

Ad hoc coalitions in global governance: short-notice, task- and time-specific cooperation

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The label ‘ad hoc coalitions’ (AHCs) is commonly if unsystematically used. In international security, arrangements such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the Joint Force of the Group of Five Sahel (JF-G5S) or the Task Force Takuba have repeatedly been referred to as AHCs.¹ In global health, coalitions such as the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, the Global Ebola Response Coalition or the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator coalition have taken up crisis response and governance tasks.² While these coalitions might operate in close coordination with other international organizations (IOs), such as the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) or the World Health Organization (WHO), AHCs are autonomous arrangements.

AHCs are an integral part of the increasingly wide array of global governance actors and structures. They often thicken already dense institutional spaces.³ We know that informal rules may change, replace or complement formal ones, and that institutions with lower creation, operation or exit costs are at times preferred over treaty-based institutions,⁴ especially when rapid action is required. What we do not yet know is how AHCs in particular are contributing to shape the global governance architecture and international crisis response.

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¹ Paul Williams, *Can ad hoc security coalitions in Africa bring stability?* (New York and Manama: International Peace Institute Global Observatory, 2019); John Karlsrud and Yf Reykers, ‘Ad hoc coalitions and institutional exploitation in international security: towards a typology’, *Third World Quarterly* 41: 9, 2020, pp. 1518–36; Amandine Gnanguènon, *Chad in its regional environment: political alliances and ad hoc military coalitions* (Bonn and Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2021).

² Colin McInnes, ‘WHO’s next? Changing authority in global health governance after Ebola’, *International Affairs* 91: 6, 2015, pp. 1299–316; David Levy, ‘COVID-19 and global governance’, *Journal of Management Studies* 58: 2, 2021, pp. 562–66.

³ Kenneth Abbott, Jessica Green and Robert Keohane, ‘Organizational ecology and institutional change in global governance’, *International Organization* 70: 2, 2016, pp. 247–77; Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Oliver Westerwinter, ‘The global governance complexity cube: varieties of institutional complexity in global governance’, *Review of International Organizations* 17: 1, 2021, pp. 1–30; Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Stephanie Hofmann, ‘Of the contemporary global order, crisis, and change’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 27: 7, 2020, pp. 1077–89.

⁴ Kenneth Abbott and Benjamin Faude, ‘Choosing low-cost institutions in global governance’, *International Theory* 13: 3, 2020, pp. 397–426; Oliver Westerwinter, Kenneth Abbott and Thomas Biersteker, ‘Informal governance in world politics’, *Review of International Organizations* 16: 1, 2021, pp. 1–27.

Understanding the impact that AHCs might have on other actors and institutions in the global governance architecture requires that we recognize an AHC empirically. Despite the prominence of AHCs in global governance, there is little scholarly understanding about how to recognize or categorize them appropriately. In this article, we define AHCs as autonomous arrangements *with a task-specific mandate established at short notice for a limited period of time*.

Existing research has zoomed in on organizational design dimensions that make it hard to see and analyse AHCs. We add to the existing scholarship a set of dimensions that have so far been overlooked. In recent years, we have seen several typologies and classifications of global governance arrangements, mostly differentiating them on the basis of their decision-making structure, degree of formality, and global or regional membership. These typologies include (formal) international governmental organizations,⁵ informal international governmental organizations,⁶ low-cost institutions,⁷ trans-governmental networks,⁸ public-private partnerships,⁹ and transnational public-private governance initiatives.¹⁰ Yet this focus on characteristics such as formality and membership has made AHCs largely invisible in the global governance complexity literature. AHCs can be formal or informal depending on what problem of cooperation they are created to tackle, and their membership can vary widely. We therefore suggest that it is useful to look beyond these design dimensions and instead turn our analytical gaze on governance arrangements set up at short notice, with a potentially very narrow scope and time-frame. These different dimensions set AHCs apart and allow us to recognize them more easily in the broader governance universe.

This conceptualization implies that AHCs share certain similarities with other global governance arrangements that are set up at short notice, such as some of the informal governance organizations. However, by focusing on several necessary defining characteristics, we intend to overcome the current conceptual ambiguity about AHCs and provide a more rigorous foundation for identifying AHCs and studying their effects, in particular on other actors, institutions and collective action problems in global governance.

⁵ Jon Pevehouse, Timothy Nordstrom, Roseanne W. McManus and Anne Spencer Jamison, 'Tracking organizations in the world: the Correlates of War IGO Version 3. datasets', *Journal of Peace Research* 57: 3, 2020, pp. 492–503; Michael Wallace and J. David Singer, 'Intergovernmental organization in the global system, 1815–964: a quantitative description', *International Organization* 24: 2, 1970, pp. 239–87; Thomas J. Volgy, Elizabeth Fausett, Keith A. Grant and Stuart Rodgers, 'Identifying formal intergovernmental organizations', *Journal of Peace Research* 45: 6, 2008, pp. 837–50.

⁶ Felicity Vabulas and Duncan Snidal, 'Organization without delegation: informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs) and the spectrum of intergovernmental arrangements', *Review of International Organizations* 8: 2, 2013, pp. 193–220; Felicity Vabulas and Duncan Snidal, 'Cooperation under autonomy: building and analysing the Informal Intergovernmental Organizations 2.0 dataset', *Journal of Peace Research* 58: 4, 2021, pp. 859–69; Charles Roger, *The origins of informality: why the legal foundations of global governance are shifting, and why it matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Charles Roger and Sam Rowan, 'Analysing international organizations: how the concepts we use affect the answers we get', *Review of International Organizations* 17: 3, 2022, pp. 597–625.

⁷ Abbott and Faude, 'Choosing low-cost institutions in global governance'.

⁸ Kenneth Abbott and Céline Kauffmann, 'The contribution of trans-governmental networks of regulators to international regulatory co-operation', OECD Regulatory Policy Working Paper no. 10 (Paris, 2018).

⁹ Liliana Andonova, *Governance entrepreneurs: international organizations and the rise of public-private partnerships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ Oliver Westerwinter, 'Transnational public-private governance initiatives in world politics: introducing a new dataset', *Review of International Organizations* 16: 1, 2021, pp. 137–74.

We argue that AHCs demonstrate that states (and non-state actors) have cooperative reflexes even when gridlock in formal IOs—especially, but not only, in times of crisis—occurs. This is demonstrated by AHCs across policy domains, such as the Global Ebola Response Coalition or the Global Coalition against Daesh. When global gridlock and inflexibility dominate a global governance problem, actors tend to look for solutions in which political resistance can be overcome or circumvented. In these circumstances, cooperatively minded actors are willing to sidestep existing commitments in other IOs and either temporarily or permanently divert their material and ideational resources to do so. In the long run, if this practice of relying on short notice and temporal arrangements becomes a major trend, then IOs may lose some of their importance in global governance. Answering if, when and how AHCs cooperate, supplement or compete with other global governance arrangements is only possible if we are able to adequately grasp this phenomenon, conceptually as well as empirically.

