

# Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG): Reinventing the Past to Explain the Origin and Development of Maritime Insecurity

*Fru Norbert Suh I*

## Structured Abstract

Article type: Research paper

*Purpose*—While many studies on maritime security/insecurity focus on understanding the immediate threats to maritime security, very little has been done to investigate the historical origins of international concerns about security on the waterways. This paper aims to fill this gap by identifying and analyzing the historical foundations of international concerns about maritime security/insecurity in the comparatively little known Gulf of Guinea (GoG) maritime zone.

*Design, Methodology, Approach*—The paper uses a chronological thematic approach based on event analysis of the events that marked a turning point in the history of the region from when it was opened to the outside world.

*Findings*—It finds that international concerns about maritime security/insecurity were primarily driven by awareness about the economic and strategic importance of maritime zones, and the ability of actors to transform them into melting pots for international trade, commerce, and other exchanges, which influenced perceptions and feelings of security/insecurity.

*Practical implications*—The study provides evidence that while it may be erroneous to assume that all aspects of the past will repeat themselves, reconstructing

*P.O. Box 1365 Yaounde/18 Soa, University of Yaounde II–Soa; tel: (237) 674 612 218; email: suh042005@yahoo.co.uk*



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them establish circumstances that condition the present and future of maritime security/insecurity.

*Originality, value*—The paper emphasizes the relevance of the past in understanding current security issues and how knowledge about it can improve the quality of decisions about security. The findings have important implications for maritime security stakeholders.

*Keywords: colonialism, Gulf of Guinea (GoG), internationalization, legitimate trade, maritime security/insecurity, resistance, slave trade*

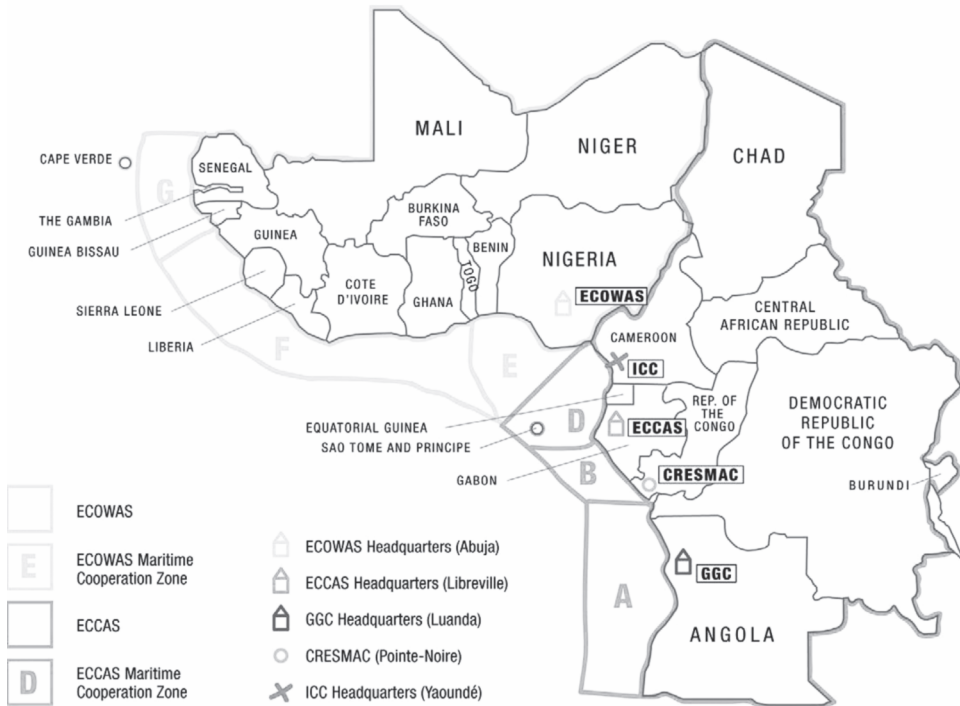
## Introduction

The heads of states and governments from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) countries met at a summit on “Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea” between 24 and 25 June 2013 in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon. At this time, maritime security advocacy agencies had declared the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) a “new danger zone.” The International Maritime Bureau (IMB), Risk Intelligence, Oceans Beyond Piracy (OBP), International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Crisis Group, among others, are unanimous that the GoG is a danger zone along the Gulf of Aden. Hijackings, short-term disappearances of tankers, robbing of supply ships, hostage taking, and kidnappings for ransom are criminal incidents that jeopardize the smooth functioning of legitimate international trade in the region.<sup>1</sup> The region, which is rich in mineral resources (mostly oil) in high demand in the world market (it supplies 40 percent of the oil for Europe and 29 percent of the oil for the U.S.),<sup>2</sup> is located on the coast of West Africa. The GoG comprises 16 African countries sharing some 6,000 kilometers of unbroken coastline. These countries include Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Senegal, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria.

From an economic and strategic perspective, the GoG is a prime sea-route for international trade and commerce, and this position is particularly relevant in a context where over 90 percent of global freight is by sea. For example, the GoG is used to connect the Far East with the Americas and Europe via the Atlantic. Although the Arab Gulf, Middle East, and North Africa routes are shorter, they are less secure due to recurrent wars and piracy.<sup>3</sup> The GoG also serves as a crucial access point for landlocked countries like Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso to carry out the export and import of goods and services.

The paper examines the historical origins of the strategic and economic importance of the GoG, as a factor of maritime security/insecurity. The focus is to see how part of Africa’s history can explain the clash between security and insecurity in the GoG maritime zone. It argues that ever since the region was opened to the outside world, it became a hotspot for international trade and commerce and because of its

The Maritime Regional Architecture in the Gulf of Guinea



The Maritime Regional Architecture in the GoG. Source: Jacobsen K L and Nordby J R M, *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea* (Royal Copenhagen: Danish Defence College, 2015, p. 33).

strategic and economic relevance; it has oscillated between security and insecurity, stability and instability, tension and détente. The paper uses a chronological thematic approach based on event analysis of the events that marked a turning point in the history of the region from when it was opened to the outside world. It finds that each historical event had a significant influence on perceptions and feelings of security and insecurity in the maritime region. From earliest contacts with Europeans through to slave trade/legitimate trade and the two Great Wars and their aftermath, the region has experienced tumultuous moments.

