

THE ROLE OF THE APSA SECURITY FRAMEWORK IN MANAGING THE BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY: THE MISSING COMPONENTS

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Abstract: This article examines the role of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) security mechanism in managing the insurgency that has persisted for over a decade in Nigeria's North-East and the Lake Chad regions. The article adopts a qualitative approach that incorporates primary and secondary sources as well as personal interviews. The findings reveal that although the APSA-led security initiative offers solutions to complex security issues and imminent transnational threats, operational, logistical, technical, financial, and political challenges continue to undermine this framework in the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency. The article concludes that despite these challenges, the security framework remains a viable and important instrument that can help the African Union and other sub-regional actors effectively address the emergent and complex security threats facing the African continent, provided that the key actors responsible for addressing Africa's problems demonstrate the will to resolve the operational, logistical, financial, and political shortcomings that hinder its full implementation.

Keywords: *African Union, African Peace and Security Architecture, Boko Haram, Conflict management, Nigeria and Lake Chad region.*

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BOKO HARAM İSYANININ YÖNETİMİNDE APSA GÜVENLİK ÇERÇEVESİNİN ROLÜ: EKSİK BİLEŞENLER

Öz: Bu makale, Nijerya'nın kuzeydoğusu ve Çad Gölü bölgelerinde on yılı aşkın süredir devam eden isyanın yönetilmesinde Afrika Barış ve Güvenlik Mimarisi (APSA) güvenlik mekanizmasının rolünü incelemektedir. Makale, birincil ve ikincil kaynaklar ile kişisel görüşmeleri benimseyen niteliksel bir yaklaşım sergilemektedir. Bulgular, APSA öncülüğündeki güvenlik girişiminin karmaşık güvenlik sorunlarına ve acil uluslararası tehditlere çözümler sunmasına rağmen, operasyonel, lojistik, teknik, mali ve siyasi zorlukların Boko Haram isyanıyla mücadelede bu çerçeveyi zayıflatmaya devam ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Makale, bu zorluklara rağmen, Afrika Birliği ve diğer alt bölgesel aktörlerin Afrika kıtasının karşı karşıya olduğu acil ve karmaşık güvenlik tehditlerini etkili bir şekilde ele almalarına yardımcı olabilecek, uygulanabilir ve önemli bir araç olmaya devam ettiği sonucuna varmaktadır. Bunun için, Afrika'nın sorunlarını ele almaktan sorumlu kilit aktörlerin, tam olarak uygulanmasını engelleyen operasyonel, lojistik, mali ve siyasi eksiklikleri giderme iradesini göstermeleri gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Afrika Birliği, Afrika Barış ve Güvenlik Mimarisi, Boko Haram, Çatışma yönetimi, Nijerya ve Çad Gölü bölgesi.*

Introduction

The evolution from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) involved more than just a change of name. According to UN reports published in 2017 and 2018 not only the structure of the organisation, but also its nature, objectives, *modus operandi*, model and regional security cooperation have changed significantly. Above all, it underwent an institutional reform and changed its main focus from decolonisation to the challenges of the continent. In addition, it has evolved by expanding its mandate from peace and security to human rights and even to economics and development. With the African Peace and Security Architecture (hereafter APSA), it aimed to improve its capacity to promote peace and stability. It reflected a shift to a holistic approach while supporting the creation of mechanisms to promote economic incorporation and good governance.

Organisation of African Unity, which no longer exists, was seen as a moribund organisation that had failed to solve many of the continents and the region's problems. Most African states are unstable, and some are failed states due to internal politics and contradictions empowered largely by ethnic sentiments, religion, corruption and external influences. Nevertheless, it would be reasonable to emphasize this as one of the soft powers and political approaches to peace and steadiness in Africa. The performance of the AU could be strongly influenced by the quality of African leaders. The extent and intensity of their political failure led to conflict and insecurity that afflict most states in the region. The absence of AU comprehensive security and defence policy could have served as a roadmap to strengthen and develop solutions. Yet, with the establishment of the APSA as a documented policy for conflict management on the continent, this long history of intransigence and mistrust in the region will be a thing of the past. However, the gap between APSA's institutional design and its practical implementation has revealed structural and operational shortcomings, particularly in combating non-state armed actors. This article addresses these shortcomings within the framework of the concept of "*missing components*". In this context, missing components refer to institutional, financial, coordination, and civilian oversight mechanisms that APSA envisages normatively but which have not been fully institutionalised, converted into operational capacity, or made functional in practice.

Despite the existence of the APSA security framework to address issues such as insecurity, conflicts and the absence of peace on the continent, it should not be forgotten

that the APSA security framework's ability to effectively facilitate sub-regional and regional cooperation to overcome the humanitarian, political, economic and social problems caused by the constant and consistent attacks of the radical insurgent group Boko Haram, which emerged more than a decade ago, has been affected. These operational challenges and gaps are areas this article seeks to address by identifying and evaluating how their absence or lack of operationalisation has impacted the APSA in countering the threats posed by this violent non-state actor. This research seeks to identify and analyse these missing components, evaluating how their absence affects the operational effectiveness of APSA in managing the Boko Haram insurgency.

Therefore, this study questions both the existence and functionality of the APSA. The main argument is that, despite the theoretical comprehensiveness of the APSA's institutional framework, it has failed to deliver the expected performance against multi-layered security threats such as the Boko Haram insurgency, either because certain critical components have not been fully operationalised or because they have not been effectively coordinated in practice.

