

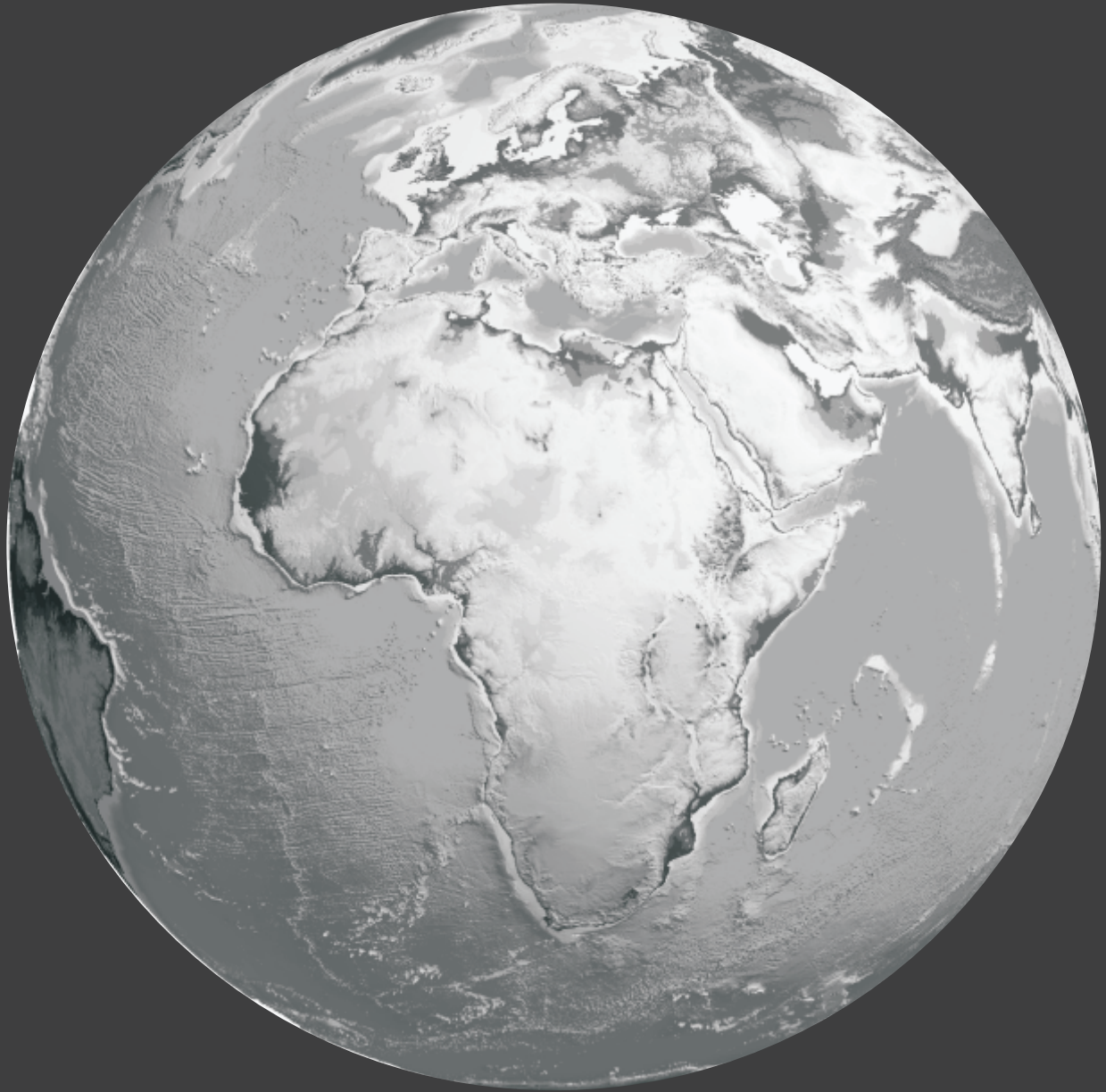
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<i>In This Issue</i>	<i>Page</i>
EDITOR'S NOTE	5
COVER STORY <i>Climate change, Water scarcity, Conflict, and Food Insecurity in Africa</i> <i>Dr. Malancha Chakrabarty</i>	6-11
COMMENTARY <i>Russia's Frontiers of Influence in Africa: Geo-strategic Economic Interest, Regime Security, and Counterinsurgency</i> <i>Mr. Adam Abbas</i>	12-18
COMMENTARY <i>Rapprochement between Türkiye and Egypt: Implications in the Horn of Africa</i> <i>Dr. Abhishek Yadav</i>	19-26
VIEWPOINT <i>The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP): Analysing the Growing Terrorist Threat in the Sahel Region</i> <i>Dr. Jason Wahlang</i>	27-33
BOOK REVIEW <i>Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa Through Sustainable Development Goals</i> <i>Mr. Dorjee Phunchu Dinglow</i>	34-36

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Editor's Note

This issue of Africa Trends examines the interconnected challenges and opportunities shaping Africa's future, beginning with Dr. Malancha Chakrabarty's exploration of climate change, water scarcity, conflict, and their cascading impacts on food insecurity amid economic stagnation and debt pressures. Shifting to geopolitics, Mr. Adam Abbas's analyses Russia's strategic re-engagement in Africa since 2024, leveraging regime security and counterinsurgency partnerships to counter Western influence. Dr. Abhishek Yadav explores Türkiye-Egypt rapprochement and its potential to recalibrate geopolitical landscape in the Eastern Mediterranean and Horn of Africa. As security threat escalates, Dr. Jason Wahlang's focus on the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) underscores the Sahel's vulnerability to extremist strategies, urging renewed counterterrorism efforts. Closing with development insights, Mr Dorjee Phunchu Dinglow reviews Utsav Kumar Singh's Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa, advocating for human-centred progress over GDP-centric metrics.

We welcome your feedback.

Cover Story

CLIMATE CHANGE, WATER SCARCITY, CONFLICT, AND FOOD INSECURITY IN AFRICA

Africa is grappling with an interconnected crisis of climate change, water scarcity, conflict, and food insecurity, which perpetuates poverty and constrains development. Despite a period of high economic growth in the early 2000s, the continent now faces economic stagnation, high debt, and rising hunger. Climate change has exacerbated extreme weather events, reducing water availability and agricultural productivity. Water insecurity affects 1.3 billion Africans, and over 35 conflicts across the continent have displaced millions. Food insecurity remains severe, with 868 million Africans affected and 64 million children under five suffering from malnutrition. Structural challenges such as low agricultural productivity, dependence on imports, and inadequate policy support exacerbate the crisis. Addressing these interlinked challenges requires coordinated domestic and international efforts, including increased agricultural investment, better water governance, and enhanced climate adaptation financing. However, with donor priorities shifting elsewhere, Africa faces an uphill battle in securing the necessary resources for sustainable development.

Malancha Chakrabarty*

After a fairly long period of high growth since the early 2000s, the African continent is again mired in a situation of poor economic growth, high debt levels, conflicts, and severe food insecurity. While globally, extreme poverty declined steadily since the 1990s, Africa experienced a very gradual decline in poverty and as per estimates by the World Bank, nearly 57 per cent of the world's poorest people currently live in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹ This article trains the spotlight on the vicious nexus of climate change, conflict, water scarcity, and food insecurity which constrains development and perpetuates poverty in the continent.

Although Africa's contribution to historical emissions is less than 3 per cent and its carbon footprint at 0.92 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂eq) is much lower than that of the

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developed countries, the continent is extremely vulnerable to climate change.² Africa has warmed much more rapidly than the rest of the world and it is likely to experience much higher temperature increases than the northern countries in future.³ According to a recent report by the African Development Bank (AfDB), nine African countries viz. Chad, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Niger, Liberia, and Somalia feature in the list of top ten most vulnerable countries of the world.⁴ Most of these countries are also conflict affected and suffer from high levels of poverty and hunger.

