MARITIME [IN]SECURITY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA DURING AN ERA OF PANDEMICS

MARCH 2022

[Kwesi Aning and Ruth Adwoa Frimpong]

AUTHORS BIO

Prof. Kwesi Aning is the Director of the Faculty of Academic Affairs and Research, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre.

Ruth Adwoa Frimpong is a Research Assistant with the KAIPTC and currently serves as security analyst intern with the Directorate of Early Warning in ECOWAS.

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the dynamic challenges posed by the unintended problems brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper argues that, Covid-19 and the attendant challenges to maritime security is creating new analytical challenges and conundrum in seeing pandemics as a key contemporary and recurrent challenge to maritime security. Pandemics, as a non-traditional maritime security threat, poses particular dangers and challenges to states. In examining the nature and scope of maritime insecurities in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG), the paper discusses the underlying factors that fuel the perpetration of maritime crimes in the region and scrutinises the existing multiple response mechanisms instituted by the international community, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and member states to counter and mitigate the adverse consequences of such crimes on human security in West Africa. Several questions guide the paper. To what extent has the pandemic contributed to and shaped the perpetration of maritime crimes in the GoG region and Ghana? and how have the existing international, regional and national instruments shaped responses in the light of the pandemic? To locate the discussion within an empirical discourse, it assesses the efforts by the Ghana Navy (GN) in particular, first to prepare for potential challenges posed within the maritime space in Ghana's territorial waters, and second, to respond to them. It concludes by offering recommendations on how best to navigate, counter and mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Keywords: *Pandemics, Gulf of Guinea, maritime insecurity, Ghana Navy, non-traditional threats*

KAIPTC

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK

Introduction

This paper discusses the nature and scope of maritime insecurity in the GoG. It examines the underlying factors that fuel the perpetration of maritime crimes in the region and examines the existing response mechanisms instituted by the international community, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and member states to counter and mitigate the adverse consequences of such crimes on human security in West Africa. Furthermore, the paper also examines the nature of maritime insecurities in the GoG in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with specific reference to the efforts made by the Ghana Navy (GN) in particular to prepare for potential challenges posed within the maritime space in Ghana's territorial waters. In seeking answers to the challenges posed by the pandemic, several questions will be posed to guide the paper. To what extent has the pandemic contributed to and shaped the perpetration of maritime crimes in the GoG region and Ghana? and how have the existing international, regional and national instruments shaped responses in the light of the pandemic? The paper concludes by offering recommendations on how best to navigate the counter and mitigating mechanisms even as the world adjusts daily activities to the COVID-19 outbreak. To begin, however, a discussion on the conceptual conundrum around key terminologies will be undertaken.

Negotiating a conceptual conundrum

There is general lack of consensus on the concept of maritime security. While one argument establishes that maritime security should be defined as the absence of threats, another argument holds that it should include how law enforcements can be made effective at sea.[1] The former argument has been criticized as "insufficient since it does neither prioritize issues, nor provide clues of how these issues are interlinked, nor outlines of how these threats can be addressed".[2] The 2016 African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (Lomé Charter) defines maritime security as "the prevention of and fight against all acts of threats of illicit acts

against a ship, its crew and its passengers or against the port facilities, maritime infrastructure, maritime facilities and maritime environment".[3] In essence, it emphasises the need to adopt an integrated approach to tackling maritime security influenced by the thinking that a maritime security agenda concentrating solely on piracy and armed robbery at sea would be skewed in favour of the developed maritime states agenda of protecting their trading interests.[4] This definition takes into consideration both the aspects of ensuring safety at sea as well as the safeguarding against threats that arise at sea. For the purpose of this paper, maritime security encompasses the safeguarding of a state and its maritime domain against threats such as maritime inter-state disputes, maritime terrorism, piracy, trafficking of narcotics, people and illicit goods, arms proliferation, illegal fishing, environmental crimes, or maritime accidents and disasters. Maritime security hinges on the Copenhagen school securitization theory. This theory postulates that political issues are constituted as extreme security issues to be dealt with urgently when they have been labelled as 'dangerous', 'menacing', 'threatening', 'alarming' and so on by a 'securitising actor' who has the social and institutional power to move the issue 'beyond politics. As such, this theory establishes that 'the maritime' has become an issue that is securitized by raising the profile of maritime issues and increases the resources available to address these threats.[5]

Pandemics and state responses

Pandemics are not a new phenomenon. There have been about twenty (20) major global pandemics in the world.[6] These include the Black Death of 1346-1353, the Flu Pandemic of 1889-1890, the Spanish Flu 1918-1920, the Asian Flu of 1957-1958, the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) pandemic from 1981 to date, the West Africa Ebola of 2014- 2016[7], and recently the novel Corona virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020. The World Health Organisation (WHO) established that this novel virus was identified in 2019 in Wuhan, China and was not common in humans.[8]

[1]Bueger, C. (2015). What is maritime security? Marine Policy, 53, 159-164. Retrieved from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X14003327

[2]Bueger, C. (2015). What is maritime security? Marine Policy, 53, 159-164. Retrieved from: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X14003327 p. 159

[3]African Union. (2016). African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (Lomé Charter). Retrieved from: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37286-treaty-african_charter_on_maritime_security.pdf

[4]Ibid.

