



The Rise of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES): A Study of Post-Colonial Sovereignism as a Driver of Regional Realignment

¹Dalong, Fatima & ²Izu, S. Iroro

^{1&2}Department of Political Science and International Relations,
Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja

Article DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ssjprds.v7.i1.17

Abstract

The creation of a new bloc, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), the union of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, is the major change in geopolitics in West Africa. The AES came into existence in 2023 as a mutual defence pact under the Liptako-Gourma Charter and later was expanded to a larger confederation, following the successive military coup in the three countries and their subsequent exiting the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in January 2025. This paper will look at how the AES emerged and rose as an expression of post-colonial sovereignism, an ideological claim of national independence, opposition to felt neo-colonial pressures and aggression against foreign interference into the internal matters of the country. The paper relies on the post-colonial theory, realist theory, and Regional Security Complex Theory to examine how security crisis, institutional dissatisfaction with the ECOWAS sanctions and threat of intervention, and ideological motives based on historical resentments of colonialism and Franc Afrique interact. It states that, post-colonial sovereignism was a major geographical realignment motive that made the Sahelian states to put emphasis on collective security, regime stability and self-reliance rather than the traditional economic integration systems. The results point to the two-fold implications of the AES: on the one hand, it strengthens the military interdependence and lowers the reliance on the Western actors (including the diversification of the relationships with the non-Western ones such as Russia), on the other hand, it allows fracturing the West African regional integration, raising the transaction costs, and diminishing the unity in addressing the transnational threats (such as terrorism). Issues such as the long-term viability of the alliance are yet to be asked with the economic vulnerability of the member states and institutional constraints. This paper is relevant to the comprehension of the role of ideological considerations in modern regionalism in Africa and provides suggestions on the dialogue between the AES and ECOWAS, bilateral cooperation, and equal collaboration with foreign powers as the means to enhance stability and growth in the Sahel.

Keywords: *Alliance of Sahel States (AES), Post-colonial Sovereignism, Regional Realignment, Security cooperation, Regional integration*

Corresponding Author: Dalong, Fatima

<https://internationalpolicybrief.org/social-sciences-journal-of-policy-review-and-development-strategies-volume-7-number-1/>

Background to the Study

West Africa and especially the Sahel region have experienced a great change in the geopolitics in recent years because of the constant insecurity, political turmoil, and changes in regional cooperation. The emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), which consists of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, is the significant shift in the political and institutional patterns in the region. In 2023, the alliance was formed as a common defence agreement between governments by the military to resolve common security concerns and external challenges (Aina et al., 2025). This process can be closely related to a series of military coups in the Sahel, such as Mali (2020/2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023), that hampered the democratic rule and spoiled the relationships with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS reacted to these coups with sanctions and threats of military action, especially when it comes to the case of Niger, which only worsened the tension between the organization and the affected states (Aina et al., 2025). The military regimes viewed these moves as foreign influence in their internal matters and this led to an increasing discontent with the regional block.

This led Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to officially withdraw their membership in the ECOWAS in January 2024, another big break in the integration of the region in West Africa (Osuchukwu et al., 2024). This process of forming the AES is indicative of a more general ideological trend of post-colonial sovereignism, meaning the national autonomy, the opposition to foreign influences and the reestablishment of the state control over the political and economic processes. This ideological inclination is based on historical wrongdoings related to colonial backgrounds, assumed neo-colonialism, and discontentment with the role of western powers in domestic policy and security matters (Afriyie, 2024).

In addition, the AES is an effort by member states to revise regional cooperation in non-traditional structures. Instead of emphasizing on economic integration, the alliance gives significance to collective security, regime stability, and self-reliance in dealing with terrorism and insurgency in the Sahel (Aina et al., 2025). This change has brought with its new realignment dynamics in the region because the exodus of these states out of ECOWAS has raised some form of instability with regard to institutional organization and business fragmentation in West Africa. The rise of the AES is also indicative of wider changes of global geopolitics, in which African states are more actively looking to establish other forms of partners other than the old traditional partners in the West. The Sahelian states have also diversified their external relations experiencing interaction with non-Western actors trying to be more dominant in their development patterns. In this sense, the AES makes a crucial case study to comprehend the manner in which new regional alignment and political organization are being formed by post-colonial sovereignism in present day Africa. The formation of Alliance of Sahel states (AES) can be viewed as a major breakage of the regional integration models previously experienced by West Africa, especially the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Although, historically, ECOWAS has been at the center of facilitating economic integration, political stability, and collective security, the pullout of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has revealed underlying structural and ideological tensions in the regional system (Osuchukwu et al., 2024).

Although the AES has gained more and more prominence, there is very little scholarly knowledge regarding the factors that led to its formation, in which post-colonial sovereignty plays a crucial role. The current literature has mostly been dwelling on such issues as military coups, insecurity and governance issues but little attention has been paid to how the concept of ideological factors influencing the choice of realignment includes the resistance to external influence and the desire to gain autonomy (Afriyie, 2024). Besides, the regional integration and cooperation implications of the AES are not clear. Establishment of a parallel alliance is an issue that concerns the disintegration of ECOWAS, derailing of trade and economic cooperation, and dilution of collective security systems in the region. Research findings suggest that these state withdrawals will lead to heightened trade barriers, complexity of cooperation in the region, and a loss of decades of integration initiatives in West Africa (Osuchukwu et al., 2024).

