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SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE GULF OF GUINEA: THE CASE OF ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED FISHING

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Abstract

Fishery resources account for almost one sixth of the total volume of animal protein consumed by people and provide livelihoods for some 820 million people worldwide. However, global fisheries are at risk due to increasing global demand for fish, declining ocean health and continued illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

According to the United Nations, more than 90 per cent of fish stocks remain fully exploited, overexploited or even depleted. The reasons are a combination of legal exploitation and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing – which accounts for about 20 per cent of global fish catches. More than 40 per cent of the cases between 2010 and 2022 were recorded in West African maritime areas, notably in the Gulf of Guinea.

This article analyses illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in the Gulf of Guinea. The findings highlight that this illegal activity is currently the greatest threat to the human security of coastal communities and to the maritime security of the whole region. Furthermore, without good order at sea, it will not be possible to take concrete measures to address the problem.

Keywords

Fishery resources; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; Gulf of Guinea; maritime security; human security

Resumo

Os recursos haliêuticos são responsáveis por perto de um sexto do volume total de proteína animal consumido pelas populações e proporcionam meios de subsistência a cerca de 820 milhões de pessoas em todo o mundo. Todavia, a pesca global está em risco devido ao aumento da procura mundial de peixe, ao declínio da saúde dos oceanos e à continuação da pesca ilegal, não declarada e não regulamentada.

De acordo com a Organização das Nações Unidas, mais de 90 por cento das reservas de peixe permanecem totalmente exploradas, sobre exploradas ou mesmo esgotadas. As razões apontadas são uma combinação de exploração legal a par da pesca ilegal, não declarada e não regulamentada – que representa cerca de 20 por cento das capturas globais de peixe. Mais de 40 por cento dos casos ocorridos entre 2010-2022 foram registados nos espaços marítimos da África Ocidental, nomeadamente no Golfo da Guiné.

O presente artigo analisa a pesca ilegal, não declarada e não regulamentada no Golfo da Guiné. As conclusões evidenciam que esta atividade ilícita é, no presente, a maior ameaça à segurança humana das populações costeiras e à segurança marítima de toda a região, e recomendam a implementação de uma boa ordem no mar que permita a adoção de medidas concretas para lhe fazer face.

Palavras chave

Recursos haliêuticos; Pesca ilegal, não declarada e não regulamentada; Golfo da Guiné; segurança marítima; segurança humana.

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SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE GULF OF GUINEA: THE CASE OF ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED FISHING

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1. Introduction

According to a report published by the US National Intelligence Council in September 2016, at that time, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) had replaced piracy as the main global threat to maritime security due to its cascading negative effect across different sectors. First, it jeopardises the food and economic security of coastal communities because the industrial fishing fleets involved in these illicit activities disrupt the economic model of coastal fisheries (many of which are still artisanal) and escalate local and regional tensions. Second, IUU fishing facilitates conflicts between countries, especially those that depend on it as a vital source of income. On the other hand, it undermines government institutions (and even the rule of law) in the areas under the jurisdiction of the affected countries, not only because it is profitable for criminals but also because it is often accompanied by other transnational crimes that take place at sea – such as trafficking in drugs, arms or human beings. Finally, IUU fishing increases the risk of piracy and / or armed robbery at sea (as seafarers who use the sea legitimately are left with no other means of subsistence) (US National Intelligence Council, 2016).

