

THE NOVEL DYNAMICS OF SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION AND ITS THREAT ON THE WEST: A CASE STUDY ON THE ALLIANCE OF SAHEL STATES (ASS)

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ABSTRACT

The rise of south-south cooperation, characterized by increased economic, political, and military collaboration among developing countries, has led to a significant shift in the global power dynamics. The Alliance of Sahel States, a regional organization comprising three African countries, is a prominent example of this trend. This article examines the dynamics of the Alliance of Sahel States and its implications for Western powers' interests in the Sahel region. This study employs a qualitative research design, involving semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders from the Alliance member states, including government officials, business leaders, and academics, coupled with secondary data analysis. The secondary data sources include academic articles, government reports, and official documents from the Alliance of Sahel and its member states. The interview guide being the main instrument of data collection for a qualitative research method for empirical data was designed to elicit insights on the alliance's formation, objectives, and implications for Western powers. The analysis reveals that the Alliance of Sahel States has been actively promoting regional integration, economic development, and security cooperation among its member states. The alliance has also been strengthening its institutional capacity and enhancing its diplomatic presence in regional and international forums. Furthermore, the study finds that Western powers' influence in the region is declining as a result of the Alliance growing economic and military cooperation among its member states. The findings suggest that the Alliance represents a significant threat to Western powers' interests in the Sahel region. As the alliance continues to strengthen its regional integration and cooperation, it is likely to further erode Western powers' influence and undermine their ability to shape regional policies. The implications of this trend are far-reaching, with potential consequences for global governance and international relations. The study recommends that, Western powers should prioritize building trust and cooperation with the Alliance of Sahel States through diplomatic efforts, trade agreements, and capacity-building initiatives. This study contributes to our understanding of South-South alliances and their implications for global politics, highlighting the need for Western powers to reassess their relationships with emerging regional actors.

KEYWORDS: South-south cooperation, Alliance of Sahel States, Western powers, Regional integration, Global governance

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1. INTRODUCTION

South-South Cooperation (SSC) refers to the collaboration between developing countries aimed at sharing resources, technology, and expertise to promote mutual economic growth and development. In recent years, this cooperation has gained significant traction, reshaping the global development landscape and presenting new challenges to the traditional power dynamics dominated by Western nations (Balaam & Dillman, 2020). The emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS), also known as "Liptako-Gourma", marked a significant development in the region's political landscape, reflecting a shift towards greater sub-regional self-reliance and cooperation. This move, especially pronounced after the military coup in Niger in July 2023, indicated a growing sentiment among these nations against external influence, and coming together as a strategy for enhancing their mutual security. The formation of the ASS has also negatively impacted its relations with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which is supported by France and Western nations. Tensions have escalated as the Sahel states pursue more autonomous collective policies and governance strategies that diverge from ECOWAS' mechanisms and resolutions (VOA News, 2023). The alliance's choice of the name "Liptako-Gurma," originating from the African language Fulani, with the words "Liba" (to

overcome) and “Ta-a-ko” (indomitable) meaning “what cannot be overcome,” signifies a profound commitment to transcending past failures and reinstating pre-colonial solidarity among its members. In doing so, the ASS not only promotes self-reliance but also significantly changes how these Sahelian nations engage with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), frequently resisting its perceived overreach. The ASS is redefining its members’ roles within both regional and global contexts, marking a steady deconstruction of historical divisions (Kellen, 2006).

The Alliance of Sahel States unravels a novel dynamics of south-south cooperation. By south-south cooperation we mean cooperation between two developing countries from the global south. International relations which are inter-state relations that have been fostered especially with the advent of globalization are a force to reckon with. It is no doubt that through inter-state cooperation as espoused by proponents of the liberal theory of international relations, states can benefit from each other. However, understanding the veritable undercurrent that drives the behavioral attitude of states in international relations which is driven by competitive national interest requires geostrategic reflection of every actor before expressing the consent to be bound by any bilateral and multilateral agreement. From a symmetric standpoint, inter-state cooperation is supposed to be a win-win one and not a win/loss one. However, because states are cynical which stems from the nature of man to dominate, the win-win position that is supposed to have characterized states interactionism with other states has rather resulted to a win/loss experience where one party gains maximally at the expense of the other party that is at the losing end. This prevails extensively when it comes to north-south cooperation between a developed and the developing countries in the global south. Former colonies of the West in Africa, through neo-colonial tendencies, are still under the illusion that their interests align with those of their former colonizers. Pro-Western leaders, driven by greed in African countries, have become remote-controlled by the West and are signing bilateral agreements, claiming they are mutually beneficial, which of course is not true. This process increases the drainage of their rich mineral resources and wealth. Before ASS which we are seeing today, developing countries have been both in bilateral and multilateral cooperation for multifaceted reasons ranging from, economic, political, social, cultural, and strategic.

However, with the upsurge of young, determined, informed, and changed oriented leaders bent at claiming absolute sovereignty from foreign powers as well as detaching from any of their neighbours that prefer western dictate over how the affairs of their countries should be ran, decided to cut-off from the regional bloc in west Africa where they belong that is, the Economic Community of West African States to re-establish a formidable sub-regional alliance known as the Alliance of Sahel States. These leaders are young military juntas who seized power through coup d’états and have been criticized heavily by other ECOWAS members as unconstitutional. These leaders are: Captain Ibrahim Troare of Burkina Faso, Colonel Assimi Goita of Mali, and Abdourahamane Tchiani of Niger. These three Sahelian states have been labeled the poorest statistically in spite of their endowed territorial space as exemplified below. The three military juntas served civilian regimes that were not democratic in governance in the general interest of the citizenry. Those civilian regimes like in Niger and Burkina Faso were almost being hijacked by the imperialist, which is why Captains and Colonels with support of their colleagues staged military coups to topple leaders as some of such African leaders have been delineated by one prolific political pundits who said, “African Leaders are Western clients, clothed in African garment” (Tazoacha Asongani, 2017).