*Background Study*

Studies on the GoG always ask the question: why does the GoG attract maritime insecurity and what can be done about it?<sup>4</sup> Structural and situational answers have been used to explain the growth and development of maritime insecurity, and solutions which range from country, bilateral, regional, continental and global efforts.<sup>5</sup> For example, the literature on the paradox of riches reflected in such titles as “The

beauty and the thief: Why the Gulf of Guinea Attracts Maritime Insecurity,” establishes that it is paradoxical to possess wealth but not be able to develop because of it. Maritime insecurity has been blamed for this paradox. That is why a prescriptive literature emerged, to propose solutions to the problems of maritime insecurity in the region. For example, Anyimadu proposes a solution based on copying the example of the success stories from elsewhere, such as the Indian Ocean, among others.<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the solution, it is important to note that a solution is primarily determined by the nature and type of the threat. Piracy has been identified as one of the most critical threats to maritime security. Jacobsen and Nordby propose four types of piracy (kidnapping-for-ransom, petro-piracy, unreported piracy, and petty piracy).<sup>7</sup> Ukeje and Mvomo Ela find that both situational and structural factors led to the emergence of insecurity in the GoG.<sup>8</sup> They also find that countries of the GoG have failed to adopt a cogent and coherent security policy, strategy and framework to effectively tackle the threat—hence the reason why it still persists. Although the work establishes the weakness of the post-colonial State in effectively dealing with the threat, among other causes, which in effect, is an appeal for meaningful international support, the approach of this study establishes that insecurity in that maritime zone has historical origins owing to its strategic and economic relevance to international trade.

### *The Historical Event Analysis Approach*

An event is understood not simply as anything that happens but as that relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transforms structures.<sup>9</sup> One of the most unchallenged definitions of “event” is that of Gerner and her colleagues, according to which an event is “an interaction, associated with a specific point in time, that can be described in a natural language sentence that has as its subject and object an element of a set of actors and as its verb an element of a set of actions, the contents of which are transitive verbs.”<sup>10</sup> In any case, an event involves an actor, a target, a time-period, an activity, and an issue that the activity resolves.<sup>11</sup>

Events in this study were selected according to their degree of interaction and transaction<sup>12</sup> between the actors, the magnitude of their influence on perceptions of security/insecurity, and the extent to which they transformed the structure of the region. Historical events such as the trans-Atlantic slave trade, legitimate trade, colonialism, etc., all meant the exchange of goods and movement of people across the waters. The GoG region was critical to the penetration, advancement, and consolidation of European colonial enterprise in Africa, via missionary, commercial and consular activities.<sup>13</sup> Those were events that marked a turning point in the history of international navigation. This means that the GoG also has something to offer when it comes to understanding the practice of international trade and commerce on the waterways. Today, the GoG has become the new frontier for what is widely referred as the “second scramble” for Africa; only that this time, the price is not territories but access to and control of newly discovered vast hydrocarbon resources.<sup>14</sup> This concept of “second scramble” implies that there was a first scramble revealed

by history and according to which the GoG, sometimes referred to as “Bight of Benin” was the theatre for unprecedented economic, political, diplomatic and military intrigues/rivalries among key European colonial powers jostling to gain access to and control new territories.<sup>15</sup>

What this discourse suggests is that it will be undoubtedly beneficial for policy makers and analysts to include the historical context in the design and implementation of appropriate maritime security policies. Ukeje and Mvomo Ela<sup>16</sup> think that, in addition to contemporary developments, the historical context is also important in today’s efforts to counter maritime insecurity. Regrettably, such wider discussion is often missing at high-level political summits such as the meeting of the Heads of States and Governments of the West and Central Africa, which took place in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in June 2013, to produce a comprehensive strategy for maritime security in the GoG. As uncertainty is mounting in the GoG, it would not be a bad thing for decision makers to seek comfort by looking for something positive in the past. After all, politicians have been known to sometimes appeal to historical facts to justify political claims.

History as method is concerned with attempts to understand the origin and chronological evolution of ideas and events as well as their impact on the human community. The importance of this approach, as well as its impact on contemporary workings in the region, is the fact that, it shows that the actors involved in the GoG as individuals, groups, States, communities and organizations repeatedly encounter the same kind of challenge—that of maritime insecurity in the GoG. If an attempt is made to understand how this problem was tackled in the past, this understanding can develop a better response to the problem when it reoccurs. In this regard, the re-examination of the past to understand the nature of maritime insecurity in the GoG is useful as it instructs that maritime security in the GoG was, is, and is likely to be a contemplated issue.

Where do policy makers and stakeholders go from here? While it is acknowledged that efforts so far, undertaken to effectively tackle maritime insecurity in the GoG, have yielded only minor results, knowledge about past attempts to deal with insecurity in that region can be inspirational. For example, reading about how European powers converged in Berlin in 1884–85 to regulate the use of waterways in the GoG, among other places, to avoid conflict among themselves (an initiative that was largely successful), can inspire African States in the region to do the same. Although it may be erroneous to assume that all aspects of the past will repeat themselves, it is arguably true that what has happened is connected to what is and what will be. Reconstructing the events of the past is in effect an attempt to establish circumstances that condition the present and future of maritime security/insecurity in the GoG.

To a large extent, the long history of maritime security/insecurity has shaped the way pirates and hijackers of today engage in forms of diverting the attention of monitoring ships to perpetuate illegal activities. The presence of merchant ships often loitering in this region also represents a continuation of an old age practice. Now that States in the region are struggling with more or less significant support from the international community to monitor the region, merchant ships and vessels

have been taken advantage of due to the limited capacity of these States to secure offloading. Pirates anchor around the calm areas of water in order to wait for the right moment to strike a loitering vessel. Anchorages and approaches to the ports of Bonny and Lagos (Nigeria), Cotonou (Benin), Lomé (Togo), Tema (Ghana), and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) are particularly vulnerable with large numbers of merchant ships often loitering in these areas.<sup>17</sup> In the process, the age-old practice of fierce resistance to British naval patrols is reinvented and even taken for granted.<sup>18</sup>

It is expected that through this approach, the study sheds light on current maritime insecurities by widening the scope of knowledge of policy makers, researchers and stakeholders on the historical roots of maritime insecurities in the region and how it was tackled. From there, hopefully, it can contribute to the on-going national, regional, continental and global approaches to maritime insecurity. To adopt appropriate measures, it is important to understand that it is not only just in recent times that the GoG waterways began to serve as a critical gateway to the world.

