

The AES–ECOWAS Rupture: Implications for Counterterrorism Cooperation and Regional Security Architecture in West Africa

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Abstract

The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and their subsequent consolidation under the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) represents a critical juncture in West African regional security governance.

This article examines the implications of this geopolitical rupture for counterterrorism cooperation and regional security architecture. Drawing on qualitative content analysis of primary documents, policy reports, and scholarly literature, the study reveals that the AES–ECOWAS fragmentation has fundamentally altered institutional frameworks for collective security, intelligence sharing, and joint military operations. While the AES emerged as a sovereignty-driven security response to perceived external pressures and insecurity, its formation has simultaneously weakened the cohesion of established regional institutions and created operational gaps exploitable by terrorist organizations.

The analysis, grounded in Regional Security Complex Theory, demonstrates that complete security disengagement is neither practical nor sustainable given the transnational nature of contemporary security threats. The article concludes that the region's long-term security effectiveness depends on pragmatic cooperation mechanisms transcending political differences, while acknowledging the fundamental tension between national sovereignty and collective regional security.

Keywords:

ECOWAS, Alliance of Sahel States, regional security, counterterrorism, West Africa, institutional fragmentation, security cooperation

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Context

The West African sub-region has historically depended on the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as a central mechanism for regional integration, conflict management, and collective security provision. Since the 1990s, ECOWAS has served as a pivotal regional security actor through initiatives including ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group) and the ECOWAS Standby Force, reinforcing its institutional prominence in peacekeeping and stabilization efforts (Aning & Bah, 2020; United Nations, 2021). The organization evolved from a primarily economic bloc into a multifunctional institution capable of military intervention, establishing normative frameworks for interstate conduct and collective response mechanisms to transnational challenges.

However, the contemporary security landscape in West Africa—particularly across the Sahel—has become increasingly complex and challenging. The region now confronts a confluence of jihadist insurgencies, transnational terrorism, and organized criminal networks, concentrated especially in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have systematically expanded their operational footprint, exploiting conditions including weak state capacity, porous borders, and governance deficits that characterize the region (International Crisis Group, 2023; United Nations Development Programme, 2022). These dynamics have placed unprecedented pressure on established regional security cooperation frameworks, straining their institutional capacity and normative authority.

Political instability in the Sahel, marked by a series of military coups between 2020 and 2023, has significantly strained relations between ECOWAS and member states under military governance. In response to sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and perceived external interference, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger announced their formal withdrawal from ECOWAS and subsequently established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) as a consolidated regional framework during 2023–2024 (ECOWAS Commission, 2024; Institute for Security Studies, 2024). This development represents a fundamental shift in regional strategic orientation.

The emergence of the AES signifies a transition from multilateral regionalism toward a sovereignty-driven and security-centric alliance model. While AES leaders justify their withdrawal on grounds of national sovereignty and dissatisfaction with ECOWAS policies, this geopolitical reconfiguration raises critical concerns regarding the sustainability of counterterrorism coordination and regional security governance. ECOWAS historically relied upon collective frameworks for intelligence sharing, joint military operations, and coordinated responses to insecurity; institutional fragmentation may consequently

undermine effectiveness of these mechanisms (Aning, 2021; Institute for Security Studies, 2024). Furthermore, the AES has begun pursuing alternative security partnerships, including increased cooperation with non-traditional actors such as Russia, signaling a reorientation of geopolitical alignments that may either enhance localized security responses or deepen fragmentation among regional forces (International Crisis Group, 2024).

Against this backdrop, the AES–ECOWAS rupture presents a critical turning point in West African security architecture. It raises fundamental questions regarding the viability of collective security mechanisms, the future trajectory of counterterrorism cooperation, and broader implications for regional stability and institutional legitimacy.

To better understand the origins of the AES–ECOWAS rupture, it is important to examine the sequence of political and security developments that contributed to the deterioration of relations between ECOWAS and the military-led governments of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The timeline presented in Table 1 highlights key events between 2020 and 2025 that culminated in the establishment of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) and the subsequent withdrawal of its member states from ECOWAS.

