ECOWAS and Sahel Alliance in West Africa: An Insight

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[0192] Abstract

Mali, Bukina Faso and Niger shocked the continent and the world after the formation and pledge of allegiance to a parallel sub-regional platform in West Africa, "the Sahel Alliance". The novelty has in the recent time engaged interests of scholars and practitioners in attempt to explore "the cause and effects" from the perspective lens of reactionary events from a sub-regional body, ECOWAS. From the internal dynamics, this study examined ECOWAS crisis management processes in the emergence of Sahel Alliance in West Africa. The methodology of the study is qualitative exploratory design in Dependency theoretical framework that argued that ECOWAS crisis management problem and emergence of Sahel Alliance was a function of intersection between western and non-western interests reflecting in imperialist syndrome which bedeviled the sub region. The study further revealed failure of crisis management processes and deliberate implementation of punitive measures in deference to western pressure which consequently triggered resentment and exit with multifaceted implications. From these findings, the study recommend that ECOWAS' crisis management mechanisms should be strengthened as the new realignment is managed in diplomacy among other fundamentals for stability and development of West Africa.

Keywords: ECOWAS, Sahel Alliance, Sahelexit, West Africa.

Introduction

Economic Community of West Africa States, ECOWAS celebrated 50 years of its existence in May, 2025 as sub regional platform for cooperation and development amid odds. In a succinct sense, one of the recent odds that make mockery of its commitment towards a sub-regional cohesion and drive was the exit of three countries in the central Sahel to form a new alliance. The development undoubtedly raised pertinent questions on crisis management process of ECOWAS and its implications in the sub-region.

Regional integration in Africa has been a major goal of African states after they begin to attain political independence in the 1950s. In addition to the African Union (AU) which serves as a regional organization, several sub-regional bodies have emerged across the continent. Notable among these are the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS/CEEAC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU/UMA), the East African Community (EAC), and the Economic Community of West African States ECOWAS, (Osuchukwu, e tal, 2025). Furthermore, Osuchukwu, etal, (2025), and Idika (2023) respectively indicated that ECOWAS emerged in May 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria, by the unity of heads of states of 15 West African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Later, Cape Verde joined in 1977. However, Mauritania withdrew from the organization in 2000. The country wanted to join the Arab Maghreb Union instead which brings ECOWAS membership back to fifteen. ECOWAS was originally formed with the aim of promoting economic integration and development in West Africa.

Beyond the regional integration and development, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) had witnessed a gradual transformation and expansion of its core mandate from the promotion of regional economic cooperation and development to broader issues of peace, security and democracy (Zounmenou & Lous, 2011). It implied that armed conflicts emanating from member-states which constitute a serious threat to regional peace also indulged the attention of ECOWAS for peace building initiatives. Rationalizing the new awareness, Gwaza (2016) stressed that violent conflict and insecurity situations in the sub-region opened up a new vista resulting in new

policy thinking on the pursuit of good governance as basis for regional cooperation, development democracy, peace and security. Coincidentally, the third wave of democratization across countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America promised not only economic growth and development, but also good governance, peace and security expressed overtly as respect for rule of law and individual freedom and civil liberty, electoral competition (Omotola, 2008; Adetula, 2011).

Unfortunately, the phenomenal resurgence of stratocracy in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger in Central Sahel region of 88 million people was a democratic reversal to the region (Madubuegwu, e tal. 2025). Consequently, ECOWAS intervened with caution and sanctions. However, in a dramatic turn of events on September 16, 2023, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso signed the *Liptako-Gourma* charter that debut the *Alliance des États du Sahel*, a structure intended to function as a strategic alliance for cooperation among its members. At first glance, the charter appeared like a collective defense mechanism for the populations of the three countries but it also includes measures that go beyond cooperation to a vision of integration of the three states in a confederal framework (Johnson, 2024). The sudden development (new-three state regional alliance) though was not strange but a trend in the history of exit of state or states from regional associations and framework of agreements within the continent. In this vein, Osuchukwu, etal (2025) recalled that the history of African countries' withdrawals from regional and continental agreement reflect the complex dynamics of regional integration, political sovereignty and economic considerations. One notable example is Mauritania, which exited the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 2000 but later signed a new associate-membership agreement in August 2017. The reasons for this initial withdrawal are multifaceted and include issues related to economic strategies, trade structures, and political alignments. The eventual return through an-associate-membership agreement indicated a nuanced approach that seeks to balance national interests with regional collaboration. Similarly, Morocco's departure from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1984 later rebranded as the African Union (AU), occurred after the body recognized the independence of Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara. This withdrawal was a result of a fundamental dispute over territorial integrity and sovereignty.