The article starts by defining AHCs, outlining three defining features. The second section provides an empirical illustration of one of the most recent AHCs in the field of security, Task Force Takuba in the Sahel, and draws out tentative findings for further policy and academic scrutiny. In the third section, the article moves on to situate AHCs in global governance. Finally, we develop a research agenda, demonstrating the need for more knowledge on how AHCs complement, compete with and impact on international organizations and international responses to crises.

Conceptualizing AHCs

In the study of multilateral cooperation, there has been a tendency towards ever more fine-grained definitions and typologies to keep track of trends and developments in global governance and its constituent entities. Much attention has been given to organizational arrangements that exist over time and are relatively easy to observe. The degree of formality and membership composition (private, public, international, transnational) have been analysed with regard to such aspects as organizational performance¹¹ and organizational ecology.¹² AHCs are not necessarily readily defined by means of these characteristics, and a rigorous definition of them is lacking. While the term ‘coalitions’ can be found across a range of academic disciplines, including in the fields of domestic politics, electoral studies and the lobbying literature,¹³ the specific concept ‘ad hoc coalitions’ features most

¹¹ Tamar Gutner and Alexander Thompson, ‘The politics of IO performance: a framework’, *Review of International Organizations* 5: 3, 2010, pp. 227–48; Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal, ‘International regulation without international government: improving IO performance through orchestration’, *Review of International Organizations* 5: 3, 2010, pp. 315–44.

¹² Abbott et al., ‘Organizational ecology’; Jean-Frédéric Morin, ‘Concentration despite competition: the organizational ecology of technical assistance providers’, *Review of International Organizations* 15: 1, 2020, pp. 75–107.

¹³ George Tsebelis, ‘Decision making in political systems: veto players in presidentialism, parliamentarism, multicameralism and multipartism’, *British Journal of Political Science* 25: 3, 1995, p. 289–325; Bert Pijnenburg, ‘EU lobbying by ad hoc coalitions: an exploratory case study’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 5: 2, 1998, pp. 303–21.

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prominently in security studies.¹⁴ However, even in this field, where loose groupings of states are common, there is no common definition of AHCs.¹⁵

The fact that the term ‘ad hoc coalitions’ is repeatedly used but seldom defined suggests a knowledge gap. Using the term as a catch-all concept without further differentiation in terms of the defining features of AHCs brings with it a risk of missing important trends in the ways in which global governance problems are addressed, and in which institutional preferences play out in practice across policy domains. For instance, Jupille, Mattli and Snidal mention that ‘actors turn to institutions when the underlying problem is complex and cannot be managed through ad hoc arrangements’.¹⁶ On the basis of their decision tree logic, they see the creation of new arrangements (rather than the reform of existing arrangements) as a matter of last resort. Actors are expected first to look for solutions within the institutional status quo. Yet this approach risks underestimating that actors can *deliberately break down (complex) cooperation problems* and agree to solve a particular multilateral governance challenge by setting up smaller and more flexible temporary arrangements. As mentioned in the introduction, the Global Ebola Response Coalition took up tasks in which the WHO could have been expected to take a leadership role. AHCs can serve as viable and less institutionalized alternatives to formal IOs, which are often hindered by slow bureaucratic procedures, or inclusive and one-country-one-vote decision-making rules.

As we understand them here, AHCs are autonomous arrangements, which means that they operate outside the institutional framework of other multilateral arrangements—such as the UN, AU, ASEAN, World Bank, IMF or NATO. However, this does not mean that they are necessarily isolated from other IOs. They can still operate in close cooperation with other governance arrangements that are active in the same region or policy domain.¹⁷ In the following paragraphs, we elaborate on the three defining characteristics of AHCs.

In line with coalition literature in political science, International Relations and sociology, AHCs are ‘means-orientated’ or purpose-built.¹⁸ They focus on *single-purpose goals* (e.g. counterterrorism, stabilization, vaccination campaigns, humanitarian relief, etc.) and are geared towards addressing a specific governance problem, often triggered by an institutional or substantive crisis. AHCs are therefore more tactically orientated than other arrangements, aimed at achieving a certain mandate and specific public good, which is different from achieving structural (strategic) or general goals such as ending poverty or bringing peace.¹⁹ These more struc-

¹⁴ Karlsrud and Reykers, ‘Ad hoc coalitions and institutional exploitation in international security’; Kathleen McNinn, *How and why states defect from contemporary military coalitions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Sarah Kreps, *Coalitions of convenience: United States military interventions after the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ Patricia Weitsman, in *Waging war: alliances, coalitions, and institutions of interstate violence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), differentiates between wartime alliances and coalitions.

¹⁶ Joseph Jupille, Walter Mattli and Duncan Snidal, *Institutional choice and global commerce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 32.

¹⁷ Malte Brosig, *Ad hoc coalitions in a changing global order* (Hamburg: GIGA Focus Global, 2022).

¹⁸ William Gamson, ‘A theory of coalition formation’, *American Sociological Review* 26: 3, 1961, p. 374.

¹⁹ Gutner and Thompson, ‘The politics of IO performance’.

tural long-term goals are commonly observed in general-purpose organizations.²⁰ Moreover, this task-specific mandate is not to be set up during lengthy negotiations but rather acted upon quickly. As already mentioned, the study of informal governance organizations has so far focused heavily on ministerial or executive gatherings such as the G-groups, which are in essence deliberation-orientated organizations or forums.²¹ These informal governance organizations can have either broad policy portfolios or a limited focus on a specific issue. AHCs, on the contrary, operate by definition with a task-specific mandate, often geared towards a particular crisis or a specific governance problem. Yet the population of AHCs does not only include operational arrangements, such as JF-G5S in the security domain. It also encompasses more deliberation-orientated arrangements such as the EU-3, which consists of the UK, France and Germany and has the specific task of resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis—as well as international contact groups, such as the International Contact Group (ICG) on the Central African Republic, which serve the goal of establishing a forum for coordinating international actors in their specific crisis responses.²²

AHCs are also characterized by their specific temporal features. AHCs emerge at *short notice* and they are set up with an intended *limited time-frame*. First, as we know from the literature on IOs and crisis management, a crisis is characterized not only by uncertainty but often also by the restricted amount of time available for providing a response.²³ AHCs are particularly suitable governance arrangements for dealing with situations of such urgency. Coalition partners can establish them once they agree to the purpose of their existence and move quickly, without having to run through formalized bureaucratic processes, long-winded funding discussions and regularized meetings. Second, AHCs are intended to be temporary. In the interest-group literature, for instance, it has been argued that AHCs focus on a specific common interest and ‘dissolve when that issue reaches some resolution or when the coalition partners no longer feel the effort is worthwhile’.²⁴ We follow this line of reasoning, but add that this initial temporariness is often implicit, because it follows logically from their problem-solving nature in global governance. AHCs—at least in theory—lose their reason to exist once the collective problem has been solved or the crisis is over. On rare occasions, the initial temporariness is made explicit. For instance, the French-led Operation Serval in Mali in January 2013 intended to halt the Islamist rebellion and regain control

²⁰ Tobias Lenz, Jeanine Bezuijen, Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, ‘Patterns of international organization: task-specific vs general-purpose’, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 49: 2014S, 2014, pp. 107–32.

