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Whose security is it? Elitism and the global approach to maritime security in Africa

Ifesinachi Marybenedette Okafor-Yarwood[a] and Freedom C. Onuoha[b]

[a]The School of Geography and Sustainable Development, The University of St, Andrews, St Andrews, UK; [b]Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Africa's marine environment and resources that lie beneath it are central to the continent's sustainable development and actualising the ambitions set out by the African Union in its Agenda 2063, where the oceans are described as the frontier of Africa's development. The continent's maritime domain and resources are also attractive to foreign partners relying on its oceans to enhance their economic development and geo-strategic interests. Serving the interests of all parties, especially the 38 coastal states and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and land-linked countries on the continent that benefit from the maritime sector, comes with challenges, some of which manifest as threats to the sustainable resource extraction and safety of those that use the maritime domain. We explored the literature, policy documents and maritime security reports database, together with our experiences as African maritime governance and security experts, to critically examine maritime security in Africa and unravel how extra-regional actors have securitised maritime threats. We show how the selective framing of what constitutes threats and associated resourcing of responses to counter them, often dictated by foreign interests, is an elite project that undermines a holistic notion of maritime security that would benefit the African people.

Introduction

The marine environment and the resources beneath it play a vital role in the socio-economic development of Africa's 38 coastal states and Small Island Development States. The significance of the maritime domain and its resources is reflected in the fact that 90% of Africa's trade is transported by sea, and fisheries resources contribute to the food and nutritional security of over 200 million Africans (Okafor-Yarwood et al. 2020, 2022). Africa's maritime industry is estimated to be worth US$1 trillion annually (Okafor-Yarwood, Kadagi, et al. 2020). This figure is set to increase as coastal states develop their offshore hydrocarbon, energy, tourism, maritime transport, shipping and fishing sectors. The continent's Blue Economy (BE) sectors are expected to advance the sustainable development of the African peoples, having been recognised as the next frontier for the continent's development by the African Union (UNECA 2016).

We engage the concept of securitisation to critically examine maritime security in Africa to unravel the elitist approach to the discourse influenced by extra-regional actors. We demonstrate how the selective framing of what constitutes threats and the associated resourcing of responses to counter them, often dictated by foreign interests and evidenced by United Nations resolutions on maritime security on the continent, is an elite project and contrary to the African Union's ambitions for a holistic approach to maritime security, whereby all threats are prioritised through law enforcement and improvement of coastal livelihood as enshrined in Articles 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the Lomé Charter (African Union 2016).

The context for the above is based on the fact that Africa's maritime affluence has made it attractive to state and non-state actors who want to benefit from the opportunities afforded by the vast space of the continent's combined coastline of more than 26,000 nautical miles (47,000 km). Ironically, the major sectors within the continent's BE are dominated by foreign interests – offshore oil exploration (Subsea 2021), shipping and ports infrastructure (Teillard and Beaubois-Jude 2022), and industrial fishing are dominated mainly by distant water nations (DWNs), especially those linked to Western and Asian countries, supported by subsidies from their governments;[1] in return, they take the profits to their respective countries. In contrast, fishing activities of the continent's artisanal fisheries sector sustain the food and economic security of millions of Africans (see Figure 1). As such, the benefit accrued by the continent from its maritime domain and resources pales into insignificance compared to the benefits derived from DWNs' exploitation of them (see, for example, Achem and Anikelechi 2021, 3–6; Okafor-Yarwood, Kadagi, et al. 2022; Teillard and Beaubois-Jude 2022).
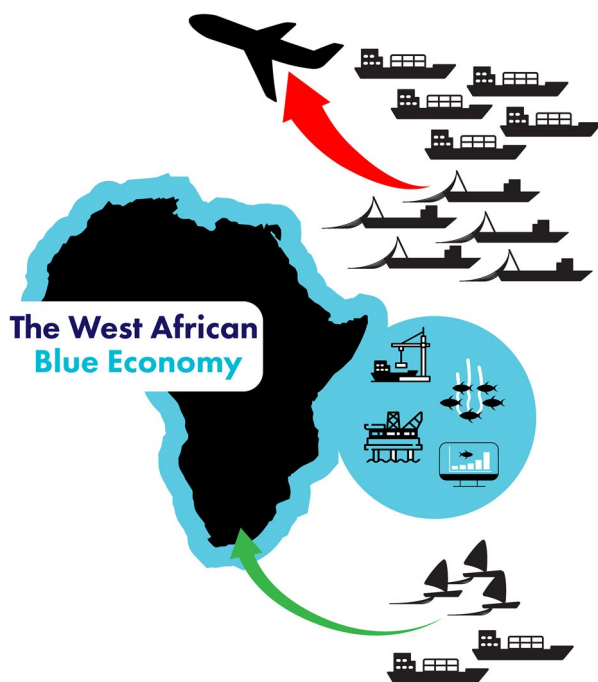
Figure 1. The nature of the relationship between Distant Water Nations and resource extraction in Africa. The infographic depicts the nature of the relationship between Distant Water Nations and resource extraction in Africa, with the red arrow representing Distant Water Nation resource outflow to their nations and the green arrow representing the flow of extracted resources by local actors towards the continent. Source: Author's creation.

As De Graaf and Garibaldi (2014, iv) observe, 25% of all marine catches around Africa are made by non-African countries. These catches, which generate US$0.4 billion for African states through fisheries agreements, could generate an additional US$3.3 billion if they were caught by African states' fleets.

Local and distant water state-sponsored and non-state actors undermine the sustainable use of Africa's maritime domain and resources by engaging in illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy and armed robbery at sea, illegal oil bunkering, toxic waste dumping, and drug/wildlife/arms smuggling (Katsouris and Sayne 2013; Okafor-Yarwood and Adewumi 2020; Okafor-Yarwood, Pigeon, et al. 2020).

For various reasons, African states' ability to ensure maritime security and capitalise on the opportunities offered by their BE remains limited. We will focus on one of the most important: their colonial and postcolonial histories. Because of the continent's colonial legacies and postcolonial experiences, countries have long prioritised land-based security issues, such as civil wars, over maritime ones. The terrestrial nature of the focus of African states on security is thus reflected in the number of armies compared to naval personnel, as shown in Table 1.

