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## The Role of the African Union and Regional Economic Communities as Impetus for Peace and Security: A Case Study of the Economic Community of West African States

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# **The Role of AU and RECs as Impetus for Peace and Security: A Case Study of the Economic Community of West African States**

Sekou Toure Otondi<sup>1</sup> & Shazia Chaudhry<sup>2</sup> (PhD)

**Abstract:** This paper aims to analyse the link between the African Union (AU), as the premier regional institution whose mandate is mainly to provide peace and security on the continent, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in maintenance of peace and security. The article, other than providing a brief background of the international security system, attempts to analyse the conceptual, theoretical, and normative aspects of security within the context of mainly the role of African Union, and RECs, and connects it to the broader international system, where the United Nations (UN) remains a central actor on issues of global peace security. To anchor the debate on the role of the AU and RECs on peace and security the paper uses the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as a case study for empirical analysis. This is due to the greater similarity between ECOWAS and the AU peace and security architecture that continues to play a complimentary role in ensuring peace and security in the ECOWAS sub-region as evidenced by its numerous intervention with full support of the AU. The article concludes by reiterating the need for institutionalising further the various norms and legal frameworks that should mirror RECs and AU's collective stand in ensuring peace and security. RECs should also be at the forefront in ensuring peace and security as they are closer to the

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conflict, which impacts their national interest more than the AU or UN which in most cases seems far flung and do not bear the immediate negative impact of the conflict.

## **Introduction**

The international system was greatly transformed with the end of the Cold War period. The bipolar systemic balance of power, dominated by the United States of America and the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) shifted to a unipolar systemic balance of power hegemonized by the United States with support from its Western European allies. This transformation greatly impacted Africa by pushing it from initial subordination by the two dominant powers—when Africa merely provided a stage for USA and USSR proxy wars—and even more further towards the periphery of the international system after the fall of the USSR. This brief neglect of Africa was mainly due to the dwindling fortunes of Africa as a significant geopolitical front in the United States and USSR's struggle for global dominance as attention shifted to Eastern European countries that were struggling for self-determination following the disintegration of USSR.

Within the continent, several economic and political changes took place, starting with the clamor for multiparty democracy, through to structural adjustment programs that affected socio-economic and political security across the continent. The ensuing liberalisation of political and economic space shifted the focus of violence from inter-state wars, which had often been proxy wars between the United States and Soviet Union,<sup>3</sup> to intra-state conflicts with debilitating consequences not only for internal security, but for regional peace and security as well. This is

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<sup>3</sup> Ohaegbulam, F, U. (1992), "The United States and Africa after the Cold War", *Africa Today*, Vol.35, No.4, Indiana University Press, p.32.

exemplified in the case of Rwanda and Burundi, where the pressure to democratize provided a tacit example of how the push for democracy could lead to internal strife in the form of ethnic power struggles.<sup>4</sup> The worsening of economic situations for countries that had comfortably relied on foreign aid from the Soviet Union and the United States further fueled domestic conflicts as the financial assistance dwindled and the United States placed demands on Africa to open the borders for trade and embrace liberal democracy.

Thus, given the shifting nature of the global framework, the formation of African Union (AU) in 2002, replacing the Organization of African Unity (OAU), was inevitable. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) has since emerged as one of the key frameworks in regard to AU's attempt at fostering regional peace and security. This is in addition to the AU principle of subsidiarity that delegates efforts at promotion and maintenance of peace and security to Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and in accordance to Article 16 of the Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC).<sup>5</sup>

### **Conceptualizing Security in a Global and Regional Arrangement**

Security, in general, has no clearly defined objective meaning. Nevertheless, it is still significant to provide an understanding of what security actually is in order to understand its nature, evolution, and magnitude. In attempts at defining security, Williams claims that security can be characterized as “the easing of dangers to procured esteems, especially those dangers that are considered to have a level of firmness and need about them.”<sup>6</sup> It is obvious from Williams's

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<sup>4</sup> Stadtmuller, E. (2001), “Regional Dimensions of Security”, *Global Politics of Regionalism: Theory and Practice*, Edited by Mary Farrell, et.al, p.106.

<sup>5</sup> See Article 16 of the *African Union Constitutive Act*, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, P, D. “Thinking about Security in Africa”, *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 83, no. 6 (2007): pp.1021-1038.

definition that the threats are mentioned within a broader context without specification and so are the values. Therefore, any issue can be securitized as long as it indicates urgent need to be prioritized as a security concern. However, the conceptualization does not provide at what point the issue can be de-securitized should the threats to that acquired value subside. There is also a lack of who defines the threats to these acquired values, and who the target audience is. In essence, this gives Williams's definition a rather broad meaning of what security actually means.

