

**New Regionalism and Achieving Security and  
Development in the African Sahel Region:  
The Role of ECOWAS**  
**الإقليمية الجديدة وتحقيق الأمن والتنمية في منطقة الساحل الأفريقي:  
دور الإيكواس**

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**Abstract:**

The research endeavour of this article is to try to understand the approach to the Sahel region as a regional security complex within an analytical context that relies on the discussion of 'old regionalism' and 'new regionalism' and their role in rebalancing the power balances in the regional system of the region and bringing about development to achieve the concept of comprehensive security, this paper analyses the role of the ECOWAS group and its attempt to reformulate the geostrategic composition of the regional system of the African Sahel. The study concluded that the defence mechanism adopted by ECOWAS was unable to bring about the required fundamental change in security patterns in the region because of the way it was designed, which does not allow it to be a real security provider mechanism or a tool for crisis management in the region, which prompted it to change through the process of reactivating the group and its defence and security orientation and creating a cooperative policy with a changing architecture desired by the Sahelian countries.

The recommendations are as follows: The need to take into account the balance between the needs of ECOWAS member states and the needs of the regional system when drafting the statute of the regional system, and the need to take into account the similarity in political and cultural aspects and economic parity in order to ensure the success of

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the organisation according to the new regional approach and its role in managing and resolving conflicts and exploiting common resources among these states.

**keywords:** New Regionalism, Achieving Security, Development in the African, The Role of ECOWAS.

#### ملخص:

يتمثل المسعى البحثي لهذا المقال في محاولة فهم مقاربة إقليم الساحل الإفريقي، بوصفه مركباً أمنياً إقليمياً، ضمن سياق تحليلي يعتمد على مناقشة "الإقليمية القديمة" و"الإقليمية الجديدة"، ودورها في إعادة توازنات القوى في النظام الإقليمي للمنطقة، وإحداث التنمية بما يحقق مفهوم الأمن الشامل، وذلك من خلال تحليل دور مجموعة الإيكواس ومحاولتها إعادة الصياغة الجيواستراتيجية للنظام الإقليمي للساحل الإفريقي وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى أن آلية الدفاع المتبناة من قبل الإيكواس لم تتمكن من إحداث التعديل الجوهري المطلوب في الأنماط الأمنية في الإقليم بسبب الطريقة التي صُممت بها والتي لا تسمح بأن تكون آلية مزودة حقيقية للأمن ولا أداة لإدارة الأزمات في الإقليم، الأمر الذي دفعها للتغيير عبر تبني عملية إعادة تفعيل المجموعة وتوجهها الدفاعي والأمني وخلق سياسة تعاونية ذات هندسة متغيرة ترغبها بلدان الساحل الإفريقي. وتمثلت التوصيات في: العمل على ضرورة مراعاة التوازن بين حاجيات الدول الأعضاء في الإيكواس وحاجة النظام الإقليمي عند صياغة النظام الأساسي للمنظومة الإقليمية، كما يجب مراعاة التماثل في الجوانب السياسية والثقافية والتكافؤ الاقتصادي حتى يتم ضمان نجاح المنظمة وفق منهج الإقليمية الجديدة ودورها في إدارة وحل النزاعات واستغلال الموارد المشتركة بين هذه الدول.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإقليمية الجديدة، تحقيق الأمن، التنمية في منطقة الساحل الإفريقي، دور الإيكواس.

**Introduction:**

The phenomenon of new regionalism, with its systems, blocs, and arrangements, represents one of the most significant political, economic, and strategic phenomena that have prevailed in the international system in the post-Cold War world. It has adopted numerous new perspectives and variables, both internationally and regionally, driven by necessities and interests that have imposed themselves on the countries under its umbrella. These objectives have comprehensive dimensions—geopolitical, strategic, geostrategic, geo-economic, cultural-civilizational, and military-security (David A & Patrick M. Morgan, 1997, pp. 4-6). This study aims to analyse the phenomenon of "new regionalism" and its role in rebalancing power dynamics in the regional system of the African Sahel region, fostering development that achieves the concept of comprehensive security by analysing the role of ECOWAS in the geostrategic restructuring of the regional system in the African Sahel.

The Sahel region is one of the least stable areas, not only in Africa but globally. Like the Horn of Africa, it witnesses armed conflicts from time to time within each state, where old regional disputes intensify, and terrorist networks and transnational criminal Organisations become more active. Some countries in the region exhibit clear inefficiency in effectively controlling their territories (Thomas & Wilkin, 1999). Deep-rooted tribal tendencies often prevent the formation of a complete national identity, leading to internal instability, fuelling tribal separatist tendencies, and keeping extremist political and religious movements active in recruiting followers and supporters.

Over the past decades, the Sahel has been a theatre for various conflicts. State fragility, poor governmental institutions, unemployment, ethnic conflicts, climate change, foreign exploitation of resources, and external military interventions have led to increased poverty, despair, and illegal migration. The multiplicity of security initiatives launched by external powers has worsened the situation, complicating issues rather than resolving them. The lack of effective development initiatives, the persistence of ageing leadership in power, and reliance on foreign powers have negatively affected the political and socio-economic conditions, leading to military coups. This highlighted that a security-only approach is insufficient. While combating violent extremist Organisations is necessary, it should be accompanied by genuine developmental programmes.