Compared to the military strengths of other coastal states in non-Western countries such as Brazil – 215,000 army and 75,000 navy,[2] India – 1,237,000 army and 58,350 navy[3] and China – 975,000 army[4] and 250,000 navy,[5] the number of personnel in Africa's armies and navies is significantly lower. However, there is an increasing focus in Africa on maritime security due to growing insecurity at sea. The confluence of threats that undermine maritime safety and security has made African waters among the world's most challenging, complex and contested maritime security environments. Underlying this complexity and contestation is the overwhelming presence of several non-African state and non-state actors not only competing to exploit Africa's rich and, for the most part, under-policed maritime domain but also, more importantly, desperate to define and promote a notion of security that prioritises their vested interests while marginalising the security interests of Africa's coastal populations, communities and states. The approach of international actors to maritime security in Africa can thus be viewed as an elite and exclusionary project.

Despite the nature of crime in the fisheries sector, in particular, the extent to which DWN vessels engage in IUU fishing and the resultant implications for livelihoods and food insecurity on the continent (Weldemichael 2012), it was the surge in piracy that drove the unprecedented concern by foreign interests regarding maritime insecurity on the continent. For example, piracy in the Gulf of Aden (GoA) – mainly off the coast of Somalia – and the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) has been met with national, regional and international interventions through United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, maritime security frameworks, and multilateral or unilateral (foreign) naval operations in African waters (Vrēy 2010). Yet other threats, such as oil stolen from coastal states in Africa with countries in Asia, Europe and North America implicated as beneficiaries (Katsouris and Sayne 2013), have received limited attention despite cross-cutting impacts on African countries.

Table 1. Regional representation of army and naval personnel in select countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Regions	Countries	Army	Navy
Central Africa	Angola	100,000	1000
East Africa	Somalia	30,000	50
Southern Africa	South Africa	38,000	6650
West Africa	Nigeria	100,000	25,000

Following this introduction, we critically reflect on maritime security and securitisation concepts to reveal their nature and dimensions from an authentic African perspective. The costs of piracy and IUU fishing are then examined, followed by the exploration of whose interest the securitisation of maritime security serves in Africa. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications and some final thoughts.

Maritime security and securitisation: conceptual and contextual framing

Gilpin (2007, 2) defines maritime security simply as the 'prevention of unlawful acts in the maritime domain, whether they directly impact the country or region in question or the perpetrators in transit'. In other words, maritime security entails uninterrupted maritime trade, the protection of coastal communities and their livelihoods, the food chain, and preserving the ocean's contribution to global health (Onuoha 2010). We define maritime security as the

> freedom from or absence of those acts that could negatively impact the natural integrity and resilience of the maritime domain or undermine the safety of persons, infrastructure, cargo, vessels, and other conveyances legitimately existing in, conducting lawful transactions on, or transiting through territorial and international waterways. (Onuoha 2009, 32)

The intrinsic and extrinsic are the two main dimensions of maritime security (Onuoha 2020, 114). The intrinsic dimension is focused on preserving the natural integrity of all components that form the basic and essential features of the maritime domain. Threats to the intrinsic dimension include, but are not limited to, the degradation of the natural integrity of the marine ecosystem by toxic or e-waste dumping, pollution from oil exploitation and the shipping industry, and IUU fishing. These threats directly undermine the lives and livelihood of coastal people and communities. The extrinsic dimension covers the safety of any entity or object using the maritime limit. This then pertains to the safety of, among others, vessels, persons and assets that are not inherent to the marine ecosystem but that are of value to a state or entity that has the legal right to utilise the marine environment (see Table 2).

The extrinsic dimension of maritime security has recently gained renewed emphasis for two reasons. The first is the persistent threat of transnational organised crime – maritime piracy, drug trafficking, dumping of waste, and arms smuggling, among others – which is facilitated through maritime channels. The second and more important reason relates to the growing threat of terrorism, especially since the 11 September 2001 (often referred to as the 9/11) attacks (Onuoha 2010). Against this backdrop, an alarm was raised that the next

Table 2. Summary of dimensions of maritime security and associated common threats.[6]

Dimensions	Core element	Primary beneficiary	Major interest promoted	Common threats	Culprits
Intrinsic	The integrity of the pristine state of waters and marine resources	Local people and their livelihoods	Livelihood security	Pollution (oil spills and dumping of toxic or e-wastes), IUU or poaching	State actors and foreign capital
Extrinsic	Safety of foreign objects/ persons	States/foreign capital (multinationals, shipping companies)	Assets and personnel security	Piracy, terrorism, accidents	Non-state actors and criminal groups

9/11 could occur at sea. As a result, some maritime security measures such as the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), Container Security Initiative (CSI), and the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism have been implemented (Onuoha 2010). While maritime terrorism has proven to be a threat that has yet to materialise,[7] piracy is the prime threat driving much of the global securitisation of the maritime domain.

The global responses to maritime insecurity in Africa have been elitist, favouring DWNs over littoral communities. On the one hand, local communities and coastal states have struggled to protect themselves from threats posed by foreign fishing and cargo vessels engaged in illicit activities that harm the environment and jeopardise sustainable fisheries and revenue generated by other sectors such as oil. On the other hand, international actors are eager to protect their interests through industrial fishing, international trade, oil and shipping; thus, international actors' conceptualisation of maritime security seeks to protect these interests. The current nature of illicit activities like piracy and armed robbery at sea, as well as large-scale illegal hydrocarbon bunkering in Nigeria, is driven by local actors and sustained by elite involvement. It is worth noting, however, that the historical link between environmental degradation by multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta and subsequent loss of livelihoods is the root cause of the emergence of these illegalities (Obi 2009).

