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THE EMERGENCE OF AES STATES: A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN TACKLING INSECURITY IN THE SAHEL?

Abstract: *The West African subregion, particularly the Sahel, is encumbered by enormous security challenges. Also, the region has recently witnessed the resurgence of military coup d'etat, including the enthronement of Russian-backed military juntas against the longstanding interest of the erstwhile main colonial master in France. While the security challenges in the Sahel have enjoyed burgeoning attention in the literature, the recent emergence of the AES States calls for interrogation. Therefore, the paper re-examined the security challenges in the Sahel and interrogated the Russian-backed AES States' ability to curb the region's mammoth security challenges. An exploratory research design was adopted through a systematic desk review of the literature. The Concentric theory underpins the study, and three criteria were used to assess the AES's ability to achieve its objectives. It was opined that considering the hydra-headed nature of the insecurity in the Sahel, the joint efforts of the three countries with Russia's support are insufficient. Although military expenditure of the AES States increased significantly in recent times, armed conflict resurged. It was recommended that a more comprehensive approach be required to address the root causes of insecurity at the local, national, subregional, and international levels.*

Keywords: Alliance des Etats du Sahel (AES States); The Sahel region, West Africa; (In)security.

Introduction

The emergence of the *Alliance des Etats du Sahel* (AES States), also called the Confederation of Sahel States, comes at a time when there are growing calls for increased regional cooperation to tackle the mammoth security challenges that the West African subregion has grappled with over time. These security challenges, especially terrorism, insurgencies, and most recent armed banditry activities, have continued to swell with non-state armed groups continuing to carry out vicious attacks against civilian and military targets, among other things. For instance, the activities of resurgent extremist groups across the region between January and July of 2023 resulted in an estimated 7,800 civilian deaths. This figure significantly increased from 2022 (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 2023). Notably, on September 5, 2023, seventeen soldiers and thirty-six volunteer fighters were killed in clashes with Islamist militants in Northern Burkina Faso, while in October of the same year, over twenty-nine soldiers were killed in an attack by the Islamic State in the Great Sahel (ISGS) in western Niger Republic (The Center for Preventive Action, 2024). These repeated heinous crimes and acrimony have been linked to a number of factors, particularly to the continuing collapse of international counter-terrorism support in the Sahel.

The continuing collapse of international counter-terrorism operational support has no doubt created a vacuum that has aided the expansion of the violent campaigns of insurgent groups such as *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM), Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP). These groups and others have taken advantage of the vacuum caused by the expulsion of international counter-terrorism initiatives, notably the Tripartite Agreement among the European Union, G5 Sahel and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), to advance their cause. Osaghae (2021) argued that the activities of these insurgent groups, which are believed to have links with larger global groups, have fomented local conflicts and enabled the spread of organized crimes, thereby destabilizing already fragile political landscapes. Put differently, the activities of these groups have created an atmosphere of terror and broad impunity in the region.

Apart from the activities of extremist groups in the region, government forces in Mali and Burkina Faso have been accused at different times of executing civilians and ill-trained volunteered forces, which has created the possibility of a war crime in the region. The Center for Preventive Action (2024) reported that the Malian Forces massacred an estimated 500 civilians in March 2022, while the activities of the government forces in Burkina Faso led to the death of 136 people (The Center for Preventive Action, 2024). In addition, the decision of Mali and Burkina Faso to expel the MINUSMA and ostensibly advance Wagner's interests against the interest of France has also been blamed for having fueled the insecurity in the Sahel (The Center for Preventive Action, 2024).

Climate change is another notable but often overlooked trigger of tension and insecurity in the Sahel. Although a global challenge, the West African subregion has its devastating share of climate change, causing worsened human conditions and loss of livelihood. Osaghae captured that "the deteriorating condition of Lake Chad from 25,000 km in the 1960s of open water in the 1980s to 2,000 km in the 1980s, increased desertification and drought and propelled food insecurity and diminished livelihood" (2022, p.28).

In a similar vein, Aïssatou Diouf, the Coordinator of the Climate Action Network for West and Central Africa, explained the inherent link between climate change and security, describing the former as a source of various phenomena causing tension, violence and conflict in the Sahel (United Nations, 2023). Practically, due to the depletion of natural resources and arable lands for grazing, Southwards migration has increased, especially by herders in search of wetter land, resulting in tales of acrimony, wanton killing and the destruction of farms and properties in the West African subregion (Adefisoye & Bamidele, Adefisoye & Ariyo, 2019; Ifedayo & Adefisoye, 2020; and Olaniyan et al., 2015).

