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THE WEALTH WITHIN, THE WEALTH UNSEEN: REFLECTIONS ON THE GULF OF GUINEA'S MARITIME DOMAIN

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ABSTRACT

The rapid escalation of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Aden over the past decade has made maritime security a policy priority both for Africa and globally. Although maritime security incidents also increased in the Gulf of Guinea, on Africa's western coast, this area did not initially generate the same degree of diplomatic and military response. To an extent, this reflects the decades of neglect of the region's maritime domain by countries in the region and broader stakeholders.

This paper analyses numerous factors that have contributed to the neglect of the Gulf of Guinea's maritime domain and considers the potential regional challenges and threats that have emerged as a result. It also examines the effectiveness of the strategies and initiatives being undertaken by various stakeholders to strengthen maritime domain awareness in the region and reduce the levels of insecurity caused by the decades of neglect.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ECCAS   Economic Community of Central African States
EEZ   exclusive economic zone
GGC   Gulf of Guinea Commission

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade piracy and armed robbery at sea have escalated from a relatively peripheral issue on the global and African security agenda to a major strategic concern. This shift has been driven primarily by the rapid escalation of maritime security incidents in the Gulf of Aden off Africa's north-eastern coast, particularly from 2007–2014.

On the opposite side of the continent, the Gulf of Guinea[1] rarely featured prominently in debates on maritime security. However, in recent years the region has experienced an upsurge in maritime security incidents, which has raised concerns among regional and broader international stakeholders. In 2012, 58 incidents against vessels were reported in West African waters, more than double those reported in 2006.[2] In 2013 Lloyd's Joint War Committee declared the region between Togo, Benin and Nigeria a 'war risk' zone for shipping.[3] Maritime security incidents then began to decrease, with 48 incidents reported in 2013 and 41 in 2014.[4] During the first six months of 2015, the International Chamber of Commerce and International Maritime Bureau reported 15 incidents in the region.[5] This reduction can be attributed to increasing awareness among littoral countries of the importance of maintaining more effective control of their maritime domain.

This paper analyses various factors that contributed to the neglect of the Gulf of Guinea's maritime domain and considers the potential regional challenges and threats that have emerged from this neglect. It also examines the effectiveness of the strategies and initiatives being undertaken by various stakeholders in the region to strengthen maritime domain awareness and reduce insecurity.

NEGLECT OF THE GULF OF GUINEA'S MARITIME DOMAIN

Several reasons have been advanced for the neglect of the maritime domain of the Gulf of Guinea. First, the region experienced significant political instability in the postcolonial

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1   Defining the Gulf of Guinea region is often a difficult task because of the large expanse of area it occupies. Nonetheless, it can functionally be defined as those countries that share their coastline with the water body called the Gulf of Guinea, which stretches from Senegal in the west to Angola. The countries that fall within this scope are Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, São Tomé e Prìncipe, Sierra Leone and Togo.
2   ICC (International Chamber of Commerce) & IMB (International Maritime Bureau), 'Piracy and armed robbery against ships: Report for the period of 1 January–31 December 2012', 2013.
3   See Joint War Committee, 'Hull war, piracy, terrorism, and related perils: Listed areas', 12 June 2013, http://www.shipownersclub.com/media/war-related-risks-june-20131.pdf, accessed 4 September 2015.
4   ICC & IMB, 'Piracy and armed robbery against ships: Report for the period of 1 January– 31 December 2013', 2014; ICC & IMB, 'Piracy and armed robbery against ships: Report for the period of 1 January–31 December 2014', 2015.
5   ICC & IMB, 2015, *op. cit.*

period, including a number of civil wars. Second, poor governance and corruption have proliferated in this environment of political instability. Third, numerous acts of transnational organised crime have been committed by networks exploiting the weak governance in the subregion. This weak governance, coupled with weak institutions, has in turn exacerbated the political instability, corruption and organised crime. Taken together, these governance and security challenges have engendered a focus on onshore issues, at the expense of the maritime domain.

