The Media and Maritime Security Information Dissemination in Africa: The Cases of Sierra Leone and Senegal

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Abstract

The traditional discourse around maritime (in)security, more often than not, involves mainly state actors; leaving out the potential contributions of non-state actors, such as the media. The media's independent practice supports the empowerment of civilian populations to engage effectively in governance processes in their respective countries. The assertion of this paper is that maritime security issues, particularly, in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG), hardly reach populations who are the custodians of its waters and wealth in their respective territorial, contiguous and exclusive economic zones. It is a reality that challenges the rights of populations to know what happens in their maritime domain through the media; especially against the background of a modern media landscape that has to survive under constant political suppression, mainly, in the global south. This paper explores the maritime security domain and the contribution of the media in promoting effective dissemination of maritime security-related information to citizens of the littoral states of the GoG, and the barriers faced by and the opportunities open to the media in this endeavour. The paper utilises the security practice theory and the classical four theories of the press in its analysis. It also examines the nature of the African State in a way that identifies options for enhancing the media landscape in Africa. Finally, Sierra Leone and Senegal are considered as cases of study.

Keywords: Maritime security, Maritime Reporting, Gulf of Guinea, Media, Sierra Leone, Senegal.

Introduction

The media is the collection of news organisations and therefore, institutional in character.[1] While the media has evolved over time beyond print newspapers, radio and television, to digital media and the internet, the independence or freedom of the media is sought from both the strong arms of the State and market forces—framed as the concentration of media ownership in the hands of an individual or a group of businesses or political elites who influence what gets published. Still, the consumption of media outputs or news, is also often driven, among other factors, by the prior beliefs and motivations of individuals in what is referred to as 'selective exposure.'[2] While the factors affecting selective exposure in the West include ideology and strongly-held political values, in authoritarian regimes, factors such as religion could inform the levels of credibility that news consumers ascribe to particular sources of news.

In other words, the freedom of the media in any society constitutes a separate subject from the broader concept of freedom of expression, which usually focuses on the individual and includes free speech, and freedom of assembly, association, religion, and so on.[3] However, just as the media cherishes its freedom, it also has a responsibility towards its publics in transmitting accurate and reliable information.

At the same time, much of the empirical discussions about the role of the media is generally tied to states and society—mostly striking a connection between the political philosophy of the society as a reflection of the way the media in that society operates.[4] Yet, the identification of the political regimes under which the media is studied, is normally driven by Cold War and Western political traditions to the extent that the term 'freedom' largely becomes the reference point for evaluating the independence or autonomy of the media in a particular society.[5] Nevertheless, this kind of freedom is largely conceived as inherent in democracies and not in other political regimes.[6] Thus, the ends of freedom of the media do not seem to matter in the evaluation of media freedom or independence. For example, the media is deemed

to operate differently under different variants of democracy, authoritarian and communist political regimes. Nonetheless, the ability to discuss political issues without state suppression, which is often ascribed to democracies, becomes the reference point for evaluating the freedom and independence of the media even in other political regimes. Therefore, the relevance of such an approach to the African media scholar and practitioner appear unclear, and this approach provides limited options for identifying and improving the infrastructure for media practice and media independence in Africa. These anomalies arise because the nature of State and society in Africa rarely corresponds to the typical philosophies underpinning statehood in the notional West and the notional East.

So, among other objectives, this paper locates the media within the context of the nature of the African State. Furthermore, the existing literature rarely explores the role of the media in relation to its reportage of transnational and/or international relations (IR) themes and sectors such as the security of the maritime domain. Indeed, discussions of the security of the maritime domain, revolve around the State and its agencies, on the one hand, and international and regional multilateral organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and regional arrangements including the African Union (AU) and its regional economic communities (REC) such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), on the other. In this context, the State and multilateral organisations tend to drive the development, dissemination and application of particular normative agreements that seek to respond to various aspects of maritime security. Consequently, the traditional discussions on the security of the maritime domain, traditionally, consist of mainly state actors; leaving out the prospective contributions of non-state actors such as the media, the private sector, coastal communities, and even internal and transnational criminal networks. These actors combined, create a thorough network of actors involved in ensuring the (in)security of the maritime domain within and across states. Additionally, from a response perspective, the

[1]John C. Nerone, ed., *Last Rights: Revisiting Four Theories of the Press.* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995).
[2]Magdalena Wojcieszak et al., (2019). "What Drives Media Use in Authoritarian Regimes? Extending Selective Exposure Theory to Iran," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 24, no. 1 (2019): 69-91.
[3]Nerone, Last Rights.
[4]See Nerone, Last Rights. ; See also See also Kaarle Nordenstreng, "'Four Theories of the Press' Reconsidered," *in Researching Media, Democracy and Participation: The Intellectual Work of the 2006 European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School,* ed. Nico Carpentier et al. (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2006), 35.
[5]Chris Paterson, Audrey Gadzekpo and Herman Wasserman, "Journalism and Foreign Aid in Africa," African Journalism Studies 39, no. 2 (August 2019): 1-8.
[6]Sarah Oates, "The Neo-Soviet Model of the Media," in *Globalisation, Freedom and the Media after Communism: The Past as Future*, eds. Birgit Beumers, Stephen Hutchings and Natalia Rulyova (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2012), 37-55; See also Orion A. Lewis, "Authoritarian Evolution: Agency and Institutional Change in the Controlled Chinese Press," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 25 (June 2020): 311-338.

mutating and transformative nature of the maritime domain including its transnational dimensions, encompass cooperative and collaborative mechanisms between states and state agencies across borders, as well as within a network of public and private transnational professionals, communities and criminal networks. But this latter category of non-state actors is often downplayed in the literature. This paper, therefore, attempts to relate the on-going scholarly conversations about the role of the media in society to transnational and/or IR themes such as the maritime security domain; specifically, the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) maritime domain.

Data for this paper is constituted by a combination of desk research and field interviews in Sierra Leone and Senegal in 2022.[7] Accordingly, in the sections that follow, the paper discusses the role of the media in society broadly. Next, it examines media practice in detail including its varied conceptions and technological transformations. Then, it presents an overview of maritime security and its diverse elements and actors in relation to media reportage. This is followed by a discussion of the nature of the African State and factors underlying media practice in Africa. Finally, the findings of field interviews in Sierra Leone and Senegal, are enumerated, followed by a conclusion to the paper.