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With nearly 1.3 billion Africans battling water insecurity and about 85 per cent of its population living without access to safe drinking water, water scarcity is another major development challenge for the continent.⁵ Climate change is one of the main reasons behind Africa's growing water scarcity as it has altered the hydrological cycle and increased the frequency and intensity of droughts in East Africa and the Sahel region of Africa in recent years causing mass starvation, deaths, and famine-like conditions in several countries like Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Somaliland. Several experts assert that climate-induced extreme events like droughts and floods will become more frequent in Africa and lead to high GDP losses, particularly in fragile and conflict affected countries which have poor adaptive capacity.

The continent is also battling the highest number of conflicts at the moment which have killed thousands and displaced over 40 million people. More than 35 armed conflicts are taking place in countries like Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.⁶

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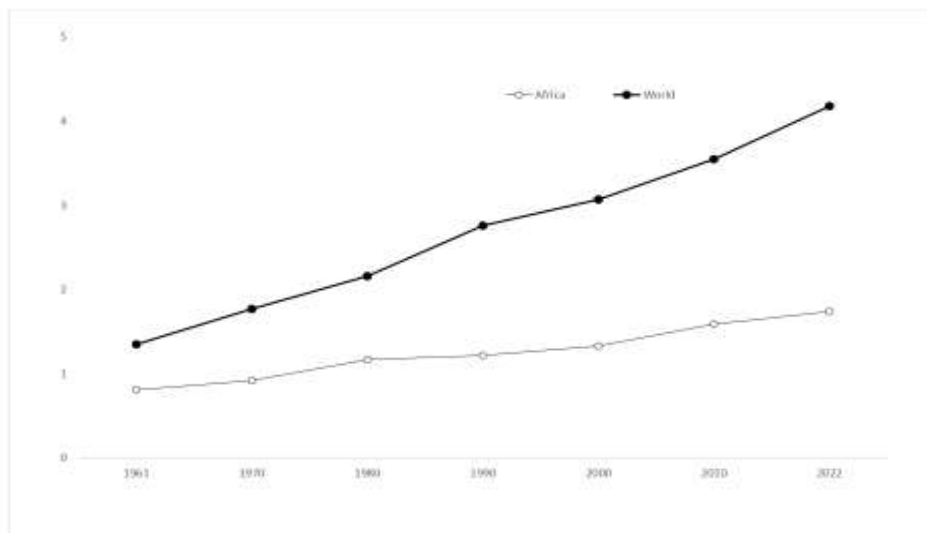
Food insecurity is another major development challenge for Africa as the continent is not on track to achieving the goal of zero hunger (SDG 2) by 2030. About 868 million African people are currently facing food insecurity and in countries like South Sudan, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, and Malawi over 50 per cent of the population is suffering from severe food insecurity.⁷ About 64 million African children under 5 years of age (i.e. one in three children) are suffering from child food poverty which increases their chances of experiencing wasting, a severe form of undernutrition which impairs long-term development in children.⁸ Soaring food prices, conflict, and climate change are the main reasons behind Africa's food

About 64 million African children under 5 years of age (i.e. one in three children) are suffering from child food poverty which increases their chances of experiencing wasting, a severe form of undernutrition which impairs long-term development in children.

insecurity. The current crisis in Africa is partly due to the Ukraine-Russia war which has led to a food and fertilizer crisis for African nations. The African continent which is a net food importer is now witnessing a steep rise in its import bill which currently stands at about US\$ 60 billion and is a significant drain on its foreign exchange.⁹ In other words, Africa's low-income countries are now spending more for even less food.

Stagnating agricultural productivity coupled with poor infrastructure and policy support meant that over the years Africa's domestic food production barely matched its population growth rates, making the continent extremely dependent on food aid and imports. Although agriculture is the largest contributor to both GDP and employment in most African countries, productivity levels are extremely low. Small farmers who employ traditional techniques of production account for the bulk of the agricultural produce. The cereal yield in Africa at 1.74 tonnes per hectare is less than half of the world average of 4.18 tonnes per hectare and much lower than developed countries like the United States (8.07 tonnes per hectare), Belgium (8.6 tonnes per hectare), United Kingdom (7.7 tonnes per hectare), and Netherlands (8.94 tonnes per hectare).¹⁰ As shown in Figure 1, crop yields in Africa did not grow significantly from 1961 and have persistently lagged behind world averages. This meant that much of the increase in domestic production was due to an expansion of area under cultivation, often at the cost of natural habitat. Similarly, agricultural value added per worker in Africa is also much lower in Africa as compared to other regions of the world.

Figure 1: Cereal Yields in Africa and the World from 1961 to 2022



Source: Ritchie (2022)¹¹

Note: Cereal yield is the quantity of cereals produced per hectare of land.

It is important to note that the challenges posed by climate change, water scarcity, conflict and food insecurity are closely interlinked and therefore a siloed approach to addressing

them is sure to fail. For instance, unprecedented high temperatures due to climate change has caused extreme variability in rainfall and river discharge which has increased both the frequency and intensity of droughts in Africa. Excessive heat, water scarcity, and extreme climate events due to a rapidly changing climate in turn pose a serious threat to the zero-hunger goal in Africa. Climate change adversely affects all the four pillars of food security: availability, access, absorption, and stability. Severe effects on food availability is likely in as productivity levels in Africa are extremely low and its small farmers have little adaptive potential. Moreover, climate change also affects food access through reduced farm incomes and incomes from livestock etc. Food utilisation is also impaired as climate change adversely affects the nutritional value in crops. Extreme climate events due to climate change cause immense damage to food supply chains through disruption in storage, trade, and transport services. Water scarcity is also increasingly emerging as a source of conflict in Africa, particularly between farmers and herders in countries like Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Ghani. The link between conflict and food insecurity is fairly well established in economic literature. Several reports suggest that conflict is the most important driver of food insecurity in Africa. Currently about 82 per cent Africans facing acute food insecurity live in conflict-affected countries.¹²

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African leaders and policy makers must realise the inter-linkages between Africa's core development challenges of climate change, conflict, water scarcity, and food insecurity and develop a comprehensive strategy to address them together. Africa's endemic poverty is linked to its inability to ensure food security which is intrinsically linked to climate change and water security. Therefore, Africa needs a plan backed by substantial investments to transform its agriculture sector and adapt to the changing climate. To do this, African countries must direct domestic resources towards agriculture and food security, an area which has traditionally not been prioritised by Africa's political leaders. However, food security has received due attention from African leaders in recent years. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) stresses on food security but only a handful of African countries are currently spending the targeted 10 per cent of their GDP on agriculture. According to Hodder and Migwalla (2023), the average government expenditure on agriculture in Africa currently hovers at around just 4.1 per cent.¹³ Notwithstanding the significance of increasing public spending in agriculture, it is clear that domestic resources will not be enough to address Africa's food insecurity and climate vulnerability, particularly at a time when the continent is reeling under mounting debt burdens. As per the African Development Bank estimates, Africa's debt servicing burden stands at roughly US\$ 163 billion in 2024.¹⁴ In other words, Africa needs massive international support to make the continent food secure, help adapt its agriculture to climate change and reduce the vulnerability of its people.

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Unfortunately, most developed countries like the UK, US, Sweden, and Norway are cutting their aid budgets at a time when Africa is going through multiple crisis. Many European countries are also diverting their resources towards spending on Ukrainian refugees. Addressing Africa's core inter-linked developmental challenges requires significant financial resources. Therefore, the international community must not ignore Africa now. However, merely increasing aid to Africa will not be enough as the present composition of aid is also deeply flawed. The share of agriculture in official aid is low and has stagnated at a mere 4 per cent over the years. The record in climate finance is even worse. Smaller African states face barriers to climate adaptation due to lack of domestic finance and weaker institutional capacity. Sadly, Africa has received scant adaptation finance from the international community. Developed countries have not yet delivered on their target of US\$ 100 billion of adaptation finance per year. So far, only seven countries viz. Norway, France, Sweden, Japan, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands have mobilised their fair shares.¹⁵ However, a large share of the adaptation finance is in the form of loans rather than grants which adds to the debt burden of African countries, many of whom are already facing debt distress.

