

The Role of Regional and International Actors in Combating Terrorism in West and East Africa: A Comparative Study of ECOWAS and AMISOM

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Abstract

The rising threat of terrorism in Africa, particularly in West and East Africa, has prompted the increasing involvement of regional and international actors in counterterrorism efforts. This study critically examines and compares the roles of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in combating terrorism in their respective regions. Despite the existence of several state-level and multinational initiatives, terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab continue to exploit weak governance, political instability, and socio-economic grievances. The study addresses the problem of

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limited comparative analyses of regional counterterrorism responses in Africa and evaluates the extent to which regional organisations have influenced security outcomes. The objectives of the study are to analyse the strategies employed by ECOWAS and AMISOM, assess the effectiveness of regional cooperation in counterterrorism, and identify challenges and lessons learned. Guiding research questions include: What are the main counterterrorism approaches of ECOWAS and AMISOM? How effective are these approaches in addressing terrorism? What are the shared challenges, and what lessons can be drawn for future regional interventions? Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, comparative case study approach, drawing on document analysis, existing literature, and institutional reports. Findings reveal that AMISOM has been more militarily robust, with notable territorial gains, while ECOWAS has prioritised diplomacy and legal frameworks. Both institutions, however, face structural constraints, funding challenges, limited operational capacity, and over-reliance on international partners. The study concludes that while regional organisations play a critical role in Africa's security landscape, sustainable counterterrorism requires a balance between military force and political, economic, and social interventions. It recommends strengthening institutional capacity, improving coordination, promoting local ownership, and integrating human rights protections into all regional security frameworks.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, Regional Security, ECOWAS, AMISOM, Africa

Introduction

Terrorism is one of the greatest security challenges for Africa. The presence of Boko Haram, ISWAP and AQIM in West Africa leads to instability in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions. On the other hand, Al-Shabaab is still very influential in Somalia with their insurgency and occasional attacks on

neighboring Kenya and nearby nations. As a result of these threats, many countries have coordinated actions to address them. Well-known organisations in each region are the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in West Africa and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in East Africa. This article looks at ECOWAS and AMISOM, outlining their official roles, methods of operation and the assistance given by other countries in dealing with terrorism in their parts of Africa. Since its founding in 1975, ECOWAS has evolved to focus not only on developing the economy but also on peace and security. Because of the increase in terrorism, ECOWAS is working to improve regional security by using the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and its 2013 Action Plan. The main points in this strategy are to exchange information, develop defense capacities and unite members in military operations.

ECOWAS has made major contributions by backing the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) that includes five countries: Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin. Although the ECOWAS force does not exist, the strong backing and collaboration from ECOWAS have greatly helped to unite African countries against Boko Haram and ISWAP. ECOWAS joins forces with the G5 Sahel Joint Force to tackle terrorism and organised crime in the Sahel region (Onuoha, 2018). Yet, the ECOWAS has still faced some setbacks. Oftentimes, countries do not have enough engagement, ability or money to conduct operations against terrorism effectively. Having responsibilities shared with the AU and G5 Sahel can lead to repeating work and inaccuracies. Because there is no strong and stable military force within ECOWAS, dealing with threats quickly and effectively as a team is made harder.

Unlike ECOWAS, AMISOM was established in 2007 by the AU to assist the Somali Federal Government by providing security and countering Al-Shabaab. AMISOM has included troops from Uganda, Burundi, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, and has received support from the United Nations, European Union, and the United States. In its fight against Al-Shabaab, AMISOM has employed kinetic means with large-scale military operations to capture areas from the group. One notable achievement was the retaking of Mogadishu in 2011, which extended government control into regions previously controlled by insurgents. AMISOM is also tasked with training

Somali military forces and assisting in humanitarian efforts in conflict zones (Williams, 2018). However, there have been issues with the organisation's operations. Some argue that too many civilians have been killed, that cooperation with Somali forces has been inadequate, and that the commitment of soldiers from different countries has been inconsistent. Naturally, even with its successes, Al-Shabaab remains a threat, as it continues to adapt its tactics and maintain power through unconventional methods and beliefs.

Compared to AMISOM, ECOWAS operates in a similar security environment, yet their mandates, how they are built and with whom they cooperate show important distinctions in using approaches against terrorism. ECOWAS mainly coordinates efforts and is guided by all member countries coming together and agreeing. Furthermore, unlike UNITAF, AMISOM has actively fought in the conflict with wide-scale international funding and support for its operations. Both regional organisations rely on the help of international actors to become more effective. Training, providing equipment and access to intelligence for ECOWAS have mainly been possible through partnerships with UNOWAS, the EU and France. As it is with the Somali government, AMISOM's achievements have benefited from aid from the EU's African Peace Facility and the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) (de Coning & Gelot, 2021). Yet, the future of their activities against terrorism remains uncertain. AMISOM faced problems relating to changing into the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), and ECOWAS deals with a shortage of funds and disputes between its members. However, failure of local institutions to handle security could lead to security gaps (Hansen, 2020).