### *The Concept of Maritime Security/Insecurity*

The concept of maritime security is one of the latest buzzwords in international relations.<sup>19</sup> This is because it captures a normative resonance and embraces a range of meanings. Bueger proposes an understanding of maritime security by exploring the relations of the term to others.<sup>20</sup> Four of these require consideration: sea power, marine safety, blue economy, and human resilience. The first two of them are particularly relevant for this study because they are somewhat historical concepts. The concepts of sea power and marine safety are century old understandings of danger at sea.<sup>21</sup> Sea power is related to maritime security in that it addresses how far state forces should act outside their territorial waters, engage in other regions than their own and have a presence in international waters.<sup>22</sup> The Berlin West African Conference of 1884–85 adopted the notion of free navigation on the waterways of Africa to address this issue. Similarly, anti-slave ships such as the West Africa squadron were stationed at strategic corners of the waters to secure a sea lane for legitimate trade using deterrence and surveillance.

The concept of “marine safety” addresses the safety of ships and maritime installations with the primary purpose of protecting maritime professionals and the marine environment.<sup>23</sup> The concept has been appropriated by the IMO and encompasses the regulation of the construction of vessels and maritime installations, the regular control of their safety procedures as well as the education of maritime professionals in complying with regulations and the prevention of collisions, accidents and the environmental disasters these may cause.<sup>24</sup>

Maritime security is also linked to economic development because throughout history the oceans have always been of vital economic importance. That is why the concepts of “blue economy” and “blue growth” aim at linking and integrating the different dimensions of the economic development of the oceans and constructing sustainable management strategies for these.

Finally, human security also provides a significant understanding of maritime



security. Given that human security concerns food, shelter, sustainable livelihoods and safe employment, fisheries are therefore a vital source of food and employment, notably in the least developed countries, and IUU Fishing is a major problem impacting human security.

An African approach to maritime security has developed recently, according to which maritime security is anything that creates, sustains or improves the secure use of Africa's waterways and infrastructure that supports these waters.<sup>25</sup> These include policies, laws, rules and regulations as well as actions and operations undertaken by known conventional actors to ensure the sustainable, safe use of the waters. It also embraces a vast range of policy sectors, information services, and user communities, including maritime safety, search, and rescue, policing operations, operational safety for offshore oil and gas production, marine environmental monitoring and protection, naval operations support.<sup>26</sup> The objective is to reduce risk and fear among conventional users of the waters.

Maritime insecurity, on the other hand, is the presence of fear and risk in the conventional ways of doing business on the waterways and beyond. It encompasses a range of threats such as maritime inter-state disputes, maritime terrorism, piracy, trafficking of narcotics, people and illicit goods, arms proliferation, illegal fishing, environmental crimes, or maritime accidents and disasters.<sup>27</sup> Logically, maritime security means the absence of these threats. Any threat to the conventional way of doing business along the said waterways is considered maritime insecurity. As at now, pirate attacks, which stood at 1,434 incidents between 2003 and 2011, to criminal activities linked to theft and illegal trade in crude oil, trafficking of persons, drugs, firearms and pharmaceuticals, IUU fishing, waste dumping, and pollution, just to name these few, represent the newest threats.<sup>28</sup> However, and as shall be demonstrated, these threats derive from age old practices rooted in the emergence of the GoG to an international navigation zone.

## Historical Experiences of Security/ Insecurity in the GoG Maritime Zone

### *Early Europeans and the Internationalization of the GoG*

Maritime insecurity in the GoG first received international attention when the region was opened to world trade and commerce. By the second half of the 15th century, European monarchies had increased their power and resources, which enabled them to turn their energies beyond their borders to the GoG. In the early 16th century, European adventurers launched their small fleets into the vast reaches of the Atlantic Ocean and reached the GoG. These voyages marked the beginning of a process that led to radical changes in the political, economic and socio-cultural life of the entire GoG.

Portugal took the lead in the European exploration. Beginning in 1420, under the sponsorship of Prince Henry the Navigator, Portuguese fleets began probing

southward along the GoG, where they discovered a new source of gold. The GoG was then called the Gold Coast. Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias was the first European to circumnavigate the GoG.<sup>29</sup> The aim of these explorers was to seize the trade of Indian Ocean and of the distant Spice Islands that was controlled by Arab merchants and traders. The GoG was strategic in that it enabled the Portuguese to check rival traders, and the ease with which they established their maritime hegemony was the result of their vastly superior naval technology, seamanship, and fire-power unmatched by anything existing in the region at the time.<sup>30</sup> The maritime activities of Portuguese sailors, explorers, and traders along the GoG represented a maritime threat to Arab traders and merchants who had gained control of the Indian Ocean. These Arab traders interpreted the presence and activities of Portuguese sailors and traders in the GoG as threats to theirs over the waterways of the Indian Ocean. The clash over control of the waterways was further intensified by the absence of a regulatory and binding navigation framework. However, the Portuguese were able to consolidate their hold in the region by building a fort there in 1481.<sup>31</sup>

The Portuguese also intended to discover and trade in gold, which was in high demand in Europe at the time. When gold was effectively discovered, regular trading relations were established at numerous ports of call between Awim and the Volta. New maritime markets were created, and this stimulated trade over wide areas and the trend away from subsistence economy gained pace.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the demand for gold occasioned considerable economic activity in the area in the later part of the 15th century and led to other explorations and discoveries. Fernão do Pó reached the GoG, including São Tomé and Príncipe and Helmina, in 1471 while Senegal and Cape Verde were reached in 1445 and 1446. In 1482, Diogo Cão reached the Congo River. He discovered that the area was well located on the sea route between West Africa, Europe, and America. In an attempt to control the wealth and land of the people, trading stations were opened at several points along the coast. The explorers also reported about the wealth of the area and this was how the GoG came to be known and began attracting international attention. The activities of European traders, explorers, and sailors, were dominant to the point that the trans-Saharan trade<sup>33</sup> was threatened and bypassed in favor of direct trade with West Africa by sea. Strategically, the GoG had become the original point of contact between the coastal peoples and the Europeans. However, with the advent of the slave trade, another form of maritime insecurity emerged in that region.

