WEST AFRICA NETWORK
FOR PEACEBUILDING

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

RE-IMAGINING
THE ACCRA INITIATIVE:
LESSONS AND
OPTIONS FOR POLICY
CONSIDERATION

RE-IMAGINING

LESSONS AND
OPTIONS FOR POLICY
CONSIDERATION

**WEST AFRICA NETWORK
FOR PEACEBUILDING**
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR PEACE

CONTENTS

Abbreviations

AES	Alliance of Sahel States
AI	Accra Initiative
APN	African Peacebuilding Network
ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ESF	ECOWAS Standby Force
EU	European Union
FLM	Macina Liberation Front
G5S-JF	Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force
GNI	Gross National Income
GTI	Global Terrorism Index
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin
LCB	Lake Chad Basin
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
MCC	Multi-National Civilian Cluster
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
MNJTF-AI	Multinational Joint Task Force of the Accra Initiative
NEWS	National Early Warning System
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PSC	Peace and security Council
SSRC	Social Science Research Council
TOC	Transnational Organized Crime
UN	United Nations
VET	Violent Extremism and Terrorism
WANEP	West African Network for Peacebuilding

Introduction

The Accra Initiative (AI) was established in 2017 as a proactive measure by littoral states in West Africa to take full responsibility for their own security following the disruptive activities and progressive incursion of violent extremist and terrorist groups from the Sahel. The AI had a specific mandate to prevent the spillover effects of violent extremism and terrorism (VET) from the Sahel, and to address transnational organised crimes in the border areas of its Member States - Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Mali and Niger with Nigeria having an observer status. [1] Although the AI was not an entirely new phenomenon to deal with complex situations of urgency in West Africa, it's formation was significant for two main reasons. First, the AI served as a stopgap measure for crisis response among like-minded littoral states following the inability of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to deploy the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) to combat terrorism and cross border crimes. In other words, the AI was deployed as a rapid response security mechanism to address an imminent crisis of VET in the coastal States.

Second, the establishment of the AI demonstrated how the concept of "African solutions to African problems" which underscores the need for Africans to take ownership and responsibility in addressing the continent's challenges, rather than relying solely on external solutions or models could manifest in reality. As noted by former President Akufo-Addo of Ghana, the AI is a "homegrown solution to regional problems". [2] Thus, for several years of the AI's existence, it was fully funded and managed by its member states until the provision of financial and logistical support by European Union (EU), ECOWAS and other bilateral partners after 2020. Arguably, this made the AI unique as compared to the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (G5S-JF) which was established with the support of France in 2014.

Despite offering hope and optimism in the fight against VET in the coastal States, the AI has become inactive since the latter part of 2024 following series of military coup d'état among some of its Member States. The fragmentation started with two military coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021, after which Burkina Faso also faced two coups in 2022. [3] Niger joined the foray of coups in 2023, making the three central Sahel States not only the epicentre of VET but also the hotbed of democratic backsliding in West Africa. [4]

----

[1] Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa: Assessing Ghana's Vulnerabilities, Resilience and Responses. ACCORD Conflict Trends Issue 3.; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ghana, (2022). Germany's Participation in Accra Initiative Summit Reinforces Strategic Partnership with Ghana. https://mfa.gov.gh/index.php/germanys-participation-in-accra-
[2] Delegation of the EU to Ghana (2022). EU and PEC Michel reaffirm support to regional security at first International Conference on the Accra Initiative. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ghana/eu-and-pec-michel-reaffirm-support-regional-security-first-international-conference-accra-initiative_en
[3] Festus K. Aubyn, Inusah Ziblim and Richard Apau (2022). Coup d'etat and Political Instability in Western Sahel: Implications for the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism. AU/PAPS/ACSRT/PP/002. AU Policy Paper
[4] Festus K Aubyn (2023). Beyond Sanctions and Use of Force: How ECOWAS can Negotiate a political solution to the Niger's Coup. Conflict Resilience Monitor https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-resilience/conflict-

The threat of the use of force against the putschists in Niger in July 2023 by ECOWAS and the subsequent formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) by the three countries under military rule and their withdrawal from ECOWAS weakened the AI. The tensions and suspicions that ensued between the AES countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger) and the rest of ECOWAS Member States especially their neighbours like Ghana, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria weakened collaborative and cooperative efforts within the AI, leading eventually to challenges in the operationalisation of the Initiative. Meanwhile, the G5S-JF had also ceased operations following the series of coups, leaving the Sahel and the coastal States with no strong multi-country collaborative security framework to respond to VET and transnational organised crimes, except the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin.

Despite these developments, VET in the coastal region has continued to escalate in complexity, scale and impact. Available data from the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) National Early Warning System (NEWS) indicated an increase of 2,197 terrorism-related and armed attack incidents in 2024, compared to 1,715 attacks reported in 2023, and 1601 attacks recorded in 2022.[5] With the exception of

Ghana, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo have reported increased attacks on civilians and security personnel in their northern regions. Similarly, the 2025 Global Terrorism Index (GTI)[6] noted that terrorist activity is increasing in coastal West Africa, with Benin and Togo witnessing an increase in attacks. Togo for example recorded 10 attacks resulting in 52 deaths in 2024, which accounted for 41 fatalities - up from 12 in 2023.[7] Burkina Faso which stands at the junction between the Sahel and the coastal States was described by the GTI as the most affected country worldwide in terms of deaths and attacks.[8] The exit of the AES from ECOWAS has also undermined collective responses to VET through joint operations and intelligence sharing both in the Sahel and the coastal States. The shifting of strategic alliances by the AES toward non-Western partners like Russia, China, Turkey and the Gulf States with bilateral military deals that emphasize regime protection over broader stabilization efforts has also complicated coordination with ECOWAS and its Western partners. Under the circumstances, security cooperation among the AES and neighbouring coastal States along the Gulf of Guinea through the revitalisation of the Accra Initiative framework has become imperative to advance regional security cooperation in the fight against VET. This has become particularly essential following the delayed operationalisation of the ESF to combat VET.

---

[5] WANEP. (2025). West Africa Early Warning Outlook - February 2025. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS). www.wanepsystems.net
[6] Institute for Economics and Peace. (2025). Global Terrorism Index. https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf
[7] Security Council Report. (2025). West Africa and the Sahel. April 2025 Monthly Forecast. https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2025-04/west-africa-and-the-sahel-14.php
[8] Institute for Economics and Peace. (2025). Global Terrorism Index. https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf

Against this backdrop, this research report explored how the AI could be re-imagined or remodelled based on the lessons learned from its operations between 2017-2024 by offering pragmatic recommendations for policy recommendations. The report begins with a brief overview of VET in the coastal states, followed by a background of the AI, highlighting some of its notable achievements/successes as well as challenges and limitations. Next, the report draws lessons from the operationalisation of the AI and other ad hoc coalitions to inform and shape the remodelling process and subsequently provides pragmatic options for policy consideration to adequately address the many but unique complex variables that drive and reinforce VET in the coastal States. Overall, the report argues that a renewed Accra Initiative could stand a greater chance of success if it cautiously combines the military approach with robust interventions aimed at addressing the complex security, social, economic, political, development, and humanitarian challenges that motivate VET with predictable and sustainable funding mechanisms as well as the restoration of trust among Member States. In other words, the Accra Initiative can be reconfigured to restore confidence among the AES and to include both military and non-military strategies, pinned with robust funding mechanisms to ensure that it is more adaptive, pre-emptive, and responsive to the complexities of VET in the coastal States.