Caption: *A cross-section of journalists in a KAIPTC Maritime reporting course.*

Credit: *KAIPTC*

The Media's Role in Society

The media's main contribution to any society, relates to its ability to influence, educate and entertain. It does so through its agenda-setting prowess.[8] This prowess is aligned to the frequency with which particular issues gain and retain prominence in media publications over time. Its extended model is the intermedia network agenda-setting model, which looks at how a certain media outlet influences agenda-setting of other media outlets. It is often in the realm of agenda-setting and intermedia network agenda-setting that the perceptions of 'fake news' are defined to include news items designed and presented with all the journalistic aegis but without any factual basis. which increasingly dominate the issues of prominence in media reportage and threaten the traditional role of the media in informing, educating and entertaining the public.[9] At the same time, the power of social media and the use of the internet in bridging what Ali[10] describes as the power of social media in developing nations, posits the media, including its digital variants, as a vehicle for transformation at all levels; bearing in mind that the kind of experiences that consumers develop from utilising the output of particular media outlets regularly, informs the levels of engagement that occur at the aggregate level between the specific outlets and their consumers. =.[11] Besides, engagement with particular types of media, especially, online media, can be very fluid and transient.[12]

It, thus, stands to reason that as the collection of institutional actors in the maritime security domain widens from purely command-based security institutions, such as the military, to the speculative and market-driven free enterprises, the implications for protocols for news gathering and journalistic information dissemination to diverse readership, listenership and viewership populations, constitute a novel and insightful endeavour to which this paper is focused. Barely enough scholarly attention is given to the role the media plays in disseminating maritime-related information to people; particularly, in the GoG. Yet, civilians must be informed of occurrences in their countries' territorial seas and the implications for their lived experiences. So, how can the media proactively socialise civilians as primary stakeholders in the maritime security conversation? Using Beuger's[13] concept of maritime security practice theory and the

[8]Chris J. Vargo, Lei Guo and Michelle A. Amazeen, "The Agenda-Setting Power of Fake News: A Big Data Analysis of the Online Media Landscape from 2014 to 2016," New Media & Society 20, no. 5 (2018): 2028-2049.
[9]See Vargo, Guo and Amazeen, "The Agenda-Setting Power."
[10]Amir Hatem Ali, "The Power of Social Media in Developing Nations: New Tools for Closing the Global Digital Divide and Beyond," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 24, (2011):185.
[11]Rachel Davis Mersey, Edward C. Malthouse and Bobby J. Calder, "Engagement with Online Media," *Journal of Media Business Studies* 7, no. 2 (2010): 39-56.
[12]Mersey, Malthouse and Calder, "Engagement."
[13]Christian Bueger, "What is Maritime Security?," *Marine Policy* 53, (March 2015): 159–164.
[14]s Eyitayo Francis Adanlawo and Hemduth Rugbeer, "Media and Democracy: Is Conventional Media Performing the Role of the Fourth Estate of the Realm?," *Journal of African Films & Diaspora Studies* 4, no. 2 (August 2021): 23.; Nerone, *Last Rights*.; Nordenstreng, "'Four Theories,'" 35.

four classical theories of the press,[14] this paper seeks to highlight the diverse roles and practices within the maritime domain, on the one hand, and explore the extent to which the media disseminates maritime issues to populations along the GoG, on the other. To achieve this, the paper explores the nexus between maritime security and media reportage towards promoting a just maritime journalism regime in Africa, including in the littoral states along the shores of the GoG.

The Media

The classical conception of the role of the media in society, is rooted in the system of social controls that underpin the relations between individuals and social institutions.[15] Indeed, one of the initial theoretical conceptions of the role of the media in society, emerged as a professionalised media agenda from the work of the Hutchins Commission of 1947 in the United States, which is referred to as 'the social responsibility theory of the press.'[16] This is an ethical theory that invites journalists to explore how the interest of the whole of society is placed above theirs. It posits that the press has the right to criticise a government and its institutions but, at the same time, has a responsibility to promote the stability of society. By 1956, one of the members of the Hutchins Commission,[17] Fredrick S. Siebert, joined two other colleagues to produce the book, *Four Theories of the Press* in which they propounded four conceptions of the media under different political and philosophical regimes; namely—authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and soviet communist theories of the press. These four theories are also known as the 'classical theories or conceptions of the media.'[18]

In the classical four conceptions of the media, the libertarian theory of the press advocates a laissez-faire, market-driven approach to the media.[19] This theory puts forward that the media in liberal democracies evolves as the 'fourth estate of the realm,'[20] after the executive, legislative and judicial arms of Government, under conditions of separation of powers in which the media is tasked with informing, educating and influencing citizens as an independent actor. As liberalism recognises a separation between the individual and society or

the State in the context of freedom of expression,[21] the libertarian conception of the media argues that media organisations have legal personalities and for that reason, individuals with enough resources to set up media organisations, must be allowed to self-regulate the operations of their organisations. Consequently, the State does not intervene in media practice under libertarian regimes. Interventions in the media are rather deferred to the exigencies of the free market. In this vein, the media is expected to function as the defender, watchdog and provider of accurate information through its agenda-setting and inter-media network agenda-setting capabilities.[22] To be sure, when Nordenstreng[23] studied the role of the media under various variants of democracy, he linked the underpinning political, philosophical and normative traditions to prevailing political models of democracy, in order to underscore his assessment of this role, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: The Roles of the Media in Different Philosophical and Political Frameworks

Philosophical (Normative Traditions)	Political (Models of Democracy)	Media
Corporatist	Pluralist	Monitorial
Libertarian	Administrative	Facilitative
Social responsibility	Deliberative	Collaborative
Citizen participation	Direct	Direct

Source: *Nordenstreng, Four Theories.*

From this mapping, Nordenstreng observes that the interplay of the normative media traditions, relative to the democratic environment and the type of media practice that prevail, is never linear.

Accordingly, based on the diverse communication environments, the role of the media in society may span from "monitorial," "facilitative," "collaborative" and/or radical.[24]

Under the social responsibility theory of the press, governmental intervention in the affairs of the media is permissible; especially, when privatised

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[15]Nordenstreng, "'Four Theories,'" 35; see also Nerone, Last Rights.

[16]Chikezie Emmanuel Uzuegbunam, "The Social Responsibility Theory: A Contemporary Review," (Postgraduate Seminar Paper, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2013), https://www.academia.edu/11187397/The_social_responsibility_theory_A_contemporary_review

[17]Indeed, all three authors of the *Four Theories of the Press*, were either part of the Hutchins Commission or worked with the Commission. They are Fredrick S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm.

[18]As cited by Nordenstreng, "'Four Theories.'"

[19]Rebecca Coates Nee, "Social Responsibility Theory and the Digital Nonprofits: Should the Government Aid Online News Startups?," *Journalism* 15, no. 3 (2014): 326-343.

[20]See Adanlawo and Rugbeer, "Media and Democracy," 23.

[21]See Nerone, *Last Rights*, 21.

[22]Vargo, Guo and Amazeen, "The Agenda-Setting Power."

[23]Nordenstreng, "'Four Theories,'" 38.