It is clear that Africa needs more aid from the developed world to reverse recent development losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia war and to put it on a path of sustained recovery which prioritises climate adaptation, better water governance, and boosting agricultural productivity for food security. But will the developed world open its purse strings for Africa?

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Commentary

RUSSIA'S FRONTIERS OF INFLUENCE IN AFRICA: GEO-STRATEGIC ECONOMIC INTEREST, REGIME SECURITY, AND COUNTERINSURGENCY

Africa has become a critical arena for geopolitical rivalry, with Russia seeking to expand its footprint despite facing diplomatic and economic isolation following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Although often viewed as opportunistic, Russia's involvement in Africa is deeply intertwined with its Cold War legacy, during which the Soviet Union provided support to anti-colonial movements and socialist regimes. Moscow's current engagement is structured around three primary objectives: advancing economic interests, ensuring regime security, and conducting counterinsurgency operations. By leveraging critical mineral agreements and military cooperation, Russia has gained strategic access to valuable resources while reinforcing allied governments through private military groups, particularly the Wagner Group (now rebranded as Africa Corps). However, the long-term viability of this strategy remains in question, as the ongoing war in Ukraine, evolving geopolitical shifts, and the uncertain effectiveness of Russian military interventions pose significant challenges. While these partnerships offer immediate benefits to African regimes, their sustainability is doubtful, highlighting the necessity for broader multilateral frameworks to address Africa's security and developmental needs.

Adam Abbas*

In recent years, the African continent has emerged as a centerpiece for geopolitical contestation for influence between global powers, particularly among the United States, China and the European Union (EU). Following the end of the Cold War and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's involvement in Africa dwindled. However, a turning point in Russia's engagement in Africa occurred when Moscow invaded Crimea in 2014. The invasion resulted in Russia's regional and international isolation prompted by Western countries who protested "Russia's imperialism" leading to

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numerous Western sanctions on Moscow's elite and the Russian economy. To reassert itself on the global scale and evade global isolation, Russia started searching for areas to secure and establish its influence particularly in the global south, and Africa emerged as the perfect arena. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 further increased the level of global isolation. However, Moscow viewed it as an opportunity amidst global isolation to further expand its influence in Africa. Today, Russia has emerged as the favorable superpower on the continent among unconstitutional leaders, successfully displacing Western dominance, with rhetoric of exploitative neocolonialism. While Russia's increasing presence in Africa has been described as opportunistic, it has been able to establish a fundamental frontier of partnership (economic interest; regime security and counterinsurgency) as an entry point into the African geopolitical space.

Today, Russia has emerged as the favorable superpower on the continent among unconstitutional leaders, successfully displacing Western dominance, with rhetoric of exploitative neocolonialism.

History of Russia's influence in Africa

To a mere observer, Russia might seem to be perceived as a new player in the geopolitical struggle for Africa. However, Russia's current and recent engagement with the continent is rooted in deep history, which perhaps some observers argued provided unrestricted entry into the African political space due to historically established ties.¹ It can be observed that the Soviet Empire's influence on the continent during the Cold War until the fall of the empire is based on two premises: one, to compete for geopolitical influence with the Western bloc (United States, France and Britain); and secondly, to propagate Marxism-Leninism pathway of economic development in the continent.²

The Soviet Union empire's presence in the continent gained considerable marks during the anti-colonial struggle for independence by most African states from their colonial power in the 1960s. This period marked heightened cold-war tension between the United States and the USSR, where both sides were jostling for influence. The Soviet Union's presence was marked by significant support for the anti-colonial struggle for independence in countries such as Botswana, South Africa, Angola and Mozambique. The Soviet Union provided military and weapon support to these country liberation fighters, who were ostensibly led by socialist/communist ideologue leaders. It also established influence on the economic front by deepening economic ties and providing economic and technical aid to most African countries.³ Similarly, it also provided free scholarships for African students and top party members to entrench Marxist-Leninist ideology into the African political arena. These educational sponsorship policies paved the way for the long-lasting ties between African leaders and the Soviet Union, which Russia is still enjoying the privilege of in present times.

In early 2000, Moscow started to emerge on the global stage by establishing small-scale footprint on the continent after stabilising political institutions and growing economic strength. Events in Europe, such as the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 and Ukraine in 2022, and the subsequent sanction and isolation by the West, have further shaped the

formation of Russia's strategy in Africa, with a significant concentration on the continent to evade international isolation, economic sanction, and project its power.

The first Russia-Africa summit happened in 2019, with a significant presence of the African leaders, as Moscow promised increased collaboration on political, economic, military, cultural, and technical cooperation. The second Russia-Africa summit took place in 2023 amidst Moscow's war in Ukraine and its on food insecurity in Africa.⁴ Despite that, Russia has emerged as a reliable partner for most African countries, securing military, trade and economic ties. Russia currently has military cooperation with 43 African countries and is also the leading major arms supplier to the continent.⁵

It is also important to note that Russia's increasing influence in the continent did not occur in a vacuum. While it has been categorized as opportunistic, Moscow has also built and revived pre-existing relations with Africa, thus making its inroad in the continent a smooth ride.

Russia's Frontiers of Influence in Africa

Many scholars and observers have identified the rationale for Russia's increasingly emerging footprint on the continent in the past few years. This author seeks to characterise the strategies employed by Russia in Africa as 'frontiers' which have served as the driving force of Russian presence in Africa. Frontiers in this essence are classified as pathways that have been a common theme in post-2015 Russia's exceptional emergence and presence. These frontiers have become the basis that both Moscow and their African partner countries have used to justify Russia's presence in their countries. These frontiers follow a systemic pattern, with each building upon the previous one, exemplifying a mutually beneficial partnership.

Geo-Strategic Economic Interest

Russia's economic interest in Africa in the pre-2010 era heavily concentrated on establishing trade ties and strengthening bilateral trade agreements and economic activities. Despite that, its trading activities amount with the continent are relatively low compared to other large trading partners such as the United States, China and the EU. In 2022, Russia's trading activities on the continent, in terms of its import values, account for less than 2 per cent.⁶ However, in the post-2010 period following the invasion of Crimea and Ukraine, there has been a major shift in Moscow's economic interest. It has largely pivoted toward securing control of the continent's critical minerals. Africa accounts for a large deposit of critical minerals. As the world race toward renewable energy transition and competition over the control of these renewable technologies' materials, Russia has positioned itself at the center of securing these minerals, in part due to the race with the other global powers for the control of the minerals, and due to shortages and difficulties in accessing these raw materials for its nuclear project.⁷

To gain control of these minerals, Moscow has signed a mineral resource deal with roughly 20 African states, mostly through Russian government-controlled mining companies. Several

African countries remain at the top of extraction of these minerals for Russia including Sudan, Mali, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Guinea, Namibia, DR Congo, Burkina-Faso and many more. In some of these countries, Moscow has quite a sizable presence in the mining industry. For instance, it controls about 25 per cent of bauxite in Guinea, critical for its aluminium production, in Zimbabwe as it owns about 50 per cent of the Platinum, among others and the extraction of these minerals is done by Russian based companies, particularly those with ties to the Kremlin.⁸

... access to critical minerals in many ways is strategic to Moscow's competition with other global powers, and also for the survival of its economy and the war in Ukraine, as these minerals are easy to bypass international sanctions strangling Moscow.

However, this access to critical minerals in many ways is strategic to Moscow's competition with other global powers, and also for the survival of its economy and the war in Ukraine, as these minerals are easy to bypass international sanctions strangling Moscow.⁹ Russia has signed minerals deals mostly with African leaders desperate for the survival of their rule or in a fight against armed groups in these countries. In essence, the African states will grant minerals concession to Moscow in exchange for

Russia providing security guarantee to these African countries and their leaders with the help of Russian private military companies.