This research, therefore, seeks to investigate the role of regional and international actors in combating terrorism in West and East Africa, from the perspective of ECOWAS and AMISOM.

Statement of Problem

West and East Africa remain particularly vulnerable to the serious threat of terrorism. In West Africa, Boko Haram and ISWAP have disrupted Nigeria, Niger and Mali, whereas the actions of al-Shabaab in Somalia and their cross-border attacks have made East Africa less safe. Regardless of the

efforts taken against terrorism, it is still a pressing issue, revealing that strong cooperation among countries is needed. Because of this, groups like ECOWAS and AMISOM have become powerful forces addressing terrorism in their regions by cooperating with groups such as the United Nations, European Union and the United States. Yet, we do not understand enough how effectively ECOWAS and AMISOM handle terrorism and coordinate their actions. Herding all the armies together and getting member states to stay politically united has proven to be a challenge for ECOWAS. However, unlike UNSOM, AMISOM has not had enough support from local communities, has difficulties sustaining its activities and is often weakened by the demands of missions. It raises the issue of how regional organisations handle terrorism when placed side-by-side with the ways international organisations get involved.

In addition, not many studies have carefully examined how these regional initiatives interact with actors from the international community in various parts of Africa. Without comparing, policy actions may end up being inconsistent, carried out late and improper in the given situation. Looking at the experiences of ECOWAS and AMISOM helps guide how regional efforts against terrorism in Africa can be improved. Consequently, the study will explore the contributions of regional and international organisations in tackling terrorism, taking the examples of ECOWAS and AMISOM in West and East Africa. By reviewing their operational methods, teamwork mechanisms and the policies they have achieved, it can help improve policies and research on the topic.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are to:

- i. examine the counterterrorism strategies adopted by ECOWAS in West Africa and AMISOM in East Africa;
- ii. analyse the effectiveness of regional and international collaboration in combating terrorism in both regions;
- iii. identify the major challenges faced by ECOWAS and AMISOM in implementing their counterterrorism mandates;
- iv. compare the structural and operational approaches of ECOWAS and AMISOM in the context of regional security governance; and

- v. draw lessons and provide policy recommendations for enhancing regional counterterrorism efforts in Africa.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

As a result of transnational threats such as terrorism, regional organisations in Africa are becoming more concerned with security. To ensure this study fits into an understandable framework, this section introduces the concepts of terrorism, regional security governance and international cooperation and connects them to the main theories used in the study- Regional Security Complex Theory, developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (RSCT) and Collective Security Theory. They shape the analysis of ECOWAS and AMISOM by comparing their efforts against terrorism from both regional and international perspectives.

Understanding Key Concepts

i. Terrorism

There is no clear and universal definition existing for the term terrorism. For the scope of this study, terrorism means non-state groups using violence or threats of violence against people or important targets (Schmid, 2011). Due to local anger, identity issues and a weak state, it is often difficult to describe and manage terrorist activities in Africa. In addition to being terrorists, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and ISWAP act as groups seeking to rule and control regions with weak or no government (Forest, 2012). Due to the fact that terrorism has many aspects, it requires actions beyond the military, such as better leadership, support for the economy and strengthening society. So, remembering that terrorism is linked to underlying issues makes it important to assess the strategies put in place by the organisations.

ii. Regional Security Governance

It involves the different models, shared expectations and bodies that allow states in one region to handle and deal with security problems (Buzan & Waever, 2003). Regional security complexes in Africa have grown stronger due to organisations such as ECOWAS and the African Union (AU), which are now filling roles that the state or international groups, such as the United Nations, once filled. For instance, ECOWAS introduced peacekeeping, mediation and counter-terrorism through the 1999 Mechanism for Conflict

Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. It can also be seen that AMISOM, under the African Union, adjusts to enduring insurgent struggles and total state collapse, while depending a lot on support from outside agencies.

iii. International Cooperation

To deal with international security issues, nations, international bodies and non-governmental groups cooperate and work together. The United Nations, European Union, United States, France and Turkey are among the international agents that have funded, taught, provided logistics and coordinated efforts on combating terrorism in Africa (Akindoyin & Obafemi, 2024). At the same time, working together internationally can sometimes have negative results. Even as it gives access to useful assistance and expertise. It could lead to dependencies, change local priorities or threaten local ownership. This matters when we consider just how much influence ECOWAS and AMISOM have, as opposed to how much they are affected by powers from outside.

