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Geostrategic Transformations in the Sahel States and Their Implications for Algeria's Geopolitical Environment

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Abstract:

This study examines the geostrategic transformations reshaping the African Sahel and their implications for Algeria's geopolitical environment. It focuses on political change, military coups, shifting regional alliances, declining French influence, the rise of new international actors, and the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States. Using a theoretical and analytical approach, the study links these developments to Algeria's security, diplomatic, economic, and strategic interests. The findings show that instability in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso has intensified challenges related to terrorism, organized crime, irregular migration, border security, and regional cooperation. At the same time, evolving alliances and diversified partnerships create new opportunities for Algeria to reinforce its African strategic depth, diplomatic mediation, economic connectivity, and regional influence. The study concludes that Algeria's response requires an integrated approach combining security, diplomacy, development, economic cooperation, border management, respect for sovereignty, and continuous adaptation to rapidly changing regional balances within the Sahel region.

Keywords: Geostrategic Transformations; African Sahel; Algeria; Geopolitical Environment; Regional Security.

Introduction

In recent years, the geopolitical environment of the African continent has witnessed rapid transformations that have reshaped the balance of power and patterns of regional and international interactions. The African Sahel stands out as one of the areas most affected by these transformations, given its geographical position, which makes it a connecting space between the northern and southern parts of the continent, as well as between the Mediterranean and Saharan regions. This is further compounded by its close association with a range of security and strategic issues, including terrorism, organized crime, irregular migration, armed conflicts, and competition over resources, energy corridors, and trade routes. Taken together, these factors have made the Sahel a space where the interests of multiple regional and international powers intersect, contributing to its transformation from a geographically defined area characterized by political and security fragility into one of the key arenas for reshaping geopolitical balances in Africa.

The significance of these transformations has increased with the political developments experienced by several Sahel states, particularly Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, accompanied by military coups and changes in the nature and foreign orientations of their governing regimes. This has also involved a reassessment of some of the traditional partnerships that had linked these states to Western powers, particularly France. At the same time, new approaches to the construction of regional relations and alliances have emerged through the establishment of cooperative frameworks among a number of Sahel states and the expansion of relations with other international and regional powers. These developments have contributed to the emergence of new patterns in the distribution of power and influence in the region. Consequently, the ongoing transformations in the Sahel can no longer be regarded as purely domestic developments; rather, they have acquired repercussions that transcend the national borders of the countries concerned, affecting the security, political, and economic environment of neighboring states.

These transformations are of particular importance to Algeria in view of its geographical and strategic position, which makes it a pivotal state in North Africa, with extensive land borders with several Sahel states, most notably Mali and

Niger. This situation makes stability in the Sahel directly or indirectly connected to Algeria's national security and to the nature of its geopolitical environment. Algeria has also accumulated, over several decades, a significant diplomatic and security presence in regional affairs, based on an approach emphasizing respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, while encouraging dialogue and political settlement of conflicts, alongside its commitment to addressing cross-border security threats. Accordingly, the rapid transformations taking place in the Sahel require Algeria to reassess its regional environment, particularly given the interconnection of the security, political, economic, and strategic dimensions of these transformations.

The repercussions of the transformations in the Sahel are not limited to security issues related to border protection and confronting armed groups and organized crime networks. They also extend to the diplomatic sphere through changes in patterns of regional and international alliances and partnerships, as well as to the economic sphere as a result of competition over resources, trade routes, and energy. Furthermore, these transformations affect Algeria's position and role within its African and Mediterranean environment. From this perspective, understanding the geostrategic transformations in the Sahel constitutes a fundamental entry point for understanding the nature of the changes taking place in Algeria's geopolitical environment and the extent to which they affect its strategic choices and regional roles.

Accordingly, this study starts from a central research problem concerning the nature of the geostrategic transformations taking place in the Sahel states and the ways in which they affect Algeria's geopolitical environment. This is examined through an analysis of the political and security transformations and the emergence of new regional and international alliances, as well as an assessment of the various repercussions these developments have on Algeria's security and strategic interests. Through a theoretical and analytical approach, the study seeks to establish a link between the transformations taking place in the Sahel and the reshaping of the geopolitical environment surrounding Algeria, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that the current phase presents for Algeria's position and role within its regional and African environment.

First: The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Geostrategic Transformations and the Geopolitical Environment

Geostrategic transformations constitute one of the central concepts in the analysis of international relations and in understanding the nature of changes occurring within the regional and international system. They reflect a set of changes affecting the distribution of power, sources of influence, and patterns of alliances, as well as transformations in states' foreign policies as they seek to protect their vital interests and strengthen their strategic position. These transformations are not limited to military and security changes; they also encompass political, economic, diplomatic, and geographical dimensions that interact with one another and influence the nature of relations among states and the restructuring of regional spaces. In this context, the Sahel region assumes particular importance as a geopolitical space characterized by the intersection of internal crises with regional and international interactions, making it a changing arena in which security and stability concerns intersect with considerations of influence and strategic interests.

1. The Concept of Geostrategic Transformations and Their Dimensions

The concept of geostrategic transformations refers to the changes affecting the determinants of power and the strategic orientations of states, as well as the nature of interactions connecting them to their regional and international environments. These changes may involve the restructuring of alliances, shifts in security priorities, the redistribution of spheres of influence, or the adoption of new approaches to managing threats and crises. This concept is based on the interrelationship between geography and strategy, whereby geographical space is not viewed merely as a fixed physical area, but rather as an active element in shaping states' political, security, and economic choices, depending on the resources, routes, and strategically significant locations it contains, as well as the opportunities it provides and the challenges it imposes.

From this perspective, geostrategic transformations are associated with changes occurring in states' surrounding environments, which may prompt them to reconsider their traditional perceptions of national security and redefine their foreign-policy priorities. This is particularly evident in regions experiencing persistent political and security instability, where institutional fragility and declining state capacity to control the national territory contribute to the emergence of new actors, the intensification of competition for influence, and changes in the nature of regional and international partnerships. A report by the Institute for International Political Studies indicated that, over the past two decades, the Sahel region has witnessed an intersection of security instability, the spread of armed groups, local conflicts, and the regional repercussions of the Libyan crisis, contributing to the increasing complexity of the region's strategic environment (Bassou, 2024, p. 56).

Geostrategic transformations encompass several interconnected dimensions. The political dimension is associated with changes in patterns of governance, the legitimacy of political authority, and foreign-policy orientations. The security dimension concerns the nature and sources of threats and the means employed to confront them. The economic dimension relates to natural resources, trade routes, and energy sources, while the diplomatic dimension reflects the nature of bilateral and multilateral relations and the forms of cooperation and competition among actors. These dimensions demonstrate that geostrategic transformation does not necessarily result from a single factor; rather, it is often the outcome of the interaction of multiple internal and external variables that lead to a reconfiguration of states' priorities and their positions within regional balances of power.

In the Sahelian context, these transformations are manifested in the political changes experienced by Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the reconsideration of some of their traditional relationships, the emergence of new regional arrangements, and the increasing involvement of international actors in the region. These developments have contributed to reshaping patterns of security and diplomatic cooperation and have raised questions regarding the future of regional integration and the ability of existing institutions to respond to shared challenges. Therefore, studying geostrategic transformations in the Sahel requires moving beyond explanations centered on isolated political events toward a broader analysis that takes into account the interaction between state structures, the nature of threats, the interests of external powers, and the transformations affecting the regional system.