Military regimes breed skepticism towards good governance. However, the commitment, organization, and transparency in governance with which we see how the young military juntas have been governing especially Ibrahim Troare in Burkina Faso present a novel dynamics in military rule. Of course this is not completely new especially in a country like Burkina Faso where an iconic leader who exemplarily injected good governance and fought for absolute sovereignty from the imperial rule died in the late eighties. While it is no doubt that this has inspired the current military leader Captain Ibrahim Troare, nevertheless, Troare’s leadership style of citizen oriented governance and zero tolerance from imperial penetration on Burkina Faso’s absolute economic and political sovereignty, away from the stalemated sovereignty that was at the whims and caprices of the west, has been curtailed. One of the preponderant factors that precipitated the creation of the Alliance of Sahel States; a sub-regional confederation seceding from the ECOWAS regional bloc is to disconnect from neo-colonial exploitation of their countries resources. Since majority of the ECOWAS Heads of State are comfortable with the western entrenchment of their sovereignty and major decisions, the three Sahelian military juntas are paradoxical and want absolute socio-economic and political sovereignty against the former colonial powers in consonance with what was certified at the Westphalian Peace Treaty of 1648 on the Sovereignty of states.

Table 1 :

Overview of the Economic, Demographic, and Natural Resource Characteristics of the Three Members of the Alliance of Sahel States.

Indicator	Burkina Faso	Mali	Niger
Area (km ²)	274,200	1,240,192	1,267,000
Population (2022 estimate)	21,751,000	20,250,833	26,803,275
Population density (inhab/km ²)	79.4	16.3	21.2
GDP (estimate 2021, in billions of U.S. dollars)	15.75	19.98	10.27
GDP per capita (estimate 2021, in U.S. dollars)	729	986	372
GDP growth (estimate 2021)	5.4%	5.1%	5.8%
Main economic sectors	Agriculture, mining, services	Agriculture, services, industries	Agriculture, stock rearing, minerals
Natural resources	Gold, manganese, zinc, nickel	Gold, phosphates, uranium, bauxite	Uranium, coal, oil, metal ores
Literacy rate (%)	36.5%	35.6%	19.1%
Life expectancy at birth (years)	61.9	60.5	62.7

The above table depicts pertinent and salient statistic on the three Sahelian countries in terms of their population size, surface area of land, GDP, literacy rate, life expectancy, and above all their endowed natural resources. From the above table, it shows that if nations are supposed to be classed as the poorest in the world, then it should not be these three Sahelian countries considering the depth of these natural resources they are endowed with. Therefore, the author thinks that these should be the overriding factor that instigated the military juntas to stage a coup from civilian governments who were not representing the interests of the populace and development but rather representing the interests of western powers sucking maximally these resources at the expense of the poor masses who are impoverished and lived below the poverty line in abject poverty.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In September 2023, during the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly held in New York from September 18-26, Mr. Bassolma Bazie, the Minister of State for Burkina Faso, delivered a compelling speech advocating for fairness and justice. He spoke on behalf of Burkina Faso, emphasizing the nation's dedication to Pan-Africanism and addressing the challenges faced by the countries in the West African Sahel. His speech on September 23 came at a significant time, as it coincided with the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States, a pact established on September 16, 2023 between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. This alliance was formed as a defensive and cooperative effort in response to regional instability and external threats, underlining a commitment to "collective security." (Bazié, 2023). The timing of Mr. Bazie's speech was crucial, as it underscored the urgency and relevance of the newly established alliance in the broader context of Africa's contemporary international relations. It highlighted the Sahelian countries' united front in advocating for their sovereignty and collective interests on the international stage. This move, and the subsequent activities of the ASS, has brought significant attention to the dynamics of power, cooperation, and self-determination in Africa, potentially reshaping interactions with international bodies and neighboring regions.

Bazié's declaration at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resonated with historical weight and urgency: "To take our destiny in our own hands" while underscoring the driving force and thinking behind the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States by the military governments in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. This alliance, birthed from shared histories, mutual respect, and a vision of self-reliance, stands as a beacon reminiscent of Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa movement, and Kwame Nkrumah's Pan-African ideals. Alliance of Sahel States represents a counter-narrative to the shackles of colonial and Westphalian impositions, and a beacon of hope for the Africans of the future (Stuart A, 2006).

The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 is arguably the bedrock of contemporary state sovereignty. It underscores the principle that every state possesses undisturbed sovereignty over its territory and internal matters, without outside interference. Such a system entrenched the tenets of territorial sanctity and non-interference, profoundly influencing international politics for centuries. Yet, while it championed state-centric governance, it inadvertently provided legitimacy to colonial interventionist and extractive activities that carved up the lands and resources of continents, including Africa through violent colonial intervention, imposing borders that disregarded the intricate tapestry of cultural, ethnic, and historical ties. The member-states of the ASS draw upon their shared legacies, and a vision of decolonization, mutual esteem, and regional self-sufficiency to challenge the Westphalian paradigm and its inherent exploitative, divisive, and unjust impact on African countries. Rather than strictly adhering to colonially imposed boundaries inherited at independence, this alliance emphasizes African autonomy, interdependence, and right to self-determination. Through these efforts, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are not merely seeking to redefine regional collaboration but also to renegotiate the basis of their relationship with regional institutions and established an emerging global power. A key element of their foreign policy is to confront the foundational elements of a system that has historically exploited and marginalized the African peoples (Liebersohn, 2016).