Table 1: Major Security Developments Leading to the AES-ECOWAS Rupture (2020-2025)

Year	Event	Security Implication
2020	Military coup in Mali	Increased tensions between ECOWAS and military authorities.
2021	Second coup in Mali	ECOWAS sanctions and diplomatic pressure
2022	Military coup in Burkina Faso	Expansion of military rule in the Sahel.
2023	Military coup in Niger	ECOWAS threat of military intervention.
2023	Formation of AES	Emergence of alternative security framework.
2025	Formal withdrawal from ECOWAS	Fragmentation of regional security architecture.

Source: Author’s compilation (2026) based on ECOWAS (2024), ICG (2024), and Reuters (2025)

As shown in Table 1, the rupture between ECOWAS and the AES did not emerge suddenly but evolved through a series of interconnected political and security developments. The succession of military coups,

ECOWAS sanctions, and increasing disagreements over governance and sovereignty collectively contributed to the formation of an alternative regional security arrangement

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite decades of regional integration and security cooperation under ECOWAS, West Africa continues to experience persistent and evolving security threats, particularly concentrated in the Sahel region. The escalation of terrorist violence, coupled with institutional capacity constraints and governance deficits, has exposed significant limitations in existing regional security frameworks (United Nations Development Programme, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2023). The recent withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS and the subsequent formation of the Alliance of Sahel States represent a significant disruption to the region's collective security architecture, creating substantial uncertainties regarding the continuity of joint military operations, intelligence sharing mechanisms, and coordinated counterterrorism strategies previously facilitated through ECOWAS institutional channels (Institute for Security Studies, 2024).

The fragmentation of regional security cooperation creates critical operational gaps that terrorist organizations may systematically exploit. The absence of unified command structures and reduced collaboration among affected states risks weakening the overall effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts across the region. Additionally, parallel security arrangements under the AES raise concerns regarding duplication of efforts, coordination deficiencies, and potential institutional rivalry between regional blocs (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2022). While existing scholarship has examined ECOWAS's role in conflict management and the rise of insecurity in the Sahel, there exists limited scholarly attention on the specific security implications of the AES–ECOWAS rupture and its ramifications for counterterrorism cooperation and regional security architecture.

1.3. Research Gap

Recent literature has extensively explored regional security cooperation in West Africa, the multifaceted challenges of counterterrorism in the Sahel, and the political implications of military coups in the region (Aning & Bah, 2020; United Nations Development Programme,

2022; International Crisis Group, 2023). However, much of this scholarship either predates or only superficially addresses the withdrawal of Sahelian states from ECOWAS. Emerging analyses (Institute for Security Studies, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2024) have begun highlighting the political and diplomatic consequences of AES formation, yet a significant gap remains in empirical and conceptual studies that systematically examine its impact on counterterrorism cooperation mechanisms, intelligence sharing frameworks, joint military operations, and the overall structure of regional security governance. Furthermore, existing studies tend to focus either on ECOWAS as a standalone institution or on national-level security challenges, with limited attention to the interaction between competing regional security frameworks. The main research question guiding this study is to find out how the AES–ECOWAS rupture affected counterterrorism cooperation and regional security architecture in West Africa?

2. Theoretical Framework

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

This study is anchored in Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver and comprehensively articulated in their seminal work, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). RSCT argues that security threats are most effectively understood within regional contexts because states are more likely to be affected by the actions and insecurities of their immediate neighbors than by distant actors. A regional security complex consists of a group of geographically proximate states whose security concerns are sufficiently interconnected that their national securities cannot realistically be considered in isolation (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

