

# Foreign Military Bases and Strategic Influence in West Africa: Interrogating Politics of Sovereignty and Regional Security

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## ABSTRACT

This paper mainly focuses on foreign military bases and strategic influence in Africa; ECOWAS, France, and the Politics of Sovereignty and Regional Security in West Africa. The statement of the problem is from the increasing concern that the foreign military presence with special regards to French military intervention in Sahel has increasingly garnered debates on neo-colonial influence whilst undermining sovereignty and the legitimacy of regional security institutions like ECOWAS. Specifically, the study will aim to explore the role of foreign military bases in regional security governance, whilst examining the nexus between ECOWAS and France in the enforcement of democratic norms, and evaluate the consequences of foreign military presence for African sovereignty, taking Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso as case studies. Qualitative research design is adopted in the study. The research population is made up of documented materials on foreign military intervention, ECOWAS security operations and regional political events in West Africa. Secondary data was used and acquired from journal articles, books, policy studies, ECOWAS communiqués, government publications and trusted media sources. The methodology used was the documentary analysis for data collecting and thematic and descriptive methodologies for data analysis coupled with interviews from professional who are relevant to the study. The time scope period is from 2020 to 2025. Results show that foreign military sites in West Africa are more than just security cooperation, but also tools of geopolitical and strategic influence. The study also demonstrates that the reactions of ECOWAS to political crises are seen as consistent with French strategic goals, therefore eroding popular confidence in the impartiality of the organization. African sovereignty remains compromised by dependence on external military players and regional security governance remains problematic, the study concludes. It so advises stronger security partnership structures led by Africans themselves, institutional independence for ECOWAS, better coordination of the regional military effort and a reduction in the reliance on outside military powers to address the security concerns in West Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

The question of foreign military involvement in Africa has become one of the most contested problems in current international relations and African security studies. Since the end of colonialism, a number of external powers, including France, the United States, Russia and China have maintained different levels of military activity across Africa. France is the most prominent external military actor in West Africa because of its colonial past and continued political, economic and security links with former colonies. The growth in foreign military participation has been justified by the rise of terrorism, insurgency, violent extremism and political instability in the Sahel. Operations such as France's Operation Serval (2013) and Operation Barkhane (2014) were seen as counterterrorism activities to address Islamist organizations in Mali and the broader Sahel region (Charbonneau, 2017). Scholars, political institutions and civil society organizations have widely criticized these operations. They hold the view that foreign military bases perpetuate dependency, slowly erode sovereignty, and embed neo-colonial impact. ECOWAS has strengthened its role as a regional security and democratic governance entity. It was more involved in the domestic political affairs of member states, through peacekeeping missions, sanctions, mediation and the enforcement of democratic norms. Critics say the group's responses to political crises typically mirror French strategic interests, notably in Francophone West Africa. Recent military intervention in Mali 2020 and 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022 and Niger in 2023 have questioned regional geopolitics. They challenged the presence of the French troops and the ECOWA and Recommendations S sanctions and operations. The outcome

has been a fierce discussion over African sovereignty, foreign interference and the legality of regional security systems.

This dissertation thus explores the politics of sovereignty in West Africa by investigating the link between foreign military bases, ECOWAS and France.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Ideally, the management of regional security in West Africa should be led by African institutions and sovereign governments acting autonomously, without undue dependency on former colonial powers or external military forces. As a regional organization, ECOWAS objectives was to promote peace, democracy and security based on collective regional interests and the principles of sovereign equality. However, the reality in West Africa is an expanding external role in regional security governance. France has various military facilities and strategic military partnerships with a variety of African states. Some critics argue that these arrangements enable France to have a role in swaying political results and security policies in the region. ECOWAS has also been criticized of the problem of regional legitimacy and public trust as increased perception is that some of acts are aligned with French geopolitical interests. It is important to note that, resurgence of anti-French agitations and the military administrations in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso show growing dissatisfaction with foreign military presence and perceived neo-colonial interference. Such developments pose critical considerations about sovereignty, regional autonomy, democratic legitimacy and the future of African security governance.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study's major objective is to examine the effect of foreign military bases and the ECOWAS-France relationship on the regional security and sovereignty in West Africa, while the specific objectives are;

- i. Examine the role of foreign military bases in shaping regional security and political influence in West Africa.
- ii. Analyze the relationship between ECOWAS and France in the enforcement of democratic norms and regional security policies.
- iii. Assess the implications of foreign military presence for African sovereignty using Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso as case studies

### **Research Questions**

- i. How do foreign military bases influence regional security and political dynamics in West Africa?
- ii. What is the relationship between ECOWAS and France in shaping democratic norm enforcement in the region?
- iii. What are the implications of foreign military presence for African sovereignty in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso?

