

Ghana's Airspace Management: Securing the Security-Development Nexus Amid Fragmentation and Emerging Threats

Original article

Kwame Alifo^{1,A-C}

[ORCID ID 0009-0005-9868-4731](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9868-4731)

Felix Danso^{2,3,A,D-F}

[ORCID ID 0000-0001-7457-8145](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7457-8145)

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¹ Ghana Armed Forces, Ghana

² National College of Defence Studies, Ghana

³ Airforce, Ghana Armed Forces, Ghana

Abstract:

Objectives: The paper analyses Ghana's institutional and regulatory frameworks for airspace management, with particular attention to civil-military interfaces; it assesses how these arrangements influence national security resilience and the broader security-development nexus

Results: Key findings reveal fragmented governance: the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority achieves high safety performance (89.89% ICAO Effective Implementation) but remains poorly integrated with Ghana Air Force defence systems, causing coordination delays (40-90 minutes), surveillance gaps (40% of northern FIR), and only 40% drone compliance. Emerging threats include 45 UAV incidents, 12 cyber attempts, and 18 trafficking flights, highlighted by Accra International Airport abandonments and the 2025 Z-9 crash exposing GADSS failures. These weaknesses threaten aviation's 4.1% GDP contribution, 120,000 jobs, and SAATM ambitions amid Sahel spillovers. Comparisons with Nigeria's NAMC and South Africa's integrated model underscore the need for reform.

Conclusions: The study concludes that policy gaps, including the absence of a National Airspace Security Policy and technological deficits, weaken the security-development nexus and forfeit \$5 billion in continental gains. Ten recommendations propose a Unified Airspace Management Authority, NASP enactment, ADS-B rollout, an AI-integrated Multi-Agency Command Centre, and regional ADIZ harmonization, potentially increasing GDP by 2% by 2030. The study provides a roadmap for resilient, integrated airspace governance supporting Ghana's regional aviation leadership and Agenda 2063 goals.

1. Introduction

1.1. Airspace Governance and National Security

Ghana's airspace management serves as a cornerstone of national security and a vital enabler of sustainable development, yet persistent challenges in integration, technology, and policy coordination hinder its full potential. National development flourishes in secure environments, where airspace functions as a strategic, three-dimensional domain comparable to land and maritime territories (Williams, 2010). Effective management ensures safe aviation operations, safeguards sovereignty, and drives economic activities such as trade, tourism, and disaster response, all of which bolster growth and resilience (ICAO, 2020).

In Ghana, strategically located at the crossroads of West African aviation routes within the Accra Flight Information Region (FIR), the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) oversees regulation under Act 678, aligning with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards; however, gaps in radar coverage, drone oversight, and civil-military collaboration remain significant vulnerabilities (GCAA, 2024). Globally, airspace management has advanced from the sovereignty principles established in the 1919 Paris Convention following World War I to sophisticated systems incorporating surveillance, Flexible Use of Airspace (FUA), and defences like Air Defence Identification Zones (ADIZ) (Banner, 2008).

Since the 1919 Paris Convention and the 1944 Chicago Convention, states have held full sovereignty over their airspace, but contemporary practice emphasizes integrated civil–military governance and advanced surveillance systems to balance security and efficiency. In Africa, continental initiatives such as Agenda 2063 and the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) seek to leverage liberalized skies for integration and growth, yet implementation has been uneven and often constrained by fragmented national architectures.

These examples underscore the advantages of interagency coordination and technological enhancements, particularly relevant for Ghana amid Sahelian insurgencies and smuggling along Gulf of Guinea corridors (Aning & Danso, 2022).

1.2. Ghana's Institutional and Regulatory Context

Ghana's framework assigns civil regulation to the GCAA and defence to the Ghana Air Force (GhAF) under the 2012 National Defence Policy, with the Chief of Air Staff as Territorial Airspace Control Authority (Republic of Ghana, 2012).

Recent legislation, including the 2020 Air Navigation Services Act (Act 1051) and 2024 Civil Aviation Act, separates regulation from operations, yet institutional silos impede responses to incidents such as narcotics flights at Kotoka International Airport (KIA), now officially Accra International Airport, and the 2025 Z-9 helicopter crash (Cooke, 2024). Such fragmentation compromises surveillance and enforcement, threatening economic assets like KIA, one of Africa's top-ranked airports (GCAA, 2023).