Moreover, whereas the AES enhances sovereignty and self-reliance, there are doubts about its sustainability and effectiveness. The members have serious economic limitations, lack of industrial power, and security issues (that can hamper their realization of long-term stability and development goals) (Aina et al., 2025). Thus, the main issue of this research is the insufficient knowledge of how the post-colonial sovereignty contributes to the creation of new regional blocs like the AES and the restructuring of the geopolitical positions in West Africa. This is a gap that needs to be filled to comprehend what regional integration, security cooperation and political order will be like in the Sahel and the West African region at large. The primary goal of the paper is to explore the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and its consequences to the West African realignment under the prism of the post-colonial sovereignty. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the factors that led to the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States among Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.
- ii. Analyze the role of post-colonial sovereignty in shaping the political and strategic decisions of AES member states.
- iii. Assess the implications of the Alliance of Sahel States for regional integration and cooperation in West Africa, particularly in relation to Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).
- iv. Evaluate the impact of the AES on regional security, economic collaboration, and geopolitical alignment in the Sahel region.
- v. Examine the sustainability and future prospects of the Alliance of Sahel States as an alternative regional bloc in West Africa.

Conceptual Review

Post-colonial sovereignty is a political, economic, and security autonomy claim by ex-colonized countries and especially when they feel neo colonial pressure and external control of their internal matters. This idea is entrenched in historical events of colonial domination and structural inequalities that are entrenched in the world-political economy in the African context. Even though the African states officially gained independence in the middle of the twentieth century, researchers believe that most of them continued to rely on the previous colonialist powers and Western institutions to provide them with economic, political, and security aid (Fanon, 1963; Said, 1978).

This situation has spawned modern-day manifestations of sovereignty which lay stress on self-determination, policy autonomy and sovereignty over national resources. Recent empirical and analytical research demonstrates that post-colonial sovereignty is also manifested in opposition to foreign military occupation, the refusal to accept the foreign rules of governance, and the desire to work out own developmental approaches (Avila & Quinn, 2023; Petidis, 2024). This revival of ideology in the Sahel region has been especially acute, and the interests of political leaders have been shrouded in the need to recover sovereignty and regain national honor. The establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) is a physical reflection of such ideology. There is an indication that the alliance was formed in part due to a feeling of external domination and discontent with Western-supported institutions, such as regional organizations, including ECOWAS (Afriyie, 2024). Recent assessments also suggest that the AES was an act of trying to exercise sovereignty in face of external pressure and this is manifested by threats of intervention and sanctions by ECOWAS after military coups.

Besides, post-colonial sovereignty does not act as a structural condition alone, but also as a political strategy. Sovereignist rhetoric has been employed by leaders in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to legitimize regime change, as well as to mobilize their own peoples and to justify restructuring foreign relations. This is in line with some of the general theoretical conclusions, which argue that sovereignty in post-colonial nations is not only challenged, but also constantly renegotiated within the global hierarchies of power. This is correlated to the aims of the given research, so post-colonial sovereignty becomes essential to comprehend the impact of the ideological aspects on the political and strategic choices of member states in the AES.

Regional Realignment

Regional realignment is the rearrangement of political, economic and security alliances between states in a given geographical area. It usually takes place when the current regional institutions do not fulfill the expectations of the member states or new strategic interests, internal pressures, and external forces appear. The major features of this process include the change of the institutional affiliation, the shift of the diplomatic orientation and the establishment of the alternative alliances which are more capable of responding to the changed interests of the states. To this extent, regional realignment does not just consist of a structural adjustment but also a manifestation of more significant changes in political legitimacy, governance preferences and strategic interests within a region (Aina et al., 2025).

The case of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger leaving ECOWAS and the creation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) in West Africa, is another important instance of realignment in the region. Having been initially created to ensure economic integration and cooperation, ECOWAS has over time been given the additional role to governance and security, especially in the responses to unconstitutional changes of government (Osuchukwu et al., 2025). Nevertheless, there is empirical data that this enlarged status has raised tensions among the member states, particularly those that feel that ECOWAS actions, e.g., sanctions and threats of military interventions, are intrusive or politically partisan. An example of this is the reaction of ECOWAS to the latest coups such as sanctions, diplomatic pressure, etc as a key factor to the withdrawal of those states and leading to the creation of the AES.

Research also shows that the withdrawal of the Sahelian states signifies more structural tensions associated with sovereignty, governing and the changing form of regionalism in West Africa. Such states have been laying more emphasis on national independence rather than commitment to the region, which points to the change in the priorities of politics and strategy. It has been revealed that the pull-out was in part influenced by the view that ECOWAS is taking up external interests and is not doing enough to contain the security issues in the Sahel, thus discrediting itself in the eyes of the concerned states. Also, the anger towards the ECOWAS policies, especially the regime of sanctions and the threat of military intervention, has strengthened the perception of foreign intervention, which has further encouraged the establishment of an alternative alliance structure.

This type of regional realignment is also indicative of larger geopolitical change in the international system. Member states of the AES have diversified their foreign relations and are no longer focused on traditional Western partners, but rather on other actors, including Russia, China, and Turkey. This is in line with the shift towards a more multipolar international system, where states have increased agency in formation of its foreign policy and foreign policy orientations. According to empirical research, these changes have a strong connection with concerns about security, as well as ideological inclinations, specifically, a need to minimize reliance on Western institutions and have more influence in international affairs (Deegbe, 2026; Adjei, 2025). Although the idea of the regional realignment can lead to the opportunities of institutional innovation, policy flexibility and autonomy, it is also associated with the serious risks. Parallel regionalism like the AES and the rise of, has led to the fragmentation of West Africa, undermined effective coordination measures, and made joint action to common issues like terrorist attacks and economic crises difficult. It has already been shown that the establishment of the AES has already derailed regionalization activities, raised the cost of trade and weakened the cooperation structures in place in the ECOWAS.

