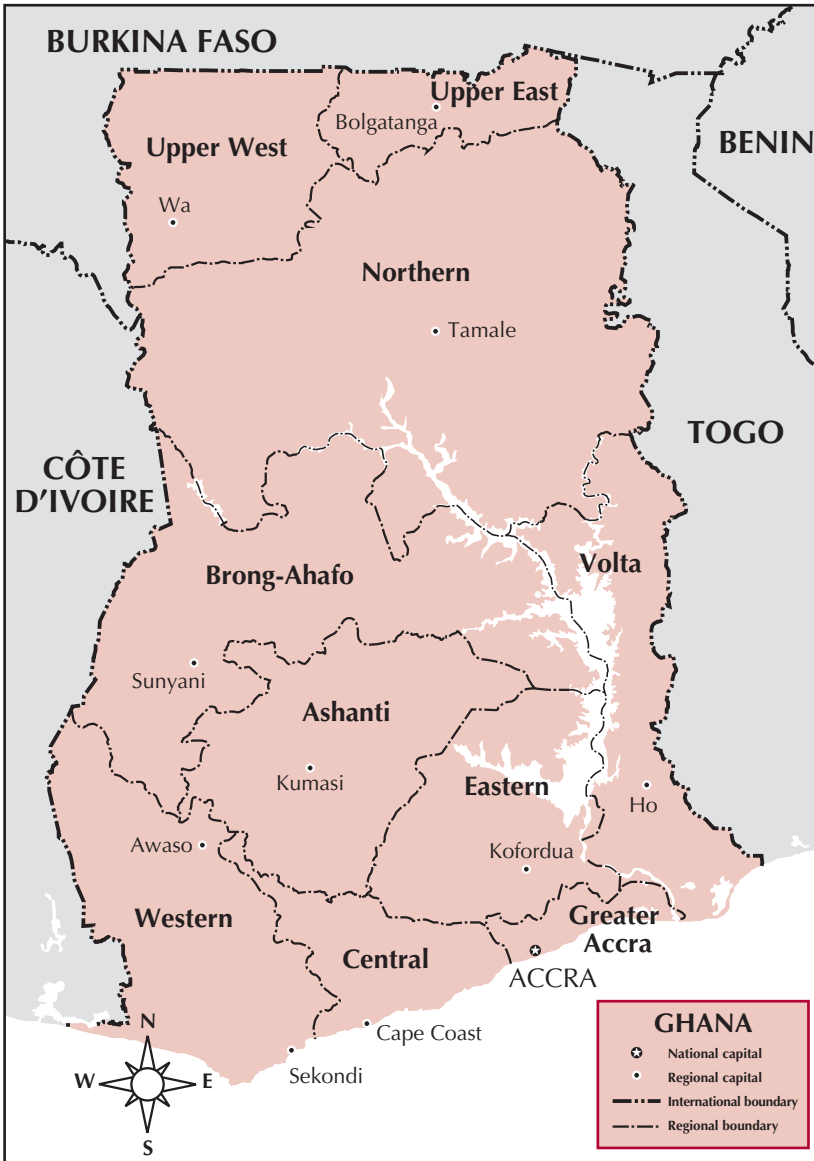




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Former Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings, 9 March 1995.

PART II



GHANA

OVERVIEW

Despite a post-independence history filled with political turmoil and military coups, Ghana is widely seen as a beacon of prosperity and peace in a troubled region. In recent years the country has made significant strides both politically and economically. The year 2000 marked the first peaceful transfer of presidential power between civilian governments since independence was granted in 1957. The winner, John Agyekum Kufuor, was re-elected in December 2004. His tenure has been buoyed by rising prices for the country's two main exports, gold and cocoa, and consequent economic growth.¹

And yet Ghana is home to several long-standing ethnic, religious, and economic conflicts. Perhaps the greatest source of these is the chieftaincy disputes that continue to flare up intermittently in the country's north. Many of the 100 or so ethnic groups that populate Ghana are made up of several clans. Heading these are traditional chiefs who wield significant power and prestige, and continue to instil fierce allegiance among follow-

ers. Disputes over succession, changing cultural practices, and the duties and obligations expected of individual chiefs have sparked outbursts of bitter fighting.² In 1994, inter-ethnic violence between the Nanumba and the Konkomba in the north was particularly acute and led to thousands of deaths, the displacement of more than 100,000 people, and the massive destruction of property.³ Other issues, such as land use and ownership, have also given rise to conflict.⁴

Fuelling concerns over increased violence is the proliferation of small arms, which many fear may exacerbate existing tensions. In addition to displacement and huge numbers of deaths, 1994 saw the increased trafficking of small arms and light weaponry into the country.⁵ Ghana's own past, moreover, may be coming back to haunt it.

