

The Puppet Corridor and the Sahel Fault-Line: From Predictive Diagnosis to a Blueprint for Sovereign Futures

“The lions were never toothless.

They were trained not to bite the hand that built the zoo.”

Abstract

This paper argues that recent events in the Sahel and Central Africa confirm, with a disturbing level of precision, a psychopolitical model of neo-colonial control first articulated in *Pan-Africanism Reimagined* and later formalised as Puppet Syndrome, the Imperial Selection Model (ISM), and the Puppet Diagnostic Index (PDI). While mainstream analysis still explains African instability in terms of “weak institutions,” “jihadist threats,” or “corruption,” we show that a more accurate predictor of outcomes is the psychological and relational profile of leadership and the corridors through which empire moves: mineral, diplomatic, military, and epistemic.

We contrast two concurrent trajectories. In the Sahel, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have expelled French troops, terminated key defence agreements, created the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), and formally withdrawn from ECOWAS, explicitly naming sovereignty and anti-imperial realignment as their horizon. In Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) under a high-TSFI (Trait–System Fit Index) leadership has moved in the opposite direction: accelerated IMF re-embedding, a tripled currency devaluation, and, most recently, a U.S.–DRC Strategic Partnership Agreement that reorganises critical mineral governance, infrastructure, and even domestic law in ways that structurally privilege foreign interests, including through the Lobito Corridor.

We argue that (1) these developments validate earlier predictions about puppet leadership and imperial corridors with unusual precision, and (2) the Sahel’s current rupture represents exactly the “early awakening” zone that *Pan-Africanism Reimagined* anticipated would move before Central and Southern Africa. On this basis we propose a liberation blueprint organised around five axes: psychopolitical screening of leaders (PDI), re-engineering of regional blocs, sovereign economic and infrastructure design, de-colonial security doctrine, and epistemic reconstruction.

Crucially, we specify clear falsification criteria and safeguards against pathologising individuals. Our claim is not that specific persons are inherently disordered, but that certain policy profiles and alliance patterns match trait-clusters (Dark Tetrad–like) that systematically correlate with neglect, legislative self-sabotage, and sovereignty erosion. If regimes that institutionalise indifference to their populations do *not* produce higher neglect-related excess mortality and structural dispossession, then our framework is wrong. We therefore present this work not as prophecy, but as a testable, uncomfortable, and urgently needed diagnostic tool.

1. Introduction – From “Toothless Lions” to Engineered Zoos

For decades, African elites, academic observers, and ordinary citizens have repeated a bitter metaphor: “*Our leaders are toothless lions.*” The image is powerful, but incomplete. The problem was never that African lions lacked teeth. The problem is that **they were trained not to bite the hand that built the zoo.**

The “zoo” is the post-Berlin African state: a cartographic enclosure whose walls are maintained by debt regimes, military agreements, extractive corridors, and diplomatic choreography. The “training” is the psychopolitical grooming of leadership: scholarships, think-tank circuits, security partnerships, international courtship, and media curation that reward rulers who perform sovereignty while ensuring that strategic decisions never threaten imperial supply chains.

Two recent trajectories clarify this dynamic:

- In the **Sahel**, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have expelled French troops, terminated Operation Barkhane’s framework, and formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). They have simultaneously withdrawn from ECOWAS, openly accusing it of acting as an instrument of external pressure and sanction rather than a vector of regional sovereignty.
- In the **DRC**, a leadership previously assessed by the Imperial Selection Model (ISM) as high-suitability for imperial backing has, within a seven-year window, delivered precisely the outcomes predicted: IMF reinsertion, currency devaluation of more than ×3, excess mortality in the modelled range, and now a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the United States that grants preferential access to critical minerals and commits Congo to amending its own tax and mining laws to create a privileged regime for foreign actors, closely tied to the Lobito Corridor infrastructure.

