



The Crisis Between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Countries of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES): A New East-West Cold War?

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Abstract: When it was established on 28 May 1975, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) consisted of fifteen (15) Member States, with the primary objective of creating a single common market and promoting the economic integration of the West African sub-region. Subsequently, on 21 December 2001 in Dakar, Senegal, the regional organization adopted the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which empowered ECOWAS to assess democratic processes and effectively combat military coups and unconstitutional changes of government within its Member States. Following the unconstitutional and anti-democratic changes of government that occurred in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, ECOWAS, acting in accordance with the aforementioned Protocol, imposed sanctions on these countries and suspended them from its regional institutions. This led to a profound political crisis that culminated in the withdrawal of the three countries from ECOWAS and the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) on 16 September 2023, which was subsequently transformed into the Confederation of Sahel States on 6 July 2024. The crisis between ECOWAS and the AES has generated significant geopolitical and geostrategic consequences, prompting some observers to describe it as a new East-West Cold War. However, this characterization is not entirely accurate, as several countries within the Western bloc, including allies of the United States of America, continue to maintain strong diplomatic and cooperative relations with the member states of the AES. To ensure lasting stability and peace in West Africa, it is essential to develop new strategic perspectives. These should include diplomatic mediation and peaceful coexistence, enhanced military cooperation, and geo-economic reconfiguration. This study, intended as a contribution to policy and decision-making, demonstrates that the crisis between ECOWAS and the AES does not constitute a new Cold War between a Western bloc led by the United States and an Eastern or communist bloc led by Russia, as was the case during the period 1947-1990. Nevertheless, the crisis can be overcome and ultimately resolved through the reintegration of the AES into ECOWAS. Achieving this objective will require patience, perseverance, sustained cooperation between the leaders of both organizations, and the support of the international community.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Alliance of Sahel States (AES), Crisis Institutional Rupture, Cold War Good Governance Democracy, Regional Integration, Free Movement Development.

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established on 28 May 1975 through the Treaty of Lagos, at the initiative of Nigeria and Togo. Initially, the organization comprised fifteen (15) Member States: Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, and Sierra Leone. Its founding objective was to establish a common market and promote the economic integration of the West African sub-region.

Subsequently, on 21 December 2001, in Dakar, Senegal, ECOWAS adopted the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, which empowered the organization to monitor democratic processes and effectively combat military coups and other unconstitutional changes of government within its Member States.

Following the anti-democratic and unconstitutional changes of government that occurred on 18 August 2020 and 24 May 2021 in Mali, 24 January 2022 and 30 September 2022 in Burkina Faso, and 26 July 2023 in Niger, the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, acting under the provisions of the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, imposed severe sanctions on the military regimes concerned and suspended them from the institutions of the regional organization.

This situation triggered a profound political crisis that culminated in the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS and the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) on 16 September 2023, which subsequently evolved into the Confederation of Sahel States on 6 July 2024.

Because of its numerous similarities with the proxy conflicts that characterized the Cold War following the Second World War, this crisis has led several observers to describe it as a new East-West Cold War, raising the following central research question:

Is the crisis between ECOWAS and the countries of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) a new East-West Cold War?

This central question gives rise to several related research questions:

- What are the underlying causes of this crisis?
- How has the crisis manifested itself?
- What are its major consequences?
- Can it genuinely be described as a new East-West Cold War comparable to that of the post-Second World War period? If so, what similarities exist?
- What prospects exist for building a united, stable, peaceful, and secure West African sub-region?

This study is structured around one general objective and three specific objectives.

The general objective is to analyze the causes of the disagreement between ECOWAS and three of its former Member States in order to propose reconciliation measures capable of strengthening unity and promoting greater regional stability.

The specific objectives are to:

- Diagnose the ECOWAS-AES crisis;
- Examine the principal manifestations of the crisis;
- Analyze its similarities with the Cold War (1947-1990) in order to draw relevant lessons;
- Assess the major consequences of the crisis;
- Propose practical solutions for building a stronger and more united ECOWAS.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH

Materials and Methodology

This study is based on a documentary and literature review concerning the crisis arising from the profound disagreements among ECOWAS Member States, which ultimately resulted in the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger following military coups and the subsequent creation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

The research also examines the similarities between this regional crisis and the Cold War that opposed the Western Bloc and the Communist Bloc from 1947 to 1990.

