Operationalizing Normative Frameworks in the Gulf of Guinea: the case of Liberia

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ABSTRACT

The ocean sustains life on earth in many ways. For that matter, several interventions exist to ensure that maritime operations are safe and secure but also, dangerous acts that undermine the marine environment are mitigated. These interventions occur at national, regional and international levels. States participate in the design of these interventions in the form of agreements and structures and they are expected to enforce the provisions and guidelines from the regional and international maritime agreements and structures that they are a party to. It is the collective commitment of states to decisions taken on multilateral platforms that determines the robustness of the norms in the agreements that emerge. In this paper, attention is devoted to Liberia, a West African state off the coast of the Gulf of Guinea and whose population represents 0.06% of the global population, to explore how states transform the multiple maritime agreements they have signed up to into reality at the domestic level. In this paper, a number of the maritime-related regional and international agreements are organized around seven threat response areas and applied to the situation in Liberia. The initial observation is that smaller states also do their bits in conforming to regional and international maritime normative frameworks but they do not often attract scholarly attention.

Keywords: : maritime norms; piracy in Gulf of Guinea, maritime security, search and rescue

INTRODUCTION

The oceans and seas are of vital importance to humanity as a source of transportation and livelihoods. As a result, initiatives that respond to security and safety operations in the ocean, particularly, in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) maritime domain, are critical. However, in 2020, the GoG accounted for 95% of all maritime-related kidnappings in the world. Again, the incidences of illegal unreported and regulated (IUU) fishing in the GoG constitute yet another cold blue crime that gradually grinds coastal community economies to a halt as artisanal fishermen persistently return from fishing without any catches. Indeed, increasing criminality at sea is challenging the efficacy of sovereign authority in the GoG. Marine pollution, and other forms of transnational organized crime at sea including human trafficking, drug trafficking, small arms and light weapons trafficking and corruption present a combined risk to safe and secure maritime operations in the GoG.

For that matter, states also share in the responsibility for addressing major threats and challenges to maritime security and safety. However, state responses are traditionally limited to the ends of their respective boundaries while threats to maritime safety and security are often transnational in nature. International cooperation, therefore, becomes the foremost basis for states to work together to address the transnational nature of threats to security and safety in the GoG. Yet, the extent to which states commit to agreements, rules and or norms reached on multilateral platforms such as those of the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in responding to threats to the security and safety of the GoG maritime domain remains a contested subject.

In West Africa, much of the threats to maritime security, particularly, piracy and armed robbery at sea often occur in the waters between Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire[1]. This also coincides with the direction of the heaviest international maritime transport destinations in the sub-region. Consequently, much of the practitioner and scholarly attention tends to focus on these supposed hotspots – i.e. Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and also Senegal. The case of comparatively smaller states hardly attracts scholarly attention. This study, therefore, follows the case of Liberia in terms of the way it has implemented the plethora of maritime security norms emerging from the various regional and international agreements

to which Liberia is a state party. This paper explores the operationalization of the normative framework for safety and security in the GoG by organizing a number of maritime regional and international agreements around seven (7) core maritime threat response areas in relation to measures taken by Liberia to implement the plethora of regional and international maritime-related agreements for the safety and security of its own waters and as a contribution to safety and security in the GoG.

The paper utilizes the conceptual tools deployed by Bueger[2] to explain maritime security and relies on the security communities framework to discuss what state and or regional actors do at all levels in terms of maritime security practice to secure their respective maritime domains. Liberia's own measures in this regard is presented as a case study. The research was sponsored by the Denmark-supported maritime security project implemented by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) from 2019 to 2021 for Gulf of Guinea littoral states in West and Central African States. In the sections following, maritime security is conceptualized to set the context for the next sub-section on normative framework in maritime security governance. This sub-section include a matrix that organizes existing maritime agreements around seven (7) maritime threat response areas. The Africa regional maritime agreements are summarized. The last substantive section relate to the case of Liberia and then a conclusion.