The report is based on the review of literature, key informant interviews with some relevant stakeholders in the region between November and January 2025, and conclusions from a roundtable policy dialogue organised by WANEP in collaboration with the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in New York in 2023.[9]

The Landscape of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Coastal West Africa

The context of VET in the coastal countries cannot be understood without linking it to the Sahel. Thus, over the past decade, insecurity in the Sahel region and the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) has continued to deteriorate, making both regions the epicentres of violence and humanitarian disaster in West Africa. The insecurity is mainly caused by the persistent threats posed by violent extremist groups including the Macina Liberation Front (FLM), Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and other terrorist groups.[10] The gravity of the threat prompted the creation of two Africa-led ad hoc coalitions by the affected countries with the strategic support of the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), France and other bilateral partners.

----

[9] For more information see the Proceedings Of Policy Dialogue - "Revisiting Frameworks for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) in West Africa: Lessons from Ghana', held on June 26-27, 2023, at the Alisa Hotel, Accra-Ghana.
[10] Aubyn, F., Edu-Afful, F and Banunle, A. (2022) Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the Sahel-Sahara Region of Africa: Recommendations for stemming a long-lasting threat. AU/PAPS/ACSRT/PP/001. AU Policy Paper.

In the Sahel, the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (G5S-JF) was established in 2014, while the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was re-activated in 2014 by the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). [11]Both the G5S-JF and MNJTF were established as regional security arrangements to fight the spread and expansion of violent extremism and terrorism. Their operations were complemented and supported by international security forces such as the French Operation Barkhane which formally ended in November 2022; the Takuba Task Force and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) which have both officially ceased operations in Mali.[12] Despite the operations of these security arrangements, VET groups have continued to carry out large-scale attacks against civilian and military targets, demonstrating their determination to pursue expansionist ambitions.[13] But more crucially, it is symptomatic of the persistent weak governance, characterized by corruption, democratic backsliding, legitimacy deficits, and human rights violations which underlies VET in the Sahel and the LCB.[14] As the uninterrupted escalation and spread of violent events in each region continues, groups operating in the Sahel have gradually expanded their operations and geographical reach, posing direct threat to the coastal countries of West Africa.[15]

The situation has become particularly concerning following the military coups in the central Sahel[16] and the weakening of regional and cross-border counterterrorism cooperation against VET following the withdrawal of France's Operation Barkhane, the EU's Takuba Forces and MINUSMA.[17]

Consequently, VET have taken advantage of political instability and fractured counterterrorism responses to escalate their attacks and expand southward towards the coastal States of West Africa. From Burkina Faso and Niger, VET groups including JNIM, ISGS Ansaroul Islam and Katiba Serma have increasingly targeted coastal countries to the south including Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, and Togo. [18]Benin and Togo especially are among the top ten countries that have experienced the greatest deterioration in terms of the impact of VET from 2021-2022 according to the Global Terrorism Index (2023).[19] Among the factors underpinning VET expansion into the coastal states are the groups' desire to: control key routes to protect financial flows and secure supply lines for items such as food, equipment, fuel and motorcycles and fertilizer used to manufacture explosives; access markets to sell illegally obtained commodities like cattle and gold; and, recruit more members by exploiting local grievances.[20]

---

[11]Onuoha, F.C., Tchie, A. E. Y. and Zabala, M. L. (2023). A quest to win the hearts and minds: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Multinational Joint Task Force. EPON Report. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs; Aning, K., Abdallah, M. and Aubyn, F. (2017) 'Responding to Boko Haram: Interrogating the Effectiveness of State and Regional Intervention Approaches' in Hentz, J.J and Solomon, H (eds), Understanding Boko Haram Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa. New York/London: Rutledge
[12] Edu-Afful, F., Tchie, A. E. Y., Aubyn, F. and Zabala, M. L. (2022) Shifting from External Dependency: Remodelling the G5 Sahel Joint Force for the Future. EPON Series, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).
[13]Ibid; WANEP. (2025). West Africa Early Warning Outlook - February 2025. WANEP National Early Warning System (NEWS). www.wanepsystems.net
[14] Center for Preventive Action. (2023). Violent Extremism in the Sahel. https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism,
[15] Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa: Assessing Ghana's Vulnerabilities, Resilience and Responses. ACCORD Conflict Trends Issue 3.
[16] Aubyn, F.K., Ziblim, I. & R. Apau, R. (2022).
[17] Demuynck, M & Böhm, M. (2023). Unravelling the Niger coup and its implications for violent extremism in the Sahel. International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT) Analysis. https://www.icct.nl/publication/unravelling-niger-coup-and-its-implications-violent-extremism-sahel
[18] Brottem, L. (2022). The Growing Threat of Violent Extremism in Coastal West Africa. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/the-growing-threat-of-violent-extremism-in-coastal-west-africa/,
[19] GTI (2023). IEP. https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/GTI-2023-web.pdf
[20] Interview, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), Accra, Ghana. November 2024.

It is also a semi-guerrilla strategy to limit the capacity of the defence and security forces by preventing the concentration of military operations in the region.[21] Furthermore, the expansion is influenced by the confluence of trade flows, artisanal gold mining, smuggling networks, and arms trafficking in the Mali-Côte d'Ivoire-Burkina Faso tri-border zone.[22] The artisanal sites in the tri-border zone have featured prominently in the revenues generated to support VET.

Among the littoral states, Côte d'Ivoire suffered the first VET attack in Grand-Bassam in March 2016, resulting in the death of 19 people, comprising six European citizens and three security personnel.[23] Since then, VET groups have mainly operated along its border area with Burkina Faso including Comoé National Park in the northeast,[24] with almost 20 attacks and incidents of propaganda sermons, threats and intimidation of civilians recorded between 2020 and 2021.[25] Some attacks have occurred in the Poro and Tchologo regions (Northern Savanes districts) and Bounkani region (Zanzan district) against the military and civilians. VET recruitment is suspected to be occurring in Doropo, Bolé, Tehini and Bouna,[26] while Kafolo has become a strategic entry point and is particularly exposed to attack.[27] For example, in June 2020, dozens of JNIM fighters on motorcycles killed 14 soldiers at a security post in the northern border village of Kafolo.[28] Since January 2022, no major VET attacks have been reported in northern Côte d'Ivoire.

