, poor governance, and ethnic tension[8].

Crisis:

A crisis represents a critical and urgent point in the life of a conflict, often marked by heightened tensions, the breakdown of normal diplomatic channels, and an immediate threat to peace and stability[9]. Crises are typically characterized by escalating violence, humanitarian emergencies, and political instability, requiring swift intervention from local and international actors. The word "crisis" suggests an emergency situation that may demand urgent decision-making and action. Crises can arise from a variety of issues, including political upheaval, economic collapse, social unrest, and military conflict. In many cases, crises can quickly escalate into more severe conflicts if not addressed immediately.

International organizations, such as ECOWAS, are often the first responders in such situations, employing a combination of diplomatic efforts, economic sanctions, and peacekeeping forces to mitigate the damage and restore order. For instance, the 2017 political crisis in The Gambia required swift mediation from ECOWAS to ensure the peaceful departure of then-president Yahya Jammeh, averting a full-scale military conflict. In this case, the crisis was defused through diplomatic engagement, peacekeeping operations, and a commitment to constitutional order.

Conciliation:
Conciliation is a process aimed at rebuilding trust and facilitating cooperation between disputing parties, typically after the conflict has escalated and relations have deteriorated[10]. Unlike mediation, which involves a neutral third party assisting in negotiations, conciliation focuses on healing relationships and re-establishing communication. Conciliation may include activities such as fact-finding missions, suggesting non-binding recommendations, and creating a platform for continued dialogue. The primary goal of conciliation is to re-establish a positive dialogue and rebuild relationships, making it an important tool in post-conflict peacebuilding.

For example, ECOWAS's role in The Gambia also involved elements of conciliation, where the organization worked with both the departing government and opposition groups to rebuild trust and ensure that the political transition was peaceful and democratic. In this way, conciliation plays a significant role in post-crisis settings, helping societies transition from hostility to cooperation.

Arbitration:
Arbitration differs from mediation and conciliation in that it involves a third-party arbitrator making a binding decision on the dispute[11]. Arbitration is often used in situations where the parties cannot agree on a resolution through direct negotiation or mediation. The arbitrator's decision is final and legally enforceable, meaning that the parties must adhere to the terms set out by the arbitrator. This process is generally quicker and more structured than mediation and is often employed in legal or commercial disputes where clear-cut decisions are needed.

In the international context, arbitration can be used in border disputes, trade disagreements, or territorial conflicts between states. One notable example of international arbitration is the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which handles disputes between sovereign states and provides binding rulings. Arbitration is particularly useful in cases where the parties involved are unwilling to negotiate directly or require a third party to impose a resolution to move forward. However, the enforceability of arbitration decisions can sometimes be a challenge, particularly in cases where states are resistant to external interventions.

Therefore, mediation, conflict resolution, crises, conciliation, and arbitration are all vital tools in the arsenal of diplomacy and international relations. While each concept has distinct characteristics, they often work in tandem to address different aspects of conflict. Mediation and conciliation focus on facilitating dialogue and restoring trust, conflict resolution aims at tackling the root causes of conflict, crises demand urgent intervention to prevent escalation, and arbitration provides binding decisions to ensure compliance.

Theoretical Framework
The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the intricate security dynamics that shape international and regional interactions, particularly in regions like West Africa. This theory, developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, focuses on how security concerns within a particular region are often linked together, such that the security of one state in the region is inextricably connected to the security of its neighbors[12]. In the context of President Tinubu's approach to ECOWAS crises, RSCT offers valuable insights into how regional security challenges in West Africa are managed, emphasizing the interdependence of states and the role of regional organizations like ECOWAS in conflict resolution and peacekeeping.

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)
The concept of a security complex refers to a group of states whose security concerns are so interdependent that the security of each state is tied to the security of others in the region. According to Buzan and Wæver, these security complexes are defined by regional patterns of conflict and cooperation that cannot be fully understood through the lens of individual states alone. Instead, the security of each state is linked to the security of others, forming a complex web of security interdependence. RSCT highlights that in regions where there is significant political, economic, and social proximity—such as West Africa—the nature of security threats often transcends national borders and requires collective action for effective resolution[13].

