

# Peace & Security Council Report



Can the African Union develop a coherent foreign policy framework?

Lake Chad Basin's counter-terrorism must adapt to defeat Boko Haram

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## Can the African Union develop a coherent foreign policy framework?

In February 2026, following recommendations from Kenyan President William Ruto in his role as champion of African Union (AU) institutional reform, the AU Assembly took decision 967. This directed the AU Commission chairperson to select five experts (one from each region) to draft an African foreign policy framework by the 40<sup>th</sup> ordinary AU summit in January 2027.

The move reflects growing concern that Africa is operating in an increasingly fragmented international order marked by intensified great/hegemonic power competition, weakened multilateralism and the weaponisation of trade, finance, technology and security partnerships. In this context, African states are frequently expected to articulate unified positions on global crises.

Persistent divisions among AU member states continue to weaken collective bargaining power in multilateral forums

Africa's demographic weight, mineral wealth and geostrategic relevance have increased its importance geopolitical calculations in major non-African capitals. Yet persistent divisions among member states continue to weaken collective bargaining power in multilateral forums. The challenge is not only external pressure but internal fragmentation.

### Is 'foreign policy' the right concept?

Traditional understanding of foreign policy is tied closely to sovereign statehood. In classical realist thought, foreign policy presupposes a central political authority speaking externally with a unified diplomatic voice. The AU

#### Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>AU</b>	African Union	<b>JAS</b>	Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati wal-Jihad
<b>CSFP</b>	Common Foreign and Security policy	<b>LCBC</b>	Lake Chad Basin Commission
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States	<b>MNJTF</b>	Multinational Joint Task Force
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>OAU</b>	Organisation of African Unity
<b>INTERPOL</b>	International Criminal Police Organization	<b>PSC</b>	Peace and Security Council
<b>ISWAP</b>	Islamic State West Africa Province	<b>TOC</b>	Transnational organised crime
		<b>UN</b>	United Nations

does not have this attribute. While it has expanded its diplomatic and security roles – including representation at the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and other multilateral institutions – it remains fundamentally an intergovernmental organisation. In it, states retain the primary authority over diplomacy, defence and strategic alignment.

Pluralist approaches offer more flexibility, arguing that regional organisations can still exercise meaningful external agency through shared norms, institutions and collective identity. From this perspective, the AU can gradually develop a diplomatic coherence even without full supranational authority.

The EU provides a useful middle ground across these perspectives. Although it formally uses the term ‘Common Foreign and Security policy’ (CSFP), the EU increasingly operates through the broader framework of ‘external action’, encompassing diplomacy, trade, development cooperation, climate negotiations and security. Importantly, even with far deeper institutional integration than the AU, EU foreign policy remains largely nationally driven.

## Common positions: successes and contradictions

Article 3(d) of the AU Constitutive Act signals an external role. However, it deliberately avoids the term ‘foreign policy’, instead referring to the ‘promotion and defence of African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its peoples’. The real question, therefore, is not whether Africa can speak with one voice, but whether the AU can build a more coherent and strategically coordinated diplomatic ‘polyphony’ among states with differing interests and alignment. This is despite 54 AU states historically being part of the non-aligned movement.

Africa already has significant experience in collective diplomacy with the most prominent example being the Ezulwini Consensus of 2005, which articulated a unified African position on UN Security Council reform.

African coordination has been evident in climate finance, loss-and-damage negotiations and Covid-19 vaccine procurement through institutions such as the Africa CDC and Afrieximbank. However, these common positions remain uneven, with unity strongest on symbolic and governance issues and weaker when regime security, geopolitical alignment or material interests are involved.

Divergences of approaches about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, relations with China and the United States, regional level disputes in Nile Basin and the Sahel all illustrate the limits of continental coherence.

Hubert Kinkoh, a Mo Ibrahim Foundation Academy Fellow at Chatham House, also posits that emerging mini-lateral groupings such as the Alliance of Sahel States reflect broader trends toward subregion fragmentation. This, he says, might complicate AU approaches in diplomatic coordination that are already playing out in Africa-France and Africa-Russia relations.

Any credible external action framework must also grapple with Africa’s expanding and shifting foreign military footprint. This includes engagement

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### Current PSC Chairperson

#### **H.E. Ambassador Nasiru**

**Aminu**, Permanent

Representative of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to the AU and PSC Chairperson for May 2026

### PSC members

Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Lesotho, Morocco, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, and Uganda

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by US, France, Russia, China, Türkiye and Gulf states, evidenced in multiple bases in Djibouti and Kenya, among others.

