GHANA’S RESPONSE TO THE THREAT OF TERRORISM REQUIRES ENHANCED INTEROPERABILITY

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**Executive summary**

Effective and sustainable responses to the threat of terrorism are dependent on comprehensive, multi-dimensional approaches with links between the different domains of violence and building on principles of multi-agency collaboration. In Ghana, the recently developed national framework for the prevention and countering of violent extremism and terrorism reflects these approaches and principles. In practice, however, responses to terrorism are shaped by a tendency to operate in silos and by politicization of intelligence which hinders collaboration and information sharing.

As a stable country in an otherwise unstable region that has become a new frontier for global terrorism, Ghana’s ability to prevent and preempt radicalization and violent extremism is critical for both the national and the regional security. Within the framework of a research program on ‘the Domestic Security Implications of UN peacekeeping (D-SIP)’, this brief stresses the urgent significance of enhancing Ghana’s response to the threat of terrorism. Based on interviews conducted with security officials and on

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1) D-SIP is a five-year research program that explores linkages between UN peacekeeping, domestic security provision and drivers of stability in Ghana. See: https://www.diis.dk/node/14438

**Recommendations:**

- Ghana’s Ministry of National Security and the country’s law enforcement and security agencies should work actively to ensure the translation of the national counterterrorism policy framework into operational practice and to strengthen inter-agency collaboration through joint exercises and training.
- Ghana’s police and intelligence agencies and departments should strengthen the basis for timely, relevant, and actionable intelligence by enhancing information sharing at both the horizontal and the vertical level and by preventing the politicization of intelligence.
- Ghana Police Service should prioritize resources for preventive efforts, including communitive outreach, and advance capacities within the field of intelligence-led policing.
- There should be increased coherence within the legal framework that is tackling counterterrorism laws in Ghana, and the laws should be integrated and progressive.
- Security force assistance, delivered by foreign nation security partners, should be coordinated to avoid duplication, focused on supporting sustainable inter-agency collaboration across the crime-terror nexus, and tailored to the operational needs of current preventive efforts.
ethnographic data collection on counterterror policing, it is proposed that the process of operationalizing counterterror policy into practice should focus on improving inter-agency interoperability, particularly through joint training, and by strengthening mechanisms and motivations for intelligence sharing as a basis for intelligence-led policing.

**The emerging threat of terrorism in West Africa**

Within the last decade, the growing threat and the expansion of terrorism and violent extremist acts in West Africa have created an oasis of insecurity and uncertainty. The drivers of these threats or vulnerabilities are both internal and external.

Externally, the emergence of Salafist-jihadist groups such as Boko Haram, Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Ansarul Islam continue to threaten the stability of the countries within the sub-region. In spite of national and international military operations combating such threats, the recent activities of these groups have expanded beyond the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin region to include countries within the coastal areas along the Gulf of Guinea. Although Ghana has not experienced any veritable terrorist attack, the country’s close proximity to unstable neighboring countries – particularly Burkina Faso where JNIM and Ansarul Islam militants are operating – makes it vulnerable to attacks.

Ghana is further susceptible to attacks due to a number of internal conditions, such as the high influx of illegal migrants from neighboring countries affected by terrorism, weak border control systems, the illicit flow, proliferation, stockpiling, and circulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), drug trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking, cybercrime and money laundering, and the general absence of the state in the border communities. Although Ghana is largely peaceful and democratically stable, internal security dynamics are shaped by sporadic conflicts around chieftaincy, land rights, intra-religious and inter-ethnic conflicts, and other resource-driven communitarian clashes within various communities and settlements. Demographic pressures and the rapidly growing, unemployed youth population represent a series of economic, social and, by extension, political problems that are currently confronting the country. Besides, a number of factors have created a heightened atmosphere of uncertainty and exacerbated the vulnerability of the internal security system. These factors include the legacy of past chieftaincy and ethnic conflict, the perennial inter-communal violence, the increase in violent crimes, including armed robbery, contract killings, kidnapping and vigilante activities, and the spate of illegal mining activities to support terrorist and extremist activities in some neighboring countries. These vulnerabilities have the potential of leading to grievances that could create an enabling environment that terrorist networks can exploit to their advantage.

**Ghana’s National Counterterrorism Framework**

The desire and effort to provide Ghana with a comprehensive policy framework for preventing and combating future terrorism acts was supported by the initial drafting of the National Counterterrorism Framework in 2016. The process was spearheaded by the newly created Ministry of National Security (MNS) which has the responsibility of harmonizing and ensuring cooperation and collaboration among security forces operating within the country – the Bureau of National Intelligence, the Research Department, the Ghana Armed Forces, the Police Service, and other

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2) Fieldwork was conducted in January and October 2018 and in July and August 2019, focusing mainly on the Counter-Terrorist Unit of the Ghana Police Service, but also involving interviews with counterterror spokesmen in the Ministry of National Security, Defence Intelligence, Ghana Immigration Service and Custom Division, and the 64th regiment of the Ghana Armed Forces.

3) The MNS was previously the National Security Secretariat and currently serves as the main advisor to the president on national security issues.
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government agencies. With the support of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, a ‘crack team’ of security agencies in Ghana assembled to chart a new path for dealing with the existential threat of terrorism to Ghana. This was done with support from civil society organizations and other bilateral arrangements with some foreign countries, particularly the British government.

The framework mainly seeks to promote inter-agency counterterrorism efforts, to establish the responsibilities of the different stakeholders, and to define their specific functions, including the possibility for law enforcement agencies to detain and prosecute individuals suspected of terrorism. Significantly, this document provides the MNS with the sole responsibility of aligning the national counterterrorism efforts between security and law enforcement agencies, the justice sector, Ministry of Education, National Commission of Civic Education, civil society, and traditional and religious/faith groups, thus ensuring that Ghana’s counterterrorism framework is aligned with international counter-terrorism legal instruments and best practices. The MNS has institutionalized a desk on counterterrorism within the ministry structure to coordinate and implement the national counterterrorism strategy and superintend the security and intelligence operations in the country.