In the case of Benin, the northern regions of Atacora, Alibori and Borgou departments have been the centre of violent attacks, primarily by JNIM and ISGS fighters. The first attack in 2019 involved the kidnapping of two French tourists by JNIM fighters, which ended with the murder of their local Beninese guide on 1 May 2019 in Pendjari Park in northern Benin.[29] Since then, more than 145 VET incidents and over 230 associated fatalities have occurred in northern Benin especially in communes and villages in the Atacora and Alibori departments.[30] The Pendjari National Park,[31] W National Park and the Kourou-Koualou have also become epicentres of VET and trafficking activities.[32] The W-Arly Pendjari Park Complex has become a haven for JNIM-aligned groups - MLF, Katiba Serma and Ansaroul Islam due to its geographic and biophysical conditions, as well as its proximity to major commercial trade and economic corridors. [33]

---

[21] Interview, regional actor, regional organization, December 2024.
[22] Eizenga, D and Gnanguênon, A. (2024). Recalibrating Coastal West Africa's Response to Violent Extremism. Africa Security Brief No. 43, African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS). https://africacenter.org/publication/asb43en-recalibrating-multitiered-stabilization-strategy-coastal-west-africa-response-violent-extremism/
[23] Gunaratna, R. (2016). "Ivory coast attack: Africa's terror footprint expands." Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses 8, no. 6 (2016): 14-18.
[24] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2022). Five Zones of Militant Islamist Violence in the Sahel, 2022. https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/five-zones-militant-islamist-violence-sahel
[25] W. Assanvo (2023). Has Côte d'Ivoire found the solution to violent extremism? ISS Today. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/has-cote-divoire-found-the-solution-to-violent-extremism
[26] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2022). Five Zones of Militant Islamist Violence in the Sahel, 2022. https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/five-zones-militant-islamist-violence-sahel
[27] OCHA (2022), p. 17.
[28] International Crisis Group (ICG) (2023b). Keeping Jihadists Out of Northern Côte d'Ivoire, Briefing Number 192, Africa. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/cote-divoire/b192-keeping-jihadists-out-northern-cote-divoire
[29] Africa Defense Forum (ADF)- 2024. Benin Boosts Security in North in Face of Extremist Attacks. https://adf-magazine.com/2024/01/benin-boosts-security-in-north-in-face-of-extremist-attacks/#:~:text=Pendjari%20National%20Park%20has%20been,members%20and%20attacking%20civilian%20targets
[30] F. Berger, L. Tagziria & A. Mossi (2024). Hostage to violent extremism: Kidnapping in northern Benin. OCWAR-T Research Report 15, ECOWAS. https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/OCWAR-T_Benin_English.v4.pdf
[31] A protected area spanning Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger
[32] J. E. Abatan (2023). Benin must target the illicit activities that enable violent extremism. ISS Today. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/benin-must-target-the-illicit-activities-that-enable-violent-extremism
[33] Those corridors include the Ouagadougou-Lomé, Niamey-Lomé, Niamey-Cotonou, Ouagadougou-Accra, and Niamey-Ouagadougou corridors.

Since 2018, VET groups have recruited vulnerable youth in the area and worked with smuggling networks to engage in illicit trade in fuel, cigarettes, counterfeit goods and medicines, arms trafficking, and gold to finance their operations.[34]

Togo recorded its first terror attack on 9 November 2021, when a security post in the northern village of Sanloaga in the Kpendjal Prefecture, Savanes region, bordering Burkina Faso was attacked by JNIM militants. [35]Since then, areas such as Kpekankandi, Blamonga, Sanloaga, Bagré, Mandoufouaré, Barwaga, Lidoli and Téliga in the Savanes region have become the hotspots of VET violent activities. Between November 2021 until June 2025, more than 30 attacks have been recorded in Togo, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people, including soldiers and civilians.

In Ghana, no VET incidents have been reported, but the country is also vulnerable to the threat with attacks close to its border with Burkina Faso in Bittou located in the Centre-East region.[36] VET groups are reported to have made incursions at the border with Burkina Faso, exposing vulnerable populations, especially youth, to radicalization and recruitment.[37] The country is also experiencing the humanitarian consequences of VET in Burkina Faso with the increasing influx of thousands of asylum seekers to its Upper East, Upper West, and Savannah regions. The Builsa South district in the Upper East region and Wa East district in the Upper West region are considered the most vulnerable to possible radicalization and recruitment by VET groups. The protracted Bawku conflict in the Upper East region has also increased the vulnerabilities of communities to VET.

The incursion of VET groups to the coastal States motivated the launch of the Accra Initiative (AI) in September 2017. It's normative framework, strategic objectives and institutional nomenclature mirrored that of the G5S-JF and the MNJTF. The next section provides an overview of the Accra initiative framework.

---

[34] Eizenga, D and Gnanguênon, A. (2024). Recalibrating Coastal West Africa's Response to Violent Extremism. Africa Security Brief No. 43, African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS).
[35] African Union. (2023). Report of the Chairperson of the Commission on Counter-Terrorism and Related Issues. Addis Ababa: African Union Peace and Security Council. https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/1182-Report-of-the-Chairperson-of-the-AU-Commission-EN.pdf
[36] Africa News. (2023). Burkina: Six civilians killed in attack near Ghana and Togo. https://www.africanews.com/2022/12/05/burkina-six-civilians-killed-in-attack-near-ghana-; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Ghana (2023). Vulnerability Assessment on the Threats of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Northern Regions of Ghana. https://www.undp.org/ghana/publications/vulnerability-assessment-threats-violent-extremism-and-radicalisation-northern-regions-ghana
[37] Ofosu-Peasah, G. (2024). Understanding armed violence in Bawku: Exploring links with terrorism and its drivers. https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/understanding-armed-violence-in-bawku-exploring-links-with-terrorism-and-its-drivers/understanding-armed-violence-in-bawku-exploring-links-with-terrorism-and-its-drivers-1/

OVERVIEW OF THE ACCRA INITIATIVE

The Accra Initiative is another example of attempts by African countries to take responsibility for their own security. It is a cooperative and collaborative security mechanism, launched in 2017 under the leadership of the President of the Republic of Ghana, H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo with his colleague Presidents from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, and Togo (see map 1).[38] Two years later as shown on map 1, Mali and Niger which were observer countries joined in 2019, bringing the membership to seven (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Mali, and Niger). Members of the AI meet at the level of Heads of States, Ministers in charge of defence, intelligence, and security, defence and security Heads and technical level personnel. Its establishment was necessitated by the urgent need to proactively curb the southward drift of VET from the Sahel to coastal West African States. It also served as a framework for Member States to cooperate and coordinate their efforts to conduct cross-border operations through a security pact while pursuing their national interests. Just like the G5S-JF and the MNJTF, it is an African-executed initiative that depended solely on the armed forces and security personnel of its Member States.

Map 1: Initial Accra Initiative countries

Source: adf-magazine.com.

Thus, each Member State controls their troops and personnel to pursue national security goals and the collective interest of the AI. However, it did not operate with an AU Peace and security Council (PSC) authorised mandate although it had the 'blessings' of the UN, AU, and ECOWAS.