In this context, the research addresses three fundamental questions: (i) To what extent are APSA's current institutional tools adequate for responding to cross-border threats such as Boko Haram? (ii) Which institutional, financial, and operational components are lacking or dysfunctional? (iii) How can addressing these shortcomings enhance the effectiveness of regional security cooperation?

Within this analytical framework, this article will critically assess the regional role of APSA in responding to the Boko Haram conflict. It does by asking questions centred around how the APSA security mechanism has contributed towards addressing the insurgency by Boko Haram, the specific missing components that inadequately addresses the insurgency, how these missing components limit the efficiency of the APSA security framework in tackling the insurgency and what are the practical and actionable recommendations that can be made to enhance the operational capacity of the security framework to respond adequately to emergent security and complex threats currently confronting the African continent. Therefore, this study aims to measure the gap between APSA's normative claims and practical applications, highlighting the impact of missing components on corporate security governance.

The main reason for this is that the conflict in question not only poses a serious security risk to Nigeria, but also creates a complex, multi-layered regional security problem across Africa. This situation raises the question of whether the existing institutional

structure can respond effectively to the threat posed by Boko Haram.

From this analytical perspective, the article reassesses APSA's regional performance in addressing the Boko Haram insurgency. In addition to presenting a significant security challenge to Nigeria, the conflict generates broader and multifaceted regional security pressures across Africa. In this context, the main issue is whether APSA has the institutional capacity and operational capability to provide an effective response to the emerging threat. This discussion will be considered alongside theoretical approaches that explain regional security interdependence and threat diffusion dynamics.

1. Methodology

This paper is based on a qualitative study that was done using a semi-structured key informant interview research design, and the primary data from the interviews has been compared to corresponding secondary information. The interviews were conducted not simply as a way of verifying what has been published in the literature to date, but also as a way to either give evidence in support of or, where applicable, to challenge the published literature. Through the collection of data from the key informant interviews, the research aims to enhance the reliability and internal consistency of its outcomes. Data collection for this research was obtained from a total of nine semi-structured interviews conducted in Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda over a three-month period (due to fieldwork in 2018) from October 2018 until January 2019. The semi-structured interviews formed part of a doctoral research study (YDÜ/SB/2018/302) that received approval from the relevant ethics committee. The data collected from these key informant interviews is re-evaluated and analyzed in this article in accordance with the analysis framework established for this research article.

The sources of information were selected using purposive sampling. All individuals participating in the study had previous experience working with the institutions responsible for managing conflicts, cooperating on regional security issues, developing counterterrorism policies, and/or developing policy and programs for the African Union and the sub-regional security architecture. This choice of participants ensured that the data obtained would come from people and places working in the field rather than from people and places that were assessing the issues using theoretical models. Selection criteria included individuals who demonstrated a significant level of expertise in APSA mechanisms, regional security governance, and/or carrying out counterinsurgency operations in the Lake Chad Basin. Interviews were conducted either in person or via

secured communication channels and analysed in order to identify recurring institutional, operational and normative challenges. Within the scope of this study, interview data were not subjected to systematic coding or quantitative content analysis; instead, findings from the interviews were used within an interpretative and comparative qualitative assessment framework alongside existing literature and official documents. The aim is to strengthen the assessment of APSA's operational capacity by analysing expert perspectives on institutional functioning in the field, together with discussions in the literature.

To ensure confidentiality, interviewees are coded as Key Informants (KI-1 to KI-9).³ Although the number of interviews may appear limited, qualitative key informant methodology prioritizes depth of expertise over numerical representation.⁴ Therefore, the findings do not claim statistical generalisation; they serve as qualitative evidence to support analytical evaluation and discussion of institutional capacity.

Thematically, the article seeks to provide an analytical framework for analysing the security framework and conflict management in the context of the Boko Haram conflict and theoretically organize it in this way. The next section of this paper contextualises the security framework of the APSA and explores the regional impact of the Boko Haram conflict. The discussion further led to the initiation of the next phase which investigated the Boko Haram conflict in the region and looked at the role of the APSA security mechanism in managing this regional conflict. Finally, challenges of the APSA in operationalising and managing the Boko Haram conflict were discussed in detail.

2. Theoretical Framework

From an operational perspective, this article examines APSA and conflict management within the framework of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver.⁵ This theoretical approach critically analyses the concept of security in the context of regional interdependence by examining not only how threats and perceptions of threats are structured geographically, but also how they spread

³ Saskia Muellmann & Tilman Brand & Dorothee Jürgens & Dirk Gansefort & Hajo Zeeb (2021), "How Many Key Informants Are Enough? Analysing the Validity of the Community Readiness Assessment", *BMC Research Notes*, 14, pp. 1-6.

⁴ Dingji Maza Kangdim (2020), "The African Peace and Security Architecture and Conflict Management in West Africa: An Analysis of the Multinational Joint Taskforce Against the Boko-Haram Insurgency", Unpublished PhD thesis, Lefkoşa: Near East University.

⁵ Barry Buzan (2003), "Regional Security Complex Theory in the Post-Cold War World", in Fredrik Söderbaum & Timothy M. Shaw (ed.) *Theories of New Regionalism: A Palgrave Reader*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 140-159.

between close or neighbouring geographical locations.⁶

This theoretical assessment of the conflict in Africa and Boko Haram reveals that the destructive effects of the organisation's actions are not limited to creating a complex regional security problem in Nigeria and the Lake Chad basin; they also have broader and deeper consequences for the security of the entire African continent.⁷ From the RSCT perspective because the conflict has now taken on an international dimension which makes the RSCT to further demonstrate that the insurgency by Boko Haram is not domestic but has reproduced itself through cross-border and transnational threats, further ensuring a sub-regional and regional collaboration by states and non-state actors such as the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) key towards containing the insurgency. Therefore, RSCT is not used as a normative framework in this study, but as an analytical tool to assess APSA's institutional capacity. The theory is applied to explain why APSA requires a regional coordination mechanism, focusing on threat diffusion and regional security interdependence.

