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The Evolutionary Path of Maritime Security Initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea: The Role of External Actors

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade and a half, the Gulf of Guinea has become a vital space in the global maritime domain. This has been due to its abundant natural resources, continued discoveries of oil and natural gas, and its importance to international maritime trade. However, its waters have been threatened by various illicit activities that undermine the economies of its states and affect the global trade and energy security of the region's major energy importers. Under these circumstances, several initiatives have been implemented to combat maritime insecurity in the region, including from states, regional and international organizations. This study examines the involvement of the European Union and the United States of America in implementing strategies in the Gulf of Guinea through instruments of their national power. The paper argues that their impact has not resulted in a significant shift in the approach to maritime security in the region as that of the United Nations Security Council's Resolutions 2018 and 2039. The fact that the United Nation's outreach was mainly based on fighting maritime piracy through the adoption of the UNSC resolutions, has skewed the focus on maritime piracy, which set a precedent in the way maritime security is viewed in the region. The findings highlight that while some unilateral steps have been taken, most of the efforts of the key players subject of this study focus on promoting regional cooperation by strengthening the capacities of the Gulf of Guinea states. However, the study concludes that a more coordinated approach, with a broader scope, would be more beneficial in combating the wide range of maritime crimes in the region.

Keywords: EU; Gulf of Guinea; Maritime Security; Maritime Piracy; USA

Introduction

The maritime space is of great economical and geopolitical relevance to globalization since more than 90% of trade utilizes the sea routes and it's also a source of employment for millions of people. With an array of new ocean-related commercial activities and continual improvements in the ocean, our dependence on the stability at sea grows as the world's population rises (OECD, 2022). On that account, maintaining open sea lines of communication (SLOC) is essential for

humankind, enabling trade and transportation to advance human development (João, 2016). As evidenced by the fact that the great world powers of the last two centuries have also been great maritime powers, the seas have acted not only as a means of human advancement but also as a tool for geopolitical hegemony.

In the past two decades, the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) has been a focus of global economic interests for its natural resources and strategic position. The discovery and production of oil and gas increased its geostrategic interest by drawing in external investment (Inês, 2017). With six of the ten biggest oil-producing states in Africa located in this region (Charné, 2022), the GoG has emerged as a significant global energy supplier in the past ten years. For the West, in particular the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), it has served as a source of energy.

To lessen energy dependence and political or economic leverage from a single supplier, one of the US energy security policies is to diversify its oil supply sources. Due to its proximity to the US and the quality of its oil, which is light sweet crude oil suitable for use in gasoline, West African oil represents a better alternative in this regard (Benjamin, 2006, p. 2).

Recently, this reliance on imported West African oil has surged as a result of the Russian oil import ban due to the conflict in Ukraine, which saw the US proportion of imported West African light sweet crude rise to almost 20% in the second quarter of this year from about 8.2% prior to the war (Arathy & Noah, 2022).

Similarly, the security of the EU's energy supply and trade is heavily dependent on seaborne transportation that utilizes open SLOC and maritime security. The GoG region, in a period, has contributed 13% of the EU's oil import and 6% of the total energy consumption in the EU (João, 2016, p. 1). According to EU officials, 40% of Nigeria's Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is being exported to Europe. This amount is projected to increase as Nigeria has stepped up production amid calls from the EU to replace Russian gas (Georja, 2022). Additionally, alike efforts to increase LNG production have been made by other EU member states in West African nations including Angola and Senegal.

Furthermore, the GoG is also a significant trading partner for the EU since, while EU nations depend on Africa for raw materials, GoG nations depend on the EU for consumer products and services as the region's economic expansion gains momentum (Pa, 2022). A large part (90 %) of the EU's external trade passes through the sea, thus the stability of the GoG waters has a significant impact on the EU commercial fleets (Inês C. , 2021).

Undoubtedly, the GoG is rich with marine resources that are essential to its economic growth in addition to oil and natural gas. Given the abundance availability of marine resources, the GoG is appealing to distant-water fishing vessels that take advantage of underdeveloped economic and governance structures to get favourable fishing rights when marine fish stocks elsewhere decline (Agnes, 2022). Whilst China and the EU are the main beneficiaries; the overfishing of these resources is devastating to the roughly 7 million people that are directly employed in the fisheries sector in the region.