---

[38] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ghana, (2022). Germany's Participation in Accra Initiative Summit Reinforces Strategic Partnership with Ghana. https://mfa.gov.gh/index.php/germanys-participation-in-accra-

The main objective of the AI is to prevent a spillover of VET from the Sahel and to address transnational organized crime (TOC) within the common border areas of Member States. The key areas of focus of the AI are - intelligence and information exchanges between intelligence services and security forces; capacity building of intelligence services and security forces; joint military operations at the volatile borders of Member States.

Conspicuously missing in the areas of intervention of the AI is the social, economic, political, development, human rights, and humanitarian dimensions of responding to VET. This limitation of the AI's mandate could be partly attributed to the fact that at the time of its establishment, only Cote D'ivoire had experienced a major terrorist attack in March 2016 at a beach resort in Grand-Bassam.[39] Therefore, unlike the G5S-JF and MNJTF whose mandates included facilitating stabilization efforts in areas affected by VET and providing humanitarian assistance, the AI only concentrated on preventing further incursion of VET groups and their activities including organised crimes.

Nonetheless, the evolving nature of the threats and direct attacks especially in the northern territories of coastal states necessitates a review of the AI's mandate for it to remain indispensable and effective in responding to the threat.

In terms of institutional structures, the AI was headquartered at Ghana's Ministry of National Security in Accra where its Executive Secretariat was located. The headquarters hosted the former Executive Secretary, Mr. Benedict Dere, and other operational staff mainly military and intelligence personnel from Member States. The Executive Secretariat coordinated the activities of Member States at the political and operational levels.

In addition, there was the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Accra Initiative (MNJTF-AI) with a Force Headquarters at Tamale, in the northern region of Ghana. The MNJTF-AI was headed by Major General Michael Amoah-Ayisi of the Ghana Armed Forces. It was supposed to be staffed with designated defence and security personnel from Member States. During the international conference on the AI in November 2022 in Accra, Ghana, the Federal Government of Nigeria also committed to designate representatives at the MNJTF-AI headquarters.

However, the MNJTF-AI could not attain full operational capabilities and preparedness until it ceased operations in the latter part of 2024.[40]

----

[39] France24. (2023) Seven years on, Ivorian beach resort of Grand-Bassam still scarred by deadly attack. https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/revisited,
[40] Accra Initiative. (2022) Communique of the International Conference on the Accra Initiative: Summit of Heads of States, 22 November 2022. Accra: Accra Initiative.

Some Notable Achievements

The operationalization of the AI since 2017 led to some tangible results. The most obvious achievement was the successful establishment of the Executive Secretariat and MNJTF-AI to coordinate the strategic and operational activities of Member States. The AI also facilitated periodic meetings of Ministers in charge of security, heads of security and intelligence agencies, as well as technical level meetings among member countries aside the regular interactions among Heads of States. These strategic, operational, and technical level meetings facilitated information and intelligence sharing on VET and transnational organised crimes which prompted discussions and cooperation on pertinent issues.[41] This was critical in maintaining the integrity of national security of Member States, keeping the population in vulnerable communities safe, and preventing terrorist attacks from occurring. Intelligence sharing among Member States contributed to identifying, locating, and 'neutralising' suspected terrorist plots and apprehending persons suspected of committing terrorist acts. For instance, according to the interviews with key stakeholders, officials from Burkina Faso on several occasions alerted their coastal countries counterparts of suspected extremists crossing into their northern territories to avoid arrest.

One of such occasions was the alert provided to coastal states after the Otapuana operation in southern Burkina Faso in March 2019.[42] Through Operation Comoé in May 2020, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire defence and security personnel captured 38 suspected terrorists, killed eight, and dismantled training camps along their borders.[43]

Furthermore, through intelligence gathering, it emerged that proceeds from illicit sales of stolen livestock from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana were used by armed groups as income to buy arms, fuel, motorbikes, and food to sustain their operations.[44] In addition, it was established through intelligence that violent extremists were sourcing materials such as fertilisers from Ghana to make explosives in Burkina Faso. The sharing of this intelligence information assisted Member States to develop strategies to disrupt the supply chains of illicit trade by trafficking networks which support the funding and logistics of extremist groups. For example, Ghanaian officials have frequently seized fertilizer consignments by smugglers in the northern border towns such as Hamile, Kulungugu and Namori.[45]

Additionally, AI Member States have conducted series of cross-border security operations to respond to the terrorist threats with their own funding since 2018.[46] In May 2018, Operation

---

[41] For more information see the Proceedings Of Policy Dialogue - "Revisiting Frameworks for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) in West Africa: Lessons from Ghana', held on June 26-27, 2023, at the Alisa Hotel, Accra-Ghana.
[42] Kwarkye, S., Abatan, E. J. and Matongbada, M. (2019) Can the Accra Initiative Prevent Terrorism in West African Coastal States?', Available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-accra-initiative-prevent-terrorism-in-west-african-coastal-states
[43] Africa news. (2020) Joint military operation by Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso kills 8 suspected terrorists. https://www.africanews.com/2020/05/25/,
[44] Assanvo, W., Dakono, B., Théroux-Bénoni, L., and Maïga, I. (2019) Violent extremism, organised crime, and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma. ISS West Africa Report
[45] Kwarkye, S. (2020) Breaking terrorism supply chains in West Africa. ISS Today. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/breaking-terrorism-supply-chains-in-west-africa,
[46] European Council on Foreign Relations. (2020) Mapping African Regional Cooperation. https://ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/accra-initiative

Koudanlgou I was jointly conducted by Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Togo in their border areas. Thereafter, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana conducted Operation Koudanlgou II in November 2018. A year later, Togo and Ghana jointly conducted Operation Koudanlgou III and subsequently Operation Koudanlgou IV was conducted in 2021.[47] The successful conduct of these joint operations reaffirmed Member States commitment to strengthening security and improving cooperation across the coastal states.

Aside these joint operations, Member States maintained robust security presence at the vulnerable border areas to deter, detect and counter any threats to the peace and stability of borderland communities. The most tangible results of these operations were the arrest of suspected militants and temporarily halting terror groups' activities and movements. For instance, in 2018 and 2019, the joint military operations along the borders resulted in the arrests of about 700 suspected terrorists and gang members, and the seizure of homemade weapons.[48] Beyond the joint operations, there were also training and capacity building of Member States defence, security and intelligence personnel to enhance their knowledge and operational readiness to combat VET.

Moreover, for the very first time, the Executive Secretariat of the AI successfully organised an international conference from 17th to 18th November 2022 at the technical level in Accra with funding support of the European Union (EU).