### **Conceptual clarification**

**Foreign Military Bases-** Foreign military bases are military installations created by a country in a different sovereign state for strategic, operational, or security reasons (Cooley & Nexon, 2013). They are not only operational hubs but also serve as geopolitical instruments. Surveillance, increased deployment of troops and lingering presence, while representing long-term strategic ties. These bases have been vital in counterterrorism efforts in West Africa, particularly in the Sahel region.

**Strategic Influence-** Strategic influence is the ability of a state (or external entity) to influence others th (Nye, 2004). In the African context, this influence is carried out through defense agreements, deployment of foreign troops, economic and diplomatic advantage. France's lingering relationship in various West African countries is an example of this type of impact.

**Sovereignty-** According to Jackson (2007), sovereignty traditionally means that a state has independent control over its territory, political and domestic matters without any foreign or external intervention. However, in contemporary African politics, the meaning of sovereignty has been increasingly circumstantial and contested because it is being defined by contemporary regional standards and international actions. The emergence of theories like Responsibility to Protect (R2P) indicates a change from absolute sovereignty to responsibility-based governance (Clapham, 2017).

**Regional Security-** Regional security is defined by Buzan & Waever, (2003) as the collective efforts of states within a geographical region to handle security threats, conflicts and instability through cooperation and institutional frameworks.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature relevant to this study can be broadly divided into three overlapping debates.

### External Military Actors in the Sahel

There is a significant corpus of scholarship on the role of external military actors in the Sahel. French deployments blur the lines between peacekeeping and counterterrorism and raise questions about their legitimacy (Charbonneau 2017, 2020). Likewise, Powell (2017) points out the pattern of French military interventions as a repetition of strategic aims. Much of this work, however, remains focused on effectiveness and intent, with less attention to the ways in which foreign presence reshapes regional institutions.

### ECOWAS and Fostering Democratic Norms

Economic Community of West African States studies show how the organization is increasingly becoming an enforcer of democratic norms and a regional peacekeeper through imposing penalties, mediating, and intervening militarily (Hartmann, 2017). However, several scholars have questioned the impartiality of ECOWAS actions, especially in Francophone West Africa, where its policies at times are believed to be in line with French strategic interests.

### Sovereignty and External Influence in Africa Foreign Military Bases and the French Connection

Clapham (2017) and others have argued that sovereignty is no longer absolute but is instead molded by regional and international norms. Research in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso shows a growing popular backlash against foreign military deployment fueled by ongoing insecurity, political instability and perceptions of foreign meddling. While studies have explored terrorism and military collaboration in the Sahel, little research has been done on the interrelationship of foreign military posts, ECOWAS, France, and the wider issues for African sovereignty. This paper fills this gap by relating regional security governance to the politics of strategic influence and sovereignty in West Africa.

Sovereignty and foreign influence in West Africa are intertwined. Foreign military bases, with connections to France, though offer security support but they also are overwhelmed with political disagreement. Whilst strengthening operational capacity against insurgency, they inadvertently pose questions about dependency, legitimacy and political autonomy. The ongoing Sahelian crisis in the region shows that West African sovereignty is no longer a stable and absolute phenomenon. There is a continuous bargaining and negotiation process between domestic governments, regional entities like ECOWAS and other non-state actors. The issue facing the region is not just whether to accept or reject foreign military involvement, but how to construct security partnerships that deliver operational effectiveness, political legitimacy (ECOWAS) and real regional autonomy. Such processes suggest that sovereignty in West Africa is a fluid and contentious process, shaped by continual interactions between local, regional and global actors.

