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MULTILATERALISM AND SECURITY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA

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Thanks to the IPRI for keeping this topic in active consideration.

A great deal has been said and done on this issue but we shall keep on talking and acting till we achieve the level of security in the Gulf of Guinea that is conducive to safe business and economic development in the region, for the Governments and populations of the countries of the region as well as their economic partners.

The issue of security in any country is one of the responsibilities of the Government of that country. This can be security on land, within the borders of the country and includes security of lives and properties, safe movement of persons in the pursuit of legitimate business of citizens and inhabitants within that country.

This can also be security at sea, as countries are expected to keep their maritime space safe and secure for legitimate activities in their territorial waters, their contiguous zones as well as in their EEZs.

Land Security and Multilateralism

On land security and multilateralism, participants may wish to recall the important role played by the member States of ECOWAS, in bringing to an end the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. ECOMOG and later in the war UN and UK also came in and together with ECOWAS, the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leon were brought to an end and these countries were assisted to gradual stability and peace.

In recent times, we have also had the rebellion in Mali with a large part of the country threatening to secede, declare its independence and form its own Republic.

Again, multilateralism – France and some other West African countries came in to put down the rebellion and tried to re-establish some normalcy in that part of Mali.

Guinea Bissau has been having some internal conflicts also in recent times and a multinational force helped to restore order, which created the conditions for the election of new leaders in that country and the installation of new Prime Minister, some three weeks ago.

At this time, Nigeria is facing serious threats in its North Eastern region from Boko Haram, an Islamic Sect that has inflicted heavy casualties of death, destruction and abduction in three States of North Eastern Nigeria, with some bombing successes in Abuja and Kano and other destabilising acts in some other cities.

Again, multilateralism has come into play with a meeting, organised in Paris, among Nigeria and the neighbouring States of Cameroun, Niger, to discuss the strategy and assistance required to confront Boko Haram and flush out its suspected hideouts, in those countries. We also have the assistance from USA, Britain and Israel, among others to find the over 230 girls abducted from Chibok by Boko Haram

This proves the case that the security within land borders of many countries of the Gulf of Guinea that we have taken for granted for so long is no longer guaranteed. More and more internal upheavals are erupting and require active involvement of State and non State actors outside of the victim state to restore security, peace and stability

In all the cases mentioned, multilateralism has played and is playing a key role in negotiating settlement of disputes, resolution of conflicts, reducing acts of terrorism and in the return to peace and stability of many countries of the GoG.

As the GGC is an organisation of States with frontiers on the Gulf of Guinea, with current membership made up of: Angola, Cameroun, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Federal Republic of Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe and as its focus on Security is more on Maritime Security in the region, I would therefore like to devote more time during this presentation on multilateralism as it may be relevant to maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Maritime Security and Multilateralism

Territorial waters are the maritime space of 12 nautical miles from the coast of a country; contiguous zone is 24 nautical miles from the coast of a country and the EEZ is 200 nautical miles from the coast. In many countries of the region, more attention has been paid to maintenance of security within the land areas, while maintenance of security in the maritime space of these countries has suffered a great deal of neglect. This has led to the increase in the use of the sea as an easier terrain for illegal activities, ranging from illegal traffic in human beings, in arms and ammunitions, in illegal drugs, illegal immigration and marine pollution; while illegal, unregulated and undeclared fishing was carried out with impunity.

In some countries, dissidents took to the sea and started using it as a safe haven to carry out acts of sabotage of their countries' economies: oil ridges were damaged, hostages of people legitimately working at sea were taken for ransom, sea faring vessels were attacked and those workers on board taken as hostages, illegal bunkering increased, piracy and armed robbery at sea increased considerably and in some countries, such activities became big and highly lucrative business.

These illegal activities had disastrous effects on the economic activities of many countries and the revenue to government coffers in the region. The adverse effects of these criminal activities in the maritime domain of many countries in the Gulf of Guinea forced the Governments of the countries of the region to focus more attention on the issue of security in their maritime space. The Navies and maritime security agencies were either empowered or established to be able to deal more effectively in curbing the illegal activities at sea.