To reach a better understanding of the significance of this Alliance, one must delve into the history of colonialism in Africa. The infamous Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, known as the "Scramble for Africa," marked a defining moment in the colonization of the African continent by European powers, driven by armed violence and greed for resources and markets. In his book "Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880-1914," H.L. Wesseling noted that by 1880, Europeans viewed Africa as an "unknown continent." Their colonial activities were justified through several ideologies: the "Civilizing Mission," which purported to bring progress and modernization to supposedly backward societies; the "White Man's Burden," a concept suggesting that Europeans were superior to the rest of humanity and had a moral obligation to govern and impart their culture to non-European peoples; and the "Doctrine of Discovery," a legal principle that gave Europeans the right to claim lands they "discovered" that were not inhabited by Christians. By 1910, they had imposed colonial rule on Africa, punctuating the landscape with artificial borders, seizing its vast natural resources, and forcefully subordinating the continent to demands of the global market on highly unequal terms, while holding its people captive. Even when independence was granted, mainly following the end of World War Two, the foundation was already laid for the unequal nature of the post-war world order, in which Africa was both marginalized and locked in asymmetrical power relations with world's rich and most powerful countries (Craven, 2015).

The emergence of the Alliance can be interpreted as a step of resistance against the inequalities and injustices embedded in the colonial legacy that has continued to haunt Africa. The Alliance of Sahel States is more than just a new partnership; it actively confronts the entrenched global systems that Stephen Krasner (1999) has termed "organized hypocrisy." Created in response to regional threats and internal instabilities, the ASS aims to bolster collective security and enhance regional autonomy, particularly in the face of opposition from France and the European Union (EU). Its core objectives include defense against both external aggression and internal rebellions, thus strengthening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its member states. The alliance's choice of the name "Liptako-Gurma," originating from the African language Fulani, with the words "Liba" (to overcome) and "Ta-a-ko" (indomitable) meaning "what cannot be overcome," signifies a profound commitment to transcending past failures and reinstating pre-colonial solidarity among its members. In doing so, the ASS not only promotes self-reliance but also significantly changes how these Sahelian states engage with the Economic Community of West African States, frequently resisting its perceived overreach. The ASS is redefining its members' roles within both regional and global contexts, marking a steady deconstruction of historical divisions. Additionally, Bazié's statement, relating to "so-called friends who want our so-called goods or who threaten us with war to impose their friendship," captures the essence of a resurgent Africa. This new Africa not only acknowledges its past but is also committed to reshaping its future, explicitly naming those who have historically exploited, oppressed, and dominated it. It envisions an Africa that is unified, prosperous, and commands widespread respect within the global community (Chappell, 2023).

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rapid rise of South-South cooperation, particularly in the form of regional alliances and partnerships among developing countries, has introduced a new dynamics in the global political landscape. One of such example is the Alliance of Sahel States, which brings together Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali to promote economic development, security, and political cooperation. However, this trend has also raised concerns about the potential threats it poses to Western powers and their interests. Specifically, the increasing economic and military cooperation among ASS member states may lead to reduced dependence on Western powers and potentially undermine their influence in the region. This study aims to investigate the dynamics of South-South cooperation, as exemplified by the ASS, and its implications for Western powers, with a focus on the potential threats it poses to their interests and influence in the Sahel region. The West, particularly France, the United States and European Union, have long been major players in the Sahel region, providing significant economic and military aid to countries such as Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad. However, the increasing cooperation among Sahel members may erode this influence, leading to a decline in Western powers' ability to shape regional policies and protect their interests. This trend may also have implications for global governance, as South-South cooperation challenges the traditional North-South hierarchical structure of international relations.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to investigate the novel dynamics of South-South cooperation, as exemplified by the Alliance of Sahel States, and its potential threats to Western powers' interests in the region. More specifically, this study aims to:

1. Analyze the evolution and key features of the Alliance of Sahel States, including its structure, membership, and areas of cooperation.
2. Examine the motivations behind the creation and growth of the ASS, including the role of regional integration, economic development, security concerns, and diplomatic strategy.
3. Assess the impact of the ASS on Western powers' influence in the Sahel region, including changes in economic dependence, security relationships, and diplomatic leverage.
4. Investigate the potential implications of South-South cooperation for global governance, including challenges to traditional North-South hierarchical structures and potential shifts in global power dynamics.
5. And lastly, analyze the implications of these findings for Western powers' foreign policy and development strategies in the Sahel region.

By addressing these research objectives, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of South-South cooperation and its potential impact on Western powers' interests in the Sahel region.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

While it should be noted that there are several antecedent publications on south-south cooperation, it should also be established crystal clear that the dimension of south-south cooperation such as what we have today in West Africa known as the Alliance of Sahel States appears novel. This first is explained by the fact that the tripartite states in the Sahel that came together to establish this alliance were already within a multilateral south-south cooperation with the member states under the Economic Community of West Africa States. This new move towards ASS is unconventional but worth analyzing and paying keen attention to. The states of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have had military coups and are now being led by military junta which of course is undemocratic and unconstitutional. However, the actions of these young military juntas with the youngest among them Captain Ibrahim Troare of Burkina Faso could be explained through unresolved grievances by democratic leaders who were toppled from power. There are enormous antecedent literatures on south-south cooperation to review, zoom into for their strengths and gaps in order to establish the originality of this study. By and large, for the purpose of this study, the following literatures were examined.