### Theoretical Framework

This paper uses the Hybrid Security Governance Theory (HSGT) conceptualized by Niagale Bagayoko, Eboe Hutchful, & Robin Luckham (2016). This theory is supported by Neo-Colonialism Theory and Postcolonial

Sovereignty Theory. The hybrid security governance theory is relevant to this paper because of the current security climate in the region cannot be sufficiently explained by a single theoretical lens. Rather, regional security governance is shaped by the intersecting of regimes of power, historical configurations of influence, and contested visions of sovereignty. The core reason of this framework is that the security architecture in West Africa has evolved into a hybrid system in which authority is distributed between domestic governments, regional institutions and external actors, most notably France. Although this model may increase military coordination and counter-terrorism capacity, it may also lead to questions of legitimacy, reliance and political autonomy. This approach originated from wider debates in security studies about the erosion of the state monopoly of the provision of security, particularly in unstable or conflict-affected contexts (Bagayoko, Hutchful, & Luckham, 2016). Traditional realist paradigms presuppose the monopoly of security inside the borders of sovereign states. Many actors acting concurrently in national and international domains, however, increasingly characterize today's conflicts. According to Bagayoko et al, (2016), security governance in Africa is increasingly marked by interactions between state security agencies, regional organizations, international actors, private military actors and foreign military partners. Within this perspective, security is produced not just by nation-states, but also by networks, shared authority, and coordinated intervention.

This idea is especially pertinent to West Africa and the Sahel. Ongoing insurgency, terrorism and political instability mean that many states can no longer deal with security concerns on their own. This means that governments are becoming more reliant on external military support, intelligence-sharing and regional intervention mechanisms. France's military bases and counterterrorism operations are thus part of a larger hybrid security system, rather than separate foreign deployments. Likewise, ECOWAS has developed from a largely economic institution to a regional security and governance actor. Consequently, ECOWAS currently actively engages in regional security management via such measures as sanctions, peacekeeping, mediation, and enforcement of democratic norms (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2016). The organization's responses to political crises in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger show this broader role. Hybrid Security Governance Theory provides explanations of the simultaneous operation of various overlapping types of authority. Rather than viewing the ECOWAS–France relationship as either very externally dominated or as fully autonomous regional collaboration, the theory conceptualizes it as a hybrid system where external military capacity and regional institutional legitimacy meet. Nevertheless, the theory also calls attention to the unequal distribution of power in such structures. External actors frequently have better military equipment, intelligence capabilities and financial resources that may enable them to disproportionately influence regional agendas (Bagayoko et al., 2016). In the West African region, asymmetrical relationships are promoted by France's military infrastructure and strategic influence that hampered the independence of regional entities. Charbonneau (2020) argued that French military actions in Africa are often not just only about critical security issues but are also involved in bigger systems of geopolitical influence. This means that hybrid governance solutions are not politically neutral, but may produce systemic imbalances between external and regional actors.

### **Theory of Hybrid Security Governance and Its Application to the Study**

The theory accounts for the interactions between ECOWAS and French military operations, the distribution or sharing of regional security authority, the institutional overlap between external and regional actors and the legitimacy disputes surrounding foreign military bases. It thus supports the theory of security governance of West Africa, which illustrates that security governance in West Africa is more organized through hybrid and multilayered systems than through state sovereignty system. French military bases and security relations in West Africa operate in conjunction with ECOWAS's effort to promote democratic norms and manage conflicts across the region. The Hybrid Security Governance Theory elucidates the relations of foreign military bases, ECOWAS interventions, and French strategic dominance. The addition of Hybrid security governance theory to literature on security contends shared and multilevel security governance (Bagayoko et al., 2016). It allows the researcher go beyond the polarity of the foreign military presence, that is, whether the presence is good or exploitative. This presence unquestionably is situated and, at times, contested, and is characterized by a myriad of interactions including collaboration, dependence, legitimization and resistance. Hence, the theory justifies the presence of foreign military bases and indicates that ECOWAS operates within a hybrid political order characterized by a continual contestation of state sovereignty between domestic, regional and foreign actors.

## METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative methodology using secondary data sources. The qualitative method applies here as the focus of the study is on political interpretation, sovereignty and institutional behavior as opposed to employed statistical measurement. The data was collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, Books, ECOWAS official documents, African Union reports, United Nations reports, Policy briefs, Newspaper publications, Security and Defense analyses, Purposive sampling was used to identify materials directly related to foreign military presence, ECOWAS interventions and regional security in West Africa. The tool used for data gathering was documentary analysis. The approaches used for data analysis were thematic and descriptive. The time scope of this study is from 2020 to 2025.

### Research Design

The research uses a qualitative research approach since the investigation involves interpretation, political analysis, historical understanding, and institutional behavior rather than numerical measurement. The qualitative approach allows for a more in depth discussion of sovereignty, regional politics and strategic impact in the West African security context.

### Data Analysis

The analysis indicates three significant characteristics. First, foreign military bases are security infrastructures and exemplify geopolitical influence. France strategically operates military cooperation agreements in its former colonies for self-interest. Second, the actions of ECOWAS are becoming enmeshed in the geopolitical confrontations of more external parties. This signals the ECOWAS commitment to neutrality and independence is waning. Third, the French military presence is rejected in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, demonstrating increasing nationalist and sovereignty-oriented public opinion in the region.

### The Strategic Role of France in West Africa and Its Military Bases.

France's longstanding presence in West Africa combining economic, political and military elements, has adapted to changes in the shifting global and regional order. Contemporary policy analyses of the Sahel French military presence portray this presence as a response to jihadist and insurgency threat and to the region's unstable state. This is, however, an incomplete justification of the French Military's engagement in the region for an extended period of time. To an extent, French military bases and deployments throughout West Africa serve as a number of clear operational interests. These bases support rapid reaction forces, intelligence sharing, provide integrated counterterrorism forces and supports in an operational environment characterized by porous state boundaries and transnational challenges. Operations like as Serval (2013) and Barkhane (2014–2022) show how bases of this kind constitute nodes in a larger network of military and operational support. French military bases in West Africa serve what may be termed a security stability structure. Although these bases serve a relatively functional security role, they also serve the interest of periods of extended French engagement in West Africa, and point to the historically close political, military and economic ties that France has maintained with its former colonies under the so-called *Françafrique* system. In this context, military establishments offer more than tools of security. They are also manifestations of geopolitical stability and of France's continued influential position as an external actor in West Africa. This duality of being operational and strategic builds a certain ambiguity in the perception surrounding French involvement. For many, it is self-evident and undisputed that at certain moments in time, particularly during the early phases of crisis in Mali, French military interventions have prevented a rapid spiral into larger security related instability. However, the long-term effects of these therapies continue to be evaluated. The merging of peacekeeping and counter-terrorism affects the mandates and evaluations of these kinds of missions, as Charbonneau (2017) explains. For a certain period, this resembles stabilization, but may gradually be perceived as a more indefinite engagement in security, with unclear conditions for leaving. Furthermore, foreign military bases have a symbolic importance in addition to the functional. Where colonialism is still a politically relevant memory, these may be seen as foreign imposition of control, regardless of the stated goals. This has become a widespread perception in the last few years for Mali and Burkina Faso, especially where there have been public protests against the French military and their services to national security. The question is not only if these bases contribute to stabilization, but if the populations view them as legitimate.

Furthermore, France has increased its involvement in regional security affairs. France has been especially important to the formulation of how threats are perceived and, as a result, dealt with, due to the provision of training, defense pacts, and the sharing of intelligence. While this is rarely direct or coercive, it is carried out through extended systems in which local and regional actors are placed in alignment with (greater) French and Western security interests. This has the potential to foster situations which, over time, have the appearance of natural alignment but in fact result from structural inequality in the realms of resources and knowledge. Recent French withdrawals from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger may point to a decline and a perceived loss of this influence. While not stated explicitly, this may be made evident through a more liberal approach to regional security. Other places in Africa still have military alliances with France and global security arrangements still have France as a key player. In this case, France's importance is changing instead of declining. Criticizing the presence of French military troops does not mean that there is an automatic rejection or against other types of foreign involvement. On the contrary, it shows that there is a need for more balanced relations where African states are allowed to map their own collaborative frameworks. This can be seen through diversification of security alliances, including with somewhat unconventional partners, which further complicates an already intricate regional system. Many African scholars and political activists claim that the continued presence of French troops signifies a neo-colonial strategy, aimed at resource plundering, maintaining political dominance and sustaining economic control (Chafer, 2002). There are ongoing anti-French protests in Bamako, Ouagadougou and Niamey. It is useful to grasp France's West African military installations as part of a larger tactic/broader scheme, to integrate security with France's geopolitical designs. Therefore, their effects are of a mixed nature. On the one hand, they can improve the ability to carry out operations and enhance stability. On the other, they can be perceived as creating dependency and diminish local standing. This duality has to be taken into consideration in any appraisal of their role, as has the fact that their efficiency is measured not just in military results but also in the political and social environments in which they operate.