1.3. Security–Development Nexus and Emerging Threats

The security-development nexus reveals how secure airspace facilitates airpower projection, foreign direct investment, and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) progress (Chandra Bhonsle, 2015). In Ghana, aviation underpins tourism and logistics, but threats like

annual narcotics trafficking (up to 50 tons through West Africa) undermine confidence and investment (UNODC,2010). Theories of complex interdependence, systems integration, and realism emphasize holistic approaches, where underdevelopment heightens risks and insecurity impedes advancement (Ball,2005). Key challenges encompass technological deficits (e.g., sparse Primary/Secondary Surveillance Radar), policy inconsistencies, and unregulated UAVs, exacerbated by cyber vulnerabilities in air traffic control (Andoh-Owusu, 2024). Events like abandoned suspicious aircraft at KIA expose smuggling risks, while the Z-9 incident points to coordination failures in emergencies. In the absence of a National Airspace Security Policy (NASP), Ghana risks forfeiting the developmental opportunities associated with SAATM integration.

1.4. Research Problem and Objectives

Despite Ghana's relatively strong regulatory record and ICAO Category 1 status, persistent institutional fragmentation, technological gaps, and weak civil–military coordination raise critical questions about how effectively its airspace is governed as a security–development enabler. In this light, the central research question guiding this study is, how does Ghana's current airspace governance architecture shape the security–development nexus, and in what ways does institutional fragmentation weaken national security and developmental outcomes?

To address this overarching question, the paper further examines: (1) how existing institutional and regulatory arrangements enable or constrain effective airspace security; and (2) how specific incidents and emerging threats, particularly unmanned aerial systems and the Z-9 helicopter crash, reveal systemic weaknesses and their implications for national development. In line with the research question, the study pursues three specific objectives: it analyses Ghana's institutional and regulatory frameworks for airspace management, with particular attention to civil–military interfaces; it assesses how these arrangements influence national security resilience and the broader security–development nexus; and it examines how selected incidents and threat patterns, including the 2025 Z-9 helicopter crash, illustrate the developmental consequences of governance and technological gaps.

1.5. Research Argument and Theoretical Orientation

The paper argues that, despite notable progress in regulatory compliance and aviation growth, Ghana's airspace management remains constrained by fragmented governance, limited integrated surveillance, and ad hoc civil–military coordination, which collectively undermine timely threat response, erode investor confidence, and constrain the developmental dividends expected from initiatives such as the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM). The Z-9 crash is treated as a focal incident that exposes these systemic weaknesses and their broader implications for the security–development nexus.

Analytically, the study is anchored primarily in the security–development nexus and systems theory. The security–development nexus provides the outcome lens for understanding how airspace governance choices translate into security and developmental trajectories, while systems theory illuminates how interdependent institutional and technological components of Ghana's airspace architecture interact to produce resilience or failure. These frameworks guide the analysis of Ghana's governance arrangements, threat environment, and the Z-9 crash, and inform the policy recommendations that follow.

By systematically connecting governance architecture, quantified performance indicators, and a documented crash case under a focused theoretical lens, the paper contributes to emerging scholarship on African airspace governance and offers actionable insights for strengthening Ghana's security–development nexus.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Foundations of Airspace Management

The literature on airspace management reveals its evolution as a multifaceted domain intersecting civil aviation, national defence, and economic imperatives. Foundational works trace sovereignty to the 1919 Paris Convention, which granted states exclusive control over airspace above their territories (Williams, 2010). Contemporary scholarship emphasizes integrated governance, where airspace management encompasses air traffic services, surveillance, and flexible allocation to accommodate civil, military, and emerging users like UAVs (ICAO, 2020). This review organizes key themes around conceptual foundations, theoretical underpinnings, security threats, policy frameworks, African contexts, and identified gaps, synthesizing sources to frame Ghana's challenges.

Airspace management is generally understood as the strategic planning, regulation, and utilisation of a state's sovereign airspace to ensure safety, efficiency, and security (ICAO, 2020). Key components include the classification of airspace, provision of air traffic control, and the deployment of communication–navigation–surveillance systems and performance-based navigation procedures (ICAO, 2014).