[5]Buerger. Op cit

[6]Jarus, O. (2020). "20 of the Worst Epidemics and Pandemics in History". Live Science. Retrieved from https://www.livescience.com/worst-epidemics-and-pandemics-inhistory.html

[7]Ibid.

[8]World Health Organization. (n.d.). Corona virus disease pandemic. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a human security crisis as it resulted in the loss of about five million lives worldwide[9]. The panic and anxiety caused by the outbreak had immense political[10], security and socio-economic[11] impacts on the international community. It exposed structural weaknesses in most states, especially those in West Africa among other regions. Pandemic outbreak further revealed the social vulnerabilities in the quality of education, health and business economies of West Africa. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the urgency for a worldwide adherence to safety protocols such as the practise of social distancing, wearing of face masks, use of alcohol-based sanitizers and other Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs). Subsequently, with the availability of vaccines, WHO directed all states to vaccinate their citizens. The pandemic has impacted the fabric of societal life and influenced how state activities are conducted[12]. This global health impacted on the already complex and existing security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea and the wider international community. It has also shaped the nature and context in which pandemics exacerbate the socio-economic inequalities in states, especially those with weak institutional capacity.

The scale of maritime insecurity in the GoG

Gulf of Guinea (GoG) region[13] was the gateway for the penetration, advancement and consolidation of European colonial enterprise and presence in Africa.[14] It is a region of economic importance as it possesses vast natural resources such as reserves of hydrocarbons, minerals (diamond, tin and cobalt), and fisheries resources. Its waterways have provided a critical access for the import and export of goods and services to and from global markets in the North and South. Additionally, it is home to a variety of wildlife and forest reserves that contribute to internal revenue generation of states but are also prone to imprudent exploitation due to weak or non-existent state regulatory frameworks. Such viable opportunities in the region have resulted in what can be termed as the 'second scramble' for Africa by former colonial rulers and emerging economies such as Russia, Turkey, Brazil and China[15]. However, the economic and strategic opportunities provided by the region and its abundance of natural resources has also generated the resource curse motivated by geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic reasons.[16] There is the increasing concern about how multifaceted domestic, regional and international threats and vulnerabilities undermine the exploitation and development of the region's vast resources.

Since the 1990s, GoG states have focused on mitigating land-based insecurities and have since the 1960s given minimum attention to maritime insecurities. The discourses around maritime security have gained prominence among policymakers and scholars due to the presence of threats such as illicit trafficking of persons, small arms and light weapons (SALW) and contraband goods coupled with illegal unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, maritime piracy and other maritime criminalities complicates the security issue in the GoG region.[17] Consequentially, maritime insecurity in West Africa also has direct implications on global security.[18] The surge in threats, such as maritime piracy, for instance, stems from the disorder that surrounds the regional oil industry. Oil established states such as Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Angola and Gabon together with West African states such as Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Liberia and Sierra have made discoveries of crude oil in commercial quantities and are contending with issues of maritime piracy.

---

[9]. Obinna Ifediora and Kwesi Aning. 2017. 'West Africa's Ebola pandemic: towards effective multilateral responses to health crises', Global Governance, Vol. 23, no. 2

[10]Governments implemented lockdowns, closed international entry points (both land borders and airports) and provided COVID-relief measures to protect citizens' safety and livelihood. Political activities such as electioneering processes were halted in some states and later organized under little or zero adherence to COVID protocols.

[11]Citizens all over the world had to refrain from social gatherings which were the crust of life, industries and organizations instituted Work from Home (WFH) policies and made use of technologies and software such as Zoom and Teams to achieve productivity whereas the decline in economic activities caused some industries and organizations to lay off staff. Prices of basic commodities such as water and food soared up due to panic buying and hoarding by citizens.

[12]See the background paper by Kwesi Aning and Frank Okyere. 2020. COVID-19 socio-economic assessment in Ghana: social cohesion and community resilience. Mimeo, unpublished

[13]Sometimes referred to as the Bight of Benin.

[14]Ukeje, C., & Ela, W. M. (2013). African approaches to maritime security: The Gulf of Guinea. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Regional Office Abuja. Retrieved from: https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/10398.pdf.

[15]. Katy Marriott. 2014. 'The 'second scramble' for Africa', Geopolitics, 20 November.

[16] . Amber Murrey and Nicholas Jackson. 2019. 'Africa and the Resource Curse Idea', at (PDF) Africa and the Resource Curse Idea (researchgate.net)

[17]Kwesi Aning, Emma Birikorang, Anna Mensah, John Pokoo, Elsie Techie-Menson. 2022. Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: Ghana's Actual Maritime Crime Culture. *Microsoft Word - WP1 POLICY BRIEF HAA Edits.docx (safeseas.net)*

[18]For example, in 2007, around 60% of cocaine on the European market (valued at USD 1.8 billion) had transited through West Africa. A large part of the cargoes of drug trafficking arrives in Africa on cargo ships, after which they are transferred in small boats for their expedition to other continents. In this regard, of the 775 million USD in contraband cigarettes and the approximately 438 million USD in counterfeit medicine for malaria, which pass through West Africa, are transported by Sea. It covers north-western coast of African states such as Sierra Leone, Senegal, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the islands of Sao Tome and Principe, Gabon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Congo and Angola on the southernmost areas. See Aning, K. and Pokoo, J., 2014. Understanding the nature and threats of drug trafficking to national and regional security in West Africa. Stability: International Journal of Security and Development, 3(1), p. Art. 8. DOI: http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.df

