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# Envoy Diplomacy in a Fractured Region: Ghana's Appointment of Larry Gbevlo-Lartey as Special Envoy to the Alliance of Sahel States and Its Implications for ECOWAS Security Architecture

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## ABSTRACT

*This article examines Ghana's appointment of Larry Gbevlo-Lartey as Special Envoy to the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) on 21 January 2025, shortly before Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger formally withdrew from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It asks how a nationally appointed diplomatic channel operates within a regional security architecture marked by institutional rupture and continuing interdependence. A qualitative documentary case study draws on eight dated public records concerning the AES, ECOWAS and the envoy's reported activities through 30 March 2026, interpreted alongside regional legal instruments and recent scholarship. Regional Security Complex Theory explains the persistence of cross-border interests despite political separation; norm subsidiarity is examined as a possible, but not automatically established, explanation of Ghana's diplomatic agency. Public records document the envoy's involvement in trade and transit discussions, the reception of a released Nigerian aircraft and crew, and subsequent Ghana–Burkina Faso contact. They do not disclose a comprehensive formal mandate or demonstrate improvements in intelligence sharing, border security or ECOWAS institutional coherence. The article finds evidence of diplomatic adaptation and functional contact, while identifying institutional complementarity and competing national mandates as alternative, untested trajectories. It concludes that transparent coordination, rather than envoy diplomacy alone, is the key policy issue for Ghana and ECOWAS.*

*KEYWORDS: Ghana; Alliance of Sahel States; ECOWAS; envoy diplomacy; regional security; norm subsidiarity; documentary analysis.*

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## 1. Introduction

Security governance within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has become more institutionally contested since the military takeovers in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Persistent violence and governance pressures across the central Sahel coexist with political disagreements over how regional bodies should respond to unconstitutional changes of government. The dispute does not simply concern whether sanctions should be imposed: it also concerns whether countries facing shared security and economic risks can maintain functional cooperation when they disagree about political legitimacy (Aina et al., 2026; Lenshie, 2025).

President John Dramani Mahama appointed retired Ghanaian security official Larry Gbevlo-Lartey as Special Envoy to the Alliance of Sahelian States on 21 January 2025 (Yire, 2025a). The institutional designation matters. The appointment was not to an ECOWAS office; it created a Ghanaian representative to engage with governments participating in the AES. The appointment preceded the effective withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from ECOWAS on 29 January 2025 (Economic Community of West African

States [ECOWAS], 2025). Ghana thus established this channel at a moment of impending institutional separation rather than only after the withdrawal had occurred.

The AES had emerged earlier. Its founding charter was announced in September 2023, and a confederal treaty was adopted in July 2024 (Presidency of Burkina Faso, 2023, 2024). Formal ECOWAS withdrawal followed in January 2025. Even then, the ECOWAS Commission called for continued recognition of travel documents and the maintenance of certain movement and trade arrangements pending further negotiations (ECOWAS, 2025). Institutional separation therefore did not erase the practical relationships connecting coastal and Sahelian states. An account describing ECOWAS either as fully intact or as wholly dissolved would miss this coexistence of rupture and continuity.

Ghana's interest is not merely abstract. Its northern frontier meets Burkina Faso, and a qualitative border study by Ansong and Hlovor (2026) identifies vulnerabilities involving limited resources, weak interagency coordination, corruption and insufficient engagement with border communities. Importantly, those authors describe the border environment examined as relatively stable while identifying threats arising from wider Sahelian insecurity. This distinction avoids inferring that violent incidents in neighbouring countries automatically establish identical conditions inside Ghana. At the same time, the Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority (GPHA, 2025) has documented the economic importance of keeping transport and transit communication open with Burkina Faso.

The article addresses two questions. First, what is publicly documented about the appointment and practical activities of Ghana's Special Envoy to the AES? Second, what can those records legitimately reveal about the prospects for complementarity or institutional tension between nationally directed engagement and ECOWAS collective security governance? These questions shift attention from assumed diplomatic effectiveness to observable actions, their institutional setting and the limits of available evidence.

The argument is deliberately bounded. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) helps explain why diplomatic contact may persist across an institutional divide: neighbouring states' security concerns remain interconnected (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Norm subsidiarity directs attention to the possible rule-making agency of regional actors, but the existence of an envoy is not itself evidence of a new rule or normative order (Acharya, 2011). The records reviewed here support a finding of continuing contact through a distinct Ghanaian office; whether this contact strengthens or weakens ECOWAS authority remains unresolved. Following a critical literature review, the article explains its documentary method, reconstructs the institutional chronology, assesses the envoy's engagements and develops carefully qualified policy implications.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Envoy diplomacy, representation and informal statecraft

Special-envoy appointments can be viewed as instruments of concentrated political representation rather than as a distinct category of treaty-based security authority. Their potential value lies in allowing a government to assign responsibility for sustained contact over a particular region, issue or set of interlocutors. Such arrangements may operate alongside foreign ministries, embassies and multilateral procedures; their existence does not necessarily imply that those institutions have become ineffective. The analytical question is therefore not whether an envoy is inherently more flexible than ordinary diplomacy, but what responsibilities the office actually holds and how it interfaces with existing institutions.

