

Mercenarism in West Africa: A Threat to Ghana's Democracy?

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Abstract

The highly destructive nature of contemporary warfare, particularly its impact on lives and property raises concern both in the corridors of power and among civil society. These concerns may be infectious; they may create a sense of insecurity and tension which threatens the stability of even a country not at war and makes the country prone to eruption of conflict. A counter argument would, however, be that such concerns send early warning signals and facilitate early and appropriate response measures by government departments and security agencies.

The paper holds that West African security threats are very real, in terms of a recurrence or an outbreak of a new conflict and the unconstitutional change of governments. These threats exist also in countries perceived to be relatively stable and peaceful with prospects of consolidating basic tenets of democracy and good governance. One of these threats that remain salient and which has become topical under the rubric of "mercenaries" is the re-cycling of combatants from one civil war to the next and, thus, a prompt or an early and appropriate response to these destabilising activities, either by individual member states or within the ECOWAS sub-regional conflict framework would enhance both state and human security in the region.

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Introduction

Mercenaries have been involved in a number of conflicts and attempts at unconstitutional change of government in different parts of Africa including West, South and Central Africa. These mercenary activities date back from the post-colonial era to the current 21st century. According to Kufuor:

*“... [M]ercenaries have been recruited either by established governments trying to hold on to their authority, or by rebel movements committed either to overthrowing the government... For example during the 1960s in Kinshasa, in the Congo, Moise Tsombe, the prime minister at the time, relied on services of mercenaries for military support... Mercenaries [also] played roles in the abortive invasions of Guinea in 1970 and Benin in 1977... [and attempts were made] by mercenaries to overthrow the government of Seychelles in 1981...”*²

Private military Companies (PMCs) like Executive Outcomes (EO) were also contracted by the governments in Angola in 1993 and Sierra Leone in 1995 to fight in civil wars against rebel groups.³ In March 2004, 64 alleged mercenaries, supposedly transiting Zimbabwe to Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), had their aircraft impounded by the Zimbabwean police. These men have, subsequently, been undergoing trial for plotting a coup against President Teodoro Obiang Nguema of the oil-rich Equatorial Guinea.

The uncertainty that characterizes stability in the West Africa sub-region becomes even more entrenched, when a country appears relatively stable and peaceful amidst a ‘hotch potch’ of conflicts or a highly unstable sub-region. More so, when a country is seen to be consolidating its democracy through peaceful elections and begins to attain an enviable status among its peers in the region.

Non-state actors, specifically rebel combatants, have engaged in destabilising acts in West Africa. These combatants are either recruited locally or from outside the country in which the conflict takes place, mainly to destabilise or overthrow the government in an attempt to wrest power and allegedly restore good governance for the betterment of the lives of individuals who remain targets in these civil wars. Knowing who these combatants are, where they come from, who leads them and what they do would help properly contextualise whether they are mercenaries by the *OAU Convention on the Elimination of Mercenaries in Africa* (CEMA) definition, the kinds of threat they pose to security (more so human security) in the sub-region, and the needed capacity (both national and sub-regional) to respond to mercenarism.

Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire, among other West African countries, have experienced civil wars fought by a mix of combatants who are either nationals or

² Kufuor, Kofi Oteng. “The OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism and Civil Conflicts” in Abdel-Fatau Musah & J. Kayode Fayemi (eds). 2000. “Mercenaries: African Security Dilemma”, (Pluto Press: London), p. 198.

³ Ibid.

non-nationals. These combatants are seen in different conflicts, especially in the Mano River Basin (MRB) (including Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea) and Côte d'Ivoire and have participated in on-going disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes (DDR) in some of these countries.

The report of the UN Secretary-General on ways to combat sub-regional and cross-border problems in West Africa notes that: "The increasing use and proliferation of mercenaries, child soldiers and small arms account for much of the instability in the West African sub-region."⁴

Some PMCs labeled as "mercenaries" have played active roles in conflicts in West Africa in particular and Africa as a whole. Specific references can be made to operations undertaken by EO , Sandline International (SI), Branch Energy (BE) and the Gurkha Security Guards (GSG) in Sierra Leone, and the recent involvement of mercenaries from different parts of Southern Africa (South Africa, Mozambique, Angola) in the Ivorian crisis. Such mercenary activities have taken place with or without the consent of state actors who have made commitments to prevent mercenaries using their territories for subversive and other 'shady' acts under the CEMA.