The maritime domain of a country or region can be defined as 'all areas and things of, on, under, relating to, adjacent to, or bordering on a sea, ocean, or other navigable waterway, including all maritime-related activities, infrastructure, people, cargo, and vessels and other conveyances'.[6] Natural resources are usually understood to consist of mineral and energy resources such as oil, gas, gold or iron ore. However, natural resources encompass a much wider group of materials, systems and life forms. This paper therefore defines natural resources as any raw materials, systems or life forms occurring in nature that can be used for economic production or consumption. These resources can further be divided into four categories, namely mineral and energy resources; soil resources; water resources; and biological resources.[7]

The Gulf of Guinea possesses a wealth of natural resources across these categories. The marine ecosystem is highly productive and diverse, supporting fisheries that contribute significantly to food security and trade. Large, navigable rivers such as the Congo and Niger extend trade linkages inland and further support rich inland fisheries and agricultural production. The region is also home to three of the world's top cocoa-growing countries, namely Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Cameroon.[8]

The countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea are endowed with large reserves of mineral resources, including gold, bauxite and diamonds, while 10 of the countries along the gulf are either producers or prospective producers of oil and gas.[9] Nigeria has the highest levels of oil production in Africa and the 12th highest in the world.[10] Ghana began commercial

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6   As defined in Center for Oceans Law and Policy, 'National Plan to Achieve Maritime Domain Awareness for the National Strategy for Maritime Security', October 2005, http://www.virginia.edu/colp/pdf/NSMS-National-Plan-to-Achieve-Maritime-Domain-Awareness.pdf, accessed 14 August 2015.

7   As found in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), 'Glossary of statistical terms: Natural resource', https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1740, accessed 14 August 2015.

8   Mañe DO, 'Emergence of the Gulf of Guinea in the Global Economy: Prospects and Challenges', IMF (International Monetary Fund) Working Paper, Office of the Executive Director: Africa, WP/05/235, 2005.

9   These countries are Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana and Nigeria, with Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia beginning the process of oil exploration.

10   Index Mundi, 'Country comparison, oil production: Top 20', http://www.indexmundi.com/g/r.aspx?v=88&t=20, accessed 9 December 2015.

FIGURE 1 GULF OF GUINEA REGION

Source: Socialist Worker, 'Maps of Africa', http://socialistworker.co.uk/art/13304/Maps+of+Africa

production of oil in 2010 and is among the world's top 10 producers of gold.[11] Ghana is also among the world's top 20 producers of bauxite, as are Sierra Leone and Guinea.[12] The Gulf of Guinea is thus an important shipping zone, not only for the export of petroleum and mineral and agricultural products from the region but also as a thoroughfare for global trade.[13]

Many of the states bordering the Gulf of Guinea have been plagued by political instability for decades. This instability is the result of the mismanagement of state resources, violent contestation for political power, economic stresses and the undermining of state and civil institutions. A number of the gulf nations were plagued by coups d'état for over two decades following independence. The era of coups was followed by civil wars and unrest, which had a direct and indirect impact on neighbouring countries in the regional security

11   Williams L, 'Update: World top 10 gold producers – countries and miners', *Mineweb*, 3 February 2015, http://www.mineweb.com/news/gold/update-world-top-10-gold-producers-countries-miners/, accessed 19 August 2015.

12   Index Mundi, 'Bauxite production by country', http://www.indexmundi.com/minerals/?product=bauxite, accessed 19 August 2015.

13   Mañe DO, *op. cit.*

complex, undermining socio-economic progress in all.[14] Most of these nations began an attempt at democratic rule in the 1990s and many are still in the process of consolidating their democratic dispensation.[15]

The cost of these conflicts to the subregion included significant loss of life and property; internal displacement of citizens; regional refugee crises; poverty and disease; the proliferation of human, drug and arms trafficking; illegal exploitation of the region's natural resources (often used to fund further conflict); and widespread lawlessness and violence.