The conference brought together participants from relevant government and international organisations, civil society organisations (CSOs), academia, Think-Tanks, and practitioners in the security sector. The objectives of the conference were in three folds: to promote a common understanding of the rapidly evolving security situation in AI countries; tell the story of the AI with respect to its progress, gaps and needs to create a platform for resource mobilisation; and to share lessons from previous counterterrorism interventions. The key conclusions and recommendations of the conference inform the discussions of the ministerial and Head of States and government summit that followed the technical meeting in November 2022. One of the key recommendations that featured prominently in the deliberations and communique of the summit of the Head of States and Government was the need to mobilise indigenous resources to fund the AI's operationalisation.[49]

----

[47] Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa: Assessing Ghana's Vulnerabilities, Resilience and Responses. ACCORD Conflict Trends Issue 3.
[48] Mensah, K. (2022) West African Countries Meet Over Spill over of Terrorism from Sahel Region. VOA News. https://www.voanews.com/a/west-african-countries-meet-
[49] UNOWAS. (2022). International Conference on the Accra Initiative. https://unowas.unmissions.org/international-conference-accra-initiative, (Accessed 19 June 2023)

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the notable achievements, the AI was undermined by some critical challenges that dimmed its prospects for success. Generally, the joint operations of the AI were ad hoc, limited in duration (usually four to five days' deployment) and geographic reach.[50] Since 2020, there was no major cross border joint operations due to the lack of funding and logistical support. While the initial activities of the AI were solely funded by its Member States, sustaining its operational cost was difficult due to the economic downturns in member countries after the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the language barriers between English-speaking Ghana and its Francophone counterparts occasionally hindered effective communication and intelligence sharing between the security services on the ground. Part of this limitation is also the fact that there was no integrated and centralised intelligence system for communication and information sharing among member countries. It was envisaged that the full operationalisation of the MNJTF-AI in Tamale could help address the problem.

Another visible limitation of the AI was that it was predominantly military-oriented with limited attention to the socioeconomic, political and governance challenges that underpin VET. Most of the AI countries are predominantly focused on countering the spillover effects of the threat or movement of extremist groups from the Sahel and not doing much to respond to the local sources of VET. The attention is mainly on security and intelligence strategies (kinetic approaches) involving the military, border security/immigration and intelligence personnel. Even the law enforcement agencies (police and gendarmerie), prisons/correctional service and the judiciary were not actively involved in the AI even though they had a major role to play. The uptick in terrorist activities in the coastal countries, the Sahel, and the succession of coups d'état in Mali and Burkina Faso is indicative of the failure of such military-oriented strategies. Since its establishment, there were limited attempts to respond to the root causes of VET through a well-coordinated, harmonised, and holistic strategy. The strategic vision and institutional structure of the AI were all military and intelligence oriented with very limited involvement of civilian actors who have the expertise and knowledge in addressing the root causes of the menace.

The series of unconstitutional changes of government in the central Sahel also impacted on the commitment of the affected countries to the AI.[51] The military coups left the affected countries with weak political leadership and weakened capacity to fight VET. The resources and focus of the transitional authorities were concentrated on the implementation of the

---

[50] Kwarkye, S., Abatan, E. J. and Matongbada, M. (2019) Can the Accra Initiative Prevent Terrorism in West African Coastal States?', Available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-accra-initiative-prevent-terrorism-in-west-african-coastal-states
[51] Aubyn, F. K., Ziblim, I. and Apau, R. (2022) Coup d'etat and Political Instability in Western Sahel: Implications for the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism. AU/PAPS/ACSRT/PP/002. AU Policy Paper

transition charters to return their countries to constitutional rule rather than fighting VET. The contracting of the Wagner group by Mali and Burkina Faso, a private security company from Russia, now Africa corps, to maintain security and help counter VET also created tensions with some neighbouring countries. Ghana and Burkina Faso had a tensed diplomatic relation in December 2022 after claims that Burkina Faso had invited Russian mercenaries into the country.[52] The Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo made this allegation while speaking to reporters alongside U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday, 14 December 2022. He specifically stated that:

> "Today, Russian mercenaries are on our northern border. Burkina Faso has now entered into an arrangement to go along with Mali in employing the Wagner forces there…I believe a mine in southern Burkina has been allocated to them as a form of payment for their services….and to have them operating on our northern border is particularly distressing for us in Ghana."[53]

While Burkina Faso denied these allegations, other coastal countries of Benin, Togo, and Cote d'Ivoire also shared similar security concerns with the hiring of the Wagner group.

Related to these security concerns was also the inexpressible suspicions and mistrust among the member countries of the Accra Initiative. Anecdotal evidence suggests a perception among most member states that Ghana led the establishment of the AI to protect its own territory. This perceived suspicion has sometimes contributed to limited intelligence and information sharing and occasional lack of communication among member countries. Further complicating this perception is the competing interest of some international partners who instead of engaging the Accra Initiative secretariat were rather engaging bilaterally with the member countries to implement counterterrorism activities. While the direct bilateral engagements may be national interest motivated and not also prohibited within the framework of the AI, it often created restrained tensions, divisions, and deepening suspicions. Lastly, there was limited public awareness of the activities of the AI in member countries and the kind of support needed from the populace to ensure the effective implementation of its mandate.

LESSONS FROM THE OPERATIONALISATION OF THE ACCRA INITIATIVE AND OTHER AD HOC COALITIONS

The first and perhaps the most critical lesson from the operations of the AI is not to view the threat of VET from a singular lens of security and

---

[52] Africanews. (2022) Tensions rise between Burkina Faso and Ghana. https://www.africanews.com/2022/12/17/tensions-rise-between-burkina-faso-and-ghana//
[53] Irish, J. (2022) Burkina Faso aware of the dangers of Wagner force -France. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/burkina-faso-aware-dangers-

deploy security centric approaches in response. This lesson is reinforced by a statement made by the former Executive Secretary of G5S-JF, Maman Sambo Sidikou, who argued that "interventions to respond to VET must not be anchored on a primarily military solution as it could be expensive and unsustainable". [54] Indeed, as the experience of the AI demonstrates, it is important to consider a holistic and comprehensive response that combines elements of security, governance, social and economic development approach. While militarized approaches are relevant, it must be used purposely to create an enabling environment for the required political, governance and development responses. Member States could therefore take this lesson into consideration in revitalizing the AI to ensure that it is pragmatic and adaptive to address the causative factors of VET such as poverty, marginalisation, unemployment, and governance issues.

The second lesson is the significance of adapting to changing environment. The security situation in the coastal countries is complex and dynamic, just like in the Sahel. The operations of the AI have highlighted the importance of adapting to changing circumstances. Within the past five years (2020-2025), the political and security situation in member countries has altered significantly with the series of military coups. For instance, MINUSMA and other international counterterrorism Forces led by France and the United States which provided technical, intelligence and funding support to some AI member states have exited from the region due to frictions with the military governments in the central Sahel. This has led to shifting geopolitical and strategic alliances with some countries, especially Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger turning to non-Western partners such as China, Russia, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States for support. Besides, there is also the formation of the AES and their exit from ECOWAS. These developments have impacted on inter-state relations, the commitment of Member States to the AI and the sustainability of the joint border operations. Under these circumstances, it was incumbent for the AI to adapt, re-imagine and position itself to strategically maintain its influence and relevance. However, this was not done. Flexibility and agility are therefore essential for success in such a challenging environment.

