

Between Prospect and Realism: Cognitive Biases, Emotions, and the ECOWAS-AES Diplomatic Fallout

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Abstract

The fragmentation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), following the September 2023 Charter of Liptako-Gourma that established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), serves as a real-world case for studying how emotional biases and feelings impact diplomatic negotiations. Contributing to the emerging debate on bloc polarization in West Africa, this study evaluates the ECOWAS-AES diplomatic fallout through psycho-political lenses, focusing on escalating tensions characterized by sanctions and defiant responses from both parties. Drawing on prospect theory in psychology and political realism, this study argues that leading actors in ECOWAS and AES allowed confirmation bias, perceived threats, overconfidence, and the sunk cost fallacy to create flawed decision-making processes, leading them to overestimate their authority. The research demonstrates that groupthink reinforced existing biases, while loss aversion encouraged high-risk decisions, jointly undermining the traditional rational decision-making approaches of ECOWAS-AES diplomats. The study recommends incorporating psychological competence into diplomatic practice through emotional intelligence training and awareness of implicit biases.

Keywords: political psychology, cognitive bias, emotional influence, diplomatic negotiations, ECOWAS-AES fallout

Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) experienced an unprecedented rupture between 2023 and 2025. Following the September 2023 Charter of Liptako-Gourma, which established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger withdrew from ECOWAS and formalized a mutual security pact. The split followed unconstitutional regime changes by military juntas in these states between 2020 and 2023, and it intensified after ECOWAS imposed strict sanctions, particularly on Niger, to reverse the coups. The AES leaders accused the bloc of neglecting their fight against terrorism and being influenced by foreign powers (Aljazeera, July 6, 2024). Despite ECOWAS' mediation efforts and a six-month grace period, the new bloc eventually formalized its exit from ECOWAS on January 29 2025 (Aboagye, 2025), prioritizing sovereignty and micro-regional security cooperation over a macro coalition they claimed threatened their national interests.

The rupture within the ECOWAS region was not merely legal or strategic; it was also deeply affective. Public narratives of betrayal, humiliation, and solidarity shaped state decisions, while appeals to pan-African dignity and anti-colonial sentiment mobilized domestic support. In the Sahel, feelings of historical grievance, mistrust of regional institutions, and aspirations for autonomy appear to have reconfigured the cost-benefit logic of cooperation. The conflict occurred within a region where historical influences intersect with modern challenges, including jihadist insurgencies and shifting international partnerships with actors such as China and Russia. Such layers increase the psychological pressure on negotiators who must address identity-linked narratives that trigger emotional reactions to perceived threats or disloyalty. This study therefore investigates how emotional biases and collective feelings influence diplomatic negotiations, using the ECOWAS–AES split as a lens to test and extend existing theories of affect in international relations.

Literature Review

Diplomacy, often described as “the management of international relations by negotiation” (Berridge, 2015, p. 1), is typically framed as a rational process driven by strategic interests, power balances, and institutional norms. Yet the integration of psychology with diplomacy has received widespread acknowledgment. Morgenthau (1967) emphasized in *Politics Among Nations* that political nature is a fundamental factor driving state conduct because powerful states must consider their leaders' psychological preferences.

Academic research on diplomatic decision processes now depends on cognitive psychology approaches. Negotiators deal with limited reasoning capabilities according to the bounded rationality framework described by Simon (1957), because they base choices on mental shortcuts instead of complete methodical examination, thus producing inferior results. According to Tversky and Kahneman (1974), judgments become distorted during uncertain situations through anchoring, overconfidence, and framing bias. The combination of restricted information access and tight deadlines forces international high-stakes negotiators to experience increased cognitive biases. Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory further argues that actors are risk-averse in domains of gains but risk-seeking in domains of losses, and that the framing of choices alters behaviour — a dynamic central to crisis diplomacy.

Research on diplomatic studies now gives substantial importance to emotional factors. Frank (1988) posited that trust, anger, and fear function as strategic indicators during negotiations to demonstrate commitment or resolve. Holmes (2018) examined diplomatic exchanges through psychology-neuroscience methods, showing that affective states can either promote cooperative activities or worsen relations (Hsee et al., 1990). Psychological influences can therefore transform the direction of diplomatic negotiations.

While structural features remain vital in international relations (Waltz, 1979), modern paradigms recognize that human decision-making diverges from the rational actor model presumed by traditional realist approaches. Crucial decisions are shaped through perception, framing of options, systematic errors in judgment, and emotional influences that include fear, pride, and anger (Jervis, 1976; Thompson, 2015). Emerging research suggests that emotions function as filters through which threats, alliances, and legitimacy are interpreted.