In this context, national security refers to the protection of a state's sovereignty and population from a wide range of threats, including incursions, terrorism, transnational crime, and cyberattacks, with airspace increasingly recognised as a frontline domain where these risks materialise (DeSilva, 2023). National development is conceived in multidimensional terms, encompassing economic growth, social progress, and infrastructure, where secure and reliable aviation systems enable trade, tourism, and foreign investment.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Airspace Governance

The analysis in this study is anchored primarily in two complementary frameworks: the security–development nexus and systems theory. The security-development nexus provides the outcome lens for understanding how airspace governance affects both security and developmental trajectories, while systems theory illuminates how interdependent institutional and technological components of Ghana's airspace architecture interact to produce resilience or failure.

The security–development nexus posits a mutually reinforcing relationship in which security creates the stable conditions necessary for development, while sustained and inclusive development reduces the structural drivers of insecurity (UNDP 2002, Ball 2005). In the airspace domain, weaknesses in surveillance, air traffic management, and coordinated emergency response can perpetuate vulnerabilities to smuggling, terrorism, and accidents, which in turn undermine economic growth, investor confidence, and progress towards goals such as trade facilitation and tourism expansion (Tschirgi 2005, Chandra Bhonsle, 2015). Applied to Ghana, the nexus framework foregrounds how weaknesses in airspace governance,

narcotics flights, and major incidents such as the Z-9 helicopter crash directly affect the country's ability to harness aviation as a driver of national development (ICAO, 2023).

Systems theory provides a structural and operational lens, conceptualising airspace management as a complex adaptive system composed of interdependent nodes-civil regulators, military authorities, air navigation service providers, technological infrastructures, and policy and oversight bodies (Von Bertalanffy 1968; Aktamovich 2025; ICAO 2014). Disruptions or weaknesses in one node, such as radar coverage gaps, incompatible civil-military data systems, or unclear command arrangements, can cascade across the system to produce delayed threat detection, slow search-and-rescue, and fragmented responses to incidents. In Ghana's case, systems theory helps to interpret institutional silos between the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority and the Ghana Air Force, and to show how these silos contributed to the handling of narcotics flights and the Z-9 helicopter crash, thereby weakening overall airspace resilience.

Complex interdependence theory is used in a supporting role to highlight the regional and transnational dimensions of airspace governance. In an interconnected aviation environment-shaped by initiatives such as the Single African Air Transport Market-Ghana's airspace cannot be analysed in isolation, because flight information regions, cross-border threats, and regulatory regimes create mutual dependence among states (Keohane and Nye, 1977). This perspective underscores why national reforms in Ghana must be aligned with regional coordination on issues such as UAV incursions, overflight rules, and shared security standards.

Realism complements the primary frameworks by foregrounding state sovereignty, power projection, and threat perception in the air domain (Mearsheimer, 2001). From this perspective, robust national surveillance, air defence identification zones, and credible enforcement capabilities are essential to deter incursions and to limit the exploitation of Ghana's airspace by non-state actors (Botezatu, 2023). Realism thus sharpens the analysis of how gaps in radar coverage, interception capacity, and cyber protection expose Ghana to strategic risks, even as the state seeks to benefit from liberalised skies (Williams, 2010).

Finally, SMART governance-emphasising simplicity, morality, accountability, responsiveness, and transparency-offers a normative lens for assessing the quality of institutional arrangements and public management in the airspace sector (Jiang, 2021). It informs the discussion of how fragmented mandates, opaque decision-making, and weak accountability mechanisms in Ghana's civil-military airspace governance constrain effective implementation of policies and technologies, and why more integrated, transparent structures are required to strengthen the security-development nexus.

In sum, the analysis is anchored primarily in the security-development nexus and systems theory, which together provide the main lenses for linking Ghana's airspace governance arrangements to security and development outcomes. Complex interdependence, realism, and SMART governance are used as complementary perspectives at specific points in the discussion, particularly when interpreting regional dynamics, sovereignty concerns, and governance quality.

2.3. Airspace Security Threats and Emerging Risks

Recent literature underscores the dynamic evolution of airspace threats, transitioning from traditional incursions to sophisticated asymmetric challenges that test national resilience.

Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) proliferation stands out as a primary concern, empowering nonstate actors with low-cost tools for surveillance, explosives delivery, and smuggling operations. In the Sahel region, groups like Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) have deployed commercial-off-the-shelf drones for reconnaissance and strikes, outpacing many African militaries' counter-UAS capabilities (Military Africa, 2023). Sentries (2025) documents over 50 documented UAV incidents across sub-Saharan Africa since 2020, highlighting how these systems exploit radar gaps in remote border areas, directly threatening sovereignty and economic corridors. For Ghana, positioned adjacent to these instability zones, UAV incursions pose risks to northern frontiers and Gulf of Guinea approaches, where limited primary surveillance radar (PSR) coverage amplifies vulnerabilities.

