



INTERNATIONAL MARITIME SECURITY WORKING GROUP

ISSUED AT THE GULF OF GUINEA MARITIME
INSTITUTE- INTERNATIONAL MARITIME
SECURITY WORKING GROUP ON THE THEME:

SECURING VITAL SEA LANES: THREATS TO GLOBAL MARITIME COMMERCE

March 21, 2024 | 11AM GMT
Virtual: Zoom



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Preamble

The International Maritime Security Working Group (IMSWG), an expert group managed by the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Institute (GoGMI), convened its ninth working group meeting. The gathering aimed to discuss perspectives on the Red Sea Crisis, explore future strategies in maritime security and safety of shipping, delve into great power politics, and develop recommendations for decision-makers on how nations can collaborate to safeguard sea lines of communication and ensure freedom of navigation.

The ninth edition of the IMSWG Forum was held on May 21, 2024, organized as part of the Institute's Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea Advocacy Program.

The panelists were Dr. Ian Ralby, CEO of I.R. Consilium, Capt. Phil Heyl, IMO Consultant, and Rear Admiral Solomon Agada, Distinguished Fellow at GoGMI. The forum was moderated by Mr. Lawrence Dogli, Programs Manager at the Institute. The forum convened an additional 70 delegates from Gulf of Guinea countries as well as representatives from the ECOWAS Commission, CRESMAO, the Atlantic Centre, and the European Union. These delegates represented the diplomatic corps, government agencies responsible maritime safety and security and the blue economy, regional (i.e the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Security and Safety (hereafter, Yaoundé Architecture)) and national civilian and military maritime authorities, academia, information-sharing platforms, shipping companies, and civil society.

1. Development of the Report

The final report was elaborated from the presentations, exchanges, findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the forum, one plenary session, and one working group discussion.

The forum was dedicated to the theme, 'Securing Vital Sea Lanes; Threats to Global Maritime Commerce'. This theme was broken down into five sub-themes to facilitate a holistic examination; namely –

- Geopolitical tensions among nations and its impact on Sea lanes and global maritime trade
- Evolution of Houthi attacks in the Red Sea
- Assessing Great Power Politics and Diplomacy in the Gulf Region

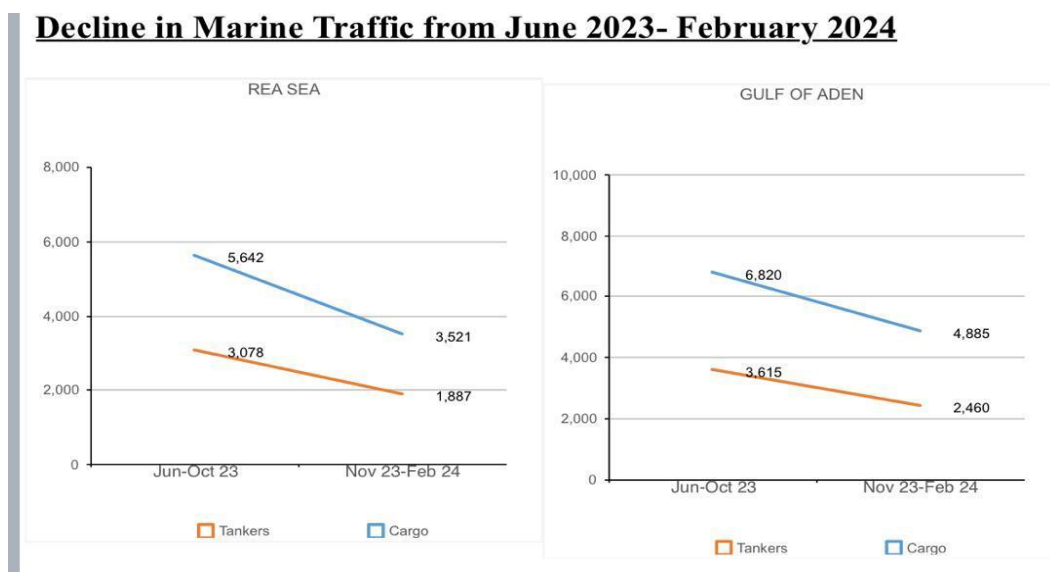
- Evaluating the impact of the Red Sea crisis on global supply chain and implications for alternative routes through the Gulf of Guinea
- The role of commercial shipping in mitigating associated risks in the Red Sea maritime corridor

2. The Report

The following background on the Red Sea crisis, and how nations can come together to safeguard Sea lines of communication, and inform future strategies in maritime security, safety of shipping, and great power politics, was provided during the forum.

