

Beneath the seeming resilience:

Assessing
Ghana's Vulnerabilities
to Threats from
Violent Extremist Groups



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From
the People of Japan



Kwesi Aning & Lydia Amedzrator

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By
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AQIM	Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BNI	Bureau of National Investigations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DISECs	District Security Councils
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GAF	Ghana Armed Forces
GES	Ghana Education Service
GIS	Ghana Immigration Service
G5 Sahel	The Group of Five for the Sahel
GPS	Ghana Police Service
GRA	Ghana Revenue Authority
IEDs	Improvised explosive devices
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JNIM	Jamā'at nusrat al-islām wal-muslimīn
KLM	Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
Momo	Mobile Money
MMDAs	Metropolitan or Municipal or District Assemblies
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad
MUJAO	Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa
MUSEC	Municipal Security Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAFPCVET	National Framework for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Ghana
NCCE	National Commission for Civic Education
NIB	National Intelligence Bureau
NPC	National Peace Council
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
REGSEC	Regional Security Council
RCC	Regional Coordinating Council
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
U.S	United States
VE	Violent extremist
VEO	Violent extremist organizations
WACCE	West Africa Centre for Counter-Extremism
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
WTRF	Western Togoland Restoration Front

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to assess Ghana's vulnerabilities to possible violent extremist (VE) attacks by exploring: (a) the risk factors that have the potential to predispose the country to violent attacks; and (b) the resilience factors that explains the structures, the mechanisms, institutions and groups contributing to reducing tensions and preventing conflict situations from degenerating into crises situations that tend to create vulnerable environments for violent extremism to thrive.

The paper has two sections. Section One focuses on identifying the various risk factors that could serve as conveyor belts for violent extremism in the country. In this section, we highlight and evaluate the effectiveness or otherwise of the mechanisms that are in place at different levels in the country and have contributed to preventing tensions from spiraling out of control. Consequently, the paper discusses the nature and impact of state and non-state responses to threats from violent extremist organizations (VEOs). Specifically, the focus here is on military interventions by the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) and their role in confronting threats from different VEOs.

Background

The current wave of violent extremism in parts of the Sahel and West Africa can be attributed to the 2012 Mali crisis which ushered in a period of upheavals in the region. For a start, the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA), a coalition of Tuareg militias, joined radical Islamic groups to defeat the Malian army and temporarily captured the Northern parts of the country. Bolstered by their successes in Northern Mali, further violent attacks from 'Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its affiliated groups, Ansar Dine and Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), which were concentrated in Northern Mali spread to the central parts of Mali before spilling over to Niger and Burkina Faso in 2016' (Assanvo, Dakono, Theroux-Benoni, & Maiga, 2019). In 2017, the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (in Arabic, Jamā'at nusrat al-islām wal-muslimīn) (JNIM) was formed, perhaps as a response to the establishment of G5 Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) and the desire of

Ansar Dine to extend its agenda to other territories outside Mali (Roetman, Migeon, & Dudouet, 2019). The activities of violent extremist groups operating in the Sahel have intensified since the formation of JNIM, a coalition of four main violent extremist groups comprising of: Ansar Dine, the West African branch of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Katiba Macina, and Al Mourabitoune (Roetman, Migeon, & Dudouet, 2019).

What is currently evident are the ambitions of VEOs operating in the Sahel to expand their spheres of influence to new territories in coastal West African states such as Benin, Togo, La Cote d'Ivoire and other states, which have not yet experienced extremist violence on a large scale. In Cote d'Ivoire, for instance, the country has been embroiled in consistent attacks in its northern regions since 2020¹ (Assanvo, 2021). Similarly, in Benin and Togo, violent incidents have been recorded. These incidents include: the abduction of two French tourists and their local guide in May 2019 in Benin's Pendjari National Park²; an attack on a police station in Keremou, near the town of Banikoara, in northern Benin in 2020³. In Benin, further attacks have taken place in early 2022, showing a worsening situation. In this recent attack, 'Nine people including a Frenchman were killed this week in attacks in a national park in Benin's remote north bordering troubled Niger and Burkina Faso, [making it] the deadliest in recent attacks ... as coastal West African states face spillover from Sahel countries battling jihadists'⁴; the killing of four custom officials in eastern Burkina Faso, close to the Togolese border in February 2019⁵; an attack on a security post in Kpendjal (northern Togo) near the Burkina Faso border on November 9, 2021⁶; and the assassination of a Spanish priest, Antonio César Fernández, in an attack by violent extremist groups close to the Togolese and Burkina Faso border (BBC News Africa, 2019).

The above provides the external context within which the domestic realities and response strategies of Ghana's endeavours at preventing VEOs for operating should be located. Ghana shares borders with Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east and Côte d'Ivoire to the west. Northern Ghana, comprising: the Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Savannah and North East regions are also in touch with Mali and

Niger through familial ties. Although the upsurge in the downward movement and the spread of activities by violent extremist groups among Ghana's northern neighbors are apparent, Ghana has so far been spared from specific, targeted attacks⁷. However, the risk that the country could be subjected to an actual attack by violent extremist (VE) groups derives from two sources: (a) external penetration, mostly from the Sahel region generally and more directly from its contiguous states, and (b) the possibility for domestic recruitment arising from the possibilities created

by several structural factors that will be discussed below (Matveeva, Aning, & Osei-Kufuor, 2020). Although public discourses on VEOs in Ghana do not indicate any actual and specific attacks, there is nevertheless strong suspicion that some extremists might have infiltrated through the country's borders, while others may be using some border and other nearby communities as transit points, safe havens and for sourcing and transporting logistics such as arms, recruits and funds. These suspicions are based on several incidents.

Table A. incident indicating Ghana's vulnerability to violent extremism

Year	Nature of incident	Groups / Persons involved ⁸
2009	• Suspected Nigerian suicide bomber who attempted to blow up a U.S. passenger jet, Northwest Airlines flight 253 with 300 people on board used Kotoka International airport as transit to Lagos before boarding a KLM flight from there to Amsterdam	Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab
December 2015	• Ten people with university backgrounds join ISIS from Ghana • Arrests for terrorist training at Jantong, Northern Region	Abubakar Mohammed aka Brother, Shakira Mohammed, Badharn Diallo, Rafiq
August 2015	• Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) graduate joins ISIS	Nazir Nortey
January 2016	• Guantanamo Bay detainees (GITMO Two)	
April 2016	• Nazir Nortey killed in Syria	
October 2017	• 22 people dissuaded from joining ISIS • Reports of over 50 Ghanaians fighting for ISIS	

⁷Violent attacks were recorded in Kafolo in June 2020 and March 2021; Kolobougou in March 29, 2021; Tougo: June 7, 2021. See Amedzator L. (2021), Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Coastal States in West Africa (Unpublished Workshop Report) KAIPTC.

⁸See Bruijine, K. d. (2021). Laws of Attraction: Northern Benin and risk of violent extremist spillover. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'.

