

Insider's Perspective: Creating a Culture of Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea

Strategic Insights, Volume VI, Issue 1 (January 2007)

by [CDR Connie Frizzell](#)

Strategic Insights is a bi-monthly electronic journal produced by the [Center for Contemporary Conflict](#) at the [Naval Postgraduate School](#) in Monterey, California. The views expressed here are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of NPS, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

For a PDF version of this article, click [here](#).

Introduction

As the United States military forces execute Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) activities in support of the Global War on Terror and Homeland Defense overseas, the development of non-traditional partners requires a variety of non-traditional engagement activities and the discovery of new tools to be applied. Defense Support to Public Diplomacy (DSPD) and Military Support to Public Diplomacy (DSPD) move to the fore of all the functional capabilities U.S. forces can provide, a non-traditional role for the Department of Defense. Previously relegated to the realm of the Commanders, military forces, specifically U.S. Naval forces, find themselves engaging more and more often with the people, the governments and the militaries of nations we desire to develop as partners. Supported by the strengthening relationship between the Department of State and the Department of Defense, TSC activities conducted by the U.S. military forces emerge as a new tools intended to encourage and influence the nations of interest to U.S. national security.

The Challenges of Creating Maritime Security Programs

This growing phenomenon of employing defense assets in unique, non-traditional roles is highlighted in the efforts to plant the seeds for Maritime Security in West and Central African Nations. The challenge of engaging these nations in a maritime fashion is a non-trivial one. The region is a lower priority for the United States when compared against other world regions. Limited historical, U.S. Naval interest is also a factor to be considered. Compounding these initial challenges, most of the countries of West and Central Africa have limited (if any) maritime capability. The stability (or instability) of the nation will also have an impact on the willingness to dedicate assets to long term efforts.

Finally, while the burden of developing and funding the resources required to monitor and enforce maritime security regulations may be shared among the region, the potential benefits must contend with historical fears, border disputes and other cultural concerns which could impact a government's decisions. Encouraging the creation of a credible maritime security force and motivating the nations to enforce the regulations will require the United States Navy to refine and

potentially re-define our relationships with interagency organizations and then to invest time, commitment and flexibility in the use of our traditional resources in as tools in non-traditional roles.

From a national security perspective, it is interesting to note (and realistic to expect) that there is a mixed signal regarding the importance of this region. The West and Central African nations provide 12% of the daily world oil supply, and the United States currently obtains one-fifth of its oil from here.^[1] In her keynote address at the Benin Ministerial, the U.S. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs stated, "Experts estimate that over the next 10 years, oil production in the Gulf of Guinea will grow by 40%. By 2020, the Gulf of Guinea is expected to be one of the world's top oil-producing regions."^[2] For these economic reasons, then, the strategic importance of Africa has risen in the estimation of the State Department.

The relative priority that the Department of State has placed on this region is lower when compared to the other regions of significant oil import, however. While priorities must be made, and it is understood that although we are a wealthy nation our resources are not unlimited, there are strong disparities in terms of U.S. relationships with various oil producing regions around the world. Notably, the West and Central African region appears to have less of a significant relationship with the U.S. than the other major oil import areas, which points to the conclusion that oil resources alone are not enough to elevate Africa to a major strategic interest. It is understandable that Canada and Mexico have unique relationships with the United States due to our shared borders. Saudi Arabia has a long standing partnership with the U.S. Yet even Venezuela has received more focused attention from the United States than has Nigeria and Angola, the two major oil exporters of the West and Central African region. This lack of priority across the region results in fewer dedicated or allotted resources to the embassies and less opportunities for training and education programs.

While the Department of State assets may be few and these specific countries receive less visibility as a region of interest, the U.S. Navy has historically placed an equally low priority in the area. Sporadic visits and annual or bi-annual West African Training Cruises have been the highlights of U.S. Navy activities in this region in the past. The Navy's nominal interest in the region was further demonstrated by the limited naval presence in the embassies. Cultural expertise and language proficiencies for this region are another area in which the U.S. Navy has not historically requested resources. At the global awareness level, capabilities for traditional (Russian and Chinese) and more recent (Arabic) areas of naval interest have been more constantly monitored, documented and subsequently resourced. Yet languages such as French and Portuguese, which were brought to the region with European colonialism and are still commonly used, have been simultaneously being categorized as "traditional" and "Cold War" capabilities. As a result, the U.S. Military has put much less emphasis on training linguists in these languages, which are critical for Africa experts.

Cultural awareness comprises more than language proficiency, however. The maritime history and capabilities in the countries of West and Central Africa are additional areas which present unique challenges for the U.S. Navy's efforts to improve regional Maritime Security. The history of maritime traditions is inconsistent across the region and even within each country. While the West and Central African nations may have maritime borders, they do not necessarily have a well established history of looking to the sea. In southeastern Ghana for example, migration from the interior of the continent to the coast and difficult navigation of the littorals was later countered by the advances brought by European trade and colonization. The slave trade created a paradox which improved maritime skills but simultaneously repressed littoral activities. The end of the slave trade created new maritime cultures that were offset by severe coastal erosion and lack of coastal protection. Government instability and social change further challenged the importance of the maritime environment.^[3] Today, the impact of offshore oil production in the region has significant impact on other maritime activities. Unequal distributions of resources and minimal, environmental protection requirements have significantly decreased littoral maritime activities.