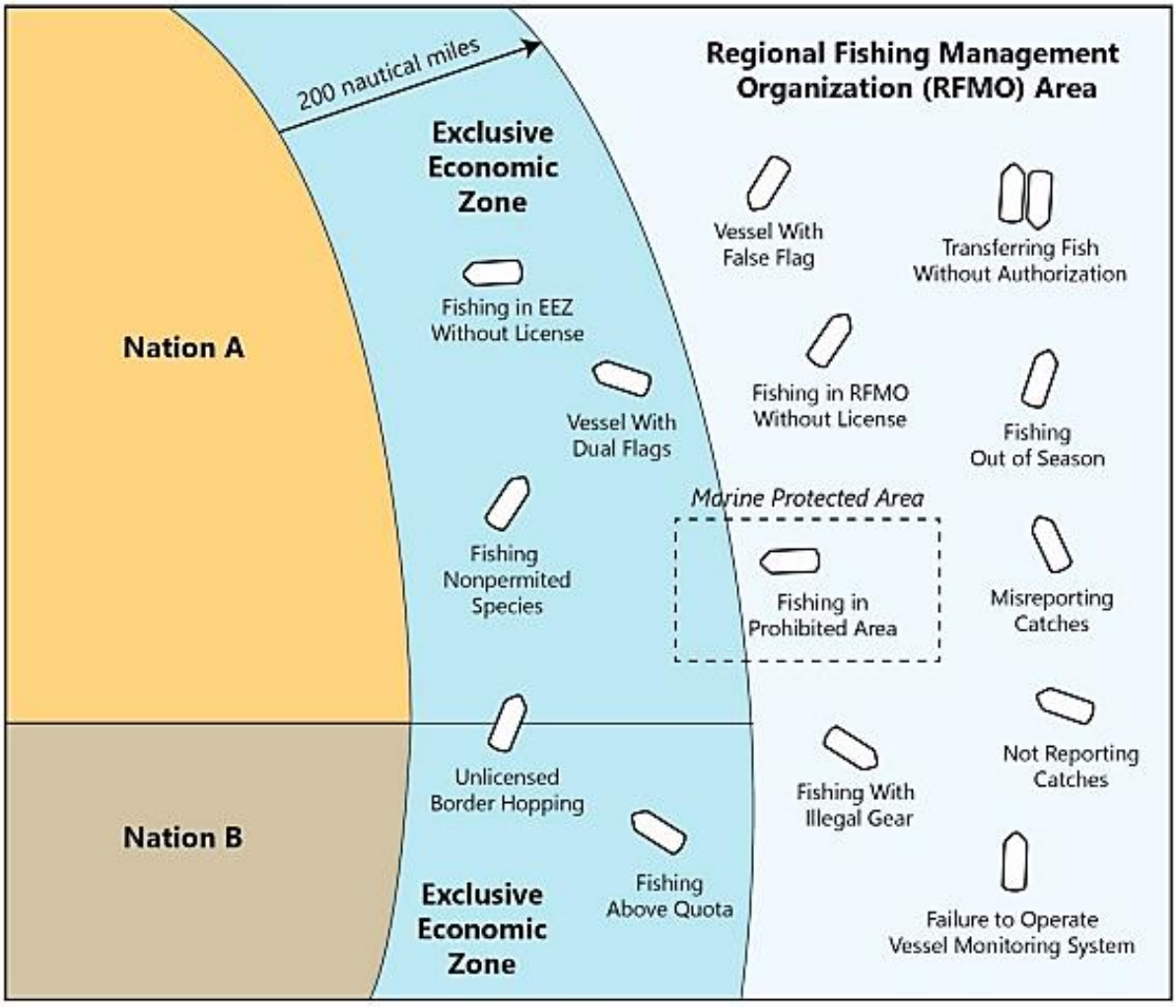
The global importance of IUU fishing and its impact on the security of the communities and waters of coastal states where it is most prevalent – and especially the countries of the Gulf of Guinea (GoG)[1] – are the starting point for this study, which will begin by describing the phenomenon.

The US National Intelligence Council report mentioned above and a report published in 2016 by the African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AUIBAR) define illegal fishing as fishing activities carried out by national or foreign vessels in the jurisdiction of a state – without that state's permission, or in violation of its laws and regulations –, as well as to other activities of vessels flying the flag of countries that belong to a regional fisheries management organization, but whose operations do not comply with the conservation and management rules that have been adopted by that

[1] Given that there is no international consensus on the geographical limits of the GoG, the definition provided by the European Union (EU) will be used in the study (Council of the European Union, 2014, p. 1). The GoG includes 17 continental coastal states, from Senegal (in the north) to Angola (in the south), as well as two island states Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe.

organization, and to which those states are bound. Unreported fishing is defined as activities that have not been reported, or that have been deliberately misreported, to the relevant authority. Finally, unregulated fishing refers to activities carried out in areas where conservation or management measures have not been defined – for example, outside the boundaries of a country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) –, as long as those areas are not under the jurisdiction of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs)[2] (US National Intelligence Council, 2016), (AUIBAR, 2016). Figure 1 shows the most common types of IUU fishing, both in the EEZs of coastal States and in RFMO areas.

