ECOWAS and IGAD are two African sub-regional organisations that are expected to play a crucial role in prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as peacebuilding. Their track-records are uneven, but especially ECOWAS is contributing significantly in terms of democratic transitions, and preventing coup d’états and civil wars.

In this report, the authors argue that the dissimilarities between the two organisations are largely due to difference in institutional strength and the relative distribution of power among the member states.

The advent of great power competition and the proliferation of transnational threats poses challenges to both ECOWAS and IGAD.

To respond to these challenges, deeper integration and better modalities for collaboration between such sub-regional organisations are needed. The report provides a comparative analysis of these organisations and points to the challenges and possible implications of these new threats.
South-South Cooperation at the Advent of Great Power Competition

The capacity of IGAD and ECOWAS to deal with threat proliferation in Africa

Øystein H. Rolandsen
Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

Marie Sandnes
Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)
PRIO encourages its researchers and research affiliates to publish their work in peer-reviewed journals and book series, as well as in PRIO's own Report, Paper and Policy Brief series. In editing these series, we undertake a basic quality control, but PRIO does not as such have any view on political issues. We encourage our researchers actively to take part in public debates and give them full freedom of opinion. The responsibility and honour for the hypotheses, theories, findings and views expressed in our publications thus rests with the authors themselves.

© Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 2019
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced. Stored in a retrieval system or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without permission in writing from the copyright holder(s).

ISBN: 978-82-343-0075-2 (print)
ISBN: 978-82-343-0076-9 (online)

Cover design: www.medicineheads.com
Cover illustration: PRIO
This paper is an outcome of the policy research project “Enhancing South-South Cooperation: Promoting African responses to peacebuilding in Africa”. The project is led by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), in partnership with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the Center on International Cooperation (CIC). It is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The authors would like to thank Dr. Kwesi Aning for contributing to the background research for this paper and to the Norwegian Embassy in Abuja for facilitating both research and dissemination.
Contents

Abbreviations ........................................................................................................... 5
1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 6
2. Long-Standing Challenges to Peace and Security in Africa ............................... 8
3. ECOWAS and IGAD Responses to Long-Standing Challenges to Peace and Security ................................................................. 10
   3.1. Institutional Bodies and Capacities Related to Peace and Security .......... 10
   3.2. Results ........................................................................................................... 11
   3.3. Explaining discrepancies in results .............................................................. 12
   4.1. ECOWAS and IGAD early warning ............................................................ 14
   4.2. Wither African standby forces? ................................................................. 15
   4.3. The rise of ad hoc Multilateral Security Responses and bilateral arrangements ................................................................. 16
5. Conclusion and Policy Implications .................................................................... 17
Further Reading ....................................................................................................... 19
Abbreviations

AMISOM  African Union Mission in Somalia
APSA    African Peace and Security Architecture
AU      African Union
ECOWAS  Economic Community of West African States
EU      European Union
IGAD    Intergovernmental Authority on Development
MNJTF   Multinational Joint Task Force
RECs    Regional Economic Communities
UN      United Nations
1. Introduction

Regional and subregional organizations play a key role in the peaceful settlement of disputes, including through preventive diplomacy, confidence-building and mediation efforts, preventing violent extremism, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

– UN Secretary General, 18 January 2018

Regional economic communities (RECs) are cornerstones in global governance and over the last two decades RECs have increasingly been expected to be the first line of response to insecurity and armed conflict. As a part of this trend, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) are engaged in promoting peace and security in western and eastern Africa. Their capacity and approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding diverge, however: ECOWAS has a solid track record and a regional apparatus to address the different stages of violent conflict – from early warning to peacebuilding. The handling of challenges in The Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone are examples of how ECOWAS uses these various capacities. In contrast, IGAD has been engaged in conflict mediation, but faces obstacles when dealing with early warning, prevention and peacebuilding. These differences between the two RECs are largely due to the varying ability of member states to invest in and empower them, but also due to the nature of the challenges facing the respective regions.