An increase in the number of pirate activities in the GoG represents a significant ratio of attacks in West African waters mainly due to weak counter-piracy mechanisms.[19] Illegal Unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing also constitutes a threat to maritime security in the GoG. It is reported that almost 40 per cent of the fishing activities in West African waters is carried out illegally.[20] This poses critical economic challenge for West African governments, who collectively lose as much as $1.5 billion annually because of IUU fishing.[21] There is also the issue of the smuggling of drugs, weapons and other contraband goods through African waters. Today, the GoG has become the most preferred transit route and hub for the smuggling of narcotic and psychotropic drugs such as cocaine, caffeine, nicotine, marijuana, and certain pain medicines from South America as well as the destination for fake and sub-standard pharmaceutics from Asia and the Far East.[22]

Contributing elements to Maritime Insecurity in the GoG

Insecurity in the region is caused by a cocktail of factors that are both historical and contemporary. The negligence of post-colonial African states to remodel their governance structures devoid of domination and exploitation of resources by colonial powers in Europe has contributed to insecurities in the GoG. It has resulted in the incapacity and unwillingness of African states to accomplish basic sovereign duties and responsibilities, including establishing law, order, security and social cohesion.[23] Bad governance practices coupled with weak law enforcement frameworks aggravates maritime security in West Africa. This is complicated by corruption[24] and mismanagement of natural resources in this region

by poor governmental policies which results in overexploitation of these resources. This creates a situation where citizens resort to any means available to improve their circumstances—even if through illegal trade, insurgency, or piracy. This leaves Africa's maritime domain susceptible to threats such as IUU fishing, maritime piracy, armed robbery and terrorism. a typical example of such a situation is the social inequalities and environmental pollution created from foreign oil exploitation in the Niger Delta region and further has produced incidences of maritime piracy.[25]

There is also the presence of local militant groups[26] that have morphed into criminal and organised transnational syndicates. This is also exacerbated by international factors such as the infiltration of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). International terrorist groups were able to co-opt local social grievances to rally support and radicalize local populations in the adjacent region during the crisis in northern Mali in 2012.[27] In addition, the present security situation in Mali and Burkina Faso together with the insurgencies in Nigeria create a pool for the operations of armed groups. The mobility of these groups facilitated by weak and porous borders to an extent contributes to maritime crimes in the GoG. Moreover, international terrorist groups have leveraged on the socio-economic inequalities in West Africa and provided disenfranchised groups with a violent means of being heard. Instability in the Gulf of Guinea has been influenced by terrorist groups' proximity in the Sahel, as well as migration of people and weapons prompted by events in Mali and North Africa.[28] Furthermore, insurgency groups have discovered old trade routes and informal economies for the trafficking of drugs, goods, and people. This dynamic is fuelled by porous borders, limited state reach, and weak enforcement mechanisms.[29]

[19]Ukeje, & Ela, op. cit
[20]Environmental Justice Foundation. (2012). Pirate Fishing Exposed. The Fight Against Illegal Fishing in West Africa and the EU Retrieved from: https://ejfoundation.org/reports/pirate-fishing-exposed-report
[21]. Elei Green Igbogi. 2019 'Illegal Fishing Activities in the Gulf of Guinea: Economic, Environmental and Social Impact on Nigeria's National Development', *CURRENT STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, VOLUMES* 5&6, NUMBERS 1-2, 2019,
[22]Ukeje, & Ela, op cit.
[23]Ibid.
[24]Both low- and high-level corruption facilitate and encourage pirate-related activity in the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria and Cameroon jointly place at 144 out of 175 countries in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index. Cote D'Ivoire sits at 136, while Togo is close behind at 123. (See Onuoha, F. C. (2012). Oil piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. *conflict trends, 2012(4)*, 28-35; Corruption Perceptions Index (2013). Transparency International).
[25]In 2014, the average amount for the release of one foreign seafarer was approximately $15,000. By 2019, the average amount paid for the release of one foreign seafarer had increased to $40,000. With 25 piracy abductions in 2020, resulting in 122 foreign seafarers taken hostage, interviewed K&R experts approximate roughly $4 million in ransom payments going into the hands of Niger Delta-based pirate groups in 2020 alone. (See ICC International Maritime Bureau, Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships (2020)).
[26]An example of such a group in the Gulf of Guinea, and the Nigerian coastal region in particular, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) that emerged in early 2016. The NDA openly challenges the Nigerian government, their armed forces and international oil companies. The Nigerian government, its armed forces, and multinational oil firms are publicly challenged by the NDA. The NDA's popularity is highlighted by assertions made by lesser militant groups such as the Red Egbesu Water Lions, Concerned Militant Leaders, Indigenous People of Biafra Movement, Joint Niger Delta Liberation Front, and other activist groups that ally with or diverge from more militant movements (See Very, F. (September 28, 2016). How we Made it in Africa. Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: Threats, vulnerabilities and opportunities. Retrieved from: https://www.howwemadeitinafrica.com/maritime-insecurity-gulf-guinea-threats-vulnerabilities-opportunities/56080/ accessed on 2 March 2022).
[27]International Peace Institute. (2014).
[28]Ibid.
[29]Kwesi Aning. 2021. West Africa Security Perspectives: Kwesi Aning Explains, May. DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.27018.59842