⁹See Le Monde Afrique. (2020, February 10). In Benin, a police station attacked near the Burkina border. Retrieved February 3, 2022, from Le Monde: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/02/10/au-benin-un-poste-de-police-attaque-pres-de-la-frontiere-burkinabee_6029048_3212.html

¹⁰Death toll in Benin national park attacks rises as France opens terror probe', 11 Feb. 2022. at <https://www.france24.com/en/afrique/20220211-death-toll-in-benin-national-park-attacks-rises-as-france-opens-terror-probe> accessed 15 February 2020.

¹¹BBC News Africa. (2019, February 16). Four customs officers killed in Burkina Faso. Retrieved March 14, 2021, from BBC News: <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-47265414>

¹²See Togo First. (2021, November 10). Togo reports terrorist attack in the northern region, near the Burkina border. Retrieved February 3, 2022, from Togo First: <https://www.togofirst.com/en/security/1011-8908-togo-reports-terrorist-attack-in-the-northern-region-near-the-burkina-border>

¹³'Soldiers deployed to Kulungungu, others near Bawku over suspected Jihadist attack', 1 Feb. 2022 at [Soldiers deployed to Kulungungu, others near Bawku over suspected Jihadist attack \(ghanaweb.com\)](https://www.ghanaweb.com/ghanaweb/News.aspx?ID=1011-8908-togo-reports-terrorist-attack-in-the-northern-region-near-the-burkina-border) accessed 14 Feb. 2022. In this reportage, '...Soldiers have been deployed to Sapeliga, Pulmakom and Kulungungu near the Ghana-Burkina Faso border, over suspected Jihadists' attack which has resulted in the death of twelve persons and a few others abducted...on Sunday January 30'.

¹⁴See Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021). White Paper: Updates on Violent Extremism Threat to Ghana. Accra: WACCE; Muqthar, M. M. (2021, November 15). Engaging Border Communities in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism. Accra; Tattersall, N. (2009, December 31). Nigeria says plane bomber began journey in Ghana. Retrieved February 3, 2022, from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-security-airline-nigeria-idUSTRE5BU33J20091231>.

January 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 young individuals arrested with 7 grenades at Odorkor, Accra. Malian involved 	
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arrest of terrorist suspects from Libya and Mali 	
2019-2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports of incursions, growing threat of attacks in the country, security alert over planned attacks on Ghana's Northern territory⁹ • Abu Dujana, a Ghanaian from Karaga in the northern region, detonated a suicide car bomb near a French military camp in Gossi, Central Mali, under the directions of Jamaa'at Nusrat-ul Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) on 21 June 2021¹⁰ 	

Source: Authors' compilation, Raw data from: Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021); Tattersall, N. (2009, December 31).

These incidents have heightened concerns about both the nature and extent of Ghana's vulnerabilities to possible violent extremist attacks.

What are Ghana's vulnerabilities to violent extremism?

Even though Ghana has not yet experienced any violent attack from violent extremist groups, a discussion is presented of the various risk factors which are present and can contribute to heightening and precipitating the possible operations of extremist organizations. Our framework for this analysis is drawn from Khalil and Zeuthen's framework for classifying the drivers of VE which lays out three different variables, namely: (a) structural motivators¹¹, (b) individual incentives¹², and (c) enabling factors¹³ (Khalil & Zeuthen, 2016).

⁹See Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021). White Paper: Updates on Violent Extremism Threat to Ghana. Accra: WACCE; Matveeva, A., Aning, K., & Osei-Kufuor, P. (2020, August 14). Conducting a conflict-related development analysis (CDA): Final Report.

¹⁰See Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021).

¹¹Tend to provide substantial explanation for the conditions that favor the rise or spread in appeal of violent extremism.

¹²Are associated with the personal rewards which membership in a group or movement, and participation in its activities, may confer.

¹³Factors that provide an enabling environment for individuals and groups to be radicalized and to support the purported aims of VE groups

Table B. Potential Drivers of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Ghana

Variables	Key Identified Drivers	Examples / Potential Sources of Radicalization and VE
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Structural motivators	Limited Economic Opportunities ¹⁴ Inequality ¹⁵ Social, economic and political marginalization ¹⁶	Nepotism in employment practices ¹⁷ , lack of investment by government in development of the North and other areas ¹⁸ , high levels of poverty ¹⁹ , a rising anti-state resentment and violence directed at public institutions ²⁰
	Tensions between 'indigenous' and 'settler' communities ²¹	Friction between Konkombas and other ethnic groups ²² ; clashes between the Fulani and communities in which they settle ²³ ; inter- and intra-sectional differences among Muslims ²⁴
	High youth unemployment rates ²⁵	VE groups exploit high levels of youth unemployment (amongst young men and women in poor rural areas) by offering incomes through joining a VE group ²⁶
	Sense of exclusion ²⁷	Feeling of a sense of injustice by 'minority' ethnic groups such as the Fulani, Ewes, Konkombas ²⁸ ; a growing sense of exclusion ²⁹ ; the urge for secessionism ³⁰ , socio-economic disparities between the South and North has deepened as the North has benefited less from development gains, uneven development in the country, poor service delivery in the North and escalating levels of violence, resulting not only in economic but social, political and cultural exclusion ³¹

¹⁴See Matveeva, A., Aning, K., & Osei-Kufuor, P. (2020, August 14).

¹⁵Ibid

¹⁶See Asante, R., & E.Gyimah-Boadi. (2004). Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public in Ghana. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development; Amedzrator, L., & Aning, K. (2017). Rethinking Regional Security Threats in Africa: Negotiating the nexus between Domestic and Transnational Actors. In E. Birikorang, F. Okyere, & K. Aning (Eds.), Annual Review of Peace Support Operations in Africa (pp. 17-29). Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre; Minority Rights Group International. (2020). World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Ghana. Retrieved from Minority Rights: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/konkomba/>; Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Nielsen, A. B. (2021). West Africa Security Perspectives. Copenhagen: DIIS.

¹⁷Interview with CSO in Tamale

¹⁸See Matveeva, A., Aning, K., & Osei-Kufuor, P. (2020, August 14)

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰Ibid

²¹See Minority Rights Group International, 2020; Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021). White Paper: Updates on Violent Extremism Threat to Ghana. Accra: WACCE; Amedzrator & Aning, 2017; Kugbega, S. K., & Aboagye, P. Y. (2021). Farmer-herder conflicts, tenure insecurity and farmer's investment decisions in Agogo, Ghana. Agricultural and Food Economics, 9(19); Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Nielsen, A. B. (2021). West Africa Security Perspectives. Copenhagen: DIIS.

²²See Pul, H. A. (2003, March). Exclusion, Association and Violence: Trends and Triggers in Northern Ghana's Konkomba-Dagomba Wars. The African Anthropologist, 10(1), 39-82.

²³See Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Nielsen, A. B. (2021); Kugbega, S. K., & Aboagye, P. Y. (2021)

²⁴See Matveeva, A., Aning, K., & Osei-Kufuor, P. (2020, August 14); Aning, K., & Abdallah, M. (2013). Islamic radicalisation and violence in Ghana. Conflict, Security & Development, 13(2), 149-167.