The twin factors of weak governance and corruption continue to be identified as major causes of violent conflict and civil unrest in the region. A number of studies identify these factors as the reinforcing elements fuelling renewed violence and civil strife in Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Liberia and Sierra Leone.[16]

Bad governance not only undermines the development of a region but also drives and motivates violence. Good governance is not a static condition, but rather a process that needs to be continually renewed and modified to suit the changing demands of a country or system. However, this requires accountability, transparency, respect for the rule of law, equitability, inclusiveness and efficiency.[17] Ultimately, good governance must be backed by strong and credible political will, supported by a private sector that adheres to good investment practices and eschews tax avoidance and bribery.[18]

Unfortunately, many of the governments in this region are still struggling to uphold the tenets of good governance. This has led to recurrent corrupt practices, in both government and the private sector. Most sub-Saharan African states still score lower than 50% on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index; a figure that has not deviated

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14   See Buzan B & O Wæver, 'Regions and powers: The structure of international security', *Cambridge Studies in International Relations*, 91, 2003.

15   See Chidume CG, 'Military coups in West Africa: The African "phenomenon" that is self-inflicted', *International Affairs and Global Strategy*, 15, 2013; Assensoh AB & Y-A Assensoh, *African Military History and Policies: Ideological Coups and Incursions 1900 – Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; Chazan N *et al.*, *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*, 3rd ed. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999; Jenkins JC & JK Augustine, 'The political origins of African military coups: Ethnic competition, military centrality, and the struggle over the postcolonial states', *International Studies Quarterly*, 36, 3, 1992, pp. 271–291; Ngoma N, 'Civil-military relation in Africa: Navigating uncharted water', *African Security Review*, 15, 4, 2006, pp. 98–111.

16   Annan N, 'Violent conflicts and civil strife in West Africa: Causes, challenges and prospects', *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 3, 1, 2014, p. 3.

17   Good Governance Guide, 'What is good governance?', http://www.goodgovernance.org.au/about-good-governance/what-is-good-governance/, accessed 21 August 2015.

18   Du Plessis A, 'Poor governance a greater threat than terror', *ISS Today*, 5 June 2015, https://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/poor-governance-a-greater-threat-than-terror, accessed 20 August 2015.

fundamentally from previous years' rankings.[19] The institutions that have been charged to serve as watchdogs and promote the rule of law are in many cases either under-equipped or mismanaged, and thus unable to effectively carry out their roles. Many of these challenges are also reflected in the institutions that oversee the region's maritime domain.

Against the backdrop of the destruction of lives and property and the continuous struggle to maintain peace, securing coastlines for a long time did not feature prominently on the political agenda. This led to what many refer to as the region's 'sea blindness' in the political sphere. The lack of attention paid to the maritime domain and the continuous rebuilding of collapsed nations caused a security gap, which gave criminal networks the opportunity to engage in numerous forms of organised crime.

Transnational organised crime occurs at the intersection of law, politics, power and sovereignty. It erodes institutions' and states' legality by undermining the rule of law, motivating corruption and buying influence, which allow criminal gangs to control the political economy. The effects of organised crime on Africa's stability and growth, especially among its fragile states, are devastating.[20] According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, transnational organised crime has many facets, from the trafficking of humans, drugs and firearms to money laundering. The considerable revenues involved in these crimes not only compromise economies but directly undermine governance processes.[21]

The most common transnational organised crimes that plague West Africa are the trafficking of humans, drugs and firearms; money laundering; piracy and armed robbery at sea; illegal, unreported and/or unregulated fishing; and cyber-crimes. This paper will not fully examine these crimes, but will look briefly at how some of the crimes contributed to diverting attention from the maritime domain.

Over the past decade, West Africa has become a hub for drug trafficking, the global illicit trade involving the 'cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances that are subject to drug prohibition law'.[22] The trans-shipment of narcotics from Latin America, through West Africa and onwards to Europe and North America, has increased significantly. Organised criminal networks operate in the subregion to ensure the safe passage of the drug cargo. Additionally, with the increase in shipments, there has been an increase in local consumption of narcotics.[23] The UN estimates that $1.25 billion of

> The institutions that have been charged to serve as watchdogs and promote the rule of law are in many cases either under-equipped or mismanaged, and thus unable to effectively carry out their roles

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19   Uwimana C, 'Sub-Saharan Africa: Corruption still hurts daily lives', Transparency International, 3 December 2014, http://blog.transparency.org/2014/12/03/sub-saharan-africa-corruption-still-hurts-daily-lives/, accessed 21 September 2015. See Transparency International, 'Corruption Perceptions Index 2014: Results', http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results for more information and actual figures.