Response Mechanisms to Maritime Insecurities in the GoG

International-level

Maritime insecurity in the GoG has implications for international security due to the geopolitical positioning of West African coastal states. GoG serves both as a source and transit routes for illegal migration, trafficking of narcotic drugs and SALW as well as contraband goods from the Middle East and South America. The situation prompted the attention of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) which was followed by a response of the UN Security Council in the adoption of Resolution 2039 in February 2012.[30] This all-important document encourages states of the sub-region to counter piracy at regional and national levels and prompted the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) to draft a regional strategy.[31] It also provides the basis for external partnerships. For example, countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Denmark, France and Spain have contributed to bilateral partnerships. These international partnerships recognize that maritime risks in West Africa are a component of transnational crime with far-reaching consequences far beyond the immediate region.[32]

Regional-level

One of the continental mechanisms formulated and adopted by AU member states in the fight against maritime crimes is the Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050, adopted in 2014. The strategy engages with maritime security from a multidimensional perspective. The scope covers piracy and armed robbery at sea and other illicit activities at sea, as well as putting sustainable development of the African Blue Economy and Maritime Safety at the core of dealing with maritime security.[33] Another policy document that guides states operations in the GoG is the African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa. Formulated in 2016 at the continental level, it sought to address issues of maritime insecurity in Africa, by preventing and suppressing national and transnational crimes including: terrorism, piracy, armed robbery against ships, drug trafficking, smuggling of migrants, trafficking in persons and all other kinds of trafficking transiting through the sea and IUU fishing and protect the marine environment in the space of coastal and insular States, in particular.[34] As part of its objectives are the promotion of a flourishing and sustainable Blue/Ocean Economy and enhancing cooperation in the fields of maritime domain awareness, prevention by early warning and fight against piracy, armed robbery against ships, illicit trafficking of all kinds, the pollution of the seas, cross-border crime, international terrorism and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.[35] Other regional mechanisms such as ECOWAS's Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS)[36], the Djibouti Code of Conduct[37] and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) Integrated Maritime Strategy[38] have been instrumental, first in appreciating the extent of the threats posed within the maritime space, and in controlling the incidences of such crimes in the GoG.

State-level

GoG States have demonstrated at least on the political level, a commitment to combatting maritime crimes through: (a) the ratification; and (b) adoption of international and regional frameworks on maritime insecurity. Statutory response mechanisms have also been instituted to counter maritime insecurities in the GoG that contributes to ensuring security in West African waters. In 2013, the Yaoundé Summit

---

[30]. Dennis Amable. 2018. 'UNODC's Fight against Drug Trafficking in West Africa: A Comparative Case Study of Ghana and Guinea-Bissau', International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research. Vol. 6, Issue 1,

[31]The Yaounde Code of Conduct was adopted in meeting of heads of West and Central African states on June 24-25, 2013 in Yaoundé, Republic of Cameroon, at the Joint Summit on the regional strategy to combat piracy, armed robbery, and other illicit activities committed at sea in the Gulf of Guinea.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Egede, E. (2018). Maritime security: Implementing the AU's AIM strategy. Retrieved from: https://www.africaportal.org/features/maritime-security-implementing-aus-aim-strategy/ accessed on 2 March 2022.

[34]African Union. (2016). African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa. Addis Ababa

[35]Ibid.

[36]The EIMS emphasises a people-centric response to the management and exploitation of the maritime domain and supports the shift from 'an ECOWAS of States to an ECOWAS of people'. In this context, the EIMS is predicated on inter-agency collaboration at the national level and must bring together political affairs, legal matters, regional security and defence, law enforcement (police, gendarmerie, intelligence, investigation), maritime administration, and port authority, early warning/observation and monitoring and response, agriculture, etc. to coordinate and synergise their activities and responses within the maritime domain.

[37]This is the policy document that was adopted on 27 November 2007 on the issues of piracy and armed robbery against ships in waters off the coast of Somalia which, among other things, called upon Governments in the region to conclude, in cooperation with IMO, and implement a regional agreement to prevent, deter and suppress piracy and armed robbery against ships.

[38]The IGAD Integrated Maritime Strategy was formulated to address holistically the priorities of the regional maritime domain and addresses other maritime related challenges, as well as opportunities for our region. It is a cross-sectorial framework formulated in order to anchor a sustainable regional maritime domain as well as adhere to the overall objectives of the blue economy in light of our regional and continental perspectives.

on Maritime Safety and Security adopted the three important instruments[39] on relating to international cooperation and the responsibility for tackling maritime insecurity.[40] Member states such: as Angola, Congo, Gabon, Nigeria, and Sao Tome and Principe signed a treaty in Libreville, Gabon establishing the Gulf of Guinea Commission in July 2001. The commission established a framework for cooperation among the countries along the GoG basin, defend their common interest and promote peace. Subsequently, in 2009, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe established a joint force to deter criminals from their common coastlines. In November 2012, following a conference on peace and security in the GoG region, the participating countries promulgated the Luanda Declaration on Peace and Security in the GoG. It called for regional cooperation and inter-state dialogue among member states. There are also joint military operations between neighbouring states, particularly, the successful operations conducted jointly by Benin and Nigeria in 2011. Partnerships have also been established with the international community on countering maritime insecurity in Africa. These include: naval assistance from the European Union (EU) and the US to Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Senegal.[41] Nigeria has also benefited from the installation of sensors along its coastline under the Regional Maritime Awareness Capability (RMAC) program supported by US and the United Kingdom (UK).[42] In Nigeria, the adoption of self-protection measures by ships traversing the region, including the employment of private military contractors by oil companies in Nigeria to guard ships transiting the Niger Delta have taken place. In 2013, private security firms collaborated with the Nigerian Navy to launch the Secure Anchorage Area (SAA) which provides security to vessels in a designated area off the port of Lagos. Moreover, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA)

and the government of Togo, respectively, engaged the services of private security firms to guard their ports.[43]