[24]Nordenstreng, "'Four Theories,'" 35.

media fails to provide the public service functions relative to information flow in a democracy.[25] What is more, within the social responsibility theory of the press, is a pendulum of state intervention in media practice ranging from a minimalist approach to full-scale state intervention.[26] To wit, media practitioners could voluntarily self-regulate media practice through subscription to self-generated ethical standards. The evolution of professionalism in the form of journalism education and capacity development, and the conformance to standards and ethics in the framework of media professional associations, are forms of self-regulation. Still, the State may intervene in media practice in a number of forms. For instance, as a regulator and/or by setting up and operating media houses, including public broadcasting houses.

Besides, authoritarianism is a political system characterised by the rejection of democracy and political plurality. It involves the use of strong central power to preserve the political status quo, and reductions in the rule of law, separation of powers and democratic voting. Authoritarian societies are often structured as top-down in nature and decisions at the top tend to permeate down the social structure or layers.[27] The locus of change in authoritarian societies, tends to reflect in intra-elite bargaining at various socially layered levels and relying, among others, on the control of the flow of ideas through the control of the media. Indeed, when Lewis studied authoritarian theory of the press through the lens of the Chinese media, he identified five models of media practice with an emphasis on levels or degrees of variance and independence in relation to the position of the Communist Party on particular issues. In this regard, the models identified, range from one extreme with conservative media outlets to the other extreme of conversion towards media independence, as follows: the Party's mouthpiece or propaganda media outlets, which entirely reproduced party positions on issues; party minimalism; risk-averse sensationalism i.e. minimalist and risk-averse media mainly avoid political issues in variations; shielded professionalism; and transgressive professionalism— the last two types of media outlets introduce levels of analysis in their political reportage.[28] Thus, under the authoritarian theory of the media, elites adopt their own theory of institutional change through their hold on the media— within the context of informing institutional change through such processes as the emergence of the legislature and rigged elections.[29]

Moreover, under the Soviet communist conception of the press, Oakes[30] explains that journalism training rarely exists, the President can issue media edicts— Presidential edicts also affect other sectors in the Russian society—that contradict laws emerging from their Parliament. Furthermore, the State almost entirely owns the most impactful segment of the media, i.e. broadcast media. Further, self-censorship occurs in the face of threats and actual execution or closure of media houses and assassination of journalists. For this reason, media practice in Russia hardly resists official policy preferences. In this regard, Oates contends that the media laws in the country, rather provides a route for politicians to threaten the media with closure for adverse coverage; notwithstanding, occasional legal victories for the media when confronted with such threats.[31] Therefore, the Russian media is assessed along the lines of bias, censorship, government influence, commercial influence, journalistic professionalism, flaws in mass media law, funding problems for the mass media, media harassment, and violation of electoral rights through distortion of media norms in the areas of bribery, hidden advertising, self-censorship, crime and violence, among others.[32]

Caption: *A facilitator addresses participants at a KAIPTC Maritime Reporting course in Takoradi.*

Credit: *KAIPTC*

[25]"Ongoing Suppression of Journalists' and Protesters' Rights; Criminal Libel Law Repealed," Civicus Monitor, October 1, 2020, https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/10/01/ongoing-suppression-journalists-protesters-criminal-libel-law-repealed/
Coates Nee, "Social Responsibility Theory."
[26]See Coates Nee, "Social Responsibility Theory."
[27]Lewis, "Authoritarian Evolution," 311-338.
[28]Lewis, "Authoritarian Evolution," 324.
[29]Lewis, "Authoritarian Evolution."
[30]Oates, "The Neo-Soviet Model, 37-55."
[31]Oates, "The Neo-Soviet Model, 37-55."
[32]Oates, "The Neo-Soviet Model."
[33]Oates, "The Neo-Soviet Model."

The Nature of Sovereignty and Statehood in Africa in the Context of the Media

The foregoing suggests that to understand the media in any society, one must first understand the culture and politics of the particular society.[33] Hence, emerging theories or models for understanding the media, tend to be state-specific in their scope of analysis, and usually explore models aligned to the inherent political structures and institutions in the society. It is from this perspective that the extent of sector-wide media coverage such as reportage of maritime security issues in GoG littoral states, may be understood. The African media model must, as a result, be based on the nature of the State and the culture in the various states on the continent; especially, its illiberal and structural constitution.[34]

However, because the classical conceptions of the media were developed during the era of the Cold War and, consequently, reflect the geopolitical environment of the time, these conceptions stand challenged on the basis of the inherent political and cultural biases rooted in this era. Its inability to respond to the changing international environment such as the new world order of bi-polarity and multi-polarity,[35] drives home its limitations in explaining a transforming media landscape at all levels. So, emerging IR literature on Africa explores the region's fields of agency to include international organisations such as the AU, the State, state leaders and their representatives, and non-state actors.[36]

Some of the works on the nature of sovereignty in Africa, for example, examines contradictions in the application of liberal institutional theory in Africa.[37] According to this perspective, the coloniser introduced sovereignty in Africa as a proprietary mechanism enforced through treaties and domination, in opposition to the kind of sovereignty espoused by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which assured societal access to rights and social justice and recognised the external independence and sovereign equality upon which states interact in the framework of interdependence.[38] Variations of the same argument, point out the contradictions in the application of international morality in liberal institutionalist theory.[39] Another perspective to sovereignty in Africa proceeds from the perspective of regime theory and claims that an African Government—the regime—usually get squeezed by a necessity to perpetuate itself in power by drawing on financial loans from external state partners and international financial institutions, in order to appease domestic actors that threaten its perpetuation; for instance, the military and public sectors capable of either overthrowing the regime or responding to otherwise harsh economic conditions to mount violent demonstrations against the State.[40]

The impact of the nature of sovereignty in Africa on the nature of statehood on the continent, often find expression in notions of juridical statehood; implying a kind of State that is unable to sustain itself but rather rely on internationally negotiated sovereign norms to sustain itself. These states are typically described in the literature variously as 'quasi,' 'fragile,' 'weak,' and so on. Additionally, the imperative of a bottom-up analysis of statehood in Africa, reveals that aggressive transnational non-state actors have carved spaces for themselves and established some quasi-authority that challenge the State.[41] These perspectives also include indigenous pacific conflict resolution mechanisms that are sometimes truncated or subsumed under a complicated global agenda such as the application of the global 'war on terror' in Mali against the peaceful options preferred by ECOWAS.[42] Last but not least, a feminist approach to statehood in Africa recommends a disaggregation and deconstruction of the combined impact of Africa's colonial and post-colonial experiences in the context of racism, ethnicity, colonialism, and patriarchy, among others; pointing in directions of emancipation and empowerment.[43]

[34]Paterson, Gadzekpo and Wasserman, "Journalism and Foreign Aid," 1-8.

[35]Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," World Politics 61, no. 1 (January 2009): 86-120.; see also Nordenstreng, "'Four Theories.'"

[36]William Brown, "A Question of Agency: Africa in International Politics," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 10 (2012): 1889-1908.