Other maritime crimes, such as maritime piracy and armed robbery at sea, crude oil theft, human trafficking, and drug trafficking, among others, disrupt the security of the maritime

sphere for all stakeholders in addition to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which also results in a cumulative economic loss of almost \$1,5 billion annually to the GoG states (Dirk, 2020). For instance, GoG pirates' prey on commercial cargoes particularly oil-laden tankers, undermining both the economy of regional states, and their trade relations with significant trading nations like the US, the United Kingdom, France, and China (Rebecca, 2020). Likewise, drugs smuggled via this route typically have the EU as their destination. The same is true with illegal immigration, as its impact can be felt on the borders of European coastal states.

Obviously, the situation in these waterways may appear localized to the GoG, but the ramifications are much more extensive, making this a global issue that necessitates a multidimensional collaborative approach. As a result, multiple actions have been taken by various stakeholders, including states, regional organizations, and the international community, to address maritime insecurity in the region.

This study aims to examine the reasoning of the international community's involvement in threat control in the maritime domain of the GoG, with a focus on two prominent external actors, the EU, and the US. The study similarly seeks to analyse how the various initiatives of those actors have evolved in light of their implemented strategies for the GoG.

To achieve this goal, the study uses a qualitative research strategy and primary sources - strategic documents of the international actors considered - in order to comprehend the reason for their involvement in the region. It also uses secondary sources - official websites and journal articles, among others - in order to obtain precise and current information about the different initiatives and their triggering mechanisms.

The Rationale for EU Maritime Security Initiatives in The GoG

This chapter seeks to analyse the logic behind the initiatives implemented by the EU in the Gulf of Guinea in terms of maritime security, considering that its presence has been intensifying over the last decade. It can be said that the reasons for this active EU posture in the region are multiple. The launch of the pilot project called Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) in 2020 was the latest initiative undertaken by the EU, which shows its clear commitment to the region, having been declared an area of common interest for Europe. This new project, which has, in fact, already been extended over time - given the good results it has achieved - also allows for a continued presence of the military power of the EU Member States in a geographic area of great geostrategic value (European Council, 2021).

In similar vein, the doctrine of the seas as a competing turf for global dominion informs EU's presence in the GoG region. EU's strategic autonomy concept of recent, constitutes the foundation for ongoing discussions towards EU's future in the world, particularly on issues of security and defence. So, apart from the fact that a stable GoG would guarantee safe SLOC that would allow among other things, safe European commercial and cargo fleet passage through the GoG, the region's overall strategic potential of being an important component of Africa's 2050 Integrated Maritime Security Strategy positions it to be a more valuable maritime space.

Thus, the established presence is aimed at protecting European interests in the GoG. This is well documented in European security strategies and policies in relation to maritime security (EU, 2018). Interests that would include but is not limited to energy security interests, maritime security interests, commercial interests, and food security interests of Europe's future. At the forefront of these security interests is energy security, considering the strategic importance of the GoG as a potential vital global energy player. To put it into context, as of 2021 five of the ten leading oil producing African countries are in the GoG. This among other reasons, has attracted the attention of foreign actors that have vested interest in energy supply and security. Equally, instability in the Middle East have to some extent compelled Europe and other foreign actors to diversify their sources of energy supplies. As result, demand in crude oil, Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and other hydrocarbons from the region continue to rise. It is therefore important to widely recognize the role that the GoG plays in global energy supply and in Europe's energy security.

Consequently, the EU has presented itself in the GoG as a relevant actor seeking to play a crucial role in addressing maritime insecurity in the region. The EU's involvement in that part of the Atlantic can be attributed to the fact that it wishes to position itself as a global maritime security actor (provider) in the GoG region. As a result, maritime security threats to Europe's interest emanating from the GoG, qualifies their involvement in the region (Council of the European Union, 2021). Similarly, these threats affect coastal states in the region, and they have direct impact on the overall stability of the GoG. These coupled with crimes occurring at sea constitute a major hinderance to freedom of navigation in the greater South Atlantic.

To better understand the rationale for the EU's engagement in the GoG on maritime security, it is important to start by noting that in 2014, the EU developed its strategy for the GoG to understand how it should consider intervening in that region, as the security of that region was critical to the stability of the wider Atlantic. Shortly afterwards, to support the implementation of the EU strategy for the GoG, the Gulf of Guinea Action Plan was launched in 2015.