The subsequent re-admission in 2017 reflect the shifting political landscape and need for reconciliation despite past disagreements. Moreover, Tanzania's withdrawal from the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) due to a zero-tariff reduction agreement underscored the intricate relationship between trade policies and regional integration. Tanzania' heavy reliance on revenues from trade tariffs and VAT led to the perception that reducing tariffs to 0% posed a threat to its economic stability, shedding light on the delicate balance that countries strike between regional integration and national economic interests. These examples emphasized diverse and intricate factors that underpin African countries' decisions to withdraw from regional agreements. Such decisions are often influenced by a combination of geopolitical, economic, and ideological considerations showcasing the nuanced approach that nations take in navigating their roles within regional entities.

Beside geographical, security and economic claims to the exit of states from multi-lateral agreements or framework of alliance, Chanda (2023) and Omar (2024) in a different perspective stressed that failure of conflict management process of mediation and conciliation has over the years undermined the credibility of most continental organizations. When the structures and process of the crisis management became deficient or abused then unity and strength of the organization are negatively affected. In this vein, Okere (2015) noted that in the 1990's there were several intrastate conflicts in West Africa that received little to no attention and engagement from international communities forcing ECOWAS to deploy its army in order to prevent further human suffering. ECOWAS has, since 1990 intervened in Liberia (twice), Mali, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau and Gambia as observed (Gwaza, 2016).

However, peculiarities of these conflicts and intervention strategy of crisis management differ from inter-state conflict to domestic armed struggles and usurpation of political power. The puzzle which this study intends to unravel is the circumstances underlying the exit of the three countries (Mali, Bukina Faso and Niger) from Economic Community of West Africa States, ECOWAS to form another sub-regional platform, SEA. From this indication, this study aimed to establish functionality or non-functionality of crisis management process in the emergence

of Sahel Alliance in West Africa. For purpose of incisive analysis, the discourse is divided in this introduction, problem statement, research questions, conceptual discourse, theoretical discourse, hypothetical assumptions, thematic discourse in data presentation, interpretation and analysis, conclusion and recommendations.

Problem Statement

The 15-nation bloc was created in 1975 as earlier indicated to promote economic integration among member states. ECOWAS has struggled in recent years to reverse a wave of military takeovers in the region but failed in events in Mali in 2020 and 2021 respectively, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Niger in 2023. The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) represent a significant turning-point in the regional political landscape of West Africa. The decision made under the sovereignty of the Alliance of Sahel States also reflected a deep-seated discontent in ECOWAS undermining the organizational foundation principles (Osuchukwu, etal, 2025). Subsequently, Omar (2024) remarked that failure of the economic integrating sub-regional associations to drive its process of conciliation to manage intractable situations has resulted to lack of commitment among member countries towards peace building initiative. To this end, perhaps the exit of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger may be the function of the inability to drive the process of conciliation as observed. In other words, the problem statement resonates from a rhetoric question of what could be internal inadequacies in ECOWAS' crisis management processes as mechanism or events that significantly or insignificantly correlate with emergence of Sahel Alliance in West Africa?

At the end of January 2024, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger announced their withdrawal invariably referred to as *'Sahelexit'* from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The withdrawal–with immediate effect according to the departing states present a complex set of challenges for the region. ECOWAS, initially designed to promote regional economic integration and democracy on several occasions had adopted sanctions against unconstitutional changes of government among its member states. However, these actions often had mixed results (Pichon, 2024). In this effect, Osuchukwu, etal (2025) revealed that the recent move in ECOWAS' sanctions against Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger had prompted series of reactions and implications not only for the withdrawing countries but also for the wider regional integration efforts in Africa. In this regard, the problem statement is obvious in what could be the consequences of the emergence of Sahel Alliance to ECOWAS and the sub region?

Furthermore, ECOWAS has come of age not only in the promotion of regional cooperation, economic development and growth, but also in the promotion and consolidation of democracy, peace and security (Justin, 2023). Superficially, the ECOWAS democracy and peace building promotional agenda was regionalism, but they have been influenced by the universal western liberal movement (Usoro, 2013). To this end, Umaru, (2024) pointedly remarked that the contents of most of the constitutions of member-states and ECOWAS protocols that promoted liberal democratic values than socioeconomic issues that seek to address daily realities of African people. In credence, it is argued that ECOWAS should have prioritized in a "democracy" that advances effective mechanism of peace building in deference to democratic principles to prevent the exit of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. In this vein, the problem statement resonates from what would have been the measures to mitigate the exit of these Sahel countries from ECOWAS.

Research Questions

From the problem statements, the following questions illuminates: **(a)** Was the emergence of Sahel Alliance in West Africa a failure of ECOWAS crisis management process? **(b)** What are the implications of the emergence of Sahel Alliance to ECOWAS and West Africa? **(c)** How can failure of ECOWAS crisis management be mitigated for the integration of West Africa?