The literature on West African peace and security provides a relevant institutional backdrop. Francis (2009) examined the role and limitations of ECOWAS in regional peacekeeping, emphasizing the political and practical difficulties faced by regional organizations. That analysis concerns collective security and cannot be treated as evidence about Gbevlo-Lartey's personal contacts, mandate or achievements. Adebajo (2002) likewise provides a historical account of West African peacebuilding, but episodes in Liberia and Sierra Leone should not be used to infer the operations of an envoy appointed more than two decades later. These foundational studies help specify the regional governance problem; contemporary, dated case evidence is required to explain the Ghanaian initiative.

For the present case, the distinction between authorization, diplomatic practice and diplomatic effect is decisive. An appointment notice can establish who was designated and for what publicly described office. A report of a ministerial meeting can establish that contact occurred. Neither, on its own, proves that confidential negotiations were authorized, intelligence shared, violence prevented or regional institutional authority altered. The analysis uses this sequence designation, observable conduct and demonstrated effects to prevent plausible expectations from being misreported as findings.

### 2.2 ECOWAS security governance: institutional obligations and political contestation

ECOWAS has a formal institutional basis for addressing insecurity. The 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security provides a framework for collective conflict-prevention and security action (ECOWAS, 1999). The 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance adds constitutional-convergence commitments. Article 1 specifically requires accession to power through free, fair and transparent elections and expresses zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means (ECOWAS, 2001). These provisions explain why the military coups posed a normative challenge to the organization; they do not imply that diplomacy with transitional authorities was necessarily prohibited or impossible.

Historical descriptions of ECOWAS as a robust regional security actor should be read alongside assessments of its uneven performance. Francis (2009) and Adebajo (2002) examined achievements and constraints in earlier conflict settings. More recent work is less settled about the consequences of the AES rupture. Lenshie (2025) argues that punitive ECOWAS measures intensified antagonism and geopolitical realignment, whereas Aina et al. (2026) analyze the broader possibilities of disintegration and reintegration. Asante and Bembir (2025) likewise investigate whether the Sahelian withdrawal consolidates or undermines security. These studies identify genuine institutional tensions, but their different conceptual emphases caution against a one-directional conclusion that every national diplomatic initiative necessarily erodes ECOWAS.

The distinction between authority and activity is also central. A regional organization can encounter contested legitimacy without becoming institutionally inactive. Following the three states' formal exit, ECOWAS publicly recommended maintaining certain transitional travel and trade arrangements (ECOWAS, 2025). This is evidence of ongoing engagement efforts, although not proof that the political rupture had been resolved. Ghana's envoy diplomacy must be evaluated against this continued institutional activity, rather than against an assumed vacuum in which ECOWAS had ceased to function.

### 2.3 The Sahel–coastal security interface and Ghana's border vulnerabilities

Sahelian insecurity cannot be treated as geographically isolated from neighbouring coastal states, although exposure differs across borders and over time. RSCT provides an explanation for the clustering of threats and responses within adjacent territories (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Ayoob (1995) adds that concerns about internal political authority and state formation interact with external security relations. Together, these perspectives suggest why even states disagreeing about political norms may have practical reasons to maintain cross-border contact.

The Ghana-specific evidence is more discriminating than general claims that instability has already spread uniformly southward. Drawing on interviews and focus groups in Ghana's Upper East Region, Ansong and Hlovor (2026) identify shortcomings in border governance, including resource and technology constraints and gaps in interagency and community cooperation. They characterize the situation examined as relatively stable despite regional risks. Their findings support a case for preventive coordination with Burkina Faso; they do not establish that Ghana's northern frontier has experienced the same level of militant violence as central Sahelian territories, or that an envoy has remedied the weaknesses identified.

The geographical and economic dimensions also interact. A documented March 2025 meeting concerned Burkina Faso's use of Ghanaian ports and transit facilities (GPHA, 2025). It therefore provides a concrete reason for maintaining relations beyond security rhetoric. The case is better approached as an intersection of diplomatic, transport and potential security interests, rather than as a narrowly intelligence-led operation whose powers are not publicly known.