The contrast is not between “Islamist threats” and “jungle politics,” but between **two different responses to the same long corridor of control**. Sahel states are attempting to dynamite the corridor from one side; puppetised Central African regimes are reinforcing it with new plaster and fresh paint.

This paper has three aims:

1. To show that these divergent trajectories **validate** core predictions of Puppet Syndrome, the ISM and PDI with a level of specificity that is statistically remarkable.
2. To argue that the **Sahel rupture** corresponds to the “early awakening zone” predicted in *Pan-Africanism Reimagined*, where peripheral yet strategically crucial states would break ranks before larger, more entangled economies.
3. To propose a **blueprint for liberation** that uses the Sahel case as a prototype rather than an exception, while clearly stating how our framework can be falsified and

mis-use can be prevented.

We treat culture as infrastructure, psychology as a strategic variable, and corridors as the concrete embodiment of imperial will. The lions have teeth; the question is whether they regain the right, and the ethical discernment, to use them.

2. The Puppet Corridor: From Trait-System Fit to Mineral Pathways

2.1 From Puppet Syndrome to the Imperial Selection Model

Previous work defined **Puppet Syndrome** as a psycho-political feedback system in which:

- emotionally damaged or dislocated elites,
- colonial conditioning, and
- foreign validation loops

interlock to produce predictable behaviours: over-alignment with former colonisers, repression of culturally grounded alternatives, and strategic choices that trade long-term sovereignty for short-term personal and regime stability.

The **Imperial Selection Model (ISM)** formalised this intuition as a probabilistic framework:

$$P(\text{selection}) \propto \text{TSFI}(L) \times \text{SOP}(L) \quad \text{propto} \quad \text{TSFI}(L) \times \text{SOP}(L)$$

where:

- $P(\text{selection})$ is the probability that a leader LLL receives direct or indirect imperial support (financial, diplomatic, military);
- **TSFI** is the **Trait–System Fit Index**, a weighted function of four trait-clusters empirically associated with subservient but resilient governance (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and sadism);
- **SOP** is **Strategic Obedience Potential**, the expected capacity to consistently prioritise external interests over local needs.

Earlier studies proposed weights derived from historical puppet regimes. In their simplified form:

$$\text{TSFI}(L) = 0.28N + 0.32M + 0.21P + 0.19S$$

where $N, M, P, S \in [0, 1]$ are normalised indices of narcissistic, Machiavellian, psychopathic, and sadistic policy profiles respectively.

The crucial clarification is ethical and methodological:

We do not claim to read souls or diagnose clinical disorders at a distance.

We measure the *politics* and *institutional behaviour* that align with these trait-clusters, not the inner person. A head of state is not “essentially” a narcissist or sadist in their private life; our concern is that their *public choices* consistently match patterns known to produce neglect, humiliation, and sovereignty loss.

A leader can, at any moment, change course and lower their TSFI by shifting alliances, reinstating accountability, or restoring cultural coherence in policy. The index is descriptive and predictive, not metaphysical. It preserves accountability: it does not excuse harm as an illness; it names harm as a choice pattern.

2.2 Corridors as Hardware for Puppet Software

Imperial control rarely operates through a single treaty or base. It operates through **corridors**:

- **Mineral corridors**: railways, ports, and special regimes that extract raw materials under foreign financing and governance (e.g., the Benguela–Lobito axis for cobalt and copper).
- **Military corridors**: chains of bases, overflight rights, and “training missions” that project external force across multiple states (e.g., Barkhane’s Sahel arc until 2022; U.S. drone bases in Niger).
- **Financial corridors**: IMF programmes, “blended finance,” and credit lines tied to conditionalities that quietly re-write fiscal and mining codes.
- **Discursive corridors**: think-tanks, multilateral conferences, “African Union positions” that stabilise obedience as common sense.

