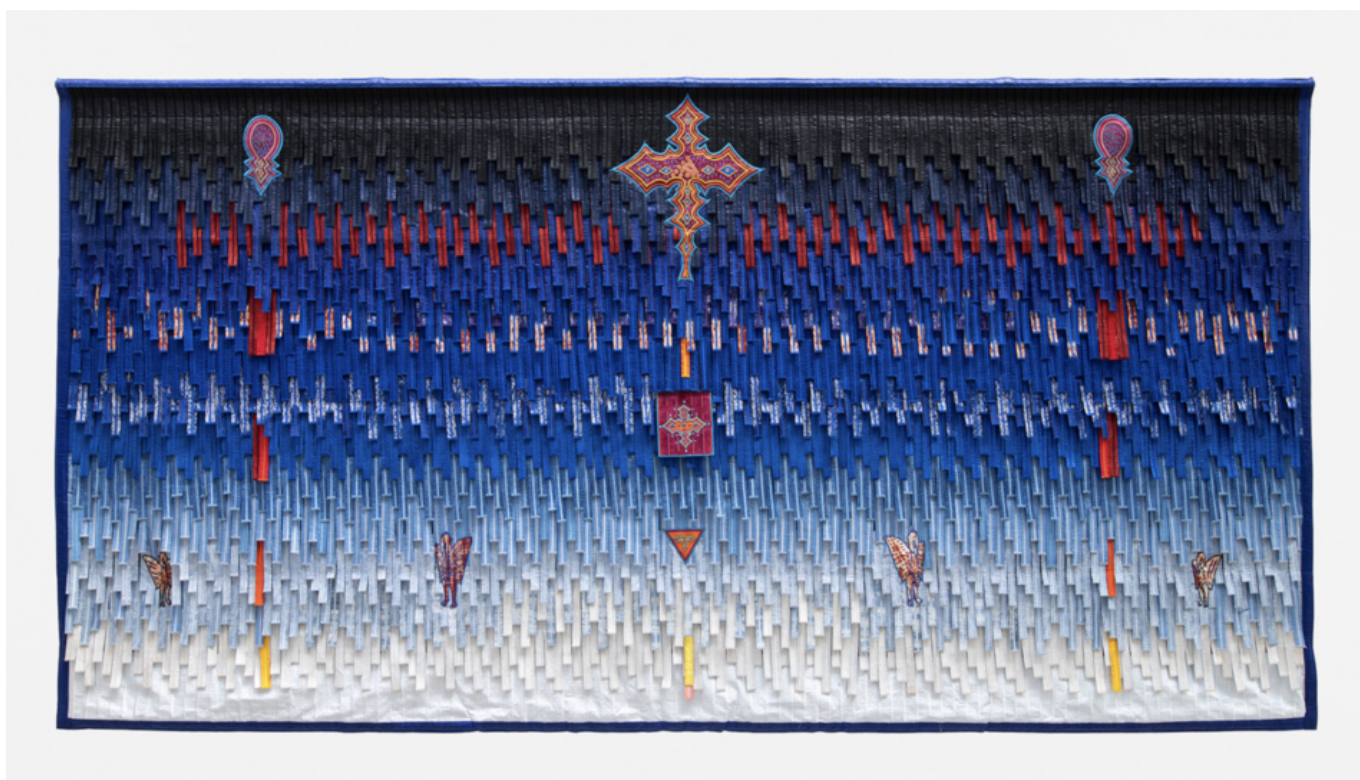


The Sahel Is the Shore of the Desert: The Fifth Pan-Africa Newsletter (2024)



Abdoulaye Konaté (Mali), *Motif du Mandé et Calao Sénoufo*, 2024.

Greetings from the desk of **Tricontinental Pan-Africa**,

Around 1235, when the dust settled after the Battle of Krina, in the south of what is Mali today, the *griot* poets proclaimed the **Manden Charter** or Kurukan Fuga. Though the empire that was subsequently formed was rooted in class segmentation that relied on enslaved labourers and patriarchal beliefs, it was far ahead of the times. Article 5 established that, ‘Everybody has a right to life and to the preservation of physical integrity’. It called for accountability from leaders based on their responsibility to ensure the welfare, social protection, and humane treatment of all in society, from the noble to the pastoralist to the enslaved. It promoted education for all and collective responsibility. It even instructed that enemies should not be humiliated.