### *Slave Trade and Humanitarian Insecurity in the GoG*

The first structural form of international trade that was introduced and practiced in the GoG was the Transatlantic Slave Trade also known as the Triangular Trade. It was the largest form of slave trade experienced in Africa, and it began in the 15th century. It consisted of the transportation of large numbers of African captives in ships from the coast of the GoG across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas to work as slaves in European-owned plantations. The growth in the demand for slaves in Europe and America caused the GoG to be reinvented as a secure terrain to carry



out the slave trade. To that effect, slave stations were opened by the Portuguese off the coast of Guinea between 1460 and 1466 to ensure a regular supply of slaves. When Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands later joined Portugal, more slave stations were opened and transactions intensified between Africa, Europe, and America via the water. The GoG was then known as “Portuguese Guinea” or the “Slave Coast.” Strategically, it was the point of departure for African slaves (considered as cargo) to such destinations as Bristol and Liverpool.

Slaves were first used to work in Cape Verde cotton and indigo plantations, but later, with the development of sugar, cotton and tobacco plantations in the Caribbean and the Americas, they began transporting slaves to their South American colonies. In return, African slave dealers got European goods like firearms, alcohol, cotton goods, and beads. Ports around the GoG served as the stock exchange market for these goods. It is estimated that some 11 million Africans were loaded on slave ships en route to the West Indies across the Atlantic Ocean and more than 1,200,000 slaves were shipped from the Bight of Benin alone.<sup>34</sup> In any case, estimates of the number of Africans sold into the trans-Atlantic slave trade range from about 9.6 million at the lower scale to about 15 million at the upper.<sup>35</sup>

During this period, maritime insecurity was interpreted as an attempt to raid slave ships off the coastal waters to Europe or ships carrying finished products from Europe to Africa. There were reports of attacks on British slave vessels in Calabar in Nigeria. The ports around the GoG, the point of departure for the slaves was perceived as a “danger zone” for the African population and a “lucrative” zone for slave dealers. By 1706, English ships had transported more than 10 thousand slaves from the Gold Coast. Between 1750 and 1807, the British transported to the GoG 49,130,368 pounds of gun powder and exported from the area slaves valued at 53,669,184 pounds.<sup>36</sup> The so-called Middle Passage was the Lion’s den or the “way of death” for African slaves. There is evidence that several million Africans died on the journey across the Atlantic and a voluminous literature now exists on the physical and psychological experiences of slaves during the Middle Passage. It is estimated that mortality rates among slaves during the Middle Passage in certain periods was as high as 20 percent, that rate having fallen to about 5 percent during the closing decades of the trade in the 19th century.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the Middle Passage was far more than being simply a trans-Atlantic journey for millions of Africans, on the contrary, it was also a symbol of the social divisions that came to separate the people of Africa and Europe.<sup>38</sup>

Table 1 indicates that the trans-Atlantic trade route secured the highest number of slaves compared to the trans-Saharan, Indian Ocean, and Red Sea routes. A total of 8,732,270 slaves were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean against only 7,047 for the Indian Ocean, 59,337 for the Red Sea, and 654,527 for the trans-Saharan which, in effect, was the dominant route prior to the trans-Atlantic one. This implies that more slaves were drawn from the regions in and around the GoG and the trans-Atlantic slave route was the most secure of all and the trans-Atlantic slave trade the most lucrative. Even the combined number of slaves from the three other routes (720,911) does not even come to a quarter of the total number of slaves shipped from the GoG via the Atlantic Ocean. In any case, slaves supplied by the Atlantic system

Country	Number of slaves per slave-route/type of slave trade				Total slaves
	Trans-Atlantic	Indian ocean	Trans-Saharan	Red Sea	
Angola	3,607,020	0	0	0	3,607,020
Nigeria	1,406,728	0	555,796	59,337	2,021,859
Ghana	1,614,793	0	0	0	1,614,793
Democratic Republic of Congo	759,468	7,047	0	0	766,515
Benin	456,583	0	0	0	456,583
Senegal	278,195	0	98,731	0	376,926
Togo	289,634	0	0	0	289,634
Congo	94,663	0	0	0	94,663
Sierra Leone	69,607	0	0	0	69,607
Cameroon	66,719	0	0	0	66,719
Ivory Coast	52,646	0	0	0	52,646
Gabon	27,403	0	0	0	27,403
Liberia	6,790	0	0	0	6,790
Central African Republic	2,010	0	0	0	2,010
Equatorial Guinea	11	0	0	0	11
Sao Tome and Principe	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,732,270</b>	<b>7,047</b>	<b>654,527</b>	<b>59,337</b>	<b>9, 453,179</b>

**Table 1: Estimated total slave exports between 1400 and 1900 from the GoG. Source: Selected from Nunn N, “The Long Effects of Africa’s Slave Trades,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2008 139–176, pp. 152–153).**

represented the largest known transfer of people prior to the 19th century. With the growing interest in slaves to work in plantations, African states, and in particular, those States of the GoG, became the targets of European commercial interests, and as the trade expanded, competition for European markets increased. It is estimated that between 1518 and 1860, some 15 to 25 million Africans were transported to the Americas, and in the network there were also powerful African slave merchants/dealers, most of whom came from Ghana.<sup>39</sup>