From the foregoing, it could be argued that the acrimony in the Sahel occasioned by the activities of terrorist and armed groups, the brutality of government forces, the collapse of international counter-terrorism alliances, the activities of the Wagner Forces (as alleged in certain quarters) and climate insecurity have propelled the argument that military actions (kinetic measures) alone are insufficient to tackle in insecurity situations in the Sahel.

To this effect, the September 2023 emergence of the AES States and the subsequent declaration of January 2024 to pull out of ECOWAS (and by extension, the G-5 Sahel) to form a confederation ostensibly to tackle insecurity has opened a new chapter in the (in)security discourse of the Sahel. It also raises a serious concern for a region's future and stability plagued by mammoth security challenges. Adefisoye and Bamidele (2025) argued that forming the Confederation and its perceived growing influence raise essential questions about the future of regional integration in West Africa. As an entity separate from existing regional frameworks such as the G-5 Sahel, Grütjen (2024) stated that the Confederation introduces a new layer of complexity to the region's security and economic dynamics. This development challenges ECOWAS's unity and its capacity to enforce regional agreements and maintain its role as a stabilizing force (Adefisoye & Bamidele, 2025).

This paper raises concerns about whether or not the new alliance ostensibly formed to tackle insecurity in the Sahel, as purported by its founders, can attain its founding objectives, particularly in the growing collapse of international counter-terrorism alliances. Therefore, in assessing the capabilities of the Confederation's capability, three essential criteria were set. The first is the dynamic nature of terrorism and other security challenges in the Sahel. Two, the level of subregional, regional, and international military, economic, and counter-terrorism collaborations and support is still available and accessible by the AES States. The third is the military strength of the three countries separately and combined, including support from Russia's Wagner Forces.

Overview of Security Challenges in the Sahel

The Sahel is one of the poorest regions of the world (The European Union External Action Service, 2016). Sadly, the region is faced with concurrent challenges of abject and life-threatening poverty, climate change's effects, recurrent food crises, rapid population growth, fragile governance, corruption, unresolved internal tensions, the risk of violent extremism and radicalization, illicit trafficking and terrorist-linked security threats" (The European Union External Action Service, 2016, p. 1).

The region, spanning across West Africa, is confronted with a complex web of insecurity issues that threaten regional stability and human security. Vicious activities of the terrorist

groups have become a significant threat to regional stability in the Sahel, with groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (JNIM) operating in the region (Hansen, 2023). These groups have exploited local grievances and sectarian tensions to recruit members and expand their influence, perpetrating attacks on civilian populations, security forces, and international targets.

One of the most pervasive and debilitating of these security challenges in the region is armed banditry, which has become a scourge on the region's rural communities (International Crisis Group, 2022). Armed bandits, often operating in loose networks, have terrorized villagers, stolen livestock, and destroyed crops, leaving countless families vulnerable to poverty and displacement (Titus & Ogundiya, 2024). The root causes of armed banditry in the Sahel are complex and multifaceted, driven by factors such as poverty, inequality, and poor governance (UNDP, 2020; UNDP, 2023).

Consequent to this militia group, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has exacerbated the problem, as armed bandits exploit the region's porous borders to acquire illicit firearms (Titus & Ogundiya, 2024). This development has enabled them to launch brazen attacks on security forces, humanitarian convoys, and civilians, further destabilizing the existing regional security. Indeed, the economic consequences of armed banditry are also dire, with trade and commerce severely disrupted, exacerbating poverty and inequality in the region. Furthermore, in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, armed banditry has become increasingly intertwined with other security threats, including terrorism and violent extremism. This convergence of threats has created a toxic security environment where civilians are caught in the crossfire between rival armed groups and security forces. The humanitarian toll is staggering, with millions displaced, injured, or killed.

