Balancing Geopolitical Economic and Geostrategic Interests in Maritime Security Initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea – Way forward: the 3 Cs

Edwin Egede[1]

1. Complexities in balancing maritime security initiatives

The Gulf of Guinea's geopolitical, economic and geo strategic interests regarding maritime security

initiatives is rather complex. Historically, by reason of Africa's colonial experience, the Gulf of

Guinea States are an intricate mix of coastal and landlocked Anglophone, Francophone and

Lusophone States, as well as one Spanish speaking State, which creates complexities as regard

divergence in languages, domestic institutions and legal frameworks.[2] The situation in the Gulf of

Guinea is further complicated by the number of institutions operating in the region, such as the

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central

African States (ECCAS), Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) and Maritime Organization for West

and Central Africa (MOWCA), as well as others in the domestic setting,[3] having competence over

maritime security matters. As if this is not complicated enough, there are also various international

players, such as the G7 Friends of the Gulf of Guinea Group (G7++FOGG),[4] the International

---

[2] Although, the Gulf of Guinea as a geographical area sometimes lacks precision, it generally is regarded to include a variety of Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone Countries, as well as the only Spanish speaking State, Equatorial Guinea, located both in West Africa and Central Africa, namely: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. [See the signatories of the Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa (Yaoundé Code of Conduct) 2013]. Also, see Kamal-Deen, A. *Maritime Security Cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea: Prospects and Challenges* (Brill, 2015), pp.13-25 and Okarfor-Yarwood, I., "Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and the Complexities of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Countries in the Gulf of Guinea", (2019)99 *Marine Policy*, pp.414-422 at 415.
[3] For instance, in Nigeria institutions and agencies that have some competence over maritime security issues include the Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Maritime and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigerian Shippers Council(NSC), Nigerian Ports Authority(NPA), Marine Police and ad hoc joint Task Force (JTF) of the Military, Navy and Air Force set up by the Nigerian government to deal with militancy in the Niger Delta area
[4] The G7++ Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea was created in 2013 during the British presidency of the G7. Its purpose is to support the maritime security architecture which was developed under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct 2013 in the Gulf of Guinea. In addition to the G7 countries (Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, France, United Kingdom, United States of America and United States of America), it includes Belgium, Brazil (observer), Denmark, Denmark, the

Maritime Organisation (IMO) and United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), working with the regional actors in the Gulf of Guinea to deal with the maritime security problems in the region, which no doubt has global impact on States and non-States actors, such as ship-owners, beyond the region. Additionally, the situation in the Gulf of Guinea is made more intricate by the multiplicity of maritime crimes occurring in the region.[5] Besides, there may be divergence in national strategic interests in maritime security (if perceived from a narrow purely nationalistic perception of such interests) in the region.[6] Some States, from such narrow nationalistic perspective, may prioritize in their maritime security agenda certain maritime crimes while ignoring others. For instance, some may focus only on the suppression of piracy and armed robbery at sea, for others it may be Illegal, Unreported and Unreported (IUU) Fishing, while for others it may be illicit drug and human trafficking at sea. Furthermore, there is the complexity with regard to the differing economic capabilities by the various States in the region, with some States being more resource rich than others, thus highlighting a divergence in terms of the economic wherewithal to implement maritime security initiatives.

2. <u>Beyond Sea Blindness: Progress in Gulf of Guinea Maritime Security Architecture</u>

Despite the complexities in the region mentioned above, the good news is that significant progress, has been made in the development of the Gulf of Guinea maritime security architecture, which must be recognized and applauded! Such developments have been at both the Continental front [such as

---

Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, the European Union, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and INTERPOL.

[5] See Article 5 of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct which states that transnational organised crime in the Gulf of Guinea 'includes, but is not limited to any of the following acts when committed at sea': piracy, armed robbery at sea, money laundering, illegal arms and drug trafficking, illegal oil bunkering, crude oil theft, human trafficking, human smuggling, maritime pollution, IUU Fishing, illegal dumping of toxic waste, maritime terrorism and hostage taking and vandalization of offshore oil infrastructure. Also see Jessica Larsen and Christine Larsen, "Reconciling International Priorities with local needs: Denmark as a New Security Actor in the Gulf of Guinea (DIIS Report, 2018) at p.6, http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/2614111/Report_08_Golf_of_Guinea_WEB.pdf , state that "[m]aritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea is a complex area of intervention with multiple types of maritime crime".

