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ECOWAS's Counter-Terrorism Push

The decision by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to establish a regional counter-terrorism force marks a significant shift in West Africa's security architecture. Faced with an escalating jihadist threat, the bloc has proposed an initial deployment of approximately 2,000 troops to address growing instability across the Sahel and coastal states. This move reflects both urgency and a broader attempt to restore ECOWAS's credibility as a regional security provider after years of perceived inaction.

The Sahel region has become the epicentre of violent extremism, with groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State expanding their reach across Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and increasingly into coastal countries such as Benin and Togo. These groups have demonstrated adaptability, employing asymmetric tactics, exploiting weak governance structures, and leveraging transnational networks. The growing sophistication of attacks including strikes on urban centres and critical infrastructure has underscored the limitations of fragmented national responses.

Against this backdrop, ECOWAS's proposed force is designed to operate within the framework of its Standby Force, drawing contributions from member states such as Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire. Unlike earlier large-scale proposals envisioning hundreds of thousands of troops, the current plan is more modest, focusing on a core brigade capable of rapid deployment. Importantly, troops will remain stationed in their home countries, with Sierra Leone serving as a logistical hub, thereby reducing operational costs and enhancing flexibility.

However, the effectiveness of this initiative will depend less on its creation and more on its operationalisation. Historically, ECOWAS has struggled with translating institutional frameworks into actionable security outcomes. Persistent issues such as inadequate funding, logistical bottlenecks, and wavering political will have hindered previous attempts to activate regional security mechanisms. The proposed force risks encountering similar challenges unless member states commit sustained financial and military resources.

Financing remains a central concern. While ECOWAS has explored mechanisms such as the 0.5% community levy on imports and potential support from the African Union and United Nations, securing predictable funding streams is essential for long-term sustainability. Over-reliance on external partners, as seen in earlier initiatives like the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Accra initiative has often resulted in operational delays and strategic dependence. Thus, self-financing mechanisms will be critical in ensuring autonomy and continuity.

Equally significant is the issue of regional fragmentation. The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS following military coups and their subsequent formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) has weakened collective security efforts. These countries remain at the heart of the jihadist crisis, and their exclusion from the ECOWAS framework poses a structural limitation. Without cooperation between ECOWAS and AES, the effectiveness of any counter-terrorism strategy will be inherently constrained.

Operational coordination is therefore imperative. Intelligence sharing, joint planning, and synchronised cross-border operations are necessary to counter highly mobile militant groups. Establishing communication channels between ECOWAS and AES military leadership, potentially facilitated by the African Union as a neutral mediator, could serve as a starting point for rebuilding trust. Finally, a purely military response is unlikely to yield sustainable results. Jihadist groups in West Africa often derive local support by providing services, exploiting socio-economic grievances, and filling governance vacuums. Addressing these root causes through development initiatives, governance reforms, and community engagement must complement military efforts.

The ECOWAS counter-terrorism force represents a crucial opportunity to revitalise regional security cooperation in West Africa. While the initiative signals renewed political intent, its success will hinge on overcoming longstanding challenges related to funding, coordination, and regional fragmentation. Without inclusive cooperation particularly with AES states and a comprehensive approach that integrates military and socio-economic strategies, the force risks becoming another unrealised ambition in the region's protracted fight against extremism.

Africa's Defence Imports: Trends and Patterns (SIPRI Data)

Recent data on SIPRI's international arms transfers highlights a significant shift in Africa's position within the global defence market. While the overall volume of global arms transfers increased by 9.2 per cent in 2021–25, Africa accounted for only 4.3 per cent of total global arms imports, making it the smallest regional share. More notably, arms imports to Africa declined sharply by 41 per cent compared to the 2016–20 period, reflecting deeper structural and geopolitical changes affecting defence procurement across the continent.

This decline is not uniform across Africa and is shaped by regional dynamics, particularly in North Africa. Algeria, historically one of the continent's largest arms importers, experienced a dramatic 78 percent reduction in imports after reaching a peak in the previous period. In contrast, Morocco increased its arms imports by 12 per cent, driven largely by its enduring strategic rivalry with Algeria. These tensions continue to act as a central driver of military acquisitions in North Africa, suggesting that geopolitical rivalries remain a critical determinant of arms flows despite the overall decline.

