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Photo Credit: Ghana Navy

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Transforming for Effectiveness: The Defence Sector and Maritime Insecurity

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ABSTRACT

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) defines Security Sector Reform (SSR) as the process by which countries formulate or re-orient the policies, structures, and capabilities of institutions and groups engaged in the security sector, in order to make them more effective, efficient, accountable and responsive to democratic control, and to the security and justice needs of the people. A responsive security sector is one that constantly adapts to the changing security needs of its people. Considering that maritime insecurity has emerged in the last decade as a major threat to Gulf of Guinea (GoG) countries, this paper assesses the responsiveness of Ghana's defence sector to the evolving security landscape. It analyses the policy frameworks enacted to guide the security sector in addressing maritime insecurity in Ghana. The paper then delineates some of the practical changes instituted by the defence sector to confront maritime crimes in Ghana. It concludes on the note that while significant changes have been made, specifically at the policy level, it is important to address coordination challenges among security entities mandated to address maritime insecurity.

Keywords: : *Defense sector, Gulf of Guinea, Maritime Security, Integrated maritime strategy*

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) defines Security Sector Reform (SSR) as the process by which countries formulate or re-orient the policies, structures, and capabilities of institutions and groups engaged in the security sector, in order to make them more effective, efficient, accountable and responsive to democratic control, and to the security and justice needs of the people. It is incontestable that maritime insecurity constitutes a major threat to states in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG). This has worsened in the last decade, affecting the human security and justice needs of the people.¹ A responsible security sector is one that adapts itself to changing security threats. In Ghana, the security sector is key to tackling the threat of maritime insecurity.

Specifically, this paper focuses on the defence sector, as one of the key institutions constitutionally-mandated to tackle threats emanating from outside the borders of Ghana. Considering that maritime insecurity has escalated within the last decade, has the defence sector correspondingly restructured to meet these challenges? What have been these changes and at what level (s) have these occurred? If there are any changes, have these been sufficient, bearing in mind the worsening security situation? This paper therefore undertakes an assessment of the institutional changes (specifically as it pertains to policy making) introduced within the defence sector to respond to maritime insecurity in order to determine their efficacy, and possible remedy.

The paper begins with a brief assessment of the maritime security threats to the Gulf of Guinea and specifically to Ghana. The aim is to determine the nature and depth of the threats, the key perpetrators, as well as elucidate the intervening actors. The paper then undertakes an assessment of the policy frameworks that have been enacted by Ghana in response to the threat of maritime insecurity. This section seeks to determine the suitability and subsequently the effectiveness of these frameworks. It zeroes in specifically on frameworks relating to the defence sector, even though these might be policies that straddle different sectors. The nature of these frameworks elicits a delineation of tasks and responsibilities, strong interagency collaboration, together with the supporting logistics and financial backing.

The paper argues that while the processes leading to the enactment of the policy frameworks have

been fraught with interagency rivalries, lack of coordination and more importantly difficulty in the determination of the national security interests (due to unclear leadership), there nonetheless is a roadmap in Ghana for how maritime security threats should be tackled. However, the paper concludes that in spite of the progress made in this endeavour, policy frameworks need to be backed with sufficient resources (human and material), political will to effect difficult decisions and strong interagency collaboration among key interlocutors in the maritime security space. The methodology of the paper is qualitative in nature, drawing on official documents and key informant interviews with officials in Takoradi, Accra and Tema.

Ghana's maritime security threats

Aning et al categorise different kinds of maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea. These are (1) crimes against movement of humans and goods. The specific crimes within this category are piracy, which is a major crime in the Gulf of Guinea. With Ghana being a leading maritime commerce destination in the region, piracy is a major threat to Ghana's economy, as it can potentially stifle the movement of good across the country's maritime space. The other crime in this category is stowing away of illegal migrants who board vessels illegally with the intention of arriving at major shipping destinations in Europe.² While this does not constitute a major threat to national security, it nonetheless deprives the nation of its human resource and increases the costs of shipping as companies incur penalties for illegal migrants. The second major category of maritime crimes is criminal flows. This includes arms trafficking, narcotics and drug trafficking, illicit migration and trafficking for labour. These crimes, according to Aning et al, are those in which the sea is used primarily as a conduit for criminal enterprise, rather than the main site of the activity itself. The sea serves as a facilitator of these crimes, as it is safe, often unpatrolled and easier to escape when detected. The final category of crimes is environmental crimes. These include fisheries crimes and pollution crimes such as illicit waste of ballast water disposal. These crimes destroy the marine environment and is an impediment to the human security of coastal communities who depend on the blue economy for survival.