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) has repeatedly expressed concern over foreign military bases and their implication for sovereignty, regional stability and proxy competition. Careful reading of the 868<sup>th</sup> meeting reveals that the PSC's authority remains limited because it cannot (by design) ban individual member states seeking to host military bases. Neither the PSC protocol nor the AU Constitutive Act grants that authority. Thus, strategic autonomy will remain elusive unless states are willing to coordinate these relationships continentally and more consistently.

### Lessons from the EU

The EU offers a useful but partial comparison for understanding the AU's external ambitions. Its external coordination was developed gradually through decades of economic and political integration rather than through a single constitutional moment. Integrations began with the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) and expanded through the European Economic Community, the Exchange Rate Mechanism (1979) and the single market (1993), creating deep economic interdependence.

### The AU and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, prioritised political unity before economic integration

This evolved into greater political coordination, culminating in the Maastricht Treaty (1992), which introduced the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Subsequent reforms under the Amsterdam (1997) and Lisbon (2007) treaties strengthened external action through the creation of the high representative for foreign affairs and the European External Action Service. However, Common Foreign and Security Policy decisions still require unanimity, leaving member states in control of defence, diplomatic recognition and major strategic choices. As a result, EU external coherence remains uneven and negotiated rather than fully unified.

Recent geopolitical crisis illustrates these limitations. Divisions over Gaza, Ukraine, Iran and Iraq demonstrate that institutional integration does not eliminate national strategic divergence. In practice, the EU often functions through coordinated plurality rather than complete unity.

The key lesson for the AU is not that integration automatically produces consensus, but that sustained institutionalisation can gradually improve coherence. However, the EU's external capacity rests on far deeper economic and legal interdependence than exists within the AU.

By contrast, the AU and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), prioritised political unity before economic integration. Although



CONCERN HAS BEEN EXPRESSED OVER FOREIGN MILITARY BASES AND THEIR IMPLICATION FOR SOVEREIGNTY, REGIONAL STABILITY AND PROXY COMPETITION

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leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah argued that political independence required continental economic integration, meaningful cooperation emerged much later through the 1991 Abuja Treaty and eventually the African Continental Free Trade Area signed in 2018 – nearly 55 years after the OAU’s founding.

This sequencing matters because the AU lacks the supranational and economic integration underpinning the EU’s external coordination.

## Institutional lessons

The EU experience highlights the value of stable coordination, long-term strategy and institutional linkages beyond changes in political leadership. One innovation suggested in previous PSC reports is an AU commissioner for partnerships and multilateral relations to coordinate the continent’s engagements with external powers and multilateral institutions. Ideally it would have at least two key directorates for engagements bilateral (AU-China, -United Kingdom (UK) and -United States) and multilateral (AU-UN, -EU and -Association of Southeast Asian Nations).

The AU already has an institutional foundation for coordinated external engagement – the Partnerships Management and Resource Mobilisation Directorate led by Steve Lalande, which oversees its multilateral partnerships and aligns them with Agenda 2063. Although reporting under the chairperson’s office, its current mandate remains primarily coordination rather than political strategy. Instead of centralising foreign policy authority, such an office could strengthen coherence across diplomacy, trade and security partnerships.

Similarly, stronger coordination between the PSC and the African members of the United Nations Security Council (A3) through the Oran Process could improve diplomatic coherence before, during and after international crises. However, as Kinkoh notes, more is needed. In particular, for African files such as Sudan – where the UK is the penholder – mandatory consultations or co-penholdership should be instituted. This would ensure clear A3 and PSC input and ownership on all African matters.

Simultaneously, direct institutional transplantation from Europe would be difficult. The AU has overlapping regional economic communities, regime diversity, external dependency and limited enforcement mechanisms. In many ways, it lacks the supranational glue that makes even imperfect European coordination possible.

Ultimately, institutional reforms may be necessary. For now, the AU’s proposed foreign policy framework should focus on improving coordinated external action in an increasingly fragmented international system. Its success will depend not on institutional ambition alone. It will rest on whether states – particularly anchors such as Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Morocco and Kenya, each with a distinct foreign policy style – are willing to align national interests with continental priorities and strategic coordination.