Regional realignment is relative to this study in that it offers a critical analytical framework on how the AES is transforming regional integration, security cooperation, and geopolitical alignment in West Africa. It draws special attention to the active interaction of the institutional change, state interests, and ideological motives and, thus, can provide great perspectives on the changing nature of regional governance in the Sahel.

Alliance of Sahel States (AES)

The Alliance of Sahel States (AES) is a regional alliance, formed in 2023 by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger as a mutual defense alliance which has since evolved into a wider political and strategic alliance. Soviet Union was formalized by the Liptako Gourma Charter later stressing on collective defense, sovereignty, and mutual aid among the member states. The Charter clearly gives joint reaction to threats by saying that any assault against one of the member states shall be an assault against all and thus a collective security framework and territorial protection has been institutionalized (Charter of Liptako-Gourma, 2023). A reaction to certain common security challenges and external pressures contributed to the establishment of the AES, in part, after the 2023 crisis in Niger, when the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) threatened to intervene with military force (Alliance of Sahel States, 2024).

In contrast to the conventional regional entities whose priorities are on the economic integration, the main priority of the AES is on security cooperation and regime stability. According to scholars this model is termed as security-driven integration wherein the main goal is to overcome short-term security issues like terrorism, insurgency, and transnational crime as opposed to long-term economic objectives (Adjei, 2025). Such direction is echoed in the fact that the alliance focuses on combined military actions, sharing of intelligence, and synchronized response to insecurity as per the Liptako-Gourma Charter, which requires joint-member states to collaborate in fighting terrorism and organized crimes (Charter of Liptako-Gourma, 2023).

The AES also is a major deviation of regional structures. The member states have argued against the current norms of regional governance and collaboration by establishing a parallel institutional structure that exists outside of ECOWAS. The studies suggest that this disjunction is a manifestation of incompatible institutional logics and accounts of legitimacy, as the AES focuses on the sovereignty, stability of regimes, and internal security, whereas ECOWAS is concerned with democratic governance, constitutional stability, and common regulation (Deegbe, 2026). This institutional difference shows larger conflict in the West African regionalism, especially in the issue of sovereignty and multilateral rule. The AES is however struggling with major problems that could impact on its sustainability in the long term. These are low economic ability, low institutional development and constant security threats. Also, the pullout of ECOWAS can have consequences on trade, movement, and economic integration, which brings up the question of the feasibility of the alliance as a replacement regional bloc (Osuchukwu et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the AES can be considered an essential example of the study of the changing processes in regional cooperation and government in Africa.

Connection between Regional Realignment and Post-Colonial Sovereignism

The connection between post-colonial sovereignism and realignment of the region is the key to the formation and development of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). Post-colonial sovereignism offers the ideological base which inspires states to oppose foreign influence, especially when foreign actors are seen to erode the local autonomy and political legitimacy. Simultaneously, regional realignment is the structural expression of such resistance in terms of the formation of new alliances and institutional structures. In that regard, the AES could be interpreted as an ideological and institutional way of reacting to the changing political and security trends in the Sahel region (Aina et al., 2025).

This association is evident in the Sahel where the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was rejected and replaced by the AES as a new regional structure. The factual evidence shows that Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger left ECOWAS due to a mixture of sovereignty and anti-imperialist feelings and displeasure over the manner in which the organization dealt with crises in the region (Ansah, 2025). These states began to give greater priority to national independence than to regional obligations to redefine their own political, security and diplomatic structures beyond institutionally mediated structures. This is an illustration of how ideological change especially one based on post-colonial sovereignism can be translated into tangible political choices and institutional changes in the regional systems.

Meanwhile, the relationship between sovereignism and regional realignment is not easy and has opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, sovereignism fosters independence, self-sufficiency, and the ability of states to implement policies that are in their national interests. Conversely, it can cause disintegration and lack of cohesion in the region unless handled well. The formation of parallel institutions like AES has already changed the security architecture in the region and provided new dimensions of rivalry and collaboration and thus redesigned the pattern of authority and legitimacy in West Africa (Deegbe, 2026). Moreover, according to recent research, this relationship of development can have long-term consequences regarding regional integration since overlapping institutional frameworks will lead to less capacity to respond to common problems such as terrorism, economic instability, and political crises (Osuchukwu et al., 2025). Therefore, although it is possible to argue that post-colonial sovereignism is offering the ideological drive behind the renewed regional order, the actual results will still be dependent on the effectiveness with which the new partnerships like the AES can juggle between independence and collaboration.

Moreover, this connection brings out the interaction of ideas and structures in influencing regional politics. Sovereignism ideologies determine the actions of the state, whereas the institutional and geopolitical outcomes of such decisions are seen in regional realignment. According to Deegbe (2026), these changes are able to change the pattern of authority and government in an area in a great way. With the aim of the current paper, it is necessary to learn about this interconnection to study the factors that contributed to the establishment of the AES, its consequences to the integration of the region, and its effects on security, economic cooperation, and geopolitical orientation in the Sahel.