### 2.4 Regional Security Complex Theory: explanatory value and limits

For Buzan and Wæver (2003), regional security relations are structured by geographically patterned interdependence and configurations of amity and enmity. This makes RSCT a suitable lens for analyzing how threats, economic corridors and political alignments continue to intersect despite disputes about regional membership. It helps explain the persistence of incentives for diplomatic communication following the ECOWAS–AES rupture, rather than proving that any particular Ghanaian diplomatic intervention has been effective.

A recent RSCT application by Bello Umar (2026) examines ECOWAS and the Sahel security order through comparative historical episodes and discusses the tension between regional threats, institutional capacity and external involvement. This provides an important point of comparison with the present article. Umar's analysis addresses the wider regional configuration; the Ghanaian case examined here focuses on the smaller and more concrete question of what a named envoy's publicly documented conduct reveals about a single member state's adaptation. The study does not claim to originate the application of RSCT to the

Sahel or to establish a new general type of regional security complex.
RSCT has a clear evidentiary limit in this context. The existence of transboundary security interdependence explains a possible incentive for engagement; it does not tell us whether Accra consulted the ECOWAS Commission, whether the AES governments trusted the envoy, or whether any security outcome followed. Those issues require direct institutional records or interviews, which the available corpus does not provide.

### 2.5 Norm subsidiarity and alternative explanations of Ghanaian agency

Acharya (2011) defines norm subsidiarity in terms of locally generated rules intended to preserve autonomy against dominance, neglect or abuse. The mechanism concerns normative agency, not simply the use of a bilateral diplomatic channel. A claim that Ghana's envoy appointment constitutes norm subsidiarity would therefore require evidence of an identifiable rule, proposed change in normative practice, or effort to redefine collective expectations not merely evidence that Ghana contacted AES representatives.
Other explanations deserve equal consideration. A functionalist interpretation would understand the appointment as a practical response to continuing transport and diplomatic needs. An institutional-complementarity reading would emphasize the possibility that Ghana's contact with AES states supports the residual relationships ECOWAS itself sought to preserve. A sovereignty-focused interpretation would treat the AES rupture as part of a wider rejection of prevailing regional political authority; Haider (2026), for example, frames the AES's political strategy in terms of sovereigntism and counter-hegemonic statecraft. None of these accounts can be accepted automatically for Ghana without evidence about the appointment's purposes and instructions.
Accordingly, norm subsidiarity is retained as a sensitizing concept and a testable possibility, not reported as an established result. Evidence of formal rule advocacy, coordinated policy proposals or explicit arguments about legitimate regional authority would strengthen that interpretation. Evidence limited to diplomatic meetings and trade arrangements supports the more modest label of adaptive state diplomacy.

### 2.6 Synthesis, gap and contribution

Recent research addresses coups, ECOWAS sanctions, regional fragmentation, the AES and Ghana's border vulnerabilities (Aina et al., 2026; Ansong & Hlovor, 2026; Asante & Bembir, 2025; Bello Umar, 2026; Lenshie, 2025). What it does not by itself establish is the mandate, observed conduct or regional institutional consequences of Ghana's January 2025 special-envoy appointment. The specific gap is therefore event-level and evidentiary, rather than a general absence of academic discussion about West African regional security.
This article contributes a traceable chronology of the appointment and selected engagements, an evidence-sensitive account distinguishing mandate from activity and outcome, and a set of competing institutional explanations that can guide further research. It does not claim to demonstrate that the envoy has already enhanced security or fractured ECOWAS. Its analytical value rests on making the difference between these propositions explicit.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design and Case Boundaries

This article employs a qualitative, interpretative single-case design based on documentary analysis. The case is Ghana's decision to appoint Larry Gbevlo-Lartey as Special Envoy to the Alliance of Sahelian States (AES) and the publicly documented exercise of that role. Document analysis is appropriate for reconstructing official decisions, institutional sequences and recorded diplomatic encounters when direct access to closed negotiations is unavailable (Bowen, 2009). The study does not evaluate a security intervention experimentally, measure changes in violence attributable to the envoy or claim access to confidential diplomatic communications. Its central question is how the initiative can be interpreted in relation to ECOWAS's regional-security institutions after the emergence of the AES. The contextual period begins with the 2020 Sahel coup wave and ends with the latest event included in the reviewed case corpus, dated 30 March 2026. The documentary search and source checks used in this study were completed on 15 October 2026. The 1999 and 2001 ECOWAS protocols are used as earlier normative benchmarks, not events within the case period.