Policy Frameworks

To counteract these threats and to ensure a coordinated response across all levels, frameworks

¹ECOWAS (2016), *ECOWAS Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform and Governance*. Dakar.

²Aning, K., Birikorang, E., Pokoo, J., Mensah, A., & Tachie-Menson, E.A. (2021) 'Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: Ghana's actual maritime crime picture.' KAIPTC/SafeSeas

have been signed by states in the GoG. For Ghana, the policy frameworks are therefore a response to the threats that maritime crimes pose to the country. These structures are at the national, regional and international levels. Key among some of the regional and international frameworks are the Yaoundé Declaration of 2013 and its Code of Conduct, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Ghana is a signatory to these protocols and has committed itself to fulfilling its obligations therein. These protocols and conventions at the regional and international levels most seek to engender interagency collaboration, information sharing, legal harmonisation and to enable joint-up approaches to tackling a common threat, especially within the GoG.

In Ghana, while different agencies have been engaged by regional and national actors with respect to their obligations, it is only within the last few years that the country has enacted critical policy frameworks to clearly articulate its maritime security doctrines, especially as it relates to the broader national security of the state.

National Security Strategy

The key framework that guides Ghana's response mechanism is the National Security Strategy (NSS) of Ghana. The policy acknowledged the global security landscape which is "characterized by competing national interests, and a crave for resource control. There is therefore the need for a continuous appraisal of the geo-strategic environment to ascertain its impact on the national and security interests of Ghana. This policy took an overarching view of Ghana's broader geostrategic interests, before it situated the threat of maritime crimes.

While cross border crimes such as smuggling and trafficking remain a menace along our land borders and maritime jurisdictional space, a surge in piracy and armed robbery at sea has been recorded in the Gulf of Guinea in recent years. Although counter measures have been instituted through regional cooperation, the threat persists. In addition to threats to safe passage, this also threatens the safety of our off-shore oil drilling activity and the related investor confidence that is required to sustain it. This NSS makes a strong case for the critical examination of our naval capabilities in this regard with the aim of adequately resourcing our military and civil agencies to provide the required maritime protection. The on-shore oil and gas deposits in the Volta and Keta basins present a positive economic prospect for Ghana. These deposits,

however, are assessed as inherently imbued with a potential for regional dispute as the Volta basin supposedly stretches into Burkina Faso while the Keta Basin is considered as stretching into Togo and Benin. This strategy seeks from the relevant stakeholder state institutions, clear technical recommendations to the National Security Council on the impact of this situation on the national security of Ghana.³

The Policy makes it clear that due to the strategic importance of the marine environment to Ghana, it needed to be protected using all available resources. It therefore called for the adequate resourcing of the military and other civil agencies, recognising that the threat goes beyond the traditional defence sector.

Situating maritime insecurity within the broader transnational organised crimes debate, the NSS identified "drug trafficking, Internet fraud, human trafficking, smuggling, money laundering, cross-border terrorist activities including use of parts of our territory as safe haven, recruitment of our youth and activities to raise finances to support terrorist activity, illegal cross-border movement of firearms, armed robbery at sea, theft of petroleum products on-board ships, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and maritime piracy as some of the trans national crime activities that have become prevalent in the West African sub-region and the GoG and which have a direct impact on the national security interests and objectives of Ghana.

However, in spite of the situation of maritime piracy within the broader context of transnational organised crimes in Ghana, the policy's assessment of risk of some maritime crimes to Ghana is problematic, and sometimes contradictory. For example, the NSS states "Ghana remains a comparatively lower-risk territory for maritime crime compared to other more piracy-prone nations in the GoG. However, Ghana's projected expansion of its maritime oil exploration and drilling industry, comes with associated maritime risks to its national security interests and objectives in that regard. Increased growth in exploration and production of oil and gas entails an increase in the traffic of vessels which could be exposed to targeting by the pirates and armed robber networks which currently operate within the GoG." For some actors in the maritime space, reducing the increasing threat that maritime crimes pose to Ghana has consequences for the level of importance that is attached to it. If the level of importance is high, it means that it will be given priority, and more resources will be allocated to the relevant agencies. Additionally, it was important for the Strategy to acknowledge that while piracy as one minor crime may not be as endemic in Ghana as other countries, nonetheless, other maritime crimes, as were outlined in the previous section of this paper are quite prevalent and threaten the