20   Du Plessis A, *op. cit.*

21   UNODC (UN Office on Drugs and Crime), 'Organized crime', http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/organized-crime/index.html, accessed 24 August 2015.

22   UNODC, 'Drug trafficking', http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html, accessed 24 August 2015.

23   West Africa Commission on Drugs, 'Background', http://www.wacommissionondrugs.org/background/, accessed 24 August 2015.

cocaine passes thorough the region annually, a figure far greater than the annual national budgets of many of these countries.[24]

There are at least two major trans-shipment hubs in West Africa, one centred on Guinea and Guinea-Bissau and the other on the Bight of Benin, along the coasts of Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria. Latin American traffickers move their consignments via 'mother ships' to the subregion and offload onto smaller vessels. The drugs are divided into two consignments: one part is shipped to Spain and Portugal and the remainder stays in the Gulf of Guinea region as payment to West African criminal networks. These consignments are then trafficked by the West African criminal networks via commercial air routes into Europe.[25] Ironically, although the bulk of narcotic consignments arrive in Africa via the sea, for a long time efforts to tackle trafficking in the region have focused on the marginal percentage transported via land and air routes or that remained in West Africa.

Aside from the trafficking of drugs, human trafficking is also a major concern in the region.[26] This crime is a global phenomenon and many of the countries along the Gulf of Guinea and inland are origin, transit or destination countries for this trade. The trafficking routes for children or potential farm labourers and domestic workers from countries in Central Africa are usually via the Cameroon coastline, after which they are put on sea-going vessels that transport them to their destinations.[27] Trafficked women are usually collected from bases scattered across the region and then taken through the Sahara Desert to Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya, where attempts are made to smuggle them into Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. Security agencies tackling human trafficking and migrant smuggling admit that, although efforts are being made to address the issue, the number of human trafficking victims continues to increase. Economic hardship and conflicts in the region are important drivers of this trend.[28]

As with the illegal drug trade, efforts to address human trafficking have largely focused on blocking inland trafficking routes. It is only more recently that the massive escalation of migration and human trafficking in the Mediterranean Sea has begun to draw worldwide attention. Although the majority of those crossing the Mediterranean Sea in recent times

> The security gap generated by the focus on land-based governance issues in West Africa created an opportunity not just for traffickers but also for perpetrators of piracy and armed robbery at sea

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24 *The Economist*, 'Drug trafficking in West Africa: The wrong way to beat it', 30 June 2014, http://www.economist.com/blogs/baobab/2014/06/drug-trafficking-west-africa, accessed 24 August 2015.

25 UNODC, 'West and Central Africa: The situation', http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/west-and-central-africa.html, accessed 24 August 2015.

26 UNODC, 'UNODC on human trafficking and migrant smuggling', http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/index.html?ref=menuside, accessed 24 August 2015.

27 IRIN, 'West Africa: Traffickers hold thousands of children, women in bondage', 12 November 2003, http://www.irinnews.org/report/47205/west-africa-traffickers-hold-thousands-of-children-women-in-bondage accessed 24 August 2015.

28 *Ibid.*

have been refugees hoping to seek asylum in Europe, traffickers and smugglers are taking advantage of the situation to conceal their victims.[29]

The security gap generated by the focus on land-based governance issues in West Africa created an opportunity not just for traffickers but also for perpetrators of piracy and armed robbery at sea. Much of the focus of global and regional institutions concerned with maritime security had been on the rapidly deteriorating situation in the Gulf of Aden, where reported piracy incidents rose from 22 in 2000 to 217 in 2009.[30] Although piracy also escalated in the Gulf of Guinea in 2007 and 2008, attacks abated somewhat in 2009–2010 following the signing of an amnesty pact between the Nigerian government and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta. However, in 2011 piracy incidents increased to their highest recorded levels for the subregion at 63 incidents, galvanising national and regional responses.[31]