This strategic document, apart from defining potential action the EU can take to help address maritime insecurity in the region, aimed at reviewing the overall scale of the threat and risks posed to coastal states in the region and to EU member states (EU, 2014). This initiative came after the summit of the GoG heads of state in Yaoundé in 2013, to formulate a common regional maritime security mechanism. As per the document, the strategy was premised on pursuing four primary objectives in the region:

- a. To build common understanding of the scale the threat in the Gulf of Guinea and the needs to address it among countries in the GoG with the international community.
- b. Help regional governments put in place the institutions and capabilities to ensure security and the rule of law.
- c. Support the development of prosperous economies in the coastal countries to enable them to provide basic services, employment opportunities for their citizens.
- d. Strengthen cooperation structures between the countries of the region to ensure effective action across borders at sea and on land (EU, 2014).

To operationalize the strategy, the EU rolled out several initiatives. Firstly, were efforts to improve data collection and information sharing for effective maritime security and governance in the Gulf of Guinea region. Analytical tools have been developed to better understand the economics related to transnational maritime criminal activities (EU, 2014). Regulation and management of key fishing and extractive industries in the GoG was further improved by engaging key stakeholders and supporting the development of safe and modern maritime infrastructure. And Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) and the African Union (AU) were supported in their efforts to internally coordinate maritime security in the region (EU, 2014).

From the above we attempted to interpret some of the underlying reasons for EU's involvement in the Gulf of Guinea. It seems evident the GoG's potential role in global energy supply and the region's position as a significant sea line of communication accounting for enormous shipping traffic. In one way or the other keeps attracting the interest of foreign actors like the EU. This is evident in the revised European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) Action Plan, June 2018, where EU iterated their renewed involvement in great strategic maritime areas of interest which include the GoG (Council of the European Union, 2018). It is also clear that maritime security in the region is not only of interest to the GoG states, but also to the EU, which explains the continued presence of military means in the region over the last decade, which has greatly contributed to the EU's emergence as a major global maritime safety provider.

The Rationale for US Maritime Security Initiatives in The GoG

To better understand the US involvement in the Gulf of Guinea, it is essential to analysing their National Strategy on Maritime Security (NSMS), the country's comprehensive maritime security strategy document. The policy document, which was created in 2005 as part of a series of security responses following the 9/11 attacks (Kamal, 2014), emphasizes that maritime security is a vital national interest and that the safety and economic security of the United States depend significantly on the safe use of the world's oceans.

Although protecting US national interest at home and abroad is indisputably the strategy's primary objective, the language used is more skewed towards the ocean being a 'common space'- that allows international trade among nations, "a source of food, natural resources, and recreation" for every individual state. Moreover, maritime threats in a given region have an impact on international security. The Strategy states that maritime security is necessary to guarantee freedom of commerce and navigation, enhance wealth and safeguard ocean resources.

To achieve this, according to the document, nations must work together to accomplish two complementary goals: facilitating the thriving maritime trade that supports economic security and preventing terrorist, hostile criminal, and harmful conduct associated with the ocean (Executive Office of the President of the United States, 2005). The document depicts the US as an actor in support of the 'common space' doctrine, which views the ocean as a source of global prosperity instead of a competing turf. Grand strategic documents, however, are sometimes

unspecific and ambiguous and can run counter to the subsequent strategic actions or policies. For this reason, it is fundamental to this study to unravel the approach used in the GoG, based on the United States Counter Piracy and Maritime Security Action Plan – Annex B, which is the policy responsible to implement the NSMS in the GoG. The US Africa Command (AFRICOM), which is the primary means for the execution of the strategy, is equally important to analyse the approach in the GoG.

Early in the 2010s, as the maritime piracy crisis in the GoG intensified, the US developed the ‘United States Counter Piracy and Maritime Security Action Plan-Annex B’ to protect its citizens and national interests. The policy’s goal, as the name implies, is to combat piracy and related maritime crimes in the GoG. This text is crucial to US national security since maritime piracy endangers not just the country’s energy security but also the lives of US citizens and crew members of ships operating in the area. To mitigate these threats, the Action Plan, which is the first of its kind, implements the NSMS in the GoG by collaborating with partner countries, international actors, and nongovernmental entities. It focuses on these three key areas: prevention, response, and governance (US State Department, 2014).

Based on this implementation plan for the NSMS, the threat focus is centred on fighting “maritime piracy and related crimes” (armed robbery and oil theft). Unsurprisingly, at the time of the document’s release, these maritime offenses were the ones that were most likely to directly harm US national security interests. Nevertheless, the strategy in essence supports national initiatives, international efforts, and the regional maritime security architecture.