The central assumption of RSCT is that security interdependence tends to be strongest among neighboring states due to geographical proximity, shared borders, historical interactions, and common security challenges. Threats such as terrorism, insurgency, transnational organized crime, arms trafficking, and irregular migration frequently transcend national boundaries and require coordinated

regional responses. The theory emphasizes the importance of regional institutions and cooperative security arrangements in managing common threats and maintaining stability (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Aning & Bah, 2020). In the West African context, ECOWAS has historically functioned as a regional security complex by facilitating collective responses to conflicts and transnational security challenges through mechanisms including the ECOWAS Standby Force, the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), and various peacekeeping operations (Aning & Bah, 2020). The emergence of the AES and the subsequent withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS present an important development within the RSCT framework. The rupture has altered existing patterns of security interaction by creating parallel security arrangements within the same regional space. From a theoretical perspective, such fragmentation may weaken established mechanisms of cooperation, reduce information sharing, and complicate collective responses to transnational threats (Institute for Security

Studies, 2024). Furthermore, the persistent threat posed by extremist organizations operating across the Sahel underscores RSCT's relevance to this analysis, as terrorist groups do not respect national boundaries and frequently exploit weaknesses in regional coordination (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Therefore, RSCT provides a particularly suitable analytical framework for examining how changes in regional relationships affect security outcomes and whether the AES emergence strengthens regional security through localized cooperation or contributes to fragmentation undermining collective counterterrorism efforts. Drawing from Regional Security Complex Theory, this study conceptualizes the AES–ECOWAS rupture as a critical development capable of reshaping patterns of security interaction within West Africa. Figure 1 presents the analytical framework guiding the study and illustrates how the rupture may contribute to regional security fragmentation with implications for intelligence sharing, counterterrorism cooperation, joint military operations, and broader regional stability.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of AES-ECOWAS Rupture



Source: Author's conceptualization (2026)

Figure 1 demonstrates the causal pathway underpinning the study. It illustrates how political tensions and institutional separation between ECOWAS and the AES may generate security fragmentation, which in turn influences the effectiveness of regional counterterrorism cooperation and overall security governance within West Africa.

3. Materials and Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on comprehensive documentary analysis. The qualitative approach is appropriate for examining the implications of the AES–ECOWAS rupture because it prioritizes understanding institutional changes, evolving security dynamics, and patterns of regional cooperation rather than statistical measurement of variables (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research is particularly suited for investigating contemporary political and security developments where contextual interpretation is essential and where institutional complexity requires nuanced analysis (Creswell, 2018).

Data were obtained exclusively from credible and authoritative secondary sources including ECOWAS official communiqués and statements, AES declarations and policy documents, United Nations and African Union reports, publications from the International Crisis Group and Institute for Security Studies, peer-reviewed academic journal articles, policy briefs and working papers, and media reports from established international outlets including Reuters and African media sources. The study examines the period 2020–2026, encompassing the wave of military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the deterioration of ECOWAS–state relations, establishment of the AES, formal withdrawal from ECOWAS, and emerging developments in regional counterterrorism and security governance. Geographically, analysis concentrates on West Africa with particular emphasis on Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and ECOWAS member states directly affected by the institutional rupture.

Data analysis employed qualitative content analysis, systematically reviewing documents, reports, and scholarly literature to identify

recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to counterterrorism cooperation, intelligence sharing, joint military operations, regional security governance, and institutional restructuring. Thematic analysis synthesizes diverse sources to generate comprehensive understanding of West Africa's evolving security landscape. The analysis is guided throughout by Regional Security Complex Theory as articulated by Buzan and Wæver, utilizing RSCT concepts to interpret institutional fragmentation and its implications for regional security cooperation.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Regional Security Architecture in West Africa

Regional security architecture encompasses the institutional frameworks, norms, and cooperative mechanisms through which states collectively respond to security threats. In West Africa, ECOWAS has historically served as the cornerstone of this architecture, evolving from an economic bloc into a multifunctional security actor with intervention capabilities (Aning & Bah, 2020). The organization institutionalized collective security through mechanisms including the ECOWAS Standby Force, early warning systems, and coordinated peacekeeping missions, reflecting broader theoretical arguments about how geographically proximate states develop interdependent security arrangements (Aning & Bah, 2020; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2024). However, recent scholarship suggests this architecture is increasingly strained. The rise of asymmetric threats, weak governance structures, and political instability have exposed significant limitations in ECOWAS's capacity to respond effectively to evolving security challenges (Aning, 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 2022).

