Regional Cooperation And Management Of National Security Among Member States: An Appraisal Of ECOWAS

Adekunle Saheed AJISEBIYAWO, Phd
Department Of Political Science
Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State

Donald Igbinosa EBOIGBE, Phd
Department Of Political Science
Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State

Abstract
This paper explores how cooperation among West African neighbours, exemplified by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), contributes to national security. Together, the ECOWAS nations can effectively address shared concerns such as criminality, terrorism, and conflicts. This paper examines how ECOWAS has carried out this throughout time. It also determines whether ECOWAS remains significant for contemporary national security. This work was guided by the complex interdependence theory. We investigated the advantages of ECOWAS collaboration in maintaining the peace and stability of the area by examining historical events and contemporary circumstances. Policymakers can make decisions to further expand collaboration more effectively by taking into account the effects of ECOWAS on national security. This paper contributes to understanding how regional alliances like ECOWAS can protect countries in West Africa from threats, making them safer and more secure.
Keywords: *Regional Cooperation, National Security, Security Integration, Economic Stability, Cross-border Security, Counter-terrorism, Peacekeeping*

I.   Introduction

Every sovereign state continues to place a high priority on maintaining national security, or the safety and defence of the country and its people against external threats. It is impossible to overestimate the value of regional cooperation in enhancing national security in the globally interconnected world of today (Obasi, 2024). The Economic Community of West African States is one of the most well-known instances of regional cooperation in Africa (ECOWAS). This essay seeks to assess the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) ongoing value in bolstering member nations' national security via cooperative efforts.

ECOWAS is a group of 15 West African nations that was founded in 1975 to promote regional economic integration and development. Beyond its economic goals, ECOWAS has become more and more important in tackling security issues, such as transnational crime, pandemics, conflicts and terrorism (ECOWAS 2022). To determine whether ECOWAS is still relevant in defending national security interests, a thorough evaluation of its performance in handling these security issues is necessary.

Conflict resolution and prevention are two important ways that ECOWAS supports national security (Lucey, 2016). In nations like Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Mali, the group has been instrumental in resolving disputes and advancing peace. ECOWAS has been successful in keeping disputes from getting worse and destabilising the region by encouraging communication and collaboration among its member states (Lucey, 2016). ECOWAS prioritises combating transnational threats like terrorism, organised crime, and the proliferation of light and small armaments in addition to preventing conflicts.

It is crucial to emphasise the dynamic nature of the security concerns that West African countries face to put the conversation in context. Political instability, ethnic wars, cross-border terrorism, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons are just a few of the internal and foreign issues that the region has had to deal with (Annan, 2014; Abiodun, Onafowora and Nwannenaya, 2018; Bala and Tar, 2021). The security environment is further made worse by non-traditional security concerns like infectious illnesses, food

instability, and climate change. Given these complex issues, it is frequently difficult for individual governments to handle security issues on their own, calling for regional cooperation (Tarif, 2023).

ECOWAS provides a forum for member states to work together and coordinate their responses to security concerns through its institutional framework and methods. The Peace and Security Architecture of the organisation, which consists of the Early Warning System, the Mediation and Security Council, and the ECOWAS Commission, provides a strong framework for peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and settlement. The crucial role that ECOWAS plays in reinstating security and peace in the area is exemplified by its intervention in wars such as those in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire.

Additionally, through programmes like the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the establishment of the ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Unit, ECOWAS has shown its dedication to battling terrorism and violent extremism. The member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) augment their collective capacity to counter terrorist threats and secure their borders from extremist infiltration using intelligence-sharing, cooperative military exercises, and capacity-building programmes.

According to Agbebaku, Uwa, and Fayeye (2018), the significance of ECOWAS goes beyond conventional security issues to include newly emerging non-traditional threats. The organization's ability to respond cooperatively to health pandemics is demonstrated by its actions during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. By coordinating surveillance, containment, and resource mobilisation efforts, ECOWAS made a substantial contribution to stopping the virus's spread and lessening its socioeconomic effects on its member states.