ARE AFRICAN STATES  
WILLING TO ALIGN  
NATIONAL INTERESTS  
WITH CONTINENTAL  
PRIORITIES AND  
STRATEGIC  
COORDINATION?

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## Lake Chad Basin's counter-terrorism must adapt to defeat Boko Haram

For nearly two decades, the Lake Chad Basin – bordering Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Niger – has borne the ravages of the Boko Haram crisis. The conflict has claimed more than 40 000 lives and displaced two million people.

As violence spread across borders in 2014, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) member states established the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). The AU approved the force's concept of operations in 2015 and has since regularly reviewed its mandate, deploying a support mission to the force's headquarters in N'Djamena to coordinate resources, training, equipment and quick-impact community projects.

The MNJTF has achieved significant results, notably reducing the militant group's territorial control to levels not seen in 2014 and 2015. Many areas, particularly urban centres once controlled by Boko Haram, have been denied to the two factions, which once held a stranglehold over them, at times reaching the gates of cities such as Maiduguri.

The Multinational Joint Task Force has had no regional operation since July 2024 – while Boko Haram rearms and expands

They shifted to keeping rear bases in border areas, on islands, in forests and on the outskirts. The success of the stabilisation agenda in Lake Chad Basin lies in its holistic approach, which creates complementarity between the non-kinetic and kinetic tracks, with MNJTF playing a key role.

Despite these advances, Boko Haram factions continue to destabilise the situation. Indeed, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) quickly regained traction after the losses from MNJTF's 'Lake Sanity 2' in 2024 and launched its Camp Holocaust. This exacted great pressure on military positions and troops and led to the capture of military equipment by the insurgents.

Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, assumed weakened from clashes with rival ISWAP, is now conducting assaults on military formations in Nigeria and Chad. It also has active cells in central Nigeria between Abuja and coastal southwestern Nigeria. The lethality of the two factions is reflected in regular violent and bloody inter-factional confrontations. The two have adapted to the responses by reducing their footprint when harassed, resorting to more fragmented commandos, limiting large-scale attacks and taking refuge in islands, forests and swamp areas before reappearing.

A turning point occurred in 2025, with ISWAP increasingly using drones for intelligence and combat and better mastering improvised explosive devices. Communication progress, too, is clear, particularly propaganda. The obvious

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presence of foreign instructors promotes and accelerates this, adding pressure on national and regional armed forces.

Recruitment, intelligence and strategic procurement have continued. Reinforced and systematic extortion, with involvement in licit and illicit trade and exchange circuits, maintains military capabilities, specifically payment of combatants and funding of propaganda. The factions are also expanding clearly into areas beyond Lake Chad Basin.

Thus, MNJTF must step up its tactical and technological efforts and, above all, engage more consistently to continue weakening the factions and ensure stabilisation to facilitate support for affected communities. This cannot happen without political cohesion among LCBC states, which provide MNJTF troops and primary resources.

## New armed groups are expanding across Niger, Nigeria and Benin – unfortunately without any coordinated state response

Since the military coup in Niger, diplomatic tensions have arisen between it and its neighbours, including Nigeria, a key LCBC member and at the MNJTF helm. Niger has withdrawn from the regional force, which has deprived it of its fourth pillar, namely sector 4 in Diffa, Niger. Boko Haram faction activity across the region since 2025 is alarming. To boot, MNJTF has conducted no regional operations since the end of Lake Sanity 2 in July 2024.

With clear danger looming, LCBC states must renew their political commitment and ease internal tensions to restore MNJTF's regionality. As force sponsor, the AU must use its diplomatic influence to reunite Niger and Nigeria.

Securing resources is vital to ramp up force capabilities and adapt it to Boko Haram advances. This must begin among member states, with continuation of current efforts and increase in financial contributions. The AU, which has always supported external funding, must push it further.

All LCBC partners must support MNJTF capabilities in civil-military activities, which constitute important counter-narrative and counter-propaganda means. With military abuses such as aerial bombardments rising, it is essential to remain close to and communicate with the population, as it is at the heart of the fight.

Boko Haram's expansion is exacerbated by worrying developments in the border regions of Niger, Nigeria and Benin. Particularly alarming are emerging groups such as Lakurawa and Mahmuda and cells linked to Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin. Unfortunately, the states concerned are not collaborating on any joint response. The AU could be decisive in bringing the affected countries together into a joint framework and in capitalising on Benin's existing participation in the MNJTF to build a more coherent regional architecture.