In our research, we define elitism as the prioritisation of threats that affect foreign interests while relegating those affecting Africans to the background. The elitist approach to the framing and pursuit of maritime security initiatives in Africa conflicts with the intended holistic understanding of maritime security that the African Union has virtualised in the Maritime Security Strategy – AIMS 2050 and Lomé Charter (African Union 2012, 2016). This selective application of maritime security policies has seen foreign vessels, some of which engage in illicit activities in the continent's waters, protected, whilst threats that undermine the livelihoods of millions of Africans, perpetrated mainly by vessels linked to DWNs, are allowed to continue unabated.[8]

It is here that securitisation becomes a useful framework to interrogate this selective application of maritime security. Securitisation is when an actor (a government or corporate body, or both acting in consort) institutes measures to enhance their security when they perceive that a referent object is existentially threatened, often without public debate or a democratic process (Buzan et al. 1998). The initial step of securitisation is to affirm that a referent object is at risk – in this case, maritime safety and security. This is often achieved through a 'speech act' – a leader articulating an issue as a threat to security and the established order. According to Buzan et al. (1998, 26), 'it is the utterance itself that is the act. By saying the words, something is done …', which allows the securitisation actors to lay claims to extraordinary measures to safeguard that which is threatened. In doing so, the issue is moved out of the sphere of everyday politics and into the realm of emergency politics, where actions can be expedited without the standard 'democratic' procedure (Buzan et al. 1998; Taureck 2006).

Ferreira (2018) notes that 'speech acts' are consolidated in official documents issued by states and may, for instance, constitute the national maritime security strategy. Political elites with the capacity to institute securitisation measures – in this case, measures to address threats to safety and security – are not always affected by the threats they seek to securitise (Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2016; Fischhendler 2015). Those most affected by issues

that require securitisation are usually constrained in their ability to speak the 'security language' and influence elite actors. As a result, they are prevented from becoming 'process participants' worthy of consideration and protection (Booth 2007). The impact of this exclusionary approach to securitisation is two-fold. First, they are marginalised from political decision-making, undermining their ability to contribute to developing securitisation or relevant governance measures. Second, they are intimidated and prevented from expressing their concerns – see, for example, the treatment of small-scale fishers on the continent (Okafor-Yarwood, Kadagi, et al. 2022). It is this notion of securitisation as elitist that this paper explores by comparing security responses to IUU fishing with those on piracy.

Weighing piracy against IUU fishing

Sustainable exploitation of Africa's maritime resources as well as allowing safe navigation of its oceans is key to socio-economic development on the continent. As a result, African governments and international partners are taking the necessary steps to address threats to maritime safety and security. What is contested is what is prioritised, and the question of whose interests the steps taken to ensure maritime security seek to promote is critical. We explore the extent and socio-economic and environmental cost of piracy and IUU fishing to demonstrate the elitist nature of the maritime security approach adopted by the international community in Africa.
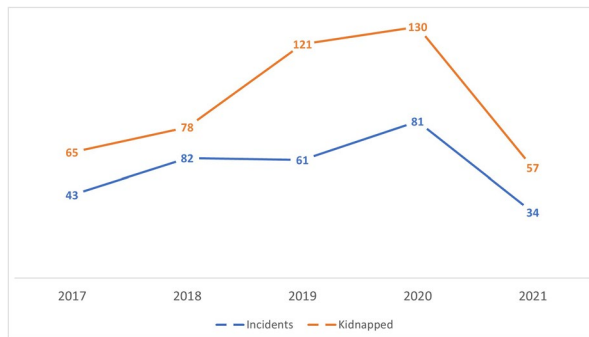
Cost of piracy

The threat of piracy undermines the safety of seafarers.[9] It threatens Africa's efforts to harness the opportunities attainable through their marine resources and domains for the sustainable development of their people. The extensive nature of piracy on the continent is such that between 2005 and 2012, when the threat was pervasive in the GoA, nearly 2000 sailors were kidnapped, and many others were killed (Freeman 2021b). Relatedly, between 2009 and 2020, in the GoG, fewer than 800 sailors were kidnapped, with only a few killings reported (Okafor-Yarwood, Pigeon, et al. 2020, 42). This is high compared to the Bay of Bengal, which reported six incidents of piracy between 2016 and mid-2019, half of which are classified as robbery or attempted robbery at anchorages and a third as the kidnapping of fishers in the Sundarbans and the northern Bay of Bengal (Benson 2020, 34).

   Table 3 presents the state of piracy and armed robbery attacks in the GoA and GoG, which for the former shows that no incident of piracy has been reported since 2018 (attempted attacks recorded in 2018 and 2021). In the latter, the number of reported incidents has significantly decreased since 2021 (see Figure 2). The reduction in incidents is further evidenced by the delisting of Nigeria, once designated a piracy hotspot, from the 'hotspot list' by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) (Arete Africa 2022). In addition, there were no reported crew kidnappings in the region during the first quarter of 2022, compared to 40 crew kidnappings in the same period in 2021 (ICC 2022), and the figures remain significantly low in the second, third and fourth quarters of 2022 compared to previous years. These reductions are down to improved cooperation and collaboration by regional navies and support from international partners in the forms of training, funding and maritime presence – especially through at-sea exercises.

Table 3. Frequency of piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea and the Gulf of Aden from 2008 to 2021.[10]

Year	Gulf of Guinea				Gulf of Aden			
	Actual attacks		Attempted attacks		Actual attacks		Attempted attacks	
	Boarded	Hijacked	Fired upon	Attempted boarding	Boarded	Hijacked	Fired upon	Attempted boarding
2008	59				111			
2009	33	1	5	8	1	46	109	40
2010	39				192			
2011	30	10	3	10	16	27	97	57
2012	33	10	8	11	2	14	20	26
2013	23	7	14	7	–	2	8	3
2014	21	5	8	6	–	–	2	5
2015	21	2	–	8	–	–	–	–
2016	34	3	9	9	–	–	1	1
2017	29	–	7	9	1	3	3	1
2018	53	6	13	10	–	–	3	–
2019	47	4	10	2	–	–	–	–
2020	58	3	9	14	–	–	–	–
2021	27	1	3	5	–	–	–	1

Figure 2. Reported incidents of piracy and kidnappings 2017–2021 in the Gulf of Guinea.[10]

