

The mission and role of the ghanian armed forces - essay



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The Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) as it is today grew from military units organized in the 19th century by European Trading Companies to safeguard their socio-political and economic interests in the Gold Coast. It all began in 1865 when the Corps of Hausas was formed for service in Nigeria. It went through a lot of changes from the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) and later Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF). The focus of the formation of these forces was the Army. It was in May and June 1959 that the Ghana Airforce Ghana Navy respectively was formed[1]. The size, role and mission of the Ghana Armed Forces were derived from the country's defence policy which was mainly focussed on preservation of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. The constitution stipulates that the Armed Forces shall be equipped and maintained to perform their role of defence of Ghana as well as such other functions for the development of Ghana as the President may determine[2]. In pursuance of the mission of the Armed Forces, its expanded roles include defending Ghana against external aggression, assisting the civil authorities to maintain law and order in the country, providing troops for United Nations, Commonwealth, African Union and sub-regional peacekeeping operations, assisting the civil authority to provide humanitarian assistance to victims during periods of national disasters and other emergencies, and participating in productive activities in support of national development.

2. 1. 2 Ghana is yet to militarily defend her territorial integrity against any external aggression however since its formation, the military has been actively engaged in assisting the police to restore law and order in the country. This has even become more relevant in contemporary times where

the face of internal security threats is fast changing into more complex situations. The GAF has been involved in local peacekeeping in the Dagbon/Konkomba/Nanumba areas of the Northern Region and the upper fringes of the Volta Region in the wake of the violent ethnic clashes between the Dagombas, Gonjas and Konkombas in 1994, and also still keeping peace in Bawku to assist the Kusasis and Mamprusis find peace. Joint military/police patrols to fight armed robbery, span all the major cities and towns. There are also operations in support of the Ministries of Lands and Forestry to check illegal lumbering.

2. 1. 3 In support of public administration, the GAF has over the years performed a more supportive role towards the political, social and economic spheres of national development as far as our manpower and material resources will permit. The GAF is endowed with manpower and material resources that make them the most complete, self-sustaining and self-supporting institution for their role. As the most developed set up, the GAF have in addition to their professional officers and men from the Services, highly skilled medical practitioners, nurses and para-medical personnel. There are also well qualified civil, mechanical, electrical, electronic, architectural and geodetic engineers, quantity surveyors and technicians of all types. Other manpower resources include lawyers, veterinary doctors, agriculturalists, accountants, pilots, air traffic controllers, navigators and sports coaches all of international repute. There are educationists, experts in procurement, storage and supply, transport and communication, rangers and paratroopers, military police, artisans of all types and lastly semi-skilled labour from all the ethnic groups of Ghana.

2. 1. 4 The concentration of skills immediately paints a picture of the material resources that the GAF possess. These include hospitals, workshops of all types and tools, veterinary clinic and training schools of various types. Others are aircrafts and aviation equipments, boats and other marine equipment, warehouses and stores, transport, fire service, construction equipment of various types, sporting and recreational facilities. Imbued with precision of time, consistency of work, discipline, training and above all unity and esprit de corps even in the face of ethnic diversity, the GAF is the most readily available institution for any national emergency duty. These attributes have assisted the GAF to undertake a lot extra roles aimed at national development.

2. 1. 5 In addition to its traditional roles, the GAF have carved an enviable reputation for themselves and the country as global peacemakers and keepers. This is evidenced by the number of GAF personnel spread throughout troubled areas in the world. Apart from keeping peace, the combat and civil engineers of the Army have been involved in the construction of bailey bridges throughout the country. Roads have been constructed to some hitherto inaccessible parts of the Afram Plains and the Sefwi area in the Western Region by the 48 Engineer Regiment. They also play an important role in times of natural disasters. For example, they contribute significantly anytime there were floods in the city of Accra through the provision of temporary shelter, rescue and evacuation of those trapped by the flood water. The 37 Military hospital apart from being designated as national emergency hospital plays a major role anytime medical personnel in the country go on industrial strikes. Additionally, the

numerous medical facilities dotted around the country provide good medical care for a lot of Ghanaians. The Navy have conducted search and rescue missions, provided escorts for merchant ships and checked poachers and smugglers across the sea. They are working in close collaboration with the Department of Fisheries in the patrolling of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of our international waters against illegal fishing by foreign fishing vessels. They have on several occasions evacuated Ghanaians and other nationals from war thorn countries in the West African sub region. They are in the position to provide personnel to man the ports and harbours of the country. The Air force, on the other hand, provides transport services to governmental, sports and delegations to both internal and external destinations. The Air force also carries out medical evacuation duties. They additionally assist in the transportation of bullions from the mining centres. They have personnel who in the past manned the international airport during periods of industrial unrest and they still have the capacity to manage the airport should need arise. It is strongly believed that with the training, human skills, material resources and the discipline in the GAF a lot more support could be achieved toward the socio-economic and political development of the country.

2. 1. 6 From the numerous roles enumerated, it is obvious that the GAF have contributed significantly towards the public administration in the political life of the country. This is evidenced by the numbers of members of the Armed Forces serving and retired, appointed to political leadership since independence. Most of them brought their leadership qualities to bear on their jobs and thus enhanced the living standards of the people. The

successful performance of the Ghana Armed Forces in accomplishing its role is thus a collective responsibility and cooperation of the government and the people. The success story of the military is best told by the media.

