

INTERVIEW WITH REAR ADMIRAL GODWIN LIVINUS BESSING CHIEF OF THE NAVAL STAFF-GHANA NAVY



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How would you define the nature of the maritime security challenges currently facing Ghana and the Gulf of Guinea region?

The maritime security challenges currently facing Ghana and the broader Gulf of Guinea (GoG) can be described as volatile, complex, evolving, transnational and multifaceted.

Although the GoG remains relatively stable compared to other maritime regions, global events such as kinetic attacks on shipping by Houthis in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea has diverted shipping routes through the GoG, thus increasing traffic in the GoG. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges, including the risk of criminal activities like hijacking and theft within the GoG. Like other GoG countries, myriad persistent threats exist, such as piracy, armed robbery, illegal fishing, drug trafficking, and marine pollution. These pose substantial risks and militate against harnessing their full potential.

In what ways does the posture and strategic orientation of the Ghana Navy align with or complement the broader defense framework of Nigeria and other regional partners?

The posture and strategic orientation of the Ghana Navy align with and complement the broader defense framework of Nigeria and other GoG countries through regional cooperation, shared operational strategies and multinational security initiatives. Nigeria's efforts at retooling its Fleet and launching its Deep Blue Project constitute great efforts at fighting piracy in that area of the Region. To align herself, Ghana signed a joint communique with Nigeria to enhance regional collaboration for improved maritime security in July 2021. Both Navies agreed to collaborate to build personnel capacity and optimise available maritime domain awareness infrastructure in both countries.

The Communique encouraged the enactment of anti-piracy laws to facilitate and harmonise procedures for the arrest, detention, and prosecution of persons and vessels engaged in piracy and other maritime crimes across the region. The Communique also encouraged both Navies to work together to draw up a Standard Operating Procedure across national maritime boundaries in the Region. Additionally, the biannual International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference held here in Accra also brings together senior officers and maritime experts worldwide to discuss innovative plans to curb piracy and other maritime security challenges in Africa, particularly the GoG.



How does the Ghana Navy execute its core security missions while also fulfilling national responsibilities and international commitments?

The Ghana Navy's core security missions are divided into wartime roles and peacetime roles. The wartime roles include defensive and offensive tasks such as insulating the Coast of Ghana against sea-borne invasion, providing sea transportation for land forces and keeping our sea lanes of communication open in the face of any form of instability. The peacetime roles on the other hand are purely policing, law enforcement and humanitarian roles. Aside from its traditional roles, the Ghana Navy recognises that maritime sector governance is a collective responsibility.

The Ghana Navy has therefore taken specific initiatives with a view to ensuring a more secure and safe maritime domain. The Ghana Navy continues to collaborate with local stakeholder agencies such as the Ghana Maritime Authority, Environmental Protection Agency, Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority, Marine Police, Narcotics Control Commission among others. This collaboration has ensured a safe and secure maritime domain for conducting multinational maritime operations in Ghana.

The Navy has also signed bilateral and multilateral agreements with allied and regional navies to build capacity and improve maritime security. Notably among these agreements are the signing of an MoU among ECOWAS Zone F member states for joint operations as well as participation in Operation ANUANZE, conducted by the Ghana and the Ivorian Navies.

What are the principal pillars of Ghana Navy policy today? Are there particular areas of modernization or doctrine development being prioritized?

The principal pillars of Ghana Navy's policy are to effectively patrol, monitor, and defend Ghana's territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) against all maritime threats, including piracy, smuggling, illegal fishing, and other transnational maritime crimes.

To achieve these, the Ghana Navy has ventured into the employment of drones to serve as force multipliers, thus enhancing the Navy's operations while reducing the burden on the limited available platforms. Additionally, the recent restructuring of the Ghana Navy has led to splitting of the Naval Dockyard Complex into the Naval Shipyard and the Naval Engineering Workshop. The 2 Units will continue to serve as the main technical and maintenance support bases for the Ghana Navy Fleet, with ultimate responsibility for the repairs of ships' machinery and equipment. The facilities also have potential commercial attraction when expanded to deliver shipbuilding and maintenance services.

What is the expected role of new Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) in Ghana's maritime operations? What are its key operational requirements and capabilities?

Maritime threats like piracy and armed robbery, Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) fishing, and lingering maritime boundary disputes require a high state of readiness to confront them when they arise. Consequently, the acquisition of new OPVs would greatly ensure a constant presence at sea to conduct intentionally adequate patrols to ward off any would-be maritime criminal. Again, the vastness of Ghana's maritime domain requires platforms in GN's inventory with adequate endurance and range, speed and maneuverability, interdiction capabilities, advance sensors and communications, helicopter operations, crew comfort and sustainability as well as fitted armament for effective policing. The acquisition of OPVs would greatly serve that purpose.

Modern simulation technologies offer powerful tools for naval training. How does the Ghana Navy employ simulation assets to enhance maritime training and operational readiness?

The Ghana Navy employ simulation to enhance maritime training and operational readiness through Tabletop and computer assisted exercises internally for naval



personnel and jointly with maritime stakeholders. Examples of such exercises include emergency bridge simulation exercises to test Executive officers' ship handling capabilities, navigation skills and collision avoidance. The Ghana Navy, in improving professionalism and enhancing capacity of personnel in ship handling, has acquired a Full Mission Bridge Simulator (FMBS) through the support of the Danish Government for training Executive officers. The FMBS facility was commissioned to train personnel on how to manage their vessels especially when on duty at the bridge and thereby enhance operational readiness. The FMBS has been sited at the Naval Training Command (NAVTRAC), as part of the development of NAVTRAC into a Regional Centre of Excellence for maritime training for Ghanaian Naval Officers and other maritime stakeholders in Ghana and the subregion.

How important is the Ghana Navy's procurement strategy in supporting domestic industry? More broadly, how do you ensure that major acquisitions deliver lasting value to the national economy and industrial base?

Ghana Navy's current procurement strategy aims to add platforms to the Navy's inventory for vessels to remain at sea and prevent maritime criminals from freely engaging in their activities. In so doing, some of these vessels would be solely dedicated to fisheries protection and fisheries patrols to ensure that industrial trawling vessels have freedom of operations. This would actively support Ghana's economic aspirations by ensuring a secure maritime environment conducive to trade, fisheries, offshore energy operations, and infrastructural development. In summary, the acquisitions are based on evolving threat analysis and the protection of vital and strategic offshore resources that contribute to national development.

Finally, what is your long-term vision for the Ghana Navy in the 21st century, especially in terms of force development, regional leadership, and international cooperation?

The mission of the Ghana Navy is to develop and deploy maritime forces with the capability to ensure a safe, secure and clean maritime domain of Ghana in collaboration with other stakeholders in order to ensure a sustainable use of maritime domain.



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Hence leveraging on the mission, my vision is “to build and sustain a well-trained, mission-ready, motivated and professional naval force that safeguards Ghana's maritime interests, advances the blue economy, and actively contributes to national, regional and global maritime security, while upholding the enduring values and traditions of our Navy”.

In that case, I will continuously enhance naval personnel's professional competencies by raising highly skilled, ethically grounded, and strategically minded personnel through continuous education, leadership grooming, and specialisation in emerging and contemporary maritime issues. Through this, I will maintain a combat-capable and operationally ready naval force through rigorous training, modern doctrine and investment in advance platforms and technologies for rapid deployment across Ghana's maritime domain. Moreover, my idea is to foster strong maritime partnerships and interoperability through joint exercises, information sharing, and active participation in regional and global maritime security frameworks such as the Yaoundé Architecture.