Buzan further broadens the definition of security by looking at three referents: individual, state, and international levels.<sup>7</sup> Buzan et al., however, place greater emphasis on international security.<sup>8</sup> In this attempt, international security is defined in accordance to sectors that fall in specific categories as economic, military, environmental, societal, and political.<sup>9</sup> The underlying issues within these sectors are the relationship between the referent object to human survival. However, what Buzan fails to point out is the fact that international security cannot stand alone but is intertwined with both sub-regional and regional security. Within this context sub-regional, regional, and international security issues provide an ecosystem that feeds and thrives on each other. This can be explained by the spillover effects of domestic conflicts across the national borders as well as regions. For instance, the Syrian conflict which began as an internal crisis over time has transformed into not only a regional, but also given birth to a major global crisis. Defining security is important in that the misconception regarding security along sectors is the denial of the inter-related nature of underlying causes, which in reality can be interlinking across all the distinct sectors as described by Buzan.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Buzan, B. "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944)* No. 3 (1991), p.67.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Buzan, B. et al. (1998). *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Pub.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

However, according to Baldwin, to comprehend the idea of security, it's first important to separate it from the conditions necessary for security,<sup>11</sup> which both Williams and Buzan allude to in their conceptualization. In this regard, Baldwin dismisses the notion that security is contested, but rather views it as a confused or inadequately explained concept. As such, Baldwin's argument comes closer to Buzan, who in his attempts at debasing security from its traditional military-political perspective explains security as a generic term that has a distinct meaning but varies in form.<sup>12</sup> In a more radical approach deviating from the traditional definition of security around the notion of nation-state as a major referent, Booth explains that the individual being is the key element around which security issues in general revolve.<sup>13</sup> This interpretation in essence makes individual humans the ultimate referent of insecurity.<sup>14</sup> Hence, regardless of sectors or issues, definition of security can be narrowed down to the survival of individual human beings.

With regard to regional security, the focus has shifted from the state as a referent object to include broader aspects of human security, such as environment, economic stability, health security, and other societal issues—issues that were previously considered as “low politics.” Because these issues are broad and intersperse nation-states, territories tend to require a collective approach. In qualifying regional security, it is important to view regions as the focus around which state and systemic levels of analyzing security issues converge.<sup>15</sup> This understanding of regions as significant actors in ensuring international harmony and security has been more clear from the time when the Cold War came to an end because the attention shifted

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<sup>11</sup> Baldwin, D. A. (1997), “The Concept of Security”, *Review of International Studies*, British International Studies Association, p. 23, 5-26.

<sup>12</sup> Buzan, B, et al., *A New Framework for Analysis*. Op cit, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Booth, K. (2007), *Theory of World Security*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Khong, Y, F. (2001), “Human security: A Shotgun Approach to Alleviating Human Misery?” *Global Governance*; Jul-Sep 2001; 7, 3; Research Library, p. 232

<sup>15</sup> Buzan, B & Ole Waever, (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge Studies in International Relations). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.41

from state centric notion of security (which often was characterised by inter-state conflict) to region specific conflicts—mostly defined by aspects of human security as a result of spillover effects of intra-state conflicts.

Thus, international security is unable to be based on the sovereignty and viability of states alone. Therefore, to ensure sustainable international peace and security it is imperative that individual security becomes an integral part of the wider global security.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, regional institutions are very important in the enhancement of individual, hence human security, but also state security through coordination of national security policies.

### **Security Within Regional and Global Context: A Theoretical Overview**

Neo-realism, whether offensive or defensive, tends to base its analysis of security around the notion of nation-state as the basic unit of the international system. In essence, more focus is given towards national security in regard to survival of the state as the referent object.<sup>17</sup> This narrow focus means that regional institutions and RECs are given less attention by neo-realist theorists. However, this state centric dominance of power based on polarity continues to face a challenge in the post-Cold War era. This is due to the proliferation of institutions that at times, mutates to challenge the power of state actors. Even more so, as Buzan and Weaver claim, polarity might influence security to an extent, but it cannot determine in entirety the character of security relations, more so between states.<sup>18</sup> For example, the inability of Britain to smoothly exit the EU has shown the significant might institutions (though created by the states) have on the

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<sup>16</sup> Hampson, F. O. (2004), "Human Security," *Globalisation, and Global Governance, Global Governance in the Twenty-first Century*, Edited by John N. Clarke and Geoffrey R. Edwards, Palgrave Publishers, London, pp. 177-203

<sup>17</sup> Buzan, B & Ole Waever, (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge Studies in International Relations), Op cit, p.4

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

sovereignty of individual member nation-states of which they belong to. This is more so given the rise of globalization, of which regional integration is a key component.