Many factors make piracy in the GoA and GoG different. For instance, the ransom paid in the GoA is much higher than in the GoG. In the GoA, at the height of piracy, an estimated US$500 million was paid in ransom to pirate groups between 2005 and 2012, and the criminals tended to ask for a higher ransom and assert more violence than their counterparts in the GoG (Freeman 2021a; Gilpin 2016). Specifically, pirates in the GoA asked for US$1.1 million to release seven Pakistani hostages on the Albedo ship in 2012 (Freeman 2021a). By contrast, US$320,000 was paid for the release of the 15 crew members of the *Mozart* taken in January 2021 off Nigeria's waters (Jacobsen 2021, 64). Relatedly, the annual amount accrued by pirates from their escapades in the GoG is estimated at US$4 million per annum (Jacobsen 2021). Based on this calculation, one can assume that between 2009 and 2021, pirates in the GoG made US$48 million. As will be discussed later, the income generated by pirates is significantly lower than those generated by the private maritime security companies that have emerged to combat the threat.

Equally worth mentioning is the economic and human cost of piracy. New investors might be discouraged,[11] and existing ones leave the maritime trade due to the lack of financial sustainability of investing in the region. In the GoG, for example, the indirect cost of piracy to the shipping industry is estimated at US$1.4 billion; the opportunity cost for the fishing

sector is US$504 million and US$524 million invested by states in counter-piracy measures, leading to the diversion of much-needed resources from other sectors (Bell et al. 2021). In the GoA, at the peak of piracy attacks, rerouting tankers carrying oil from the region to South Africa's Cape of Good Hope cost an estimated US$3.5 billion in fuel annually. The tourism and fishing sectors were also affected: countries like Seychelles lost 4% of their gross domestic product (GDP) in 2009 due to piracy in the GoA (Mbekeani and Ncube 2011). Meanwhile, the human cost of piracy is irreparable. In 2011, for example, 35 hostages died at the hands of pirates in the GoA (BBC 2012). Although attacks in the GoG are not as violent compared to the GoA, hostages have been killed by pirates in the GoG; the most recent incident was the killing of an Azerbaijani sailor aboard a Turkish vessel in January 2021 (Spicer and Koca 2021).

The cost of IUU fishing

IUU fishing is one of the pervasive threats in Africa's maritime domain.[12] One direct impact of IUU fishing is the exacerbation of the depletion of fish stocks. The economic cost is also worth bringing to the fore. Although the clandestine nature of the threat makes it impossible to be conclusive about the figure, according to the former Chairperson of the African Union, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Africa has lost US$200 billion in five decades to IUU fishing (Okafor-Yarwood, Kadagi, et al. 2022). The monetary value of the lost fishing opportunities attributable to IUU fishing is estimated at US$10 billion, and the economic multiplier effects from this amount exceed $30 billion annually – more than 1% of the GDP of coastal states on the continent (AU-IBAR 2016). In West Africa, Doumbouya et al. (2017) noted that the cost of IUU fishing in six West African countries – Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone – is an estimated US$2.3 billion each year.

Due to the above, fisherfolk are exposed to increased risk to their personal security. In Sierra Leone, industrial fleets trawl the nets of local fishers and, in extreme cases, attack them when fishing in inshore areas reserved for them (EJF 2012). The narrative is similar in Nigeria, where fisherfolk have experienced violence from IUU fishing vessels and, in extreme cases, have been shot at, resulting in deaths (Okafor-Yarwood 2020b). Fisherfolk in both countries have responded by seeking to defend themselves, with Sierra-Leonean fisherfolk taking hold of a vessel they accused of encroaching in inshore areas (Kamara 2018), and in Nigeria, fisherfolk have noted:

> [I]f we had access to guns, and we are shot at, we might be able to respond in kind. You cannot come in our waters and kill us and expect us to do nothing. But sadly, we are not in a position to even protect ourselves …. (Okafor-Yarwood 2020b, 125)

Further, the direct impact of IUU fishing in reducing the fish catch of the millions of people employed in the artisanal fisheries sector is worth noting – in Africa, 10 to 19 million[13] people rely on fisheries for their primary livelihood, with another 90 million depending on fishing in diversified livelihood strategies, and the sector has a direct bearing on the food security of over 200 million Africans (Du Preez 2018). The income accrued by small-scale fishers in Africa has already been decreased by up to 40% over the last decade (The World Bank 2016). Reduced catch leads to a decrease in fish available for local consumption, affecting animal protein intake, especially in areas where fish is the only source of animal protein. By extension,

this casts doubt on the attainment of select Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as 1 and 2 – no poverty and zero hunger, respectively (Okafor-Yarwood 2019).

Further impacts include rising unemployment in coastal communities, fisherfolk abandoning the trade or boat owners laying off crew members to reduce costs. Some fisherfolk who have lost their livelihoods have taken to criminality, including but not limited to drugs trafficking, IUU fishing, illegal migration to Europe and engaging in acts of piracy (Weldemichael 2012; INTERPOL 2014; Okafor-Yarwood 2020b). For the women in the value chain who rely on the fish caught by the fishers to support their families, reduced catch means little or no fish available for them to process and/or sell, resulting in persistent poverty for littoral families and communities at large (Okafor-Yarwood, Van Den Berg, et al. 2022). Relatedly, some women's responses to this poverty, through the practice of 'sex for fish' or 'sex for money', undermine their safety and health security further (Béné and Merten 2008; Fiorella et al. 2015).

More than the immediate socio-economic and environmental impact of IUU fishing in Africa, the economic cost accrued through lost opportunities and future stock rehabilitation for select species on the continent is estimated at $326 billion – see Table 4 for a regional breakdown (AU-IBAR 2016).

Table 4. Regional breakdown of lost opportunities from IUU fishing and the cost of stock rehabilitation since 1980 (AU-IBAR 2016, 3).