[37]Amy Niang, "Rehistoricizing the Sovereignty Principle: Stature, Decline, and Anxieties About a Foundational Norm," in *Recentering Africa in International Relations: Beyond Lack, Peripherality, and Failure,* eds. Marta Iñiguez de Heredia and Zubairu Wai (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 121-144.; see also Amy Niang, "The Imperative of African Perspectives on International Relations (IR)," Politics 35, no. 4 (2016): 453-466.

[38]Niang, "Rehistoricizing the Sovereignty Principle.;" See also Tandeka C. Nkiwane, "Africa and International Relations: Regional Lessons for a Global Discourse," *International Political Science Review* 22, no. 3 (2001): 279-290.

[39]Siba N. Grovogui, "Sovereignty in Africa: Quasi-Statehood and Other Myths in International Theory," in *Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory* eds. Kevin C. Dunn and Timothy M. Shaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 29-45.

[40]John F. Clark, "Realism, Neo-Realism and Africa's International Relations in the Post-Cold War Era," in *Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory* eds. Kevin C. Dunn and Timothy M. Shaw (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 85-102.

[41]Edoardo Baldaro, "*Rashomon* in the Sahel: Conflict Dynamics of Security Regionalism," *Security Dialogue* 52, no. 3 (June 2021): 266-283.

[42]Kwesi Aning and Nancy Annan, "Africanizing the International and Internationalizing Africa: Security, War on Terror and Mali," in *Africa in Global International Relations: Emerging Approaches to Theory and Practice*, eds. Paul-Henri Bischoff, Kwesi Aning and Amitav Acharya (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2016), 144-163.

[43]Heidi Hudson. "Subversion of an Ordinary Kind: Gender, Security and Everyday Theory in Africa," in *Africa in Global International Relations: Emerging Approaches to Theory and Practice,* eds. Paul-Henri Bischoff, Kwesi Aning and Amitav Acharya (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2016), 43-63..

Therefore, the essence of the nature of sovereignty and statehood in Africa translates into states of duality, hybridity and multiple institutional structures, and traditional social collectives.[44] These structures tend to unfold and interplay under conditions of diverse protocols, conventions and norms that are rarely formally written, but must be identified and observed. Furthermore, the nature of African sovereignty and statehood also reflects in the evolution of high levels of informality that plays out within and across sovereign jurisdictions and reinforces notions of developmentalist regionalism in furtherance of economic integration[45] and in security regionalisms in which transnational non-state armed groups defy and co-exist with state authority within sovereignties.[46] In the same vein, the diverse structures, protocols and conventions inherent in statehood in Africa, challenge the Weberian State and the notions about its efficacy or lack of it; requiring new interpretational approaches. Thus, the ability of the media in Africa to appreciate these nuanced and structural constitution of the African State is imperative. As will be discussed in the next section, the implications of the nature of sovereignty and statehood in Africa on media practice is, as a result, profound.

How does the Media Operate in an African State and with Specific Reference to Maritime Security Reportage?

One would expect that journalism practice in Africa could reinforce the underlying structural, illiberal and layered democracies prevailing, as an alternative to the Weberian notions of statehood. However, journalism practice on the continent rather unfolds under conditions of increasing dependency on foreign aid, which is engineered to pressure African democracies towards free speech and capitalism.[47] To be sure, African media dependency on foreign aid is shown by the example of the analysis of the Ghanaian media coverage of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which not only demonstrates a high level of dependence by Ghanaian journalists on international news in developing their own understandings of what was at stake, but also, by local media houses, which directly published international news on the pandemic.[48] This 'dependency' approach to media reportage has implications for the quality and depth of news analysis and also context; particularly, in a technical and transnational sector such as the maritime domain in which local and international interests are at stake.

Thus, there is a clear sense of institutional and layered African society in which the State is but the main actor. Therefore, maritime security governance in Africa, occurs in an environment constituted, for instance, by traditional authorities who in certain cases, exercise original allodial titles to land and spearhead the application of custom, traditions and conventions. There are also, traders' associations, religious and community groups, which play multiple social roles with defined protocols and become targets for political mobilisation. What is more, there are the bureaucratic, security sector and private sector actors that constitute the workforce and entrepreneurs in multiple areas, including the maritime domain. Embedded in the workforce are professionalised associations aligned to various sectors of each economy. Indeed, the presence of professionalised and commercial private sectors does not only co-exist with purely traditional and informal constituencies, but also with trade and communal associations. These associations do not necessarily wield financial wherewithal but serve as useful social and political capital. Besides, non-state intra and transnational armed actors exist to defy and co-exist with state authority. Media organisations and journalists operating in such environments, must be aware of these dynamics in order to undertake their operations and activities.

Bueger's maritime security practice theory is the third framework—among semiotics and securitisation—which guides the understanding of the content of security, the duties of diverse actors and the inherent cooperative mechanisms within maritime security. Under this approach, the duties or functions within maritime security and their associated actors are categorised into four groups; namely—

1. Actors involved in maritime domain awareness (MDA), including surveillance through radar, satellites or tracking data and the sharing and fusing of such information through database and service centres;
2. Maritime security operations relating to activities at sea, such as patrolling, interdictions, searches, inspections, and exercises;
3. Maritime legal framework comprising laws and law enforcement activities, such as arrests, the transfer of suspects, prosecutions, and imprisonment; and
4. Coordination, cooperation and professionalisation activities at different levels.

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[44]Paterson, Gadzekpo and Wasserman, "Journalism and Foreign Aid."

[45]S. K. B. Asante, *Regionalism and Africa's Development: Expectations, Reality and Challenges*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 45-61.

[46]Baldaro, *"Rashomon* in the Sahel."

[47]Paterson, Gadzekpo and Wasserman, "Journalism and Foreign Aid."

[48]Audrey Gadzekpo et al., "Media Coverage of COVID-19 Vaccines: Sources of Information, and Verification Practices of Journalists in Ghana," *Journal of Communication in Healthcare* 17, no. 1 (2024): 15-29.

This might involve meetings, conferences, the harmonisation of legal standards, procedures and mandates or the development of strategies and implementation plans.

Nevertheless, while these categorisations appear comprehensive in describing every existing and conceivable actor and function within the maritime security domain, they mask the plethora of legal and policy decisions, conventions and standards that give rise to the multiple structures, professions, standards, platforms, and installations that combine to sustain the systemic functioning of what is referred to as 'the maritime domain.' Moreover, one of its main drawbacks is the exclusion of the media in the context of maritime information flow to citizens; especially those of GoG littoral states. Undeniably, one of the most interesting dimension to the security practice theory approach to maritime security functional analysis, relates to the visible demarcation of maritime security roles in documents and on oceanographic maps. Yet, in practice, such demarcations are often blurred; requiring extra networks of technical knowledge as primary sources , investment and access to briefings, and participation in sea patrols to facilitate journalists' appreciation of the expanse of the maritime domain. Criminal networks blatantly ignore such categorisations and are rather determined to explore limitations to national boundaries in order to loot and/ or over-exploit maritime facilities and resources at alarming and unsustainable limits.