Studies of West African regionalism have largely emphasized structural drivers. While recent analyses by WADEMOS (2025) and Amani Africa (2025) examine the systemic factors driving institutional antagonism, they lack a micro-level psychological evaluation of the regional actors involved. This omission is notable because diplomatic successes stem from addressing both rational interests and emotional needs (Fisher et al., 2011). The ECOWAS–AES conflict offers analytical opportunities because it contains psychological elements, including AES leaders' feelings about sovereignty and ECOWAS leaders' overconfidence in diplomatic force. This study therefore anchors on the psychological basis to explain diplomatic breakdowns. The research was conducted in April 2025, showcasing current West African diplomatic trends that affect international relations studies.

Prospect Theory and Political Realism: A dual approach to understanding the ECOWAS–AES diplomatic collapse

This study combines Prospect Theory from psychology with Realism from international relations to examine the breakdown of the ECOWAS-AES diplomatic negotiations. Prospect theory describes how decision makers react when faced with the choices involving risk and uncertainty, taking into cognizance their aversion to losses (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), and realism perceives the global system as a competitive and conflictual environment where state actors prioritize their own sovereign survival and national interest, often at the expense of others (Morgenthau, 1948).

Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) Prospect Theory advocate that people make choices by assessing their decisions through reference point-based loss and gain estimations instead of focusing on straight outcomes or gains. According to Prospect Theory, the human mind first detects losses before gains and becomes strongly influenced by how information is presented in different frames. Through diplomatic negotiations this theory demonstrates that cognitive biases strengthen actors to take more extensive risks to steer clear of losses than to achieve gains. Taliaferro's (2004) work titled "Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery" explored why great powers often engage in risky interventions in peripheral regions, even when those regions pose no direct threat to their security. According to him, these interventions are driven by a psychological tendency to avoid perceived losses in power, status, or prestige, rather than purely rational calculations of national interest. In demonstrating the AES's disobedience toward ECOWAS directives, Prospect Theory helps to evaluate dangerous foreign policy choices of ECOWAS and AES and how the leaders avoid losing power and prestige through persistent sanctions and disobedience.

Although the root of realism as a political theory is traceable to the intellectual works of the Greek historian, Thucydides (c. 460–c. 400 B.C.E.); English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679); and Italian theorist, Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) (Author, 2023), contemporary political realism is largely credited to the works of Morgenthau (1948; 1967), and Waltz (1979), among others. These realists maintain that the best that can be achieved in the global environment is a stable distribution of power among states, and any attempt to break out of such a system will only end in wars (Morgenthau, 1948). To the realist, the purpose of statecraft is to ensure national survival in an environment that is anarchical and replete with war of all against all (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018). Realism interprets international relations as states battling to preserve their sovereignty and acquire power (Morgenthau,

1948). Morgenthau (1948, p. 382) noted that ‘the actions of states are determined not by moral principles and legal commitments but by consideration of interest and power’. States make security and sovereignty their main priorities which produces diplomatic mistrust along with zero-sum theoretical negotiations.

Realism adopts rational actors as its starting point yet the combination with Prospect Theory allows for including psychological irrational behaviors stemming from emotional reactions towards perceived threats. Blending the two theories in the analysis of ECOWAS-AES political logjam, realism proposes for the exit of the AES from ECOWAS because it wanted to be free from the latter’s alignment with Western interests and the Prospect Theory explains the AES’s risky choices because of both emotional attachments and fear of losses rather than the gains of remaining in the regional bloc. Emotional reactions such as anger combined with fear, pride and humiliation made the positions of both parties harder to adjust from the beginning, thus creating a situation where trust vanished into retaliating cycles. These allowed cognitive or confirmation bias, threats, excessive confidence and sunk cost fallacy to create flawed decision processes through which both the ECOWAS and AES mistakenly believed their authority to be much stronger.

Methods

To determine cognitive biases and emotions in the ECOWAS-AES diplomatic split, a multi-faceted approach, combining qualitative analysis of political rhetoric with behavioural insights into decision-making is required. The study utilized the qualitative documentary method to collect data, decoding textual information to identify meaningful patterns. Official sources integral for this study consist of ECOWAS summit communiqués from July 7th 2024 alongside AES treaty documents from July 6th 2024. Niamey Summit along with official declarations made by leaders like General Abdourahmane Tchiani of Niger and Colonel Assimi Goita of Mali. Multiple media reports include Al Jazeera (2024) along with BBC (2025) which accompanies scholarly assessments from Crisis Group (2024) and Amani Africa (2025). The chosen documents had major importance in the negotiation process and contained psychological elements such as emotional speech patterns and examples of unbalanced reasoning.