[6] The reason I have designated this as a rather narrow nationalistic approach to maritime security is because there is evidence that a number of the maritime crimes are inter-linked. See for instance, Denton, G, and Harris, J. "Impact of Illegal Fishing on Maritime Piracy: Evidence from West Africa" (2019) *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, pp.1-20(points to the linkage between IUU Fishing and Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea); and Eshelby, K., "Pirate Politics", (2007) 32(2) *Ecologist*, pp.26-31(points to the linkage between IUU Fishing and the transportation of illegal immigrants to Europe)

the development and adoption of 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) adopted in 2014; the African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and development in Africa (Lomé Charter) adopted in 2016, as well as and the involvement in organizing various Conferences in Africa engaging with maritime security, such as the 2018 Nairobi Blue Economy Conference] and specifically in the Gulf of Guinea [such as the adoption of the 2013 Yaoundé Code of Conduct, adoption of 2014 ECOWAS and GGC separate Integrated Maritime Strategies, creation of various regional centres for information sharing and coordination,[7] establishment of the Gulf of Guinea Inter-Regional Network (GoGIN), as well as involvement in organizing various Conferences, including of course the present one organized and hosted by Nigeria, the Global Maritime Security Conference (GMSC) 2019]. Accordingly, with these important landmark normative instruments, major global Conferences and the establishment of some institutional frameworks, it is safe to acknowledge that Africa generally and the Gulf of Guinea, specifically, have gone beyond the era of sea blindness.[8] With the growing awareness and engagement with maritime insecurity, especially as it relates to the notion of the Blue Economy, in Africa, generally, and specifically, the Gulf of Guinea region, there is a need to consolidate the gains made from these maritime initiatives.[9]

---

[7] Including Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the Regional Centre for Maritime Security of West Africa (CRESMAO) in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and the Regional Centre for Maritime Security of Central Africa (CRESMAC) in Pointe Noire, Congo.

[8] Kamal-Deen, *Maritime Security Cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea: Prospects and Challenges,* op.cit at p.246 citing Anyimadu, A. "Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Lessons Learned from the Indian Ocean", Chatham House, July 2013, pp.7-8 explains 'sea blindness' as '…the inability to appreciate the vast potential of maritime threats and resources for socio-economic development.' I am however rather concerned with a generalized use of the word sea blindness in the Gulf of Guinea, especially as regard local coastal communities. It is difficult to accept that local coastal communities, who have since time immemorial being and are still actively engaged with the sea and have always been aware of the maritime threats and potential of using maritime resources for socio-development, were 'sea blind.' I would prefer to narrow the notion of 'sea blindness' to the policy-makers in the various Gulf of Guinea Countries. See for instance, "Angola and the Gulf of Guinea: Towards an Integrated Maritime Strategy", Chatham House, November 2002, (Report of the Angola Forum conference aboard HMS Dauntless in Luanda, Angola, 29 June 2012), at p.12 which stressed the necessity of "reducing the 'sea blindness' of policy-makers." Furthermore, a 2015 report written on behalf of the Royal Danish Defence College warns that sea blindness should be distinguished from political unwillingness. It points out that '…whilst sea blindness refers to a prevalent lack of knowledge about issues related to the maritime domain, political unwillingness refers to political priorities that reflect a lack of will to prioritize resources for maritime security.' See Jacobsen, K.L and Nordby, J. R., *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea* (Royal Danish Defence College Publishing House, 2015) at p.47

[9] See Bueger, C. and Edmunds, T. "Beyond sea blindness: a new agenda for maritime security studies", (2017) 93(6) *International Affairs*, pp.1293 – 1311, where the authors exploring security studies generally concluded at p.1311: "we believe that it is time for security studies to move beyond sea blindness and recognize the maritime arena as a crucible for change and innovation in global politics as a whole."

3. Way Forward: the 3 Cs

It is only with effective consolidation of the gains made so far that there can be a more effectual balancing of geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic interests in the maritime security initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea. Such consolidation may be achieved, in my view, by enhancing the 3 Cs – **coordination**, **collaboration** and **communication**. Although, these are different concepts, they are interconnected, interdependent and complementary.[10] For instance, effective coordination is a key backdrop for boosting collaboration, while effective communication is crucial in improving on coordination, as well as promoting collaboration. I would touch on a few key points involving the 3 Cs as regard balancing geopolitical, economic and geostrategic interests in maritime security initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea.

