

Violent Extremist and Terrorist Threats: Examining Ghana's Preparedness

Mawusi Yaw Dumenu

Key points

The growing threat of terrorism and violent extremism from the Sahel region is spreading towards Coastal West Africa, and Ghana is the only country among its neighbors that has not been attacked.

Several initiatives have been set in motion by the government of Ghana to counter the emerging threats of terrorism and violent extremism.

Although many security agents operating in border areas have been trained in counter terrorism, there is a deficit regarding resources for effective operations.

There is the need for government to increase deployment of security personnel, provide security agencies in border areas with adequate resources that will enhance their effective mobility and operations, improve communication and surveillance and increase the safety of operatives.

INTRODUCTION

Until May 11, 2022, Togo had not experienced any deadly terrorist attack on its soil. This attack which happened in the northern part of the country bordering Burkina Faso, reportedly claimed the lives of 8 soldiers and wounded 13 other soldiers. This follows a series of attacks that indicate that terrorists are expanding from the Sahel region to Coastal States of West Africa¹. Previously, the threats of terrorism were confined to the Sahel region, but have consistently increased in the last few years, first from Mali to Burkina Faso, and now spreading towards the Coastal States of Benin, Ivory Coast, Togo and Ghana. According to the 2022 Global Terrorism Index (GTI)², over the last 15 years, the Sahel region has become increasingly violent, with ascending death tolls by over thousand percent between 2007 and 2021, with no end in sight. The 2022 GTI continued to indicate that Sahel countries – Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso – were among the top ten countries most impacted by terrorism. The growing spate of violent extremism and terrorism in the sub-region spells doom for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16 which focuses on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Ghana is now the only country among the earlier mentioned coastal states that has not suffered from any violent extremist and terrorist violence. This notwithstanding, there have been several alarming incidents involving extremist attacks that have occurred in close proximity to Ghana's borders. Even though Ghana has not yet been hit with any terrorist strikes, this is not an immunity pass for the country. In fact, a number of attacks carried out by violent extremists and terrorists in Burkina Faso since 2018 happened in close proximity to Ghana's northern border. The tipping point of increasing terror threats to Ghana became apparent when violent extremists in Burkina Faso begun attacking churches in April 2019, and the attacks on churches have continued unabated^{[3][4]}.

1 Africanews (May 11, 2022). Eight soldiers killed in Togo "terrorist attack"- Government.

See: <https://www.africanews.com/2022/05/11/eight-soldiers-killed-in-togo-terrorist-attack-government/>

2 Institute for Economics & Peace. (March 2022). Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, Sydney. Available from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/resources>.

3 Human Rights Watch (6th January, 2020). Burkina Faso: Armed Islamist Atrocities Surge <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/06/burkina-faso-armed-islamist-atrocities-surge>

4 One of such deadly attacks that ignited massive public reaction in Ghana was carried out by about 30-armed men on a Catholic Church in Dablo, Center-Nord region of Burkina Faso on May 12, 2019 while service was underway. Six persons including the priest were killed in the attack: Weber, J (May, 2019). Another Sunday Church Attack in Burkina Faso Kills Six. See: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/may/burkina-faso-church-attack-dablo-catholic-mass-terrorism.html>

Later in 2019, a minor incident occurred in which a Burkinabe was arrested with a loaded pistol in a church in Hamile, a town bordering Burkina Faso. These have heightened fears of imminent threats and the government of Ghana has taken a number of initiatives aimed at countering the emerging threats.

INITIATIVES TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT OF GHANA TO CURB VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

This section highlights some of the initiatives that Ghana has set in motion with the aim of countering internal and external threats including violent extremism and terrorism.