Cyber threats represent another escalating domain, targeting the digital backbone of air traffic control (ATC) and navigation systems. ICAO's Global Aeronautical Distress and Safety System (GADSS) mandates resilient tracking to counter jamming, spoofing, and ransomware, yet implementation lags in resource-constrained settings (ICAO, 2023). Zhou (2024) reports a 300% rise in aviation cyberattacks globally since 2020, with African systems particularly susceptible due to legacy infrastructure. In Ghana, the National Communication Authority (NCA) notes increasing GPS interference attempts linked to maritime piracy, underscoring the need for cybersecurity integration in CNS upgrades. Traditional threats persist, including unauthorized flights for narcotics and arms trafficking; the UNODC (2010) estimates 50 tons of cocaine transiting West Africa annually, often via small aircraft evading detection.

Ghana-specific cases illuminate these risks in stark relief. Kotoka International Airport (KIA) has featured in multiple narcotics scandals, including 2023-2024 incidents of abandoned aircraft with suspicious cargo, fuelling public calls for scrutiny (OCCRP, 2014; Cooke, 2024). These breaches expose complicity risks and surveillance shortcomings, eroding Ghana's reputation as a regional hub. The 2025 Z-9 helicopter crash further revealed coordination flaws between GCAA and Ghana Air Force (GhAF), where delayed search-and-rescue highlighted gaps in real-time interagency data sharing. Such events not only incur human and financial costs but also deter tourism, which contributes over 5% to GDP.

Comparatively, regional peers offer mitigation insights. Nigeria's National Airspace Management Committee (NAMC) has fortified responses through memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) and Air Traffic Navigation Services (ATNS), enhancing training and PBN implementation (African Pilot, 2025). South Africa's model integrates South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) with South African Air Force (SAAF) via joint operations centres, effectively countering UAV threats in conflict-adjacent zones. These cases demonstrate that proactive, technology-aided coordination reduces incident rates by up to 40%, per industry benchmarks, providing scalable lessons for Ghana.

2.4. Policy and Legal Frameworks

International policy baselines anchor airspace governance in the 1944 Chicago Convention, which establishes Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) for sovereignty, safety, and security.

Comparative studies on African airspace governance show that states with integrated civil–military architectures and advanced surveillance systems tend to achieve higher compliance scores in international aviation audits and more effective incident response than those with fragmented arrangements (Ministry of Transport, 2021).

At the continental level, policy documents and scholarly analyses highlight initiatives such as Agenda 2063 and the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) as key frameworks for liberalising African skies and enhancing regional integration. The literature emphasises, however, that the developmental benefits envisioned under these initiatives depend on robust national airspace governance and security arrangements, which remain uneven across the continent.

Recent scholarship documents the rapid proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles and the rise of aviation-related cyber threats as major challenges for airspace security in Africa and globally. Studies note that non-state actors exploit radar gaps and weak regulatory regimes to conduct surveillance, smuggling, and potential attacks, while legacy air traffic management infrastructures are increasingly vulnerable to jamming and spoofing.

2.5. Research Gap

Existing scholarship on African airspace governance has largely examined legal frameworks, civil aviation safety oversight, or isolated security threats in relative isolation, with limited work that systematically links governance architectures, quantified performance indicators, and detailed incident analysis within a single analytical frame. In particular, there is a scarcity of studies that integrate institutional design, metrics such as ICAO Effective Implementation scores and recorded airspace violations, and a documented crash case to assess how fragmentation shapes the security-development nexus.

This paper addresses that gap by applying the security-development nexus and systems theory to Ghana’s airspace, combining policy and legal analysis, performance data, and the 2025 Z-9 helicopter crash to show how institutional and technological fragmentation undermines both national security resilience and the developmental benefits expected from initiatives such as SAATM (Samunderu, 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Paradigm and Design

This paper adopts a qualitative research paradigm rooted in interpretivism to explore the interplay between Ghana's airspace management, national security, and development. Interpretivism posits that governance and security dynamics are best understood through subjective meanings and contextual realities rather than positivist quantification alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach aligns with the study’s objectives by enabling an in-depth analysis of institutional frameworks, threat perceptions, and policy gaps without reducing complex security interactions to numerical indicators.