BY 2025, ISWAP WAS DEPLOYING DRONES IN COMBAT AND REFINING IEDs – A QUALITATIVE LEAP IN CAPABILITY

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## A youth-focused strategy can curb transnational organised crime in Africa

Youths account for more than 60% of the population and this is projected to exceed 75% by 2030. This bulge is incommensurate with current socioeconomic and political investments and trajectories on the continent. As a result, criminal economies and networks offer the economic agency, social identity and belonging that states and formal markets have failed to provide.

This is the security challenge that the AU PSC must confront with renewed urgency as it holds regular annual sessions on strategies to combat transnational organised crime (TOC). These include the commemoration of Africa Amnesty month in September for the voluntary surrender of illicit arms and weapons. While the PSC recognises the diversity of TOC, most of its attention is on arms and weapon flows, which are often directly linked to violent insecurity.

Attention is limited on the nexus between insecurity and other TOCs that enable and sustain the worsening episodes of violent extremism and armed activities in the Sahel, Central Africa and East Africa. Crimes that undermine state stability include human and drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, cybercrime, and illegal logging, mining and fishing, with youth at the frontlines. Hence, understanding youth susceptibility and involvement is central to any credible African strategy to combat the scourge and attain durable peace and stability.

### Drug trafficking and abuse

In Sierra Leone and Liberia, for example, youths are caught in the web of both drug trafficking and abuse. The drug of primary concern is kush, a synthetic substance driving a public health crisis, particularly among youth. More worrying is the involvement in drugs of children as young as 12 – both male and female.

Research by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) indicates that the drug is produced in Sierra Leone using chemical compounds, including synthetic cannabinoids and nitazenes. Liberian and Sierra Leone gangs collaborate with transnational drug cartels to smuggle, distribute and trade drugs.

In Liberia, substance abusers are colloquially called 'zogos', both a description and a stigmatisation of people living on the margins of society, particularly disadvantaged youth experiencing homelessness and destitution. More than 70% of Liberia's 5.9 million population are under 35 and about 57% of school-aged children are out of school. Most live in chronic poverty and are unemployed, which drive hopelessness and substance abuse.

### Crimes such as human and drug trafficking, cybercrime and illegal mining threaten state stability

Ghettos where substance users congregate have proliferated across the capital in publicly visible places such as cemeteries, abandoned buildings, beaches, under bridges and improvised settlements near police stations, schools and residential communities. This reflects the state's growing inability to manage, contain or reverse the crisis. These ghettos offer an abode to many homeless, idle and addicted youths, but also harbour large and growing youth gangs, thereby creating a convergence of drug and gang cultures.

The ghettos are organisational hubs and hideouts for gangs. Armed with machetes, knives and, increasingly, firearms, these groups rob, extort and peddle protection services to paying customers. During elections, political elites have recruited gang members as enforcers to intimidate voters and disrupt opposition activities. Gangsterism and criminality among youths could further jeopardise Liberia's stability in the medium- to long term.

### Glamour of cybercrime

A parallel and equally significant trend is the normalisation of cybercrime as a viable livelihood strategy among youngsters. Cyberfraud is rising among youth in Ghana and Nigeria, for instance, as they are the most digitally connected citizens.

In Nigeria, this has produced so-called 'hustling kingdoms' – informal cybercrime academies where

youngsters are trained in digital fraud as if attending a vocational institution. These centres deploy sophisticated, diversified methodologies, including romance scams, advance-fee fraud, investment and lottery schemes, business email compromise and ransomware attacks, targeting victims globally.

The elderly are targeted disproportionately due to perceptions of greater trust and lower digital literacy. The scale of financial harm is substantial and increasingly involves sophisticated technical infrastructure. Emerging cybercrimes and the advent of artificial intelligence and cryptocurrencies are advancing way beyond international regulations, including the AU's 2014 Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection.

In Nigeria, confraternities are linked to cybercrime and protection racketeering. Nigerian confraternities, often called cults or secret societies, originated in the 1950s as university-based movements advocating liberation and social justice.