The third lesson is the need to have adequate resources to implement the mandate of the mission. The AI faced challenges in terms of inadequate funding, equipment, and personnel which impacted on the long-term sustainability of its interventions. The G5S-JF experience has also shown that dependence on external funding is risky and unpredictable. It is crucial for the AI Member States to have innovative and indigenous mechanisms to generate sustainable and predictable funding including mandatory annual membership assessed contributions.

---

[54] Sidikou, M.S. (2021) Lessons learned from the G5 Sahel Force for Mozambique, SADC and the AU. https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/

The fourth lesson is the importance of coordination and collaboration among different countries and key actors in responding to the threat of VET. For counterterrorism operations to be successful, it is relevant for defence, security and intelligence actors to work effectively alongside local communities, civil society, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), media, development partners, governance, human rights, and humanitarian actors with a common strategic objective and strategy. Effective collaboration will enable the key stakeholders to avoid duplication of efforts and working in silos, share information, intelligence, resources, and expertise, and to conduct joint operations. It will also help to better engage communities to gain their support and cooperation to build trust and gather intelligence in the fight against VET.

The fifth lesson is exploring the possibility and viability of including dialogue and negotiations in the mandate of any intervention force to address VET within the limits of applicable national, regional, and international normative frameworks. The argument for this consideration is that VET is partly caused by the exploitation of structural faultlines for which a solely military response may never work effectively. Dialogue and negotiations become pertinent to address any grievances and concerns that drive people into VET.

The last critical lesson is the need to recognise the significance of managing public perception through an effective strategic communications strategy. Evidence abounds in the Sahel and the LCB on people joining VET groups due to human rights abuses by the security forces. It is crucial to understand that the asymmetric nature of the fight against VET may inevitably results in human rights abuses. There is therefore the need for effective strategic communication to address any negative perception of the activities of security forces to gain public support.

RE-IMAGINING THE ACCRA INITIATIVE

Going Beyond Security-Oriented Strategies

The lessons learned, limitations and challenges of the AI shows that it could stand a greater chance of success if it adopts a more comprehensive approach that combines both military responses and non-military strategies to combat VET in the coastal states. The prioritization of military responses which was evidenced in its strategic objectives, institutional nomenclature and operations is likely to repeat the same "blunders" of the G5S-JF intervention in the Sahel. The ability of the AI to build effective synergies with good governance and development initiatives is essential. For the AI to achieve this desired outcome, there is the need to forge closer linkages between the military operations and an overarching strategy that aims to improve governance, public services, development, and resilience of affected and vulnerable communities especially along the border regions. This can be realized by remodelling the AI to ensure greater synergy, harmonization, and complementarity among the security, intelligence, political, development, human rights, peacebuilding, and humanitarian actors based on a common strategic plan and a shared understanding of the priorities to address VET. Adopting a comprehensive approach will improve the overall coherence, cooperation, and coordination among the key stakeholders in tackling VET in the coastal countries. it will also ensure that all key stakeholders operate in a coherent and mutually supportive manner in close collaboration with one another.

Against this backdrop, re-imaging the AI will involve reforming its strategic objectives, and a reconfiguration of its processes, mechanisms, and structures to accommodate the roles of other important actors whose interventions are critical in addressing VET. Regarding the strategic objectives, it is important to acknowledge the underlying causes of VET in the coastal countries. The strategic focus on preventing a spillover of VET from the Sahel and addressing transnational organized crimes within the common border areas is not only limiting in scope but denies the existence of internal drivers or root causes of VET in Member States. It also creates a mindset of response rather than prevention of VET. In addition, the strategic objective of the AI reinforces the limited/or non-involvement of other critical actors beyond the defence, security, and intelligence actors in its operations. It is therefore necessary to review the strategic objectives of the AI to better prevent and counter both the domestic and cross border dynamics of VET in member countries. A comprehensive strategy for the coastal countries developed and implemented by all the relevant stakeholders would be very instrumental to the attainment of these reforms. Apropos the institutional structures of the AI, it is essential to create a Multi-National Civilian Cluster (MCC) aside the Executive Secretariat and the MNJTF-AI. This will help to

accommodate the governance, development, human rights, peacebuilding, and humanitarian actors who are conspicuously missing in the AI's institutional structures. In practical terms, each Member State can create a MCC with membership from various stakeholders including relevant ministries and agencies of states, civil society, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), humanitarian agencies, youth groups, women groups, academia, media, traditional and religious bodies. The MCC will work locally and across borders with their counterparts to complement the efforts of the defence and security actors in addressing the underlying causes of VET in a coherent and mutually supportive manner.

However, to ensure that the creation of the MCC does not place additional financial burden on Member States or create heavy administrative structures, it can be a "loose association" at the country level with just liaison offices/focal persons at the Executive Secretariat and the MNJTF-AI for the purpose of coordination. The liaison offices/focal persons can be civil servants seconded from relevant ministries or state agencies whose salaries are already being paid by the State. In other words, although the MCC will be a key component of the AI structures, it will not operate with a formal structure like the MNJTF-AI. Members of the MCC will only coordinate their interventions using their own generated resources with the AI through the liaison offices/focal persons within an overarching AI strategy. Alternately, a civilian component that have professional staff with

expertise in governance, development, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and other relevant areas can be created as a unit within the Executive Secretariat to coordinate the non-military responses with other actors like civil society, NGOs, humanitarian agencies, youth groups, women groups, academia, media, traditional and religious bodies.

In terms of processes and mechanisms, the AI before it ceased operations in the latter part of 2024 held meetings at the level of Heads of States; ministers responsible for national security; heads of defence, security, and intelligence agencies; and technical level personnel. Given the proposal to establish a MCC in each member states or civilian component at the secretariat, it would be useful to have meetings at that level as well. The meeting can be both virtual and in-person based on the availability of funds. Overall, meetings at all these levels will help ensure greater synergy, harmonization, and complementarity in addressing VET in the coastal states.

Ensuring Predictable and Sustainable funding

Predictable and sustainable funding is critical to the success of the AI. Aside their own resources, the AI countries will have to mobilise sufficient funds to support the long-term expenses of its operations. Funding is particularly required to facilitate integrated services such as administration, communication and information

system, equipment, logistics, medical and other additional support as required for the attainment of its mandate. Given the paucity of external funding over time, AI countries must awaken to the fact that they cannot depend heavily on donor funding to run the mission's operations. There is the urgent and strategic imperative to generate indigenous financial resources to bolster and sustain the AI's operations through innovative sources of funding with strong financial management, oversight, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that resources are used effectively and prudently.