Bilateral and multilateral cooperation was encouraged to confront these threats to the economic well being of countries of the region. I would like to mention some of this collaboration. Bilateral: Benin-Nigeria Operation Prosperity, which commenced in August 2011, this is a joint patrol between Nigeria and Benin Navies and Maritime Security Agencies carried out in the territorial waters and contiguous zones of the two countries, renewable every six months till the threat was considerably reduced when it was scaled down sometime this year. This initiative led to immediate success and we saw Piracy attacks off the coast of Benin, reduced considerably.

Multilateral collaboration as in the case of ECCAS Strategy to secure ECCAS' Gulf of Guinea Vital Interests in Seas, adopted in Kinshasa, DRC, where the ECCAS Region was divided into four zones: ABCD. Zone D is the most active in that region and comprises Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and SaoTome and Principe

ECOWAS adopted its own Maritime Strategy in Yamoussoukro on 29 March 2014, similar to the ECCAS Strategy by dividing its region into Zones EFDG, with Zone E comprising of Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Niger Republic. The GGC adopted its own Strategy on 10 August 2013 and this is basically maintaining the infrastructure already established by the two Regional Communities but with other coordinating Centres to be established when and where necessary.

It was soon discovered that securing a Region as wide as the Gulf of Guinea is beyond the capability of any one country of the region. Also, the type of illicit activities perpetrated at sea in the area demands the cooperation of all the stakeholders in the region, Governments, populations, economic partners, investors and the international community.

Efforts at collaboration among the countries of the region were greatly encouraged by the UNSC, which in its Resolutions 2018 of 31 October 2011 and 2039 of 29 February 2012 urged the countries of the region, and the regional organisations of ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC to adopt a Regional maritime security Strategy, the implementation of which will enhance safety and security in the whole region covered by the three organisations.

With the assistance of the UN offices in Central Africa-UNOCA and in West Africa- UNOWA, a series of meetings of the three regional organisations was held in Libreville in July 2012, Dakar in October 2012, to work out the modalities of a joint Summit of Heads of State and Government of the three organisations towards the adoption of the Regional maritime security and safety strategy.

A preparatory ministerial meeting of all Member States of ECOWAS, ECCAS and GGC was held in Cotonou in February 2013 and the Summit was held in Yaoundé on 25 June 2013. The Yaoundé Summit was very important because it was the first time that the Member States of the three sub-regional organisations met together to discuss this serious threat to the economic development of the region.

The Summit was a very important step in multilateral approach to solving problems that have threatened the economic well being of many States of the region.

Three important documents were adopted at the Yaoundé Summit of 25 June 2013. These are:

1. The Yaoundé Declaration of Heads of State and Government of Central and West Africa on Safety and Security in their Common maritime Space.
2. The Code of Conduct relating to the prevention and punishment of piracy, armed robbery against ships and illicit maritime activities in West and Central Africa
3. The Memorandum of Understanding among ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC on safety and Security in the Central and West Africa maritime Space.

Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct is like the Djibouti Code of Conduct and it has provisions for boarding suspect vessels and arresting those on board if found to be involved in criminal activities.

It comes into effect for those countries that have signed it. It will be reviewed after three years after which it will be binding on all Member States of the three organisations.

If this Code is implemented by those countries that have signed it, it will really help in reducing acts of piracy and other illegal activities in the Gulf of Guinea.

Memorandum of Understanding

The Memorandum of Understanding calls for the establishment of an Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) for the Gulf of Guinea Region to be based in Yaoundé Cameroun. With the assistance of the Government of Cameroun, US-AFRICOM, EU, France, UK, Brazil and other partners, efforts were intensified between April-June 2014 to draft the basic documents of the ICC.

Two of the documents were adopted and signed on 5 June 2014 to enable the ICC take off.

These are:

1. The Additional Protocol to the Memorandum of Understanding among the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) on Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa, relating to the structure and functioning of the International Coordination Centre (ICC).
2. The Rules of Procedure of the meeting of the Chief Executives of the three organisations.