Empirical Review

The available empirical research on the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) continues to increase over the past years as more academics develop a curiosity in the formation of the Alliance and how it will impact regional integration, security governance, and geopolitical realignment, in West Africa. Current literature shows that the AES is not a simple reactionary structure, it is a multidimensional phenomenon, which is conditioned by the crisis of security, institutional pressures, ideological changes, and geopolitical changes of the world. Aina, Afolabi, and Fayemi (2025) offer one of the best empirical studies in which they argued that the AES had been born in the environment of democratic regression, growing insecurity, and growing displeasure with ECOWAS. According to their research, its revival of military coups and the failure of the ECOWAS to cope with them encouraged the creation of the alliance. The authors also argue that the AES presents the prospect of either the disintegration of the region or the reconfiguration of the institutions in West Africa. In the same vein, Osuchukwu, Itike, and Emesiani (2025) note that the departure of AES member states out of ECOWAS has interfered with the economic cooperation, added transaction expenses, and diminished the integration mechanisms in the region.

In the security perspective, Adefisoye and Titus (2025) theorize that the development of AES is directly correlated with the worsening of the security situation in the Sahel, which implies the increased number of terrorist attacks, insurgency, and armed banditry. These views are

supported by Bachman (2022) who recognizes the Sahel as a region that is one of the most conflict prone and Walther (2024) who emphasizes on the transnational character of violent networks that disrupt national security structures. Previous research by Walther, Leuprecht, and Skillicorn (2016) also proves that insurgent groups act across the porous boundaries, and individual responses by nations are not effective. All these studies indicate that the AES was created in response to the failure of both the domestic and international security structures. Moreover, Adefisoye and Braimah (2023) and Adefisoye and Bamidele (2025) claim that the response of ECOWAS to the unconstitutional changes of government through sanctions and coercive diplomacy was one of the sources of the tension with the member states. These measures as seen by their results are seen as punitive and not constructive accelerating the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Oji and Madubuegwu (2025) support this opinion as they discover that the ECOWAS crisis management policies proved ineffective and usually worsened political tensions.

In addition to the security and institutional aspects of the AES, a number of studies highlight the ideological aspect of the AES. Sabitu and Lawal (2025) approach the alliance in a post-colonial perspective by stating that it is a product of historical grievances regarding colonial histories and neo-colonial impact. Their results indicate that the discontent with the foreign intervention especially by France was a critical factor in the formation of the alliance. Avila and Quinn (2023) also use this argument when they point to the continued presence of the networks of *Françafrique* in shaping the politics and economy of West Africa, and Petidis (2024) to the realignment of the region in the Sahel as part of larger post-colonial resistance. Equally, despite their works not addressing the AES, Fanon (1963) and Said (1978) offer conceptual backgrounds that aid the depiction of the revival of the sovereigntist ideologies in the region. Their writing emphasizes that historical experiences of domination still determine the contemporary politics behavior, which is empirically supported by recent works on the AES. In these aspects, the alliance may be understood as strategic and symbolical denial of foreign domination.

Deegbe (2026) provides an institutional approach, suggesting that the AES indicates rival legitimacy discourses and institutionalizations of West Africa. His research shows that the split between ECOWAS and AES is redefining the authority structure and remaking governance systems of the regions. This stance is also supported by Adjei (2025), who thinks of the AES as a form of security-led integration, in which security interests dominate economic and democratic agendas. Additional empirical evidence outlines the economic and integration consequences to the AES. According to Grutjen (2024) the disintegration of regional institutions is dangerous to the stability of the economy and long-term development, whereas according to Abdelhak (2024), the establishment of parallel institutional structures may also hurt decades of integration work. Also mentioned by Walther (2024) is the economic vulnerability of Sahelian states, which restrict their capabilities to maintain alternative regional arrangements, which raises questions about the feasibility of the AES.

The further understanding of the formation of the AES is gained through geopolitical analysis. Laplace (2024) and Carnegie Endowment of International Peace (2023) note that the

member states of the AES have been becoming more and more oriented towards the non-Western partners, including Russia, which is the trend of wider strategic diversification. This can be correlated with the results of Avila and Quinn (2023), who state that the weakening of Western power in Africa is providing the opportunity to establish new geopolitical relations. Reuters (2024, 2025) also adds that AES member states have formalized military collaboration and created a collective force that points out their determination to collective protection and sovereignty.

The changing character of regionalism in West Africa is also brought to attention in the empirical studies. Ibok and Atayero (2022) and Onwuamaeze and Garba (2024) indicate that ECOWAS has traditionally been unable to reconcile between economic integration and political stability, which implies that the rise of the AES is an element of a larger institutional change process. In a similar manner, Bach (2016) and Hartmann (2017) claim that due to conflicting domestic interests and external pressures, African regional organizations tend to experience the problem of legitimacy.

Additionally, Zoubir (2020) and Lacher (2022) highlight how the implementation of external interventions in the Sahel has had many unintended effects on the region, such as militarization of politics and erosion of state legitimacy. Such results can support the thesis that the AES can be viewed as the response to both the failures of internal governance and intervention strategies.

Even though the scope of current research is extensive, there are a number of limitations. The majority of empirical studies emphasize so much on the aspect of security and governance at the expense of ideological, economic and geopolitical aspects. Also, it is the absence of longitudinal studies that can evaluate the long-term effects of the AES on the regional integration, as well as stability. According to Aina et al. (2025) the gap in the understanding of whether the AES will result in the disintegration or reconfiguration of the regional institutions remains. Even though the empirical literature on the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has been on the increase, there are still gaps in academic knowledge, especially with respect to how ideological, institutional, and geopolitical aspects of regional realignment have been incorporated in West Africa.