Theoretical Frameworks

To better understand how regional and global participants collaborate in fighting terrorism in West and East Africa, the analysis uses Regional Security Complex Theory and Collective Security Theory.

i. Regional Security Complex Theory

Developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in 2003, the theory claims that security ties are strongest within regions where there are neighbours. The relationships between countries, based on their history, friendly ties and need for each other, are what create a security linkage that can be more significant than efforts from the rest of the world. When using regional security complex theory in West and East Africa, it is clear that terrorism becomes an area of mutual concern for several neighbouring countries. As a result, the activities of Boko Haram influence Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon, so ECOWAS contributes by offering guidance and support to the three countries and the MNJTF. Likewise, Al-Shabaab's behaviour influences countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda, and calls for AMISOM to be active in more than one nation. Regional Security Complex

Theory gives us an explanation for why regional organisations start to act in security fields normally handled by nations or multilateral agencies. It allows a review of how regions deal with balancing security within the region and pressures from outside factors.

ii. Collective Security Theory

This theory holds that when one country is attacked, the whole group, to which the country belongs, starts to defend it because anything that affects a country affects the entire community. The United Nations conventionally used the collective security logic, and its principles have been moved regionally in Africa with the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and ECOWAS's Conflict Prevention Mechanism.

With this theory, we can see why AMISOM was set up, as it was allowed and supported by both the African Union and the United Nations. It is also relevant for the ECOWAS activities, mainly when they assist countries dealing with terrorists by providing capacity, in that it provides training and diplomatic support. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of collective security in Africa depends on how united the member states are and how much they have in common. These frequently vary among some organisations. Due to different interests among member states of ECOWAS and political unrest, taking firm action against terrorism sometimes proves difficult. Also, the reliance of AMISOM on donations for its work causes certain difficulties which affect sustainability.

Linking Theory to Practice: Comparative Implications

By merging regional security complex theory and collective security theory, it becomes easier to compare ECOWAS and AMISOM. While regional security complex theory deals with the reasons that accounts for regional groups providing security in highly connected areas, collective security theory focuses on how they address terrorism. Relating them together gives us ways to:

- i. Examine the abilities of ECOWAS and AMISOM in coordinating, planning and carrying out their tasks;
- ii. Determine how much independence members of the alliance have in carrying out security measures with partners from other regions.

- iii. Analyse if the actions taken by the regions are efficient and supported by people in that area.

Additionally, these theories shed light on how different actors from regions and nations divide roles, share duties and create responsibilities in relation to security. It is particularly essential to note AMISOM's change to ATMIS and the latest issues ECOWAS faces with security threats, caused by several coups and management crises.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study approach to examine the roles of regional and international actors in combating terrorism in West and East Africa, using the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) as principal cases. The comparative design is grounded in the recognition that while both regions face significant terrorist threats, the institutional responses, regional dynamics, and international partnerships vary considerably. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of how context-specific variables influence regional counter-terrorism strategies and their outcomes.

Data for this study were collected primarily through desk-based research, drawing on a wide range of secondary sources. These include official documents from ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), the United Nations (UN), and other multilateral bodies; policy briefs and reports from international organisations and think tanks; and peer-reviewed academic literature. News articles and expert commentaries were also utilised to capture evolving developments and provide contemporary perspectives on the interventions in question. The timeframe under review spans from 2007, marking the establishment of AMISOM, to 2023, which captures the height of ECOWAS involvement in counter-terrorism and the transition from AMISOM to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS).

The selection of ECOWAS and AMISOM as comparative cases is justified by their prominence as regional security instruments in their respective subregions. While ECOWAS has been more diplomatic and policy-oriented in its counter-terrorism efforts, AMISOM represents a militarised response to insurgency, making it suitable for exploring different

models of regional engagement. The study focuses on three main dimensions: (i) institutional design and capacity, (ii) international partnerships and external support, and (iii) effectiveness in degrading terrorist threats and promoting regional stability.

The analysis proceeds through a thematic comparison across these dimensions, highlighting both similarities and divergences in strategy, coordination, and outcomes. Triangulation of sources was employed to ensure the credibility and reliability of findings, and efforts were made to critically assess bias, especially in policy documents and donor narratives. While the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, it offers an in-depth, context-sensitive exploration that contributes to broader debates on regional security governance and international cooperation in Africa.