Geopolitical shifts in the region, notably the decline of French influence and the rise of other significant players like Russia, China, and some Middle Eastern parties, may reshape the region's geopolitics, especially when facing the varying roles of African regional alliances and Organisations. This research paper seeks to uncover these dynamics by analysing the geopolitical dimensions of the African Sahel region and the role of alliances and regional complexes, particularly ECOWAS, in maintaining stability in the region. It aims to answer the following question: **What are the dimensions and features of the geopolitical map of the African Sahel region, and what role does ECOWAS play amid the transformations occurring in the region?**

Under this question are the following sub-questions:

- 1- What is the phenomenon of the new regionalism and its conceptual structure, and what is meant by security and development?
- 2- What is the geopolitical space of the Sahel region and how has it been affected by various shifts in the regional and international contexts?
- 3- What is the role of ECOWAS in rebalancing the balance of power in the new regional and international context?

The study is based on a set of **hypotheses**:

- 1- The new regionalism is a comprehensive and multidimensional political, economic, and security phenomenon, and therefore it is a “new phenomenon” in a qualitative sense; because it is an integral part of the current global transformation.
- 2- There is a close relationship between the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel region and the rebalancing of power in the current regional order.
- 3- The role of ECOWAS in the geostrategic reshaping of the Sahel regional order. This is part of the phenomenon of the “new regionalism” and its role in rebalancing the balance of power and bringing about development in order to achieve the concept of comprehensive security.

The study sought to answer the main research question with the help of a group of **previous studies** that established the study, each of which contributed directly and indirectly to the formation of the knowledge structure of the general framework of regionalism and the new regionalism, which is the analytical basis for the study of ECOWAS

and its role in achieving development, security and stability in the region. **Rodrigo Tavares'** The State of the Art of Regionalism: The Past, Present and Future of a Discipline established the concept of traditional regionalism, which means the intensification of economic, political, cultural and social cooperation between geographically close countries (Tavares, The State of the Art of Regionalism the Past, Present and Future of a Discipline, 2004). The research also relied on the study of **Norman Palmer** in his book: The New Regionalism in Asia and the Pacific, who used the term new regionalism for the first time and considered it the most appropriate level of reconciliation between rising nationalism on the one hand, and trends towards internationalization on the other They are cooperative relationships between different social units as a means of promoting economic and social cooperation (Norman, 1991). **Mitellman James's** study entitled: Rethinking the New Regionalism in the Context of Globalisation, the new regionalism is not only a chapter of Globalisation but can also be seen as a response or challenge to Globalisation. The latest study (Mittelman, 1996). **Bjorn Hettne, Andras Inotai.** The New Regionalism, Implications for Global Development and International Security: The new regionalism is a multidimensional form of integration that encompasses economic, political, social, social, and cultural conditions, and thus goes far beyond the goal of creating free trade regimes or security alliances (Hettne & Inotai, 1994).

To answer this question, the research paper addresses the following axes:

First: New Regionalism, Security, and Development: A Conceptual Approach:

1. Conceptualisation of the New Regionalism.
2. Security Concept and Levels of Analysis.
3. The concept of development and its evolution

Second: The Geopolitical Map of the African Sahel Region:

1. The African Sahel region: the geopolitical domain.
2. Internal characteristics of the Sahel countries.
3. The Sahel region in regional and international contexts.

Third: ECOWAS and the Dilemma of Achieving Security and Development:

1. ECOWAS: Origin and Objectives.

2. ECOWAS and the attempt to control stability in the region.
3. Geopolitical implications of the new alliance and the decline of ECOWAS's role.

### **First: New Regionalism, Security, and Development: A Conceptual Approach**

Researching conceptual frameworks is a practical and objective necessity before delving into the subject of the study. These frameworks are the foundation, upon which the meanings of the study are built, and they become the main tools and indicative methods relied upon in the organized research process. Our study is based on the following concepts:

#### **1. New Regionalism:**

Opinions and discussions on the concept of regionalism and new regionalism have varied widely. Despite the prevalence of the concept of a region in many political writings, opinions differ on a specific and clear definition (Thompson, 1995, pp. 91-95). The renowned German geographer Friedrich Ratzel was the first to refer to the idea of regions in international politics through his formulation of the seven laws of determinism and *Lebensraum*, embodied by population growth and its accompanying developments in various fields. (Fawcett & Hurrell, 1995). The divergence in researchers' definitions of a region stems from the variety of methods they use. Some define it in terms of national interest, while others define it in terms of the shared interests that unite the countries of the region, such as Southeast Asia. Hence, the region is a multifaceted concept, though everyone agrees that geography is a common factor in its traditional definition. Consequently, a geographic region means a group of geographically contiguous countries that politically interact with each other, whether cooperatively or antagonistically, in a manner that influences each other's foreign policies. Research in the literature on regional studies indicates that the concept of a region is based on four components: geography, the regularity and intensity of interactions, shared regional perceptions, and active agencies (Tavares, *The State of the Art of Regionalism the Past, Present and Future of a Discipline*, 2004, pp. 2-4).