Despite their diverse professional membership, these youth-driven confraternities have become largely synonymous with violence and crime. They have transformed over decades of economic marginalisation, the capture of leadership structures by criminal elements and the systematic instrumentalisation of confraternity members by influential state and non-state actors.

Ghettos offer an abode to homeless, idle, addicted youths, but also harbour large youth gangs

Bonded by oaths of secrecy and loyalty, these organisations have in recent years acquired global notoriety as transnational criminal networks, with members implicated in sophisticated and extensive cyberfraud, drug and sex trafficking and money-laundering. They operate across borders, exploiting

**Chart 1: List of select confraternities in Nigeria**

Official name	Other names	Founding year	University where it was founded
<b>National Association of Seadogs</b>	Pyrates Confraternity	1952	University of Ibadan, Oyo State
<b>National Association of Airlords</b>	Supreme Eiy Confraternity (SEC, NAA, Airlords, Fliers)	1965	University of Ibadan, Oyo State
<b>National Association of Sea Lords</b>	Buccaneers Confraternity (Fine Boys, Ban Boys)	1972	University of Ibadan, Oyo State
<b>NBM of Africa</b>	Axemen, Black Axe, Aye	1977	University of Benin, Edo State
<b>Green Circuit Association International</b>	Maximum Academic Performance Highly Intellectuals Trained Executioners (Maphites)	1978	University of Benin, Edo State
<b>De Norsemen Kclub International</b>	Supreme Vikings Confraternity (Vikings, Adventurers, Aro-mates, Vultures)	1982	University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State
<b>Eternal Fraternal Order of the Legion Consortium</b>	The Klan Confraternity, KK	1983	University of Calabar, Cross River State
Female confraternities mostly act as auxiliaries to male confraternities, sometimes providing espionage or engaging in sex work			
<b>Black Bra Confraternity</b>	Axe Queens	Late 1980s	
<b>Daughters of Jezebel</b>	Jezebel	Late 1990s	

Source: ISS, Enhancing Africa's Response to Transnational Organised Crime

local criminal markets and cooperating with indigenous criminal networks in host countries.

In 2017, Canadian authorities dismantled a money-laundering network estimated at US\$5 billion involving syndicates linked to Nigerian confraternities. International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) Operation Jackal III in 2024 seized assets worth US\$3.5 million across 21 countries through operations targeting networks connected to these organisations. In South Africa between 2021 and 2025, joint operations involving the Hawks, Interpol and United States agencies made several arrests, including senior confraternity members.

### Where states have failed to invest, criminal economies thrive, with devastating results for long-term security

Not all confraternity members are involved directly in crime, but the role of protection rackets – enforcing agreements and resolving disputes in the criminal economy through mob loyalty – makes uninvolved members structurally complicit. The revenues flow not always through deliberate design, but through the structural logic of criminal economies, into the coffers of extremist organisations and armed groups. This sustains instability.

#### Implications for the PSC

The growing allure of organised crime among desperate youths is a significant threat to Africa's stability. Where states have failed to invest, criminal economies thrive, with devastating results for governance, social cohesion and long-term security.

Any counter-TOC strategy that focuses exclusively on enforcement and interdiction, however necessary, will not address the structural conditions that make organised crime the most rational economic option for millions of marginalised young Africans. Therefore, the PSC must press member states to adopt explicit youth investment commitments framed as peace and security imperatives, not merely as development aspirations.

The Council must move beyond rhetoric to redefine youth participation in peace, security and governance. It must work with AU youth ambassadors and Youthwise to engage youngsters in member states for early warning and counter-crime strategy design. This will ensure that young people are integral in formulating policies to address their vulnerability. Organised crime should be addressed in civic and peace education in schools to prevent the entrapment of youths in crimes packaged and justified as alternative economic opportunities.

Lastly, the PSC must champion the development of a comprehensive AU convention on transnational organised crime to promote harmonised national legislation, cross-border law enforcement cooperation, regional intelligence sharing and consistent disruption of criminal networks.

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IN 2024, INTERPOL'S  
OPERATION JACKAL III  
SEIZED ASSETS WORTH

US\$3.5

million

ACROSS 21 COUNTRIES

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## Is Borgu-Kainji becoming the next hub of Sahel and Lake Chad extremists?

Nigeria's western borderlands are becoming a convergence zone between violent extremist and terrorist groups across the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. Recent attacks in the Borgu-Kainji axis show that this is no longer a localised security problem, but a rapidly-evolving regional threat with implications for coastal West Africa and the AU counter-terrorism agenda.