Mercenaries are usually known to freelance their labour and skill to a party in foreign conflicts for fees higher and above those of native counterparts.⁵ Article 1(1) of the CEMA defines a mercenary as any person who: (a) is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict; (b) does in fact take a direct part in the hostilities; (c) is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and in fact is promised by or on behalf of a party to the conflict material compensation; (d) is neither a national of a party to the conflict nor a resident of a territory controlled by a party to the conflicts; (e) is not a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; and (f) is not sent by a state other than a party to the conflict on official mission as a member of the armed forces of the said state.⁶ The CEMA definition is thus clearly drafted with inter-state conflict in mind.

The above definition raises questions regarding how else mercenaries differ from re-cycled combatants or their native counterparts, and are re-cycled combatants engaged in civil wars (not provided for by CEMA) mercenaries? Combatants, and for that matter, re-cycled combatants who are natives or residents of a country are not regarded by CEMA as mercenaries under its article 1(1d); the reason being that native combatants are, essentially, either nationals of a party or residents of a territory controlled by a party to the conflict. Thus, Charles Taylor and Foday Sankoh (leaders of NPFL and RUF respectively) together with their counterpart Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in their

⁴ Report of the Secretary-General on ways to combat sub-regional and cross-border problems in West Africa, S/2004/200, UN Security Council, 12 March 2004.

⁵ Abdel-Fatau, Musah, Kayode Fayemi (eds.). 2000. *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma*, (Pluto Press: London), p. 16.

⁶ Convention of the OAU for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa. Libreville, 3rd July 1977.

respective rebel groups will not be considered as mercenaries fighting in their respective countries. However, non-nationals/non-resident members of the NPFL and RUF fighting in both Liberia and Sierra Leone would be classified as such, as long as they are not sent by a state (say Guinea) other than that of both countries on official mission as a member of the armed forces.

PMCs like the EO and SI on the other hand, also present interesting scenarios regarding their status and activities in say Sierra Leone and Angola. Can a PMC provide protection for lives and property without self-defence, and to what extent can self-defence and the protection of sensitive installations be construed as engagement in direct hostility? EO for instance, secured the mineral fields and sensitive installations in Angola and Sierra Leone, but also took part in direct hostilities in conflicts in these countries (under the excuse of protecting the mineral fields) on behalf of the state against the UNITA Rebels and the RUF respectively. Thus, by CEMA definitions, EO, together with the other PMCs engaged in similar activities, compromises their legitimate status as a PMC by engaging in combat activities with rebel groups. By not only guarding the diamonds but also becoming involved in combat with rebels, they have in fact taken part in direct hostilities for private gains and again, were not sent, at least officially, as members of the armed forces of the state in question to the conflicts.

Some pertinent issues regarding mercenarism are not addressed by the CEMA and, thus, would need some clarification in order to properly address the problem posed by mercenary activities. For instance, what would be the status of a foreign PMC engaged in direct hostilities on behalf of a party to a conflict in another country while guarding VIPs and sensitive installations, and training the military of a regime in need of its services in a totally different country or after its first engagement?

Despite the existence of some definitional problems regarding mercenaries under CEMA, mercenaries generally provide various services to their clients, some of which include undertaking subversive acts against sitting governments and supporting a specific faction (either state or non-state actors) in armed conflicts for specific gains. For purposes of clarity and to distinguish who a mercenary is and is not, this paper adopts the term mercenary based on the CEMA definition to imply both re-cycled combatants and PMCs who are non-nationals nor resident in the territory of a state party to a conflict, but engages in direct hostility on behalf of a state or non-state actor group within the core or periphery of the territory of conflict.

The paper attempts, first, to examine the phenomena of “re-cycled” combatants in West Africa with specific reference to where they are, what they do and why, and who leads them. In doing this, the paper highlights threats posed by mercenarism to the consolidation of democratic rule in Ghana, its security sector loyalty and professionalism, security sector capability and competence and the regional capacity to support Ghana in the event of an attempt at unconstitutional change of government. Major security concerns are expected to be addressed, while diffusing the tense and seemingly unstable environment characterizing the pre-election and post-election periods in Ghana and security in the West African region in general.

