

Turning the tide: Dealing with bad order at sea off Africa

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African security thought and practise reflect a strong landward culture and so does its rising security architecture. More recently events off the African coast compelled African decision-makers to take note of their important maritime domain as bad order at sea appeared to mimic that taking place on land. Two very important African maritime regions drew most of the attention: The seas off the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. Both appear as unstable, but nonetheless very important economic hubs for Africa and the rest of international society. While piracy against international shipping appear most visible off the Horn of Africa and attacks against oil infrastructure in the Gulf of Guinea dominate, the threat landscapes are more complex, and so are the solutions.

Both maritime regions off the African west and east coasts respectively suffer from ongoing landward threats and vulnerabilities that exacerbate events unfolding at sea and its is necessary to address both the landward and maritime domains simultaneously. The former receives prominent international attention, but the latter less so although this maritime side holds wider regional and international repercussions if not managed in an appropriate way. This raises the important question: How does Africa shift its strong landward security culture to the rising and very important maritime domain? It is thus necessary to draw attention to events off the African east and west coasts, identify and describe the reigning maritime threats and vulnerabilities, the ongoing attempts to deal with these maritime insecurities and also unpack and comment upon the declared intent in 2010 to turn the attention of the African Union towards the African maritime domain in a more deliberate and focussed manner.