A. Coordination

In a previous write-up, I had pointed out how critical effective coordination was to the implementation of the 2050 AIM Strategy and the African Blue Economy, as such is vital to achieving coherence, consistency, comprehensiveness, as well as harmonious policy outcomes.[11] The need for effective coordination is the same in the Gulf of Guinea maritime insecurity situation, especially with the multiplicity of actors and stakeholders involved, as well as the wide array of maritime crimes that plagues the region. An effective coordination would bring lucidness to maritime security governance in the Gulf of Guinea. Such effective coordination requires a high-profile and well-resourced lead body within the region to coordinate the well-intentioned efforts of the various actors and stakeholders so as to avoid wasteful duplication.[12] This lead coordinating body cannot be a body

---

[10] Markowitz, A., Green, L.T. and Laine, J., "The 3 C's: Communicate, Coordinate, Collaborate – Doing Together What We Can't Do Alone", (September 2003) 5(5) *Water Resources IMPACT Magazine*, pp.8-10 at p.8 explain the concepts as follows: "**Communication** is the process of conveying information: can be one way or an exchange of thoughts, messages or ideas. **Coordination** is a process in which two or more participants link, harmonize or synchronize interaction and activities. **Collaboration** is a process in which two or more participants work collectively to deal with issues that they cannot solve individually: partnerships, alliances, teams."

[11] Egede, E. "Maritime Security: Horn of Africa and Implementation of the 2050 AIM Strategy", (2018)30(2) *Horn of Africa Bulletin*, pp.7-10 at p.8 citing Linda Challis et al. Joint Approaches to Social Policy: Rationality and Practice. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988

[12] See Jacobsen and Nordby, *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea,* op.cit at pp.50-51

outside the region, such as the G-7++ Friends of Gulf of Guinea, as this was established to better co-ordinate the international partners efforts as regard maritime capacity-building in the Gulf of Guinea,[13] even though, in my view, they are doing a reasonably good job at this. Rather, it must be a 'home-grown' local body familiar with and equipped to grapple with the historical and peculiar regional challenges to effective integration with regard to maritime insecurity in the region.[14] In essence, what is needed is a Gulf of Guinea body, which is explicitly conferred with the mandate to act as lead in coordinating the burgeoning maritime security initiatives in the region. Potentially, the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé could play such lead regional coordinating role, but to be effective in so doing a lot more would need to be done to ensure that the ICC is well resourced, in terms of funding and appropriate qualified human resources, to carry out the undoubtedly demanding task of coordinating the various maritime security initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea.[15] Similarly, each of the various Gulf of Guinea States in their domestic setting would need to have a high-profile lead body with a clear mandate to coordinate the several ministries, institutions and agencies that deal with maritime security so there would be coherence in their national maritime security initiatives.[16] The Yaoundé Code of Conduct recognizes how critical this is and provides:

> "The Signatories intend to establish, as necessary, a national maritime security committee or other system for co-ordinating the related activities between departments, agencies, control authorities, and other organizations of the State, port operators, Companies and other entities concerned with, or responsible for the implementation of, compliance with,

---

[13] Ibid at p.50

[14] See Section A above discussing the complexities in balancing maritime security initiatives.

[15] The Yaoundé Code of Conduct 2013 appears to implicitly acknowledge the role of the ICC as the lead regional coordinating body in Article 17 where it tasks the ICC to invite the signatory States within 3 years of the effective date of the Code to consult to eventually transform the Code into a binding treaty; assess the implementation of the Code; share information and experiences and best practices; review activities which National Maritime Security Centres have carried out and recommend actions to be taken thereafter and to review all other issues concerning Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea. The Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of Central and West African States on Maritime Safety and Security in their Common Maritime Domain, one of the other documents adopted in 2013 after the Yaoundé Summit, requested the 'ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC to promote activities aimed at cooperation, coordination, pooling together and interoperability of resources between Member States by' amongst other things 'establishing between them an inter-Community framework for cooperation in maritime safety and security,' without specifically mentioning the ICC. See para.2.3(a) of the Declaration. On 5 June 2014 the ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC signed an Additional Protocol to establish the ICC, and this body was established on 11 September 2014 in Yaoundé, Cameroon to 'provide a means for establishing cooperation, coordination and communication between Member States of the three regional organizations at the strategic level, including exchange of information on a range of issues such as best practices and collaboration on capacity building, as well as contributing to countering piracy, armed robbery and other illicit activities at sea.' See IMO website, http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/WestAfrica/Pages/Code-of-Conduct-against-illicit-maritime-activity.aspx

[16] See for instance, footnote 3 on various bodies in Nigeria that could deal with maritime security.

and enforcement of, measures to enhance maritime security and search and rescue procedures."[17]