The traditional concept of regionalism (Old Regionalism) primarily focuses on understanding the reasons that drive countries to

cluster and cooperate. This concept is linked to the emergence of the European Common Market at the end of World War II, which led to the demolition of the old European system and the division of the world into bipolarity. Regionalism played a significant role in determining polar allegiances through the nature of alliances and blocs adopted by countries and in attempting to control regional conflicts by fostering cooperation among European countries.

With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the new international system, the concept of regionalism evolved significantly and became known as "new regionalism." Its birth was marked by the emergence of regional economic blocs worldwide. The phenomenon of new regionalism sparked numerous discussions and dialogues, leading to what is known as the dialogue between economic models and cultural values, resulting from the emergence of cultural factors due to national conflicts as an outcome of the new international system. Bjorn Hettne, one of the leading figures in new regionalism, defines it as a "multi-dimensional process of achieving regional integration, which includes economic, political, social, and cultural aspects." He argues that regional integration involves decisions and policies that encompass all the aforementioned aspects without exception (Hettne & Inotai, 1994, p. 10). Norman Palmer also defines it as "the most suitable level for reconciling rising nationalism on the one hand and trends toward internationalization on the other (D, 1991, pp. 174-176).

New regionalism, therefore, comprises a mix of formal and informal medium-level relationships between states or non-governmental actors. Since the mid-1980s, various forms of regionalism and its projects have emerged globally. The lessons of the European Union may be the first building block to explain this phenomenon, but other regional processes that differ in form and content have also been observed in other parts of the world. These include the reorganisation and expansion of old regional projects and institutions such as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Hence, it must be considered that this renewed and global trend of regionalism, described as "new regionalism," is not limited to relationships between international governmental Organisations shared by states. On the contrary, new regionalism is Characterise by its multi-dimensionality, complexities, and contradictory actors (Soderbaun & Timothy M. Shaw., 2003, pp. 1-5).

**Security:**

The concept of security is one of the most debated political terms due to its association with the survival and continuity of individuals, peoples, and states. Its numerous definitions, varying in content, level of analysis, means, and involved parties, underscore its complexity. True state security stems from a deep understanding of the sources threatening its various capabilities and addressing these threats to allow for the genuine development of those capabilities in all fields, both present and future (Tashtoush, 2012, p. 18). One of the most significant definitions of security in academic studies is provided by Barry Buzan, a prominent expert in security studies. He defines security as the effort to be free from threats, and in the context of the international system, it is the ability of societies and states to maintain their independent identity and functional integrity against forces of change that are perceived as hostile (Baylis, 2014, p. 414). The concept of security can be said to rest on four main pillars: (Al-Harbi, 2008, p. 9).

- A genuine recognition of both external and internal threats.
- Developing strategies to enhance the state's powers.
- Providing the capacity to confront these threats by building armed forces and police forces capable of countering them.
- Preparing scenarios and taking appropriate measures to address the threats, with a necessity for these measures to evolve gradually as threats escalate.

Buzan identifies five key dimensions of security:

- **Military Security:** This concerns the interplay of armed attack capabilities and defensive measures, as well as the perceptions states have of each other's intentions.
- **Political Security:** This refers to the Organisational stability of states, including their government systems and the ideologies from which they derive legitimacy.
- **Economic Security:** This concerns the financial resources and markets necessary to sustainably maintain acceptable levels of welfare and state power.
- **Social Security:** This pertains to the ability of societies to maintain and reproduce their distinct patterns in language,

culture, national and religious identity, and customs within acceptable conditions for their development.

- **Environmental Security:** This relates to the preservation of the local or global biosphere as a fundamental factor upon which all human activities depend.

The concept of security and the global security landscape have transformed because of Globalisation. One of the most significant shifts is in the concept of power, which is no longer closely and solely linked to military strength. Instead, power now encompasses technology, education, economic growth, interdependence, and information. Global power today is built on sources such as **soft power**, as well as tangible sources: **hard power**. As noted by Joseph Nye, **soft security** pertains to indirect or non-military threats such as instability, extremism, terrorism, smuggling, drugs, illegal immigration, organized crime, and pandemics. In contrast, **hard security** refers to direct threats, namely military threats.

If the concept of security traditionally means the security of a country's territory against external aggression or the protection of its national interests, the legitimate concerns of ordinary people, directly related to their security and threatened by various ramifications of epidemics, famine, unemployment, crime, and social conflict, have been neglected. For most people, feelings of insecurity arise more from daily life concerns than from fears of violent world events. Therefore, human security is not about weapons but about human life and dignity.

The concept of **human security** emerged in the second half of the 1990s because of global transformations, especially the spread of internal conflicts and the resulting civilian casualties, and the Globalisation of environmental problems, epidemics, and poverty. Consequently, the nature of threats facing the world changed, as addressed in the 1994 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Nations, 17 Goals to Transform Our World), which was the first to conceptualize human security and incorporate it into broader security studies.

The contributions of the "Copenhagen School" in the early 1980s, particularly the theoretical work led by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever associated with the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, marked the first theoretical attempts to formulate and expand the concept of security. This expansion moved beyond focusing solely on state security to include other sectors beyond the military (Antar, 2005, p.

