



Conflict Prevention, Climate Change, and Why Ghana Matters Now

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THE ISSUE

- **Underlying structural, economic, and security-related challenges in Ghana** mean that its status as a paragon of stability in a turbulent region should not be taken for granted.
- **Significant challenges in the realms of economy, politics and governance, and climate change** are contributing to growing levels of violent conflict, particularly outside of Accra.
- **Ghana benefits from innovative domestic and regional conflict prevention and response systems**; however, successful maintenance of Ghana's peace requires concerted focus at the district, national, and regional levels.

Situated in coastal West Africa, Ghana is a country of more than **32 million people**, well-known for its competitive elections and peaceful transition of political leadership. In a region beset by volatility in recent years, Ghana is regularly heralded for its relatively stable democracy and for its socioeconomic growth and security interventions; as such, it has been viewed as a reliable partner to other African nations, to Europe, and to the United States. Its government has consistently pursued policies promoting private-sector growth and foreign investment as well as strengthening public social services and welfare programs.

So why a CSIS brief on conflict prevention in Ghana? Because some of the underlying economic and security factors that have promoted stability over the years are fraying and have the potential to deteriorate further due to climate change. Because the sense among many in Ghana is that the eruption of violence is a matter

of when, not if. Because now is the time to focus on conflict prevention in Ghana and across broader coastal West Africa.

This brief presents an initial examination of fragility factors in Ghana and the potential of climate change to exacerbate or multiply those factors and drivers of conflict.

WHY GHANA?

Economics. Ghana is an active member of the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**. The Ghanaian economy grew by **5.8 percent** annually between 1991 and 2013, compared to an average growth rate of 3.7 percent in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. This positive trajectory has been fueled by Ghana's valuable exports (gold, cocoa, timber, and, most recently, crude oil), though household-level livelihoods are heavily dependent on agriculture and livestock. Ghana is the **top** gold-producing country and is now the **eighth-largest** oil-producing country in Africa. With additional **technical support**

Map 1: Ghana and Its Neighbors



and due diligence measures, the country has significant potential to maximize revenue and export earnings.

Politics and Governance. Ghana's two main parties (the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress) have peacefully alternated control over the executive and legislative branches in recent decades, with eight free and fair elections held between 1996 and 2020. This is in sharp contrast to the political instability that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced, including **successive military coups** and coup attempts in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Sudan just since August 2020.

Security. Ghana is a key **contributor of troops** for African peacekeeping missions and a regular participant in **joint military training exercises**, including with the United States. It is also situated within a hotbed of **persistent insecurity**. Though there has not yet been an attack by the violent extremist organizations (VEOs) operating in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, Ghana's neighbors—**Burkina Faso** to the north, **Togo** to the east, and **Côte d'Ivoire** to the west—have each experienced extremist attacks in recent years; the threat is escalating in Ghana as these operations get closer and closer to its borders. The Ghanaian government has responded to the intensified security threat by adopting a comprehensive **National Counterterrorism Framework**, conducting capacity-building and simulation

exercises, and being the key interlocutor for the **Accra Initiative** (see text box later in the brief), a regional security cooperation mechanism.

A CSIS research team traveled to Ghana in October 2022 to explore the impacts of climate change on the potential for violent conflict. This brief presents the results of dozens of meetings with key stakeholders, augmented by significant desk research. The team found that although Ghana has benefited on the global stage from its stable progress, it currently faces heightened vulnerability to conflict due to internal conditions and the higher-than-usual potential for external shocks—including those related to climate change—to exacerbate its internal state fragility.

FACTORS OF FRAGILITY

Economics. Like many countries in the developing world, Ghana's economy is highly susceptible to global shocks. The Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have shifted the country's economic situation significantly since early 2022. Inflation spiked from **13.9 percent** in January to **40.4 percent** in October 2022, with food prices increasing by 122 percent since January 2022 alongside rising prices for water, fuel, and public transport. As one interviewee described it, these conditions are forcing people to go into "survival mode," where they are focused on meeting their basic needs. A March 2022 World Bank and UNICEF survey found that adults in **almost half** of households with children were skipping meals because they did not have enough money to feed themselves. Moreover, Ghana's public debt rose to **104.6 percent** of GDP while its currency depreciated by **60 percent**, making it the world's **worst-performing** currency in 2022. With most government revenue required for debt servicing—which includes a recent **\$3 billion bailout** from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—there is a limited surplus for investment in public services and policies to offset rising consumer costs. These factors are combining to stunt the country's economic trajectory; the World Bank predicted that GDP growth will drop to **3.5 percent** in 2022, far below the average pre-pandemic performance of 7.0 percent.