A thematic framework based on Prospect Theory and Realism served to identify and code both cognitive biases including confirmation bias and overconfidence and emotional influences including anger and fear and trust in the data analysis process. The study used

tables to organize findings and increase both clarity and comparability between the data sources.

Findings and analysis

ECOWAS-AES breakdown provides researchers with extensive material to study diplomatic psychology through identification of influences created by cognitive biases and emotional responses. The analysis in this section extends the previous findings through a detailed examination of documented cases together with expanded observations about biases and emotions which then receive enhanced analytical treatment.

Cognitive Biases in the ECOWAS-AES Fallout

Cognitive biases such as confirmation bias, overconfidence and sunk cost fallacy represent only a minor portion of the cognitive distortions observed throughout decision-making. The negotiation process between ECOWAS and AES became more complex due to several other biases of cognition including anchoring alongside groupthink and availability heuristic which were evident in the official documents and media reports. See Table 1 for the expanded cognitive biases in ECOWAS-AES negotiations.

Table 1: Expanded Cognitive Biases in ECOWAS-AES Negotiations

Bias	ECOWAS Example	AES Example
Confirmation Bias	Sanctions as democracy tool	ECOWAS as neo-colonial threat; Ignoring data that contradicts the need to exit ECOWAS
Overconfidence	Assumed AES economic dependence	Belief in confederation's viability
Sunk Cost Fallacy	Persisted with failed sanctions	Committed to exit despite risks
Anchoring	Relied on 1999 and 2001 Protocols	Sovereignty as non-negotiable
Groupthink	Unanimous sanction push	Unified anti-ECOWAS stance
Availability Heuristic	Focus on past successes	Emphasis on terrorism neglect

Source: Adapted from ECOWAS (2024); Al Jazeera (2024); WANEP (2024); Modern Diplomacy (2024); Crisis Group (2024); BBC (2025); Amani Africa (2025); AES (2024); Obadare (2024).

Beyond ECOWAS's reliance on sanctions as a democracy-restoring tool, confirmation bias manifested in its selective interpretation of AES actions. The ECOWAS Extraordinary Summit Communiqué of July 7, 2024, for instance, framed the AES treaty as a temporary rebellion, ignoring the juntas' long-term strategic pivot toward Russia and China (ECOWAS, 2024). AES leaders, meanwhile, fixated on historical grievances, including ECOWAS's perceived inaction against terrorism, reinforced their narrative of betrayal, as seen in Tchiani's Niamey speech (Al Jazeera, 2024). Jervis (1976) noted that confirmation bias distorts threat perception – a dynamic that fuelled mutual misjudgements between ECOWAS and the AES.

Again, ECOWAS' overestimation of its economic leverage was starkly evident in its 2023 sanctions on Niger, which cut electricity supplies and froze assets, assuming swift capitulation (WANEP, 2024). This step, rather than coerce Niger into negotiating a return to democracy by restoring the government of President Mohamed Bazoum, pushed the military juntas into sourcing for alternatives. In ECOWAS' stead, Niger secured alternative support from Guinea and Russia, a miscalculation rooted in overconfidence about regional dependence (CSIS, 2024). AES leaders, too, overestimated their confederation's viability, with Traore's July 2024 claim of a "self-sufficient Sahel" ignoring logistical and economic challenges (Modern Diplomacy, 2024). Kahneman and Tversky (1982) link overconfidence to heuristic-driven decisions, a pattern clear in both parties' inflexibility.

ECOWAS' persistence with sanctions, despite their failure to reverse coups in Mali (2020), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023), reflects a commitment to past investments. The December 2024 ECOWAS Summit, held in Abuja, Nigeria and which focused on the formalization of the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger from the bloc reiterated its reluctance to abandon its age-long conflict resolution strategy even when adopting a context-specific approach would have yielded a much better result. This ECOWAS sunk cost fallacious strategy is akin to what Crisis Group (2024) described as risking credibility rather than adapting to current reality. The AES, having staked their legitimacy on rejecting ECOWAS, entrenched their withdrawal despite economic strain, as Goita's January 2025 declaration "we will not turn back" illustrates (BBC, 2025). This aligns with Arkes and Blumer's (1985) sunk cost research, where emotional attachment to prior choices overrides rationality.