The pirates in the Gulf of Guinea operate differently from the Somali pirates. Their aim has generally been to attack, capture and off-load any commodity that can be resold. The targeted commodities are usually crude oil or refined petroleum products off tankers.[32] The kidnapping of vessels and holding crews to ransom, as was common in the Gulf of Aden, has been far less prevalent in the Gulf of Guinea. The pirates in the Gulf of Guinea have also tended to be more violent than those operating in the Gulf of Aden, with reported cases of attacks on ships with automatic weapons and the killing of crew members.

As in the Gulf of Aden, pirate groups have shown themselves capable of adapting technology and methods in response to changes in the security environment. It has been reported that pirate groups in the Gulf of Guinea are acquiring heavier weapons and adopting sophisticated manoeuvres.[33] Inasmuch as the pirates of the Gulf of Guinea initially focused on robbing vessels of their cargo, in some instances ransoms have been paid for crew members. The pirates are increasingly not only kidnapping crew members for ransom but also sorting through the crew to kidnap nationalities they believe to be more 'valuable', such as US, Indian and Polish citizens, often leaving behind Nigerian crew members, who are less likely to generate significant ransom payments.[34]

The pirates in the Gulf of Guinea operate differently from the Somali pirates. Their aim has generally been to attack, capture and off-load any commodity that can be resold

29   *New York Times*, 'What's behind the surge in refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea', 20 April 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/04/20/world/europe/surge-in-refugees-crossing-the-mediterranean-sea-maps.html?_r=0, accessed 24 August 2015.

30   UNODC, 'UNODC on maritime piracy', https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/9.Maritime_piracy.pdf, accessed 9 December 2015.

31   UNODC, 'Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea', https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTAWestAfrica/West_Africa_TOC_PIRACY.pdf, accessed 9 December 2015.

32   Doyle M, 'Nigeria's piracy: Another form of oil theft', *BBC World News*, 18 June 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-22956865, accessed 9 November 2015.

33   Nelson R & A Ware, 'An emerging threat? Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea', Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2012.

34   Harper M, 'Danger zone: Chasing West Africa's pirates', *BBC World News*, 13 November 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30024009, accessed 9 November 2015.

STRENGTHENING AWARENESS OF THE GULF OF GUINEA MARITIME DOMAIN

As a result of the upsurge in piracy and armed robbery at sea, political leaders have turned their attention to the Gulf of Guinea maritime domain. Various initiatives, at the national, regional and international level, have been adopted since 2012 to secure the maritime domain.

At the national level, many countries are strengthening their naval capacity. Modern, more sophisticated vessels have been acquired, together with updated surveillance and tracking equipment. Human resources have been developed and response capability strengthened by engaging in more frequent and more complex naval exercises, often in collaboration with external partners and donors such as the US, France, EU and ECOWAS. New security agencies are being created to focus specifically on the maritime domain.

In Ghana, for example, a maritime police unit has been established within the police service. Nigeria has established a joint task force comprising the navy, army, air force and mobile police to tackle challenges in the Niger Delta. The government of Benin, in partnership with national civil society organisations, also adopted a number of measures in recent years to develop an integrated response to complex maritime security challenges.[35]

The Nigerian Navy, which is already the biggest in the region by a significant margin, was expected to receive eight new vessels in 2015. Four of these were launched in February 2015. The NNS Okpabana has been enrolled as a frigate with capabilities for long-distance patrol of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The NNS Centenary's mission includes maritime surveillance, EEZ patrol and response, and protection of offshore resources and infrastructure, while it will also provide aid to the civil authority when called upon to do so during civil unrests and natural disasters, among others. The NNS Sagbama is classified as a river town patrol vessel and the NNS Prosperity will serve as a training ship for junior officers and ratings.[36] The Ghanaian Navy currently has 14 vessels, of which six are seagoing and four are considered small class boats; the remaining vessels will be decommissioned and replaced in coming years.[37]

Nigeria and Ghana have the best-equipped and most functional navies in the subregion. However, national-level responses by their navies and other regional partners must be integrated with broader regional and subregional initiatives. It is essential that countries establishing new security agencies or joint task forces undertake effective consultations among all relevant stakeholders to ensure a harmonised and co-ordinated approach to address the problem.