Regime Security

The provision of regime protection to the African government is largely conducted by Wagner Group force, now known as Africa Corps, where it has used the opportunity to establish Moscow's footprint on the continent.¹⁰ The first Russian regime protection in Africa occurred in Libya where it provided military support to aid and bolster Khalifa Haftar's ambition as a strongman in the country.¹¹ Ever since, regime protection has extended to other countries such as Equatorial Guinea, Central Africa Republic, Burkina-Faso, and others.

Kremlin's regime protection can be interpreted in two ways, to protect fragile regimes from collapse, as a result of clashes with armed groups or internal regime rancour. This case of regime protection drove Russia's involvement in the Central African Republic, where Wagner forces were deployed to halt rebel group offensive on the capital in 2019, and over the past years, it has effectively pushed back rebel groups outside of the capital.¹² A similar scenario can be observed in Burkina Faso when President Ibrahim Traore came into power and survived two coup attempts. Realizing the internal difference within the army ranks, he requested regime protection from Russia's bear brigade before its eventual withdrawal in mid-2024.¹³

On the other hand, it is to provide regime security for long-term authoritarian rulers, or to defend their authoritarian ambition. This recently played out in Equatorial Guinea, with the deployment of hundreds of Wagner forces to the country, to protect the president, and train the presidential guard.¹⁴ This occurred amidst growing concern about the four-decade long-serving ruler's possible regime collapse. A similar case can be observed in Sudan during the reign of the long-term ruler Omar al Bashir, where around 500 Wagner forces were

deployed in 2017 and also participated in the 2019 violent crackdown of the pro-democracy demonstration against the long-term ruler.¹⁵ There is also concern from observers that Chadian leader Mahamat Derby might potentially reach out to Russia to strengthen its regime stability, after severing ties with Western partners.¹⁶ This form of transactional relations between African regimes and Russia's military forces does not only occur in the regime security realm, it also extends to counter-insurgency assistance, particularly in the Sahel region.

Counterinsurgency

Russia's opportunistic strategy has mostly played out in this area in the past few years, particularly in the Sahel region, as countries battle armed groups with violent activities amidst dire political instability and strained relations with traditional Western partners. As Western military engagement in the fight against armed groups in the region declines, Russia's erstwhile Wagner Group moved in to fill this security vacuum.

The Wagner Group's counter-insurgency operations can first be traced to its contract in Mozambique, where it first deployed Wagner forces to combat armed groups affiliated with the Islamic state in the mineral-rich region of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique.¹⁷ However, it eventually withdrew due to its inability to combat the Islamic extremists. In recent years, we have witnessed a significant shift in Russia's counter-insurgency assistance towards the coup-affected Sahelian states of Mali, Burkina-Faso and Niger. In Mali, around one thousand Wagner forces were deployed in the country to combat the jihadist threat, and the Tuareg secessionist group.¹⁸ Their operations against the groups have aided the success of the capture of the Tuareg separatist stronghold of Kidal.¹⁹ On the contrary, they suffered significant losses in these operations and was widely accused of perpetrating war crimes against the local population, raising concern about Wagner's effectiveness in combatting the insurgent violent activities.²⁰

A sustainable frontier or not?

As African regime continues to increase ties with Russia and its Wagner private military company for regime protection and counter-insurgency military assistance, while it has been relatively successful in these areas, there are growing concerns about how sustainable these frontiers of partnership are in the longer term. The author has identified factors that could hamper these frontiers of Russia's engagement on the continent, particularly in the provision of regime security and counter-insurgency assistance.

First, the Russian war in Ukraine and geo-political tension around the world will continue to significantly impact Russia's posture on the continent. As the war in Ukraine rages on, with no sign of de-escalation, the allocation of military resources and manpower to commit to the warfront in Europe will impact Russia's presence in Africa. As Russia continues to battle losses of soldiers on the battlefield and deter and resist further Ukrainian forces' incursion into Russia's territory, Moscow will likely continue to seek Africa Corps forces, to serve as reinforcement on the frontline.²¹ The reported withdrawal of Wagner forces from Burkina-Faso and Libya to bolster Russia's position on the battlefield in Ukraine is a call for concern as long as the war rages on.

On the other hand, Geopolitical events around the world can undermine its influence. The case of the overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria, reveals two areas of concern. First, the withdrawal of Russian forces from its air and naval bases in Syria, which serve as a resupply hub for Wagner forces operating in sub-Saharan Africa, and the complete loss of these bases will impact its military assistance in the region. Secondly, it reflects the unreliability of Russia to provide adequate regime protection in the face of greater opposition resistance, as in the case of the opposition group offensive against the Assad regime.²²

Lastly, the inability of Russia's Wagner to provide adequate security in battling the anti-insurgency campaign. While it has been successful in halting rebel advancement on the capital of the Central African Republic, reclaiming more territory for the government, and aiding the Malian junta in recapturing and establishing control of Kidal, the recent defeat in the face of this onslaught in Mali reveals it does not possess the military capacity and preparedness to resist and contain the violence. If such defeat persists in the long term, it might probably be forced to withdraw, akin to its withdrawal in Mozambique following heavy losses from the insurgents.²³

It is therefore important to acknowledge that the transactional relationship between African regime, leaders and agencies provides short-term and unreliable support for its purpose. Instead, multilateral efforts and support should be garnered to ensure adequate security and uphold democratic values for sustainable peace and security for the continent.

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Commentary

RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN TÜRKIYE AND EGYPT: IMPLICATIONS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

After a decade of strained relations, high-level diplomatic engagements including reciprocal presidential visits have fostered renewed cooperation in trade, energy, and defense. Türkiye's supply of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to Egypt underscores growing military collaboration. This normalization influences regional stability, particularly in the Horn of Africa, where both nations have vested interests. Key economic drivers, such as bilateral trade growth, foreign direct investment, and energy cooperation, are analysed alongside persistent geopolitical tensions, including Libya, Sudan, and Eastern Mediterranean disputes. While pragmatic considerations fuel this rapprochement, ideological and strategic divergences remain. The evolving Türkiye-Egypt partnership will significantly impact regional power dynamics, shaping alliances and conflict resolution efforts in the Horn of Africa and beyond.

Abhishek Yadav*

INTRODUCTION

The recent diplomatic developments between Türkiye and Egypt show a significant shift in regional geopolitics, marking the end of a period of estrangement and the beginning of renewed bilateral engagement. This rapprochement, initiated in 2020, is part of a broader Turkish diplomatic initiative to mend relations with several key regional actors, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

The mutual reappointment of Ambassadors in 2023 signified a formal restoration of high-level diplomatic ties between Ankara and Cairo. In the first week of February 2024, the Foreign Minister of Türkiye, Hakan Fidan, disclosed a significant development in the ongoing normalisation of diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Egypt. According to Fidan's statement, the two nations reached an agreement for Türkiye to supply Egypt with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs),¹ commonly called

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drones. This arrangement can be considered part of a broader initiative between the two countries to collaborate in the domain of technology. This move indicates a multifaceted approach to rebuilding relations, encompassing both diplomatic and strategic-military dimensions.

High-Level Visits and Key Outcomes

The context of the announcement by Türkiye to provide drones to Egypt is particularly noteworthy as on 14 February 2024, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan officially visited Cairo which provided momentum in quest for strengthening Türkiye-Egypt bilateral relations. The visit was historic, considering it was the Turkish president's first visit to Egypt since 2012.² The joint declaration was signed to pledge cooperation in multiple areas covering "political and diplomatic, economy, trade, banking and financial services, investments, transportation, aviation, maritime, tourism, health and labor, security, military and defense industry, combating all kinds of organised crime and terrorism, culture, education, science and technology, energy, mining, agriculture, environment, forestry, housing and urban transformation, climate change, communication and information, and consular affairs".³ Additionally, the restructuring of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council was decided to be co-chaired by the presidents of both countries.