On the one hand, some studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of insecurity and political instability on the creation of the AES, but these studies are rather security-focused. As an example, Adefisoye and Titus (2025), Bachman (2022), Walther (2024), and Walther et al. (2016) highlight the degradation of the security situation, such as terrorism, insurgency, and transnational criminal networks, as the major causes of the alliance. On the same note, Aina et al. (2025) and Osuchukwu et al. (2025) trace the development of the AES to democratic backsliding and failures in institutional capacities to deal with insecurity. Nevertheless, such studies are more inclined to immediate security triggering factors and little emphasis is given to the ideological motivation that underlies state actions. Consequently, the further implication of post-colonial sovereigntism as a structural and ideological force of alliance formation is under-researched.

Second, even though there are scholars who adopt post-colonial views, their analyses have been descriptive as opposed to analytically integrative. Sabitu and Lawal (2025), Avila and Quinn (2023), and Petidis (2024) emphasize that the colonial legacies, neo-colonial relations, and anti-Western sentiments played a major role in determining the AES. Although these studies are valuable clues to the ideological background, they lack the operationalization of how post-colonial sovereignty will be translated into policy action, institutional withdrawal and coalition building. Moreover, the theoretical work of Fanon (1963) and Said (1978) is seldom empirically related to the modern regional processes in a systematic way, which leaves some gap between theory and its practical use.

Third, recent research on regional integration has given much attention to the AES with its disruptive impact on ECOWAS without comprehensively discussing the prospect of transforming institutionalism or hybrid regionalism. These articles by Osuchukwu et al. (2025), Grütjen (2024), and Abdelhak (2024) highlight the adverse impact of fragmentation such as high trade costs and poor economic cooperation. Nonetheless, little is been done to examine whether the AES can become a complementary or alternative model of regional integration and especially one that focuses more on security and sovereign than on economic liberalization. This indicates the existence of a larger gap in the realization of the evolutionary pathways of regional organizations in Africa.

Fourth, although institutional approaches like Deegbe (2026) and Adjei (2025) study opposing legitimacy discourse and the security-based regionalism, they fail to provide the discussion in the sustainability and success of these approaches over time. In particular, there is not enough empirical data on whether the AES is capable of sustaining cohesion and building effective institutions as well as producing tangible results in terms of security and economic development. And in the same way, Adefisoye and Bamidele (2025) and Oji and Madubuegwu (2025) point to the problems in institutional tensions and governance but do not proceed to future analysis of institutional resilience and adaptability.

Fifth, despite some scholars discussing the geopolitical realignment that comes with the AES, such as the shift to non-Western partners (Avila & Quinn, 2023; Laplace, 2024; Carnegie Endowment, 2023), they tend to view the geopolitical changes as an independent variable instead of a part of the larger picture of the regional change. Also, Zoubir (2020) and Lacher (2022) discuss the unintended effects of external action but do not entirely relate these dynamics to the internal dynamics of forming alliances and restructuring the region. This leaves a knowledge gap on how global power transformation interrelates with local ideological and institutional transformation. Sixth, the economic aspect of the AES is still not well developed in literature. Although Walther (2024) and Abdelhak (2024) note the economic vulnerability of Sahelian states and risks of withdrawal because of its membership in ECOWAS, there is scanty empirical evidence on the economic feasibility of AES as an autonomous regional bloc. Specifically, there is a lack of study of such issues as intra-alliance trade potential, fiscal coordination and long-term development strategies.

Seventh, methods are also a limitation to the literature. The available research is based on qualitative and descriptive methods with a little application of comparative, quantitative, or longitudinal methods. It limits the possibility to estimate causation links, gauge lasting effects, and extrapolate the results in other regional settings. According to Ibok and Atayero, (2022) and Onwuamaeze and Garba, (2024), a higher level of methodological sophistication is required to have a complete picture of what is going on with regional integration and political realignment in West Africa. Lastly, another gap exists in literature concerning the interrelation of ideology, security and the governance of the region. Although studies focus on these dimensions independently, there are very few studies that offer a comprehensive and integrated system that explains the relationship between the two dimensions. This gap is just starting to be fulfilled in the work by Aina et al. (2025), who has been able to make the connectivity between insecurity, democratic relapse, and regional disintegration, but additional research is required to include post-colonial sovereignty as a unifying explanatory variable.

Overall, the current body of literature is divided in many aspects in terms of security, institutional, ideological, economic, and geopolitical aspects, and these intersections are weak. The necessity to pose a thorough and an interdisciplinary study that looks into the role of post-colonial sovereignty in the shaping of alliances like the AES and the redefinition of regional realignment of West Africa is evident.

Theoretical Framework

Post-Colonial Theory

The post-colonial theory focuses on the legacies of colonialism on political, economic and social institutions of the colonized people. It focuses on such problems as dependency, cultural domination, and opposition to foreign control (Fanon, 1963; Said, 1978; Sabitu and Lawal, 2025). The post-colonial theory can be useful in the AES context in explaining why Sahelian states are growing more assertive about their sovereignty and demand outside interference. New alliances like the AES can be attributed to this reaction, then, to perceived neo-colonialism, unequal power dynamics, and ongoing external interventions into domestic matters (Sabitu & Lawal, 2025).