³Republic of Ghana. (2020). National Security Strategy. Accra: Ministry of National Security

human security of coastal communities. While the broader geostrategic importance of oil exploration and production cannot be underestimated, for the majority of people living in coastal communities, anything that threatens their livelihood should be deemed a major national security threat, and be given priority.

The strategy therefore proposed a number of initiatives, and named the key agencies whose responsibility it was to tackle the threat of maritime security threats. With the exception of the Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA), all the actors such as the navy and air force fall within the traditional defence sector. However, within the GMA, the division in charge of maritime security is headed by a naval captain. This underscores the necessity for collaboration between the GMA and the military in combating maritime insecurity.

According to the NSS “enhancing the early warning and response capabilities of our Ghana Maritime Authority, the surveillance and response capacities of our Navy and Air Force to dominate our territorial waters are therefore primary considerations of this NSS. This is to be done within the context of the principle that maritime security is inherently linked to cooperation with our regional neighbours with who we share the GoG. The vulnerability of the coastal frontier (GoG) also stems from its long stretch with beach able areas for small boats that are suitable for terrorists’ landings and criminal activity including drug trafficking and smuggling. In consideration of the threat posed to maritime security and the risk thereof to our national security interests, an effective technological system such as ground to air satellites and radars for monitoring will be deployed for reporting in order to reduce the human factor risk as a priority issue that Government seeks to implement as part of this NSS.”

National Integrated Maritime Strategy (NIMS)

Another framework to tackle Ghana’s Maritime Security is the National Integrated Maritime Strategy (NIMS). This Strategy is “intended to chart viable courses of action towards addressing [maritime security] issues to ensure that Ghana’s maritime domain is globally considered safe and secure, with strong blue economy sectors that not only generates substantial national income, but also ultimately improve the living standards of our people.” (NIMS) This strategy seeks to fill the gaps of the National Security Strategy, by having a more holistic view of the maritime environment, the actors, as well as their responsibilities, and coordinating mechanisms. It also advocates for the establishment of governing structures, which is important in determining priorities and subsequently funding allocations.

According to the NIMS, “coordination among relevant

agencies has been identified as a major challenge confronting effective maritime governance in Ghana. There are over twenty (20) Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) with varying mandates and responsibilities on maritime issues. Without adequate coordination mechanisms, there is the tendency to duplicate efforts within these institutions, or to sub-optimally apply institutional capabilities and resources towards achieving shared objectives.”⁴ Additionally, the absence of a governance structure in the maritime sector often results in a disjointed and uncoordinated approach. Given the complexities of the maritime domain, interagency collaboration must be documented, cross-cutting, and integrate multiple agencies. A national-level framework to facilitate the exchange of information and synchronize maritime sector decisions where multiple agencies are involved is a key element of implementing this Strategy and is directly linked to advancing the priorities of the highest levels of political, military, and diplomatic leadership. (NIMS)

A critical component of the NIMS is its governing structures. It proposes the establishment of a National Maritime Council to be chaired by the Vice President with membership of relevant ministers.; a National Maritime Steering Group to coordinate its activities and give direction; the Ghana Maritime Authority as the coordinating agency; the National Security Council Secretariat to coordinate relations at the broader state level; and National Maritime Technical Working Groups composed of various thematic areas such as legal and operational, safety and security, sustainability and blue economy. The enactment of these policy frameworks is important, because it is within these structures that the defence sector finds it relevance in the maritime security domain.