### 3.2 Documentary Corpus and Source Selection

Eight dated, event-specific public records constitute the core case corpus. They comprise two reports on AES formation and confederation issued by the Presidency of Burkina Faso (2023, 2024); two appointment

reports issued by the Ghana News Agency and Burkina Faso's government information service (Government of Burkina Faso, 2025; Yire, 2025a); ECOWAS's 29 January 2025 withdrawal statement (ECOWAS, 2025); Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority's March 2025 account of a Burkinabé delegation (GPHA, 2025); Ghana News Agency's December 2025 report concerning the released Nigerian aircraft and crew (Yire, 2025b); and Burkina Faso's Ministry of Territorial Administration and Mobility account of a 30 March 2026 ministerial meeting. Separately, the ECOWAS conflict-prevention mechanism (1999), its Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance (2001), and contextual policy scholarship inform the interpretation of institutional obligations. Regional Security Complex Theory and norm subsidiarity supply conceptual lenses, not independent proof of the envoy's activities (Acharya, 2011; Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

### 3.3 Identification, Eligibility and Appraisal

The corpus was assembled by targeted searches and direct retrieval from identifiable institutional websites and the Ghana News Agency, using combinations of the envoy's name, 'Alliance of Sahel States', 'ECOWAS withdrawal', 'Ghana Burkina Faso trade', and relevant event dates. Source identification was purposive rather than exhaustive: the objective was to establish the chronology and independently attributable activities, not to estimate the frequency of every diplomatic contact. To be included in the core corpus, a record had to (a) directly address the appointment, an institutional turning point or a named engagement relevant to the case; (b) have an identifiable issuing organization or byline and date; and (c) be accessible for direct inspection. Institutional communications were preferred for claims about their issuing bodies' decisions; signed or attributable news reporting was used for publicly described events. Duplicate accounts, undated assertions, opinion pieces without identifiable underlying events and claims available only through indirect repetition were not coded as event evidence. The eight records and their provenance are enumerated in the accompanying source matrix. French-language records were read for factual content and interpreted in English, without treating editorial phrasing as evidence of an undisclosed mandate.

### 3.4 Interpretative Procedure and Analytical Categories

Each core record was entered into a chronological evidence matrix recording its issuer, date, document type, reported event, relevance and evidentiary limit. The records were examined using a directed qualitative coding procedure with five categories: (1) institutional chronology and membership status; (2) documented office designation or mandate; (3) observed diplomatic activities and interlocutors; (4) the interface between national diplomacy and ECOWAS institutions; and (5) asserted policy or security outcomes. Within each category, statements were assigned one of three evidentiary statuses: directly documented (an attributable report or instrument expressly records the matter); reasonable inference (a theoretically plausible interpretation of documented activity); or unsubstantiated by the corpus (no directly inspectable support). The chronology was cross-checked across independent or differently situated issuers where practicable, including Ghanaian, Burkinabé and ECOWAS records. Competing readings were then assessed: that envoy engagement can preserve contact across the ECOWAS–AES divide, and that it might generate coordination problems if national messages conflict with collective positions. Neither explanation was treated as empirically established without evidence of mandates, inter-institutional coordination or attributable results.

### 3.5 Trustworthiness, Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Credibility is strengthened by a source-level audit trail, prioritization of attributable public records, explicit dating of events and deliberate separation of evidence from inference. Official communications establish what an institution publicly announced, but they do not independently validate its claims about success, private intentions or downstream effects; media accounts likewise provide partial, event-specific visibility. The absence of the envoy's complete terms of reference, internal correspondence, meeting minutes and interviews prevents reliable assessment of intelligence-sharing powers, negotiating agency, intergovernmental coordination and causal changes in security conditions. Publicly reported meetings should not be assumed representative of the office's entire workload, and the corpus is not an exhaustive review of all regional publications. The study therefore offers a bounded interpretative assessment, not a causal evaluation or comprehensive process-tracing account. It uses publicly available documents and does not involve recruited human participants or confidential personal data. A fuller appraisal would require permissioned access to official records and interviews with relevant Ghanaian, ECOWAS and AES officials.

## 4. The Fractured Regional Context (2020–2026)

### 4.1 Coups and competing interpretations of regional legitimacy

The series of coups in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger between 2020 and 2023 brought ECOWAS's constitutional-governance commitments into direct tension with the claims of Sahelian military authorities. Wilén (2024) places Africa's recent coups within longer patterns of civil–military imbalance, cautioning against treating every takeover as a mechanically contagious event. In the ECOWAS context, the 2001 Supplementary Protocol's constitutional-convergence principles established a clear formal basis for opposing unconstitutional accessions to power (ECOWAS, 2001). The practical challenge was how to uphold those principles while remaining able to negotiate on cross-border threats and civilian livelihoods.