²⁵Interview in Tamale; Matveeva, A., Aning, K., & Osei-Kufuor, P. (2020, August 14); Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Nielsen, A. B. (2021).

²⁶Interview in Tamale; Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021).

²⁷Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Nielsen, A. B. (2021).

²⁸Interview with CSO based in Accra, Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021).

²⁹See Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Nielsen, A. B. (2021).

³⁰See Aning, K. E. (2020, November 9). A nascent 'secessionist' challenge for Ghana? domestic and regional implications. DIIS Comment.

³¹See Matveeva, A., Aning, K., & Osei-Kufuor, P. (2020, August 14)

	<p>Weak state presence in border regions / deficiencies of security personnel at the borders³²</p> <p>Abuses by security forces³⁴</p> <p>Stigmatization of certain groups³⁸</p> <p>Lack of transparency in policy making⁴⁰</p>	<p>the external infiltration and breaches of the country's borders³³</p> <p>Trust between state security agencies and citizens³⁵; lack of locally-led PVE initiatives; lack of involvement of civil society in operations³⁶; tensions between security agencies and cross-border communities whose livelihoods are often based on smuggling generates distrust towards state representatives³⁷</p> <p>Social stigma attached to Fulani³⁹</p> <p>Government deemed to be paying lip service to the development of the North, few job opportunities deemed only to prevent young people from rebelling against the state, foot soldiers ransacking public offices⁴¹</p>
Individual Incentives	<p>Status⁴²</p> <p>Material incentives⁴⁴</p> <p>Revenge⁴⁶</p> <p>Sense of belonging⁴⁸</p>	<p>Frustration and grievance of young people for their unemployment status⁴³</p> <p>High youth unemployment rates in the country even though it offers a weak explanation for enlistment of graduates who had left the country to join ISIS⁴⁵</p> <p>Hatred toward the state, blind wish to retaliate for perceived injustice⁴⁷</p> <p>Sense of belonging against a common enemy (the state). The feeling by Fulanis and some Muslims that they are under attack, hinges on perceived marginalization of the Fulani communities and other 'minority' communities in the country⁴⁹</p>

³²Interview in Tamale, 2021

³³See Matveeva, A., Aning, K., & Osei-Kufuor, P. (2020, August 14); Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021).

³⁴Interview in Tamale, 2021

³⁵See Amedzrator L. (2021), Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Coastal States in West Africa (Unpublished Workshop Report) KAIPTC.

³⁶See Muqthar, M. M. (2021, November 15). Engaging Border Communities in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism. Accra

³⁷Ibid

³⁸See Amedzrator, L., & Aning, K. (2017). Rethinking Regional Security Threats in Africa: Negotiating the nexus between Domestic and Transnational Actors. In E. Birikorang, F. Okyere, & K. Aning (Eds.), Annual Review of Peace Support Operations in Africa (pp. 17-29). Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre.

³⁹See Amedzrator, L., & Aning, K. (2017); Kugbega, S. K., & Aboagye, P. Y. (2021).

⁴⁰Interview in Tamale, 2021

⁴¹See Matveeva, A., Aning, K., & Osei-Kufuor, P. (2020, August 14)

⁴²See Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Nielsen, A. B. (2021).

⁴³Ibid

⁴⁴See Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021).

⁴⁵See Muqthar, M. M. (2021, November 15). Engaging Border Communities in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism. Accra

⁴⁶See Muqthar, M. M. (2021, November 15); Aning, K. E. (2020, November 9). A nascent 'secessionist' challenge for Ghana? domestic and regional implications. DIIS Comment.

⁴⁷See Muqthar, M. M., & Newton, R. (2021).

⁴⁸See Aning, K. E. (2020, November 9). A nascent 'secessionist' challenge for Ghana? domestic and regional implications. DIIS Comment; Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Nielsen, A. B. (2021). West Africa Security Perspectives. Copenhagen: DIIS

⁴⁹Ibid

Enabling factors	Access to radical online communities ⁵⁰	WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram ⁵¹
	Absence of familial support ⁵²	

Source: Authors' Compilation

Vulnerability factors: Adducing evidence

a. Porous borders

Along Ghana's border communities, there are a numerous unapproved borders and entry points which are used for different forms of cross-border activities such as the movement of arms⁵³, human trafficking⁵⁴, fertilizers⁵⁵, cattle⁵⁶, motorbikes⁵⁷ and vehicles⁵⁸. Ghana continues to experience constant movement of different categories of migrants across its borders. First, there are irregular migrants who transit through the country's borders to their destinations in Northern Africa and Europe. Some of the routes that are favoured by these migrants include Cinkassé (a town in Togo which shares borders with Ghana and Burkina Faso), to Kantchari (in Eastern Burkina Faso) to Agadez (Niger) to Libya. Second, undocumented migrants who are fleeing from conflict situations in Sahelian countries like Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and Mali enter and settle in communities while others have a more insecure existence. Some of these migrants move to illegal mining (galamsey) sites in areas such as 'Accra dollar power', Banda Nkwanta and Tinga in the Savannah region. During military operations such as '*Operation Vanguard*', a joint military-police operation to end 'galamsey'⁵⁹, there has

been the seizure and burning of equipment belonging to illegal mining operators; the forced closure of mines without official as well as the arrest of 347 people who were mining illegally⁶⁰. Vanguard was also connected to the identification of potential terrorists coming from across coastal West Africa and the Sahel to make a living mining gold in Ghana (Albrecht, Aubyn, & Edu-Afful, 2021). Residents in these illegal mining sites, including foreigners, some of whom are armed are chased out of the mining sites⁶¹. It is reported that when operations cease, some migrants return to these illegal mining sites and other surrounding areas and use their weapons to attack mobile money (momo) vendors in daylight, collect people's motorbikes and use the motorbikes to facilitate their criminal activities, conduct highway robberies and run back to their home countries (Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and other neighboring countries)⁶². The activities of migrants have raised concerns about the possibility of terrorist networks infiltrating into these artisanal mining sites, buying precious minerals, which are small, high in value and easy to hide, transport and retail them at higher prices in order to finance their operations.