Various initiatives, at the national, regional and international level, have been adopted since 2012 to secure the maritime domain

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35   IPI (International Peace Institute), 'Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: Assessing the Threats, Preparing the Response', January 2014, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ipi_e_pub_gulf_of_guinea.pdf, accessed 25 August 2015.

36   *Premium Times*, 'Jonathan commissions 4 new Nigerian warships, vows to defeat Boko Haram', 19 February 2015, http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/177171-jonathan-commissions-4-new-nigerian-warships-vows-to-defeat-boko-haram.html, accessed 10 November 2015.

37   Interviews with Ghanaian naval officers, Accra, November 2015.

On the bilateral level, in September 2011 President Thomas Boni Yayi of Benin engaged his counterpart in neighbouring Nigeria, President Goodluck Jonathan, on how best the two countries could collaborate in addressing piracy. Benin's Port of Cotonou contributes greatly to the gross domestic product of the country. With the upsurge in piracy and increased instability in the region's maritime domain, the port began to lose significant revenues, which in turn undermined the country's already struggling economy.

Talks between Nigeria and Benin resulted in the launch of Operation Prosperity, a joint naval operation to ensure a secure maritime environment. The Nigerian navy provided the necessary vessels and most of the logistical support and human resources, while Benin opened its waters to Nigerian naval vessels and hosted the joint operation in Cotonou.[38] The operation not only strengthened collective maritime security but also contributed significantly to enhanced consultation, information sharing and co-operation between the two navies.

In June 2013 the heads of state and government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) held a summit on 'Maritime Security and Safety in the Gulf of Guinea' in Yaoundé, Cameroon. This summit was central in developing a regional response to maritime security concerns in the Gulf of Guinea, and produced a declaration on maritime security, a memorandum of understanding and a code of conduct.

The Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of Central and West African States on Maritime Safety and Security in Their Common Maritime Domain (Yaoundé Declaration) committed the signatories to promote peace, security and stability within the Gulf of Guinea maritime area through mobilising sufficient operational resources. It further called on ECCAS, ECOWAS and the GGC to encourage activities aimed at co-operation and co-ordination, and to share resources among members while continuing to co-operate with international strategic partners.[39]

The Memorandum of Understanding among ECCAS, ECOWAS and the GGC on Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa aims to facilitate the co-ordination and implementation of joint activities as well as the sharing of experiences and information exchange on suspicious movements and activities at sea. The memorandum further calls for the harmonisation of legislation on piracy and other illegal activities and control procedures on reinforcing the fight against crimes at sea. It also envisages the establishment of an inter-regional co-ordination centre for the implementation of the regional strategy on maritime safety and security.[40]

The Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activities in Central and West Africa aims to ensure that there

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38   Osei-Tutu JA, 'Lowering the anchor on maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: Lessons from Operation Prosperity', KAIPTC (Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre) Policy Brief, 11/2013, 2013.

39   IPI, *op. cit.*

40   *Ibid.*

is full co-operation in the repression of transnational organised crimes in the maritime domain. The code of conduct is nonbinding for the first three years, after which a review will take place to establish a timeframe for transforming the document into a binding multilateral agreement, assess its implementation, and share information, experiences and best practices.[41]

Additionally, the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy and its implementation plan were adopted in March 2014.[42] ECOWAS and the GGC also plan to develop an integrated maritime strategy.[43] It is essential that these regional plans and strategies are aligned with the Yaoundé Declaration, in order to ensure a co-ordinated and efficient regional maritime security response.