Political instability was another significant outcome of the slave trade in the GoG. It brought about villages or states raiding one another for slaves which in turn led to uncertainty and insecurity. In extreme cases, intra-state and inter-state conflicts over slaves caused the collapse of preexisting forms of government. In 16th century northern Senegambia, the Portuguese slave trade was a key factor leading to the eventual disintegration of the Joloff Confederation, which was replaced by the much smaller kingdoms of Waalo, Kajoor, Baol, Siin, and Saalum.<sup>40</sup> The most dramatic example still comes from another GoG territory—the Congo Kingdom of West-Central Africa. There, as early as 1514, the kidnapping of local Congo citizens for sale to the Portuguese had become rampant, threatening social order and the King's authority. In 1526, the King of Congo himself, Affonso, wrote to Portugal complaining that there were many traders in all corners of the country, who were bringing ruin, enslaving and kidnapping people, including nobles and members of his own family.<sup>41</sup>

It was for some 400 years that the GoG was strategically and economically viable and secure for the slave trade. Nevertheless, European slave dealers interpreted and perceived maritime insecurity as relating to the pirating of slave ships, but for the greatest number of African population along the area, maritime insecurity was reflected in the fear of one day becoming a slave captive for a journey of no return across the GoG waterways.

### *Legitimate Trade, European Scramble and Colonialism from the GoG*

The GoG was also strategic in the abolition of slave trade, the introduction of legitimate trade, European scramble and eventual colonization of Africa. It was critical to the penetration, advancement, and consolidation of European colonial enterprise and presence in Africa via missionary, commercial and consular activities. It was a theater for unprecedented economic, political, diplomatic, military intrigues/rivalries among key European powers jostling to gain access to and control new territories.<sup>42</sup>

Britain took the lead in the abolition of slave trade. Naval patrol ships belonging to the British Royal Navy were stationed around the ports of the GoG to check suspected slave ships.<sup>43</sup> In 1851 a British anti-slave-trade squadron bombarded Lagos. From 1825 to 1865 the British navy used twenty ships to arrest 1,287 slave ships and free about 130,000 slaves.<sup>44</sup> Maritime security was redefined as operations to track down slave ships and maritime insecurity was seen as any attempt to smuggle slaves out of the GoG. During that period about 1,436,000 slaves were smuggled to America.<sup>45</sup> Coastal Chiefs were also convinced to sign abolition treaties with European abolitionists. However, resistance from some of them meant that they had become threats to human security.

With the introduction of legitimate trade, the GoG was reinvented as the world trade center for the exchange of African raw materials for European finished goods. Ships that left the ports of the GoG for Europe were loaded with raw materials such as timber, palm oil, rubber, cotton, minerals and ivory in return for European products

such as gunpowder, wine, etc. It is estimated that between 1905 and 1912 Togo's external trade increased by 86 percent and Cameroon's by 154 percent.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the introduction of legitimate trade was not a guarantee of maritime security given that conflicting European economic interest along the area meant another form of insecurity.

Some European countries claimed a monopoly over some navigable waters in the GoG thereby preventing others from navigating the waters (the case of Belgium over River Congo). The clash of European interests along the area in the 19th century led to the Berlin West African Conference of 1884–85.<sup>47</sup> The conference involved 14 countries roughly all the States in Europe except Switzerland, along with Turkey and the United States—following intensified colonial rivalries in the GoG. The aim was to obviate the misunderstandings and disputes which might in future arise from new acts of occupation on the coast of Africa.<sup>48</sup> The Final Act of the Conference comprised six chapters summarized as (1) a declaration relative to freedom of trade in the Congo, (2) a declaration relative to slave trade, (3) a declaration relative to the neutrality of the Congo, (4) an act of navigation for the Congo, (5) an act of navigation for the Niger, and (6) a declaration introducing into international relations certain uniform rules with reference to future occupations on the coast of the GoG.<sup>49</sup> One of its resolutions was to free navigation in the Congo and Niger waters. This resolution was among the first international legal attempts to regulate the use of African waters. It redefined maritime security as the freedom of navigation along the waters of the GoG and insecurity as any attempt to deny access to these waters.

The principle of effective occupation was also adopted as a means to regulate the peaceful acquisition of territories. It meant an effective control of the coastal areas including the hinterlands through three core methods: cession, conquest, and occupancy.<sup>50</sup> In line with this resolution, Europeans were able to penetrate the hinterlands from the sea coast and the navigable rivers of Niger, Senegal, and Gambia. In 1884, German flags were raised in Cameroon and Togoland. In 1886 the French occupied the coast between Lagos and Togo, and the rest of the West African coast not claimed by Britain, Portugal, Germany, or Liberia. The four British colonies in West Africa were Gambia, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria. Treaties of annexation were signed with African chiefs as recognition of European right and control over the occupied territory. However, Europeans sometimes faced stiff resistance which they successfully suppressed and established themselves as full-time authorities in the territories. This meant that they had gained the right to use the coastal waters and lands for their economic and other activities. That was how the GoG was instrumental in bringing about colonialism.

### *Implications*

The Berlin Conference and eventual colonialism had some significant implications for security/insecurity in the GoG. For Europeans, it marked the end of scramble over the waters and ushered an era of regulation of waterways, which, in effect meant that maritime-related disputes were prevented or could be settled peacefully.

Some measure of maritime security was gained given that after the conference, no significant conflict occurred between European powers over the use of the waters and the occupation of GoG territories.

However, if the Berlin Conference created a sense of security among Europeans in the GoG, Africans, on the other hand, resented the loss of their hegemony over the waters and even over their own land. Indeed, the resolution on the abolition of the slave trade was a welcome humanitarian initiative, but the legalization of colonialism, without the express consent of Africans sowed the seeds of future conflicts. The fact that colonialism redrew boundaries without regard for pre-existing ethnic, political, trade boundaries and ties, meant long term political and social instability in many parts of the GoG. Colonial boundaries caused longstanding grievances as well as economic underdevelopment due to a history of economic subordination to Europe. The atrocities in the Belgian Congo, the outbreak and extension of World War I to the GoG, African independence movements, modern hostilities among ethnic groups, ongoing wars and humanitarian crises, and mass emigration from GoG due to lack of economic opportunities, are possible long-term effects of the Berlin Conference and colonialism of the people, waters, and land of the GoG. The partition of GoG territories among the European powers symbolized the inevitable geographic reorientation of GoG and a wholesale dismantling of their States, societies, and livelihoods to be replaced by European models, so that by the eve of World War I, a new type of fragmentation had changed the face of GoG forever.