Reciprocally, on 4 September 2024, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi made an official visit to Ankara.⁴ It was his first visit in almost 12 years as the last Egyptian presidential visit to Türkiye was of Mohamed Mursi in September 2012. The first meeting of the Strategic Cooperation Council between Egypt and Türkiye was held in Ankara on 4 September 2024 and resulted in the joint declaration. The declaration called for strengthening bilateral relations to elevate their partnership to a strategic level, covering various fields including economic, political, and cultural cooperation. Regarding regional issues, both leaders called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and condemned Israeli actions, supported Palestinian right to statehood, advocated for a solution to the Syrian conflict based on UN Resolution 2254 and supported stability in Iraq, Libya, and the Horn of Africa.

Both leaders expressed willingness to coordinate positions in international forums and organisations. Regarding sectoral cooperation, the declaration covered various areas for enhanced cooperation, including energy, environment, civil aviation, health, education, and security. A total of 20 agreements were signed. On the economic front, both leaders set a target to increase bilateral trade volume to \$15 billion and promote mutual investments.⁵ This visit marks a significant step in normalising and strengthening Egypt-Türkiye relations, which have been strained for many years. The comprehensive nature of the declaration suggests a mutual desire to rebuild a strong strategic partnership between these two influential regional powers.

Economic Bilateral Dynamics

The endurance of robust trade relations between Türkiye and Egypt, despite a decade of diplomatic estrangement, exemplifies the resilience of economic ties in the face of political tensions. Türkiye's position as Egypt's fifth-largest trading partner and Egypt's status as

Türkiye's largest African trade partner underscores the pragmatic separation of economic and political dimensions within their bilateral relations. This sustained economic engagement, transcending diplomatic discord, not only reflects the interdependence of regional economies but also highlights the potential for economic interests to serve as a stabilising factor and eventual catalyst for diplomatic reconciliation.

Türkiye's position as Egypt's fifth-largest trading partner and Egypt's status as Türkiye's largest African trade partner underscores the pragmatic separation of economic and political dimensions within their bilateral relations.

For instance, the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Türkiye and Egypt, signed on 27 December 2005 in Cairo and implemented on 1 March 2007, led to a comprehensive economic partnership. This accord extended beyond the elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers, encompassing various trade-related domains such as sanitary and phytosanitary measures, foreign direct investment, trade in services, taxation, balance of payments, public procurement, state aid, anti-dumping and safeguard measures, intellectual property rights, and rules of origin.⁶

Upon the agreement's enactment, Türkiye removed customs duties on Egyptian-origin industrial goods. Conversely, Egypt phased out tariffs on Turkish industrial products, culminating in their complete elimination by 1 January 2020, as stipulated in the first Protocol. In the agricultural sector, both nations granted reciprocal concessions, including unlimited tariff eliminations or reductions, as well as tariff quotas for specific agricultural commodities. This FTA exemplifies economic collaboration aimed at promoting bilateral trade and investment between the two nations,

Year	Export	Import	Total Trade
2020	3,136.16	1,722.94	4,859.10
2021	4,513.69	2,211.76	6,725.45
2022	4,556.66	2,550.80	7,107.46
2023	3,352.65	3,647.45	7,000.10
2024*	2,316.85	2,648.29	4,965.14

Data till May 2024. [Data in Million USD]

Source: Prepared by the author from data available from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), June 2024. URL: <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Foreign-Trade-Statistics-May-2024-53529>

The bilateral trade relationship between Türkiye and Egypt from 2020 to 2024 presents an intriguing case study of economic interactions in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Table 1

shows the export, import and total trade volume data (in million USD), which has been examined to see the trends, patterns, and potential factors influencing the trade dynamics between these two significant economies. It is important to note that the 2024 data only cover the period until May 2024.

The total trade volume between Türkiye and Egypt highlights a consistent upward trajectory from 2020 to 2022, followed by a slight decline in 2023 and a more significant decrease in the partial data for 2024. In 2020, the total trade volume stood at \$4,859.10 million, rising to \$6,725.45 million in 2021 (a 38.4 per cent increase) and peaking at \$7,107.46 million in 2022 (a 5.7 per cent increase from 2021). However, 2023 saw a slight decrease to \$7,000.10 million (a 1.5 per cent decline from 2022), while the partial data for 2024 shows a total of \$4,965.14 million.

The trade balance between the two countries has shifted notably over the observed period. From 2020 to 2022, Türkiye maintained a significant trade surplus. However, in 2023 and 2024, the balance shifted, with Egypt now enjoying a trade surplus. This reversal in the trade balance is a key finding that warrants further investigation into the specific economic sectors or policy changes that might have driven this change. Key commodities exchanged in trade include fertilisers, electrical wires and braids, textiles and ready-made garments, rebar, soda, automobiles, soybean oil, yellow corn, animal feed, and household appliances.

Year-by-year analysis reveals interesting patterns. The year 2020 recorded the lowest total trade volume in the dataset, possibly influenced by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, there was a substantial increase in both exports and imports, suggesting economic recovery. The year 2022 marked the peak for total trade volume, with continued growth in both exports and imports. However, 2023 saw a slight decline in total trade, marked by a significant drop in Turkish exports and an increase in imports from Egypt. The partial data for 2024 indicates a continued decline in Turkish exports and a slight increase in imports from Egypt.

According to official statistics from Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, Türkiye has a significant economic presence in the country. The data indicates that over 200 entities, comprising both Turkish companies and manufacturing facilities, are actively operating within Egypt's borders.⁷ Furthermore, the agency reports that Egyptian enterprises are benefiting from substantial Turkish capital infusion. The cumulative Turkish investments in these Egyptian companies surpass \$2.5 billion, underscoring the considerable scale of economic engagement between the two nations. This level of investment suggests a robust bilateral economic relationship and highlights Türkiye's role as a notable foreign direct investor in the Egyptian economy.

The fiscal year 2021/2022 witnessed a significant increase in remittance flows between Egypt and Türkiye, showing the economic interdependence promoted by transnational labour migration. Egyptian workers in Türkiye remitted \$29.1 million, marking a substantial 35.2 per cent growth from the previous fiscal year's \$21.5 million. Conversely, Turkish workers in Egypt contributed \$10.3 million in remittances, a 13.6 per cent increase from the \$9.1 million recorded in 2020/2021.⁸ These figures underscore the asymmetric nature of the remittance relationship, with Egyptian workers in Türkiye transferring nearly three times

the amount of their Turkish counterparts. The Egyptian diaspora in Türkiye, estimated at 40,000 individuals by the end of 2022, embodies a significant community whose economic activities have tangible impacts on both home and host economies. This data also reflects the growing importance of diaspora economics in shaping bilateral financial flows.

TURKISH ASPIRATION TO BECOME ENERGY HUB

Türkiye wants to play a greater role in energy transportation. According to Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Alparslan Bayraktar, Türkiye is keenly interested in offshore gas fields located in Egypt to supply hydrocarbon via Turkish Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) vessels.⁹

Ankara has expressed a strong interest in importing liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Egypt, a move that aligns with Türkiye's broader ambition to establish itself as a key energy distribution hub for Europe. This endeavor, if realised, could significantly enhance Türkiye's geopolitical leverage and economic position in the region. Concurrently, Türkiye is seeking to revitalise maritime trade links with Egypt through the proposed resumption of freight shipping operations between the port of Mersin in Türkiye and Alexandria in Egypt.¹⁰

However, the inception of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which was conceptualised in 2018 by Egypt and was established in January 2019 in Cairo with founding members including Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Palestine, Italy and Jordan,¹¹ has deliberately kept Türkiye away from its membership till date. France also joined EMGF as a member in March 2021. Considering that the northern part of Cyprus is being administered by the Turkish Cypriot community, geopolitics and geo-economics, specifically in the energy sector, have been at play in the region.