Mercenarism and Instability in the Mano River Basin

Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea have experienced their fair share of civil wars. These wars started from Liberia in 1989 and gradually “spilled-over” to its neighbouring Mano River countries. These wars were fought by combatants who are or were both nationals/non-nationals as well as residents/non-residents, moving across the porous borders in the Mano River area. The re-cycling of these combatants from one country to the other underscored their status as professional fighters who fought purely to gain power and wealth and survived by the use of the gun.

Former president Charles Taylor has always been blamed for plunging the MRB into conflicts by recruiting professional and experienced combatants who have fought in different civil wars in the MRB. The blame stems from the open declaration by the warlord that he would make Sierra Leone and by extension, Guinea pay for lending support to anti-National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) elements in the Liberian civil war in his attempt to take over power from the Doe regime. In one of such accusations, a 2003 *Global Witness Report* accused Liberia, and specifically its former President Charles Taylor, of being responsible for the instability in the Mano River area and Côte d’Ivoire and for having recruited most of the combatants in the region. Charles Taylor allegedly continues to finance the training of militias and import illegal arms and ammunition. By invading Côte d’Ivoire with armed mercenaries, and planning to destabilise Sierra Leone with elements of former Revolutionary United Front (RUF)⁷, former president Charles Taylor and his government again proved themselves unreliable and indignant at the UN Security Council’s authority, but adept at violating Security Council sanctions to the highest degree by organising the invasion of a neighbouring state using illegally imported weapons.⁸

Liberia was believed to have a strong security apparatus, many members of whom have been blamed for the insurgency in Côte d’Ivoire and planned destabilisation of Sierra Leone – apparently to disrupt proceedings of the Sierra Leone Special Court for indicting him for war crimes.⁹ These combatants are key commanders of the Liberian Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) for Côte d’Ivoire and possibly Sierra Leone and have fought in many civil wars in countries of the MRB of which they are not necessarily nationals.

⁷ RUF was led by Foday Sankoh until his arrest in May 1999. Issa Sesay took over from Sankoh as the leader of RUF and was indicted in March 2003 by the Sierra Leone Special Court for committing war crimes in the Sierra Leonean civil war.

⁸ See “The Usual Suspect”, *Global Witness Report*, 2003, pp.28-34. Also available at www.globalwitness.org.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 28-31. Some of the members were identified as: Mohammed Sammoh; Sam Bockarie (believed to have died in the Ivorian civil war); Musa Sesay; Frances B. Kpanga; Foday Sesay; Brima Fofama; Brima Kargbo; Amara Sammoh; Jusufu Mansaray; Alieu Massaquoi; and Michael Bangura.

Both Burkina Faso and Libya have been named as backers of the Liberia-organised Movement for Justice and Peace (MPJ) and Ivorian Popular Movement for the Great West (MPIGO).¹⁰ Some mercenaries were also believed to have transited Ghana into Côte d'Ivoire from South Africa to help the Gbagbo government contain the rebel insurgency in the recent crisis.¹¹ There are other names like Aloysius Sackie, Felix Doh and William Sumo responsible for recruiting and deploying Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in Côte d'Ivoire for an attack on Man, Danane and Toulepleau.¹²

Most of these combatants have fought civil wars in the MRB for over a decade and have participated in disarmament and demobilisation programmes in the Mano River Basin.¹³ They fight these wars mainly for the economic gains derived from these activities and are usually attracted to areas endowed with rich mineral and natural resources. These resources (some of which are diamonds, timber and oil) have provided the financial and material basis for the sustenance of their activities.

Sierra Leone presented a slightly different engagement of combatants in its civil war. Private military Companies mentioned earlier (like GSG, EO, SI, BE, HOG and DW) were contracted by the late Capt. Valentine Strasser (1995) and President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's government to guard and protect the diamond mines, ward-off RUF insurgency and train local militias and members of the Sierra Leonean Army to fight the RUF insurgency in exchange for financial and material gains.¹⁴ Names like Tim Spicer and Tony Buckingham were behind some of these companies and helped the Sierra Leone government, backed by the Kamajor militia, some of whom were believed to be based in Guinea to contain the RUF insurgence and protect sensitive installations in the country for material and other gains.