Likewise, security interdependence is often seen as premised between actors inside a regional security complex than between actors in the regional security complex and the external actors.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, this shouldn't mean that external security concerns do not impact security within the regions and vice versa. Indeed, with the emergence of regional security frameworks, the balance of power that has long characterized the relations between states, seems to be shifting towards balance along regional lines. The formation of collective security arrangements—be it military, economic, political, or environmental—to defend the interests of member states in a regional block against other regions and states might be interpreted as a shift from state centric analysis of balance of power formations to a more region centric. The EU, for instance, has developed numerous collective security arrangements such as a Common Foreign and Security Policy that aims to protect the interests of its member states. In Africa, the AU has subsequently formed a Common Security and Defense Policy that aims at not only defending the interests of African states, but also overcoming the subordination of Africa in the international system and promoting its agency in line with shifts in the systemic balance of power.

Neo-realists have often viewed institutions as products that nation-states form in attempts to achieve their national interest—at least, those which they are unable to achieve individually—through coordination.<sup>20</sup> This is to overcome the anarchic nature of the international system. In line with this thinking is the fact that nation-states only join institutions or RECs if they best serve their national interest. Theorized this way, it can be concluded that the AU is meant to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Randall S, L & Priess, D. (1997), “A Tale of Two Realisms: Expanding the Institutions Debate.” *Mershon International Studies Review* 41, No. 1: pp.1-32.

promote the national interest of Africa's hegemonic states such as South Africa and Nigeria—at the expense of smaller nation-states. Away from the AU as the premier regional organisation, these hegemonic power plays are further entrenched in Africa's sub-regional economic blocs. This partly explains why southern Africa and western Africa, dominated by South Africa and Nigeria respectively, have had relative success in ensuring good governance and democracy in their respective regional sphere of influence, hence nascent political stability, in the SADC and ECOWAS regions compared to their counterparts in the eastern and central Africa regions, where there is no existence of a clear cut dominant nation-state that is capable of ensuring stability around a single hegemon.

The second theoretical approach to regional and sub-regional institutional security is liberal institutionalism. Despite agreeing with structural realists on the anarchic nature of the global structure, liberal institutionalists perceive international institutions as agencies of cooperation towards achieving universal peace and security.<sup>21</sup> Underpinning cooperation with regard to liberal institutionalism is the aspect of reciprocity between nation-states. Keohane, for instance, points out that institutions tend to provide information, reduce transaction costs, and enhance the credibility of commitment and coordination between states.<sup>22</sup> To back up their claim, liberal institutionalism provides empirical evidence on the basis of the EU, as well as security specific regimes such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Liberal institutionalism attributes the long duration of political and economic stability in Europe in the post-War era to cooperation on functional issues such as the European Coal and Steel

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<sup>21</sup> Lamy, S, L. (2011), “Contemporary mainstream approaches: neo-realism and neo-liberalism”, *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. Edited by John Baylis et.al, New York: Oxford University Press, pp.121-122.

<sup>22</sup> Keohane, R, O. (1984), *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton University Press.

Community that eventually gave rise to the EU.<sup>23</sup> This is as opposed to the inter-war period that was characterized by balance of power relations between European nation-states, resulting in unpredictable peace.

Therefore, providing a comparative outlook between the origins of the EU and AU, proponents of liberal institutionalism are justified to lay claim to the effect that reduction of conflict across the continent depends on building strong national, sub-regional, and regional institutions. This is evidenced by low trends of military coups and growth of emerging democratic principles across the region since the transformation of OAU to AU in 2001. This positive development can be attributed to coordination between the AU and RECs. This positive trajectory has been strongest across southern and western Africa regions where ECOWAS and SADC have often worked in conjunction with AU to entrench democratic norms and practices where regime change is encouraged via the ballot and not the bullet. It can be argued that the existence of hegemonic powers, mainly South Africa in the southern Africa region and Nigeria in the western Africa region, where both have embraced democracy, has in essence made it easier for ECOWAS and SADC to intervene in smaller states that might engage in unconstitutional regime change.

On the contrary, it can still be argued that these two hegemons are in some ways driven by their own national interest in intervening in smaller states internal affairs. The danger of regional humanitarian crisis is likely to hamper their economic and political interest necessitating the need for timely interventions. Their primary goal is thus premised on ‘containment’ of internal situations in smaller countries within their regions. This can be illustrated by the actions of South Africa towards the dire economic and poor governance record in Zimbabwe, where

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<sup>23</sup> Parsons. C., (2002), “Showing Ideas as Causes: The Origins of the European Union.” *International Organization* 56, no. 1: pp. 47-84.

despite decades of misrule, South Africa has tended not to directly intervene. The fallacy of stability based on the reliance of hegemony, however, is the inadequacy on how best to intervene should the hegemony themselves be faced with internal political or economic instability.