Therefore, any efforts to combat the threat posed by this group should reflect a regional and continental response, for the conflict is no longer a threat to Nigeria, but to the stability and security of the entire region. However, this study does not simply apply the classical formulation of RSCT. Instead, it adapts the theory to the contemporary threat environment by considering how non-state armed actors and transnational network structures transform regional security dynamics. In this respect, the analysis goes beyond a state-centric perception of threats and questions APSA's capacity for multi-actor security governance.

3. The African Peace and Security Architecture: Contextualising the Framework

APSA as a security context created by AU through its Constitutive Act providing "African solutions to African problems" with a specific attention towards achieving "*a common African defence and security policy*" to manage any form of threat and threat perception and to help prevent and if possible resolve conflicts and insecurities in the continent.⁸ At the same time Africa as a continent is not immutable to this conflict

⁶ Alan Collins (ed.) (2022), *Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁷ Louise Fawcett (2025), "The Changing Regional Faces of Peace: Toward a New Multilateralism?", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 46(2), pp. 372-401.

⁸ Alexandra V. Khudaykulova (2023), "Regionalization of Peacekeeping in Africa: The Case of the African Union", *Bulletin of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia. Series: International Relations*, 23(2), pp. 339-357.

paradigm, as “the process of state formation”, independence, and “state building” in the region is not designed and structured to manage the diverse interests and cultural differences of the various groups that make up the continent.⁹ This has created the perfect path for conflict, instability, and fragility in most of these states. As Williams (2019) stated Africa has recorded over 400 conflicts, including ethno-religious conflicts in the Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan, and South Sudan, as well as cross-border conflicts in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, and Cameroon.¹⁰ However, conflicts are not limited to only these two types. There are other types of conflicts such as civil wars in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Sudan, genocides in Rwanda, Burundi, and Somalia, politically driven and motivated violence, as what can be seen in Liberia, Lesotho, and Sierra Leone and increased insurgent activities in Mali, Somalia, and Nigeria. In most cases, these violent clashes or conflicts threaten the peace, stability, and development of the region. According to a report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (2017), there were nearly one million deaths in Africa in the first half of 2015 alone due to conflicts of varying scale and intensity.¹¹ More than 8,300 people lost their lives in five sub-Saharan countries: Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, and Sudan. This table raises the question of how effective the institutional capacity of the AU, and particularly APSA, is in practice.

The transformation of the OAU into the AU is not only due to the organisation’s inability to resolve the continent’s problems but also signifies a normative paradigm shift in its understanding of security. The transition from the principle of non-interference to that of non-indifference shows that the organisation has adopted a more interventionist approach to security in the context of conflict and humanitarian crises.¹² Article 3 of the AU Constitutive Act defines the promotion of peace, security, stability, and good governance as one of its fundamental objectives. The organisation also reserves the right to intervene under certain conditions. This normative framework has created the need for a more institutionalised security architecture.¹³ The provisions of

⁹ Alan Collins (ed.) (2022), *Contemporary Security Studies*, 6th edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Maia Carter Hallward & Ji Eun Kim & Cécile Mouly & Timothy Seidel & Zubairu Wai (ed.) (2025), *The Sage Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*, London: SAGE Publications.

¹⁰ Paul Williams (2019), “Key Drivers of Violent Conflicts in Africa: Myths and Reality”, Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), 01.06.2019, Date of Accession: 24.04.2026 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXN8_VIPcSQ.

¹¹ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) (2017), “Real Time Data: Armed Conflicts in Africa”, Date of Accession: 18.11.2018 from <https://acledata.com/>.

¹² Joseph Onwuamaeze Megwalu & Dimas Garba (2024), “Regional Security Cooperation for Peace, Stability and Security: The ECOWAS Experience”, *Journal of African Union Studies*, 13(3), pp. 119-142.

¹³ Tim Murithi (2009), “The African Union Transition from Non-Intervention to Non-Indifference: An Ad Hoc

the Constitutive Act indicate that criticism of conflict management capacity during the OAU period reinforced the need for institutional reform. Consequently, the transition from the OAU to the AU signalled a normative paradigm shift in the region's politics, reflected in the move from the principle of non-interference to that of non-indifference.

This change has established the legal and normative basis for the organisation to play a more active security role in response to conflicts and humanitarian crises. Studies have supported this argument by noting that the renewed and revitalised AU acts in accordance with Charter 33 of the United Nations, which authorises and mandates it to assist in conflict resolution.¹⁴ Also, the intervention encompasses various peacebuilding processes and methods of conflict resolution such as mediation, negotiation, peacekeeping, and peace enforcement under the mantra of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and on humanitarian grounds. This framework represents a more institutionalised and intervention-oriented approach to security than during the OAU era.

The shift from the principle of non-intervention to the principle of non-indifference has led African states towards a more collective sense of responsibility in the face of conflict, insecurity, and mass human rights violations. However, this normative expansion has not always been matched by operational capacity; this gap will be discussed in the context of APSA in the following sections.¹⁵

In this context, APSA is designed as a multi-layered security structure comprising components such as the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the Panel of the Wise (POW), and the African Peace Facility (APF).¹⁶ However, the gap between the normative design of these components and their operational implementation has become more apparent, particularly in the face of asymmetric threats such as Boko Haram, which are transnational and carried out by non-state actors. Therefore, not only the institutional existence of APSA but also its functionality and coordination capacity should be analysed. The main argument of the article is that the lack, inadequacy, or incomplete operationalisation of these components in some areas limits the effectiveness of regional security cooperation.