### *Resistance to Colonialism to Secure the GoG for Africans*

Europeans had set up trading companies and stations along the coast of the GoG. They were supplied by coastal middlemen with raw materials from the interior. However, they clashed with these middlemen in their attempt to bridge their trade monopoly by penetrating into the interior. The GoG again became insecure for European powers when indigenes staged resistances against the conquest and exploitation of their territory.

Europeans interpreted African resistances as threats to their activities on land and sea in the GoG. Africans attacked European supply vessels and cargo ships, companies situated along the coast, and businessmen. Duala Manga Bell, a famous Cameroonian coastal resistor was hung when he resisted German attempts to appropriate the rich Douala coastal land in 1914. British also faced uprisings in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the most spectacular resistance was against the French by Samori Toure in Guinea who headed the Wassulu Empire which at its height included parts of present-day Guinea, Mali, Sierra Leone and Northern Ivory Coast.

Although the resistances failed, since the Africans were virtually unarmed and the reprisals were often cruel and disproportionate, resistance to colonial penetration was an attempt by Africans to limit European control over the waters and to keep a monopoly over trade along the GoG. The failure of coastal resistances meant that the coastal groups had lost control over the strategic lands and waters of the coast including their trade monopoly.

## *The GoG from the Two Great Wars to Post-Colonial Africa*

The GoG was also the arena of fierce battles during the two Great Wars of 1914 and 1939. During the wars, the area was used as a fighting and hunting ground for African soldiers. Colonial masters recruited soldiers from among the inhabitants of the area. The French recruited some 137,000 soldiers. The British are said to have used 300 000 troops from the area. During World War II the Royal West African Frontier Force was increased from 8,000 to 146,000. Northern Nigeria provided the most soldiers, and they played an important role fighting in East Africa against the Italians.

It was the gateway for the penetration of military troops. In Cameroon for example, Anglo-French (Ally) forces came in from Gabon and Nigeria to oust the Germans. They captured the strategic waters in Douala on September 27, 1914, and took Buea, another strategic coastal town on November 13. The GoG was also a refuge area for some Germans who fled from the interior. For example, Col. Zimmerman and some German troops fled from Mora in Cameroon to the Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea. The war also brought in deadly pandemics which threatened security in the area. In 1918, towards the end of World War I, for instance, it is estimated that an influenza pandemic killed more than 120,000 in French West Africa and 70,000 in French Equatorial Africa.<sup>51</sup>

With the end of colonialism, the control of maritime security and safety was left in the hands of new African governments although European businessmen retained a strategic supervisory role over the waters. The GoG still continued to serve as the exchange center for raw materials and other equipment. It was not until mineral resources notably oil emerged and gained an unprecedented value in the world market that the GoG assumed a new strategic and economic importance, leading to “new” maritime security challenges.

## **Beyond the Past: “New” Stakes and Threats**

Today, the GoG is a strategic global trade route through which around 30,000 commercial vessels travel every year.<sup>52</sup> It has a market size of about 300 million consumers.<sup>53</sup> The region provides immense potential for maritime commerce, resource extraction, shipping, and development. Indeed, container traffic in West African ports has grown 14 percent annually since 1995, the fastest of any region in Sub-Saharan Africa. The GoG has also become a hub for global energy supplies with significant quantities of all petroleum products consumed in Europe, North America, and Asia transiting this waterway.<sup>54</sup> The effective execution of development plans for most of the States in the region depends on 60 percent of their revenues coming from hydrocarbon resources either sourced from or transiting through the waterways of the region.<sup>55</sup> The estimated projection of proven deposits in the region is about 50.4 billion barrels, with an actual production of 5.4 billion barrels per day.<sup>56</sup> Paradoxically, the communities in the region have not been able to fully benefit from these immense potentials because of “new” security challenges.



## Piracy, Oil Theft and Unlawful Activities

The term “piracy” encompasses two distinct sorts of offenses: the first is robbery or hijacking, where the target of the attack is to steal a maritime vessel or its cargo; the second is kidnapping, where the vessel and crew are threatened until a ransom is paid. In 2012, the GoG surpassed that of the Gulf of Aden as the region with the highest number of reported piracy attacks in the world. These attacks, which are sometimes violent, seem to be growing every day because of the limited maritime security presence off the West African coast. In 2013 alone, 1,871 seafarers were victims of attacks and 279 were taken hostage in 2013.<sup>57</sup> Although it is difficult to give precise figures to the annual losses incurred in the region through piracy, estimates of the annual cost of piracy range from \$565 million to \$2 billion.<sup>58</sup>

Date	Incident	Observation
28 September 2008	Attack of several bank buildings in the city of Limbe, Cameroon	Attack by perpetrators from the sea. 01 dead.
October 2008	Attack on Bakassi waters with hostages taken	Hostages taken: 07 French, 02 Cameroonians and 01 Tunisian
17 February 2009	Attack on Malabo (Bioko island)	Pirates from sea attacked the presidency and bank building
24 February 2010	03 Trawlers attacked	In Rio del rey
29 March 2010	Attack on the gendarmerie brigade of Bamuso	
17 May 2010	Attack on 02 ships	Buoy A (Wouri channel) hostages taken
25 July 2010	Attack on 02 trawlers OLUKUN4 and KULAK7	Cap Debundscha
12 September 2010	Attack on 02 ships (SALMA, AMERIGO VESPUCI)	Buoy Wouri channel base
16 November 2010	Attack on MOUNGO7	Moudi site, 05 dead
01 February 2011	Attack on 21 <sup>st</sup> BAFUMAR at Ekondo Titi	01 dead and 01 injured
07 February 2011	Attack on the gendarmerie post in Bonjo Bakassi	02 dead, 01 wounded and 10 hostages
27 February 2011	Attack in KANGUE village	02 hostages
18 March 2011	Attack on ECOBANK Bonaberi	05 dead and 07 wounded at sea, 02 attackers apprehended
19 March 2011	[Confrontement] at sea between RIB/DELTA patrol and the alleged attackers of ECOBANK	18 dead
23 July 2011	Attack on 02 MONGO MEYEN I and II trawlers in Equatorial Guinea waters	In the Bata zone
28 July 2011	Attack on 02 trawlers in Equatorial Guinea waters (to be confirmed)	Bata region
09 October 2011	Attack on a Gendarmerie unit from Isangele on a recommended mission to the Bakassi peninsula	02 gendarmes killed

**Table 2: Timeline of attacks of violence in ECCAS waters. Source: Ukeje, C and Mvomo Ela W, *African Approaches to Maritime Security—The Gulf of Guinea* (Abuja: Friedrich-Hebert-Stiftung, 2013, p. 17).**

In 2014, a total of 41 incidents were confirmed to the IMB PRC in West Africa.<sup>59</sup> The target of the hijackings is mainly product tankers from which the cargo is stolen and transshipped to smaller tankers. Although the hijacking of vessels appeared to have subsided in the last quarter of 2014, it does not mean an end to piracy.

Oil theft and bunkering represent yet another category of threats to the smooth conduct of commerce in the GoG. According to a press release from the Council of European Union (EU) on the region, Nigeria alone loses between 40,000 and 100,000 barrels a day due to theft.<sup>60</sup>

Trafficking in narcotics, fake and substandard pharmaceuticals are yet other threats to security in the GoG. The area has become one of the preferred transit hubs in the global trade in narcotics and psychotropic substances largely from South America, as well as a destination for fake and substandard pharmaceuticals coming from Asia and the Far East.<sup>61</sup>

### *Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing*

The GoG has become a juicy haven for IUU fishing trawlers from diverse regions of the world. Although it may be hard to produce exact figures in this domain of illegal maritime activity, as well as its real insecurity impact, experts estimate that 11 to 26 million tons of sea products are extracted annually in that manner.<sup>62</sup> It is also observed that 40 percent of the region's annual catch is estimated to be illegal, unregulated, or unreported and the region has kept the position of the highest region of illegal fishing in the world.<sup>63</sup> This represents up to 37 percent of the region's catch, resulting in economic losses and compromising the food security and livelihoods of coastal communities.<sup>64</sup> In addition to the environmental damage, the large catches made by illegal boats deplete fish stocks and deny fish to local, artisanal fishermen.<sup>65</sup>

### *Pollution*

Pollution is another significant threat to maritime security in the GoG. It has been revealed that aggressive natural resource exploitation degrades the environment and pollutes ecosystems.<sup>66</sup> High levels of water and air pollution, for example, are contributing factors to instability in the region, not only regarding environmental and economic impact but also by their contribution to a climate of desperation among the population.<sup>67</sup> Oil production companies located in the region release toxic gases into the air which damage the environment and community health. The 3.3 million deaths caused by outdoor pollution annually,<sup>68</sup> suggests that if nothing is done, the GoG is likely, in the not too distant future, become an environmental deathtrap. This is plausible because levels of oil production are not only rapidly increasing, but they have incurred and continue to incur spills and leakage of oil into the marine environment, polluting the ecosystem and further endangering fisheries and livelihoods. The threat of pollution is real in the GoG given that it jeopardizes the ecological base of the long-term development of the region.<sup>69</sup>

## *Sociopolitical and Economic Instability*

The latest political, social and economic developments in the GoG indicate pre-occupying instances of uncertainties. Underlying threats to maritime security are also the weakness of the post-colonial State. States within the areas have not been able to control their maritime borders effectively. One reason could be that Africa continues to look at the sea from a distance. As Coelho explains, post-colonial Africa remained beyond sea issues for most of the second half of the 20th century, busy as it was with settling disputes and consolidating political borders in the hinterland and deprived of the means to integrate the sea into its national economies.<sup>70</sup> State weakness offers ideal conditions for extremists looking for a foothold, to the point that these areas are the primary locations for terrorist organizations. Instability essentially means uncertainty and range from extremely violent—terrorist attacks, civil war, ethnic cleansing, massacres, coups, and revolutions—to lesser forms of instability such as protests, strikes, riots, and declarations of emergencies. All these elements make the region unsafe for international navigation.

## Conclusion

The international concern about security in the GoG is not a recent matter. Maritime security/insecurity in the GoG started receiving sustained international attention when the earliest Europeans first reached the area in the 15th century and opened up trading posts along the coast. This marked the beginning of a series of activities between the GoG and the international system which was not without concerns for maritime security and safety. Slave trade was the most dominant and lucrative of all, with about four centuries of practice. During the period, the waterways of the GoG and in particular, the Atlantic Ocean were seen as the Lion's den for African slaves or a way of death. However, concerns about human security, coupled with economic motives led to efforts to abolish the slave trade and substitute it with legitimate trade, under the watchful eyes of well-established colonial States and governments. With colonialism, European countries took over control of not only the waterways of the GoG but the land and people as well, following the prescriptions of the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, which was convened purposefully to address security concerns in the region. The process was not completely a peaceful one either as these Europeans met with sometimes stiff resistances from the people of the GoG. Colonialism might have come to an end but it left an indelible mark on the way the people of GoG had to perceive the relationship between them and with the outside world especially when it came to managing the resources of the GoG.

Maritime security conferences such as the Yaounde tripartite conference of June 24 and 25, 2013, held as a follow up to a United Nations Resolution and witnessed by stakeholders at all levels, was, from every indication, a continuation of a series of forums inspired by and drawn from history. They are aimed at finding a lasting solution to safety and security concerns in this internationally coveted maritime

domain. However, given the strong and dynamic resolutions that were arrived at, it can only be expected that participating and concerned countries follow-up on them to build the structures and centers that are needed for permanent peace and security to reign in the GoG, just like the resolutions of Berlin Conference which succeeded to restore security and safety among Europeans over the use of waterways. This paper might not have exhausted the entire literature on the historical origins of maritime insecurity, but it provides a clue to understanding the historical and strategic dynamics of security/insecurity in the GoG.