Neither has the workforce been representative of the natural resources of the region. The traditional natural resources have been terrestrially-based, such as gold and diamonds,[4] which should be indicative of an industry related workforce. Yet on average, within the West and Central African region, more than 70% of the workforce today is engaged in agriculture.[5] Even with the advent of offshore drilling, the majority of the workforce in the region remains tied to an agricultural mind-set.

This agricultural philosophy may be directly related to the relative instability of governments in the region. Ghana is today's representative of stability, yet until just a few years ago, Côte d'Ivoire would have been hailed as the model of choice. This lack of stability in the governments may drive an aspect of insecurity into any labor activities aligned with or managed by the national governments. Without a communal, ubiquitous, national understanding of overarching, long term goals and objectives, the populations are left to self determinations of survival and prosperity. Specifically relating to maritime occupations, the risk that there will be a lack of government support to the maritime environment and maritime activities is a real one, given the history of instability of governments and the unreliable support for maritime and littoral industries.

Potentially significant advantages gained from a long term effort may also be severely undermined by the instability of the national governments. While there is no doubt that the value of the offshore resources is clearly understood, the question is whether or not these governments are committed to protecting their offshore resources. This question relates to the relevance placed on maritime assets by the nation. There is a lack of a common, national understanding regarding the value of protecting natural resources, specifically those in the maritime environment. This lack of national accord facilitates governmental lack of action. Protection and security of the maritime environment will require the governments in the region to not just recognize, but to dedicate resources to the effort. The protection of their maritime industries, including offshore oil exploitation and fishing, both of which are easily exploited with no maritime security measures, require long term commitments. This redistribution of assets for a long term payoff however, directly competes with the uncertainty of the government's longevity.

Indeed, the governments of the region are still dealing with internal unrest as well as disputed border areas.[6] Hostilities and antagonisms associated with tribal cultures are common and do not lend themselves to easily signed collective agreements for cooperation, sharing of information or pooling of resources. In a 2002 assessment on emerging oil markets, one analyst suggested the challenge to multinational cooperation stems from the diversity of the countries on the western coast compared to the landlocked Central African countries. "The countries of West Africa have a more diverse historical and culture heritage than those of Central Africa. The entrepreneurial and trading spirit of West Africa has helped to overcome this diversity to some extent, but examples of cooperation on major industrial schemes are few." [7]

These are not the only challenges which underlie the initiatives and efforts of the United States Navy to improve the maritime security environment in West and Central Africa. Other serious issues in this region, such as negative military associations within the societies, army-centric militaries and concerns over re-colonization must also be addressed as the U.S. Navy begins its long term commitment to the region. Intertwined with the latter concern is the U.S. Navy's desire to maintain strong partnerships with traditional allies.

U.S. Navy Efforts—Maritime Security and Safety

There is no doubt that the U.S. Navy represents a formidable, war-fighting, maritime capability, but any good mariner would tell you that no one can command the seas. All sailors, including those in the U.S. Navy, understand that the unpredictability of the sea is a risk common to all maritime occupations. For example, fishermen, merchantmen, military mariners, longshoremen,

ferry workers, dock workers and ordinary seamen understand it is both a duty and an obligation to rescue persons in distress due to perils of the sea, regardless of their nationality or location.

Through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982), which outlines the internationally recognized rules and laws to bring order to the governing of the world's waters, the international community acknowledges the right of vessels of any nation to enter a foreign state's territorial sea to engage in good faith efforts to provide emergency assistance.

This understanding of mutual obligation to assist forms the initial foundation of a common maritime culture, the roots of which exist in the recognition that there are unique challenges associated with working on the seas and in the waterways. *Safety* procedures and assuring the *security* of legal, maritime activities are two basic principles to counter the challenges. Maritime security and safety then, are the guiding principles that the U.S. Navy is bringing to the West and Central African coastline.

As already stated, the challenges are not insignificant but neither are they unmanageable. The initial approach for the U.S. Navy's efforts to engage West and Central Africa could probably best be described as crafting the strategy for a maritime security culture. Execution of this strategy requires a commitment of resources from the U.S. Navy. Engagement activities must focus on promoting the need for maritime security and encouraging the desire to build capacity and capability. Reviewing maritime regulations and identifying requirements to enforce them will eventually lead the governments of West and Central Africa to an acknowledgement that a redistribution of resources must be affected. As the article in this special issue by Raymond Gilpin argues, area governments are beginning to comprehend what needs to be done and to come to a common understanding. The subsequent development of capabilities and capacity to enforce maritime regulations is a natural flow for the redistributed resources. The following increase in profits from the curtailment of illegal and illicit activities is rolled back in to the national economy, demonstrating the value of the program.

To identify required resources, the U.S. Navy coordinated with embassies, interagency organizations and existing partner states, and reviewed traditional naval capabilities to be employed in non-traditional ways. A number of new opportunities were revealed, including teaming up with traditional, European partners, U.S. Coast Guard initiatives, training teams, education, demonstrations, and medical and civil affairs assistance. These new assets, combined with traditional capabilities and dedicated manpower, form the basic tool kit for engaging this emerging area of interest.