2. The Concept of Geopolitics and the Geopolitical Environment

Geopolitics is one of the analytical approaches concerned with studying the relationship between geographical space and political power by examining the influence of location, resources, borders, and strategic routes on states' behavior and foreign-policy orientations, as well as on the nature of interactions arising among them. Geopolitics is not confined to examining the physical significance of geographical space; rather, it extends to understanding how geographical factors are utilized in the construction of power, the determination of spheres of influence, the management of competition and conflict, and the formulation of strategies related to national security. Accordingly, geographical space is not merely a physical framework within which states operate; it constitutes one of the fundamental determinants influencing their ability to exercise influence, expand partnerships, and protect their vital interests.

Geopolitical thought has evolved alongside the development of international relations. It has moved from an emphasis on geographical location, territorial size, and resources as fundamental elements of power toward greater attention to the influence of political, economic, technological, and military factors in reshaping the strategic environment. Contemporary geopolitical analysis has consequently come to require an examination of interactions between states and non-state actors, as well as between national territories and regional and international spaces, particularly in light of the growing prevalence of transnational threats and the increasing interconnectedness between local crises and international transformations. From this perspective, understanding the transformations taking place in the Sahel requires analyzing the region as a dynamic structure influenced by shifts in the balance of power, the nature of relations among neighboring states, and the presence of international powers seeking to protect their interests and strengthen their strategic positions.

The geopolitical environment, meanwhile, refers to the set of geographical, political, security, and economic spaces with which a state interacts and which directly or indirectly influence its strategic choices and its ability to achieve its national objectives. It includes neighboring states and regional spaces with which the state maintains historical, economic, or security relations, in addition to areas of international competition whose developments may affect balances of power and stability. The geopolitical environment varies from one state to another according to its geographical location, the nature of its borders, its regional extensions, and the degree of its integration into international systems, as well as the scale of challenges and opportunities offered by its surrounding environment.

Within this framework, Algeria's geopolitical environment cannot be considered independently of its African, Mediterranean, and Arab dimensions, given that it is a state whose strategic space intersects with several geographical spheres, each characterized by particular security, political, and economic features. The Sahel region represents one of these major spheres, given the geographical extension of Algeria's southern borders, the historical, social, and economic ties connecting it to several countries in the region, and the impact of political and security developments in the Sahel on regional stability. Recent Algerian studies have addressed this relationship from the perspective of Algeria's regional role, noting that the crises experienced by neighboring Maghreb and Sahel countries since 2011, particularly the Malian crisis since 2013, have compelled Algeria to deal with a changing regional environment requiring a balance between national-security imperatives and the roles of mediation and regional diplomacy (Saliha, 2024, pp. 1–13).

Accordingly, the geopolitical environment should not be understood as a fixed space determined solely by political borders, but rather as a field of changing relations and interactions influenced by internal transformations in neighboring states, competition among regional and international powers, and the nature of threats that transcend national borders. This perspective makes it possible to understand how a political or security crisis within one neighboring state can become a factor affecting the security, diplomatic, and economic calculations of surrounding states. This is particularly applicable to the relationship between the ongoing transformations in the Sahel and Algeria's geopolitical environment.

3. The Sahel Region as a Geopolitical and Strategic Space

The Sahel region occupies a distinctive geographical position on the African continent, extending across the transitional zone south of the Sahara Desert and north of the tropical regions. It encompasses a group of states that differ in their political, economic, and social conditions, while sharing several characteristics related to developmental fragility and environmental and security challenges. The region derives its strategic importance from its location linking North Africa with the African hinterland and from its extension across vast spaces where national borders intersect with networks of commercial and social mobility. It is also connected to strategic routes, natural resources, and areas of importance in the calculations of regional and international powers.

The geopolitical significance of the Sahel is not determined solely by its geographical location; it is also associated with the nature of the challenges affecting the region, foremost among them weak governance in some states, declining institutional capacity to exercise authority throughout the national territory, the growing prevalence of local conflicts, the spread of armed groups, and the expansion of organized criminal networks. These factors have interacted with economic

and social pressures and climate change to produce a regional environment characterized by multiple and interconnected sources of threat. Abdelhak Bassou points out that instability in the Sahel is associated with a range of accumulated factors, including the spread of armed groups, the persistence of certain separatist conflicts, and the regional repercussions of the Libyan crisis, all of which have contributed to the complexity of the security situation and the prolongation of crises in the region (Bassou, 2024, p. 56).

The Sahel has also become an arena of increasing international competition, as external powers seek to strengthen their political, economic, and security presence and establish new partnerships with Sahelian states in order to protect their interests and expand their spheres of influence. Developments in relations between some countries of the region and their traditional partners have contributed to the restructuring of external relations and the emergence of tendencies toward diversifying partnerships and engaging with new international actors. This dynamic demonstrates that the Sahel is no longer merely a geographical space affected by internal crises; rather, it has become an arena in which national interests intersect with international influence, making regional stability closely linked to the nature of the balances established among local, regional, and international actors. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's Centre for Peace and Security Cooperation noted that the interconnected crises in the Sahel have contributed to reshaping the geopolitical and security cooperation landscape and have created space for the return of certain international actors and the emergence of others amid changing power and alliance dynamics (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024).

Analytically, the Sahel can be viewed as a geopolitical space in which three fundamental levels intersect. The first concerns the internal structures of states, including the nature of political systems, institutional capacity, developmental challenges, and social conditions. The second relates to regional interactions, including bilateral relations, security cooperation, economic integration, and competition among neighboring states. The third concerns international interventions and interactions, including diplomatic, military, and economic forms of presence, as well as cooperation and partnership initiatives offered by external powers. Linking these three levels makes it possible to explain the transformations taking place in the region in a more comprehensive manner and to avoid reducing them to a single security or political factor.

Accordingly, the strategic importance of the Sahel for Algeria derives from its status as a neighboring space in which border security intersects with economic interests, social ties, and diplomatic considerations. Any change in the structure of alliances, the nature of political regimes, or patterns of security cooperation in the region may affect the nature of Algeria's relations with neighboring states and the options it adopts toward regional crises. A study examining new regional variables addressed the impact of military coups and transformations in relations between Sahelian states and regional organizations on Algeria's role, highlighting the connection between ongoing transformations, border protection, and the development of Algerian diplomatic initiatives (Hattahat & Abdelaziz, 2025, pp. 751–770).

4. Theoretical Approaches to Explaining Geostrategic Transformations in the Sahel

Several theoretical approaches can be employed to explain the geostrategic transformations taking place in the African Sahel, reflecting differences in their conceptions of the nature of power, sources of threats, and factors determining state behavior within the regional and international environment. In this context, political realism, defensive realism, the geopolitical approach, and role theory stand out as analytical frameworks that allow for an understanding of regional interactions, an interpretation of transformations in relations between Sahelian states and international powers, and an analysis of their implications for Algeria's strategic choices.