Furthermore, considering the limitations to the authority of the State and the multidimensional and transnational nature of threats to security and safety in the maritime domain, states need to go beyond strategies bounded within their respective territorial waters, and adopt cooperative and collaborative measures.[49] In this regard, Bueger further adopts the concept of maritime security communities which Deutsch et al. describe as a form of political cooperation in the absence of war and a growing sense of mutual trust and political identity.[50] The security community concept promotes a sense of cooperation and collaboration among actors at all levels, including cooperation across national boundaries. Thus, the paper uses the concept of maritime security community to map out institutional actors at the inter-regional, regional and national

levels, as demonstrated in subsequent sections.

Maritime Security Operations

Maritime threats in the GoG have significantly evolved over the years. Previously, piracy and armed robbery at sea were the major threats in the region's maritime domain. However, in recent years, the region has witnessed an increase in other maritime threats, including environmental pollution, fisheries, illegal oil bunkering, trafficking, and piracy, among many other maritime crimes. Evidently, in West African waters, their occurrence has increased markedly since 2010. According to the third quarter report of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the region remains a high-risk area for piracy and armed robbery at sea.[51] Nonetheless, in recent years, the number of maritime incidents has been on the decline. This notwithstanding, the region continues to be of grave concern; particularly, with an increase in the scale and frequency of kidnappings at sea.[52] The environment has been severely affected by the exploration and drilling for oil, by mainly oil spills into the sea, accidental discharges at sea, ongoing distillation processes, and the disposal of toxic waste. Likewise, West Africa is one of the main spots for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the world, with almost 40 per cent of the fish caught illegally.[53] This illegal activity at sea costs West African governments an estimated USD 1.5 billion annually.[54] In effect, the fishing industry in the GoG is contributing to the economic woes of the region and is facing a severe threat of extinction due to rampant over-fishing and IUU fishing activities. Regulations in the region prohibit industrial fishing vessels from operating in the Inshore Exclusive Zone, which spans from the coastline to six nautical miles (nm) seaward or below 30 metres in depth. This area is reserved for artisanal fishing canoes.

To address the insecurity in the GoG maritime domain, there have been a number of initiatives by Member States to implement a regional strategy to ensure safety and security. Prominent among such initiatives is the Yaoundé Code of Conduct concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa (YCC), which was adopted on 25 June 2013 as an inter-regional initiative of ECOWAS, ECCAS, and

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[49]John Mark Pokoo, "Operationalizing Normative Frameworks in the Gulf of Guinea: The Case of Liberia," Policy Paper, (Accra: KAIPTC, 2022),https://kaiptc-danishmaritimesecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Operationalizing-Normative-Norms-in-the-GoG_ the-case-of-Liberia.pdf

[50]Karl Wolfgang Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North American Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[51]"Maritime Piracy Incidents Down in Q3, yet Gulf of Guinea Remains a Hot Spot," ICC Commercial Crime Services, October 14, 2019, https://www.icc-ccs.org/index.php/1282-maritime-piracy-incidents-down-in-q3-yet-gulf-of-guinea-remains-a-hot-spot

[52]ICC Commercial Crime Services, "Maritime Piracy."

[53]Environmental Justice Foundation, *Pirate Fishing Exposed: The Fight against Illegal Fishing in West Africa and the EU*, (2012), https:// ejfoundation.org/resources/downloads/Pirate-Fishing-Exposed.pdf
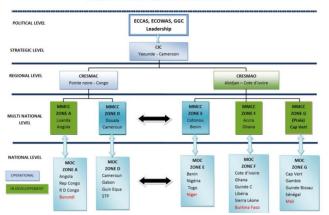
[54]Adjoa Anyimadu, "Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Lessons Learned from the Indian Ocean," (London: Chatham House, 2013), https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Africa/0713pp_maritimesecurity_0.pdf

the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) on the joint platform of the United Nations (UN) and the AU, and with technical support of the International Maritime Organization (IMO)——the maritime agency of UN. The YCC contextualizes and operates within the parameters of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which is the primary international legal framework that governs the rights and responsibilities of states vis-à-vis the world's oceans. Under the UNCLOS, states have sovereignty over their territorial and contiguous seas, which extends 12 nm (22.2 kilometres (km)) from their coastline. Beyond the contiguous sea, to which it limits of the full application of national laws, states have special rights to explore, exploit and manage the natural resources, both living and non-living, in the waters and on the seabed within their exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that extends up to 250 nm (370.4 km) from their coastlines.

Accordingly, the YCC contains a comprehensive strategy to collectively counter maritime threats in the GoG. Consequently, it is a framework for cooperation and coordination among GoG Member States, supplemented by the Declaration of the Heads of States and Government of Central and West Africa on the management of safety and security in the GoG Maritime Domain. The YCC, thus, provides the framework for state parties to commit to curbing maritime crimes committed anywhere within the transnational waters of the GoG region, collaboratively. In addition, the YCC and the aforementioned Declaration, constitute the basis for the establishment of the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, which is augmented by similar structures in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (for West Africa) and Pointe-Noire, Congo (for Central Africa) in the form an inter-regional maritime threat response architecture that connects state parties' commitments to a joined-up framework for responding to threats to safety and security in the GoG maritime domain. The evolving inter-regional architecture and associated governance inter-linkages is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Maritime Threat Response Architecture

Source: ICC, Yaoundé, Cameroun

Legal Frameworks in Maritime Security

Beyond UNCLOS, a number of legal frameworks have been put in place to enhance maritime security in the GoG. These frameworks include the implementation of regional and international maritime security initiatives and the strengthening of national maritime governance. The frameworks seek to promote the sustainable use of the region's marine resources, while protecting the rights of coastal communities and ensuring their access to the benefits of maritime activities.

The UN, as a global body, acknowledges that issues surrounding maritime security have a global connotation as they are transnational. Subsequently, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted two Resolutions (UNSCR); namely—UNSCR 2018 in 2011 on Peace and security in Africa and UNSCR 2039 in 2012 on Peace consolidation in West Africa. Additionally, there are the 1988 Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA Convention) and its 2005 Protocol on Safety of Navigation, and the 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and its follow-up 2002 International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS) Code. Similarly, at the regional level, the AU adopted the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy (2050 AIM Strategy) in 2012. This is a multidimensional approach, which not only focuses on piracy, but also on other maritime criminalities. In responding to the growing menace of maritime criminality, particularly piracy and armed robbery at sea at the sub-regional level, both ECCAS and ECOWAS have maritime security strategies within their respective geographical locations.