3. The Context

The crisis unfolding in the Red Sea region over the past 5 months has brought to light a multitude of complex challenges threatening global maritime commerce. The attacks orchestrated by Iran-backed Houthis from mid-November 2023 till date have showcased a disturbing array of tactics, including, physically seizing vessels, the use of UAVs, UWCs, missiles, and loitering drone munitions, prompting a swift and forceful response from international forces such as the US carrier group and the UK, among others. This has created a volatile sea region for shipping vessels leading to significant decreases in maritime activities in the region impacting local economies.

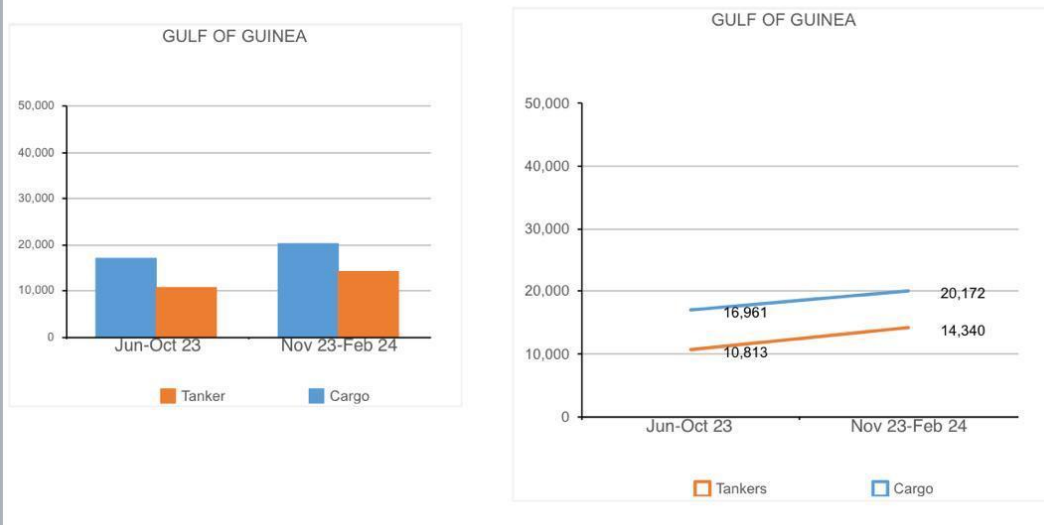


Data Source: Ghana Navy monitoring. Excludes vessels with AIS switched off or dark vessels.

This escalation of hostilities has had a profound impact on shipping activities in the Red Sea, with vessels opting to reroute around the Cape of Good Hope and through the Gulf of Guinea as a longer but safer alternative.

A careful analysis points to the strategic shift leading to a surge in vessel traffic in the Gulf of Guinea while also raising concerns about the potential resurgence of piracy in the region which has largely been suppressed for the past 3 years. The heightened risk of piracy poses a significant threat to the security of vital sea lanes and necessitates proactive measures to mitigate these risks effectively.

Increase in Maritime Traffic in GoG from June 2023- February 2024



Data Source: Ghana Navy monitoring. Excludes vessels with AIS switched off or dark vessels.

Amidst the security challenges brought about by the rerouting of vessels, there exists a silver lining for coastal authorities in the Gulf of Guinea. The increase in vessel transit through the region presents a unique economic opportunity, as ports stand to benefit from additional business in terms of vessel refueling, crew changes, and supplies. This economic boost has the potential to stimulate local economies and foster growth in the maritime sector.

However, the looming question persists; will the cycle of attacks in the Red Sea cease? The ongoing military responses by the US-led maritime security task force, EU naval task force, and the Indian navy task force signal a deep-rooted conflict that goes beyond mere security concerns. Furthermore, the spillover effect resulting in an uptick of the prevailing insecurity in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean underscores the complex interplay of geopolitical dynamics and maritime security impacting global maritime commerce.

The intricate geopolitical dynamics at play, particularly in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, underscore the necessity of a political solution to effectively address the underlying issues driving the tensions in the region. In the end, what is likely to happen? The root cause of the current situation in the Red Sea is fundamentally a political problem that demands a political solution. As Carl Von Clausewitz stated, war is an extension of politics, and this is evident in the ongoing tensions between the US-backed Israel and Palestinian group Hamas.

To bring an end to the conflict and address one of the key root causes, a roadmap that will see Israel and Palestine coexist as two states cannot be overemphasized. In the short to medium term, a total cease-fire needs to be sanctioned by the UNSC and implemented by all parties focusing on humanitarian relief operations.

In navigating the complexities of securing vital sea lanes amidst these escalating tensions, a comprehensive approach integrating robust security measures with diplomatic initiatives is imperative. By addressing the socio-political complexities driving conflicts and fostering dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders, a sustainable framework for safeguarding global maritime commerce can be established, ensuring stability and prosperity for all involved.

4. Panel Discussions

The speakers described the Red Sea situation with respect to geopolitical, asymmetrical warfare, and global maritime commerce crisis, citing the following main issues:

- The Red Sea situation extends beyond the Houthis' attacks on ships; it entails complex international disruptions and far reaching implications for global trade and geopolitical alliances.
- An acknowledgment of the global shipping industry's remarkable agility in finding alternative routes around the continent of Africa.
- Countries facing near-existential harm remain silent due to the nature of regional tensions.
- Recognize that the Houthis proved more savvy than anticipated, as they have executed five layers of escalation thus far: boarding and seizure of ships, launching aerial bombardments using missiles and drones, surface attacks with manned and unmanned vessels,

utilizing unmanned underwater systems to threaten maritime commerce, and conducting information operations.

- The Houthis have successfully leveraged technology to disrupt global trade, highlighting the critical importance of technology in military combat today.
- In the era of terrorism, non-state actors are interconnected, and it's possible that the Houthis could establish relationships with criminal groups in the Gulf of Guinea region.
- Recognizing that increased traffic, due to vessel rerouting around the African continent, will necessitate significant investment within the sector. This includes infrastructure such as vessel size accommodation, logistics support, and crew change facilities.
- Recalled that the Africa Union Combined Maritime Task Force has been agreed in principle by Chiefs of Navies in the GoG since the 22nd of May, 2023
- Increasing vessel traffic in the Gulf of Guinea has the potential for environmental pollution.
- Amidst geopolitical tensions, new alliances and partnerships are likely to form between partners in the Gulf States and Gulf of Guinea countries in terms of changes in trade.
- Recognize the existence of various maritime strategies to assist Gulf of Guinea states in addressing a 'Houthi-like' situation.
- The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has developed the Boosting African Implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct Architecture (BAY Program) to support the ongoing implementation of the YCoC.

5. The Recommendations

Based on the issues discussed, the following recommendations emerged from presentations, plenary discussions, and deliberations:

1. Military response is not an absolute solution to end the Houthi attack in the Red Sea. Multilateral tools that can best be leveraged to address situations are continuous consultation and inclusion. Consultation would identify the varied interests of the parties involved and enable the development of a common ground for

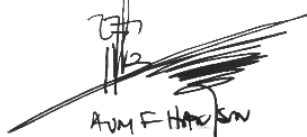
- interventions. Inclusion would enhance community cohesion and commitment to the common course;
2. Gulf of Guinea Member States and development partners should prioritize counterterrorism measures to enhance maritime safety and security in the GoG. This could be achieved by deploying additional surveillance capabilities to complement naval presence at sea;
 3. The African Union, in consultation with ECOWAS Heads of State, should facilitate the establishment of a Combined Maritime Task Force as a regional multilateral mechanism for rapid intervention and deterrence of emerging insecurity at sea
 4. African ports should prioritize investment in infrastructure and security to accommodate evolving global shipping trends;
 5. Gulf of Guinea states should enforce regulations and place sanctions on environmental crimes committed within areas of national jurisdictions;
 6. The emergence of alliances between Gulf states and GoG countries due to the Red Sea crisis is a double-edged sword. GoG countries must carefully weigh both its positive and negative impacts. They should identify common interests before forging partnerships, ensuring Gulf states' interests align with theirs wherever possible;
 7. GoG countries should continue to engage the political class and other relevant partners to assist in the full implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct Architecture and the Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS 2050);
 8. Navies and coastguards need to assess their proficiency in asymmetric warfare and prioritize the development of capabilities to both operate drones effectively and defend against them. Asymmetric warfare represents the future, thus it's imperative for the military to be competent in operating Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs);
 9. Africa's shipping community should facilitate an open dialogue to deliberate on global trade needs and developments in maritime commerce;
 10. A maritime dialogue should be facilitated among GoG navies, coastguards, civilian authorities, and industry to address emerging threats, risks, and the collective role of all stakeholders in preparing for situations similar to the Houthi attack in the Red Sea.

Report by: Mr. Lawrence Dogli, Programs Manager, GoGMI

WHEREUPON, The Executive Director of GoGMI append his signature to this report on the date below:

Issued on 21st May, 2024

SIGNED

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A.V.M. F. HANSON', with a large, sweeping horizontal stroke underneath it.

AIR VICE MARSHAL FRANK HANSON (Rtd)

Executive Director, GoGMI