Maritime Transport and Security

Globalization, State Failure and Maritime Insecurity in West Africa
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INTRODUCTION

The West African sub-region, especially the Gulf of Guinea, has been a zone of maritime insecurity for many centuries, back to the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The nature and impact of this insecurity has changed over time, often reflecting changes in the world economy and state system. In the past two decades, maritime insecurity in this region has been exacerbated by the twin forces of globalization and the growing problem of failed or weak States. Although aspects of this insecurity may be regional or local, they pose a serious challenge to global security and the world economy in view of today's more integrated and complex economic relationships. As the Commander of United States Naval Forces in Europe put it, "the West African coast is a common challenge of maritime security." This is especially true since the last decade when the region began to rise in importance for the United States due to increased oil importation from the region as the U.S. seeks to move away from its reliance on the Middle East.1

This article explores these complex relationships and examines strategies for responding to problems of ocean use in West Africa in the near future. I argue that an understanding of maritime security threats in the region would be incomplete without an understanding of the extent to which the forces of globalization have both undermined and strengthened state capacity vis-à-vis local and external non-State actors. The sources and consequences of these threats are both local and global in nature and effect. Therefore, future directions in dealing with them must be anchored in the


realization that maritime security is human, or comprehensive, and any threats to it must be dealt with collectively and collaboratively, especially with support from the United States and other developed countries.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. It first elaborates on the link between heightened globalization and State failure or weakness, and the attainment of "comprehensive security." In other words, it explores how heightened globalization has impacted the capacity of States and the private sector to advance aspects of maritime security in West Africa. The analytical frameworks articulated in that section are further strengthened with a discussion of elements of contemporary maritime security. I then discuss the maritime security environment in West Africa, identifying the extent to which globalization and failed or weak States have created, exacerbated, or contained these problems over the past three decades. Finally, the article focuses on the lessons learned from this study and suggests strategies to respond to growing insecurity in oceans of West Africa, especially in the Gulf of Guinea region.

HUMAN SECURITY, GLOBALIZATION, AND STATE FAILURE AS ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

One of the most contentious concepts that has gained prominence among students of world politics since the end of the Cold War is the phenomenon of "State failure" or "collapsed State." The "failed State" is often portrayed as the mirror image of what is presumed to be the "norm" or traditional view of the Western European State as a person in international law. This modal State controls a defined territory and population, is capable of engaging in relations with other States, provides adequate social goods for its population, and more importantly, monopolizes legitimate use of force or violence within that defined territory. The "failed State," on the other hand, lacks all or most of the above capabilities, and more. Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner, for instance, claim that the failed State is "utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community." Robert Rotberg, on the other hand, asserts that such States