The third main school of thought that aims to explain the aspects of global security is constructivism. The central idea around this school of thought within the context of peace and security is that the notion of security is as much about ideas, norms, values, and principles.<sup>24</sup> This view is opposed to the concept of structural power politics that mostly defines neo-realist and liberal institutionalist thinking with regard to the workings of the international system. Empirically, within the international system, constructivists view NATO as a shared idea between its member states with an understanding of building a security community.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the common thread between and amongst NATO members is a core value of peaceful co-existence.

Within the context of AU and Africa's RECs, the idea of Africa Governance Architecture (AGA) as an ideological framework for advancing peace and security exemplifies core constructivism assumptions. The idea is based on the fact that for AU to achieve its objectives—peace and security through good governance and democratic ideals—it has to work collaboratively with RECs, as well as individual AU member states and other non-state actors such as civil society groups across the continent.<sup>26</sup> In addition to AGA, the values of pan-Africanism, instilled in the AU's Constitutive Act, has seen African policy makers and scholars rally the continent around the mantra of “African solutions to African problems.”<sup>27</sup> This concept

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<sup>24</sup> Baylis, J. (2011), “International and global security”, *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. Edited by John Baylis et.al, New York: Oxford University Press, pp.237-238

<sup>25</sup> U. Vessa, (1999), “Prospects of Security Communities: On the Relevance of Karl W. Deutsch's Contributions.” *Peace Research* 31, No.1: pp. 18-25.

<sup>26</sup> See *Africa Governance Structure*, Accessed June 2019, Available at <http://aga-platform.org/about>.

<sup>27</sup> Ayttey, G, B, N. (August 2002), “Sustainable Development: Promoting Progress or Perpetuating Poverty? Edited by Julian Morris, Profile Books, London.

gave momentum to the AU member states to respond to decades of state failure in Somalia through the formation of African Union Mission in Somalia. Although it can be argued that AMISOM still heavily relies on external donors for funding, its origin was initiated by AU's leadership, with majority of peacekeeping forces being drawn from Africa's nation states driven by the ideals of "African solutions to African problems."

The concept of "African problems, African solutions" has also seen normative responses to non-military security threats. This has been witnessed in threats emanating from health crisis, as was the case during the Ebola outbreak in west Africa. ECOWAS in collaboration with the AU took a lead in containing the spread of the Ebola virus thus mitigating a potential regional humanitarian crisis. However, some critics have pointed to the lack of practicality of African problems to African solutions on the basis of the inter-linkages between Africa's problems to the wider global challenge. In essence, they claim that there is a need to avoid narrowing Africa's problems specifically as Africa's, but to look at Africa's security challenges as being part of the general global issues as well.<sup>28</sup> This is understandable given the fact that security tends to be dynamic and have wider regional and global implications beyond its epicenter. In addition, some critics believe that the concept of African solutions to African problems also tends to be misused by dictatorial regimes on the continent to ward off interventions from external actors, especially with regard to violations of human rights and constitutional revisionism. This latter claim has been witnessed in cases in Darfur, in Sudan, and in Libya where the AU took a lukewarm and slow response despite the violations of human rights and cases bordering on genocide. To the detriment of the ideal "African solutions to African problems," and the lethargic response by AU, external actors have found room to carelessly intervene in Africa. These interventions by

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<sup>28</sup> Gbrewold, B. (25 May 2010), The Cynicism of "African Solutions for African Problems", *Journal, African Security*, Volume 3, Issue 2, Taylor & Francis, pp. 80-103.

external actors, often driven by their own national interests more often lead to further instability across the continent. For instance, this was witnessed by NATO's misguided intervention in Libya that has since destabilized the entire Sahel region despite being addressed on the basis of international morality by NATO.<sup>29</sup>

Social constructivists have a point with regard to claims of shared understanding of ideas, values and knowledge as a means to peace and security. Wendt asserts that anarchy is primarily what states make of it.<sup>30</sup> This illustrates that security or insecurity is a socially constructed knowledge. Thus, security can be enhanced at the individual, state, and international level through instilling values, ideas, norms, and practices that promote peaceful co-existence within communities. Nevertheless, states tend to have an overly ambitious and optimistic perceptions, based on ideas on how to ensure security.<sup>31</sup> However, constructivists' views do not entirely echo the truth of the international system. In contrast their assumptions at times seem farfetched in comparison to the actual nature of the international system which is highly anarchic.

