



AFRICA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

ENHANCING MARITIME SAFETY AND SECURITY IN AFRICA: WHOLE-OF-AFRICA MARITIME DIALOGUE 2021

Virtual Dialogue
27 - 28 July 2021

OVERVIEW

Since July 2017, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies has held several “Whole-of-Africa” Maritime Safety and Security Dialogues, beginning with an event in Yaoundé, Cameroon on “Inter-Regional Coordination for Maritime Safety and Security.” Subsequent Whole-of-Africa Maritime Dialogues were convened in Victoria, Seychelles in March 2018 and Windhoek, Namibia in May 2019. These events involved rich discussions among the participants from across littoral Africa. Since the event in Namibia, however, all our lives have been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic we continue to face. Nevertheless, the Africa Center is pleased to convene a virtual Whole-of-Africa Maritime Dialogue 2021 with Africa Center maritime safety and security alumni and invited guests to take stock of the African maritime safety and security domain amid a decidedly different global context.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected states and regions in many ways, the maritime domain has continued to operate throughout these challenging times. So, too, are maritime criminals. The 2021 Whole-of-Africa Maritime Dialogue will take stock of key developments in the African maritime domain since our last dialogue in May 2019 and considering the effects of the pandemic. The following represent some of the highlights of what has happened in Africa’s maritime domain over the last two years, considering threats at sea and state actions at sea region by region, as well as several global maritime domain developments which we may wish to discuss.

RED SEA AFRICA

Serious maritime accidents in the Red Sea area have had major impacts on Africa's maritime economy and security. The politics of basing and maritime cooperation continue to shape maritime security dynamics in the Red Sea.

Threats at Sea:

The EVER GIVEN Suez Canal Incident:

The EVER GIVEN captured the world's attention in March 2021 when it became stuck in the Suez Canal for six days, blocking trade through the Red Sea. The world was momentarily reminded that 90% of world trade moves by sea and 10% of world trade transits the Red Sea. The blockage led to spikes in fuel and food prices, rationing of fuel in some places and major financial loss. Specifically, it led to \$1 billion in claims by the Suez Canal Authority, and an estimated loss of \$416 million per hour for global shipping. While it was officially deemed an accident, a number of cyber experts question whether it may actually have been a cyberattack involving remote operation of both the propulsion system and the rudder.

- Joe Weiss, "Was the Ever Given hacked in the Suez Canal?" *Control Global* (blog), 13 April 2021, <https://www.controlglobal.com/blogs/unfettered/was-the-ever-given-hacked-in-the-suez-canal/>

The Potential Spill of the FSO SAFER:

The FSO SAFER remains a looming threat to the region, and UN efforts have failed to even access the SAFER, making it increasingly likely to become one of the largest and most devastating oil spills in world history.

- Ian Ralby, David Soud, Rohini Ralby, "The United Nations Security Council Needs to Authorize Military Action to Prevent the Spill of the FSO SAFER," *Atlantic Council*, 14 March 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/the-united-nations-security-council-needs-to-authorize-military-action-to-prevent-the-spill-of-the-fso-safer/>.

State Action at Sea:

Russian Naval Basing in Sudan: Russia announced the creation of a Naval Base in Sudan, meaning that four of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council would have bases on the Red Sea (China, France and USA in Djibouti and Russia in Sudan). In April 2021, Sudan suspended the permission for Russia to proceed and the fate of the project remains uncertain.

- "Sudan puts Russia naval base deal under review," *Al-Monitor*, 2 June 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/06/sudan-puts-russia-naval-base-deal-under-review>.

Establishment of the Red Sea Council:

On 6 January 2020, seven states established a multinational Red Sea Council for addressing security and stability in the Red Sea. The seven countries are Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Eritrea, Yemen, Sudan, Djibouti, and Somalia. The aim is to cooperate to enhance maritime and regional

security and to that end, several exercises have been conducted. The pandemic has interrupted some of the plans for developing this cooperative regime, as have conflicts in the region.