The axis spans parts of Niger, Kwara and Kebbi in Nigeria. Kainji Lake National Park sits at the centre, linking northwestern and southwestern Nigeria to the Borgu and Alibori departments of Benin and Dosso region of Niger through poorly governed forest corridors, waterways and long-neglected rural communities. Jihadist-group violence in the region rose by 86% from 2024 to 2025, while the death toll increased by 262%.

Concern is mounting over security as the AU PSC this month considers interconnected issues such as climate change and insecurity. Attention will also focus on the AU's draft five-year continental counter-terrorism strategic

action plan and the stabilisation role of the MNJTF. The emerging dynamics in Borgu-Kainji demonstrate how unresolved conflicts in one place can mutate, overlap and spread into new areas when responses remain slow, fragmented and reactive.

Jihadist-group violence in Borgu-Kainji rose 86% from 2024 to 2025, increasing the death toll by 262%

Mass killings, abductions and roadside bombings in recent months point to a dangerous escalation of violent extremism along Nigeria's western borders with Benin and Niger. In February, the Sadiku wing of Boko Haram's Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati wal-Jihad (JAS) faction attacked Woro and Nuku villages in Kwara State's Kaiama local government area. This followed the community's refusal to embrace the terrorists'

Chart 2: Convergence zone at the Nigeria, Benin and Niger triborder



doctrine. About 170 people were killed and many others were kidnapped by Sadiku-JAS – Boko Haram’s furthest and most successful expansion outside Lake Chad Basin.

In response, President Bola Tinubu announced Operation Savannah Shield. Within days, however, further coordinated attacks struck communities in Borgu local government area in neighbouring Niger, with more than 30 civilians killed. These incidents – with repeated roadside bomb attacks, mass abductions and targeted strikes on military formations – form part of a wider pattern across the region.

Particularly worrying is the interaction among armed groups from different theatres. Sadiku-JAS is now operating in an environment with Lakurawa – a jihadi-criminal network – Ansaru-Mahmuda – an early Boko Haram splinter – and al-Qaeda-linked Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin elements filtering southward from the Sahel through northern Benin. Research by the ISS already points to operational cooperation and co-production of violence from groups such as Lakurawa and Sadiku-JAS.

### The proposed counter-terrorism action plan should stem the convergence of extremist theatres across West Africa

This convergence creates opportunities for tactical learning, logistics coordination and transfer of resources across theatres. For example, both the Sadiku wing and larger JAS headquartered on Lake Chad’s islands are operationally networked, with pathways for arms and fighter reinforcements emerging from headquarters and ransom and extortion funds flowing back.

This resembles earlier failures in Lake Chad Basin, where Boko Haram exploited weak state presence, porous borders and slow political responses to entrench itself. While military operations in the area prevented the militants from sustaining territorial control on the scale seen in 2013, 2014 and early 2015, the ecosystem sustaining its operational resilience and financing has never been fully dismantled.

Similar conditions are emerging in Borgu-Kainji. First, terrain – poorly governed forests, waterways and porous borders – provides good cover for mobility, training and supply lines. It offers escape routes and hard-to-reach sanctuaries similar to Lake Chad Basin’s Sambisa forest and Mandara mountains. Secondly, overlapping armed groups overwhelm and complicate security operations. Thirdly, illicit economies are powerful multipliers. Terrorists tax logging and small-scale artisanal mining, much as Boko Haram profits from fishing in Lake Chad Basin. Added to ransom payments and extortion of communities, this revenue funds weapons acquisition and recruitment and helps secure local cooperation.



THE INTERACTION AMONG ARMED GROUPS FROM DIFFERENT THEATRES CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR TACTICAL LEARNING, LOGISTICS COORDINATION AND TRANSFER OF RESOURCES

If these dynamics continue unchecked, the axis could become a stable base for armed groups – a gateway to the more stable southwestern Nigeria and coastal West Africa. That could shift attention and resources from Lake Chad, exacerbating national and regional security priorities.

Nigeria's response to date remains too narrow and geographically confined. Operation Savannah Shield focuses on Kaiama despite the highly mobile and cross-border threats. This reflects a broader weakness that has long affected continental counter-terrorism responses – lack of coordination and cooperation to match armed group mobility and failure to target proactively their enabling ecosystem.