Figure 1 – Types of IUU fishing



Source: (US National Intelligence Council, 2016)

[2] International organizations that regulate fishing in international waters, whose members are countries or associations of countries – such as the EU – with fishing interests in the areas regulated by those organizations. Non-coastal countries operating distant-water fleets can also be contracting parties of these organizations, which can be divided into those that regulate migratory species (such as tuna) and those that regulate other pelagic and / or demersal fish (DGRM, 2023).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Philip Steinberg highlighted the importance of the sea for humanity. Steinberg stated that "it is difficult to overstate the role of the ocean in the rise of the modern world-system" and that "the sea remains a crucial domain for the resources and processes that sustain contemporary life" (Steinberg, 2001, p. 8). Some years later, in 2009, Geoffrey Till pointed out the need to maintain good order at sea, adding that three of the main attributes of the sea which contribute to human development[3] were at least as important in the present as they had been in the past, and that each faced risks and threats to good order at sea, jeopardising their continued contribution to human development. As Till put it, "The importance of this 'good order', and the corresponding threats of disorder, are such that navies around the world are focusing much more on their role in helping to preserve it" (Till, 2009, p. 286).

However, at this time, good order at sea is (very) far from guaranteed. Poor governance and deficient application of the law make crime a high-profit activity, especially in certain maritime spaces. Elei Igbogi (2019, p. 30) states that "life in the maritime region has become synonymous with lawlessness", and that this is often due to governments' lack of motivation to intervene at sea – and consequently, to a lack of effective surveillance. States can take measures to address the spike in criminal activity at sea, but they lack funds, resources (both material and human) and even experience (in the case of the GoG), and the results have generally been less than satisfactory.

While this background provides an explanation for the emergence (and consistently high levels) of IUU fishing, it is difficult to measure its impact with accuracy. Still, the estimated global loss of revenue from this type of fishing is approximately 23.5 billion dollars a year, which corresponds to about 26 million tonnes of fish – approximately a quarter of the global catch. There are considerable profits to be made and a fairly low risk of legal repercussions, as most African States do not have the necessary capabilities to intervene. This means that the incentive to fish illegally in the waters off the west coast of Africa is indeed high (Igbogi, 2019, p. 30), (Daniels, Kohonen, Gutman, & Thiam, 2022, p. 6).

This article discusses the concepts of maritime security and human security and how they relate to each other; it analyses the phenomenon of IUU fishing in the GoG, which threatens the human security of coastal communities and the maritime security of the whole region; finally, it highlights that, to tackle the challenges in these countries' coastal waters, good order must be maintained in those spaces.

This study adopts an interpretive epistemological perspective and an inductive qualitative research strategy. Written literature sources were used as the main method of data collection.

[3] The resources it contains, its usefulness as a means of transportation and its importance as a means of exchanging information (Till, 2009, p. 286).

2. Maritime security and human security

This chapter introduces the two key concepts of the study – maritime security and human security – both of which are threatened by IUU fishing, and analyses the relationships between them.