High-TSFI leadership is the **software** that makes these corridors run smoothly. Without compliant governments, the corridors face friction: renegotiations, expulsions, cancellations, or unexpected alignments with rival powers. With compliant governments, corridors can be expanded and legalised into near-permanence.

The December 2025 U.S.–DRC Strategic Partnership Agreement sits at the intersection of all four corridor types: it formalises critical mineral access, ties infrastructure to Atlantic export routes, embeds U.S. development finance, and packages this in the language of “stability” and “shared prosperity,” while committing Congo to adapt its laws accordingly.

By contrast, the Sahel AES bloc is attempting to **cut** an existing military-political corridor (French and U.S. presence) and replace it with a more inward-oriented axis. The same predictive model therefore has to explain both deepening puppetisation in some zones and aggressive rupture in others.

3. The Sahel Fault-Line – A Predicted Awakening

3.1 From Barkhane to AES: A compressed timeline

The last decade in the Sahel reads like a slow-motion collision between imperial persistence and popular exhaustion:

- 2014–2022: **Operation Barkhane**, a French-led counter-insurgency mission, deploys thousands of troops across Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania. Despite tactical successes, it fails to reverse the strategic spread of jihadist violence and becomes increasingly unpopular.
- 2020–2023: Waves of **coups** in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger bring military juntas to power, each denouncing previous civilian regimes as corrupt and externally captured.
- 2022–2023: These juntas **terminate defence agreements with France**, demand troop withdrawals, and expel ambassadors, explicitly invoking sovereignty and denouncing perceived interference.
- 2023–2025: The three states sign a **Sahel security pact** and formalise the **Alliance of Sahel States (AES)**, then jointly withdraw from ECOWAS after a year’s notice, presenting the move as liberation from a bloc perceived as aligned with Western interventionism and sanctions.

The AES communiqués are unambiguous: their horizon is not technical “reform” but a re-centering of sovereignty, control over strategic resources, and freedom from punitive regional and international mechanisms. This exactly matches the “**Sahel first**” awakening that *Pan-Africanism Reimagined* anticipated: peripheral in GDP, central in geography, and too exhausted by endless counter-insurgency to keep playing the role of cooperative buffer zone.

3.2 Sahel vs Central Africa: Two branches of a prior prediction

The earlier model argued, in essence:

1. **Where corridors are deepest and elite grooming pipelines most entrenched (grandes écoles, Anglophone think-tanks, church NGOs, IMF careers), rupture will be later and harder.** This applies to countries like DRC, Kenya, South Africa, or Nigeria.

2. **Where external military presence is heaviest and populations experience daily humiliation, rupture will come earlier, even if the formal economies are weaker.**
This applies to the Sahel and parts of the Horn.

The Sahel's moves since 2020, including the collective rejection of Barkhane, AES formation, and ECOWAS withdrawal, map almost line-by-line onto that prediction. At the same time, the DRC's path under a high-TSFI regime has validated the "deep corridor" prediction: stronger Western partnership, greater legal self-subordination, increased mineral exposure through projects like the Lobito Corridor, and steep currency deterioration.

This dual validation matters because it suggests that we are not indulging in after-the-fact narrative inflation. The model predicted:

- **who** would be chosen (type of leader, not exact name),
- **what** they would sign (asymmetric mining/infra deals),
- **how** they would be shielded (foreign diplomatic reinforcement), and
- **where** rupture was most likely to start (Sahel rather than Central African corridors).

The events of 2019–2025, especially in the DRC and the AES, are now an empirical stress-test that the theory survived.

4. A Blueprint for Liberation: Learning from the Sahel, Avoiding the DRC Trap

The point of building a model is not academic self-congratulation. It is to **change the odds**. If the Sahel is the first crack in the corridor and the DRC is the latest reinforcement, then a serious Pan-African strategy must:

1. protect and deepen *constructive* ruptures;
2. prevent their co-optation or premature collapse;
3. reduce the probability that future corridors can be constructed in their current form.