23) and to deepen the concept to encompass the security of groups and individuals.

Human security is defined as safeguarding human dignity by meeting material and moral needs and ensuring the exercise of fundamental rights. The threats to human security are numerous and are summarized in the following categories by the report: economic security, food security, **health security**, environmental security, personal security, and social security (Jadid & Qaiza, p. 46).

**Development:**

The definition of development is closely linked to the scientific and theoretical political and economic background of the person providing the definition. For instance, economists typically define development as the rapid increase in the level of economic production and national and household income (Al-Nasr & Yasmin Medhat Muhammad, 2017, p. 80). In contrast, sociologists view development as intentional and planned social change aimed at altering behaviours and cultures to be positive, open, flexible, and productive...

Political scientists, on the other hand, define development as the process of establishing political institutions that adhere to democratic principles and allow citizen participation in decision-making... Environmental researchers emphasize the environmental dimension of development, focusing on preserving it from all types of pollution... In conclusion, despite the varied and sometimes divergent perspectives, development can be seen as encompassing all the aforementioned dimensions. It includes economic, social, political, and environmental aspects and must achieve these dimensions while also maintaining a balance among them.

The "Declaration on the Right to Development," adopted by the United Nations in 1986, defines the development process as "an integrated process encompassing economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions, aimed at the continuous improvement of the well-being of all the population and all individuals, through which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized (Nations, United Nations Declaration of the Right to Development).

## **Second: The Geopolitical Map of the African Sahel Region:**

### **1. The African Sahel Region: The Geopolitical Domain:**

The African Sahel has been known by various names, reflecting different geographical and anthropological contexts and the civilizational implications that produced these terms. Some of the most notable names include Bilad al-Sudan, Bilad al-Siba, the Great Sahara, the African Sahel, the Saharan Sahel, and the African Plain (Safi, 2010, p. 8).

The term "African Sahel" (Sahel Africain) originates from French and is associated with the French presence in the region. Geographically, the Saharan Sahel comprises six countries: Sudan, Chad, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania. According to colonial maps, it was divided into English Sudan and French Sudan, forming a strip that extends from the Red Sea in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west (Milburn, 1984, p. 91).

According to the International Committee for the Fight against Drought in the Sahel (CILSS), the Sahel region consists of nine member countries: Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, and Chad. The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) defines the region based on colonial ties through the French franc zone, including Burkina Faso, Benin, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, and Togo (Demon, Geopolitics of the Sahel and the Sahara, 2011, p. 11).

Geographically, the African Sahel serves as a bridge between North Africa, overlooking the Mediterranean, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite each having its distinct geopolitical space with unique characteristics, geopolitically (Griffiths & Terry O'Callaghan, 2007, p. 163) they form an integrated space. This can be described as a Maghreb-Sahel security complex, based on the regional security complex approach that relies on intense security interdependence and strict mutual influence among regional parties; any disintegration within one party's environment affects the other parties (Taj, 2011, p. 3). 2011)

Thus, the geopolitical boundaries of the African Sahel go beyond mere geographical limits and reflect security boundaries. These start from recognizing threat sources, where a specific region becomes

a geopolitical extension for any state when it becomes a security concern.

Geographically, the Sahel is a semi-arid region separating North Africa from the Sahara Desert in the north and the savannah in the south. Most of the Sahelian land is arid desert, lacking conditions for normal life, and the natural resources vary among Sahel countries. Additionally, the region faces weather risks and drought waves. It is the driest and least populated area in its countries, with temperatures often reaching 50 degrees Celsius. Only 30% of its land is arable.

The African Sahel is rich in important resources that could make it an economic hub. It is abundant in strategic natural resources, attracting significant international attention. These include oil (10% of the world's reserves) and gas (8% of the world's reserves). African gas is particularly notable for its easy extraction and marketing due to the continent's strategic location, being centrally located among the world's continents and having substantial oil reserves in coastal or territorial waters.

Niger's fossil fuel reserves are 993 million barrels of oil and 175 million cubic meters of natural gas. Its eastern neighbour, Chad, has an estimated 1.5 billion barrels of oil reserves (A paradise of minerals and energy resources... How did the great powers plunder the coastal wealth?).

In October 2019, Mauritania and Senegal announced significant gas discoveries, totalling 50 trillion cubic feet in the "Ahmeyim" field within their territorial waters. Additionally, the Mauritanian "Banda" field holds about 1.2 trillion cubic feet of gas. Mauritania also has significant oil reserves estimated at 20 million cubic meters.

The Sahel region possesses substantial uranium reserves used for generating nuclear electricity. Niger holds about 7% of the world's total uranium reserves, estimated at 532,000 tons, ranking fourth globally in uranium production. Chad has an estimated 2.4 thousand tons of uranium, and Mali holds 9 thousand tons.

The Sahel countries also have large gold reserves, estimated at 1,020 metric tons. These are distributed across 13 mines in Mali, with 800 metric tons, 11 mines in Burkina Faso with 154.2 metric tons, and Niger with 65 metric tons.