²¹ Christian Downie, ‘How do informal international organizations govern? The G20 and orchestration’, *International Affairs* 98: 3, 2022, pp. 953–72.

²² Tom Sauer, ‘The role of informal international organizations in resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis (2003–15)’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 57: 5, 2019, pp. 939–55; Ingo Henneberg, ‘International contact groups: ad hoc coordination in international conflict management’, *South African Journal of International Affairs* 27: 4, 2021, pp. 445–72.

²³ Eva-Karin Olsson and Bertjan Verbeek, ‘International organisations and crisis management: do crises enable or constrain IO autonomy?’, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21: 2, 2018, pp. 275–99.

²⁴ Jeffrey Berry, *The interest group society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), p. 166. See also Pijenburg (‘EU lobbying by ad hoc coalitions’) and Gamson, who defined coalitions as ‘temporary, means oriented, alliances among individuals or groups which differ in goals’ (‘A theory of coalition formation’, p. 374).

over northern Mali. The mission, which received military support from Chadian troops and logistical support from NATO allies, ended in July 2014 after it had successfully prevented a take-over of the country. Importantly, this limitation in duration does not mean that AHCs always cease to exist in practice. AHCs can endure by changing or expanding their mandates, or by being incorporated into another AHC. This happened with Serval, which was followed by Barkhane—a new French-led coalition with an expanded mandate that is still in operation. Some AHCs are incorporated into another, more formal and institutionalized effort with a wider mandate.²⁵ But in cases of institutional transformation, we no longer speak of an AHC but other institutional forms. One example is the military intervention of 2011 in Libya, which started as a rapidly deployed AHC, after which NATO took over command and control.

We argue that these three dimensions of short-notice creation, task specificity and initial temporariness are necessary characteristics of AHCs. Other design dimensions, such as formality or membership, on the other hand, can vary and are not constitutive of AHCs. For instance, as a result of the three key features, AHCs are likely to be lightly organized and flexible, which means that they generally have low creation and dissolution costs, a feature they share with low-cost institutions.²⁶ While this is often an important reason for states to prefer AHCs over formal IOs, allowing members to join or leave easily also comes with clear risks. AHCs are in this way inherently more prone to defection because of international or domestic political changes, or unanticipated events that affect the calculus of their members.²⁷ Within formal IOs, on the contrary, member states have a number of legal obligations such as following specific decision-making procedures and supporting an active secretariat. However, this does not mean that AHCs necessarily come without rules and procedures. Below the level of contractual obligations, there are often implicit or explicit agreements on how AHCs should operate. This can be achieved in the form of declarations, memoranda of understanding, joint statements or other forms of expression of intent. It also means that an AHC can have an independent secretariat;²⁸ yet the temporary nature of these coalitions implies that these secretariats are (at least initially) not created as permanent arrangements.

Membership composition is also not a defining feature of AHCs, as this can rapidly change. AHCs do not necessarily consist of states only. They can combine state and non-state members, a feature that they share with, for instance, transnational public–private government initiatives.²⁹ This occurs because AHCs, while navigating the complexity of facing a crisis, have to aggregate the actors that are appropriate to deal with the context. This may mean combining efforts from

²⁵ Karlsrud and Reykers, ‘Ad hoc coalitions and institutional exploitation in international security’, p. 1528.

²⁶ Abbott and Faude, ‘Choosing low-cost institutions in global governance’.

²⁷ Mali’s opt-out from the Group of Five Sahel Joint Force is a recent example. See ‘Mali’s military junta pulls out of regional G5 Sahel force’, Reuters, 15 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/malis-military-junta-pulls-out-regional-g5-sahel-force-2022-05-15/>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 15 Dec. 2022.)

²⁸ Scholars studying interest group coalitions recognize that even though they are temporary they may still come with secretariats for coordination purposes (Pijenburg, ‘EU lobbying by ad hoc coalitions’).

²⁹ Westerwinter, ‘Transnational public–private governance initiatives’.

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states and other governance organizations along with those of private actors, such as business, NGOs and civil society groups. We would expect the occurrence of such mixed memberships to differ between policy fields, given the varying degrees to which non-state actors are embedded across domains. An example of an AHC with such a mixed composition in global health is the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator. Its membership includes governments, scientists, businesses, civil society groups, philanthropists and global health organizations, as well as IOs such as UNICEF and the WHO. Other multi-stakeholder arrangements include Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI).³⁰ The Biafran airlift offers another illustration. In 1968, this coalition reportedly evacuated about 4,000 children from Nigeria after reports of starvation and potential genocidal violence.³¹ The coalition consisted of church groups, NGOs and airline companies, and received active (behind the scenes) support from several states, including the United States, Canada, Norway and Denmark.

Table 1 provides a snapshot of some AHCs across policy domains and time. Cases such as the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) or the Biafran airlift coalition show that AHCs are not a new phenomenon—they have just not been recognized as an analytical class of units in global governance research. Moreover, AHCs have been created in a wide range of policy domains, including health governance, disaster relief, food security and counterterrorism. However, the more visible AHCs are likely to be found in the field of peace and security, as crises in this domain are often characterized by a need for action at short notice.³² In the next section, we discuss one such case, Task Force Takuba, and illustrate how it fits our definition of AHCs.

Table 1: Examples of AHCs

<i>Name</i>	<i>Domain</i>	<i>Temporality</i>	<i>Task specificity</i>
Biafran airlift	Humanitarian	1967–70	Humanitarian relief and evacuation
Interim Force East Timor (INTERFET)	Security	1999–2000	Peace enforcement
Joint Force Group of Five Sahel (JF-G5S)	Security	2017 (ongoing)	Counterterrorism
Task Force Takuba	Security	2020–2022	Counterterrorism
ACT-Accelerator	Health	2020 (ongoing)	Equitable vaccine access
Global Alliance for Food Security (GAFS)	Food	2022 (ongoing)	Joint response to food crisis

³⁰ As indicated in the introduction, there can be an overlap between what we label ‘AHCs’ and what have elsewhere been labelled transnational public–private governance initiatives or TGIs.

³¹ Bonny Ibhawoh, ‘Refugees, evacuees, and repatriates: Biafran children, UNHCR, and the politics of international humanitarianism in the Nigerian civil war’, *African Studies Review* 63: 3, 2020, pp. 568–92.

³² Yf Reykers and John Karlsrud, ‘Multinational rapid response mechanisms: past promises and future prospects’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 38: 3, 2017, pp. 420–26.

