

CHALLENGES TO MARITIME SECURITY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA

Reflections of Dr. Kamal-Deen Ali

In my most recent [publication](#), I argue that the Gulf of Guinea presents a convolution of opportunities and challenges to the international community. The reasons are apparent in number of paradoxes. While the exploitation of the Gulf's oil and gas resources can lead to immense socio-economic gains, the resultant gaping governance challenges may far outweigh the dividends. In another instance, we see an estimated US\$9 billion to US\$24 billion lost to IUU fishing globally, with the level of illegal fishing in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) being 40% higher than the global average. But the scenarios don't end here. Although the GoG's deep-water petroleum industry was described as the most active in the world in 2011 (with offshore activities remaining relatively high in the years that followed), illicit and illegal activities have affected the good order of the region, posing serious challenges to the security of States.

I find that one question arises from examining on-going international and regional responses to the declining maritime security environment of the GoG: will the measures being embarked on adequately address the maritime security needs of the region? To address this, I suggest that developing effective regional and global responses will depend on a sound knowledge of the operational environment, an awareness of relevant actors and a clear understanding of how the complex situation within the region evolved.

The Regional and International Landscape

It is clear now, more than ever, that global attention is focused on addressing the maritime security deficit in the GoG, exemplified by UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 2018 and 2039; and the UNSC Presidential Statement on Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea, issued April 2016. Even though there is some level of optimism about ongoing global and regional initiatives, we are hit with one hard truth: these initiatives and processes hardly address the state of insecurity in the region.

There are several instances to prove this. For example, Security Council Resolutions have endorsed a myriad of institutional frameworks of cooperation resulting in confusion and disharmony in the regional processes. In addition, although the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) and Maritime Organisation for West and Central Africa (MOWCA) are being profiled

as suitable avenues for maritime security cooperation, the two institutions face fundamental structural and geopolitical challenges that prevent them from playing a significant role in the region. Of course, they still wield strengths that can support the institutional frameworks of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which have proved to be more suitable platforms for cooperation.

What's more, the prevailing cooperative agenda is heavily centred on combating piracy, thus failing to prioritise other dimensions of insecurity – such as declining fisheries – that undermine the human security needs of the region, with long term implications for regional stability. Finally, critical requirements that will contribute to durable security outcomes including institutional accountability and governance concerns do not feature prominently in the maritime security dialogue.

I am driven to conclude that there are three categories of challenges that need to be addressed for maritime security cooperation to be effective in the GoG: structural, geopolitical and governance-related. At the heart of tackling these challenges lies the need for broader security and justice reforms in the GoG.

Intersections with Security Sector and Justice Reforms

While it may seem onerous to adopt security and justice reforms lenses in the maritime domain, I suggest five ways below through which this can be attained:

1. Adopting a broadened concept of security, given the strong connections between maritime security and other dimensions of security, including human security
2. Ensuring that actors, players and all relevant stakeholders share a common concept of security or are at least able to harmonise the pursuit of security outcomes, with external players approaching security cooperation transparently and inclusively.
3. Employing good governance as an element of security and an enabler of durable security outcomes
4. Creating an understanding of the crucial role of legal frameworks whose implementation will ensure effective assertion of jurisdiction and practicable rule of law at sea
5. Recognising maritime security as a source of greater international peace and stability

Of course, these guidelines are by no means adequate without cognition of the fact that one of the governance challenges of maritime security cooperation in the Gulf is the governance of security itself. An analysis of the concept of security demonstrates that its pursuit is more successfully advanced through the enhancement of society's welfare, so that it is imperative to seek a governance approach to maritime security cooperation which has society at its core. Such an approach requires changes in the security culture of certain States, as well as reforms to security sector institutions and the judicial system.

With governments of GoG States permitting the direct "sale" of security services by navies and other agencies through provision of guard/escort duties in exchange of money, the governance problems of the region are exacerbated and unbridled corruption in security services encouraged. To curb this, governments should work towards raising required revenue through legally established governmental channels (e.g. through taxes and royalties). These revenues could be channelled towards building and reforming the capability of security agencies.

Equally important to enhancing maritime security in the GoG is the need for an effective implementation of the UNCLOS framework and other legal instruments. While international legal frameworks have provided a normative regime for responding to security threats in the Gulf, there has been a general lack of implementation mechanisms by GoG States, limiting the capacity of States to exercise jurisdiction, enforcement and prosecution. Being a product of consensus, international frameworks themselves have limitations; however, they provide a suitable platform for stimulating bilateral, regional and global responses to maritime security, particularly within the context of complex regions like the GoG.

I am certain that for maritime security cooperation to be effectively attained within the GoG, these issues must be considered at the forefront. Only then can a clear path of maritime security be charted for the vulnerable States bordering the Gulf.