Historical and Political Context of Terrorism in West and East Africa

Terrorism in Africa has been on the rise for the past two decades, necessitating the response of regional organisations to the handling of security tasks. In parts of West and East Africa, terrorism is linked to political, social and regional issues. To assess the effectiveness of both ECOWAS and AMISOM and how they interact with countries abroad, one should understand the environment in which they operate. Here, we explore the background and politics of terrorism throughout West and East Africa, paying attention to the parts that are alike and those that are apart.

West Africa: The ECOWAS Security Context

Most of the attacks in West Africa are linked to the formation of Boko Haram in Nigeria. In its early years, Boko Haram was formed to support an Islamic government in northern Nigeria, though it turned violent after its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was extrajudicially killed by the Nigerian police in 2009. They launched an all-out conflict against the Nigerian government and attacked both people, military facilities and public areas. As time passed, Boko Haram became involved in other West African nations such as Chad, Niger and Cameroon, shifting from an insurgency to a threat to many countries (Onuoha, 2014). The development of ISWAP in 2015 made the current situation more challenging. ISWAP, a branch of Boko Haram, joined the Islamic State and chose to act in a more disciplined manner, trying to

gain locals' approval, unlike Boko Haram which targeted the groups and individuals they held responsible for corruption. They attracted many people by emphasising issues such as hardship, being far from politics and the collapse of government help. Consequently, the Lake Chad Basin became a very unstable security area in Africa.

Additionally, the same period saw jihadist activity increase in the Sahel region, especially in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, due to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Following a Tuareg rebellion in 2012 and Mali's subsequent coup, Islamist groups occupied the northern part of the country, contributing to increased instability in the area (Oladoyin, Osimen, Pokubo, Obozehai, & Oladipo, 2025). However, both the missions Operation Serval and Barkhane, along with the creation of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, have not improved the country's security situation (International Crisis Group, 2016).

As a result of these developments, ECOWAS decided to take a stronger stance on security issues. Consequently, the Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security from 1999 made it possible for the organisation to address instability and terrorism within SADC countries. In 2013, ECOWAS adopted a strategy and plan that encouraged member countries to focus on prevention, cooperate in law enforcement, share intelligence and uphold human rights (ECOWAS, 2013). Yet, putting this plan into action has encountered several issues, such as insufficient support from national agencies, a low level of political commitment among countries and not enough money. Moreover, the area's political problems have hindered ECOWAS's fight against terrorism. In 2020, 2021 and 2022, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger all went through military coups. Due to these changes, the group of countries could not agree on security, causing clashes between ECOWAS and military governments. Disagreements about the role of France and the Wagner Group in counter-terrorism efforts made the situation in Mali and Burkina Faso even more difficult for other nations.

Nevertheless, ECOWAS has continued to offer support to its members facing threats, for example by sending diplomats, observing elections and providing some training for various capacities. Even so, it generally defers the most important military actions in counter-terrorism to groups such as the Multinational Joint Task Force, which are administered outside ECOWAS.

East Africa: Somalia, Al-Shabaab, and the AMISOM Response

Somalia is the main source of terrorist activity in East Africa. Within days after the fall of Siad Barre in 1991, Somalia was thrown into a cycle of civil war, the state breaking down, and warlords taking over. As a result, groups influenced by Islam started growing, which was mainly due to having no single authority to lead the nation. The ICU organisation, which ruled briefly in Mogadishu, was driven out by an Ethiopian military supported by America in 2006. For a while, this step helped, but it resulted in a deep division within the ICU, sparking the rise of Al-Shabaab (Menkhaus, 2007). Today, Al-Shabaab plays a strong role in Somalia, as it has expanded its influence over much of the south and centre, the country's media and its connections with the clans. In the year 2012, the group expressed support for Al-Qaeda and began playing a key role in the global jihadist movement. It's not only in Somalia where Al-Shabaab has carried out its attacks; it has also caused terror in Kenya, as seen by the 2013 attack on the Westgate Mall and the 2015 massacre in Garissa University.

AMISOM was formed by the African Union in 2007 because of the threat in Somalia. Working as one group with forces from Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti, AMISOM was meant to support the Somali Federal Government, take action against Al-Shabaab and promote humanitarian activity in Somalia. As time passed, its role included supporting and improving the capacity of the Somali security forces. AMISOM was created to maintain peace by force and not just to assist in peacekeeping. It clashed with Al-Shabaab, reclaimed the main cities and focused on strengthening important infrastructure. AMISOM helped safeguard elections and assisted with the process of building a new government in Somalia. The United Nations provided the mission with logistical assistance, and the European Union helped by financing the stipends for participating troops (Williams, 2018).