Task Force Takuba—an illustrative case

Task Force Takuba is a relatively small but typical case of an AHC. In fact, it is one of the most recently established AHCs in the field of international peace and security.³³ Task Force Takuba was requested in January 2020 by the governments of Mali and Niger, to support their counterterrorist activities particularly in the Liptako region, the tri-border area where Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali meet, where a jihadist insurgency had spread rapidly and the humanitarian situation had deteriorated. On 27 March 2020, eleven European states signed a political statement to create a European-led coalition with the specific mandate to provide training and assistance to Malian armed forces.³⁴ Task Force Takuba declared initial operating capacity on 15 July 2020, which means that it reached a minimum deployable capacity at relatively short notice. Full operating capacity was declared on 2 April 2021. At its peak, the coalition consisted of approximately 800 military personnel. In addition to France, which contributed about half of the coalition's forces, Sweden, Estonia and the Czech Republic were among the key contributors, as was the United States, which provided necessary strategic enablers (including surveillance and transport capabilities).³⁵

Although several EU member states signed the original political statement and Task Force Takuba potentially benefited from previous cooperation among troop contributors within EU and NATO frameworks, the coalition was deliberately established outside the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) structure to avoid delays and to retain operational autonomy. This was particularly important for France, which had not only taken the initiative in assembling the coalition but was also trying to balance interests in retaining command alongside strengthening European defence cooperation and burden-sharing. The coalition was therefore initially established under the command structure of the larger French military mission Barkhane, which had been operating in the region since 2014. The fact that operational command remained in the hands of a French force commander illustrates a common feature of AHCs, which is that authority is often either implicitly or explicitly delegated to the largest contributor to coordinate the coalition members as lead nation. The risk with such a set-up is that it creates power asymmetries, which might result in perceptions of the AHC being a tool that mainly serves the lead nation's interests. Most analyses of Takuba to date have thus predominantly focused on how it serves French interests.³⁶ However,

³³ Task Force Takuba is not an isolated special case, as illustrated by the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH) mission. This maritime coalition of eight European states was created in January 2020, including a military component, Operation Agénor, and it too operated outside the EU CSDP framework.

³⁴ 'Task Force Takuba: political statement by the governments of Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Mali, Niger, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom', 20 March 2020, <https://www.government.se/495ef1/globalassets/government/dokument/forsvarsdepartementet/2020/political-statement-task-force-takuba.pdf>.

³⁵ Ed Arnold, *Ad hoc European military cooperation outside Europe*, occasional paper (London: Royal United Services Institute, Dec. 2021).

³⁶ Nina Wilén and Paul D. Williams, *What are the international military options for the Sahel?* (New York and Manama: International Peace Institute Global Observatory, 12 April 2022); Arnold, *Ad hoc European military cooperation outside Europe*; Pernille Rieker, 'Making sense of the European side of the transatlantic security relations in Africa', *Politics and Governance* 10: 2, 2022, pp. 144–53.

command of Takuba was later, in July 2021, transferred to Sweden, which not only shows the ambition to further Europeanize the mission,³⁷ but also illustrates that leadership can easily change within AHCs, given their flexible design.

The complexity of contemporary security crises implies that AHCs in this domain almost inevitably have to engage in inter-organizational relations if they are to provide effective crisis responses. This certainly applies to Task Force Takuba, the Sahel region being characterized by a growing number and diversity of intervening actors.³⁸ Despite operating outside the frameworks of other governance arrangements, the task force's operational activities were strongly linked to those of the many actors in the region, including the EU training and advisory missions, the JF-G5S and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).³⁹ Interestingly, the coalition also received explicit political support from several of these international organizations, including from the EU in its 2021 Sahel Strategy.⁴⁰ In fact, the EU appears increasingly to embrace AHCs, as illustrated by its adoption of the European Peace Facility (EPF). This off-budget policy instrument, which since 2021 has replaced the African Peace Facility, offers the EU more flexibility in funding AHCs directly.⁴¹ The increase in EU funding flexibility will also have impacts on the relationship between AHCs and IOs, in particular the AU.

The temporary nature of Task Force Takuba, as well as its low dissolution costs, became clear in February 2022 when France announced that it was pulling its troops out of Mali, including Takuba and Barkhane, following increased pressure and obstruction from the country's new leadership. Troop-contributing countries one after the other announced their withdrawal, and Takuba's activities in Mali were ultimately concluded in June 2022, raising concerns about the safety of other missions, such as MINUSMA, and about the stability of the region at large. It shows that the flexible nature of AHCs comes not only with benefits, in terms of short-notice creation and rapid action, but also with risks of being prone to defection because of unanticipated events. AHCs' rapid crisis responses may even take place at the expense of longer-term governance objectives and stability.

Situating AHCs in global governance

How do AHCs compare and contrast with other multilateral organizational forms?
Much initial work focused on intergovernmental organizations (IGOs): Wallace

³⁷ Arnold, *Ad hoc European military cooperation outside Europe*.

³⁸ Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde and Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, 'Disentangling the security traffic jam in the Sahel: constitutive effects of contemporary interventionism', *International Affairs* 96: 4, 2020, pp. 855–74.

³⁹ Bruno Charbonneau, 'Counter-insurgency governance in the Sahel', *International Affairs* 97: 6, 2021, pp. 1805–23.

⁴⁰ Council of the European Union, *The European Union's integrated strategy in the Sahel, Council conclusions*, 16 April 2021, p. 10, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7723-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁴¹ As an example, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) fighting Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region has been in a forced marriage with the AU, as funding from the EU African Peace Facility (APF) had to be managed by the African Union Commission as the APF only allowed funding to be given to formal parts of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and not to ad hoc coalitions or individual states. The situation has now changed with the replacement of the APF by the European Peace Facility. For more, see e.g. European External Action Service, *EU statement on MNJTF*, 15 Sept. 2017, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/32228_en.

and Singer, who comprehensively measured the number of IGOs in existence from 1815 to 1964, did groundbreaking work in that area.⁴² The resulting Correlates of War (COW) Intergovernmental Organizations database and its repeated updates, the latest containing no fewer than 534 IGOs, has been a valuable resource for many scholars in the field.⁴³ Moreover, their definition of IGOs is nowadays the norm. This baseline definition sees IGOs as formal institutions that possess a permanent secretariat or headquarters with permanent staff, and are composed of at least three member states, which meet regularly in a plenary session.⁴⁴ Mapping efforts such as the COW IGO dataset inspired researchers to undertake longitudinal studies of the evolution of IGO characteristics, including their membership, design, overlap and survival, either in general or with a more domain-specific focus.⁴⁵

Over the past decade, these IGO-orientated studies have been complemented with a focus on actors other than IGOs. Scholars have examined institutions that go beyond an exclusive state-based membership. Both Andonova and Westerwinter have drawn attention to actor-configurations that include state and non-state actors, also known as public-private partnerships or transnational public-private governance initiatives (TGIs), which Westerwinter defines as ‘institutions in which states and/or intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) cooperate with business and civil society actors to govern transnational problems’.⁴⁶ In a similar vein, Abbott and Kauffmann narrow down their focus to regulatory bodies, offering an overview of so-called ‘trans-governmental networks’ (TGNs);⁴⁷ and Lake introduces the concept of ‘Private Governance Organizations’ (PGOs), referring to largely similar phenomena.⁴⁸ What connects the various strands of this research is the shared goal of grasping institutional complexity beyond the state and IGOs in contemporary global governance.

