HYBRID MARITIME SECURITY:
Private maritime security companies in Ghana

Nelson Atanga Ayamdoo

October 2026

African Security Sector Network (ASSN)

Formed in 2003, the **African Security Sector Network (ASSN),** headquartered in Accra (Ghana), is a pan-African network of practitioners and organizations working to promote effective and democratically governed security sectors across Africa.

For more information, please contact the **ASSN** team by email: **info@africansecuritynetwork.org**

or visit the **ASSN** website:
http://africansecuritynetwork.org/assn/

Article available online at:

https://

To cite this article:

Nelson (A.), «*Hybrid Maritime Security: Private Maritime Security Companies in Ghana.*», ASSN, October 2026.

Table des matières

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS 4
ABSTRACT 5
INTRODUCTION 6
EMERGENCE OF PRIVATE MARITIME SECURITY COMPANIES IN GHANA 7
HYBRID MARITIME SECURITY GOVERNANCE AND PRIVATE MARITIME SECURITY COMPANIES 9
REGISTRATION AND LICENSING OF PRIVATE MARITIME SECURITY COMPANIES 10
CONCLUSION 11

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition
SIGLE : Definition

ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the provision of maritime security has been the responsibility of the sovereign state, and, as such, the emergence of security companies as private actors has blurred the lines between public and private authority. In Ghana, private maritime security providers compensate for the state's incapacity and, as a result, exercise de facto public authority in delivering maritime security. Their operations, however, are complicated by regulatory ambiguities, as licensing should be overseen by the Ministry of the Interior, just like any other private security company, while the Ghana Maritime Authority retains the mandate for maritime security. This leads to fragmented oversight and limited scrutiny. Private maritime security companies, therefore, operate in a "grey zone', which raises significant questions about legitimacy, regulatory adequacy, and the balance between state sovereignty and effective security provision.

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the then President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, revealed that the country was losing an estimated USD 26.3 billion annually to maritime piracy.[1] Far from being a problem confined to Nigerian waters, piracy poses a significant global challenge, particularly for commercial vessels navigating the high-risk corridors of the African coastline. These threats do not only disrupt trade, but also highlight the growing complexities of maritime security in regions where state authority is limited and private security actors increasingly play a central role.

The picture of maritime insecurity in West Africa is even more complicated. For instance, Iheduru (2023) posits that:

> Other maritime criminal activities that are replete in the region, namely illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, human and small arms and light weapons smuggling, coastal erosion and environmental degradation, etc., receive less attention, even though they are often the incubators of maritime piracy and sea robbery. (p117.[2]

It is, therefore, not surprising that the deployment of armed private security personnel aboard vessels is increasingly regarded as a sustainable response to the persistent challenge of maritime insecurity. At the height of security threats in the Gulf of Guinea, industry stakeholders advocated for the deployment of private maritime security to protect vessels from piracy and to deter attacks.[3] The advocacy implicitly indicts the capacity and capability of Gulf of Guinea countries to provide security for the industry, and that, amidst insecurity, states should outsource their sovereign duty to provide security to private industry. Ghana's experience exemplifies the growing tension between the imperatives of state sovereignty and the pragmatic pursuit of effective security partnerships to combat maritime insecurity.

While it is not unprecedented in the history of maritime governance, the outsourcing of security functions to the private sector continues to be critically scrutinised. Despite such scrutiny, personnel of private maritime security are still deployed in high-risk areas as a pragmatic response to Somali piracy in the Indian Ocean. Armed guards have been embarked on merchant ships, fishing vessels and private yachts sailing in those risk-prone waters.[4] In certain parts of the Gulf of Guinea, armed private security companies escort vessels transiting that part of the region.[5]

---

[1] "Nigeria Loses $26.3bn to Piracy, Others Annually — Buhari," Vanguard (Lagos), 13 July 2021, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/07/nigeria-loses-26-3bn-annually-to-piracy-sea-robbery-others-buhari/amp/.

[2] Iheduru, O. (2023). Hybrid maritime security governance and limited statehood in the Gulf of Guinea: A Nigeria case study. *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies, 22*(3), 116–163. https://doi.org/[DOI if available]

[3] Royal Danish Defence College, *Engaging in the Gulf of Guinea: Cooperation between maritime authourities and industry is needed to stem the tide of piracy* (17 May 2021), https://www.fak.dk/en/nyheder/2021/engaging-in-the-gulf-of-guinea-cooperation-between-maritime-authorities-and-industry-is-needed-to-stem-the-tide-of-piracy/; Humphrey Asamoah Agyekum, *Tackling Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Interactions Between Global Shipping and Ghanaian State Agents* (2024) African Security 17 (1-2) 115-140, https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2024.2379186; Hani Albasoos, *Maritime Security Companies: Challenges and Legal Responsibilities*, Vol 1 Issue 1 journal of Strategic and Defence Studies 84-92; Dirk Siebels, *Maritime Security in Africa: Potential for the Private Sector?,* (2014) 4 Conflict Trends 19-26, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/189266/ACCORD-Conflict-Trends-2014-4_entire.pdf#page=20; Freedom C Onuoha, *Sea piracy and maritime security in the Horn of Africa: The Somali coast and Gulf of Aden in perspective,* 18:3 African Security Review (2009), 41.

[4] Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy West Africa (BMP GoG: https://www.ics-shipping.org/publication/best-management-practices-to-deter-piracy-and-enhance-maritime-security-in-the-red-sea-gulf-of-aden-indian-ocean-and-arabian-sea; Marine Link, *Role of Private Security Companies in Combatting Maritime Piracy* (29 December 2025), https://www.marinelink.com/articles/maritime/role-of-private-security-companies-in-combating-maritime-piracy-101436#:~:text=In%20summary%2C%20Private%20Security%20Companies,the%20associated%20challenges%20and%20concerns; Jessica Larsen & Stephanie Schandorf, *Vessel Protection Against Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea: A Public Private Hydrid* (March 2024), https://www.diis.dk/en/research/vessel-protection-against-piracy-in-the-gulf-of-guinea-a-public-private-hybrid#:~:text=According%20to%20the%201982%20UN,and%20the%20Gulf%20of%20Guinea.

[5] Larsen & Schandorf, ibid.

The reliance on non-state actors underscores the limitations of state actors in fulfilling their monopolistic mandate of security provision. However, the operation of private actors often occurs within ambiguous regulatory contexts,[6] and private maritime security models that require deploying private armed security elicit the most concern. These issues create controversy regarding the legitimacy of private armed operations at sea and what that portends for security governance (at sea).

As non-state actors, the operations of private armed security companies represent an encroachment on state sovereignty and the exclusive prerogative over the use of force. In hybrid maritime security governance, the increasing role of private armed security at sea does not only obscures the vital distinction between public and private authority, but also raises serious concerns about the nature of their oversight and accountability. The manifestation of this hybridity at sea challenges the notion of the state's monopoly over the use of force through a scrutiny of what Avant (2005) describes as "The market for force".[7]

The presence of private maritime security companies in Ghana's domain, therefore, presents significant questions of legitimacy and regulatory adequacy. This expanding presence is emerging at a time when private security companies (PSCs) on land have already established themselves as significant providers of a wide- range of policing functions (such as escorting bullion vans, guarding private residences and providing security and protection for some politicians during elections), often operating under conditions of weak or highly-contested oversight and inadequate accountability mechanisms. Like private maritime security companies, these private security companies operating on land are qualitatively dominated by international companies, which reinforces some of the well-known challenges of current neo-liberal policies. Already, there have been some sceptics and critics of the increasing role of private actors. For example, Iheduru (2023, p. 117)[8] is convinced that "Rather than enhance state capacity, the introduction of PMSCs has tended to exacerbate maritime insecurity in general",

It is within this complex security sector governance space / era that this article analyses the evolving role of private maritime security companies in Ghana's maritime domain through the lens of hybrid security governance.

EMERGENCE OF PRIVATE MARITIME SECURITY COMPANIES IN GHANA

Although private maritime security companies emerged in Ghana only recently (from about 2015), they are not new in the Gulf of Guinea region.[9] In Nigeria, private maritime security companies evolved in the early years of piracy (1992-1999) when private security, shipping and oil companies employed security personnel on vessels, sometimes armed, for protection.[10] Private maritime security companies in Nigeria, subsequently, entered into Memoranda of Uunderstanding (MoU) with state security agencies, which authorised the deployment of armed guards on merchant vessels and oil installations for a fee.[11] In 1999, when the insurgency escalated, the Nigerian government instituted an amnesty programme for repentant militants to solve the piracy dilemma. The

[6] Siebels, *Maritime Security in Africa: Potential for the Private Sector? Ibid* at 23-25.
[7] Avant, D, (2005). The Market for Force: The Consequences of Privatizing Security (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
[8] Iheduru, O. (2023), ibid.
[9] Okechukwu Iheduru, *Hybrid Maritime Security Governance and Limited Statehood in the Gulf of Guinea: A Nigeria Case Study* (2023) 22(3) Journal of Military and Strategic Studies 116-163 at 129. The highlighted is not correct.
[10] Iheduru, *Hybrid Maritime Security Governance and Limited Statehood in the Gulf of Guinea: A Nigeria Case Study, p 129;* Adeniyi Adejimi Osinowo, *Combatting Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea* (2015) 30 Africa Security Brief 1-8 at 5. Is the citation correct? Only the surname? Kindly check for all the citations using APA7,please.
[11] Ibid.

programme included the award of oil pipeline surveillance and protection contracts to prominent leaders of the insurgency. The award of protection contracts to private entities reportedly ceased by 2015, allowing the Nigerian Navy to protect commercial vessels and oil platforms in its waters.[12]

The Nigerian piracy, having expanded to Ghana and the wider Gulf of Guinea to make the region the "nerve centre" of maritime piracy,[13] the industry gravitated towards private maritime security companies to complement security needs. In 2011, it was reported that ship charterers and owners had hired a private security company to protect crew and cargo on the shores of Togo.[14] Not too long after, a private security firm was reported in 2015 to have been licensed by the Government of Ghana to provide armed guards on board commercial vessels in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to provide security services, and that it was the first of such an agreement to allow armed foreign nationals to board vessels in territorial waters.[15] The report suggested the joint deployment of Marine Police personnel and British security officers on board vessels. Since then, other private maritime security companies have emerged to provide maritime security services in Ghana.[16]

The provision of maritime security services to the industry involves different models. It may involve an arrangement by private maritime security companies to embark armed state security agents on board vessels or for state security agents to provide armed escort of vessels in dangerous waters.[17] This model does not raise the concerns which are the focus of this article. The sovereignty of the state as the provider of maritime security is evident. The private maritime company in this model is an aggregator of maritime security rather than a provider. Private maritime security models that require embarking armed private security guards on vessels for protection or armed escort of vessels in Ghana's domain is what raises concerns regarding state sovereignty and bearing of arms.

The existence of private armed maritime security companies may amount to the raising or formation of illegal armed forces in Ghana contrary to article 210(2) of the *1992 Constitution.* The provision states that "*no person shall raise an armed force except by or under the authority of an Act of Parliament.*" That apart, the Arms and Ammunition Act, 1972 (NRCD 9) restricts the possession and use of arms and ammunition. With the exception of the Ghana Armed Forces and the Ghana Police Service, arms and ammunition in the control of any person ought to be registered, and there are strict rules for the carriage of arms.[18] A license or authorisation to bear arms is not as of right, and a person could be denied the license to possess arms.[19] In the maritime domain, section 61 of the Ghana Maritime Security Act, 2004 (Act 675) also restricts the carriage or possession of arms on board ships.

---

[12] Ibid at 129-136; Larsen & Schandorf, *Vessel Protection Against Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea: A Public Private Hydrid.*
[13] Ibid at 133.
[14] Safety4sea, *Benin, Togo Join Forces to Fight Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea* (1 December 2011), https://safety4sea.com/benin-togo-join-forces-to-fight-piracy-in-the-gulf-of-guinea/#:~:text=In%20response%20to%20the%20attacks,draw%20on%20lessons%20learned%20elsewhere;
[15] Seafarers Rights International, *Ghana government allows private security on vessels* (14 June 2015), https://seafarersrights.org/ghana-government-allows-private-security-on-vessels/; Ships & Ports, *Ghana approves armed security guards on vessels* (17 June 2015), https://shipsandports.com.ng/ghana-approves-armed-security-guards-on-vessels/.
[16] See for instance claims by Neptune P2P Group (https://neptunep2pgroup.com/services-category/maritime-security-services/), PVI (https://pvi-group.com) and Seagull Maritime (https://seagullmaritimeltd.com/protective-services) of offering security and anti -piracy services in the Gulf of Guinea including Ghana. PE Solutions Ltd (https://pesolutionsgh.com/inner-page%202.html) states that it has been approved by regulatory agencies to provide a range of maritime security services.
[17] DCAF- Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, *Contracted Maritime Security-Are Current Models Accountable, Safe and Sustainable?* (2022) 4 Business and Security Series, https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Contracted_Maritime_Security_EN.pdf; See for example the claim of PE Solution https://seagullmaritimeltd.com/protective-services that it has negotiated an MOU with Ghana Navy to manage secure anchorage areas and that its patrol vessels are "Navy registered with Navy callsigns and are manned by armed Ghanaian Navy…".
[18] See sections 1, 3 and 11 of NRCD 9.
[19] See section 23 of NRCD 9. Also see generally sections 5-9 of the *Public Order Act, 1994 (Act 491)* prohibiting the possession of arms.

In view of the extant regulation of arms, the legitimacy of armed maritime security operations in Ghana becomes murky. Rather, private martime security companies could collaborate with state security agencies to provide armed security services to vessels and industry.

HYBRID MARITIME SECURITY GOVERNANCE AND PRIVATE MARITIME SECURITY COMPANIES

The conception of hybrid maritime security governance is clustered in what hybrid security governance entails. Bakayoko *et al* (2016) opine that hybrid security governance "is characterised by the coexistence of multiple state and non-state providers of security, as the state shares authority, legitimacy and capacity with other actors, network and institutions across the formal / informal divide."[20] In hybrid security governance, public and private actors jointly contribute to security provision, a function traditionally associated with sovereign authority.[21] When applied in context, hybrid maritime security is manifested in the interplay among state security agencies (the Ghana Armed Forces, marine police, port authorities), private security companies and shipping operators) in the provision of security.

Maritime security governance in Ghana has shifted toward hybrid arrangements that combine state authorities, private security actors and international partners, and precisely because of a hybrid maritime threat environment.[22] In addition to piracy and armed robbery at sea, Ghana is plagued by other threats, including illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, smuggling, oil theft, trafficking and environmental crimes.[23]

Unlike land-based security, maritime security governance is characterised by institutional and jurisdictional complexity, vast operational spaces and fragmented authority. Notwithstanding the state's monopoly in the sovereignty to provide maritime security, these conditions create incentives for the state to share security responsibilities, especially where there is incapacity to deliver maritime security.[24]

In hybrid security governance, non-state providers such as private maritime security companies augment and compensate for the state's incapacity or lack of authority, and by so doing, private maritime security companies exercise *de facto* public authority in the provision of maritime security and private authority emerges. The interaction between state security agents and private maritime security actors creates a signifcant fusion of public and private authority and responsibility. It has been suggested that private maritime security actors substantially augment maritime security, resulting in the reduction of maritime insecurity in the region[25] which definitely extends to Ghana's marime domain.

Although the emergence of private maritime security companies presents a challenge to prevailing notions of state sovereignty, they play complementary roles when the state is unable to assure maritime security. The impact of a hybrid maritime security governance arrangement allows industry to negotiate suitable maritime security arrangement with private maritime security companies as the state is not the sole provider of maritime security.

---

[20] Bakayoko et al., *Hybrid Security Governance in Africa: Rethinking the foundations of security, Justice and Legitimate Public Authority* (2016) 16(1) Conflict, Security & Development 1-32 at 8.
[21] Abrahamsen, R., & Williams, M. C. (2011). *Security beyond the state: Private security in international politics*. Cambridge University Press.
[22] Bueger, C. (2015). What is maritime security? *Marine Policy, 53*, 159–164.
[23] UNODC. (2023). *Maritime crime programme: Gulf of Guinea threat assessment*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
[24] Kraska, J. (2011). *Maritime power and the law of the sea*. Oxford University Press.
[25] Iheduru, *Hybrid Maritime Security Governance and Limited Statehood in the Gulf of Guinea: A Nigeria Case Study.*

There is, however, a caution, and it is the risk of "securitisation" to legitimise the relevance of private security companies as actors in maritime security. Thus, amidst a hybrid threat environment, maritime threats like piracy and armed robbery at sea could be "securitised" to advance the use of private maritime security companies in hybrid maritime security governance.[26] As profit-oriented ventures, it is not in the interest of private maritime security companies that the maritime threats that sustain their relevance ever abates and so they may be stoking the fire of maritime insecurity to remain in business.

REGISTRATION AND LICENSING OF PRIVATE MARITIME SECURITY COMPANIES

There are two broad categories of private security arrangements in Ghana.[27] The first is private security established and maintained within organisations and businesses to protect life and property. In this category, persons whose responsibility it is to provide security are employed, trained and commanded from within the establishment, and not *dehor*. The second category involves entities whose business is the provision of security for consideration. As a business, these entities recruit, train and dispatch security personnel to other organisations and individuals to provide security.[28] With this latter category, a company is purposely established to provide security services governed by regulation and licensing.

Section 38 of the Police Service Act, 1970 (Act 350) establishes the foundation for the regulation and licensing of private security companies. The Police Service (Private Security Organisations) Regulations, 1992 (LI 1571) further provides the framework for their licensing and operations. A private security company is defined broadly as "*an organisation which undertakes private investigations as to facts or the character of a person, or which performs services of watching, guarding, patrolling or carriage for the purpose of providing protection against crime, but does not include the Police Service, the Prisons Service or the Armed Forces.*"[29] The Regulations reinforce that no person or organisation shall engage in these stipulated activities unless the person or organisation applies for a license and has been granted one from the Ministry of the Interior.[30]

The licensing process requires organisations to disclose key information, including shareholders, directors, partners or owners and the number of intended offices and locations for service provision in Ghana. Additionally, all personnel employed as guards of the organisation must also be licensed and there is strict prohibitions against licensing persons with criminal conviction, whether in Ghana or elsewhere.[31]

Crucially, private security personnel are prohibited from bearing or possessing firearms or ammunition while on duty, and it is an offence to bear or possess arms contrary to the stipulation.[32] These provisions are designed to hold the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force, regulate the proliferation of arms and prevent the formation of private groups under the guise of provision of private security companies.[33] By tightly controlling the possession of arms by non-state actors, the

---

[26] Iheduru, *Hybrid Maritime Security Governance and Limited Statehood in the Gulf of Guinea: A Nigeria Case Study at* 127-128.
[27] Kwesi Aning & Ernest Lartey, *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector: Lessons from Ghana* (2009) Centre on International Cooperation, New York, https://gsdrc.org/document-library/parliamentary-oversight-of-the-security-sector-lessons-from-ghana/.
[28] Aning & Lartey, *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector: Lessons from Ghana.*
[29] *Police Service Act, 1970 (Act 350*), section 39.
[30] *Police Service (Private Security Organisations) Regulations, 1992 (LI 1571),* Regulation 2.
[31] *Police Service (Private Security Organisations) Regulations, 1992 (LI 1571),* Regulations 2, 4, 5, 8 and 11.
[32] *Police Service (Private Security Organisations) Regulations, 1992 (LI 1571),* Regulations 13 and 14.
[33] See generally discussions of Elke Krahmann, *Private Security Companies and the State Monopoly on Violence: A Case of Norm Change?* (PRIF Reports, 88), Frankfurt am Main: Hessische Stiftung Friedens-und und Konfliktforschung.

state ensures that the authority to employ armed force remains a sovereign perogative and exercised only in response to recognised threats and strict regulatory oversight. The regulatory framework, thus, aims to balance the need for private security services and the imperative of safeguarding state sovereignty and national security.

It would be contended that LI 1571 which governs activities such as "*services of watching, guarding, patrolling or carriage for the purpose of providing protection against crime*" serve as the principal regulatory and legislative framework for private security services in Ghana – covering both terrestial and maritime security. Consequently, in the absence of explicit provisions in the Ghana Maritime Security Act addressing the regulation of private maritime security companies, these entities should, by default, be subject to the same regulatory standards and licensing requirement established for all private security organisations.

The appointment of recognised private security organisations in the Ghana Maritime Security Act is limited to functions, such as assesment, verification, certification and approval of security plans, measures of ships and port; it does not directly provide for protection services.[34] There is, therefore, regulatory arbitrage as licensing of private maritime security companies tends to be performed by the Ministry of the Interior just as any other private security company, yet, the mandate for maritime security rests with the Ghana Maritime Authority. Private maritime security companies, therefore, operate in the "grey zones" of fragmented regulatory authority portending ineffective state scrutiny and supervision of their activities.

Extrapolating terrestial private security regulation to the maritime domain, however, is problematic. Terrestial private security regulation is designed to ensure public safety, with the assumption that private security personnel can rely on police or other state security institutions in cases of emergency. In contrast, private maritime security companies function in a rather challenging environment where there is a notable absence of police or naval presence. This lack of support significantly diminishes their ability to respond effectively to threats and, consequently, arms restrictions raise critical questions about the effectiveness of their protective measures. In view of this, it is essential to establish a separate and clearly defined legal and administrative framework for private maritime security companies in Ghana.

CONCLUSION

Entrusting maritime security (traditionally the *sanctum* of the state) to private maritime companies introduces profound challenges and opportunities. The hybrid threat facing Ghana's maritime sector necessitates a governance model that blends state authority with private sector capabilities. While private maritime security companies can play vital roles in addressing gaps in state capacity, their involvement must be carefully regulated to preserve the integrity of state sovereignty and ensure accountability.

Regulatory ambiguities, inadequacy and fragmented oversight currently create a "grey zone" in which private actors operate, raising concerns about legitimacy and effective supervision. Hybrid maritime security governance in Ghana requires the harmonisation of the regulatory framework for private maritime security to balance the imperatives of sovereignty, security, and industry needs in its maritime domain.

https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-292745 on how the state enforces its monopoly in violence.

[34] See sections 4-6 of the *Ghana Maritime Security Act, 2004 (Act 675)* on the appointment of security organizations.