Conceptual Discourse: ECOWAS stands for Economic Community of West African States. Pichon (2024) embellish that on 28th May 1975 in Lagos (Nigeria), 15 West African countries concluded the treaty establishing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS in English and CEDEAO in French and Portuguese) to promote economic cooperation and integration through the harmonization of its members' national policies. Cape Verde after gaining independent status in 1975, joined the Community in 1976. Mauritania left ECOWAS in 2000 to concentrate on its membership of the Arab Maghreb Union – however, it maintained ties with its sub- Saharan neighbors and signed an

association agreement with ECOWAS in 2017. ECOWAS is one of the eight regional economic communities (RECs) recognized by the African Union (AU). The inspiration for the creation of ECOWAS came from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), which had in the 1960s divided Africa into regions for purposes of economic development. The initial objective of forming ECOWAS was to achieve economic integration and development so as to form a unified economic zone in West Africa. Later on, the scope was widened to include political and security issues. The ECOWAS Treaty seeks to establish an economic and monetary union based on the removal of duties and equivalent taxes, the adoption of a common external tariff, and a harmonization of economic and sectoral policies (Osuchukwu, e tal 2025).

Subsequently, Pichon (2024) documents that ECOWAS's main institutions are similar to those of the EU. These organs are. **(a)** The Authority of Heads of State and Government takes binding decisions (including sanctions) by consensus. **(b)** The Council of Ministers issues regulations and directives, and formulate recommendations to the Authority of Heads of State and Government **(c)** The Commission, the executive body, implements Community decisions and programmes. **(d)** The Parliament, made up of 115 members from national parliaments (35 seats for Nigeria; five to eight seats for each of the other member states) mainly has a consultative role The Office of the Auditor General checks the Community's financial management. **(e)** The Community Court of Justice settles disputes between member states and renders decisions on human rights cases brought by citizens. **(f)** The Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) finances public and private development projects. ECOWAS also has an intergovernmental action group against money laundering and terrorism financing, and special agencies on topics of concern such as agriculture, energy, gender, health, monetary policy, water management, and youth.

Succinctly, the concept of management crisis is polemical and elicits different interpretations and meanings. To this end, management crisis is defined as process and structures put in a place to mitigate issues which affects negatively organizational growth. It is coordinated efforts to resolve issues seen as threat to the progress and growth of an organization (Slakar, 2021). In another perspective, management crisis is also seen as the failure of the leadership and mechanism put in a place to respond to targets of effectiveness and efficiency. Thus, it is failure of leadership to rise and challenge what are militating against its process toward effectiveness and efficiency (Odiogolo & Charles, 2011). Also in a contrary perspective, management crisis represent conflict management mechanism and process designed to conciliate and reconcile disagreement and disaffection that often arise from time to time among members of a formal association which if not tackled may bring stress on the group. It is mechanism institutionalized with conventions and procedures to engage aggrieved members and reconcile them back to the union (Chanda, 2023). In the same interpretation, Omar (2024) opined that management crisis is structures in place readily activated to manage conflicts that may undermine organizational unity and goals.

Furthermore, ECOWAS management crisis include the Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. The task of these mechanisms are facilitated by ECOWAS Peace Fund and Mediation and Security Council, MSC. Also, the Observation and Monitoring Centre (OMC), the deployment of peace support operations (Civilian, Police and Military), the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, ECPF and protocols on democracy and good governance are activated to drive the process of crisis management particularly in early warning system (Lawal and Mohmmed, 2024). Furthermore, Tobo (2024) documents that ECOWAS crisis management is driven by legal and policy frameworks such as Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999) which established the core framework for ECOWAS's security and conflict management activities. In addition, the ECOWAS protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001) was entrenched to prevent crisis by promoting democratic principles and constitutional order in member countries as ECOWAS convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons tackles the menace of illicit supply and trade in weapons in armed conflict areas in the sub region. And, ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework, ECPF represents a comprehensive approach to addressing structural conditions for conflict and managing crises as they arise.

Beside the protocols and frameworks, Shaw (2025) revealed that there are institutional mechanisms that also provide leadership for the process of crisis management in ECOWAS. These mechanisms are Mediation and Security Council (responsible for positions on security matters and coordinating responses), Observation and Monitoring Center (OMC) working strategically in early warning system and task of detecting and monitoring potential conflicts as ECOWAS Parliament play

a more active role in conflict prevention and crisis management including conflict analysis training for its staff. Also in efforts to enhance operational performance of these frameworks and mechanism in crisis management, the ECOWAS ministers adopted a Regional Resilience Strategy to advocate on good governance fundamentals, peace and security and sustainable and inclusive growth and development occasioned with Peace Support Operations in the deployment of civilian, police and military personnel for peacekeeping and peace building efforts in conflict-affected areas across states and regions of West Africa(Akinyemi, 2023). The thrust of this discourse resonate from what informed the circumstances which facilitated the emergence of Sahel Alliance in view of these elaborate frameworks and mechanisms of crisis management in ECOWAS?