PSC discussions this month offer an opportunity to push for a more strategic cross-border response before the situation deteriorates further. The proposed counter-terrorism action plan should stem the convergence of extremist theatres across West Africa. Often, violent extremism in the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin and coastal states is treated through separate policy silos, despite increasingly clear connections among armed actors. For example, the February attack on Airbase 101 and Diori Hamani International Airport in Niamey, Niger was co-produced by ISWAP, Islamic State Sahel Province and fighters from sleeper cells in northwestern Nigeria.

The AU should encourage member states to move beyond country-specific approaches to integrated regional threat assessments and coordinated preventive action. These should include improving intelligence sharing on armed group supplies and logistics across borders and strengthening joint border surveillance mechanisms.

Military operations alone are not enough. The Lake Chad experience shows that insurgencies thrive amid governance vacuums. Therefore, kinetic efforts must be combined with governance improvements, expanding state presence through services and accountability to enhance local resilience and deny terrorists the void they exploit for recruitment and control. This is even more important given the current PSC climate-security discussions. Environmental stress, shrinking livelihoods and competition over natural resources continue to deepen vulnerability across Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel.

The AU and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) should, therefore, support a stabilisation framework for the Borgu-Kainji axis and Nigeria-Benin-Niger borderlands. The proposed 1 650-soldier ECOWAS standby force should then be activated quickly, combined with governance expansion, economic alternatives and environmental resilience measures. The force must include an amphibious or a naval formation to deny armed groups easy movement along waterways.

Audiovisual materials reviewed by the ISS showed armed fighters moving weapons through a hybrid waterland route between Niger and Alibori. Informants advised that they were JAS fighters reinforcing Lakurawa at a border base between Alibori and Kebbi.

Local resilience must be enhanced through services and accountability to deny terrorists the void they exploit for recruitment and control

The political tension between ECOWAS and the juntas in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali is a challenge to effective cross-border cooperation. However, security realities increasingly demand pragmatic fixes regardless of political disagreements. The AU should advance re-engagement to address regional security.

At the same time, the MNJTF requires renewed political and operational support. Although the force has faced limitations, it remains one of the few institutional frameworks for cross-border counter-terrorism operations in Lake Chad Basin. Lessons from its experience – particularly intelligence fusion, joint operations and cross-border coordination – could inform efforts in the Nigeria-Benin-Niger borderlands.

The central lesson from Lake Chad Basin is not that insurgents can become entrenched, but that slow and fragmented responses allow armed groups to evolve faster than the institutions confronting them. The affected member states, ECOWAS and the AU still have a narrowing window to prevent Borgu-Kainji from becoming the next major hub of regional violent extremism and terrorism.

## Burundi strives for cohesion within the African Union

Faced with geopolitical pressures and internal divisions, the Burundian presidency aims to mend the fabric of African solidarity. His Excellency Willy Nyamitwe, Ambassador of Burundi to Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the AU and UN Economic Commission for Africa shared his views.

### Amid geopolitical uncertainties and transactional approaches, what is the AU's role and what does it mean for Burundi as the current chair?

The current chairship affirms African solutions for African problems. However, there are structural constraints. On one hand, endogenous factors – internal divisions, identity-based rifts and the inability to build continental solidarity – weaken African cohesion. The crises in virtually all regions of Africa illustrate this persistent fragmentation, even within states.

On the other hand, exogenously, many conflicts are fuelled or exploited from outside, notably through flows of arms and funding. Furthermore, the continent's wealth attracts external interests that exploit these vulnerabilities.

### Reservations of certain states do not amount to rejection: they are a desire to improve coordination

The Burundian presidency aims to strengthen African cohesion, promote mutual acceptance among people and generate momentum around Agenda 2063. The challenge is to move from a fragmented Africa to a strategically united one.

### What are Burundi's priorities and its main presidency projects?

As indicated by the acceptance speech by His Excellency Évariste Ndayishimiye at the recent AU summit, three priorities exist. First is the year's theme dedicated to water and sanitation, a cross-cutting issue for development and human security. Secondly are peace and security, with a focus on silencing the guns. As long as insecurity, terrorism and conflict persist, development will remain compromised.

The third priority is the transformation of the continent through innovation, skills development and the empowerment of young people and women. This initiative is linked directly to the vision of an African revival.