### **The United Nations, African Union, and Regional Economic Communities: A Normative Security Architecture**

The two main issues with regard to normative analysis of security include actors and the audience. These two factors can be examined within the context of international, regional, and sub-regional values, principles, procedures, rules, and norms that guide the conduct of security.

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<sup>29</sup> Kuperman, A, J. (2015), "Obama's Libya Debacle: How a Well Meaning Intervention Ended in Failure", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2015 Issue, pp. 66-77.

<sup>30</sup> Wendt, A. (1992), "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46, No. 2, pp. 391-425.

<sup>31</sup> Baylis, J. (2011), "International and global security", *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Op cit, pp.237-238

With regard to the actors, the key concern is with their moral legitimacy that gives them the authority to securitise or de-securitise an issue of security concern.<sup>32</sup> In security studies, the key actors have traditionally been states and governments who have been known to either securitise or de-securitise security matters. However, with the changing nature of domestic and international system, due to globalisation, there has been an increased involvement of non-state actors in defining which security issues actually matter and thus should be given priority. This has more so been witnessed within the realm of human security where non-state actors have greatly influenced securitization and desecuritization of key issues outside the traditional domain of national security. Nevertheless, while some scholars, such as Floyd have elevated the discussion on what can be securitized or desecuritized on the basis of abstract concepts calling for a just securitization, akin to the just war theory,<sup>33</sup> others such as Hansen advocates for securitization or desecuritization not on the basis of a set of common principles, but with regard to the reality and necessity of the prevailing situation.<sup>34</sup>

At the international level, the core normative aspect of peace and security is largely domiciled in the United Nations Charter. The essence of the United Nations as contained in its preamble and throughout the charter was aimed at to prevent “future ages from the menace of war” after the discontent of the international community to prevent the two world wars.<sup>35</sup>

Although the UN, with regard to its structure and functionality, mainly focused on preventing wars between states, the UN taking a leading role in resolution of conflicts, the termination of the

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<sup>32</sup> Wæver, Ole. (1995), “Securitization and Desecuritization.” In; R. D. Lipschutz (Ed.), *On Security, 1995*, Columbia University Press, pp. 46-87.

<sup>33</sup> Floyd, R. (2011), “Can Securitization Theory Be Used in Normative Analysis? Towards a Just Securitization Theory,” *Security Dialogue* 42, No. 4–5, pp.427–39.

<sup>34</sup> Hansen, L. (2012), “Reconstructing Desecuritization: The Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for how to Apply it,” *Review of International Studies*, British International Studies Association, Volume 38, Issue 3, pp. 525-546.

<sup>35</sup> See, UN Charter.

Cold War and decline of intra-state conflict has seen the UN invoke Chapter VIII of its Charter in resolving regional conflicts through cooperation with regional and sub-regional institutions. The urgency of the UN to prioritize coordination with regional institutions can largely be attributed by the failure of the international community to prevent the Rwandan genocide. Thus this failure, in addition to regional and sub-regional intra-state conflicts, necessitated the need for a working arrangement between the UN and regional organizations such as the AU. The normative framework that guides the UN's collaboration with regional and sub-regional organizations is chapter VIII of the UN Charter, but still the UN Security Council is important in defining the standard procedures and rules of engagement between the UN and regional, as well as sub-regional, organizations. This is clearly stated in Article 52(2) which requires decisions made by regional and sub-regional organizations to be referred to the UN Security Council for further deliberations or approvals.<sup>36</sup> This is despite the splits between the five permanent UN Security Council members, which has threatened resolutions of global conflicts.<sup>37</sup> The divisions, in recent times, have mostly played out with regard to the Venezuelan and Syrian conflict as alignment within the Security Council is based entirely on their own national policy preferences.

Although the UN has its own set of rules with regard to promotion of regional peace and security, regional organization also have an elaborate normative arrangements that define their conduct and approach to promotion of regional peace and security. Despite the fact that the Constitutive Act, like the UN Charter, is aimed at promotion of regional peace and security, the specific framework within the AU that governs and places significant emphasis on the continental peace and security is the AU Peace and Security Architecture. This is further

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> *International Crisis Group*, (2019), "Council of Despair? The Fragmentation of UN Diplomacy", New York/Brussels.

reinforced by six fundamental structures that aim to resolve and prevent conflict across the region. These building blocks of the AU Peace and Security Architecture includes: the Panel of the Wise, the Peace Fund, the African Standby Force, Continental Early Warning System, and the Commission.