The dynamic security environment in West Africa emphasises how important regional collaboration is to defending national security objectives. With its institutional structure and cooperative methods, ECOWAS continues to play a crucial role in tackling the wide range of security issues that the area faces. ECOWAS keeps proving its importance in advancing peace, stability, and development in West Africa by encouraging cooperation, solidarity, and group efforts.

II.   Literature Review

In the sphere of international relations, the effect of regional cooperation on national security is a crucial subject. It is well known that improving national security in member states requires regional collaboration, such as that found in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Numerous academics have investigated how this kind of cooperation affects security dynamics in the West African region.

Scholars have emphasised that ECOWAS plays a significant role in fostering peace and stability using conflict prevention and resolution processes. Ayambire (2019), for example, highlights the ECOWAS's attempts to mediate disputes and facilitate peace negotiations, noting that it was involved in ending the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. By tackling the underlying causes of instability, these programmes have assisted in reducing threats to national security. Regional organisations can successfully manage security risks that cross national borders by combining resources and coordinating activities.

Scholars have also looked at how important ECOWAS is for promoting economic growth and tackling socioeconomic issues that lead to insecurity. The significance of regional economic integration in fostering prosperity and mitigating susceptibility to security risks is emphasised by AUC (2019) and Nwangwu et al (2019). By resolving issues resulting from economic inequities, ECOWAS measures, such as the free movement of people and goods, have not only helped economic progress but also contributed to stability.

Furthermore, studies have shown how important it is for ECOWAS to support institutional development and governance frameworks that are strong enough to address security issues. Ismail (2015) talks about the creation of organisations that act as venues for member-state security coordination, such as the Peace and Security Council and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework. These channels improve the exchange of information, response coordination, and cooperative strategy implementation against transnational threats such as organised crime and terrorism.

In addition, researchers have examined the effects of ECOWAS's interactions with outside partners on the dynamics of regional security. Holt and Shanahan (2005) and Ajayi (2008) have both investigated the alliances that ECOWAS has with institutions such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) to advance peace and security in West Africa. These alliances have made it easier to mobilise funds, manpower, and diplomatic backing to tackle the intricate security issues that the region faces.

Moreover, scholarly works underscore the necessity of ongoing adjustment and creativity within ECOWAS to successfully tackle changing security risks. Igwe et al. (2020); and Onuoha, Ojewale, and Akogwu (2020) contend that the organisation needs to continue being adaptable and sensitive to new dangers, like conflicts brought on by climate change and cybersecurity vulnerabilities. To guarantee that the security architecture of ECOWAS remains relevant and successful, continuous institutional reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and the involvement of civil society actors are necessary.

However, several academics have expressed doubts about how well regional cooperation can address security-related issues. Yoroms (2014), for instance, makes the case that regional organisations such as ECOWAS frequently lack the ability and resources necessary to deal with sophisticated security challenges. Furthermore, internal conflicts within member nations may make it more difficult for regional organisations to react quickly and effectively to security threats.

Critiques have also been levelled at the way ECOWAS handles security matters. According to some academics, the organization's reliance on military involvement as a means of resolving disputes may be ineffective and contribute to additional instability in the area (Uhi, 2023; Albadawi, 2023; Ajala, 2023). For example, the 2017 intervention in The Gambia drew criticism for its lack of accountability and transparency. Furthermore, discussions concerning how outside actors influence security dynamics in the West African region are still going on. Some academics contend that outside interventions, like those carried out by the EU and the UN, have the potential to erode the sovereignty of regional alliances like ECOWAS (Bilal, 2013). Others argue that external support is necessary to address security challenges that exceed the capacity of regional organizations (Piccolino and Minou, 2014).