In West Africa, security challenges such as military coups, civil wars, terrorism, and ethnic violence are not isolated incidents but are interwoven into the fabric of the region's broader security environment. This interconnectedness makes ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) a crucial actor in addressing these crises. Under the

leadership of President Bola Tinubu, ECOWAS has employed mediation and conflict resolution strategies aimed at managing these shared security concerns, emphasizing the importance of regional cooperation and security guarantees.

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) was developed primarily by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, who argued that security issues within a region should not be examined in isolation. Instead, they proposed that security complexes are formed by interactions between neighboring states, which influence each other's security policies and strategies. Buzan's work highlights the role of regional actors and regional organizations in managing collective security within these complexes. According to Buzan, regional security is a process of shared security threats and responses, where the actions of one state in the complex can ripple across borders, affecting neighboring states[14].

In the case of West Africa, Buzan's model is particularly useful in understanding how ECOWAS functions as a regional security organization. ECOWAS has historically been involved in various peacekeeping and mediation efforts, from the Liberian Civil War to the Crisis in Mali, where it has acted as a mediator and peacekeeper in response to military coups, insurgencies, and civil unrest. Under the leadership of President Tinubu, ECOWAS has continued this tradition, striving to address the root causes of conflict and ensuring stability in the region through diplomatic interventions and the establishment of security protocols among member states.

President Tinubu's approach to ECOWAS crises reflects a strategic understanding of regional security dynamics. His leadership has seen ECOWAS take a more active role in managing crises, particularly in situations of political instability caused by military coups and unconstitutional changes in government. Tinubu has emphasized the importance of collaborative diplomacy and multilateral efforts in conflict resolution, aligning with the regional security complex framework that underscores the interdependence of states within the region[15].

In addressing the military coup in Niger (2023), for example, President Tinubu, as Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, employed mediation efforts in conjunction with economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure to encourage a peaceful transition of power. His leadership demonstrated a commitment to using dialogue and negotiation as key tools in ECOWAS's toolkit for conflict resolution, echoing Buzan and Wæver's emphasis on regional cooperation and security[16].

Tinubu's approach can also be understood through the lens of "security community", a concept central to RSCT, which refers to a region where states develop a mutual understanding and commitment to resolving conflicts peacefully. This is evident in ECOWAS's ongoing efforts to create a security architecture that not only addresses immediate crises but also promotes long-term stability through governance reforms, democratic transitions, and economic development initiatives. By fostering trust and cooperation among West African nations, ECOWAS, under Tinubu's leadership, is strengthening the region's capacity to manage security threats collectively[17].

The regional security complex in West Africa is characterized by a unique set of dynamics where states face common security challenges, yet have different capacities and interests in resolving those challenges. This diversity is reflected in ECOWAS's approach to crisis management, where the organization acts as both a mediator and peacekeeper in resolving conflicts. The success of ECOWAS in navigating these crises—such as the Nigerien Coup, Burkina Faso's insurgency, and Guinea's political turmoil—lies in its ability to harness the collective efforts of its member states while maintaining a neutral stance in the mediation process[18].

In line with RSCT, Tinubu's leadership within ECOWAS has reinforced the idea that regional security is a shared responsibility. By prioritizing diplomacy and cooperation over unilateral action, Tinubu is ensuring that West African states are united in their response to crises, recognizing that the stability of one nation impacts the stability of the entire region. This reflects the interdependent nature of the West African security complex, where the actions of one state, particularly in times of crisis, can have significant implications for neighboring states and the region as a whole[19].