These priorities do not overshadow those of Agenda 2063, which includes climate change, the African Continental Free Trade Area, free movement of goods and people and health. The approach is, therefore, both targeted and systemic.

### Given the year's theme, how can water resources become drivers of development and peace and how can the AU contribute?

Water is key to stability. If mismanaged, it can lead to conflict; if well governed, it becomes a lever for regional integration. Burundi, a country rich in water resources, contrasts with many African countries that face aridity.

The answer lies in resource pooling and complementarity, much as with agricultural trade among regions. Water must be viewed as a strategic continental asset requiring mechanisms for shared governance. This approach would enable a potentially contentious resource to drive cooperation and development.

### With the candidacy of former president Macky Sall for the post of United Nations Secretary General having revealed procedural tensions within the AU, what lessons does Burundi intend to draw?

This situation has been perceived as a sign of fragmentation, whereas it actually reflects the vitality of dialogue and expression within the AU. The reactions observed do not call into question the legitimacy of promoting strong African candidates, but underscore the importance of a fully inclusive, transparent process in line with established procedures.

The use of the silent procedure has also raised questions about the form of and timeframes for consultation.

That some member states have reservations should be interpreted not as a principled rejection, but as a collective desire to improve coordination and ensure shared ownership of initiatives undertaken for Africa.

For Burundi, in its capacity as chair, this episode is an opportunity for institutional learning. It highlights the need to further consolidate consultation mechanisms, ensuring more systematic upstream consultations and better circulation of information.

**The AU is operating amid increasing externalisation of conflict resolution. How can it reaffirm its leadership in security crises management?**

Although external partners play a role, the growing externalisation of crisis management weakens African leadership and may, in some cases, prolong instability. Crucial is the mechanism for suspending states from AU activities following unconstitutional changes of government. This approach, while normative, is counterproductive, as it severs dialogue.

Without financial autonomy, political sovereignty remains a theoretical concept for the AU

Paradoxically, these states continue to contribute financially to the AU while being excluded from decision-making. This situation calls for reform to prioritise engagement and dialogue. The AU must adopt a pragmatic, context-specific approach focused on the causes of crises, particularly terrorism.

**How can coordination between the AU and its member states be strengthened to defend African interests?**

A unified African voice is key. Lack of coordination often leads to divergent positions, which weaken the continent's influence. Despite challenges, African states have progressed by consulting with one another in advance. To put forward common and coherent positions, it is essential to strengthen

coordination, particularly between the PSCI and African representatives within international bodies.

**With about 50% of its operational budget coming from external partners, what avenues are available to strengthen the AU's internal financing?**

Fifty percent is an understatement. Financial dependence remains a major obstacle to sovereignty. While staff salaries are now covered largely by member states' contributions (between 90% and 96%), programmes remain overwhelmingly funded by external partners, sometimes up to 90%.

This situation limits the organisation's strategic autonomy. Mechanisms exist, notably the 0.2% levy on imports and the involvement of the private sector, but their implementation remains incomplete.

Without financial autonomy, political sovereignty remains theoretical. To gain independence and credibility, the AU must strengthen its internal financing capacities urgently.

**In his inauguration speech, President Ndayishimiye emphasised the importance of youth. What initiatives can be expected under this presidency?**

Young people are a central pillar of Burundi's strategy. Ndayishimiye – known as the 'friend of youth' – is the AU champion for the 'Youth, peace and security' agenda, with its focus on innovation, skills and empowerment.

The continental dialogue on youth, peace and security, scheduled for Bujumbura from 10 to 12 August 2026, will be a major gathering bringing together initiatives for young people and women. It will assess the implementation of previous decisions and strengthen their impact.

The stakes are strategic: a youth without prospects is an agent of instability, while a trained and integrated youth accelerates development. Investing in youth is a direct investment in continental peace and security.

## About the PSC Report

The *Peace and Security Council Report* analyses developments and decisions at the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC). The monthly publication is the only one of its kind dedicated to providing current analysis of the PSC's work. It is written by a team of ISS analysts in Addis Ababa.

## About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) partners to build knowledge and skills that secure Africa's future. Our goal is to enhance human security as a means to achieve sustainable peace and prosperity. Using its networks and influence, the ISS provides timely and credible analysis, practical training and technical assistance to governments and civil society.

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