We outline five axes for such a blueprint.

4.1 Psychopolitical Screening and the Puppet Diagnostic Index (PDI)

The PDI was introduced as a culturally grounded, multi-axis tool to assess whether a would-be leader's *politics* align with patterns of subjugation or sovereignty. It evaluates:

- discourse (foreign praise-seeking vs community grounding),
- policy choices (secretive deals vs transparent, locally beneficial agreements),
- crisis responses (empathy and accountability vs denial and scapegoating),
- symbolic behaviour (cultural pride vs self-contempt and mimicry).

Clarification on pathologising:

We deliberately avoid language that would declare a president “mentally ill” or “essentially a psychopath.” Our claim is narrower and testable:

If a leadership *persistently* prioritises foreign validation, systematically neglects its population’s basic needs, and rewrites laws to advantage external actors, then its policy profile can be described as functionally Machiavellian, psychopathic, or sadistic, regardless of the leader’s private personality.

This preserves two principles:

- **Full accountability:** A head of state remains morally and legally responsible. The model does not exonerate; it tracks choices.
- **Possibility of change:** If policy and alliance patterns change, scores change. There is no metaphysical “mark.”

Falsifiability #1 (carelessness → mortality).

Our hypothesis links institutionalised carelessness to higher neglect-related excess mortality. It can be falsified in at least one clear way:

If we identify a regime that clearly institutionalises carelessness towards its own population (e.g., systematically underfunding health, ignoring preventable crises, legislating in ways that expose citizens to predictable harm) *and* that regime does **not** exhibit significantly higher neglect-related excess mortality than culturally comparable but more caring regimes, then our core causal link is wrong or severely overstated.

This is why excess-mortality estimates in high-TSFI regimes such as DRC are central to the test, not an ornamental flourish.

4.2 Regional Blocs 2.0 – From AU/ECOWAS Theatre to Sovereignty Instruments

Critics have long argued that the African Union and several regional blocs function more as **containment and legitimisation devices** than as engines of sovereignty. Their behaviour during the DRC’s 2018–2019 electoral crisis, their rapid certification of contested results,

their silence on later sovereignty-eroding deals, and their punitive posture toward certain Sahel transitions while accommodating externally favoured regimes all reinforce this view.

If the AES represents a first attempt to build a bloc whose **primary loyalty is to its populations and shared security, rather than to external partners**, then the blueprint must:

- Encourage **Sahel–Gulf of Guinea** and **Sahel–Central Africa** dialogues on alternative integration rules that explicitly ban:
 - foreign base installation without multi-level popular consent;
 - regional endorsement of deals that force legal self-sabotage (like mandatory mining-code degradation) on member states.
- Develop **Pan-African charters of corridor ethics**: any large mineral or infrastructure project crossing borders must meet baseline criteria for local value capture, environmental protection, labour dignity, and legal non-subordination.
- Anchor **PDI-style screenings** into regional endorsement processes: no candidate should be presented as a “consensus” choice without passing minimum psychopolitical criteria, especially around empathy, cultural coherence, and resistance to secretive external deals.

The Sahel’s exit from ECOWAS is not the end of integration; it is a referendum on a particular *model* of integration. A liberation blueprint treats this not as a tragedy, but as an opportunity to redesign.

4.3 Economic Architecture – From Extractive Corridors to Sovereign Loops

Our earlier quantitative work proposed simple but revealing relationships between:

- foreign control over resources and labour (P),
- total resource and labour value (R),
- capital and labour flight (F), and
- poverty index (I).

In its refined form:

$$F=0.82 P, I=0.58FR+0.28F \quad = \quad 0.82 \setminus, P \setminus, R, \quad \quad I = 0.58 \frac{F}{R} + 0.28F=0.82PR, I=0.58RF+0.28$$

Monte Carlo simulations across African, Latin American, and other resource-rich countries showed correlations of $r \approx 0.98$ between simulated and actual poverty rates, with low mean squared error, suggesting that high PPP (foreign control) is strongly associated with structural impoverishment even when we use conservative parameters.