Politics and Governance. One of the root causes of

Ghana's current economic crisis is fragile governance, particularly poor domestic resource management and dissatisfaction with public services and institutions. Tax exemptions for large corporations, weak credit controls, and a lack of discipline in accounting for resources have contributed to significant gaps in public resources. CSIS analysis of a report by Ghana's auditor general revealed that between 2016 and 2020 financial irregularities in the public sector increased by **1,204 percent** according to the authors' analysis. The 2021 report showed that financial irregularities amounted to **17.5 billion** Ghanaian cedis (at the time, the exchange rate was roughly 6 cedis = 1 USD), representing a 36 percent rise from **12.856 billion** cedis in 2020.

Corruption also persists in the public services sector. In 2021, a **quarter** of Ghanaians who interacted with a public official claimed to have paid, or were asked to pay, a bribe—amounting to roughly 17.4 million bribes paid that year. Public frustration with the manifestations of corrupt governance is apparent. A **recent Afrobarometer survey** found that the most important problems facing Ghana were the mismanagement of the economy (22 percent), unemployment (19 percent), and infrastructure (12 percent), all issues heavily influenced by corruption. Last year the social media campaign #FixTheCountry mobilized **thousands** of protestors in Ghana's capital, Accra, expressing frustration with government mismanagement and the lack of educational and economic opportunities. Corruption issues do not just affect socioeconomic conditions; major electoral candidates have hired political vigilantes who are involved in electoral violence to promote and protect their party's power under a **"winner-takes-all"** mentality.

Citizens' wavering trust in electoral processes, coupled with a declining economy, may prompt some to question the legitimacy of democracy. While they represent a small minority, the number of people that say that, in some circumstance, a nondemocratic government could be preferable has steadily increased from **10 percent** in 2014 to **14.4 percent** in 2022. Moreover, the combination of rapid and severe currency devaluation and inflation, rising taxes, spiraling debt, and the recent IMF bailout amount to a high risk of **social unrest** in the coming months. While it has enjoyed political stability since 1992, Ghana is currently experiencing more the absence

of violence—often referred to as “negative peace”—rather than sustainable peace. Systemic and structural challenges inhibit that stability and a more sustainable “positive peace.” International partners would do well to acknowledge but not take for granted Ghana's status as a paragon of progress and prosperity in an otherwise volatile region. In that spirit, the **Biden administration identified** Ghana as part of a priority coastal West African region for implementation of the **Global Fragility Act** (GFA) in April 2022. While most **bilateral assistance** to the region has focused on economic development and health, there has been a recent increase in peace and security-related assistance—for example, under the U.S. Agency for International Development's **Littorals Regional Initiative**. With a vested interest in the region through the GFA, the United States has a critical opportunity to apply a concerted conflict prevention lens to Ghana, which must also include consideration of climate-related impacts on peace and conflict.

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THE GLOBAL FRAGILITY ACT

The landmark **Global Fragility Act** (GFA) was signed into U.S. law in 2019. In April 2022, the Biden administration identified coastal West Africa—Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo—as a priority region in a **prologue** it added to the 2020 U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (SPCPS), sometimes referred to as the **“Global Fragility Strategy.”** Under the strategy, the United States has committed to at least 10 years of programmatic efforts aimed at lowering violence levels and enhancing conflict-prevention efforts in the region.

For more details on the GFA and the SPCPS, please see **“A Policymaker's Guide to the Global Fragility Act”** and **“The Global Fragility Strategy Gets a Refresh.”**

Climate Change. Climate change threatens to disrupt the lives and livelihoods of many Ghanaians, including those living in the more volatile and arid northern regions, as well as in Ghana’s coastal regions. Notably, by 2080, temperatures are expected to rise by between **1.7 to 3.7 degrees** Celsius and water availability could decline by as much as 70 percent. Ghana’s coastal regions are likely to also experience **significant sea level rise**: climate models predict that by 2080, the sea level on Ghana’s coast will have risen by nearly 40 centimeters, affecting coastal communities and livelihoods. Overall, vulnerability to climate change is related to limited access to public services (such as water, sanitation, and healthcare). Furthermore, many Ghanaians depend on agriculture and livestock—sectors likely to be severely impacted by climate change.

Models project that Ghana’s economy will **significantly decline** as the planet warms; an increase in temperatures of 1 degree Celsius would correspond with a 2 percent decline in GDP, while an increase of 4 degrees Celsius would correspond with a 17 percent decline in GDP. Throughout the country, climate change is already threatening infrastructure. **One study** found that, in 2007 alone, “1016 km of roads were destroyed, 13 bridges collapsed, and 442 sewers damaged in the northern region of Ghana” due to extreme weather events. These events have also led to the **erosion and subsequent decimation** of over half of Keta city. Similarly, the once-coastal town of **Fuveme** has been transformed into an island, leading to a forced exodus of its people.

Ghanaians have been explicit in their concerns about climate change: according to Afrobarometer, **60 percent** of those who are aware of climate change say that it is making life worse, and that both the government and citizens must take action. While the Ghanaian government has adopted several written policies and strategies to deal with the effects of climate change, the aforementioned corruption and overall fragile governance systems have limited the effectiveness of these policies and strategies to spur meaningful climate adaptation.