The Sierra Leone and the Liberian cases depict a general typology, trend and dynamics of combatants recruited by both state and non-state actors to provide services of all kinds in exchange for material and financial gains. Re-cycled combatants comprise mainly of 'radical' youth (including child soldiers and females) as well as adults, with no distinct military insignias or professional military training. These combatants are either voluntarily or forcibly recruited through abduction or other illegal means, armed with weapons and ammunition and paid comparatively low sums of money acquired from financial gains made from exploitation of conflict resources. They are usually large in

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ According to John Tuma, a South African security analyst, forty men arrived in Abidjan in October from South Africa and some 160 were meant to follow. For further reading, see "Mercenaries on the Loose Again in Africa", *The Tehran Times*, 9 September 2002, accessed at <http://www.madagasikara.de/1noveng/021109tehrantimessoeldner.htm> accessed on 20-10-04.

¹² Global Witness Report, op. cit., p. 29.

¹³ It is believed that more than 70,000 RUF combatants participated in Sierra Leone DDR programme and over 95,000 in Liberia.

¹⁴ See Musah, Abdel-Fatau. "A Country Under Siege: State Decay and Corporate Military Invention in Sierra Leone" in Musah, Abdel-Fatau & J. Kayode Fayemi (eds.). 2002. "Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma", (Pluto Press: London), pp. 76-116.

number and have the tendency of breaking away (out of disaffection resulting from low financial gain or access to power) from their original group to form other splinter rebel groups.

PMCs on the other hand comprise of retired military officers and men from professional armed forces, with distinct hierarchy, sophisticated arms and ammunition, and *modus operandi*. These companies are corporate entities and run as business enterprises, providing professional services for financial and material gains. The cash contract for EO from May to December 1995 was US\$13.5 million and this contract was later renewed from April 1996 for 20 more months at a fee of US\$35.2 million.¹⁵ They are usually few in number compared to re-cycled combatants.

The diamond mines in Sierra Leone, timber and rubber plantations in Liberia and Cocoa plantation in Côte d'Ivoire created an appropriate environment for an economic driven agenda, backed by political and military ideals for the engagement of these combatants. This objective reinforces the argument that the concept of greed or grievance as a cause of conflict has emerged as a lens through which to analyse the issue of apparent or obvious economic agendas.¹⁶

Guinean Armed Forces fought to contain fierce cross-border attacks by alleged Guinean, Sierra Leonean and Liberian rebels fighting under the Movement of the Democratic Forces of Guinea (RFDG) from Liberian territory between 2000 and 2001. These attacks were believed to have been motivated by revenge for Guinea's military support to fighters of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) of Sierra Leone (mainly Kamajor militia) who were based in Guinea refugee camps.

The use of native West African combatants from different countries, both within and outside ECOWAS member states, however, lends credence to the notion of "re-cycled combatants" contracted either by state or non-state actors, profit-oriented groups moving across porous borders of member states to engage in unconstitutional change of governments or provide combatant services to a state party in the conflict. Unlike Côte d'Ivoire where these attacks were initially launched from the core, the cases of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia had combatants launching their attacks from the periphery. Mercenaries, thus, joined forces with either government forces or rebels and fought in civil wars or launched attacks on governments, not only in the MRB but other parts of West Africa and Africa as a whole. These mercenaries are recruited both from within (re-cycled combatants) and outside West Africa (PMCs mainly from Southern Africa).

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 91.

¹⁶ See Paul Collier. "Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective" in Berdal, Mats., David Malone. 2000. *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, (Lynne Rienner Publishers: Colorado), pp. 91-111.

Mercenarism as a threat to democratic consolidation in Ghana

Ghana, increasingly being perceived as a stable, democratic country and the ‘gateway to (West) Africa’, is scheduled to go to the polls in December 2004 to either maintain or change the democratically elected government of the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Typical of an election year, major security concerns exist within civil society regarding a peaceful change-over of government. This security concern is informed by a turbulent history of coups d'état¹⁷ and conflict spill-overs across borders of ECOWAS member States. Interviews granted and comments made by security analysts in the media, seminars and workshops¹⁸ in the recent past indicated no major security concerns in an election year but current developments seemingly negate this assertion. In fact, the general consensus during these seminars was that the security situation in the country was stable, but with a caveat that it is an election year and there is need for the security agencies to be on the alert and civil society to be only cautiously optimistic.