We began by reviewing the work titled, "A new political and military alliance in the Sahel" authored by David Doukhan (2023). This work of David Doukhan discusses the establishment of a new political and military alliance among Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, known as the Liptako-Gourma Treaty, signed on September 16, 2023. The alliance, formed in response to common threats from radical Islamic Jihad groups and potential military intervention from ECOWAS, aims to bolster collective defense and assistance in the Sahel region. The work delves into the geographical and strategic significance of the Liptako-Gourma area, highlighting its vulnerability to extremist groups like Katiba Macina, Ansarul Islam, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. An emphasis is placed on the challenges faced by the alliance, such as the need for improved military capabilities, funding difficulties, and the absence of a unified command structure. The author also critically examines the potential role of external forces like the Wagner Group and compares this alliance with previous efforts like the G5 Sahel. On September 16, 2023, the leaders of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso signed the

‘Liptako Gourma Treaty’ (Liptako-Gourma-Alliance of Sahel States) in Bamako, the capital of Mali, thus establishing a new alliance between these three Sahel states (Security Pact Reuters, 2023). The three countries face a common threat from radical Islamic Jihad groups that aspire to establish the Islamic Caliphate and spread towards the Gulf of Guinea countries. It seems that the decision to unite their forces stems from the common threats and challenges they face.

Still on the work of David Doukhan, the treaty among the three Sahel states was also signed in the wake of the threat of military involvement by ECOWAS countries in response to the July 26 2023 military coup in Niger. Mali and Burkina Faso have committed to come to Niger’s aid in the event of a military invasion. At the same time, it is interesting to understand why the name Liptako-Gurma was chosen? Liptako-Gurma is a geographical area that spans across these three countries. It is an area of approximately 536,000 square kilometers, 17 million inhabitants, an agricultural area with agro-pastoral potential (agricultural and grazing landscape) and gold mines. The focus on Liptako-Gurma is due to the presence of armed extremist Islamic groups that sow terror and violence in this land. Katiba Macina, commanded by Hamadou Kouffa, is the most well-known of them. Then there is Ansarul Islam led by Abdoul Salam Dicko, which is mainly active in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISWAP), led by Abdulaziz Mahwaz Al-Jamal. The Liptako-Gurma area has been suffering from total insecurity for years due to the presence and activity of the armed groups. The population is isolated, trapped, and desperate for assistance because of the escalating pressure put by radical organizations on economic and consumption resources that are becoming scarce (herds are kidnapped to feed the rebels). This situation resulted in the closing of schools, to the spread of people being kidnapped for bargaining purposes or to be recruited into the ranks of the Islamist groups. The geographical area is suitable for these groups due to the ability to slip away and hide in one of the countries; therefore the area is also called ‘the meeting of the three borders’.

Liptako-Gurma Convention, contains 17 articles. The main goal is to establish a collective defense and assistance architecture. The heads of the ASS undertake in the treaty to fight terrorism in all its forms and organized crime in the common space of the alliance. By the way, the signatories of the alliance believe that the military alliance is justified due to the failure of the G5 Sahel. The G5 Sahel, it must be remembered, is a joint and integrated military force that was supposed to fight the problem of insecurity prevailing in the region because of the activities of the radical Islamic organizations, a task which, according to them, failed. The jihadist danger prevails in full force mainly in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. However, it threatens to expand towards countries in West Africa. Benin, for example, suffered several attacks in the north of the country. The progress of the groups indicates their intention to expand also to the coastal countries in the Gulf of Guinea. The ASS charter does not rule out the potential of new enterprises joining from countries with similar realities.

One of the challenges of the ASS in its fight against the threat of the spread of radical Islamic terrorism and organized crime is the means and the improvement of military capabilities. The alliance needs to strengthen its military capabilities to deal with the hybrid threats facing the countries and the entire region. The new alliance must significantly strengthen the intelligence capabilities and the use of air power. This raises the question of funding. The member states of the new treaty are poor and are often supported by grants from the West. The military coups that took place there cut them off from that financial support and worsened their economic situation. The assumption that Russia or China would fill the gap turned out to be a mistake. They are ready to sell military equipment in exchange for mining valuable minerals. The question of funding was also one of the obstacles of the G5 Sahel, an organization created in 2014 by Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. Without a UN mandate, and thus receiving no financial support from the UN, the G5 Sahel joint forces set up to fight against jihadists in the region has struggled to raise resources to achieve its goals. The ASS will probably have to do the same.

The work of David Doukhan is quite explicit and chronicled with insightful facts. It gives us a comprehensive understanding on the geographical positioning of the three Sahelian states that formed the ASS. It also shows us the fundamental problem of terrorism and organized crime that is ravaging the area. Lastly, it pointed out the issue of poverty grappled by the three countries and also how the G5 that was initially set up could not last but disintegrated due to lack of funding to sponsor its operations. Added to this, it equally pointed out the fact that the UN and western countries failed to deploy funds for its operational effectiveness to help contain the rising insecurity in the area. In a nutshell, the work of David Doukhan denotes also gaps in the areas of why the western powers could not rally resources behind the G5 to combat insecurity and the UN but allowed them to their fate. These gaps automatically constitute the originality of our study on the novel dynamic of south-south cooperation and its threat on the west: a case study of the Alliance of Sahel States. Thus, we see that the failure of the G5 was a bolster to the formation of the ASS as well as its eventual boycott from ECOWAS.

The second antecedent literature we have to review is titled, “The Sahel Conflict: economic and security spillovers on West Africa” (Sherillyn Raga, Alberto Lemma and Jodie Keane, 2023). Extremist activities and violence in the centres of conflict in the Sahel (i.e. Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) are moving south towards the four countries of interest (Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and Togo). At the time of writing this work by the authors, all except Ghana have experienced direct jihadist attacks, and all have reported extremist encroachment and recent increased in refugees, especially from Burkina Faso. The Sahel conflict may affect economic performance in the focus countries in two ways. One pathway is through economic spillover effects. Even though the epicenter of extremist attacks and humanitarian disaster is in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, impacts on focus countries may be transmitted through economic links (e.g. trade, investment, remittances) with conflict-affected countries, and their policy response (e.g. refugee management, security defense, trading partner substitution). These effects are already happening. Losses through lower exports and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows could be equivalent to between 1.3% (Ghana) and nearly 5% (Senegal) of GDP.