CONFLICTUAL DYNAMICS

The Turkish Egyptian relationship has been characterised by significant ideological and geopolitical tensions persisting for over a decade. President Erdogan, known for his support of Islamist movements, maintained a staunch backing of Mohamed Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt. Following Mursi's ousting in 2013 and Egypt's then-army chief El-Sisi's ascension to power, Erdogan emerged as a vocal critic of the new Egyptian leadership, reflecting a deep ideological rift between the two nations.¹² On the one hand, Erdogan referred to al-Sisi as a tyrant, dictator and murderer on multiple occasions, while on the other side, al-Sisi described Türkiye as a state sponsor of terrorism, considering its linkage with Islamist organisations, including the Muslim Brotherhood.¹³ Even the bilateral diplomatic relations were downgraded to the level of charge d'affaires from 2013 till June 2023.

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This antagonism is also manifested in divergent foreign policy stances, particularly evident in regional conflicts. A notable example was the Libyan conflict, which emerged as a theatre for competing Turkish and Egyptian interests, with each nation establishing significant influence in different regions of the country. Türkiye has positioned itself as a significant military and political force in western Libya, while Egypt maintains a robust military and diplomatic presence in the eastern part of the country. However, recent normalisation efforts between Türkiye and Egypt have started to show a visible impact. For instance, a Bloomberg report revealed that Türkiye has started holding talks with Libyan military leader Khalifa Haftar, Ankara's enemy and Egyptian ally, to find a solution to the dispute over the administration of Libya's Central Bank which effectively controls the country's massive oil wealth.¹⁴ Hence, joint political will displayed by leaders of both countries could possibly bring momentum in finding some viable mechanism or solution to the crisis.

Furthermore, Türkiye's support for Qatar during the 2017-2021 economic blockade imposed on Qatar by a coalition including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain underscored the broader regional dimensions of this bilateral tension. Also, Türkiye and Egypt are entrenched in the geopolitical dynamics of the Eastern Mediterranean, where several nations have conflicting claims over maritime boundaries and natural gas reserves, particularly in relation to Greece and Libya.¹⁵

Cooperation between Türkiye and Egypt is a strategic necessity, considering that many structural dynamics affect their bilateral relations, including the dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia, the Sudanese civil war and the ongoing conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia.¹⁶ Moreover, the Somaliland dispute between Somalia and Ethiopia can pave the way for Turkish Egyptian cooperation. Ankara's diplomatic efforts are aimed at mediating the conflict while maintaining equilibrium in its relations with both nations. Türkiye has

... a coordinated approach by Ankara and Cairo could prove instrumental in addressing the multifaceted challenges in the Horn of Africa, potentially aiding stability through their combined diplomatic influence and strategic interests.

already hosted two rounds of talks till August 2024 playing the role of a mediator to repair relations between two East African neighbours.¹⁷ In contrast, Cairo aligns with Somalia, influenced by concerns over Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam project and its aspirations to gain access to the Red Sea via Somaliland. The potential for enhanced military ties between Somalia and Egypt adds another dimension to regional dynamics. Consequently, a coordinated approach by Ankara and Cairo could prove instrumental in addressing the multifaceted challenges in the Horn of Africa, potentially aiding stability through their combined diplomatic influence and strategic interests.¹⁸

These conflictual aspects highlight the multifaceted nature of Turkish Egyptian relations, encompassing ideological differences, conflicting regional ambitions, and alignment with different blocs in the West Asia North Africa (WANA) and the Horn of Africa region's complex geopolitical backdrop. The duration and intensity of these disagreements underscore the immense significance of the current diplomatic rapprochement between Ankara and Cairo.

Conclusion

The recent diplomatic normalisation between Türkiye and Egypt indicates a significant shift in the geopolitical and geo-economic backdrop of the WANA and the Horn of Africa region. This rapprochement, characterised by high-level engagements and comprehensive agreements, signals a pragmatic approach to bilateral relations that transcends historical animosities. The economic underpinnings of this renewed relationship, evident in robust trade figures and investment patterns, underscore the potential for mutually beneficial cooperation.

However, persisting ideological differences and competing regional interests suggests that this rapprochement may be driven more by strategic and economic necessities than a fundamental alignment of values. As both nations navigate their evolving relationship, their ability to coordinate on regional issues, particularly in conflict zones and areas of strategic importance, will be crucial in determining this diplomatic recalibration's long-term stability and influence. The rapprochement will not only reshape Turkish Egyptian bilateral relations but also have broader implications for regional alignments and conflict resolution efforts in the Horn of Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean region.

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Viewpoint

THE ISLAMIC STATE WEST AFRICA PROVINCE (ISWAP): ANALYSING THE GROWING TERRORIST THREAT IN THE SAHEL REGION

There has been a recent surge of terrorist activities in the West African Region, and the prominent threat emerges from the Islamic State and its affiliates, such as the Islamic State West Africa Province. Reports from international organisations and the Global Terrorism Index have highlighted a significant shift in the global epicentre of terrorism, transitioning from the West Asian region to Africa. This study examines the rising influence and threat posed by the Islamic State in West Africa while addressing its broader implications for the African continent. It analyses the group's operational strategies, including propaganda and mechanisms for terror financing. Furthermore, the paper explores the geopolitical and geostrategic dynamics that have facilitated the Islamic State's expansion and consolidation of power in the region.

Jason Wahlang*

Introduction

On 20 November 2024, Turkish News Channel Andalou Agency reported an attack by ISWAP militants on a military installation in the remote town of Kareto in the Mobbar Local Government Area in the Borno State in Nigeria in the 19 November 2024.¹ This is the latest attempt by the Islamic State West Africa Province in the African continent to carve influence in the region. However, terrorism is not a new challenge in West Africa; it remains deeply entrenched in the internal security dynamics of many states, particularly those facing persistent instability. Terror groups have taken up arms in arenas of constant political instability and economic hardships, thus trying to frame an alternative to the population which could be susceptible to radicalisation. This trend has become increasingly evident in recent years, with the Islamic State and its affiliates gaining traction across the region.

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The Islamic State and West Africa

The Islamic State is a Salafi jihadist organisation established in Iraq and Syria with the primary objective of establishing an Islamic Caliphate globally. However, its presence is not limited

The African continent comparatively hosts a larger presence of Islamic State groups mainly due to its vast geographical expanse and the political instability and insecurity prevalent in certain regions.

to these two countries, as various affiliates have emerged and established themselves worldwide. In Africa, various affiliate of the group has their pockets of influence, including. the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Islamic State Sahel Province, Islamic State Mozambique, and Islamic State Somalia. The African continent comparatively hosts a larger presence of Islamic State groups mainly due to its vast geographical expanse and the political instability and insecurity prevalent in certain regions. Another reason

for the change of the Islamic State towards Africa has been that since 2019, the group has shifted its focus and ramped up operations in the African continent due to political, economic and security turmoil in the region. The rising political instability has also affected the rise of terror incidents in the region. The expansion of the group towards West Africa has been alarming, particularly with the ISWAP and its independent sub-group, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).

Background

The Islamic State of West Africa Province, which has been the main focus of most of the counter-terror groups, has been significantly involved in the terror activities in the region. The group came into being in 2015 under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, who was the leader of Boko Haram after the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. This all changed in 2016 with a split within the group. Since its split from Boko Haram in 2016, which came out due to differences in the leadership, with the Boko Haram leadership continuing to be under the support of the Abubarku Shekau, the Islamic State in the Levant instead chose to support one of its principal commanders in Abu Musab al-Barnawi who then was considered to be the leader of ISWAP, with Shekau declaring himself the leader of the Boko Haram.² The leaders have since been killed in action, and the ISWAP has replaced its leaders in recent times. While both groups have strong affiliations with the Islamic State, there is a conflict of interest, thus creating a schism. The turf war has significantly increased regional instability and led to further complexities for peace. After its split, the group focused on its recruitment drives and added members to continue.