The response to this particular observation is twofold: firstly, that most participants in the security debate were aware of the instability in the sub-region and the possibility of consistent conflict spill-overs from the Western to the Eastern parts of West Africa. This is reflected in the systematic movement or gradation of the epi-centre of conflicts/civil wars from Senegal through the Mano River region to Cote d'Ivoire with Ghana or Togo appearing to be next in line. Civil society, however, expects Ghana's national security apparatus to guard against any unforeseen destabilization. Secondly, elections in Ghana are always characterized by widespread tension in which pronouncements by political elites and sensational headlines by the media, create the general fear, insecurity and tension. Again, the security agencies are said to have these developments under control.

The role of the Media in “defining” the mercenary threat

It is an election year and the stakes are high as regards who takes over government in 2005. Politicians concentrate and harp on their opponents' shortfalls and weaknesses as a means of getting themselves into power. This creates all kinds of tension and insecurity as opposing party members also attempt to convince each other of the potency of their respective parties ruling the country. With current threats of destabilization, mercenaries in the sub-region may attempt to take advantage of the situation, informed by their political, economic and military calculations alluded to in the cases of Liberia and Sierra Leone.

¹⁷ The successful coup d' états Ghana experienced spanned the periods of 1966-1969 (NLC), 1972-1975 (NRC), 1975-1978 (SMC I), 1978- 6/1979 (SMC II), 6/1979- 9/1979 (AFRC) and 1981-1992 (PNDC).

¹⁸ The media here refers to both print and electronic media, while the seminars (dubbed “*Reflections on Security Series*”) and workshops being referred to were organized by the African Security Dialogue and Research (ASDR), a security think tank in Accra, Ghana.

Hence, it is not surprising that a Liberian newspaper, *The Analyst*, carried an advertisement on a ‘mercenary attack on Ghana’, alleging that certain opposition figures in Ghana were planning to subvert the Ghanaian government prior to the pending general presidential and parliamentary elections.¹⁹ The story (subsequently carried in both the Ghanaian *Statesman* and *Insight* newspapers) had it that Ghana’s opposition leaders are massively recruiting mercenaries in the Ivory Coast, Togo, Senegal and Guinea to lead an attack on Ghana by August 20 or certainly before the general elections.²⁰ Interestingly, President Abdullah Wade of Senegal and a retired Ghanaian military officer and former national security boss in the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government, Capt. (rtd) Kojo Tsikata were implicated in the story.

The story was carried for the first time in *The Statesman* of 19 August 2004, eliciting a lot of reactions from the print and electronic media, civil society and government officials. The credibility of the story was in question raising further questions regarding the motive behind the paid supplement in the *The Analyst*. Though no apparent motive was given for carrying the story/advert, the managing editor stated that Liberians consider Ghana as a true friend, and also that Ghana (since the National Democratic Congress (NDC) days to date) has rendered assistance to Liberia in helping her come out of the civil strife.²¹

The managing editor of the *The Analyst* eventually came out with an apology, reproduced in *The Insight* (of Ghana), after massive attacks and unfriendly comments made against the newspaper.²² Besides acknowledging the story in the newspaper as a costly error, investigations conducted by the paper revealed that the story – “Ghana’s Stability Threatened as Opposition Leaders Recruit in the West African Region” – was the work of ‘hidden hands’. In a nutshell, the paper realized that the whole story was a hoax intended to tarnish the reputation of reputable individuals in the sub-region who had made enormous sacrifice to restore sanity to Liberia, including President Abdullah Wade of Senegal and Capt. (rtd) Kojo Tsikata.

The interesting aspect of this whole mercenary debacle was the *Accra Daily Mail*’s (ADM) assertion of receiving information that mercenaries are preparing to strike, using Côte d’Ivoire as the staging post. On the afternoon of 19 August 2004, ADM received a call from an individual with security and intelligence connections in the sub-region. He told ADM that the story of the alleged intended mercenary attack on Ghana had filtered to some of his sources in Côte d’Ivoire and they had got back to him *post haste* because of the urgency of the situation. His source, whom he described as a “Baule speaking officer” in the Ivorian military had told him (the individual divulging the information) that Ghana should not take the mercenary threat lightly because some malcontents were indeed trying to use the Ivorian territory to destabilize Ghana to mar the country’s record

¹⁹ *The Analyst*, 13 August 2004.