The Additional Protocol defines the functions of the ICC in its Article 3 and these include:

- Promoting the development of a unique strategy framework including issues relating to safety and security, development, and governance in the common maritime space;
- building up the capacities of civil and military components of both regions in Maritime Law Enforcement;
- coordinating training and practice activities common to both regions;
- facilitating exchange of information and experience among Heads of Navy and other maritime safety and security agencies of the Gulf of Guinea in conformity with the goals of the Centre;
- collecting, storing, disseminating and exchanging information from CRESMAC, CRESMAO and any other sources;
- disseminating information on the risk level in the waters of the two regions so as to avoid speculation in the determination of freight rates and insurance premiums;
- promoting the harmonisation of texts on Maritime Law Enforcement for the benefit of Member States of the two regions, namely the harmonisation process of statutory laws relating to the fight against piracy, armed robbery, and other illicit acts committed at sea;

- raising States' awareness on the need to ratify Conventions on Piracy and illicit acts committed at sea;
- raising population's awareness and foster awareness concerning the stakes of the maritime space;
- coordinating multilateral programs concerning Maritime Law Enforcement;
- coordinating cooperation with international organisations concerned with the fight against maritime criminality;
- seeing to the compatibility and interoperability among regional architectures for maritime safety and security;
- Setting up an ad hoc advisory committee with partners and third party contributors.

The Interim Executive Director for the Centre has been named. The ICC was to be inaugurated on the 11 July 2014 (today) but this had to be postponed due to some difficulties to be resolved, before inauguration. It is hoped that the ICC will take off very soon and will be able to perform many of the functions attributed to it in the fight against criminality at sea.

Apart from State actors and non- state actors of the Region, Multilateralism also involves other stakeholders. These include States outside of the region, international economic partners, institutions, and investors doing big business in the region, ship owners, insurance companies and security agencies.

These stakeholders have a role to play in ensuring that the Gulf of Guinea is safe and secure in order to create conditions that are conducive for legitimate businesses to flourish in the region.

Countries of the region have shown their willingness/readiness to collaborate in fighting the threat, bilaterally, sub-regionally and now regionally. There are however, difficulties in achieving this laudable goal of ridding the region of all illegal activities:

- Difficulties of interoperability of equipment used in the different countries of the region;
- Difficulties in non harmonisation of legal texts in regulating the different illegal acts in the region;
- many security Agencies managing maritime security;
- Different training for Navies and other maritime security agents of the countries of the region involved in joint patrol/surveillance activities, to mention just a few and the most common difficulties.

Multilateralism can be useful in ensuring that some of these difficulties, militating against close collaboration among the countries, are eliminated by:

- Encouraging National Navies to have special squads dedicated towards the regional cooperation, trained and equipped in a way that they will be effective when called upon to act with their counterparts from other countries;
- Providing more surveillance and patrol vessels and aircrafts for effective and necessary surveillance and patrol functions in the territorial waters and the contiguous zones of countries of the region to detect and deter perpetration of illegal activities at sea and to repel attacks of criminals, if these happen;
- Equipping the special squads with superior firing power to those of pirates and other perpetrators of illegal activities;

- Developing required infrastructure and the personnel to prosecute those apprehended for breach of security and safety at the sea.

These requirements do not come cheap and will require the financial and material support of the stakeholders within or outside the region.

The UNSC Resolution 2039 urges all Stakeholders to assist the region bilaterally and in close collaboration with the regional organisations to strengthen national and regional capacities to be able to fight this serious threat to economic development of the countries and peoples of the region, which is also a threat to international trade with countries of the region, an attack on investments in the region, and a serious threat to international peace and security.

With increased national awareness and political will to confront and solve the problem, regional cooperation amongst the countries and active involvement of non state actors within the region and other state and non state actors outside of the region, multilateralism will definitely go a long way in helping to curb dramatically, if not outrightly eliminating, this threat and thus contributing to a greater security in the Gulf of Guinea Region.

I thank you for your attention.

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