Nevertheless, AMISOM faced numerous challenges. Coordinating troops from different nations was complicated because their objectives often did not align. Allegations of abuses against civilians, unintended casualties in combat, and limited engagement with the local community diminished the mission's credibility. Furthermore, as the Somali National Army struggled to strengthen itself and frequently disintegrated, AMISOM's

successes were regarded as temporary. In 2022, AMISOM was rebranded as ATMIS, with the goal of transferring security responsibilities to Somali forces by 2024. However, this transition to public elections occurs amid the resurgence of Al-Shabaab, ongoing conflicts within Somalia, and waning international interest. The outcomes of ATMIS may shape future regional security cooperation and establish the African Union's long-term capacity to manage counter-terrorism efforts.

Comparative Reflections

With little or no national or international response, both West and East Africa are regionally handling counter-terrorism. At the same time, the fundamental nature of these interventions is not the same. ECOWAS has mainly focused on using diplomacy, coordinating policies and putting pressure on political leaders. The organisation has dedicated more time to diplomacy and strengthening global systems than to using the military. Alternatively, AMISOM adopted hard security, with soldiers deployed and an order to fight a powerful insurgency. These indicators have external variables that are not the same. The organisation's effectiveness has sometimes been influenced by France (with Operation Barkhane), the United States (through AFRICOM) and the European Union. Many times, it has been easier for countries to sign bilateral pacts rather than collaborate as a united region. Unlike TFG, AMISOM worked within a framework supported by many countries, including the AU, the UN and the EU. Still, it has faced difficulties due to depending heavily on other countries' funding and not always working together as a unified group. The two situations are alike because it is hard for countries in Africa to build sustainable, local responses to terrorism that are recognised and strong. Both AMISOM's use of force and ECOWAS's guidelines ensure success if they collaborate with local officials, earn the trust of nearby communities and manage relationships with other nations.

Regional Actors and Counterterrorism Strategies: ECOWAS and AMISOM

There has been an increase in the importance of regional organisations in Africa when it comes to security, mainly terrorism. With violent extremism spreading worldwide, responding within regions has become essential and vital to strategy. We cover here an analysis of how counterterrorism

measures from ECOWAS and AMISOM have been created, implemented and used within their regions.

ECOWAS: A Normative and Policy-Oriented Approach

ECOWAS has mainly put in place a set of guidelines focused on controlling terrorism and violent extremism. ECOWAS has given importance to talking, rules and regional cooperation, rather than solely using its army to address conflicts. When the 1999 Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security was ratified by ECOWAS, it became authorised to deal with security threats such as terrorism, in member states. In 2013, ECOWAS unveiled the Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan, which is based on three strong areas: (1) prevention, (2) pursuit and (3) reconstruction. On the prevention side, the authorities look to reduce conditions like poverty, marginalisation and weak government to prevent terrorism. The focus for security under pursuit is security cooperation, sharing of intelligence and safeguarding borders, while issues of post-conflict stabilisation and reintegration with the community are handled by the reconstruction pillar (ECOWAS, 2013). While ECOWAS has a strong counterterrorism policy, its actual ability to fight terrorism is not strong. Efforts to fight terrorism, mainly made by the MNJTF in the Lake Chad Basin and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, take place without the supervision of ECOWAS. Moreover, because of recent military coups within Africa, countries in the region are now divided, and their shared security goals are less effective. ECOWAS, however, has helped in stopping non-democratic governments and promoting communication among all its member states, clearly revealing its willingness to deal with situations diplomatically.

AMISOM: A Military-Led Security Architecture

Rather than serving as a union, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has been built as a strong military intervention force. When AMISOM was established in 2007, it started backing the Somali Federal Government in securing its territory from Al-Shabaab. Its strategies included safeguarding important government buildings, securing people in cities, weakening the capability of Al-Shabaab and providing humanitarian aid. AMISOM had over 20,000 troops from Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya

and Djibouti working together at its highest level. The forces engaged in warfare with Al-Shabaab, successfully taking control of Mogadishu and Kismayo. Besides, it took part in reorganising the Somali National Army (SNA) by training and working together, but this proved challenging due to both political problems and insufficient resources (Williams, 2018).

As a result of the significant support from around the world, the mission was more successful. Money for the troop stipends was mainly given by the EU, while the UN provided other kinds of support (Akindoyin & Obafemi, 2024). The U.S. and U.K. provided training as well as intelligence help. Therefore, AMISOM was an African-initiated operation that counted on international support and worked under a multilateral scheme that helped it gain acceptance. AMISOM was able to weaken Al-Shabaab's positions in Somalia, but it still struggled to remain sustainable. Its overall impact was diminished by the strong need for money from abroad, the lack of unity among participants in the peacekeeping missions and the reports of civilian losses. When it became ATMIS in 2022, the mission aimed to have Somali authorities take over, but challenges are still present.