- Desirée Custers, Red Sea Multilateralism: Power Politics or Unlocked Potential, Stimson Center, 7 April 2021, <https://www.stimson.org/2021/red-sea-multilateralism-power-politics-or-unlocked-potential/>.

INDIAN OCEAN AFRICA

Despite some setbacks, the overall trend of successful counter piracy in Somalia's maritime region continues. At the same time pre-existing threats of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, heroin smuggling, and unsafe migrant smuggling remain serious challenges.

Threats at Sea:

MV WAKASHIO Oil Spill:

On 25 July the MV WAKASHIO, after trying to get close enough to shore to have a phone call in celebration of one of the crew members' birthday, grounded on a reef in a pristine marine protected area of Mauritius. After two weeks of inaction to mitigate the consequences of the grounding or to prevent a spill, the WAKASHIO broke apart, spilling 8,450 barrels of oil. In addition to damaging the marine environment (and thus the blue economy including both fisheries and coastal tourism), the spill revealed that bunker fuel is behaving differently in water thanks to changes in chemical composition required under the recent changes to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) Annex VI.

- Nishan Degnerain, "Satellites Make New Discovery About Mauritius Oil Spill Ship Wakashio," Forbes, 22 January 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nishandegnarain/2021/01/22/satellites-make-new-discovery-about-mauritius-oil-spill-ship-wakashio/>.

Iranian IUU Fishing:

A major report by Global Fishing Watch and Trygg Mat Tracking has shown that several hundred Iranian fishing vessels have been illegally fishing in the territorial seas of Somalia and Yemen. Imagery from the report paints a compelling picture of the volume of illicit fishing activity in the region and the extent of the disregard for the economic or even sovereign rights of the coastal states. Details also help indicate how fisheries crime may hide among this widespread IUU fishing endeavor.

- "Fisheries Intelligence Report - Northwest Indian Ocean," Trygg Mat Tracking and Global Fishing Watch, 26 May 2020, <https://globalfishingwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/GFW-TMT-2020.pdf>.

Changes in Drug Trafficking:

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime followed their 2018 report "The Heroin Coast: A Political Economy Along the East African Seaboard" with a new report: "Changing Tides: The Evolving Illicit Drug Trade in the Western Indian Ocean." The report details key routes, actors, and dynamics, as well as changes in the geographic footprint of the illicit market.

- Lucia Bird, Julia Stanyard, Vel Moonien, Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa, “Changing Tides: The Evolving Illicit Drug Trade in the Western Indian Ocean,” Global Initiative, June 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/drug-trade-indian-ocean/>.

Maritime Migrant Deaths Between Comoros and Mayotte:

Migration between Comoros and Mayotte during the pandemic has continued to highlight that, while formal travel routes have been closed, people have continued to move. The deaths of 10 migrants, including a child, in September 2020 stands as a grim reminder that as many as 50,000 people have died in what is one of the least visible migratory routes around the world. It also underscores a growing regional tension with some European partners.

- “Ten Migrants, including child, drown in attempt to reach French territory Mayotte,” Al Jazeera, 25 September 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2020/09/25/Ten-migrants-including-child-drown-in-attempt-to-reach-French-outpost-Mayotte>.

State Action at Sea:

Somalia Hostage Release:

On 20 August 2020, the last hostages held by pirates in Somalia were released. Three Iranian hostages went home to Iran after having been kidnapped off their fishing vessel – the FV SIRAJ – in May 2015.

- “Iranian hostages held by Somali pirates since 2015 freed: Adviser,” Al Jazeera, 20 August 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/20/iranian-hostages-held-by-somali-pirates-since-2015-freed-adviser>.

Somalia Boarding Incident:

On 20 August 2020, a boarding by a local militia off Somalia was initially reported as a piracy incident, indicating that tensions remain high. Despite that reality, some of the structures established for countering piracy – including the prisoner transfer agreement to allow pirates tried in Seychelles or Kenya to service their sentences in Somalia, and the Contact Group for Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) – have begun to see members leave.