Not only have scholars paid more attention to membership composition, they have also paid more attention to the degree of formality that these institu-

⁴² Wallace and Singer, ‘Intergovernmental organization in the global system’.

⁴³ Jon Pevehouse, Timothy Nordstrom and Kevin Warnke, ‘The Correlates of War 2 International Governmental Organizations data version 2.0’, *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 21: 2, 2004, pp. 101–19; Pevehouse et al., ‘Tracking organizations in the world’.

⁴⁴ Volker Rittberger, Bernhard Zangl, Andreas Kruck and Hylke Dijkstra, *International organization* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019); Wallace and Singer, ‘Intergovernmental organization in the global system’.

⁴⁵ Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, ‘Death of international organizations: the organizational ecology of intergovernmental organizations, 1815–2015’, *Review of International Organizations* 15: 2, 2020, pp. 339–70; Emilie Hafner-Burton, Edward Mansfield and Jon Pevehouse, ‘Human rights institutions, sovereignty costs and democratization’, *British Journal of Political Science* 45: 1, 2015, pp. 1–27; Yoram Haftel and Tobias Lenz, ‘Measuring institutional overlap in global governance’, *Review of International Organizations* 16: 2, 2021, pp. 323–47; Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Tobias Lenz, Jeanine Bezuijen, Besir Ceka and Svet Derderyan, *Measuring international authority: a postfunctionalist theory of governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Michael Zürn, Alexandros Tokhi and Martin Binder, ‘The International Authority Database’, *Global Policy* 12: 4, 2021, pp. 430–42; Yoram Haftel and Stephanie Hofmann, ‘Institutional authority and security cooperation within regional economic organizations’, *Journal of Peace Research* 54: 4, 2017, pp. 484–98; Maria Josepha Debre and Hylke Dijkstra, ‘Institutional design for a post-liberal order: why some international organizations live longer than others’, *European Journal of International Relations* 27: 1, 2021, pp. 311–39; Cheryl Shanks, Harold Jacobson and Jeffrey Kaplan, ‘Inertia and change in the constellation of international governmental organizations’, *International Organization* 50: 4, 1996, pp. 593–627.

⁴⁶ Andonova, *Governance entrepreneurs*; Westerwinter, ‘Transnational public-private governance initiatives’, p. 137.

⁴⁷ Abbott and Kauffmann, ‘The contribution of trans-governmental networks’.

⁴⁸ David Lake, ‘The organizational ecology of global governance’, *European Journal of International Relations* 27: 2, 2021, pp. 345–68.

tions exemplify. A growing focus on informality has led scholars to differentiate between formal intergovernmental organizations (FIGOs) and informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs).⁴⁹ Vabulas and Snidal, for instance, draw attention to the so-called ‘G-groups’, such as the G7/G8 or G20, and also multilateral settings that value negotiations and deliberations between members.⁵⁰ On the basis of their IIGO 2.0 dataset, they challenge the idea that IIGOs ‘only handle “easy” international problems’ by showing the continued rise of IIGOs and by highlighting their growing prominence in domains of high politics such as peace and security.⁵¹ Roger presents a discussion on IIGOs in which he broadens the scope of the category by also capturing informal organizations with a secretariat.⁵² Westerwinter, Abbott and Biersteker likewise showed that the number of these IIGOs grew between 1990 and 2014 by 193 per cent, while the number of TGIs rose by no less than 665 per cent.⁵³ Some of these IIGOs may be created at short notice and have a narrow focus, but many of them have a broad policy portfolio and are more permanent. The key point is that none of these studies systematically discuss the dimensions of task specificity and especially temporality. As a result, we may identify some AHCs among these IIGOs—but certainly not all IIGOs are AHCs.

Trying to make sense of this broader phenomenon of complex institutional relations is a research programme that has often been captured under the term ‘regime complexity’. Scholars working in this research stream have focused their attention on formal and informal, global and regional organizations and the ways in which they overlap, coordinate, cooperate or compete,⁵⁴ and have observed that a variety of governance arrangements are (closely) interconnected, cannot be compartmentalized into single units and therefore are a distinctive (and collective) form of global governance. Some go so far as to analyse them as complex adaptive systems,⁵⁵ or in terms of organizational ecology.⁵⁶ Regime complexes vary in their degree of fragmentation and coordination, and are not necessarily deliberately designed.⁵⁷ The literature tends to explore phenomena of institutional overlap and their consequences.⁵⁸ Together with the emergence of regime

⁴⁹ The term FIGOs has also been used by Volgy et al. (‘Identifying formal intergovernmental organizations’) to differentiate IGOs further by their level of formality.

⁵⁰ Vabulas and Snidal, ‘Organization without delegation’.

⁵¹ Vabulas and Snidal, ‘Cooperation under autonomy’.

⁵² Roger, *The origins of informality*.

⁵³ Westerwinter et al., ‘Informal governance in world politics’, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Kal Raustiala and David Victor, ‘The regime complex for plant genetic resources’, *International Organization* 58: 2, 2004, pp. 277–309; Oran R. Young, ‘Institutional linkages in international society: polar perspectives’, *Global Governance* 2: 1, 1996, pp. 1–24.

⁵⁵ Amandine Orsini, Philippe Le Prestre, Peter M. Haas, Malte Brosig, Philipp Pattberg, Oscar Widerberg, Laura Gomez-Mera, Jean-Frédéric Morin, Neil E. Harrison, Robert Geyer and David Chandler, ‘Forum: complex systems and international governance’, *International Studies Review* 22: 4, 2020, pp. 1008–38.

⁵⁶ Abbott et al., ‘Organizational ecology’; Morin, ‘Concentration despite competition’.

⁵⁷ Tyler Pratt, ‘Deference and hierarchy in international regime complexes’, *International Organization* 72: 3, 2018, pp. 561–90; Haftel and Hofmann, ‘Institutional authority and security cooperation’.

⁵⁸ Thomas Gehring and Benjamin Faude, ‘The dynamics of regime complexes: microfoundations and systemic effects’, *Global Governance* 19: 1, 2013, pp. 119–30; Karen Alter and Sophie Meunier, ‘The politics of international regime complexity’, *Perspectives on Politics* 7: 1, 2009, pp. 13–24; Stephanie Hofmann, ‘The politics of overlapping organizations: hostage-taking, forum-shopping and brokering’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 26: 6, 2019, pp. 883–905.

complexes, the inter-organizational turn in the literature explores ever closer links between IGOs.⁵⁹ The increase in actor density, pervasive institutional overlap, and decentralized and informal hierarchical structures has increased interest in complexity research.