Africa's arms procurement patterns also underscore continued dependence on a limited group of external suppliers. The United States, China, Russia and France together dominate arms transfers to the continent, accounting for 19 per cent, 17 per cent, 15 per cent and 8.3 per cent of African imports respectively. This distribution reflects both long-standing defence relationships and intensifying geopolitical competition, as major powers seek to consolidate influence across African security architectures.

In contrast to the broader continental trend, sub-Saharan Africa presents a divergent picture. Arms imports in this subregion increased by 13 per cent during 2021–25, although the region still accounts for only

2.2 per cent of total global imports. This increase is closely tied to ongoing security challenges, including insurgencies, terrorism and internal conflicts. Countries such as Nigeria, Senegal and Mali emerged as the principal recipients, reflecting the concentration of defence procurement in states confronting immediate security threats. The supplier landscape in sub-Saharan Africa further illustrates shifting dynamics, with China emerging as the largest supplier, followed by Russia and Türkiye. This trend signals a gradual diversification of partnerships, with emerging suppliers offering more flexible and cost-effective alternatives to traditional Western sources.

The relationship between arms transfers and conflict is particularly evident in cases such as Sudan, where the civil war that began in 2023 has drawn in multiple external suppliers. Both the Sudanese armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces received arms during this period, including drones, artillery and air defence systems. Notably, several of these transfers originated from unidentified or less transparent sources, highlighting the difficulty of tracking arms flows in conflict zones. This opacity suggests that official figures may underestimate the true scale of arms transfers in Africa, especially in contexts involving non-state actors and informal supply networks.

Taken together, these trends indicate that Africa's declining share in global arms imports does not necessarily correspond to a reduction in security challenges. Instead, it reflects a complex interplay of fiscal constraints, shifting procurement cycles and evolving threat perceptions. The divergence between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa further underscores the uneven nature of defence dynamics across the continent. At the same time, the continued dominance of external suppliers highlights Africa's reliance on foreign military technology, even as new entrants reshape the competitive landscape. Africa's arms import trends between 2021 and 2025 reveal a nuanced and evolving security environment. While aggregate imports have declined, localized demand driven by conflict and strategic rivalry persists. The continent's security trajectory will likely depend on how states balance resource constraints with defence needs, manage external partnerships and respond to emerging threats within an increasingly multipolar global arms market.

The UNGA Resolution and Reparatory Justice

The recent resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly represents a watershed moment in the global recognition of historical injustices inflicted upon Africa and its diaspora. Introduced by Ghana on behalf of the 54-member African Union the largest regional bloc at the UN the resolution was passed with 123 votes in favour, with only three countries opposing and 52 abstaining. This voting pattern itself highlights both the growing global consensus around the moral gravity of slavery and the enduring political divisions over how such historical wrongs should be addressed.

The scale of the transatlantic slave trade provides the foundation for this recognition. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, an estimated 12 to 15 million Africans were forcibly transported across

the Atlantic, with over two million perishing during the brutal Middle Passage alone. Over a span of more than 400 years, entire societies were hollowed out, losing generations of labour, knowledge, and social capital. As highlighted during the debate, this was not merely a humanitarian tragedy but a form of mass resource extraction that fundamentally reshaped global economic hierarchies.

The resolution's designation of slavery as the "gravest crime against humanity" is therefore rooted in both its unprecedented scale and its enduring systemic consequences. It acknowledges that the legacies of slavery continue to manifest in persistent racial inequalities, underdevelopment, and structural discrimination affecting Africans and people of African descent worldwide. Importantly, the resolution also encourages member states to consider reparatory measures, including apologies, restitution of cultural artefacts, and contributions to development-oriented funds, even though it stops short of mandating specific financial commitments.

However, the contemporary debate on reparations has evolved significantly beyond historical compensation. Today, it increasingly focuses on structural injustices embedded in the global economic system. Empirical data illustrates this starkly. Ghana, for instance, exported approximately $9.58 billion worth of gold in 2024 but retained only about 14% of its value due to the structure of multinational agreements. Similarly, the Democratic Republic of Congo produces over 70% of the world's cobalt, yet only around 1% is refined domestically before export. In agriculture, West Africa accounts for nearly 70% of global cocoa production but captures less than 1% of the global chocolate market.