Mali's Goulamina mine holds an estimated 142.3 million metric tons of lithium. Regarding phosphate reserves, Niger has approximately 2 billion metric tons, followed by Mauritania with 1.2 billion metric tons, Mali with 600 million metric tons, Chad with 200 million metric tons, and Burkina Faso with 100 million metric tons.

The African Sahel's strategic significance is heightened by its abundant natural resources, which vary and diversify from one region to another. Key industries in Mali include mining, with significant diamond, phosphate, and copper extraction. Niger is rich in coal, iron, and phosphate. Guinea-Bissau has diamond, iron, and copper resources. Senegal possesses various minerals, including iron and phosphate, with Mauritania producing 100 million tons of iron and having copper reserves estimated at 27.3 million tons.

The abundance of natural resources and energy in the African Sahel explains and reveals the underlying reasons for intense competition among global powers for control in this region.

## **2. Internal Characteristics of the African Sahel Countries:**

The political, security, economic, and social variables are among the most significant factors influencing the geopolitical conditions of the Sahel region under study. These variables can be analysed as follows:

### **1. Characteristics of the Political Environment:**

Referring to the origins of the African political environment, it emerged from the interaction between two different cultures: the traditional African culture and the Western European colonial culture. This cultural interaction played a significant role in shaping the unique characteristics of the African political environment. Some of the key features include:

- **Ethnic Conflict for Power:** Sahelian African societies are characterised by ethnic plurality (linguistic, religious, cultural, racial, etc.), often-crossing borders. Most African ethnic groups extend across borders into neighbouring countries due to the retention of colonial boundaries established on a geographical rather than an ethnic basis (Nada, 2023, pp. 68-90). The struggle to control power and unify these groups has fuelled the desire of different ethnicities in many African countries to remain in power, leading to the creation of autocratic

political systems. This affects the structure and distribution of ethnic diversity, preventing access to power through democratic means, leaving military coups, armed conflict, and civil wars as the primary alternatives.

- **Elite Conflict for Power:** Colonialism experienced by Sahelian countries initially united African elites. However, after the departure of the colonizers (both militarily and administratively) and the transfer of power to these African elites, the cause for national unity dissipated, resulting in bitter struggles among the elites for power.

- **Civil-Military Relationship Overlap:** Many ruling regimes, lacking political legitimacy, increasingly rely on the military to stay in power. This reliance involves suppressing opposition and quashing uprisings, which enhances the political role of the military and encourages military personnel to seize power (Rahman, 2013, pp. 127-149).

- **Authoritarianism and Lack of Institutionalism:** Most African political systems exhibit various forms of political authoritarianism, personalizing power, and unilateral decision-making, regardless of the nature of the government system, whether parliamentary, presidential, or semi-presidential. This stands in contrast to political institutionalism.

## **2. Characteristics of the Security Environment:**

The African environment has always been, and remains, one of the regions with the highest rates of insecurity in the world. Armed conflicts are rampant across the Sahel region, organized crime syndicates operate with impunity across its borders, and terrorist groups are expanding, exacerbating human security threats and risks. Key characteristics of this security environment include:

- **Armed Conflicts:** The Sahel region experiences conflicts over resources and wealth, which are supposed to be fundamental to building development in these countries. However, they have become direct or indirect causes of undermining security and stability and, in some cases, dismantling the state, as seen in Niger.

- **Lack of State Control over Territory:** This is evident in countries like Mali, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the state loses control over entire regions or vast border areas, such as the border triangle between Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. This situation facilitates the spread of organized crime and arms trafficking (Amal, 2002, pp. 1-26).

- **Phenomenon of Terrorism:** Several factors have contributed to the spread of extremist groups in the region, primarily the geography, demography, and prevailing culture. The vast deserts, dense forests, sprawling swamps, mountains, plateaus, and plains, coupled with limitless human and cultural diversity, facilitate the easy spread of ideology and movement. Thus, terrorism has spread from the northern part of the continent, through the Sahara and the Sahel, to West, Central, and East Africa, becoming another significant factor undermining stability and security.

### 3. The Impact of Climate Change in the African Sahel Region:

Research indicates that climate change exacerbates poverty, which in turn increases internal instability, fuelling terrorism and crime and potentially driving youth to join armed groups. In the Sahel region of West Africa, environmental and social factors have played a role in the emergence of violence within communities, whether tribal or ethnic, or through the rise of extremist Organisations.

The effects of climate change continue to exacerbate conflicts between local communities in both Mali and Niger, leading to widespread poverty, a decline in public services, and the disruption of traditional means of subsistence.

Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), stated after visiting the region that violence and the challenges faced by the region are not solely due to conflicts but are also linked to the shrinking of arable land and the unpredictability of water resources (CROSS, 2019).

Similarly, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) warned of a "very dangerous" humanitarian situation in **Niger** and, more broadly, in the Sahel region due to security deterioration caused by jihadist groups and the effects of climate change.

The Organisation noted that a large number of the two million displaced people in **Burkina Faso** are "in besieged cities" or "under siege" by jihadists, making it impossible for them to access food, water, and medicine.

The country is facing a severe food crisis exacerbated by terrorist violence preventing farmers from working in their fields, while **floods** since June have killed about 200 people in **Niger**.