Another pathway is through ‘conflict spillovers’, whereby conflict and violence from the centre of the Sahel are transmitted to the focus countries. This pathway would lead to adverse effects on lives and economic activities and may result in an 8% reduction in GDP in the focus countries at the onset of an intense conflict. In both pathways, higher military spending involved in mitigating the effects (of both conflict and economic spillovers) in the four countries would add further pressure to their macro-financial stability risks, given that they are currently dealing with high inflation and moderate/high risk of debt distress (Ghana is already in default). Economic spillover effects of the conflict may be mitigated by ensuring that trade, FDI and financial channels in the Sahel region are open, safe and facilitated. It is critical to continue combatting the spread of extremism, while simultaneously addressing the structural roots of extremism. Evidence suggests that deepening trade and investment reduces disputes, while MSME-led development improves social cohesion. Political ownership, stronger fiscal positions, and predictable and patient financing for multi-stakeholder and conflict-sensitive interventions may help the Sahel region achieve economic resilience and better peace outcomes.

The positions of the authors of the above work are quite multifaceted. The ASS has huge economic implications to other neighboring member states which are under ECOWAS as revealed by Sherillyn Raga, Alberto Lemma and Jodie Keane. While the future and sustainability of the ASS cannot be ascertained approximately considering the fact that for now Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have military and not civilian rule in place, we cannot say after democratic elections are conducted in the three countries and democratic civilian leaders take over, they will maintain the ASS and not dissolve it to join back ECOWAS. Also, with the good governance that these military juntas acting interim have been doing, especially Captain Ibrahim Traore of Burkina Faso, it is a force to reckon with when democratic elections are organized which might eventually see a massive vote cast for these military juntas by the populace who are more pleased with their governance far more than when civilian regimes were in power. Do such independent governance detached from any foreign interference especially the former colonizer of the three ASS countries France not going to be a threat on her and the West? Consequently, one can say that what actually depicts the undercurrent that explains the setting up of the ASS is focused more on expressing anti-western sentiment especially against the French than fighting violent extremism. This position is visualized as a salient gap that the above two antecedent literatures examined under this section of literature review failed to cover. As such, this automatically constitutes the originality of our study on the novel dynamics of south-south cooperation and its threat on the west: a case study of the Alliance of Sahel States.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

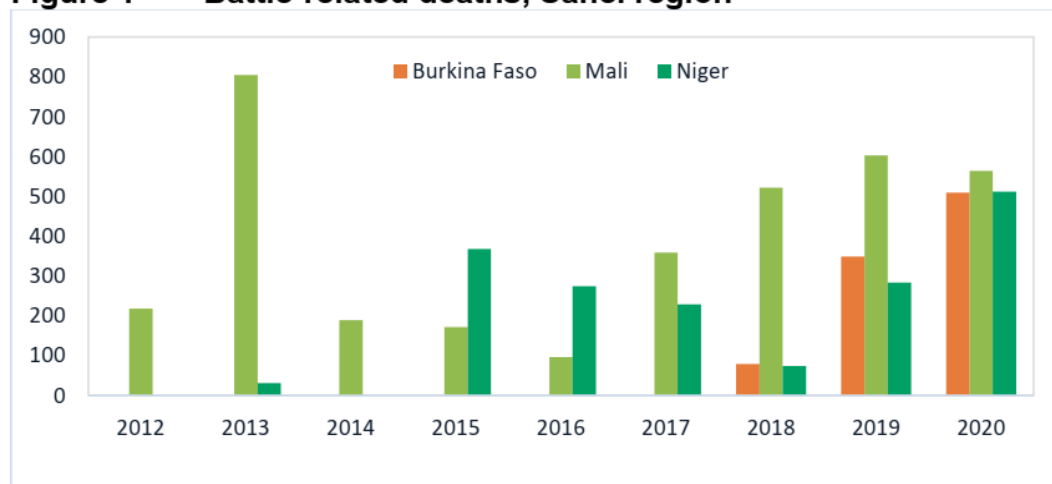
It should be underscored that the Sahel is plagued with violent extremism and organized crime. This explains why the Human Development Index Report of 2022 rated the three countries that splitted from ECOWAS to form ASS in this order. Out of 191 countries ranked on the Human Development Index comprising indicators for health, education and income, Burkina Faso (184th), Mali (186th), Niger (189th) and Chad (190th) are in the bottom 10 as of 2022, having fallen by more than 20 spots from their ranks in 2010 (UNDP, 2010; 2022). An IMF study on the impacts of conflict and terrorism in developing countries finds that higher government spending on defense leads to a decline in spending on welfare (Gupta et al., 2002).

Under this important segment of this paper on the results, it is important to tactfully examine vis-à-vis the aforementioned objectives. The Sahel has had a difficult time in terms of violent extremism and attacks that stemmed right back during the times of the Arab spring from northern Mali spanning to the Maghreb region that saw the fall of Colonel Muhammed Gaddafi of Libya. This violence insurgency spread to the Sahel thereby making it a hotspot of violence and horrendous insecurity accompanied by unprecedented killings. The conflict