Political realism begins from the premise that the state is the primary actor in international relations and that its behavior is largely determined by its pursuit of security, interests, and a stronger position within an international environment characterized by competition over power and influence. From this perspective, political and security transformations in the Sahel can be understood in light of changes affecting balances of power, the restructuring of alliances, and states' efforts to seek new partners to secure their national interests. This approach also makes it possible to interpret competition among international powers over the Sahelian space as part of a broader struggle over influence and strategic interests, without overlooking the role of states' domestic calculations in determining the nature of their foreign-policy choices.

Defensive realism, by contrast, focuses on states' efforts to ensure their security and reduce sources of threat that may affect their stability, while avoiding unnecessary expansion of commitments and conflicts that could increase their exposure to risks. This approach is particularly relevant to analyzing Algerian policy toward the Sahel, given the connection between Algeria's national security and the stability of its border environment, its interest in strengthening security and diplomatic cooperation, and its efforts to prevent regional crises from extending into its national territory. Defensive realism also helps explain the relationship between transformations in neighboring states and the reassessment of security priorities, particularly when regional cooperation mechanisms weaken or existing partnerships undergo change. Studies addressing Algeria's position toward Sahelian crises have employed realist approaches and role theory to understand the tension between the traditional constants of Algerian foreign policy and the requirements of adaptation to geopolitical and security transformations (Sid, 2025, p. 31).

The geopolitical approach provides another framework for analyzing transformations in the Sahel by focusing on the relationship between geographical space, resources, and sources of power and influence. It facilitates an understanding of the strategic importance of the region's location, the nature of its extensive borders, its trade routes, and its natural resources in shaping the orientations of local and international actors. It also highlights the importance of border areas as spaces of interaction and exchange, which may, under conditions of weak monitoring and security coordination, become

areas for the activities of criminal networks and armed groups. From this perspective, geopolitical transformations in the Sahel are not limited to changes in political regimes; they also encompass the reconfiguration of the strategic value of geographical space itself in response to changing interests, alliances, and patterns of international presence.

Role theory, meanwhile, focuses on the roles that states seek to perform within their regional and international environments, as well as on the relationship between states' self-perceptions of their status, the expectations of other actors, and the capabilities available to them for achieving their objectives. This theory makes it possible to analyze Algeria's role in the Sahel in terms of diplomatic initiatives and political mediation, participation in regional cooperation frameworks, and efforts aimed at promoting stability and protecting border security. It also helps explain how this role is affected by transformations in the region, the nature of relations with neighboring states, and the ability of regional institutions to continue performing their functions. A university study on Algeria's African policy employed role theory to analyze transformations affecting the determinants of Algerian foreign policy, particularly the growing importance of security considerations in Algeria's African orientations (Boularouaih, 2024).

By combining these approaches, an integrated analytical framework can be developed for examining geostrategic transformations in the Sahel. Such a framework takes into account the interaction between interests and power on the one hand, and the importance of geographical space and regional security on the other, while also considering the roles played by states in managing crises and reshaping patterns of cooperation. This theoretical integration makes it possible to move beyond one-dimensional explanations and understand Sahelian transformations as the outcome of interactions among internal, regional, and international variables whose effects vary according to each state's position, capabilities, and external relations.

5. The Relationship Between Geostrategic Transformations and Algerian Regional Security

The relationship between geostrategic transformations in the Sahelian states and Algerian regional security is based on the interconnectedness of geographical space with political, security, and economic interactions. National security cannot be separated from the nature of the regional environment surrounding the state, particularly in regions characterized by extensive borders, overlapping interests, and multiple sources of threat. Transformations occurring in neighboring states may lead to changes in patterns of security cooperation, the emergence of new challenges associated with the movement of armed groups and organized criminal networks, or the restructuring of diplomatic relations and regional alliances. Such developments require neighboring states to adapt their strategic perceptions to the changing nature of their environment. In the Algerian case, this relationship assumes particular importance because of the geographical extension of Algeria's southern borders, its historical and political ties with the Sahelian states, and the role it plays within its African environment. The stability of the region constitutes an important determinant of Algerian regional security, not only because of transnational security risks but also because political and economic crises affect relations among states and opportunities for regional cooperation and integration. Studies addressing the Sahel crisis confirm that security threats in the region, including terrorism, organized crime, and irregular migration, intersect with political and economic factors, making their management dependent on comprehensive approaches that go beyond direct security responses (Ben Saïd, 2024).

The relationship between geostrategic transformations and Algerian regional security is also manifested in changes affecting regional cooperation frameworks. Differences in political and strategic orientations among the states of the region may lead to the reconsideration of existing coordination mechanisms and the emergence of new arrangements and alliances that can affect the nature of regional interactions. This creates diplomatic challenges related to the need to maintain channels of dialogue, develop partnerships, and strengthen coordination on shared issues while respecting state sovereignty and differences in national priorities. At the same time, these transformations may provide opportunities to rebuild cooperative relations on new foundations and develop joint economic and development projects that contribute to addressing some of the structural causes of instability.

Accordingly, studying geostrategic transformations in the Sahelian states is not limited to monitoring the nature of the changes occurring within these states. It also requires analyzing their effects on Algeria's surrounding environment and understanding how Algerian foreign policy interacts with emerging developments. This article adopts the concept of the geopolitical environment as a dynamic space in which security challenges, economic interests, diplomatic relations, and international balances intersect. This approach makes it possible to analyze the implications of Sahelian transformations for Algeria's position and regional roles without reducing these implications to the security dimension alone.

Second: Current Geopolitical Transformations in the Sahel Region and the Reshaping of the Balance of Power

In recent years, the African Sahel has witnessed rapid political, security, and geostrategic transformations that have contributed to reshaping the nature of regional balances and changing patterns of relations between the countries of the region and the international and regional powers operating within it. The Sahelian environment no longer functions according to the traditional framework that had developed over previous decades; rather, it has been undergoing a gradual transition toward multiple centers of influence, diversified partnerships, and changing security and foreign-policy priorities. This transformation has occurred within the context of accumulated political, security, and developmental crises associated with weak state institutions in some countries, the expansion of armed threats, declining capacity to control border areas, and growing criticism of external approaches adopted to address the region's crises. Taken together, these factors have produced a highly fluid geopolitical environment in which changes in the balance of power are linked not only to internal developments within the Sahelian states but also to changes in the nature of their relations with external

actors. This dynamic is particularly important for Algeria because of the direct geographical connection between its territory and the Sahelian space, and because stability in Mali and Niger, in particular, is closely linked to Algerian regional security calculations. Zoubir and Abderrahmane noted that Algeria is situated within a turbulent regional environment and that instability in the Sahel, particularly in Mali, has become one of the major determinants of its regional engagement. This has prompted Algeria to reactivate its regional diplomacy since 2020, emphasizing dialogue, mediation, and diplomatic action rather than direct military intervention (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 120).