To achieve these objectives, numerous academic publications, scholarly articles, and authoritative works relating to international relations, regional organizations, international law, geopolitics, international economics, international trade, and political science were consulted.

These documentary sources enabled a comprehensive understanding of the ECOWAS-AES crisis, the historical dynamics of the Cold War, and the prospects for preserving peace and security in West Africa.

In addition, digital resources available on the Internet and specialized online journals provided valuable supplementary information.

After collecting the relevant information, the data were carefully sorted, classified, and organized into themes and sub-themes. Consequently, the study is structured around four major analytical axes:

- Axis 1: Causes of the crisis (endogenous and exogenous factors);
- Axis 2: Manifestations of the crisis;
- Axis 3: Consequences of the crisis;
- Axis 4: Prospects for a stable, peaceful, and integrated West African sub-region.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Maps of ECOWAS and the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)



The map of the 15 ECOWAS Member States



The Alliance of Sahel States (AES)

The crisis between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the countries of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) or what some observers have described as a new East-West Cold War is analyzed in this study through its causes, manifestations, and consequences. The study also examines the similarities between this crisis and the Cold War of 1947-1990, while proposing practical policy options to support bilateral, multilateral, and sectoral decision-making aimed at promoting a united, stable, and peaceful West African sub-region.

CHAPTER I: CAUSES OF THE CRISIS BETWEEN ECOWAS AND THE COUNTRIES OF THE ALLIANCE OF SAHEL STATES (AES)

The crisis between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the member countries of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES)—namely Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger is rooted in several fundamental causes. These include the breakdown of constitutional order, failure to comply with electoral transition timetables, and major geopolitical divergences.

Breakdown of Constitutional Order

The first major cause of the crisis lies in the unconstitutional seizure of power by military juntas in the three countries. These actions violated the provisions of the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (December 2001), which explicitly prohibits military coups and all unconstitutional methods of acquiring political power. Under this Protocol, the perpetrators of such actions are subject to sanctions imposed by ECOWAS.

Accordingly, following the successive military coups that overthrew democratically elected governments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, ECOWAS imposed a series of sanctions, including:

- Suspension of the three countries from ECOWAS institutions;
- Economic and financial sanctions;
- A demand for a rapid return to constitutional order within a specified timeframe.

The Sequence of Coups Unfolded as Follows:

- Mali: Military coups on 18 August 2020 and 24 May 2021, led by Colonel Assimi Goïta, resulting in the removal of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta.
- Burkina Faso: President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was overthrown on 24 January 2022 by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who was himself deposed on 30 September 2022 by Captain Ibrahim Traoré.
- Niger: On 26 July 2023, General Abdourahamane Tiani overthrew the democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum.

These successive coups represented direct violations of ECOWAS constitutional norms and marked the beginning of the institutional crisis between the regional organization and the three Sahelian states.

Rejection of ECOWAS Sanctions and Failure to Respect Electoral Timetables

A second major source of tension arose from the military authorities' rejection of ECOWAS sanctions and their unwillingness to comply with agreed transition schedules leading back to civilian rule.

Following the coup in Mali, ECOWAS appointed former Nigerian President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as mediator to negotiate with the transitional authorities and facilitate a swift return to constitutional governance under civilian leadership. However, these mediation efforts failed due to the military government's refusal to accept the proposed transition timetable. As a result, ECOWAS imposed severe sanctions, including:

- Closure of national borders;
- A comprehensive trade embargo;
- Freezing of Malian state assets held by the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO).

The Malian transitional authorities immediately condemned these measures as illegitimate and inhumane, refusing to comply with them. This significantly deepened political tensions between Mali and ECOWAS.

The Malian authorities further accused ECOWAS of failing to provide meaningful support in the fight against terrorism and alleged that the organization had become excessively influenced by foreign powers.

Similarly, the military authorities in Burkina Faso viewed the economic and political sanctions imposed by ECOWAS as punitive measures directed not only against the government but also against the Burkinabè people.

In Niger, the situation deteriorated further when ECOWAS threatened the possibility of military intervention to restore constitutional order. Supported by Mali and Burkina Faso, the Nigerien authorities denounced the threat as an unacceptable act of aggression against their national sovereignty.