Maritime insecurity in the Context of COVID-19

The architecture of maritime response mechanisms to tackle insecurities in West Africa is rapidly developing. Cooperation at the international, regional and state levels to improve maritime security has provided a clearer image of what a continental approach to maritime insecurity would look like in the next decade. COVID-19 pandemic has had potentially negative effects on the socio-economic and political life in the GoG. It is reported that although the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed marine traffic, there was a spike in the number of piracy and robbery attacks at sea at the beginning of the pandemic[44]. The pandemic has compelled states to increase onshore security deployments to enforce lockdowns and other restrictions, in order to ensure that citizens abide by public health and safety regulations. This has shifted some of the attention from the threats at sea, creating opportunities for pirates.[45] The first nine months of 2020 recorded a 10 percent increase in piracy and other maritime crime incidents compared to the same period last year, including known hotspots in West Africa and Southeast Asia.[46] The 2020 ICC International Maritime Bureau report on piracy and armed robbery against ships accounts that the GoG recorded the highest number of kidnapped crew in 2020 with 130 crew taken in 22 separate incidents.[47] What is striking about the nature of these attacks is that the crew were kidnapped from 25% of the vessels attacked by criminal groups and the 80% use of SALW in all these cases.[48] Similarly in 2021, the GoG accounted for 43% of the totality of global

---

[39]These are 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, the Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activities in Central and West Africa and Memorandum of Understanding Among ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the GGC on Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa.
[40]International Peace Institute. (2014). Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: Assessing the Threats, Preparing the Response. Retrieved from: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_gulf_of_guinea.pdf accessed on 2 March 2022.
[41]Gachupin, W. C. (2016). Good Governance as a Sustainable Solution for Maritime Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships on Africa's Coastal Waters: The Cases of Somalia and the Gulf of Guinea. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/oceancapacity/sites/www.un.org.oceancapacity/files/complete_thesis-_caroline_kenya_2016_fellow.pdf accessed on 1 March 2022.
[42]Ibid.
[43]Ibid.
[44]'Surge of Piracy amid Coronavirus Outbreak' at Surge of Piracy amid Coronavirus Outbreak | Global Risk Insights
[45]Islam, S. (2021). The Pandemic Has Not Only Resulted in Operational and Financial Challenges for the Shipping Industry but has also Contributed to an Increase in Maritime Attacks. Retrieved from: https://insights.s-rminform.com/rising-threat-of-piracy-and-maritime-crime accessed on 3 March 2022.
[46]Ibid.
[47]ICC International Maritime Bureau. (2020). Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships. Retrieved from: https://www.icc-ccs.org/reports/2020_Annual_Piracy_Report.pdf accessed on 3 March 2022.
[48]Ibid.
[49]ICC International Maritime Bureau. (2021). Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships. Retrieved from: https://www.skuld.com/contentassets/a58fecffc88b4418959a19e6d2e07778/2021-q1-imb-piracy-report.pdf accessed on 3 March 2022.
[50]Hassan, R. (2021). Gulf of Guinea persists as maritime security hotspot. Retrieved from: https://www.skuld.com/topics/port/piracy/gulf-of-guinea-persists-as-maritime-security-hotspot/

maritime crimes comprising of 40 kidnapped crew.[49] The fatal attack on the container vessel "Mozart" on 23 January 2021 highlighted the urgency of the situation in the Gulf of Guinea.[50] Surge in maritime crimes amidst the pandemic is attributable to the pre-existing structural issues in West African states. The impact of the pandemic consequentially exposed the vulnerabilities of these states and their capacities or otherwise to promote human security.

However, according to the Director of the ICC International Maritime Bureau, there has been a decline in the rate of piracy and armed robbery attacks in the Gulf of Guinea in 2021.[51] Yet, the reduction in maritime crimes in the GoG hinges on enhanced maritime security and response coordination measures adopted by national, regional and international authorities. Comparably, Nigeria reported four incidents in the first nine months of 2021, as against to 17 in 2020 and 41 in 2018.[52] Likewise, crew kidnappings in the region have plummeted with only one crew member kidnapped in the third quarter of 2021 as compared to 31 crew members taken in five separate incidents during the third quarter of 2020.[53] Consequently, an unfolding shift in maritime security amidst the pandemic is that although policymakers and scholars had predicted that the pandemic will increase the rate of maritime insecurities in the GoG, the impact of Covid-19 has not led to any immediate maritime security challenges in addition to those already present in the region.[54] Although there are advances in controlling the spread of the pandemic, it is predicted that the economic impact is likely to increase poverty rates and income equality. In 2021, the World Bank stated that the outlook for emerging markets and developing economies will likely be dampened by the lasting legacies of the pandemic: erosion of skills from lost work and schooling; a sharp drop in investment; higher debt burdens; and greater financial vulnerabilities.[55] In the medium to long term, this will complicate regional and state security efforts in addressing existing criminal patterns, including piracy attacks against vessels operating throughout the Gulf of Guinea.[56]