Divergent Paths, Common Challenges

ECOWAS is policy-driven, while AMISOM is about peacekeeping, yet both groups have to deal with similar problems due to their structure. They consist of limited resources within the Union, depending too much on help from others and finding it difficult to harmonise the interests of member nations. Additionally, it is shown through these experiences that addressing security involves combining reforms to how governments function, working with people in communities and long-term planning. More integrated, suitable and flexible regional strategies are evidently needed because terrorism in Africa is developing. These instances of terrorism in Africa reveal the different ways regions can respond and teach what works best.

International Actors and Strategic Partnerships in Regional Counterterrorism

International partners are incredibly important in helping shape and back regional efforts to fight terrorism in Africa. Since terrorism crosses many nations and ECOWAS and AMISOM face limited resources, it has become

necessary to rely heavily on partners outside the region. It looks at what external involvement in counterterrorism means for West and East Africa, with an emphasis on the contributions of the UN, EU, US and France.

International Support to ECOWAS and West African Counterterrorism

In West Africa, most support from the international community for counterterrorism has involved financial help, development of skills and cooperation between armies. Though ECOWAS has made progress in planning against terrorism, it does not have the resources to handle the actual tasks, so other nations usually lead direct security activities. An important actor in West Africa is France, whose significant roles are the 2013 Operation Serval in Mali and 2014–2022 Operation Barkhane in the Sahel. They were set up to take on jihadist uprisings in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Although tactical action was successful, critics believe they did not solve the basic issues that drive extremism (Charbonneau, 2021).

U.S. support in Africa comes in large part from AFRICOM, which offers intelligence, training and logistics for African armies and regional units. The US is cooperating with the G5 Sahel and MNJTF, as well as the regional organisation ECOWAS, on initiatives near Lake Chad. In addition, the US Department of State has backed up programmes such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, which aim to protect civilians and reject extremist ideologies. The European Union is dedicated to strengthening institutions and bringing stability. Using instruments such as the EUCAP Sahel missions and the European Peace Facility, the EU gives technical, training and financial assistance to Central African countries. Still, managing work with ECOWAS has not always been smooth, meaning different strategies are sometimes put forward instead of one unified one. Yet, ECOWAS carries on having discussions with the EU and UN to match the international aid with its regional approach to fighting terrorism.

International Engagement with AMISOM in Somalia

It has become much easier for AMISOM to secure consistent support from international organisations in East Africa. Since 2007, the UN, EU, US, and other countries have contributed aid to support AMISOM. However, because the costs and logistical demands were so high in Somalia, this

support was vital to the mission's survival. AMISOM obtained its mandate through Security Council resolutions passed by the United Nations and received practical logistical and operational assistance through UNSOS. The UN facilitated connections among donors and collaborated with the African Union to improve governance across Africa. Thanks to the European Union, which primarily supported AMISOM through the African Peace Facility (later renamed the European Peace Facility), the mission could fund its troops' salaries and expenses. Although EU troops were not involved directly, the EU's ongoing financial support sustained AMISOM and helped it navigate some of its most difficult moments (Williams, 2018). The US contributed by developing, equipping, and training both AMISOM and the Somali Army, without providing direct financial support for troop stipends. US drone strikes and special operations eliminated leaders of Al-Shabaab, bolstering AMISOM's overall missions. Nonetheless, the heavy reliance on foreign actors has raised concerns about the mission's long-term viability and the progress of Somali institutions.

Strategic Challenges in External-Regional Cooperation

Although getting assistance from other countries has been important, it has also created some problems. A repeated problem is the bigger focus given to military than developmental help, which results in quick advances but no long-term stability. Sometimes, in West and East Africa, foreign actors have valued security over governance and human rights, which causes locals to feel their support is not trusted and encourages them to dislike foreigners. At times, the way international support is given, with numerous donors each working towards different goals, has resulted in unnecessary repetition and inefficiency. The partnership between ECOWAS and global actors is frequently hindered by disagreements in priorities, red tape and poor planning systems within their institutions. Just as the UNMAS operation was hampered by independent goals, the harmonic running of AMISOM could be interrupted by different national interests among its member countries. In spite of all this, international-regional cooperation is still very important. Because terrorism in Africa is very complex, action to confront it should involve different regions and be designed to empower them, without replacing their efforts. Cooperation in the future will play a major role in shaping the prosperity of both regions.