The group, which has focused on recruitment from radicalised elements through various modes of propaganda, focuses on recruiting members from North Eastern Nigeria and its neighbouring regions, primarily based on the conflict-impacted territories. The group is said to have approximately 5000 fighters,³ thus ensuring it has a strong support base and fighter base for its terror activities. One of the unique recruitment drives amongst the terror groups in the region is that the group takes advantage of the economic issues, and the political and security turmoil riled up in its sphere of functioning and attracts youths who are disdained by such situations.

Hearts and Mind Strategy

The ISWP group has focused on protecting citizens affected by the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, popularly known as the Boko Haram. It has also provided social services and economic prospects for members,⁴ famously known as the "Hearts and Mind Strategy coined by Bernard Fall in his idea of competitive control but this term was first used by Field Marshall Gerald Templer in 1968". The group is said to assist in digging up wells, giving out seeds and fertilisers, creating safe pastures for herders, using clerics to encourage internally displaced people to return to their communities, and ensuring that it does not target civilians. This has painted the group in a positive light with the local populace since Nigeria is devastated by conflict, poverty, shrinking rivers and expanding desertification with little government intervention.⁵ This has ensured support for the terror group over the local authorities, as well.

This has made the group gain prominence in the region and ensured it overtook Boko Haram as the dominant group. The group has used this tactic to differentiate itself from Boko Haram and the Nigerian state, thus creating an alternative to the state as well as acting as a non-state actor alternative to radicalised elements. The group has attempted to build positive relationships with society, given how Boko Haram and even, to a certain extent, the Nigerian state has portrayed a negative image mainly through various violent means. This can be seen as the ISWAP providing a carrot while the Boko Haram and the authorities a stick.

Given Boko Haram's violent history with the local populace, the initiative from the ISWAP has ensured that the group has gained traction amongst radicalised individuals, as they not only provide economic and social security but, more importantly, protection. As part of their attempts to differentiate themselves from Boko Haram, the group ensured that no civilians would be harmed across its line of influence, thus ensuring their mirage of safety. This was an important initiative in part of their overall propaganda of the group's attempts at radicalising individuals and gaining favouritism amongst the local populace.

In recent times, however, there has been a decline in the strategy with the local populace. After earning a significant influence among the local populace, the group shifted their approach from the heart and mind policy to aggression. Those who were thought to be protected by the group have been under attack, and this veil of security has been removed. Recently, the group has resorted to attacking and abducting local populations, including three abductions and nine executions by June 2024 and in May 2024, the group attacked Baga town of Kukawa in the Northeastern Nigerian state of Borno and killed 15 people.⁶ Therefore, the group has ensured that the Heart and Mind strategy has been used to gain legitimacy amongst the locals. Still, at the same time and thus once gaining prominence and popularity, including hefty support amongst the local populace, the group has taken violent methods similar to Boko Haram. The group has not just limited itself to this strategy as part of its propaganda initiatives; it functions similarly to other affiliates of the Islamic State.

Islamic State Propaganda in West Africa

The Islamic State, across the global arena, has ensured that there has been some strong connection among the radicalised youth through its propaganda machinery – the use of

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various magazine outlets, translations and social media platforms, including Telegram and TikTok. Similar tactics are being used in the West African region. In the region, the terrorists have taken up initiatives to use cyberspace. The group uses it to garner information and act as a virtual training ground, help boost morale and networking, and drive fundraising efforts.⁷ The groups have used propaganda to exploit the disgruntled individuals affected by the various instabilities in the region. They have used languages through various translation platforms, including the French language, to connect

with the local populace. This systematic use of propaganda has been a strong suit of the terror group, using it in various other territories to spread its messages.

The ISWAP, in particular, has used propaganda to advance its agenda. In recent times, the straightforward use of propaganda to advance its ideology and agenda is one that security and intelligence forces must monitor and analyse to avoid long-term implications.⁸

While the propaganda machinery has been working steadfastly to gain some traction and increase the group's influence and membership across the region, terror financing has been the other initiative taken by the group, which has been an essential part of its functioning.

Terror Financing in West Africa

When it was first established, the Islamic State's focus on financing its activities was based

The groups raise money through various criminal activities split between ISIS- Somalia, DRC, Mozambique and the Central ISIS Command. These terror financing avenues are not just limited to West Africa but have stemmed into the enormous African continent, with the groups looking at other alternatives and also other radicalised individuals in various other countries.

on the resources available in its territorial gambit, including kidnappings and extortion. With the loss of influence, financial stability has been lost. Therefore, the group has begun looking for alternative terror financing models. The terror financing schemes are more prevalent in the African villages of the Islamic State, with some of the affiliates cross-funding each other. The Somalia-based Islamic State had supported and funded some activities of the Democratic Republic of Congo Islamic State affiliate. The groups raise money through various criminal activities split between ISIS- Somalia, DRC, Mozambique and the Central ISIS Command.⁹ These terror financing avenues are not just limited to West Africa but have stemmed into the enormous African

continent, with the groups looking at other alternatives and also other radicalised individuals in various other countries.

Other alternatives used by such groups have been using social media and applications like Tinder to raise funds for the organisation. This initiative was conducted in South Africa through various cells, such as the Durban, Cape Town, and Johannesburg cells¹⁰. Thus, this has helped fund the Islamic State, both the Central Command and the affiliates, but this has also ensured that the various African-based affiliates have gained some prominence and status amongst the various terror affiliates of the group.

The group's resurgence around the Lake Chad basin and its accessibility to regions, including Nigeria, show that the terror group's outreach could have a long-term negative impact on the region and the continent overall. The group, which came out as a splinter cell of Boko Haram, has, over time, gained influence over north-eastern Nigeria and the different regions around it. With a more extensive member base than the other terror groups, the ISWAP has ensured dominance in the region.

Regional and International Reactions

The region and the leadership within Western Africa have shown concern and stressed the importance of tackling the issue of the ISWAP presence in the region. The Nigerian leadership and military have attempted to counter the group's rise and reduced the group's advancement in the region, particularly within the state. There is a need for a more significant regional collaboration to counter the threat, including more effective efforts through various initiatives, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), with the other Lake Chad Basin nations. Though respective governments' attempts have been made to reduce the threat and improve security, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in 2024 has stressed that lack of cooperation and coordination amongst the governments can be a long-term cause of concern and this could hamper the efforts to reduce the rise of the ISWAP. With conflicts between states and civilians continuing in the region, the states need to focus on rebuilding trust and support for the local population. Regaining trust could help reduce ISWAP attempts to gain traction amongst the local population.

The region's increasing political and military instability could impact efforts to counter the group. Shifting political ideologies and leadership in countries like Mali could create shifts in the ideas for countering the group. These could create further complications as differences begin to seep into the region. The reactions are not just limited to the state and the region but internationally also there has been expressions of concerns and attempts have been made to find a solution to the ISWAP threat.

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One prominent nation with a strong influence in the region has been France. France has always stressed its full commitment to supporting peace and security in the Sahel region, including providing troops. In the past, this included support from the European Union and significant initiatives such as the Partnership for Security and Stability in the Sahel

The Russians, have been acting through various outlets, including the Wagner Group, which has been established to bring about regime change and thus led to confrontation with the ISWAP militants. The Russians have sought to gain influence in the region, and it is through various regime stability initiatives that they seek to find such influence.

(P3S).¹¹ The French have, however, seen a reduction in their influence in recent times, with various coups in French-supported nations losing out on their pro-French leaderships. This has caused a vacuum which could either be taken up by other nations such as Russia or even non-state actors like ISWAP. The Russians, have been acting through various outlets, including the Wagner Group, which has been established to bring about regime change and thus led to confrontation with the ISWAP militants. The Russians have sought to gain influence in the region, and it is through various regime stability initiatives that they seek to find such influence. The Russians, therefore, would be attempting to act as an option for

long-term cooperation, particularly with the new anti-West leaders, to ensure stability, including fighting back with the ISWAP. The Russians could provide long-term security and long-term counter-terrorism cooperation.