Movement of transhumance occurs along the Northern borders where herdsmen from Sahel states

⁵⁰See Muqthar, M. M. (2021, November 15). Engaging Border Communities in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism. Accra;

(Muqthar, White Paper: Updates on Violent Extremist Threat to Ghana, 2021)

⁵¹(Muqthar, White Paper: Updates on Violent Extremist Threat to Ghana, 2021)

⁵²Ibid

⁵³See Aning, Kwesi. 2019. 'Ghana' in Fiona Mangan and Matthias Nowak, Eds. The West Africa-Sahel connection: mapping cross-border arms trafficking. Briefing Paper, December. Geneva: Small Arms Survey

⁵⁴. A.Tisseron, C.Collin, N. Aladeselu, K. Aning. 2019. SUPPORT TO THE FIGHT AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE STATES OF THE GULF OF GUINEA (Mid-Term Evaluation Report), Paris

⁵⁵ 'Smuggling of fuel, fertilizer from Ghana to Burkina Faso ongoing despite border closure', 23 June 2021. At <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/06/smuggling-of-fuel-fertilizer-from-ghana-to-burkina-faso-ongoing-despite-border-closure-article/> accessed 12 February 2022. According to the reportage, '... According to the Planting for Food and Jobs Secretariat, of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ghana lost a whopping GHS120 million from unaccounted for fertilizer, diversion of coupons and fertilizer smuggling in 2017 and 2018 planting seasons'. There is tangential evidence that the massive amounts of fertilizer smuggled out of Ghana can be a source of critical material for extremists to make explosives. Fertiliser, which is a critical component for the manufacture of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which is the weapon of choice for VEOs are smuggled in sizable quantities to Burkina Faso. Earlier interviews in 2020 at in border towns such as Hamile, Kulungugu and Namori pointed to this fact. See Mateeva, Aning and Kufuor, 2020.

⁵⁶See Abubakari Ahmed. 2021. 'Ranches won't solve farmer-herder conflicts in Ghana if they don't deal with root causes', The Conversation, 3 October

⁵⁷ Interviews between 2020 and 2022

⁵⁸Interview with member of a civil society group in Tamale

⁵⁹a Ghanaian term derived from the phrase 'gather them and sell' which refers to illegal small-scale mining, see Peter Albrecht, Festus Aubyn & Fiifi Edu-Afful. 2021. 'Halt and Vanguard: Two military operations in Ghana and their consequences', DIIS POLICY BRIEF, 10 December

⁶⁰Peter Albrecht, Festus Aubyn & Fiifi Edu-Afful. 2021.

⁶¹. Peter Albrecht, Festus Aubyn & Fiifi Edu-Afful. 2021. 'Halt and Vanguard: Two military operations in Ghana and their consequences', DIIS POLICY BRIEF, 10 December.

⁶². Interview in Tamale, Ghana, 2021



are in search of pasture and water traverse the region through unapproved routes and settle in farming areas in the Upper East and West, Eastern Volta and the Ashanti regions (Aning, Albrecht, & Nielsen, 2021; Kugbega & Aboagye 2021). Some of these migrants, who are Muslims, are known for establishing local Qur'anic memorisation centres (madrasas) which are not regulated by the Ghana Education Service (GES) because they are not registered. Unlike the formalised madrasas that are structured, have a curriculum where the academic progression of pupils are monitored, use English language for teaching and learning; the dominant language used in imparting knowledge in these local madrasas is Arabic. There are concerns that, driven by doctrinal differences, inter and intra-sectional contestations, perception of marginalisation of Muslims by non-Muslims, these local madrasas could become potential breeding grounds for the training and recruitment of members of violent extremist groups. Already, Ghana's national security architecture is cognisant of the potential abuse of religion for radicalising purposes⁶³.

Ghana has emerged as a transit hub for the trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW) to neighboring countries such as Nigeria, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. These arms which are easy to transport are moved through routes such as Agbogbloshie to Kumasi to Tamale to Bole to Bawku before they are transported across the borders to final destinations in neighboring countries. There is a wide circulation of arms in the country because of the 'gun culture' where locally made guns are used in hunting, farming, chieftaincy rites, conflicts, funerals and festivals aids its proliferation and transportation across borders (Sosu, 2011). In the North, in particular, field interviews suggest that these licensed and unlicensed guns are buried in wells or on top of ceilings and at the slightest provocation, they are used to perpetrate violence against other groups or individuals. Ghana has the domestic capacity to produce arms. In all regions in the country, workshops that manufacture farming hard wares also manufacture local arms which are the most lucrative due to its sophistication (Aning, 2005). Because of their 'competitive prices, their effectiveness, and their accessibility, these locally manufactured guns could be a significant source of weaponry' for violent extremist groups when they

gain a foothold in the country (Aning, 2005).

Evidence is also emerging of extremists sourcing materials such as ammonium nitrate/fertilisers in sizable quantities to make improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (Kwarkye, 2020). These materials are sourced from a main sales point at Tudu, Accra and they are smuggled through northern border towns such as Hamile, Kulungugu and Namori to Burkina Faso and other west African countries. In July 2019, Upper West Regional Minister Dr Hafiz Bin-Salih said Ghana had lost US\$12 million to fertilizer smuggling from Ghana to neighboring countries in 2018 (Ghana Business News, 2019).

b. Familial and ethnic ties

Closely related to the porosity of the country's borders are the familial or cultural ties among people who settle across the country's borders. VEOs are known for establishing networks which build on familial ties with the local population in their areas of operation. For example, residents in Nandom, the Dagaabas from the Upper west region, people in Chereponi, the Anufus, Sandema, Wangara, the Sefwis from Western North region, Ewes from the Volta region have ethnic ties with people from neighboring countries. The Fulani, in particular, cut across the Sahel, Maghreb and parts of Ghana. Residents in these border communities move across the borders for funerals and engage in other social activities such as marriage and naming ceremonies while others come in to do simple tasks as fetching water. Concerns have however been raised about the extent to which cross border relationships could be exploited by suspected extremists who cross into the northern territories, to hide, rest or to avoid arrest (Kwarkye 2020; Aning 2020; Matveeva, Aning, & Osei-Kufuor 2021).

c. Poverty and high levels of youth unemployment in the North

Compared to the Southern part of Ghana, the North is characterised in several areas by deep poverty levels due to climate variability, poor conditions for sustainable agricultural production, demographic trends, limited access to basic services, the continuing residual impacts of colonial developmental history

⁶³. 'National Security picks up top sheikh over terrorism suspicions', 2 December 2018 at [National Security picks up top sheikh over terrorism suspicions \(ghanaweb.com\)](#) accessed t 14 February 2022. According to the report, '...



and lack of adequate urban infrastructure (Aning & Abdallah 2013; Matveeva, Aning, & Osei-Kufuor 2020). The socio-economic conditions in the North, particularly, the limited economic opportunities, high youth unemployment, issues of poverty, poor service delivery have the tendency to breed popular disaffection against the state and these resentments could be exploited by violent extremist groups to radicalize young people and attract support from local communities (Matveeva, Aning, & Osei-Kufuor, 2020). Already, there are growing numbers of young people who make up vigilante groups such as: the Invincible Force, the Delta Force, the Task Force, the Pentagon, Al Qaeda, Azoka Boys, Bamba Boys, Bahrijira and Kandahar, Aljazeera, NATO Forces, Al-Qaeda, Kandahar Boys and Delta Forces (Edu-Afful & Allotey-Pappoe 2016; Aning, Albrecht, & Nielsen 2021; Kyei & Berckmoes 2021). These large number of youth groups whose members are largely idle and unemployable are recruited and misused as thugs, personal security guards for politicians during registration exercises, electoral campaigns and on voting days. Vigilante groups tend to unleash fear and terror on political opponents across the country and sometimes they have challenged statutory security institutions with impunity⁶⁴. This creates an environment of lawlessness and insecurity⁶⁵.