2. 2 The media environment in Ghana

2. 2. 1 The media, as an important estate of the Republic has the enviable task of being the harbinger of news and information essential to our democracy. The constitution of Ghana states that ' the freedom and independence of the media are hereby guaranteed'.[3]It further states that there shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a licence as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information. Editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media shall not be subject to control or interference by Government, nor shall they be penalized or harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications.[4]

2. 2. 2 The media, as public service institutions, have traditionally performed a political propagandist and developmental role and served the interest of competing elites[5]since independence. However, since the mid 1990s, democratic and liberal reforms that swept the Sub-Saharan African continent have resulted in the introduction and growth of independent media, particularly private radio, and ended decades of state media monopoly.

Consequently, the role of the media, particularly independently owned radio broadcast services, has been changing.[6]From the 1960s to the early

1990s, the media in Ghana focused on development concerns. It was only in <https://assignbuster.com/the-mission-and-role-of-the-ghanian-armed-forces-essay/>

the mid 1990s, when struggles on the streets put democracy on the political agenda, that the concept of civil society and media's role in the country and the Africa continent began to register significantly in scholarly writings.[7]

2. 2. 3 A more vibrant and critical independent media has emerged in the country and is fostering the dissemination and free exchange of information leading to social, political and economic reforms. The independent media is also promoting the development of socio-economic interests that mitigate traditional political polarities that will ultimately strengthen civil society.[8]A new African public has also emerged from the 1990s reforms. One that is being transformed from a passive to an 'aroused' public. For the first time in decades, the public is participating in civil discourse and has begun to show a keen interest in civil and state matters. The development of independent media and an aroused public in the country is an important emerging component of civil society that call into question past description of African civil society as weak. They also draw attention to the need for media and civil society scholars to re-examine emerging civil society institutions in the country.[9]

2. 2. 4 One of the most critical civil society institutions is a media that allows for communication between groups, builds relationship between social groups, and supports the development of organizations articulating public needs and opinions[10]. For decades, critics of Ghana's media questioned whether the state media that existed prior to 1995 played any significant role in building civil society[11]. They point to the tight control and censorship of the mass media by authoritarian and undemocratic

governments, the use of the media for government propaganda, and the <https://assignbuster.com/the-mission-and-role-of-the-ghanian-armed-forces-essay/>

political and economic crises that plagued the nation for decades to justify their criticism. However, the intensification of democratic and liberal reforms in the mid 1990s have resulted in the establishment of multi-party democracy, the privatization of the airwaves, and the emergence of independent mass media operations, especially in regional and community FM radio broadcasting. Since 1995, over two hundred independently owned radio and television stations have been broadcasting alongside the state media, thereby significantly changing the media environment in the country[12]. The traditional propagandist and developmental role played by the state media, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC), was transformed after the introduction of private media. Early in their operations, the independent media, particularly radio, assumed the center stage in the democratic and civil society building process. For the first time in Ghana, it began to provide the needed avenue for free speech, freedom of expression and public participation in civil discourse. This has allowed for the free expression of divergent or dissenting views on civic and political matters without fear of government repercussion. It has also made possible the exchange of information between various elements of civil society and for public participation in the social, economic, cultural and political development of the nation.[13]

2. 2. 5 The independent Ghanaian media has positioned itself at the center of the emerging Ghanaian civil society and is developing into an alternative power center to the state. In exercising this power, it is encouraging and empowering other civil society groups to shed off the ' culture of silence' that has characterized them from decades of state control and suppression

of press freedom and free speech. The media is assisting and strengthening other civil society groups to develop interdependent relationships among themselves and with the state. In addition, it is not only demanding for democratic changes (as civil society scholars have expected), it is also demanding for social and structural changes within the society and other non-state civil society institutions. In particular, the privately owned radio stations have not been afraid to play this civic role.[14] In the process of exercising their newly found freedom, the independent media operations, especially radio stations, are performing two important civil society functions: disclosing the society's shortcomings and abuses (not just that of the state), and strengthening the democratic process and civil society. They are serving as advocates for the new democratic dispensation by scrutinizing public servants, the state, private organizations, and other civil institutions. They are also gaining the ability to reach various segments of the populace with information and to create links between like-minded civil society groups. These functions have made the Ghanaian independent media a committed media and a viable civil society institution, one that is positioned in the center of the democracy and civil society building process. The independent media, particularly radio, have proven to be the best tools to assist civil society organizations in Ghana speak to and listen to the populace. In view of these developments, one can only conclude that given the right environment, the media in Ghana can play a major role in the democratic and civil society process.[15]

2. 2. 6 Prior to the introduction of independent media in Ghana in 1995, the Ghanaian public generally had lost interest in participating in state affairs

and in the state print and broadcast media (Ansah, 1993). A 1985 study by Obeng-Quaidoo reported that Ghanaians spent on the average only two and half hours per day listening to the state radio, GBC Radio. The lack of participation in state governance and in the media were results of decades of political instability, public disappointments with governments, and decades of state control of the media and free speech[16]. However, the liberal reforms and the growth in private media opened up avenues for the public to freely express their views on all matters of civil and social interest. Particularly so is the public's interestedness in military matters which have been shrouded in secrecy during authoritarian regimes .