Recognizing the growing complexity of global governance actors and institutional forms, scholars have started making sense of this complexity by focusing both on actors that can bridge the complexity and on the institutional constellations at large. They have introduced ‘low-cost institutions’ (LCIs) as an umbrella term, suggesting that non-treaty-based institutions—including IIGOs, TGNs and transnational public–private partnerships (TPPPs)—are all characterized by similar calculations that explain their use.⁶⁰ In particular, LCIs are argued to be less suitable for creating credible state commitments; yet the low costs of ‘creating, operating, changing, and exiting them’ makes them popular governance mechanisms that can help to overcome cooperation problems and avoid inaction.⁶¹ In other words, there is growing recognition that flexibility is a key asset, as it allows for the avoidance of gridlock in highly institutionalized settings.

As illustrated in table 2 on page 18, most of these studies have paid attention to the emergence of (new) collective actors in global governance by putting emphasis on dimensions such as formality (formal, informal, low-cost), organizational structure (secretariats) and membership (state and non-state actors). Interestingly, these analyses seem to be biased towards institutions with a certain degree of permanence, as temporality is rarely discussed in these conceptualizations. As we argue above, as a result many arrangements have been left out of analyses of global governance complexity. In distinguishing between different kinds of actors, relatively little attention has been given to the speed with which they are set up, the initial time-span for which they are created and their task specificity.⁶² By drawing attention to temporality and task specificity as features of AHCs, we not only shed light on the design of overlooked but important global governance arrangements but also demonstrate that multilateral action takes place in contexts not previously examined.

A research agenda on AHCs in global governance

In the following, we discuss how a more systematic focus on AHCs and attention to the dimensions of temporality, task specificity and short-notice creation has the potential to contribute to a wide variety of salient research programmes in the fields of IO and global governance studies. In particular, research programmes on organizational design, organizational performance, organizational choice and

⁵⁹ Rafael Biermann and Joachim Koops, *The Palgrave handbook of inter-organizational relations in world politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Stephanie Hofmann, ‘Overlapping institutions in the realm of international security: the case of NATO and ESDP’, *Perspectives on Politics* 7: 1, 2009, pp. 45–52.

⁶⁰ Abbott and Faude, ‘Choosing low-cost institutions in global governance’.

⁶¹ Abbott and Faude, ‘Choosing low-cost institutions in global governance’, p. 397.

⁶² The literature on informal organizations does mention speed as one of the motivations that might push states towards informal arrangements, as they ‘can be concluded more quickly’: Vabulas and Snidal, ‘Organization without delegation’, p. 211.

organizational life-cycles can be enriched by opening up to AHCs. We discuss these research programmes in the light of changing geopolitical circumstances,⁶³ and point to where AHCs might confirm, modify or challenge existing hypotheses.

First, at least over the past two decades, explaining how IOs work and why they look the way they do has been a core objective in the field of IO studies. Much of this research on *organizational design* has focused on design features linked to the formality and membership of an increasingly wide variety of international arrangements.⁶⁴ In addition, recent scholarship has paid increased attention to the financing of organizational activities and the agency of international secretariats.⁶⁵

Given the changing geopolitical circumstances, organizational flexibility and adaptability are considered key conditions for avoiding gridlock and guaranteeing multilateral solutions to shared problems.⁶⁶ However, flexibility has so far mainly been seen as either institutional informality in terms of low creation and dissolution costs,⁶⁷ or built in through flexibility clauses or opt-out procedures.⁶⁸ In focusing on AHCs, we draw attention to arrangements that combine flexible design features linked to short-notice set-up, task specificity and temporality. This enables us to observe more multilateral action than what is commonly observed in existing scholarship and databases. Karlsrud and Reykers have shown that it is particularly the design features of short-notice creation and initial temporariness that have proven vital for providing rapid ad hoc responses to crises in the field of peace and security.⁶⁹ For instance, the 2011 Libya intervention first took shape as an AHC because consensus had not yet been reached within NATO. As such, gridlock in FIGOs does not necessarily imply a total crisis of multilateralism, nor indeed a lack of appetite for cooperation.

⁶³ Stacie Goddard, *When right makes might: rising powers and world order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Phillip Y. Lipsky, *Renegotiating the world order: institutional change in international relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Amitav Acharya, 'The future of global governance: fragmentation may be inevitable and creative', *Global Governance* 22: 4, 2016, pp. 453–60.

⁶⁴ Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson and Duncan Snidal, 'The rational design of international institutions', *International Organization* 55: 4, 2001, pp. 761–99; Tana Johnson and Johannes Urpelainen, 'International bureaucrats and the formation of intergovernmental organizations: institutional design discretion sweetens the pot', *International Organization* 68: 1, 2014, pp. 177–209; Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, 'Delegation and pooling in international organizations', *Review of International Organizations* 10: 3, 2015, pp. 305–28; Daniel Blake and Autumn Payton, 'Balancing design objectives: analysing new data on voting rules in intergovernmental organizations', *Review of International Organizations* 5: 3, 2014, pp. 377–402; Haftel and Hofmann, 'Institutional authority and security cooperation'.

⁶⁵ On the first of these aspects, see Erin Graham, 'Follow the money: how trends in financing are changing governance at international organizations', *Global Policy* 8: S5, 2017, pp. 15–25; Klaus Goetz and Ronny Patz, 'Resourcing international organizations: resource diversification, organizational differentiation, and administrative governance', *Global Policy* 8: S5, 2017, pp. 5–14. On the second, see Tana Johnson, 'Institutional design and bureaucrats' impact on political control', *The Journal of Politics* 75: 1, 2013, pp. 183–97; Hooghe and Marks, 'Delegation and pooling in international organizations'.

⁶⁶ Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: why global cooperation is failing when we need it most* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

⁶⁷ Vabulas and Snidal, 'Organization without delegation'.

⁶⁸ Barbara Koremenos, *The continent of international law: explaining agreement design* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Christopher Marcoux, 'Institutional flexibility in the design of multilateral environmental agreements', *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 26: 2, 2009, pp. 209–28.

⁶⁹ John Karlsrud and Yf Reykers, *Multinational rapid response mechanisms: from institutional proliferation to institutional exploitation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

Without the design dimensions put forward by this article, defining AHCs in terms of short-notice creation, task-specific purpose and temporarily circumscribed existence, governance arrangements such as Task Force Takuba would live a conceptual half-life as a European task force led by France, falling between the conceptual categories of IOs and international crisis management, neither of which would be able to capture its essence. However, the specific design of AHCs also comes with risks and uncertainties. For instance, because members of AHCs typically retain high levels of autonomy over their own contributions, and the delegation of authority is mostly limited to delegating coordination tasks to the coalition leader (with or without the support of a secretariat), it is often unclear by whom AHCs are held accountable. Moreover, it is worth asking how much AHCs such as Task Force Takuba rely on previous interactions and collaboration of their members in formal IOs such as NATO or the EU for providing action at short notice, a point explored elsewhere by Karlsrud and Reykers.⁷⁰

Second, emphasizing features such as task specificity and temporality can tell us something new about *organizational performance*. As international arrangements increase in number and variety, variation in performance has become more visible, which has raised questions about why some arrangements are better in fulfilling their mandates than others.⁷¹ Central in this debate have been theoretical questions about the importance of bureaucratic capacity and size,⁷² autonomy and control,⁷³ and organizational pathologies.⁷⁴ Yet once more the focus is predominantly on characteristics related to organizational structure and formality. The dimensions of temporality and task specificity have received much less attention in the study of institutional performance.