After the 2023 Niger coup, the use and threatened extension of coercive measures generated disagreement about their consequences. Obasi (2023) urged recalibration of sanctions in view of political and social costs. Lenshie (2025) goes further by associating ECOWAS interventions with the political environment in which the AES consolidated. These are analytically important interpretations, not settled causal findings of the present case. The evidence here supports the more limited conclusion that disagreement over appropriate crisis responses formed part of the context for Ghana's later appointment.

### 4.2 AES formation, confederation and ECOWAS withdrawal

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger announced the establishment of the AES under the Liptako-Gourma Charter on 16 September 2023, initially emphasizing collective defence and mutual assistance (Presidency of Burkina Faso, 2023). On 6 July 2024, their leaders adopted the treaty establishing a confederation, as recorded by the Presidency of Burkina Faso on 7 July 2024 (Presidency of Burkina Faso, 2024). The distinction is chronological and substantive: alliance formation preceded the confederal agreement, and both preceded formal withdrawal from ECOWAS.

ECOWAS confirmed that the three countries' withdrawal became effective on 29 January 2025 (ECOWAS, 2025). Its statement also called for the continued recognition of specified documentation and mobility and commercial arrangements until subsequent arrangements could be settled. Hence the event altered formal membership, but did not abolish every basis for practical cooperation. Aina et al. (2026) and Asante and Bembir (2025) identify wider risks for integration; the ECOWAS statement nevertheless provides direct evidence of institutional attempts to preserve some connectivity.

### 4.3 The continuing relevance of ECOWAS legal instruments

The 1999 regional security mechanism and the 2001 Supplementary Protocol remain necessary benchmarks for understanding the rupture, even though the extent of their application to former members after withdrawal raises distinct legal questions (ECOWAS, 1999, 2001). The 2001 Protocol's Article 1 addresses constitutional accessions to power and establishes the political norm implicated by the military takeovers. The 1999 mechanism, by contrast, creates a framework for collective response to conflicts and threats. Treating those instruments as interchangeable obscures the dilemma confronting ECOWAS: how to defend constitutional norms without foreclosing communication on shared practical and security concerns.

Neither instrument establishes that Ghana's envoy acted on ECOWAS authority. Conversely, no document in the reviewed corpus demonstrates that Ghana's appointment violated a specified ECOWAS obligation. The legally and politically relevant question is whether Ghana's national engagement was coordinated with regional positions; this cannot be answered conclusively from the public record.

### 4.4 Ghana's exposure and diplomatic incentives

Ghana's proximity to Burkina Faso makes regional developments relevant to border management, mobility and trade, but proximity should not be conflated with measured insecurity. Ansong and Hlovor (2026) identify deficiencies in coordination, resources and local participation along the Ghana–Burkina Faso border. Their findings establish concrete governance concerns and support preventive cooperation. They do not demonstrate that the envoy was appointed because of a specific intelligence assessment, or that border risk subsequently declined.

The March 2025 Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority report documents discussions on port usage, transit and bilateral trade with a Burkinabé delegation led by the envoy (GPHA, 2025). This provides an observable diplomatic incentive independent of any hypothesized intelligence duties. Ghana's initiative therefore sits at the intersection of regional political division, practical connectivity and potential security concerns rather than within a single, demonstrably security-only mandate.

### 4.5 Institutional overlap, not institutional disappearance

The emerging regional configuration is best described as institutional divergence accompanied by continuing functional interdependence. The AES and ECOWAS represented competing political alignments, but transport, mobility and security interests continued to cross their membership boundary (ECOWAS, 2025; GPHA, 2025). This finding is consistent with RSCT's emphasis on proximate interdependence, although the theory alone cannot determine the impact of Ghana's response (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

This contextual distinction matters for the case that follows. If Ghana's envoy simply maintained an otherwise unavailable bilateral channel, the institutional effect could be complementary. If the office negotiated positions inconsistent with collective undertakings, coordination difficulties might follow. Both are plausible, but their empirical status depends on records of mandate and cooperation that are not publicly available in the present corpus.

## 5. Ghana's Special Envoy to the AES: Documentary Case Analysis

### 5.1 Appointment and professional background

The Ghana News Agency's 21 January 2025 report records Gbevlo-Lartey's appointment as Special Envoy to the Alliance of Sahelian States (Yire, 2025a). A Burkinabé government account confirms the appointment and refers to his previous position as Ghana's national security coordinator (Government of Burkina Faso, 2025). His security background is therefore documented. Whether it explains why the President selected him is an interpretation, not a directly stated presidential rationale in the reviewed records.