Conceptualizing Maritime security and safety

According the United Nations Secretary General's report on *Oceans and the law of the sea,* "there is no universally accepted definition of the term "maritime security". Several definitions exist and each definition may differ in meaning, depending on the context and the intended message being portrayed. At its narrowest conception, maritime security involves protection from direct threats to the territorial integrity of a state, such as an armed attack from a military vessel. Most definitions also usually include security from crimes at sea, such as piracy, armed robbery against ships, and terrorist acts. However, intentional and unlawful damage to the marine environment, including from illegal dumping and the discharge of pollutants from vessels, and depletion of natural resources, such as from IUU fishing, can also threaten the interests of states, particularly coastal states. Various

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[1]Aning, K., Birikorang, E., Pokoo, J., Mensah, A.N.A., & Techie-Menson, E., (2021). Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: Ghana's actual maritime crime picture. Available at: http://www.safeseas.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Policy-Paper-KAIPTC-on-Maritime-Insecurity-and-Maritime-Crime. pdf (Accessed: 22 June 2022)

[2]Bueger, C., (2015). What is maritime security?, Marine Policy, 53, 159–164

approaches have been adopted to [explain] maritime security, depending on the state's perception of the interests that may be threatened, either directly or indirectly, by activities in the oceans and seas"[3]. While the above assertion that no widely acceptable definition of the term maritime security exists is true, the above rather recounts the challenge of a non-existent definition rather than an effort to define one.

For the purpose of this paper, therefore, the interlinked approach to understanding maritime security as expatiated by Bueger, offers broader guidelines for appreciating the wide-ranging dimensions of maritime security. Bueger utilizes three interlinked tools to show that, like national security, the rationale for maritime security is also to contribute to national economic development and human security. In that regard, Bueger's approach further shows what maritime security is, how specific maritime security issues are prioritized and what is done by actors in maritime security at all levels. The conceptual tools deployed in this regard are "semiotics", "securitization" and "security practice theory" . He uses these three tools to show the close link between maritime security on one hand, and economic development and human security, on the other. Here, economic development and human security include linkages to the development of the blue economy as well as commerce, sustainable livelihoods in coastal communities and food security. Semiotics (i.e. words derive their meaning in relation to the meaning of other words) in this case, helps to highlight how threats or anything that poses a danger to the ocean, becomes threats to human security and economic development that must, therefore, be responded to. Such dangers, risks and or threats include acts of piracy, maritime terrorism, trafficking and smuggling by sea (e.g. human, arms, narcotics, fake medicines etc), illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, oil spill and oil pollution among other maritime crimes, risks and threats. But, as he notes, maritime security defined this way leads to a "laundry-list" which does not offer any clues for prioritization nor a referent entity. To address this latter dilemma, Bueger relies on the securitization framework[4] to explain how an actor with authority to prioritize and legitimize an issue as a security issue, presents or communicates such issues as security issue to the appropriate constituents who accepts it as such. Finally, once a maritime issue is securitized,

Bueger deploys the security practice theory to help understand the security politics in which practice, understood as organized patterns of doing and sayings, is the central unit of analysis. From such a perspective, the question of which tools and technologies, such as naval ships or sattelites, are used in maritime security practice becomes of core interest. Here also, there are a range of practices that are pursued divergently by different agencies. Such practices include:

- Those that are geared at Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) -i.e. surveillance through radar, satelites or tracking data and the sharing and fusing of such information through databases and service centers;
- Activities at sea, such as patrolling, interdictions, searches and inspections, but also exercises;
- Law enforcement activities, such as arrests, the transfer of suspects, as well as prosecution, trials and prisons;
- Coordination activities on different levels including meetings and conferences and the harmonization of legal standards, procedures, mandates or the development of strategies and implementation plans.

Again, given the transnational nature of threats to maritime security, states are limited in acting alone to respond to threats to their respective territorial waters. States, therefore, need to cooperate in responding to the transnational nature of threats to maritime security. To explain how states may be able to cooperate and coordinate their responses to threats to maritime security, Bueger proposes the application of Karl Deutsch's security communities framework[5] to maritime governance to better appreciate actions at all levels. Thus, the "security communities" framework studies regional integration under conditions of shared domestic values among constituent states[6].

According to Deutsch et.al *"Security Communities"* constitute "a belief on the part of individuals in a group that they have come to an agreement on at least this one point: that common social problems must and can be resolved by processes of peaceful change." This suggests that becoming a security community is a deepening interactive process with pathways including on one hand, ability to intervene through diplomatic techniques to prevent a forcible settlement of conflicts among

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[3]UNSG, (2009). Oceans and the law of the sea. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_63_111.pdf (Accessed: 22 June 2022)

[4]Wæver, O. (1993). Securitization and desecuritization. Copenhagen: Centre for Peace and Conflict Research.