4.2. Counterterrorism Cooperation in the Sahel

The Sahel has emerged as one of the world's most volatile security zones, characterized by proliferation of jihadist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and Islamic State. These organizations

exploit porous borders, local grievances, and weak state institutions to expand their influence systematically (International Crisis Group, 2023; United Nations Development Programme, 2022). Empirical evidence indicates significant escalation in terrorist activities across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, with violence intensifying despite regional and international interventions. Regional cooperation frameworks, including ECOWAS-led initiatives and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, have aimed to address these threats through intelligence sharing and joint operations, yet coordination challenges, funding constraints, and political divergences have limited effectiveness (Security Council Report, 2024; African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, 2024). Contemporary evidence demonstrates that insecurity continues deteriorating, with extremist groups expanding territorial reach and exploiting governance gaps, underscoring fragility of existing counterterrorism mechanisms.

4.3. Political Instability and Institutional Breakdown

Growing scholarly consensus links erosion of regional security cooperation in West Africa to political instability, particularly the wave of military coups between 2020 and 2023. These coups disrupted democratic governance and strained relations between affected states and ECOWAS. The imposition of sanctions and threats of military intervention by ECOWAS further deepened tensions, with military-led governments accusing the organization of external influence and undermining national sovereignty (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2022). This perception has been central to withdrawal justifications by Sahelian states. Scholars argue these developments reflect a broader shift from liberal institutionalism toward realist, sovereignty-driven approaches to security, with regimes prioritizing survival and autonomy over multilateral cooperation (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2022; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2024).

4.4. The Alliance of Sahel States and Regional Reconfiguration

The Alliance of Sahel States marks a significant turning point in regional security governance.

Established initially as a mutual defense pact, the AES evolved into a comprehensive security framework following member state withdrawal from ECOWAS in January 2025 (Reuters, 2025). The AES is widely interpreted as a response to both internal insecurity and external pressures, including sanctions and perceived foreign interference. It represents a model of security-led integration where cooperation is driven primarily by shared security threats rather than economic or political integration (Regional Security and Stability Institute, 2024; Modern Ghana, 2024). Recent developments indicate the AES is actively constructing its own security infrastructure, including establishment of a joint military force aimed at combating terrorism across the Sahel, suggesting deliberate shift toward autonomous, regionally controlled security mechanisms (Reuters, 2025; Modern Ghana, 2024). However, scholars remain divided on its effectiveness. While some view the AES as pragmatic response to localized threats, others argue it risks deepening fragmentation and undermining broader regional coordination (Institute for Security Studies, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2024).

4.5. Fragmentation and Institutional Implications

The AES–ECOWAS rupture has introduced new fragmentation layers into West Africa's security architecture. Instead of unified regional framework, the region now faces parallel and potentially competing security arrangements. Studies highlight that this fragmentation may weaken intelligence sharing, disrupt joint operations, and create coordination gaps exploitable by terrorist groups. The decline of unified frameworks such as the G5 Sahel and tensions within ECOWAS further exacerbate these challenges (International Crisis Group, 2024; African Union Peace and Security Council, 2024). Emerging evidence also suggests withdrawal has broader institutional implications, affecting ECOWAS's legitimacy, cohesion, and operational capacity, raising concerns about long-term sustainability of collective security in the region (Chatham House, 2024; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2024). The AES's pursuit of alternative partnerships and independent security

strategies simultaneously reflects geopolitical realignment with potential implications for external actors and regional power dynamics.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Institutional Transformation and Regional Security Cooperation

The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS represents one of the most significant challenges to regional integration in West Africa since the organization's 1975 establishment. Historically, ECOWAS functioned not only as an economic bloc but also as a security community responsible for promoting peace, conflict prevention, and collective responses to transnational threats. The departure of three strategically important Sahelian states therefore raises fundamental questions regarding the future of regional security cooperation. The immediate origins of the rupture trace to the succession of military coups in Mali (2020 and 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023). ECOWAS responded by imposing sanctions and demanding rapid return to constitutional rule. However, military governments interpreted