Violence is taking a highly concerning trajectory. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported that the number of recorded deaths in Mali reached 1,686 in 2018, compared to 949 in 2017 and 320 in 2016. The hotspots are expanding from northern Mali to its centre and along the borders between Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

This means that climate change will further complicate the internal situation in countries already suffering from low development rates, poverty, and widespread criminal activity. The United Nations estimates for the Sahel region and agricultural security there indicate a critical deterioration of approximately 80% of agricultural land due to climate change. Around 50 million people rely on agriculture and livestock as their primary source of livelihood. As of 2018, about 33 million people in the Sahel alone lack **food security** (Othmane, 2019).

Additionally, unstable climatic conditions and conflicts have been major factors contributing to **increased violence** in Africa. The reduction of arable land, affected by desertification due to climate change, has increased hunger and poverty, creating competition and conflict over resources. This is often managed through customary practices and quick mediation by local tribal leaders, but such coexistence does not last long. Thousands of civilians are killed annually in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria in bloody inter-community violence (Mahdi, 2006, pp. 11-13).

A report by the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, based in Washington, indicates that the rise of terrorism in Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger has been faster than in any other region in Africa, with a 140% increase since 2020. This has resulted in 8,000 deaths and the displacement of 2.5 million people, with attacks by ISIS alone causing nearly 1,000 deaths in 2022. The report reveals that governments in the region have shown an inability to sustain pressure on militant groups and provide security for communities. Security forces in the Sahel region have suffered heavy losses in conflicts, with militants successfully targeting security and defence forces across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The superior mobility and intelligence capabilities of armed groups have enabled them to overrun fixed military bases, resulting in hundreds of casualties among the armed forces.

The ICRC points out that violence has forced 4.5 million people to leave their homes in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, a 200% increase in the past two years.

Regarding **health security threats**, rising temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns have significantly impacted the health of populations across Africa. Increased temperatures and rainfall make habitats more suitable for biting insects and vector-borne diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, and yellow fever.

Additionally, new diseases are emerging in areas where they were previously unknown. In 2017, an estimated 93% of malaria deaths worldwide occurred in Africa, with malaria epidemics often following periods of unusual heavy rainfall. Furthermore, warming in Africa's highlands allows malaria-carrying mosquitoes to survive longer.

**The Sahel Region in Regional and International Contexts:**

The Sahel region faces multifaceted and complex crises, posing threats to local, regional, and international actors:

1. **Algeria:** The neighbouring Sahel region poses a continuous security threat to Algeria, (Algeria shares long borders with Mali (1,300 km) and Niger (951 km), despite its strong military presence the instability and chaos in these countries create significant national security threats. These include potential extremist influxes, increased migration towards Europe, drug trafficking, and human trafficking.

The Tuareg issue remains a destabilizing factor due to separatist tendencies, a legacy of French colonialism. This problem has historical roots, with France promising the Tuaregs independence during Charles de Gaulle's era but reneging once Mali gained independence in 1960. This led to several Tuareg uprisings in Mali (1963-64, 1996, and 2012) (Demon, Geopolitics of the Sahel and the Sahara, 2011).

For Algeria, the Tuareg issue is geostrategic due to their presence in southern Algeria, posing a threat to national unity and reflecting similar separatist aspirations in the Sahel region.

2. **France and the European Union:** France attempted to achieve peace in Mali and the Sahel region through military operations such as Operation Serval in 2013 and Operation Barkhane from 2014. Despite these efforts, peace was not achieved, leading France to establish the G5 Sahel group,

including Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger, with an annual cost of nearly one billion dollars. By 2020, these efforts had also failed, signalling France's defeat in the Sahel, where the primary goal was counter-terrorism (Al-Yafai, 2023), but underlying motives included safeguarding economic interests.

Regarding the European Union, it deployed a force of 900 soldiers called Takuba in the Sahel region, including troops from Denmark, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Italy, Greece, and France. Despite not all EU countries participating, EU member states spent 4.72 billion euros (\$5.21 billion) on aid for the G5 Sahel from 2014 to 2020 (Ziad, 2023).

The EU's strategy for stability in Mali, under Article 28 of the EU Treaty, includes four main pillars: combating terrorism, strengthening national defence and security forces, extending state authority and essential services, and developmental measures.

**3. United States:** IN 2002, Washington launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative following the US invasion of Afghanistan, anticipating that groups like Al-Qaeda would seek refuge in the Sahel. This initiative reflected in US defence foreign policy and led to the creation of the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership in 2005, previously known as the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative. This partnership aimed to combat terrorism and prevent the Sahel from becoming a safe haven for extremist groups (Al-Masri, 2023).

### **Third: ECOWAS and the Challenge of Achieving Security and Development:**

#### **1. . ECOWAS: Origins and Objectives:**

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was officially established on May 28, 1975, originally comprising 16 states and now consisting of 15 after Mauritania's withdrawal in 1999. The current member states are: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Cape Verde, and Liberia. **The primary goal** of its establishment was to address **economic development** issues,

eradicate poverty, reduce economic dependency, and create new mechanisms for growth (Kwaja, 2017).