### **The ECOWAS-France Nexus: Impact or Coincidence?**

The ECOWAS's relationship with France continues to be highly problematic. Some observers suggest that the convergence of the ECOWAS policies and the French strategic interests is only fortuitous, given both parties have as priorities a regional stability and constitutional order. Others argue that France has indirect influence on ECOWAS decision-making through diplomatic networks, economic advantage and political connections with Francophone leaders. The 2023 Niger coup was an important test case. ECOWAS threatened military involvement to reinstall President Mohamed Bazoum and France expressed its strong support for the position. Critics saw this convergence as proof of a strategic link between ECOWAS and France. To some West Africans, especially in the Sahelian states, the notion of external interference has eroded ECOWAS legitimacy.

### **Case Study Review**

the first decades of the 21st century, terrorist and rebel groups funded by religious and ethnic radicals from the Middle East have attacked West African countries. In Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, Sahelian countries, the inability of foreign military bases to eradicate terrorism led to the toppling of pro-French civilian Governments and to the installation of military regimes. The anticipated military intervention by Nigeria and ECOWAS to restore civilian Presidents to power alienated these countries from Nigeria and ECOWAS. In response, these Sahelian countries requested Russia to back them militarily in the event of a hypothetical military invasion by France. In effect, the francophone countries now look to Russia for protection in case they are attacked by French and US forces and other ECOWAS countries that would allow the set up military bases in them. Thus, world power rivalry is moving into West Africa whose inhabitants may suffer severe collateral damage in case war breaks out. The development of foreign military facilities in West African countries cannot solve current fight against insurgency in the sub-region. The failure of foreign military bases in the Sahel suggests they will not be successful in other West African States fighting very analogous insurgencies. The entry of foreign military bases into West Africa is likely to result in total failure in the war against insurgency and eventual expulsion of foreign powers on both sides as was the situation in Afghanistan.

The comparative case study is applied to uncover patterns across country contexts. These situations were selected as recent and serious political crises with both ECOWAS intervention and foreign military deployment, and demonstrating varied levels of domestic resistance. The analytical strategy is theoretically informed but

practically based, allowing the study of the practice of notions such as sovereignty and strategic influence.

## Mali

Mali remains among the most politically volatile and security precarious nations of the West African subregion. Incursions to date include multiple military coups, a protracted insurgency, foreign military involvement, and growing anti-Western sentiment. These phenomena are changing the politics of domestic governance and security in the region.

- a. **Military Coups and Political Instability:** - Mali's 2020 and 2021 military coups point to extreme dissatisfaction with public leadership resulting from high levels of malfeasance and community insecurity. Many members of the population, who had complained for years about the terrorism and socioeconomic misery, supported the removal of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. However, the second coup in 2021 aroused concerns of a prolonged military dictatorship and democratic backsliding. ECOWAS responded with sanctions and diplomatic pressure, stating that unconstitutional changes of government posed threats to regional stability. The coups highlighted the waning legitimacy of democratic institutions, and reflected growing popular discontent with administration failings.
- b. **Terrorism and Insecurity:** - Mali continues to suffer intense security threat from jihadist groups related to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). The organizations leverage weak official authority, ethnic conflicts and poverty to extend their power, notably in northern and central Mali. Insecurity has lasted despite years of international military action, and exacerbated in some regions. Attacks on villages, military posts and public facilities continue and thousands of residents have been displaced.
- c. **French Military Action:** - France militarily entered Mali in 2013 with Operation Serval followed by Operation Barkhane to quell insurgency. The intervention was first endorsed as an effort to avoid the collapse of the Malian state. Yet over time anti-French sentiments developed. Many Malians blame France for prolonging instability, meddling in local politics and failing to effectively combat terrorism. In 2022, Mali's military government demanded that French troops leave, a momentous shift in regional geopolitics and the end of French involvement in the country.
- d. **Russian and Wagner Group Presence:** - Following conflicts with France, Mali deepened its security relationships with Russia, largely through the Wagner Group, a Russian private military company. However, Wagner's presence has drawn international condemnation over allegations of human rights abuses and lack of accountability. The country's leadership is now exploring various avenues to bolster its security and economic stability, seeking to balance relationships with both Western nations and emerging powers. This dynamic reflects broader trend in the region, where nations are increasingly pursuing multi-faceted foreign policies to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes.