Major Geopolitical Divergences

The final major factor underlying the crisis concerns the profound geopolitical realignment undertaken by the three Sahelian states.

The governments of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger progressively distanced themselves from France, several traditional Western European partners, and international peacekeeping forces. At the same time, they strengthened their strategic relations with new partners, most notably the Russian Federation.

These geopolitical shifts created an increasingly wide gap between ECOWAS and the three military-led governments, making political reconciliation progressively more difficult.

This divergence culminated in the signing of the Liptako-Gourma Charter on 16 September 2023, establishing the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) as a new regional security and political alliance.

Comparison with the Cold War

The Cold War (1947-1990) was fundamentally rooted in ideological, political, and economic rivalry between the United States, representing the capitalist Western bloc, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), representing the communist Eastern bloc.

Although ideological differences existed before 1945, they intensified after the Second World War due to the division of Europe, the arms race, and deep mutual distrust. Direct confrontation was generally avoided, with both superpowers instead engaging in proxy wars fought through allied states.

The ECOWAS-AES crisis shares certain characteristics with these proxy conflicts, particularly the geopolitical competition among external powers for influence in the Sahel.

Nevertheless, while the strategic orientation of the AES countries toward Russia resembles certain aspects of Cold War alignments, these similarities alone are insufficient to characterize the current crisis as a new East-West Cold War.

Unlike the bipolar confrontation of 1947-1990, several Western countries—including allies of the United States continue to maintain constructive diplomatic and economic relations with AES member states. Consequently, the present crisis should be understood primarily as a regional political, constitutional, and geopolitical dispute, rather than as the emergence of a new global Cold War.

CHAPTER II: MANIFESTATIONS OF THE CRISIS BETWEEN ECOWAS AND THE ALLIANCE OF SAHEL STATES (AES).

The crisis between ECOWAS and the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has manifested itself in political, diplomatic, social, economic, bilateral, multilateral, and international dimensions. It has significantly reshaped regional relations and altered the geopolitical landscape of West Africa.

Political, Diplomatic, and Social Manifestations

From a political and diplomatic perspective, the crisis has been characterized by a growing atmosphere of mistrust between the AES countries and ECOWAS Member States, as well as between the AES and the broader international community.

Relations among the peoples of the two regional blocs have also deteriorated considerably, giving rise to mutual suspicion and increasing political polarization.

The Case of the 49 Ivorian Soldiers in Mali

One of the most significant diplomatic incidents illustrating this deterioration was the arrest of 49 Ivorian soldiers at Bamako International Airport on 10 July 2022.

The Malian transitional authorities accused the soldiers of being mercenaries seeking to undermine the security of the Malian state. In contrast, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire maintained that they were National Support Elements (NSE) deployed in support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

This position was confirmed by the United Nations and widely supported by the international community. Nevertheless, the Malian authorities rejected these explanations.

The soldiers were formally charged, imprisoned in August 2022, and later sentenced by the Malian courts to twenty years' imprisonment in December 2022. Following mediation efforts led by Togo, Mali's transitional President Colonel Assimi Goïta granted them a presidential pardon in January 2023, allowing their release and return to Abidjan.

Tensions Between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso

The crisis has also generated serious diplomatic tensions between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. These tensions have been reflected in:

- Mutual accusations of political destabilization;
- Alleged cross-border incursions by armed groups;

- Divergent positions regarding regional governance within the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU/UEMOA).

Growing Hostility Between the Peoples

Political disagreements have gradually extended beyond governments, creating increasing mistrust among the populations of ECOWAS and AES countries. These tensions have fostered hostility and weakened the traditional bonds of regional solidarity that have historically characterized West African integration.

Bilateral, Multilateral, and International Manifestations

At the bilateral and international levels, the crisis has been marked by an unprecedented deterioration in relations between the AES countries and several international partners. This has resulted in the withdrawal or expulsion of numerous foreign military forces operating in the region.

Withdrawal of MINUSMA from Mali

The withdrawal of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), completed by the end of 2024, followed a severe political breakdown between the Malian authorities and the United Nations. The Malian government criticized MINUSMA for:

- Its inability to effectively improve security;
- The absence of a counter-terrorism mandate;
- Alleged political interference in Mali's internal affairs.

