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Maurice Beseng & James A. Malcolm

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Maritime security and the securitisation of fisheries in the Gulf of Guinea: experiences from Cameroon

Maurice Beseng ^a and James A. Malcolm^b

^aSheffield Institute for International Development, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK; ^bCentre for Trust, Peace & Social Relations, Coventry University, Coventry, UK

ABSTRACT

Since the 2000s, maritime security threats in the Gulf of Guinea region have been of growing international concern. In many countries, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is one such problem with negative impacts on environmental, food and national security and links with wider maritime crime. Focussing on Cameroon, this article argues that there has been a securitisation of the fisheries sector within the broader context of changes in maritime security governance in the Gulf of Guinea. The article examines the process and implications of the securitisation of Cameroon's fisheries sector. Using documents, direct observations, and in-depth interviews with state agents and actors of civil society organisations (CSOs), the article illustrates how the fisheries sector was securitised through a range of linguistic, institutional, and structural mechanisms. The institutional and structural mechanisms were highly militarised with the increased deployment of military forces in monitoring, control and surveillance of fishery activities. These changes, the article concludes, subsequently diminished the agency and capacity of non-military state and civil society actors in fisheries governance and undermines their role in cooperative efforts within the broader maritime security architecture that now operates in Cameroon.

KEYWORDS

Maritime security; securitisation; fisheries; Gulf of Guinea; Cameroon

Introduction: fisheries, maritime insecurity and governance in the Gulf Of Guinea

On 24 October 2009 in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, a summit of heads of state and governments of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) adopted the 'Protocol Relating to the Securitisation of the Maritime Interests of ECCAS States of the Gulf of Guinea'¹ – hereafter the Kinshasa Protocol. Months earlier, the vulnerability of the maritime domain of ECCAS to being exploited for criminal intent had been starkly visible with a sea-borne attack on the presidential palace of Equatorial Guinea on 17 February 2009.² While piracy and armed robbery at sea had dominated public discussions leading up to the Kinshasa summit, broad in scope, the Kinshasa Protocol also pledged, 'to protect the natural resources and artisanal maritime fishing areas of ECCAS'³ through a three-tier cooperative maritime security governance architecture of regional, multi-national (zonal) and national maritime coordination centres.⁴

CONTACT Maurice Beseng  m.beseng@sheffield.ac.uk

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The policy decision to protect the region's fisheries was an acknowledgement by political leaders that illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing posed serious environmental, social and economic challenges which can undermine regional and national security. Some studies showed IUU fishing⁵ was a growing security problem, mindful for example, of the resultant impact on the depletion of fish stocks and its association with crime.⁶ In 2009, illegal and unreported fishing losses worldwide were estimated at between US\$10 and \$23.5 billion annually, valued at between 11 and 26 million tonnes of fish and 'developing countries are most at risk from illegal fishing, with total estimated catches in West Africa being 40 per cent higher than reported catches'.⁷ According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural organisation (FAO) in 2009, 54 per cent of fish stock in the East Central Atlantic Ocean – which includes the GoG region – were overfished, one of the highest affected of the FAO 19 major fishing areas.⁸ In Cameroon for instance, estimated illegally caught fish by mainly Chinese industrial trawlers rose from 2,300 tons in 1989 to 9,500 ton/year in the late 2000s,⁹ while total losses from illegal foreign industrial fishing represented 20 per cent of reported catch estimated at 77,300 tonnes in 2010.¹⁰

The consequences of depleted fish stocks in the GoG were far reaching. In some coastal states, fisherfolks lost their livelihoods resulting in unemployment, poverty and social unrest. In Senegal for example, artisanal fishers threatened to take up piracy in response to the devastating illicit practices of foreign industrial fishers in Senegalese waters.¹¹ The United Nations Office for Drug and Crime reported that, fisherfolks in West Africa were involved in people smuggling, arms and drug trafficking as they sought out alternative livelihoods.¹² Moreover, declining fishing resources created tension among fishers within and across state boundaries, resulting in clashes, such as between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea's naval forces over the protection of artisanal fishing rights.¹³ IUU fishing therefore was perceived as a threat to national and regional security in GoG.

As the plethora of maritime threats in the GoG region became more problematic, heads of state and governments of ECCAS, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and leaders of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) convened in 2013 in Yaounde, Cameroon, for a summit on maritime safety and security in the GoG. While the summit was heavily focused on issues related to piracy and armed robbery at sea, there was also high-level discussions on the region's broader maritime security challenges and the need for a comprehensive strategic response. The summit resulted in the adoption of the 'Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa'¹⁴ hereafter the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCC). The YCC, identified 13 maritime threats,¹⁵ some interrelated and which can manifest transnationally across GoG states. Crucially, the YCC recognised IUU fishing as a transnational organised crime that threatens the sustainable development of States in West and Central Africa.¹⁶ Moreover, the YCC also endorsed and expanded the maritime security governance framework laid out by ECCAS, urging coastal states to co-operate and collaborate in using law enforcement in monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) of fisheries and other maritime activities.¹⁷

With increasing illicit activities in fisheries, most empirical studies have focused on the environmental, socio-economic and security implications of these criminal activities in particular GoG states.¹⁸ Less attention, however, has been paid on the process through which increased securitisation of the fisheries sector has taken place in the GoG. Indeed,

more generally research on securitisation in the GoG remains nascent and broad in scope. João Piedade for example, argued that securitisation had been initiated in West and Central Africa in relation to maritime challenges, with regional strategies and plans adopted to deal with threats.¹⁹ Yet while this research highlighted an emerging trend in regional maritime security governance, it did not seek to undertake a detailed analysis of securitisation. Others such as Ian Ralby have elaborated how maritime insecurity has evolved, mapping the way ‘military-backed cooperative initiatives’ in the region were established, are continually evolving, and are becoming increasingly sophisticated and effective.²⁰ Yet Ralby’s focus remained on general regional trends. Where attention has fallen on exploring the securitisation of specific maritime threats, it has predominantly rested on responses to piracy and armed robbery at sea and mostly outside of the GoG.²¹

The lack of research on the process of the securitisation of fisheries in the GoG means that there is also limited awareness of what the day-to-day response to IUU fishing looks like in practice. Such an understanding of practice allows us to map key actors, locate policy trends, and highlight response mechanisms that influence regional geopolitics through to the lives of coastal communities. Moreover, for those interested in what security does, exploring practice is a prerequisite to being able to subsequently examine the wider implications of securitisation on the lives and livelihoods of those for whom security policies and practices are presented as being intended to protect.

To begin to fill this knowledge gap, we specifically examined the securitisation of fisheries in Cameroon and her response to IUU fishing and crimes associated to the fisheries value chain, analysing key developments between 2009 and 2019. The article demonstrates that Cameroonian state agents, at times supplemented by civil society organisations (CSO) actors, employed a range of linguistic, institutional and structural mechanisms to securitise the fisheries sector within the broader framework of maritime security governance implemented in the country and wider region. We highlight examples of implemented practice emerging within this securitised environment noting their highly militarised characteristics. We conclude that while multiple actors – state (military and non-military agents) and CSO actors – deployed linguistic mechanisms that created and reinforced the environment that enabled the deployment of extraordinary/emergency measures, these measures subsequently reduced the agency and capacity of non-military state and CSO actors in the subsequent response to tackle illegality in the fisheries sector.

To explore the process and impact of increased securitisation on the governance of fisheries in Cameroon, the article proceeds in the next section to justify the country focus and outline the methods used to collect data. With this complete the analytical framework used in the case study is elaborated. This section argues that securitisation theory, as conceived by the Copenhagen School,²² provides a useful starting point to explore the performative power of security on governance whilst offering a set of core conceptual components to structure empirical research. Noting the widespread debate around the Copenhagen School’s theory, its widespread evolution and deployment, we argue for a broader understanding of whom may be a securitising actor and for a reorientation of research focus on to practice and emergency/extraordinary measures. This results in us selecting Itay Fischendler’s²³ typology of securitisation for our case study. This typology is grounded in research in environmental resource management and consists of examining linguistic, institutional, and structural mechanisms of securitisation. Section three explores key developments in Cameroon around the securitisation of fisheries,

structuring discussion in three sub-sections using Fischendler's typology. The article concludes by summarising the key findings and noting the significance of developments in Cameroon for those interested in securitisation and the governance of fisheries.

Methodology

Cameroon is a central player in shaping the emerging maritime security governance architecture in the GoG. The country hosts key regional maritime security governance institutions such as the GoG Inter-regional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security and the Multinational Coordination Centre for Zone D of ECCAS. Geographically, Cameroon is centrally situated in the GoG (Figure 1) and the composition of its maritime fisheries sector is a microcosm of other GoG countries.²⁴ The sector is broadly categorised into industrial and artisanal fisheries. The former is dominated by foreign industrial trawlers, mainly from China and Nigeria while the latter includes fisherfolks from Nigeria (71.58 per cent), Ghana (2.99 per cent), Benin (4.11 per cent), Togo (0.07 per cent), and just 21.25 per cent Cameroonians.²⁵

The fisheries sector makes a substantial contribution to the economic and food security of millions of Cameroonians. In 2016, it accounted for 3 per cent of Cameroon's estimated \$35 billion gross domestic product.²⁶ Fish also contributes about 25.5 per cent of animal protein consumed by millions of Cameroonians and the

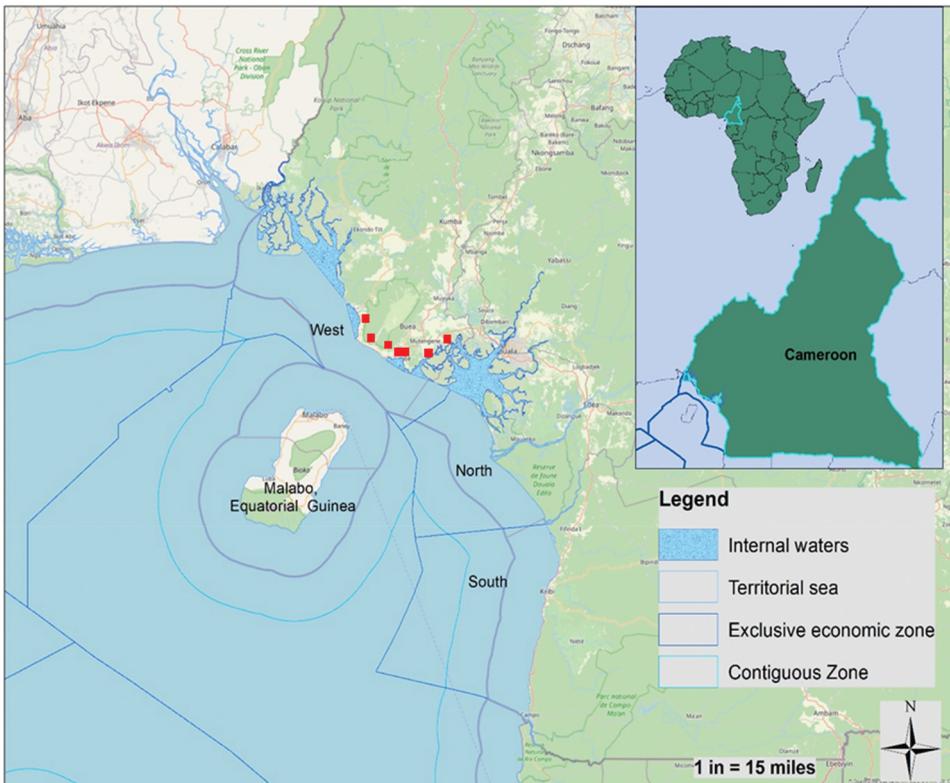


Figure 1. Cameroon maritime area showing data collection site in red squares.³¹

sector employs over 240,000 artisanal fisherfolk including thousands of women who mostly depend on the fish trade for their livelihoods.²⁷ A myriad of factors can impact on the quality and quantity of fish produced per year. While habitat degradation, pollution and climate change contribute to the depletion of fish stocks in Cameroon,²⁸ IUU fishing and associated criminality in the fisheries sector has also been identified as one of the main drivers of fish scarcity.²⁹ Indeed since 2012, marine capture fish production averaging 228 thousand tons/year has not met national demand, and as such the state imports an estimated 180 thousand tons/year, costing ~US\$288 thousand.³⁰

Empirical material in this article is presented through a qualitative case study method. To assess linguistic mechanisms used by different actors and assess ways in which they have contributed to the securitisation of fisheries, we drew upon grey literature (reports, news articles and speeches) from relevant government and civil society organisations (CSO) actors involved in maritime security and fisheries governance. These were then triangulated with 28 in-depth interviews from relevant state actors (n = 12), local CSOs representatives (n = 16), and direct observation at fisheries landing sites and offshore operations to provide additional information and new dimensions to the study.³² The analysis of interviews and direct observation data also enabled us to assess the different structural and institutional mechanisms used in the securitisation of fisheries.

Fieldwork was carried out in the West Maritime District (WMD) or West Zone (Figure 1) from September to November 2016 with follow-up interviews with key informants in January 2019. Through fixed purposeful sampling³³ state actors concerned with maritime governance and fisheries management were drawn from the following: Ministry of Defence (MINDEF); Ministry of Transport's (MINTRANS) Merchant Marine Department; Ministry of Finance's (MINFI) Custom department; and Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA). Purposeful and snowball sampling was employed to select civil society actors due to the need to get the views of actors directly involved in fisheries. An inductive analysis was employed in data analysis to understand the construction of threats in fisheries and the extraordinary/emergency measures being employed to combat them.

Towards an analytical framework: the securitisation theory and beyond

In the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory, a securitising actor identifies an existential threat to a particular referent object and in doing so frames the issue 'either as a special kind of politics or as above politics'³⁴ so that extraordinary means and/or emergency action can be pursued. This securitising move is only successful if an audience (which can be either elites or the general public) 'accepts' the need for extraordinary/emergency measures, creating an environment in which ordinary rules can be and are revoked, suspended and/or circumnavigated; and in doing so changing the relationship between securitising actor, referent object and audience in some way. It is only at this point we are said to be witnessing securitisation. Extraordinary/emergency measures do not necessarily need to be implemented in practice to determine if securitisation has occurred, since what is important is that the securitising actor establishes a platform where the presented existential threat will gain enough support from an audience from which it may be possible to legitimise extraordinary/emergency measures. For the

Copenhagen School, 'security' is a 'self-referential practice, because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue – not necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat'.³⁵

Several 'facilitating conditions' are necessary for a successful securitisation, categorised as 'internal, linguistic-grammatical' and 'external, contextual and social'.³⁶ The former concerns the rules of the speech act itself where it is expected that the securitising actor presents a narrative that shows that a referent object is existentially threatened, and the latter concerns the external environment or general circumstances of the act. As a result, it is important to explore both the threat narratives deployed by securitising actors, assessing the extent to which they are perceived as realistic and believable, and the extent to which an actor has credibility to make such security claims.³⁷

The Copenhagen School's securitisation theory has been the subject of wide-ranging and ongoing debate since its inception. One line of critique is that the theory is too conservative, with, for example, its logic of security, 'being associated with secrecy, urgency and panic politics is quite "unconstructivist" in the sense that it is positioned as relatively fixed and inevitable'³⁸ while the theory's focus on state or influential actors doing the securitising means gender issues and marginalised groups are silenced in the construction of security.³⁹ Another prominent line of critique is that securitisation theory is underdeveloped and as such inadequate to give us a complete picture of how security is socially constructed. For example, Matt McDonald posits that the focus on speech acts means other forms of representation such as images or material practices are excluded.⁴⁰ Thierry Balzacq⁴¹ meanwhile argues that the role of the audience in 'accepting' securitising moves is underdeveloped.⁴² Despite the criticism, the theory maintains significant value for scholars who conceptualise security as being socially constructed inter-subjectively through processes of negotiation and contestation. The theory captures the performative power of security on the wider policy environment as framing something as a security issue can imbue issues with newfound urgency. The Copenhagen School also provide scholars with an analytical framework of securitising actors, referent objects, audience, facilitating conditions, that provides a firm basis to structure empirical research.

In the maritime context, securitisation theory has been periodically used to explore how actors have treated issues as urgent or matters of top priority examining what measures or resources have been allocated in response. Vrey⁴³ has shown that the United Nations (UN) presented piracy as an existential threat to global shipping and security, threatening food security to war-torn Somalia, and thereby legitimising the need for international intervention after acceptance by the UN Security Council. Similarly, Oliveira⁴⁴ using the Somalia case study, demonstrated the process of macrosecuritisation, arguing that the UN Security Council accepted piracy as a threat to good order at sea, a physical threat to the environment, human life and property. This resulted in UN Security Council Resolution 1772⁴⁵ allowing international naval assets to enter Somalia's territorial waters and use all means necessary to repress piracy.⁴⁶

The tendency for the Copenhagen School '... to invite and open up the discussion of security rather than to entrench into fortified positions'⁴⁷ has helped encourage conceptual debate and adaptations around securitisation theory further contributing to its ongoing use. In this spirit, our examination of the securitisation of fisheries in Cameroon took as its starting point that actors beyond state elites, such as prominent figures in the

fishing industry, may serve as 'secondary' securitising actors through the deployment of particular narratives. These individuals may then be both a target audience for state securitising moves and reiterate, and initiate securitising moves around the threat posed by IUU fishing to say, the broader fishing community. The descriptor of 'secondary securitising actors' to label these actors recognises that while their securitising moves do meet some of the facilitating conditions for securitisation – both in terms of the structure of the threat narrative and, most pertinently, their credible standing and influence within coastal communities; their securitising moves would be unlikely to be successful if state elites had not pursued securitisation first. Alongside this, our second shift in emphasis was to reorient research emphasis towards implementation in order to get a more complete picture of what the added urgency associated with securitisation has meant in practice in relation to the governance of the fisheries sector. As a result, alongside securitising narratives, we embraced the insights and examples of scholars who have mapped what has been described as the 'post-securitised environment'⁴⁸ exploring the characteristics, implementation and impact of the different practices that are wrapped up in securitisation.

In exploring the post-securitised environment, we recognise that extraordinary/emergency measures can be broad in character, ranging from the military invasion of a state, such as the case of Iraq in 2003⁴⁹ to using fencing, CCTV and ID checks to improve United Kingdom port infrastructures as a response to international terrorism.⁵⁰ Although some practices may be relatively routine in character, we acknowledge that under certain conditions and in particular contexts, the linguistic moves associated with securitisation instil a sense of urgency whereby the status of those routine practices are transformed by the environment in which they were developed, implemented and subsequently justified, and thus come to be viewed as extraordinary/emergency measures.

Drawing on the work of the Copenhagen School, recognising the two shifts in emphasis noted above, and utilising a framework associated with environmental resource management, Fischendler's securitisation typology was used with its (1) linguistic, (2) institutional and (3) structural mechanisms associated with securitisation.

Linguistic mechanisms encapsulate the metaphors, framings and/or narratives deployed to highlight danger or scarcity issues requiring emergency measures.⁵¹ For instance, metaphors can involve alarmist or panicky language to highlight danger, e.g. reference to 'water wars' is commonly used to evoke concern about water scarcity in relation to international and regional waterways such as between Israel and Lebanon.⁵² The use of the terminology of war invokes a sense of priority and urgency. Framing is a cognitive process where a group of professionals or individuals express their understanding of a state of affairs in a manner that is consistent with their opinions to evoke danger, laying the foundation for emergency action.⁵³ One example here is agro-economists' use of the notion of 'virtual water' – the displacement of water from one locality for food production and consumption globally – resulting in local water scarcity issues in the production site.⁵⁴ Lastly, narratives involve the use of particular phrases to emphasise threat. For example, 'fishing militia' to highlight the securitisation of maritime fisheries in the South China Sea.⁵⁵

Institutional mechanisms can include the integrating of environmental regimes into higher level security-related agreements or treaties, the establishment of special committees or institutions such as the Nile Basin Initiative.⁵⁶ Structural mechanisms can be 'concrete infrastructures' set up to protect a resource in view of its central importance to society, such as setting up buffer zones and/or demilitarised areas around water systems and the installation of early warning systems in response to their vulnerability to international terrorism.⁵⁷

Results and discussion: the securitisation of fisheries in Cameroon

The use of linguistic mechanisms

Since the late 2000's, Cameroon's maritime environment and fishery sector in particular have become national security concerns, especially in relation to recurrent reports of IUU fishing and associated criminality following decades of perceived government neglect.⁵⁸ Media sources reporting on Cameroon carried headlines such as: 'Fishermen Fear Trawlers will Deplete Cameroon's Fish Stock',⁵⁹ 'Fishermen Buying Fish'⁶⁰; 'More Security for our Waterways'⁶¹; 'Cameroon Deploys Navy to Seize Illegal Fishing Vessels'.⁶² Fishermen want Chinese Trawlers out of Cameroon Waters⁶³; and 'Cameroon: Chinese Fishermen in Tug of War with Southwest Fishermen'.⁶⁴

These news headlines mirrored changes in narratives from senior Cameroonian political elites especially at regional and global policy events. For instance, at the Yaounde Summit in June 2013, Cameroon's Minister of Communication, and government spokesman Issa Tchiroma Bakary warned that while piracy remained the major preoccupation of most actors with interest in the GoG, it is 'illegal fishing which may eventually stem up to be a source of instability and hinder the development of local communities'.⁶⁵ Such voices were reflected in the resulting Yaounde Code of Conduct declaration which noted IUU fishing as a transnational organised crime that also poses national security concerns to GoG states.⁶⁶ This emphasis of the threat posed by illegal fishing to the wellbeing of parts of Cameroonian society was set amidst wider securitising moves wrapped up in concern over piracy and armed robbery at sea. At the June 2013 Yaounde Summit, Cameroon's President Biya stated that '[m]aritime piracy poses a serious threat to the peace and stability of our States. It undermines the people's development and wellbeing' and cannot be left in the hands of individuals and organisations whose motives are to transform it into a 'predators' haven' and 'hellhole'.

Within the broader discourse on securitising the GoG maritime space nationally, Minister Bakary's observation on illegal fishing was the first by a senior Cameroonian state actor to specifically highlight the link between illegal maritime fishing and state stability and development. Some interviewees in this study referred to the Minister's intervention at the Yaounde Summit, with one noting that 'IUU fishing has now moved to a higher agenda in government thinking'.⁶⁷ Post Kinshasa and Yaounde maritime security conferences, institutional and structural measures to protect the maritime and fisheries resources followed (sections 3.2 and 3.3), but in the proceeding subsections, we focus on the linguistic mechanisms deployed by the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) departments- the Navy and Delta-Rapid Intervention Battalion (Delta-BIR), non-

military state actors (fisheries, marine transport and custom officials), and civil society representatives who called for urgency in tackling IUU fishing and other crimes associated to fisheries sector.

The role of the MINDEF

The narratives used by MINDEF personnel have been influential in portraying the vulnerabilities of the fisheries sector. Prominent Navy officers, speaking during national media interviews, have highlighted the importance of the fisheries sector to food security and national cohesion and justified the case for military involvement in anti-IUU fishing operations. For instance, in 2016, in an interview broadcast by Cameroon's flagship political programme on the government-run Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV), the Commander of the Limbe Naval Base commented:

Fishing is illegal when it is done without the required license or permits. It is unregulated when it is done in prohibited areas or uses unauthorised methods of fishing. Some of them [fishers] fish and scrape everything from the bottom of the ocean. That is not allowed. You might want to know why the Navy is interested in fishing activities. Beyond its primary mission of defence, the navy carry out policing at sea for the benefit of other administration and other agencies that cannot be out there every day. We sent a message out recently that repression is on, two weeks ago we caught a fishing vessel fishing in prohibited areas and our investigation on-board produced the same results that the evidence was clear, these people were catching species that were prohibited within our waters. Barely two weeks afterwards, we are catching another vessel, and last night when the maritime patrol was out they actually found more vessels than this one and managed to catch this one. Just to tell you that, the illegal activities in our waters is just too much and even though we are doing our best to carry out repression, it is not enough for now.⁶⁸

The above assertion is compelling. First, it was an unprecedented move for a Navy Commander to explain to the Cameroonian public what illegal and unregulated fishing is. It is equally significant that the Navy acknowledged publicly that despite its capacities and best efforts, it was unable to contain the threats posed by IUU fishing. This influenced a sense of emergency with the Navy Commander using the threat posed by IUU fishing to justify the need to further enhance the Navy's capacity and involvement in anti-IUU fishing governance efforts.

To demonstrate how important the fisheries sector is to Cameroon's security, the Cameroonian Navy has been prominent on other media platforms such as Facebook with the aim of sensitising and educating the general public on the security threats associated with the fisheries sector. The Navy's Facebook page posts regular stories of fishing vessels caught in various acts of illegality in the maritime environment (violation of fishing zones, trafficking of arms, refugees, wildlife, fuel and contraband) and highlights its active role in combatting these threats.⁶⁹ This illustrated to readers that the fisheries sector is vulnerable to many other security challenges that are transnational in scope emphasising the scale of its challenge. Sitting alongside the transnational nature of the threat, at times the connectivity between the threats posed by IUU fishing, broader criminality in fisheries and other prominent threats such as piracy is noted. This focus on the interconnectivity of threats, particularly with a strong regional profile like piracy further sought to emphasise

the scale of the challenge posed, imbuing the situation with urgency. For example, according to the Rapid Intervention Battalion Maritime Force (Delta-BIR), fishers in Cameroon pose significant security challenges as an officer note:

... for the fishermen located in Bakassi peninsula, traffickers and pirates have contacts with them and can infiltrate the ranks of fishermen and threatened them not to tell anyone anything. We are not to know that. Hence, we need to be very vigilant.⁷⁰

Thus, the potential fisher-piracy nexus is presented as posing a serious national security threat especially as suspected Niger Delta militants have been implicated in sea-borne attacks in two coastal cities in Cameroon, robbing banks and killing several people in the process.⁷¹ Since these incidents in coastal cities of Limbe and Douala, the state created additional Delta-BIR camps and strengthened its surveillance activities on fishing communities and the maritime domain.⁷² As the Delta-BIR officer reiterated, since over 80 per cent of maritime artisanal fishers in Cameroon are Nigerians and most still having strong social ties with family in Nigeria – mostly from the Niger Delta region – there is need for extreme vigilance.⁷³ Overall, from MINDEF's perspective, it is the entire maritime fisheries sector that needs to be securitised since the fishers, their fishing operations at sea and social relations on land and transnationally, pose a serious threat to national security. This demonstrates the way securitisations can influence and fuel each other such as with the case of macrosecuritisation in Somalia.⁷⁴

Non-military state actors as securitising actors

Beyond military actors, in interviews with the national press, senior officers from the Ministry of fisheries (MINEPIA) referenced the 'conflict between industrial and artisanal fishers' to highlight the fierce competition to access fishing grounds and deployed emotive imagery such as 'scraping the ocean floor'⁷⁵ to illustrate the destructive practices of industrial fishers. Similarly, senior customs officers used the phrase, 'drastic drop in revenue to state coffers',⁷⁶ to highlight threats to their ability to generate taxes from fisheries exports and imports as well as highlighting the link between fishers and the trade in contraband, smuggling of endangered species and the impact this has on state economy and the environment.⁷⁷ IRAD marine research officers warned of the rapid 'decline of fish stocks'⁷⁸ in their reports to senior MINEPIA officers and other government departments, while Merchant Marine officers stressed the deplorable working conditions for fishers onboard fishing vessels and the lack of social security for workers involved in the fishing industry.⁷⁹ Such utterances greatly repositioned fisheries as an important sector in broader sustainable development initiatives and the wellbeing of Cameroon's economy and society.

CSO actors as securitising actors

Prior to and during data collection, some CSOs located in the study area were very prominent in highlighting IUU fishing issues through national media. During an interview on Cameroon's primetime political programme, a representative of a prominent fish processors and traders' association warned that the devastating fishing practices of Chinese industrial trawlers meant that 'we do not have fish again',⁸⁰ as the prices of their staple fish, the 'Bonga shad', had doubled in price, making it unaffordable for

ordinary traders and local consumers. She rallied members of the CSO to stage a demonstration if the state did not respond to their plight. On the same radio programme, another leader of a prominent CSO, asserted:

Chinese [industrial] fishers are saying that they do not use twin trawling. They are. They are raking the sea and have raked all. In the morning, when the local fishermen go to sea, they find no fish. How can the common man live? We do not want those Chinese people, full stop”.⁸¹

The reference to Chinese industrial trawlers reflects the dominance of this group of fishers in Cameroon’s maritime area. In fact, several CSO leaders representing artisanal migrant fisherfolks, have threatened to abandon fishing and return to their home countries citing the devastating impact of twin-trawling practices of some Chinese industrial trawlers on fish stocks and their livelihoods.⁸² Such a move will impact on fish supply to local people as well as contributing to loss of revenue generated by the state through taxes, since most artisanal fishers in Cameroon are immigrants.

These contributions from CSO’s represent reiteration and acceptance of narratives of existential threat associated with illegal fishing used by state elites, highlighting audience acceptance of their securitising moves. However, they also represent evidence of CSO’s acting as secondary securitising actors themselves – a possibility noted in [section 3](#) – where these actors’ significant profile and influence in the fishing community meant their narratives around existential threat had the ability to securitise, as they appealed to association members, local fishers and coastal communities. Admittedly without securitisation from state actors the moves of these CSO’s is unlikely to have gained much credence; but nevertheless, at times, their role went beyond being part of the audience for state securitising moves. The implication of such utterances has been a swift and direct response by the government. Firstly, the government issued legislation banning twin trawling to protect fish stocks.⁸³ However, when this failed to curb twin trawling, and with continuous threat of protests by coastal communities in WMD, the Prime minister was sent to meet with local fishers to calm tension.⁸⁴

Securitisation through institutional mechanisms

To understand how securitisation occurred through institutional change it is important to look at their evolution. Prior to October 2009, the MCS of fishing activities both onshore and offshore was largely the responsibility of Cameroon’s Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Animal Industries (MINEPIA). At the time, MINEPIA worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) and Ministry of Transport (MINTRANS). While MINDEF through the Navy, assist MINEPIA in offshore surveillance of fishing activities, MINTRANS through the Merchant Marine department is responsible for matriculating fishing vessels and regulating the health and safety of workers involved in maritime fishing.⁸⁵ At the sub-national level, MINEPIA’s functions – especially offshore monitoring, control and surveillance of fishery activities – were led by Fisheries Centres (FC) and Fisheries Control Posts (FCP). Articles 98 and 99 of the decree reorganising the MINEPIA⁸⁶ outlines the functions of these two services, as shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Functions of fisheries centres and fisheries control posts in Cameroon.⁸⁷

Fisheries Centre	Fisheries Control Post
Organization and management of fishers	The control and monitoring of fishing activities
Issuing and/or control of documents accompanying fishery products	Monitoring compliance with the fisheries regulations
Monitoring of compliance with fisheries regulations	Monitoring of fishing zones and biological rest periods
Monitoring the landing of fisheries resources	Monitoring the protection of fisheries resources
The collection of fisheries statistics	Control of gear and catch methods and market sizes of commercially exploited species
	The monitoring of landings of fishery products from fishing units duly authorised to fish in waters under national jurisdiction

As the FCPs were the main institutions responsible for most aspects of MCS of fishing activities at sea and on land, they were also able to carry out MCS on an ad hoc basis, especially through projects or programmes sponsored by national or international organisations. As a senior officer of an FCP explained:

Previously there was surveillance activity carried out by some of these fisheries inspectors. I was one of them and was given a boat worth 40 million CFA Francs [~US\$70000] to carry out surveillance at sea. Which I did, and I caught so many fishing vessels. They came and paid penalties to the state. My other colleague in the Bakassi Peninsula was also given a boat for surveillance. My other colleague at the Limbe Fisheries Centre was also given a boat. Since 2006, these surveillance activities stopped because it was being sponsored by SOWEDA⁸⁸ [Southwest Development Authority] and SOWEDA is no longer there to sponsor these activities.⁸⁹

As noted by the officer, although officially FCPs were recognised as the institutions responsible for MCS at sea, they lacked capacity and depended on help from external organisations to perform their work. Following the end of SOWEDA's support to FCs and FCPs in 2006, a new institution, the Brigade for Monitoring and Control of Fishing Activities (BSCAP), was created at the level of the Director of Fisheries and Aquaculture.⁹⁰ Amongst other responsibilities, the BCSAP was tasked to set up a central MCS system. However, the creation of the BSCAP hinted at the prospect of military style MCS due to the verbal association of the term with the unpopular 'Gendarmerie Brigade', created in Cameroon after independence to quell uprisings against the state.⁹¹ Nonetheless, like the sub-national FCs and FCPs, the centralised BCSAP lacked the capacity such as well-trained personnel, equipment, and technical capabilities, to enforce MCS activities throughout Cameroon's EEZ.⁹² The increase in IUU fishing incidents from 2006 and their association with other maritime crimes, especially piracy and armed robbery in Cameroon's maritime domain prompted the state to seek alternative ways to combat IUU fishing.

What followed was the enactment of new laws and the creation of new institutions constructed through the prism of a traditional, military dominated lens underpinned by a strong political will to integrate maritime security issues into national security policies and architecture. This was epitomised by the Presidential Decree No. 2007/290/CAB/PR of 1 November 2007 which, seeking to organise 'action of the state at sea' and in navigable waterways, set up a National and Local Commission for the Coordination of State Action at Sea.⁹³ The decree stipulated that a Commandant of the Naval Forces, heading

a General Directorate of the sea and directly accountable to the President, would control and coordinate the interventions of all the Ministries in maritime areas.⁹⁴ This move, taken within the broader framework of combatting maritime insecurity, clearly instituted a securitised approach to maritime fisheries management under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Cameroon. Indeed, a study that evaluated Cameroon's Navy maritime security tasks since 2000 shows the top 3 priorities for the Naval force are the protection of oil installations, illegal fuel trade and illegal fishing.⁹⁵

The move towards a securitised approach to combatting maritime threats including illegal fishing was followed up with the enactment of Decree No. 2009/080 of 20 February 2009, creating the elite military maritime force- Delta-BIR.⁹⁶ Institutionally and strategically, the Delta-BIR are stationed in most fishing ports and other strategic coastal locations to supplement the work of the Navy and the Amphibious Battalion responsible for defending the territorial integrity of the state through maritime and coastal defence.⁹⁷ The securitisation of maritime fishing activities at sea was formalised in 2013 when MINDEF signed a cooperation agreement with MINEPIA in relation to MCS of maritime fishing at sea.⁹⁸ This agreement made the Navy largely responsible for all MCS activities at sea as declared by the Commander of the Limbe Naval Base (located in the study area):

You might want to know why the Navy is interested in fishing activities. Beyond its primary mission of defence, the Navy carry out policing at sea for the benefit of other administrations and other agencies that cannot be out there every day.⁹⁹

Although the Commander hinted of carrying out the activities for the benefit of other government services that cannot be at sea, there appeared to be an institutional strategy for enabling only military operations at sea. This was indicated by some FCPs officers at the sub-national level, who noted they were neither equipped nor permitted to carry out MCS at sea:

Like as I was saying, when we had these [patrol] boats, I can easily go to sea on any day and catch offenders, but I don't have, and we are not permitted. We have not been given the powers to do that. So, it is Yaoundé [BSCAP at central level] who comes and do surveillance. The only service that comes and assists us is the [Delta] BIR, and at times when they find trawlers less than 3nm or in prohibited areas, like the Rio-Del-Rey basin, they catch them and hand them over to MINEPIA.¹⁰⁰

The reference to Yaoundé in the above relates to the location of the BCSAP at MINEPIA's central office in Yaounde, capital of Cameroon. The WMD for instance is 309 km from Yaounde and most officers are based there. A fisheries control post officer noted that, it can be 'difficult for them [BCSAP officers] to do constant surveillance or impromptu surveillance mission'.¹⁰¹ Thus, the diminishing role of MINEPIA in MCS at sea is largely due to the government's state-centric approach to maritime governance¹⁰² as the MCS of fishing activities ashore is now largely a role performed by the MINDEF¹⁰³.

This evolution of institutional structures at the national level was largely in response to decisions adopted at the regional and pan-African level ranging from the Kinshasa Protocol (ECCAS 2009),¹⁰⁴ to the Yaounde Code of Conduct,¹⁰⁵ the 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy¹⁰⁶ and African Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development in Africa (Lomé Charter).¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the involvement of influential

political and security actors in the formulation and adoption of these strategies provided legal and political credence to support the elevation of IUU fishing threats above the bounds of normal politics.

The resulting governance architecture comprised the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa (CRESMAC) located in Pointe Noire, Republic of Congo, two Multinational Coordination Centres (MCC), located in Douala, Cameroon, and Luanda, Angola and National Maritime Operation Centres (NMOC) to be set up in each member state. While CRESMAC covers ECCAS-wide operations the two MCCs are responsible for transnational operations for two designated zones: A, comprising (Angola, DRC and Congo) and D (Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome & Principe). The MCC located in Douala Cameroon works in close collaboration with the Cameroonian Navy and Delta-BIR.¹⁰⁸

Securitisation through structural mechanisms

Turning to structural mechanisms, following Cameroon's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in April 2000, the state delimited its maritime zone into a territorial sea of 12 nautical mile (nm) (UNCLOS article 2), a contiguous zone of 24 nm (article 33), an exclusive economic zone of 200 nm (UNCLOS article 55), and claimed a continental shelf area of 14,000 km² (UNCLOS article 76).¹⁰⁹ Subsequently, the state created separate fishing zones for artisanal fisheries (3 nm from coastal baseline) and industrial fisheries (>3 nm from artisanal fishing zone) to avoid conflict between the two groups and protect fisheries resources.¹¹⁰ Despite these structural measures, conflict between artisanal and industrial fishers was still recurrent largely due to IUU fishing as competition for fisheries resources intensified.¹¹¹

With the increasing association of the fisheries sector to other maritime crimes such as piracy, further structural measures were instituted. A prominent feature was the creation of military infrastructures and services in coastal areas, especially at bustling fisheries landing sites. These included the creation of Delta-BIR camps in Idenau- a busy fishing village close to the Nigerian Niger Delta region, alongside the setting up of security check points at ports such as at the Tiko industrial port where access is controlled by the military with the presentation of a national ID card. Although it can be argued all these changes were implemented largely within the framework of combatting broader maritime crimes in Cameroon, there was also a strategic decision to build 'socio-military relations' with fishing communities along the coast.¹¹² At the Delta-BIR camps in Idenau for instance, the military health facility offers free medical care to fisherfolks and such structures provide the Delta-BIR an opportunity to glean more information from the fishing community which can help inform their strategic response.

A key structural response was the creation of prohibited zones. Examples include a 3 nautical mile (nm) diameter boundary around offshore oil and gas installations and 7 nm for the coastal oil/gas refinery complex.¹¹³ The declaration of these prohibited zones does not respect existing legal maritime delimitations for fishing resulting in de facto overlapping and perhaps contradictory zonation which impacts negatively on fishers' ability to fish. However, it enables the better monitoring and control of fishers' activities as a Delta-BIR officer notes: "They [fishers] are not supposed to go beyond 3 nm [~5.6 km] of oil platform. If not, they are in the restricted zone. [. . .]. Yes, not only oil platforms.

There are also petroleum exploration zones, which are quite large. There is also the SONARA¹¹⁴ complex which no vessel can fish around its 7 nm [~13 km diameter] area. This is for security.¹¹⁵ Many CSO leaders noted that it was important for fishers to keep to the de facto new fisheries zones because if they did venture into these restricted zones, they are beaten, arrested, and imprisoned without due process.¹¹⁶

With increasing concerns of the implications of depleting fish stocks and the implementation of securitisation measures, acceptance among stakeholders differed. For instance, the representative of the traditional rulers' association was full of praise for the role of the Navy noting:

... because of the recent appeals that we made, they [the government] have finally heard our voices and the naval base [the Navy] are now carrying out a marvellous job. Because, before, they [illegal fishers] worried us a lot, but now we are happy the navy seized the boats even in the night, auction the catch and gives fines to deter them from coming again. But I know that because of human nature, they may still come back again. The naval base should be on alert so anytime they see them they will help us arrest them.¹¹⁷

While this perspective represents some acceptance of the emergency measures devised and implemented by the state, other actors like marine fisheries scientists noted that '[t]hey are using the military way of trying to resolve this problem [IUU fishing]'.¹¹⁸ This view was also echoed by other CSO actors who opposed the militarised approach of MCS at sea and in some fishing ports and express concern over the dominance of Delta-BIR and the Navy in combatting illicit activities in fisheries.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Using Itay Fischendler's typology of securitisation mechanisms this article has examined Cameroon's response to IUU fishing and other related criminality in fisheries within the context of a maritime security agenda in the Gulf of Guinea, analysing key developments between 2009 and 2019. We have demonstrated that political, military, and civil society actors in Cameroon employed various linguistic mechanisms to highlight the broader security threat associated with fisheries. This included political actors using statements linking illegal fishing to instability and the underdevelopment of local coastal communities, military actors using the 'fishers-as-pirates' narrative to highlight the need for increased military capacity and responsibilities in the MCS of fisheries activities, and local CSO actors raising the possibility that without adequate maritime security 'we do not have fish again'. This emphasis on the importance of the maritime domain generally, and the fisheries sector specifically, for national and human security, alongside the need for urgent action to tackle illicit activities, was communicated widely via platforms such as important political radio and TV programmes and social media such as official Facebook pages of government military departments (Navy).

This security discourse reiterated by diverse actors in both status and influence resonated with different audiences and resulted in a policy environment where the traditional administrative and regulatory fisheries management response was sidelined. The Cameroonian state has built a new relationship with the Cameroonian public, enabling extraordinary/emergency measures, institutional and structural, to be implemented. The increasing role of military forces in building a social contract with fishing

communities, and assuming a leading role in combatting IUU fishing and other associated crimes in the fisheries sector, indicates the centrality of fisheries as a threat to national security in Cameroon. The role of military personnel in the fisheries sector has grown and associated security infrastructure has proliferated. With increased surveillance through the creation of prohibited zones (buffer zones) around offshore and coastal infrastructures, fishing space has subsequently been restricted, while the proximity of military infrastructures to fishing communities and fisheries operations has enabled military forces to monitor fishers and their activities. Practices involve military drills, ID checks, and records taken at industrial ports with arrests and detention (without due process) of fishers suspected of violating buffer zones. Collectively, we label this 'blue securitisation', a process whereby activities associated with the maritime domain are increasingly framed with the logic of existential threat and imbued with urgency, facilitating extraordinary/emergency measures. It is a process that is gaining momentum in Cameroon, but it remains understudied and its wider implications for governance and capacity-building efforts in Cameroon and wider GoG is worthy of more consideration. Thus, it would be beneficial to draw connections with emerging work that explores criminal activities across the land-sea nexus, evident in the concept 'blue crime'.¹²⁰

What is clear in terms of governance of fisheries within Cameroon is that while non-military state and CSO actors contributed to the securitisation of the fisheries sector between 2009 and 2019, the subsequent measures implemented undermined their agency. In the interests of mobilising resources and delivering a quick and often very public response to a presented challenge, the Cameroonian state – inadvertently or not – squeezed out different voices who are arguably important in determining the future and sustainability of the fisheries sector. Indeed, they are key players beyond fisheries as Cameroon and other states in GoG seek sustainable maritime security governance. As a result, there remains a need to reflect further on the ways particular mechanisms of securitisation can undermine cooperative activity, and on the kind of activity which can also enhance knowledge of the maritime domain which is critical for its security and sustainable use. Ultimately for those interested in what security does in an era of interlinked, transnational challenges and a multiplicity of security actors, the maritime domain is increasingly an important environment to explore.

Notes

1. ECCAS, 'Protocole Relatif à la Stratégie de Sécurisation des Intérêts Vitaux en Mer', p. 1.
2. Africa Research Bulletin, 'Cameroon–Equatorial Guinea: Border Sealed'
3. ECCAS, 'Protocole Relatif à la Stratégie de Sécurisation des Intérêts Vitaux en Mer', p. 6.
4. Ibid, 8
5. The term 'illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing' is formally described in the United Nations Food & Agricultural Organisation's International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing (IPOA-IUU), adopted in 2001. Generally, it refers to any fishing activity that undermines efforts to conserve and manage fish stocks in all capture fisheries. However, there is debate on a precise definition especially in relation to the possible overlap of the three prongs of the term, how to quantify their cost and the legal applications. Moreover, IUU fishing is associated with criminal activities in the fisheries value chain e.g. corruption, labour rights abuse, drug and arms trafficking and the concept of fisheries crime is used to describe this and has been accepted in international political arena.

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11. Vidal, 'Will Overfishing by Foreigners Drive Senegalese Fishermen to Piracy?'
12. UNODC Transnational Organised Crime in the Fishing Industry
13. Africa Research Bulletin, 'Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea: Border captives exchanged'.
14. ECOWAS and ECCAS, 'Code of Conduct'.
15. The threats include: Piracy and Armed Robbery at sea; Human trafficking and human smuggling; Drug trafficking; Illegal arms trafficking; Illegal dumping of toxic waste; money laundering; vandalism of offshore oil installations, crude oil theft, illegal oil bunkering; Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; maritime terrorism and hostage taking
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26. Ministry of Finance, 'Report on the nation's economic, social and financial situation and prospects' p. 17.
27. FAO Yearbook, 'Fisheries and Aquaculture Statistics 2016', p. 17.
28. Envirep-Cam, 'Overview of Management and Exploitation of the Fisheries Resources'
29. Hosch, 'National plan of action'; Beseng, 'Cameroon's Choppy Waters'.
30. National Institute of Statistics, 'Fisheries and Animal Industries', p. 208
31. Flanders Marine Institute, 'Marineecoregions'.
32. Yin, 'Case Study Research: Design and Methods', p. 114.
33. Bryman, 'Social Research Methods', 410.
34. Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, *Security: A new framework for analysis*, p. 23.
35. Ibid, p. 24.
36. Ibid, p. 32.
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38. McDonald, 'Constructivism', p. 17.
39. Hansen, 'The little mermaid's silent security dilemma'.
40. McDonald, 'Securitization and the Construction of Security', p. 564.
41. Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization'.
42. Leonard and Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory', p. 61.
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58. Hosch, 'National plan of action'; Beseng, 'Cameroon's choppy waters', p. 4.
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78. Interview, Marine Fisheries Officer at IRAD, 21 October 2016, Batoke, Cameroon
79. Interview, District Officer for Merchant Marine Service, 9 November 2016, Tiko, Cameroon
80. Cameroon Radio and Television (CrTV), 'Cameroon Calling'.
81. Ibid
82. Interviews, President of the Association of Semi-Industrial Fishers, 24 October 2016, Idenau, Cameroon; President of Nigerian Fishing Community Limbe, 20 October 2016, Limbe, Cameroon.
83. Twin trawling was banned by Order N0. 0025/MINEPIA/DIRPEC/SDEPIA/SP of 16 February 2000
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118. Interview, Marine Fisheries Officers at IRAD, 21 October 2016, Batoke, Cameroon
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120. Bueger and Edmunds, 'Blue crime'

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Notes on contributors

Dr Maurice Beseng is a Research Associate at the University of Sheffield's Institute for Sustainable Development and Visiting Fellow in Maritime Security at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, UK. His research explores the intersection of maritime insecurity and ocean sustainability.

Dr James A. Malcolm is an Assistant Professor of Maritime Security at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, UK. His research explores port and coastal security, alongside the maritime security activities of small island states, with a particular focus on maritime security governance and capacity building.

ORCID

Maurice Beseng  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1761-3068>

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