One solution to ensure timely, sufficient, reliable, and predictable resources to support the AI's regular budget to cover administrative costs and core activities would be to institute a monthly or quarterly or bi-annually or yearly assessed contributions (mandatory payments) by Member States. The formula for the assessed contributions could follow the example of the United Nations assessed contributions which considers the economic capacity, primarily the Gross National Income (GNI) of Member States.[55] If successfully implemented, it will constitute the core element of the financing of the AI' operations. To help operationalise this proposal, the AI Member States can agree to dedicate a percentage of their yearly national security budgets to support the AI operations instead of ad hoc financial arrangements. This could be done in a manner that will not place additional financial burden on Member States,

bearing in mind other international commitments and economic challenges. However, aside the assessed contributions, there could be options for additional voluntary contributions from Member States. Overall, Member States could consider taking financial responsibility for 70 percent of the AI's annual budget to reinforce their ownership of the Initiative and allow them to fund priority projects.

Furthermore, there is an opportunity to raise internal resources from the formal and informal cross-border trading activities across the AI countries. A levy can be charged on the movement of people, goods, and services across the land borders to support the AI budget. To operationalise this proposal, some useful lessons could be drawn from the African Union's implementation of the 0.2 percent import levy in Member States since the adoption of the Kigali Decision on Financing of the Union in July 2016.[56] For example, one such critical lesson is the need for institutional and legal reforms to make the levy implementable in Member States.

A robust fundraising strategy can also be developed and implemented to mobilise financial and in-kind contributions from other sources, including the private sector/business community, religious bodies, civil society, and donations from affluent individuals. The mining companies operating around the border areas could for example be targeted in fundraising activities. These stakeholders have an interest

---

[55] United Nations. (2025). Committee on Contributions. https://www.un.org/en/ga/contributions/assessments.shtml
[56] For more information see African Union (2016). Financing the Union: Towards the financial autonomy of the African Union. https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/35739-file-financing_the_union_6.pdf

and stand to benefit from improved peace and security in the region. It is therefore important to leverage financing from them to support the AI's activities.

The AI countries could also argue strongly for predictable and sustainable financing from the ECOWAS Peace Fund and the AU Peace Fund as part of 'burden-sharing' of responses since they are undertaking an operation that is critical for the maintenance of regional and continental peace and security. Typically, the AU and ECOWAS are supposed to undertake such operations as part of the implementation of regional and continental peace and security architectures. Thus, the African Standby Force (ASF)/the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF)[57] is supposed to conventionally undertake the operations by the AI. However, the growing scepticism about the effectiveness of ECOWAS/AU security mechanisms and their suitability to asymmetrical conflicts and terrorism has in many instances motivated the creation of ad hoc coalitions like the AI, G5 Sahel Force and the MNJTF. Therefore, for the coastal West African states to take up this responsibility, it is incumbent on both organisations to provide financial assistance through the Peace Funds to support the AI's operations. If the UN assessed contributions[58] is used to finance AU-led peace operations authorised by the UN Security Council, then it should be possible for the AU to consider supporting the AI's activities just like it is supporting the MNJTF in the LCB. Nevertheless, the AI member states should ensure that the mission is mandated by the ECOWAS and AU Peace and Security Council to qualify for such funding. Lastly, a Trust Fund which is dependent on voluntary contributions of external partners can also be created. The AI Executive Secretariat (if revitalised) could consider holding series of international conferences for resource mobilization purposes in cooperation with ECOWAS and the AU.

Rebuilding Trust Among Member States

Trust is the cornerstone of any collaborative security effort like the AI especially with the exit of the AES countries from ECOWAS. High level of trust fosters transparency, minimises suspicions, enhances legitimacy and ensures effective joint action against a shared threat. Without mutual trust, cooperation will become fragmented, information would be withheld, and collective action would be weakened. Addressing the mistrust and suspicions among AI countries is essential to revitalise the Initiative. First, it is important to reconsider changing the name "Accra Initiative" which is not an inclusive name for such a collaborative security framework. There have been past concerns regarding the name of the Initiative, with some speculating that Ghana's leadership role in its establishment was, in part, aimed at mitigating the potential spillover of VET into its territory. Therefore, adopting a neutral name

----

[57] For ECOWAS, the operations will be in its member states excluding the AES which has exited the regional bloc.
[58] For more information see UN Security Council Resolution 2719 on Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security. http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2719

such as "Sahel-Gulf of Guinea Security Alliance" or Sahel-Gulf of Guinea Initiative, or "Sahel-Littoral States Security and Resilience Initiative" could be considered to rebuild trust and inclusivity among the Member States especially with the AES countries.

Second, the Executive Secretariat and the MNJTF-AI should all not be located in Ghana. Locating both headquarters in Ghana somehow confirms the suspicions that Ghana may have spearheaded the AI's creation primarily to prevent the spillover of VET into its territory. The headquarters of MNJTF -AI for instance could be situated in any of the three central Sahel countries where VET is particularly prevalent. This would help restore trust and strengthen the commitment of the Member States.

Lastly, the goodwill and leadership role of President John Mahama of Ghana could be leveraged to revitalise the AI and restore confidence among the AES countries. Since President Mahama took office in January 2025, he has prioritized diplomatic re-engagement with the AES and displayed that commitment with the appointment of H.E. Larry Gbevlo-Lartey as his Special Envoy to the AES. On their part, the attendance of key government functionaries from the AES at the investiture of President Mahama and their subsequent bilateral meetings also showed their willingness to re-engage diplomatically to rebuild trust and foster regional unity. This rebirth of friendship and trust could be leveraged to revitalise

regional security cooperation under a new name that is more inclusive and acceptable to the AI Member States.

CONCLUSION

For a long time, the Sahel region and the Lake Chad Basin were generally classified as the epicenters of violent extremists' activities in West Africa. However, the series of recorded attacks in Togo, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire has shown the increasing expansion of VET activities in the coastal region. As a response to the spillover effects of VET from the Sahel, the AI was birth as a proactive measure to curtail the threat. However, despite the interventions of the AI since 2017, the threat of VET continues to grow in the coastal countries. While several factors account for the increasing proliferation of VET activities in the region, a critical interrogation of the AI's responses before it became inactive revealed some significant gaps and lessons in its intervention approach. Key among them is how the AI is primarily anchored on a militarized approach and reliance on unpredictable external financing. The need for the AI countries to consider a holistic and comprehensive approach that deftly combines the military approach with strong innovative interventions that addresses the complex security, governance, economic, development, human rights, and humanitarian challenges that drive and reinforce VET was brought to the fore. The analysis also highlighted the significance of

generating sufficient indigenous funding to sustain the AI's operations. Others included the importance of coordination and collaboration among the different actors; being pragmatic and adaptive to changing environment to address the causative factors of VET; and the significance of managing public perception about the mission through an effective strategic communications programme.

Based on these important lessons, the re-imaging or revitalisation of the AI is crucial to address VET in the coastal states especially with the exit of the AES from ECOWAS. Areas suggested for the reconfiguration of the Initiative are the strategic objectives, mandate, processes, mechanisms, and institutional structures. One crucial area is the strategic review of the objectives and mandate to acknowledge responses to the underlying causes of VET through a comprehensive strategy developed and implemented by Member States and the relevant stakeholders.

At the institutional level, the proposal is made for the creation of a multi-national civilian cluster aside the Executive Secretariat and the MNJTF-AI to accommodate the governance, development, human rights, peacebuilding, and humanitarian actors who are not currently part of the structures.