In the wake of the pandemic, ongoing international, regional and national efforts to regulate illegal activities in West African waters have been no different from the status quo or already instituted mechanisms. In 2021, international partnerships with the United Nations Office for Drug Control (UNODC) assisted with legislative and regulatory frameworks in 16 coastal countries and also trained almost 2,000 judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers.[57] The UNODC assisted Togo and Nigeria in achieving the first ever successful prosecution of piracy in the region 2021.[58] In the case of Nigeria, the reduction in violent activities on Nigeria's coast was a collaborative effort, spearheaded by the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) and the Nigerian Navy's Deep Blue Project with the U.S and Danish Navy to procure an equipment needed to fight piracy.[59] There was also the prosecution by a Federal High Court in Lagos in July 2021 of 10 men under a new law designed to combat the rising piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.[60] These continued efforts speaks to the unrelenting and sustained efforts even in the midst of the pandemic. To add to this, the state of maritime security in the GoG is enhanced by the requirement to adhere to international treaties, as well as mandates from the UN and the World Health Organization (WHO) on COVID-19 programs across these states.[61] These requirements contribute to the safety of crew members and citizens of the states in which their maritime activities are carried out.

[51]International Chamber of Commerce. (2021). Piracy and armed robbery incidents at lowest level in decades, but IMB cautions against complacency. Retrieved from: https://iccwbo.org/media-wall/news-speeches/piracy-and-armed-robbery-incidents-at-lowest-level-in-decades-but-imb-cautions-against-complacency/
[52]Ibid.
[53]Ibid.
[54]Risk Intelligence. (2020). Maritime security and Covid-19: Impacts and Implications. Retrieved from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f3f8460cb3933732c1b3650/t/5f984316e606836d108ed586/1603814171548/Whitepaper+Maritime+Security+Post+Covid+Sep+2020_sml.pdf accessed on 3 March 2020.
[55]World Bank. (June 8, 2021). The Global Economy: on Track for Strong but Uneven Growth as COVID-19 Still Weighs. Retrieved from: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/06/08/the-global-economy-on-track-for-strong-but-uneven-growth-as-covid-19-still-weighs#:~:text=In%20the%20longer%20term%2C%20the,burdens%3B%20and%20greater%20financial%20vulnerabilities.
[56]Risk Intelligence. (2020).
[57]Pecquet, J. (January 12, 2022). UN: Gulf of Guinea countries push anti-piracy resolution. The Africa Report. Retrieved from: https://www.theafricareport.com/165265/un-gulf-of-guinea-countries-push-anti-piracy-resolution/
[58]In July 2021, a Togolese court sentenced nine people to years of jail time for acts of maritime piracy.
[59]Ukpe, W. (January 6, 2022). Gulf of Guinea piracy: Tracking Nigeria's progress in 2021. Naira Metrics. Retrieved from: https://nairametrics.com/2022/01/06/gulf-of-guinea-piracy-tracking-nigerias-progress-in-2021/ accessed on 3 March 2022.
[60]The Federal High court handed 12-year prison sentences after they were captured in May 2020 during a forceful boarding of a Chinese fishing vessel off the Ivorian coastline and kidnapping the crew member.
[61]Karasik, T. (2021). Gulf of Guinea pirates threaten region's security. Arab News. Retrieved from: https://www.arabnews.com/node/1943441 accessed on 3 March 2022.

Ghana's responses to COVID-19 and its impact on maritime insecurities

With the outbreak of the pandemic, the security forces in Ghana were authorized to undertake covid-related duties. A highly securitized approach was adopted in the management of the Covid-19. These have been manifested by speech acts from the president and implementation of extraordinary measures including enacting of emergency law, namely Imposition of Restrictions Act (2020), Act 1012. Other measures included a 21-day partial lockdown in some urban areas; ban on public gatherings; closure of all air, sea and land borders; and closure of schools and religious institutions.

As the Covid-19 pandemic has been securitized in Ghana security institutions, including the navy, were integral stakeholders and played diverse support roles in the implementation of public health and security policies. *Operation COVID Safety* –the national security task force established to enforce the COVID-19 safety protocols and lockdown – was launched in March 2020 with a combined team of the police, the armed forces and other security agencies. The involvement of security forces especially the navy in such civic duties often brings to the fore other unintended consequences. There have been concerns about human rights violation, arbitrariness and excessive use of force in violent tactics being used by security personnel. These developments further undermine public trust and cast doubts about the professionalism of the security sector in the country.

With specific respect to the navy and the maritime space, Ghana Navy, through its operations at the landing beaches ensured that people did not gain unlawful entry into the country through unapproved routes by sea. Several arrests were made of people seeking to enter into the jurisdiction from Cote d'Ivoire and Togo.