In the 1980s, after leading his second successful coup d'état, Jerry Rawlings' regime established and armed People's Defence Committees (PDCs) and Workers' Defence Committees (WDCs), militias that were largely drawn from Rawlings' grass-roots support base. These groups were later renamed Committees for the Defence of the Revolution.⁶ Equipment included thousands of

PART II

AK-47 assault rifles, the whereabouts of which are still unknown—although some speculate that many could still be stored in caches.⁷ Another significant source of small arms is the long-standing and increasingly advanced local tradition of illicit gun manufacturing⁸ (see Chapter 3). Retired General Emmanuel Erskine, the chairman of the Ghana Action Network on Small Arms (GANSA), reports that there could be as many as 40,000 small arms circulating beyond the reach of the state.⁹ According to the United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supports this assertion. IRIN adds that many experts believe the actual number of illicit weapons in Ghana to be significantly higher.¹⁰

OUTLOOK

A combination of ethnic rivalries, proximity to more conflict-prone neighbours, and the increasing availability of small arms threatens Ghana's economic and political progress. Many of the issues that triggered the 1994 violence remain unresolved. Chief among these are

the unequal representation of various local ethnic groups in the Northern House of Chiefs and issues related to the Northern Region's land tenure system.¹¹ Unlike its neighbours, Ghana has not had to contend with huge numbers of refugees fleeing regional wars and insecurity. In 2004, Ghana hosted only 44,000 refugees,¹² most of them Liberians.¹³ Already, the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire has opened up new illegal arms routes from the north-eastern part of that country into northern Ghana.¹⁴ Should the situation in Côte d'Ivoire deteriorate further, this number could rise significantly and create additional security challenges. The unexpected presidential transition and accompanying political turmoil in neighbouring Togo are also a cause for concern.

So pressing is the threat posed by small arms proliferation that President Kufuor's government identified their removal as a top priority. In 2001, the Ghanaian police offered immunity from prosecution to anyone who turned in an illegal weapon. The disarmament programme lasted six months and resulted in the collection of 2,000 firearms.¹⁵ In July and again in October 2004, the government launched yet another crackdown on

illicit weapons, and police destroyed several hundred during a series of public bonfires.¹⁶ More, however, needs to be done.

The Dagbon chieftaincy dispute in the Yendi area of the Northern Region exemplifies the gravity of the situation. Over the years, the traditional power rivalry between the alternating Andani and Abudu clans¹⁷ has been exacerbated by political interference in the succession arrangements as each clan has aligned itself with one or the other of the two dominant political figures or political parties in Ghana.¹⁸ In March 2002, Ya-Na Yakubu Andani II, the Dagbon king, was assassinated and some 30 members of his Andani clan also killed. The king was decapitated and other body parts were taken.¹⁹ His palace was destroyed. The Andanis held the Abudu responsible, and many felt strongly that the government was also complicit in their king's death.²⁰ Tensions ran so high between the two clans that the government immediately declared a region-wide state of emergency and dispatched the military to quell the violence. The government did not fully lift these measures until August 2004.²¹

While the security situation may have improved, the underlying

tensions that led to the uprisings persist, and there is reason to believe that the protagonists will once again resort to armed violence to settle scores or defend their interests. The highly contentious issue of the succession has yet to be resolved, and the king awaits proper burial. Both are potential flashpoints.²²

According to a 2003 White Paper drafted by the government commission investigating the events of 2002, the military authorities found AK-47 and G-3 assault rifles among the various arms caches and also uncovered 'evidence of the existence of training camps for weapon handling'.²³ The situation remains explosive. In 2003, IRIN reported allegations that both sides had been arming themselves for a possible showdown.²⁴ Again, in 2005 an informed observer cautioned that supporters of both the Abudu and Andani camps are now well armed and are adding to their stockpiles with weapons smuggled in from Côte d'Ivoire.²⁵

PART II

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

		6	Written correspondence with Abdel-Fatau Musah, peace and security expert, 15 April 2005.
CDR	Committees for the Defence of the Revolution	7	Musah (1999, pp. 116 and 132).
GANSA	Ghana Action Network on Small Arms	8	Aning and Florquin (2004); Ebo (2003, pp. 33–34). See also Chapter 3.
IRIN	United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks	9	NISAT (2002).
		10	IRIN (2004b).
PDC	People’s Defence Committee	11	Confidential written correspondence with expert based in northern Ghana, 18 February 2005.
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	12	UNOCHA (2004, p. 9).
		13	UNHCR (2003, p. 226).
WDC	Workers’ Defence Committee	14	Written correspondence with Abdel-Fatau Musah, peace and security expert, 15 April 2005.

15 Bah (2004, p. 41). See also Chapter 3.

16 IRIN (2004b).

ENDNOTES

1 IRIN (2004c).

2 Aning, Addo and Sowatey (2002).

3 See UNSCRI (2004); confidential written correspondence with expert based in northern Ghana, 18 February 2005; Musah (1999, p. 132).

4 Aning, Addo, and Sowatey (2002).

5 Confidential written correspondence with expert based in northern Ghana, 18 February 2005. Musah (1999, p. 132) notes that not only were weapons smuggled into Ghana from Burkina Faso and Togo, but government security forces diverted guns from the state’s armouries to support protagonists.

17 For background on the Andani and Abudu power struggles, see IRIN (2002a).

18 Written correspondence with Abdel-Fatau Musah, peace and security expert, 15 April 2005.

19 GoG (2002).

20 IRIN (2002b).

21 Over the years, the curfew had been rolled back in some areas, but had remained in Tamale and Yendi (IRIN, 2004a).

22 IRIN (2004a).

23 GoG (2002).

24 IRIN (2003).

25 Confidential interview with knowledgeable Ghanaian source, Bamako, 17 March 2005.

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PART II

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