The transitional authorities also argued that, despite more than a decade of deployment, the mission had failed to halt the expansion of jihadist violence or stabilize the country.

In addition, increasing restrictions imposed on UN peacekeepers and repeated public criticism by Malian officials ultimately led to the mission's departure.

Expulsion of French Military Forces

French military forces were progressively expelled from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger after the military governments unilaterally terminated their defense agreements with France.

The new authorities considered the continued French military presence and Paris's political influence incompatible with their national sovereignty.

Although France had conducted extensive counter-terrorism operations—including Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane—for nearly a decade, the persistence of insecurity and jihadist attacks significantly undermined public confidence in the French strategy throughout the region.

Departure of United States Forces from Niger

The military authorities in Niger also ended military cooperation with the United States, resulting in the complete withdrawal of American forces by September 2024. This decision further illustrated the strategic reorientation of the AES countries toward new international security partnerships.

Resurgence of Terrorism and Insecurity

Despite the withdrawal of Western military forces, terrorist organizations intensified their activities across the Sahel.

Armed extremist groups regained control of several government-controlled areas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

In Mali, this resurgence was illustrated by:

- The recapture of Kidal by insurgent groups;
- Major attacks against state institutions;
- The assault on the military base of Kati, regarded as one of the symbols of Malian state authority.

These attacks demonstrated that terrorism remains a major security challenge despite the ongoing reorganization of regional defense partnerships.

Strengthening Cooperation with the Russian Federation

Another defining manifestation of the crisis has been the significant strengthening of relations between the AES countries and the Russian Federation.

This cooperation extends to several sectors, including:

- Defense and military cooperation;
- Economic development;
- Agriculture;
- Public services;
- Security;
- Strategic investment.

Russian military instructors are now present in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, providing training and supporting the implementation of bilateral strategic cooperation.

The governments of the AES have also regularly received Russian military equipment as part of their new security partnership with Moscow.

Following the dissolution of the Wagner Group, its activities in Africa have largely been assumed by the Africa Corps, which now plays a significant role in supporting the security strategies of the AES countries.

Furthermore, the Russian Federation has announced plans to strengthen the air defense capabilities of these states by supplying advanced anti-aircraft defense systems capable of enhancing control over their national airspace.

Interim Assessment

The manifestations of the ECOWAS-AES crisis demonstrate that the conflict extends far beyond institutional disagreements.

It has evolved into a multidimensional crisis involving diplomatic confrontation, regional fragmentation, military realignment, changing international alliances, and renewed security challenges.

Although these developments reveal significant geopolitical transformations and certain similarities with historical Cold War dynamics, they do not constitute sufficient evidence to classify the crisis as a new East-West Cold War.

CHAPTER III: CONSEQUENCES OF THE CRISIS BETWEEN ECOWAS AND THE COUNTRIES OF THE ALLIANCE OF SAHEL STATES (AES)

The constitutional crises that led to military takeovers in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger and their subsequent withdrawal from ECOWAS have had profound consequences for regional integration, security, diplomacy, the economy, governance, and humanitarian affairs.

The creation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has fundamentally reshaped the geopolitical and institutional architecture of West Africa, generating long-term implications for regional cooperation.

Security and Military Consequences

One of the most immediate consequences of the crisis has been the weakening of regional security cooperation.

The withdrawal of the AES countries from ECOWAS has disrupted the organization's collective security mechanisms, particularly those designed to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime.

To compensate for their departure, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger established a Collective Defense Pact through the Liptako-Gourma Charter, under which an armed attack against one member is considered an attack against all members of the Alliance.

This new defense arrangement has produced several important consequences:

- The suspension of ECOWAS joint military operations;
- The dismantling of regional rapid-response mechanisms;
- The interruption of intelligence-sharing networks;
- Reduced operational coordination among West African armed forces.

Consequently, the crisis has significantly weakened the region's collective capacity to address terrorism and cross-border insecurity.

Breakdown of Regional Security Mechanisms

The departure of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger deprived ECOWAS of three of its most experienced military forces in the fight against jihadist insurgencies.