Theoretical Discourse
The study adopted Dependency Theory. Dependency theory, a neo-Marxist scientific construct that established the rationale of African underdevelopment from the perspective of historic relationship of exploitation and expansion. In this vein, Okeke (2009) document that Dependency theory is also known as Underdevelopment theory came as a direct response to the short-comings of the Modernization theory in explaining why the Core(center/west) is developed and the Periphery(south) is underdeveloped. Its proponents include; Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, Samir Amin, Claude Ake, etc. In reference to the scope of this study, arguably the two dominant assumptions of the Dependency Theory illuminates under the following: **(a)** The process of underdevelopment is relational and historic. Immanuel Wallerstein argued that as far back as 16th century (1450-1640) during mercantilism and slave trade, and later, colonialism, were eras the Western Europe enriched itself with the human and material resources it siphoned from the other continents, particularly from its colonies in Africa and Latin America. From these continents, Africa and Latin America, millions of slaves and huge raw materials were transferred to Europe. The plunder of Africa, Asia and Latin America by European capitalist powers enhanced development in Europe as it created conditions of underdevelopment and dependency in colonies/countries of these continents (Okeke, 2009). **(2)** The imperialist relationship between the Center and Periphery has advanced today in more exploitative dynamics and trend. Andre Gunder Frank, like other Dependency theorists, believes that the Periphery feeds and nourishes the Centre with its cheap labour and primary commodities (cocoa, cotton, palm oil, rubber, groundnuts, crude oil, etc), while the Centre stagnates and under develop the Periphery with its capitalist greed, export of expensive finished goods, unfavourable terms of trade and exploitative international politico-economic capitalist policies and institutions. All these factors individually and collectively, have led to underdevelopment of the south and dependency on the Industrialized Capitalist States of the West(Audu, 2013).

It is from this indication that Dos Santos cited in Offiong (1980) contextualized dependency as referring to a situation in which a certain group of countries have their economy conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy, to which the former is subject. The relation of interdependence between two or `more economies and between these and world trade assumes the form of dependence when some countries (the dominant) can expand and give impulse to their own development, while other countries (the dependent) can only develop as a reflection of this expansion.

Sadly, imperialist tendencies reflected in the impasse between the regional body and the exited three states (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) and Economic Community of West Africa States, ECOWAS. Similarly, it is argued that postcolonial African governments continue to be politically and economically dominated by Western institutions and former colonial powers (Edozie, 2017). The Sahel states contend that outside forces, most notably France and the European Union, have an impact on ECOWAS and set its policies, especially with regard to governance norms and economic sanctions (Koné, 2022). This assertion illuminates as the theory is applied. Arguably, dependency syndrome reflected in vertical relationship between Africa countries in alliance with Europe. In this vein, Nugene (2023) revealed that economic data and policy analysis showed that the withdrawing governments' decision to leave was strengthened by the negative economic effects of ECOWAS' sanctions. After border closures and the termination of financial help, Mali's GDP shrank by 1.2% in 2022 (Diop & Sky, 2023). Border closures and trade restrictions hurt Niger's trade dependence on Nigeria, its biggest trading partner, which resulted in disruptions in the energy supply and a 32% increase in food prices (Ansah, 2025). Foreign direct investment (FDI) declined in Burkina Faso as a result of ECOWAS' diplomatic actions discouraging investor's confidence. With officials claiming that

the bloc's policies affected civilians rather than military elite, these economic repercussions consequently heightened anti-ECOWAS sentiment(Ansah,2025).

Dependency resentment was also witnessed in the resistance of French- controlled currency by the exiting countries in ECOWAS. It was argued that use of the CFA franc, a currency under the jurisdiction of the French Treasury, is one of the main economic grievances against France. Mali had previously expressed interest in switching from the CFA franc to a sovereign currency (Koné, 2022). These governments may be able to investigate new currency arrangements without being subject to French economic control as a result of their removal from ECOWAS (Diop & Sky, 2023). In order to lessen their reliance on institutions controlled by the West, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali have increased their economic collaboration with China, Russia, and Turkey (Olander, 2023). Thus, the decision to leave ECOWAS is associated with larger initiatives to restore economic independence, particularly in the areas of commerce and finance(Ansah, 2025). Ironically, the new collaboration with China, Russia, and Turkey signifies another form of dependency. Subsequently, dependency syndrome also reflected in realignment and re-realignment of security alliance with developed countries. It was observed that exiting nation-states under Sahel Alliance have changed their military affiliations from ECOWAS to Turkey and Russia. Thus, the evidence showed that Russia, Mali, and Burkina Faso signed military pacts that included training through the Wagner Group and arms shipments (Shinn, 2023). Turkey and Niger have increased their security collaboration, especially in the areas of drones and counter-terrorism training (Tchie, 2022). An effort to create an alternative security framework outside ECOWAS is seen in the creation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) (Harmon, 2024). This realignment reflected a strategic shift towards multipolar security relationship and a decline in confidence in ECOWAS' capacity to deliver security solutions(Ansah, 2025).