Conclusion

As the entire global arena experiences constant instability and flux, this period has provided a space for various non-state actors to involve themselves and revive their lost space to a certain extent. The same can be seen in Africa; with a shift of the traditional allies and alliances becoming loose and the grip of regional and extra-regional powers reducing, there has been either a space for new powers or non-state actors to involve themselves. This is where groups like the Islamic State come in; the African continent and the West Africa and Sahel region have become the hotbeds of global terrorism in recent times.

The group has established a sense of influence, encouraging their attempts at establishing and gaining traction in the region. The African chessboard of constant political and leadership changes has encouraged such groups to further enhance their outreach in such conflicting times. The economic crisis also adds to it; thus, such groups can gain from such situations and further stamp their influence. The rise of terrorism in the Sahel region, in particular, could be seen as a long-term destabilising factor. Thus, the focus in the long term could be shifted towards the Sahel region.

With data suggesting that West Africa and the Sahel Region are the countries most affected by terrorism in the year 2024, this rise can be seen as a concern. In the long term, the region is seen as the hotbed of terrorism, shifting focus from the traditional concept of West Asia being the main focus. Al Qaeda and particularly the Islamic State can, in the long term, lead the region into further chaos through various methods, including terror financing and propaganda, which could have a long-term impact on the region.

Lastly, the turf wars could impact the rising terrorism in the region. The increasing competition between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State could cause friction between the two groups. The attempt at a revival of Al-Qaeda could see further conflict between the two groups, which could create a period of caution for the region but also could lead to finding a long-term solution if both groups' constant conflict could lead to a long-term solution through their elimination.

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Book Review

UTSAV KUMAR SINGH, *Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa: Through Sustainable Development Goals*, Springer Nature: India (2024), pp.200

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Dorjee Phunchu Dinglow*

Despite impressive economic growth in both India and South Africa, South Africa often outperforms India in key social indicators. Why do some regions or countries thrive while others struggle? Why does economic growth alone fail to eradicate poverty? Are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) effective in addressing regional disparities? The book *Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa: Through Sustainable Development Goals* seeks to address these pertinent questions.

Dr. Utsav Kumar Singh's work offers a robust comparative study of human development in two emerging economies, India and South Africa. This scholarly text examines the challenges and opportunities for human development through the framework of the United Nations' SDGs. Singh explores the puzzle of why India, despite its rapid economic growth, lags behind South Africa in several critical human development indicators. The book's strength lies in its empirical rigor, in-depth discussion of policy frameworks, and application of theoretical models, such as Amartya Sen's capability approach. Singh's analysis compels readers to look beyond GDP metrics and consider factors such as human welfare, institutional integrity, and historical contexts in development.

Human Development in the Paradigm of Sustainable Development Goals

The book begins by laying a strong conceptual foundation, discussing various development approaches, from economic growth-centric models to human development frameworks. Singh traces the evolution of global development discourse, emphasising the transition from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to SDGs. The author highlights the indivisible nature of the SDGs, asserting that progress in one goal is inherently linked to advancements in others. The introductory chapter skilfully integrates Sen's concept of "development as freedom," providing a nuanced perspective on how India and South Africa prioritize (or neglect) human well-being.

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Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals

Singh's critical assessment of India's progress toward achieving the SDGs is particularly enlightening. Despite India's impressive economic growth, the benefits have not been equitably distributed. For instance, India's low ranking in the Global Hunger Index (GHI) and its persistent challenges in poverty alleviation reveal significant shortcomings. Empirical data on issues such as high maternal mortality rates, inadequate sanitation, and disparities in education underscore the challenges of implementing uniform policies in India's diverse federal structure.

In contrast, the book examines South Africa's progress and challenges concerning the SDGs. Post-apartheid South Africa has navigated a complex socio-economic landscape and often outperforms India in areas such as health, education, and poverty reduction. Singh attributes this to targeted welfare programs like the National Development Plan (NDP) and the Expanded Public Works Program (EPWP), which directly address unemployment and social inequalities. However, South Africa's development trajectory is not without its limitations, including persistent unemployment, inequality, and the lingering impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Singh's analysis emphasises how policy decisions often delineate the line between thriving and struggling nations.

Impact of UN's Sustainable Development Goals on Human Development in India and South Africa

Dr. Singh employs regression analysis to evaluate the relationship between economic growth and poverty alleviation, illustrating that human development extends beyond mere economic metrics. While South Africa's economic growth has been relatively sluggish compared to India's, it has achieved a higher ranking on the Human Development Index (HDI). Singh explores why growth-centric models fail to capture broader dimensions of development, particularly in access to healthcare, education, and decent living standards. This statistical evaluation forms the core of the book's contribution to the comparative human development literature. By examining regional disparities within Indian states and South African provinces, Singh highlights how these inequalities impede overall progress toward the SDGs.

The book also offers forward-looking strategies to address these challenges. Singh underscores the importance of asymmetric approaches to tackling uneven development. He argues that a one-size-fits-all model for achieving the SDGs is impractical given the socio-economic diversity of India and South Africa. Singh's recommendations for policy frameworks prioritize investments in education, health, and gender equality to foster both social and economic capital. He concludes by advocating for long-term strategies that can transform the youthful populations of both nations into productive human capital.

Insights and Critical Reflections

One of the unique features of the book is Singh's engagement with Amartya Sen's framework of "development as freedom." Throughout the text, Singh calls for integrating capabilities – freedoms to lead lives individuals value – into the policy agendas of India and South Africa. The comparative framework employed allows readers to appreciate the nuances of policy design and implementation in nations with shared colonial histories but divergent post-independence trajectories.

The empirical rigour of Singh's analysis is another noteworthy aspect. By grounding theoretical discussions in robust data – including regression analyses and human development indicators – the book strengthens its central thesis: economic growth alone cannot guarantee human development without complementary investments in social infrastructure. Singh's policy recommendations focus on region-specific interventions to address issues such as gender inequality, unemployment, and inadequate access to essential services like healthcare and education.

Regional Dimensions of Human Development in India and South Africa makes a significant contribution to the fields of development studies, policy analysis, and comparative politics. Singh's analysis is especially timely as the global community approaches the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs. By comparing two nations at different economic and developmental stages, the book offers valuable lessons for policymakers, scholars, and development practitioners. Singh's call for nuanced, regionally sensitive approaches to development provides a refreshing counterpoint to the often simplistic, one-size-fits-all solutions in global development discourse.

This book is an essential read for anyone seeking to understand the complexities of human development in emerging economies. It offers a comprehensive perspective on the intersection of economic growth, social policy, and human well-being.

Call for Contributions

MP-IDSA invites articles, commentaries and book reviews for publication in *Africa Trends*, a biannual magazine on Africa. Submissions can focus on security, political and economic issues relating to African countries. Articles may focus on analysing bilateral, regional and multilateral developments of strategic significance to India's engagement with African countries.

Articles could be of approximately 2000 words. Commentaries can range between 1,000-1,500 words (excluding footnotes) and book reviews between 600-1,000 words. Guidelines for contributors may be found at: <http://www.idsa.in/africatrends>. Submissions may be emailed to the Editor at idsa.africatrends@gmail.com.

About Africa, Latin America, Caribbean & UN Centre MP-IDSA

The Centre's research focus includes understanding developments in the African region and analysing various hotspots like Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and the Indian Ocean Region. It also focuses on bilateral, regional as well as multilateral engagements between India and the countries of Africa. The Centre also endeavours to analyse India's engagement with Latin American countries, particularly in forums such as the IBSA and BRICS.

In addition, the Centre carries out research on the broader theme of India and the United Nations. It deals with important topics that come up in the Security Council and those that have relevance and significance for India's foreign policy.

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