List of regions	Estimate of lost opportunities and the cost of stock rehabilitation from 1980 to 2016
Central Africa	$24.9 billion
Eastern Africa	$19.3 billion
Northern Africa	$81.2 billion
Southern Africa	$62.8 billion
Western Africa	$137.9 billion

There is also the extended impact of crime in the fishing sector, whereby vessels might be authorised to fish in countries on the continent and take advantage of the continent's marine space to engage in other crimes. This is evidenced by the capture of fishing vessels from Latin America off the Gulf of Guinea (Naval News Staff 2022) and Cabo Verde (LUCA 2022). In explaining the national security impact of maritime insecurity in Nigeria, in the context of the insecurity in the Niger Delta, a maritime law enforcement agent noted that it is conceivable that fishing vessels are further used to smuggle arms into Nigeria (Okafor-Yarwood, Pigeon, et al. 2020, 124–125).

Addressing these threats requires a securitised response. What is questioned is this current elitist approach, dictated by external actors through UN resolutions, that sees the prioritisation of piracy due to its impact on their economic and energy security. This exclusionary approach ignores other threats perpetrated by foreign entities, such as IUU fishing, that have vast implications for the food and economic security of millions of Africans.

Securitisation of maritime security in Africa: in whose interest?

As observed in the preceding discussion, envisaging maritime security through an elite lens entails a focus on the threats of piracy to the detriment of a more holistic approach that also encompasses IUU fishing. Specifically, concerns about the persistence of piracy in the GoG

and GoA, alongside their impact on global sea trade and the safety of seafarers, inspired different levels of interventions by the United Nations in the forms of Security Council resolutions and Presidential Statements, as highlighted in Table 5 – the latest resolution being passed in May 2022 (UN 2022).

Table 5. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and presidential statements on piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Guinea.[15]

Global response to piracy	Gulf of Aden	Gulf of Guinea
UNSC resolutions	1814 (2008), 1816 (2008) 1838 (2008), 1844 (2008) 1846 (2008), 1851 (2008) 1897 (2009), 1918 (2010) 1950 (2010), 1976 (2011) 2015 (2011), 2020 (2011) 2077 (2012) 2125 (2013) 2184 (2014), 2246 (2015) 2316 (2016), 2383 (2017) 2442 (2018), 2500 (2019 and 2608 (2021)	2018 (2011) 2039 (2012) 2634 (2022)
UN Presidential Statements	S/PRST/2010/16 (2010) S/PRST/2012/24 (2012)	2012

These resolutions called on states and regional organisations to cooperate and develop maritime strategies and legal frameworks to combat maritime crimes collectively, and African states responded to these calls by committing to the Djibouti Code of Conduct (2009) and Yaoundé Code of Conduct (2013). Specifically, following UN resolutions 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012) in the GoG, in June 2013, 25 heads of West and Central African government met in Yaoundé, Cameroon, to declare their support for collective security in the region, with a particular emphasis on combatting piracy. This culminated in the Yaoundé Declaration and the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A Code of Conduct was also adopted to guide and encourage the member states to conform to one standard of conduct in combating maritime crimes (Okafor-Yarwood 2020a). Since the Yaoundé Code of Conduct was signed in 2013, the Yaoundé Architecture has been established, with the Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) based in Cameroon at the apex, followed by two regional Maritime Security Centres based in Cote d'Ivoire and Congo. There are five Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres, in Cameroon, Ghana, Benin Republic, Angola and Cabo-Verde, and National Maritime Operation Centres in the 19 coastal states, supported by funding from external partners (Okafor-Yarwood, Pigeon, et al. 2020).[14] As a result, the last decade has seen increased investment in securitisation through maritime law enforcement on the continent (Bell et al. 2021).

Further, in the GoA, Somalia's example highlights international conceptions of whose interests Africa's maritime domain and resources serve. On the one hand, the global response to piracy led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) coalition, including the US and other naval forces launching coordinated efforts, in response to the UN resolutions, has seen the threat neutralised, bringing an end to the international mandate (France 24 2022). Despite the presence of an international coalition in the GoA, the elitist nature of determining who is worth saving is also highlighted by the stories of the forgotten hostages, wherein

'piracy cases only attracted much attention if they were Westerners' (Freeman 2021b). On the other hand, as piracy recedes in the region, IUU fishing continues unabated (Bahadur 2021). This is ironic: seas have been made safe for foreign vessels to continue with their plunder of the fisheries in the region, even though IUU fishing by foreign vessels has been cited by many as a major contributory factor for piracy off the GoA (Weldemichael 2012; McVeigh 2020). A tautological policy stance is thus present.

African states are complicit in sustaining this elitist approach to maritime security as they often require external support to implement policies and are attracted to the revenue accrued from resource extraction, hence the skewed implementation of a holistic maritime security policy. There is also a question of power dynamics, as wealthy external actors try to push their interests through strategies and funding projects that align with their maritime security agenda on the continent (see for example EEAS 2021). Some African elites perceive that the current approach serves foreign interests more than those of the continent, as threats that affect foreign entities are prioritised at the expense of dealing with those affecting the continent. Such concerns might have resulted in what seems to be an abrupt ending to the mandate of the UNSC in Somalia. Specifically, in December 2021, the UNSC voted unanimously to allow international naval forces to continue using all necessary means to combat piracy off the coasts of Somalia, but only for the following three months – until March 2022 (UN 2021). Simultaneously, the Government of Somalia expressed their disinterest in any future extension of the UN mandate to suppress piracy off Somalia's territorial waters. Specifically, the representative of Somalia to the UN noted the following (as quoted in UN 2021):

> 'As you all are aware, piracy is only one of the many threats' in Somali territorial waters, he said, stressing the need to fight against illegal, underreported and unregulated fishing in its exclusive economic zone. His delegation's decision to explore other avenues is guided by national priorities. The militarization of Somali national waters has helped eradicate piracy over the years, but continuing this militarization has nothing to do with piracy and armed robbery, he stressed.

The position of the Somali government reflects an understanding of the elitist nature of the maritime security responses on the African continent, wherein international priorities supplant national ones.