Climate change also interacts with violent conflict in increasingly prevalent—and well-documented—ways.

A vicious cycle (see Figure 1) emerges when conflict-prone communities are never able to build the resilience necessary to cope with man-made shocks, whether of the climate or conflict variety.

Governance is often a determining factor in the outcome of the relationship between climate and conflict. Weak and incoherent governance can escalate community vulnerability to climate change and increase the risk of conflict. On the other hand, effective, accessible, and inclusive conflict resolution mechanisms, along with policies to address the adverse impacts of climate change, can mitigate these insecurities. For its part, the Ghanaian government and external partners have taken several steps to address the progressively visible threats of climate change and widespread conflict; however, climate response efforts largely exist on paper only, and linkages between climate and conflict systems are not yet visible in policy and programming.

Figure 1: Climate and Conflict: A Vicious Cycle



Source: A version of this graphic first appeared in a March 2022 CSIS publication: Catherine Nzuki, Anastasia Strouboulis, and Erol Yayboke, “Going Green While Building Peace: Technology, Climate, and Peacebuilding,” CSIS, *CSIS Commentary*, March 3, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/going-green-while-building-peace-technology-climate-and-peacebuilding>.

The 2013 **National Climate Change Policy** and several additional policy directives—such as the **Renewable Energy Master Plan of 2019**—provide plans for climate

adaptation, and Ghana has at least **eight** government institutions that have some role in implementing these policies. While these institutions provide a strong foundation for climate and natural resource governance, there is limited transparency and accountability on policy implementation. Moreover, institutions lack the financial, technical, and personnel resources to execute their mandates effectively.

Several climate-related policies reference the need for local conflict resolution mechanisms to address potential natural resource-based conflicts; however, the overarching challenges of execution and resourcing have inhibited conflict mainstreaming across all sectors. There is plenty of blame to go around: conflict-related initiatives similarly neglect, or fail to fully mainstream, climate considerations. For example, in 2017 the Ministry of Food and Agriculture collaborated with the Ministry of National Security to launch the **Ghana Cattle Ranching Project** to address farmer-herder conflicts. Under the program, large swaths of land were fenced off for cattle to graze. However, one of the **challenges** the program faced was that, as climate variability continued to impact water and food security, people who relied on the ranch for their livelihoods were not provided with the appropriate resources to sustainably adapt to changing environmental conditions.

With climate impacts manifesting primarily at the local level, interviewees expressed the importance of foreign assistance being distributed outside of Accra to develop local governance capacities. But with limited government focus on, and execution of, climate policies and strategies, international and national stakeholders who appreciate the interrelated nature of climate change and conflict in Ghana have few avenues through which to formally engage at the policy levels needed for more systematic change. But it is these vulnerable communities—like many in northern Ghana—that are dealing with the consequences: forced displacement, loss of livelihoods, increased household debt, rural to urban migration, and more. Climate change-related environmental issues—extreme heat, desertification, sea level rise, and intensifying rains, just to name a few—will vary from community to community; however, all impacts require concerted policies and policy implementation efforts to support

and protect communities, including from those that are ready, willing, and able to take advantage of climate vulnerabilities, even through violent conflict.

FOUR WAYS CONFLICT CAN MANIFEST

1. Protracted Chieftaincy Contestation

Many current risks of violence stem from localized conflicts, including competition over chieftaincy succession. In Ghana, chiefs are considered part of the formal governance system under **Article 270** of the constitution and they have significant political and cultural influence. Chiefs are the traditional custodians of the land and determine how it is used. They are also traditional leaders responsible for managing community development and mediating conflicts. Because there is no established political process for deciding succession after the death of a powerful chief, there can be violent clashes between hopeful ascendants. Though primordialism does have a role in driving chieftaincy conflicts, these can also have political dimensions, with actors hoping to secure greater control over territory and resources. Political elites and opportunists often take sides in these conflicts, leveraging them to mobilize support during election periods while stalling conflict resolution efforts. There are currently **over 350** protracted chieftaincy conflicts around the country, with the most violent ones concentrated in northern Ghana. For example, the northeastern municipality of Bawku—where colonial administration **hardened** political affiliations along ethnic lines—is an epicenter of ethnic conflict between the Kusasi and Mamprusi ethnic groups.

Access to environmental resources is critical to socioeconomic standing and, for chiefs, to political power. Extreme weather events and climate shifts escalate tensions as chiefs compete for shrinking resources. With agriculture accounting for **21 percent** of Ghana's GDP and especially vulnerable to climate change, the role of chiefs in ruling over land disputes will become increasingly frequent. Research has identified that less than **1 percent** of the national crop area is irrigated, meaning that yields of staple crops like maize, millet, and cassava will continue to rely on increasingly volatile rain

patterns. With **projections** showing a significant decrease in the yield of maize and millet, along with an increase in drought exposure nationwide, the stakes of chieftaincy succession conflicts will likely grow.