Table 2: Comparative Security Approaches of ECOWAS and AES (2020-2025)

Dimension	ECOWAS	AES
Security Philosophy	Collective Security	Sovereignty-Based Security
Membership	12+ West African States	Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger
Decision Making	Multilateral	Alliance-Based
Counter terrorism Strategy	Regional Coordination	Joint AES Operations
External Partnerships	Broad International Engagement	More Selective Partnerships
Governance Position	Constitutional Democracy	Military-Led Governments

Source: Author’s compilation (2026) based on ECOWAS Commission (2024), African Union (2024), and ICG (2024).

5.2. Counterterrorism Cooperation: Cooperation: Implications and Challenges

One of the most immediate consequences of the AES–ECOWAS rupture concerns counterterrorism cooperation. The Sahel remains the epicenter of violent extremism in Africa, accounting for substantial proportions of global terrorism-related fatalities.

these measures as infringements on national sovereignty and evidence of external interference. Consequently, the three states deepened cooperation through the Alliance of Sahel States, initially established as a mutual defense pact before evolving into a broader political and security alliance (International Crisis Group, 2024).

This development signifies a transition from collective governance-based regional security frameworks toward ones increasingly shaped by regime security and sovereign decision-making. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2024), such fragmentation often reduces institutional effectiveness by creating overlapping mandates and weakening collective action against shared threats. The AES emergence therefore challenges ECOWAS's traditional role as principal security coordinator in West Africa and introduces uncertainty regarding future regional security governance structures.

Table 2 below provides a comparative overview of the major security characteristics of both organizations.

Terrorist organizations operating in the region exploit weak governance, poverty, porous borders, and inter-communal conflicts to expand activities systematically (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Effective counterterrorism requires sustained intelligence sharing, coordinated military operations, and cross-border collaboration. Prior to the rupture, ECOWAS facilitated various mechanisms

designed to strengthen cooperation among member states, supporting information exchange, early warning systems, and joint responses to emerging threats. The withdrawal of AES states complicates these arrangements significantly.

Security analysts have warned that reduced institutional interaction may limit information sharing between ECOWAS members and AES governments, thereby creating intelligence gaps that extremist groups could exploit (Institute for Security Studies, 2024). Given terrorism's transnational nature, diminished cooperation in one area produces consequences across the wider region. Furthermore, the existence of separate security structures may result in operational duplication and reduced coordination. While AES leaders argue that localized decision-making enhances responsiveness, critics contend that fragmented approaches could undermine long-term counterterrorism effectiveness by weakening regional coherence (Chatham House, 2024). The challenge therefore lies in balancing sovereignty concerns with practical necessity of collective security action.

5.3. Intelligence Sharing and Joint Military Operations

Intelligence sharing has long been recognized as one of the most critical components of successful counterterrorism operations. Terrorist networks in the Sahel operate across national boundaries, making regional cooperation indispensable. The withdrawal of AES states raises concerns about continuity of intelligence exchanges previously facilitated through ECOWAS platforms. Security cooperation is often dependent on trust, institutionalized communication channels, and shared strategic priorities. Political tensions between ECOWAS and AES governments may therefore reduce opportunities for information exchange and collaborative planning (African Union Peace and Security Council, 2024). In addition, the formation of an AES joint military force reflects efforts to establish alternative security arrangements. Reports indicate that the alliance has committed thousands of troops to coordinated operations against insurgent groups within member territories (Reuters, 2025). This

initiative demonstrates the determination of AES governments to address security threats independently.

However, the effectiveness of such arrangements remains uncertain. Research on regional security institutions suggests that parallel military structures can produce coordination challenges, particularly when multiple organizations operate within the same geographical space without formal mechanisms for cooperation (African Union Peace and Security Council, 2024; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2024). The resulting situation may lead to fragmented operational environments in which ECOWAS and AES pursue similar objectives through separate institutional frameworks, ultimately weakening collective response capacity.

