



# AFRICA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

## PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN COASTAL WEST AFRICA: LESSONS LEARNED ON THE ROLE OF DEFENSE AND SECURITY FORCES

### *ACADEMIC PROGRAM*

#### **Information Note**

- WHAT:** The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) and the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT/CAERT) will convene a three-day roundtable to assess the level of progress made by Coastal West Africa (CWA) states in implementing the political, legislative, and operational frameworks relating to the role that defense and security forces (DSF) play in preventing violent extremism (PVE). Operational-level participants will provide context-based insights and recommended practices into the PVE actions of DSF. Subnational actors, NGOs, and other law enforcement partners will offer their experiences in working with security actors and relevant sector-based ministries in the implementation of PVE.
- WHERE:** Cotonou, Benin
- WHEN:** May 13-15, 2025
- WHO:** The target number of attendees is approximately 30 participants. Participants will be invited from DSF command personnel and sector-based ministries responsible for defense and security from Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal, and Togo. AFRIPOL and the West African Police Chiefs Committee (WAPCCO) will also be invited. ACSS will invite relevant USG stakeholders (AFRICOM, SOCAF, State/CSO, ICITAP, and INL) as well as identifying additional African direct invitees and catalysts, including mayors, community organizations, and NGOs to help shape the discussion. An additional four (4) alumni will be invited to attend from the Benin ACSS Alumni Chapter.
- WHY:** This roundtable builds upon demand signals that ACSS received during the roundtable held in Nouakchott, Mauritania between January 30 and February 1, 2024, on the role of collaborative approaches by security actors in CVE that included 29 participants from 14 countries as well as regional and international organizations. That event helped establish a knowledge base on the political, legislative, and operational frameworks that states in CWA have adopted to improve synergy of interventions between DSF, political actors, parliamentarians, populations, civil society organizations (CSOs), and local communities. It also shed light on the opportunities that exist to implement P/CVE policies and programs designed to facilitate cooperation between the different CVE stakeholders in CWA. Various opportunities exist for ACSS to continue to support

implementation efforts in the region. Notably, participants proposed introducing PVE into defense and security forces training curricula, better training security forces to collaborate with elected officials and local communities and benchmarking good practices and lessons from useful case studies in areas such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Benin.

This roundtable provides an opportunity to document the progress that CWA states are making in advancing the operationalization of the structures, mechanisms, operations and training programs relating to the role of DSF in PVE. Specifically, there is a need to benchmark best practices and lessons learned in implementing P/CVE programming and policies. Implementing coordinated approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism is a complicated and multifaceted process that demands the effective engagement of communities in the problem-solving process as well as sound changes in the structures and management styles within DSF and other relevant stakeholders. Operationalizing security forces–public partnerships necessitates political will, sufficient resources, and careful coordination between multiple stakeholders. None of this is easily achievable, particularly in conflict-affected areas where security forces in particular are under-resourced, unmotivated, and may lack cultural ties to the community. However, as ACSS' program in Mauritania revealed, there are some case studies worth assessing and benchmarking for their lessons learned around designing and implementing effective and well-coordinated P/CVE programs.

**HOW:** The roundtable will consist of in-person panels and breakout group sessions, conducted in French and English, and moderated by ACSS and ASCRT/CAERT experts. The Chatham House rule will apply.

**THEORY OF CHANGE:** If African states adopt/review/implement comprehensive and better integrated strategies, they can achieve better results through enhanced coordination in the implementation of P/CVE/CT efforts and be better placed to effectively build the community trust needed to counter VEOs.

**PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:**

1. Assess the level of progress made by DSF in implementing the operational measures relating to PVE, including community policing programs; civil-military action; and concerted action to secure borders.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms dedicated to preventing violent extremism, such as the Permanent Secretariat for Countering Radicalization, VE and Terrorism (CNLCREVT) in Benin; the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Prevention and Fight against Violent Extremism (CIPLEV) in Togo; etc.
3. Develop a compendium of identified good practices and lessons from useful case studies such as Côte d'Ivoire.
4. Catalyze next steps towards the effective operationalization of PVE efforts among CWA states.