Dependency syndrome reflected as ECOWAS is currently perceived as a proxy for western interests. ECOWAS is generally seen as being influenced by the US, the EU, and France. France's strong support for ECOWAS sanctions, which are seen as an effort to preserve its power in former colonies lends credence to this view (Matambo, 2023). Also, the European Union's adherence to ECOWAS policy especially when it concerned financing counter-terrorism efforts (Koné, 2022). Again, following the July 2023 coup in Niger, the United States and France put pressure on ECOWAS to launch a military intervention in Niger (Diop & Sky, 2023). In order to connect themselves with non-interventionist diplomatic strategies offered by China, Russia, and Turkey, Sahel leaders presented their exit as a rejection of neo-colonial involvement (Ansah, 2025).

Finally, the Dependency theory provided an insight in the circumstances and effects of the emergence of Sahel Alliance from ECOWAS in West Africa. Arguably, the resentment against ECOWAS was deliberate steps to cut ties with the Western industrialized nations and establish alliance with leading nations (Russia and China) of defunct Eastern-Communist bloc. Again, the strident responses of the regional body, ECOWAS through sanctions and suspensions against Mali, Bukina Faso and Niger was also largely influenced by Western interests. These bipolar influences in West Africa represented a trend of ''dependency syndrome'' - the bane of independence, assertiveness and drive.

Hypothetical Assumptions
From the perspective and sequence of the foregoing analysis, the following hypotheses are established:
(a) The emergence of Sahel Alliance in West Africa is a failure of ECOWAS crisis management process.
(b) There are implications of the emergence of Sahel Alliance to ECOWAS and West Africa. **(c)**The failure of ECOWAS crisis management can be mitigated for the integration of West Africa.

Thematic Discourse in Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis
The three research hypotheses are thematically presented and tested to underscore the significance or insignificance of ECOWAS crisis management problem in the emergence of Sahel Alliance in West Africa.

Hypothesis I: Emergence of Sahel Alliance in West Africa and Failure of ECOWAS Crisis Management Process: According to Article 91 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty, the withdrawal of a member state is effective only one year after it is notified, unless the member state renounces its withdrawal in the meantime. On 28 January 2024, three of the suspended countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) announced their unilateral withdrawal from ECOWAS (Guinea did not make such a move). They had already withdrawn from the G5 Sahel, a security cooperation framework between them, Chad and Mauritania – making it an empty shell – to form a new alliance, the AES (Alliance des États du

Sahel). On 29 January 2024, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger sent a formal withdrawal notification to ECOWAS (Pichon , 2024).

The fundamental question is why did these countries took the decision to withdraw from ECOWAS and pledge allegiance to a new Sahel Alliance (Alliance des États du Sahel)? The decision to withdraw is an attempt by the departing members to assert greater autonomy vià-vis ECOWAS governance principles, which they consider dictated by international players – particularly France, a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the ex-colonial power, which maintained close ties with these countries after independence. The sanctions imposed by ECOWAS have triggered this decision, according to the junta leaders(Achita, 2024). Similarly, Ndiaye (2023) stressed that the pull-out has many different and intricate political reasons which include perceived bias, close ties to Western powers, and inability to adequately address regional security threats, the three Sahelian states—all currently governed by the military due to coups between 2020 and 2023—have become more and more dissatisfied with ECOWAS (Matambo, 2023; Souaré, 2022). These nations contend that rather than acting as an impartial arbitrator of regional stability, ECOWAS has evolved into a "club of elites" supporting democratic regimes (Adebajo, 2021). Economic penalties put on Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, as well as their expulsion from ECOWAS, increased their dissatisfaction and fostered a strong sense of defiance against what they see as outside meddling in their internal affairs (Ansah, 2025).