Coordination and Cooperation in Maritime Security Governance

The dynamic and complex nature of maritime threats and the limited capacities of states to individually address the aforementioned trans-national and trans-regional threats, call for coordination and cooperation among maritime-related agencies within national jurisdictions, and between public and private agencies including business concerns, communities and non-governmental organisations, and thematic state agencies and their counterparts in other states. The basis for this coordination and cooperation within and among states of the GoG, is rooted in a range of regional and international agreements and frameworks,[55] such as the Yaoundé Process, which is

made up of the Declaration of Heads of States and Government, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) defining the cooperation between the regional organisations and the YCC.

Maritime Domain Awareness

MDA refers to the use of a range of technological tools and systems to comprehensively understand activities or events related to the maritime domain—including activities in coastal areas and offshore—that may have an impact on safety, security, the Blue Economy or the environment, in order to serve as an early warning mechanism against maritime threats to, in turn, allow for the inception of timely and suitable operational responses.[56] In other words, it may be defined as a system that enhances or contributes to situational awareness and supports decision-making to ensure safety and security at sea. It involves the gathering, processing, analysing, and disseminating of information related to maritime activities, such as vessel traffic, cargo, fisheries, maritime borders, and security. Hence, MDA is a crucial tool for defending the marine interests of the GoG. MDA is pertinent to the GoG since the maritime domain is a complex and critical environment for trade and commerce on a global scale. Likewise, the maritime domain is an area that is vulnerable to various threats, such as piracy, terrorism, environmental pollution, illegal oil bunkering, smuggling, and IUU fishing. These criminal activities not only threaten safety and security of vessels and crews in the region, but also have serious economic consequences for states. For instance, between 2016 and 2018, coastal states along the GoG lost about USD 2.3 billion to maritime crimes.[57] Therefore, maintaining MDA is vital to the protection of maritime interests, to the prevention of illegal activities and to execution of prompt and efficient responses to incidents. In order to achieve effective and sustainable MDA, various tools, gadgets and devices are required. These include radar systems, surveillance cameras, automatic identification systems (AIS), satellite imagery—Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) system, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), and underwater sensors. These tools can provide real-time data on vessel traffic, weather, sea conditions, and other critical factors that affect maritime operations. Proper MDA also involves the development of efficacious information sharing and coordination mechanisms among maritime agencies, law enforcement agencies and other relevant agencies, including coastal communities and the media. Therefore, MDA is concerned with advancing freedom of navigation and maritime trade as well as protecting civil rights.[58] Additionally, MDA may comprise the integration of different data sources, such as maritime databases, intelligence reports and law enforcement databases. The use of MDA can help maritime authorities to identify potential risks, monitor vessel movements, detect anomalies, and respond to incidents efficiently. For instance, it can help identify suspicious vessel activity that may be linked to smuggling, piracy or terrorism. It can also support search and rescue operations, response to oil spills and other emergency situations within the maritime domain.

Enhancing Maritime Security Reportage in Gulf of Guinea States

Regarding reporting in this domain, this segment discusses the following five 5 areas towards enhancing maritime security reportage in West and Central Africa, in general, and GoG states, in particular:

2. Education and professionalism – Education for journalists is the cornerstone for improved understanding of the importance of adhering to certain ethical standards, of the need for further analytical work, and of the framework for greater capacity development in journalism. Media education should recognise social and political structures and professional associations and networks, and map the same to specific content and news gathering methodologies. More specifically, the maritime security domain is broad with a mix of security, oceanographic, commercial, and communal actors. It is an economy in itself and requires a deeper level of exposure that enables journalists to display comfort and nuance in their reportage. An option is for governments and notable business concerns to support the introduction of media training courses into their journalism schools. As field studies in Sierra Leone and Senegal revealed, these types of courses are non-existent in the two countries . Also, awards of relevant scholarships and prizes could help attract more budding journalists to specialize in maritime security reporting.

2. Regulation and strong institutions – One of the

[55]Kwaku Danso and Serwaa Allotey-Pappoe, "Mapping Maritime Actors under the Yaoundé Protocol: Establishing Mandates, Interrelationships, Gaps and Prospects," Policy Paper, (Accra: KAIPTC, 2022), https://kaiptc-danishmaritimesecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Mapping-Maritime-Actors-under-the-Yaounde-Protocol.-Establishing-Mandates-Interrelationships-Gaps-an-Prospects.pdf

[56]Irvin Fang Jau Lim, "Comprehensive Maritime Domain Awareness: An Idea whose Time Has Come," *RSIS Working Paper*, no. 141 (2007), (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University), https://hdl.handle.net/10356/79842

[57]"Nigeria, UNODC Rally Multi-National Efforts to Thwart Piracy in Gulf of Guinea: West Africa Loses $2.3 Billion to Maritime Crime in 3 Years," Nigeria Health Online, May 17, 2019, https://www.nigeriahealthonline.com/2019/05/17/nigeria-unodc-rally-multi-national-efforts-to-thwart-piracy-in-gulf-of-guinea.nho/

[58]Joseph L. Nimmich and Dana A. Goward, "Maritime Domain Awareness: The Key to Maritime Security," *International Law Studies* 83, (2007): 57-65.

challenges associated with media freedom in Africa is the paucity of media laws and regulations that seek the independent growth of the media. Most countries sweep media independence under freedom of expression and human rights laws. However, such laws fail to separate media independence from the reporting of issues deemed, rightly or wrongly, to border on national security. Indeed, the criminal code and sedition laws have been used to gag journalists in the past and in the present, where such legislation continue to exist. Nonetheless, as the Sierra Leonean experience shows, state authorities are increasingly resorting to the use of provisions in national security and cyber security laws to intimidate and frustrate the work journalists. The situation is not helped by the limited opportunities for capacity development among journalists on specific sectoral issues. In addition, there are occasional brushes with sub-state groups, including traditional authorities and criminal networks whose members operate within society. Hence, the approach could be to map and identify reporting techniques that enhance reportage in diverse audiences and sectors. The irony is that the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good governance[59] enjoins states to invest in both public and private media within their fold. Yet, media laws and regulations in the various Member States could benefit from further improvement. Moreover, there is no comparable regional declaration in Central Africa to warrant an inter-regional approach to media law development in West and Central Africa to the benefit all GoG states.

3. Levels of openness in the political space – The issue of openness of societies ought to be conceived beyond relations between political parties or between Government and opposition in African democracies. Unfolding events in Senegal, Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso, suggest that the sources of tension in African democracies have more to do with the potential for leadership entrenchment than with adversarial relations between political parties. Incidentally, the aforementioned states have also had governance systems that historically pander towards longevity in power either by strongmen as in Burkina Faso, Togo, Guinea, and Senegal or through a deeper role for the military as in Mali and Guinea in the past. These underlying leadership dynamics have been engineered to adapt to elections as tenure-based constitutional leadership approaches but no clear intentions to respect the term limits constitutionally imposed on leaders. Journalists need to understand these dynamics at leadership level and in political governance, understand social structures, including traditional level governance

and cultures, professional and other associations, especially, professions within maritime security, and the interactions and inter-linkages evolving between these groups. Such structures provide a framework for understanding the fabric of society and for the sources of news to reflect the lived experiences of society.