Comparative Analysis: Effectiveness, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Experiences and histories in each region have led the ECOWAS and AMISOM organisations in West and East Africa to form different approaches to counterterrorism. The second section presents a comparison of the achievements, barriers and valuable lessons of the institutions for those interested in future regional security.

Effectiveness of ECOWAS and AMISOM Counterterrorism Strategies

To address terrorism, ECOWAS primarily employs policies and establishes normative standards, emphasising preventive diplomacy, legislation, and efforts to unify regional initiatives. The organisation has garnered support from political leaders for programmes targeting terrorism and conflict prevention within West Africa. Its involvement in issues in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger demonstrates its role in fostering peace across Africa. ECOWAS has also promoted partnerships in intelligence sharing and border control, which are vital in combating transnational terrorism (Ibrahim, 2020). However, the organisation engages less directly in counterterrorism operations, which are mainly carried out by specialised task forces rather than NATO itself. Due to recent coups and divisions across the region, it has become significantly more challenging for ECOWAS to ensure collective security. Additionally, addressing the diverse interests of each state and managing limited resources complicate the organisation's ability to sustain a coordinated and ongoing military response (Adegbulu, 2022).

Conversely, AMISOM concentrates on centralised military efforts to combat terrorism. The mission has deployed over 20,000 troops, and its combat operations against Al-Shabaab have enhanced security. Many recognise that AMISOM has retaken key cities like Mogadishu and Kismayo, reducing Al-Shabaab's influence in these regions (Williams, 2018). Additionally, AMISOM has assisted in training and supporting the Somali National Army and taken steps towards a more stable political and security future. However, its success is hampered by recurrent issues such as difficulties in forming joint forces, high operational costs, and the ongoing instability of the Somali state. Heavy dependence on external funding, mainly

from the EU, leaves the future of the institution uncertain. Moreover, allegations of human rights violations and collateral damage have at times undermined the mission's credibility among local communities. Nonetheless, AMISOM remains a key player in counterterrorism efforts across East Africa.

Common Challenges Faced by Regional Counterterrorism Efforts

Both ECOWAS and AMISOM face challenges that limit their ability to combat terrorism. To begin with, these countries struggle to integrate their military and civilian operations because their institutions are weak. AMISOM's decision-making structure is hindered by disagreements among its contributors, and the security groups within ECOWAS are poorly funded and divided politically (Olonisakin, 2019). Additionally, the political and social conditions in both regions disrupt counterterrorism efforts. Organisations like Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab exploit issues such as corrupt rulers, unemployment, and ethnic disputes to gain followers. Addressing these core problems thoroughly is essential to ensure that successes are sustainable. Unfortunately, West African efforts to coordinate security strategies have been impeded by frequent military coups (Onuoha, 2019).

Next, depending too much on outside help and money can make it hard to keep projects going. It is common for both ECOWAS and AMISOM to depend on help from countries abroad when it comes to finance, logistics and information. Because of this, operations are vulnerable to change, as changes among donors or in foreign affairs can affect what happens on the ground. Sometimes, when the aims of regional institutions differ from those of global powers, cohesion and local acceptance can be hard to maintain.

Fourth, important challenges come from the fear of human rights abuses and doubts about legitimacy. Accusations of human rights violations by security forces have made local people less trusting of regional organisations. Counterterrorism efforts require communities to trust the authorities and hold them responsible.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

Despite the challenges, the experiences of ECOWAS and AMISOM offer valuable lessons for future regional counterterrorism efforts in Africa. Some of these include:

- i. Integrated Approach Combining Security and Development: Military operations must be complemented by governance reforms, socioeconomic development, and community engagement. Counterterrorism strategies that address underlying grievances and improve state capacity are more likely to yield sustainable outcomes (Bjørge & Horgan, 2019).
- ii. Enhancing Regional Coordination and Institutional Capacity: Strengthening the institutional frameworks of regional bodies is critical. ECOWAS's role could be enhanced by consolidating command structures and improving funding mechanisms. Similarly, ensuring clearer command unity and operational coherence among AMISOM troop contributors is vital.
- iii. Building Local Ownership and Legitimacy: Regional initiatives should prioritise respect for human rights and engage local communities as partners rather than adversaries. Accountability mechanisms and transparent operations can help build the trust necessary for lasting peace.
- iv. Leveraging Strategic International Partnerships: While external support is indispensable, regional bodies must seek to shape partnerships that enhance autonomy and capacity rather than foster dependency. Collaborative frameworks that align donor support with regional priorities can improve strategic outcomes.
- v. Adapting to Evolving Threats: Terrorist groups continuously adapt tactics and networks. Regional strategies must therefore remain flexible and intelligence-driven, emphasising rapid response and resilience.