2.1 Maritime security

The concept of maritime security emerged after the end of the Cold War. It was the result of the widening of the security agenda and of a new framework for security studies that examined the specific nature of security dynamics in five sectors: the traditional political and military sectors, but also the economic, environmental and societal sectors (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998, p. 1). Two separate views in security studies emerged from this "widening": the new view that argued that the concept should be broadened[4]; and the traditionalist view, in which security was mainly military and state-centred. And while the referent object of the "narrow" or traditionalist view was still the state, the same cannot be said about the "wider" view of those who argued that the concept should be extended to new types of non-military threats. These threats included several referent objects, such as financial markets and resources (in the economic sector), collective identity (in the societal sector) and the biosphere (in the environmental sector) (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

Even though there is no clear and universal definition of maritime security[5], the term highlights the new challenges in the maritime domain and points to how the problems they entail should be addressed. The report of the United Nations Secretary-General submitted to the 63rd Session of the General Assembly mentions two conceptions of maritime security: one (more narrow) which refers to protection against direct threats to the territorial integrity of states, and includes security from crimes at sea – such as piracy, armed robbery against ships and maritime terrorism; and a broader conception in which intentional and illegal damage to the marine environment are also seen as threats to countries' interests – this includes the damage caused by illegal dumping of waste and depletion of natural resources, and especially IUU fishing (UNSG, 2008).

Christian Bueger (2015, p. 161) proposes a holistic definition based on a matrix with four dimensions – marine environment, economic development, national security and human security – and four concepts – marine safety, seapower, blue economy and resilience –,

[4] Some proponents of this theory include the main scholars of the Copenhagen School – Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan and Jaap de Wilde – as well as Mohammed Ayoob (however, Ayoob concedes that not all issues have the same impact over time and in specific countries, and his definition of security excludes aspects like environmental degradation, pollution or migration), and Michael Klare and Daniel Thomas, who argue that the concept of security should be expanded because geographical borders are becoming less significant (as States are unable to address global problems such as ecological threats, rights abuses, negative demographic trends or economic crises) (Padrtova, 2020, p. 31).

[5] A report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the Oceans and the Law of the Sea published on 10 March 2008 states that the definition of maritime security "may differ [...] depending on the context and the users" (UNSG, 2008).

as well as a set of risks and threats. Bueger argues that maritime security can be interpreted through the relations between each of these concepts.

2.2 Human security

The term human security was first mentioned in the 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The report explains that, for years, the concept of security had been interpreted narrowly – as the security of a territory from external aggression or as the protection of national interests abroad. Until that moment, security focused on states rather than people. But for many people, security meant protection against other types of threats, from disease to hunger, unemployment, several types of crime, social conflict, political repression and even environmental hazards (UNDP, 1994, p. 22).

Since then, and especially in the 21st century, several authors have examined the concept of human security. For Mary Kaldor, Mary Martin and Sabine Selchow (2007, p. 273), it refers to the security of people and communities and includes a wide range of threats to human security – from genocide and slavery to natural disasters and massive violations of the right to food, health and housing.

For Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Carol Messineo (2012, pp. 2-3), the concept implies that the main goal of national and international security policy is the security of human lives, that is, the primacy of human life is the main referent object. It focused on the individual, and as such should cover all aspects of human rights, including the duty to meet basic human needs and the demands of political and social freedom.

Bueger (2015, p. 161) argues that human security was proposed as an alternative to the conceptualisation of security as national security, and that it focused on the needs of people rather than states.

For Daniel Marcos and Nuno Severiano Teixeira (2019, p. 12), the concerns about human security that emerged after the Cold War ended meant that the state no longer had a natural privilege over individuals – from that moment, people were at the centre of security concerns. The authors add that human security may involve military means, but usually refers to non-conventional responses, and that this stems from the idea that prevention is the best way to counter threats, and that states should cooperate with multilateral, non-governmental and regional organizations to prevent those threats (Marcos & Teixeira, 2019, p. 19).

Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood (2020, pp. 118-119) highlights that human and national security issues are interconnected with maritime security issues, but also that individual security should not be achieved by simply ignoring the security of the state. In fact, the state and its institutions are decisive in ensuring the security of the maritime domain.

2.3 The interconnectedness of maritime security and human security

Maritime security and human security are relatively new terms. They emerged within the conceptual framework of International Relations, after the widening of the security

agenda in the post-Cold War era. But even though they were coined at the end of the 20th century, their use only became widespread in the 21st century.