[5]Deutsch, K.W., Burrell, S.A., Kann, R.A., Lichterman, M. L. Jr, Lindgren, R.E., Loewenheim, R.E. and van Wgenen, R.W., 1957. Political community and the North Atlantic area: international organisation in the light of historical experience, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[6]Griffiths, M., Roach, S.C. and Solomon, M.S., 2009. Fifty key thinkers in international relations. Routledge.

its members, and on the other hand, the ability of the community to present a common military front collectively against an external actor.

The rules, norms and institutions created by security communities include regional and international agreements, protocols, declarations but also, harmonized policies, multilateral platforms, mutual technical assistance etc. In this regard, a range of regional and international norms for maritime security governance are found in relevant regional and international agreements and it is the responsibility of constituent member states to adopt such norms to become enforceable locally.

Normative frameworks in maritime security governance

According to Finnimore and Sikkink[7], a norm is a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity. Norms matter in international relations because they constitute, enable or restrain state behavior towards the promotion of peace in the international system. These norms are found in acceptable practices, conventions, values, rules, laws, agreements etc. In maritime security governance, norms are found in related national, regional and international maritime conventions, practices, agreements and protocols. In international security studies, however, norm research tends to focus on their robustness or the extent of their wider acceptance.[8]

The table below identifies and maps regional and international maritime-related agreements to particular maritime safety and security threat. The abbreviation in the titles of the agreements in the table are expanded and explained in the narrative beneath the table.

Table 1: A map of issue-based agreements at all levels, to particular maritime threats response

S/L	Maritime threat response area	International	Africa regional	ECOWAS
1	Governance /law enforcement	UNCLOS (1982)	AMC (2016)	
2	Organized crime	UN Convention on ToC (2001) Vienna Conv (1969) Conv against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs & psycho subst. (1988)	YCC (2013)	
3	Safety and security	SOLAS (19740; ISPS Code (2004); MARPOL (1973 – 1978); Collision at Sea (1972); Load Lines Conv (1966)		
4	Labor safety	Maritime labour Conv (2006) – ILO No. 188; Work in fishing Conv (2007)		
5	Pollution	Conv on Oil Pol casualties (1969 – 1973); Conv on Oil Pollution Preparedness response (1990 – 2000);		
6	Search and rescue	SARS Conv (1979); SUA (1988)		
7	Blue economy		AIMS -2050 (2012);	EAIMS (2014)

[7]Finnemore, M. and Sikkink, K., 1998. International norm dynamics and political change. International organization, pp.887-917.
[8]Deitelhoff, N. and Zimmermann, L., 2019. Norms under challenge: Unpacking the dynamics of norm robustness. Journal of Global Security Studies, 4(1), pp.2-17.

Based on the above, activities relating to maritime safety and security have been regulated by a number of United Nations organisations, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO), in particular through its Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) which focuses on all matters of maritime safety and security, the International Labour Organization (ILO) which leads on the development of international labour standards for Seafearers, the International Hydrographic Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). These coordinate with member states to set standards that member states are expected to commit to, adopt and enforce locally.

For example, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) provides for the enforcement of laws and regulations of the coastal state in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) with respect to living resources, including boarding, inspection, arrests and judicial proceedings (Part V), and with respect to the protection and preservation of the marine environment (Part XII). The United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC, 2001) addresses the issue of organized crime and organised crime networks in all its forms. Three inter-related supplementary protocols on: firearms trafficking, human trafficking and corruption provide empirical and thematic teeth to the discourse of transnational organized crime. There is also the United Nations Convention on Drugs and Psychotropic Substances also known as the Vienna Convention and the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

Additionally, the international conventions developed by the IMO relating to maritime safety, includes the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS). SOLAS was expanded in December 2002 to include a new maritime security regime in the form of Special Measures to Enhance Maritime Security and the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code . The ISPS Code provides a standardized, consistent framework for managing risk and permitting the meaningful exchange and evaluation of information between governments, companies, port facilities and ships; establishes the right of states to impose control and compliance measures on ships in or intending to visit their ports; provides for states to take further action when relevant requirements are not met or when there are other clear grounds for taking such action; and requires the coastal state where a risk of attack has been identified to advise the ships concerned of the current security level, and any security measures that they should put in place or that the State has decided to put in place.
Other international maritime agreements include

the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), the Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, the International Convention on Load Lines - also known as the Load Lines Convention, the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers.