Despite these structures and processes of crisis management, Shaw (2025) embellished that ECOWAS crisis management has four fundamental roles that begins with *diplomatic engagement* where ECOWAS showed diplomatic efforts to resolve tensions with the exited states and improve relations but failed. The second process is preventive diplomacy which was never applied as ECOWAS Standby Force, ESF, was on alert to deploy for aggression as avenues and mechanisms for engagement and indulgence with aggrieved states become inactive as western interests takes preeminence for show-down. Tensions increased as a result of ECOWAS's implementation of financial and economic sanctions. Following the coup in Mali in 2021, ECOWAS implemented border closures, financial freezes, and trade restrictions—measures that were repeated following the military coups in Burkina Faso and Niger (Diop & Sky, 2021). The economy of these already precarious governments suffered greatly as a result of these sanctions, which made unemployment, food shortages, and inflation worse. Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso contend that instead of forcing civilian political elite to adopt democratic governance rather punitive measures were disproportionately applied with adverse effects on welfare of common people (Nugent, 2023). In response to coups, ECOWAS' strategy with that of the African Union (AU), which favoured sanctions over conciliation. So the decision to leave ECOWAS was informed by economic pressure and an assertion of economic self-determination (Ansah, 2025).

Beside the failure of ECOWAS crisis management processes, Sahelian security problem is also one of the main causes of the breakup. The area has seen a rise in insurgencies associated with jihadist organizations like the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM) from the early 2010's (Kobo, 2021). Military solutions have failed to stop terrorism in the region, despite a number of ECOWAS-led programs, including the Accra Initiative and the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) (Tchie, 2022).

Also, ECOWAS' position on illegitimate transitions of administration is a key factor in the Sahel states' decision to leave. Between 2020 and 2023, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali all had military takeovers that resulted in their expulsion from ECOWAS (Matambo, 2023). Member nations are legally obligated to ensure that coup-led administrations in accordance with the 2001 ECOWAS protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, are committed to upholding constitutional governance (Hartmann, 2023). These nations contend, however, that ECOWAS employed selective enforcement, punishing military juntas while allowing authoritarian civilian regimes. For example, ECOWAS did not step in when Côte d'Ivoire amended its constitution in 2020 to allow Alassane Ouattara to serve as president for a longer period of time than his term restriction (Adebajo, 2021). The legitimacy of regimes that have emerged from popular discontent with governance shortcomings is not acknowledged by military leaders in the Sahel, who see ECOWAS as an organization dominated by civilian elite with Western affiliations (Ndiaye, 2023). By leaving ECOWAS, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger hope to strengthen their position of authority at home and fend off outside pressure to return to civilian governance outside a rigid time-frame set by the regional organization (Ansah, 2025).

In a gesture to appease tensions and allow the departing members to reconsider their positions, on 24 February 2024 ECOWAS lifted most of the remaining sanctions on Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger as well as Guinea. This is an indication that these sanctions had not worked, as

most of ECOWAS's demands had not been met – notably the release of Nigerien President Bazoum and clear timetables for elections. The prolongation of sanctions would also have put neighbouring countries at risk of popular unrest, due to the negative economic side-effects. The lifting of sanctions did not convince the AES states to renounce leaving ECOWAS. Rather they announced and move further to set up their own joint anti-jihadist force on 6th March 2024.

Conclusively, scholarly submissions indicated that the exit of these countries and emergence of Sahel Alliance was failure of conciliatory measures in crisis management of ECOWAS influenced by imperial pressure and interest amid other ancillary conditions revealed. The member-countries of ECOWAS are in hurry to enforce western punitive measures trumpeted by French interest on Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger thereby jettisoning structures and procedures of crisis management. Also, the ancillary conditions were seen in security and economic reasons as embellished that influenced the emergence of Sahel Alliance. To this end, the hypothetical assumption is established.

Hypothesis II: Implications of the Emergence of Sahel Alliance to ECOWAS and West Africa: Ironically, despite ECOWAS sanctions, dialogues, and threats of military action, the military authorities in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger haven't given a precise timeline for restoring constitutional governance since the coups. Instead, they have become more antagonistic towards ECOWAS because of deliberate violation of its principles and procedures and vulnerability to external pressures. The move deepened antagonism between the three states and Western countries, which have seen their influence diminish as various Sahelian states have sought diplomatic alternatives (Achita, 2024). France, the region's former colonial lord was pressured into removing its troops from the three countries in 2022 and 2023 respectively. Also, U.S. counter-terrorism activity in the region has dwindled since Niger's July 2023 coup. The Alliance is set to diminish French influence in the region. Once-powerful France, first as a colonial power and, an occupying force, is fast losing its military and economic influence from the Sahel to the Gulf of Guinea region. Also, the Alliance may spell doom for France and bring an end to its not-so-glorious postcolonial legacy in West Africa. The Alliance is also bad news for ECOWAS, as the three countries opted out of the ECOWAS in the same way Mauritania withdrew its membership. This may not be helpful to continental integration. It is not only the ECOWAS that will be divided against itself; it is mainly the Francophone states that will be more divided against themselves. For instance, Benin Republic is being used as an access territory to mount military surveillance over Niger. As a result, Niger strained its military cooperation with Benin. In the same vein, the pro-France countries cannot but be at loggerheads with those not favouring France (Robert, 2024).

