

FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ
ISSUED AT THE 2024 MARITIME SECURITY CONFERENCE ON THE
THEME:

'THE GULF OF GUINEA AND THE RED SEA AS A LEARNING CURVE
FOR AFRICAN DECISION-MAKERS IN CAPACITY BUILDING',

HELD IN STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA
ON 5 AND 6 SEPTEMBER 2024



1. Preamble

The Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC), the Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa (SIGLA) of Stellenbosch University, and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), held the Third International Conference on Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) on the theme: 'The Gulf of Guinea and the Red Sea as a learning curve for African decision-makers in capacity-building', on the 5th and 6th of September 2024, in Stellenbosch, South Africa, funded by the Danish Peace and Stabilisation Fund and Stellenbosch University.

The 2024 Maritime Security Conference convened distinguished participants and stakeholders from maritime authorities from the Yaoundé and Djibouti architecture, international academia, academia from West, East and South Africa along with national maritime authorities (civilian and military), associations from the fishing industry, and non-governmental organisations.

The aim of the conference was threefold. Firstly, to highlight the GoG as an African maritime landscape persistently exposed to various maritime security threats. Secondly, to consider and identify first order lessons from the Northwest Indian Ocean where the threat landscape since December 2023 migrated closer to traditional maritime security threats. The latter also holds implications for countries and the oceans further south and this was also addressed. Thirdly, to present key maritime stakeholders from the West, South and East coast with a platform to share perspectives, insights, and foster greater mutual comprehension on strategies to address maritime security challenges and capacity-building.

The conference examined the adequacy of the existing maritime security frameworks established under the Yaoundé and Djibouti Code of Conduct: Specifically, it sought answers to whether the structures currently provide the necessary scope and flexibility for fostering enhanced cooperation in the realm of maritime security. The conference also aimed to address the apparent lack of African ownership in addressing maritime issues in general and during the recent events in the Red Sea which so far has seen little to no response from African countries. To this effect, the conference touched upon on how to build partnerships in maritime security capacity building and conduct maritime diplomacy.

2. The Communique

The final communique is based on presentations, observations, discussions, and conclusions of the 2024 Maritime Security Conference. Participants made the following observations and recommendations during the conference:

2.1. The Context

1. Current international politics is characterised by a lack of multilateralism, as well as reduced commitment, involvement and cooperation to deal with maritime security in Africa, especially after successes with piracy around Somalia. The increased great power rivalry limits the scope for cooperation and international support for the African continent and its regional structures. However, it also provides an opportunity for African states and institutions to navigate international rivalry to their advantage.
2. The changing global geo-political situation, and current armed conflicts (e.g. Ukraine and Gaza) have ripple effects on Africa in terms of sanctions, disrupted food imports, dangers for shipping in the Red Sea, and pollution with oil tankers being targeted. This has increased shipping around the Cape of Good Hope,

resulting in higher insurance, security outlays and shipping costs, as well as global supply chain delays, with negative economic consequences. The risk exists that instability in the Red Sea by attacking commercial shipping may spill over to the GoG. The use of drone and missile technologies and tactics in the Red Sea by Houthi militias operating from Yemen, could spill over to the Somali coast and GoG, especially through collaboration between Houthi militias and Somali dissidents. There is a possible role for Gulf states, particularly Oman, to help address maritime security challenges in the Red Sea, such as preventing Houthi militias from targeting ships and cutting sub-sea cables. India has become a more prominent actor in the Indian Ocean offering a deterrent value against piracy, and is a notable potential partner to reinforce a stronger reimplementaion of the Djibouti Code of Conduct.

