

## **Security Situation**

A report by the  
CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & DEFENSE STUDIES  
West Africa

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### **Summary Report of the Center for Strategic and Defense Studies on the Security Situation in West Africa**

#### **I. Introduction**

The security situation in West Africa and the Sahel continue to be marked by asymmetric threats and a wave of terrorist attacks against security forces and civilians. A number of countries in the region face several internal security challenges. In addition, maritime piracy, drug trafficking and transnational organized crime continue to affect the security situation.

While a recent rise in violence and conflict as well as drug trafficking, piracy, extremism and other emerging threats have sparked concerns over the region's future development, efforts to prevent conflicts have also improved, contributing to overall stability. West Africa is making progress in economic growth, democratization and regional cooperation. Development policy has a critical role to play in supporting stability to reduce conflict and violence over the long term. This requires interventions in many areas including support for lagging States, strengthening local governance, improving land management, and spurring job creation among others.

#### **II. The nature of violence has changed significantly in West Africa since independence**

- The vast majority of armed conflicts in West Africa since independence have been intrastate conflicts, marked by 5 large-scale civil wars.
- In the new millennium, the incidence of civil wars and large-scale conflicts dropped off dramatically, representing a watershed in the political stabilization of the region.
- However, other forms of political violence and new threats have emerged such as election related violence, longstanding ethno-national conflict, drug trafficking, maritime piracy, and extremism.

- Other stresses include youth inclusion, migration, the rapid development of extractive industries, and land management.

Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone offer lessons in resilience

- Regional actors, especially the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) played a pivotal role in bringing an end to conflict
- Rapid mobilization of foreign aid for reconstruction and development supported stability
- Inclusion of civil society in peace deals and national dialogue enabled agreements to take hold
- Strong post-conflict leadership helped chart the path to stability

### **III. Development policies have a critical role to play in improving stability where conflict risks are high**

- Development aid needs to be concentrated in lagging regions and on addressing perceptions of inequity in access to opportunities. Focusing investments where conditions are best risks exacerbating tensions. Cross-border economic exchanges and collaboration may be useful.
- Better land management and addressing grievances linked to land access is needed.
- The boom in extractives discoveries requires greater attention to conflict risks, managing community and regional grievances as well as corruption.
- Improvement in the management of migrants is an urgent priority.
- Significant investments in basic and technical education are required to increase the size of the skilled labor force and improve livelihoods for youth.
- Emerging security threats boost the imperative for security and intelligence sector reform, along with improvement of justice and the rule of law.
- Greater support to ECOWAS and other regional institutions is also important.
- Local governance needs to be strengthened, requiring greater citizen participation, improved social accountability, transparency and better services. Support for decentralization is one approach.