Also, the move attracted the presence of non-Western powers such as Russia, China, and Iran. In January 2024, Russia agreed to establish military cooperation with Niger. Several Russian military personnel arrived in Burkina Faso to protect the military leader. Meanwhile, despite the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin, the chief of Russia's private military group, around 1,000 Wagner troops continue to fight in Mali. With waning French influence in contrast to the growing Russian presence, the region has eventually become a theatre for a proxy war (Achita, 2024). More revealing, Osuchukwu, etal (2025) opined that the exit of the Alliance of Sahel States from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has considerable effects on the economies, trade relations, and diplomatic connections of the member-nations, especially since they are landlocked. The departure has also adversely impacted ECOWAS mission and objectives for fostering integration aimed at enhancing collective security and economic collaboration.

More succinctly, short- term and long-term repercussions are likely to arise from the exit action: **(a)** Economically, the exit from ECOWAS could jeopardize the trade relationships and economic alliances that member states have developed over time. This disruption may adversely affect critical sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, natural resource and commerce. Landlocked countries, especially, rely on effective and open trade routes to connect with international markets. Without the support of ECOWAS, the Alliance of Sahel States may also struggle to retain the trade and economic benefits they once enjoyed within the regional community. Moreover, their ability to access regional infrastructure and transport networks for goods distribution could be at risk, potentially leading to increased expenses and logistic difficulties. **(b)** In the context of trade relations, the withdrawal could potentially weaken the diplomatic and economic connections between the Alliance of Sahel States and the other ECOWAS member countries. Losing the benefits of trading bloc privileges and preferential access to larger markets may create challenges for the Sahel States as they strive to preserve essential trade relationships in the region. Without the ECOWAS trade framework, trade dynamics may shift, compelling the Sahel States to explore new trade partnerships and forge agreements beyond the regional bloc. **(c)** Diplomatically, the withdrawal could prompt a reassessment of regional cooperation

initiatives and the diplomatic status of Sahelian countries in West Africa. Adjustments in alliances and existing diplomatic ties may be required to reflect the new circumstances resulting from the withdrawal. Additionally, the lack of ECOWAS mechanisms for conflict resolution, security collaboration, and economic integration may increase the diplomatic challenges faced by the Alliance of Sahel States, compelling them to address these matters on their own or explore other regional partnerships. **(d)** For landlocked nations, the challenges faced by landlocked countries are intensified by their dependence on effective trade routes and access to regional markets (Osuchukwu, etal, 2025).

Subsequently, the absence of the support and infrastructure provided by ECOWAS, the landlocked nations of the Sahel may encounter greater difficulties in reaching seaports, transportation corridors, and international markets, which could hinder their economic growth and development. Consequently, the withdrawal of the Alliance of Sahel States from ECOWAS could disrupt the economies, trade relationships, and diplomatic connections of the member states and presents distinct challenges due to their landlocked status. Adapting to these new realities will likely necessitate strategic planning and proactive engagement to alleviate negative effects and explore new avenues for economic and trade collaboration both within the region and beyond. In addition, the existence of Alliance of Sahel States within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has far- reaching effects on participation in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and could alter economic strategies in numerous ways. Firstly, the withdrawal from ECOWAS significantly impacts the trade dynamics and market access for the Sahel States within the larger African landscape. Without the established trade framework and preferential access to the ECOWAS market, these nations may need to reassess their trade strategies. This could involve modifying trade policies and regulations to fit within the AfCFTA framework and initiating bilateral trade negotiations with other AfCFTA member countries to establish new trade agreements (Robert, 2024, Osuchukwu, etal, 2025). To this end, scholarly submissions explicitly indicated that there are obvious consequences visibly adverse to the emergence of the Sahel Alliance to ECOWAS, member-countries, West Africa and the western interests. These consequences obviously reflected in social, economic, security and military relations. To this end, the hypothetical assumption is established.

Hypothesis III: Mitigation of ECOWAS Crisis Management Problem for the Integration of West Africa sub-Region: The withdrawal of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS is a significant development that reflect the continuing security, economic, and political challenges facing Wes Africa. As these countries seek to redefine their regional relationships and address national challenges, ECOWAS must reflect on its role and its capacity to promote regional integration and cooperation in an environment marked by constant and rapid change (Balima, 2024). Preserving peace and stability in West Africa is a key priority For ECOWAS. The questioning of the community framework should be taken as an opportunity to adjust its integration model. The need to emphasis its vision of creating an ECOWAS of the people must make room for increasing targeted investment to bring economic integration to fruition. Its legitimacy as a player in the political arena and as a catalyst for peace and security will be built on the foundation of its economic success. For both blocs, the major trends emerging in relation to terrorism highlight obvious operational imperatives. There is a need to articulate clear concepts for the use of operational forces based on the coordination and logistical capacities of each bloc in order to avoid any further unfortunate experiences. The need for security cooperation between the two blocs: given the territorial continuity between the two blocs and the nature of the threat, there is a need for dialogue and targeted co-operation in the area of security. Future peace and stability in the sub-region will depend on the ability of the blocs to interact (Balima, 2024, Robert, 2024).