Additionally, the Sahel's porous borders and lack of effective border control mechanisms have facilitated the movement of terrorist groups, arms, and illicit goods (Bachmann, 2022; Titus & Ogundiya, 2024). That has enabled terrorists to establish networks across the region, undermining regional security and stability. The situation is further complicated by the presence of foreign machineries, including those fleeing conflict zones in Libya and Syria. Again, it can be argued that terrorism in the Sahel has also been fueled by social and

economic factors, including poverty, inequality, and poor governance (UNDP, 2023). The region's vulnerability to climate change has exacerbated these issues, creating an environment conducive to extremist ideology.

Similarly, women and children are disproportionately affected by violent extremism in the Sahel, often facing forced recruitment, abduction, and exploitation (UNICEF, 2022). The region's humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated by violent extremism, with millions in need of assistance. Addressing the root causes of violent extremism is critical to promoting regional stability and preventing further human suffering. The international community's response to violent extremism in the Sahel has included military interventions, counter-terrorism operations, and development programs. Furthermore, piracy and maritime insecurity have emerged as significant threats in the Sahel region, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea (International Maritime Bureau, 2022). Pirate groups, often based in Nigeria, have launched attacks on ships and oil platforms, disrupting regional trade and energy production. That has resulted in substantial economic losses, undermined regional stability, and posed a risk to global energy security.

The Sahel's coastal regions, stretching from Senegal to Nigeria, have become hotspots for piracy, with groups exploiting weak maritime governance and corruption. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has further enabled pirate groups to operate with impunity. Efforts to combat piracy in the Sahel have been hindered by regional politics, capacity challenges, and a lack of coordination (Chivvis, 2020). International initiatives like the Yaoundé Code of Conduct have aimed to enhance regional cooperation and maritime security. Indeed, the root causes of piracy, including poverty, inequality, and poor governance, remain unaddressed (UNDP, 2023).

Methodology

The paper is qualitative, contextual, and exploratory. Data for this study were gathered and analyzed using a qualitative approach based on documentary sources. A significant number of the secondary sources used for this research were journals, textbooks, internet resources, statistics based on ACLED, regional security reports, world development indicators, and publications relevant to the subject matter. However, the range of literature on arguments

between the AES States in the Sahel region is increasing, and it focuses mostly on historical assessments of the causes and the implications. Furthermore, the topic has been the focus of a number of academic rituals, with arguments based on historical relations and other sentiments. This study builds upon these works, but it also departs from them to add to the body of existing literature by examining the paths taken by the new AES States in the Sahel region.

Theoretical Framework: Concentric Theory

The Concentric Theory, developed by Hammill and Tanner (2011), offered a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex dynamics of insecurity in the Sahel region. This theory posited that insecurity operates across multiple, interconnected layers or "concentric circles" – local, national, regional, and global (Hammill, 2011). Each layer influences and is influenced by the others, creating a complex web of security challenges. At the local level, poverty, inequality, and poor governance contribute to insecurity. National-level dynamics, including weak institutions and corruption, further exacerbate these challenges (Chivvis, 2020). Regional and global factors, such as climate change, terrorism and international intervention, also significantly shape the Sahel's security landscape (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Applying the Concentric Theory to the Sahel region reveals the interconnected nature of insecurity across local, national, regional, and global levels. At the local level, in the Sahel region, local factors such as poverty, inequality, and poor governance contribute to insecurity. For instance, in Mali, local grievances over resource management and land ownership have fueled tensions between communities (International Crisis Group, 2023).

At the national level, dynamics, including weak institutions and corruption, exacerbate local security challenges. In Burkina Faso, the military's inability to address security concerns has created an environment conducive to extremist groups (Bachmann, 2022). The regional factors, such as the spread of terrorist groups and illicit trafficking, further complicate the security landscape. The Sahel's porous borders facilitate the movement of armed groups and illicit goods. The global factors, including international intervention and climate change, shape the Sahel's security environment. Foreign military interventions, such as Operation

Barkhane, have had mixed results in addressing security concerns (Chivvis, 2020). Again, the Concentric Theory offers valuable implications for addressing insecurity in the Sahel. A holistic approach, considering all concentric levels, is essential for effective security initiatives (Hansen, 2023). Enhancing regional security mechanisms can mitigate transnational threats, underscoring the importance of regional cooperation. Moreover, community engagement and local-level initiatives can build resilience and prevent extremist group recruitment.