Therefore, the Regional Security Complex Theory offers a robust theoretical framework for understanding President Tinubu's approach to managing ECOWAS crises. By emphasizing the interdependence of states within the region, RSCT helps explain how regional security is addressed through multilateral efforts, mediation, and collective action. Tinubu's leadership within ECOWAS underscores the importance of diplomatic engagement and peacebuilding in

resolving conflicts and promoting stability. As the West African security complex continues to evolve, ECOWAS, under Tinubu's guidance, remains a key actor in shaping the region's response to crises and fostering long-term peace.

The Role of ECOWAS in Regional Mediation and Conflict Resolution: A Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) Perspective

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 with the primary goal of promoting economic integration among its 15 member states. However, by the late 1980s, the organization recognized that economic development could not be sustained in an environment of political instability and armed conflict. The civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which erupted during this period, underscored the need for ECOWAS to expand its mandate to include peacekeeping and conflict resolution[20]. This shift aligns with the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which emphasizes that security issues within a region are interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation.

The formation of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990 marked the organization's first direct military intervention in regional conflicts[21]. The deployment of ECOMOG to Liberia set a precedent for ECOWAS's future role in regional security, demonstrating that African states could take the lead in resolving conflicts that international organizations, such as the United Nations, were either unwilling or too slow to address. From an RSCT perspective, West Africa functions as a regional security complex, where instability in one state often spills over into others, necessitating coordinated regional responses. The ongoing crises in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and the broader Sahel region illustrate this interdependence, making it imperative for ECOWAS to play an active role in mediation and conflict resolution.

Since its first intervention, ECOWAS has refined its approach to conflict resolution, adopting a three-pronged strategy consisting of diplomacy, economic sanctions, and peacekeeping missions[22]. Each of these methods aligns with RSCT's key assumptions. Diplomatic efforts serve as a tool for mediating disputes that have regional implications, economic sanctions act as a preventive mechanism to deter actions that may escalate into full-blown conflicts, and peacekeeping missions underscore the necessity of regional security governance, ensuring that local actors take responsibility for maintaining stability within their geopolitical space.

ECOWAS's conflict resolution efforts are guided by several legal instruments that provide the foundation for its interventions. The 1999 Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security[23] outlines the principles for ECOWAS's involvement in member states, establishing clear conditions for deploying peacekeeping forces or engaging in mediation. This framework institutionalizes the regionalization of security, a key concept in RSCT, where responsibility for maintaining order rests primarily with local actors rather than external powers. The 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance[24] further strengthens ECOWAS's role by prohibiting unconstitutional changes of government and outlining procedures for restoring democracy. This legal framework has justified ECOWAS's interventions in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger under President Tinubu's leadership, reflecting the interconnected nature of political stability and security across the region.

From an RSCT perspective, ECOWAS's interventions are not isolated responses but part of a broader regional security dynamic. The military coups in Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) were not merely domestic political crises; they were symptoms of a larger pattern of instability that posed direct risks to neighboring states. The theory explains such patterns through the concept of security interdependence, where instability in one country can quickly spread to others, creating a chain reaction that threatens regional peace.

RSCT, developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, provides a useful framework for understanding why ECOWAS has taken on a security role alongside its economic mandate. According to the theory, regions like West Africa form security complexes due to shared historical, economic, and political ties. These connections shape patterns of amity and enmity, influencing how states interact in matters of security. The interventionist role of ECOWAS in conflicts across West Africa reflects these regional security dynamics, as alliances and rivalries among member states determine their willingness to support or resist collective security initiatives.

One of the core arguments of RSCT is that security challenges within a region are best managed by regional actors rather than external powers. ECOWAS's leadership in deploying peacekeeping forces, imposing sanctions on

unconstitutional regimes, and mediating conflicts aligns with this principle. The limited success of international interventions, such as the UN's missions in Mali and the Central African Republic, further underscores the importance of regionally led security mechanisms. While global actors like the United Nations and the European Union play supportive roles, ECOWAS remains the primary security guarantor in West Africa, reflecting RSCT's assertion that regional organizations are best suited to handle their own security affairs.