Again, there are several international conventions governing labour conditions of seafarers, such as the Merchant Shipping (Minimum Standards) Convention. The 2006 Maritime Labour Convention consolidates and updates 68 international labour standards relating to seafarers. With respect to fishers, the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (ILO Convention No. 188), provides for decent working and living conditions for fishers and the safe operation of fishing vessels.

Furthermore, a number of instruments are relevant to the transport of dangerous goods. Carriage requirements for radioactive material are set out in the International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code and the International Code for the Safe Carriage of Packaged Irradiated Nuclear Fuel, Plutonium and High Level Radioactive Wastes on Board Ships, which are both mandatory under SOLAS, and the IAEA Regulations for Safe Transport of Radioactive Material.

Additionally, international conventions containing measures for the control of marine pollution owing to maritime casualties include the International Convention relating to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution Casualties and its Protocol of 1973 relating to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Marine Pollution by Substances other than Oil, the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation and its Protocol of 2000 on Preparedness, Response and Cooperation to Pollution Incidents by Hazardous and Noxious Substances and the International Convention on Salvage.

Also, several international conventions also specifically address search and rescue and the provision of assistance to persons in distress, including SOLAS, the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR Convention), and the International Convention on Salvage. Last but not least is the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, 1988 (SUA Convention) and its Protocols. The SUA Convention's main purpose is to ensure that appropriate action is taken against persons committing unlawful acts against ships including the seizure of ships by force; acts of violence against persons on board; and the placing of devices on board ships which are likely to destroy or damage them. It obliges states to extradite or prosecute alleged offenders. The 1988 Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Fixed Platforms Located on the Continental Shelf extended the

requirements of the SUA Convention to fixed platforms such as those engaged in the exploitation of offshore oil and gas. The 2005 Protocol strengthened the 1988 legislation by criminalizing various activities including the intentional transport on board a ship of a person who had committed an offence under the SUA Convention or another UN Counter-Terrorism Convention.

Regional maritime normative framework

At the Africa regional and sub-regional levels, the western coastal corridors of the African continent stretching from the waters of Senegal to Angola, constitutes the GoG maritime domain. But the entire continent of Africa is also surrounded by the ocean. Accordingly, the African Maritime Transport Charter revised in 2016 is a crucial agreement that addresses the issue of maritime transport governance and its relation to economic development and human security on the continent. The Charter further addresses the issues of ports and cabotage management and sets up platforms for cooperation and coordination for the collective benefit of all member states.

Again, Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050 adopted in 2012- also known as AIMS-2050 -, aims at restoring ocean health, reinstating security at sea, and strengthening strategic 'blue growth' sectors. The AIMS lists six (6) pivotal threats to maritime security in Africa as follows:

   i. Transnational Organized Crimes in the maritime domain (includes Money Laundering, Illegal Arms and Drug Traffic, Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea, Illegal Oil bunkering / Crude Oil Theft along African coasts, Maritime Terrorism, Human Trafficking, Human Smuggling and Asylum Seekers Travelling by Sea);
   ii. Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing - IUU Fishing - and overfishing, and Environmental Crimes (includes deliberate shipwrecking and oil spillage as well as dumping of toxic wastes);
   iii. Natural Disasters, Marine Environmental Degradation and climate change;
   iv. Strategic Communications Systems;
   v. Vulnerable legal framework;
   vi. Lack of and/or poorly maintained aids to navigation and modern hydrographic surveys, up-to-date nautical charts and maritime safety information in a number of AU Member States.

Furthermore, in 2013, the AU, acting in collaboration with the UN and in response to growing incidences of piracy attacks and armed robbery at sea in the

GoG, convened a summit of heads of state and governments in Yaoundé, Cameroun where the coastal states in West and Central together with the GoG Commission based in Luanda, Angola, signed a declaration that committed the signatories to establish an inter-regional platform to coordinate collective responses to threats to safety and security in the GoG maritime domain. At the summit in Yaoundé, the Heads of state also adopted the "code of conduct concerning the repression of piracy, armed robbery against ships, and illicit maritime activity in West and Central Africa". The above-mentioned declaration, together with the code and structures evolving out of their implementation, collectively constitute the Yaoundé architecture that is critical to West and Central African states' collective responses to threats to safety and security in the GoG maritime domain.