While the peace and security capacity of both RECs has primarily been used to address conflicts within the member states and tension between them, various transnational threats pose additional challenges to sub-regional peacebuilding frameworks. Transnational threats have been a long-standing feature of African politics, but in recent years such threats have multiplied and become more diverse and complex. This is a major challenge to both ECOWAS and IGAD. Insecurity related to the operations of extremist groups has required a co-ordinated response from affected states, especially in the Sahel and around the Lake Chad basin. In eastern Africa organised violence within Somalia has gradually morphed into a broad regional security problem. Local inter-community conflicts also increasingly feature transnational dimensions in Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and even Ghana. Finally, external actors, in particular the US and EU member states, consider trafficking and uncontrolled migration as urgent problems, and they seek partnership with African countries and institutions, including RECs, to deal with these. The diversity of security challenges is to some extent mirrored in the range of multilateral initiatives tasked to deal with them. Re-emerging great power competition is becoming manifest in the international politics surrounding African security, in the sense that various kinds of un-coordinated assistance and interventions become tools for increased influence in recipient nations, rather than a joint effort to bring peace and stability.

We will discuss these developments, focusing on two questions: What accounts for the variation in IGAD and ECOWAS capacity to handle a proliferation of threats to peace and stability in their respective regions? Within such a crowded field, what are the comparative advantages of African RECs in terms of providing security, conflict prevention and peacebuilding? Answering these questions is necessary in order to develop approaches that play to the strengths of RECs while avoiding their inherent limitations. In our analysis we emphasise the important – but often overlooked – factor of the capacity and relative strength of members states and the dynamics between them. We also argue that its important both to differentiate between types of challenges
on the one hand and threats to peace and security. Such insights are also required when crafting mechanisms that can handle responses from a broad range of organisations so that efforts are co-ordinated and duplication is avoided.
2. Long-Standing Challenges to Peace and Security in Africa

When identifying challenges to peace and security in Africa and how states and multilateral organisations respond to these, we may distinguish between long-standing challenges and more recent threats. The former include preventing and ending inter-state and civil wars, while the latter revolve around violent activities related to transnational networks and organisations that threaten several countries at once. Arguably, a rising threat is also the intensifying competition between external actors for influence on the African continent. We will briefly discuss these threats and their implications for security and cooperation within the framework of RECs and other entities handling peace and security on the continent.

Deterrence of and defence against external aggressors has officially been the primary task of African militaries. However, the classic inter-state war, where one country invades another, is a rare occurrence in the continent’s recent history. Since the 1960s the main security challenges facing African states have instead been coups d’état and civil wars. Many African states have experienced some form of rebellion, either during the process of becoming independent or afterwards. In these internal conflicts one or several rebel groups have fought state security forces in order to seize power or gain regional self-determination. The intensity and frequency of such internal conflicts have been amplified by a tendency among African states to use sponsorship of rebels as a weapon of in conflicts with their neighbours. As a consequence counter-insurgency has been the main activity of the armed forces in many states; long-lasting conflicts have resulted in society-wide militarisation and whole countries stuck in a state of permanent insecurity, in turn encouraging the army to seize power. Therefore, to defuse tension between African states and to prevent civil war and coups d’état have for multilateral organisations promoting peace and security been what we in this paper will refer to as long-standing tasks.

In recent years African states and multilateral organisations have also become increasingly preoccupied with new transnational security threats requiring collective responses from affected states. These include global networks of violent extremism, spreading community conflicts, piracy, uncontrolled migration and trafficking. These typically originate in peripheries and remote areas, which can be found in many parts of the African continent; central states’ capacity to control and police these has been tenuous and based on various local society-based solutions (rather than state security). In recent decades, such areas have become more connected and their populations more mobile, and also more broadly integrated into a global network of information exchange, economic transaction and migration outside the control of central states. This development has created new opportunities for conflict entrepreneurs to bring peripheral populations into their networks, and to use ungoverned spaces for various activities threatening to central governments and to overall global security. And even though these threats represent different types of activities, one conflict actor can be involved in several of them. Notably, groups of violent extremists might foment hostility at the community level and use both trafficking and the control of migration networks as a way of financing the pursuit of various political agendas.