Ghana Navy and institutional responses to Covid-19[62]

In preparing to respond to the challenges, the Navy introduced measures to prepare them to undertake Covid-19 operations. These interventions, included among other:

(a) Checking of temperature of personnel;
(b) No hand shaking/hugging;
(c) Regular washing of hands under running water;
(d) Regular usage of alcohol-based hand sanitizer in the absence of running water;
(e) Observing Social Distancing rules of two meters;
(f) Wearing of facemasks at all times whilst at work;
(g) Exercising regularly; and
(h) Stay at home as much as possible

Initiating Pandemic responses within the maritime space

In response to increasing high incidents of piracy, armed robbery at sea and other maritime related crimes reported in 2020, the Ghana Navy has intensified its patrol at sea[63]. The intention is to dominate our sea areas, showing more presence at sea especially in the Eastern Naval Command (ENC) Area of Responsibility (AOR). A second ship has been asked to join the ENC duty ship to ensure the AOR is dominated. In addition, Naval Intelligence has intensified its covert beach combing activities in the less policed coastal areas whilst the Navy's Special Boat Services (SBS) Team have deployed in the same areas to conduct beach patrols. Currently, the Navy's available platforms and resources are not adequate to effectively and efficiently carryout the mentioned jobs. The need to maintain constant presence at sea with adequate endurance and speed of vessels cannot be over emphasized. Currently, the Navy's vessels endurance to remain at sea is limited. This cannot effectively combat the complex and dynamic pirate activity seen in the Gulf of Guinea.

The main focus of the Ghana Navy is to enhance its current capabilities in the wake of increasing maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea after the decommissioning of 4 of its ships in 2016. In this regard, Ghana announced her intention to procure 2 Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) and other support patrol vessels that would mainly be deployed on protection of offshore oil and gas installations, maritime law enforcement and maritime safety and security. Additionally, they would be able to position the Navy to effectively deploy for Peace Support Operations including sea lift of land forces and conduct re-supply duties for peacekeeping missions. The procurement of the said vessels is yet to materialize.

It is envisaged that the most effective way to defeat

---

[62]. The section below draws heavily on the works and guidance of the two Naval Officers mentioned below
[63] . I am most grateful to my colleague, Captain (GN) Solomon Asiedu Larbi, for his support and guidance and provision of materials for the subsequent sections.

piracy, armed robbery at sea, illegal trafficking, etc. is effective intelligence collection resources and efficient intelligence personnel. There is, therefore, the urgent need to train, equip and deploy Navy Intelligence and SBS teams along the coast of Ghana to conduct covert and overt operations to smoke out criminal gangs who use the coastal communities to launch their attacks at sea.

Whiles the Navy especially worked both in responding to infiltrations from the seas by individuals, it also institutes a more holistic approach to dealing with vessels in port. Among the several initiatives introduced by the Navy were[64]:

(a) *Boarding Teams and their compositions:* These boarding teams were normally made up of 4-8 persons. According to interviewees, in cases where the vessels to be boarded were compliant, the boarding teams for inspections were normally made up of 4 to 5 persons. However, it was not in all situations that vessels and their crew were compliant. In some cases, they were either opposed to or non-compliant with the requests made by boarding teams. In such cases where there were possibilities of resistance or violence, the boarding teams could be increased from four up 7 or 8;

(b) *Types of vessels interrogated or boarded:*

a. Tankers;
b. Commercial fishing vessels[65]; and
c. Artisanal fishing boats/canoes.This was a major aspect of the engagement[66]. Below, we provide figures that demonstrates the extent of operational challenges to the Ghana Navy in checking these boats/canoes even randomly taking into consideration the available logistics mentioned above. For the different categories of boats, there are the:

i. Ali/Poli/Watsa canoes	3,969
ii.Beach seine canoes	797
iii.Set net canoes	1,852
iv.Seine canoes	1,004
v.Drift gillnet canoes	3 450
vi.Total	8,072

(c) Pre-boarding Protocols:

Due to the contagious nature of the pandemic, the Ghana Navy instituted particular protocols with respect to pre-boarding protocols. These included among others:

(a) Hailing and/or initial interrogation of the tanker, commercial fishing vessel and artisanal boats or canoes to be inspected;
(b) An enquiry relating to the extent to which Covid-19 protocols are being observed?
(c) All crew to muster on open deck.
(d) To ensure constant oversight of the main vessel undertaking the inspection, two personnel at least must remain on board. These would usually comprise the Captain and one other personnel to remain at the bridge of the vessel;
(e) Prior to the boarding of the vessel to be boarded, the boarding team are assembled and given a briefing relating to the operation and procedures;
(f) Personnel are given thorough briefing on the significance of observing Covid-19 protocols;
(g) Inspection.; and finally
(h) Certifying that all personnel undertaking the operations are properly attired with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPEs)

---

[64]. This section draws heavily on Capt. (GN) Derrick Attachie, 2021. Experience and Best Practices on the Impact of COVID-19 on the Conduct of Operations Against Maritime Crime'

[65]. For an analyses of the industry and the dubious licensing regime, see, Licensed fishing vessels in Ghana unmasked as illegal Chinese fronts, 24 January 2022, https://www.primenewsghana.com/business/licensed-fishing-vessels-in-ghana-unmasked-as-illegal-chinese-fronts.html

[66]. O Gulbrandsen. 1986. 'Canoes in Ghana',   Programme for Integrated Development of Artisanal Fisheries in West Africa – IDAF GCP/RAF/ 192/DEN at https://www.fao.org/3/an076e/an076e.pdf; Zadok Kwame Gyesi. 2022. 'Reduce number of canoes in Ghana to 9,000 - Fisheries expert to govt', 18 August at https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/reduce-canoes-in-ghana-to-9-000-fisheries-expert-to-govt.html . The current figure is 13,000 reduced from 16,000.