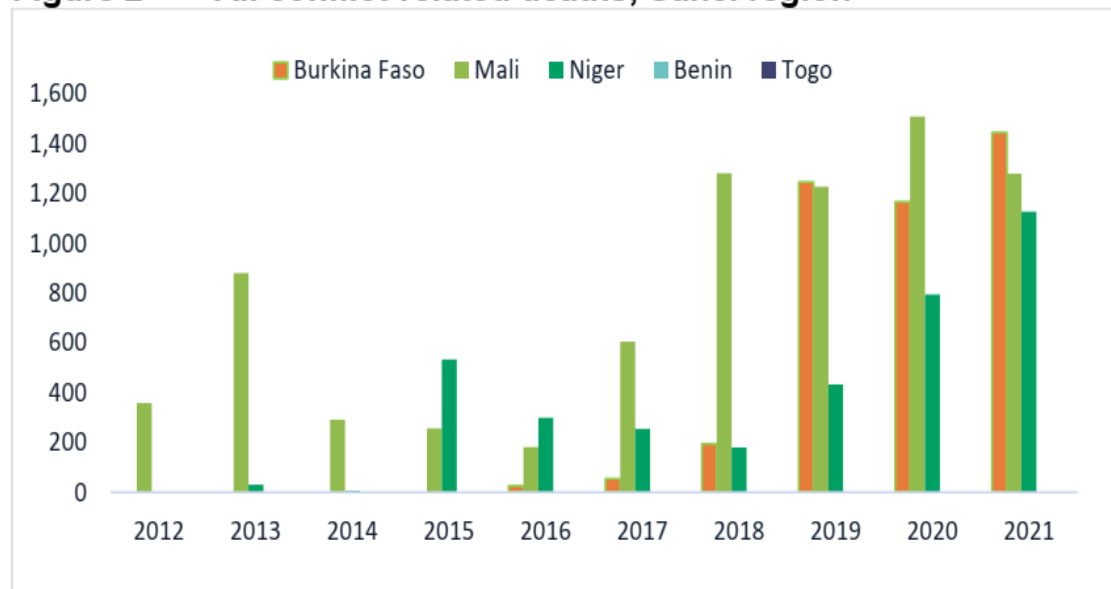
spilled over from Mali into Burkina Faso in 2015, initially through terrorist attacks led by Boko Haram. Attacks intensified in 2016 after the formation of a new group, named Ansur ul-Islam. In Niger, Islamist insurgents carried out attacks in the western region of the country. There were also concurrent attacks in the south-eastern region of the country, as conflict spilled over across the border from Nigeria. The Niger conflict intensified in 2017 and attacks remained frequent throughout 2021. Since 2020, violence and internal displacement have been moving southwards, with considerable violent attacks in Burkina Faso's southern regions and borderlands with Côte d'Ivoire and increasing violence in southern Mali (MMC, 2021). Violence and conflict have spilled over to Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo (UNHCR, 2022).

Loss of life would be one of the most visible and devastating impacts of the Sahel conflict. However, the number of deaths the conflict has caused is likely to be difficult to determine accurately, as it is affected by many factors, including the number of actors involved, the complexity of the conflict and lack of reliable data. Some estimates are available, however Figure 1 shows the number of battle-related deaths across three Sahel conflict countries—Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger using data from the WDI (2023) from between 2012 at the outset of the conflict and 2020.

Figure 1 Battle-related deaths, Sahel region



Source: WDI (2023).

Figure 2 All conflict-related deaths, Sahel region

Source: <https://ucdp.uu.se/>

There is a long history of regional migration in the Sahel, facilitated by free movement within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region. Migration can be broadly categorized into labour migration towards urban or coastal economic centres; seasonal employment and transhumance; movement of people along tribal and pastoral society lines; and displacement in response to conflict, persecution, climatic challenges or extreme weather events (MMC, 2021). Key informants claim that, while migration from the Sahel (i.e. Burkina Faso, Mali) to coastal areas (i.e. Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana) is predominantly for economic reasons, in 2019–2020 there was a rise in migration of people fleeing conflict and IDP cross-border movement owing to lack of resources or loss of livelihoods triggered by the conflict in their area of origin (ibid.). It is estimated that the conflict generated an approximately 1.9 million IDPs within the Sahel region from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in 2020 (IOM, 2022).

From the startling statistics above on the aftermaths of the Sahel conflict, it became incumbent for the young military juntas who seized power from civilian leaders to come together to build a formidable front to counter terrorism and violent extremism. This of course is very unconstitutional but then a dissection of the ASS with these military juntas in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is examined objectively. How were these countries during the civilian leaders vis-à-vis their bilateral and multilateral relations within ECOWAS and globally? Was the insecurity situation under control and was there frantic assistance from external forces to arrest the intractable insecurity situation in the Sahel before the military coups that brought the three military juntas to power in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger?

The ASS aims to address shared challenges such as terrorism, climate change, and economic instability in the Sahel region, focusing on security and development through regional collaboration (African Union, 2022). The ASS has successfully established frameworks for joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and coordinated responses to terrorist threats. This collective security arrangement provides a substantial deterrent against external aggressors and empowers member states to secure their borders more effectively (Mahamadou, 2022). The ASS represents a proactive measure against both traditional security challenges (such as terrorism) and non-traditional challenges (such as environmental crises), aligning military cooperation with broader socio-economic development goals.

Still under the results, the ASS has accounted for the followings:

1. Economic Integration and Developmental Initiatives

The ASS has facilitated economic projects such as cross-border trade agreements, which reduce reliance on Western economies by promoting intra-regional commerce (Oumarou & Abdou, 2023). Initiatives focused on agriculture, infrastructure development, and renewable energy underscores the ASS's commitment to sustainable

development, framing economic resilience as a strategy for reducing vulnerability to external shocks and aid dependencies.

2. Political Cohesion and Autonomy

The ASS fosters political solidarity among member states, creating a platform for collective negotiation on international issues and multilateral forums. This cohesion strengthens the political voice of member states and enables them to advocate for their interests on the global stage (Yero, 2023). By advocating for localized solutions to regional challenges, the ASS asserts its political autonomy, presenting a challenge to Western hegemony, which often seeks to impose external governance models.