- a. The Accra Initiative: The government of Ghana in September 2017 entered into a pact with Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Togo to create 'the Accra Initiative', a sub-regional security arrangement to collaboratively combat transnational crimes such as terrorism, smuggling and drug trafficking^{[5][6]}. The Accra Initiative has since then held several joint operations, that is, Operation Koudalgou 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively
- b. Army deployments to Northern Ghana: The government took additional security measures in 2019 by deploying military detachments to mainly the northern part of the country where Ghana shares a border with Burkina Faso⁶ in what is known as 'Operation Conquest Fist'. This deployment covers most areas where historically state security presence had been absent or minimal at best
- c. Training of security personnel in counter terrorism: Several training exercises in counter terrorism have been held and are still ongoing for various security personnel from the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), Ghana Police Service (GPS), Ghana Immigration Service (GIS), Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) among others. The trainings aim at harmonizing the operations of various Counter Terrorism Units of security agencies, and building the capacity of security personnel to tackle threats of terrorism
- d. At the strategic level:

- o A National Framework for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and Terrorism (NAFPCVET) was adopted in 2019. The framework combines security and non-security approaches; and clearly defines the roles, functions and specific responsibilities of several state institutions beyond the traditional security agencies, and includes state regulatory agencies, peacebuilding institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs) and religious bodies to fulfill the four main pillars of preventing, pre-empting, protecting and responding



NAFPCVET

to fulfill the pillars of
PREVENTING,
PRE-EMPTING,
PROTECTING and
RESPONDING

5 Theroux-Benoni, Lori-Anne (September, 2019). West Africa doesn't need another counter-terrorism force.

See: <https://www.africaportal.org/features/west-africa-doesnt-need-another-counter-terrorism-force/>

6 Africanews (22nd September, 2018). Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Ghana launch joint security operation.

See: <https://www.africanews.com/2018/11/22/burkina-faso-ivory-coast-ghana-joint-security-operation/>

7 Myjoyonline.com (15th August, 2019). Upper East Region: Soldiers deployed to secure borders, fight terrorism threat. See: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/upper-east-region-soldiers-deployed-to-secure-borders-fight-terrorism-threat/>

- o Launch of a National Security Strategy in 2021 to serve as *“the blueprint reference document for the coordination of the total national response effort to protect and safeguard the nation from threats, risks, challenges to its security and stability from both the domestic and international environments.”*⁸
- e. Building of Forward Operating Bases in selected areas: The government has initiated processes to build 12 Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) and three logistics stations for the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) in northern border communities with the aim of preventing cross border crimes and infiltration of terrorists.
- f. Launch of a national anti-terrorism campaign: In May 2022, the Ministry of National Security launched a campaign dubbed *“See something, say something”*⁹ to sensitize the citizens on the need to be vigilant and collaborate with security agencies to fight crime and avert the threats of terrorism.

“Many security personnel who were team members but did not participate in the survey were noted to have participated in training on terrorism preparedness.”

”

ASSESSING THE PREPAREDNESS OF SECURITY AGENCIES

While these and many other initiatives not highlighted here have been set in motion to counter the threats of violent extremists and terrorists, it is crucial to examine the level of awareness and preparedness of security agents in border communities. The Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) with support from the US Embassy in Ghana implemented a project titled “Enhancing Citizens Participation in Border Security” between September 2019 to March 2022 in selected border communities in the country to raise the security awareness and consciousness of residents while facilitating engagements between residents and security agencies. As part of this project, CDD-Ghana conducted a baseline survey in 60 border communities in 2021 to assess the level of awareness regarding border-related threats including violent extremism and terrorism, and gather information on the relationship between border residents and security agencies.

Overall, 689 persons sampled from the 10 border regions of Ghana were interviewed for the survey. Out of this, 601 persons were residents of border communities and 88 were security agents located in these communities. This paper will focus on the security agencies. Here are some excerpts from this baseline survey, and highlights of key issues that are particularly important even as the government is making strides to protect the country from activities of violent extremists and terrorists.

Among the 88 security agents operating in the border communities who were interviewed, close to 6 in 10 (59%) said they had not participated in any training or

8 Ministry of National Security, Ghana (2020). National Security Strategy. A secure and Prosperous Ghana, with Regional, Continental and Global Reach and Influence. Ministry of National Security, Ghana. Page VII.

9 Republic of Ghana (2021). The Budget Statement and Economic Policy of the Government of Ghana for the 2022 Financial Year. Page 204, paragraph 1086.