One of the most prominent manifestations of transformation in the Sahel is the series of military coups that occurred in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. These were not merely changes in the nature of political authority; they were also associated with a redefinition of the foreign relations of these states and a reassessment of several security-cooperation arrangements previously established with Western powers. These transformations contributed to the emergence of a political discourse emphasizing national sovereignty and rejecting what the new authorities regard as foreign interference in domestic affairs, alongside a shift toward diversifying international partnerships. In this context, the transformation in the relationship between the Sahelian states and France has become one of the clearest indicators of the restructuring of the region's geopolitical landscape. France's traditional position declined in several Sahelian countries, and French forces withdrew from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, while the new military authorities sought to rebuild their security and diplomatic relations according to different priorities. Analyses by the French Institute of International Relations have linked this change to a broader transformation in the regional environment, arguing that the withdrawal of French forces from Operation Barkhane and the Takuba Task Force created an opportunity for Algeria to reactivate its diplomatic role in the Sahel, drawing on its legacy of mediation and regional dialogue (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 120).

The decline in the French presence cannot be separated from emerging tendencies among Sahelian states to establish more autonomous regional arrangements independent of traditional frameworks. This was particularly reflected in the establishment of the **Alliance of Sahel States**, bringing together Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, which subsequently developed into a confederation framework. This development reflected the desire of the three states to establish their own mechanisms of cooperation in the security, political, and economic fields. It represented an important transformation in the structure of the regional system of West Africa, particularly following the three states' formal withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in January 2025. A study by the Policy Center for the New South indicates that the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States is not solely related to political disagreements with ECOWAS; rather, it reflects an orientation toward constructing a new model of cooperation aimed at achieving greater autonomy in security, defense, development, and external alliances (Alaoui M'hammdi & Jaïdi, 2025).

This development indicates a transition from a pattern of regional integration led by West African institutions toward a more fragmented situation in which different regional frameworks coexist and competing visions emerge regarding collective security and relations with external powers. A study published by Chatham House observed that the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS represented a significant political reconfiguration in West Africa and that the trajectories of the two blocs, despite the existing division between them, remain interconnected due to shared security and economic challenges (Dideberg & Melly, 2025).

From another perspective, the geostrategic transformation in the Sahel has been associated with Russia's growing presence in the region, particularly following the decline of the French and broader Western military presence. This presence should not be reduced to its military dimension alone, as it is also associated with Moscow's efforts to expand its political and economic relations with several African states and to present itself, according to Russian discourse, as a partner that does not impose the political conditions associated with traditional Western partnerships. The transformations in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger created a favorable environment for developing these relations at a time when the new authorities were seeking alternatives to previous security partnerships. Russia has consequently become part of the new strategic landscape of the Sahel, although the scale and nature of its influence vary from one country to another.

At the same time, the decline of the French presence has not resulted in the disappearance of international interests in the region. Rather, it has contributed to a shift from a pattern characterized by the predominance of a traditional external partner toward a more pluralistic environment in which different powers compete to establish political, economic, and security relations with the Sahelian states. This situation demonstrates that geostrategic transformation does not necessarily mean the departure of external powers from the region; it may instead involve a redistribution of their roles and changes in the instruments through which they exercise their presence.

Within this framework, the geographical importance of the Sahel remains a constant element in the calculations of international powers, given its location between North and West Africa, its connection to the Saharan spaces, and its links to trade, energy, and natural-resource networks. The United Nations has indicated for years that the Sahel-Saharan space is characterized by its vast geographical extension and considerable difficulty of monitoring, and that historical cross-border trade routes have become vulnerable to exploitation by terrorist groups and criminal networks. It has also noted that developments in the Sahel and Sahara affect North and West Africa while simultaneously being affected by developments in these regions (United Nations, 2013, p. 2). Consequently, the changes taking place in the region cannot be explained independently of the nature of the geographical space, which makes borders between Sahelian states areas of social and economic interaction while simultaneously constituting sensitive security spaces.

This dimension is particularly important for Algeria, whose southern borders intersect with the Sahelian space, making any instability in Mali or Niger potentially consequential for its security and diplomatic calculations. In this context, the

political transformations experienced by the Sahelian states have produced a new environment for Algeria, requiring it to balance the preservation of the principles of its traditional foreign policy, foremost among them respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, with the protection of its security and strategic interests in its southern neighborhood. Zoubir and Abderrahmane emphasized that Algeria has sought to restore its regional presence through active and preventive diplomacy and that it considers itself a pivotal actor in the stability of the Maghreb-Sahel space, drawing on its historical experience in mediation and conflict resolution (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 120).

However, subsequent transformations in Algeria's relations with some members of the Alliance of Sahel States have demonstrated that the regional environment has become more complex. Algeria-Mali relations experienced acute tensions during 2025 following an incident involving a Malian drone near the border, which affected diplomatic relations between the two countries as well as relations with the other members of the alliance, before efforts to restore communication and dialogue subsequently began. In March 2026, the Institute for Security Studies indicated that Algeria had intensified its diplomatic contacts with Niger and Burkina Faso in an attempt to reactivate its presence in the Sahel, while difficulties in relations with Mali persisted (Koné, Sow & Salia, 2026).

These developments demonstrate that Algeria's geopolitical environment has become more dynamic and that managing relations with the Sahelian states no longer takes place within a relatively stable regional framework. Instead, it occurs within a space in which alliances change rapidly and national sovereignty considerations intersect with regional security concerns and international competition. Thus, the transformations taking place in the Sahel have contributed to a transition from a regional model largely based on traditional security partnerships and strong Western presence toward a more pluralistic and competitive model in which the Sahelian states interact with different international powers while simultaneously seeking to develop their own regional frameworks.

This transformation has direct implications for Algeria, which finds itself facing a southern neighborhood undergoing political, security, and diplomatic restructuring. This makes strengthening dialogue with neighboring states, maintaining channels of communication, and monitoring changes in the structure of regional alliances essential elements for understanding Algeria's position within the emerging balances. Therefore, the geostrategic transformations in the Sahel should not be viewed as a series of isolated political events, but rather as a broader process of regional-system restructuring in which internal transformations within states interact with changes in their external relations, the emergence of new actors, and the redefinition of the concepts of sovereignty, security, and partnership. This process has clear implications for the nature of the geopolitical environment within which Algeria operates.

Third: The Reshaping of Balances and Alliances in the Sahelian States

In recent years, the Sahel region has witnessed a gradual restructuring of political and security balances and alliances as a result of the interaction of a range of internal, regional, and international variables. Their effects have extended beyond the borders of the states that experienced political crises or military coups, influencing the structure of the West African regional system and the nature of relations between the Sahelian states and international powers. This transformation is particularly evident in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, where the accession of military authorities to power coincided with a broad reassessment of relations with several traditional partners, particularly France and the Economic Community of West African States, alongside efforts to establish new frameworks for political, security, and military cooperation. This has gradually shifted the region from a pattern dominated by West African institutions and security partnerships led by European powers toward a more pluralistic environment in terms of actors and sources of influence, making the restructuring of alliances one of the most important manifestations of geostrategic transformation in the region.

The Policy Center for the New South noted that the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States emerged within a political and security context characterized by increasing tensions between the three states and ECOWAS and that the alliance carried from the outset dimensions extending beyond defense cooperation toward the construction of a more autonomous political and economic framework (Alaoui M'hammdi & Jaïdi, 2025).

The establishment of the **Alliance of Sahel States**, comprising Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, represents one of the most significant developments that has reshaped the regional map. The three states moved from situational cooperation in response to political and security pressures toward the construction of their own institutional framework. The establishment of the alliance in September 2023 was associated with the signing of the Liptako-Gourma Charter, which made defense and security cooperation one of its principal foundations. The project subsequently developed into the Confederation of Sahel States in July 2024, reflecting a political desire to deepen coordination among the three states. The process of withdrawal from ECOWAS subsequently became a political and institutional reality when the withdrawal took effect in January 2025.

These developments reveal a change in the very concept of regional security, as the three states no longer rely primarily on collective mechanisms provided by traditional regional institutions. Instead, they have begun constructing an independent security and political mechanism based on a shared understanding of threats and sovereignty. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung considered the Alliance of Sahel States an attempt to establish a new regional arrangement in response to what its founding states regard as shortcomings in the regional and international response to the security challenges they face (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024, p. 7).

This development cannot be understood without linking it to the transformations in the relationship between the Sahelian states and France, as accumulated political and security disagreements have led to an unprecedented decline in traditional French influence. In Mali, the French withdrawal from Operation Barkhane began in 2022, and a similar dynamic

subsequently extended to Burkina Faso and Niger, where French forces departed amid growing tensions between the new authorities and Paris. This withdrawal was not merely a military development; it carried broader political and geostrategic implications because it represented a decline in one of the principal forms of external presence that had characterized the region for decades.

At the same time, the three states sought to redefine their external relations on the basis of diversifying partnerships and avoiding dependence on a single international power. A study by the French Institute of International Relations indicated that transformations in France's relationship with the Sahel coincided with Algeria's reassessment of its regional role, particularly in light of the declining French presence and the growing need for new regional diplomatic approaches (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 120).

Within this context, **Russia** emerged as one of the actors benefiting from the restructuring of international relations in the Sahel. Its relations with Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger expanded, particularly in the security and military fields, while it also sought to strengthen its political and economic presence. This orientation was associated with the desire of the new authorities in the three states to seek alternatives to Western partnerships. However, the nature of the Russian presence varies from one country to another and cannot be reduced to a single model. Russia's entry into the Sahelian arena has not eliminated international competition; rather, it has added a new actor to an already multipolar geopolitical environment, making the Sahel a space in which European, Russian, Turkish, Chinese, and other interests intersect.

An analysis published by the European Parliament indicates that the decline of French influence in the Sahel coincided with the growing presence of Russia, particularly in Mali, alongside the transformation of the region's security and political environment toward greater competition among external partners (European Parliament, 2024, p. 4).

Alongside Russia, **Türkiye and China** have begun strengthening their engagement in Africa generally and in the Sahel both directly and indirectly, relying on economic, diplomatic, and commercial instruments that differ from the traditional security instruments associated with the French presence. China's strategy is based primarily on investment, infrastructure, and trade, while the Turkish approach combines economic diplomacy, defense cooperation, and commercial exchange. This contributes to expanding the range of options available to the Sahelian states. This diversification reflects a transformation in the nature of power within the region, as military power is no longer the sole determinant of actors' positions. Economic resources, investment, infrastructure, technological cooperation, and diplomacy have become increasingly important elements in constructing influence.

On another level, developments in the **relationship between the Sahelian states and the Economic Community of West African States** have contributed to deepening the restructuring of regional balances. Disagreements over military coups and the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS on some states generated unprecedented tensions between the regional organization and the military authorities in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, ultimately leading the three states to announce their withdrawal from the organization. Although the withdrawal took effect on January 29, 2025, economic and social relations between these states and the rest of West Africa have remained in place because of geographical, human, and commercial interdependence. Political and institutional separation therefore does not necessarily mean complete geo-economic separation.

Chatham House observed that the withdrawal of the three states created a new division within West Africa but did not eliminate the need for regional cooperation in the fields of security, trade, and mobility, since shared challenges transcend political and institutional boundaries (Dideberg & Melly, 2025).

These transformations have particular implications for **Algeria**, which now faces a Sahelian space whose internal and external relations have been restructured and in which traditional patterns of cooperation have become less stable than before. The significance of this development lies in the fact that Algeria does not view the Sahel solely as a security space but also as part of its African strategic depth and a historical sphere of diplomatic engagement. Consequently, changes in regional alliances require Algeria to reassess its channels of communication with different parties while preserving the fundamental principles underpinning its foreign policy, particularly respect for state sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and preference for political solutions and dialogue.

This is particularly important in light of Algeria's relations with Mali and Niger, both of which share extensive borders with Algeria, in addition to the historical and social relations connecting the peoples of the region. Zoubir and Abderrahmane noted that Algeria, because of its geographical position and historical experience, regards stability in the Sahel as directly connected to its national security and prefers to address crises through political mediation and diplomacy rather than direct military involvement (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 121).

Thus, the restructuring of alliances in the Sahel places Algeria within a more complex diplomatic environment. States that previously operated within familiar regional and international frameworks are increasingly adopting more autonomous choices, while the diversification of external partners makes regional interactions more susceptible to change. This does not necessarily imply a decline in Algeria's position; rather, it requires Algeria to engage with new rules of regional interaction based on multiple actors, diverse interests, and the intersection of security with economic and political considerations.

These transformations may also create new opportunities for Algeria to strengthen economic and diplomatic cooperation with the Sahelian states, particularly in the fields of energy, transportation, trade, and infrastructure, provided that appropriate political and security conditions exist. At the same time, the restructuring of alliances creates challenges

related to the need to maintain balanced relations with different powers and to prevent the Sahelian space from becoming an arena of direct international competition that could further increase the region's fragility.

Accordingly, the restructuring of balances and alliances in the Sahel represents one of the most prominent manifestations of the current geostrategic transformation because it reflects the transition from a regional structure characterized by Western presence and traditional institutions toward a more pluralistic and competitive structure in which political and security alliances intersect with economic and strategic interests. This process is particularly important for Algeria because changes in the nature of partnerships and alliances in its southern neighborhood affect its security and diplomatic calculations and the nature of its regional role, making the management of its relations with the Sahelian states and the competing powers operating there an essential component of its adaptation to the new geopolitical environment.

Fourth: The Security and Geopolitical Implications of Sahelian Transformations for Algeria

The rapid political and geostrategic transformations taking place in the Sahel region have generated a new regional environment characterized by the interconnectedness of security, political, economic, and diplomatic dimensions. Their repercussions have therefore extended beyond the borders of the states that have experienced crises and coups to affect neighboring countries, particularly Algeria, given its geographical position and direct connection to the Sahelian space. The significance of these transformations for Algeria derives not only from the length of its shared borders with Sahelian states, but also from the nature of cross-border threats, which make the security of its southern borders closely linked to the stability of the broader regional environment. Zoubir and Abderrahmane have noted that the instability experienced by the Sahel region, particularly Mali, has become one of the major challenges facing Algeria, given that instability in its immediate neighborhood may affect its security and strategic interests. This has encouraged Algeria to attach increasing importance to diplomatic engagement and mediation in the region (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 120).