Before the discovery of oil and gas in the GoG (Pre-1960s), its military and strategic value arose from its materials (minerals) and geographic location. Preventing Communist control of the Sub-Saharan region was the US’s main strategic interest. There was little or no reason for the Department of Defence to directly engage in the region, especially if the clear and direct value to U.S. interests was difficult to determine (Cornelius, 2010, p. 10).

As oil production in the GoG increased at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the highest echelons of the American administration became interested in this region of the African continent. In these circumstances, American foreign policy toward Africa became increasingly linked to its energy security and the fight against terrorism, making it crucial to evaluate how the American military is positioned regarding its interests. As a result, AFRICOM which is exclusively focused on Africa, was established, since the US European Command (US EUCOM) was too stretched to effectively protect the state’s rapidly expanding strategic interest in the Sub-Saharan region (Watson, 2006, p. 1).

The proliferation of Nonstate Actors, like maritime criminals and terrorists, and Africa’s growing economic importance, which includes the rise in oil production in the GoG, were arguably the two key geostrategic factors that led to the establishment of AFRICOM in 2007. Furthermore, unlike other Combatant Commands, AFRICOM encompasses a whole-of-government posture with several US government agencies and has a broader soft power mandate (David, 2013). This is apparent in its ongoing involvement in the Gulf of Guinea, which are multifaceted and covers every aspect of maritime security governance. This also

pertains to maritime-related initiatives run by different US agencies in the Gulf of Guinea, mostly under the direction of US Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF).

Despite being a combatant force, US NAVAF, the forward-deployed naval element of U.S. AFRICOM, has as its main objective as improving the maritime security capacity and capabilities of African partners (NAVAF, 2022). As opposed to the Gulf of Aden, where US naval assets are heavily involved in the front lines of the direct fight against maritime piracy, their operation in the Gulf of Guinea is more supportive of partner naval forces through training, capacity building, conducting Express-series exercises, and raising maritime domain awareness (MDA).

Although AFRICOM's prime and initial objective is to protect US energy interests in Africa and the surrounding waters, its outreach in maintaining maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea has been highlighted in most regional initiatives. In brief, the Command prioritizes the protection of U.S. national interests by assisting African states in preserving maritime security, which reciprocally indirectly safeguards US interests. In other words, this is a win-win situation.

The table below shows a strategic analysis of some of the main actors of maritime security in the region, including the EU and the US. The table also exemplifies the multidimensional approach of countering illicit activities by various actors such as state, regional, and international. The 'ends' represent their various objectives according to their strategic interest. The 'ways' represent the initiatives, policies, cause of action taken to fulfil their strategic goal. And the 'means' are resources or tools of national power used to implement their various initiatives.

Strategic Elements	Interregional Framework	Nigeria	United States	EU
Ends	Suppression of piracy, armed robbery on ships Maritime Safety and security in West and Central Africa Preventing and prosecuting illegal maritime activities	To eradicate piracy in its waters and those of its immediate neighbours To protect its oil Industry and maritime economy To retain its international reputation	The safe and secure use of the oceans Freedom of navigation and free movement of goods Maintaining a sustainable maritime atmosphere Secure waterways of its energy sources Safety of its Citizens	Safeguarding the shipping lane Uninterrupted energy commerce Protecting EU communities from drugs trafficked through the GoG Maintaining its fishing activities in the GoG