The body of research emphasises how crucial regional cooperation—such as that provided by ECOWAS—is to improve national security in West Africa. By encouraging economic growth, bolstering institutions, promoting peace-building, and interacting with outside partners, ECOWAS plays a major role in reducing security risks and pushing stability in the area. However difficulties still exist, requiring ongoing efforts to innovate and adapt to changing security dynamics.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Complex Interdependence offers a framework for comprehending the relationships between nations. Scholars like Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane created it (1977). According to this thesis, there are more connections between nations than merely those based on wealth or military might. They are mutually dependent in many areas, including politics, trade, and culture. This theory's central tenet is that various nations possess distinct forms of power. It goes beyond simply determining who is wealthiest or has the largest army. Power can also accrue to nations due to their propensity for producing goods, such as culture or technology. By sharing these things, they can have an impact on other nations.

The belief that nations don't always resort to war to resolve disputes is another crucial one. Alternatively, they could collaborate to identify win-win solutions. We refer to this as "cooperation." For instance, nations may work together to combat climate change or halt the spread of illness. According to the Complex Interdependence Theory, nations are not always able to achieve their own goals. They need to consider the impact of their activities on other nations. This implies that they must communicate and negotiate. They are not free to act however they like.

This theory will be applied to demonstrate how the cooperation of West African nations, known as ECOWAS, aids in maintaining national security. For instance, the ECOWAS countries demonstrate their preference for cooperation over confrontation when they decide to assist one another in times of need, such as when thwarting terrorist attacks. Everyone is safer as a result of this. According to Keohane and Nye (1977), cooperation is preferable to conflict in a world where nations rely on one another for a variety of needs. And ECOWAS is centred around it.

Importance of Regional Cooperation in Ensuring National Security

National security and regional stability are like two sides of the same coin—they are mutually dependent and intricately entwined. Protecting a country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and residents' safety from both internal and external threats is the definition of national security, whereas regional stability refers to the peaceful coexistence and cooperation of nations within a specific geographical area. Brauer (2015) argues that national security depends on regional stability since it fosters political stability, social cohesiveness, and economic growth inside individual nations. Conflicts are less likely to cross over borders when nearby countries are stable and cooperative, which lowers the risk of armed conflict and terrorism.

Because security challenges are interrelated, regional cooperation is crucial to national security. Security issues like violent extremism, transnational crime, and terrorism do not respect national boundaries in today's globalised society. These dangers frequently call for a coordinated response, involving the cooperation of several nations to handle shared security issues. Through regional cooperation organisations such as ECOWAS, governments can pool resources and expertise to better address these common security concerns and stop them from spreading to neighbouring countries.

Through the promotion of intelligence and information exchange among member states, regional cooperation can increase the efficacy of national security initiatives. Countries can better anticipate and address new security challenges by exchanging information on security threats and working together on cooperative security operations. In the end, by battling transnational dangers like organised crime, drug trafficking, and

terrorism, this cooperative strategy can boost the overall security of the region by assisting in the identification and disruption of criminal networks that operate across borders (Gana, Adamu, and Zakariya'u, 2018).

Furthermore, trust and confidence among member states—both of which are necessary for productive security cooperation—can be fostered through regional collaboration. Countries can strengthen their bonds and create a sense of solidarity by cooperating on shared security goals, which can aid in averting crises and advancing regional stability. In addition to helping diplomatic efforts to settle conflicts and stop tensions from turning violent, this trust and collaboration can help.

As a regional body committed to strengthening political and economic integration in West Africa, ECOWAS has made a substantial contribution to the advancement of regional security cooperation in the area. A variety of initiatives have been formed by the organisation to address security concerns, such as the ECOWAS Standby Force and the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (1999). These methods give member states a framework for coordinating their efforts to avert confrontations, settle disagreements, and address security risks in the region.

Additionally, to prevent or diplomatically resolve interstate crises, ECOWAS encourages political discourse and conflict settlement among its member states (Okeke, 2014). ECOWAS promotes regional stability, which is necessary to guarantee national security, by mediating peaceful settlements of conflicts. In addition, ECOWAS promotes economic development and integration, which lessens social inequality, unemployment, and poverty, all of which have an indirect positive impact on national security. Internal conflict and external aggression are less likely to occur in an economy that is stable and affluent.