Terrorism and armed groups constitute one of the foremost security repercussions of the ongoing transformations in the Sahel. The weakness of governmental control over certain areas, the vastness of desert spaces, and the difficulty of monitoring borders have created favorable conditions for the activities of various armed groups, some of which are affiliated with international terrorist organizations, while others are rooted in local, ethnic, or political conflicts. Armed activity has expanded from northern Mali to areas in the central part of the country and subsequently into Burkina Faso and Niger, making the Central Sahel one of the areas most affected by armed violence in Africa. This development is particularly significant for Algeria because any expansion of armed groups toward border areas may place additional burdens on monitoring and protection agencies and may also affect population movements, trade, and cross-border transportation. The United Nations has warned that the continued weakness of institutions and the existence of vast areas that are difficult to bring under effective control constitute factors facilitating the expansion of armed groups and criminal networks in the Sahel-Saharan region (Nations Unies, 2013, p. 2).

The threat is not confined to terrorism in the conventional sense; it is also associated with the interaction between armed groups and **transnational organized crime**, including arms, drug, fuel, and goods trafficking, as well as the exploitation of informal trade routes extending across desert areas. This interaction weakens states' ability to control border spaces and turns some border areas into spaces where illicit economic interests intersect with armed activity. For Algeria, the expansion of such networks in the Sahel represents a persistent challenge, given the vastness of its Saharan territory and the connection of its southern borders to areas characterized by weak security monitoring. Consequently, the geostrategic transformations in the Sahel require Algeria to strengthen border cooperation, information exchange, and monitoring and surveillance mechanisms, while maintaining political coordination with neighboring states, since a purely security-based approach is insufficient to address a phenomenon involving interconnected social, economic, and political dimensions.

Irregular migration also represents one of the repercussions that may be affected by political and security instability in the Sahel. Security and economic deterioration, together with drought, climate change, and declining employment opportunities, encourages segments of the population to move within the region or toward North Africa. This makes Algeria one of the countries that may become a transit or temporary settlement space for migrants arriving from Sahelian states and other African regions. Such movements generate multiple security, humanitarian, and social challenges, particularly when migration intersects with the activities of smuggling and human-trafficking networks. The International Organization for Migration confirms that the Sahel is one of the major areas of mobility and migration on the African continent and that patterns of movement in the region are shaped by interconnected economic, environmental, and security factors (OIM, 2024, p. 9). Consequently, changes in conditions within Sahelian states may affect the scale and direction of migration flows, making the management of Algeria's southern borders also connected to demographic and social developments in the region.

At the political and diplomatic level, the transformations in the Sahel have generated a **challenge related to redefining Algeria's relations with the new authorities in Sahelian states**. Algeria has traditionally adhered to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states and respect for their sovereignty, while simultaneously seeking to protect its security interests and maintain relations with neighboring countries. This balance has become more difficult amid changes in governing regimes and differences in their positions toward regional institutions and international powers. This is particularly evident in relations with Mali, where bilateral relations have shifted in recent years from cooperation and mediation toward a period of diplomatic tension, illustrating how political transformations within Sahelian states can directly affect Algeria's relations with its neighbors.

Within this context, the **Mali crisis** assumes particular importance, as it is one of the issues most closely connected to Algerian national security, not only because of the shared border but also because of the historical role played by Algeria in mediating between the Malian parties. Zoubir and Abderrahmane explain that Algeria played an important role in reaching the 2015 peace and reconciliation agreement in Mali and considers stability in Mali a strategic interest because of the geographical and security interdependence between the two countries (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 121). Accordingly, the decline in the effectiveness of political settlement mechanisms or weak commitment to previous agreements does not constitute merely an internal Malian problem; rather, it requires Algeria to reassess its instruments for dealing with the crisis, particularly in light of the emergence of new alliances and changing positions among local and regional actors.

Another significant consequence is the **reshaping of Algeria's surrounding diplomatic environment** as a result of increasing competition among international and regional powers in the Sahel. The decline of French influence has opened space for other powers to expand their influence, particularly Russia, Türkiye, and China, alongside the continuing interest of the United States and the European Union in the region. This means that Algeria operates within a multi-actor environment in which its relations with Sahelian states can no longer be analyzed independently of its relations with international powers seeking to strengthen their presence in the region. In this context, changes in the structure of influence may provide Algeria with opportunities to expand its diplomatic room for maneuver, while simultaneously requiring it to maintain balanced external relations and avoid becoming involved in international polarizations that could negatively affect the stability of its surrounding environment.

This challenge is particularly important because Algeria combines multiple geographical and strategic affiliations: it is simultaneously a Maghreb, Mediterranean, African, and Arab state. Its foreign policy must therefore engage with overlapping geopolitical spheres. The transformations in the Sahel also carry **economic and strategic implications** that may affect regional projects linking Algeria to its African hinterland. Stability in the Sahel represents an important condition for developing trade exchanges and cross-border projects, particularly in transport, infrastructure, energy, and economic connectivity with West African states. Continued instability may disrupt the movement of goods and people, increase the costs of securing infrastructure, and reduce the attractiveness of certain border areas for investment. Conversely, the restoration of stability could create important opportunities for Algeria to expand its economic role in the region, benefiting from its geographical position, energy resources, and network of African relations.

Studies addressing Algeria's role in the Sahel confirm that the economic dimension has become increasingly connected to the security dimension and that strengthening economic and development relations with regional states can constitute a supporting element of regional stability alongside diplomatic and security instruments (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 124). The ongoing transformations also require Algeria to reconsider the concept of **border security**, so that it is not limited to protecting territorial boundaries but extends to addressing the surrounding conditions, including local development, monitoring smuggling networks, developing cooperation with neighboring states, and strengthening surveillance and response capabilities. Algeria's southern borders extend across vast desert spaces, and their security cannot be guaranteed through military measures alone. Rather, it requires an integrated approach combining security, development, diplomacy, and regional cooperation. From this perspective, stability in the Sahelian states becomes part of Algeria's regional security system, while cooperation with these states becomes a means of protecting common interests rather than merely a diplomatic option.

Another dimension of the Sahelian transformations concerns the **changing nature of Algeria's regional role**. Historically, Algeria has been among the states that have relied on mediation, dialogue, and conflict resolution as key instruments of foreign policy. However, the new environment in the Sahel has become more complex as a result of the multiplicity of actors, declining confidence in some regional institutions, and divergent perceptions among states concerning the nature of external partnerships. The continuation of Algeria's role therefore requires adaptation to this environment while preserving the traditional principles of its foreign policy. A study of Algerian African policy concluded that security and political transformations in the Sahel have encouraged Algeria to strengthen its attention to its African strategic depth, while attempting to reconcile the principle of non-interference with the requirements of protecting national security and exercising a regional role (Berkani, 2024, p. 63).

Accordingly, the security and geopolitical repercussions of Sahelian transformations for Algeria can be understood as operating at multiple levels. They begin with border security and the fight against terrorism and organized crime and extend to migration management, diplomatic relations, international balances, economic interests, regional projects, and Algeria's position within Africa. These repercussions do not necessarily mean that Sahelian transformations constitute a negative factor in every circumstance. Some of them may create opportunities to rebuild economic and diplomatic relations on new foundations, expand Algeria's room for maneuver in Africa, and strengthen its presence as an actor seeking dialogue and stability. However, benefiting from these opportunities remains dependent on Algeria's ability to manage a changing regional environment, maintain channels of communication with the various Sahelian states, develop security and economic cooperation, and continue supporting political solutions to conflicts. Such an approach may allow the challenges arising from geostrategic transformations to be managed within an integrated vision of security and national interest.