## Notes

1. For example, a 2012 World Bank report reveals that piracy-related incidents cost the world's economy between 740 and 950 million U.S. dollars, a figure that is due to increase if nothing is done. The 2013 Global Piracy Report states that more than 300 persons were taken hostage, with 21 of them injured by knives or guns.
2. It was in the last decades of the 20th century that Africa's natural resources and revenue raised the profile of Africa in the geopolitics of world resource endowment. For details see C. Ukeje and W. Mvomo Ela, *African Approaches to Maritime Security—The Gulf of Guinea* (Abuja: Friedrich-Hebert-Stiftung, 2013).
3. Ukeje and Mvomo Ela (2013), p. 9.
4. Joana Ama Osei-Tutu, "Beauty and the Thief: Why the Gulf of Guinea Attracts Maritime Insecurity" *Policy Brief* (Koffi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, 2014).
5. J.V. Ntuda Ebode (ed.), *Terrorisme et piraterie: De nouveaux défis sécuritaires en Afrique centrale* (Yaounde: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Presses Universitaires d'Afrique, 2010).
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8. Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *Ibid.*
9. William H. Sewell, *Logics of History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005), p. 100.
10. Deborah J. Gerner, Philip A. Schrodt, Ronald A. Francisco and Judith L. Weddle, "Machine Coding of Event Data Using Regional and International Sources," *International Studies Quarterly* 38(1) (1994), 91–119, p. 95.
11. Edward E. Azar, "The Issues of Event Research." In *Theory and Practice of Events Research*, ed. E.E. Azar and J.D. Ben-Dak (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1975), p. 1.
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13. Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *Ibid.* p. 10.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
17. Adeniyi A. Osinowo, "Combating Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea," *Africa Security Brief* 30(2) (2015), p. 2.
18. In August 2013, for example, pirates aboard a passenger boat opened fire on a Nigerian Navy (NN) craft during a routine patrol along the Cameroonian border, and in the exchange six pirates were killed. This is just one among many of the fierce naval patrol resistances that the GoG has witnessed in the last decade. For details on related incidents see Adeniyi A. Osinowo, *Ibid.*
19. Christian Bueger, "What Is Maritime Security? Forthcoming in Marine Policy," 2015, <http://bueger.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Bueger-2014-What-is-Maritime-Security-final.pdf>, accessed February 14, 2017, p. 1.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.* p. 3.

22. *Ibid.* p. 4.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. The Brenthurst Foundation, “Maritime Development in Africa,” *Discussion Paper* (2010/03), p. 1.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Bueger, *Ibid.* p. 1.
28. Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, *Ibid.* p. 7.
29. S.A.I. Tirmizi, *Indian Sources for African History* (UNESCO Sponsored Guides to the Sources of the History of Nations, 1993), p. 2.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
31. The modern application of the name Guinea to the coast dates from 1481, when the Portuguese built this fort, on the Gold Coast region, and their King (John II) at the time was permitted by the Pope (Sixtus II) to style himself Lord of Guinea.
32. I. Wilks, “A Medieval Trade-Route from the Niger to the Gulf of Guinea,” *Journal of African History* 3(2) (1962), pp. 337–341, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853700003236>
33. The trans-Saharan trade was trade that was carried on between the people of GoG and North African Arab traders through the Sahara desert.
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37. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
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39. C. Goucher, C. LeGui and L. Walton, *The Tentacles of Empire: The New Imperialism in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, The Balance: Themes in Global History* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998).
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42. Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, p. 9.
43. It was in 1807 that parliament in London decided to stop British ships from carrying slaves and the importation of slaves into any British colony.
44. R. Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition 1760–1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975) p. 78.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Wilks, 1962, p. 12.
47. The idea to convene the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 originated from King Leopold II of Belgium, owner of a vast territory in the GoG, otherwise known as Belgian Congo or Congo Free State (later Zaire and now Democratic Republic of Congo). His intention was to regulate the use of waterways among Europeans in order to prevent a clash of interest
48. W. Shih-tsung, “The Conference of Berlin and the British ‘New’ Imperialism,” [http://140.112.142.79/publish/pdfs/22/22\\_08.pdf](http://140.112.142.79/publish/pdfs/22/22_08.pdf), accessed May 14, 2016.
49. *Ibid.* p. 196.
50. For details of the international law implication of the resolutions of the Berlin Conference, see *Ibid.*
51. Anstey, *Ibid.* p. 77.
52. Open Briefing, Intelligence brief, “Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea,” March 19, 2014.
53. Damian Ondo Mañe, “Emergence of the Gulf of Guinea in the Global Economy: Prospects and Challenges,” *IMF Working Paper* WP/05/235 (2005), p. 3.
54. Adjoa Anyimadu, *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Lessons Learned from the Indian Ocean* (London: Chatham House, July 2013).
55. Loïc Moudouma, *Lead Maritime Security Expert, ECCAS, and Commander in the Navy of Gabon, Panelist Discussion at the National Defense University’s Round Table, “Africa’s Security and the United States: Converging Interests and Expanding Partnership,” Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., July 29, 2014.*

56. Ukeje and Mvomo Ela, p. 10.
57. Osinowo, *Ibid.*
58. Jens Vestergaard Madsen, Conor Seyle, Kellie Brandt, Ben Purser, Heather Randall, and Kellie Roy, *The State of Maritime Piracy 2013* (Colorado: Oceans Beyond Piracy, 2014), 55. *Report of the United Nations Assessment Mission on Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea (7 To 24 November 2011)*, UN doc. S/2012/45(1) (2012), p. 11.
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66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*
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69. Mañe, *Ibid.* p. 4.
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## Biographical Statement

Fru Norbert Suh I is political scientist/historian and researcher with the Centre d’Etudes et de Research en Dynamiques Administratives et Politiques (CERDAP) of the Faculty of Laws and Political Sciences (FSJP) of the University of Yaounde II–Soa, Cameroon. He has published and co-published several articles in scientific peer-reviewed journals. His area of research interest is the role of the past in modern political engagement and processes, with a focus on Africa.