4.Trust and reliability – Usually, the extent to which the news impacts its consumers, defines the degree of engagement or reliability that these consumers ascribe to particular news channels. For this reason, news channels with a reputation for churning out fake news and which are subjected to persistent judicial suits for misrepresentation of facts in their reportage, are likely to lose out in market sustainability and reliability. Based on a combination of informed reportage, adherence to ethical standards, exposure to conflict-sensitive reporting, and improved media regulation and capacity development, the media is anticipated to be in a position to deliver reliable news that courts the trust of consumers.

5. Levels of challenge to sovereign authority – Based on a combination of leadership conduct, worsening living conditions and ambitions of criminal networks, violence is increasingly becoming a feature of the security politics in many states in West and Central Africa. From community level (in)security to harsh and violent attacks on communities and insurgencies targeting the toppling of states, the journalist in the African context needs to understand what is at stake at every moment, within social structures and in the area they are covering, including maritime security. So, all together, the aforementioned proposals constitute interventions that could potentially enhance media practice in West and Central Africa where GoG littoral states are located. The section that follows, presents a summary of findings from interviews conducted in Sierra Leone and Senegal.

Media in Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: The Case of Senegal and Sierra Leone

In multiple interviews in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone and Dakar, the capital of Senegal, it emerged that there is a dearth in the frequency and diversity of reportage on maritime issues. News headlines have been flooded with sensational issues, entertainment and politics at the expense of maritime security. Hence, news coverage in both countries misses the inherent benefits of a fully developed Blue Economy. The research discovered a number of factors accounting for the tunnel vision of journalists when it comes to maritime security in the GoG.

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[59]Protocol A/SP. 1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, 2001, (ECOWAS).

Lack of Knowledge of the Maritime Industry and its Importance to the Economies of Member States and Civil Society

Journalists in the GoG have demonstrated a lack of understanding of the maritime industry and its importance to the economic development of countries. This feeds into their limited capacity to adequately report on maritime issues in their waters. For journalists in Sierra Leone and Senegal, this is not uncommon. The persistent neglect of coverage of maritime issues, is attributed to the complex and dynamic nature of the maritime security industry and the cloak of secrecy, particularly, in the context of operations by state security agencies. This facilitates a blasé attitude among journalists towards maritime security. Expectedly, in both countries, no journalist who solely report on maritime security, was identified. Furthermore, journalists resort to the use of an episodic approach[60] when it comes to news on maritime security. To elaborate, there is no deliberate/intentional or specialized reportage on maritime security in Sierra Leone and Senegal. Journalists tend to report on ceremonial events convened by maritime agencies rather than go out of their way to initiate an investigation and/or analysis into specific maritime issues. As such, maritime issues are underreported in both countries, especially, Sierra Leone.[61] In Sierra Leone, news headlines have not only been largely inconsistent with facts, but they have also been dominated by issues on illegal fishing by Chinese vessels, the fisheries industry and vessel licensing, arrests at sea, the cost of human lives at sea, and corruption in the maritime industry. Interestingly, such stories hardly entail any detailed analysis about the legal and policy underpinnings of the impact of these activities. What is more, in Sierra Leone, riverine and marine incidents are treated as human interest stories; focusing on incidents of human casualties and capsized canoes. However, there is no attempt to examine the appropriate international norms breached in the wake of such incidents to inspire authorities to be conscious about gaps in the system and how these could be tackled. Yet, it is important for journalists to be knowledgeable about the maritime industry, as they play a critical role in informing the public about crucial issues and events. Their lack of understanding has also resulted in issues of maritime security being reported by foreign journalists whose interests, normally, differ from that of the locals. This is especially concerning given the significance of the maritime industry to the region's economy and its role in providing employment opportunities and sustaining food security. Without a better appreciation of the maritime industry and enhanced capacity on reporting of maritime security, journalists in the GoG are unable to adequately report on the industry and its relevance to the region. This lapse in reporting does not only result in the misinformation passed on to the respective societies, but also, in the creation of a void in checks and balances; particularly, in the operations of governments, maritime policies and state maritime stakeholders. It is important for journalists to do their research and seek out sources with expertise in the maritime industry, in order to accurately report on this industry.

Insecurity of Reporters

Covering maritime security news in the GoG is a daunting task due to the volatile nature of insecurity in the region. To elaborate, piracy, kidnapping at sea and other criminal activities as well as political interference pose significant threats to maritime operations. In Sierra Leone, for instance, the media landscape has been politicized; targeting critical voices. Consequently, media houses are owned by journalists, lawyers and known politicians. The politicization of the media is deeply rooted in the previous Public Order Act/Libel Law. The Act provided that a person who publishes defamatory material is guilty of libel and, on conviction, is punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment not exceeding two years.[62] However, it failed to stipulate what characterized 'defamatory material.' This omission made the Act vague and easily manipulated by implementing state agencies. Consequently, a number of journalists were arrested and abused based on cyber-related offenses.[63] Although, no journalist was arrested for publishing a maritime security-related article, the Act prevented investment in the media domain in Sierra Leone, as politicians in the past used the law to curtail freedom of expression. While the law was repealed in 2020 and an MoU was signed between the journalists' association and the military, the 2021 Cyber Security Law is seen as a replacement to the repealed Libel Law.

Poor Financial State of Reporters

Generally, journalists are not well paid due to the small and oversaturated nature of the media domain. Financial challenges coupled with safety issues faced by journalists, prevent them from taking on investigative stories in the maritime industries because taking necessary precautions to ensure their safety while covering these issues, will come at an extra cost. These precautions may include hiring security personnel, travelling with a trusted group of people and being aware of their surroundings at all times.

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[60]Interview with media personality, Freetown, 10 Nov., 2022.
[61]Interview with journalist, Freetown, 12 Nov. 2022.