²⁰ See *The Insight*, 27-29 August, 2004, front page.

²¹ *The Statesman*, 19 August, 2004, front page.

²² *The Insight*, 27-29 August, 2004, p. 7.

as the only beacon of hope in a generally unstable sub-region. The intention, he said, is to disrupt Ghana's electoral process and plunge the nation into a major political crisis similar to what is taking place in Cote d'Ivoire.²³ The reason for this, perhaps, is that this is the first time that a non-coup civilian government is taking Ghana to elections after serving its four-year term. Some people do not like that and would want this seamless democratic process to be disturbed in these few months left for the polls.

This development reinforces the question as to whether the supposed mercenary attack on Ghana is mere politicking/'politricks' or a threat on Ghana's democracy and stability in West Africa and if informants or the media know, or are well-informed of activities of mercenaries.

The Minister for the Interior himself mentioned on one of the local (FM) stations (*Joy 99.7 FM*)²⁴ that the government has intelligence information about some people (having links with the opposition National Democratic Congress but unconfirmed) moving in the sub-region, from Ivory Coast to Guinea for no apparent reason and that they are monitoring the situation. The President has called for the security agencies to be vigilant; so has the Minister for the Interior and the National Security Coordinator. A pronouncement has also been made by the Minority Leader in Parliament on the same *Joy FM* and other FM radio stations in the country that (he is reliably informed that) President Gbagbo and President Blaise Campaore do not like President Kufour's role in the Ivorian peace process, but this allegation has been denied by both presidents.

Security threats create fear and tension; as well as an unstable condition within an otherwise stable and peaceful environment which should not under any circumstances be taken lightly. These developments may certainly be construed as an early warning for the security agencies for which adequate preparation for an early response should be made if the need arises.

Capacity to deal with real threats

With obvious mercenary engagement in West Africa and the possibilities of destabilizing relatively peaceful ECOWAS member states, as well as states in transition or states emerging from complex humanitarian emergencies, there is the need to identify options for control of such mercenary activity.

The Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) is mandated by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana to be equipped and maintained to perform their role of defence as well as undertake such other functions for the development of Ghana as the President may determine.²⁵ In similar

²³ *Accra Daily Mail*, posted to the web 23 August 2004.

²⁴ Interview with the Minister for the Interior, Hon. Nana Hackman Owusu Agyeman on alleged security threats to Ghana on 26 August 2004.

²⁵ See The 1992 Constitution of Ghana, Article 210(3).

vein, the Security and Intelligence Agencies Act of 1996, *Act 526*, makes provision for internal and external security of Ghana and details the institutions and structures responsible for guaranteeing the security of the country. Thus, the need for defence of the state against any mercenary attack would be operationalized within these broad legislative mechanisms based on GAF's military doctrine.

The national security and intelligence apparatus was successful in warding off subversive attempts at overthrowing ex-President Jerry John Rawlings under his PNDC (military) and National Democratic Congress (NDC) governments for close to 20 years. The GAF is also credited all over the world for its professionalism and a good sense of dedication to duty on peace support operations. These competencies provide a good basis for dealing with threats to Ghana's security challenges. These achievements notwithstanding, Ghana's high rate of troop deployment/rotation on peacekeeping operations abroad leaves very few troops in formed units back home where they would be needed in the event of a mercenary attack.²⁶

Ghana has a good conflict prevention/management mechanism in place which has helped secure the country for all these years.²⁷ This is a 'good practice' that should be further strengthened to detect mercenary activities in the country and also prevent, manage and resolve conflicts which facilitate such mercenary activities.

In addition to these positive developments, Ghana, since the change of government in 2000, has embarked on security sector reform or transformation (SSR/T). The initiative, pioneered by non-governmental organizations and personnel within the security agencies, is taking place under the auspices of the Government of Ghana (GOG) and the United Nations Development Programme Thematic Trust Fund (UNDP-TTF) for reform of the Ghana Police Service (GPS) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Department for International Development (DfID) for the military.

The SSR initiative is expected to equip, reorient the philosophies, attitudes and *modus operandi* of both government and the security agencies to handle challenges including mercenarism in the 21st century. These security agencies, tasked with guaranteeing state and human security, fall under the executive or judicial arms of government, with the legislature exercising prudent oversight functions over these agencies. This initiative in itself is credible and should help consolidate good governance and maintain a peaceful and democratic country.

