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INTERVENTIONISM IN THE GULF OF GUINEA

THE CASE OF MARITIME SECURITY GOVERNANCE



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Synopsis:

On Friday 21st October 2022, over 40 participants from around the world gathered virtually to participate in the seminar on “Interventionism in the Gulf of Guinea; The Case of Maritime Security Governance. The virtual seminar was jointly organized by the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Institute (GoGMI) in Accra, Ghana, and the Atlantic Centre in Lisbon, Portugal. The seminar formed part of a series of events organized in several locations from 17 to 21 October 2022 and addressed security issues in the Atlantic space.

The seminar was moderated by GoGMI’s Programs Coordinator, Mr. **Lawrence Dogli**, with key interventions from **Rear Admiral Solomon Agada**, Chief of Naval Operation, Nigeria Navy, **Mr. Gilles Chehab**, Head of Component – Capacity Building, EU GoGIN Project, **Professor Christian Bueger**, Professor of International Relations (Maritime Security), University of Copenhagen, and **Captain Emmanuel Bell Bell**, Head of Division in charge of Information and Communication Management at the Inter-regional Coordination Center (ICC) Yaoundé – Cameroon. Together with interactions from the participants, the panel shared perspectives on the successes or otherwise of notable maritime security interventions in the GoG region, the discourses and practices of actors in the region that is shaping approaches to maritime security governance, and how the complexities resulting from maritime security interventionism in the region can be more effectively navigated by the varying actors with competing interests in the region.

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Background

The Gulf of Guinea is crucial, not only because it is geographically cardinal to maritime trade but also because its strategic significance is largely interwoven with the interests of a large number of actors. The implications of this are as extensive as they are multifaceted. For instance, while it implies a multiplicity of interests in enhancing the region's maritime security, it equally infers the exposure of the region to a more complex set of maritime security threats, as well as a more complex set of responses to these threats. The Gulf is therefore characterised by an intricate nexus of threats and governance challenges that have resulted in varied responses from different levels of actors.

The implications of this proliferation of interventions are two-fold. First, it heightens tensions between Atlantic and non-Atlantic powers in the region and, as a matter of consequence, deepens the need for partnerships and collaborations across a broad range of stakeholders. Second, it results in informality and experimentation in governance approaches towards attaining shared goals within the region.

Whether such an evolution will be beneficial to advancing the multiplex of interests in the region, however, is dependent on a contextual analysis of the power and influence wielded by competing actors and powers in the region, as well as how actor discourses and practices will continue to shape the region's maritime security architecture.

Objectives of the Seminar

- Identify the various maritime security interventions in the Gulf of Guinea region instituted to address different security threats.
- Share perspectives on the successes or otherwise of notable maritime security interventions in the GoG region and the discourses and practices of actors in the region that is shaping approaches to maritime security governance
- Discuss how the complexities resulting from maritime security interventionism in the region can be more effectively navigated by the varying actors with competing interests in the region.

The paragraphs below provide a summary of the dialogue that took place during the forum and provides highlights of the major recommendations from the panelists.

Nature of Maritime Security Interventionism in the Gulf of Guinea

Changing trends in maritime security threats are calling into question the evolutionary trajectory of maritime security interventions in the Gulf of Guinea and their disposition, especially in terms of their threat focus. Threats such as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, illicit trafficking of drugs, the risk of piracy and armed robbery against ships and the dangers to seafarers, threats to maritime routes, effects of climate change, and questions about the long-term sustainability of the Yaoundé code of conduct architecture are driving debates on the region's maritime security governance. Additionally, these threats and challenges are gradually becoming the yardstick against which the success or otherwise of the region's maritime security interventions are being measured. Fortunately, the region has more manageable security problems now than during the last ten years. Illegal fishing is one of the new emerging threats in the region with serious implications for livelihoods. However, maintaining democratic peace, stability and prosperity still remains a primary security concern for GoG states who are seeking to develop and guarantee the sustainability of their Blue Economy, which touches upon different sectors including fisheries, tourism, transport, trade, offshore exploitation, and many others. Consequently, a number of significant initiatives have emerged to address the region's maritime security challenges. Notable among them are as follows:

1. **Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC):** GGC was established by the Treaty signed in Libreville, Gabon, on July 3, 2001, by Angola, Congo, Gabon, Nigeria, and Sao Tome and Principe. The commission later commenced operations in March 2007 with the establishment of its Executive Secretariat in Luanda, Angola. It constitutes a permanent Institutional framework for cooperation amongst the countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea in order to defend their common interest and promote peace and socio-economic development based on the bases of dialogue, consensus, and ties of friendship, solidarity, fraternity, and maritime security. Cameroun and the Democratic Republic of Congo joined the Gulf of Guinea Commission in 2008 with Ghana recently joining as the ninth member. Membership of the Gulf of Guinea Commission is open to other states in the Gulf of Guinea region for the purposes of transforming the sub-region into a Zone of Peace and Security. On October 7, 2022, the commission held its 12th Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers, which served as a prelude to the 5th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The meeting agenda items included discussions on the threat of illegal activities in the Gulf of Guinea and the provision of adequate means by member states to make the commission more visible, useful, and relevant to free the region from maritime crime for sustainable development.
2. **Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC):** ICC was set up as the coordination and information-sharing structure that connects the Regional Maritime Security Centre for Central Africa (CRESMAC) and the Regional Maritime Security Centre for West Africa (CRESMAO). This is in accordance with the instruments adopted during the Summit of Heads of State and Government of ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the GGC on safety and security in the maritime space of Central Africa and West Africa; the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, the Heads of States Declaration and the Memorandum of Understanding between regional organizations. The Centre is the body in charge of enhancing the activities geared towards cooperation, coordination, mutualization,

and systems interoperability as well as the implementation of the regional strategy on safety and security within the Central and West African common maritime space. Since its development, the

ICC in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States, and the Gulf of Guinea has achieved the following:

- Assist some West African countries to harmonize national legislation with regional maritime laws, with support from UNODC.
- Development of a regional framework to counter piracy and armed robbery at sea.
- ✦ Information-sharing and operational coordination mechanisms in the region.

3. **G7++ Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (G7++FoGG):** The G7++ Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (FOGG) is a multilateral maritime security group that supports the implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct for regional maritime security. The FOGG is committed to supporting regionally-led solutions to maritime security in West Africa. The UK and Senegal co-chaired the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea during 2021, but now it's being chaired by Germany and Cote D' ivore. The group also recently adopted a focus on environmental protection as part of its agenda.
4. **Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum – Shared Awareness and Deconfliction- GoG-MCF SHADE:** The GoG-MCF SHADE initiative was born as a result of the prevalent cases of piracy and kidnapping of seafarers in the Gulf of Guinea region. The forum seeks to create a viable platform for navies, industry partners, and other relevant stakeholders from across the Gulf of Guinea and beyond to harmonize counter-piracy efforts and communication in the region under the existing information-sharing architecture provided by both the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCOC) and the Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security off the Coast of West Africa (BMP-WA). Nigeria in partnership with the ICC through an MoU developed the GoG-MCF/SHADE. The GoG-MCF/SHADE functions primarily through plenary sessions, each intended to generate dialogue and result in tangible action steps necessary to foster operational coordination between regional navies and stakeholders within the Gulf of Guinea's maritime industry. The initiative's three (3) Working Groups (WG) were formed during the first plenary session across the following thematic areas: Cooperation at Sea (operations), Reporting and Information Sharing, and Air De-confliction. The primary purpose of the WG is to identify viable areas for the enhancement of cooperation and de-confliction and to make salient recommendations for each plenary to adopt. To facilitate this, each WG includes a subject-matter expert and is chaired by a regional representative.
5. **Yaoundé Architecture Regional Information System (YARIS):** YARIS is a controlled and secure computer network for sharing information among the Gulf of Guinea maritime community. The system allows institutions to better understand the maritime domain in order to secure and protect it for the purpose of developing the blue economy. The system was born in response to the principles enshrined in the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to improve maritime safety in the Gulf of Guinea: maritime information sharing, interoperability and pooling of resources, harmonization. Originally, YARIS was intended for the centres that comprised the Yaoundé Architecture: 3 regional centres; 5 zonal centres; 19 national operational reference centres, for a

total of 27 centres, but due to requests from the Yaoundé Architecture Member States, and from several partners, access to YARIS has been extended to various national administrations and external partners.

6. **EU Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP):** The CMP relies on coordination of the existing EU member states naval and air assets deployed on voluntary basis in specific maritime areas that are of interest to the European Union (EU), around the world, to increase the EU's capacity to act as a reliable partner and maritime security provider. Currently, there are 5 EU member states contributing to the CMP - Denmark, Spain, France, Italy and Portugal.
7. **Multilateral Exercise (OBANGAME EXPRESS):** Exercise Obangame Express is a United States led maritime counter-security exercise in Africa, spanning from Morocco to Angola. The purpose of the exercise is to improve regional cooperation and information sharing among participating nations to counter sea-based illicit maritime activity and to strengthen safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea. Hosted by the United States of America through the U.S Naval Forces Africa, the exercise promotes maritime security by enhancing interoperability among African, European, Atlantic, and U.S. militaries and agencies.
8. **Multilateral Exercise (GRAND NEMO):** Since the Yaoundé summit in 2013, the French Navy has led and organised three to four times a year the joint patrols African NEMO and a major annual exercise Grand African NEMO. This exercise brings together a larger number of units and operational centers, including 17 of the 19 countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea (Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Gambia, Cape Verde, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Guinea) and 8 partner nations (Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, France, Italy, Morocco, Spain and United States of America). The exercise focuses on a wide area stretching from Senegal to Angola. The fourth edition which ran from Oct 11-16 2022, focused on sharing know-how and improving the operational level of participants in the fight against illegal fishing, piracy, maritime pollution, illegal trafficking and rescue at sea. This particular exercise benefited from the support of the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission, the Fisheries Committee of the West and Central Africa, the United Nations with UNODC, and also the European programmes GoGIN, PESCAO, and WeCaps.

The Role of YARIS in the Existing Information Sharing Yaoundé Architecture

The Gulf of Guinea region is, unlike the Gulf of Aden, Singapore Strait or Caribbean Sea, driven by intense maritime traffic and often prone to piracy incidents. Equally important to note is that, the region has the most complexities in terms of vigilance and cooperation, making it difficult to act as a security provider to commercial activities. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that for the past ten years, debates in the region have largely centered on piracy. What is more, reports show an upward trend regarding issues of IUU, drugs trafficking, and migratory and ecological issues regarding pollution. The question is how to remedy the current situation in the GoG region.

One key solution for developing responses to the many maritime threats and consequently rejuvenate the GoG region's approach to maritime crisis management is the improvement of maritime domain awareness. Following this, the EU since 2014 has deployed a range of actions to support the operationalization of the Yaoundé Architecture. One of this support is the Gulf of Guinea Interregional Network (GoGIN). The launch of GoGIN effectively means that Gulf of Guinea member states through the Yaoundé architecture, can conduct joint operations, share intelligence and harmonize legal frameworks.

GoGIN supports the exchange of necessary maritime information among maritime centres on the Yaoundé Architecture through a specific information system- Yaoundé Architecture Regional Information System (YARIS). In a time where member states have all committed to collaborate in the fight against piracy and respond to maritime security challenges in the region, a new great game to coordinate crisis situation operation has started. The results so far have been improvement in the collection, sharing and use of information, in accordance with the needs of maritime centres, relevant authorities and users of the sea, including national organizations in charge of maritime safety and security and transnational maritime centres, in charge of zonal, regional and interregional coordination. Although the transnational architecture is functioning, many stakeholders have raised concerns about the little knowledge about the Yaoundé Architecture.

Reflecting on the Success or Otherwise of Interventions in the Gulf of Guinea Region

Regarding the productive impact of the various interventions in the GoG region, it is important to note that the reduction in maritime insecurities has been largely linked to the several interventions by different stakeholders.

In fact, a recent operation to combat illegal fishing which involved an Egyptian-flagged fishing vessel FADH Aleslam (MMSI 62210901), engaging in unauthorized fishing activity during a biological rest period was successfully conducted by the Maritime Operations Centre (COM) of the Maritime Prefecture of Guinea, because of the use of the YARIS platform. The success of the operation underscored the indispensability of the YARIS system as a maritime surveillance tool and a decision-making tool. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage mobilization of resources in order to secure the maritime domain for sustainable economic use. While recognizing that the operationalization of the Yaoundé architecture is a work in progress, it is also important to examine the decisive episodes of the various interventions; incidents that changed threat focus and outcomes.

The creation of GoG-MCF SHADE – the new maritime security alliance between Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigeria Navy and ICC – in July 2021 marked a milestone in harmonization of counter-piracy efforts and communication in the GoG region. It demonstrated continued commitment by stakeholders to foster partnerships in keeping the region free from piracy. Crucially, the SHADE forum has had a significant impact on two arms: cooperation between stakeholders in the region and outside the region to connect and share ideas on how best to tackle security challenges – and build on regional efforts in effective maritime law enforcement operations. The emergence of the SHADE framework coupled with collaborative initiatives and efforts of the Nigerian Navy and other regional Navies has considerably resulted in the reduction of piracy incidents in the GoG region. SHADE stakeholders note that, as they collaborate on efforts to secure the GoG region, a crucial question remains on how they can sustain the status of piracy-free GoG. SHADE attempts to contribute to the improvement in Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), and thus is encouraging national stakeholders to consider the integration of national air assets in enhancing MDA and regional counter-piracy responses. It is also considering the development of a regular threat assessment for the Gulf of Guinea to facilitate regional naval awareness and industry risk assessment.

The ICC's role in the GoG region has grown over the last decade, as part of the region's steady maritime security cooperative awakening, evidenced by increased efforts and investments in the operationalization of the Yaoundé architecture and strategic alliances focusing on the region. The promotion of information exchange is a core strategic interest to the ICC, given the importance of stakeholders' maritime operation centres working collectively to make maritime safety and security a reality in the Gulf of Guinea. The ICC is continuously leveraging on its institutional and diplomatic strengths to reinforce multilateral frameworks that focus on maritime security and has so far been successful in working closely with key institutions like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central Africa States (ECCAS) and Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC). A long-term sustainability plan for operationalization of the Yaoundé architecture is crucial. ICC recognizes this concern and is working on collaborative tools for sharing and pooling resources, as well as joint operations into specified zones on a multinational basis.

Managing Capacity-Building during Interventions

When it comes to capacity building, one important question to ask is the long term cost of platforms, like the YARIS platform. In addition, there needs to be an expanded vision for critical capacity building programmes and management. Not all capacity building programmes respond to the real threats on the ground, thus, there is a need to have integrated planning between multilateral agencies, international partners and the local authorities. What is more, member states can focus their capacity building efforts on territorial security in the short term by rapidly investing in maritime domain awareness and surveillance technology. There is a need to strategize about how the GoG states can proactively respond to security threats, but first they have to learn from the failures to get better.

Navigating the Complexities and Competing Interests of Actors in the Gulf of Guinea Region. Where to Go From Here?

1. The partial presence of political leadership, and the challenge this poses to member states in terms of naval diplomacy and regional stability in the Gulf of Guinea, represents a significant problem of local ownership. Without defining interest and developing capacity, member states will continue to rely on external support to secure the maritime domain during a crisis. Presently, a regional presence in the GoG is not credible enough, if it is aimed at reassuring the commercial shipping industry or deterring maritime offenders.

Recommendation

African leaders should therefore be clear about the objectives their naval diplomacy seeks to accomplish and their capacity to do so, and invest accordingly. The real case for building political leadership that can be used to champion local ownership should be a matter of prioritizing structural and institutional capacity, and adopting multilateral tools like consultation and inclusion to foster closer collaborative approaches. This approach can help identify the varied interest of the community, and enable the development of a common ground for interventions.

2. In the absence of a significant improvement in coordination among maritime agencies, GoG member states will continue to face pressing maritime security challenges.

Recommendation

The GoGIN, which continues to work in close collaboration with the ICC, maintains a level of interagency cooperation and information sharing that is significant to strengthening institutional capacity. This collaboration must be maintained and sustained to cover different maritime threats in the region, beyond piracy.

3. The presence of various actors and powers present in the GoG is a double-edged sword. The strategic importance as well as the interests at stake in the GoG are too important for international partners to turn a blind eye. Moreover, most GoG states welcome international partner's involvement as contribution to fostering stability in the region, consequently resulting in complexities of maritime security governance, and incentivizing member states to engage in multilateral frameworks.

Recommendation

It is important for a study to be conducted on the negative and positive impact of actor relations as well as their varying interest and segregated based on different context. Various actors can make relevant contributions to the multilateral maritime design in the GoG region: regional states have real needs for collaboration on comprehensive maritime security issues to do with:

- (1) Maritime security and law enforcement;
- (2) Environment and climate security;
- (3) Maritime security governance, practice, and conflict prevention.

For the foreseeable future, GoG Stakeholder should focus on human resource financing and sustaining of GoGIN to secure the maritime domain for sustainable economic use.