## Niger

Niger is located strategically in the Sahel and has historically been an important ally to Western security partner. Nevertheless, recent political upheavals have dramatically changed its regional and international relations.

- a. **The July 2023 Military Coup:** - The military overthrew President Mohamed Bazoum, causing a serious political crisis in West Africa. The coup undermined the authority of ECOWAS, as Niger had been seen as one of the most stable democratic republics in the region. ECOWAS slapped sanctions and threatened military action to restore constitutional order. The junta ignored outside pressure, and won support from Mali and Burkina Faso. The crisis exposed cracks in the regional security architecture and undermined the confidence of ECOWAS.
- b. **Strategic Importance to Western Powers:** - France, the United States and European powers have found Niger to be of strategic importance due to terrorist operations, intelligence collection, uranium deposits and geographic location. Niger has hosted foreign military bases to facilitate regional surveillance and anti-terrorism operations across the Sahel. Many residents following the coup wondered how much impact foreigners had on national issues.
- c. **Expulsion of French Forces:** - After the coup, the military regime in Niger asked that French troops leave and downgraded its diplomatic ties with France. This represented the growing nationalist sentiment and a wider

hostility to the French military presence in the region. The pullout also represented another big blow to France's strategic posture in the Sahel.

d. Regional realignment and alliance building: - Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso deepen political and security ties to counter perceived external influence. The three countries eventually launched the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) to foster mutual defense and regional autonomy. This alliance signals a dramatic departure away from traditional Western and the ECOWAS security ties. Previously, Niger relied heavily on France and Western allies for counterterrorism support the country's uranium mining due to its prime and strategic location. However, following the 2023 military coup, this dynamic collapsed, altering the relationship significantly, when the new military administration accused Paris of meddling and ordered the French forces to be withdrawn.

### **Contemporary Issues**

Coup and democratic disintegration, ECOWAS sanctions, Anti-French protests, Realignment to alternative security providers

### **Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso has become one of the hubs of insecurity in the Sahel. The country is experiencing increasing insurgency, political instability, humanitarian crises, and foreign influence.

a. Repeated Military Coups: - In 2022, Burkina Faso had two coups, a reflection of the anger within the military at the government's inability to put an end to insurgent warfare. The coups exposed how insecurity had compromised civilian government and escalated military engagement in politics. The coup leaders said it was justifiable because democratic administrations had failed to safeguard citizens. This has produced contradictions between claims to national sovereignty and ECOWAS' commitment to constitutional government.

b. Increasing Terrorist Violence: - Burkina Faso is susceptible to attacks from extremist groups that operate throughout the Sahel. Insecurity has become rife in large parts of the country, particularly in rural communities where the state's authority is weak. Current security problems include attacks on citizens, devastation of villages, kidnappings and disruption of economic activity. The humanitarian toll has been tremendous, with millions of internal displacements and growing food insecurity.

c. Anti-French Sentiment and Security Frustration: - Like Mali, Burkina Faso has experienced a rise in public criticism of France. Many protesters now view the presence French troops as ineffective and politically intrusive. As a result, the government requested that the French Special Forces leave the country. This move reflects broader regional demands that call for greater autonomy and reduced Western influence. The situation has become symbolic of wider issues regarding sovereignty and neo-colonialism.

d. Seeking Alternative Alliances: - Burkina Faso has strengthened its political ties with Mali and Niger through the formation of the Alliance (AES) in their opposition of external pressure from ECOWAS and Western powers. Additionally, the government has aimed to enhance its relationship with Russia, indicating a shift in geopolitical alliances in the region. This change is an example of how Sahelian states are striving to renegotiate external relationships while demanding increasing authority over security policy. Burkina Faso has been plagued by a serious insurgency and political instability since 2015. The military chiefs who took control in 2022 blamed France of not doing enough to fight terrorism. The administration removed the French troops and took a more nationalist security posture.