2. Farmer-Herder Disputes

The second type of conflict in Ghana is between farmers and herders. Both groups depend on access to and control over land for growing crops and grazing cattle. However, there are rising tensions over productive land resources that are being depleted by climate change, population growth, and expanded industrialized cultivation. Fulbe herders—an ethnic group that extends across the Sahel and West Africa, also known as Fulani or Peuls—are often involved. The Fulbe first began migrating southward from the Sahel in the early twentieth century, a pattern that **has continued** due to the increased incidence of climate variability, scarcity of viable grazing lands, and safety concerns (cattle rustling, attacks on livestock markets, etc.) across the Sahel that threaten their lives and livelihoods. Farming activities have become more intensive at the same time that grazing lands have receded; with communities becoming more densely populated, farmers’ and herders’ lands are converging.

There is precedent of **coexistence and intergroup cooperation** between the two as well as conflict among farmers themselves and herders themselves. Still, most tensions emerge as farmers plant crops on designated cattle pasture or transhumance corridors and then cattle **trample or feed** on the crops; these tensions can potentially escalate to violent attacks between farmers and herders. Moreover, while chiefs traditionally mediate these localized incidents, they are not always neutral. Chiefs frequently own the cattle under the care of Fulbe herders or simply back the conflict party who pays the highest bribe, undermining the perception that they are a neutral arbiter. More generally, **identity politics, the ineptitude of the formal justice system, and the exclusion of key stakeholders**—such as women and Fulbe herders themselves—in mediation processes weaken the sense of trust and justice within conflict resolution efforts.

While environmental degradation related to climate change is undeniably a root cause of these types of violent conflicts, ethnic dimensions also play a

significant role. The Fulbe are an ethnic group that has historically engaged in long-range transhumance. However, a portion of the Fulbe population has permanently settled in Ghana. Despite some Fulbe having lived in Ghana for generations, they continue to face **social marginalization and political exclusion** as a minority population. For example, Fulbe are deliberately omitted from the national census, face barriers in obtaining government documents—including ID cards and passports—and experience land confiscation and eviction because they cannot claim ownership over the land. Beyond institutional framing of Fulbe as “noncitizens,” some other Ghanaian ethnic groups have entrenched **harmful stereotypes** of them being uncivilized, criminals, rapists, and perpetrators of violence against farmers. These prejudices, combined with a pervasive resource scarcity mindset, have forced Fulbe populations to live in the periphery of their communities without access to quality public services while perpetuating vicious cycles of retribution.

3. Illegal Artisanal Mining

A third area that presents the potential for conflict is “galamsey”—the illegal artisanal and small-scale mining of natural resources, namely gold, bauxite, and manganese. Illegal mining was not a government priority **until 2017**, leaving significant gaps in regulatory frameworks and environmental protections. However, in recent years, mining has transitioned from a rudimentary, localized activity to a “**capital intensive, mechanically and politically driven cash generating venture**” that includes local businessmen, politicians, and foreign nationals. An influx of **about 50,000** Chinese miners over the last 15 years has driven this shift thanks to the introduction of mechanized equipment and techniques by Chinese national-led operations, which has boosted the scale of these mines and led to country-wide gold production increases from less than 20,000 ounces in 1990 to **1.6 million ounces in 2016**.

Galamsey is a problem not just because of forgone government revenue: it can adversely impact the environment, the physical health of miners, and the broader livelihoods on which many Ghanaians depend. Existing research shows that galamsey also causes water pollution and land degradation. Mining

and mineral processing generate or use pollutants, including high turbidity, oil and grease, and arsenic and mercury. Mercury exposure is especially harmful to Ghanaian youth who work at these mining sites without adequate safety protections. In addition to decimating crop growth, people who live near galamsey sites are at risk of **mercury poisoning** through drinking water and fish consumption, which can cause neurological disorders.

Galamsey represents a point of fragility in three ways. First, farmers and miners compete to access and control the same inputs—land, water, labor, and capital. Galamsey has consistently proven to be environmentally destructive, with one 2014 study revealing that **30 to 50 percent** of farmlands in the Amansie West district of south-central Ghana was rendered unfit for agricultural production due to mining activities. Moreover, after mines are depleted, operators **fail to implement proper closure and land reclamation plans**, so the land remains unusable for farming, herding, and other forestry activities. Local Ghanaian cocoa farmers have been particularly impacted by galamsey, with a **significant majority** of farmers reporting declines in their annual harvests due to labor shortages, pollution, land destruction, and flooding from mines full of rainwater. While Ghana is the **second-largest** exporter of cocoa in the world, farmers are being forced to supplement their incomes by either **directly participating in or selling their land** for mining. These conditions create an antagonistic relationship between miners and farmers working in the same geographic area, another source of resource-based violent conflict.