3. Somalia has undergone positive change in the wake of diminished incidents of piracy. The country's domestic political institutions are better positioned to cooperate with international maritime partners. Somali courts now have the ability to prosecute pirates. There is also an improvement in Somalia's domestic security, particularly in Puntland, where maritime policing helps to curb piracy. Considering these developments, there is a need to include Somali authorities in future maritime security initiatives and operations in a more comprehensive manner.
4. There are, however, some concerns regarding maritime security developments in Somalia. Firstly, pirates now have the ability to operate even further from shore, and with larger crew. The number of Somali pirates arrested on the MV Ruen in March 2024 attest to the ability of piracy groups to launch large operations from Somalia. To appreciate this resurgence of Somali piracy we need to look at both offshore and onshore factors as well as its linkages. Furthermore, the continued unresolved civil war in Somalia is a cause of concern and means that the small security gains observed can be reversed rather rapidly. The security situation in Somalia has also been complicated by the growing presence of Islamic State-affiliated actors, especially in the province of Puntland.
5. The depletion of marine resources in Africa, notably the GoG, is linked to increased crime and migration of coastal communities. Most fishing in the GoG is unlawful, and the depletion of fish stocks contributes to fishers migrating to other countries (e.g. Senegal to Mauritania, Ghana to neighbouring states, Congo-Brazzaville to Angola). This presents the potential risk of fishery conflicts in the regions. Moreover, the state of the environment and fishing stocks is aggravated by extensive pollution (including oil slicks off Nigeria in particular) and the destruction of seabed and habitats, which impacts negatively on income, jobs and human security. There is a lack of efficient law enforcement and logistics to manage unlawful fishing and pollution in the GoG.
6. In the Western Indian Ocean, the implementation of the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC) has seen limited progress due to insufficient maritime security investment in African regions.

The lack of national commitment, ownership, ratification of the DCoC and implementation of national structures continue to constrain progress. The need was identified to involve Egypt in the DCoC to a greater extent and to expand maritime security cooperation with the latter beyond the current focus on anti-piracy.

7. With reference to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCC) in West Africa, the need was identified to reform the YCC by enhancing or optimising its operational and functional utility by means of political buy-in, especially since the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have been reluctant with financial support, and have not recruited or replaced seconded staff whose tenures have expired to the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé. Furthermore, staffing problems of regional centres and lack of national support from member states has after more than ten years of existence never been resolved and need to be addressed. Lastly, the multiple layers of the YCC architecture complicates affordability, implementation and effective information-sharing. A question was even raised about whether the YCC must be replaced with a different or leaner arrangement, such as removing the five regional maritime zone centres.
8. Several challenges for effective maritime security cooperation in Africa were identified. Firstly, successes in maritime security (e.g. anti-piracy) are often followed by complacency, as well as reduced funding, cooperation and patrols, which often results in the return of the same problematic phenomena. For example, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) mandate to patrol the Somali coastline (Resolution 2608) has lapsed in March 2022, and has not been renewed. Secondly, there is a lack of clear maritime security strategies where opportunities for investment in capacity-building exist. There is a need for closer engagement between strategic partners to develop African solutions and capacity. Instead of having imposed solutions, much more effort must go into building upon indigenous solutions to address regional maritime challenges.
9. One of the primary challenges to implementation is bureaucracy and having the right buy-in. Capacity-building initiatives are most effective when they form consultative engagements that meet the needs of the beneficiaries, which is key to achieving the desired impact. More particularly, partners must ensure that training programmes are targeted at meeting the pillars in the frameworks developed in the regions. There is an urgent need for the African states to formulate maritime strategies, which could help identify their security and capacity-building needs. Too often, capacity-building initiatives are directed from outside partners, which can lead to what in developmental studies are known as "white elephants", i.e. expensive projects that fail to have an impact. In the maritime field, the Mozambican failed attempt to build a turn-key maritime coastguard and coastal awareness capacity springs to mind.
10. Southern Africa has largely become a neglected, if not ignored, maritime zone, given the predominant focus on the GoG, the Horn of Africa and East Africa.

Formulated maritime-related strategies of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) require dissemination, operationalisation and implementation. By not addressing illegal maritime trade in the region, other forms of illegal trade tend to converge. In the absence of a pressing threat, SADC does not have the systems to respond proactively to emerging threats such as biodiversity crimes. Maritime industries in SADC should partner with governments to establish maritime security; it is crucial to integrate coastal communities' inputs. Additionally, land-based drivers should receive equal attention and resources as sea-based interventions.

11. Since the launch of Operation Phakisa in 2014, South Africa has not made considerable progress with its implementation, which inhibits the country's ability to fulfil the demands of e.g. cargo handling and ship repairs, especially following increased ship traffic around the Cape of Good Hope. South Africa should invest in improving its law enforcement capabilities to curb illegal maritime trade and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as the nexus between IUU fishing and organised crime. Government departments, agencies and various fisheries crime units should improve their cooperation to overcome narrow approaches and efforts linked to jurisdictions. These institutions should partner with research entities and non-governmental organisations to help enhance overall data analysis on crime in the maritime sector, in order to better direct law enforcement measures and responses.
12. Women practitioners are inadequately represented in maritime security decision-making. There is a need for increased representation and appointment of women practitioners in decision-making bodies and leadership positions in maritime security governance. Support is required for initiatives that encourage women's participation and contribution to the maritime sector.