Another important issue emphasized in the analysis is the need for predictable and sustainable funding mechanisms to support the short to long term operations of the AI. A proposal is also made for the AI to consider indigenous sources of funding through monthly or quarterly or bi-annually or yearly assessed contribution of Member States, voluntary contributions, levies on cross-border trading activities, financial and in-kind contributions from the private sector, business community, civil society, and donations from individuals.

A strong case is made for the AI to explore predictable funding from the ECOWAS Peace Fund and the AU Peace Fund as part of 'burden-sharing' of responses to VET in the region. The report concludes that the success or failure of the AI after its revitalisation will largely depend on how it is able to adapt and remodel its strategic objectives, mandate, and operations to respond to VET in the coastal countries.

REFERENCES

- Accra Initiative. (2022) Communique of the International Conference on the Accra Initiative: Summit of Heads of States, 22 November 2022. Accra: Accra Initiative

- ACCORD. (2018) The Joint Force of the G5 Sahel. ACCORD Conflict & Resilience Monitor 2018/2

- ADF. (2023). Creeping Terrorism Now an Emergency in Togo. https://adf-magazine.com/2022/07/creeping-terrorism-now-an-emergency-in-togo/

- Africanews. (2022) Tensions rise between Burkina Faso and Ghana. https://www.africanews.com/2022/12/17/tensions-rise-between-burkina-faso-and-ghana//

- Africa News. (2023). Burkina: Six civilians killed in attack near Ghana and Togo. https://www.africanews.com/2022/12/05/burkina-six-civilians-killed-in-attack-near-ghana-

- Africa news. (2020) Joint military operation by Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso kills 8 suspected terrorists. https://www.africanews.com/2020/05/25/,

- Aning, K., Abdallah, M. and Aubyn, F. (2017) 'Responding to Boko Haram: Interrogating the Effectiveness of State and Regional Intervention Approaches' in Hentz, J.J and Solomon, H (eds), Understanding Boko Haram Terrorism and Insurgency in Africa. New York/London: Rutledge

- Assanvo, W., Dakono, B., Théroux-Bénoni, L., and Maïga, I. (2019) Violent extremism, organised crime, and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma. ISS West Africa Report

- Assanvo, W., Abatan, J. E. and Sawadogo, W. A. (2016) Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram. ISS West Africa Report, issue 19.

- Aubyn, F. (2021). The Risk of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in the Coastal States of West Africa: Assessing Ghana's Vulnerabilities, Resilience and Responses. ACCORD Conflict Trends Issue 3.

- Aubyn, F. K., Ziblim, I. and Apau, R. (2022) Coup d'etat and Political Instability in Western Sahel: Implications for the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism. AU/PAPS/ACSRT/PP/002. AU Policy Paper

- Aubyn, F., Edu-Afful, F and Banunle, A. (2022) Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the Sahel-Sahara Region of Africa: Recommendations for stemming a long-lasting threat. AU/PAPS/ACSRT/PP/001. AU Policy Paper.

- Brottem, L. (2022). The Growing Threat of Violent Extremism in Coastal West Africa. https://africacenter.org/spotlight/the-growing-threat-of-violent-extremism-in-coastal-west-africa/,   (Accessed 15 June 2023)

- Center for Preventive Action. (2023). Violent Extremism in the Sahel. https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism, (Accessed 10 June 2023)

- Cannon, B. J. (2022). The scourge of terrorism in Benin and Rwanda's counter-insurgency role. https://trendsresearch.org/insight/the-scourge-of-terrorism-in-benin-and-rwandas-counter-insurgency-role/,

- Edu-Afful, F., Tchie, A. E. Y., Aubyn, F. and Zabala, M. L. (2022) Shifting from External Dependency: Remodelling the G5 Sahel Joint Force for the Future. EPON Series, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

- European Council on Foreign Relations. (2020) Mapping African Regional Cooperation. https://ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/accra-initiative (Accessed 2 June 2023)

- France24. (2023) Seven years on, Ivorian beach resort of Grand-Bassam still scarred by deadly attack. https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/revisited, (Accessed 19 June 2023)

- International Crisis Group. (2023) Crisis Watch: Tracking Conflict Worldwide. https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/march-alerts-and-february-trends-2023,

- International Crisis Group. (2017) Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Report 258 /Africa. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa,

- Irish, J. (2022) Burkina Faso aware of the dangers of Wagner force -France. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/burkina-faso-aware-dangers-

- Kwarkye, S., Abatan, E. J. and Matongbada, M. (2019) Can the Accra Initiative Prevent Terrorism in West African Coastal States?', Available at: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/can-the-accra-initiative-prevent-terrorism-in-west-african-coastal-states

- Kwarkye, S. (2020) Breaking terrorism supply chains in West Africa. ISS Today. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/breaking-terrorism-supply-chains-in-west-africa,

- Mensah, K. (2022) West African Countries Meet Over Spill over of Terrorism from Sahel Region. VOA News. https://www.voanews.com/a/west-african-countries-meet-

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ghana, (2022). Germany's Participation in Accra Initiative Summit Reinforces Strategic Partnership with Ghana. https://mfa.gov.gh/index.php/germanys-participation-in-accra-

- MNJTF. (2023) About the Force. https://mnjtffmm.org/about/.

- Onuoha, F.C., Tchie, A. E. Y. and Zabala, M. L. (2023). A quest to win the hearts and minds: Assessing the Effectiveness of the Multinational Joint Task Force. EPON Report. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

- Sandnes. M. (2021) The G5 Sahel Joint Force: Operationalisation and Dependency on External Actors. PRIO Policy Brief 5/2021

- Sidikou, M.S. (2021) Lessons learned from the G5 Sahel Force for Mozambique, SADC and the AU. https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/,

- UNOWAS. (2022). International Conference on the Accra Initiative. https://unowas.unmissions.org/international-conference-accra-initiative,

- WANEP. (2023) West Africa Early Warning Outlook 2023. Accra: WANEP

Acknowledgements

Reviewers

1. **Mrs. Levinia Addae-Mensah**
   Executive Director, WANEP

2. **Mr. Ifeanyi Okechukwu**
   Programme Director & Deputy Executive Director,
   WANEP

Author

Dr. Festus Kofi Aubyn
Regional Coordinator, Research and Capacity Building,
WANEP

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of WANEP and its partners. While every attempt has been made to ensure that the information published is accurate, no responsibility or liability is accepted for any loss, damage or disruptions caused by errors or omissions whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, or any other cause.

About WANEP

The West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), established in 1999, is a leading regional civil society organisation promoting conflict prevention and peacebuilding across West Africa and beyond. With National Offices in all ECOWAS Member States and over 750 member organisations, WANEP works with communities, civil society, States, ECOWAS, AU, UN, EU, and other partners to promote peace and security in Africa.

RE-IMAGINING
THE ACCRA INITIATIVE:
LESSONS AND
OPTIONS FOR POLICY
CONSIDERATION