Numerous instances demonstrate how ECOWAS has had a major impact on member states' national security outcomes. The 2017 political crisis in The Gambia was resolved in part because of the participation of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council. By using diplomatic pressure and threatening military action, ECOWAS was able to force former President Yahya Jammeh to resign, averting a possible civil war and establishing democratic rule (Hartmann, 2017).

National security in ECOWAS member states has benefited from regional cooperation. The part ECOWAS played in ending the civil war in Liberia is one instance. The ECOWAS nations assisted in mediating a peace deal and dispatched peacekeeping forces to Liberia (Arthur, 2019). As a result, there was less bloodshed and more stability in Liberia, which enhanced security there as well as in its surrounding nations.

These examples highlight how regional cooperation within ECOWAS has directly contributed to enhancing national security by preventing conflicts, combating terrorism, and promoting peace and stability in member states.

Mechanisms Employed by ECOWAS to Address Security Challenges
ECOWAS has developed several mechanisms to tackle security challenges in the region. These mechanisms aim to promote stability, peace, and cooperation among member states.

The Authority of Heads of State and Government
The heads of the member states of ECOWAS make up the Authority of Heads of State and Government, which is the highest decision-making body in the organisation. This body convenes regularly to deliberate and decide on issues concerning the security and peace of the area. To handle security threats, the Authority can send peacekeeping forces, impose sanctions, and approve military actions. For instance, the Authority of Heads of State and Government approved the deployment of a regional military force to guarantee the peaceful transfer of power in The Gambia in response to the political crisis that year. This intervention supported the nation's rule of law and helped avert a possible conflict.

All things considered, the Authority of Heads of State and Government is an essential tool used by ECOWAS to tackle regional security issues. This group, which unites the leaders of its member states, can act quickly and decisively to advance peace and stability. Authority of Heads of State and Government is still very important because ECOWAS is still a major player in regional security.

The Executive Secretariat
Ezeani (2016) claims that the Executive Secretariat is in charge of carrying out decisions and organising security-related actions inside ECOWAS, acting as the organization's administrative branch. The Executive Secretariat is essential to the ECOWAS member nations' ability to communicate and work together to combat security risks like political instability, transnational crime, and terrorism. The Executive Secretariat strives to develop and implement plans to improve security and stability in the region through its different departments and specialised divisions. In addition, the Executive Secretariat facilitates communication and cooperation amongst ECOWAS member nations, allowing them to pool resources, knowledge, and experience to tackle shared security issues. The Executive Secretariat contributes to the enhancement of the region's collective security by encouraging coordination and cooperation among member states.

Defence and Security Commission

The Chiefs of Defence Staff of the ECOWAS Member States comprise this Commission. Its job is to evaluate the technical concerns and the logistical needs of any peacekeeping operations. Additionally, according to Odobo, Andekin, and Udegbunam (2017), the Commission's role is to support the Security Council and Mediation in matters about the deployment and organisation of peacekeeping forces within the sub-region. The committee also examines reports from the numerous observation and monitoring centres, based on which it advises and suggests actions to the Security and Mediation Council. The Commission convenes once every three months, but additional meetings may be scheduled if needed (Odobo et al. 2017).

Council of Elders

The Executive Secretary appoints the Council of Elders to assist the organisation in the field of preventative diplomacy. The group consists of distinguished and well-known people, including former heads of state, well-known diplomats, and influential religious figures. They are asked to act as mediators, conciliators, or facilitators during times of political unrest inside or between member states by using their good offices. In Niger, the Council of Elders was established in July 2001. In addition, they have monitored elections in nations outside of the sub-region, like Zimbabwe, as well as in the Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Early Warning Systems

The Early Warning System (EWS) is one of ECOWAS's primary tools. This technique assists in seeing possible disputes or security risks before they become more serious. To find early indicators of crisis, it compiles data from a variety of sources, including member states, non-governmental organisations, and international organisations. To keep an eye on political, social, and economic changes in its member states, for instance, ECOWAS established the Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) (IOM, n.d.). ECOWAS can counter possible dangers by taking preemptive action when they are identified. ECOWAS can keep ahead of new security threats and successfully defend the interests of its member nations by utilising technology and information sharing.