A liberation-oriented economic architecture would:

1. **Cap P** for critical sectors: constitutional or treaty-level ceilings on foreign ownership and profit repatriation in mining, energy, and strategic infrastructure.
2. **Trap F locally**: require that a fixed portion of profits be recycled into local public funds, research ecosystems, and reparative social programmes, rather than leakage through tax havens and commodity traders.
3. Build **sovereign loops** instead of one-way corridors: combine east–west routes like Lobito with north–south and intra-African supply chains that pass through locally controlled processing hubs, not just export ports.

Again, this is falsifiable:

- If **high-P, high-F** economies with “good governance” reforms consistently achieve *durable* poverty reduction and sovereign capacity, our model is wrong or incomplete.
- If **low-P, sovereignty-oriented** economies systematically perform worse in human development despite having comparable starting conditions and without facing extraordinary sanctions, then the corridor critique must be revisited.

4.4 Security Doctrine – From “War on Terror” to Anti-Puppet Defence

A central lesson of the Sahel is that the “war on terror” frame provided ideal cover for **long-term corridor consolidation**. Barkhane and associated operations produced, in practice:

- dependency on external military assets,
- public resentment against foreign presence,
- minimal progress on underlying governance pathologies.

An alternative doctrine would include:

- **No foreign base without triple consent**: legislative approval, local-community approval (through meaningful consultation), and time-limited constitutional clauses.
- **Mutual defence pacts that include anti-coup and anti-puppet clauses**: coups that clearly move toward greater sovereignty and popular participation should not be

automatically treated as equivalent to coups that install high-TSFI regimes. The criteria must be transparent and rooted in outcomes, not in donor preferences.

- **Regional early-warning systems for puppetisation:** consistent patterns of secretive deals, extra-constitutional law changes for foreign benefit, and PDI score spikes should trigger diplomatic alarm and, eventually, sanctions from *sovereignty-oriented* blocs, not from those who benefit from obedience.

4.5 Epistemic Infrastructure – Narratives, Research, and Education

The AU, ECOWAS, IMF, and even global media simultaneously produce and depend on a **certain story**: Africa fails because of corruption, tribalism, lack of modern values. The Sahel and the DRC present a more complex reality: what fails is a system that rewards betrayal and punishes coherence.

A liberation blueprint must therefore:

- Build **research centres and journals** dedicated to psychopolitical sovereignty, corridor mapping, and leadership screening, under African institutional control, with open data and clear methodologies.
- Reform **education** to include:
 - courses on imperial tactics (false flags, proxy wars, conditional aid);
 - case studies of AES, Cuba, Bolivia, Botswana, and others that show alternative paths;
 - training in PDI-style evaluation for civil society organisations.
- Support **popular pedagogy**: radio programmes, graphic novels, community theatres, and digital tools that explain corridors, puppet dynamics, and sovereignty in accessible language.

Only when populations can *name* the zoo and the training will they stop blaming their teeth.

5. Methodology, Falsifiability, and Safeguards

Because this framework is provocative, it must be unusually rigorous about how it can be tested, refined, or rejected. Here we summarise key methodological commitments.

5.1 What We Are Claiming (and Not Claiming)

We claim that:

1. **High-TSFI policy profiles** (as measured by observable behaviour) correlate strongly with:
 - increased probability of asymmetric resource and infrastructure deals,
 - legal self-sabotage (e.g., law changes to privilege foreign firms),
 - higher neglect-related excess mortality,
 - stronger external diplomatic shields against domestic accountability.
2. These profiles are **not** distributed randomly, but emerge from **imperial selection pipelines**: scholarships, security programmes, church and NGO networks, etc.
3. The Sahel AES rupture and the DRC 2019–2025 sequence **jointly confirm** this dynamic in opposite directions.