Fifth: Algeria's Position within the Geostrategic Transformations of the Sahel Region and Its Regional Roles

Algeria occupies a geographical and strategic position that makes it one of the countries most closely connected to developments in the Sahel region. It combines a Maghreb and Mediterranean orientation with an African strategic depth and shares extensive land borders with states of direct importance to the Sahelian equation, particularly Mali and Niger. This geographical position has given Algeria a distinctive status in dealing with regional crises. Its presence in the Sahel is not merely a response to current security developments but is based on a historical accumulation of political, diplomatic, economic, and social relations with neighboring states. Therefore, the geostrategic transformations that the region has experienced in recent years require a renewed understanding of Algeria's position, not merely as a neighboring state of the Sahel but as a regional actor whose interests are directly affected by the restructuring of power balances and alliances within this space. Zoubir and Abderrahmane confirm that Algeria views stability in the Sahel as part of its national security and that its geographical position and historical experience in mediation make it directly concerned with the crises affecting the region (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 120).

The **geographical dimension** is particularly important in determining the nature of Algeria's role. The Algerian borders with Mali and Niger extend across vast desert areas, making political and security developments in the two countries directly relevant to Algerian border security. The Saharan space also does not constitute an absolute natural barrier to the movement of people, goods, and groups; rather, it has historically served as a space for mobility and exchange. Border management therefore requires continuous cooperation among the states concerned. Given the spread of armed groups and organized criminal networks, border cooperation has become part of the regional security system, explaining Algeria's interest in developing coordination mechanisms with Sahelian states, particularly in combating terrorism and trafficking and securing border areas.

The importance of **Algerian diplomacy** in the Sahel derives from its traditional reliance on dialogue and mediation, an orientation rooted in the history of Algerian foreign policy since independence and reinforced by its role in settling several African and regional conflicts. The Mali file represents one of the clearest examples. Algeria played the role of mediator in the peace and reconciliation process between the Malian parties, culminating in the 2015 Algiers Agreement. This agreement represented an attempt to establish a political settlement to the Malian crisis by addressing a number of issues related to governance, development, security, and relations between the central government and the northern regions. Zoubir and Abderrahmane note that Algeria played a central role in the Malian peace negotiations and that its historical experience in mediation made it one of the few states capable of communicating with multiple parties to the crisis (Zoubir & Abderrahmane, 2022, p. 121).

However, the political transformations that Mali experienced following the military coup in 2020 and the second coup in 2021, together with the resulting changes in the nature and external orientations of the authorities, made the environment in which Algerian diplomacy operated considerably more complex. The new Malian authorities became more cautious toward certain regional and international initiatives and redefined their relations with several partners, which affected the implementation process of the peace agreement. This coincided with the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States, signifying a restructuring of political and security priorities and requiring Algeria to deal with a regional reality in which previous mechanisms no longer operated with the same degree of effectiveness.

Within this context, **Algeria's approach to regional security** emerges as being based on linking political stability, security, and development rather than reducing crises to their military dimension. The Algerian experience is based on the premise that addressing terrorism and organized crime cannot be effective in the absence of stable political institutions, economic and social development that reduces vulnerability factors, and regional cooperation enabling the states concerned to exchange information and expertise. This approach corresponds to the nature of the challenges facing the Sahel, where unemployment, poverty, marginalization, and weak public services intersect with local conflicts and armed activity. Consequently, Algeria's role is not limited to security cooperation but also includes supporting political solutions, promoting development, and strengthening regional integration.

A study issued by the Institute for Security Studies indicated that Algeria sought to revitalize its relations with Sahelian states by intensifying diplomatic contacts, with particular attention to Niger and Burkina Faso, within an effort to restore its presence in an increasingly complex regional environment (Koné, Sow & Salia, 2026). This initiative reveals an Algerian understanding that transformations in the Sahel cannot be addressed through isolated security instruments but require the construction of a network of political and diplomatic relations that enables Algeria to maintain channels of dialogue with different actors. This option becomes increasingly important in light of the **multiplicity of international actors** in the region. The Sahel is no longer subject to the influence of a single external power but has become an arena of competition and interaction among France, the United States, Russia, China, Türkiye, the European Union, and others. The decline of French influence has altered the rules of regional interaction, but it has not ended international competition; rather, it has redistributed it among different actors and instruments.

In this context, Algeria faces the need to preserve the independence of its foreign-policy decision-making while developing balanced relations with different powers and avoiding involvement in polarizations that could affect its ability to perform a mediating role. This is particularly important because Algeria maintains strategic relations at multiple levels: it is a partner of the European Union, a member of the African Union, an actor in the Maghreb region, and maintains extensive relations with Russia, China, Türkiye, and others. This provides it with considerable diplomatic room for maneuver but simultaneously requires careful management of its external balances.

From an **economic and strategic** perspective, the transformations in the Sahel provide Algeria with possibilities that could support its efforts to strengthen its African strategic depth. Cross-border projects, transportation networks, energy, trade, and overland connectivity between Algeria and Sahelian states may serve as instruments for strengthening economic interdependence and reducing reliance on traditional routes. This dimension has become increasingly important in light of Algeria's recent efforts to strengthen its economic presence in Africa and utilize its geographical position to build broader trade and investment relations with African states. The development of infrastructure in border areas may also perform a dual function by supporting local development while simultaneously strengthening control over border spaces.

The Trans-Saharan Highway project is particularly relevant in this regard, as it may contribute to enhancing connectivity between North Africa and the heart of the continent, although its effectiveness remains dependent on the degree of political and security stability in the countries through which it passes. Accordingly, security, development, and economic integration become interconnected elements within Algeria's strategic vision toward the Sahel.

The **African dimension of Algerian foreign policy** cannot be overlooked, as the Sahel constitutes part of the space through which Algeria seeks to strengthen its presence on the continent. This orientation has historically been associated with principles supporting the independence of African states, respecting their sovereignty, and supporting political solutions to conflicts. Nevertheless, current transformations require Algeria to develop its instruments in line with changes in the nature of actors and threats. The African environment has become more complex than before, and interstate relations are no longer based solely on political considerations. Economic interests, energy, infrastructure, security, and public diplomacy have increasingly become influential factors in determining a state's position. Consequently, strengthening Algeria's role in the Sahel requires combining diplomatic, economic, and security instruments while preserving the distinctive Algerian approach that gives priority to sovereignty and dialogue.

Within this framework, Algerian mediation can be understood as one of the soft-power instruments that Algeria may employ to preserve its regional presence, particularly in issues requiring dialogue and negotiation. However, the effectiveness of mediation remains dependent on the acceptance of the parties concerned, the mediator's ability to maintain an appropriate distance from the different parties, and the availability of a regional environment conducive to negotiation. Therefore, the transformations experienced by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, together with changes in their relations with regional organizations and international powers, require Algeria to develop its mediation approach in accordance with the new circumstances rather than relying exclusively on mechanisms that proved effective in earlier phases.