B. **Collaboration**

A vast amount of impressive collaborative work is already taken place in the Gulf of Guinea, including collaboration amongst the States in the region, such as joint exercises and patrols, as well as collaboration between regional actors and international partners, [18] which, as mentioned above, can only be enhanced by an effective coordination of such efforts. However, apart from the collaborative work between international partners and regional stakeholders; the various regional organizations i.e. ECOWAS, GGC and ECCAS,[19] as well as the various States in the region, there is a need to promote collaboration that would incorporate local coastal communities in the various Gulf of Guinea States. It is of course no secret that the maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea begins from the land territory of the coastal States in the region, perhaps more so in some than others.[20] The perpetrators of these maritime crimes would not be able to commit these crimes without the knowledge of the leaders and members of local coastal communities. It is therefore strategic to accelerate collaboration with local coastal communities, who are crucial stakeholders in maritime security initiatives. The need for such collaboration with local coastal communities has been highlighted on previous occasions, yet not enough is being done in this regard. For instance, a scholar, analyzing the standpoint of the 2014 Abuja Declaration on the necessity for a major role for local coastal communities in maritime security efforts,[21] identifies the importance of '… bridging the policy gap between the top-down(state-centric) versus bottom-up(citizens-focused) approaches that focuses on

---

[17] Article 4(2) of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct

[18] For instance, the Obangame Express and Grand African Nemo Maritime Exercises, both held in 2019.

[19] For instance, there is the Memorandum of Understanding between the ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC on Maritime Safety and Security in West and Central Africa.

[20] For instance, several piracy and armed robbery at sea incidents in the Gulf of Guinea are said to be mostly carried out by militants coming from the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.

[21] The Abuja Declaration: Towards a Comprehensive Maritime Security Regime in the Gulf of Guinea was the output of a two-day Conference organised in May 2014 by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in conjunction with the Nigerian National Defence College with the theme: African Approaches to Maritime Security: The West and Central African Perspectives', which brought together various experts from academia, civil society, the military and government. See Ukeje, C., "The Abuja Declaration and the challenge of implementing a maritime security strategy in the Gulf of Guinea and the South Atlantic", (2015) 11(2) *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, pp.230-235 at 220

human security issues' and the need to understand maritime security '…from the perspective of coastal communities who bear the direct and heavier brunt of deficits in maritime security and safety but who are also in a position to play a pivotal role in the quest for a lasting and sustainable solution to the menace.'[22]

For an effective bottom-up approach there would be a need for each coastal State in the Gulf of Guinea to establish some sort of high-profile **Government- Coastal Communities Dialogue platform,** which should be formalized (possibly incorporated into domestic legislation) that would meet regularly with the different local coastal communities so they can properly contribute towards any national strategy to deal with maritime insecurity, especially as regard those emanating from the land territory of that State.

C. **Communication**

The final C is effective Communication. Again, as I pointed elsewhere in relation to the AIM Strategy, information flow is crucial in implementing any maritime security initiative.[23] Such information flow would enhance coordination and collaboration amongst multiple actors and stakeholders. For there to be effective communication the information flow should not be merely top-down, but also a bottom-up too, as this would encourage wide-spread input and monitoring of the implementation process of maritime security initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea by both policy-makers and other stakeholders.[24] Different communication and advocacy tools, including the savvy use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, websites, which should be regularly updated and have periodic comprehensive reports on the state of play as regard maritime security initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea,[25] as well as the use of community television centers and oral story telling would be helpful

---

[22] Ukeje, Ibid at p.222
[23] Egede, "Maritime Security: Horn of Africa and Implementation of the 2050 AIM Strategy", op.cit, at p.9
[24] Ibid
[25] I am aware the ICC currently publishes a weekly report on maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea(though not as regularly as it should be – from what I see on the website, last time I visited, the weekly reports do not go beyond 2018), which is good. However, I think a more detailed annual report, which would highlight various maritime security initiatives at different levels and best practices, would be helpful.

in promoting such information flow. To achieve the requisite information flow a clear-cut Communication Strategy would have to be developed by the policy-makers in the Gulf of Guinea on how to effectively disseminate information on the various maritime security initiatives at regional, national and local levels, including good practices, benefits of the blue economy and the dangers of maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea to economic well-being of the region generally, as well as the nation and local communities.

4. Conclusion

Tremendous progress has been made in the Gulf of Guinea to deal with the obviously complex maritime insecurity situation in the region. However, to effectively balance geopolitical, economic and geostrategic interests in maritime security initiatives within the region would require more effectual coordination, collaboration (especially by also adopting an approach that would include local coastal communities in such collaboration efforts) and communication (the 3Cs).