Ways	<p>Drafting an MOU on Maritime Safety and Security</p> <p>Developing a code of conduct for suppression of piracy and armed robbery at sea</p> <p>Implementation of a regional framework</p>	<p>Interagency collaboration (NIMASA-NN)</p> <p>Unilateral, Bilateral means of collaboration</p> <p>Coordinated Patrols and law enforcement operations</p> <p>Partnership with the private sector.</p> <p>An integrated maritime surveillance project- Deep Blue</p> <p>Pre-emptive and deterrent measures</p>	<p>Implementation of the counterpiracy and maritime security action plan -Annex B</p> <p>Interagency collaboration between various departments</p> <p>Capacity building and security cooperation with regional states to develop response capabilities</p> <p>Building a maritime domain awareness in the GoG</p> <p>Supporting state Judiciaries in strengthening the rule of law</p> <p>Advocating for the deployment of PCASP in the GoG</p>	<p>EU maritime strategy for the GoG.</p> <p>EU critical Maritime Route Initiative GRIMGO</p> <p>Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) initiative</p>
Means	<p>Establishing an interregional coordination centre (ICC)</p> <p>Formulation of coordination Maritime zones</p> <p>Joint Patrols within the maritime zones</p> <p>Information Sharing through YARIS</p>	<p>Amnesty program for potential pirates and armed robbers</p> <p>By legislating the SPOMO act</p> <p>Joint interagency and bilateral naval patrols</p> <p>Combined Army, Navy, Police personnel under the Maritime Guard Command</p> <p>Deployment of Patrol boats in Critical regions of the Niger Delta</p> <p>Combined land, sea, and air platforms</p> <p>Information Sharing through MCF/SHADE project</p>	<p>The establishment of the Africa Command (AFRICOM)</p> <p>The formation of the Africa Partnership Station (APS)</p> <p>The establishment of the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA)</p> <p>Training and policy formation through Africa Centre for Strategic Studies (CESA)</p> <p>The Initiation of the Regional Maritime Awareness Capability (RMAC)</p>	<p>GOGIN- capacity building and information sharing tool</p> <p>Promoting collaboration and coordination through the YARIS platform</p> <p>Deployed naval vessels under the CMP mandate</p>

The Evolutionary Trajectory of EU Maritime Security Initiatives in The Region

This chapter looks at how EU maritime security initiatives in the GoG have evolved and continue to evolve overtime. It dwells on the approaches adopted by the EU in the region's maritime domain. Since development of the strategy for the Gulf of Guinea in 2014, various programs are being implemented in the region through which we can observe the evolutionary nature of these initiatives in support of the Yaoundé architecture. The initiatives range from raising maritime domain awareness, information-sharing platforms to supporting capacity building.

Initially, the EU approached maritime security in the GoG by raising awareness and understanding of maritime security threats as opposed to the interventionist approach it followed in the Gulf of Aden. Drawing from their experience in the Indian ocean, the EU thought it suitable to first build a common understanding of the nature and scale of maritime security threats affecting states in the GoG (EU, 2014). And equally echoed the need for states in the region to take the lead in addressing these threats in the short, medium, and long term in a sustainable manner. In short, their approach was geared towards promoting African ownership of maritime security in the South Atlantic, in line with the UNSC resolutions number 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012) (EU, 2014).

In 2009, in response to the worsening maritime security situation worldwide, the EU established the Critical Maritime Routes Programme (CMR) to address maritime security challenges in different regions of the world, including the GoG. The project aimed at increasing security on critical maritime routes through information sharing cooperation and capacity building (Pa, 2022). The CMR project equally focused on developing capacity of coast guards, maritime law enforcement agencies and other maritime security agencies of vulnerable states in the GoG (Pa, 2022). In doing so, it targeted improving data collection and information sharing. Notable examples include the Critical Maritime Routes Monitoring, Support and Evaluation Mechanism (CRIMSON) which promotes understanding of all the components of the CMR. It further set the stage for improved communications, monitoring and evaluation of the CMR project in the region.

Similarly, the Gulf of Guinea Interregional Network (GOGIN) was established in 2016 with the purpose of improving maritime safety and security in the region. It primarily aimed at supporting training and the Yaoundé architecture in enhancing the Yaoundé Architecture Regional Information Sharing Network – YARIS. YARIS is a naval platform that fosters information sharing to promote collaboration and coordination during crisis amongst the Yaoundé Architecture's maritime operation centres (Pa, 2022).

Subsequently, the EU directed its efforts to supporting regional organisations in their initiatives to addressing maritime security in the region, both at the regional and local level. This is done in part to strengthen maritime safety and security in the region as far as regional and national approaches are concerned. In this sense, the program for Improved Regional Fisheries Governance in Western Africa (PESCAO) was initiated to run from January 2018 to December 2022 (a period of five years) and aimed to strengthen the regional approach to the sustainable use and management of fisheries resources, including combating illegal,

unreported and unregulated fishing. In these circumstances, it is supposed to support ECOWAS in facilitating cooperation with partners and the sub-regional fisheries organizations (Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea), and to helping to address the threat of IUU fishing in the GoG waters.

Similarly, the initiative to Support to West Africa Integrated Maritime Security (SWAIMS) was launched in 2019 and is expected to extend until 2023. It aims to support the implementation of the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy and improve maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, with special attention to law enforcement and governance frameworks (ECOWAS, 2023).