On anchoring, ECOWAS' strategy of resolving the AES exit was anchored on the 2001 Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, expecting Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to adhere despite their post-coup contexts (Amani Africa, 2025). Article 25 of the 1999

ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace– Keeping and Security also notes that, in the event of a ‘massive violation of human rights and the rule of law’ or ‘overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically elected government’ in a member state, ECOWAS can adopt different strategies, including imposition of sanctions and suspension of the erring member(s). These rigid reference points blinded ECOWAS to the juntas’ new priorities, which were averse to some existing ECOWAS Protocols on democracy and good governance. Conversely, AES leaders anchored to a narrative of sovereignty, with the July 6, 2024, AES treaty emphasizing “total independence” as non-negotiable (AES, 2024). This also limited compromise options for the AES group, reflecting its show of power.

Within ECOWAS, the consensus-driven push for sanctions, evident in unanimous summit decisions stifled dissenting voices advocating dialogue, such as Senegal’s initial mediation offer (Obadare, 2024). Janis (1972) describes groupthink as suppressing alternatives, a factor that rigidified ECOWAS’s approach. The AES, united by coup leaders’ shared anti-Western ideology, similarly exhibited groupthink, rejecting ECOWAS overtures outrightly (Modern Diplomacy, 2024).

Finally, ECOWAS’ focus on high-profile successes (e.g., Gambia 2017) made punitive measures seem more effective than they were, overshadowing failures like Mali’s drift (WANEP, 2024). AES leaders, influenced by vivid memories of terrorist threats and ECOWAS’s perceived neglect, prioritized security alliances over economic ties, as Tchiani’s reference to “decades of abandonment” suggests (Al Jazeera, 2024). These instances are evident in groupthink bias between ECOWAS and the AES, which Tversky and Kahneman (1973) note are salient events that skew judgment.

Emotional influences in the ECOWAS-AES fallout

Emotions not only amplified the cognitive biases of ECOWAS and AES but also drove them into independent actions, shaping the negotiation trajectory. Beyond anger, fear, and trust, pride, humiliation, and hope emerged as critical forces, drawn from leaders’ statements and regional analyses. Table 2 provides a summary of the emotional influences.

Table 2: Expanded Emotional Influences in ECOWAS-AES Negotiations

Emotion	ECOWAS Manifestation	AES Manifestation
Anger	Frustration at coup defiance	Outrage at sanctions, neo-colonialism
Fear	Loss of regional authority	Loss of sovereignty

Trust	Assumed AES would return	Lost faith in ECOWAS's solidarity
Pride	Legacy as regional leader	Triumph of coup-led independence
Humiliation	Loss of face from rejection	Reaction to "insulting" sanctions
Hope	Sanctions restoring order	Vision of a new Sahel

Source: Adapted from ECOWAS (2024); Al Jazeera (2024); WANEP (2024); Modern Diplomacy (2024); Crisis Group (2024); BBC (2025); Amani Africa (2025); AES (2024); Obadare (2024).

Anger produced defiance that was responsible for escalation of tension between ECOWAS and AES. The AES leaders' anger was visceral, with Traore's July 2024 declaration "we will not be dictated to" reflecting defiance against ECOWAS sanctions and French influence (Al Jazeera, 2024). ECOWAS, angered by the AES's rejection of its authority, doubled down on punitive measures, as seen in its July 2024 threat of military action (ECOWAS, 2024). Markwica (2018) links anger to bold moves, a pattern driving both sides' escalation.

Also, Prospect Theory's loss aversion was stark in the AES's fear of losing sovereignty. The preamble of the Niamey Summit's treaty cites "external domination" as a threat, justifying withdrawal from ECOWAS (AES, 2024). On its part, ECOWAS feared losing its regional dominance, with summit reports warning of a "fragmented West Africa" (Crisis Group, 2024). McDermott (2004) ties fear to risk aversion, yet here it paradoxically spurred risky defiance.

Trust, once a bedrock of ECOWAS integration, collapsed as AES leaders accused the bloc of favoring Western interests over Sahel security (WANEP, 2024). According to Georgetown Security Studies Review (2025, para.4), "AES members have blamed ECOWAS for many of the region's woes, including selling out the Sahel to its former colonizers and supporting Salafi-jihadists responsible for insecurity in the region." ECOWAS' trust in AES compliance eroded after repeated coup defiance, with its December 2024 communiqué lamenting "irreconcilable differences" (ECOWAS, 2024). Stein (1988) and Author (2025) note trust's role in cooperation, its absence deals a fatal blow to diplomatic cooperation and international negotiations.