Professional experience might facilitate access to military-led governments, but neither a biography nor an appointment notice establishes delegated intelligence powers. The analytical starting point is the public designation, followed by documented action; a fuller mandate would require the appointment instrument or formal terms of reference.

### 5.2 Documented engagements after appointment

In March 2025, the Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority reported that a delegation from Burkina Faso, including senior ministers and its ambassador to Ghana, met GPHA officials under Gbevlo-Lartey's leadership. The reported agenda concerned port and transit arrangements and broader commercial cooperation (GPHA, 2025). The event establishes an official bilateral engagement and an active convening or accompanying role for the envoy. It does not quantify any resulting increase in trade or prove improved border security.

In December 2025, the Ghana News Agency reported that the envoy received a Nigerian aircraft and crew released by Burkina Faso following diplomatic engagement (Yire, 2025b). This establishes a visible role in the reception or handover. The same record is not sufficient to conclude that Gbevlo-Lartey personally conducted the negotiations that achieved the release, or that the episode represents a general mandate to resolve interstate disputes.

On 30 March 2026, Burkina Faso's Ministry of Territorial Administration and Mobility documented a meeting in Accra between minister Emile Zerbo and the envoy, with bilateral relations, transport and transit among the matters discussed (Burkina Faso Ministry of Territorial Administration and Mobility, 2026). Taken together, these episodes show continuing contact with Burkinabé officials. Because the sources are episodic and disproportionately concern Burkina Faso, they do not permit an inference that the envoy had equivalent access or produced equivalent results in Mali and Niger.

### 5.3 The public mandate: what can and cannot be stated

The reported appointment directly establishes the creation of a Ghanaian special-envoy position directed to the AES (Yire, 2025a). Subsequent records establish selected visible activities. No reviewed public instrument reproduces a comprehensive legal mandate, specifies intelligence-sharing authority, identifies formal reporting arrangements with ECOWAS, or assigns a standing humanitarian coordination function. Assertions about those powers must therefore be removed or clearly described as unverified possibilities.

This distinction corrects a common interpretative error: assuming that the full range of functions a special envoy could perform must be among the activities this envoy was authorized to undertake. The official and news records offer a bounded picture of diplomatic participation; they are not a proxy for the entire content of private diplomacy. An absence of documented intelligence meetings does not prove that none occurred, but neither can it support a positive claim that they did.

### 5.4 Competing interpretations of the observed pattern

One reading is functional adaptation: the government of Ghana created an identifiable contact point able to engage senior representatives of an AES state during political estrangement from ECOWAS. The March 2025 port meeting and March 2026 ministerial discussion support the existence of that channel. A second, more ambitious reading is mediation: the aircraft and crew reception suggests participation in a diplomatically sensitive process, although the extent of the envoy's negotiating role remains unverified (Yire, 2025b).

A third reading is institutional competition: independent contacts with AES authorities might weaken ECOWAS coordination if they carried commitments inconsistent with collectively agreed positions. But this is a risk proposition. The public records establish neither such contradictory commitments nor a dispute between Ghana and ECOWAS about the envoy's conduct. Indeed, ECOWAS's own transitional statement envisaged maintaining forms of practical cooperation with the departed states (ECOWAS, 2025), providing a counterexample to the assumption that continued contact necessarily contradicts ECOWAS policy.

### 5.5 Interim finding

The findings at this stage are limited but meaningful. Appointment, public diplomatic engagement and functional economic discussion are documented. The envoy's full instructions, actual intelligence responsibilities, private negotiations, level of institutional coordination and effects on security outcomes are not. Accordingly, the case demonstrates observable national diplomatic adaptation amid regional fragmentation, not a proven increase in security or a demonstrated weakening of ECOWAS.

## 6. Discussion: Diplomatic Adaptation and Regional Security Governance

### 6.1 Ghana: access and flexibility without a demonstrated security effect

For Ghana, the strongest observed advantage is an operating channel through which senior Burkinabé representatives engaged on concrete bilateral issues (Burkina Faso Ministry of Territorial Administration and Mobility, 2026; GPHA, 2025). Such contact can be useful when transport corridors and border governance require cooperation, especially given the vulnerabilities identified by Ansong and Hlovor (2026). The inference, however, should remain proportionate: meetings show an opportunity for communication, not a measured improvement in state capacity, intelligence sharing or counterterrorism outcomes.

An envoy might reduce the transaction costs of arranging talks with particular interlocutors; alternatively, reliance on one individual could concentrate information and make arrangements less durable. Neither effect has been measured here. The practical policy issue is therefore to retain institutional records and clear departmental responsibilities so that the potential value of direct engagement does not depend on a single officeholder.

