CHAPTER 10

Enhancing Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea

This concluding chapter summarises the key findings reached in the book and also provides recommendations for enhancing maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

10.1 Threats, Opportunities and Challenges

The strategic importance of the Gulf of Guinea dates back to ancient times, and indeed the region remains vital to global security and commerce in the contemporary world. The Gulf of Guinea is a major source of essential commodities for both domestic and industrial use, while its sea lanes connect trade between multiple continents. There is also a growing global focus on the Gulf of Guinea due to increasing offshore oil and gas discoveries, as well as international dependence on the region for energy security needs. The maritime profile of the Gulf of Guinea is also making a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of member States. Indeed, if the opportunities afforded by the region’s maritime domain are effectively harnessed, there is great potential for delivering positive human development outcomes for Gulf of Guinea region and its citizens.

Manifestly, however, the maritime domain of the Gulf of Guinea is characterised by threats and sea-based crimes that undermine the prospects of harnessing the requisite socio-economic benefits. Piracy presents a major risk to the security and stability of the region and also to the security and safety of maritime transportation and the sealines in general. This has prompted UNSC Resolutions 2018 and 2039 calling for effective national, regional and global responses. Yet, piratical attacks are increasing and the piracy profile, trends and dynamics in the region are in many respects more complex than the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden.

While piracy is undoubtedly a major concern and thus receiving high global attention, there are equally other maritime security threats that undermine the security and stability of the region. The region has experienced decades of illegal trafficking in narcotic drugs, with criminal networks constantly adjusting their modus operandi to sustain the drug trade. Organised criminals also exploit the Gulf of Guinea maritime domain for illegal trafficking in arms, thereby contributing to violent crimes and conflicts, while illegal migration by
sea leads to maritime risks and disasters. Finally, illegal fishing contributes to depleting fisheries resources in the Gulf of Guinea.

There is therefore a convergence of national, regional and international maritime security interests in the Gulf of Guinea: interest in harnessing the opportunities provided by the region; but also interest addressing the maritime security threats. The key requirement for meeting these interests is effective regional and international maritime security cooperation. There are on-going cooperative initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea with prospects to address the maritime security threats, enhance safety and security in the maritime domain, and foster peaceful and sustainable use of the maritime space.

Regional cooperative processes are being carried out through the frameworks of four regional institutions: MOWCA, GGC, ECOWAS and EECAS. These institutional arrangements have their respective strengths and weaknesses but the limitations of WOWCA and the GGC are more profound. Nonetheless, they still possess strengths that can supplement the institutional frameworks of ECCAS and ECOWAS—both of which have been shown to be more suitable platforms for cooperation. ECCAS member States have already devised a framework for maritime security cooperation which is anchored in the broader political and economic structures of the region. This is being replicated by ECOWAS member States. Both ECCAS and ECOWAS would still need to address there are three types of challenges—structural, geopolitical and governance-related—in order for maritime security cooperation to be effective in the region.

International cooperation and support in the Gulf of Guinea has gained momentum, especially so since in the light of UNSC Resolutions 2018 and 2039. It is also logical that the experience of the international community over the debilitating impact of Somali piracy underscores efforts to find effective cooperative channels and outcomes. As in all areas of inter-state relations, however, the pursuit of other strategic objectives or exclusive national interests cannot be discounted. Indeed that should be expected. Thus the US, France, UK, EU and even China, are charting cooperatives paths and initiatives in the region with dual objective of enhancing maritime security and attaining specific national objectives.

Five key conclusions have reached from the analysis of prevailing regional and international engagements in the Gulf of Guinea. These are:

(i) Current processes for maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea do not adequately address the multiple security threats in the region;