Maintaining relations with the authorities currently governing Sahelian states does not necessarily imply adopting their political positions. Rather, it falls within the logic of diplomatic communication necessary to protect national interests and manage crises. Recent developments have shown that Algeria has intensified contacts with several Sahelian states in an effort to rebuild confidence and strengthen communication, reflecting an orientation toward restoring diplomatic presence in a region undergoing profound transformations (Koné, Sow & Salia, 2026).

Regarding Algerian-Nigerien relations, geographical position, shared borders, and security and economic interests make stability in Niger an important factor in Algerian calculations. Niger also represents an important space for transportation, energy, and trans-Saharan trade projects, giving bilateral relations a dimension that extends beyond border security. As for Burkina Faso, although it does not share a direct border with Algeria, its position within the Alliance of Sahel States makes developments there influential in the structure of regional balances within which Algeria operates. Algerian engagement with Sahelian states therefore no longer rests solely on bilateral relations but requires a broader understanding of the interconnectedness among the three states and the new alliances linking them.

Accordingly, Algeria's position within the geostrategic transformations of the Sahel can be understood as resting on a set of interconnected roles. It is a neighboring state directly affected by security developments, a diplomatic actor with experience in mediation, an African state seeking to preserve its continental strategic depth, and an economic and energy power capable of contributing to regional integration projects. However, the exercise of these roles faces growing challenges resulting from changes in Sahelian alliances, the multiplicity of international powers, the declining effectiveness of certain regional institutions, and tensions in relations with some states in the region.

Therefore, the geostrategic transformation of the Sahel does not require Algeria either to withdraw from the region or to become fully involved in international competition. Rather, it encourages Algeria to develop a flexible approach combining the protection of national security, preservation of the independence of foreign-policy decision-making, strengthening dialogue with neighboring states, developing economic cooperation, and supporting political solutions to crises. The success of such an approach remains linked to Algeria's ability to continuously assess regional transformations and transform its geographical position, diplomatic experience, and economic resources into instruments for constructive engagement with its surrounding environment, thereby protecting its national interests and enhancing its capacity to influence the shaping of its geopolitical environment without departing from the principle of respecting the sovereignty of the states of the region.

Conclusion

The analysis of the geostrategic transformations that have taken place in the Sahelian states in recent years demonstrates that the region is undergoing a profound restructuring of patterns of power, alliances, and regional and international positioning. This has transformed the Sahel from a relatively limited regional security space into an arena where multiple

political, security, economic, and diplomatic interests intersect. Successive political crises, military coups, the growing threat posed by armed groups, changes in relations with external powers, and the establishment of new regional alliances, such as the Alliance of Sahel States and subsequently its confederal structure, have contributed to reshaping the geopolitical environment of West Africa and the Sahel. The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States has also opened new paths for regional cooperation, reflecting an institutional transformation whose implications extend beyond the three countries to affect the broader structures of security and regional integration in the region.

The analysis has shown that these transformations cannot be understood merely as the result of changes in relations between the Sahelian states and certain international powers. Rather, they should be viewed within a broader context involving the redistribution of roles and influence within the African space, the growing multiplicity of international and regional actors, and the decline of some traditional patterns of partnership alongside the emergence of new arrangements and partnerships. In this context, the Sahelian states have become increasingly open to diversifying their external relations, while the interaction between security, sovereignty, development, and natural resources has acquired growing importance in determining the foreign-policy orientations of the states of the region. Accordingly, the geostrategic transformation of the Sahel represents a complex and ongoing process whose ultimate outcomes remain open to multiple trajectories.

With regard to Algeria, the study has demonstrated that its geographical position as a Maghreb state with an African strategic depth and direct borders with Mali and Niger makes it closely connected to the transformations taking place in the Sahelian space. Its border security can therefore not be separated from the political, security, and economic developments occurring in the region. Specialized literature has confirmed that Algeria views stability in the Sahel as closely connected to its regional security and that its policy toward the region is largely based on dialogue, mediation, and the defense of the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, while employing various diplomatic, economic, and security instruments according to the nature of each crisis.

The analysis has also shown that the ongoing transformations in the Sahel are creating a more complex geopolitical environment for Algeria, particularly given the overlapping challenges associated with terrorism, transnational organized crime, irregular migration, the movement of armed groups, and smuggling, in addition to the transformations affecting patterns of regional cooperation. This issue assumes additional importance given the length of Algeria's desert borders and the interconnectedness of security and economic interests between Algeria and its Sahelian neighbors. In this context, the management of the southern borders is not limited to security measures but is also connected to regional diplomacy, local development, economic cooperation, information exchange, and the peaceful settlement of political crises.

Recent developments have demonstrated that Algeria's relations with the Sahelian states are not static but are directly affected by the restructuring of regional alliances and by internal political transformations within these countries. The tensions that characterized Algerian-Malian relations during 2025 reveal the sensitivity of the border environment and the close connection between security issues and regional diplomacy. Meanwhile, during 2026, Algeria undertook diplomatic initiatives toward Niger and Burkina Faso as part of an effort to revitalize relations with the states of the Alliance of Sahel States, while complexities continued to characterize its relations with Mali. These developments confirm that the Sahelian space increasingly requires a flexible diplomatic approach capable of dealing with multiple positions and actors without reducing regional relations to a logic of bilateral alliances.

Accordingly, the repercussions of the geostrategic transformations in the Sahel on Algeria's geopolitical environment are multidimensional. They are security-related because of the growing risks associated with borders, armed groups, and transnational organized crime; diplomatic because of changing patterns of alliance and regional cooperation; economic because regional stability is closely connected to trade, energy, investment, and cross-border projects; and strategic because of the multiplicity of international and regional powers that have become increasingly present in the Sahelian space. From this perspective, the transformation of the Sahel does not constitute merely a source of pressure for Algeria; it also presents a set of issues related to managing its relations with the various states of the region and maintaining channels of dialogue and regional cooperation.

In light of these findings, the study concludes that understanding Algeria's geopolitical environment is no longer possible without taking into account the structural transformations occurring in the Sahel, as the security of Algeria's southern space has become increasingly interconnected with the trajectories of political, security, and economic stability in neighboring states. The multiplicity of actors and alliances also requires a shift from a traditional conception based on addressing individual crises toward a regional perspective that recognizes the interdependence between security, development, diplomacy, and border cooperation. At the same time, continuing divisions within the Sahelian space and the proliferation of regional frameworks pose challenges to the establishment of stable collective mechanisms for security and cooperation.

Thus, the study confirms that the geostrategic transformations in the Sahelian states have become a fundamental factor in reshaping Algeria's geopolitical environment and that addressing them requires an approach based on continuous monitoring of regional transformations, strengthening dialogue mechanisms with neighboring states, and supporting African frameworks capable of bringing different parties together, while maintaining a balanced focus on security, political, economic, and developmental dimensions. This is not a unidirectional process but rather a dynamic geopolitical process that changes according to power balances, alliances, and domestic, regional, and international circumstances.

Consequently, the future of Algerian-Sahelian relations will depend on the ability of the various actors to build channels of cooperation that protect national interests while simultaneously supporting regional stability.

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