One of the outcomes of the Yaoundé Summit was the decision by ECOWAS to cluster its member countries into maritime zones. Zone E comprises Nigeria, Niger, Benin and Togo, with Benin hosting the co-ordination centre.[44] The co-ordination centres play an important role in promoting information exchange and joint actions in response to piracy and maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea.[45] The Regional Maritime Security Coordination Centre of West Africa, hosted in Abidjan, was established to support the functions of the co-ordination centres in each of the zones.[46]

The regional initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea are also linked to broader, continental-level processes led by the AU. The primary framework at this level is the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy, which provides a broad framework for the protection and sustainable exploitation of the African maritime domain. The strategy is the product of cross-cutting inputs from African experts, including representatives of think tanks, non-governmental organisations, academia, regional economic communities, regional mechanisms, AU member states and all other relevant stakeholders. It is intended to

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41   *Ibid.*

42   See the Interregional Coordination Center (ICC) for a list of regional maritime strategies that have been adopted: ICC, 'Regional maritime strategies', http://cicyaounde.org/maritime-strategies-africa/, accessed 15 September 2015.

43   *Vanguard*, 'ECOWAS set to implement strategy on maritime security', 26 May 2014, http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/05/ecowas-set-implement-strategy-maritime-security/#sthash.UJzRP5uW.dpuf accessed 25 August 2015.

44   Also see Oceans Beyond Piracy, 'International information-sharing centers', http://oceansbeyondpiracy.org/sites/default/files/attachments/WestAfricaInfoSharingMap_0.pdf, accessed 10 September 2015, for a map of all regional maritime security co-ordination centres within the region, both planned and operational.

45   See *World Bulletin*, 'ECOWAS set to launch maritime zones to fight piracy', 11 September 2014, http://www.worldbulletin.net/world/144164/ecowas-set-to-launch-maritime-zones-to-fight-piracy, accessed 25 August 2015; and Rider D, 'Nigeria piracy: A small step', *Maritime Security Review*, 19 September 2014, http://www.marsecreview.com/2014/09/nigerian-piracy-a-small-step/, accessed 25 August 2015.

46   Blede B, 'A huge step forward in tackling piracy in the Gulf of Guinea', *ISS Today*, 13 March 2015, https://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/a-huge-step-forward-in-tackling-piracy-in-the-gulf-of-guinea, accessed 25 August 2015.

address current, emerging and future maritime challenges and opportunities in Africa, taking into account the interests of landlocked countries, with a clear focus on enhanced wealth creation through the sustainable governance of Africa's inland waters, oceans and seas.[47]

As with the subregional initiatives, the development of continental-level strategies and initiatives must be undertaken with careful consideration in order to avoid diluting strategic focus and duplicating efforts. During crisis periods, countries, regional bodies and international institutions may face pressure to be seen to be responding to the problem, often leading to inefficient responses and a lack of co-ordination.

On the international level, multilateral institutions and external partners have also played an important role in the response to the maritime security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea. In November 2011, the AU sent a request to the secretary-general of the UN for assistance in tackling the piracy situation. The UN secretary-general responded by sending a delegation to the Gulf of Guinea to assess the piracy and make appropriate recommendations on how the UN can assist. This led to the adoption of UN Security Council resolutions 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012), which condemned all acts of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea and emphasised the need for a comprehensive strategy among all affected nations to effectively address the problem.[48]

In March 2015 the Council of the EU adopted the Gulf of Guinea Action Plan 2015–2020, which outlines the EU's approach to helping the region combat its maritime insecurity. This plan intends to provide support at both the regional and the national level towards the ongoing efforts of ECOWAS, ECCAS, the GGC and all signatories of the Yaoundé Declaration. The EU envisages that the implementation of this plan will reinforce intra-regional co-operation and increase the level of co-ordination among the EU, its member states and international partners. The plan states that the Council 'stands ready to assist West and Central African coastal states to achieve long lasting prosperity through an integrated and cross-sectoral approach, linking the importance of good governance, rule of law, and the development of the maritime domain to enable greater trade cooperation, and job creation for the countries in the region'.[49]

As mentioned earlier, the navies of the Gulf of Guinea have conducted exercises to build capacity and ensure their readiness. One such exercise was the 'Obangame Express', which

> During crisis periods, countries, regional bodies and international institutions may face pressure to be seen to be responding to the problem, often leading to inefficient responses and a lack of co-ordination

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47   AU, '2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy', http://pages.au.int/maritime, accessed 25 August 2015.