Realist Theory

According to realist theory of international relations, states are driven by self-interest which is based on survival, power, and security in the anarchic international system (Waltz, 1979; Morgenthau, 1948). In this context, alliances become the strategic tools to promote national security and address the perceived threats. The development of the AES is consistent with the premises of realism because member states are trying to enhance collective defence strategies to address internal insurgencies and external forces. The formation of collective military operations and combined security activities is a strategic effort to increase defence capacities and guarantee the survival of regimes (Aina et al., 2025).

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

According to Buzan and Waever (2003), the reasons behind geographical clustering of security dynamics are that threats are stronger and more interdependent in certain regions as

explained by the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). The postulate of this theory is that states in a region are more likely to form an alliance to solve common security problems. The Sahel region has all the attributes of a regional security complex; transnational terrorism, insurgency, weak government, and political instability. The formation of the AES therefore should be viewed as a local reaction to these co-occurring threats, in order to limit the reliance of the member states on external security actors but instead enhance their cooperation (Deegbe, 2026; Buzan & Waever, 2003).

Methodology

The research design used in this study is a qualitative research design, which is aimed at investigating the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) as an expression of post-colonial sovereignty and its consequences regarding the realignment of the region in West Africa. The qualitative methodology is suitable as it allows the researcher to explore the phenomena of interest in depth, categorizing the complex political, historical, and socio-economic phenomena and being able to interpret the meanings, perspectives, and contextual dynamics that cannot be sufficiently described with the help of quantitative methods (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The research will use secondary data, implying the utilization of information that has already been created on the basis of the credible and authoritative sources, including the articles in academic journals, books, policy papers, governmental reports, and reports of international organizations. The analysis of secondary data is a well-known technique in social science studies as one of the most reliable tools to analyse trends, determine patterns, and come up with new findings based on the ready-known knowledge (Ruggiano and Perry, 2017).

Data on this study were relevant because they were found in peer-reviewed journals, reports by regional organizations like ECOWAS and publications by global institutions that deal with governance, security and regional integration. Triangulation of the research in the use of various secondary sources strengthens the validity of the research since the results are backed up by different sides of argument and evidence. Qualitative content analysis is the data analysis approach that is utilized. This entails analytical reading and interpretation of written material in order to extract common themes, patterns and associations as pertains to the study objectives. Some of the major themes that the analysis is based on include post-colonial sovereignty, regional autonomy, security cooperation, and institutional realignment in West Africa. In this way, it is possible to have a systematic interpretation of the role of ideological and structural factors in the development of the AES. To achieve the validity and reliability, the study applies only credible, recent and peer-reviewed sources, whereas the study is consistent in the interpretation of the data. The ethical considerations are also respected through the appropriate recognition of all the information sources used as well as ensuring no plagiarism of any kind is used in the process of research.

Results and Discussion

The formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) can be explained by the fact that the process of the development of the security crisis, political instability, and the failure of the West African subregion institutions are interconnected. The Sahel has become more and more

the center of world terror, and the attacks of extremist groups are becoming more and more serious to disrupt the state power and the control over the territory (Aina et al., 2025). This impaired security situation established a situation whereby the conventional regional arrangements, especially those that are organised via ECOWAS, were considered to be inadequate or ineffective in tackling the existential threat that Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger were facing at immediate levels (Adefisoye and Braimah, 2023; Bachman, 2022). Consequently, these states wanted to have a more direct and responsive means of collective defense.

Besides the security issue, political uncertainty in form of an outbreak of military coup between 2020 and 2023 was a decisive factor in the formation of the conditions of the AES. These coups not only affected the process of democratic governance, but also completely changed the relations between the states concerned and ECOWAS. The reaction of the regional organization, especially the introduction of sanctions and the threat of military interventions, was seen by the military governments as the violation of national sovereignty (Osuchukwu et al., 2025; Grütjen, 2024). This impression created the atmosphere of opposition, in which the formation of the alternative alliance not only became a political need but also a strategic one. Moreover, the formation of the AES is an indication of a larger strategic re-calibration based on the survival of the regime. The alliance is a tool by which military based regimes can tighten their grip amongst themselves and still flaunt their force among others. This conforms to realist explanations of alliances formation whereby the states in danger of attack unite together in collective arrangements to improve their safety and political existence (Waltz 1979). As a result, the AES is not only a reaction to insecurity but also a mirror of more profound political considerations to preserve ruling regimes under the unstable environment.

Post-colonial sovereignism is important in the ideological orientation, as well as the behaviour of AES member states. Without the historical and structural legacies of colonialism, the reason behind withdrawal in ECOWAS and the rejection of western partnerships is impossible to comprehend as they are still in the political and economic relations of the region (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1963). Here the idea of sovereignism appears as a kind of opposition, and states want to obtain control over their national and international matters once again.

The AES is one of the practical expressions of such ideology because the member states actively seek the policies that would decrease the reliance on external players. This involves the expulsion of foreign military presence and the reorganization of security relations and the creation of independent institutional structures (Sabitu & Lawal, 2025; Afriyie, 2024). These measures are symptomatic of the more general attempt to reconsider sovereignty not so much as legal independence but as a material influence on political, economic and security practices. In addition, sovereignism has played a role in justifying the activities of military regimes in the AES. These governments have been in a position to attract domestic support and justify leaving the status quo of the regional affairs by framing their policies as anti-neo-colonial opposition and national humiliation (Petidis, 2024; Avila & Quinn, 2023). This implies that postcolonial sovereignism is a framework of analysis and also a vehicle of political power that influences discourse, identity and policy decisions within the Sahel.