10 Graphic Online (26th May, 2022). Support 'See something, Say something' campaign.

See: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/daily-graphic-editorials/support-see-something-say-something-campaign.html>

“ Almost 8 in 10 (77%) of security agents surveyed indicated that members of their team participated in drills in terrorism awareness and preparedness in the past 12 months before the survey.

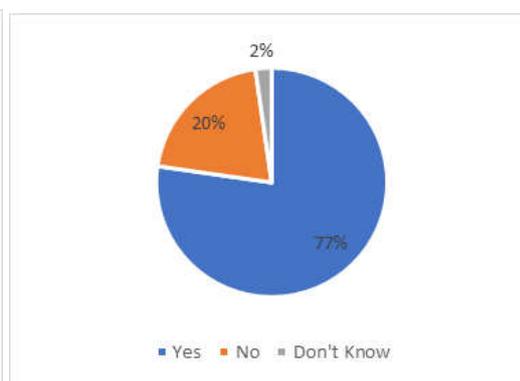
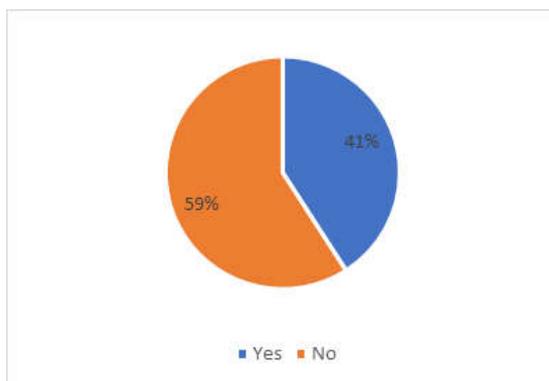


drills in terrorism awareness and preparedness in the last 12 months prior to the survey (Figure 1). On the bright side, many security personnel who were team members but did not participate in the survey were noted to have participated in training on terrorism preparedness.

In this regard, almost 8 in 10 (77%) of security agents surveyed indicated that members of their team participated in drills in terrorism awareness and preparedness in the past 12 months before the survey (Figure 2). This finding highlights the gains that are being made towards making combat-ready frontline security personnel from the various security agencies.

Figure 1: Training or drills in terrorism awareness and preparedness

Figure 2: Other team members participating in training or drills in terrorism awareness and preparedness



Source: Survey Data (2021)

The security personnel were asked how prepared the security agencies at the borders were able to detect and deal with threats of terrorism, terrorists and terrorist activities. A little over one-third (38%) of the respondents thought that security agencies located at the borders are “very well” or “extremely well” capable of detecting and dealing with the threats of terrorism. On the contrary, and of concern, most of the respondents (61%) thought that the security agencies located at the borders are either “Somewhat well” or “not so well” or “not well at all” in terms of their capability to detect and deal with terrorist activities (Figure 3). While administering the survey instrument to the security agents in the Volta and Oti regions, respondents were asked to provide reasons for the latter three response options. In response, some of them especially Immigration and Custom Officers, indicated that although quiet a number of them had been trained in counter-terrorism, they felt that the capacity of the security agencies to deal with these emerging threats is hampered by a number of factors outlined below:

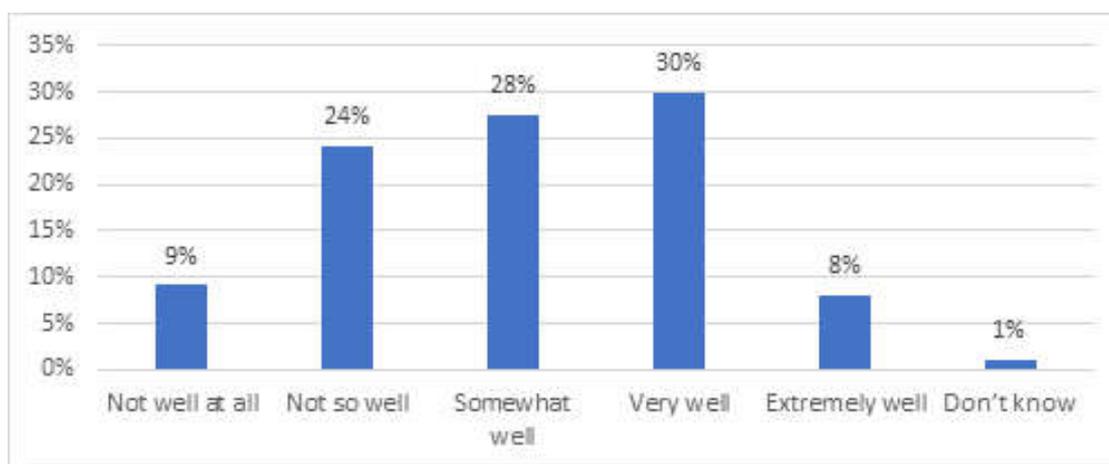


ADEQUATE RESOURCING OF THE SECURITY AGENTS WILL EQUIP THEM TO HANDLE COMBAT SITUATIONS.

- o *Inadequate logistics* such as guns, ammunition, bullet proof vests, communication gadgets among others will be make it difficult to face terrorists head-on when faced with a combat situation. Among the security agents that were interviewed, it was observed that even among a team of 3 to 4, there was usually only one person who carried a gun.
- o *Inadequate personnel to control the crossing points*: The number of personnel deployed to the border communities are not enough to cover the many crossing points in the country especially for unapproved routes, many of which spring up after previous routes are discovered by the officers.

- o *Inadequate vehicles and motorbikes to aid mobility and patrols:* Most border posts do not have adequate vehicles, motorbikes and All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) for effective and efficient patrolling of the vast areas where the border crossings are located. For instance, at the time of conducting this baseline survey, the Aflao Sector Command of the GIS which is the biggest command and has many crossing points had only two ATVs, of which one was functioning.
- o *Absence of metal detectors* at most border posts make it easy for concealed or dismantled weapons to be trafficked across the borders, and that portends danger.

Figure 3: Preparedness of security agents at the borders to detect and deal with threats of terrorism, terrorists and terrorist activities



Source: Survey data (2021)

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that the Government of Ghana is concerned about the surging threats of violent extremists and terrorists, and has taken some appreciable steps aimed at hedging the country from imminent attacks. The findings reveal that many personnel from the security agencies are being trained in counter terrorism. However, there is a feeling of inadequacy among frontline agents located in border areas to directly tackle situations of violent extremist attacks, should they arise. This requires the government to provide more resources to adequately equip the security services (GIS and Customs) and their agents stationed in the border communities. Based on this, the following are recommended:

1. The government should procure and provide adequate guns, ammunitions, bullet proof vests, communication gadgets and other pertinent logistics to



THE SECURITY SERVICES SHOULD BE ADEQUATELY EQUIPPED AND STATIONED IN THE BORDER COMMUNITIES.

“ Government should work on improving the effective mobility of security agencies located at the borders, particularly Immigration and Customs by providing them with vehicles, motorbikes and All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) to enhance their patrol duties.

”

personnel of Immigration and Customs to adequately equip all frontline officers. This can contribute in boosting the confidence of officers, thereby placing them at an advantage to prevent transnational criminals from operating freely.

2. The government should work on improving the effective mobility of security agencies located at the borders, particularly Immigration and Customs by providing them with vehicles, motorbikes and All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) to enhance their patrol duties, surveillance and effective operations in border areas.
3. The government should increase deployment of officers to border areas, especially places with unapproved routes to increase the presence and visibility of officers in these communities.
4. In the long term, the requisite resources should be provided by government to establish duty posts in the tension-prone locations while also providing adequate accommodation facilities to officers deployed to border areas.

Mawusi Yaw Dumenu is a Senior Programs Officer and Team Lead for Elections at the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana). He is also a member of the Center’s Security Sector Governance team.

This paper was produced as part of the baseline survey on the US Embassy supported project, “Enhancing Citizen Participation in Border Security”, which was implemented between September 2019 and March 2022 in selected border communities in the country to raise the security awareness and consciousness of residents while facilitating engagements between residents and security agencies.

The views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Board of Directors or development partners of the Center