Approach to the Responsibility to Protect", *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 1, pp. 90-106, http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/ipg/ipg-2009-1/08_a_murithi_us.pdf.

¹⁴ Ademola Abass (2025), "The African Union and the Responsibility to Protect: Principles and Limitations", *Responsibility to Protect*, London: Routledge, pp. 213-236.

¹⁵ Ben Kioko (2003), "The Right of Intervention Under the African Union's Constitutive Act: From Non-Interference to Non-Intervention", *International Review of the Red Cross*, 85(852), pp. 807-826.

¹⁶ African Union (2017), "Peace and Security Council", Date of Accession: 15.01.2025 from <https://au.int/en/psc>.

4. Boko Haram and Regional Security Dynamics

Boko Haram, also known as ‘*Jama’tu Ahlis Sunna Lida’awati Wal-Jihad* in Arabic, is a radical and violent insurgent group in North East Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin.¹⁷ The organisation came to prominence in 2009 after a violent confrontation with Nigerian security authorities that eventually led to the death of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf. A number of researchers in the field such as Hansen (2017),¹⁸ Iyekekpolo (2016),¹⁹ Peters (2014),²⁰ and Thurston (2017)²¹ stated that Boko Haram essentially abhors Western education and civilisation. The group’s main philosophy and ideology is to establish a *caliphate* in Nigeria and create an administrative structure consistent with the teachings and precepts of Islam and *Sharia law*.

Since its emergence, it has carried out a series of attacks on the Nigerian government, institutions, and civilian targets. These attacks have resulted in significant human casualties, economic damage and mass displacement. Various national and international reports indicate that the uprising has had serious humanitarian and economic consequences.²²

The Boko Haram insurgency is no longer solely an internal security issue for Nigeria; due to cross-border movements and armed network structures, it has become a regional security concern. From an RSCT perspective, the perception of the threat spreading beyond Nigeria’s borders to neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Niger, and Chad has created regional security interdependence in the Lake Chad Basin.²³ The group’s activities have strained Nigeria’s internal security capacity and put pressure on the

¹⁷ Ahmad Murtadā (2013), *Boko Harām in Nigeria: Its Beginnings, Principles and Activities in Nigeria [Jama’at “Boko Harām”: Nasha’uhā, Mabādi’uhā wa A’māluhā fī Nayjīriyā]*, SalafiManhaj, http://download.salafimanhaj.com/pdf/SalafiManhaj_BokoHaram.pdf; Andrew Walker (2012), “What Is Boko Haram?”, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/SR308.pdf>.

¹⁸ William Hansen (2017), “Boko Haram: Religious Radicalism and Insurrection in Northern Nigeria”, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 52(4), pp. 551-569.

¹⁹ Wisdom Oghosa Iyekekpolo (2016), “Boko Haram: Understanding the Context”, *Third World Quarterly*, 37(12), pp. 2211-2228.

²⁰ Michael A. Peters (2014), ““Western Education Is Sinful”: Boko Haram and the Abduction of Chibok Schoolgirls”, *Policy Futures in Education*, 12(2), pp. 186-190.

²¹ Alexander Thurston (2018), *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²² Suranjan Weeraratne (2017), “Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 29(4), pp. 610-634.

²³ Abiodun Joseph Oluwadare (2016), “Boko Haram Terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin Region: Implications for Subregional Security”, *Journal of International & Global Studies*, 8(1), pp. 40-56; Dingji Maza Kangdim & Kwopnan Ibrahim Bulus & Cemal Yorgancioğlu & Aminu Idris & Cyprian Pali (2024), “Regional Security Cooperation and the Changing Dynamics of Insecurity in West Africa: An Analysis of the Boko Haram Conflict”, *Near East University Journal of Social Sciences*, 17(2), pp. 213-247.

country's regional leadership role and identity as a security provider.²⁴

Ogbogu (2015)²⁵ argues that Boko Haram has become a threat not only to Nigeria but to the entire continent. At the regional level, because of the permeability of African borders and limited state capacity, the group has expanded its influence through cross-border crime, human trafficking, kidnapping, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and the movement of foreign terrorist fighters.²⁶

Internationally, the group is said to have ties to other radical insurgent groups operating in the region, such as Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Shabaab in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, the Janjaweed militia in Sudan, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which place the region at the centre of international discourse on the Global War on Terror. The social and environmental impacts of the conflict are significant. Mass displacement, refugee movements, and social tensions have increased regional instability. The group has sought to legitimise its violent practices through radical interpretations of religious discourse, further deepening identity-based tensions.

Considering all these dimensions, the Boko Haram insurgency cannot be viewed solely as an internal security issue. From an RSCT perspective, the perception of threat and the dynamics of violence have extended beyond Nigeria's borders to the Lake Chad Basin and neighbouring states, creating regional security interdependence.²⁷

5. The Regional Role of APSA in Managing the Boko Haram Conflict

It was pointed out that the AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, a communiqué adopted in Algeria in 2002, formed the basis for the necessary measures that the newly formed AU will respond to the security threats facing the continent, particularly those caused by the presence and activities of terrorist groups, insurgents, bandits, the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and other emerging security threats.²⁸ This narrative was especially necessary considering the United States' commitment to the Global War on Terror following the September 11

²⁴ Abiodun Joseph Oluwadare (2016), "Boko Haram Terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin Region: Implications for Subregional Security", *Journal of International & Global Studies*, 8(1), pp. 40-56.