In West Africa, ECOWAS also adopted the ECOWAS integrated maritime strategy (EIMS) in 2014 focusing on five (5) strategic objectives: Governance, Security and safety; Environmental management, development of the ECOWAS maritime economy; and promoting maritime awareness and research. As the EIMS notes under its point 7, its effectiveness will depend on the extent to which Member States commit to harness regional resources, work together to enhance the effectiveness of individual States, and also, work in close cooperation with all stakeholders.

Operationalizing normative frameworks in the Gulf of Guinea – the case of Liberia

Liberia is in West Africa off the coast of the Gulf of Guinea and with a population of Liberia is 5,291,049 as of June 2022 and an estimated gross domestic product (GDP) of USD$2.7 billion as at 20221. The country share borders with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Its population is the equivalence of 0.06% of the total world population. An estimated

52.6 % of the population are urban dwellers (2,658,561 people in 2020). The total land area of Liberia is 96,320 Km2. According to the World Bank, the country is rich in natural resources which include iron ore, diamonds, gold, fertile soil, fishery, and forestry. However, the economic potential of these assets remains largely untapped[9].

Liberia is a signatory to a number of regional and international maritime agreements. For example, at the international level, Liberia is a state party to the UNCLOS, SOLAS Convention and the ISPS Code, SUA Convention and its Protocols, UNTOC and its supplementary protocols, The United Nations Convention on Drugs and Psychotropic Substances; Vienna Convention and The United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances etc.

Similarly, at the Africa regional level, Liberia is a state party to the African Maritime Transport Charter which also provides the legal basis for the platform of the Port Management Association of West and Central Africa to which Liberia is also a member state. The African Integrated Maritime Strategy-2050, Yaoundé Code of Conduct, Yaoundé Declaration and Additional Protocol to establish the Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) for managing safety and security in the GoG based in Yaoundé, Cameroun. For this reason, Liberia participates in all the structures of the ICC at all levels. It specifically belongs to Zone F of the GoG maritime zones at the Yaoundé architecture together with Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. Liberia is also a member of the GoG Commission among others.

Again at the sub-regional level in West Africa, Liberia is a member state of ECOWAS and by extension a party to the EIMS. It is also a key member state of the Mano River Union (MRU). Additionally, Liberia is a party to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of a Subregional Integrated Coast Guard Network in West and Central Africa. under the auspices of the Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA).

However, between 2017 and 2018, the Liberian Coast Guard made 13 arrests of foreign fishing trawlers involved in various breaches of the countries fisheries regulations[10]. Thus IUU fishing is key threat to Liberia's maritime domain. But the country is also famous for operating a heavily congested flag-state registry as a strategic source of national revenue. However, Liberia is currently reforming its maritime regulatory authority to focus beyond the maintenance of the flag-state registry but also, to promote local maritime infrastructure that promotes further maritime commerce in Liberia[11]. Thus, Liberia established its maritime programme in 1948 and became a founding member of the IMO a year later. The Bureau of Maritime Affairs (BMA) administered the program under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance and later the Ministry of Transport. When the country adopted the Liberia Maritime Authority Acts in 2010, the BMA then transitioned into the Liberian Maritime Authority (LiMA) which is spearheading the country's efforts in ensuring enhanced maritime commerce and also, safety and security in its maritime domain by conforming to regional and international maritime-related agreements to which Liberia is a state party.

Beyond the LMA Act, Liberia has transformed the main elements of the multiple maritime-related regional and international agreements into a series of policy and regulatory documents that guide daily practices and procedures on the maritime front. Through a collaborative and consultative process, Liberia finalized its national maritime security strategy (NMSS) in 2021. It was in that same year that the country transformed relevant portions of the ISPS Code into a "Designated Authority National Maritime ISPS policy letter. That policy letter is in the form a practice code guiding the management of maritime infrastructure and the governance of the maritime domain in Liberia. From the perspective of the NMSS, Liberia is of the view that its maritime security is directly linked to its national security. However, it notes that the poor quality of maritime infrastructure at its disposal against the background of its stretch of coast area, the country is potentially vulnerable to poachers as well as IUU fishing and smuggling of drugs which is generally supported by organized criminal networks, terrorism, seaborne illegal immigration, destruction and degradation of the marine environment and acts against the underwater cultural heritage. Secondly, Liberia perceives itself as a potential victim of accidental threats from natural disasters as a result of climate change. Together, these threats could undermine revenue generation for the State.