5.4. Implications for Regional Security Architecture

The AES–ECOWAS rupture has broader implications extending beyond immediate counterterrorism concerns to fundamentally affect regional security governance architecture. Regional security architecture is most effective when states share common norms, institutions, and strategic objectives. The withdrawal of three member states weakens this cohesion and introduces competing visions of regional order. While ECOWAS continues to emphasize democratic governance, constitutionalism, and multilateral cooperation, AES leaders prioritize sovereignty, regime stability, and independent security decision-making (African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, 2024). This divergence creates possibilities for institutional competition rather than complementarity.

According to the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (2024), fragmented security governance can complicate collective responses to terrorism, organized crime, and illicit trafficking networks that operate across borders. The rupture also has implications for external partnerships. International actors traditionally engaged with ECOWAS as the principal regional interlocutor on security matters. The emergence of AES introduces an additional complexity layer, requiring external partners to navigate multiple institutional arrangements and competing political priorities.

As a result, West Africa appears to be entering a period of security pluralism characterized by overlapping institutions, diverse partnerships, and evolving cooperation patterns (Chatham House, 2024; African Union Peace and Security Council, 2024).

5.5. Future Prospects and Cooperation Potential

Despite current tensions, complete security disengagement between ECOWAS and AES is neither likely nor sustainable. The shared nature of security threats means that both sides retain strong incentives for cooperation. Terrorism, arms trafficking, irregular migration, and organized crime transcend political boundaries and cannot be effectively addressed by isolated national or sub-regional efforts alone. Consequently, pragmatic forms of collaboration may emerge even in the absence of full political reconciliation (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2024; Regional Security and Stability Institute, 2024). Future regional security governance will likely depend on the ability of both organizations to establish mechanisms for dialogue, information sharing, and operational coordination. Such arrangements could preserve collective security objectives while accommodating differing political perspectives.

Ultimately, the AES–ECOWAS rupture represents both a challenge and an opportunity. While it exposes vulnerabilities within existing regional institutions, it also encourages reassessment of security governance models in West Africa. The long-term impact will depend on whether fragmentation evolves into sustained rivalry or gives way to renewed forms of cooperative engagement grounded in pragmatic recognition of shared security interdependence.

6. Conclusion

The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS and their subsequent consolidation under the Alliance of Sahel States represents a major turning point in West African regional security governance evolution. This development has fundamentally altered the institutional landscape through which collective security and counterterrorism cooperation have traditionally been pursued. This article examined

the implications of the AES–ECOWAS rupture for counterterrorism cooperation and regional security architecture in West Africa. The analysis revealed that the withdrawal has introduced significant challenges to regional security coordination, particularly in intelligence sharing, joint military operations, and collective responses to transnational threats. As terrorism, violent extremism, and organized crime continue transcending national borders, the fragmentation of established security mechanisms risks creating operational gaps that may be exploited by non-state armed groups.

The study further found that the AES emergence reflects a broader shift in regional politics from multilateral security governance toward sovereignty-oriented security arrangements. While AES leaders view the alliance as a means of strengthening autonomous responses to insecurity, its formation has simultaneously weakened the cohesion of existing regional institutions and generated uncertainty regarding collective security's future in West Africa. The coexistence of ECOWAS and AES as parallel security actors has created a more complex and fragmented security environment characterized by competing institutional priorities and evolving geopolitical alignments (International Crisis Group, 2024; Institute for Security Studies, 2024).

Despite these challenges, this study argues that complete security disengagement between ECOWAS and the AES is neither practical nor sustainable. The interconnected nature of contemporary security threats necessitates some level of cooperation among states irrespective of political differences. Terrorism, arms trafficking, illicit financial flows, irregular migration, and cross-border criminal networks remain regional challenges requiring coordinated responses. The article therefore concludes that long-term effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts and regional security governance in West Africa will depend on the ability of ECOWAS and the AES to develop mechanisms for pragmatic engagement, dialogue, and operational cooperation. Without such efforts, the region risks experiencing deeper institutional fragmentation and reduced capacity to address increasingly complex

security threats, ultimately undermining regional stability and prosperity.

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