²⁵ Jennifer Ogbogu (2015), "Analysing the Threat of Boko Haram and the ISIS Alliance in Nigeria", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 7(8), pp. 16-21.

²⁶ Anthony N. Celso (2015), "The Islamic State and Boko Haram: Fifth Wave Jihadist Terror Groups", *Orbis*, 59(2), pp. 249-268.

²⁷ Dingji Maza Kangdim & Cemal Yorgancıoğlu & Kwopnan Bulus & Adamu Yakubu Muazu & Semshak Kassem Danladi (2022), "The Impact of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: A Multi-Sectoral Analysis", *Siyasal: Journal of Political Sciences*, 31(1), pp. 157-172.

²⁸ Organization of African Unity (1999), "OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism", 14.07.1999 (06.12.2002 tarihinde yürürlüğe girmiştir), https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37289-treaty-0020_-_oau_convention_on_the_prevention_and_combating_of_terrorism_e.pdf.

attack.²⁹ As Escorrega (2012) further noted, the outcome of this communiqué paved the way for the APSA as an institutional security mechanism to assist regional actors in addressing these myriad complex security challenges.³⁰

In this context, APSA's response to the Boko Haram threat can be seen not only as an intervention in a specific conflict but also as a practical test of the broader collective security approach being developed across the African continent. This demonstrates that APSA's role in combating the threat posed by Boko Haram is part of a broader security framework aimed at finding solutions to the continent's myriad problems. The question, therefore arises as to what the AU-led APSA has done to manage and resolve the Boko Haram conflict.

As stated in an interview with Allison (2015) and an expert researcher in the field of conflict resolution, the role played by the APSA in addressing the threat posed by Boko Haram insurgents cannot be entirely disregarded.³¹ The reason for this is that, unlike the previous non-intervention approach, the regional security framework has normatively legitimised joint intervention and coordination by member states.

Similarly, in a meeting with an ECOWAS official, it was stated that the APSA security framework prompted regional and sub-regional actors to view the Boko Haram issue not merely as an "internal matter for Nigeria" but as a common regional security threat.³² This demonstrates that APSA serves as an important political and institutional platform for shifting the perception of threat from the national to the regional level.

As a result of this shared security perception, the AU, through the Peace and Security Council (PSC), one of the core components of the APSA, supported the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram in cooperation with ECOWAS and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). The MNJTF (Multinational Joint Task Force) is composed of military units from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria and was set up to carry out joint operations against Boko Haram in the Northwest region of Africa. The African Union (AU) pledged an additional 7,500 troops to strengthen the capacity of the force after its establishment. However, the

²⁹ See Outcome of a communiqué reached at the African Union Led High Level Inter-Governmental meeting aimed at preventing and combating Terrorism in Africa, – "The African Union Counter Terrorism Framework", <http://www.caert.org.dz/official-documents/AU-CT-Framework.pdf>.

³⁰ Luís Carlos Falcão Escorrega (2012), "African Peace and Security Architecture: A Strategic Analysis", *Nação e Defesa*, 133, pp. 213-234.

³¹ Simon Allison (2015), "Good Talk, Not Enough Action: The AU's Counter-Terrorism Architecture, and Why It Matters", Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Policy Brief, 66; B. M., (11.10.2018), Conflict Resolution Expert and Researcher on Boko Haram Activities, personal interview.

³² Dr. H. Y. B., (22.10.2018), Executive Assistant Commissioner (Finance), ECOWAS Commission, Abuja, personal interview.

establishment of the MNJTF raises an important analytical question: how much of the military operations against Boko Haram are directed through APSA and how much are based on sub-regional or national level initiatives. Therefore, the question is if APSA is only providing institutional support or if APSA has been successful in providing operational coordination is critical to assessing the ability of APSA to manage the Boko Haram conflict.³³

6. Challenges Facing the Operationalisation of the APSA in Conflict Management: The Boko Haram Question and the Missing Components

Despite the development of various security initiatives at the regional level against the Boko Haram threat, the terrorist organization has persisted in carrying out lethal attacks in the Lake Chad region, raising significant questions about the sustainability of counterinsurgency efforts. The following factors and conditions contribute to the inability of the APSA security mechanism inability to be effectively combat the Boko Haram conflict. In this context, the fundamental issue is how effectively the security mechanism can be operationalised against transnational and asymmetric threats such as Boko Haram, despite the institutional existence of APSA.

6.1. Bureaucratic Bottlenecks in Decision Making

The inability of regional actors and leaders, particularly the AU, ECOWAS, and LCBC, to address administrative and bureaucratic ambiguities – especially in making swift decisions to counter threats from this group – remains a major challenge for the APSA in managing the Boko Haram conflict.³⁴ As Albert (2017) highlighted this was evident in the processes and procedures such as the troop deployment component and decision on the location of the task force headquarters and other aspects of operational logistics that eventually led to the establishment of the MNJTF.³⁵ These bureaucratic delays have limited the capacity for collective intervention in a security environment where threat dynamics change rapidly, highlighting the gap between APSA's stated ability to respond quickly to crises and its practical implementation.

³³ Ionel Zamfir (2015), "African-led Counter Terrorism Measures Against Boko Haram", *European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS)*, 03.03.2015.

³⁴ Emmanuel Ogueri Ibekwe & Uzoma D. Nosiri (2023), "Counter Terrorism: An Assessment of Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in Combating Boko Haram Insurgency in the Lake Chad Region", *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 13(2), pp. 526-542.