The Media Landscape in the Gulf of Guinea is Predominantly a Monologue in Nature

There is no evidence to suggest that there is a proactive relationship between state maritime security agencies and journalists in the GoG. While there may be some level of communication between these two groups, it appears to be limited and reactive, rather than proactive; especially, when it comes to sensitive topics such as maritime security. On the part of the security agencies, each agency has a media unit responsible for public relations (PR). However, although both journalists and PR practitioners study under the broad subject of mass communications, while a PR officer is preoccupied with projecting a positive image of an organization its stakeholders, the journalist is expected to educate, inform and influence with accuracy and promote social stability. Thus, the two professions are not the same. For this reason, recruiting journalists to occupy PR positions does not equate to enhancing journalistic practice. In Sierra Leone, the Marine Police have a media unit responsible for marine and land affairs; nonetheless, they do not have a trained media person handling maritime issues. The Sierra Leone Office for National Security also has a Strategic Communications Department, which communicates with private media on maritime issues through press briefings. In contrast, the military/navy has restrictions when it comes to dealing with the media. The Ministry of Defence (MoD), in this regard, organizes press conferences when the need arises. The navy can invite the press to cover some maritime operations and incidents at sea but only with the approval from the MoD. In critical instances, the military/navy give information to their PR officers who, in turn, liaise with media outlets. All these bureaucratic bottlenecks prevent the timely flow of information to the press.

Additionally, the flow within most maritime agencies in Sierra Leone, takes a top-down approach. For this reason, journalists hardly access and or engage with senior officials in the maritime domain, apart from the officials in the PR units. This culture is also common in Senegal.

The Senegalese Navy and the Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime Economy/Direction for Protection and Monitoring of Fisheries in Senegal, does not communicate directly with journalists. Usually, there is a public relations unit in charge of sharing information with the public through the media, once the hierarchy of the government agency in charge has given approval.

This limits media reports to what is received from these agencies. Despite this state of affairs, initiatives are underway to ensure public education on maritime issues in Senegal using the media as the vehicle. Moreover, the Sierra Leone Port Authority (SLPA) has a sponsored capacity building training system for their PR Department. Nevertheless, they are yet to send their team out for this training.

Lack of Proactive Relationship

It was reported in both Sierra Leone and Senegal that the media is rarely involved in the day-to-day maritime operations of state security agencies. This has contributed to the reactive relationship between the two actors. Therefore, the media is primarily invited to attend events/briefings organized by state security agencies, rather than scheduled events. In such cases, the media only receives information or briefings from state security agencies when there is a specific incident at sea or a maritime related initiative has occurred and requires the attention of the civilian population, rather than being involved in ongoing collaboration and communication with these agencies. This kind of reactive relationship can have some drawbacks such as limiting the media's ability to provide independent context and analysis of maritime security issues. and restricting the ability of state security agencies to build trust and credibility with the public through ongoing communication and transparency.

Potential of the Media in the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Domain

Journalists in the GoG region, whose capacities have been built with respect to maritime security issues, can contribute in this area in the following ways:
1. They can improve public awareness by providing accurate and up-to-date information on maritime security in the GoG. The media can help raise public awareness of the maritime security issues, which can lead to increased public support for maritime security decisions, policies and programmes;
2. Additionally, as the fourth estate of the realm, the media increases accountability. This can be achieved through highlighting instances of maritime security breaches or failures. The media can assist with holding those responsible accountable for their actions, which can contribute to the prevention of future incidents;
3. The media's influence on public perception can also impact government priorities and policy decisions. If maritime security incidents are

[62]The Public Order Act, 1965, (Sierra Leone), http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/1965-46s.pdf
[63]"Ongoing Suppression of Journalists' and Protesters' Rights; Criminal Libel Law Repealed," Civicus Monitor, October 1, 2020, https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2020/10/01/ongoing-suppression-journalists-protesters-criminal-libel-law-repealed/

consistently featured in the media, policymakers may feel compelled to address these issues more prominently. Media coverage can lead to increased demand for policy changes, resource allocation and international cooperation to enhance maritime security measures in the GoG; and

4. Finally, the media can support the facilitation of collaboration between different stakeholders, including governments, international organizations and the private sector, by fostering open and transparent communication about maritime security issues.

Way Forward

In addition, in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges that exist in maritime reportage in the GoG,

1. It is important to commission evidence-based research on media contributions to maritime security, given that this study was restricted to Sierra Leone and Senegal with a limited budget. Aggregation of experiences of many other GoG littoral states could provide a more nuanced appreciation of the prevailing challenges faced by the media, in ways that identify further measures for enhancing maritime reportage in the GoG.

2. Similarly, it is crucial to organize maritime security capacity building training programme. This requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the various capacity needs and interests of media professionals in order to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge. This will not only aid these professionals to effectively cover maritime security topics in the GoG, but also give them a competitive edge internationally, and the opportunity to change the negative narrative about the region's maritime domain. Training could be on maritime law, safety and security, maritime security actors and their respective mandates and jurisdictions, and on the latest technology and techniques. It also involves creating a platform for media professionals and other maritime stakeholders to exchange ideas and best practices related to maritime security. Generally, providing capacity building for the media focusing on maritime security, ensures that media professionals are prepared to accurately and effectively cover its related issues, which, in turn could have a positive impact on the economy, through increased employment opportunities.

3. Research for this paper also discovered that incorporating maritime security education into journalism school curricula is a valuable step towards stimulating the interest of journalists. Maritime security education provides a comprehensive overview of the history, culture, and economy of the world's oceans and seas. This knowledge can be used to inform and improve journalistic practices. By introducing maritime education into journalism school curricula, students/journalists will gain a deeper understanding of the global maritime landscape, and be better prepared to report on this important topic. Furthermore, this knowledge can be applied to other areas of journalism, such as environmental reporting, the Blue Economy and other maritime related areas. Ultimately, the incorporation of maritime education into journalism school curricula is an important step towards ensuring that students are well-versed in the complexities of the world's oceans and seas.

4. In the same vein, the development of an inter-regional maritime security strategy involving the media is critical. The media within a regional maritime security strategy can be used to share information and best practices between media organizations in the GoG. This can help foster collaboration between the media and relevant maritime state agencies' media units, streamline dissemination of information from these agencies to the media, as well as ensure that the media is better equipped to report accurately on maritime security.

5. Furthermore, it is advisable for the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) to consider incorporating a maritime security academic course into its existing training programmes for the media. This specialized course would provide media professionals with in-depth knowledge of maritime security issues; enabling them to report with a wider comprehension of its intricacies.

Participants and facailiator make presentation at a capacity building course in Maritime reporting at the KAIPTC.

Credit: *KAIPTC*

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is imperative to acknowledge the indispensable role that the media play in the discourses on maritime security in the GoG. Despite the challenges of appreciating the complex nature of the maritime domain and the lack of trust and confidence in other maritime actors, it is worth noting that there are a number of opportunities for media practitioners to contribute to improved maritime security in West and Central Africa. This could be achieved through socialization of the civilian population, creation of awareness and the promotion of transparency and accountability. These potential inputs by the media, if harnessed effectively, can go a long way in bolstering the security of the region's waters.

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About the Project

The five-year project on "Integrated Responses to Threats to Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Domain in West and Central Africa (2022-2026)," is being implemented through three key approaches; namely—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 the policy, technical and operational levels. Overall, the project seeks to contribute to strengthened regional approaches to maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea through enhanced joined-up responses to shared threats.

About the Centre

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

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