

Public round table

Understanding the potential of defense and security forces (FDS) to prevent violent extremism in West Africa

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 14 September 2022
Seen Hotel, 10:00-13:30

SYNTHESIS

Given the limitations of military and security responses to violent extremism, has the response of prevention, which focuses on the multiple and complex causes that generate violence, been sufficiently explored? Can the defense and security forces (DSF) have a role in preventing violence? If so, do their mandate, culture and training prepare them for this? How and with whom can the DSF build a culture of dialogue? Where are the spaces for these exchanges to take place?

These were the questions posed by participants at a roundtable organized in Abidjan on 14 September 2022 by the Peace and Human Rights Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF). On that day, they presented the results of the comparative study on the [Review and Analysis of Policy, Legislative and Operational Frameworks for the Engagement of Defense and Security Forces \(FDS\) in the Prevention of Violent Extremism \(PEV\) in West Africa \(2020-2022\)](#).

This study, carried out in 2020 and 2021 in **seven West African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, Senegal and Togo)**, is part of the regional dialogue initiative led by Switzerland since 2016 in favor of violence prevention in West and Central Africa, which has already organized some forty meetings and workshops in recent years, involving more than 2000 people. Among other things, this program launched, in Dakar and with the Centre for Advanced Studies in Defense and Security (CHEDS) of Senegal, a series of regional seminars specifically devoted to the role of the DSF in the PVE. The study explicitly aimed to respond to the requests of the DSF in the region, expressed during these seminars, to better understand and compare the frameworks in which they operate. **This was in order to better understand the potential of the defense and security forces (DFS) to prevent violent extremism in West Africa.**

This work benefited from the participation of a dozen experts from the region who, alongside the DCAF and the Swiss FDFA, carried out the documentation gathering, the field surveys (more than 300 individual interviews in the seven countries), the comparative analysis of the engagement frameworks and finally, the drafting and validation of the results in the final report presented in Abidjan. To achieve this overall objective, the study sought to:

- To better understand how extreme violence undermines the experience and mandate of the DSF.
- To clarify how the DSF themselves can engage in a PVE process.
- To collect and analyze the frameworks for engagement of the DSF in PVE, be they political, legislative and operational.
- To strengthen the will and capacities of the DSF for such a commitment.
- To continue the dialogue with senior politicians, senior officers, civil society and researchers on their vision, experience and needs in the face of this challenge.

With this wealth of knowledge in their hands (the report contains 89 pages), **some sixty people took part in the round table**, which was opened by the representative of the Minister, Special Advisor to the President of the Republic and National Intelligence Coordinator of Côte d'Ivoire. For him, violence is gaining ground in West Africa and **trust between the DSF and citizens is essential to help reduce violence**. He considers that this study and the round table presenting its results in Abidjan are important and calls for other meetings to continue to develop doctrine in this holistic sense, including human security.

Brief presentation of the results

The content of the report was then presented by two representatives of the FDFA and the DCAF, who emphasised that **the essential tool of the PVE was the inclusive dialogue**, among others between the DSF and the populations, women and young people, and that this roundtable was an integral part of this dialogue. Furthermore, the report shows that, although the reading of the threats, the organization of the envisaged responses and the interactions between texts and practices are different in each country, there is an increasing **concordance of security policies in the countries of the region**. The example of Burkina Faso and its late awareness of the importance of the threat serves as a precedent for the countries of the Gulf of Guinea. Although the causes of the VE (porous borders, weak state presence at the borders, weak capacity of the DSF to cover the national territory, ambiguous behavior of the DSF, links with criminal circles, expansion of illegal gold mining, political and decision-making exclusion) are better understood, the security reading of these causes (rather than the socio-political one) remains predominant according to the results of the study. States strive to secure their borders but too often use the population as an intelligence auxiliary. Furthermore, **the role of the DSF in the PVE is still very rarely explicitly included in policy, legislative and operational frameworks, and even less so in DSF training**, which hinders the integration of the prevention role in their mandates and practices. It is true that PVE strategies have been prepared in all countries, but generally without any concrete link to the role of the DSF, and similarly, although public security and defense policies are almost everywhere under review, they still rarely integrate the prevention dimension. This **siloed approach**, as well as the lack of linkage between security policy makers and senior DSF officials, which blurs the vision of security for those with that mandate, are among the obstacles to be overcome. Nevertheless, the study reveals that pragmatic steps have already been taken in many places, even if the momentum remains tentative and unstructured. **Local mechanisms for dialogue** and therefore PVE, such as security committees, exist and, in some cases, are effectively opened to civil society, which generally seeks this dialogue with the DSF. It was also noted that **civil-military activities** geared towards the needs of the population contribute to the easing of tensions. However, the necessary measures regarding the training of the DSF and public access to information have not yet been fully taken into account, except for a few initiatives such as the Malette pédagogique in Côte d'Ivoire. In its final section, the report mentions **seven challenges and courses of action** and asks the fundamental question: **what is the real place of our armies in our societies?**

Where to find the report:

https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/PVE_Report_EN.pdf

Exchanges

The ensuing debate, launched by three panelists from Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Cameroon, was very lively and made a number of points:

Taking the example of what happened in **Nigeria** more than two decades ago that led to the **creation of Boko Haram**, and pointing out that it was the violent repression and abuse of a socio-religious movement by the DSF that caused it to turn violent, a high-ranking Ivorian official attested that the human dimension of the PVE was so important that **Côte d'Ivoire** was applying the concept in various ways: through the early detection of signs of radicalization, especially among young people; through the establishment of an effective **intelligence** system and a **multi-stage military and security cordon** near the borders; but also through civil-military activities and an **emergency**

development program for the Northern regions of the country, all under the umbrella of the National Security Council. He concluded with the words: "**Prevention is golden, lethal is silver**".