Accompanying the different views about these two concepts was the idea that some threats to human security in the maritime domain are also threats to maritime security. Fisheries are a vital source of food and employment, particularly in less-developed countries, and IUU fishing is a serious problem that affects several aspects of human security – from the security of seafarers who use the sea for legitimate purposes to the vulnerability of coastal communities, in addition to a wide range of threats in the maritime domain.

Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds (2017, pp. 1299-1300) analysed the four core dimensions of maritime security proposed by Bueger in 2015[6]. One of those dimensions addresses issues that relate to human security, more specifically, the insecurity experienced by local residents and communities. Fisheries are vital for the livelihoods of millions of coastal residents, who are also the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change or maritime pollution. However, in addition to the security of coastal residents and communities, human insecurity drives people to criminal activities such as piracy or various types of trafficking, which become sources of employment in economically deprived regions (or regions in collapse) (Bueger & Edmunds, 2017, p. 1300).

Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood argues that, in the context of maritime security issues, there must be robust and efficient state institutions capable of ensuring that marine resources are exploited in a sustainable manner, and that the human security needs of coastal communities are met (Okafor-Yarwood, 2020).

The above analysis shows that a region's maritime security and the human security of coastal communities are interconnected (an insecure maritime environment facilitates the emergence of criminal activities that threaten the security of all those who use the sea legitimately), and that robust security bureaucracies (with suitable capabilities, experience and procedures) are vital to achieve (and maintain) good order at sea.

3. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the Gulf of Guinea

This chapter analyses the consequences of IUU fishing on the GoG and examines its impact as a threat to the security of coastal communities and the region's maritime security.

3.1 The impact of IUU fishing on the GoG

For Denys Reva and David Willima (2021), IUU fishing in West African waters (and especially in the GoG region) poses a challenge at three levels.

First, IUU fishing hinders the management of fish stocks. To achieve a sustainable fishing sector, countries must be able to manage the growth and depletion of fish stocks, impose safety and operational rules, define time periods during which fishing is permitted, as

[6] Marine environment, economic development, national security and human security.

well as areas reserved for conservation. Illegal fishing hinders blue economy initiatives in Africa and costs coastal nations billions in revenue. Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone alone lose 2.3 billion dollars per year to illegal fishing (Reva & Willima, 2021).

The second level is the damage IUU fishing causes to food security in coastal communities. This is the case of Nigeria, the GoG's dominant regional power[7]. The country's waters are home to several fish species on which the food and economic security of a large part of the population depend. In fact, local fisheries (most of which are artisanal) are responsible for 80 per cent of catches and for the livelihoods of about 24 million Nigerians. But they are also facing several threats. One such threat is environmental pollution, mainly from the oil industry. Pollution damages the marine environment, depletes fish stocks and reduces catches. But the greatest threat is illegal fishing[8]. In 2021, the Nigerian House of Representatives reported that the country had lost 70 million dollars in revenue to illegal fishing. This includes the loss of licence fees and tax revenue. However, other sources estimate that the cost of illegal fishing in Nigeria is much higher (between 600 and 800 million dollars per year[9]). Despite the different estimates, all sources agree that the revenues Nigeria has lost to illegal fishing are high and that the numbers only paint a superficial picture of the real cost of this practice, which does not occur in isolation[10](Okafor-Yarwood & Bhagwandas, 2021).

On the third level, illegal fishing erodes people's trust in law enforcement and creates a climate of lawlessness and neglect. This type of environment becomes a hotbed for organized crime, and, combined with the loss of income and jobs, it can fuel local violence and encourage other types of crime (Reva & Willima, 2021). Some authors note that illegal fishing is a threat to the way of life of coastal residents because the lack of government support to combat the phenomenon and protect the livelihoods of fishing communities – which is often the case in the Niger Delta region – drives people into poverty, making them vulnerable to criminal networks (Okafor-Yarwood & Bhagwandas, 2021).