These vigilante groups are a ready army that violent extremist groups could form alliances with by providing them with logistics and training and use them to perpetrate attacks on their targets. Information gathered from the field research revealed that terrorist organisations who are able to reach out to these young people through the 'provision of scholarship schemes in the Gulf or North Africa, job opportunities and enticing religious narratives around Salafism online'⁶⁶, could exploit their vulnerability and these could serve as conveyor belts for recruitments,

formation of cells and attacks in the country.⁶⁷

d. Growing sense of exclusion and the urge for secessionism

Ghana's increasing population growth; competition for increasingly scarce natural resources; land tenure insecurity; and the marginalization of certain ethnic groups, have become key conflict drivers (Amedzrator & Aning 2017; Aning, Albrecht, & Nielsen 2021). The Konkombas, situated mostly in Ghana's Northern Region in the area of the Oti River⁶⁸ is one of the ethnic groups that deems themselves to be marginalized in the North due to their limited political power⁶⁹ and land rights⁷⁰ because they are referred to as settler groups. However, there is a change as consciousness about their numbers, a reinterpretation of their history generates tensions as it challenges pre-existing hierarchical structures. Disputes over land ownership and land control have led to violent clashes between the Konkombas and other ethnic groups such as the Bimobas⁷¹, Dagombas⁷², Nanumbas⁷³, Chokosis⁷⁴, Fulanis⁷⁵, Gonjas and Nawuris (Tsikata & Seini 2004; Sulemana 2009). Another group that is considered to be marginalized are the Fulani. Their status as seasonal migrants and the destruction of crops have created a strained relationship with the communities in which they settle sometimes leading to violent clashes⁷⁶. The difficulty in addressing the farmer herder conflicts stems from the fact that: (a) business elites, in chiefs, politicians, custom, immigration and military officers own most of the cattle, (b) ECOWAS protocol on transhumance allows free movement but has no proper mechanism to ensure minimal destruction⁷⁷, (c) policies to address the conflicts are contradictory and incoherent (Bukari 2017; Penu 2021), (d) nomadic herders are denied the right to citizenship after residing in the country for many

⁶⁴Interview with head of a civil society group in Tamale, Ghana

⁶⁵ 'JHS graduate dies from stray bullet wounds sustained from Lamashegu clashes', at <https://www.gbcghanaonline.com/news/crime/jhs-graduate-dies-from-stray-bullet-wounds-sustained-from-lamashegu-in-clashes/2022/> 14 February 2022 accessed on 15 Feb 2022

⁶⁶See Muqthar & Newton 2021.

⁶⁷Interview with CSO based in Accra

⁶⁸See Minority Rights Group International. (2020). World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Ghana. Retrieved from Minority Rights: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/konkomba/>

⁶⁹They are not represented in the National House of Chiefs. See Minority Rights Group International. (2020). World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Ghana. Retrieved from Minority Rights: <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/konkomba/>

⁷⁰They are regarded as landless subjects. See Asante, R., & E.Gyimah-Boadi. (2004). Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public in Ghana. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

⁷¹ <https://www.myjoyonline.com/two-dead-in-konkomba-bimoba-clashes/>

⁷²<https://www.modernghana.com/news/768384/konkomba-dagomba-clashes-expert-recommends-relocation-of-re.html>

⁷³ Ghana: Conflict between the Konkomba and Nanumba tribes and the government response to the conflict (1994-September 2000) at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be33c.html>

⁷⁴<https://dailyguidenetwork.com/more-arrests-in-konkomba-chokosis-clashes/>

⁷⁵<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/One-hacked-houses-burnt-in-Konkomba-Fulani-clashes-640411>

⁷⁶See Aning, K., Albrecht, P., & Nielsen, A. B. (2021). West Africa Security Perspectives. Copenhagen: DIIS.

⁷⁷Ibid

years and their perception as strangers affects their access and rights to land even though they may have permanent residence status (Olaniyan, Francis, & Uzodike 2015; Bukari 2017; Setrana 2021), and (e) the perceived lack of interest by the state in protecting the rights of herders (Setrana, 2021). An isolated case of a pre-recorded video by Abu Dujana, a Ghanaian suicide bomber (from Karaga, a town in the Northern Region of Ghana) who detonated a suicide car bomb at a French military camp in Gossi, central Mali, under the directions of JNIM has raised disturbing questions (Muqthar & Newton, 2021). In the video which was meant to bid his family farewell, it is reported that Abu Dujana called on Ghanaian youth, especially those from the Fulani ethnic group to rise up against the state in order to express their grievances.

In parts of the Volta Region and in areas that share borders with Togo, secessionist movements have since the 1970s made demands for the independence of Western Togoland (an area covering parts of the Volta Region, the Oti Region, parts of Northern, North East and Upper East Regions). These demands for secession resurfaced in 2017 and 2020 respectively. In September 2020, the Western Togoland Restoration Front (WTRF), one of several groups agitating for Western Togoland's independence, staged spontaneous, well-coordinated and synchronized attacks in various parts of Ghana's Volta region (Aning, 2020). Although these secessionist groups appear to have weak local support among the areas they cover, the underlying issues of marginalization of the Volta and North regions resonate with a majority of the people in the area.

The rise of the secessionist movements in the Volta Region in particular raises several questions. Why have these groups become active since 2017? To what extent could collective grievances contribute to the emergence or support for violent extremism? What measures are being taken to address grievances in order to prevent these groups from becoming susceptible to exploitation from violent extremist groups.

e. Doctrinal and interpretational differences: potential sources of Islamic radicalization and violent extremism?

In Ghana, Islam consists of two main classical sunni groups known as Al-Tijaniyya and Ahlus Suna Wljama'a and other groups such as the Ahmadiyya Movement, the Shiite and the migratory group known as Jama'at Tabligh. There are significant theological differences between the Al-Tijaniyya⁷⁸: which is the more traditional or mainstream Muslim group with moderate doctrinal viewpoints with regard to other religions and cultural groups enabling them to function with relative ease within a non-Muslim and pluralistic society such as Ghana, and the Ahlus Suna Wljama'a⁷⁹ which is the more radical group. While both groups derive their sources from the Qur'an and the Sunna, the latter places great emphasis on the strict teachings and practices of the Prophet in accordance with the wahhābīya doctrine. And due to its radical preaching methodologies, it is largely associated with radicalization and violent extremism in Ghana. Attempts by the Al Sunna group⁸⁰ in particular to condemn the ideologies of the Al-Tijaniyya group has led to violent confrontations and attacks in the past in some parts of the country including Tamale, Techiman, Atebubu, Ejura, Asokore and Kumasi. In recent times, these tensions are more pronounced in Tamale and particularly manifest from the month of Ramadan to the month of the Hajj⁸¹ where verbal abuses on radio and in public places have become annual rituals sometimes requiring intervention from the police. Although these inter-sect differences and contestations exist, what is more worrying is the intensification of intra-sect differences that have sometimes erupted into violent clashes. An example relates to clashes between the Ambariyya and Masjidul Bayan rival Sunni Islamic factions in Tamale in February 2018 at the Regional Police Headquarters over an attack on the Masjidul Bayan sect' mosque by the Ambariyya faction (Acheampong, 2018).