The personnel requirement was identified relatively early in the initial efforts to engage the countries of West and Central Africa. The increased interaction with the U.S. embassies was hampered by a lack of Naval presence, which was further complicated by the Navy's still-developing understanding of interagency processes. This disaccord put unplanned strain on the limited resources of both the U.S. Navy and the country teams as each organization grappled with capabilities and vocabulary that had been foreign to them just a year before.

The capacity of the embassies to support Department of the Navy efforts was therefore recognized early as an initial limiting factor to U.S. Naval, TSC type activities. Resolvable by a variety of means, the permanent solution requires time to allow manpower processes to flow personnel with desired skill sets, including language training, into the specific embassies. Similarly, the embassies will require time to ensure the personnel support structure (housing, health care, etc) is in place to accept the additional support provided.

U.S. Navy engagement activities with the countries of West and Central Africa have focused on developing the governments' understanding of why the surrounding waters are important and to encourage them to improve the maritime security and safety of those waters. Building an

awareness of a national maritime environment, including territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone, are illustrative of one of the initial engagement steps the U.S. Navy is taking. Demonstrations of new, inexpensive technologies which identify large units operating in the territorial waters provide previously, unimagined insights to the militaries and governments of Africa. This is an initial step toward helping the African countries to develop and expand their understanding of their own maritime borders.

Extending the concept of partnering, intertwining long standing relationships between U.S. and European partners with long standing relationships between the European partner and the African nations provides a model for information sharing which can be repeated among all coastal African nations. The benefit of partnering among the coastal states can also be expressed in economic terms. Technological systems which provide coverage of the maritime region do not stop at internationally recognized borders. Information sharing agreements could decrease the number of systems each state needs to purchase. If the partnering concept continues to be extended into programs such as Search and Recovery Centers, it becomes the natural next step to encourage the development of compatible capabilities with neighboring states.

Senior leader visits with government and military officials provide opportunities to explain how these observations identify activities which may be stealing internationally recognized, natural resources of the state. The means to deny the theft is the development of the capability and capacity to stop it. Limited, national, maritime capabilities must be strengthened through systematic improvements. U.S. Navy training teams and military to military exchanges can help assist in this. Tactics and techniques associated with maritime security are strengths that the U.S. Navy can bring as the nations continue to build their capacity. Eventually, opportunities for combined exercises and training competitions will not only improve their capability, but also demonstrate their competency and will, deterring illegal and illicit activities.

While the above efforts sound ambitious, it cannot be overstated that in order to achieve the final objective, that of a secure maritime environment in the region, the U.S. Navy, its traditional allies and the governments, militaries and societies of the West and Central African region must be committed to a long term investment and relationship. While a strategy may be crafted and new tools identified within the span of a year, the realization of a mature, self-sustaining, maritime security culture is developed over many years, dedicating efforts and resources to the tools of the craft.

About the Author

CDR Frizzell is a native of Syracuse, NY. She received her commission from the United States Naval Academy in 1986 as a Naval cryptologist. Currently the Information Operations Officer on the staff of Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet, CDR Frizzell has served in a variety of Joint and Naval commands located overseas, within the continental United States, and across the Pacific, Atlantic and Central Command theaters. Her assignments have included service in Operation Allied Force (Kosovo Campaign), Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Joint Task Force Lebanon.

CDR Frizzell is a 1997 graduate of the Naval Postgraduate School (M.S. in Systems Engineering). She has been awarded various campaign, service and unit awards and her personal decorations include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (3 awards), Joint Service Commendation Medal (2 awards), Navy Commendation Medal (2 awards) and Navy Achievement Medal. CDR Frizzell's next assignment is to Commanding Officer, Center for Information Dominance in Pensacola, Florida.

For more insights into contemporary international security issues, see our [Strategic Insights](#) home page.

To have new issues of *Strategic Insights* delivered to your Inbox, please email ccc@nps.edu with subject line "Subscribe." There is no charge, and your address will be used for no other purpose.

References

1. Samuel Bodman, Secretary of Energy, "[Corporate Council on Africa Oil & Gas Forum Keynote Address](#)," December 1, 2006.
2. Jendayi Frazer, U.S. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, "[Keynote Address: Maritime Safety and Security—Gulf of Guinea Ministerial Conference](#)," Cotonou, Benin, November 15 2006.
3. Robin Law, "Royal African Society, Book Review of *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An eco-social history of the Anlo of south-eastern Ghana, c. 1850 to recent times* by Emmaneul Kwaku Akyeampong," *African Affairs*, 102 (2003): 155-170.
4. [Infoplease: All the knowledge you needed to know. Almanacs. Countries](#), 2005.
5. [Ibid.](#)
6. "[BENIN-NIGER: Border dispute agreement ratified](#)," *IRIN Africa*, April 12, 2002 .
7. "[West Africa: Oil and Gas Reports](#)," *Emerging Markets Online, Global Energy and Utilities Market Research*, April 2002.