Second, the government's securitized response can escalate conflict. The government outlawed small-scale mining in 2017 and has used the military for enforcement. The Ghanaian president **launched** Operation Vanguard in mid-2017 with 400 dedicated security personnel; after **allegations** of extortion, corruption, and excessive force, it was dissolved in March 2020 and replaced by Operation Halt II in April 2021. Militarization has led to indiscriminate **arrests** and **clashes** with security personnel and **criticism** of the approach, as the actions target miners themselves and not the politicians and officials often fueling—or at least complicit in—galamsey.

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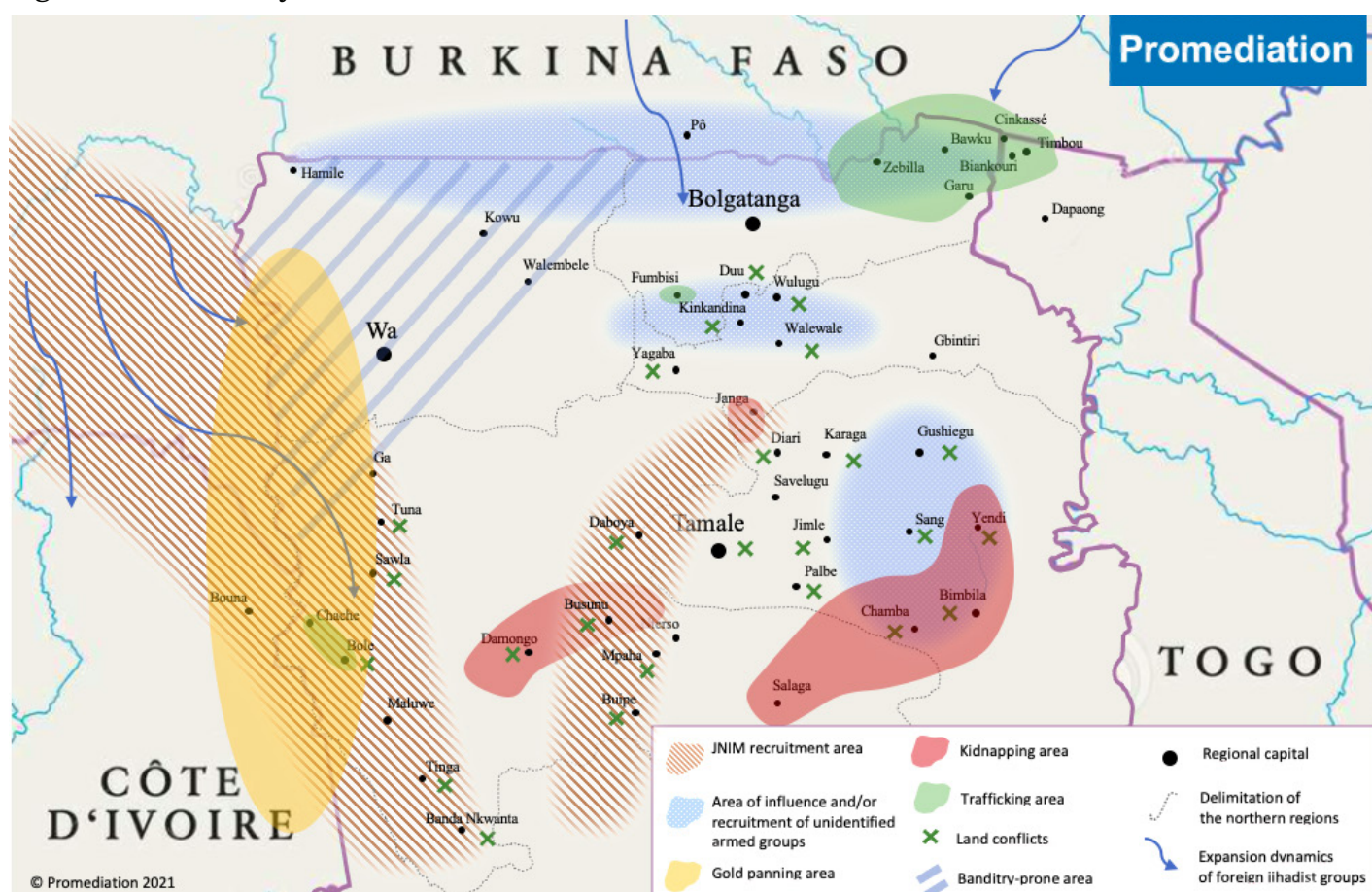
Third, there are concerns that violent extremists living in and around Ghana could exploit grievances associated with livelihood losses, militarized responses, and economic gains for foreigners. As seen in the **Central Sahel**, natural resource extraction is a lucrative source of revenue and recruits, and the clandestine nature of galamsey in Ghana's forests makes it an especially attractive exploit.