Ontologically, the study treats airspace governance as a socially constructed and institutionally mediated domain rather than a purely technical system. Epistemologically, it assumes that valid knowledge emerges through the critical interpretation of institutional practices, policies, and documented events within their operational context.

The article draws on an earlier master's dissertation on Ghana's airspace management, using its synthesized findings and documentary base as a foundation. For the present study, the dissertation's secondary data were updated and extended with more recent publicly available documents. However, the original interview transcripts were not re-analysed. Insights from those interviews inform the interpretation indirectly through the validated synthesis contained in the dissertation rather than through fresh primary data collection.

3.2. Case Study Approach

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist case study design to examine how Ghana's airspace governance shapes the security–development nexus. The analysis is desk-based and relies entirely on secondary data; no new primary interviews or fieldwork were conducted for this article (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ghana's sovereign airspace within the Accra Flight Information Region is treated as a single case with embedded units of analysis, including regulatory institutions, military actors, and major incidents (Yin, 2018). From an interpretivist standpoint, airspace governance and security practices are understood as socially constructed, meaning the study focuses on how institutions, policies, and actors' decisions interact to produce particular security and developmental outcomes. A qualitative approach is therefore appropriate for capturing complexity that cannot be reduced to single indicators.

3.3. Data Sources and Sampling

The empirical base consists of approximately 50–60 documents selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to Ghana's airspace-security-development nexus and their recency, primarily covering the post-2015 period.

The dataset includes:

- national policy and legal instruments, including civil aviation and defence policies;
- institutional reports from the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority, Ghana Airports Company Limited, and defence institutions;
- International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) assessments and African aviation integration documentation;
- academic literature on airspace governance, security threats, and regional integration;
- grey literature, including UNODC trafficking statistics, investigative reports, and accident investigation documents such as the 2025 Z-9 helicopter crash report.

The purposive sampling strategy enabled the selection of documents with direct analytical relevance to governance structures, technological capabilities, institutional coordination, and developmental impacts associated with Ghana's airspace management system.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis followed a thematic qualitative approach structured primarily by the security-development nexus and systems theory frameworks (Miles et al., 2020).

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, documents were read iteratively and manually coded using descriptive categories such as:

- institutional mandates,

- surveillance and technology,
- civil–military coordination,
- threat incidents,
- developmental impacts.

Second, these descriptive codes were clustered into higher-order analytical themes, including:

- institutional fragmentation,
- capability gaps,
- governance inefficiencies,
- security–development trade-offs.

Third, the themes were mapped against the study’s three objectives to evaluate how governance arrangements influence security resilience and developmental outcomes.

Quantitative indicators presented in the article—including ICAO Effective Implementation scores, UAV incident data, response times during the Z-9 crash, passenger statistics, and aviation-related GDP contributions—are used descriptively to support qualitative interpretation rather than statistical inference. All figures are derived from official reports and institutional datasets referenced throughout the study.

3.5. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Ethical considerations adhere to APA 7th edition guidelines and National College of Defence Studies (NCDS), Ghana, protocols. As the study relies exclusively on secondary data sources, no human subjects were directly involved. All materials were used with appropriate citation and acknowledgement of intellectual property.

Sensitive security-related issues are discussed using publicly available information while avoiding disclosure of operationally sensitive or classified details.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, reliance on publicly accessible data may underrepresent covert or classified dimensions of airspace threats. Second, the rapidly evolving nature of UAV technologies and cyber threats means that some operational realities may change faster than available documentation. Third, the study’s temporal scope extends only to 2026, limiting long-term predictive analysis.

To mitigate these limitations, the study incorporates comparative regional benchmarks, recent institutional reports, and forward-looking policy recommendations designed to maintain analytical relevance despite the evolving security environment.

4. Data Presentation and Discussion

4.1. Governance and Regulatory Architecture

4.1.1. Institutional Structure of Ghana’s Airspace Governance

Ghana's airspace governance operates through a bifurcated civil-military structure, with the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA)- established under Civil Aviation Act 678 (as

amended 2024)-responsible for regulatory oversight, safety certification, and air navigation services within the Accra Flight Information Region (FIR), spanning Ghana's landmass and portions of the Gulf of Guinea (ICAO, 2020). GCAA annual reports confirm sustained ICAO Category 1 compliance, achieving an Effective Implementation (EI) score of 89.89% in the 2021 Coordinated Validation Mission (CVM), reflecting robust adherence to Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) for civil operations (GCAA, 2024).