Accordingly, Liberia, under the auspices of its NMSS, commits to capacitate their Coast Guard (i.e. military) . Additionally, Liberia has institutionalized a series of coordination mechanisms towards the

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[9]The World Bank in Liberia. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/liberia/overview (Accessed: 22 June 2022)
[10]The Maritime Executive (2018). Sea Shepherd assists Liberia in trawler arrest. Available at: https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/sea-shepherd-assists-liberia-in-trawler-arrest (Accessed: 21 June 2022)
[11]See the website of the Liberia Maritime Authority (LMA). Available at: http://www.lima.gov.lr/index.php/media-center/press-release/item/82-the-liberia-maritime-program-an-abridged-history.html#gsc.tab=0 (Accessed: 21 June 2022)

integration of several agencies involved in maritime security while avoiding duplication and/or overlap of roles. Such mechanisms include the design and implementation of the "Scope of Operation Procedure" document that guides the relations between the National Port Authority and the Liberian Coast Guard, the development and implementation of National Maritime Search and Rescue Plan, National Spill Contingency Plan for Oil and other Hazardous Substances, the National Fisheries Regulation of 2010 and other relevant legislations, which are highly significant to the implementation of the NMSS of Liberia. Additionally, implementation of these mechanisms is aligned to the implementation of the above-mentioned Designated Authority National Maritime ISPS policy letter document which provides, among others, measures for ensuring that port facility security plan (PFSP) is thorough and effective. Beyond these plans, as part of measures to ensure better coordination of activities among the diverse public sector maritime agencies, Liberia strategically focuses on: Enforcement of International and National Maritime Law; Protection of Liberia"s coastline from threats emanating from IUU; National surveillance; Regional and International Engagement; Manpower Development and capacity building including training in crisis & incident management (coordination / communication etc.), Coastal Security Technical Surveillance, and Monitoring.

The NMSS also identifies and promotes collaboration and coordination among relevant ministries and also among agencies within specific ministries including the Presidency. For example, in the NMSS, the ministries and agencies identified as critical to ensuring safety and security in the maritime domain are Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Ministry of Agriculture and the National Security Agency. Several agencies under these ministries, combine to collectively deliver the national maritime security mandate of the republic of Liberia. Such agencies include the National Maritime Security Committee, Liberia National Coast Guard and/or Military, Customs Division of the Liberia Revenue Authority, National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Liberia Maritime Authority and the Bureau of Immigration National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL) and the Liberia Seaport Police.

These coordinated policy feat has ensured that the country remains robust in all the seven normative response areas already outlined. Thus, Liberia, has managed to escape the kind of frequent acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea that bedevils other states in West Africa. Through its membership of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, Liberia is a member of the Multi-national Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC) Zone F under the Yaoundé Architecture together with Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Sierra-Leone and Guinea since 2018, enabling a pooled capacity to address the transnational nature of maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea.

However, given the transnational nature of maritime criminality, Liberia contemplates that it could also become a target of piracy and armed robbery at sea. Such perception has existed over the years and it comes as no surprise that Liberia endeavours to harmonise its obligations under multiple regional and international maritime agreements into one comprehensive and implementable policy document with accompanying structures that ensure coordination and accountability at all levels.

Conclusion

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea concerns every state along its coastlines because the threats to safety and security in the waters of the GoG potentially affects every state. While it is true that the main players ought to do more, it is equally important to pay attention to other states that may lack the resource and equipment to play commanding roles yet, their remarkable efforts stand a chance of encouraging other vulnerable states that are also doing their best with a wider sub-region. The case of Liberia provides a good example. Since 2010 when the country adopted the LMA Act, Liberia has undertaken significant reforms aimed at building confidence in its own citizens but also assuring the West African sub-region and international community about Liberia's commitment to implementing plethora maritime agreements it is a state party to.