Mediation and Conflict Resolution

Another name for this is preventive diplomacy. Early conflict intervention is a key component of preventive diplomacy as it keeps disputes from worsening and becoming major crises. ECOWAS assists with mediation and attempts at conflict resolution when disputes emerge amongst member states. To assist parties in reaching amicable agreements, it frequently sends out peacekeeping forces or mediators. For example, in the 1990s, ECOWAS was instrumental in mediating the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Dumbuya, 2008). ECOWAS contributed to the restoration of peace and stability in these nations by sending peacekeeping forces and pursuing diplomatic initiatives.

Peacekeeping Operations

In addition, ECOWAS participates in peacekeeping missions to tackle security issues within the region. To preserve peace and security, military personnel are sent into conflict areas as part of these missions. To assist in preserving peace and security, the organisation has sent peacekeeping troops to nations like Mali, Guinea-Bissau, and The Gambia (Reuters, 2023). These missions have been crucial in averting harm to civilian populations and stopping acts of violence. ECOWAS has proven its dedication to advancing peace and stability in the area by adopting a proactive stance towards security issues.

Capacity Building and Training

Training and capacity building are two more crucial ECOWAS mechanisms. To improve its capacity to handle security issues, ECOWAS offers member states' security forces assistance and training. To strengthen the military and law enforcement capabilities of its member states, for example, ECOWAS developed the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) (ECOWAS, 2022). ECOWAS members are better able to uphold peace and security inside their borders when their capacities are strengthened. ECOWAS has directed its attention towards tackling transnational challenges like trafficking, organised crime, and terrorism in the past few years. To address these issues, ECOWAS forges regional counterterrorism and border security plans in conjunction with foreign partners.

ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)

ECOMOG is a structure made up of multiple military and civilian standby multipurpose modules that are ready for instant deployment from their home nations. ECOMOG's operations include peacekeeping and restoration, humanitarian action support, peacekeeping and observation missions, missions to monitor the enforcement of sanctions, such as embargoes, preventive deployments, peace-building operations, disarmament

and demobilisation, policing activities to combat fraud and organised crime, and any other operations that may be directed by the Middle East and North Africa (MSC). In 2001, the ECOWAS reform agenda was agreed to engage in a P-3 Agreement with the US, France, and the UK to reinforce and build ECOMOG's capabilities for future peace support missions (Adedeji cited in Bryden, and Hänggi, 2004).

Evaluating the Effectiveness of ECOWAS Mechanisms in Enhancing National Security

With the help of its framework for managing conflicts, ECOWAS has taken the lead in advancing security and peace in the area. The organization's mission has been broadened throughout time to encompass conflict management, resolution, and prevention. The guiding concepts of the ECOWAS conflict management framework are collective security, non-interference, and peaceful dispute resolution. The organisation has worked to resolve disputes and advance peace in the area under the guidance of these ideals.

ECOWAS has developed a multifaceted conflict management framework comprising diplomatic, political, economic, and military components. The Protocols on Non-Aggression and Defence (ANAD) and Mutual Assistance of Defence (PMAD), which emphasise member states' commitment to peaceful coexistence and the peaceful settlement of disputes, are the cornerstones of this framework (ECOWAS, 1993). According to Article 18 of the PMAD (ECOWAS, 1978: 7–8), the Authority may choose to interfere if an internal conflict in a member state is actively perpetuated and sustained by outside forces; however, if the conflict were driven by internal factors, the Authority may choose not to do so. A member state may not use force against another member state or permit foreigners to use force against a member state, according to Article 2-4 of the ANAD (quoted in Anning, 2011). PMAD and ANAD have been criticised as having an overly narrow scope since they externalise internal conflicts and neglect the likelihood of internal instability stemming from issues of state fragility or sectarian and communal confrontations (Elowson and Macdermott, 2010: 23).4 Francis (2009: 92, 93), for example, contends that both protocols were essentially measures of regime protection that protected the leaders of the ECOWAS from foreign (as well as internal/oppositional) security concerns while serving their interests.