Furthermore, the AES leaders' pride in their military-led regimes fuelled their stance, with Goita's January 2025 speech hailing the exit as a "triumph of the people" (BBC, 2025). ECOWAS's pride in its legacy, including its decades of peacekeeping missions prevented concessions, risking irrelevance (Amani Africa, 2025). Lebow (2008) argues pride drives

status-seeking, evident in both parties' posturing. ECOWAS sanctions and leaders' utterances evoked humiliation, which emotionally affected AES' leaders. The AES states felt humiliated by ECOWAS's sanctions and public condemnation, with Tchiani's reference to "insulting measures" in 2024 (Al Jazeera, 2024). ECOWAS, in turn, felt humiliated by the AES's public rebuff, as media noted its "loss of face" (Modern Diplomacy, 2024). Frijda (1986) links humiliation to retaliation, a cycle fuelling the divide.

Initially, ECOWAS hoped sanctions would restore order, a sentiment in early 2023 statements (WANEP, 2024). AES leaders hoped their alliance would galvanize regional support, as seen in Traore's vision of a "new Sahel" (AES, 2024). When hopes faded ECOWAS facing defiance, AES economic strain positions hardened (Crisis Group, 2024), notwithstanding that neglect of economic mitigation strategies for conflict negatively impacts the new bloc's ability to build off past, present, or future military successes (Georgetown Security Studies Review, 2025).

The interplay of biases and emotions created a feedback loop. Groupthink reinforced confirmation bias, entrenching ECOWAS's sanction strategy and AES's defiance. Anger and humiliation, combined with pride, escalated rhetoric and narrowed the space for compromise. Hope's collapse evident in ECOWAS's 2024 shift to containment and AES's isolationist stance solidified the fallout (Obadare, 2024). This aligns with Goldgeier and Tetlock's (2001) synthesis of psychology and international relations, showing how human factors disrupt structural outcomes.

Discussion of findings

The ECOWAS-AES diplomatic failure demonstrates how mental factors influence diplomatic progress despite being part of a historically united regional organization. Jervis (1976) has previously suggested in his historical study that inadequate diplomatic signalling occurs when cognitive biases create perceptual mistakes which produce destabilizing cycles. The ECOWAS group showed confirmation bias when it saw the coups in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali as an event that could be fixed with sanctions. However, the AES had more (perchance irrational) faith in building their new alliance alternative than rebuilding its relationship with ECOWAS even if it had greater chances to gain by taking the second alternative. Primitive decision-making influenced by bounded rationality, according to Simon (1985), emerges from this mutual misinterpretation among the diplomats involved in negotiating a future for the West African regional blocs.

The emotional factors made negotiations between the parties involved more difficult to navigate. The angry manner leaders adopt, according to Markwica (2018), leads them toward defiance instead of compromise which was visible when AES leaders denied ECOWAS' authority. Through his rhetoric in Niamey (2024), Tchiani termed ECOWAS to be a “threat” while Traore implemented his strategy to protect AES sovereignty via a declaration to Al Jazeera (2024) that demonstrated the emotional rationale which valued national independence above pragmatic collaboration. The sanctions policy adopted by ECOWAS reflects its fear of losing regional influence which confirms McDermott’s (2004) theory about how fear interferes with strategic planning enabling actors to escalate problems in an unproductive fashion.

Analysed through the lens of Political Realism, the formation of the AES underscores the priority of regime survival and hard security over regional institutionalism. Furthermore, Prospect Theory explains the juntas' drastic withdrawal from ECOWAS as a classic risk-seeking response to a perceived loss frame imposed by severe economic sanctions. The situation demonstrates a fundamental dispute between *realpolitik* principles and the mental dynamics of the situation. Realist logic shows how the AES sought sovereignty because of its need for power while ECOWAS executed punitive action as self-protective in an ungoverned international framework (Waltz, 1979). The moves made by both ECOWAS and the AES validate the core tenets of Prospect Theory; while ECOWAS framed its sanctions as an order-restoring mechanism, it failed to anticipate that the AES, operating within a severe loss frame, would choose the high-risk gamble of total institutional withdrawal. According to Taliaferro’s (2004) analysis of foreign policy gambles using Prospect Theory both sides discarded potential gains in favour of playing major stakes in their high-risk decisions.