3.2 IUU fishing as a threat to human and maritime security in the GoG

Fish has a vital role in the human security of the GoG's coastal communities because it is an important source of protein – often the only animal protein available to millions of

[7] Nigeria has the largest population in Africa (estimated at 225 million in 2022). Geographically, it is one of the largest countries in the GoG region – 923,768 km2. It is also one of the largest economies in West Africa, with about 135,000 personnel in the three branches of its military, which has been considerably modernised, having received military equipment from several countries over the last decade – mainly from China, Russia and the US. The country is also developing its national defence industry, which includes new small arms, armoured vehicles and small-scale naval production (CIA, 2023).

[8] Vessels flying the flags of China, EU Member States (MS) and Belize are some of the worst offenders in terms of illegal exploitation of resources in the waters under Nigeria's jurisdiction (Okafor-Yarwood & Bhagwandas, 2021).

[9] The discrepancy shows how difficult it is to ascertain the true cost of this criminal activity (Okafor-Yarwood & Bhagwandas, 2021).

[10] Fishing-related crimes include a wide range of illegal activities, including customs fraud, trafficking in humans and drugs, and even piracy. Illegal fishing and the crimes mentioned above are also threats to human rights (Okafor-Yarwood & Bhagwandas, 2021).

the region's inhabitants. The fisheries sector is a source of direct and indirect employment for about nine million people across West Africa – 40 per cent of the population lives in coastal areas – and the fish trade is a vital source of revenue for several countries in the region (Okafor-Yarwood & Belhabib, 2019). The steady rise in the global demand for fish has led to the expansion of countries' fishing fleets, which in turn has led to a sharp increase in the number of fishing vessels, from about 585,000 in 1970 to 4.6 million in 2016[11] (Okafor-Yarwood, 2020, p. 121).

Almost half of the vessels reported for IUU fishing activities between 2010 and 2022 were detected in Africa's waters[12], costing the region up to 11.49 billion dollars per year. The most affected countries are located in the west coast of Africa, where 40 per cent of global IUU fishing takes place. It has cost the region up to 9.4 billion dollars in losses from illicit financial flows, which corresponds to the combined annual GDP of Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Liberia (Daniels, Kohonen, Gutman, & Thiam, 2022), (Skrdlik, 2022), preventing the region's countries from fully exploiting their marine resources (Bladen, 2022).

In Senegal – one of the most affected countries – the catches in the artisanal fishing sector dropped by 8.7 per cent in 2018 compared to the previous year due to IUU fishing. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), about 90 per cent of fish stocks are depleted (or at the risk of collapsing) (Skrdlik, 2022), (Nwoye, 2020). However, in early 2020 (a period marked by the pandemic), 52 foreign vessels applied for fishing licences from the Senegalese government. Naturally, this angered the Senegalese fishing community, including artisanal fishers, industrial shipowners and various civil society organizations. The Ministry of Fisheries was forced to make a public announcement stating that it had refused the applications, but local media published evidence that the government secretly issued a licence to the Chinese vessel *Fu Yuan Yu 9889* on 17 April 2020, and that the vessel's operator, Univers Peche, was negotiating licences for nine other vessels (Nwoye, 2020).

In Ghana, stocks of small pelagic fish have declined by almost 80 per cent over the last two decades. One species – the *sardinella aurita* – is now overfished. In 2021, the Environmental Justice Foundation in Ghana announced that without robust government intervention, the country's fish stocks are likely to collapse in less than ten years (ADF, 2022).

IUU fishing in the GoG has been on the rise since the beginning of the 21st century. The phenomenon prevents the sustainable management of living resources, which in turn increases the food insecurity of coastal communities – jeopardising human security – and facilitates their involvement in criminal activities at sea (such as piracy or armed robbery against ships). Therefore, it poses a serious threat to the region's maritime security.

[11] And in fact, several states – including China, Japan and Russia – and even political entities – such as the EU – have been turning to the GoG region to meet the increasing demand for fish (Okafor-Yarwood, 2020, p. 122).

[12] The Financial Transparency Coalition – a global network of organizations that track illicit financial flows – stated that almost a quarter of the vessels involved in IUU fishing (of those who provided information on their ownership) belonged to ten companies (eight Chinese, one Spanish and one Colombian) (Skrdlik, 2022).