There are also links between long-standing security challenges (see above) and these new threats. For instance, violent protest movements, rebel groups and hostile neighbouring states can harness these opportunities for mobilisation and destabilisation, as seen in Libya, Sudan and in Iran’s meddling in other Middle Eastern states. Also, old conflicts can become re-defined as new security threats when what were previously called “liberation movements” become “terrorist
networks”. These renaming exercises either happen as a matter of convenience for the states opposing them, or as a result of these organisations pledging allegiance to international terror organisations pursuing support, legitimacy, and attention from adversaries.

Finally, in the past two years the foreign policy paradigm of (a renewal of) great power competition has emerged, as foreign countries’ have intensified efforts to gain influence in Africa through military means. At the global level, China, the US (in alliance with European countries) and, to a lesser extent, Russia compete for influence. Middle Eastern states (foremost among them Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Iran) are interested in expanding their influence in Africa. Their agendas are pursued through direct intervention, establishing military bases, and massive military aid and co-operation with African security forces. The many motives for what may amount to a “new scramble for Africa” include access to rapidly expanding markets, control of increasingly precious and strategic resources, curtailing transnational threats, protecting trade routes and infrastructure, and even establishing spheres of influence and bilateral alliances. All of these trends point towards further securitisation of African politics and to a focus on military might in the interaction between external powers and African states. Foreign engagement with Africa is thereby increasingly driven by narrow self-interest and the need to nourish bilateral relations. This is a particular threat to multilateralism and the idea of “African solutions to African problems” which underpin AU and the RECs.
3. ECOWAS and IGAD Responses to Long-Standing Challenges to Peace and Security

Through early warning, conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding, multilateral organisations such as the UN, the AU, and various RECs have taken responsibility to handle the long-standing security threats outlined above. The AU and RECs have different strengths and capabilities and, together with several other RECs, IGAD and ECOWAS are part of the AU African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). It is, however, a long-standing endeavour to sort out how responsibilities are to be divided between the AU as a continental organisation and the RECs, and to find functioning mechanisms for co-ordinating their efforts. Moreover, as the following brief comparison between ECOWAS and IGAD reveals, African RECs are heterogeneous in composition and capabilities. Indeed, ECOWAS has been successful within the field of peace and security to such a degree that it is often used as a model for how other African RECs as well as the AU and UN can become more effective in handling conflicts and promoting peace and democracy. IGAD, on the other hand, has quite limited capacity.

3.1. Institutional Bodies and Capacities Related to Peace and Security

**Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**

**Established:** 1975

**Member states (15):** Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Niger, Nigeria, Togo

**Key institutional bodies:**
- Heads of State and Government
- Council of Ministers
- Executive Commission
- Community Parliament
- Community Court of Justice
- Bank for Investment and Development

ECOWAS and IGAD have the following capacities in terms of conflict handling and peacebuilding. Each has an assembly of Heads of State and Government, which is the supreme policy making organ, and a Council of Ministers, which incorporates the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the member-states. IGAD’s Secretariat and the ECOWAS Executive Commission are comparable as engine rooms of programs, projects and activities. IGAD’s also has the Committee of Ambassadors consisting of the member states’ ambassadors to the country of IGAD’s official headquarters, Djibouti. Both RECs have developed early warning capacities. The IGAD Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) has limited capacity and is focused on community conflicts in the peripheries. In contrast, ECOWARN is a broad-based initiative that
aims to monitor the potential occurrence of all kinds of conflict and insecurity, while also working closely with civil society organisations.

**Inter-Governmental Authorities on Development (IGAD)**

**Established:** 1986

**Member states (8):** Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda

**Key institutional bodies:**
- Heads of state and government
- Council of Ministers
- Secretariat
- Committee of Ambassadors

Another difference from IGAD is that ECOWAS has the *Community Parliament* with 115 members divided between the organ’s political and administrative wings. ECOWAS also has a *Community Court of Justice* that observes, interprets and applies law for and to ECOWAS and its member states. This is often referred to as an active and bold adjudicator of human rights, which bypasses national courts and judicial supervision in the region. In comparison, IGAD has no institutional judicial body and there is no specific entity that can control and settle internal disputes or provide legal advice through interpreting IGAD’s legal documents. ECOWAS thus also plays a policing and regulatory role in its region, more so than IGAD does in eastern Africa. All in all, although ECOWAS and IGAD have many of the same formal functions and structures, the institutions of the former have a higher capacity and additional functions.

### 3.2. Results

Among the African RECs, ECOWAS has been the most successful in terms of preventing violence and reinforcing peace in situations that could potentially escalate to full-scale conflicts. Moreover, although cases such as Mali could suggest otherwise, since the mid-1990s ECOWAS has generally provided a comprehensive response to civil wars and inter-state tension with sufficient military and political pressure to achieve peaceful outcomes, such as in the recent case of The Gambia. A notable exception is Nigeria, where ECOWAS has only to a very limited degree responded to conflicts that threaten long-lasting insecurity in the Niger Delta, in areas where Boko Haram operates, and in parts of the country where long-standing conflicts between farmers and herders have become increasingly violent. As one of the wealthiest and most militarily sophisticated states on the African continent, Nigeria has insisted on handling these challenges without the assistance of ECOWAS; it increasingly appears that these threats are beyond the capacity of the Nigerian state to solve on its own.

While both Kenya and Ethiopia hold strong positions, there is no clear lead state within IGAD; mistrust and rivalry between member states is a key obstacle to effective responses to conflicts. Nevertheless, IGAD has in several instances organised negotiations and brought conflict actors together for talks. Its mediation efforts have become a key element of eastern Africa’s security management capacity. But this is as far as IGAD has gone in terms of conflict responses, and it has little strength with regard to implementation or enforcement of agreements. For example, IGAD has been engaged in conflict resolution at the political level in Somalia, but the response on
the ground has been handled by a combination of the AU force AMISOM and member countries’ unilateral interventions. IGAD has also had a leading role in peace negotiations related to the civil war in South Sudan, but it has been criticised for inefficiency and for becoming hostage to neighbouring member countries’ narrowly defined interests.

In addition, division of labour among the UN, the AU and the two RECs remains unclear, and their relations are characterised by both competition and mutual dependency: the RECs’ mandates for engagement in peace and security activities are often legitimised by the UN and AU, but the organisations compete over resources and attention from both external donors and member states. Despite efforts to address this issue, there is still no established precedence or practise as to which organisation should get involved in different stages and activities related to peace and security. For instance, in the long-lasting, low-intensity conflicts in Sudan’s peripheries, IGAD has had a minor role and the AU, UN and various bilateral initiatives have dominated conflict resolution efforts.

3.3. Explaining discrepancies in results

There are several possible explanations for why ECOWAS has been more successful than IGAD in dealing with long-standing threats to stability and security. A fundamental factor is the overall institutional strength and autonomy of ECOWAS, vis-à-vis both external donors and in some respects also its member states. The latter have ceded political prestige and negotiating power to ECOWAS (as well as paying membership dues). Nigeria is the most generous contributor, both militarily and in terms of financing ECOWAS peace and security activities, although in recent years external donors have become more important. This makes it possible for ECOWAS both to act forcefully on behalf of the member states, and also to develop a permanent capacity to deal with different stages of conflict.

IGAD on the other hand levies practically no fees on its member countries and is dependent on the unpredictable and somewhat random support from countries outside the African continent. For instance, the cost of mediating in the South Sudan conflict was carried by such donor countries, not member states. But perhaps more significant, IGAD has very limited opportunity to intervene in member states in order to reinforce peace or end conflict.

Another explanation for the difference in results between ECOWAS and IGAD is the symbiotic relationship between Nigeria’s foreign policy and the development of ECOWAS as a regional institution. Nigeria has over the decades been a key factor in the overall cohesiveness of ECOWAS and the organisation’s ability to levy contributions from member states. As the “big brother” and regional hegemon, Nigeria desires West Africa to be standing as its “backyard” and is for instance wary of France’s efforts to maintain influence through its French speaking former colonies. In the same way as the US often wields hegemonic power through coalitions, alliances and multilateral organisations (at least until quite recently), Nigeria prefers to channel elements of its regional security policy through ECOWAS. This essentially means that any major ECOWAS initiative requires Nigeria’s approval and that the organisation’s capacity to intervene in the internal affairs of member states does not apply to Nigeria itself (and probably not to the three medium-size members, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal).

Within the IGAD region there is continuing competition for regional hegemony, wherein Ethiopia for the time being is top contender. It does not, however, have the necessary financial muscle or political capital to bring other member states into line in the way Nigeria does within ECOWAS. In conflict mediation the heads of state of the stronger IGAD countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Sudan) and various informal envoys handle the portfolios. For instance,
Sudan has in recent years taken a lead in facilitating a negotiated solution to the civil war within the neighbouring state to the south. Until his downfall, in April 2019, this was handled by President Omar Bashir personally. Thus, the differences in terms of ECOWAS and IGAD conflict mediation capacity can partly be explained by variance in the relative distribution of influence among the member states and the degree to which the member states empower the REC to act on their behalf.

### Key points on conflict prevention and peacebuilding capacities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECOWAS</th>
<th>IGAD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 2014 GDP per capita in member states was about $2130</td>
<td>- 2014 GDP per capita in member states was at about $874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Nigeria holds vastly more military and financial capacity than any other ECOWAS member state</td>
<td>- Has a weak early warning framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Has well-developed early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms</td>
<td>- Capacity to engage in mediation, but limited ability to implement and enforce agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Has a selective rapid response to conflict, largely because member states are willing to commit financial and military resources to the organisation</td>
<td>- Decision-making is characterised by rivalry among member states and that no member state has predominant influence on decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Judicial power surpassing its member states’ jurisdictions</td>
<td>- Compete with partly overlapping regional organisations (East African Community and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) for resources from donors and member states.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. A Crowded Field: Responses to New Transnational Threats to Peace and Security

When responding to the new transnational threats to peace and security in Africa, RECs face two mutually compounding challenges: that the threats tend to occur in ungoverned or lightly governed areas, and that countering these threats requires broad and often unprecedented co-operation between a number of African states within costly and sensitive issues related to security and defence. Complexity is also increased by the direct involvement of the US and European countries in meeting these threats. Indeed, such engagement by actors from outside the African continent can also be seen as an aspect of the above-mentioned great power competition paradigm, wherein these powers vie for influence and the action of one results in counter-moves by others. A symptom of these tendencies seems to be an increasingly crowded field of multilateral security operations and organisations. In this section we discuss implications of these new threats and different kinds of responses.

4.1. ECOWAS and IGAD early warning

In terms of dealing with transnational threats to peace and security, it is in the management of grassroots level conflicts that the two RECs have the strongest track record. In West Africa pastoralist mobility is regulated by the ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance (1998), in order to make it easier to cross borders and avoid conflicts that may arise when foreign herds destroy the crops of local farmers. The ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons also acknowledges border management as a key challenge and thereby also addresses trafficking as a transnational threat. However, ECOWAS free movement policy is a complicating factor when it comes to border control.

What appears to be the most direct response to transnational threats is the above-mentioned ECOWAS early warning mechanism, ECOWARN. This has stations in all ECOWAS member states. Essentially, is a reporting mechanism based on several peace and security indicators, where the potential for violence or unrest is to be identified so ECOWAS can respond as early as possible to avoid violence breaking out. Reporting is, however, country-based which makes it difficult to report on developments in border areas and to identify cross-country threats. IGAD also has an early warning mechanism with functions similar to that of ECOWAS. As IGAD does not have a particular institutional body addressing peace and security issues, IGAD’s CEWARN reports to the Assembly of Heads of State. A general challenge to multilateral early warning systems is that they require participant states to share sensitive conflict and security information or allow foreign agencies to collect such information within their borders. Publication of such information might expose governments’ Human Rights abuses and other wrongdoing as well as draw attention to government short-comings in terms of handling domestic threats. These can be strong disincentives for states to participate fully in early warning systems.
4.2. Wither African standby forces?

Since the early 2000s a considerable amount of funding and planning effort has been invested in the development of a continental capacity to deal with security threats through a system of rapid response forces. The African Standby Force was established in 2003 with what was intended as a quick reaction capacity. This was to enable the AU to respond swiftly to a crisis. Through its Constitutive Act, the AU has the right to intervene in a Member State in grave circumstances, i.e. in light of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. It is supposed to comprise military, police and civilian capabilities, on standby in their countries of origin and ready for rapid deployment. The ASF is based on standby arrangements within Africa’s five sub-regions, whereby each has a force available for rapid deployment. This includes the East Africa Standby Force (EASF) and the ECOWAS Standby Force.

However, the ASF has not yet formally deployed in response to any crisis. There are several inherent challenges in developing it as a functional tool for dealing with threats to peace and stability. At the most fundamental level it appears difficult to mobilise substantial funding from member states or external donors to train, equip and keep such a force on standby. Several of the RECs, moreover, and even the AU lack the institutional capacity to manage and govern such forces. Then too, like the UN Security Council, the AU and the RECs are hampered by rivalry between member states. This makes it difficult for them to reach decisions as to when the necessary conditions for deployment are met. Problems related to decision-making are amplified in the case of the EASF, which is not attached to a REC. Instead, the EASF has its own head-of-state governing body with membership expanded beyond IGAD to include both central African countries and to two island states. Ostensibly, this arrangement was a result of Ethiopia being considered too influential within IGAD for EASF to be governed by this organisation.

As an integrated part of a well-established REC, the ECOWAS Standby Force should be in a better position to deploy when member states are threatened by crises and instability. This status has proven difficult to achieve, however, and currently it is only the operations in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau that can be counted as successful. The Force was briefly deployed during the Mali crisis (as the African-led International Support Mission in Mali), and after six months, in July 2013, it was rehatted the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. In the case of the Sahel conflicts and the Boko Haram around Lake Chad, ECOWAS has found it difficult to address a conflict involving African states that are non-members. As a consequence, two ad hoc solutions have been adopted instead (see below).

A fundamental challenge for the African Standby Force structure is that it was conceived as a result of the responsibility to protect (R2P) discourse. R2P was a dominating perspective in discussions around peace and security at the turn of the century, but is increasingly being replaced by the great power competition paradigm. The R2P discourse is centred around the idea that the international community needs the mandate and capacity to intervene in states where populations are under threat and governments are unable or unwilling to deal with the problem. An important background for this discourse was the Rwanda genocide in 1994, when the international community proved unable to intervene. The ASF structure was thought of as a way to deal rapidly and appropriately with civil wars and genocides. In recent years, however, support for the R2P idea has faded, in part due to spectacular R2P failures, notably the intervention in Libya in 2011. This demonstrated that short-term military interventions in highly fragile states are not enough, and may in fact undermine the integrity of the governance structure as well as trigger violent struggles for power. But the ideological underpinnings of the ASF structure are also challenged by the above-mentioned new threats to security that spill across the borders of the RECs.
4.3. The rise of ad hoc Multilateral Security Responses and bilateral arrangements

Faced with transnational threats straddling the borders of both ECOWAS and non-ECOWAS countries, ad hoc multinational forces have been established: the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the MNJTF. The former was spearheaded by France, while Nigeria is a driving force behind the MNJTF, although it is worth noting that that initiative also receives a large amount of funding from external donors. Both operations face challenges similar to those that the ASF encounters in terms of funding structure and co-ordination and in decision-making. G5 Sahel Joint Force is an operation essentially conceived of as a substitute for French military operations dealing with violent extremism in the Sahel. The five countries contributing to the G5 Sahel Joint Force do not have the funding they need, however, and are dependent on French support and co-ordination to carry out their missions. In the case of the MNJTF the Chadian contingent has proven capable as an offensive military force against Boko Haram, but it has been difficult to hold onto territorial gains. The emerging threat from the Islamic State in West Africa Province, a splinter of Boko Haram, is further stretching the capacity of the MNJTF.

It is too early to draw any definite conclusions, nevertheless we might at least observe that although the ad hoc multilateral forces might be presented as both flexible and indigenously African, there are reasons to believe that they do not represent the much-coveted “African solutions to African problems”. Indeed, the increased focus on transnational threats can easily overshadow the fact that long-standing challenges to peace and security persist. There is a noticeable shift in donor policy from promoting democracy in African states to bolstering stability and increasing the repressive power of authoritarian regimes. With the advent of great power competition on the continent these tendencies might be further strengthened.
5. Conclusion and Policy Implications

We have argued that RECs are well-suited to handle long-standing challenges to peace and security, namely inter-state hostility, civil war, coups d’état and political transitions. We have also identified considerable differences in how IGAD and ECOWAS deal with these challenges. This is by and large due to the degree in which member states have invested in the RECs, which in turn has ramifications for their institutional capacities and legitimacy. There are essentially two aspects to such commitments. RECs need substantial economic contributions from member states to ensure continuity and some degrees of autonomy, which is difficult to maintain if a REC is dependent on the whims of external donors. Member states must also transfer some of their sovereignty to empower the REC to make binding decisions on behalf of member states. We find that this has happened to a considerable extent in the case of ECOWAS, less so when it comes to IGAD. A key factor explaining the difference is the relative distribution of power between member states. More precisely, Nigeria has used its hegemonic position in the western African region to empower ECOWAS, while in eastern Africa none of the member states have succeeded in strengthening IGAD in a similar fashion. However, the magnitude of both long-standing challenges and new transnational threats will also impact these developments in the sense that they can both increase and impede the impetus for collaboration.

Long-standing challenges will remain existential threats to their member states and to overall regional stability. There is no guarantee, however, that these challenges will remain high on the agenda of external donors such as the US and the European countries, especially in light of their increased focus on the new threats and on their own narrowly defined self-interest. Consequently, for ECOWAS to maintain its capacity Nigeria must continue to shoulder the responsibility of regional leadership. For IGAD much depends on whether the stronger states can agree on a modus vivendi wherein the REC is seen as a preferred tool to deal with the long-standing challenges to peace and security.

It is even more challenging to find sustainable modalities within the framework of the current APSA structure to deal with the new trans-border threats to security, i.e. violent extremism, spreading community-level conflicts, trafficking and uncontrolled migration. Firstly, handling these challenges requires that REC member states agree to – and implement – a deeper integration of their respective security forces and conflict monitoring mechanisms. This is expensive and requires that the security forces have compatible capacities and high levels of mutual trust. Secondly, this kind of threat spills over borders to other RECs, requiring co-operation between states that are part of different RECs. This also makes such threats difficult for the African Standby Force, which is structured around the RECs. Thus, if security is to be handled at the REC-level, co-operation mechanisms are required not only between member states, but also between the relevant RECs. Until now, this has resulted in either ad hoc arrangements between individual states or solutions at the AU and UN level, with little room for the RECs to play a role.

Finally, that these threats are high on the agenda of external donor countries means that funds are available. However, co-operation is frustrated by diverging interests and priorities between external donors on the one hand and the RECs and their member states. And since these threats directly affect donor countries, their demand for effective measures are more insistent, and this might result in a shift towards more short-term unsustainable solutions such as training and directing small elite groups of security forces, or direct interventions from the donor country’s security forces. The new threats to security represent an existential challenge to the RECs and to the whole APSA framework, and require a thorough and systematic reassessment of their strategy for preventing and responding to security challenges.
The Authors

Dr. Øystein H. Rolandsen is a Senior Researcher at PRIO. Rolandsen has broad experience from research in conflict zones and has focused on the study of African security forces and insurgency groups. He has published several books, articles and policy papers on political violence and escalation, organisations that use violence, civilian protection, humanitarian intervention and post-war security.