The development between ECOWAS and AES represents a similar pattern seen in diplomatic breakdowns where psychological factors influence strategic issues. The Cold War’s Cuban Missile Crisis almost resulted in disaster according to Allison and Zelikow (1999) before back-channel emotional calibration prevented it from developing into complete catastrophe. The ECOWAS-AES rift failed to adopt mechanisms similar to other breakdowns because both parties neglected Kurbalija’s (2018) recommendations for emotional intelligence in contemporary diplomacy. Lack of trust-building approaches such as mediation or confidence-building dialogues allowed negative biases and emotions to grow because diplomacy historically needs interpersonal trust (Kerr & Wiseman, 2012; Holmes, 2018).

These observations achieve greater intensity because of the regional situation. The history of external military deployments and regional instability across West Africa (such as the Mali crisis of 2012) has made its nations hypersensitive to foreign intervention leading to AES resistance (Amani Africa 2025). The different strategies ECOWAS employed in 2017 when it dealt with Gambia demonstrate cognitive stubbornness that according to Goldgeier and Tetlock (2001) exists within rigid institutional structures. The AES chose Russia as partner due to a new global pattern which shows emotional opposition to Western influences surpassing economic relationships as Crisis Group (2024) reports.

This research fills a knowledge gap through psychological assessment of African politico-diplomatic interactions where traditional studies primarily focus on Eurocentric cases. Stein's (1988) proposed integration of cognition and emotion receives support from this analysis which questions that diplomacy operates exclusively through rational processes. The ECOWAS-AES crisis highlights general diplomatic challenges which develop when psychological factors remain unresolved because they evolve moderate disputes into persistent conflicts.

Conclusion

Intense psychological factors together with subconscious decision-making patterns caused impairment to ECOWAS-AES agreements in diplomatic negotiations. The entities became firmly rooted in inflexible positions through confirmation bias and overconfidence and the sunk cost fallacy after which anger and fear and mistrust pushed the conflict toward regional division. Both Realism and Prospect Theory provide a combined understanding of how these power conflicts emerged yet Prospect Theory better explains decision-making procedures based on risk and emotions which exceeded rational capabilities. On April 10, 2025 the AES completed its departure which had begun on January 2025 initiating a significant change in West African integration because of psychological errors in its foundation.

The successful practice of diplomacy requires leadership ability along with specific steps to dissolve mental obstacles that hinder understanding. The approach of ECOWAS sanctions combined with AES outcome indicates its inability to understand Jervis's (1976) perceptive errors and McDermott's (2004) findings on irrational emotional behavior. Trust represents the cornerstone of diplomacy (Kerr & Wiseman, 2012; Author, 2025), yet, the crisis advanced while trust dissolved due to what Kurbalija (2018) described as insufficient emotional intelligence in diplomacy. According to WANEP (2024), the West African sub-region has

become fragmented because of diminished ECOWAS power and questioned AES sustainability.

To prevent similar breakdowns and foster effective negotiations, ECOWAS together with other regional bodies should incorporate psychological training for diplomats by providing negotiators with the ability to detect and handle cognitive biases through scenario-based training which demonstrates confirmation bias and overconfidence. The application of Kahneman and Tversky's (1982) heuristics would improve decision-making flexibility. In the same vein, sharpening mediation through emotional intelligence will be essential for upcoming conflict resolution since Kurbalija (2018) recommends such mediators. The African Union could act as an unbiased party to conduct discussions between AES and ECOWAS that would address domination concerns of AES members while rebuilding stability incrementally to restore trust. The Gambia experience has shown ECOWAS how to leverage dialog instead of confrontation according to Obadare (2024). Countries following AES can be guided back to dialogue through economic benefits and security agreements structured as balanced opportunities under Prospect Theory which would escape their fearful loss avoidance mindset. Through the creation of psychological early warning systems, regional organizations can identify emotional flashpoints together with cognitive rigidities which enable them to take pre-emptive action for de-escalation. Following Markwica's (2018) view on affect tracking in diplomacy, this approach fits into the discussion. The approach of Track II Diplomacy which Amani Africa (2025) recommends should become a supplement to conventional diplomatic paths to help lower emotional tensions and develop common regional identification.

By leveraging these approaches, the ECOWAS-AES crisis would become an opportunity that leads to institutional renewal. Through this psychological framework researchers and diplomats can acquire a method to study and handle diplomatic failures that demand human-centered decision making. The continued economic and security obstacles of West Africa create an unprecedented importance to master diplomatic psychology practices.

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