More recent examples from the GoG demonstrate the extent to which the international community is willing to go to protect its interests – including acts of militarisation; even when such actions might undermine the very security it claims to protect by going against regional interests and the effort to address threats through cooperation and collaboration at the regional level. One example that accentuates this claim is the case of *Esbern Snare*, in November 2021, where, after a gun battle involving the Danish navy, three 'suspected' pirates 'were put to sea in a small dinghy with enough food and fuel for them to reach safely to shore, after the charges against them were withdrawn … [and] after Denmark failed to find a country in the region to take them' (Reuters 2022). These were suspected criminals accused of piracy and attempted manslaughter caught and released to roam wild in the region because the alternative of prosecuting them in Denmark 'risk[s] that they would not subsequently be deported' (Reuters 2022).

The decision of the Danish government to deploy its naval warships to the GoG stems from continuous pressure from representatives of the shipping industries, such as the Baltic

and International Maritime Council (BIMCO), which has lobbied for stringent action to be taken to address the threat of piracy in the region. Despite the outcry from legal experts in Nigeria (Eyewitness Reporter 2021) and condemnation of other stakeholders who described the Danes' actions as 'colonial', BIMCO published a statement praising the Danes for a successful outing: 'BIMCO is grateful to the Danish Navy for their firm actions to stop suspected pirates in the Gulf of Guinea. While every loss of life is tragic, we note the Danish special forces – acting in accordance with international law – were forced to fire …' (Fraende 2021, quoting David Loosley, Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer of BIMCO).

In presenting the Danes as benevolent actors, despite the fact that people were killed and the disruptive nature of the incident in terms of the region's collective response to piracy, their unilateral action does little for efforts to build trust between regional states and their foreign partners; BIMCO reinforces the elitist nature of the external response to maritime security wherein the interests of foreign entities are expected to supersede those of African countries and their peoples. This is hardly surprising given that Africa owns a very insignificant share of the world fleet. As of 2017, no African country was among the top 35 ship-owning nations (UNCTAD 2019).

Ironically, whilst the shipping industry is calling for action on maritime security in the region, it has refused to utilise the maritime security architecture available in the region for information sharing, having been 'strongly urged to report to the FR/UK operated, Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea (MDAT-GoG) which is a secure and trusted agency' (OCIMF 2018). Ultimately, whilst the international commitment to ensuring safety and security at sea on the African continent has enhanced the capacity for local agencies and brought about some positive results, there is no arguing that the foreign parties are there to serve their own respective interests: protecting their investments. The shipping industry often cites the need to save the 'poor' seafarers when galvanising support for a Somalia-style response in the GoG. It has gone so far as implying that addressing the livelihood issues, including illegal fishing and pollution, identified as root causes of piracy in the region, are long-term solutions that can only be undertaken by regional states, while addressing piracy requires immediate international action (Larsen 2021). It does not seem logical that the livelihood issues they have recognised as the root cause of insecurity in the GoG, which foreign interests are complicit in contributing to through IUU fishing and oil pollution, as examples (Obi 2009; Okafor-Yarwood, Kadagi, et al. 2022), should now be reserved for regional states to deal with.

It seems even more illogical that external actors are seeking a Somalia-style response to piracy rather than getting behind regional efforts centred on cooperation and collaboration between actors, which have significantly contributed to the decline of piracy and armed robbery in the region, and which have also improved interagency cooperation and collaboration. Specifically, the cooperation and collaboration between fishing agencies in the region and the navy in Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria resulted in the capture of the pirates that kidnapped the crew of the *Hai Lu Feng II* in 2020 (FCWC 2020). The enthusiasm for cooperation is further evidenced by the recent adoption of a Supplementary Act for the Transfer of Piracy Suspects and their Associated Property and/or Evidence for prosecution by heads of states of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) states (UNODC 2022). Relatedly, cooperation between the Nigerian and Equatorial Guinean navies resulted in the arrest of the *Heroic Idun* in Equatorial Guinea and the vessel's subsequent transfer to Nigeria for contravening Nigeria's Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act 2019 (Yafugborhi 2022).

Moreover, the presentation of BIMCO's call for an international response to piracy in the GoG as being about saving human lives and not profit or protecting external interests is invalidated by two examples. First, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, foreign navies withdrew or suspended their operations in the GoG (Okafor-Yarwood 2020a). Secondly, in February 2022, Denmark announced it was calling home its aforementioned frigate, the *Esbern Snare*, which was on an anti-piracy mission, due to ongoing tensions with Russia over Ukraine – the frigate's mandate was supposed to end in April 2022 (The Local 2022). These examples show that external states in the GoG's maritime domain act to protect their own interests; in both cases, the safety and security in the region were not a priority; hence, their assets were recalled.

Ironically, since 2008 when the UN gave its mandate for joint action in Somalia, it has exposed new forms of ocean capitalism whereby capitalist states and corporations seeking to transcend the geophysical difference between firm land and fluid sea are doing so in the name of 'security' (Campling and Colas 2018). Western insurance firms are profiteering (Onuoha 2021), and the demand for private maritime security companies (PMSCs), an industry valued at US$21 billion in 2021 (Mordor Intelligence 2022), has increased. At the height of piracy in the GoA, an estimated 50% of the 42,000 merchant ships transiting the region engaged the services of PMSCs, with an average cost of US$50,000 per PMSC team (Priddy and Casey-Maslen 2012). Although there are a few African PMSCs, these services were, and continue to be, provided mainly by Western companies and Asian mercenaries, as the post-Cold War political and security transition facilitated the major downsizing of armies, leaving a surplus of military professionals from the former Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom available for employment in such ventures (Kmelisch 2013; Affi et al. 2016). The following quote captures the importance of this 'pirate economy' benefitting Western firms:

> The emerging economic paradigm indicates that use of maritime armed guards will only increase … private security companies, many based in Britain or elsewhere in northern Europe, that combat the pirates were earning much more than the pirates themselves. Thus piracy is good for at least some businesses. (Isenberg 2012)

The benefits accrued from this growing sector thus go directly to the countries where these companies are established, and not the African continent, and, as criminals need to be policed, there is an incentive for them to seek to maintain the status quo on piracy and armed robbery. Shipping industries are pushing for a Somalia-style response, which includes allowing PMSCs aboard vessels operating in the region. However, the majority of the regional states in the GoG objected to such demands and, unlike in the GoA, have not given free rein to the employment of PMSCs in the region because they want to develop and strengthen their own naval capabilities (Okafor-Yarwood, Pigeon, et al. 2020, 75–86).