In another perspective, the recent exit of the Alliance of Sahel States from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) represents a crucial shift in West Africa's political dynamics. Additionally, examining the possible contributions of the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS in promoting regional integration, tackling geopolitical issues, and enhancing conflict resolution and solidarity underscores the vital functions these organizations serve in maintaining stability and fostering development in the area. The Alliance of Sahel States is now at a crossroads, facing important choices about its future, including the possibility of joining the West African Economic and Monetary Union, addressing the challenges of being landlocked, and capitalizing on international trade opportunities. The current situation and future outlook for the Alliance of Sahel States present a complicated array of diplomatic, economic, and political factors that affect regional integration (Achita, 2024, Osuchukwu, etal, 2025). To navigate these complexities, it is vital for Alliance of Sahel States

to engage proactively with regional and international stakeholders. This approach will help to address the consequences of the recent withdrawal, explore avenues for economic cooperation, and develop strategic initiatives that align with the alliance's long-term goals. As the Sahel States work through these challenges, the importance of strategic collaboration, diplomatic relations, and a commitment to regional integration will be essential in shaping their future endeavors within the Pan-African context. Diplomatically, the prospects for future collaboration between the Alliance of Sahel States and ECOWAS depend on ongoing diplomatic discussions and the synchronization of regional goals (Osuchukwu, etal, 2025).

To prioritize in a diplomatic relationship, it is essential to engage consistently, share interests, and work together towards common objectives. Both entities (ECOWAS and Sahel Alliance) acknowledge the importance of positive diplomatic relations and forum for dialogue on issues that affect the region. Economically, the future of the relationship between the Alliance of Sahel States and ECOWAS is fundamentally linked to the economic benefits that this partnership yields. ECOWAS provided an essential framework for trade, investment, and economic cooperation among its member states. The Sahelian countries enjoy advantages from trade agreements, preferential access to larger markets, collaborative infrastructure projects, and joint economic initiatives. The likelihood of future collaboration will depend on the commitment to sustain these economic benefits and to further integrate into the regional economy (Robert, 2024). Politically, future collaboration between the Alliance of Sahel States and ECOWAS will be shaped by the alignment of their political goals and regional security dynamics. ECOWAS has played a vital role in managing political crises, resolving conflicts, and promoting security cooperation throughout West Africa. The active participation of Sahelian countries in these initiatives, along with their shared political and security interests with ECOWAS will be crucial for the continuation of their collaborative efforts. In light of these considerations, the probability of the Alliance of Sahel States sustaining its partnership with ECOWAS and the prospects for future cooperation depend on a shared comprehension of diplomatic, economic, and political priorities (Shaw, 2025, Osuchukwu, etal, 2025, Akinyemi, 2023). Conclusively, scholarly suggestive remarks which explored the ways of functional cooperation between Alliance of Sahel states and ECOWAS did not look critically on fundamentals of the crisis management problem as policy to resolve similar crisis in future. To this end, the hypothetical assumption was not established.

Conclusion and Recommendations
The discourse introduced the background to ECOWAS crisis of integration as problem statement raised curiosity in the internal mechanism and processes of the sub regional body to the debut of Sahel Alliance in West Africa. The research questions set the pace of conceptual and empirical insights in dynamics and effects of the Sahel Alliance exit from ECOWAS. The findings revealed failures to establish implications and optimism for sub regional cooperation amid gaps for recommendations.

From the findings, the following recommendations are made: **(a)** ECOWAS should revisit its protocols and crisis management mechanism. Hence, the leadership of the regional body should isolate itself from external politics and interest and activate conflict management processes that upholds virtues of justice and fairness for resolving peculiar crisis of exit and emergence of a parallel alliance. **(b)** The new realignments in trade, security, military that have emerged from the Sahel Alliance in ECOWAS and West Africa should be managed diplomatically to ensure safety and development of the sub region. The diplomacy is obvious in the friendly relations and confidence that countries in Sahel Alliance enjoy in relation with some member countries in ECOWAS before and aftermath of the diplomatic row. **(c)** The need to strengthen ECOWAS crisis management for efficiency and impact. The fundamentals to strengthen crisis management process in ECOWAS begins with regional interests (in unity, cooperation, security and development) against western or non-western interests and meddling, conciliatory measures not punitive measures, preventive diplomacy to reengage the aggrieved and activate good governance and democracy peer review mechanisms to compel member-countries to adhere to democratic principles in leadership against public resentment and coup.

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