4. The need to maintain good order in the seas off the Gulf of Guinea

This chapter identifies the main factors that facilitate IUU fishing – and prevent the sustainable use of the GoG's living resources – and analyses some of the measures taken to combat the phenomenon.

4.1 The (un)sustainable use of fisheries resources in the GoG

Several factors facilitate the involvement of vessels in IUU fishing, especially in the GoG: nations lack capabilities to monitor their waters[13]; vessels frequently change their flags and names; there are few negative consequences due to corruption and / or difficulty enforcing regulations; vessels belong to multi-level corporate structures that often allow the true owners to remain anonymous; countries outside the GoG grant subsidies to their distant-water fleets[14] (which include cheaper fuel and lower insurance rates); fishing operators use ethically questionable practices; and the fact that the increasingly high levels of IUU fishing in the GoG are part of a much more complex global problem – many of the oceans' living resources are being squandered by fishing vessels from some of the richest nations in Europe and Asia. It is worth noting that the waters off the west coast of Africa are among the few fishing grounds that are still relatively fertile (Merem, et al., 2019, p. 11).

The signatories of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which has been ratified by EU countries as well as by GoG countries that have agreements with the EU[15], have agreed to ensure the sustainable use of ocean resources. On the other hand, some reports indicate that fishing vessels from EU MS (even those who have proper licences) sometimes engage in abusive practices that result in the over-exploitation of living resources, endangering these areas' marine environment, and in a loss of revenue for local fishers (Okafor-Yarwood & Belhabib, 2019, p. 2).

Africa's coastal waters have long attracted industrial fishing fleets from countries all over the world. As resources have dwindled, their vessels have begun operating at shorter distances from land, as well as illegally crossing into areas reserved for small fishing communities. Protecting those areas from industrial fishing is necessary to regulate catches, but it is also vital for artisanal fishers. Collisions with industrial vessels kill more than 250 artisanal fisherfolk every year in West Africa alone (Riskas, 2020). According to data from a 2019 study (Belhabib, et al., 2019), between 2012 and 2016, industrial fishing vessels operating in African waters spent almost 6 per cent of their total fishing

[13] Only a few GoG countries have the capacity to effectively enforce the law in their seas (one of them is Nigeria). Foreign vessels act with (almost) total impunity, even when they are operating under formally established agreements with countries in the region (Merem, et al., 2019).

[14] It has been estimated that the wealthiest nations grant subsidies of up to 27 billion dollars per year to vessels that end up depleting stocks of living resources through illegal fishing because this funding allows them to operate in remote areas for long stretches of time and catch larger quantities of fish (Merem, et al., 2019, p. 11).

[15] Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPA) are international agreements between the EU and third countries, which provide the EU access to those countries' EEZs and authorise fishing vessels from MS to sustainably fish for surplus stocks in a legally regulated environment (Milt, 2022).

hours operating illegally in areas reserved for artisanal fishing. Vessels flying African flags – especially from Ghana – were the worst offenders, followed by vessels from South Korea, EU MS and China. But the large number of vessels from Ghana is likely misleading, as a large part of Ghana's national fleet is owned and / or operated by Chinese companies (Riskas, 2020).

Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly clear that African countries are charging less than they should for fishing licences, (wrongly) believing that they are getting a good deal. The increase in industrial fishing in the region – largely by European, Chinese and Russian vessels – has created even more insecurity in the waters off the west coast of Africa and the decline of coastal communities (Munshi, 2020).

4.2 Measures taken to combat IUU fishing in the GoG

Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood (2020, pp. 116-117) warns that "If we lose command of the sea, it is not invasion we must fear but starvation", and that maritime security involves not only the protection of coastal communities but also the security of seafarers, as well as the sustainable exploitation of ocean resources. The lack of a sustainable fisheries management strategy for the GoG has led to the illegal exploitation of living resources by vessels from Russia and several Asian States (including China), and even some EU MS (Merem, et al., 2019).