ECOWAS uses economic tools to encourage growth and stability in the area. By advancing shared economic interests, the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) encourages economic interdependence among member nations and lowers the risk of war (ECOWAS, 2020). Research by Bankole, Olasehinde, and Raheem (2014) found that the ETLS has been successful in advancing ECOWAS economic integration and cooperation. The programme has assisted in fostering intra-regional trade and lowering trade barriers, which has strengthened the economic bonds between member states. This interdependence on the economy not only promotes stability but also advances the region's general development.

Countries are less prone to start wars when they depend on one another for trade. This is a result of their mutual desire to maintain the smooth operation of trade. For instance, if Country A is dependent on Country B for commodities, they would prefer that there be no interruptions to their supply. Scholars like Hadjiyiannis, Heracleous & Tabakis (2016), who contend that economic cooperation, such as the ETLS, fosters a sense of mutual benefit among member states and lowers the likelihood of war, corroborate this theory. Thus, ECOWAS indirectly supports regional stability when it encourages economic interdependence through programmes like the ETLS. Additionally, the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework emphasizes the role of economic development in preventing conflicts by addressing root causes such as poverty and inequality (ECOWAS, 2008).

When political and diplomatic measures fail to end hostilities, ECOWAS has shown that it is prepared to step in with force. By sending troops into crisis areas to bring peace and stability back, the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) acts as a quick reaction mechanism for peacekeeping operations (ECOWAS, 2017). ECOWAS interventions in Liberia and Mali are noteworthy instances where the restoration of order and suppression of violence required military involvement (ECOWAS, 2021). This intervention served to stabilise the situation and stop more deaths. Sakihu and Aning (2023) claim that the military participation of ECOWAS showed its dedication to maintaining security and stability among its member states. This strategy demonstrates ECOWAS' flexibility in confronting difficult circumstances and demonstrates its ongoing importance in tackling security risks in West Africa (Sakihu and Aning, 2023). Thus, ECOWAS has shown it's ready to take action to restore peace and security in the region.

Notwithstanding its successes, the conflict management framework of ECOWAS is confronted with various obstacles. Financial limitations impede the organization's work by preventing it from deploying peacekeeping missions and providing the resources required for resolving conflicts. Moreover, ECOWAS lacks the institutional capacity to carry out its conflict management plans in an efficient manner, which causes delays and inefficiencies in resolving disputes. Its capacity to carry out plans and coordinate activities amongst member nations is weakened by this shortcoming (Alumona and Azom, 2018). Because of these institutional flaws and resource limitations, ECOWAS's conflict management framework fails to maintain peace and

stability in the area, despite the organization's commitment to doing so. These difficulties make it more difficult for the organisation to carry out its mandate, which is to maintain stability and security throughout the region.

Occasionally member states' conflicting national interests obstruct cooperative action, compromising the coherence of ECOWAS's crisis response. Decision-making processes during times of crisis are sometimes beset by conflicts and delays stemming from the diverse aims and ambitions of member states within ECOWAS. For example, competing interests among ECOWAS members resulted in a disjointed response during the recent political turmoil in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, restricting the organization's capacity to intervene effectively. Specifically, a joint statement (France24, 2023) from the military coup-led governments of Burkina Faso and Mali warned that an ECOWAS intervention in Niger would result in a military reaction from those two countries (Yabi, 2023). These instances underscore how divergent national interests can undermine the coherence of ECOWAS's response to crises, hampering its effectiveness in maintaining regional stability and security.