At the same time, the suspension of joint border patrols and intelligence cooperation with neighboring coastal states—including Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire created operational gaps that terrorist organizations could exploit.

The resulting decline in military coordination has complicated efforts to contain armed extremist groups operating across national borders.

Emergence of a New Regional Security Architecture

The establishment of the Confederation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has given rise to an alternative regional security framework.

Under the principles of collective defense enshrined in the Liptako-Gourma Charter, the AES countries have committed themselves to mutual military assistance in the event of external aggression.

This development reflects the emergence of a new regional security bloc operating independently from ECOWAS.

Economic and Humanitarian Consequences

The withdrawal of the AES countries from ECOWAS has also produced significant economic and humanitarian repercussions.

One of the principal concerns is the potential restriction of the free movement of persons, goods, and services, which has long been one of ECOWAS's most significant achievements.

Any deterioration in regional mobility threatens:

- Cross-border trade;
- Regional supply chains;
- Labor mobility;
- Economic integration.

Although the AES countries continue to share the CFA franc within the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU/UEMOA), future customs barriers and trade restrictions could substantially reduce commercial exchanges throughout the region.

Refugee Flows

The crisis has also contributed to increasing humanitarian pressures.

Large numbers of displaced persons from Mali and Burkina Faso have sought refuge in neighboring ECOWAS countries, particularly Côte d'Ivoire.

More than 90,000 refugees have reportedly entered Côte d'Ivoire in search of security and improved living conditions.

The Ivorian authorities have responded by providing:

- Housing;
- Humanitarian assistance;
- Basic social services;
- Livelihood support.

Economic Challenges

The institutional rupture between ECOWAS and the AES has generated several additional economic risks, including:

- Possible customs duties on regional trade;
- Inflationary pressures;
- Reduced regional market integration;
- Lower foreign investment;
- Decreased economic competitiveness.

Given that Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger rank among the world's least-developed countries, these challenges could significantly hinder long-term economic development.

The crisis also increases the risk of:

- Social tensions;
- Identity-based polarization;
- Greater economic isolation.

Institutional and Legal Consequences

The withdrawal from ECOWAS has important legal implications for citizens of the AES countries. Most notably, individuals and institutions from these countries may lose access to the ECOWAS Court of Justice, which has historically provided an important mechanism for protecting human rights and resolving regional legal disputes.

Additional institutional consequences include:

- Loss of certain Community rights;
- Reduced freedom of establishment;
- Suspension of jointly funded regional projects;
- Declining legal harmonization among West African states.

As a result, West Africa is increasingly divided into two distinct institutional blocs, making regional cooperation more complex.

Geopolitical and Diplomatic Consequences

At the international level, the creation of the Confederation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) challenges the traditional diplomatic influence exercised by ECOWAS and its international partners. It has also contributed to a broader redistribution of geopolitical influence in the Sahel by strengthening relations with emerging international partners while reducing dependence on traditional Western alliances. The regional balance of power has therefore undergone significant transformation.

Comparison with the Cold War

The consequences of the Cold War (1947-1990) fundamentally reshaped the international order. Among its principal outcomes were:

- The emergence of a unipolar world dominated by the United States following the collapse of the Soviet Union;
- Profound geopolitical transformations;
- Enormous human and material losses across many developing countries.

By comparison, the ECOWAS-AES crisis has certainly reconfigured the political landscape of West Africa. However, a comparative analysis demonstrates that these developments do not justify describing the crisis as a new East-West Cold War. While certain geopolitical similarities exist—particularly regarding shifting international alliances—the conflict remains fundamentally regional in nature and lacks the ideological bipolarity that characterized the Cold War.

Interim Conclusion

The crisis between ECOWAS and the Alliance of Sahel States has produced far-reaching consequences across multiple sectors. It has weakened regional security cooperation, disrupted economic integration, altered diplomatic relations, and transformed West Africa's institutional architecture. Nevertheless, despite these profound changes, the crisis cannot accurately be characterized as a new East-West Cold War. Rather, it represents a regional constitutional, political, and geopolitical crisis arising from disagreements over governance, democratic legitimacy, regional integration, and strategic partnerships.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that several interrelated factors contributed to the institutional rupture between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the three member states—Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger—that withdrew from the organization to establish the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).