The challenge for Ghana, regarding the media however, lies in the dilemma of exercising an editorial discretion based on good judgment, balanced opinion, objective and verifiable contents and the ability to use the "fourth estate of the realm" not to hype or

²⁶ At least one-third of Ghana's troops are deployed on peacekeeping missions abroad at any given time and this has a possibility of undermining its capacity to deal with real threats when the need arises.

²⁷ These conflict mechanism institutions comprise of national/traditional conflict prevention, management and resolution structures for managing conflicts at the district, regional and national levels.

cause destabilizing sensations but to maintain a stable and peaceful environment for democratic consolidation.

Ghana's capacity to deal with armed attacks and coup d'état, notwithstanding, mercenary groups (either as PMC or rebel groups) have ex-military/professional soldiers and recycled combatants who have fought many civil wars on the African continent and, thus, have been tried and tested, and are well resourced and equipped leaving possibilities for them to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ghana. Given the existence of such a possibility, there may be need for additional capacity to deal with mercenary threats.

Within the sub-regional context, a comprehensive and credible ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security was established in December 1999 and provides the framework for early warning, backed by structures to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts.²⁸ What has been lacking within ECOWAS, though, is an ability to respond early to threats which are beyond the capacities of member states with a credible and robust sub-regional standby force. Thus, efforts by the ECOWAS Defence and Security Commission (DSC) to establish an ECOWAS standby force for rapid deployment to contain conflicts and other destabilizing acts within ECOWAS member states is commendable and a step in the right direction.

Conclusion

Mercenary threats exist in all forms in West Africa and Africa as a whole. Such threats are posed by re-cycled combatants and PMCs both within and outside West Africa. With the existence of these threats and knowing some of the faces behind these threats, Ghana as a relatively peaceful and stable democracy must do everything within its legislative and security domain to ward off any such threats posed by mercenaries (either real or a hoax). This becomes even more imperative during the presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2004 and post-elections security challenges, especially in 2005.

Though credible reforms are underway and Ghana is known to have dependable national security and intelligence apparatus, its security measures cannot be fool-proof. Hence adequate provisions would have to be made for all security agencies both in charge of internal and external security to prevent any mercenary attack or outbreak of conflict in the country.²⁹ As a medium-to-long term measure, however, provisions must be made for

²⁸ The Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance and the ECOWAS Moratorium on Import, Export and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons gives credence to the ECOWAS Conflict Mechanism and provides credible options for dealing with mercenarism in West Africa.

²⁹ The arrest of seven civilians/retired military officers of the GAF on 6 November 2004, suspected of attempting an overthrow of the NPP government also lends credence to the capacity of the security and intelligence agencies to deal with real threats, but also goes to reinforce the need for these agencies and civil society to remain vigilant during and after the December 2004 elections.

a readiness system that encapsulates a well-equipped and logistically sound security and intelligence apparatus for combating any subversive attacks on the country. Like the other West African countries, Ghana is rich in gold, diamonds and cocoa and these resources could serve as credible attractions to profit-oriented and motivated re-cycled combatants and PMCs, who would spare no moment to profit out of a destabilized “model democracy” in an unstable sub-region.

Numerous conflicts (mainly chieftaincy and land disputes) still exist and erupt occasionally. These, combined with electoral violence, could create a conducive environment for destabilizing activities and must be promptly resolved and guarded against.

The media as “a fourth estate of the realm” has the responsibility to remain fair, objective and neutral as the elections gain momentum. It must give adequate information to the electorate to facilitate informed choices rather than whip up sentiments or fan simmering disputes and party political rivalries with inflammatory statements and sensational headlines.

ECOWAS should in the short-term, support Ghana’s democratic process by getting actively involved in the electoral process and sending its observers to monitor the elections. This will lend credibility to the process and prevent conflicts likely to arise from declaration of election results. In the long-term, the sub-regional body should lend its support to “democratic growth poles” in the sub-region while improving upon its pre-conflict and post-conflict reconstruction programmes for member states emerging from conflict situations to facilitate stability in the sub-region. Efforts must also be speeded up towards the establishment of an ECOWAS Standby Force to give the ECOWAS conflict mechanism the credibility and enforcement powers need to maintain peace and security in the sub-region.