- Katherine Houreld, “Piracy: Aegean II is safe and underway,” gCaptain, 23 August 2020, <https://gcaptain.com/piracy-aegean-ii-is-safe-and-underway/>.

ATLANTIC AFRICA

The Gulf of Guinea has faced very serious challenges in terms of piracy, armed robbery, and abduction during this period. Despite some prominent successes, the overall responses to these challenges have had mixed results.

Threats at Sea:

Piracy, Abduction, and Responses in the Gulf of Guinea:

In 2020, over 90% of all seafarers abducted at sea around the world were taken in the Gulf of Guinea. With oil futures going negative at one point and prices being greatly depressed, more

traditional modalities of piracy involving theft of fuel were replaced by kidnap for ransom. A recent report by UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provides some of the most detailed network analysis of the pirates who continue to attack the wider region. While Nigeria has been successful in implementing its high-tech program called Deep Blue, piracy has spread across the region putting increased burdens on Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe, Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire.

- Ifesinachi Oakafor-Yarwood, Timothy Walker, Denys Reva, "Gulf of Guinea Piracy: A Symptom, Not a Cause, of Insecurity," ISS Africa, 10 February 2021, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/gulf-of-guinea-piracy-a-symptom-not-a-cause-of-insecurity>.

Attacks on Fishing Vessels:

In 2020, there was also a marked increase in attacks on fishing vessels. This makes sense given the change in focus to kidnap for ransom, but it means that there is greater concern for the activities of fishing vessels. Scrutinizing such activity with new analytical tools, however, reveals considerable fraudulent and deceptive conduct by different fishing vessels including sharing identities.

- Ian Ralby, "Looking Past Gulf of Guinea Piracy: Chinese Twins, "Ghanaian" Fishing and Domain Awareness," CIMSEC, 20 March 2021, <https://cimsec.org/looking-past-gulf-of-guinea-piracy-chinese-twins-ghanaian-fishing-and-domain-awareness/>.

State Action at Sea:

Recapture of the HAI LU FENG 11:

One fishing vessel that was attacked, the HAI LU FENG 11, has joined the ranks of the MT MAXIMUS as one of the examples of success in operational cooperation. The vessel was taken off Côte d'Ivoire in May 2020, and with information sharing across the region and operational cooperation between Benin and Nigeria, the vessel was successfully recaptured. The pirates in this case will be the first pirates tried under Nigeria's new Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offenses Act (SPOMO). The law represents a major development in the pursuit of meaningful legal finish in the region.

- Ian Ralby, "Nigerian Navy Thwarts Hijacking of Chinese Fishing Vessel," The Maritime Executive, 18 May 2020, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/nigerian-navy-successfully-interdicts-maritime-kidnapping-attempt>.

Successful Drug Interdictions:

Several countries – particularly Cabo Verde, Senegal, and Côte d'Ivoire – have all had record drug busts in the last two years. That is both a product of the region's impressive improvements in drug interdiction, and a result of more extensive flows through the region.

- Lucia Bird, "West Africa's Cocaine Corridor," Global Initiative, April 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/west-africas-cocaine-corridor/>.

MEDITERRANEAN AFRICA

External politics and naval actions in the Mediterranean continue to have significant impacts on the African maritime environment. This is present both in terms of EU naval efforts to counter smuggling and migration, as well as competition for maritime resources.

Threats at Sea:

Continuing Migrant Smuggling and the Case of the MAERSK ETIENNE:

While international news has largely stopped reporting on the smuggling of migrants across the Mediterranean, the movement of people from Africa to Europe has continued during the pandemic. One of the cases most illustrative of a variety of concurrent maritime challenges was that of the MAERSK ETIENNE. In August 2020, after rescuing 27 migrants after their vessel sank, the MAERSK ETIENNE proceeded to Malta. There, the authorities refused to allow the migrants to disembark on account of concerns surrounding COVID-19. As a result, the ship was stuck, unable to continue its operations and unable to unload the migrants it had rescued for five weeks. Ultimately, an NGO agreed to meet with the Maersk vessel and take the migrants so that it could resume commercial operations. That NGO, however, proceeded to bring the migrants to Sicily where it is now facing prosecution for a number of alleged violations of law.