Likewise, the Support Programme to the Maritime Security Strategy in Central Africa (PASSMAR) project was launched in 2020. It aims to support the Interregional (ECOWAS and ECCAS) maritime security strategy in addressing maritime security challenges (IUU, transnational organized crime, environmental crimes, piracy and armed robbery at sea) in the region (DCI Group, 2023).

Successively, EU redirected efforts to improving and strengthening maritime platforms and infrastructure in the GoG region. Strengthening infrastructures such as port security became relevant to addressing maritime security in the GoG for the EU. In this regard, the West and Central Africa Port Security Project (WeCAPS) was launched in 2019 with the aim of improving port security in partner countries in West and Central Africa. The project further aimed at rendering assistance to boost resilience and preparedness for emerging port and shipping security threats.

Additionally, in its attempts to strengthen cooperation between national, regional, and international actors in the region as far as maritime security is concerned, the EU introduced initiatives geared towards cooperation in areas of common interest. Areas such as port security and transnational criminal activities seems to take precedence in their strategy for the GoG. As a result, various initiatives were brought about in the region. Among others, we could refer to the Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP), which was started in 2015 and seeks to build capacities and strengthen cooperation against maritime trafficking in countries on the trans-Atlantic cocaine route (Inter Regional Coordination Centre, 2022). It aims at reinforcing capacities in seaports in selected countries in West Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The programme Improvement of Ports' Customs and Operations Efficiency in African Ports (IPCOEA), launched in 2019 with goal of enhancing the efficiency of customs, goods clearance, and administration of ports of the ECOWAS region, also stands out.

Due to constraints such as time and space the study was limited to only analysing EU's main initiatives, nevertheless we directed efforts toward having a clear picture of the evolution of EU maritime security approaches in the region. That said, raising maritime domain awareness, data collection and information-sharing platforms extending to supporting regional organizations in their approach to maritime security and strengthening maritime security cooperation, show the evolution of EU maritime security initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea region.

The Evolutionary Trajectory of The US Initiatives in The Region

Looking at the profile of the maritime domain, both the variety and the magnitude of the threats in the Gulf of Guinea have evolved over the years. This in turn is accompanied by a change in varied initiatives of the actors in the Gulf of Guinea, including the US. In this context, this chapter analysis the US involvement in the GoG since its initiation of the consultation on regional maritime security cooperation, in 2004, to date.

Between 2004 and 2006, the US EUCOM hosted two conferences with the chiefs of a number of Navies to reach sub-regional consensus on threats to maritime safety and security in the GoG region. The purpose was to achieve strategic level harmony and political buy-in for a Plan of Action on maritime security, to advance regional cooperation and coordinate the active participation of relevant regional institutions, and finally, to provide a mechanism for coordinated and collaborative international assistance (Kamal, 2014, p. 369). These conferences not only signalled the beginning of US strategic engagement in the GoG, but they also helped West African states to gain political will to adopt more ambitious national and regional strategies.

Parallel to these forums, the US Navy's presence in West and Central Africa also increased, going from occasional in 2004 to continuous in 2007, with the addition of numerous smaller deployments (New Africa, 2008). These deployments were part of the West Africa Training Cruise (WATC), a training assignment between the US Naval Forces and their African allies. The WATC is a cooperative maritime mission that includes port visits by US naval assets, to further the Navy's working relationship with African navies and allows for unique training and exercises that are beneficial to participating maritime forces (Global Security, 2011). The WATC, in contrast to the Africa Partnership Station (APS) – AFRICOM's maritime security engagement program –, covers a wider range of operations that are not primarily maritime, such as HIV/AIDS awareness training, CBRN medical management training, and humanitarian assistance.

Launched in 2007, APS, is a multilateral security cooperation initiative, that serves to strengthen Africa's maritime security by utilizing four "pillars" to increase maritime safety and security through a regional and all-encompassing approach: "Develop maritime domain awareness to maintain a clear picture of the maritime environment, build maritime professionals, establish maritime infrastructure, and develop response capabilities while building regional integration" (AFRICOM, 2022). The program kicked off with the deployment of USS Swift and USS Fort McHenry to the Gulf of Guinea for six months. Since then, the APS has had consistent deployments and maintained a presence in the area. The APS is seen as a more practical and maritime-focused model of WATC; however, APS vessels engage personnel from the GoG states for longer stays, often up to six months, during which time they receive training and crucial skills related to maritime security enforcement (Kamal, 2014). The rapid advancement of US interest in the region and the creation of a Combatant Command entirely devoted to Africa may have prompted the evolution of APS into a rigorous and extensive version of the WATC. This is because US EUCOM's inability to concentrate on the region was hindered by its expansive AOR, which spans both Europe and Africa. As a result, US EUCOMs efforts were insufficient regarding the GoG.