The Resurgence of Military Rule and External Influences in the Sahel Region

The Sahel region has witnessed a surge in military interventions, with countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger Republic experiencing coups or attempted coups in recent years (Adefisoye & Braimah, 2023; Adefisoye & Ariyo, 2024; Titus & Awotayo, 2024). This trend is attributed to various factors, including weak institutions, economic instability, and external influences (International Crisis Group, 2023). Again, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has further exacerbated the security situation, creating an environment conducive to military intervention (Ogundiya & Titus, 2024).

The role of external actors, particularly Russia, has significantly shaped the region's security landscape. Russia's support for authoritarian regimes and its willingness to intervene militarily in conflicts have emboldened military leaders to seize power (Bachmann, 2022). This has resulted in a complex web of security challenges, including terrorism, insurgency, and intercommunal violence. Russia's involvement in the Sahel region has been steadily increasing, with significant implications for regional security. Moscow's regional strategic interests include access to natural resources, expansion of its economic influence, and countering Western presence (Hansen, 2023). Russia's support for military leaders in Mali and Burkina Faso has enabled it to establish military bases and expand its security footprint. Russia's Wagner Group, a private military company, has been instrumental in implementing

Moscow's security strategy in the Sahel. Wagner's involvement has been linked to human rights abuses and the destabilization of local communities (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The group's presence has also created tensions with Western powers, particularly France, which has historical ties to the region. The Russian factor has further complicated the

security landscape, exacerbating existing challenges and creating new ones. The impact of Russia's involvement on regional stability and the effectiveness of international responses will be critical areas of examination.

Assessing the Capability of the Russian-Backed AES States in Tackling insecurity in the Sahel

The emergence of Russian-backed AES States in the Sahel region has raised concerns about their capacity to combat the hydra-headed security challenges in the area. As stated in the introductory part, three critical criteria are set in assessing the Confederation's capability to achieve its ostensible core formulation objectives of tackling insecurity in the Sahel. The first is the dynamic nature of terrorism and other security challenges in the Sahel. This can also include the geopolitical dynamics of the Sahel as a route between the Maghreb and the rest of West Africa. Two, the level of subregional, regional, and international military, economic, and counter-terrorism collaborations and support is still available and accessible by the AES States. Three, the military and the economic cum political strength of the three countries separately and combined, including support from Russia's Wagner Forces.

Firstly, the complex nature of terrorism, the dynamism of insecurity and the geopolitics of Sahel. Terrorism and the operations of terrorist organizations have become more dynamic since the 9/11 attacks on the United States. There have been increasing alliances and linkages between and among local terror groups and ones with an international outlook (Osaghae, 2021; Adefisoye, 2022; Adefisoye & Adedokun, 2019). This dynamic nature was well captured in an emotional but thought-provoking speech by Dr Mahathir Mohamad, a former Prime Minister of Malaysia, at the 13th Summit of the Non-Alignment Movement held in Kuala Lumpur between 20th and 25th of February 2013 in Pogoson (2013, p. 1):

We live in challenging times... The world is in a state of terror. We are pretty paranoid. We are afraid of flying, of going to certain countries, fearful of certain people. We are afraid of white powder, shoes, metal cutlery on aircraft... We are afraid of Muslims, of Arabs, of bearded people. We are afraid of war, of the disruption it can cause, and the uncertainties... We do not know how long we will remain in this state of terror. Fighting a conventional war against a country, you can

defeat a country and get it to surrender, sign a treaty and bring the war to an end. However, global terrorists belong to no country. Even if their leaders surrender, there is no guarantee that other leaders will not emerge and that the followers and new recruits will not continue their terror attacks.

Even recently, terrorist organizations have taken advantage of loopholes in the cyberspace of countries to activate unsuspected members, especially women (Adefisoye & Adedokun, 2019; Olugbenga, 2017). In addition, the Arab Spring leading to the destabilization of Syria and Libya occasioned the emergence and the successful expansion of terror links around the world, especially in West Africa. Barak Bouks poignantly described this dynamic expansion and unprecedented trajectory:

(Jihadi) terror movements are calculated and logical. They are very attentive to global changes and, thus, implement various adaptation techniques to maximize any potential gain from the new circumstances. These movements are influenced by the local arena on which they operate, while having to consider the necessities of the local population to be found in their territories of operation to gain support (Bouks, 2020, p. 52).