### **Contemporary Issues**

Increased insecurity, Erosion of civilian government, Rejection of French military presence, Rhetoric on popular sovereignty.

### **Implications for African Sovereignty and Security Governance**

The cases studied in this work suggest a wider transition in the modes of understanding and exercising

sovereignty in West Africa. Sovereignty is no more a given attribute but a negotiated outcome, determined by the interplay of local, regional and external actors. With the re-emergence of foreign military competition in Africa, these crucial questions of sovereignty and regional autonomy are increasingly pertinent. This has a number of repercussions. First, reliance on external military players hinders and diminishes indigenous security capacity and institutional development. Secondly, foreign troops often give rise to the perception of neo-colonial control and external interference. Third, the legitimacy dilemma confronting ECOWAS underscores the difficulty of balancing the enforcement of democratic norms with respect for sovereignty and public opinion. The objective is to adjust external involvement in ways that are both productive and legitimate, rather than merely seeking to reduce it. Finally, the emergence of alternative security partnerships with Russia, Turkey and China is part of a broader geopolitical shift occurring in Africa.

### Summary of Findings

This study reveals that foreign military bases serve not just as a security measure, but also as a means of strategic and political influence. The presence of French military forces in West Africa has significantly affected regional security strategies, defense cooperation, and political decision-making. While foreign military engagement has bolstered counter-terrorism initiatives, especially in the Sahel region, it has also raised concerns regarding reliance on external actors and potential neo-colonial influence (Charbonneau, 2017; Chafer, 2002).

Evidence from Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso indicates that the presence of foreign military forces is becoming more of a source of political contention rather than a guarantee of security. The report concludes that although ECOWAS is officially an independent regional organization, it is often perceived as reflecting French strategic interests, particularly in Francophone West Africa. This perception was further reinforced during the political crises in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger when ECOWAS adopted positions akin to those of France. While there is no concrete evidence that France directly controls ECOWAS, the alignment of their security and governance objectives has fostered public skepticism regarding ECOWAS's impartiality and independence.

The findings also show that foreign military presence has significantly impacted sovereignty in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. There is a prevailing sentiment that the ongoing deployment of foreign troops restricts national sovereignty and undermines domestic authority over security matters. This perspective has contributed to rising anti-French sentiments, military coups, and the withdrawal of French soldiers from these nations. Additionally, the emphasis on sovereignty has prompted these countries to explore alternative security partnerships and pursue more autonomous foreign policy decisions.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study reveals that foreign military bases in West Africa have evolved from being primarily about security cooperation to functioning as instruments of strategic and political influence, particularly concerning France and its former colonies. While ECOWAS continues to play a crucial role in regional security and democratic governance, concerns about external influence have weakened its legitimacy in certain areas of the region, notably in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

### Recommendations

1. With the increasing role of foreign military facilities as weapons of external influence, West African countries should build their own military capacity and regional security cooperation to lessen reliance on foreign military actors.
2. Given the impression of ECOWAS as an instrument of external interests, the organization should increase its institutional independence, openness and accountability in dealing with regional political crises in order to regain the trust and legitimacy of the public. ECOWAS and member states should allocate more of its resources to governance reforms, economic development, and conflict prevention methods that address the core causes of insecurity, rather than focusing solely on foreign military operations.
3. Given the sovereignty issues expressed in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, African states should emphasize African-led security arrangements and guarantee that external security cooperation is conducted within the framework of clearly articulated national interests and sovereignty. Regional security policy should strike a

balance between enforcing democratic norms and respecting state sovereignty and local political realities to avoid the perception of external interference and increase regional stability.

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