Furthermore, the establishment of the Africa Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership Program (AMLEP) in 2008 marked another step in the US' engagement in the region. This initiative aimed

to support the law enforcement operations of the GoG's coastal states in combating criminal activities such as illegal oil bunkering, fisheries poaching, drug trafficking and piracy. The joint operations comprised the US Coast Guard (in most cases a vessel), the law enforcement agencies (Navy, Coast Guard, Customs, Immigration and Port Authorities) alongside with combined boarding teams of the participating states.

Even though the program is a real-world operation aimed at deterring and responding to illegal maritime crimes, the US Coast Guard shares with partner nations the law enforcement skill set for conducting law enforcement boardings, obtaining evidence, and maintaining chains of custody (David, 2013). This model of security collaboration is crucial to the region as it facilitates intergovernmental and interagency cooperation which is a cornerstone in the Maritime Architecture of the region. Moreover, the AMLEP program's operational stages reinforce the skill sets acquired during the annual APS exercises (United States Africa Command, 2022).

One of the greatest challenges in maintaining maritime security in the GoG was the lack of maritime domain awareness (MDA). MDA is the ability to recognize and understand what is occurring at sea using radars, automatic identification systems (AIS), and other pertinent sensors. Since Navies have few assets to patrol their waters, the GoG is where these techniques are most helpful. This is because real-time monitoring of the maritime situation within their AOR would promote the efficient use of their scarce naval resources. Hence, MDA is predictably the focal point of the US Navy's GoG strategy (Patrick, 2007). The Regional Maritime Capability (RMAC) programme, funded by the US Department of Defense, uses AIS, ground-based radars and sensors to improve awareness of maritime traffic. The RMAC program is incorporated into the Maritime Safety and Security Information System, a comprehensive database that monitors vessels all over the world (Kris, 2011).

Under the National Defence Authorization Act of 2007, RMAC was established. The RMAC system in Nigeria, which has 13 stations along the coast, was set up in 2009. RMAC offers continuous maritime environment surveillance up to 35 nautical miles from the coast using its integrated MDA tools (Guy, 2016). Although the RMAC programme has been implemented in a few East and North African countries, the initial focus was on the GoG states. Some of the states that subsequently benefited from the initiative include Sao Tome and Principe, Gabon, Benin, Senegal, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. The prioritization of Nigeria in implementing the maritime awareness programme was a prudent strategic move. This is because Nigerian waters were the most afflicted in the Gulf of Guinea at the time, particularly in terms of armed robbery and maritime piracy. In the years thereafter, the menace has spread beyond Nigeria's coast to the waters of neighbouring Cameroon, off the coast of Benin and other GoG states (Pa, 2022, p. 31). Correspondingly, RMAC's spread to other GoG states.

It is crucial to mention that the MDA infrastructure provided by the RMAC programme has been used as a steppingstone to strengthen states' sea surveillance and monitoring capability, therefore serving as a foundation for the development of MDA in the region. The MDA tools used by individual states, complemented by the Yaoundé Architecture Regional Information System (YARIS), have enhanced the sharing of accurate and up-to-date information within the Yaoundé Architecture (YA).

Above all, the US conducts the biggest maritime exercise in the GoG, the OBANGAME Express (OE). Since its initiation in 2011, the number of participating nations has increased from 9 to 29 this year (Barthelemy, 2017) (AFRICOM, 2023). In 2019, up to 33 nations, including GoG states, European and North African partners, took part (Kyle, 2019). A few factors can be attributed to the exercise's evolution from a single-area exercise involving a small number of countries to a regional and multinational maritime exercise. The participating nations of the OE first edition (2011) were only member states of the ECCAS and Nigeria. During this time, the ECCAS sub-region has an established structure divided into zones (A, B, and D), each of which is coordinated by a Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre, which is connected to a Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa. In contrast, the ECOWAS sub-region does not have a maritime security framework. Nigeria's early inclusion in the exercise can be justified by the threat posed by its pirate-infested waters to maritime security in the GoG.