Two decades earlier, the Magna Carta – a legal document that is the basis of most nations’ legal systems and touted as a blueprint for civil liberties – was established largely to address the disgruntled feudal nobility who

threatened King John's rule in medieval Britain. This elite rebellion came from the heavy taxes and scutage (a fee paid in lieu of military service) to fund military campaigns and royal expenditure at a time of financial strain, in part from past religious Crusades in North Africa and West Asia.

Over nearly eight centuries, the appeal to humanity in Manden was repeatedly trampled by the Magna Carta and its legions who would come to divide the world into North and South. But the quest for sovereignty and dignity was never entirely wiped out. Even nearly 800 years later, the people of Mali honour their ancestors' call. Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea have experienced a wave of popularly supported coups that have actively repelled and ejected Western domination and interference, part of a shifting tide in the Global South where more and more nations are strongly seeking sovereignty.



Ato Delaquis (Ghana), *Northern Lancers (Sahelian Lancer)*, 2011.

Following both the war in Ukraine and Israel's over seven-month-long genocide in Gaza, the international division of humanity is more visible, more keenly felt. More and more people are seeing how the Global North operates in its own interests, even when this jeopardises the long-term interests of its citizens. The suppression and violation of the world's people is largely meted out by the integrated military bloc of the Global North. The United States – whose actual military spending in 2022 was at least US\$ 1.5 trillion – controls 74.3% of all military spending worldwide through NATO and other means. This amounts to over US\$ 2 trillion.

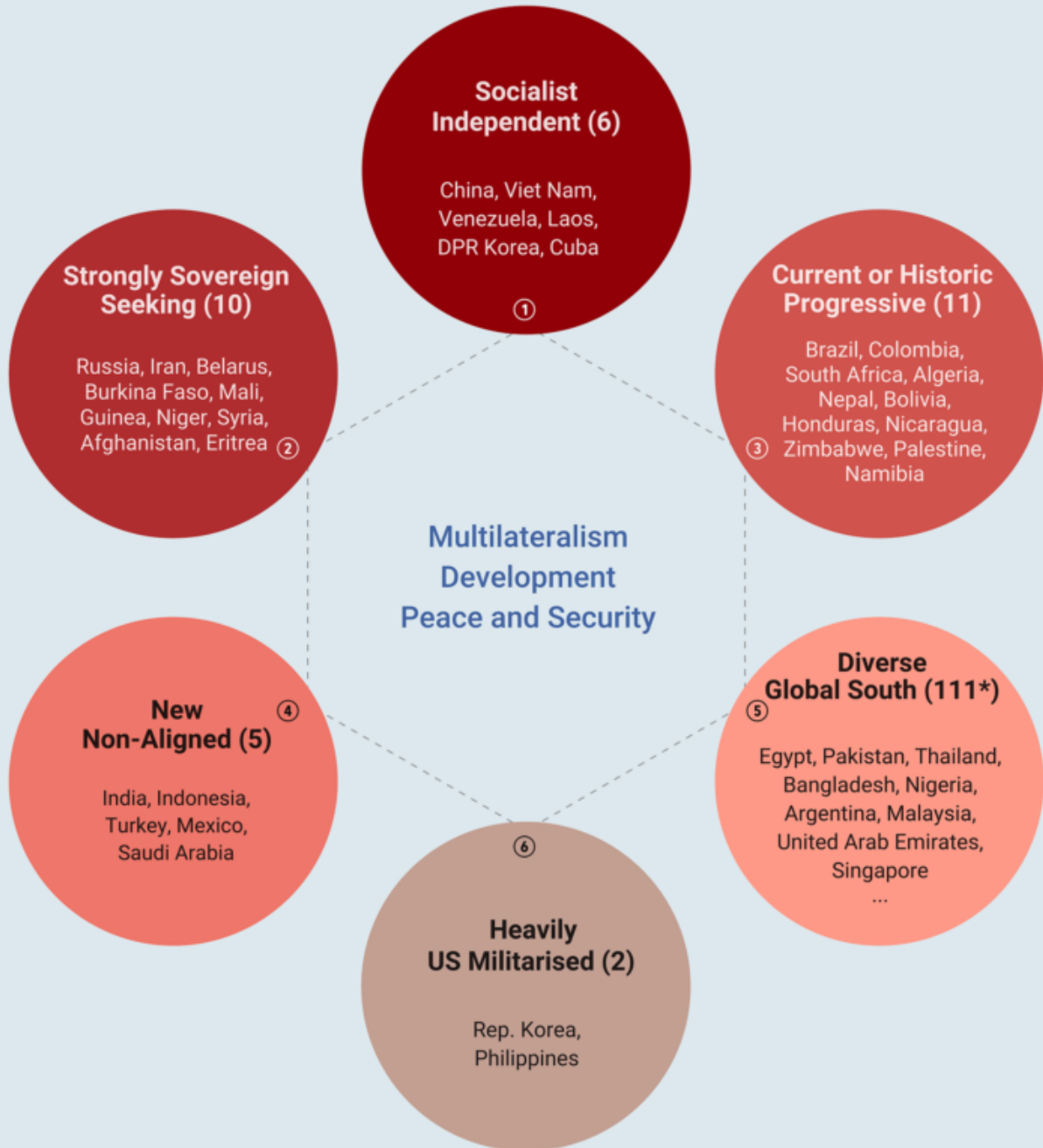
Yet, the objective conditions may be changing in ways that could favour those who fight for humanity. As highlighted in our recent **study**, *Hyper-Imperialism: A Dangerous Decadent New Stage* (January 2024), there has been a southward shift in the economic base. By 1993, the Global North accounted for 57.2% of the global Gross Domestic Product (Purchasing Power Parity), while the Global South accounted for just 42.8%. Today, the situation has reversed with the Global South representing a 59.4% share and the Global North holding 40.6%.