The current wave of radicalization probably emerged after 9/11 attacks and the subsequent global war on terror that targeted terrorist groups and governments that supposedly support them. In some sections of the Muslim world, the war on terror is perceived as a war on Islam and this has spurred support, especially among the youth, for the cause that the terrorists claim to represent. This constituency of Muslims find some

⁷⁸In Ghana, this group is led by Sheikh Usmanu Nuhu Sharubtu, who is also the National Chief Imam

⁷⁹Started by a group of Ghanaian Muslim scholars who came into contact with the Arab/Muslim world. See Samwini, N. I. (2014). Religious Toleration as a key factor for Social Stability in Plural Ghana. *Developing Country Studies*, 4(12). Retrieved February 10, 2022, from <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/DCS/article/viewFile/13508/13820>

⁸⁰Its clerics are mostly trained in Middle East countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya and the group receives financial support largely from Saudi Arabia. Interview with Islamic scholar in Tamale.

⁸¹There are no fixed dates for these ceremonies because they are moveable dates. The dates for their observation are provided by the Office of the Chief Imam in the course of the year. See Ministry of Information, statutory public holidays and commemorative days in the republic of Ghana for the year 2022.

sort of justification in the emergence of extremist or terrorist groups, holding a popular perception that Islam is under siege supposedly by Western countries. In West Africa, mobilization for the cause of Islam has been marked by the need to establish sharia across the region, joining extremist groups, fighting in the cause of Allah, and 'dying in defence of Islam' through a warped interpretation of Jihad. In Ghana, the social media and online platforms have been used by tertiary and second cycle institutions as well as vulnerable Islamic communities as entry points for recruitment and training. WACCE has indicated that since 2015, some 12 young people have been radicalized online and joined terrorist groups presumably ISIS and Boko Haram. The repercussion of this popular perception of the marginalization of Muslims by non-Muslims which have been manifest lately in demonstrations in Accra, Tamale, Kumasi over acts of discrimination in public schools against Muslim girls for wearing the 'hijab'. As these grievances exist, question which arises is, will these issues attract support from terrorist groups?

Resilience factors

a. Decentralized local governance law

Ghana's local governance structure comprises of the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) which serves as the coordinating body; the Metropolitan or Municipal or District Assemblies (MMDAs) and the Sub- district structures: Sub metropolitan, Urban, Town, Area and Zonal Councils and Unit committees. Because the district assemblies (a) 'in co-operation with the appropriate national and local security agencies, be responsible for the maintenance of security and public safety in the district';⁸² and (b) are responsible for 'meet[ing] the electorate before each meeting of the District Assembly;' they are able to provide early warning on security threats in the local areas. Specifically, the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act 526 and the new revision, Act 1030 makes provision for the establishment of regional and district security councils. The functions of the District Security Councils (DISECs) in particular include: (a) providing early warning signals to the Government of the existence or likelihood of a security threat to the district, the country or the Government; (b) taking appropriate measures, in consultation with the Council, to ensure peace in conflict areas in the region; (c) taking measures to ensure peace building in, and the unity and

stability of, the region; (d) taking immediate steps to ensure law and order and assist the affected population in the event of an emergency or a disaster in the region; and (e) performing the functions of the Council assigned to that regional security council by the Council. At the community level, there are other arrangements such as community policing which seeks to involve the local communities in providing the required intelligence and evidence to the law enforcement agencies⁸³

Besides, in their respective areas of jurisdiction, district assemblies: (a) promote local economic development; (b) are responsible for the overall development of the district; (c) formulate and execute plans, programmes and strategies for the effective mobilization of the resources necessary for the overall development of the district; and (d) promote and support productive activity and social development in the district and remove any obstacles to initiative and development⁸⁴; they are able to initiate development projects that can address human security challenges at the level of the district assemblies.

b. The Role of Civil Society

Ghana has an active civil society which cuts across all sectors in ensuring equitable development, building on stable democracy, and a vibrant media landscape which allows people to freely express their grievances thereby helping to deal with issues in a non-violent manner. The media, for instance, has been instrumental in safeguarding Ghana's democratic principles by performing its watchdog and monitoring functions, holding government and public office holders accountable and raising issues that are relevant to peace and security (Issifu, 2017). The efforts of CSOs are seen as partnering the government sector to promote economic development, peace and stability. As partners, CSOs such as the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) and WANEP have played crucial roles in sustaining political stability and building resilience in the country. At the grassroots, women's and youth groups, traditional and religious leaders, with integrity respected for their qualities who often act as first respondents to evolving tensions

⁸²Republic of Ghana, Local government Act 2016 (Act 936)

⁸³Republic of Ghana, National Security Strategy (2020), p.34

⁸⁴Ibid

(Matveeva, Aning, & Osei-Kufuor, 2020). Their existence forms a fundamental element of security and justice for people, particularly those in rural communities where state institutions are often unable to reach (Annan, 2013). Women in particular have played important roles as peace actors at the grassroots. A case in point is that of the women's groups which organized for peace in the Nkonya / Alavanyo conflict in Ghana. At a point during the mediation process, when it was apparent from the deadlock at the negotiations that no meaningful agreements would be reached in order to end hostilities, it took the intervention of women groups to create space for negotiations to continue.

However, in recent times, the media and some CSOs have come under attacks due to their watchdog roles, which potentially can jeopardize their resilience through the culture of silence.

c. National Security Architecture

Ghana has a National Security Council (NSC) that is chaired by the President. Other members of the council include: the Vice-President; (c) the Ministers holding the portfolios of foreign affairs, defence, interior and finance and such other Ministers as the President may determine; (d) the Chief of Defence Staff and two other members of the Armed Forces; (e) the Inspector-General of Police, the Commissioner of Police responsible for the Criminal Investigation Department and one other member of the Police Service; (f) the Director-General of the Prisons Service; (g) the Director of External Intelligence; (h) the Director of Internal Intelligence; (i) the Director of Military Intelligence; (j) the Commissioner of Customs, Excise and Preventive Service; and (k) three persons appointed by the President.