It becomes increasingly important to state that the establishment of the AES has significant consequences regarding regional integration in West Africa and especially concerning ECOWAS. In the past, ECOWAS has acted as a foundation of regional cooperation, economic integration, political stability, and collective security. Nevertheless, the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has greatly upset these processes, which has caused a restructuring of the regional processes (Osuchukwu et al., 2025). Among the most immediate after-effects of this withdrawal, the undermining of economic integration should be mentioned. The withdrawal of member states has decreased the population and geographical coverage of ECOWAS, and, consequently, its economic and political impact. Also, the disintegration of the traditional trade routes and the emergence of new obstacles have made economic co-operation in the region difficult. These events reveal how the regional integration structures are weak against political and ideological difference.

Simultaneously, the AES reflects the rise of a different variant of regionalism one that does not focus on economic integration and normative power, but on security and sovereignty. This change questions the basic principles of ECOWAS especially its allegiance to democracy and joint decision-making. Consequently, the region is becoming more defined by overlapping institutional frameworks, all of which represent alternative ideas of regional cooperation (Deegbe, 2026). The effect of the AES on the security of the region is not simple but impressive. On the one hand, the alliance has enhanced the co-ordination of member states towards combating cross-border threats. The formation of a unified army comprising around 5,000 soldiers is an indication of a well-coordinated initiative to increase the level of collective defense and decrease dependence on other actors (; Reuters, 2025). This process is consistent with the theory of Regional Security Complex in which the states of a region have an increased tendency to collaborate to address common security issues (Buzan and Waever, 2003).

Conversely, the impact of such measures is still unclear. Indications indicate that although military collaboration has improved, insecurity has remained and in other instances, it has escalated after the exit of the Western troops and peace keeping missions (Aina et al., 2025). This doubts the ability of the AES to deal with complex security threats on its own. The AES has challenges and opportunities in its economic context. Although the alliance aims at fostering self-reliance and intra-regional collaboration, the secession out of the ECOWAS has shaken the pre-existing economic links and curtailed entry into the regional markets. This is especially important considering the fact that the member states have limited industrial capacity and vulnerability in relation to the economy (Walther, 2024). In this way, economic independence might be achieved at the price of a lower level of integration and pace of economic development. The AES is a major change of direction geopolitically. The growing interaction with non-Western players like Russia and China is just one among the larger trends of diversification of the international partnerships (Avila & Quinn, 2023). Such redirection not only weakens western influence in the region but also changes the power balance bringing new dynamics into global geopolitics. The sustainability of the AES in the long term is questionable and depends on a number of interacting factors. Although through the alliance, a greater degree of autonomy and coordination are possible, there are considerable structural limitations, such as inadequate economic resources, poor institutional capacity, and

intractable security dilemmas (Adefisoye & Bamidele, 2025). These restraints pose questions on whether the AES can be a viable alternative to the regional bodies like ECOWAS.

Additionally, there are more complexities presented by the focus on regime survival as a major force behind the alliance. Such centralization of the military in the member states can subvert democratic leadership and restrict the popularity of the AES in the wider world system (Aina et al., 2025). This may, in its turn, influence the capacity of the alliance to receive external assistance and investment.

Though these may be the challenges, the AES also has the innovation opportunities in the regional governance. Emphasizing the importance of local agency and localized solutions, the alliance can create alternative patterns of cooperation that are more productive in respecting the realities of the Sahel. Nonetheless, it will be a delicate balance between sovereignty and cooperation and the prolonged efforts to resolve the underlying structural issues before the potential can be achieved.

In the end, the AES will rely on its capacity to overcome the contradictions between independence and interdependence, safety and progress, and ideology and utility in its future. Although it is a considerable departure of the old regional structures, its feasibility will be found on its ability to provide real gains in providing security, financial stability and governance.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to discuss the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and its effects on realigning the region in West Africa using the prism of post-colonial sovereinism. The results show that the AES is not only an outcome of the immediate structural problems, including insecurity and political instability, but also a personification of the deeper ideological trend based on the protest of foreign domination.

The paper concludes that one of the central factors that contribute to the AES is post-colonial sovereinism, which influences the political and strategic choices of its member states. Through focusing on autonomy, self-reliance and resisting outside influence, sovereinist ideology has affected the pull out of the ECOWAS and establishment of other governance and security systems.

Moreover, the development of the AES has some important consequences on the regional integration. Although it offers a platform of responding to common security issues, it is also a source of disintegration and undermines the existence of institutional structures. This two-fold impact shows that the process of regional realignment is not that straightforward as it can involve strengthening sovereignty and weakening cooperation at the same time. The paper also concludes that the AES is important in capturing larger changes in the global geopolitics such as the diversification of partnerships, and weakening of Western actors in Africa. It is however not sustainable in the long term with the economic and institutional constraints of its member states.

To conclude, the AES is a very severe example of the intersection of ideology, security and geopolitics to define the regional order in modern Africa. These dynamics are important to understand so as to create effective policies that ensure that there is a balance of autonomy and cooperation.