### 6.2 ECOWAS: conditions for complementarity or conflict

The ECOWAS consequence is not determined by the mere fact that Ghana appointed an envoy. A compatible national channel could exchange information, facilitate technical discussions and help keep channels open without displacing collective processes. Such complementarity would be more likely where the envoy's remit is explicit, reporting arrangements are clear and matters of collective concern are communicated through established regional institutions. ECOWAS's willingness to preserve transitional mobility and trade arrangements provides institutional context for this possibility (ECOWAS, 2025).

A competing-mandates pathway is also plausible. Where a member state makes unilateral commitments on issues covered by agreed regional positions, institutional trust and collective negotiating leverage could suffer. Recent scholarship places considerable weight on disagreement over sanctions, legitimacy and security priorities in the ECOWAS–AES rupture (Aina et al., 2026; Lenshie, 2025). Yet the documents assembled for this case do not show that Ghana made such conflicting commitments. The responsible conclusion is a conditional coordination risk rather than a finding that the envoy has fragmented ECOWAS.

### 6.3 AES governments: practical contact and unresolved perceptions

From the perspective of AES governments, the documented port and ministerial contacts show that engagement with a remaining ECOWAS state was possible after withdrawal. The March 2025 report is especially significant because Burkinabé ministers participated in formal discussions about Ghana's transport infrastructure (GPHA, 2025). This provides direct evidence of functional diplomacy across an institutional boundary.

However, the evidence does not disclose the perceptions of the AES leadership as a whole. It would be

speculative to claim that Mali and Niger trust the envoy, that Burkina Faso considers him an ECOWAS intermediary, or that the envoy's work has conferred particular political legitimacy on military administrations. Scholarship emphasizing sovereigntist political narratives (Haider, 2026) supplies context for why trust and representation could be sensitive, but those concerns require investigation with actual decision-makers rather than attribution through theory alone.

### 6.4 Analytical evidence test

The case supports a tiered assessment: a fact is 'documented' when directly reported in a dated attributable public record, an interpretation is 'plausible' when consistent with theory and observed events, and an effect is 'not established' when the reviewed record contains no direct evidence that it occurred. The distinction applies equally to affirmative and critical claims. It prevents the article from treating institutional complementarity as automatic, while also preventing an unsupported presumption of institutional erosion.

**Table 1**

*Evidence status of principal claims*

| Claim | Status | Documentary basis or limitation |
|---|---|---|
| Appointment as Ghanaian envoy to the AES in January 2025 | Documented | Ghana News Agency and Burkinabé government appointment reports. |
| Ministerial trade/transit engagement and aircraft/crew reception | Documented | GPHA (March 2025), GNA (December 2025), and Burkina Faso ministry (March 2026). |
| A standing intelligence mandate or direct reduction in insecurity | Not established | No reviewed mandate, intelligence records or attributable outcome evidence. |
| Envoy reinforces or undermines ECOWAS coherence | Alternative interpretations | No examined ECOWAS–Ghana coordination minutes or evidence of contradictory commitments. |

*Note.* Status reflects the eight-item core corpus described in Section 3 and does not imply that unobserved activities could not have occurred.

### 6.5 Theoretical implications: interdependence is not norm creation

The two frameworks help answer different questions. RSCT explains why Ghana and AES states retain shared interests after legal membership changes: physical proximity, security exposure and infrastructure corridors cannot be detached by withdrawal from ECOWAS (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Acharya's (2011) norm subsidiarity directs attention to whether regional actors devise rules to protect their autonomy from larger institutional pressures. The first lens fits the observed continuation of contact; the second remains a possible explanation requiring evidence of norm entrepreneurship rather than an envoy appointment alone. The case consequently offers a modest conceptual contribution. It illustrates how a state may use a dedicated diplomatic office to manage practical relations across a regional membership boundary. That observation refines discussion of institutional fragmentation by separating organizational departure from the persistence of functional relationships. Unlike Bello Umar's (2026) broader examination of regional security complexes, this article does not propose to revise the RSCT typology; its value lies in exposing the evidentiary requirements for assessing small-scale diplomatic adaptation within that wider system.

### 6.6 Rival explanations and conditions for future evaluation

At least three explanations of the envoy initiative remain compatible with the public record. A pragmatic explanation prioritizes trade, transit and routine representation. A security-interdependence explanation places regional threats and border governance at the centre of the government's interests. A normative explanation treats the initiative as part of an effort to reconfigure who may speak for regional security. Documentary evidence about the office's terms of reference and internal decision process would help distinguish these motives.

