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## **“The Gulf of Guinea and the Red Sea as a learning curve for African decision-makers in capacity-building.”**

**Planned special issue: Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies**

### **Background**

In recent years, the focus on maritime security has increased and clustered around vulnerabilities and responses, programmes, and related initiatives to mitigate maritime insecurity with Africa as one dominant focus. Geographically, priority was given to developments off the Horn of Africa and in the Gulf of Guinea, where piracy, robbery, IUU fishing and related maritime crimes affected the littoral countries, international shipping down to the levels of community and even individual security. The research was often structured around these dominant themes, informing a host of local and international responses and initiatives. Overall, international events and geopolitical and geostrategic shifts continue to illustrate how vulnerable international trade and logistical maritime routes are to changes in security dynamics. Industrial production, trade flows and even electronic transactions can come to a standstill because of what can seem insignificant local maritime events that, in fact, hold international ramifications.

### **Setting the scene**

Recent developments in the Red Sea off Africa’s northeastern littoral have meant that several global shipping companies have diverted some of their shipping away from the Red Sea, altering shipping flows between the huge global markets of Asia and Europe to sail around the Cape Sea Route off South Africa. Insurance premiums for shipping have surged, raising the costs or availability of certain goods for consumers in Africa and worldwide. Diversions around South Africa have added up to 2 weeks and 6,000 nautical miles to a journey.

Attacks on shipping in the Red Sea by the Houthi militia in Yemen have exposed the critical importance of understanding and upholding Africa’s maritime security. One example pertains to threats to sub-sea infrastructure off Africa and the lack of sufficient capacity for repairs and maintenance. The Houthi treat for example disrupted rapid repairs, and stressed how a lack of capacity or disrupted capacity can directly interrupt modern-day communication flows and global financial transactions. Another example is the perceived room events in the Red Sea opened up for a sudden spate of piracy attacks in the Gulf of Aden that split the attention and resources of responding countries. In addition, events also stressed the importance of the Cape Sea Route around Africa’s southern tip.

In 2023, the United Nations adopted the BBNJ agreement (the High Seas Treaty). This resolution seeks to protect maritime resources beyond national boundaries to curb illegal fishing and overfishing through science-based management plans and so restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible. The special issue will also speak to the current state of fisheries in the Gulf of Guinea and Western Indian Ocean to address how inter-agency cooperation can help detect and report IUU fishing.

Despite having an increased focus on maritime security for more than a decade, local capacity and especially the regional mechanisms do not function in an optimal way, with the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCoC) and Djibouti Code of Conduct and Jeddah Amendment (DCoC) architectures two cases in point. In this regard, capacity building and maritime diplomacy to promote maritime security off Africa gained increasing traction as ways to



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grow Africa's capacity to take care of its vast maritime landscape. In addition, progress with African arrangements such as the DCoC, YCoC, the Lomé Charter and AIMS-225 are attractive African initiatives that must be considered, empowered, and evaluated.

### **Aim**

The special issue is one of the outputs of the 3<sup>rd</sup> jointly hosted conference on maritime security organised by the RDDC, SIGLA of Stellenbosch University and KAIPTC. In keeping with the African focus of the annual event, panels focus on developments off East Africa and in the waters of Somalia and the Red Sea, as well as the Gulf of Guinea. With this, the partners envisage to highlight the nature and impact of the sudden spate of armed attacks in the Red Sea that flag the threat of armed non-state actors, state responses, and the opportunities for piracy and hijackings. On West Africa, maritime security threats persist in the Gulf region. Events in both regions have spill-overs that also impact Southern African waters as an alternative sea route and not without its dangers. In all three cases, maritime security governance is complex, but not a new, and this begs the question of why attempts to address and even preempt these challenges have failed or at least had limited impact.

### **Context**

The special issue theoretically resides within maritime governance, especially security governance, but also draws upon geopolitics and geostrategic settings. Maritime security governance draws upon a wide sub-field of theoretical tools that tie together the issue and its different contributions. The empirical aims of the special issue are threefold: First, highlight the Gulf of Guinea as an African maritime landscape persistently exposed to various maritime security threats. Second, to consider and identify first-order lessons from the Northwestern Indian Ocean, where the threat landscape since December 2023 has migrated closer to one leaning towards armed hybrid maritime security threats. The latter also holds implications for African countries and the oceans further south and calls for attention as well. Third, the special issue will present key maritime stakeholders from the West, South, and East African states, as well as the donor community, with an academically innovative issue creating mutual comprehension and suggestions of programmes to address maritime insecurity and capacity-building.

Contributions are planned to examine the adequacy of the existing maritime security frameworks established under the Yaoundé and Djibouti Code of Conduct. Specifically, it shall seek answers to whether the structures currently provide the necessary scope and flexibility to foster enhanced maritime security cooperation. The special issue also aims to address the apparent lack of African ownership in addressing maritime issues in general and the recent events in the Red Sea, which so far have seen little to no response from African countries. To this effect, the publication touches upon building partnerships in maritime security capacity building and conducting maritime diplomacy to help mitigate maritime threats and vulnerabilities off Africa.

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