Recommendations

The results of this study allow the following recommendations to be made:

- i. AES member states and ECOWAS should engage in renewed discussions, in order to avoid further fragmentation and to seek cooperative solutions to common problems. Diplomatic involvement must aim at restoring trust and consider ways of coexisting and cooperating (Osuchukwu et al., 2025).
- ii. Though the quest of sovereignty is inherent, the involved member states of AES must take a middle ground that acknowledges the need to cooperate regionally in solving transnational issues like terrorism and economic instability. There is a need to consider hybrid forms of cooperation, which entail a combination of autonomy and a collective action (Sabitu and Lawal, 2025).
- iii. The AES needs to be sustainable through building powerful internal structure that will help to coordinate the policies and manage the resources efficiently. Institutional growth, transparency, and accountability should be given priority by the member states in order to become viable in the long run (Adefisoye & Bamidele, 2025).
- iv. To minimize the adverse consequences of their exit out of ECOWAS, the member states of the AES need to enhance economic collaboration within the alliance by formation of trade agreements, infrastructure building, and investing in productive areas. It will increase the resilience of an economy, and decrease the reliance of external actors (Walther, 2024).
- v. To solve the complicated security issues in the Sahel, military solutions are not enough. Member states of the AES are also urged to apply integrated strategies entailing a mixture of military intervention and governance reforms, economic growth, and community involvement that would address the causes of insecurity (Aina et al., 2025).
- vi. Although it has its opportunities, when working with non-Western partners, AES states should consider a strategy that does not imply excessive dependence on one outside player. Balanced partnerships will increase the strategic autonomy and reduce geopolitical risks (Avila & Quinn, 2023).
- vii. AES member states are recommended to come up with effective road maps to democratic transition and inclusive governance in order to increase the legitimacy and stability. This will enhance confidence in the people and enhance global relations (Adefisoye & Braimah, 2023).

References

- Abdelhak, B. (2024). *From the Alliance of Sahel States to the Confederation of Sahel States: The road is clear, but full of traps*, Policy Center for the New South.
- Adefisoye, T. O., & Ariyo, O. O. (2024). Resurging military interventions in francophone West and Central African countries: Between re-colonial rhetoric and flagrant civilian misrule, *Innovations*, 76(3), 220–230.
- Adefisoye, T. O., & Bamidele, S. (2025). *A house divided against itself: The emergence of the Confederation of Sahel States and ECOWAS' regional integration dilemma*, Insight on Africa.
- Adjei, C. A. (2025). A theoretical analysis of security-led integration: The case of Alliance of Sahel States (AES), *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*.
- Adjei, K. (2025). Security-focused regionalism in West Africa: Lessons from the Alliance of Sahel States, *Journal of African Policy Studies*, 12(1), 45–66.
- Afriyie, F. A. (2024). *Dissecting the Alliance of Sahel States' withdrawal from ECOWAS*, Research Center for Analysis and Security Studies (RECASS).
- Afriyie, S. (2024). Post-colonial sovereignism and emerging security alliances in the Sahel, *African Security Review*, 33(2), 145–160.
- Aina, F., Afolabi, B., & Fayemi, J. K. (2025). The Alliance of Sahel States, democratic relapse, insecurity, and the prospects of regional (dis)integration in West Africa, *Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-025-01154-0>
- Alliance of Sahel States. (2024). *Overview of the Alliance of Sahel States*.
- Ansah, R. A. (2025). The exit of Sahel states from ECOWAS: A political analysis of regionalism in crisis, *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 15(2), 167–173.
- Avila, J., & Quinn, B. (2023). The future of Françafrique: Neocolonialism in Africa and the war on terror, *Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union*, 2023(1), Article 20.
- Bachman, J. (2022). Terrorism and political instability in the Sahel region. *Journal of African Security Studies*, 11(2), 55–70.
- Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and powers: The structure of international security*, Cambridge University Press.

- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. (2023). *Russia in Africa*, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/02/russias-growing-footprint-in-africas-sahel-region>
- Charter of Liptako-Gourma. (2023). *Charter establishing the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)*.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.), SAGE Publications.
- Deegbe, F. (2026). From ECOWAS to the Alliance of Sahel States: Shifting security architectures in West Africa, *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*, Grove Press.
- Grütjen, K. (2024). *Current developments in West Africa's regional integration: Challenges for the future design of foreign and development policy (Policy Brief 6/2024)*, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS). <https://doi.org/10.23661/ipb6.2024>
- Laplace, M. (2024). Political solidarity and military cooperation in the Sahel: AES formation and implications, *African Security Review*, 33(2), 95–110.
- Morgenthau, H. J. (1948). *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Oji, K., & Madubuegwu, C. (2025). Crisis of regional governance and the rise of alternative alliances in West Africa, *African Journal of International Relations*, 9(1), 88–104.
- Ologea, U. H., & Erameha, N. I. (2025). The implications of the emergence of the Alliance of Sahelian States for regional integration, stability and development in Africa, *The Round Table*, 114(6), 780–796. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2025.2554979>
- Osuchukwu, C. N., Iteke, W. C., & Emesiani, I. G. (2025). The alliance of Sahel states and the future of West African regional integration, *Direct Research Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies*, 13(1), 27–38.
- Petidis, K. (2024). Post-colonial legacies and regional realignment in the Sahel, *Journal of Political Discourse*, 3(3), 117–126.
- Ruggiano, N., & Perry, T. E. (2017). Conducting secondary analysis of qualitative data: Should we, can we, and how? *Qualitative Social Work*, 18(1), 81–97.
- Sabitou, M., & Lawal, L. (2025). Regional stability in the Sahel states within the framework of post-colonial theory: From ECOWAS to the Alliance of Sahel States, *Journal of Political Discourse*, 3(3), 112–126.

Sahel Alliance Report. (2025). *The Alliance of Sahel States and regional integration challenges*.

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books.

Walther, O. (2024). Economic implications of Sahel regional realignment, *African Development Review*, 36(2), 210–225.

Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics*, McGraw-Hill.