Marie Sandnes is a Doctoral Researcher at PRIO. Sandnes researches security force assistance, regional cooperation and counter-terrorism in Africa. She is currently focusing on the use of sub-regional military forces in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel.
Further Reading


ECOWAS and IGAD are two African sub-regional organisations that are expected to play a crucial role in prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as peacebuilding. Their track-records are uneven, but especially ECOWAS is contributing significantly in terms of democratic transitions, and preventing coup d’états and civil wars.

In this report, the authors argue that the dissimilarities between the two organisations are largely due to difference in institutional strength and the relative distribution of power among the member states.

The advent of great power competition and the proliferation of transnational threats poses challenges to both ECOWAS and IGAD.

To respond to these challenges, deeper integration and better modalities for collaboration between such sub-regional organisations are needed. The report provides a comparative analysis of these organisations and points to the challenges and possible implications of these new threats.

South-South Cooperation at the Advent of Great Power Competition
The capacity of IGAD and ECOWAS to deal with threat proliferation in Africa

ECOWAS and IGAD are two African sub-regional organisations that are expected to play a crucial role in prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as peacebuilding. Their track-records are uneven, but especially ECOWAS is contributing significantly in terms of democratic transitions, and preventing coup d’états and civil wars.

In this report, the authors argue that the dissimilarities between the two organisations are largely due to difference in institutional strength and the relative distribution of power among the member states.

The advent of great power competition and the proliferation of transnational threats poses challenges to both ECOWAS and IGAD.

To respond to these challenges, deeper integration and better modalities for collaboration between such sub-regional organisations are needed. The report provides a comparative analysis of these organisations and points to the challenges and possible implications of these new threats.

South-South Cooperation at the Advent of Great Power Competition
The capacity of IGAD and ECOWAS to deal with threat proliferation in Africa

ECOWAS and IGAD are two African sub-regional organisations that are expected to play a crucial role in prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as peacebuilding. Their track-records are uneven, but especially ECOWAS is contributing significantly in terms of democratic transitions, and preventing coup d’états and civil wars.

In this report, the authors argue that the dissimilarities between the two organisations are largely due to difference in institutional strength and the relative distribution of power among the member states.

The advent of great power competition and the proliferation of transnational threats poses challenges to both ECOWAS and IGAD.

To respond to these challenges, deeper integration and better modalities for collaboration between such sub-regional organisations are needed. The report provides a comparative analysis of these organisations and points to the challenges and possible implications of these new threats.

South-South Cooperation at the Advent of Great Power Competition
The capacity of IGAD and ECOWAS to deal with threat proliferation in Africa

ECOWAS and IGAD are two African sub-regional organisations that are expected to play a crucial role in prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as peacebuilding. Their track-records are uneven, but especially ECOWAS is contributing significantly in terms of democratic transitions, and preventing coup d’états and civil wars.

In this report, the authors argue that the dissimilarities between the two organisations are largely due to difference in institutional strength and the relative distribution of power among the member states.

The advent of great power competition and the proliferation of transnational threats poses challenges to both ECOWAS and IGAD.

To respond to these challenges, deeper integration and better modalities for collaboration between such sub-regional organisations are needed. The report provides a comparative analysis of these organisations and points to the challenges and possible implications of these new threats.

South-South Cooperation at the Advent of Great Power Competition
The capacity of IGAD and ECOWAS to deal with threat proliferation in Africa

ECOWAS and IGAD are two African sub-regional organisations that are expected to play a crucial role in prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as peacebuilding. Their track-records are uneven, but especially ECOWAS is contributing significantly in terms of democratic transitions, and preventing coup d’états and civil wars.

In this report, the authors argue that the dissimilarities between the two organisations are largely due to difference in institutional strength and the relative distribution of power among the member states.

The advent of great power competition and the proliferation of transnational threats poses challenges to both ECOWAS and IGAD.

To respond to these challenges, deeper integration and better modalities for collaboration between such sub-regional organisations are needed. The report provides a comparative analysis of these organisations and points to the challenges and possible implications of these new threats.