4. Violent Extremism

This leads to the fourth source of potential conflict: Ghana's proximity to violent extremists operating in West Africa and the Sahel, primarily though not uniquely Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims—JNIM). According to one report, there are **at least 189** unofficial entry points on Ghana's border with Burkina Faso alone. Each one of Ghana's neighbors has experienced a terrorist attack recently as militant cells have **pushed southward** over the last few years.

Ghana currently serves a useful purpose for VEOs: a place for rest, relaxation, and restocking. The Ghana-Côte d'Ivoire-Burkina Faso tri-border area is a **key route** in illicit arms trafficking, including ammunition, small arms, and **fertilizer** for improvised explosive devices. There are also reports that fighters have sought refuge in Ghana; for example, following **Operation Otapuanu** in southeastern Burkina Faso in March 2019, jihadists **reportedly** fled to Benin, Togo, and Ghana. Interviewed

Figure 2: Conflict Dynamics in Northern Ghana



Source: Reproduced with permission from Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, ed., *The Jihadist Threat in Northern Ghana and Togo: Stocktaking and Prospects for Containing the Expansion* (Promediation, March 2022), <https://www.kas.de/documents/261825/16928652/The+jihadist+threat+in+northern+Ghana+and+Togo.pdf/f0c4ca27-6abd-904e-fe61-4073e805038a>.

experts frame the threat of violent extremism as “a ticking time bomb”—while they have not yet gone on the offensive, extremists’ activities and presence have created a foothold for potential future attacks.

Armed groups also exploit existing grievances to create **compelling narratives for recruitment**. There are concerns that violent extremist groups could enter Ghana’s Upper East, Savannah, and Upper West regions, places that have significant police presence but are facing service deficits. Inadequate healthcare, weak infrastructure, limited availability of potable water, and limited educational and economic opportunities make youth particularly vulnerable. There are reports that **200 to 300 Ghanaian youth** were incorporated into JNIM and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS, another active VEO) units, trained in the Sahel, and sent back to their home communities to proselytize and recruit. Socioeconomic marginalization and unemployment have

been an entry point for recruitment throughout the Sahel, a phenomenon some worry could spill over into Ghana.

Existing vulnerabilities to VEOs can be exacerbated by climate-related environmental changes. Shifting rainfall patterns, depleting arable land, and diminishing access to water for herding and crop growing intensify competition over resources. The compounding effects of reduced agriculture output, increased food prices, and other environmental stressors—coupled with existing conflict dynamics—diminish community resilience to VEOs. As seen elsewhere, notably in **Syria**, extremists have weaponized access to critical resources for strategic or tactical purposes and “as a means to terrorize, coerce, and subjugate local populations.” While civilians have not yet turned to VEOs as an alternative en masse, if frustrations with the status quo continue to escalate, there is potential for radicalization and further exploitation.

AN EXAMPLE OF VEO EXPLOITATION OF STATE FRAGILITY

Violent extremist organizations (VEOs) are known to foment ethnic tensions between Fulbe and non-Fulbe populations to boost support. In June 2021, Abu Dujana, an ethnic Fulbe living in Ghana, detonated a suicide bomb at a French military camp in Gossi, Mali, as part of a JNIM attack. In a pre-recorded video, Dujana called upon the Fulbe to **fight local authorities** to protest their mistreatment and injustice. While some may not believe armed resistance is an effective solution to systemic marginalization, persistent realities **reinforce feelings of Fulbe alienation** from formal political and security institutions. In the video, Dujana also references a JNIM contingent **operating along** the Burkina Faso-Ghana border. The Upper East Region towns of Bawku, Garu, and Zebilla are already embedded in jihadist-controlled illicit trade networks and the prevalence of chieftaincy and farmer-herder conflicts in the north has led to an influx of weapons in these communities. The Upper West region is an entry point for armed groups operating in the porous cross-border area between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and certain groups have reportedly already **become involved** in gold mining sites.

ONGOING CONFLICT-PREVENTION EFFORTS

Ghana has some natural and earned immunities to the conflict dynamics presented above. Relative to its neighbors, Ghana has significant professional capacity in the security sector. The government has prioritized increased capacity and capabilities, particularly in its military. There is valuable defense cooperation between Ghana and the United States, with U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) forces conducting **training** with special operations units and yearly regional **military exercises** such as **African Lion**. The United Kingdom and France have also engaged in joint military exercises with the Ghanaian army. In addition to bilateral military cooperation, the military has forward-deployed forces

around its northern borders. For example, under **Operation Conquest Fist**, which launched in July 2019, an additional 600 to 800 military, police, and border officials were deployed to Ghana's five northern regions. Similarly, three separate short-term operations under the **Koudanlgou** name in 2018 and 2019 saw Ghanaian forces jointly deployed across the region with troops from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo focused on transnational threats, including violent extremism, smuggling, and drug trafficking.