Another key aspect of RSCT is the global-regional security nexus, which acknowledges that while security is primarily managed at the regional level, external influences still shape outcomes. ECOWAS's partnerships with organizations such as the African Union, the UN, and the European Union demonstrate this interaction between regional and global security governance. For example, ECOWAS has worked alongside France in counterterrorism operations in the Sahel and has aligned its peacekeeping missions with UN mandates in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. This layered security governance model highlights how regional and international actors collaborate while maintaining distinct spheres of influence.

Therefore, the evolution of ECOWAS from an economic bloc to a regional security actor is a direct response to the security interdependence among its member states, as explained by Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). The legal and institutional frameworks governing ECOWAS's conflict resolution efforts, along with its proactive role in mediation and peacekeeping, illustrate how security within the region is interconnected. The organization's responses to recent crises in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger under President Tinubu's leadership further reinforce the idea that instability in one country threatens the collective stability of the region.

Through the RSCT lens, it becomes clear that West Africa remains a highly integrated security complex, where governance challenges, state fragility, and transnational threats demand sustained regional cooperation. As ECOWAS continues to refine its conflict resolution mechanisms, RSCT provides a valuable perspective for understanding why regional mediation is not just necessary but essential for the long-term stability of West Africa.

President Tinubu's Approach to ECOWAS Crises:
President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's leadership in ECOWAS has been marked by a proactive and assertive approach to addressing regional instability, particularly the rise of military coups and governance crises in West Africa. His strategies—ranging from diplomatic engagements and economic sanctions to the controversial threat of military intervention—reflect the interconnected nature of security challenges in the region. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides a useful framework for analyzing these strategies, as it emphasizes that security threats within a region are deeply interlinked, requiring coordinated responses by regional actors.

Diplomatic Engagements and Negotiation Strategies
A key aspect of President Tinubu's mediation strategy has been diplomatic engagement with military juntas, recognizing that direct confrontation alone cannot resolve the governance crises in West Africa. His administration has facilitated several ECOWAS summits aimed at negotiating political transitions with coup leaders[25]. For instance, in Mali, Tinubu played a crucial role in fostering dialogue between ECOWAS and the ruling junta to establish a clear transition timeline[26].

From an RSCT perspective, this diplomatic approach aligns with the idea that security within a regional security complex is best managed by local actors who understand the historical, political, and economic dynamics at play. Mali's coup, like those in Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger, was not an isolated event but part of a broader pattern of political instability in the region. As RSCT posits, security concerns in one country inevitably spill over into neighboring states, necessitating a regionally coordinated response. Tinubu's diplomatic engagements reflect an awareness that resolving governance crises through negotiations rather than force can help prevent further destabilization across the region.

Economic Sanctions as a Conflict Resolution Tool
Beyond diplomacy, Tinubu's administration has utilized economic sanctions as a pressure mechanism to compel military rulers to restore democratic governance[27]. Under his leadership, ECOWAS has implemented a series of restrictive measures, including[28]:

The freezing of state assets in regional financial institutions.
Travel bans on coup leaders and their associates.
Suspension of trade and financial transactions.

These measures align with RSCT's principle that regional actors have both the capacity and responsibility to manage security crises within their complex. By restricting access to financial resources and imposing trade embargoes, ECOWAS, under Tinubu, has aimed to create internal pressure on coup regimes, pushing them toward negotiated political transitions. However, RSCT also highlights the unintended consequences of such actions. While economic sanctions are designed to weaken military juntas, they often exacerbate economic hardships for ordinary citizens[29]. This, in turn, can generate popular resentment against ECOWAS rather than the ruling juntas, potentially fueling further instability. The effectiveness of economic sanctions, therefore, remains a contested issue within the broader framework of regional security governance.

The Threat of Military Intervention in Niger
Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Tinubu's approach has been his strong stance on military intervention in Niger following the July 2023 coup that deposed President Mohamed Bazoum. Under Tinubu's directive, ECOWAS issued an ultimatum demanding the restoration of civilian rule[30]. The organization threatened military intervention if the junta refused to comply[31].