Similarly, consequences require outcome-specific evidence. Claims about improved trust would need comparative accounts from involved interlocutors or traceable cooperative agreements. Claims about reduced cross-border insecurity would need credible security data and a causal strategy that isolates the envoy's role from other interventions. Claims about ECOWAS erosion would require evidence of contradictory undertakings, failed coordination or institutional decisions attributable to Ghana's bilateral channel. Without those materials, a policy-facing discussion should emphasize safeguards and plausible

scenarios rather than accomplished results.

## 7. Conclusion and Policy Implications

### 7.1 Principal findings

This documentary study establishes three linked findings. First, Ghana appointed Larry Gbevlo-Lartey as its Special Envoy to the AES shortly before the formal ECOWAS withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger; that chronology is central to the case (ECOWAS, 2025; Yire, 2025a). Second, the public record documents the envoy's involvement in specific trade, transport and diplomatic engagements, especially with Burkina Faso (Burkina Faso Ministry of Territorial Administration and Mobility, 2026; GPHA, 2025; Yire, 2025b). Third, neither the appointment notice nor subsequent event reports establish a complete mandate, measurable security outcomes or an actual change in ECOWAS institutional coherence.

The broader conclusion is therefore conditional. Envoy diplomacy can operate alongside formal regional arrangements when political integration is strained, but its institutional effects depend on mandate, coordination and the content of the engagement. This is evidence of diplomatic adaptation across a fractured political boundary, not proof of a wholly new regional security order. The study also rejects the opposite assumption that such activity must be institutionally corrosive: ECOWAS itself sought to preserve functional links after withdrawal.

### 7.2 Theoretical and policy contribution

RSCT clarifies why practical regional interdependence survives formal membership change. The Ghanaian case makes that insight tangible in reported transport and intergovernmental encounters. Norm subsidiarity helps formulate a further research question about the autonomy-seeking purposes of nationally led engagement, but a new regional norm is not demonstrated by the available documents (Acharya, 2011; Buzan & Wæver, 2003). The article's distinctive contribution is to specify how evidence about a named diplomatic office can be connected to but must not be conflated with claims about institutional transformation.

### 7.3 Recommendations for Ghana

Ghana should clarify the envoy's public terms of reference insofar as security and diplomatic sensitivities permit. A statement of thematic responsibilities and departmental reporting channels would reduce ambiguity while protecting confidential negotiations. The government should also preserve records of formal meetings, identify which matters require consultation with established foreign-policy and security institutions, and publish periodic non-sensitive summaries of diplomatic engagements. These recommendations address governance risks revealed by the evidence gap; they are not premised on a proven breakdown of existing coordination.

Where talks concern shared regional obligations or cross-border arrangements, Ghana should establish explicit procedures for consulting relevant ECOWAS bodies and domestic agencies. Border-management cooperation should also involve specialized technical institutions and border communities rather than depend wholly on high-level diplomatic contacts, consistent with the weaknesses identified by Ansong and Hlovor (2026).

### 7.4 Recommendations for ECOWAS and AES interlocutors

ECOWAS should consider a transparent interface through which member states can share non-confidential information about bilateral engagement with non-member neighbours on issues of regional significance. Such an arrangement could support collective awareness without claiming exclusive control over all national diplomacy. The organization's existing effort to maintain transitional travel and trade relationships offers a practical starting point (ECOWAS, 2025). Political dialogue should be distinguished from endorsement of unconstitutional seizures of power; the constitutional principles in Article 1 of the 2001 Protocol remain a relevant benchmark.

AES governments and ECOWAS members should identify narrow areas where technical cooperation remains possible despite political disagreement, including safe transit, border coordination and civilian mobility. Such engagement would not require a claim that the wider constitutional and institutional dispute has been resolved. Structured communication can be assessed on its own terms rather than used as a substitute for negotiation over the underlying regional political divide.

### 7.5 Limitations and directions for further research

The study uses a purposively selected public documentary corpus rather than a comprehensive archive or interviews with policymakers. Its records are strongest on appointment dates and public engagements and weakest on internal instructions, private negotiations and measurable results. Subsequent research could combine interviews in Accra, ECOWAS institutions and AES capitals with official meeting records to determine whether the envoy's activity is coordinated with collective positions. Comparative cases from other regional organizations could then test whether similar nationally led channels systematically complement or compete with multilateral diplomatic arrangements.

The defensible closing proposition is not that envoy diplomacy has already secured Ghana or weakened ECOWAS. It is that changing institutional membership has not abolished the need for functional diplomatic contact, and that the quality of coordination will determine whether such contacts strengthen or strain regional governance.

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