48   See UN Security Council Resolution 2018 (2011), http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2018(2011), accessed 21 June 2012; and UN Security Council Resolution 2039 (2012), http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4fbe210f2.html, accessed 21 June 2012.

49   Council of the European Union, 'Council conclusions on the Gulf of Guinea Action Plan 2015–2020', 16 March 2015, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2015/03/st07168_en15_pdf/, accessed 25 September 2015.

was conducted for the fifth time in March 2015 with 23 nations[50] from Europe, South America, North America and the Gulf of Guinea participating. 'Obangame Express' is a US Africa Command-sponsored multinational maritime exercise designed to increase maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea.[51]

The long-term effectiveness of these initiatives is difficult to assess at this stage, as many are still relatively new or only partially implemented. There is certainly a need to continually assess progress while addressing implementation challenges. However, there are encouraging signs of progress; for example, of the 16 planned co-ordination centres, 10 have been established and are currently operational.[52] While there is still much to be done in terms of improving information sharing and co-ordination, this is an important step forward.

The greatest challenge this region continues to face is the translation of initiatives and plans into tangible actions at the operational and tactical level

As shown earlier, there appears to have been a reduction in the number of reported attacks in the first half of 2015 when compared to the same period in previous years, although the growing shift towards kidnapping and abduction for ransom is concerning. The decline in attacks likely reflects increasing awareness of the maritime domain and the continuous presence of security agencies in territorial waters. However, it should be noted that a significant number of piracy attacks go unreported, and therefore any complacency would be misplaced. The greatest challenge this region continues to face is the translation of initiatives and plans into tangible actions at the operational and tactical level. There is typically a significant gap between the initiatives that are signed and adopted and their implementation.

CONCLUSION

The maritime challenges within the Gulf of Guinea are numerous and complex. There is gradual acceptance that a holistic approach, emphasising collaboration and co-ordination, is needed to address the prevailing threats and deal with their root causes. As Ghanaian Vice President Kwesi Amissah-Arthur said at the closing ceremony of Obangame Express 2015 in Accra, Ghana, 'The maritime security challenges threaten global trade and the economies of the countries in the region, requiring collaborative effort to combat.'[53]

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50 Participating nations in Obangame Express 2015 were Angola, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Norway, Portugal, São Tomé and Prìncipe, Spain, Togo, Turkey, the UK and the US, as well as ECOWAS and ECCAS.

51 See US Africa Command 2015, 'Exercise Obangame Express 2015 enhances Gulf of Guinea', 25 March 2015, http://www.africom.mil/newsroom/article/25293/exercise-obangame-express-2015-enhances-gulf-of-guinea, accessed 26 August 2015.

52 See the map at Oceans Beyond Piracy, 'West Africa information sharing', http://oceansbeyondpiracy.org/publications/west-africa-information-sharing, for full details of the centres that are operational and planned.

53 See US Africa Command, 'Obangame Express 2015 concludes in the Gulf of Guinea', 30 March 2015, http://www.africom.mil/newsroom/article/25316/obangame-express-2015-concludes-in-the-gulf-of-guinea, accessed 26 August 2015.

While a number of initiatives have been established nationally, regionally and internationally in an attempt to address the various issues, this will mean little if they are not effectively translated into operational and tactical actions. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are crucial to ensure the ultimate success of these initiatives, as is maintaining the necessary political will to drive implementation.

Exercises such as Obangame are extremely important, as they offer stakeholders the opportunity to work together and build the trust and mutual respect necessary for effective co-operation. These efforts should be developed further with similar exercises at the national and regional level. The neglect of the Gulf of Guinea maritime domain for much of the region's postcolonial history resulted from weak governance structures, an unstable political arena, and the proliferation of land-based organised crime. If recent efforts to address maritime security are to be effective, progress will also have to be made in strengthening broader institutions of governance at the national and regional level. Good governance is the foundation on which the success of any initiative will be based.

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