It was then noted that **the task of promoting the PVE is a heavy one and a long-term one**. Fortunately, the discourse has evolved over the last five years. We all know today the limits of our responses, essentially military, and our insufficiencies, in particular when we apprehend violence as was the case for the various rebellions that arose in West Africa thirty years ago. But in order to ward off the VE that spreads daily and imposes asymmetric warfare, is the lethal response really effective? Are we doing everything possible **to fight against the abuses of the DSF and the impunity that accompanies them, which are the real fuel for the VE**, it was asked?

The **contribution of the DSF to the PVE** was discussed at **length**. How can it be made optimal? **Do the DSF have the choice to do their work differently?** It was indeed recalled that the DSF cannot act without a clear mission. It was said that there is the spirit and the letter of the PVE: if policy makers are increasingly taking the PVE into account, how can we ensure that the DSF are formally mandated? Another dimension addressed: the needs of the **"individual DSF"** himself to address this transition to human security, who is also affected by the context, by a form of "second socialisation" by his profession and by the negative perception that accompanies it? What process, including a psychological one, can be used to bring him to become the defender of the nation and its people that we are looking for? Furthermore, **at the political level, the principles of action of the DSF must be revised**, national PVE strategies must be established that include the DSF, and texts dating back to independence must be revised. If the DSF must be more active in the PVE, it is also essential to **integrate the PVE and the tool of dialogue into DSF training**, beyond human rights and humanitarian law, described as a sword of Damocles for the DSF. And how to make the DSF understand that **everyone is responsible for their actions?** This task is perfectly possible and will contribute to the commitment of the DSF to the PVE.

The need for a **broad dialogue between civil society, the population and the DSF** was also discussed as a central point of the challenges to be met: this is how the population will be integrated into the practice of the PVE of the co-construction of security that concerns them. There is, of course, a framework for consultation with the communities, which is called community policing. But such a permanent dialogue must also serve to reduce the resistance of those who only want to react with force and get out of the emergency. Re-establishing more peaceful relations between the DSF and the population also means acting on one of the negative causes of the EV.

The **multiple causes of VE** and the need to correct the imbalances were repeatedly pointed out (unemployment, lack of future prospects, lack of inclusion, inequities, lack of economic integration of young people, glaring differences between the capital and the peripheral areas of the states). While the DSF are not responsible for all these ills, they can also act to **remedy them**, for example through the ACMs, military engineering and military health services.

The **theme of dialogue** was taken up on several occasions. First of all, the two years of conducting the study presented at the round table were the occasion for many meetings and exchanges. They brought together different worlds: political leaders, the DSF, civil society and research, because it was necessary to have a shared understanding of the concept of PVE, but also to evolve from a static vision of VEs (they are nebulae to be exterminated) to the realization that they are constantly evolving and that understanding them allows a differentiated approach to those who are also sons of the country. Furthermore, **dialogue is essential with those whom we must protect**. We have to get to know the population, share with them, because they tell us "**everything you do without us, you do against us**". However, the population too often sees the DSF as an obstacle to its movements and freedoms. This negative perception most often stems from the fact that the DSF oversteps their mission statement and the objective of their mission. As they are the ones who are deep in the territories, it is important that they mobilize the politicians and defend the image they leave to their children.

For an effective PVE that will bear fruit both now and in the future, **women must be given a voice and placed at the heart of the action**. They are marginalized in our societies when they actually

are the main actors in social balance. As women are everywhere, in the market, in the hospital, they know what is coming. They are also mothers and accomplices of their children, they influence them all their lives. Why are they not involved in decisions that concern the community? They certainly suffer from shortcomings, especially in rural areas, in terms of education and economics. But they are extraordinarily resilient. So we need to help them increase their knowledge and build their capacity: that is human security. **The DSF, which should have many more women in its ranks, must therefore reach out to them and take advantage of their strength.**

In conclusion, it was said that **peace is not a word but a behavior** and that it is necessary to involve all actors in the work of PVE, among which the DSF and justice are indispensable.



Program

09 :30-10 :00	<i>Arrival, coffee and installation of guests</i>
10 :00-10 :10	Welcome and introduction of the program and panelists
10 :10-10 :40	Opening of the round table <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H. E. Mme Anne LUGON-MOULIN, Ambassador of Switzerland to Côte d'Ivoire • Anne BENNETT, Director of the Sub-Saharan Africa Program, Centre for Security Sector Governance - DCAF • Pierre KOUASSI, Prefect, representing the National Intelligence Coordinator, Côte d'Ivoire
10 :40-11 :00	<i>Groupe photo</i>
11 :00-11 :30	Presentation of the main results of the study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carol MOTTET, Senior Advisor, Peace and Human Rights Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs - FDFA, Switzerland • Ariane INKESHA, Program Coordinator, Centre for Security Sector Governance - DCAF Commentator : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrôleur General of Police Seydou TOURE, Diplomatic Advisor to the Minister of the Interior and Security, Côte d'Ivoire
11 :30-13 :00	Panel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Paul NDIAYE, former Director General, Centre des Hautes Etudes de Défense et de Sécurité - CHEDS, Senegal • Madeleine MEMB, Coordinator, MediaWomen4Peace, Cameroun • Souleymane CISSOKO, Expert consultant, Analyst at the National Intelligence Coordination, Côte d'Ivoire Facilitation: Dr. Séverin KOUAME , Research Professor, University of Bouaké Discussions
13 :00-13 :15	Closing
13 :15-14 :15	<i>Refreshments and press briefing</i>