- “NGO Accused of Taking on Maersk Etienne’s Migrants for Pay,” Maritime Executive, 1 March 2021, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/ngo-accused-of-taking-on-maersk-tanker-s-rescued-migrants-for-pay>.

Subsea Resource Tensions:

One of the biggest maritime issues in the Mediterranean presently concerns the growing tensions around claims to subsea resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. While the focal points of the tension are Greece and Turkey – rising even to the level of vessel collisions between warships – this conflict could easily expand to impact the states of Northern Africa.

- Michele Kambas, Tuvan Gumrukcu, “Greek, Turkish warships in ‘mini collision’ Ankara calls provocative,” Reuters, 14 August 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-turkey-warships/greek-turkish-warships-in-mini-collision-ankara-calls-provocative-idUSKCN25A161>.

State Action at Sea:

EUNAVFOR Missions to Counter Smuggling and Arms Trafficking:

On 30 March 2020, Operation SOFIA – the European Union’s Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) mission in the Mediterranean to address migrant smuggling and to monitor fuel smuggling was formally stood down. It was, however, replaced by Operation IRINI – an EUNAVFOR mission to combat arms trafficking into and out of Libya. Despite heavy criticism for its ineffectiveness, IRINI was renewed in March 2021.

- Emma Wallis, “Irimi mission: One year, no migrant rescues,” InfoMigrants, 7 April 2021, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/31367/irini-mission-one-year-no-migrant-rescues>.

GLOBAL CONSIDERATIONS

While not specific to any one region of Africa, but rather to the entire global maritime domain, the pandemic has raised a few issues that will need to be addressed.

COVID-19 Quarantines Strain Maritime Industries:

The lack of cooperation between states on how to address disembarking crew of different nationalities meant that, between March of 2020 and March of 2021, there were as many as 400,000 seafarers stuck at sea waiting to get off their ships but unable to do so. At the same time, there were 400,000 seafarers stuck on land, waiting to embark ships and resume work but unable to do so. This meant that exhausted and overworked seafarers, some of whom were at sea for more than 17 months without setting foot on shore, became the custodians of the global economy and the critical supply chains that kept life functioning on land. This crisis underscored a need for greater global cooperation to resolve unexpected emergencies.

- Ian Ralby, “Navigating Maritime Governance Challenges and the Future of the Global Economy,” *The Diplomatic Courier*, 5 September 2020, <https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/posts/navigating-maritime-governance-challenges-and-the-future-of-the-global-economy>.

Financial Defaults in Shipping Create Risk:

There was also an exponential increase in vessel defaults leading to abandoned vessels and crews at sea. This was the sort of situation that led to the Beirut explosion on 4 August 2020. Failing to address growing problem will cause trouble for ports around the world.

- K Oanh Ha, “Tycoon’s Downfall Pushes Trapped Seafarers to Hunger Strike,” *Bloomberg*, 16 February 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-16/tycoon-s-fallen-empire-pushes-trapped-seafarers-to-hunger-strike?fbclid=IwAR0o9tPr-gfVD6nV2K91hGnnmMjvvJUd8QVe0CVKMhRSFR7U7L5K3ddReQE>.

Growing Cyber Security Challenges:

Cyber security is a growing concern for ships everywhere, and there is a wide array of issues that needs to be addressed. Ransomware attacks on the Colonial Pipeline in the US and a major meat production facility indicate the global vulnerability to these sorts of attacks, all of which are reminiscent of the 2017 Notpetya attack that cost Maersk \$300 million to remedy. But new concerns are arising regarding the spoofing of navigational systems as well as the spoofing of AIS data. There is much work to do to monitor maritime cyber concerns and develop national-level responses to them.

- H I Sutton, “Positions of Two NATO Ships Were Falsified Near Russian Black Sea Naval Base,” *US Naval Institute*, 21 June 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/06/21/positions-of-two-nato-ships-were-falsified-near-russian-black-sea-naval-base>.