By opening up the discussion to AHCs, we can not only contribute to refining under what conditions more task-specific arrangements are performing better than more general-purpose arrangements, but also help to think about organizational performance as a conjuncture of several organizational arrangements. Their short-notice creation suggests that AHCs, such as Task Force Takuba, are ‘first responder’ governance arrangements, whose performance should be examined in particular during the fast-burning phase of a crisis such as a natural disasters or terrorist attacks.⁷⁵ Our conceptualization of AHCs shows that a more nuanced analysis of organizational performance is needed, which recognizes that some arrangements are likely to perform better during limited time-frames or that sequenced action by different types of arrangements can lead to better overall results. Granted, solutions with a limited time-frame such as Takuba can still have

⁷⁰ Karlsrud and Reykers, ‘Ad hoc coalitions and institutional exploitation’.

⁷¹ Ranjit Lall, ‘Beyond institutional design: explaining the performance of international organizations’, *International Organization* 71: 2, 2017, pp. 245–80.

⁷² Roland Vaubel, Axel Dreher and Uğurlu Soylu, ‘Staff growth in international organizations: a principal-agent problem? An empirical analysis’, *Public Choice* 133: 3–4, 2007, pp. 275–95.

⁷³ Abbott and Snidal, ‘International regulation without international government’.

⁷⁴ Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, ‘The politics, power, and pathologies of international organizations’, *International Organization* 53: 4, 1999, pp. 699–732.

⁷⁵ Leonard Seabrooke and Eleni Tsingou, ‘Europe’s fast- and slow-burning crises’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 26: 3, 2019, pp. 468–81.

an enduring impact, so a longer-term focus on performance is desirable, even for short-lived arrangements. More generally, the temporality of AHCs allows us to think about performance across time. In addition to this, the temporal and task-specific nature of these coalitions also raises interesting questions about how they govern, how this compares to other governance arrangements and how this affects their performance. For instance, while AHCs are most likely to implement their crisis responses themselves, some may still use indirect modes of governance such as orchestration. Just as for IIGOs, this mostly depends on what capabilities they have at their disposal and their mandate.⁷⁶

Third, AHCs speak to *organizational choice* and organizational strategies in global governance.⁷⁷ Much of the research in this field starts from recognition of the impact of institutional overlap, both in membership and in policy orientation, on the strategic options that states have to undertake multilateral action.⁷⁸ Building on insights from the forum-shopping literature, this research programme has led to the identification of a range of strategies, including among others competitive regime creation, regime shifting,⁷⁹ hostage-taking and brokering.⁸⁰ Yet AHCs have hardly been treated as a fully fledged option; indeed, they have even been considered suboptimal outcomes.⁸¹ This has implications not only for understanding the overall ‘chessboard’ that actors have available to them when conceiving their multilateral policies and strategies, but also provides us with an incomplete picture of how easily some strategies can be pursued over others.

As various actors clearly consider AHCs an option in tackling global governance problems, we argue that adding them systematically to the palette of governance arrangements when discussing complexity provides several insights. By considering AHCs as an integral part of the global governance architecture, it becomes possible to explore when factors such as responsiveness or temporariness prevail in strategies of institutional choice. Moreover, AHCs are arguably easier and less costly to set up (and leave) than IGOs and other formal governance arrangements. On the one hand, their creation could suggest that competitive regime creation, hostage-taking or regime shifting take more often place than so far assumed—if only for short periods of time. On the other hand, their task-specificity also invites researchers to investigate how much creation of niches is taking place

⁷⁶ Kenneth W. Abbott, Philipp Genschel, Duncan Snidal and Bernhard Zangl, ‘Two logics of indirect governance: delegation and orchestration’, *British Journal of Political Science* 46: 4, 2016, pp. 719–29; Downie, ‘How do informal international organizations govern?’.

⁷⁷ Alter and Meunier, ‘The politics of international regime complexity’; Jupille et al., *Institutional choice and global commerce*; Julia Morse and Robert Keohane, ‘Contested Multilateralism’, *Review of International Organizations* 9: 4, 2014, pp. 385–412.

⁷⁸ Haftel and Lenz, ‘Measuring institutional overlap in global governance’; Malte Brosig, ‘Overlap and interplay between international organisations: theories and approaches’, *South African Journal of International Affairs* 18: 2, 2011, pp. 147–67; Stephanie Hofmann, ‘Why institutional overlap matters: CSDP in the European security architecture’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 49: 1, 2011, pp. 101–20; Benjamin Faude and Julia Fuss, ‘Coordination or conflict? The causes and consequences of institutional overlap in a disaggregated world order’, *Global Constitutionalism* 9: 2, 2020, pp. 268–89.

⁷⁹ Morse and Keohane, ‘Contested multilateralism’.

⁸⁰ Hofmann, ‘The politics of overlapping organizations’.

⁸¹ Jupille et al., *Institutional choice and global commerce*.

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across organizations.⁸² Yet AHCs' flexible design also makes cooperation more uncertain and prone to political shocks, as illustrated by the Takuba case discussed above, or the example mentioned earlier of Mali's opt-out from the JF-G5S in 2022. This raises questions about when actors prefer cooperation through arrangements that can easily be dismantled, and when they want to protect multilateral efforts and arguably more legitimate and inclusive arrangements from political shocks. Overall, given the current geopolitical circumstances, shedding light on AHCs might provide us with a better understanding of what kind of multilateral action is taking place in a world characterized by geopolitical rivalries, to what effect, and how long-lasting it is.

Finally, scholars of IOs have in recent years moved beyond the design, performance and formation of these bodies to take a growing interest in the *life-cycle* of IOs, guided by questions about why IOs die, thrive, survive or remain in 'zombie' mode.⁸³ AHCs, in principle, imply a limited institutional lifespan. When the crisis that prompted its creation dissipates, the AHC might disappear too. However, from historical institutionalism we also know that, once set up, institutions can persist, are 'sticky', and are likely to remain in place long after the initial motivations for establishing them have weakened or vanished.⁸⁴ Thus, AHCs do not necessarily disappear and may develop a complex life-cycle of their own. Future studies would therefore do well to pay attention not only to their formation, but also to their potential consolidation and afterlife, as this can lead to new insights about, among other things, actor motivations, resource generation or institutional interaction. In the longer term, some may be transformed and further institutionalized. If AHCs do not die, they may very well be transformed from individualized, task-specific and spontaneous responses to a crisis into more stable and quasi-permanent institutional structures, which would mean that they change organizational form and may be core elements in the emergence of new IOs. This necessitates research into the morphology of AHCs and the reasons for organizational change. When an AHC has reached the end of its life-cycle, is it deliberately changing its organizational features to prevent termination? Are AHCs fitted with formal treaties, co-opted into larger organizations or liquidated?