Ghana’s national framework for the prevention and countering of violent extremism and terrorism is developed around four main pillars, each with specific short, medium to long-term objectives. The four mutually reinforcing pillars are:

- **Prevent**: Measures to prevent terrorist attacks by addressing the root causes, minimizing vulnerability and building resilience.

- **Preempt**: Activities to detect and deter a terrorist threat.

- **Protect**: Measures to protect vulnerable infrastructures and spaces.

- **Respond**: Activities to mitigate impact and recover from terrorist incidents.

Discrepancies between strategic policy and operational practice

At the heart of Ghana’s counterterrorism policy is a well-coordinated inter-agency collaboration which encourages the timely sharing of information and intelligence, operational coordination, and joint strategy formulation. Many security watchers have, however, argued that inter-agency tensions hinder the smooth operationalization of policy. Furthermore, inter-agency coordination is challenged by the lack of links between the myriad of laws concerning terrorism. Combined with these tensions, the absence of an unambiguous legal framework presents a significant challenge to processes of policy implementation.

**Turf Wars and Tendency to Operate in Silos**

Law enforcement and security agencies involved in the implementation of the counterterrorism framework share a common motivation to enhance their response to the threat of terrorism through inter-agency collaboration. Yet, in a context where counterterrorism has only recently emerged as a field of shared responsibility among these agencies, a number of discrepancies and unclarities shape the process of implementation and collaboration.

At a fundamental level, different organizational cultures, capacities, and mindsets create tension between kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to the threat of terrorism. While the national framework

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4) Although MNS does not in principle have statutory executive functions in the control and administration of the security agencies in the country, it does have some advisory roles.


emphasizes the significance of an all-inclusive approach that involves both military and non-military strategies, law enforcement officers within the police, customs, and immigration have expressed concern over the tendency to prioritize reactive responses over proactive prevention. This prioritization is for instance reflected in recent measures to beef up security through joint patrol activities at the northern borders (Operation Conquest Fist) and in the emphasis on neutralizing terrorists as part of crisis management exercises (for instance Exercise Home Shield). In a context where resources allocated for counterterrorism are limited, such prioritization is fueling competition and turf wars among the agencies. In everyday practices of policing and security provision, these turf wars are reflected in the tendency to operate in silos and compete over resources that can benefit the individual unit rather than inter-agency collaboration. At the same time, the lack of a clear command and control agreement is adding to the frictions. While the police and, in particular, the newly formed Counter Terrorist Unit (CTU) have been mandated the operational response to terrorism, competing interpretations of role divisions and lack of confidence in other agencies’ professional capabilities pose a challenge to integration and a unified response.

**Politics of Intelligence**

Intelligence is key to preemptive measures aimed at detecting individuals, networks, and organizations that may pose a terrorist threat. Yet, for intelligence to be effective, it needs to timely, actionable, and based on a sound analytical assessment. Furthermore, and particularly in the context of counterterrorism inter-agency collaboration, intelligence needs to be shared.\(^7\)

A number of obstacles linked to politicization and lack of efficient mechanisms for intelligence fusion hinder intelligence-supported measures. In terms of collection, intelligence officers on the ground are navigating in a context where senior authorities and political big men are closely monitoring the processes of criminal investigation. Here, intelligence officers have noted that intelligence collection is often focused on cases and suspects linked to the political opposition. In terms of analysis and intel fusion, lack of trust between intelligence analysts make them reluctant to share information. If information is not handled carefully, sources may not be protected, covers may be blown, and planned operations may not be carried out. As a result, analysts are sometimes stuck with intelligence that cannot be acted upon. Furthermore, inter-agency collaboration is hindered by diverging modi operandi and by bureaucratic mechanisms that make the different agencies hold on to the information during an extended period of time before the request for information is processed.

**Strengthening collaboration, prevention and intelligence-led policing**

The translation of inter-agency counterterror policy into operational practice is not a straightforward process. It requires transparency, trust, and a high degree of institutional and individual dedication to move from bureaucratic coordination to actual collaboration around joint actions and coherent response mechanisms. In Ghana, this process is currently in its initial phase. Because counterterrorism has only recently emerged as a joint concern and responsibility, implicated stakeholders still need to develop their capacities and target their resources within this field.

In this context, a number of external military and security agencies – mainly from Britain, United States, France, and Israel – have delivered periodic training based on their own counterterror doctrines and experiences. To a large extent, this training has been aimed at boosting technical capabilities and advancing terrorist attack response mechanism. Despite a tendency towards duplication and the lack of sustainable impact, the training has generally been positively received. It is, however, important to consider how measures and activities aimed at preventing, preempting, protecting, and responding can most effectively be balanced and directed to

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address vulnerabilities to threats of domestic and transnational terrorism.

While the current emphasis on counterterrorism is important, it is noteworthy that Ghana has not been exposed to any acts of terror on home soil. In the light of the current threat status, it is critical to build resilience to terrorism by strengthening and allocating resources for preventive efforts, including the countering of violent extremism. Community outreach and proactive, intelligence-based policing is key to these preventive efforts. Yet, it is dependent not only on skilled intelligence analysts, but also on organizational structures that support intelligence sharing and the use of intelligence in operational planning and decision-making. Most significantly, interoperability must be enhanced. Both at the intra-agency and inter-agency levels, the ability to collaborate and operate in synergy will determine Ghana’s future ability to respond to the emerging threat of terrorism.