But Ghana's immunities extend beyond its professional security services. Many people interviewed emphasized the historical and cultural preference for religious and ethnic tolerance as a key aspect of Ghanaian society. An active and free civil society provides a regular venue for this tolerance to be exercised and for conflicts to be adjudicated. Ghana's security and peace councils offer further possibilities for conflict prevention, representing an innovative, decentralized architecture worth considering in more detail.

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SECURITY COUNCILS

The evolving security landscape both within Ghana and in its West African neighborhood has compelled the government to cultivate a network of defense and peacebuilding institutions. Within the security sector, the Ministry of National Security, particularly the National Counterterrorism Fusion Centre, has a key role in stemming external threats. Ghana's counterterrorism strategy, the **National Framework for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism**, articulates four components: prevention, preemption, protection, and response. Security officials interviewed shared the nuance

between prevention (identifying and mitigating the root causes of conflict) and preemption (addressing potential threats identified through intelligence). Officials also emphasized the importance of non-kinetic human security approaches in conflict prevention, recognizing the importance of reducing vulnerabilities, improving state presence and effectiveness, and engaging with organizations representative of the local population. Nonetheless, other interviewees stressed that these initiatives, while welcome, are largely overshadowed by hard security approaches, with limited interaction between the Ministries of National Security and Defence and civil society.

Ghana's security councils are a core network of institutions focusing on human security. The National Security Council works on countrywide issues, while Regional Security Councils cover each of Ghana's 16 regions. District Security Councils serve 260 districts across Ghana. Meant to represent communities, these councils are comprised of representatives from Peace Councils, civil society organizations, traditional leadership, religious leaders, and the media. The security councils are responsible for information sharing with the rest of the security apparatus and implementing counterterrorism initiatives at the local level. For example, the National Security Ministry launched a “**See Something, Say Something**” campaign in early 2022 to educate the public on identifying potential threats and reporting suspected extremists.

PEACE COUNCILS

Ghana also has an innovative infrastructure for peace and stability. Following several flare-ups in violence in the 1990s and early 2000s, the National Peace Council (NPC) was established in 2006 and, in May 2011, **Parliamentary Act 818** provided a legal framework for the peace councils. The councils follow the same three-tiered structure as the security councils, with the national board acting as a supervisory and coordinating body for the regional and district levels.

The core mandate of the NPC is to facilitate and develop mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, and resolution and to build sustainable

peace in the country. To achieve this, each council is comprised of **13 members**: four representatives from Christian organizations, three representatives from Muslim organizations, a representative of the African traditional religions, a representative from the traditional authorities (e.g., a chief), two representatives nominated by the president (one of whom must be female), and two representatives from other organizations, including the media, the private sector, and civil society. Regional Peace Councils (RPCs) are present in 12 of Ghana's 16 regions, though there is a planned expansion to all 16 in the coming months. Despite good national and regional coverage, significant gaps remain in establishing district-level peace councils—in large part because of funding challenges—with some estimates suggesting that less than five District Peace Councils (DPCs) are operational out of the 216 total districts across the country. Ghana has not yet been able to meaningfully deploy its innovative peace architecture at the district level.

Nonetheless, RPCs and DPCs are meant to actively engage with their complementary regional and district-level security councils. The RPCs and DPCs (where they exist) have largely earned community trust because of their inclusive and transparent nature. This enables them to mediate various conflicts, including land disputes, succession contestation, and election-related violence. For example, to address violence caused by **hired vigilante groups** ahead of the 2020 elections, Ghanaian political candidates **signed the Presidential Peace Pact** whereby they agreed to use peaceful, democratic means to resolve election-related issues. In addition to conflict resolution, the peace councils also employ a **conflict prevention approach**—identifying and addressing the root causes of conflict through localized trust-building programs, public education campaigns, dialogues, and reconciliation processes for sustainable peace.

Ghana has not yet been able to meaningfully deploy its innovative peace architecture at the district level.

In 2018, Ghanaian authorities initiated a **territorial redrawing**, which expanded the number of regions

from 10 to 16. In particular, the division of Ghana's north into five regions—rather than one large one—has improved early warning capabilities by enabling more granular information gathering and sharing between the local and national peace and security structures.

THE ACCRA INITIATIVE

The domestic security and peace council structures are complemented by Ghana's involvement in the Accra Initiative. Launched in September 2017 by Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo, the Accra Initiative **exists to** “prevent spillover terrorism from the Sahel and to address transnational organised crime and violent extremism in member countries' border areas.” The **three pillars** of the Accra Initiative are sharing information and intelligence, training security and intelligence personnel, and conducting joint cross-border military operations. In taking lessons from previous regional security mechanisms, the Accra Initiative operates through specific focal points in each member country and a central coordinator in Ghana's National Security Secretariat. The initiative is also self-financed, meaning member states are not reliant upon or beholden to external funders. Finally, **quarterly meetings** at two levels—one with each country's security and intelligence officials and the other among government ministers in charge of security—have fostered trust-building among its participants. These institutional structures reduce bureaucratic hurdles and ease collaboration.