New multilateral institutions and alternative development financing models emerging from the Global South are gaining momentum. Nearly 80% of UN member states participate in China's Belt and Road Initiative, comprising around 64% of the global population with their combined economies representing 52% of the world's GDP in 2022. BRICS countries now encompass 45.5% of the world population, with 35.6% of the share of the world GDP.

Figure 23

The 'Rest of the World' | 145 diverse countries and territories | 6 groupings

Current or former colonies, semi-colonies, and socialist projects
The Global South, 2023



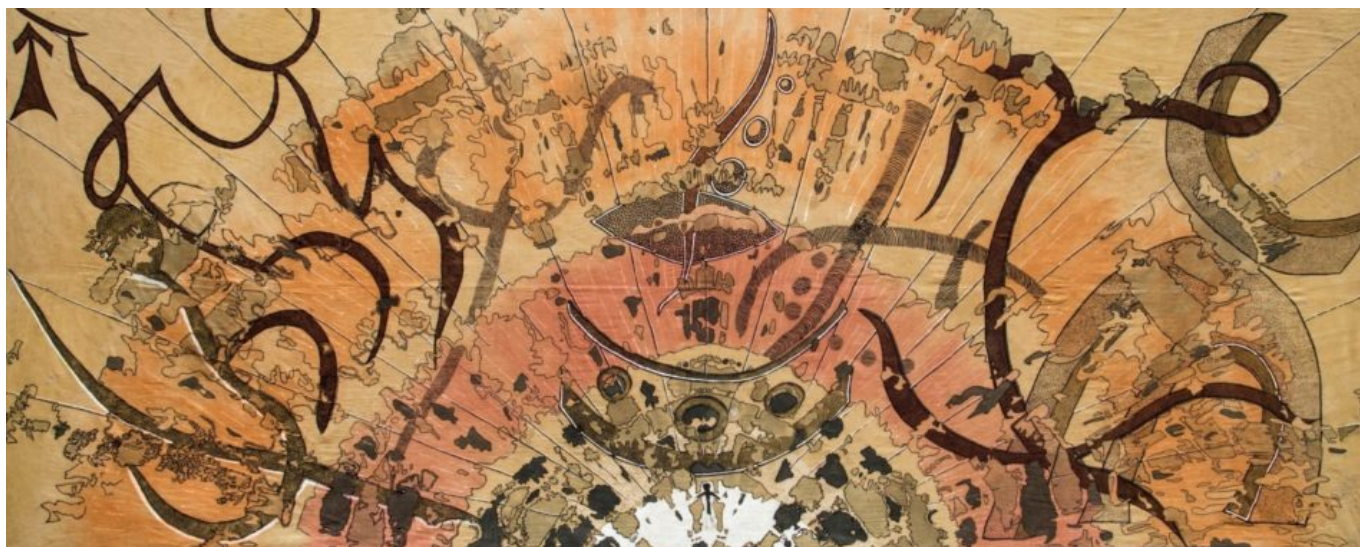
Source: Global South Insights
Note: Only the nine largest economies are listed (as of 2022)

