



ROYAL DANISH DEFENCE COLLEGE



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Communiqué from Conference

Challenges and Prospects for International Cooperation on Maritime Domain Awareness in West Africa

1. Background

On the 6th – 7th of February 2020, the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) and the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC) convened the conference titled *Challenges and Prospects for International Cooperation on Maritime Domain Awareness in West Africa*. The meeting took place in KAIPTC's facilities in Accra, Ghana, while the Danish Peace and Stabilisation Fund sponsored the event.

Rear Admiral Seth Amoama (Chief of Naval Staff of Ghana), Rear Admiral Henrik Ryberg (Commandant, RDDC), Major General Francis Ofori (Commandant, KAIPTC), Her Excellency Tove Degnbol (Denmark's ambassador to Ghana) and Prof. Kwesi Aning (Director, Faculty of Academic Affairs & Research, KAIPTC) opened the conference.

Representatives from Benin (Prefet Maritime, Unité Speciale de Police Fluviale et Maritime, Forces Navales), Côte d'Ivoire (SEPSIM, Marine Nationale), Ghana (Ports and Harbour Authority, Marine Police, Navy, Ministry of Transport, Ghana Maritime Authority), Nigeria (NIMASA, Ministry of Transport, Navy) and Togo (Forces Armees Togolaise) participated at the conference.

Representatives from Denmark (Defence Command Denmark, Danish Institute of International Studies, Danish Shipping Association) and international actors (Centre for Maritime Law and Security Africa, European External Action Service, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) were also present.

2. Objectives

The conference reflected a growing concern for maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea and the necessity for constructive scrutiny with the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and its components. Particularly the recent data and developments on maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea were a concern.

The conference had three objectives. The first of these was to assess current obstacles for cooperation and interoperability between maritime authorities in the Gulf of Guinea to improve the Yaoundé structure. Secondly, the conference sought to develop and strengthen relationships between maritime authorities through dialogue and networking. These steps had the ultimate ambition of building trust and shared understanding, as this is an essential enabler of cooperation and improved regional communication. Finally, the conference sought to produce recommendations and generate ideas on how to support and further develop existing initiatives for enhanced maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The individuals gathered at this conference had detailed insights on the current situation in the Gulf of Guinea and the functioning of the Yaoundé-architecture, which make them vital stakeholders for any future development.

3. Key Findings and Recommendations

Despite the investment of substantial resources and many projects and initiatives, the Gulf of Guinea has not experienced an increase in maritime security. A lack of progress in implementation and political willingness is hindering decisive action. Pirates and armed robbers seem to have shifted focus to kidnapping operations and do so more violently and with impunity. They are exploiting gaps in state governance, and despite political attention and oratory focus, the requisite action remains to be taken against maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea.

3.1. COORDINATION

Coordination issues were a recurrent theme at the conference, affecting every part of the Yaoundé structure. The state-level constitutes the backbone of this structure, but horizontal interagency coordination within states are lacking, and clear distribution of roles is needed. Different authorities are responsible for various aspects of the maritime domain, and without coordination, the whole structure becomes prone to silo-thinking. Some states – notably Côte d'Ivoire and Togo – have good experiences with designating a national focal point for maritime matters. Placement of these focal points close to the president's/prime minister's office has promoted domestic coordination on maritime issues.

- **States must designate domestic maritime focal points.** Doing so close to the executive power might provide leverage to overcome bureaucratic obstacles.
- **States should share lessons learned and best practices** on the establishment of state focal points and domestic coordination structures.

Coordination between Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres (MMCC) and Maritime Operation Centres (MOC) also needs improvement. For example, the MMCCs are supposed to be staffed by officers from all the countries in the zone, yet this is not currently the case everywhere. This highlights a weakness of the Yaoundé structure, as the MMCCs are not yet empowered to direct national fleets and thus are dependent on a good working relationship with the MOCs.

- **MOCs and MMCCs must strengthen interactions**, for example, by placing national officers at the MMCCs in compliance with the Yaoundé Code of Conduct.

The conference revealed ambiguity on the exact role and function of the Regional Maritime Security Centre in ECOWAS (CRESMAO, located in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire) and the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé. ICC and CRESMAO play a crucial role in facilitating cooperation between various actors and levels within the Yaoundé-structure. Specifically, the need for a standard reporting and communication framework were highlighted, as the countries in the Gulf of Guinea are both francophone and anglophone. This language barrier is a great hindrance, which can be partially mitigated through a common, standardised reporting framework.

- **The ICC and CRESMAO must create clarity on their respective roles** together with the zonal and state levels. It is necessary to gauge expectations and formulate clear role descriptions with other parts of the structure to ensure the fulfilment of essential transverse functions.
- **The ICC should ensure standard operating procedures**, including reporting format, content and recipients.

Many international organisations and extra-regional actors are engaged in different projects throughout the Gulf of Guinea, highlighting the necessity for close coordination between them. The absence of such

coordination leads to the risk of duplication, contradiction, and forfeiting potential synergy benefits. On the other hand, ensuring that coordination happens effectively is also necessary to avoid “coordination fatigue”. Currently, very few resources are dedicated to coordination across levels and between actors. The “G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea Group” provides a platform for coordination, while the possibility of establishing a contact group was also discussed. Simultaneously, international actors were warned against ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches and unsustainable initiatives without a clear exit strategy.

- ➔ **International actors must coordinate efforts more** to avoid duplication and ineffectiveness.
- ➔ **International efforts must be sustainable, consider context and promote local ownership.**

3.2. MISSING NUMBERS

While piracy and armed robbery at sea are fast-paced and apparent instances of insecurity in the maritime domain, other issues such as illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, drugs and human trafficking, and smuggling are not enjoying the same level of attention. Focusing on what is an immediate threat to international shipping runs the risk of overlooking critical issues that are harder to study but have immense economic and social repercussions in and beyond the region. ‘Hidden numbers’ on maritime crimes such as IUU fishing or smuggling/trafficking entail risks in the form of big blind spots that may have severe consequences for food security – and consequently on security in general. However, even if piracy/armed robbery is prioritised, different organisations have reported varying numbers on these. No complete overview exists on the situation in the Gulf of Guinea, which means that insufficient data guide current efforts.

- ➔ In cooperation with researchers, **identify a methodology through which more reliable and valid data can be obtained.** This would likely entail data-collection measures (which requires trust as noted above) and analytical tools to scrutinise them. It also requires insight into other forms of maritime crime such as IUU fishing.
- ➔ **Support research efforts into land-sea interactions.** Crime at sea is tied to crime on land and uncovering how and to which extent will yield knowledge that can diminish this criminal nexus.

Furthermore, the available data shows that the number of recorded incidents is higher in the first and fourth quarter of a year. The question is whether this reflects an increase in the number of attacks during these periods or whether reporting is higher because it coincides with naval exercises and thus increased presence at sea.

3.3. LEGAL BASIS

Only two countries in the region have ratified anti-piracy laws. This constitutes an enormous obstacle for improving maritime security, as the possibility to sanction perpetrators is essential to combat maritime insecurity and gain trust from outside actors. Considering that the states within the Gulf of Guinea have different laws and judicial systems, a process of harmonisation would be cumbersome and take time to do. Domestication of law was highlighted as an alternative, which calls for international laws and regulations (UNCLOS Article 101) to be integrated into domestic law. Such a scenario would still entail variations between domestic legislation in the region, but it would provide an underlying common legal basis. Instead of establishing anti-piracy laws in all countries, a burden-sharing approach could also be pursued where certain countries in the region take responsibility for prosecuting piracy suspects.

- ➔ **All countries should enact laws that criminalise piracy and armed robbery at sea.** Currently, only two countries in the region have anti-piracy laws, and these could provide recommendations and lessons-learned for the other nations.
- ➔ **Harmonise anti-piracy laws** to enable prosecution of criminals across borders.

3.4. INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND TRUST

Finally, the issue of trust was raised at the conference. A trust deficit hinders information exchange between different actors in the Gulf of Guinea, further exacerbating problems with coordination and data. Specifically, concerns over information leaks and the risk that sensitive data can end up in the wrong hands limits information flow. While the improvement of this issue relates to the other issues identified above, a specific way forward is to initiate trust-building measures between maritime authorities and commercial maritime actors. Concern was raised that merchant vessels tend to avoid reporting incidents to local authorities, preferring instead to contact ship owners and MDAT-GoG.

- ➔ **MMCCs and commercial maritime actors should initiate trust-building measures.** An example of such an action could be informal meetings, workshops, or conferences between authorities and the shipping industry. Such meetings will act as the first step in reaching a common understanding, determining what kind of information exchange is viable, and initiating closer cooperation.