The functions of the Council, in accordance with article 84 of the Constitution, include (a) considering and taking appropriate measures to safeguard the internal and external security of Ghana; (b) ensuring the collection of information relating to the security of Ghana and the integration of the domestic and

foreign policies relating to the security of Ghana so as to enable the security services and any other departments and agencies of the Government to co-operate more effectively in matters relating to national security; assessing and appraising the objectives, commitments and risks of Ghana in relation to the actual and potential military power in the interest of national security; and (d) taking appropriate measures regarding the consideration of policies on matters of common interest to the departments and agencies of the Government concerned with national security⁸⁵. The Security and Intelligence Services Act 1030 also empowers subsidiary security councils such as the Regional (REGSEC); Municipal (MUSEC) and District (DISEC) to provide early warning signals to the Government of the existence or likelihood of a security threat and take appropriate measures, in consultation with the NSC, to ensure peace, stability, law and order and assist affected population in the event of an emergency or a disaster in at the local level⁸⁶. The various functions of the NSC and its subsidiary institutions are to 'forestall surprise'⁸⁷ and prevent the outbreak and escalation of violence. Even though its functions are clearly spelt out in the NSS, other areas of concern exist. These relates to: (a) how the NSC works, both its nature – whether it is an implementing or coordinating agency – and the continued lack of transparency over any Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); (b) influence of political parties within the bureaucracy; and (c) questions over the NSC's supporting systems (Aning & Salihu, 2022).

d. National Peace Architecture

Established by Act 818 of Parliament, the National Peace Council is the apex body responsible for facilitating dialogue to avert, and prevent an escalation of a conflict situation with the potential of widespread violence from local to national levels⁸⁸. The National Peace Council has a governing board which is made of thirteen eminent personalities including representatives from religious bodies, national house of chiefs and other identifiable groups which has made major contributions to the stability of the nation. As espoused in the NSS, the priority areas for the NPC include: (a)Compilation of

⁸⁵Republic of Ghana, Security and Intelligence Services (2020), Act 1030

⁸⁶Ibid

⁸⁷Republic of Ghana, National Security Strategy (2020)

⁸⁸Ibid

⁸⁹Republic of Ghana, National Security Strategy (2020)

a list and details of disputes and conflicts that are likely to erupt into violence to include community mediators, gate keepers, influencers and facilitators; (b) Establishment of a database and creation of a network of influential stakeholders in conflict prevention and peacebuilding; (c) Promotion of public awareness of the values of mutual trust, tolerance, confidence building, negotiation, mediation, dialogue, reconciliation with emphasis on indigenous mechanisms for peace building and considering our cultural diversity, and encourage their use; (d) Creation and dissemination of innovative context specific models for conflict prevention, management, resolution, and peacebuilding; (e) Facilitation of the implementation of agreements and resolutions reached between parties in conflict and same registered in the courts in accordance with Ghana's Alternate Dispute Resolution requirements.

As part of the national peace architecture, the NPC has regional and district peace councils across whose principal functions involve public education, sensitization and raising awareness of conflicts indicators and peacebuilding at the regional and local levels⁹⁰. A key component of the National peace council are religious leaders whose ability to preach peace, counselling sessions and dialogue platforms established across the country help to maintain inter-faith harmony (Matveeva, Aning, & Osei-Kufuor, 2020). In performing its roles of prevention and resolution of conflict in conflicts and disputes and for peace building in identified potential conflict areas in the country⁹⁰, the NPC collaborates with REGSECs, METROSECs, MUSECs, DISECs and the respective Regional House of Chiefs. In this respect, security agencies engage the national and regional house of chiefs based on intelligence on impending security threats in order to harness their efforts in reducing tensions. The research gathered that in the North, representatives of National Peace Council are engaged when there are intercommunal clashes between Muslim sects in order to prevent tensions from erupting into violent conflict. In other instances, however, in some districts, officers of the NPC are perceived to be aligning to one party or other, are chased out during mediation thus undermining their credibility.

Response Mechanisms

Ghana has several frameworks and legislations such as the National Framework for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Ghana (NAFPCVET) which makes provision for a multifaceted approach to confronting the threats from violent extremist groups such as education, sensitization, addressing poverty, involving the media, and CSOs. However, its current response initiatives are military oriented. This section discusses the country's involvement in three interventions, namely: (a) the Accra Initiative; (b) Operation Conquered Fist, (c) Operation Eagle Claw; and (d) the National Border Fusion Centre and their implications on the security situation in the country.

a.The Accra Initiative

With a permanent secretariat in Accra, the Accra Initiative was established in September 2017 with the aim of mobilizing member to jointly initiate mechanisms to prevent the activities by terrorists and other violent militant groups from operating within their territories or using them as launching areas to attack others⁹¹. Comprising seven west African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Ghana, Mali and Niger, the areas of cooperation include: (a) Capacity-building in the area of information and communication technologies and sharing of information on measures to enhance cyber security, countering cyberterrorism and combatting cybercrime, with particular emphasis on advanced electronic techniques for monitoring, intercepting and detecting information, as well as the security and protection of computer data systems and networks⁹²; (b) information and intelligence sharing; and (c) conducting joint cross-border military operations to sustain border security (Kwarkye, Abatan, & Matongbada, 2019).

As a member of the Initiative, Ghana has, since 2018, collaborated with neighboring states to execute a number of military operations which have been code-named 'Koudanlgou'. These joint operations have led to the arrest of some suspected extremists, the seizure of weapons, ammunition, vehicles, drugs and large amounts of material to make improvised bombs (Reuters 2021, Aning K. 2020). In spite

⁹⁰Ibid

⁹¹Ibid

⁹²Republic of Ghana, National Security Strategy (2020)

of the successes, some challenges remain. The main challenge relates to the fact that the military operations are ad hoc, limited in duration (four-day deployments) and geographic reach and this leaves openings for suspected criminals and extremists for criminals to maneuver and hide in neighboring countries and regroup when operations cease (Kwarkye, Abatan, & Matongbada, 2019)

b. Operation Conquered Fists

Part of national efforts to prevent suspected extremists from entering Ghana. These operations have been carried out by the Ghana Immigration Service, the military, the Airforce, Ghana Revenue Authority and the Ghana Police specifically in the border areas in the Northern part of the country. Some of the areas that are covered include Bongo, Mognori, Pusiga, Nankpanduri, Widnaba, Bawku, Kulungugu, Pusiga. Hamile, Bole, chereponi, Wa, Nadowli and other officially demarcated borders and unapproved borders. Some of the activities undertaken by troops include day patrols along vulnerable areas of borders; night patrols along vulnerable areas of borders; Night and day static patrols; Day and night foot patrols; Helicopter patrols; Sensitization operations as well as Information gathering. Operation Conquered Fists have 'regularised standard operating procedures (SOPs) and contingency plans to heighten preparedness for any contingencies' (Aning, 2020).

Successes

In June 2019, a Burkinabe by name Tigan Dun Bernadin was arrested by Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) at Hamile border with a locally manufactured pistol with two AA cart while an imposter by name Ahmed Tijani Abubakari who claimed to be an Army officer of the rank of Lieutenant was arrested by the Military police team in Tumu. In that same month, a 51-year-old Burkinabe by name Bilgo Tibilah Desire was arrested by Hamile Catholic Church members with a pistol and ammunition. Other arrests also took place in November 2019 when operation Conquered Fist in collaboration with the elders of the Tumu Kuro arrested 10 persons reported to be Western

Togoland secessionists who were at the Palace to seek support.