³⁵ Isaac Olawale Albert (2017), "Rethinking the Functionality of the Multinational Joint Task Force in Managing the Boko Haram Crisis in the Lake Chad Basin", *Africa Development*, 42(3), pp. 119-135.

6.2. Institutional Weakness and Policy Failure

In line with Darkwa (2017),³⁶ in interview held with subject matter experts and regional security actors³⁷ that the APSA framework in its current form, appears to be fully functional in theory and to have the necessary tools to combat the Boko Haram insurgency. However, in practice, the operational and institutional capacity to ensure the framework achieves the desired security objectives remains limited. This highlights a significant gap between the design capacity of APSA and its actual performance in the field. This is reflected in the fact that most of the critical components of the APSA, such as the African Standby Force (ASF), CEWS, and POW, still do not appear to be fully operational.³⁸ The limited functionality of these mechanisms has made it difficult for the security chain, from early warning to intervention, to operate effectively. Consequently, the failure of these critical components to reach full operational capacity has limited the coordination, speed, and sustainability of counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram, hindering APSA's ability to achieve the expected effectiveness in regional security management.

6.3. Funding Paucity, Overreliance on External Support and Misappropriation of Funds

During an interview with a senior researcher working at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) as part of the LCBC programme, noted that the success or failure of any counterinsurgency operation depends largely on sufficient funding and sustainable resource allocation to enable the task to be carried out smoothly.³⁹ This assessment shows that financial capacity is crucial for the long-term sustainability of regional security operations. Currently, the APSA relies heavily on external support to fund most of its activities. In a briefing to the Security Council, the UN Deputy Secretary-General Dr. Amina Mohamed called for an increase in international financial support to the AU, ECOWAS, and LCBC. An estimated USD 1.6 billion is needed to address the humanitarian crisis resulting from the Boko Haram conflict. This situation highlights the structural limitations of the financial sustainability of Africa-centred security initiatives.

³⁶ Linda Darkwa (2017), "The African Standby Force: The African Union's Tool for the Maintenance of Peace and Security", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 38(3), pp. 471-482.

³⁷ Professor W. O. A., (14.11.2018), Former Director of Research, Nigerian Institute for International Affairs, Lagos, personal interview; Dr. A. E. O., (07.01.2019), Senior Researcher, Transnational Threats and International Programme, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, personal interview; B. M., (11.10.2018), Conflict Resolution Expert and Researcher, personal interview.

³⁸ Baldaro, E., & Lopez Lucia, E. (2024). Spaces of (in-) security and intervention: spatial competition and the politics of regional organizations in the Sahel. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 12(8), pp. 1095-1113.

³⁹ Dr. A. E. O., (07.01.2019), Senior Researcher, personal interview; Rev. Dr. J. A., (15.10.2018), Head of Protocol, Church of Christ in Nations, Jos, Security Expert on Inter-Group Relations, personal interview.

In an interview with the authors of the current article, another senior research fellow at the University of Nigeria highlighted discussed that most contributing countries that contributed to the Boko Haram conflict have failed to fulfil their financial obligations to support the Task Force and some other components of the APSA in addressing these emerging security threats. This situation directly affects the implementation capacity of the collective security mechanisms planned within the framework of the APSA.

In an interview with former Director of Research argued that the security framework, coupled with inadequate funding for the APSA security framework, was unable to establish a mechanism to monitor financial disbursement and accountability for resources.⁴⁰ According to Transparency International, corruption is affecting the Nigerian military's action against Boko Haram.⁴¹ Furthermore, although states have allocated enormous budgets and financial resources to combat the threat posed by Boko Haram, widespread corruption among senior security officials responsible for combating Boko Haram is hindering the success of these measures.⁴²

In this context, the problem is not simply a lack of funding, but an issue of institutional capacity to manage existing resources transparently, accountably, and in a coordinated manner. Therefore, for effective implementation and enforcement of the APSA framework, a strong and stringent step should be taken to ensure financial accountability, probity and punitive measures in dealing with cases and incidents of corruption as this is one of the major vices sabotaging the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency.

6.4. Failure to Overcome the Challenge of Managing the Politics of Vested Interests and Mistrust Among Members

The differing national priorities, strategic interests and perceptions of mutual distrust among member states have hampered the fully coordinated implementation of APSA's security mechanisms and continue to affect the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency. A cross-cultural researcher believes in an interview that the fight against the Boko insurgency and the conflicts and insecurity in Africa will not yield the desired results as long as there are divergent interests and politics of mistrust among regional

⁴⁰ Professor W. O. A., (14.11.2018), Former Director of Research, personal interview.

⁴¹ *Reuters* (2017), "Military Graft Undermines Nigeria's Fight Against Boko Haram: Transparency Int'l", 18.05.2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN18D2XG/>.

⁴² Teniola Tayo (2022), "Analysis: Can Nigeria Finance Its War Against Insurgents?", *Premium Times*, 25.08.2022, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/550536-analysis-can-nigeria-finance-its-war-against-insurgents.html>.

actors and leaders.⁴³ This assessment shows that a shared perception of threat in regional security governance does not necessarily result in the development of common policies. Therefore, the problem is not only a lack of military or institutional capacity, but also the political difficulties in coordinating and harmonising the security priorities of the member states. While the leaders' commitments to advancing peace processes and the common security agenda are significant, differing national positions and strategic calculations sometimes limit the consistent implementation of the APSA framework in practice. This is a fundamental structural challenge in the operationalisation of APSA.⁴⁴