Summary of Findings

The study finds that ECOWAS and AMISOM are clear examples of different ways that regions participate in counterterrorism efforts. The organisation stresses dialogue, diplomacy and the rule of law as it deals with issues in its member countries. AMISOM, on the other hand, relies on the African Union and includes a strong presence of troops fighting on the ground and supported externally in counterinsurgency missions. Findings

from the study reveal the difficulty posed by terrorism in different areas and the diversity in the organisations' capacities.

ECOWAS and AMISOM both receive important assistance from the UN, EU, US and France when it comes to funding, planning and technical skills. With AMISOM, support from the EU has played a key role in maintaining expensive military action in Somalia. International aid given to ECOWAS is mainly used to develop the organisation's abilities and assist civil society initiatives. Even so, the strong role played by outside actors leaves doubts over who owns these activities, their future success and the ongoing development of native counterterrorism skills.

According to the study, though AMISOM has had success in recapturing land from Al-Shabaab, it has run into difficulties such as cooperation, human rights issues and dependence on aid from outside. Even though ECOWAS has strengthened its legal framework and designed a regional counterterrorism programme, it doesn't have the resources to carry out security missions on its own. Both organisations have had difficulties due to internal division, weak institutions at the member countries' level and the way terrorism is now related to local dissatisfaction, social and political shut-off and financial hardship.

Conclusion

Since terrorism is becoming a greater danger in West and East Africa, keeping peace and security in the region and internationally has become a major challenge. The article discusses how both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) address terrorism in different ways by selecting and combining different tactics and joining forces with international groups. This last section puts together the key findings from this comparison and makes smart recommendations aimed at making regional counterterrorism in Africa more effective and sustainable.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this comparative study, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, regional actors, and international partners:

i. Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Autonomy

Both ECOWAS and AU-led missions, such as AMISOM/ATMIS, must invest in developing institutional frameworks that enable swift and coordinated responses to security threats. ECOWAS, in particular, should build a standing regional force or rapid deployment capacity under its command to reduce reliance on ad hoc coalitions. Similarly, ATMIS's transition should prioritise the development of Somali security forces, ensuring that local institutions gradually assume full responsibility for counterterrorism.

ii. Balance Military and Non-Military Approaches

Military operations alone are insufficient to defeat terrorism in Africa. Addressing the root causes- such as youth unemployment, political marginalisation, and weak governance- is essential. ECOWAS's emphasis on preventive diplomacy and human security provides a valuable model that should be complemented by targeted development programmes, community engagement, and deradicalisation initiatives. AMISOM/ATMIS should adopt similar holistic strategies, integrating stabilisation, reconciliation, and humanitarian support into its mandate.

iii. Improve Coordination among Regional and International Actors

The current architecture of counterterrorism in Africa is fragmented, with overlapping mandates and inconsistent coordination between regional bodies and international donors. A more integrated command-and-control system, improved transparent information-sharing mechanisms, and joint strategic planning platforms are needed. ECOWAS and the AU should also work toward greater interoperability between their respective peace and security instruments and international partners.

iv. Prioritise Accountability and Human Rights

Counterterrorism operations must adhere to international humanitarian law and human rights standards. Both AMISOM and West African regional forces have been accused of committing abuses, which undermines public trust and provides propaganda

fodder for terrorist groups. Regional organisations must institutionalise robust accountability mechanisms, including independent investigations, judicial redress, and civilian oversight.

v. Promote Local Ownership and Community Engagement

Sustainable counterterrorism must be locally rooted. Regional and international actors should engage local leaders, religious institutions, civil society, and youth groups in their strategies. ECOWAS, for example, should expand its early warning systems to include community-based monitoring and response. In Somalia, ATMIS should work with clan elders and local security actors to foster trust and legitimacy.

vi. Institutionalise Lessons Learned and Best Practices

There is a need for systematic learning and knowledge-sharing between regional organisations. AMISOM's operational experiences could inform future ECOWAS security missions, while ECOWAS's normative frameworks could benefit AU-led interventions elsewhere. A continental repository or think tank under the African Union could collect, analyse, and disseminate best practices in African counterterrorism.

Final Thoughts

Africa's efforts against terrorism still need to be improved, so regional groups will remain crucial. AMISOM and ECOWAS each play different roles, but together they prove how African countries can show leadership and be operationally strong. The future importance of peacekeeping forces will depend on their ability to respond to new dangers, reduce their need for outside help and create approaches that respect all citizens' rights. In the future, understanding security governance, legitimacy and development should become central to counterterrorism efforts in Africa. At that point, only by eliminating terrorism both in battles and in people's minds will regional and international groups be successful in overcoming it.

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