In January 2020, operation Conquered Fist collaborated with Operation Vanguard personnel in Wa to conduct swoops operations at certain illegal mining sites in Wa East and Wa West. This led to the arrest of a number of Burkinabes. Before this 2020 joint operation, however, patrols by Operation Conquered Fist in December 2019 revealed that illegal miners now use industrial grade explosives for mining. This led to the seizure of large quantities of cyanide. Similarly, in February 2020 static patrols by personnel of operation Conquered Fist at an unapproved route known as Mountain back along Hamile border chased two Burkinabes on a motor bike using the unapproved route. When they were intercepted, it was discovered that the two persons were carrying two parcels of Riodin high explosive bars. The substance is used as shock energy nitroglycerin for blasting in quarries, construction tunneling. This has raised concerns about the potential damage these explosives can cause when they get into the hands of suspected extremists⁹³.

Challenges of Operation Conquered Fist

The first has to do with the lack of trust between members of the local communities and the personnel of the Operation which has resulted in the unwillingness of locals to provide valuable information.

Secondly, the bad nature of roads in the areas of operation and in the northern Sector in particular has led to the rapid wear and tear of vehicles and left vast areas inaccessible by land.

Third, is the lack of equipment such as binoculars and night vision equipment; surveillance equipment such as drones and close circuit cameras; motor bikes and all-terrain vehicles which restrict the geographic reach of operations. Another challenge has to do with the use of the right tools and equipment for the right job. In some instances, pickups have been used in terrains that are not motorable when

⁹³Interview with the head of a civil society group in Tamale

motorbikes could have been more appropriate in unapproved routes and difficult to access terrains. The criminals are able to maneuver and flee because they know these unapproved routes more than the state agencies.

Fourth, the lack of a base station at the Joint Operations Centre and lack of shelter for static persons at unapproved routes could contribute to the lack of effectiveness of personnel in those areas

c. Operation Eagle Claw

Operation Eagle Claw is a joint military operation by the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), the Ghana Police Service (GPS), the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) that was undertaken in 2020 at some border towns along the Ghana-Togo and Ghana-Burkina Faso borders in the Upper East and Upper West regions respectively. It 'was an anti-terrorism operation aimed at improving training and testing the skills of troops in air mobile operations' and their preparedness to confront the threats from violent extremist groups (Aning, 2020). These joint operations have fostered some level of cooperation among security agencies, enhanced information and intelligence sharing and led to the arrest of suspected extremists.

Challenges of Operation Eagle Claw

The operations only temporarily halt terror groups' activities, and don't ensure continuity. Suspected extremist groups hiding in some areas could flee to other areas during the operation and move back when the operation ends.

The disproportionate focus on military measures to the seeming neglect of non-military measures such as development initiatives and these could produce counterproductive outcomes could lead to radicalizing young people who are already frustrated with their economic conditions.

The non - involvement of civil society alongside these military operations tends to draw public distrust and suspicions about the intentions behind these military operations

d. National Border Fusion Centre

The National Border Fusion Centre was officially inaugurated in January 2020 under the Security Governance Initiative. The Centre brings together several security agencies notably the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI), the Research Department, Ghana Immigration Service, Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority, National Control Board, Ghana Police Service, and other agencies in order to facilitate and share information and intelligence in a timely manner (Nettey, 2020). It is expected that the Centre will provide a platform for coordination among the security agencies that will help to fight crime and drug trafficking, illegal migration, terrorism, piracy and many other transnational crimes (Nettey, 2020). The Centre will also be dedicated to synchronizing data for analysis and decision-making that will contribute to improving security at the borders and providing the judiciary with valuable information that will help it to prosecute cross-border crimes.

Conclusion

Even though Ghana has not yet experienced any violent attacks from violent extremist groups, there are indications, first, from the activities of suspected extremists who use various communities as their safe havens where they recuperate, hide from arrest, source their logistics and probably recruit that Ghana is a potential target. In different parts of country, there are governance related issues that serve as drivers of radicalization which could be exploited by violent extremist groups to garner support for their activities. In as much as there are risk factors, the country has also put in place some structures such as the National Security and Peace Architecture which have contributed to reducing tensions and preventing conflicts from escalating into crisis situations. However, the current response from the state to the activities of suspect extremists has been military heavy.

Recommendations

a. Preparedness of state security institutions

Military operations are somewhat effective in warding off criminal elements or suspected extremists from the northern border communities. What remains to be seen however is the capacity and capability of the state security agencies to confront potential threats from violent extremist groups. What is the capacity of security agencies in terms of their understanding of the nature of the threat from violent extremist groups and do these agencies have the tools and equipment to enforce the laws and protect the population?

b. Surveillance

Concerns have been raised about the movement of long haulage of vehicles from Burkina Faso to and from Ghana. These vehicles pass through security checkpoints and sometimes they are not checked because of escorts in front of the vehicles. How many of our checkpoints have tracers or scanners Detective gadgets that can track suspicious characters and items? Could some of these vehicles be used to traffic guns and other illicit goods. Networks of extremist organizations could extend to these ports for them to make money from these illicit activities and protect their activities. Research has also revealed that security personnel at the check point sometimes pay less attention to people who drive luxurious cars, they are not thoroughly scrutinized to see if they have correct documents.

c. Interagency collaboration

How well networked is the Intelligence unit of the various state security agencies? What is the level of interagency collaboration with respect to intelligence sharing? When there is an incident what is level of information flow to from one agency to the other. There needs to be capacity building in terms of communicating an alert to the citizenry for instance. There have been occasions when an announcement is made about an impending attack from violent extremist groups and the next moment another announcement is made to that earlier one was a mistake? These extremist organizations understand what is happening in the ranks of the state security

agencies and would strategize to take advantage of the loopholes. Resources should be dedicated to strengthening intelligence. Intelligence sharing with neighboring states should also be enhanced so that even when criminals and suspected extremists are successful in crossing the border they can be picked up.

d. Equity in the distribution of national resources

Equity in the distribution of national resources to constituencies so that young people can sustain themselves in any part of the country by providing technical and vocational training. Some of these young people who migrate to major cities return home as hardened criminals and others with unplanned pregnancy. Some 50% of farmers in the North in particular depend on rain-fed agriculture so when there is crop failure, they have to go for loans and financial support from others. Sometimes the yields are less than the support they received and it becomes difficult to repay the loan. Some farmers have to depend on man-made dams, irrigation farming which are expensive. These challenges could feed into grievances that are exploited by violent extremist groups.

e. Sensitization and awareness creation in local communities on the activities of violent extremist groups

NCCE needs to be resourced so that it can strengthen civic engagement initiatives in the communities. Religious leaders and media should also be engaged to sensitize communities on the dynamics of the activities of violent extremist groups and how to need for religious tolerance. People need to understand the consequences of supporting violent extremist groups.

f. Collaboration between Regsecs, Disecs and regional peace councils

There should also be greater collaboration between the Regsec, Disec and the regional peace councils in order to deal with threats from violent extremist groups.

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