In addition to the AU Peace and Security Architecture, there are eight sub-regional economic communities and organizations across the continent that are critical in ensuring regional peace and security. The awareness of the proximity of the conflicts to regional economic communities has necessitated the AU to establish the principle of subsidiarity which places greater responsibility on sub-regional economic communities to resolve local conflicts.<sup>38</sup>

Most importantly, regardless of the seemingly well-structured and multilayered approach to peace and security through coordination between sub-regional, regional and international levels, there still exists an apparent lack of clarity between the normative frameworks guiding the conduct of peace and security between the UN at the international level, AU at the regional level, and Regional Economic Communities at the sub-regional levels. This is exemplified by the way the frameworks of the UN Charter and AU Constitutive are structured and financed to manage issues of peace and security.

While the AU, through its Constitutive Act, aims at asserting its independence on dealing with regional crises, in practice, it is still hampered by the overarching nature of the UN that limits its actions in the region due to the UN requirement that it refers its recommendations on peace and security first to the UN Security Council for approval. This limitation is not only with regard to the UN rules of procedure, but is also linked to the nature of AU funding, which in large part comes from external donors. The AU budget as of 2016 was up to 90% funded by

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<sup>38</sup> See Article 16 of the *African Union Constitutive Act*, 2002.

external actors. This mirrors negatively on AU's decision making process with regard to its norms, values, and procedures, as the AU has to fine tune its objectives to manage peace and security with demands from external donors.

### **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Sub-Regional Peace and Security**

The AU and RECs play a symbiotic role in maintaining peace and security in the region. While owing to its elevated status as a continental body, the AU is mainly supposed to provide legitimization of RECs interventions in resolving conflicts. Due to the proximity of RECs to the conflicts as well as better understanding of key actors requires RECs to take a leading role in conflict resolution. These actions by RECs are further driven by the fact that unlike the AU, which has a wider continental mandate, RECs tend to exhibit a perception of genuine concerns to resolve sub-regional conflicts within their sphere of influence to avoid the spillover effects, which might not only be harmful to their individual national interests, but also to the successful provision of regional public goods to citizens within a regional economic arrangement.<sup>39</sup> However, due to the reality of AU conflicts overall, the AU and other international actors such as the UN still performs a coordinative function with RECs in preventing, managing, and resolving conflicts.

The case of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), nevertheless, illustrates the proactive role that RECs can play in coordination with AU as well as other international actors, such as the UN, in ensuring peace and security across the continent. The

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<sup>39</sup> Williams, P, D. (2007), "Thinking about Security in Africa." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* No.6, p.83.

institutionalization of ECOWAS peace and security architecture that closely mirrors the AU's peace and security architecture has enabled it to strengthen its military security as well as make significant strides in advancing human security across the West Africa region. Although ECOWAS was established in May 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria following the signing of the ECOWAS Treaty by fifteen West African states<sup>40</sup> as an economic bloc, the institutionalisation of its peace and security architecture began in earnest in 1993 with the realisation that economic development could only be sustained through political stability. In essence, ECOWAS further reviewed its treaty to include the component of ensuring regional peace and security, as per Article 4 of the revised treaty.<sup>41</sup> This aspect formally institutionalised Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) as the military wing of ECOWAS. Its main aim was to ensure rapid intervention in incidences that threatened regional peace and security. Thus ECOMOG first direct military intervention was during the 1990 Liberian civil war. In this regard ECOWAS achieved a historic milestone as the first ever regional body to militarily intervene in maintaining peace and security without the direct permission from the UN Security Council or OAU.<sup>42</sup>

However, it is significant to note that until the Liberian civil war, most of ECOWAS's approach to regional peace and security had been based on ad-hoc basis and was less institutionalised. In addition, the immediate existential threat to peace and security in the post-Cold War era, with its spillover effects not only being felt across the region, but even globally, had changed to mainly intra-state conflicts. However, at the formation of ECOWAS the focus

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<sup>40</sup> See, Original Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Available at <http://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-law/treaties/>, Accessed April 2019.

<sup>41</sup> See, Economic Community of West African States Revised Treaty, Abuja, (1993), 101 Yakubu Gowon Crescent, Asokoro, P.M.B. 401, Abuja, Nigeria.

<sup>42</sup> Gershoni, Y. (1997), "War without End and an End to a War: The Prolonged Wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone." *African Studies Review* 40, No. 3, pp.55-76.

was mainly at resolution of inter-state and external aggression rather than intra-state conflicts. This is exemplified by the 1986 Protocol on Mutual Defence,<sup>43</sup> which laid much emphasis on securing the ECOWAS region from external aggressors, while paying less attention to internally generated conflicts that undermined ECOWAS's main goal of ensuring regional peace and security. This was further compounded by the existence of Standing Mediation Committee and ECOMOG's principle of non-interference in internal affairs of member nation-states, which was also an OAU legal and normative policy.