Equally rarely mentioned in the discourse on piracy is the role that foreign actors play in negotiating the ransoms paid for the release of pirates: 'some global shipping companies and foreign actors are using cash and bypassing local authorities in the region to negotiate directly with pirates' (Onuoha 2021, para. 23), thereby indirectly allowing the proliferation of the trade. In August 2020, for instance, negotiators involved with the case of MV *Elobey VI* off Equatorial Guinea were fined US$26,300 each for their role in negotiating the payment of US$200,000 for the crew's release, in contravention of Nigeria's Piracy Acts (BBC 2020). Specifically, Article 16 (1) of Nigeria's SPOMO 2019 Act notes, 'any incident, which may

constitute an offence under this ACT shall be reported by the master, ship-owners or man-ager, crew rep, cargo rep, insurer …'.[16] Freeman (2021a) details the role of Western negotiators in the GoA in negotiating the release of kidnapped sailors. As noble as their actions might seem, they undermine regional and national legal and prosecutorial efforts to combat these threats. In their current state, the elitist approaches to maritime security, through stressing militaristic intervention that focuses only on piracy, grant minimal benefits for African states (see Figure 3).

Implications and conclusions

We have reviewed the extent and impact of the threats to maritime security and measures introduced to address them. It is unequivocally clear that maritime security policies promote the interests of foreign entities whilst the African interest is relegated to the background.

Considering the two sides of the coin, local use of ocean resources is essential for food and economic security. On the other hand, the activities of the industrial sector, mainly by DWNs, are largely predatory, with the resources extracted and benefits accrued utilised outside the continent. As the evidence provided thus far has shown, the activities of these foreign entities contribute to overexploitation and degradation of the resources they exploit and the environment in which they operate.

Our conclusive argument is that maritime safety and security in Africa will be attained only when the same level of collective attention and deployment of resources that are given to countering piracy is extended to threats in Africa, with more far-reaching implications than the former – particularly IUU fishing. In other words, sustainable maritime security can only be achieved if equal attention is devoted towards promoting and preserving both the extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions of maritime security on the continent. African governments should consider the following recommendations for the continent to get things right.

First, there is an urgent need for African states at the continental African Union (AU) and sub-regional Regional Economic Communities (RECs) levels to galvanise collective action to encourage the UN and other international bodies, such as the World Trade Organization, to show more commitment in pushing for an end to exploitative relationships when it comes
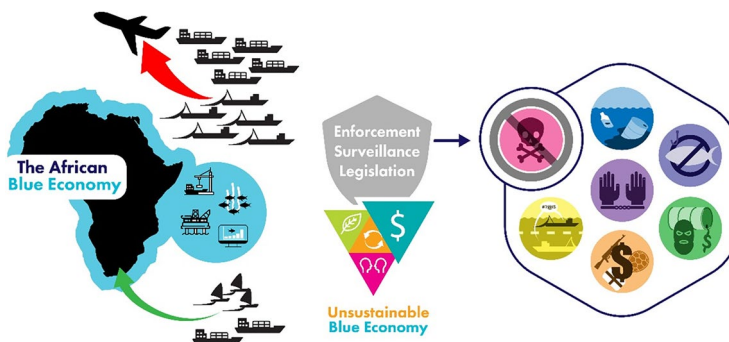

Figure 3. Elitist representation of maritime security policies in Africa. This infographic depicts an un-sustainable maritime security scenario in Africa, where piracy takes precedence over other threats. The inverted triangle represents the negative effects of the Africa's current approach to its Blue Economy development on social well-being and ecological conservation.
Source: Author's creation.

to the ocean's resources on the continent – in particular, explicitly recognising IUU fishing and associated crimes as a threat to security. Doing this could trigger more explicit action at the levels we have seen with piracy, such as introducing UNSC resolutions on IUU fishing and the international support needed to implement such resolutions.

Secondly, African states should implement the holistic approach to maritime security envisioned in the AIMS 2050 and Lomé Charter, allowing for intersectoral cooperation and collaboration – whereby assets and platforms created for countering piracy are used in tandem to counter IUU fishing and associated activities. Doing this would ensure that international partners go beyond the rhetoric of pronouncing the urgency of addressing IUU fishing and associated crime and take action by not financing the plunder of the continent's resources through the subsidies they provide to their vessels, which currently allows for the legal overexploitation of depleted resources and IUU fishing (see Figure 4).

Thirdly, African voices need to be prioritised to understand better how resource extraction and the impact of threats to maritime security affect Africans; doing this could lead to better implementation of policies and possibilities of co-management schemes that see communities supporting the government in their effort to improve the sustainable use of ocean resources and safety and security in the continent. Relatedly, further research that would see more data on the nature of ocean resources on the continent and their condition is needed now more than ever, as the continent cannot understand what it has lost or is losing until it has more knowledge about its resources.

Fourthly, although the effort made by the African continent with the support of foreign partners to ensure greater maritime law enforcement through various initiatives has contributed significantly to the reduction of piracy on the continent, the current approach is not sustainable. Specifically, a sustainable approach to maritime security would see that the root causes, not the symptoms, of insecurity are addressed. Doing this entails equally addressing social, economic and environmental issues – widespread youth unemployment and environmental degradation, corruption, and the exploitative nature of the current arrangements between DWNs and their African partners. This can be achieved by urgently addressing the threats to depleting fisheries resources, which would ensure that the
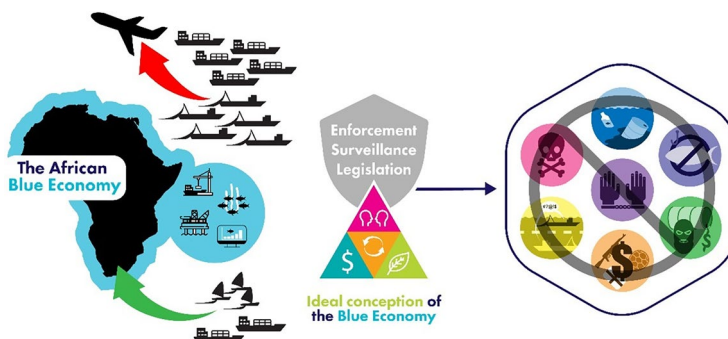