(D) *The Boarding Phase*

This involves several procedures among them:

(a) Guaranteeing that all crew assembled on open deck for proper checks to be undertaken;
(b) There is then the interrogation and inspection of documents of the vessels being checked, which is done at bridge;
(c) Critically, interrogations are undertaken and inspections done as to the extent to which the Covid-19 protocols are being adhered to;
(d) In cases where there is suspicion of the need to go further, there can be the inspection of ship's compartments when necessary;
(e) There is then a general education on Covid-19 prevention given to crew; and
(f) In cases where the vessel is arrested with its crew, it is then escorted to port under armed guard.

(E) *Post-Boarding Disinfection*

In the aftermath of the boarding operations, teams go through specific protocols, including:

(a) post-boarding team disposal of used PPEs to designated labelled bins;
(b) Personnel are also made to wash hands with soap under running water in turns as they disembark from boat; and finally
(c) The Sea boat and other equipment used are jet-sprayed with seawater and then disinfected.

(F) *Operations on Oil fields*[67]

(a) Covid-19 test conducted on personnel, to safeguard their welfare and to ensure production. Nevertheless, production levels at the various oil-producing fields are also cut in the wake of the pandemic[68];
(b) As a measure to control the disease and enforce existing protocols, those found to be infected are given a compulsory 14-day quarantine;
(c) In the aftermath of the quarantine period, a Covid-19 test is conducted and those found healthy released; and
(d) Personnel after checks are deployed to the oilfields.

Recommendations

In view of the latest developments in maritime insecurities amidst the pandemic, the paper recommends the following in mitigating the incidences of maritime crimes in the sub-region at both state and REC levels:

a. Joint capacity building programmes should be periodically organized for security institutions to develop procedures, augment their skills and expertise as well as improve their interoperability in combatting maritime crimes in the GoG. Similarly, inter-agency collaborations should also be strengthened between statutory and non-statutory security institutions. This will be strategic for experience-sharing and the exchange of information on security issues that affect the coastlines.
b. Stringent penal and legislative measures on maritime piracy, maritime terrorism and the trafficking of illegal small arms and light weapons and contraband goods must be formulated and implemented to control such insecurities. In the same vein, judicial institutions must tighten the loose ends by expediently prosecuting crimes and armed attacks as delays in the prosecutions of such crimes and attacks due to judicial bureaucracies serve as a motivating factor for these armed groups in carrying out their activities.
c. Additionally, community policing must be instituted in hotspots of maritime crimes in the sub-region to foster relations between security institutions and community members. It will enable community members to better provide information on criminal activity in the coastal communities and also provide a community-wide network by which common concerns can be effectively addressed.
d. Lastly, safety requirements from international treaties and the WHO need to be adhered to GoG states. It is the responsibility of states to protect their citizens and that of others by ensuring vessels and crew operate within the health standards of the WHO pertaining to the pandemic.

[67]. 'Impact of COVID-19 on Ghana's petroleum upstream sector', at Impact of COVID-19 on Ghana's petroleum upstream sector - Ghana Business News
[68]COVID-19 affected upstream oil and gas sector in 2020 – PIAC, May 19, 2021. At https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2021/05/19/covid-19-affected-upstream-oil-and-gas-sector-in-2020-piac/

Conclusion

From the discussions above, the paper establishes that maritime insecurities in the GoG range from maritime inter-state disputes, maritime terrorism, piracy, trafficking of narcotics, people and illicit goods, arms proliferation, illegal fishing, environmental crimes, or maritime accidents and disasters. These maritime crimes have increasingly threatened the security architecture of the sub-region and resulted in the loss of lives and properties and also negatively impacted the economies of states. The causes of maritime insecurities in the GoG identified are internal factors such as weak governance structures, socio-economic inequalities, overexploitation and mismanagement of state resources and external factors such as the infiltration of FTFs who complicate the challenge of fighting local armed groups in the GoG. In response to these insecurities in the maritime domain of West African states, there have been a number of international, regional and state preventive and counter mechanisms to address the plethora of maritime crimes. Despite the instrumental nature of these efforts, the region still battles with ongoing piracy, kidnapping and armed robbery on the high seas. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic stifled political and socio-economic advancements in West Africa. It also reshaped the security landscape of Africa in a way that demands innovative, strategic and coordinated measures to mitigate insecurities. In addition, the paper argued from one stance that a change in the nature of maritime insecurities and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic may have either overshadowed or improved the collaborated efforts by RECs and states seen across the sub region. It also examined empirical evidences from the experience of Ghana and the naval force in securing the state's maritime domain in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper recommends that the spectre of these maritime crimes require states and RECs in the sub region to transform their security institutions to respond appropriately and effectively to the non-traditional security implication of COVID-19.

About the Centre

Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) is an ECOWAS Centre of Excellence that provides globally recognized capacity for international actors on African peace and security through training, education and research to foster peace and stability in Africa.
www.kaiptc.org

About the Project

The three-year project on "Enhancing Regional Research, Capacity Buildign and Convening of Stakeholders towards a Safer Maritime Domain in the Gulf of Guinea", covers the coastal countries in West and Central Africa and is being implemented through three key approaches: research, dialogue and capacity building. The project is primarily aimed at promoting a safer maritime security domain in the Gulf of Guinea. Knowledge-based products highlighting key maritime security issues are part of the research outputs in an effort to raise awareness at a policy, technical and operational level. Overall, the project recognizes that piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea continue to be significant threats not only to the economies of Guinea countries, but also regional and international shipping, necessitating a harmonized regional response to counter these threats.