On the basis of ECOWAS's inadequacies to effectively ensure local harmony and security, the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security was received in December 1999.<sup>44</sup> The aim was to develop an institutionalised system with a legal framework that could ensure member nation-states worked in tandem in ensuring peace and security across the region. This framework is arguably the most comprehensive protocol relating to peace and security in the ECOWAS sub-region. Its mandate has been to address peacekeeping, humanitarian support, and peace building capabilities, as well as the issue of cross border crimes.<sup>45</sup> In essence, the ECOWAS Security Mechanism has led to the establishment of highly institutionalized ECOWAS peace and security architecture similar to the AU peace and security architecture. The components of ECOWAS's peace and security architecture includes: the Mediation and Security Council, an Early Warning System, a Standby Force, as well as the adoption of a protocol on good governance and

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<sup>43</sup> See, Economic Community of West African States Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Defence, [http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/3827~v~Protocole\\_%20d\\_Assistance\\_Mutuelle\\_en\\_matiere\\_d\\_e\\_Defense.pdf](http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/3827~v~Protocole_%20d_Assistance_Mutuelle_en_matiere_d_e_Defense.pdf), Accessed April 15, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> See ECOWAS, *The Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-Keeping and Security*, Available at; [https://www.zif-berlin.org/fileadmin/uploads/analyse/dokumente/ECOWAS\\_Protocol\\_ConflictPrevention.pdf](https://www.zif-berlin.org/fileadmin/uploads/analyse/dokumente/ECOWAS_Protocol_ConflictPrevention.pdf), Accessed April 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

democracy. Thus the ECOWAS's peace and security architecture that closely resembles AU peace and security architecture enhances complementarity and compatibility between the two institutions towards ensuring promotion and maintenance of sub-regional peace and security.

The Mediation and Security Council is the top decision-making organ of ECOWAS. It is made up of heads of states and government, minister of foreign affairs, and government representatives from member states. The main role of the Mediation and Security Council as the name suggests is to ensure the maintenance, promotion of peace and security including deployment of peacekeepers and military operations. It works in tandem with AU Peace and Security Council in high level decision making with regard to peace and security. This is reinforced by the fact that the AU is the only African inter-governmental organisation with permanent representation at the UN due to the fact that it is considered as the overall representation of other African sub regional institutions.<sup>46</sup> Thus, ECOWAS has to collaborate with AU in terms of initiating and implementing peace and security concerns across the West African region in liaison with the UN.

The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (EPCF) was formed in 2008 by the Mediation and Security Council to enhance the capacity for human security within the ECOWAS region. Its unique aspect is with regard to its holistic approach to ensure sustainable peace and security through comprehensive understanding of specific potential and ensuing conflicts and crises across the region. The ECPF perspective and understanding of conflict prevention has 14 components that are divided into two broad realms as either structural or operational. The structural aspect focuses on establishing new institutions while strengthening existing ones as a measure for conflict prevention. It aims to strengthen democracy, the rule of law, reconciliation

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<sup>46</sup> Ajayi, T. (2008), "The UN, the AU and ECOWAS – A Triangle for Peace and Security in West Africa?" *FES Briefing Paper 11*, November 2008, p.7.

and reintegration, as well as peace education through civil society organizations' engagement.<sup>47</sup> The operational strategies, however, focus on the process or methods of conflict prevention such as early warning and response, mediation, conciliation, disarmament and peacekeeping through the ECOWAS Standby Force.<sup>48</sup>

The aim of the ECOWAS Early Warning System is to report incidences and trends of conflict and security concerns across the region with a primary goal of ensuring peace and security, through providing real-time options to policy makers so as to be able to avert, defuse or transform dire situations of conflict, instability, disruptions and disasters.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Early Warning System is buttressed by Early Response mechanism that provides possible mitigation measures in potential trouble hotspots to avoid escalations. The early warning mechanisms are divided along four main zones across the ECOWAS sub-regions; however, it's headquartered in ECOWAS Commission in Abuja, Nigeria. This has enhanced monitoring capabilities due to its widespread antennae at the grassroots level.

The Early Warning System usually makes three reports which include country profiles, information on incidents that have occurred, and general situation reports. The reports are collated by the four offices to inform the decisions of the Monitoring and Security Council (MSC). Based on reports of the early warning mechanisms, the MSC can either decide to undertake fact finding, use of good offices to mediate, invoking the services of the council of the wise-constituted of fifteen prominent personalities from each of the member states or provide ultimatum decision for military intervention in the conflict. This formation reflects the

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<sup>47</sup> Lucey, A. and Arewa, M. (2016), "Sustainable peace: Driving the African Peace and Security Architecture through ECOWAS", *Institute for Security Studies*, ISS Paper 301, November 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> See, ECOWAS Early Warning System, Accessed April 2019, Available at <http://www.ecowas.int/ecowas-strengthens-capacity-of-its-early-warning-directorate-on-governance-and-human-rights/>

attachment that ECOWAS provides to peaceful resolution of the conflict and is complementary to AU given the near similarity of ECOWAS and the AU's peace and security architecture.