Furthermore, the ECOWAS's dependence on military intervention gives rise to questions regarding legitimacy and sovereignty, especially in cases where actions are interpreted as foreign meddling. Some consider ECOWAS military interventions in member states to be external interference. They might start to doubt ECOWAS's authority to intervene in domestic matters as a result. They may believe that there is a threat to their nation's sovereignty, or its capacity to rule itself free from foreign intervention. For instance, some opponents of ECOWAS's deployment of troops to interfere in crises such as those in Sierra Leone and Liberia contended that it was not the organization's responsibility to meddle in the domestic affairs of these nations. They believed that this kind of intervention could set a dangerous precedent and weaken the legitimacy of the governments involved.

The governments of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso—all founding members of ECOWAS—condemned the organization's decision to send a "standby force" to Niger to restore constitutional order following the military's overthrow of President Mohammed Bazoum's civilian government. They interpreted the action as an attempt to meddle in another sovereign state's domestic affairs. As a result, in January 2024, the three nations ceased to be members of ECOWAS. They asserted that ECOWAS had strayed from pan-Africanism and the principles of its founding fathers. In addition, they declared that ECOWAS had "betrayed its founding principles and become a threat to member states and peoples, having fallen under the influence of foreign powers." To guarantee the validity and efficiency of its peacekeeping operations, the organisation must therefore find a balance between involvement and upholding the sovereignty of its member nations.

III.   Conclusion

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger may have left ECOWAS, but the organisation still has a lot of potential to promote regional collaboration and strengthen national security. The surviving member states still have a lot in common and deal with similar security issues like political instability, transnational crime, and terrorism. As a result, to successfully address these issues, ECOWAS can continue to act as a forum for collaboration and group action among West African nations.

Therefore, it is clear that ECOWAS will always be important for boosting national security through regional cooperation. Significant contributions to the peace and security of its member states have been made by ECOWAS through a variety of procedures, including cooperative military exercises and intelligence sharing. To combat transnational threats like terrorism, organised crime, and cross-border conflicts, this has become especially important. Furthermore, the prevention of tensions in the area from rising has been made possible by ECOWAS's role in fostering communication and dispute resolution. By promoting confidence and collaboration between neighbouring nations, regional organisations such as ECOWAS play a crucial role in decreasing the probability of hostilities. Thus, maintaining West Africa's peace and stability depends on member states' unwavering adherence to ECOWAS and its tenets. Going forward, ECOWAS's institutional strength will need to be strengthened, and member states' cooperation must be encouraged more closely to effectively handle new security problems in the area.

To ensure the continued relevance of ECOWAS in national security, several recommendations are offered:
1. Strengthen Institutional Capacities: ECOWAS needs to bolster its institutional frameworks to effectively manage and respond to contemporary security challenges. This includes enhancing the capabilities of the ECOWAS Standby Force and establishing more robust mechanisms for crisis response and disaster management.
2. Enhance Political Cooperation: For ECOWAS to function effectively in the realm of security, there must be a higher degree of political will and cooperation among member states. This can be achieved by fostering a shared sense of regional identity and mutual accountability. Regular summits and dialogues should be prioritized to build trust and consensus on security issues.

3. Focus on Preventive Diplomacy: ECOWAS should invest more in preventive diplomacy to address conflicts before they escalate. This involves expanding its mediation and negotiation capabilities, and deploying special envoys and liaison officers in potential hotspots.
4. Community Engagement and Human Security: Engaging local communities and focusing on human security can enhance the effectiveness of ECOWAS's security initiatives. This approach ensures that security strategies are not only state-centered but also address the needs and rights of individuals, thus building community resilience against radicalization and violence.
5. Partnerships with International Actors: ECOWAS should seek to strengthen partnerships with international organizations such as the United Nations and the African Union. These partnerships can provide additional resources and support for peacekeeping operations and conflict resolution effort

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