In addition to economic factors, political proximity among West African countries facilitated the Organisation's creation. Leaders agreed on the necessity of adapting policies to serve economic needs in response to contemporary international demands. The 1975 Lagos Treaty outlined primary objectives, including developing and promoting cooperation in economic sectors such as industry, transportation, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, trade, currency, and socio-cultural issues to enhance the quality of life in West Africa and maintain economic stability (Sagiru Mati AND OUTHERS, pp. 4-8).

Recognizing the diverse problems and crises in West Africa, the Organisation in 1993 expanded its focus to **political and security aspects**, establishing new institutions such as a joint parliament, community court, and specialized committees. Key principles were adopted, including non-aggression among member states, maintaining peace, security, and regional stability, encouraging and strengthening good neighbourly relations, resolving disputes peacefully, and fostering an environment conducive to economic development (David, 2011).

ECOWAS is governed by a set of goals and principles that regulate relations among states, citizens, and Organisational institutions. The founding treaty and other agreements emphasize adherence to these fundamental principles and **objectives**, which are comprehensively outlined in Article 3 of the current treaty adopted since 1993 :

- Equality and interdependence among member states.
- Solidarity and collective self-sufficiency.
- Cooperation between states, harmonization of policies, and programme integration.
- Non-aggression among member states.
- Maintenance of peace, security, and regional stability through good neighbourly relations.
- Peaceful resolution of disputes and active cooperation between neighbouring states to foster a peaceful environment as a prerequisite for economic development.
- Respect, promotion, and protection of human rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

- Transparency, economic and social justice, and popular participation in development.
- Recognition and respect for the community's legal principles and rules.
- Promotion and consolidation of democratic governance in each member state as stipulated in the Declaration of Political Principles adopted on July 6, 1991, in Abuja.
- Fair and equitable distribution of the costs and benefits of economic cooperation and integration.

## **2. ECOWAS and the Attempt to Stabilize the Region:**

ECOWAS has undertaken numerous military interventions to restore stability since its inception in 1975, making it a leading regional Organisation in conflict resolution. Initially focused on economic goals, political and security developments necessitated a broader approach. In January 1999, member states signed a protocol for collective security called "Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security." In 2004, ECOWAS formed a 6,500-strong military force, including a rapid intervention unit (Hassan, 2023). ECOWAS has intervened in several conflicts within its member states, notably in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau in the 1990s, and more recently in Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, The Gambia, Guinea, and Mali.

During the recent coup in Niger, ECOWAS leaders adopted a firm stance, viewing swift action as crucial for maintaining African collective principles and ECOWAS's authority in stabilizing the Sahel and West Africa. Factors supporting this stance included:

1. Coup Leaders' Justifications: Coup leaders cited ongoing security deterioration and poor economic and social governance.
2. Refusal of Dialogue: Niger's coup leaders refused to engage with an African Union, UN, and ECOWAS delegation.
3. Detainment of President Mohamed Bazoum: Bazoum's deteriorating health condition while in custody.

On July 29, ECOWAS imposed strict economic and financial sanctions on Niger, demanding Bazoum's immediate release and

reinstatement, with a deadline of August 6, 2023, threatening further measures, including potential use of force.

ECOWAS, alongside the West African Economic and Monetary Union, suspended all trade transactions with Niger, froze its assets in the regional central bank, and halted financial aid from regional development banks. The regional central bank cancelled Niger's issuance of \$51 million in bonds after sanctions, amidst plans to raise \$834 million from the regional debt market in 2023.

Additionally, ECOWAS sanctions led to the suspension of power supply from Nigeria and halted import-export activities by Côte d'Ivoire, with the West African Central Bank closing its branches in Niger.

### **3. Geopolitical Implications of the New Alliance and the Decline of ECOWAS:**

In an unconventional move that could redraw the geopolitical map of the Sahel region, the military leaders of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger signed the Liptako-Gourma Charter on Saturday, September 16, 2023, to establish a new regional defence alliance.

With the increasing threat of attacks by armed groups in the Liptako-Gourma region, which represents the border triangle of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the three countries recognised the need for a unified response. The establishment of this new alliance also comes against the backdrop of rising tensions with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and deteriorating relations between these three countries and France, the former colonial power. Following the coup in Niger on July 26, 2023, ECOWAS repeatedly threatened military intervention and imposed severe economic sanctions on the country. The Organisation insists that the military authorities must immediately restore constitutional order and release ousted President Mohamed Bazoum to resume his constitutional duties. In response to potential threats to Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso deployed fighter jets to deter any aggression, demonstrating the emerging cooperative defensive stance.

Three major implications of the new military alliance in the Sahel can be discussed, which are likely to **reshape the regional geopolitical landscape**:

**1. Shift from Traditional African Diplomacy:** Many African countries have prioritized state-building efforts and adopted non-intervention policies, especially post-independence. Instead of military alliances, regional Organisations like ECOWAS and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) emerged to address collective security. Additionally, the dynamics of the Cold War, economic constraints, historical rivalries, and the presence of foreign military forces in some countries reduced the need for alliances. Internal politics and concerns about sovereignty also played roles in this cautious approach to forming military partnerships. Therefore, the formation of the new Sahel alliance represents a significant departure from this norm. The alliance charter explicitly emphasizes the principle of collective defence: any attack on the sovereignty or territorial integrity of one member is considered an attack on all.