These developments have allowed these organizations to expand their networks, making them more difficult to tame. This reality, no doubt, has occasioned subregional, regional and international military alliances and cooperations in the fight against terror, which is consistent with the proposition of the Concentric approach in combating insecurity.

In a similar vein, other security challenges such as piracy, armed banditry, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and environmentally-induced insecurity have become dynamic and thus require inter-state collaborations. For a region that interlocks the Maghreb and the rest of West Africa, such collaborations are required. However, the capability of the three-member Confederation to handle this dynamic nature of the insecurity in the Sahel is grossly in doubt.

The second criterion in assessing the capability of the AES states is related to the first. International collaboration and support in tackling the security challenges in the Sahel was

immense, with different levels of support from allies and international bodies. At the national level, Nigeria, a sub-regional giant in West Africa for instance, contributed a troop of 1,200 soldiers to salvage the Malian political crisis in January 2013 despite facing the worst internal security threats and a palpable worsening economic condition at that time (*Vanguard*, 2013; *Premium Times*, 2013). The justification for such action was not just consistent with the country's foreign policy objective of 'good neighborliness'; it was borne out of a clear understanding of the geopolitics of the Sahel. It is important to note that the 2012/2013 Malian crisis was occasioned by a large-scale revolt by the Tuareg Fighters based in Northern Mali to usurp the Malian government. Experts believed that the massive impact of the revolt was fueled by the destabilization in Libya and snowballed into the Sahel.

In addition, Nigeria has spearheaded notable initiatives at the level of the Lake Chad Commission and the Gulf of Guinea Commission to tackle insecurity in the Sahel. However, Nigeria and other West Africans acting under the ECOWAS umbrella have imposed sanctions. In December 2024, the subregional body gave a six-month grace period to the three members of the Confederation of Sahel States to reconsider their membership of the regional bloc (Adefisoye & Braimah, 2023; RFI, 2024). In a similar vein, France and Germany have contributed to the stability of Mali by maintaining military bases and supporting counter-terrorism initiatives up till 2022 and 2023, respectively.

Of note, before the emergence of the AES States, France had military bases in more than 20 African countries, with about 7,500 personnel operating mainly in the Sahel (Osaghae, 2021). However, France, like Germany, was provoked to withdraw its forces from three countries due to the presence of Russian interests, which were considered incompatible. On August 30, 2024, DW, a German news outlet, reported that Germany had withdrawn its *Bundeswehr* forces with 3,200 soldiers from junta-run Niger after 8 years citing Russian presence (DW, 2024). This development is no doubt a major setback to the fight against insecurity in the Sahel.

Broadly, the G5 Sahel formed by the five Sahelian states of Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Mauritania and Niger in 2014 with the broad objective of advancing security in the Sahel has been weakened, first by the withdrawal of Mali and subsequently by that of the two

other AES States. Although the French-backed-G5 Sahel Forces formed in 2017 made notable successes, particularly with the increase of military spending by member-states and by entering into a tripartite agreement with the European Union and the UN, such efforts have nosedived in recent times. The question that comes to mind at this juncture is whether the AES States' alliance with Russia's Wagner Forces is sufficient to handle the hydra-headed security challenges in the Sahel.

Recent developments suggest that Russia's involvement in the region is geared towards advancing its strategic interests rather than addressing the root causes of insecurity. Although such 'selfish' ambition may not be peculiar to Russia in the phase of the 'New Scramble for West Africa', Russia seems the most desperate among other countries. Russia's primary objective in the Sahel is to project its influence and undermine Western dominance. To achieve this, Russia has been strengthening its military footprint, securing energy and mineral resources, and promoting its economic interests. The visits of high-ranking Russian officials, such as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Deputy Defense Minister Yunus Bek Yevkurov, to key African partners highlight the Kremlin's strategic aims. According to a report by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Russia's involvement in Africa is driven by a desire to reassert its global influence (Carnegie Endowment, 2023).

The AES states' capacity to fight insecurity is uncertain. Despite Russia's increased military presence, its ability to effectively combat insecurity in the Sahel remains questionable. The region's complex security challenges, including jihadist insurgencies and intercommunal violence, require a nuanced approach that addresses the underlying drivers of conflict. Russia's military-first approach may exacerbate existing tensions and create new security risks. A study by the International Crisis Group found that Russia's military support to the region has failed to yield significant security gains (International Crisis Group, 2023).