However, with the inception of the Gulf of Guinea Code of Conduct in 2013 and the subsequent establishment of the YA, the scope of the maritime exercise has expanded. States from both regional economic communities have been included in the exercise and the hierarchical structure for information sharing and coordination provided by the YA has been operationalized. This pragmatic adjustment was observed when the sea events were held off the coasts of all the Gulf of Guinea states in 2015. The purpose of the exercise that year was to evaluate how well the 21 maritime operations centres (MOCs) at the national, sub-regional and regional levels could coordinate and manage maritime interdiction operations (MIO) through tactical level forces such as patrol boats, boarding teams and special forces teams (Dirk S., 2015). Moreover, the number of international partners participating in the OE has grown over the years, in addition to the exercise's geographical and regional expansion. The increasing number of external participants other than the GoG states is related to the rise in global maritime security concerns regarding the region.

Besides the Gulf of Guinea designated maritime security programs covered so far, the US is also bilaterally engaged in building the naval capabilities of individual states. Through the Foreign Assistance Act, decommissioned US naval assets are transferred as a grant to friendly foreign governments under the auspices of the State Department. States such as Nigeria and Cameroon are recipients of this US naval aid (Christina, 2016). Additionally, the US has been assisting GoG states' law enforcement and criminal justice sectors in addressing the wide range of maritime crime challenges through its Trans-Atlantic Maritime Criminal Justice Workshop Program (ACSS, INL, USCG, 2015). It also promotes the implementation of the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation and its amendments, as well as other international maritime treaties among GoG states.

Overall, based on the main US' initiatives analysed in this chapter of the study, there is relative growth in the US' maritime security engagement in the region. Over the years, the intensity and coverage of the efforts have increased. Furthermore, as revealed by the design of AFRICOM and the objective of its Counter Piracy and Maritime Security Action Plan-Annex B, the actions have entailed a whole-of-government approach involving many US government agencies. As a result, the three essential areas of maritime security management, which are prevention, response, and governance, were all reflected in the endeavours taken by the US.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was analysing the underlying motives behind the two main external maritime security actors in the GoG and the progression of their initiatives. According to the evaluation of their main strategic documents, we conclude that their motives are linked to economic interests, ambitions to be global maritime security actors and promotion of open and secure SLOC. On the other way, this study also focused in analysing the evolutionary path of the maritime security initiatives of both actors chronologically and thematically in the past two decades. The findings show those initiatives have grown significantly, and its impact on the maritime domain of this region of the world cannot be overlooked.

EU initiatives in the GoG have impacted maritime security in different ways. Initially, these maritime security initiatives in conjunction with regional approaches in the region, have contributed to enhancing the overall credibility of the YA at the national, regional, and international levels. Also, EU approaches in the GoG have together with regional efforts significantly contributed to enhancing and improving maritime security capacities. Areas such as raising maritime domain awareness, data collection and information-sharing have played major roles in controlling the threats to the maritime security in the region. Additionally, EU initiatives have contributed to helping to build and improve capacities of coast guards and navies of the countries in the region overall harmonising efforts and strengthening maritime security cooperation in the GoG. The United States, on the other hand, has also contributed to raising awareness of the magnitude of maritime threats in the GoG through its conferences with the maritime actors in the region. These efforts have also tackled sea-blindness and encouraged nations to work more closely together through a series of events that propelled the GoG states to be more proactive against the threats to maritime security in the region. Although US maritime security efforts have grown over the years multifacetedly as shown in this paper, it has been moulded by the interregional maritime security framework in the GoG. Prior to UNSC resolutions number 2018 and 2039 which resulted in the creation of the YA, the US support was predominantly concentrated on a small number of individual states and a specific crime, mainly maritime piracy.

Contrary to their previous intervention to combat maritime crime in the Gulf of Aden, both the actors object of this study took an African-led approach in addressing the problem in the GoG. Their efforts haven't achieved a breakthrough like the UNSC resolutions, or the adoption of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, but they have complemented these efforts through the strengthening of the YA framework. In turn, the joint efforts of the region's states have made it simpler for international partners to channel their assistance in one direction. Diverging interests among different actors have resulted in a variety of undertakings aimed at achieving their strategic goals. Finally, although from maritime security perspective the actors' interests are diverse and wide-ranging, this study points to the need to ensure the security of the maritime domain and adopt measures for the sustainability of the oceans - including their governance and the sustainable use of marine resources. We believe we have proved in this study that the threat to maritime security in the GoG can only be tackled if a bottom-up model of involvement of all

the actors present - internal and external - is maintained and that, in this respect, the role being played by the EU and the US has been crucial in enhancing maritime security in the region.

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