This approach can be understood through the security interdependence lens of RSCT, which explains how instability in one state can quickly escalate into a wider regional crisis. The coup in Niger posed not just a national governance issue but a broader security dilemma for West Africa. The presence of Islamist militant groups in the Sahel, growing geopolitical competition in the region, and the risk of further democratic reversals made it imperative for ECOWAS to respond decisively.

However, Tinubu's military intervention stance faced internal resistance from key ECOWAS member states, particularly Mali and Burkina Faso, which had also experienced military takeovers and viewed any intervention as external interference[32]. RSCT helps explain this opposition by highlighting the role of regional rivalries and alliances in shaping security policies. In a complex like West Africa, states often align based on their shared security perceptions, meaning that military-led governments in Mali and Burkina Faso naturally opposed ECOWAS's interventionist approach, fearing similar actions against their regimes. This underscores a key RSCT principle: security policies are not just about addressing threats but also about navigating the regional political landscape.

Regional and International Partnerships in Conflict Resolution
Recognizing that regional security challenges often require external support, Tinubu has actively sought partnerships with international actors, including the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), and the European Union (EU), to strengthen ECOWAS's conflict resolution mechanisms[33]. These partnerships have provided[34]:

Diplomatic backing for ECOWAS resolutions.
Financial assistance to support peacekeeping and mediation efforts.
Logistical support for monitoring political transitions.
From an RSCT perspective, this engagement illustrates the global-regional security nexus, where regional security governance does not operate in isolation but interacts with broader international security frameworks. While RSCT argues that regional actors should lead security interventions, it acknowledges that global powers and institutions still play a role in shaping regional security outcomes. Tinubu's approach reflects this balance—ECOWAS remains the primary actor in resolving West African conflicts, but international support enhances its capacity to act effectively.

President Tinubu's leadership in addressing ECOWAS crises has been shaped by a mix of diplomacy, economic sanctions, military threats, and international partnerships. Viewed through the lens of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), his strategies highlight the interconnected nature of West Africa's security dynamics. His diplomatic engagements acknowledge the reality that conflicts in one state have ripple effects across the region, making negotiation essential. His use of economic sanctions reflects an inward-focused security strategy, leveraging regional financial instruments to influence governance outcomes. However, the resistance to military intervention in Niger

reveals the political complexity of regional security governance, where different states have competing interests and threat perceptions.

Therefore, Tinubu's outreach to international partners demonstrates the blending of regional and global security frameworks, reinforcing RSCT's argument that while regions take the lead in managing their own security, external actors remain strategic enablers. As ECOWAS continues to navigate security challenges under Tinubu's leadership, RSCT provides a valuable analytical tool for understanding why West Africa's stability depends on a delicate balance of regional coordination, strategic pressure, and diplomatic engagement.

Challenges in Tinubu's Mediation Approach: A Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) Perspective

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's mediation efforts within ECOWAS have encountered significant challenges, reflecting the complexities of regional security governance in West Africa. These challenges—ranging from the resistance of military juntas to internal divisions within ECOWAS—underscore the interconnected nature of security threats in the region, as conceptualized by Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). RSCT highlights that security concerns in a region are deeply linked, making cooperative responses necessary while also acknowledging that regional actors may have divergent security interests. Tinubu's approach has been shaped by these dynamics, as ECOWAS struggles to balance its commitment to democratic governance with the realities of regional power politics.

Resistance from Military Juntas

One of the most persistent obstacles to Tinubu's mediation efforts has been the reluctance of military leaders in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso to comply with ECOWAS directives[35]. These regimes perceive ECOWAS's interventions—particularly demands for early elections and the restoration of civilian rule—as external interference, prompting them to resist regional pressure.

From an RSCT perspective, this resistance reflects the idea that regional security governance is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The juntas in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso do not see themselves merely as domestic actors but as part of a broader security bloc with shared interests. Their defiance of ECOWAS sanctions and directives is partly driven by regional security interdependence—they recognize that if one regime collapses under ECOWAS pressure, others could follow. This perception has reinforced solidarity among military-led governments, complicating Tinubu's efforts to enforce democratic norms.

Moreover, these states have redefined their security alignments, viewing ECOWAS's democratic principles as a threat rather than a safeguard. The military regimes have increasingly sought alternative security partnerships, moving closer to Russia and Wagner Group mercenaries, which has weakened ECOWAS's leverage and reduced its ability to enforce compliance. This shift illustrates how regional security complexes are dynamic and subject to external influences, reinforcing RSCT's argument that regional conflicts are shaped by both internal and external actors.

The Limitations of Economic Sanctions

Economic sanctions have been a central component of Tinubu's conflict resolution strategy, aimed at isolating military juntas and pressuring them toward democratic transitions. However, while these sanctions have imposed financial constraints on military regimes, they have also led to unintended economic hardships for ordinary citizens, rather than significantly affecting the ruling elite. This has fueled public resentment against ECOWAS, weakening its credibility as a regional body.

RSCT helps explain why economic sanctions in regional security complexes often produce mixed results. In highly interdependent regional security complexes like West Africa, economic pressure does not operate in isolation—it has ripple effects across multiple states. For example, trade restrictions on Niger following the July 2023 coup had economic consequences for neighboring countries that rely on cross-border trade. These unintended effects have led to growing skepticism among West African populations about ECOWAS's approach, with many arguing for more targeted sanctions that directly affect coup leaders rather than entire populations.

Additionally, RSCT highlights that regional actors do not operate in isolation from global power structures. As ECOWAS has enforced economic sanctions, military-led governments have sought alternative economic partnerships, particularly with Russia and China, which have provided financial and security support. This undermines the

effectiveness of ECOWAS's sanctions, as juntas can bypass regional financial systems, reducing their economic vulnerability.

Internal Divisions within ECOWAS

One of the most significant challenges to Tinubu's mediation efforts has been internal divisions within ECOWAS itself. While ECOWAS operates as a regional security complex, it is not a monolithic entity—member states have different political interests, foreign policy orientations, and security priorities.

Under RSCT, these divisions can be understood through the concept of regional polarity, where certain states within a security complex align with external actors to pursue their own security agendas. For instance, Mali and Burkina Faso have strengthened their partnerships with Russia, forming security alliances outside the ECOWAS framework. These alliances complicate ECOWAS's influence, as states with strong external ties become less dependent on regional mechanisms for their security.

Furthermore, Nigeria's dominant role in ECOWAS under Tinubu has led to pushback from smaller member states that resent Abuja's leadership style. Countries like Cape Verde and Senegal, while democratic, have occasionally opposed Nigeria's hardline stance on military interventions, preferring diplomatic solutions. This divergence in threat perception and policy preferences weakens ECOWAS's ability to present a unified front, reinforcing RSCT's argument that security governance within regional complexes is shaped by internal power dynamics.

The Complexity of Military Intervention

Tinubu's strong push for military intervention in Niger following the July 2023 coup demonstrated ECOWAS's commitment to constitutional order, but it also exposed the practical and political difficulties of military interventions in regional security complexes[30].

From an RSCT standpoint, military interventions within regional complexes are rarely straightforward due to interconnected security risks. A military campaign against the Nigerien junta could have triggered retaliatory actions from Mali and Burkina Faso, both of which warned against ECOWAS military interference[32]. Given that these states are already facing insurgencies from jihadist groups, a military intervention risked escalating regional instability, creating a wider security crisis that ECOWAS might struggle to contain.

Logistical concerns also played a role. Funding, troop deployment, and military coordination presented major hurdles, as many ECOWAS member states were reluctant to commit troops and resources to a military campaign without guarantees of success. Nigeria's domestic opposition to intervention further weakened the case for military action, with key Nigerian lawmakers and security experts warning that engaging in a prolonged conflict in Niger could overstretch Nigeria's military capabilities.

Additionally, RSCT suggests that external actors play a crucial role in shaping intervention decisions. France and the United States, both of which have military bases in Niger, expressed concerns about an ECOWAS military intervention, fearing it could disrupt their counterterrorism operations in the Sahel. This external influence further complicated ECOWAS's decision-making process, highlighting another RSCT principle: regional security governance is often constrained by global geopolitical interests.

Tinubu's mediation approach within ECOWAS has been hindered by several structural and political challenges, all of which align with Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). The resistance of military juntas in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso underscores how security threats within a regional complex are mutually reinforcing, making it difficult for ECOWAS to impose a singular governance model. Economic sanctions, while intended to pressure juntas, have had unintended spillover effects, affecting regional trade and strengthening alternative alliances with non-Western actors. Internal divisions within ECOWAS have further weakened its cohesion, as member states with different security alignments and economic dependencies pursue divergent strategies. Finally, the complexity of military intervention highlights the challenges of using force in an interdependent security system, where an armed response can escalate into wider regional instability.

RSCT provides a critical analytical lens for understanding why Tinubu's mediation efforts have faced significant roadblocks. West Africa's security challenges are not isolated national crises but rather deeply interconnected threats

shaped by regional, economic, and geopolitical factors. Moving forward, a more adaptive and consensus-driven approach—one that acknowledges the plurality of security interests within ECOWAS—may be necessary for effective conflict resolution in the region.

Conclusion

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's leadership of ECOWAS has brought renewed energy to the organization's mediation and conflict resolution efforts, particularly in response to the resurgence of military coups and democratic erosion in West Africa. His tenure has been defined by a strategic mix of diplomatic engagement, economic sanctions, and regional security cooperation. By asserting a strong stance on restoring constitutional governance, Tinubu has positioned ECOWAS as a more proactive regional bloc. However, despite these efforts, the challenges facing ECOWAS remain significant. The resistance of military juntas, the unintended consequences of economic sanctions, and internal divisions among member states continue to undermine the effectiveness of ECOWAS's conflict resolution mechanisms.

A key aspect of Tinubu's strategy has been direct diplomatic engagement with military regimes in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Through several high-level ECOWAS summits, his administration has attempted to negotiate transition timelines and extract commitments from coup leaders to restore democratic rule. In some instances, these diplomatic efforts have yielded progress, as seen in Mali, where the junta has reluctantly agreed to a prolonged transition period. However, the effectiveness of diplomacy has been hindered by the strong defiance of military leaders who view ECOWAS interventions as an infringement on national sovereignty. Many of these regimes have sought alternative alliances, particularly with Russia and the Wagner Group, which provide them with security assistance and financial incentives. This realignment has weakened ECOWAS's leverage, making diplomatic mediation less effective as a tool for resolving governance crises.

In addition to diplomatic efforts, economic sanctions have been a central component of Tinubu's approach. ECOWAS, under his leadership, has imposed measures such as freezing state assets in regional financial institutions, imposing travel bans and asset seizures on coup leaders, and restricting trade with military-controlled states. While these sanctions have succeeded in exerting economic pressure on juntas, they have also had severe unintended consequences. The economic blockade on Niger, for example, has exacerbated hardships for ordinary citizens, fueling resentment against ECOWAS rather than weakening the resolve of the ruling elite. In some cases, sanctions have even backfired, allowing juntas to frame themselves as defenders of national sovereignty against external interference. Moreover, the effectiveness of these sanctions has been undermined by the financial support these regimes receive from alternative partners such as Russia, China, and Middle Eastern actors. With access to alternative economic and security arrangements, the juntas have been able to bypass ECOWAS restrictions, raising concerns about the long-term viability of economic sanctions as a conflict resolution tool.