6.5. The Challenge Associated with Professionalism and Credibility of Troops

In an interview, a conflict resolution and security expert noted that APSA's failure to put in place adequate mechanisms to address the unprofessional behaviour of task force members undermines the credibility of its commitment to conflict management in the region.⁴⁵ This failure is not unique to the (contextualised) the Boko Haram conflicts, as many of the regional troops deployed to some of the conflict areas have often been accused of committing serious acts that violate their professional ethics.⁴⁶ Reports published by the Amnesty International (2018)⁴⁷ have shown that members of the MNJTF are sometimes accused of committing certain extra-legal actions that involve violating the rights of citizens in the communities they are supposed to protect. The mismanagement of these troops and the APSA framework failure to address these fundamental issues have caused the MNJTF members to lose their public trust and credibility in society. Such claims demonstrate that accountability and oversight mechanisms are as critical to conflict management as operational security capacity. Therefore, the issue concerns not only military capacity but also the need to strengthen institutional frameworks that regulate and monitor standards of conduct in regional security operations. For APSA's future functionality, addressing operational effectiveness, human rights, and professional discipline standards is an important factor that could enhance the legitimacy of regional security initiatives.⁴⁸

⁴³ S. A. L., (02.01.2019), Lecturer, Department of History and International Studies, University of Jos, personal interview.

⁴⁴ S. A. L., (02.01.2019), personal interview.

⁴⁵ Dr. S. R., (03.12.2018), Expert on Conflict Resolution and Security, Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), Kampala, personal interview.

⁴⁶ C. N., (12.11.2018), Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, personal interview.

⁴⁷ Amnesty International (2018), "Nigeria: Still No Accountability for Human Rights Violations", Submission for the UN Universal Periodic Review – 31st Session of the UPR Working Group, November 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/AFR4485292018ENGLISH.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Dingji Maza Kangdim & Olusegun Ilemore & Cemal Yorgancioğlu & Nanbilil Ruth Bakylil (2022),

6.6. The Absence of an African-Centred Approach to Conflict Management

In our interview with a Nigerian Defence Academy research fellow, it was highlighted that the current conflict management strategy, for which the APSA is institutionally designed, may not always be fully in tune with the social and cultural dynamics on the ground.⁴⁹ The current AU and APSA approach is considered state-centric and relies heavily on security paradigm and addresses security issues primarily through institutional and military means. Some argue that, in certain cases, this approach relegates the role of local social actors and cultural mediation mechanisms to a secondary position.⁵⁰

Therefore, in an interview with a senior researcher, it was also argued that the APSA security framework should incorporate the cultural element of conflict management on the continent, since most conflicts and insecurities in the region have the common element of ‘society’ as a pull or push factor. Therefore, it is argued that managing an insurgency with strong ideological and social dimensions, such as Boko Haram, requires security policies to go beyond military measures and include cultural, religious, and community-based mediation mechanisms. The ability of traditional leaders and religious actors to influence social radicalisation and transform violent rhetoric is noteworthy in this context. This suggests that the long-term effectiveness of APSA may depend on support from elements of local ownership and social legitimacy.

7. APSA and emergent security threats a mismatch?

The current complex security challenges facing the continent are often discussed in the contexts of “*emerging threats or new wars narrative*, and the *African Peace and Security Architecture: APSA Roadmap 2016-2020*”.⁵¹ This roadmap provides a four-year strategic plan on how the APSA framework can adequately address the growing security dilemma in the region in terms of conflict management, conflict reconstruction, security issues, peacebuilding, strategic security issues, coordination, and partnerships with relevant actors to promote and strengthen peace, security, and stability on the

“Democratic Governance and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic: Its Implication on International Human Rights Law”, *Uluslararası Beşeri Bilimler ve Eğitim Dergisi*, 8(18), pp. 467-486.

⁴⁹ D. J., (05.01.2019), Research Fellow, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, personal interview.

⁵⁰ Brooke Coe & Kathryn Nash (2020), “Peace Process Protagonism: The Role of Regional Organisations in Africa in Conflict Management”, *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 32(2), pp. 157-177.

⁵¹ African Union (2015), *African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) Roadmap 2016-2020*, Addis Ababa: African Union Commission, Peace and Security Department, https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38310-doc-9_2015-en-apsa-roadmap-final.pdf.

continent.⁵² This strategic roadmap was specifically developed to provide a contextualised analysis to address complex security threats, conflicts, and insecurities related to the Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation, the use of child soldiers as shields, illicit financial trafficking, militancy, insurgency, and terrorism. A conflict resolution expert and researcher participated in our interviewers discussed that there is a clear mismatch between institutional capacity and the speed and scale of threats.⁵³ Even though, in theory, this policy guide contains grand plans to ensure that these emerging and complicated security issues are addressed. As it stands, critical components of the APSA mechanism, such as the CEWS, which is supposed to provide intelligence and proactive measures to counter threats, have remained dormant. The lack of a functioning ASF also complicates conflict management.⁵⁴ The African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACRST), were established to monitor and analyse these emerging security threats, but they have had limited impact on improving the operational capacity of the regional security architecture.⁵⁵

This situation partly explains the difficulties encountered in operations against Boko Haram and other extremist groups. The flexible, network-based structure of the threats continually tests the speed and coordination capacity of institutional response mechanisms. As these groups are still able to carry out assaults without being held accountable. Assessing the performance of the current road map, it is not hard to argue that APSA is still struggling with how exactly to address and contain these current security challenges facing the region, especially given the magnitude of the threat posed by radical groups operating on the continent.

In analytical terms, this mismatch is both functional and structural. Based on the analysis conducted in this study, the missing components can be grouped into five main categories: (i) incomplete operationalisation of ASF and CEWS, (ii) lack of financial accountability mechanisms, (iii) weak political coordination, (iv) insufficient civilian oversight and human rights monitoring, and (v) limited incorporation of African-centred conflict mediation structures.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ B. M., (11.10.2018), Conflict Resolution Expert and Researcher, personal interview.