These patterns are compounded by systemic financial imbalances. Africa is estimated to lose over $500 billion annually through illicit financial flows, unfair trade practices, and debt servicing obligations. This paradoxically renders the continent a net creditor to the global economy despite hosting some of the world's poorest populations. Additional sector-specific losses further illustrate the scale of the issue; for example, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing costs Somalia alone approximately $300 million each year.

In this context, reparations must be reconceptualised as a multidimensional project encompassing justice for the past, present, and future. Financial compensation, while symbolically important, is insufficient on its own. Instead, meaningful reparatory justice requires structural transformation reforming global trade systems to enable value addition within Africa, addressing the "African premium" that inflates borrowing costs, curbing illicit financial flows, and ensuring equitable representation in global governance institutions.

The resolution also gains added significance within broader multilateral developments. The African Union's declaration of a "Decade of Reparations" and the growing support for reparatory justice across the Global South signal an emerging normative shift. Yet, resistance from major powers particularly on legal and financial grounds suggests that the path ahead will remain contested.

Ultimately, the UNGA resolution is not merely symbolic; it is a political and moral inflection point. By combining historical recognition with contemporary economic realities, it reframes reparations as an issue of systemic justice rather than retrospective charity. The challenge now lies in translating this momentum into concrete policy action. Without addressing both the quantified historical injustices and the measurable structural inequalities that persist today, the promise of reparatory justice will remain incomplete.

Rwanda's Withdrawal Threat in Mozambique

Rwanda's threat to withdraw its troops from Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province represents a critical turning point in the region's fragile security architecture. Since its intervention in July 2021, Kigali has played a decisive role in stabilising insurgency-affected zones, particularly those surrounding key energy infrastructure. However, uncertainties surrounding continued European Union (EU) funding amounting to roughly €40 million since 2022 have placed the future of this mission in doubt, exposing deeper structural vulnerabilities in Mozambique's counterinsurgency framework.

The origins of the crisis lie in the long-running insurgency in Cabo Delgado, which began in 2017 and escalated significantly by 2021 with attacks on strategic locations such as Palma. These attacks disrupted major liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects led by multinational corporations, including TotalEnergies. Rwanda's deployment of initially around 1,000 troops now expanded to several thousand helped recapture key territories and enabled the gradual resumption of energy operations. Yet, this success has been uneven, as Rwandan forces have largely prioritised resource-rich areas, leaving peripheral regions vulnerable to continued insurgent activity.

Despite early gains, the sustainability of Rwanda's mission has come into question. The EU's financial support covers only a fraction of the actual operational costs, with estimates suggesting that European contributions account for less than 20% of total expenditure. Kigali's recent signalling of a potential withdrawal is therefore not merely a budgetary concern but also a strategic lever to exert pressure on international partners. This reflects a broader trend in which external security providers increasingly link military engagement to financial and geopolitical incentives.

The implications of a Rwandan withdrawal would be severe. Cabo Delgado has already witnessed approximately 6,500 deaths and the displacement of nearly 1.3 million people since the insurgency began. A sudden exit could create a security vacuum, allowing insurgent groups particularly Islamic State-affiliated factions to regroup and expand their operations. Such an outcome would not only destabilise northern Mozambique but also threaten regional security, especially for neighbouring Tanzania, which shares porous borders and has direct exposure to extremist networks.

Mozambique's options in the event of Rwanda's withdrawal remain limited. A return to multilateral intervention through

the Southern African Development Community (SADC) appears unlikely, given its previous logistical and operational shortcomings. Similarly, an African Union (AU) intervention under Article 4(h) remains improbable due to political reluctance and procedural constraints. The most viable alternative is likely a strengthening of bilateral security cooperation, particularly with Tanzania, though scaling up such efforts would require significant political will and resources.

