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In *Maritime Security Cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea*, the legal adviser to the Ghana Navy, Commander Dr. Kamal-Deen Ali, argues that the world should pay attention to the maritime domain of West and Central Africa. The same argument can be made about his book, as Ali not only provides the most in-depth analysis of maritime security prospects and challenges in the Gulf of Guinea to date but offers conceptual frameworks for maritime security that are applicable around the world. Furthermore, the lessons that can be extracted from the Gulf of Guinea experience—both the problems of insecurity and the efforts to address them—can serve as helpful guidance for approaching similar challenges elsewhere. Notwithstanding the relative absence of credible literature on maritime security in West and Central Africa, this book exhibits the rigor of first-rate legal scholarship combined with the intimate knowledge gleaned from an insider’s perspective, making it undoubtedly a seminal work on both the Gulf of Guinea specifically and maritime security in general.

Ali begins, rather helpfully, by exploring the meaning of several terms. First and foremost, he seeks to provide a working definition of the “Gulf of Guinea,” as the phrase has been used for years without any real consistency to describe the maritime region of West and Central Africa. Ultimately, the author expands the range of states included in this important region. At a minimum, Ali includes the twenty-five member states of the Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa, all of which are members of either the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). But he notes that Rwanda, which recently rejoined ECCAS, should not be included, as its strategic interests do not align with the maritime domain of West and Central Africa. On the other hand, he argues that Mauritania, which left ECOWAS in 2000 and is a member of the Arab Maghreb Union, should be included, as it is an important partner for maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea. This argument constitutes the first of many
novel contributions the book makes to the context-specific dynamics of maritime security in West and Central Africa. Beyond defining the Gulf of Guinea, Ali makes a convincing case for the region’s global strategic significance. The economic contribution of the region to the global energy, mineral, and agriculture markets makes the national security concerns of states in West and Central Africa concerns for the entire world. Even after the decline in the price of oil, Ali’s case remains unimpeachable, as his arguments for the region’s geostrategic relevance go far beyond oft-repeated statements about Nigerian oil in particular. With details about the region’s contribution to the global supply of cotton, cacao, and fish, one need never mention oil to recognize the economic significance of the Gulf of Guinea. These arguments lend further weight to the examples and analyses of the main portions of the book, but the conceptual features of the book are perhaps its most significant academic feature. In reviewing the literature on maritime security, Ali exposes some significant gaps, in both coverage of issues and existing conceptual frameworks. He begins his analysis by asking a few important questions: What is security? What is maritime security? And for whom is maritime security? In dissecting some of the existing works on maritime security, he comes to advocate a “human security” approach, but compiles elements from a number of different sources. He thus settles on maritime security as being a composite of societal security, environmental security, food security, and economic security. One could argue, therefore, that this approach aligns maritime security more closely with development than defense. Conceptually, Ali charts new territory on several fronts. First, his analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of security lead him to the conclusion that, although the literature is largely silent in doing so, the theoretical approaches to “security” in general can be applied to the maritime realm as well. He writes, “It is argued that since the ocean environment serves the political, economic, and strategic objectives of States, the dynamics that surround the pursuit of all interstate interests will similarly be reflected in the maritime realm.” This notion of the activities, interests, and challenges of the maritime domain being interrelated with the broader national interests suggests that a state’s maritime territory is a microcosm of the state itself. Thus maritime security cannot be severed from national interests—security, development, governance, etc.—and is, indeed, a fundamental component of them. Ali’s second departure from the literature involves taking an evolutionary approach to maritime security. By examining how maritime security has developed from being a matter merely of transportation security into a field posing integrated, multisectoral challenges today, he shows how the concept of maritime security has changed and broadened over time. Furthermore, he contends that states’ maritime concerns are context specific rather than universal. Partly for this reason, he also asserts that there is no real consensus on the elements of maritime security, allowing for a wide conception of what is included. He seems to suggest that the best approach in the literature is in the 2008 UN secretary-general’s Oceans
and the Law of the Sea report, which lists (section V[B]) the main maritime security threats as “piracy and armed robbery against ships”; “terrorist acts involving shipping, offshore installations and other maritime interests”; “[i]llicit trafficking in arms and weapons of mass destruction”; “illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances”; “[s]muggling and trafficking of persons by sea”; “[i]llegal, unreported and unregulated fishing”; and “intentional and unlawful damage to the marine environment.” He later assesses this set of threats, along with others, in the specific context of the Gulf of Guinea.