AHC are furthermore likely to have consequences for the global governance structure that surrounds them. An important part of future research will be to map the frequency, membership composition, mandates and duration of AHCs within different domains of global governance and assess the impact that AHCs may have on other multilateral arrangements. Relevant questions can be asked about whether AHCs help other arrangements to survive by providing a temporary and possibly effective solution to problems which existing IOs fail to address,

⁸² Brosig, 'Overlap and interplay'; Abbott et al., 'Organizational ecology'; Malte Brosig, 'Whither a theory of inter-organisational relations: a burgeoning field of research between conceptual innovation and fragmentation', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 14: 2, 2020, pp. 171–86.

⁸³ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 'Death of international organizations'; Debre and Dijkstra, 'Institutional design for a post-liberal order'; Julia Gray, 'Life, death, or zombie? The vitality of international organizations', *International Studies Quarterly* 62: 1, 2018, pp. 1–13.

⁸⁴ Paul Pierson, 'Increasing returns, path dependence, and the study of politics', *American Political Science Review* 94: 2, 2000, pp. 251–67.

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for instance, due to gridlock. They can buy time for other arrangements to solve internal divisions or to find the necessary resources for taking multilateral action. More controversially perhaps, AHCs may, in the longer run, also well have a more disruptive effect on the life-cycle of existing IOs, if they undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of the latter. In that case, they compete with rather than complement existing IOs, which may struggle to maintain a central position in their domain.

In sum, then, we have sketched out here some of the questions that arise with the emergence of AHCs as serious players in global governance. By not only defining AHCs but also problematizing their position and role in global governance, we aim to show the potential of this field of research for ongoing research programmes in the study of international organizations and global governance complexity. With global order displaying a move away from formal organizations, and recognizing the potential attractiveness of flexible arrangements, we assume a growing role for AHCs in the decades to come.

Conclusions

This conceptual article has presented AHCs as a specific organizational form in the complex institutional ecology of global governance. We discussed the defining characteristics of this type of organization in comparison to other already conceptualized formal and informal arrangements in global governance. While AHCs share many characteristics with other types of informal forms of cooperation among states and non-state actors (such as IIGOs, TGNs, TGIs, LCIs, PGOs and ICGs), we draw attention to the fact that actors can focus on very specific cooperation mandates with like-minded partners and can swiftly set up lightly organized cooperative structures, often envisioning these autonomous arrangements as lasting only for limited periods of time. By doing so, we intend to make AHCs more visible to stimulate more systematic research into their impact on other global governance arrangements and on international crisis response.

Conceptualizing AHCs is important not only to better grasp the current complexity of global governance arrangements, but also to analyse longer-term transformations of global governance. AHCs are likely to affect the broader global governance landscape, with direct or indirect impacts on other competing, cooperating and overlapping institutional arrangements. In the short run, AHCs are tools to bring a diverse set of actors together in focusing on a specific dimension of complex cooperation problems. They may be seen as a cost-efficient way to address a particular crisis rapidly, but they may also be considered tools to overcome gridlock in other arrangements. The longer-term effects of AHCs on other global governance arrangements, however, remain to be explored, including in terms of resource availability, legitimacy and effectiveness. The analytical dimensions proposed here to identify AHCs allow these groupings to be identified and enable a more systematic study of their impact on a densely institutionalized global governance environment.

Table 2: Comparing AHCs to other global governance arrangements according to their defining characteristics

	<i>Formality</i>	<i>Secretariat</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Mandate</i>	<i>Speed</i>	<i>Time-frame</i>	<i>Examples</i>
AHCs	Non-defining	Non-defining	Non-defining	Task-specific	Short notice	Temporary	INTERFET, JF-GSS, Task Force Takuba, ACT-Accelerator, Biafran airlift
FIGOs	Treaty-based	Permanent secretariat and/or permanent staff and/or headquarters; regular meetings	Three or more state members	Non-defining	Non-defining	Permanent	ASEAN, Arab League, AU, EU, IMF, UN, WTO
IIGOs	Non-treaty-based	No independent secretariat or permanent staff or headquarters; regular 'summit meetings'	Explicitly associated members, primarily states	Non-defining	Increased speed	Less permanent	Concert of Europe, G7/8, G20, G77, Global Forum on Migration and Development, Non-Aligned Movement, EL2, JEF
TGNs	Non-treaty-based	Relatively 'flat' or organizational structures (horizontal ties between peers and consensus decision-making)	Non-state members (specialized units of national governments)	Non-defining	Non-defining	Non-defining	International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO), International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS)
TGIs	Non-treaty-based	Non-defining (33% of initiatives have a secretariat)	At least one state and/or IGO, one business actor, and one civil society actor	Non-defining	Non-defining	Non-defining	Alliance for Water Stewardship, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Kimberley Process, World Commission on Dams
LCIs	Non-treaty-based	Less elaborate and complicated decision-making formalities and operating procedures	State and non-state actors	Non-defining	Non-defining	Non-defining	Financial Stability Forum (FSF), Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), Protocol-type Carbon Fund (PCF)
PGOs	Non-defining	Non-defining	Civil society and/or business actors	Fill governance niches	Non-defining	Non-defining	International Accounting Standards Board (IASB), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)
IGCs	Non-treaty-based	No permanent secretariat or permanent staff; regular meetings	Explicitly associated state members, potential non-state actors (Os and ROs)	Single-issue, managing peace and security crisis	Non-defining	Non-defining	Western Contact Group, International Contact Group on the Central African Re-public (ICG-CAR)
RC/ GGC	Non-treaty-based	Self-organizing system	Overlapping treaty regimes	Policy-specific	Non-defining	Permanent	African security regime complex, environmental regimes complexes

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Note, Table 2: For literature on the various global government arrangements, see:

FIGOs: Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 'Death of international organizations'; Hafner-Burton, Mansfield and Pevehouse, 'Human rights institutions, sovereignty costs and democratization'; Haftel and Hofmann, 'Institutional authority and security cooperation'.

IIGOs: Vabulas and Snidal, 'Organization without delegation'; Vabulas and Snidal, 'Cooperation under autonomy'.

TGNs: Abbott and Kauffmann, 'The contribution of trans-governmental networks of regulators to international regulatory co-operation'.

TGIs: Westerwinter, 'Transnational public-private governance initiatives'; Andonova, *Governance entrepreneurs*.

LCIs: Abbott and Faude, 'Choosing low-cost institutions in global governance'.

PGOs: Lake, 'The organizational ecology of global governance'.

ICGs: Henneberg, 'International contact groups'.

RC/GGC: Raustiala and Victor, 'The regime complex for plant genetic resources'.