We do **not** claim:

- that we can diagnose individual mental disorders without clinical evaluation;
- that culture is irrelevant; rather, that culture is often *distorted under betrayal*, and thus must be analysed through the lens of power and trauma rather than as an independent variable.

5.2 Falsifiable Predictions

We propose at least three concrete falsification paths:

1. **Carelessness–Mortality Link:**
Identify a regime that, by any reasonable standard, institutionalises carelessness (budget cuts to essential services, neglect of predictable crises, legal exposure of citizens to known risks) and yet *does not* exhibit higher neglect-related excess mortality than more caring regimes under similar structural conditions. If such cases are robust, our main causal claim is weakened or falsified.
2. **High-TSFI Without Puppet Outcomes:**
Apply PDI/TSFI scoring to a leader whose profile appears high (e.g., strong image obsession, frequent secretive deals, foreign-oriented rhetoric) and track outcomes over a decade. If such a leader consistently **refuses** sovereignty-eroding deals, improves domestic value capture, and resists external base installation, then the ISM must be revised.
3. **Low-TSFI With Puppet Outcomes:**
Conversely, if leaders who score low on PDI (empathy-rich, culturally grounded, transparency-oriented) still produce the same pattern of sovereignty erosion and

neglect without facing overwhelming external military/economic coercion, then our emphasis on psychopolitics is overstated.

5.3 Safeguards Against Mis-use

Because any diagnostic tool can be abused, we propose safeguards:

- **Transparent rubrics:** PDI indicators, weights, and case examples must be public and open to critique.
- **Community participation:** evaluation panels should include traditional authorities, civil society, youth, and women's organisations, not only academics and officials.
- **Appeals processes:** leaders or candidates should be able to contest scores through documented counter-evidence (e.g., publication of previously secret agreements, independent audits).
- **Anti-weaponisation norms:** regional charters should explicitly forbid using PDI scores as pretexts for coups or foreign intervention. The tool is for *prevention and citizen oversight*, not for regime change by external actors.

6. Conclusion – From the Sahel Fault-Line to Continental Repair

The Sahel today and the DRC today are not opposites; they are **two positions on the same corridor**. On one end, AES states have decided that the cost of remaining a militarised buffer for external powers is greater than the risks of rupture. On the other, a high-TSFI regime has delivered everything empire could reasonably want: legalised access to critical minerals, preferential marketing channels, Atlantic export routes, deeper IMF relations, and a domestic population too exhausted by neglect to mount coherent resistance.

This paper has argued that:

- These outcomes validate, with rare precision, prior predictions about puppet leadership, corridors, and early rupture zones.
- The **Sahel awakening** is not an anomaly, but the first visible part of a continental process that *Pan-Africanism Reimagined* identified more than a decade ago.
- A viable liberation strategy must move beyond denunciation to **institutional design**: psychopolitical screening, regional blocs 2.0, corridor ethics, security doctrines that treat puppetisation as a threat, and epistemic infrastructure that teaches citizens

what is being done in their name.

The image of the “toothless lion” can now be retired. The lions were never toothless. They were trained not to bite the hand that built the zoo. The Sahel has started biting the fences. Central and Southern Africa must decide whether they will keep repainting the bars in development-project colours, or whether they will design a landscape in which no one needs a zoo at all.

The blueprint offered here is incomplete and intentionally vulnerable to empirical correction. It invites others to refine the indices, contest the corridors, and design better safeguards. What it refuses to accept is the one story that has dominated too long: that Africa’s misery is a cultural accident. The evidence from 2019–2025 suggests something else entirely. Misery was modelled, selected, and rewarded. If so, it can also be **diagnosed, disqualified, and replaced.**

The Sahel has shown that even within the zoo, some gates can still be opened from the inside. The next phase of Pan-Africanism must ensure that, when they are, the lions remember why they have teeth at all.