The third main departure is Ali’s novel framework for conceiving of maritime security. His framework, elaborated throughout the book, has three elements: (1) identifying the maritime security threat path; (2) applying the threat path to geopolitical and geostategic features; and (3) implementing a three-layer, three-indicator approach. The maritime security threat path is a bit more than merely a list of generic or even specific maritime security threats. It examines both the activity and the effects of any given threat. This approach allows for the contextualization of the threats versus geopolitical or strategic priorities. The third element of the framework then concerns the approach to those threats, involving three layers—national capacity, regional cooperation, and global support—paired with three progress indicators—improved maritime governance, adequate legal frameworks, and an inclusive maritime security concept. While the book elaborates this conceptual approach in the Gulf of Guinea context, it is applicable globally. Further academic work is therefore warranted, applying Ali’s conceptual framework to other contexts besides the Gulf of Guinea.

As significant as this book’s theoretical contribution may be to the academic literature on maritime security in general, the book’s contribution to the discourse on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea is impossible to express adequately. As a Ghanaian naval officer and legal adviser, Ali is able to delve into the subject matter in a way that few could. The majority of the book is dedicated to the region-specific analysis, and this is truly the heart of the work.

Given the resource constraints of West and Central Africa as well as the transnational nature of many of the threats, it is not surprising that cooperation is seen as the overarching answer to addressing maritime insecurity in the region. But the architecture of maritime security cooperation is still very much under construction. Ali meticulously dissects the challenges, internal and external, that plague the progress of effectively using cooperation as a means of countering threats. His personal familiarity with the processes afoot takes the chapters on both regional approaches and international partnerships beyond the capacity of normal academic scholarship. Indeed, one could not look up most of the information contained in these portions, further adding to the tremendous value of this volume.

Similarly, the legal analysis in this book would be difficult for any scholar outside the region to replicate. Ali’s access to national laws and regional legal frameworks as well as his detailed understanding of international maritime law affords him the opportunity to provide insight into both the legal developments and
challenges in the Gulf of Guinea. Indeed, the book may be viewed as a compendium of the existing legal regimes in the Gulf of Guinea. This legal landscape is important to understand as efforts proceed to combat maritime insecurity and enhance maritime governance through cooperation. The section on emerging jurisdictional issues and legal complexities is particularly significant, as it provides a helpful warning of problems that are likely to arise as the cooperative architecture continues to develop.

Naturally, one of the challenges of writing an analysis of real-world issues is that they do not remain constant. If one were to attempt to identify a criticism of the book, it is that it is already out of date on a few specific issues, although one hardly can blame that on the author. For example, the section on private security companies or private maritime security companies, if written today, likely would include a number of new issues as well as new accountability mechanisms. But the analysis and lessons that can be gleaned remain sound and important, even if additional facts exist that could enhance the discussion.

The book expressly arrives at five main conclusions: (1) Current processes for maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea do not address adequately the multiple security threats in the region. (2) Poor governance contributes significantly to maritime security threats in the Gulf of Guinea, but the current cooperative framework does not address the land-sea nexus of maritime security concerns. (3) The relevant legal framework for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea is poorly developed, and this undermines the effectiveness of maritime security enforcement and regional and international cooperation. (4) Prevailing regional cooperative processes lack coordination and have suffered several setbacks. (5) International support for maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea is inadequate, uncoordinated, and in some cases driven by national interests that affect its overall effectiveness.

These conclusions, as well as the analysis that led to them, serve as an invaluable aid in the ongoing effort to secure the maritime domain of West and Central Africa. This book is a must-read for maritime security scholars and anyone—from policy makers to industry leaders to students—working on maritime matters in the Gulf of Guinea.

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One is tempted to ask why naval officers should be interested in reading a biography of the wife of the famous Prussian philosopher of war Carl von Clausewitz. In answer we might go to the words of Marie von Clausewitz herself, from her letter of dedication to Carl’s unfinished masterpiece On War: “Readers will be rightly surprised that a woman should dare to write a preface for such a work as this. My friends will need no explanation. . . . Those who knew of our happy marriage and knew that we shared everything, not only joy and pain but also every occupation, every concern of daily life, will realize that a task of this kind could not occupy my beloved husband without at the same time becoming