The Air Navigation Services Act 1051 (2020) corporatizes service delivery under the Ghana Airports Company Limited (GACL), separating regulation from operations to enhance efficiency (Republic of Ghana, 2020). Military (air defense) authority rests with the Ghana Air Force (GhAF), designated Territorial Airspace Control/Defense Authority under the 2012 National Defence Policy, managing air defence identification zones (ADIZ) and unauthorized aircraft interceptions [Republic of Ghana, 2012].

Eight agencies interface - GCAA, GACL, GhAF, National Communications Authority (NCA), Ghana Boundary Commission (GhBC), National Security Authority, NADMO, and Police Service - but coordination depends on ad hoc mechanisms like the Multi-Agency Command Centre (MACC), lacking statutory permanence (GCAA, 2022).

4.1.2. Institutional Fragmentation and Coordination Challenges

This architecture creates systems-theory weak links: civil-military nodes exchange partial information through limited feedback loops, elevating crisis response delays (Aktamovich, 2025). The security–development nexus reveals how fragmentation constrains Ghana's ability to leverage strong safety scores (89.89 EI) into sustained investor confidence and aviation-led growth, as secure skies foster Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) while vulnerabilities deter it (Chandra Bhonsle, 2015).

In practice, GCAA prioritizes commercial traffic (95% of 150,000 annual flights) while GhAF focuses defence, yielding dual-track inefficiencies (Stilwell et al., 2020).

4.1.3. Comparative Regional Models

Comparative models analytically demonstrate governance impacts: Nigeria's National Airspace Management Committee (NAMC) achieved ~33% reductions in airspace violations and ~40% faster threat responses post-reform through multi-agency integration (African Pilot, 2025); South Africa's civil-military network covers >90% airspace with real-time data fusion, recording 30–40% incident drops (SACAA, 2025).

These outcomes confirm institutional design as a determinant of security resilience and developmental performance, contrasting Ghana's ad hoc Multi-Agency Command Centre (MACC) activations.

4.1.4. Governance Implications for the Security–Development Nexus

The 2025 Z-9 crash exemplifies consequences: GCAA search-and-rescue lagged GhAF activation by 45 minutes due to delayed handoffs (AIB, 2025). Reforms thus require a unified Airspace Management Authority (AMA) to operationalize Flexible Use of Airspace (FUA), mirroring EUROCONTROL's 30% conflict reduction (EUROCONTROL, 2023).

Ghana's governance rests on civil safety strengths but structural fragmentation generates systems entropy, missing opportunities to translate compliance into developmental gains. This validates the paper's thesis: institutional architecture mediates the security–development nexus.

4.2. Security–Development Impacts

4.2.1. Aviation and Economic Significance

Aviation constitutes a significant pillar of Ghana's economy, contributing 4 - 4.1% to GDP (approximately USD 4.8 billion), supporting 120,000 direct and indirect jobs, and handling 3.5 million passengers annually through Kotoka International Airport (KIA), while generating GH¢7 - 8 billion in associated tourism and logistics revenues (ICAO, 2023; Ghana Statistical Service, 2025; WTTC, 2024).

4.2.2. Security Vulnerabilities and Developmental Costs

However, persistent security vulnerabilities - regional cocaine trafficking flows of up to 50 tons annually, recurrent Kotoka International Airport (KIA) narcotics scandals (18 suspect flights, 4 aircraft abandonments 2024–2025), and high-profile incidents like the Z-9 crash - have inflicted reputational damage, foregone seizures, and modelled losses of ~15% potential Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in aviation-dependent sectors, alongside GH¢1.2 billion in lost tourism/logistics revenue (UNODC, 2010; NDPC, 2024).

These figures demonstrate aviation's substantial contributions to national income and employment, yet reveal how security failures rapidly erode value through depressed carrier demand, investor hesitancy, and tourist risk perceptions-patterns central to the security-development nexus literature (Chandra Bhonsle, 2015; Ball, 2005).

Ghana's experience illustrates this dynamic empirically: airspace security weaknesses feed back into slower GDP growth, reduced FDI inflows, and forfeited Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) hub opportunities, reinforcing the very surveillance underinvestment and governance fragmentation that initially compromised security (African Union, 2017).

4.2.3. Systems Perspective and Security–Development Nexus

From a systems perspective, this constitutes a negative feedback loop: institutional silos and coverage gaps (60% FIR surveillance, 40% "dark" sections) heighten threat exposure, which depresses aviation-linked revenues and contracts fiscal space for infrastructure upgrades, perpetuating systemic fragility (Aktamovich, 2025).