Steps to Tackling Maritime Insecurity - Logistics, Training, Personnel

This final section reviews some of the practical changes that have taken place within the defence sector to tackle the maritime crimes in Ghana. With the defence sector, the key units in charge of addressing maritime crimes are the Navy and Airforce. Therefore, some of these changes involves major institutional reorganisation, buying and installation of equipment, manpower increases and training modalities. Technology has always been a key driver of global development. While the use of technology in Ghana’s maritime sector falls below the global average, some progress has been made in electronic surveillance through the installation of the Vessel Traffic Management Information System (VTMIS) and the Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) – both of which have been shared with other security agencies. The Ghana Navy’s surveillance capabilities have also been enhanced with the addition

of the Maritime Domain Awareness Network Stations (MDANS). The robust technology and innovation are key requirements of ensuring effective surveillance, monitoring and control of the maritime domain. The harnessing of the socio-economic potential of shipping, ports and other sectors is a function of innovation and technology, which must be leveraged for the promotion and development of the maritime sector (NIMS).

Within the defence sector, depending on the threat analysis that is conducted, the number of naval duties ships are reduced or increased. For example, while previously most of the piracy and other maritime crimes were occurring in the western coast of Ghana, there has been a considerable shift. More recently, the attacks emanate from Nigeria's eastern Niger Delta area. In response, the Ghana Navy increased its deployment to the Eastern Naval Command by augmenting the number of duty ships deployed to the area.

Training and preparedness are key components of a defence sector that seeks to transform to meet its current challenge. For this reason, a number of new trainings and units are being established. A key initiative is the set up of the Special Boat Service (SBS), a naval special force. The SBS are specially trained naval officers who have received more difficult combat training. Some received the training from Greece and Nigeria, while the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) contributes to the training content. It is important to have more SBS personnel so that each time a vessel is going on patrols on the sea, they will have a section of them on board. They need to have more presence at sea, to act as a deterrence.

The navy is also in the process of building a facility for Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) operations. This facility is being built at the naval training command. The VBSS is an initiative specifically set up to combat terrorism, capture enemy vessels, and combat piracy and other transnational organised crimes. It is expected that the VBSS facility will be one of the biggest in West Africa, which can attract other Navies to use their facilities.

With respect to personnel, some new Commands have been added to the Ghana Navy. This includes the Riverine Command which has been deployed in several places such as Ximeni, Yeji and Axim. To ensure that there is adequate personnel to achieve their mandate, there has been an expansion in terms of manpower, with a gradual increase in the number of recruits, as well as at the officer level.

These changes are in a response to the national security policy that creates a stronger role for the military, particularly the navy in combating maritime insecurity. Under the NSS, the roles of the actors have been clearly delineated to prevent overlaps. There

seems to be more collaboration among maritime related stakeholders. In spite of this, tensions still exist in terms of the lead entity in addressing maritime insecurity. The National Security Strategy lists the Navy as the lead coordinating entity, with all the others playing a supportive role. The National Integrated Maritime Strategy, however, mentions the Ghana Maritime Authority (GMA) as the lead coordinating agency. This contradiction is detrimental to the effective operations of these institutions and subsequently to their coordinating duties. This could lead to renewed interagency rivalries if a convergence is not found between the NSS and the NIMS. Needless to say, in spite of the positive changes in training, personnel and equipment, more needs to be done. The propensity for transnational organised criminals to adapt to security strategies means that the security entities also need to adapt to technological advancement. For example, while having sufficient vessels at sea might be useful, it is not the most prudent way to use resources as it is not economically efficient. The use of drones and other advanced technologies could vastly improve efficiency and performance. Additionally, better information sharing and coordination, as well as intelligence-based monitoring among actors lead to better outcomes in the fight against maritime crimes and transnational organised crimes.

Conclusion

The maritime domain of Ghana is a vital resource for the country's development. The case is similar for the other countries in the GoG. It is for this same reason that criminal groups have sought to exploit the resources that states could use to improve the living conditions of their citizens. The security sector is key to addressing maritime insecurity in the GoG. In Ghana, there have been a multiplicity of actors all mandated by various instruments to tackle the threats. However, it is only in the last few years that at the national level, discussion and subsequently two major policy frameworks were enacted to coordinate the national response to maritime insecurity. These are the National Security Strategy and the National Integrated Maritime Strategy. Should Ghana stringently follow its commitment to these instruments, while dedicating adequate resources, it would lead to strong changes in how maritime security threats are handled. The defence sector has demonstrated its preparedness to adapt to the changing security climate and respond to the human security needs of Ghanaians.

In the maritime world, no one agency or country can do it all. Interagency and cross country collaboration is imperative.

About the Centre

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About the Project

The three-year project on “Enhancing Regional Research, Capacity Building 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.