The principal causes of the crisis include the unconstitutional seizure of power by military regimes, the inability of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government to ensure full

compliance with the organization's principles of democracy and good governance, and the growing political and strategic support provided by the Russian Federation to the military authorities in the three Sahelian states. The limited support offered by the African Union to certain ECOWAS initiatives aimed at restoring constitutional order further contributed to the deterioration of the situation.

In response to the successive military coups, ECOWAS imposed a series of severe political, economic, and financial sanctions on the military governments of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. These measures were firmly rejected by the transitional authorities, marking the beginning of an unprecedented institutional confrontation between ECOWAS and the future members of the AES.

The crisis subsequently expanded beyond institutional disagreements and generated significant diplomatic tensions between Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and several ECOWAS Member States, particularly Côte d'Ivoire, through mutual accusations of political destabilization, border-related disputes, and growing regional mistrust. Diplomatic tensions also emerged between Benin and Niger.

At the bilateral, multilateral, and international levels, the crisis resulted in the withdrawal or expulsion of several foreign military missions, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), French military forces operating in the three AES countries, and United States forces stationed in Niger. These forces were progressively replaced first by personnel associated with the Wagner Group, and subsequently by the Africa Corps, supported by the Russian Federation.

These developments have produced profound geopolitical and geostrategic consequences, leading some observers to characterize the situation as a new East-West Cold War. However, the findings of this study do not support such a conclusion.

Unlike the Cold War of 1947-1990, the current crisis is neither driven by a global ideological confrontation nor by a bipolar international order. Furthermore, several Western countries including close allies of the United States—continue to maintain constructive diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation with the member states of the Alliance of Sahel States. Accordingly, the ECOWAS-AES crisis should be understood primarily as a regional constitutional, political, institutional, and geopolitical crisis, rather than as the emergence of a new global Cold War.

Policy Recommendations

To restore stability, strengthen regional integration, and preserve peace in West Africa, this study proposes three major strategic directions.

Diplomatic Mediation and Peaceful Coexistence

It is imperative to encourage sustained diplomatic initiatives aimed at preserving constructive dialogue between ECOWAS and the AES.

Particular attention should be given to mediation efforts led by neutral regional actors, including countries such as Togo, with the objective of preventing the complete isolation of the Sahelian states while safeguarding regional peace and stability.

In the longer term, the reintegration of the AES countries into ECOWAS should remain a strategic objective, whether through the restoration of democratic governance or following future political transitions within the three countries.

Enhanced Military Cooperation

Despite their institutional differences, ECOWAS and the AES share a common security challenge posed by terrorism and transnational organized crime. Consequently, stronger operational cooperation between their armed forces should be encouraged through:

- Joint military operations;
- Intelligence sharing;
- Coordinated border security;
- Counter-terrorism cooperation;
- Creation of a Sub-Regional Special Intervention Force capable of responding rapidly to emerging security threats.

Such cooperation would reduce security gaps and prevent the emergence of ungoverned spaces that extremist groups could exploit.

Geo-economic Reconfiguration

The future economic development of the Sahel depends largely on maintaining constructive economic relations with neighboring ECOWAS countries. Although the AES countries have chosen a new political path, they remain geographically dependent on access to the ports and transport corridors of coastal West African states. Accordingly, pragmatic economic cooperation should be maintained in areas such as:

- Regional trade;
- Transport and logistics;
- Customs facilitation;
- Infrastructure development;
- Cross-border investment;
- Economic integration.

Such cooperation would contribute to regional prosperity while preserving economic interdependence between both regional blocs.

FINAL REMARKS

This research contributes to policy and decision-making by demonstrating that the crisis between ECOWAS and the Alliance of Sahel States does not constitute a new East-West Cold War comparable to that of 1947-1990.

Rather, the crisis originated from disagreements surrounding unconstitutional changes of government, the application of ECOWAS principles concerning democracy and good governance, and differing geopolitical and security strategies adopted by the parties involved. Nevertheless, the study concludes that reconciliation remains possible.

With patience, political will, sustained dialogue, and close cooperation between the leadership of ECOWAS and the AES supported by the international community—the current divisions can gradually be overcome, paving the way for renewed regional integration, lasting peace, and sustainable development throughout West Africa.

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