To address the problem and support regional efforts to combat IUU fishing, in November 2021, two international non-profit organizations, Global Fishing Watch and Trygg Mat Tracking, launched a pilot project with Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC)[16]. The project provides satellite tracking data, analyses and training to the relevant authorities, who use it to assess the operations of fishing vessels and the risk of non-compliance with the law (Bladen, 2022). Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria (with the support of the FCWC) launched the Regional Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Centre (RMCSC) to monitor fishing and fishing-related activities in the GoG. The initiative was funded by the EU's Improved Regional Fisheries Governance in Western Africa project (PESCAO[17]).

After establishing a new partnership agreement with Global Fishing Watch in May 2022, which aimed to improve the monitoring, control and surveillance of fishing activities in its waters, Benin signed an agreement with Ghana and Togo that involved the participation in joint initiatives to curb IUU fishing in the GoG (Bladen, 2022). Benin and Togo completed their first joint patrol operation in mid-December 2022. The operation was funded by the PESCAO programme, but Ghana only signed the agreement at the end of the month. In addition to maritime patrols, the three countries agreed to exchange information with the RMCSC in Ghana (ADF, 2022). However, as most GoG countries lack

[16] An intergovernmental organization that facilitates cooperation in fisheries management between GoG countries.

[17] The PESCAO project was adopted by a European Commission Decision of 28 April 2017. It had a projected duration of five years (2018-2022) and 15 million euros in funding. It aimed to implement a set of measures to improve fisheries governance in West Africa, one of which was to develop a fisheries policy that included the creation of a regional coordination body to combat IUU fishing, as well as improving the management of living resources (EFCA, 2023).

the capabilities to monitor their waters, there is no way of knowing which vessels are operating illegally, even if they have proper authorisations (by using banned gear, fishing in prohibited areas or exceeding the quotas defined in the agreements).

The fact that most GoG states lack adequate maritime surveillance capabilities must be addressed and measures should be taken to tackle the problem (with the support of third states and international organizations, including the EU). Therefore, maintaining good order at sea in the GoG is vital because it is the only way to implement a sustainable fisheries management strategy. The measures that have been taken so far are a good start, but are clearly insufficient, and it will require the participation of other states and regional and international organizations, increased naval capabilities and more assertive action to protect the human security of coastal communities and the region's maritime security.

5. Conclusions

This article has analysed the impact of IUU fishing on the human security of the inhabitants of the GoG and its influence on the maritime security of that vast area of the sea. Furthermore, it examined the need to maintain good order in those maritime spaces as a way of addressing the considerable challenges facing the region.

Using inductive reasoning (which involves observing specific facts and drawing associations between them), it was possible to determine that, at this time, IUU fishing in the GoG is the most serious threat to the security of the region's seafarers who use the region's living resources legally, as well as to the communities for whom fish is an essential source of protein.

IUU fishing in the GoG jeopardises the sustainable management of the region's living resources and represents a considerable loss in revenue for coastal countries because there are fewer fish for their vessels to catch, less revenue from fishing licences, and less taxes collected from legal fishing activities. On the other hand, IUU fishing – and especially the climate of impunity in the GoG region due to the (almost total) lack of maritime surveillance capabilities – encourages the idea that crime can, in fact, pay. This sense of injustice, and even lawlessness – especially in areas like the Niger Delta – may lead people to believe that their only alternative is to be involved in activities linked to transnational organized crime (such as piracy and armed robbery against ships), or to join the ranks of those who regularly attempt to travel to the European continent (often in disorganized movements).

Maintaining good order at sea (across the GoG) is vital because it will allow African states and third countries from other continents (particularly Asia, and especially Europe) to join forces – even if they have signed fishing agreements with each other – to combat IUU fishing (most of which is carried out by vessels from non-GoG countries, precisely from Asia and Europe). If states (and the regional organizations to which they belong) do not create a code of conduct to guide their operations (and reduce the impact of IUU fishing), many of the GoG's fish stocks will eventually collapse (as of now, some have already been depleted). If this were to happen, it would have unpredictable consequences

for the human security of the communities who need those resources and for the fisherfolk who will lose their only source of income, which will significantly increase the region's maritime insecurity.

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