2.2. Key Insights

1. Piracy in the GoG and around the Horn of Africa should not be viewed as a maritime problem alone, but as part of onshore crime, employment cycles and recruitment. Thus, a more holistic and systematic understanding of piracy is required.
2. The challenge of IUU fishing cannot be resolved by states unilaterally; regional and inter-agency cooperation is required. It is a process that commences with the practices of coastal fishers/communities and runs all the way to states, their actions and interactions with regions and beyond to international bodies such as the United Nations (UN).
3. Maritime diplomacy is a neglected diplomatic practice of African littoral governments. Limited naval means in Africa and the prevalence of non-traditional threats limit operating spaces for naval coercion.

This necessitates diplomacy of persuasion and cooperation. As maritime security situations change, the relevant type of diplomacy must be considered.

2.3. Recommendations

1. The need was identified to better understand and scrutinise political decision-making processes and interests regarding maritime security cooperation or lack thereof, as well as decisions around allocating and policing licenses for fishing – especially in the GoG where maritime governance weakness combined with the lucrative opportunities for organised crime in pollution with those in power has traditionally driven the insecurities.
2. The YCC architecture needs to be streamlined to improve affordability and better implementation. Effective information-sharing can be secured by discarding the zonal centres and let the respective national maritime operation centres report directly to the regional centres i.e. West Africa Regional Maritime Security Centre (CRESMAO) and Central African Regional Maritime Security Centre (CRESMAC).
3. Navies should become more involved in maritime security strategies. It is essential for navies to develop regional and national strategies to confirm their essential requirements in terms of means (i.e. "knowing what they want"). Overall, there is a need for a commonly agreed upon end state and objectives for the full range of maritime security capabilities in the Western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden to address all aspects from legislative frameworks, maritime domain awareness and information sharing, interdiction operations at sea, prosecution and the planning, organisation and budgeting required to operate and maintain assets needed to ensure security at sea. There is also a need to develop a mechanism for action and doctrine for the region to quickly and effectively organise and manage a multi-country effort to integrate support from outside the region in response to any type of threat to the maritime environment.
4. Pro-active and persistent approaches are required to overcome complacency in terms of reducing maritime patrols, funding and cooperation.
5. The establishment of mutual beneficial relationships between funders and African navies are indispensable to save costs for all role-players, and build capacity for maritime security.
6. New technologies (e.g. software applications) should be harnessed more intelligently or fully to improve maritime domain awareness and law enforcement pertaining to e.g. fishing.

7. Continuous research on pollutants, pollution activities, and their impact are needed to identify and manage sensitive marine areas.
8. Indigenous and cost-effective solutions for regional maritime challenges should be found. Regulatory agencies should harness the indigenous knowledge of community folk with scientific knowledge, to promote understanding of best practices for local management of resources. Fishers should be involved in governing and conserving fishing resources to promote buy-in and compliance on matters such as closed fishing seasons.
9. Information sharing on IUU fishing needs to be improved, as with information sharing to curb piracy. Inter-agency cooperation between fisheries authorities, navies and regional fisheries organisations (e.g. Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea) can help to detect and report IUU fishing. This includes the full implementation of the memorandum of understanding between ECOWAS and the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) from 2021 on the establishment of a framework for cooperation on effective fisheries management.
10. Southern African states must increase their cooperation to curb maritime crime, as well as to improve search and rescue capabilities and responsiveness, especially with higher sea traffic around the southern tip of Africa. Via the Benguela Current Convention, Angola, Namibia and South Africa should improve the sustainable management, monitoring, research and protection of the marine ecosystem on their Atlantic coasts, including fish stocks; and also expand sea and air patrols.
11. An open access special journal issue should be compiled within 12 months from the conference event which covers maritime security matters that resonate with themes covered during the conference.

WHEREUPON, We the under listed, Professor at RDDC, Dean of the Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University, and Director Faculty of Academic Affairs & Research at KAIPTC, append our signatures to this communique on the date below;

Issued in Stellenbosch on 7 September 2024.

SIGNED:



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PROF THOMAS MANDRUP

Associate Professor, Centre for Stabilisation, Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC)



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PROF SAMUEL TSHEHLA

Dean, Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University



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MAJOR GEN. RICHARD ADDO-GYANE

Commandant, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC)