



thruMYeyes

with PROF. BOLAJI AKINYEMI

THE WEEKLY FOREIGN-POLICY BRIEFING

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FROM THE ARCHIVE · FOREIGN POLICY

NO CASTING VOTE

A misquoted interview, a fracturing regional bloc —
this week tests whether words carry any consequence at all.

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FROM THE ARCHIVE

No Casting Vote

From a misquoted interview to a fracturing regional bloc to an indictment his base won't punish him for — this week keeps testing whether words carry any consequence at all.

An episode that opens defending itself against distortion and closes on the same problem at a larger scale: does anyone actually believe what's said, once it has been through a news cycle? In between, a coup in Niger tests whether ECOWAS's own words carry any real weight. **Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi runs the same test on his own misquoted remarks, on Nigeria's single vote as ECOWAS chair, and on a Trump indictment he expects to harden loyalty rather than shake it.**

An archive edition, recorded 3 August 2023, in the first week of the ECOWAS ultimatum following the coup in Niger. Events and figures are described as they stood that week.

01 · A DEFENSE BEFORE THE DEBATE: ON BEING MISQUOTED

The session opens with Prof. Akinyemi pushing back against a viral claim that he had called Nigeria's president's ECOWAS position illegitimate. On his account, an Arise TV interview was clipped and re-titled to say the opposite of what he argued, which was a rebuttal of a South African commentary questioning the legitimacy of Nigeria's election — a commentary he found hard to take seriously, he says, from a country whose own president faced a corruption finding that the ANC's parliamentary majority moved to set aside.

He lays down ground rules before the discussion proper begins: interpreting or analyzing a position is not the same as endorsing it, and given his public standing, he won't use a foreign-policy platform

to "demarket" his own president or country. He draws a pointed parallel to the US, where he says inconvenient facts no longer move partisan opinion either.

"Interpretation and analysis of what somebody said should not be interpreted as an endorsement of what he said."

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

02 • NIGERIA'S ONE VOTE, AND THE CHAIR WHO HAS NONE EXTRA

Turning to Niger, Prof. Akinyemi rejects the idea that Nigeria's president should tread carefully as ECOWAS chair to protect his domestic standing. On his account, sovereignty cuts both ways: no member state is bound to follow the chair's preference, and Tinubu — even holding the gavel — has exactly one vote in ECOWAS, with no casting vote to break a tie. Leadership, he argues, was the very thing critics said Nigeria had been shirking for sixteen years; it can't now be treated as optional the moment it's inconvenient.

"Even as chairman, President Tinubu has one vote in ECOWAS — and I'm not sure he even has a casting vote."

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

03 • SEVEN DAYS, AND WHAT A DEADLINE DOESN'T MEAN

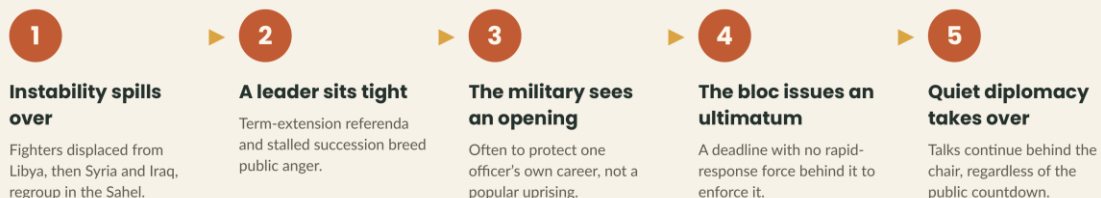
On ECOWAS's ultimatum to Niger's junta, Prof. Akinyemi is careful to lower expectations: there is no ECOWAS rapid-response force and no standing army, he notes, so the deadline's expiry won't put troops on the ground that day regardless. On his account, quiet diplomacy — including a delegation of former head of state Abdulsalami Abubakar and the Sultan of Sokoto, already accepted by Niger's junta — was always likely to continue behind the scenes whether or not the public countdown reached zero.

"The expiry of the seven days does not mean boots on the ground — that's not the way diplomacy works."

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

HOW WEST AFRICA'S COUP CYCLE REPEATS

THE PROFESSOR'S READING OF THE NIGER CRISIS



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How West Africa's coup cycle keeps repeating, per the Professor's reading of the Niger crisis.

04 • MALI, BURKINA FASO, AND A FRACTURING BLOC

Mali and Burkina Faso's warning that any move against Niger's junta would be treated as an attack on them too gets a pointed reframing: on his account, ECOWAS's divisions were created by the coups themselves, not by this latest statement. He's equally skeptical of tidy conspiracy narratives

around the protests in Niger — noting that demonstrators have targeted France specifically, despite comparable US troop numbers in the country, without a clear account of why one and not the other.

“Why is it France that is being targeted by the demonstrators, and not the United States, which also has troops on the ground?”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

05 • A COLONIAL HABIT THAT KEEPS PRODUCING COUPS

Zooming out, Prof. Akinyemi traces the Sahel's instability to two compounding factors on his account: jihadist fighters displaced from Libya and later Syria and Iraq relocating into the region, and France's long record of installing and removing West African leaders, which he dates to the 1963 coup against Togo's Sylvanus Olympio. He adds sit-tight leadership — pointing to the Central African Republic's term-extension referendum and unrest in Senegal — as a second, self-inflicted driver of coups across the continent.

He closes the point with an appreciative note for the region's overwhelmed nationalists — Gaddafi, Sankara, Nkrumah — read here as figures who were simply outmatched by what he calls the forces of neo-colonialism.

“France was the first to mastermind a coup in West Africa, when it overthrew Togo's Sylvanus Olympio.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

06 • A COUP THAT CAUGHT EVEN HIM BY SURPRISE

Asked whether Niger's coup was foreseeable, Prof. Akinyemi is candid that it caught him off guard — no protests, no strikes, no visible friction between troops and the presidency beforehand, on his account. He's openly doubtful of claims that an outside power must have engineered it, reading the available evidence instead as pointing to a narrower plot aimed at protecting the coup leader's own military career.

“There were no demonstrations, no strikes, no confrontations between the troops and the presidency. This one caught me by surprise.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

07 • AN INDICTMENT, AND A BASE THAT WON'T BLINK

The episode closes on Trump's indictment over efforts to overturn the 2020 election. Prof. Akinyemi's reaction is double-edged: the charges were overdue, on his account — “justice delayed is justice denied” — but he expects them to harden Trump's support rather than erode it, given how evenly divided and immovable the electorate already is.

His closing worry travels outward: if the strategy of simply outlasting legal accountability works for Trump, he argues, embattled leaders elsewhere — he names South Africa's use of its own institutions to shield its president from corruption findings — may take it as a playbook worth copying.

“You could bring another ten charges against him and they will still vote for him.”

— Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi

THREADS TO PULL

- If interpreting an argument gets treated as endorsing it, is honest scholarly commentary on domestic politics still possible in an era of clipped, decontextualized video?
- Does a strict one-country-one-vote reading of ECOWAS make its collective ultimatums more credible, or just slower to act on?
- If protesters in Niger target France but not the US, despite comparable troop numbers, what does that selective focus actually reveal about who's seen as the threat?
- Is a coup that catches everyone by surprise evidence against external orchestration, or just evidence that outside actors are good at covering their tracks?
- If an indictment hardens a political base instead of shrinking it, what does that suggest about the real limits of legal accountability as a check on power?

Watch Session 151 in full on the Syncterface Media channel. New episodes every Thursday, 7pm WAT (7pm UK, 2pm ET).

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