Another significant challenge facing ECOWAS under Tinubu's leadership has been internal divisions among member states. While ECOWAS presents itself as a unified regional bloc, the reality is far more complex. The varied political orientations and security priorities of member states have complicated decision-making processes. Countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal have taken a firm pro-democracy stance, advocating for stringent measures against military regimes. In contrast, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea have outright rejected ECOWAS authority, forming their own parallel security alliances with external actors like Russia. The influence of Francophone-West African nations, many of which have historical ties to France, further complicates the region's geopolitical landscape. These internal fractures have weakened ECOWAS's ability to act decisively. When ECOWAS threatened military intervention in Niger following the July 2023 coup, member states failed to reach a unified decision, leading to a retreat from its initial hardline stance. This inconsistency has raised doubts about ECOWAS's ability to enforce its own directives effectively.

Looking ahead, the future of ECOWAS under Tinubu's leadership will depend on the organization's ability to adapt its strategies to the evolving political and security landscape in West Africa. One necessary adjustment will be a re-evaluation of mediation strategies. Rather than relying solely on threats and economic pressure, ECOWAS may need to offer more gradual incentives for military regimes to transition back to democratic governance. A flexible, staged approach to negotiations could increase the likelihood of compliance from juntas that currently perceive ECOWAS's demands as rigid and unrealistic. Similarly, economic sanctions should be more precisely targeted at military elites

rather than imposed as blanket restrictions that harm civilian populations. By refining its sanction mechanisms, ECOWAS could reduce public discontent and prevent military regimes from exploiting economic hardships for political gain.

Internal unity within ECOWAS will also be critical. The organization must work towards bridging the policy divides among member states by fostering greater consensus on conflict resolution strategies. Strengthening diplomatic coordination among West African nations will be essential for ensuring that ECOWAS presents a united front in responding to regional crises. Additionally, expanding security partnerships beyond West Africa—particularly with the African Union, the United Nations, and the European Union—could provide ECOWAS with greater diplomatic leverage and financial resources to support its mediation efforts. Given the increasing influence of external actors such as Russia and China in the region, ECOWAS must position itself as a credible and effective security body that can counterbalance foreign interventions that may undermine its authority.

Finally, while military intervention remains an option for restoring democratic order, it should be employed only as a last resort and with broad regional and international consensus. The logistical, financial, and political risks associated with armed intervention in a sovereign state are immense, and premature military action could escalate conflicts rather than resolve them. Any intervention must be carefully coordinated to ensure that it does not create further instability in an already volatile region.

Therefore, President Tinubu's leadership of ECOWAS has reinvigorated the organization's mediation and conflict resolution efforts, reaffirming its role as a key player in West African security governance. However, the path to sustainable peace remains fraught with challenges. Military juntas continue to resist regional governance norms, economic sanctions have produced mixed results, and internal divisions among ECOWAS member states have weakened the organization's decision-making processes. Despite these obstacles, Tinubu's tenure represents a crucial turning point for ECOWAS. The organization now faces a critical choice: it can either strengthen its internal cohesion and adapt its strategies to effectively address regional security challenges, or it can allow the continued erosion of democratic norms, further emboldening military regimes. If ECOWAS can overcome its structural and strategic shortcomings, it has the potential to restore its legitimacy and promote a more stable and democratic West Africa. However, failure to do so may deepen the region's security crises and weaken ECOWAS's long-term credibility as a regional peacekeeping body.

Recommendations
1. Strengthening Diplomatic Channels: ECOWAS should enhance behind-the-scenes negotiations to build trust with military leaders.
2. Targeted Sanctions: Instead of broad economic sanctions, ECOWAS should impose targeted measures that specifically affect coup leaders.
3. Enhanced Regional Unity: ECOWAS must address internal divisions by fostering stronger coordination among member states.
4. Security Sector Reform: ECOWAS should engage military juntas in discussions on security reforms to address their grievances.
5. Economic Incentives for Democratic Transitions: The organization should provide financial and developmental incentives to encourage juntas to transition to civilian rule.

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