Though new opportunities for a different world order are on the horizon, the Global South currently lacks the organisational and political coherency that is needed to seize them. Outside the 49 countries of the Global North imperialist camp, making up the vast majority of the world's population, are 145 countries that constitute the Global South. Given the lack of unity and integration amongst Global South states, we

attempted to identify some common characteristics of countries in the Global South. Importantly, these ‘groupings’ were also based on who is a prime target of US-led military confrontation, regime change, and hybrid warfare.

Grouping 2 – ‘Strongly Sovereign Seeking’ – are prime targets of US interventionism, as they are actively rejecting Western domination or undermining it. These countries are fiercely defending their sovereignty and others, and are amongst the most proficient at articulating questions of surrounding alternative paths to development. Grouping 2 is where the aforementioned Sahelian states were placed. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have rejected the neo-colonial presence of France in the Sahel and removed their Western-aligned political leaders. They have established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), aiming for economic and military cooperation and to potentially deepen political exchange. However, the situation in the Sahel is still unstable, and individual countries are struggling to guarantee their actual independence from imperialist powers. They face challenging material conditions not of their own making.

The next issue of *Interventions* which explores what is happening in the Sahel will be released soon.



Groupe Bogolan Kasobané (Mali), *The Charter of Kurukan Fuga*, 2018.

Each year when Africa Liberation Day, the anniversary of the 1963 founding of the Organisation for African Unity, comes around on 25 May, we gather to evaluate the extent to which Africans have achieved sovereignty and what more needs to be done. Though Moussa Faki Mahamat, chairperson of the African Union (AU), **acknowledged** that the continent ‘finds itself at a real crossroads’, most government officials sleepwalk through the commemoration event. Achievements of the national liberation movement of the past are exalted, concerns are raised about dizzying poverty figures, and calls are made to transform society.

Mali could not participate given its suspended AU membership since the 2020 coup. Over in Bamako, at a gathering for 25 May, Malian Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maïga said the following:

...we have always inscribed in golden letters that Mali is ready to abandon everything for the sake of its sovereignty in the name of African unity construction. Today, we are part of all

organisations that aim to unite Africans to make a great geopolitical entity that can weigh in the world.

...

African communities show that our peoples are actually ahead of politicians. The community you have just seen being born, and whose nationals are massively represented, are surrounded by other African peoples. This shows that in reality, people have already done it, but it is governments that are reflecting, hesitating, or often under foreign influence. I would therefore like to salute African communities and encourage them to continue their work of mobilisation and awareness-raising among the various governments.

In response to his remarks, one viewer thanked Maïga for ‘always showing his solidarity with the soldiers and encouraging them in their fight’ and took issue with ‘so-called patriotic activists who have positions close to the destabilisers’.

The Sahelian states are rejecting the dominant lethargic political and diplomatic culture. The formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) reflects a frustration with the prevailing organisational frameworks and procedures that continue to fall short of realising even the most basic aspirations of the Manden Charter. The AES represents a new appetite for organisations that represent not only their national interests but their regional realities. Though the outcomes of the political processes unfolding in the Sahel are yet to be known (whether or not they are rooted in a commitment to serving their people), this renewed desire for sovereignty that has its lineage in the processes initiated by our forebears is palpable.

‘Sahel’ is borrowed from the Arabic word الساحل *al-sāḥil* meaning the ‘coast’ or ‘shore’. A shore along the border of a desert, not a body of water. Though we are surrounded by uninhabitable sands created by imperialism, the Sahel could be a shore for the African continent’s aspirations for dignity and sovereignty.

Warmly,

Mika



Mikaela Erskog

Mika is an educator and researcher at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. She is part of the Pan Africanism Today Secretariat, which coordinates the regional articulation of the **International People's Assembly** and is also part of the **No Cold War** coordination committee, a peace platform promoting multilateralism and maximum global cooperation. She is also part of Dongsheng, an international collective of researchers interested in Chinese politics and society, and hosts *The Crane: An Africa-China Podcast*.