The ECOWAS Standby Force plays a central role in peacekeeping and peace maintenance process within the region. ECOMOG was transformed into ECOWAS Standby Force in 2004. The force's mandate was further expanded to include conflict prevention, humanitarian intervention, enforcement, peace building, and control of organized crime. As compared to other regional forces, the ECOWAS Standby Force, with about seven hundred trained military personnel, has been more in the forefront in stabilising and enforcing democracy and peacekeeping operations than its peers—such as the East African Community (EAC) sub-regional bloc. The deployment period was reduced to fourteen days in comparison to the standard required thirty-day period recommended by the AU for its continental Standby Forces. This has made the Standby Forces an efficient military force capable of enforcing recommendations of the Mediation and Security Council compared to its peers across the region.

In recent times, ECOWAS has been able to promote peace and security amidst debilitating conflict in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Ivory Coast. This, again, is unlike in the EAC region which has numerous failed to provide decisive and timely resolution of conflicts in the EAC sub-region with regard to pushing for good governance and peaceful resolution of conflicts, as witnessed by ongoing conflicts in Burundi and South Sudan. ECOWAS adopted the Protocol on Good Governance in 2001. The Protocol advocates for a raft of measures that ensure adherence to: constitutional principles shared by all member states, including the separation of powers; the independence of the judiciary; and zero tolerance for obtaining and maintaining power by unconstitutional and undemocratic means.<sup>50</sup> These measures

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<sup>50</sup> Aggad, F, & Miyandazi, L. “Understanding ECOWAS efforts in promoting a governance agenda: Adapting regional norms to lessons from national crises”, *European Centre for Development Policy Management*, pp.3-20.

have seen ECOWAS participate as an observer in all the ECOWAS member nation-states general elections since 2004.<sup>51</sup>

Buoyed by democratic transition in leading member-states in recent years, such as Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast, ECOWAS has managed to vociferously underscore the need for good governance and democratic principles across member states within the region. For instance Ghana and Nigeria, which are notorious for unconstitutional ascension to power through military takeover, have in recent decades held successful and democratic transfer of power through the ballot. This has also been the case in Senegal, where attempts by Abdoulaye Wade to extend the presidential term limits in 2010 flopped. These positive developments by ECOWAS, backed by the legal and normative aspects of AU's Constitutive Acts requirements, have seen diplomatic and military interventions in countries that have either attempted to undertake constitutional revisionism or unconstitutional ascension to power.

With support from the AU and the UN Security Council, ECOWAS has also managed to enforce the requirements of the Protocol on regimes that have failed to adhere to them through suspensions and sanctions and in worse cases, deploying the Standby Force. In Burkina Faso, tough diplomatic response to the military leaders who had overthrown the constitution led to threat of banning the country from the AU. This, in addition to strong diplomatic stance by ECOWAS saw the country return to a democratic path. The case of Gambia also saw ECOWAS apply the traditional carrot and stick approach that eventually led to Yahya Jammeh reluctantly exiting power after losing elections and attempting to reverse the outcome to unconstitutionally and undemocratically continue holding onto power—in total violation of provisions of the AU Constitutive Act and ECOWAS treaty.

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<sup>51</sup> Lucey, A, and Arewa, M., “Sustainable peace: Driving the African Peace and Security Architecture through ECOWAS,” Op cit.

## **Conclusion**

The AU, RECs, as well as other regional security mechanisms play key roles in resolving, maintaining, and promoting regional peace and security. This fact is evident as discussed above and illustrated the role of ECOWAS in ensuring peace and stability across the West Africa sub-region. Although AU and RECs core aim has been economic development of the region, it is important to note that economic growth and development cannot be attained without meaningful and sustainable peace and security. The end of the Cold War has resulted in intra-state conflicts rather than inter-state conflicts. However, the corresponding effect of the intra-state conflicts has been the spillover effect, beyond the affected nation-states territorial boundaries, leading to wide scale debilitating humanitarian, social, political, and economic crises—the effect of which is not only felt regionally but globally as well. It is therefore imperative that the AU and Africa’s RECs leverage economic integration with efforts at promoting peace and security. The relative success of the AU and RECs, exemplified by ECOWAS, in institutionalising various norms and legal frameworks to ensure peace and security should be replicated across the continent. This, then, is likely to catalyse the push towards realisation of Africa’s vision of 2063, a prosperous, integrated, and stable continent.

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