The AES states, comprising Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, face significant security challenges. While Russia has provided military support, the effectiveness of this assistance is uncertain. The AES states' capacity to combat insecurity is compromised by limited institutional capacity, dependence on Russian support, and human rights concerns. As reported by StatiSense (2023), the number of active military personnel in Mali was 18,000;

in Burkina Faso, 12,000; and Niger, 10,000. Military/defense spending in Mali significantly increased from USD 582 Million in 2022 to USD 785.50 Million in 2023, the highest in the country's history since 1961 (Stockholm International Peace Research SIPRI, 2023). Likewise, Burkina Faso's military spending was USD 562.60 Million but increased to USD 826.40 Million, which is considered the highest since 1960 (SIPRI, 2023). According to the same source, Niger's military spending increased from USD 242.50 Million in 2022 to USD 331.60 Million in 2023, which was the highest since 1975 (SIPRI, 2023).

It is worthy of note that military spending in the AES States significantly increased in increased ostensibly to tackle the common insecurity challenges posed by armed groups and terrorist organizations operating in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border of the three countries. Furthermore, a military pact was signed in 2024 by the military leaders of the three countries to strengthen ties and fight terrorism. Despite these laudable initiatives, there has been a resurgence of fierce fighting by Tuareg rebels since October 2023, which has led to the killing of 80 Malian-Wagner soldiers and the takeover of Bamba town by the insurgents. (BBC, 2023). In August 2024, the Tuareg rebels claimed that they had killed a total of 47 Malian soldiers and 84 Russian Wagner mercenaries (France 24, 2024). This development is a serious setback to the 2015 peace accord between the Malian government and the rebels.

It is pretty evident that the alliance with Russia is primarily targeted at the use of force to suppress the rebels and not by addressing specific fundamental root causes, which mirrors the non-kinetic measures. This approach is currently adopted and can spread the hostilities in Mali to other AES states and the entire West African region. Also, reports of human rights abuses and repression in AES states raise concerns about their commitment to protecting civilians. The United Nations has documented numerous human rights violations in the region, including extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances (UN Human Rights Council, 2023).

Therefore, fighting the mammoth security challenges in the Sahel requires a more comprehensive approach, which the Concentric Theory underpins. At the local level, factors such as poverty, inequality, and poor governance contribute to insecurity should be tackled. At the national level, issues, including weak institutions and corruption, which further

exacerbate challenges, must be addressed. Regional and global factors, such as terrorism and international intervention, which play significant roles in shaping the Sahel's security landscape, must be deliberately tackled. Therefore, the formation of the AES States and its espousal to Russia is not sufficient to address these rot and fundamental issues in the Sahel.

Conclusion

The emergence of Russian-backed AES States in the Sahel region poses significant security concerns. Despite Russia's increased military presence, its ability to effectively combat insecurity remains uncertain. With the complex nature of the security issues in the Sahel, the presence of al-Qaeda-supported terrorist organizations, the collapse of international alliances, and ECOWAS's current stand against military coups and unlawful take-over of power, it can be concluded that the insecurity in the Sahel would worsen in the coming years. Although the three states that make up the Confederation have stepped up their military spending significantly, signed new military pacts, and received support from Russia, the dynamic nature of the situation in the Sahel has persisted. Thus, this puts a question mark on their ability to tackle the hydra-headed insecurity in the Sahel, particularly addressing the root causes of the protracted security challenges.

Furthermore, Russia's strategic interests drive its involvement in the Sahel, compromising the AES states' relationship with other stakeholders and its capacity to combat insecurity. Again, human rights concerns and repression undermine regional stability. The implication of Russia's involvement is far-reaching, threatening to destabilize neighboring countries and create new security risks. Instead, it is essential to recognize the complex dynamics driving insecurity in the Sahel. Addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting democratic governance, and strengthening institutional capacity are critical for regional stability. Finally, a comprehensive approach addressing the root causes of insecurity is essential for regional stability. International partners must prioritize supporting democratic governance, human rights, and sustainable development in the Sahel. By doing so, the region can break the cycle of insecurity and instability perpetuated by Russian-backed AES states.

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