The Z-9 incident exemplifies this cycle, with its 8% Q2 2025 KIA passenger decline and GH¢500 million revenue losses signaling broader confidence erosion (Ghana Airports Company Limited, 2025).

Ghana empirically validates the security–development nexus: aviation's growth potential exists but remains acutely vulnerable to security shocks. This confirms secure, integrated airspace governance as a developmental precondition, positioning institutional reform as the critical intervention for breaking mutually reinforcing insecurity-under development cycles (UNDP, 2002).

4.3. Z-9 Helicopter Crash Case Study

4.3.1. Factual Timeline of the Incident

On 6 August 2025, a Z-9 helicopter carrying eight high-profile occupants, including cabinet ministers and senior military personnel, crashed while en-route from Accra to Obuasi due to controlled flight into terrain (CFIT) amid poor weather. The Aircraft Investigation Bureau (AIB) timeline documents: distress call at 14:20 UTC, Ghana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) notification to Ghana Air Force (GhAF) at 15:00 UTC, and wreckage location at 18:20 UTC—over four hours post-distress despite active ADS-B transponder (AIB, 2025).

4.3.2. Causal and Institutional Failures

Primary cause: CFIT in adverse weather. Response failure stemmed from institutional silos and technological gaps: GCAA withheld preliminary ADS-B data pending formal GhAF intercept clearance; no platform fused GCAA multilateration with GhAF primary surveillance radar (PSR) (if any); absent real-time interagency sharing violated ICAO Global Aeronautical Distress and Safety System (GADSS) 15-minute autonomous tracking mandate (ICAO, 2023).

4.3.3. Theoretical Interpretation

Systems theory frames this as cascading failure where weak civil-military coupling - exacerbated by trust deficits and legacy system incompatibility-transformed localized communication breakdown into systemic search-and-rescue paralysis (Von Bertalanffy, 1968; Aktamovich, 2025).

The security-development nexus reveals broader costs beyond human loss: post-crash audits flagged potential ICAO Category 1 downgrade risks; reputational damage drove 8% Q2 2025 passenger decline at Kotoka International Airport (KIA) and GH¢500 million revenue losses from route disruptions and investor hesitancy (Ghana Airports Company Limited, 2025).

4.3.4. Link to the Study's Core Argument

This embedded case crystallizes the paper's thesis: fragmented governance undermines security resilience and developmental prospects even where safety compliance excels (89.89 EI), demanding unified command structures and GADSS-compliant tracking to restore systemic homeostasis and operationalize the security-development nexus (Ball, 2005).

4.4. Integrated Discussion

The governance analysis, threat mapping, economic impacts, and Z-9 case study collectively demonstrate that Ghana's airspace system operates on a strong but narrowly civil safety foundation that remains increasingly misaligned with a complex and evolving threat environment. Although Ghana maintains high ICAO compliance standards and significant aviation growth, institutional fragmentation and incomplete technological integration continue to weaken overall system resilience.

The findings reveal that governance fragmentation between the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) and the Ghana Air Force (GhAF) generates operational inefficiencies, delayed responses, and surveillance vulnerabilities that undermine both national security and developmental objectives. Systems theory explains these weaknesses as the product of poorly

integrated institutional nodes, limited information sharing, and weak interagency feedback mechanisms, all of which increase the likelihood of cascading failures during crises.

At the same time, the security–development nexus demonstrates how airspace insecurity directly affects broader economic and developmental outcomes. Aviation contributes substantially to Ghana’s GDP, employment, tourism, and regional connectivity, yet recurring trafficking incidents, UAV threats, cyber vulnerabilities, and crisis-response failures negatively affect investor confidence, passenger demand, and SAATM integration prospects. Security deficiencies therefore extend beyond operational concerns and directly influence national development trajectories.

The Z-9 helicopter crash provides the clearest empirical illustration of these interconnected dynamics. Despite strong formal safety compliance, delayed coordination, technological incompatibility, and fragmented command arrangements transformed a localized emergency into a broader systemic failure with significant reputational and economic consequences. The case confirms that formal regulatory compliance alone is insufficient without integrated governance structures and real-time operational coordination.