**2. Decline of Western and Specifically French Influence:** Especially in Niger, the support provided by the military regimes in the Sahel to the new authorities in Niger, in contrast to most Western countries, indicates a shift in regional policies and alliances, pointing to deeper currents **reshaping the regional geopolitical landscape.**

**3. Decline of ECOWAS's Role:** The recent coup in Niger dealt a severe blow to the unity and capability of ECOWAS. Due to the economic and trade sanctions imposed by ECOWAS and the hint of potential military intervention, the solidarity reaction from countries governed by military regimes in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger—resisting ECOWAS's punitive measures—served as a test of the bloc's influence and its traditional conflict resolution approach. Historically, ECOWAS's collaborative efforts in crisis management, such as in The Gambia in 2017, were Recognised. However, the challenge posed by coup leaders, coupled with notable public support for some of the coups, has complicated the situation, questioning the legitimacy of constitutionally elected governments. While the African Union has taken similar steps to suspend the membership of countries experiencing military coups, there is a call for a broader, inclusive consultative approach involving all stakeholders to resolve ongoing crises in the region.

In the broader strategic landscape, these countries might find allies outside the continent, especially from countries keen on the decline of Western influence in the region. Countries like **Iran, Russia, and China**, which have vested interests in Africa, may be inclined to offer their support and fill the security voids in the Sahel countries.

**Conclusion:**

This study provides an analysis of the phenomenon of "new regionalism" and its role in reshaping the balance of power in the regional system of the African Sahel, promoting development to achieve the concept of comprehensive security, by analysing the role of ECOWAS in the geostrategic reconfiguration of the regional system of the African Sahel. The research has reached the following conclusions:

- The new regionalism is an approach that is more capable of meeting the needs of countries in terms of security and interests, and this stems from the belief that finding effective solutions to regional problems can only be guaranteed by the entry of the countries concerned by those problems into new regional blocs, and it is required that they have the appropriate amount of potential for joint international action. Individuals are also more receptive to regional grouping ties than global Organisation.
- The new regionalism has become one of the most important phenomena of contemporary international political and economic life and has been a major factor in discussing and addressing regional issues within a collective framework that contributes to strengthening the position of member states in the regional grouping.
- The Sahel region can be placed within this analytical framework, and in the midst of the complexity and overlap of issues between the countries of the region, the role of regional organisations, especially ECOWAS, as a supranational entity with the potential and capabilities to face these challenges, which can achieve cooperation and integration, including development and security among the various countries of the region to face the risks and challenges imposed by the situation.
- The reactivation of ECOWAS and its explicit defensive and security orientation reflect the objectives of the active parties and their choice of an alternative within a geographically narrower cooperative framework.
- There is a collaborative policy with a changing structure desired by the Sahel countries, allowing a limited number of states to proceed with their cooperation without undermining the comprehensive approach to cooperation led by ECOWAS. This policy also allows member countries of the group to have a "sphere of influence" in the political process between states regionally and internationally, while enhancing their ties with

their northern neighbours, the Maghreb countries, thanks to the geographically narrower regional dynamics.

- The defence mechanism adopted by ECOWAS has not brought about a fundamental change in the security patterns in the African Sahel region. This is due to the way it is designed, which does not allow it to be a genuine security provider nor a crisis management tool in the region. This was one of the reasons for its inability to influence many unresolved conflicts or prevent crises that erupt in its regional space and its vicinity.
- The weakness of ECOWAS's defence mechanisms and its inability to generate dynamics that drive convergence and cooperation among the countries of the region is due to the fragmentation of the Sahelian component, which does not encourage sustainable cooperation among its countries in various fields.
- Unless ECOWAS succeeds in addressing sources of tension or preventing and managing crises within its own space, it will not have the capacity to deal with this insecurity developments in its vicinity, nor will it be able to influence them.
- Raises the issue of the group's independence from Western parties, which calls into question the regionalization and securitization of the area, further complicating ECOWAS's role in regional relations.
- The intervention mechanism of ECOWAS risks falling into the trap of excessive securitization and dependence on external policies, due to its reliance on the lowest common denominator and the predominance of certain issues over others. Thus, it can be said that ECOWAS, as designed by its member states, is incapable of effectively influencing regional (in) security situations despite its attempts to contribute to building trust and regional cooperation. Hence, there is a need to redesign the regional architecture in the African Sahel, even if only partially.

As a conclusion, ECOWAS has served as a forum and mechanism to address issues of border and resource disputes, terms of trade, and the regulation of all cooperation relations between the countries of the regional system. However, various obstacles, both internal to the organisation and external interventions by international parties, have created major challenges for the organisation, and even changed its composition and priorities, which negatively affected the effectiveness of the latter in performing its tasks. This necessitates the need to take into account the balance between the needs of member states and the needs of

the regional system when drafting the statute of the regional system, as well as political and cultural similarity and economic parity in order to ensure the success of the organisation in accordance with the new regional approach and its role in managing and resolving conflicts and exploiting common resources among these states.

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