Under the Accra Initiative, Ghana has conducted yearly joint multinational security operations since 2018, known as Operation Koundanlgou I-IV. In the most recent **November 2021 iteration**, over 5,700 troops were deployed at member countries' borders. These operations targeted individuals involved in transnational crimes such as terrorism, smuggling, illegal mining, and drug trafficking, though there are **reports** of excessive force during raids and arrests. Moreover, the limited duration and

limited geographic reach of these operations are not sufficient to fully uproot armed group activities.

Importantly, there are also non-kinetic elements of the Accra Initiative, with national authorities establishing localized programs, committees, and tool kits to prevent radicalization and promote community resilience. While these programs are critical in addressing the root causes of conflict, the military may not be best placed to implement these programs without concurrent commitments to decentralizing governance and upholding human security. As one interviewee said, “Terrorism has never been defeated on the battlefield, only through hearts and minds.”

THE WAY FORWARD

None of the conflict dynamics discussed above—chieftaincy succession contestation, farmer-herder disputes, illegal artisanal mining, and spillover violent extremism—were caused by climate change. But all of them are exacerbated by it. Thus, efforts to prevent conflict in Ghana should focus on the conflict dynamics at play, but with a deeper understanding of how the environmental changes in areas of concern will only make the job harder. At the same time, efforts must be made to increase the adaptive capacity of communities on the front lines of climate change, especially in Ghana's north where its effects exacerbate tensions and undermine progress.

Successful violent conflict prevention must be executed at the local and national levels, especially in light of climate change. Unfortunately, Ghana will be unable to fund many (if not all) of these and other priorities, even if it so desires. The current fiscal crisis (and resulting recently negotiated IMF bailout) will focus much of the government's attention on fiscal issues—such as higher taxes, more fees, and budget cuts to social services—which, in addition to diverting funds away from important climate adaptation and peace and conflict prevention priorities, could itself also result in more social unrest and fragility.

Efforts to prevent conflict in Ghana should focus on the conflict dynamics at play, but with a deeper understanding of how the environmental changes in areas of concern will only make the job harder.

For 2023 and perhaps beyond, Ghana will require external support. Given Ghana's strategic importance, the international community would be wise to provide it.

Much of this support should be targeted at the local level, prioritizing:

- Providing adequate and longer-term financial support for the establishment and maintenance of all district and regional peace councils and local civil society organizations (CSOs), all of which provide the forum for conflict resolution and prevention.
- Strengthening social cohesion and building trust between disparate communities through dialogue and mediation, with a particular focus on the inclusion of marginalized groups (e.g., the Fulbe).
- Offering technical support to dispute resolution mechanisms, including capacity building workshops for peace council members and CSO workers.
- Supporting the drafting and dissemination of standard templated written agreements between farmers and herders.
- Establishing mechanisms for chieftaincy succession plans to be put in place and publicized well in advance of the death of a chief.
- Establishing resource (e.g., land and water) management committees to train local leaders on available legal frameworks, empowering them to inform community members of their rights and how to peacefully resolve resource-related conflicts.
- Providing alternative sources of income for artisanal miners, especially youth, and the communities that rely on such illegal activity.
- Developing livelihoods and other productive opportunities for youth, especially in areas (e.g., in

northern Ghana) with significant VEO presence.

At the national level, priorities should include:

- Supporting broad campaigns for community peacebuilding and sensitization focused on intra- and interethnic coexistence, recognizing early warning indicators, and reducing stereotyping.
- Developing public-private partnerships that link development and government actors with market actors, including around incentivizing investment in smallholder farmers, building resilient agricultural ecosystems, and ingraining more adaptive, climate-resilient farming techniques.
- Supporting the development—and, more importantly, the execution—of national climate change plans and strategies, aligning and integrating them with those focused on peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
- Funding scientific research on agricultural conditions and production, socioeconomic conditions (including Fulbe inclusion and representation), and political economy analysis—particularly on understanding relationships within communities, public perception of security forces (e.g., military versus police), trust in chiefs, and citizen confidence in the peace and security councils.
- Training the military and police on human security issues, human rights principles, and other non-kinetic roles for security actors in peacebuilding.
- Developing a policy framework and execution strategy for more regular and coherent inclusion of minority groups (e.g., the Fulbe), including support to local authorities to more regularly issue birth certificates and national identification cards.
- Avoiding the urge to create standalone climate-related programming, instead integrating a “climate lens” (in other words, how is climate change going to make the issues and efforts to address them more challenging) into existing conflict prevention and peacebuilding programming.
- Enabling regular donor coordination, strategy alignment, and (where appropriate) cofinancing of efforts, especially amongst international actors supporting peace and working within the complex

systems at the heart of the identified factors of fragility: economics, politics and governance, and climate change. ■

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