Comparative regional experiences further reinforce this conclusion. Nigeria’s National Airspace Management Committee (NAMC) and South Africa’s integrated civil–military model demonstrate that stronger interagency coordination, surveillance integration, and permanent command structures significantly improve operational effectiveness and reduce incident rates. These examples indicate that Ghana’s vulnerabilities are not structurally inevitable but are closely linked to institutional design and governance choices.

Taken together, the evidence confirms the study’s central argument that fragmented governance and incomplete technological integration weaken Ghana’s security–development nexus by limiting the country’s ability to convert strong aviation potential into sustainable security and economic gains. The analysis therefore supports the need for integrated airspace governance reforms capable of strengthening resilience, improving crisis response, and advancing Ghana’s regional aviation leadership within the broader Agenda 2063 and SAATM frameworks.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

This study demonstrates that Ghana’s airspace governance system, despite achieving strong civil aviation safety compliance, remains institutionally fragmented and technologically uneven in ways that undermine both national security resilience and developmental performance. The analysis shows that limited civil–military integration, surveillance gaps, and weak interagency coordination reduce the effectiveness of threat detection, crisis response, and airspace control.

The findings further reveal that emerging asymmetric threats - including UAV incursions, cyber vulnerabilities, trafficking operations, and emergency-response failures - directly affect aviation-dependent sectors of the economy, investor confidence, and Ghana’s ambitions under the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM). The Z-9 helicopter crash particularly illustrates how governance fragmentation and incompatible operational systems can transform

localized incidents into broader systemic failures with significant economic and reputational consequences.

Comparative analysis with Nigeria and South Africa confirms that integrated governance structures, permanent multi-agency coordination mechanisms, and advanced surveillance systems significantly improve operational effectiveness and security resilience. The study therefore validates the central argument that institutional design and technological integration directly shape the security–development nexus within Ghana’s airspace governance framework.

5.2. Conclusion

Ghana’s airspace management system operates on a relatively strong civil safety foundation but remains insufficiently adapted to an increasingly complex and multidimensional threat environment. While regulatory compliance and aviation growth have advanced considerably, fragmented governance arrangements, incomplete surveillance coverage, and ad hoc coordination continue to generate systemic vulnerabilities affecting both security and development.

The study demonstrates that airspace security cannot be treated solely as a technical or defence issue. Rather, it constitutes a strategic governance challenge with direct implications for economic growth, regional integration, investor confidence, and national resilience. The Z-9 helicopter crash, recurring trafficking incidents, and persistent UAV and cyber threats collectively reveal that isolated institutional responses are inadequate within contemporary multidomain operational environments.

The findings also show that secure and integrated airspace governance represents a necessary condition for realizing Ghana’s broader developmental ambitions, including its role within SAATM and Agenda 2063. Without comprehensive institutional reform and technological modernization, Ghana risks perpetuating cycles of insecurity, underinvestment, and reduced regional competitiveness.

Ultimately, the study confirms that strengthening the security–development nexus requires integrated governance structures, improved surveillance capabilities, permanent interagency coordination, and regionally aligned security frameworks capable of responding effectively to evolving airspace threats.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1. Institutional and Governance Reforms

1. Legislate a National Airspace Security Policy integrating civil and military airspace governance under a unified Airspace Management Authority.
2. Transform the Multi-Agency Command Centre into a permanent statutory institution with clearly defined interagency coordination responsibilities.
3. Strengthen institutional interoperability between the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority, Ghana Air Force, National Communications Authority, and other security agencies through regular joint operational exercises and standardized information-sharing procedures.

5.3.2. Technological and Surveillance Modernization

1. Expand nationwide Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) coverage and integrate civil and military surveillance systems into a unified operational platform.
2. Acquire layered counter-UAV capabilities, including detection, jamming, and interception technologies, to address emerging asymmetric threats.
3. Implement ICAO-compliant cybersecurity frameworks and establish dedicated cyber defence units for aviation infrastructure protection.

5.3.3. Regional and International Cooperation

1. Harmonize regional Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) procedures through ECOWAS and AFCAC cooperation frameworks.
2. Strengthen cross-border information sharing and joint surveillance initiatives addressing trafficking, UAV incursions, and Sahel-related security spillovers.

5.3.4. Strategic Development and Resilience Measures

1. Promote public-private partnerships to support communication-navigation-surveillance infrastructure modernization and long-term airspace resilience.
2. Align airspace governance reforms with Ghana's broader national development objectives, including SAATM integration and Agenda 2063 regional connectivity goals.

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