⁵⁴ Linda Darkwa (2017), "The African Standby Force: The African Union's Tool for the Maintenance of Peace and Security", pp. 471-482.

⁵⁵ Lukong Stella Shulika & Mahtab Shafiei (2024), Assessing the Role of the United Nations in Countering Terrorism in Africa: A Case Study of the Lake Chad Basin, *African Security Review*, 33(2), pp. 156-174.

Conclusion

The establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) has been one of the most significant steps symbolising institutional and normative transformation during the transition from the OAU to the AU. APSA was designed as a security framework to enable a faster, more coordinated, and collective response to increasing conflict and insecurity on the continent. However, this study shows that, as exemplified by the Boko Haram insurgency, there is a clear structural tension between the institutional design of APSA and the dynamic, network-based nature of the security threats it faces.

Boko Haram has emerged not only as Nigeria's internal security problem but also as a multi-layered threat affecting sub-regional, regional, and global security. APSA has very much experienced its performance in regional security management with this scenario. Findings from this article indicate that APSA is an important mechanism as a result of its normative and institutional framework. However, the following challenges remain for APSA in terms of operational capacity, speed of decision-making, financial sustainability, political coordination, and ownership, among others.

When assessed from an RSCT perspective, the mismatch between the speed and complexity of the spread of threats and the capacity for institutional response reflects one of the fundamental challenges facing regional security complexes. In this context, the issue is not that APSA is completely dysfunctional, but rather that its institutional and operational capacity needs to be strengthened to address the nature of emerging security threats.

In light of these findings, recommendations to enhance APSA's effectiveness in addressing emerging security threats should be evaluated not merely as normative aspirations, but as institutional and operational reforms structured around short-, medium-, and long-term priorities. Within this framework, the following recommendations are systematically addressed under three main categories: (i) short-term operational and institutional strengthening measures, (ii) medium-term political and structural reform areas, and (iii) long-term normative and societal transformation strategies.

Considering the above-mentioned challenges facing the AU-APSA security framework in addressing the conflicts in the region, the article suggests:

i. Short-Term Operational and Corporate Strengthening

- (1) The need to continuously improve and update the APSA security framework is

necessary and meaningful given the dynamics and trends of conflict and insecurity on the continent. There should not be a *cosmetic improvement* of the APSA security mechanism, but an improvement that is seen as comprehensive and holistic.

- (2) Counterinsurgency (COIN) and especially the deployed forces, such as the MNJTF in tackling the Boko Haram conflict, should not be drawn into negative and controversial politics that can affect the outcome of COIN efforts. In other words, negative politics should not be mixed into the fight against terror.
- (3) It is reasonable and necessary that the current APSA security framework has the capacity and capability to adequately address the complexity of emerging threats such as insurgency, militancy, terrorism, and other forms of transnational crime. In other words, the AU and other regional actors should ensure that these policies are translated into concrete, implementable, and workable plans, as this is an important aspect of offering African solutions to African problems.
- (4) Despite the challenges faced by the APSA security framework, particularly in relation to the *smooth operationalisation* of this policy in addressing modern and complex security challenges such as insurgency, terrorism, and other forms of transnational crime, the AU, the various sub-regional economic communities and the APSA guidelines appear to be the most plausible platform for effective conflict prevention and management.

ii. *Medium-Term Political and Structural Reform Areas*

- (5) The maxim African solutions to African problems, especially in conflict management, should not be seen as a mutually exclusive endeavour of the state concerned to entrench. Yet, there should be a comprehensive engagement of the AU, the various regional economic communities, African states, and heads of states and governments driving the process to ensure that this mantra is not just seen as a rhetorical statement, but reflects what it really means.
- (6) The paradox of regional security cooperation within the framework of a well-structured security community is necessary if the continent is to counter the threats to its peace, stability, and development. This is because the current security threats on the continent pose a complex security dilemma, and the AU, together with the various regional economic communities in the sub-regions, provides the perfect platform to further strengthen this Security Communitarian paradigm in response to these challenges.

- (7) The resolution of conflicts on the continent must be achieved through the willingness and action of African leaders and regional actors to take ownership of the conflict, to assume responsibility, and to lead the process to ensure the effective realisation of peace and security in the region.
- (8) For the AU and the APSA security framework to also address the challenge of conflict and insecurity in the region, political actors must show their full willingness and commitment to drive the process forward. This includes decisive leadership to ensure that the AU-APSA framework is adequately resourced to make it more viable and effective and to find solutions to the region's problems.

iii. Long-Term Normative and Social Transformation Strategies

- (9) The fight against the Boko Haram insurgency should not be reduced to a military response while neglecting other important components of conflict management. Therefore, other non-military solutions should also be included, as this will increase sustainability and further build trust and capacity.
- (10) There should be an African-centred strategy for conflict management that fits within the framework of commonly accepted cultural values and norms, and that mimics how traditional African societies respond to and manage conflict.
- (11) The AU-APSA initiative should also consider some non-military components of conflict management and peacebuilding that address the societal factors and undercurrents that exacerbate tensions and insecurity. For example, local and community actors must ensure that problems related to radicalisation and negative teachings that misrepresent religious values are contained and that punitive measures are taken against individuals or groups who resist these measures.
- (12) Good governance and accountable leadership are necessary for the continent as most cases and incidents of conflict and insecurity in the region are due to centuries of history of poor governance and unaccountable leadership in most African states.

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