Figure 4. The ideal maritime security scenario. This infographic depicts an ideal maritime security scenario in Africa, where all maritime security threats are prioritised, as opposed to the current arrangement, which prioritises piracy. It also demonstrates that while Distant Water Nations (DWNs) extract resources from the continent, social well-being and environmental conservation are considered part of a comprehensive approach to maritime security, as indicated by the triangle.
Source: Author's creation.

livelihoods of fisherfolk who would otherwise be lured into criminality are protected. Further, achieving this would require the future development of the African BE sector while prioritising social well-being and ecological conservation, and not just economic growth (Okafor-Yarwood, Kadagi, et al. 2020).

There is a role that the third sector, especially non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations (CSOs), can play in supporting state institutions. Although CSOs have paid less attention to issues relating to the maritime domain compared to terrestrial issues, those that do receive limited support from the state, making it difficult for them to be effective in their role. Recognising CSOs as partners in maritime security would improve co-management efforts, including reaching out to impoverished and disempowered people who risk turning to crime out of desperation and, in the long run, seeing that 'no human [is] left behind' (JCIE 2010).

The levels of poverty and deprivation in coastal communities mean that unless a holistic approach to maritime security – that is beneficial to and driven by Africans – is implemented, the peace and security of the continent and, by extension, the continent's prospects for prosperity by 2063, will be undermined.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributors

Ifesinachi Marybenedette Okafor-Yarwood is a lecturer at the University of St. Andrews' School of Geography & Sustainable Development Scotland. Her work advances an interdisciplinary understanding of oceans' sustainability and criminality as a question of resource management, environmental justice, and the disproportionate effects of depleting marine resources on inequality, poverty and insecurity. Her current research deepens the understanding of maritime security and governance. It considers the gendered dimensions of maritime (in)security across the Gulf of Guinea. She has a PhD in leadership, security and development from King's College London, an MA in conflict, security and development and a BA in international relations, peace and conflict studies.

Freedom C. Onuoha is a professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Coordinator of the Security, Violence and Conflict (SVC) Research Group domiciled at the university. He has published extensively on diverse aspects of national and transnational security threats, with an emphasis on violent extremism, terrorism, insurgency, maritime security, election security and state fragility. His work has been published by several top-ranked international

journals, including *African Affairs*; *Disasters*; *Security Journal*; and *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. He was listed among the top 100 Global Thinkers of 2014 by the Lo Spazio della Politica for his ground-breaking studies on Boko Haram. He recently co-edited *Boko Haram's Terrorist Campaign in Nigeria: Contexts, Dimensions and Emerging Trajectories* (London: Routledge, 2021) with Temitope B. Oriola and Samuel Oyewole. With Caroline Varin, he co-edited *Security in Nigeria: Contemporary Threats and Responses* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), and with Oshita Oshita and Ikenna Alumona, *Internal Security Management in Nigeria: Perspectives, Challenges and Lessons* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Notes

1. Some subsidies have been identified as harmful due to their contribution to overfishing and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. In June 2022, the World Trade Organization reached an agreement with its members, after many negotiations, to put an end to these harmful subsidies (WTO 2022).
2. From https://www.indexmundi.com/brazil/military_profile.html
3. From https://indiancc.mygov.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/mygov-9999999991587689524.pdf
4. https://www.businessinsider.com/new-pentagon-maps-show-the-chinese-military-growing-reach-2022-3
5. From Gill (2022, 119).
6. Extracted from Onuoha (2020, 114).
7. Besides the attacks on USS *Cole* on 12 October 2000 and MV *Limburg* on 6 October 2002, the world has yet to witness any significant attack in the maritime domain by an ideologically motivated group that would qualify as maritime terrorism. Hence, much of the concern has focused on piracy rather than maritime terrorism.
8. Here, foreign vessels are recognised as those that are allowed to operate in Africa's waters through licensing or agreements, whilst vessels linked to foreign companies are used to define those who gain access to Africa's waters by investing in African companies (see for instance, concerning fisheries, EJF 2021; Freitas 2021). Some of these vessels contravene the terms of their licensing and agreements by engaging in IUU fishing, and the subsidies provided by their governments have allowed for the overexploitation of certain species on the continent (Skerritt and Sumaila 2021; Doumbouya et al. 2017).
9. Article 101 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines piracy. Armed robbery refers to similar crimes committed in territorial, archipelagic and internal waters. These terms are not interchangeable, although 'pirates' sometimes refers to criminals who commit either crime (Okafor-Yarwood, Pigeon, et al. 2020, 4).
10. Extracted from https://www.icc-ccs.org/piracy-reporting-centre/: accessed 01 August 2022.
11. The extent to which foreign investors are discouraged from investing is debatable, as many port infrastructure projects are underway throughout the continent. DWNs continue to renew their fishing agreements and sign new ones, and new players want to tap into the opportunities in the maritime transport and shipping sector.
12. IUU fishing, as the name implies, refers to fishing activities that conflict with existing regulations and violate management or conservation measures for a specific fishery (Okafor-Yarwood 2019).
13. This figure could be much higher. In Nigeria, the fisheries sector employs over 8.6 million people directly and a further 19.6 million indirectly, 70% of whom are women (WorldFish 2018).
14. The Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres (MMCC), due to be situated in Angola and Cabo Verde, still need to be operationalised. However, the headquarters agreement was signed for Cabo Verde in October 2022).
15. See, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/piracy/
16. See: Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act 2019.pdf (placbillstrack.org).

ORCID

Ifesinachi Marybenedette Okafor-Yarwood http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4952-9979
Freedom C. Onuoha http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4321-1065

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