3. Social and Cultural Cooperation

The ASS emphasizes cultural and social linkage among its member states, contributing to a shared identity and mutual understanding. Initiatives to enhance educational exchanges, cultural awareness, and shared historical narratives play a significant role in strengthening regional solidarity (Touati, 2022). These social dimensions complement political and economic strategies, reinforcing the idea that human and cultural connections are integral to regional cooperation.

Challenges to Western Dominance

The findings from the study underscore that the ASS represents a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape. The growing influence of South-South Cooperation (SSC) through the ASS poses several threats to Western powers:

Diminished Influence: As African nations increasingly pursue collaborative models of development, the traditional Western influence that relied on donor-recipient relationships is weakened (Khan, 2021).

Alternative Models of Development: The ASS sets a precedent for alternative development strategies that do not require adherence to Western policy prescriptions. This paradigm shift encourages other regions to explore similar collaborative frameworks (Balaam & Dillman, 2020).

Western Response Strategies: The emergence of such alliances necessitates a reconsideration of Western engagement strategies in Africa, moving from paternalistic approaches to more equitable partnerships based on mutual respect and cooperation (Smith & Jones, 2023).

The dynamics of South-South cooperation, as exemplified by the Alliance of Sahel States, reveals a significant transformation in international relations. The ASS not only advances regional security, economic cooperation, and political autonomy but also signifies a challenge to the enduring dominance of Western powers in global affairs. As these dynamics continue to evolve, scholars and policymakers must carefully consider the implications for development practices and international cooperation in the 21st century.

Discussions

The article examines the contemporary dynamics of South-South cooperation with a focus on the Alliance of Sahel States, which includes Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The ASS epitomizes the shift towards regional solidarity among developing nations, indicating a strategic move away from traditional Western-centric development models. The key areas of discussions as we round off with this paper focused on:

1. Redefining Geopolitical Alliances

The ASS exemplifies a significant shift in geopolitics, with developing nations forging alliances that prioritize regional interests over external pressures. This re-orientation poses a challenge to the historically dominant narratives set by Western powers (Hudson & Stokes, 2020). Discussions emphasize how such alliances enable member countries to negotiate as a bloc on the international stage, thus amplifying their collective voice. This collective bargaining power can counterbalance external influences, thereby diminishing Western hegemony in the region.

2. Resilience through Regional Cooperation

The ASS focuses on building resilience against a variety of challenges, including security threats from terrorism, environmental changes, and economic vulnerabilities. By leveraging local knowledge and resources, these nations aim to create sustainable solutions suited to their unique contexts (Sharma & Khan, 2021). The conversations in the article reflect a growing recognition that sustainable development cannot solely rely on Western models or aid. Instead, African nations can devise their own localized strategies that resonate with their cultural, social, and economic realities.

4. Political Sovereignty and Autonomy

The ASS symbolizes a quest for political autonomy among its member states by fostering a sense of shared identity and solidarity. This is significant in a landscape often dominated by Western narratives that can overshadow local governance frameworks (Ali & Mena, 2022). The discussions highlight the importance of political cohesion as a mechanism for achieving greater sovereignty. Member states can collectively address

governance issues, such as corruption and democratic deficits, without external influences that may not align with their priorities.

5. Economic Diversification and Innovation

The ASS promotes economic initiatives that focus on regional trade and investment, reducing reliance on traditional Western economic partnerships. This is accomplished through joint infrastructure projects, resource sharing, and fostering innovation driven by local needs (Zhang et al., 2023). The discussions reveal how this economic diversification can enhance resilience by creating alternative avenues for growth. Western nations may find their traditional economic foothold in the region challenged as African nations increasingly look within their networks for support and collaboration.

6. Emerging Global Power Dynamics

The shifting dynamics of South-South cooperation may impact global power structures, as developing nations seek to redefine their roles in international relations. The ASS serves as a case study for understanding how emerging economies can leverage their collective strength against established powers (Patel & Thornton, 2021). The article discusses how the rise of alternatives to Western-led institutions and aid models signals the emergence of a more multipolar world. This changing landscape compels Western powers to reassess their strategies in engaging with developing nations, as their influence diminishes.

7. Social and Cultural Integration

The ASS also focuses on social and cultural cooperation as foundations for solidarity, promoting initiatives that strengthen cultural ties, educational exchanges, and community engagement (Distro, 2022). This recognition of the importance of human connections goes beyond mere diplomatic relations, fostering a more profound alliance based on shared values. Discussions emphasize that social integration can bolster political and economic initiatives, ensuring holistic development that resonates with the realities of Sahelian populations. This cultural perspective can potentially reverse the narrative that sees Western models as superior.

The discussions stemming from the article underline the transformative potential of South-South cooperation as exemplified by the ASS. As these nations assert their agency through collective action, they challenge the traditional power dynamics that have characterized international relations. Insights into this shift prompt a re-evaluation of the role of Western powers, necessitating an adaptive approach to engagement with developing countries that respects their sovereignty, interests, and aspirations for regional collaboration.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion of the article titled "The novel dynamics of south-south cooperation and its threat on the west: A case study on the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS)" likely synthesizes the key findings and implications of the research presented. Here are several points of profound contemporary knowledge that could be included in the conclusion:

1. Resilience and Adaptation

The ASS represents not only a response to shared challenges, such as security threats from terrorism and climate change but also an adaptive strategy for enhancing resilience among member states. The collaboration may lead to innovative solutions that are regionally tailored, contrasting with the often one-size-fits-all approach of Western interventions.

2. Changing Power Dynamics

The rise of South-South Cooperation, particularly through frameworks like the ASS, signals a significant shift in global power relations. Developing nations are increasingly asserting their agency and redefining their partnerships on their own terms. This could threaten traditional Western dominance, as countries in the Global South leverage their collective strengths and resources.

3. Multipolar World Order

The enhanced cooperation within the ASS illustrates the emergence of a multipolar world where regional alliances play crucial roles. This shift could lead to a more equitable global governance structure as Southern states seek to promote their interests together. The conclusion could argue that Western countries need to recognize and adapt to this new reality, moving away from unilateralism toward more collaborative approaches.

4. Economic Interdependence

The ASS may foster economic interdependence that challenges previous economic systems dominated by Western countries. By creating trade agreements, joint investments, and shared infrastructure projects, member states can enhance their economic stability. The conclusion might highlight examples of how these economic ties have strengthened resilience against external shocks.

5. Global Solidarity and Identity

The increasing solidarity among countries in the Global South, as seen through ASS, could contribute to a stronger sense of identity and purpose among member nations. This collective identity can be a powerful force for change in addressing global issues like poverty, inequality, and climate change. The ASS could serve as a

model for other regions to form similar alliances, reinforcing the idea that collaboration among the Global South is not just beneficial but essential.

6. Implications for Western Policies

The threat posed by the ASS to Western countries is not just about political power but also involves how Western nations approach development aid and international relations. To remain relevant, they may need to reconsider their strategies, focusing on partnership rather than dominance. The conclusion could suggest that productive engagement with South-South Cooperation initiatives, rather than viewing them solely as threats, could lead to more beneficial outcomes for all parties involved.

7. Future Research Directions

The article might conclude with a call for more empirical research into the specific mechanisms and outcomes of SSC, particularly in the Sahel region, to better understand its impact and potential. Additionally, it may urge scholars to look into how different geopolitical contexts affect the dynamics of SSC and the responses of Western powers to these developments.

In summary, the conclusion of this article would encapsulate the significance of the ASS as a case study for understanding the shifting landscape of international relations. It would highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of South-South cooperation, not only as a simple counterbalance to Western influence but as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon with transformative potential on a global scale. The overall message may advocate for proactive engagement with these dynamics to foster a more inclusive and equitable international order.

Recommendations

The recommendations section of the journal article titled "The novel dynamics of south-south cooperation and its threat on the west: A case study on the Alliance of Sahel States (ASS)" would likely present actionable insights and strategic proposals for various stakeholders, including policymakers, scholars, and civil society. Here is an outline of possible profound contemporary recommendations:

1. Enhance Partnerships and Dialogue

For Western Policymakers: Engage in open dialogues with ASS member states to understand their priorities and challenges. Collaborating rather than competing can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes, enhancing stability in the region.

For ASS Leaders: Foster communication channels with Western nations that encourage mutual understanding, thus mitigating perceptions of threat and paving the way for collaborations on common issues such as counter-terrorism and climate resilience.

2. Strengthen South-South Initiatives

For ASS Member States: Continue to deepen the mechanisms of South-South Cooperation, focusing on knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and joint investment strategies. This can enhance self-reliance and promote sustainable development.

For Global Institutions: Support initiatives that encourage SSC among developing countries, providing funding or expertise to foster partnerships on healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

3. Research and Knowledge Development

For Academics and Researchers: Conduct further empirical studies to analyze the impact of South-South Cooperation on regional power dynamics, economic stability, and development outcomes. This research will enrich the understanding of these dynamics and inform future policies.

For International Organizations: Invest in research initiatives that document best practices and success stories from the ASS, providing a model for other regions considering similar cooperation frameworks.

4. Adaptive Policy Frameworks

For Western Governments: Reassess foreign policy frameworks that might undermine the sovereignty of ASS member states. Policies should respect local governance models and acknowledge the rising influence of South-South partnerships.

For ASS Policy Makers: Develop adaptive policy frameworks that allow for flexibility in partnerships and cooperation activities, ensuring they can respond to shifting geopolitical landscapes and emerging challenges effectively.

5. Promote Regional Integration

For ASS Member States: Work towards establishing a comprehensive regional integration agenda that prioritizes economic cooperation, security collaboration, and shared resources management. This could involve creating frameworks for trade, investment, and migration policies aligned with regional interests.

For Multinational Organizations: Facilitate platforms for regional cooperation that include both South-South and North-South perspectives, enriching dialogues on integration challenges and opportunities.

6. Utilize Technology for Cooperation

For ASS States: Leverage technology to facilitate communication, trade, and knowledge sharing among member states. Digital platforms can enhance cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, education, and health.

For Global Development Organizations: Invest in technological infrastructure in ASS countries to support capacity building, innovation, and sustainability, particularly in rural areas that may benefit from greater connectivity.

7. Addressing Common Challenges Collectively

For ASS Leadership: Formulate joint strategies to combat shared challenges such as climate change, food security, and health crises. Collaborative efforts can lead to more effective and sustainable resource use.

For International Partners: Recognize and support ASS's efforts specifically in addressing environmental issues and promoting resilience, contributing to long-term development goals aligned with international standards.

8. Foster Cultural and Educational Exchange

For ASS Member States: Encourage cultural and educational exchanges to strengthen ties among member countries and promote a shared vision. Exchange programs can help build capacity and foster mutual respect among cultures.

For International Educational Institutions: Partner with ASS countries to establish scholarship programs and academic collaborations that enhance education and knowledge in areas relevant to sustainable development.

The recommendations aim to create a collaborative pathway that acknowledges the significance of South-South Cooperation, particularly in the context of the ASS. They emphasize strategic engagement, reiterating that the dynamics of global politics are shifting, and adapting to these changes can foster a more inclusive and sustainable world order. The emphasis on mutual respect, collaboration, and shared goals is crucial for stakeholders looking to navigate and benefit from these evolving dynamics.

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