Beyond the immediate security concerns, the crisis underscores the limitations of a militarised approach that prioritises infrastructure protection over addressing root causes. Cabo Delgado remains one of Mozambique's poorest regions despite its vast natural resource wealth, including graphite, gold, and natural gas. Local grievances stemming from economic exclusion and lack of development have fuelled insurgent recruitment, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive strategy that integrates governance, development, and security.

In essence, Rwanda's withdrawal threat is less about an imminent exit and more about reshaping the terms of engagement. It reveals the inherent fragility of externally driven security arrangements and raises fundamental questions about sovereignty, burden-sharing, and long-term stability. For Mozambique and its partners, the challenge lies not only in maintaining security gains but also in building resilient institutions capable of sustaining peace without perpetual external dependence.

India's Maritime Engagement with Western Indian Ocean States

India significantly expanded its maritime outreach across the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR) in March 2026, reinforcing its role as a key security partner for African littoral states. Through a combination of joint military exercises, port calls, training initiatives, and multilateral engagements, New Delhi demonstrated a calibrated approach to strengthening defence cooperation with countries such as Seychelles, Mauritius, and Mozambique. These engagements are anchored in India's maritime vision of SAGAR and its upgraded framework, MAHASAGAR, which together emphasise inclusive security, capacity building, and a more comprehensive regional partnership approach.

A key highlight of India's engagement was the eleventh edition of the joint military exercise *Lamitiye 2026* with Seychelles, marking its first-ever tri-services participation involving the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force. Conducted from March 9–20 at the Seychelles Defence Academy, the exercise focused on sub-conventional operations in semi-urban environments and peacekeeping coordination. Naval participation included the deployment of INS Trikand, which also engaged in joint maritime drills such as Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) operations alongside the Seychelles Defence Forces. The exercise culminated in coordinated landings and joint operations on Praslin Island, underscoring enhanced interoperability between the two forces.

Parallel to this, INS Trikand undertook a series of strategic port calls across the region. In Mauritius, the vessel participated in the country's 58th National Day celebrations, symbolising longstanding diplomatic and defence ties. The visit included high-level interactions with Mauritian officials, joint training exercises, and community outreach activities. Notably, over 500 visitors were hosted onboard, reflecting efforts to strengthen people-to-people linkages alongside military cooperation.

Following its engagement in Seychelles, INS Trikand proceeded to Mozambique, where it conducted professional exchanges with the Mozambique Navy and delivered humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) materials. The port call included medical camps, training modules, and joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance activities. These initiatives highlight India's emphasis on capacity building and humanitarian cooperation key pillars under SAGAR and further expanded under MAHASAGAR as integral components of its maritime diplomacy in Africa.

Beyond bilateral engagements, India also advanced multilateral maritime cooperation through initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) SAGAR programme. The 2026 edition saw participation from personnel of 16 Indian Ocean countries, including several African states. The programme combined shore-based training in Kochi with operational deployments at sea, focusing on seamanship, navigation, maritime security, and advanced boarding operations. By integrating international personnel into Indian naval platforms, IOS SAGAR operationalises the SAGAR vision, while also reflecting the broader ambitions of MAHASAGAR in fostering deeper, institutionalised maritime partnerships.

In a further boost to multilateral cooperation, India hosted the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Maritime Exercise (IMEX) TTX 2026, bringing together naval representatives from countries including Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritius, and Seychelles. The exercise addressed non-traditional maritime threats such as piracy, trafficking, and illegal fishing through simulated scenarios, facilitating dialogue and coordination among participating navies. India's assumption of the IONS chairmanship for the 2026–2028 cycle adds further significance to these engagements, positioning it as a central actor in shaping regional maritime security frameworks.

Collectively, these initiatives illustrate a coherent evolution in India's maritime strategy from SAGAR to its upgraded version, MAHASAGAR. While SAGAR laid the foundation for cooperative security and regional engagement, MAHASAGAR expands this vision by integrating broader developmental, technological, and institutional dimensions. As geopolitical competition intensifies in the Indian Ocean Region, India's approach anchored in partnership, capacity building, and mutual benefit reinforces its role as a "preferred security partner" and contributes to a more stable, secure, and cooperative maritime environment across Africa's western Indian Ocean littoral.