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Report

Piracy and Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Nigeria as a Microcosm*

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Introduction

The resurgence of pirate attacks in African waters is now a subject of serious concern to African states and indeed the international community. For the last decade, piracy in African waters is concentrated in three main regions, namely the Somali coast/the Gulf of Aden along the East African Coast; Nigeria's territorial waters in West Africa; and the Mozambique Channel/Cape sea route in Southern Africa (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of Africa showing the three main Hotspots of Piracy



Source: Adapted from Onuoha (2009a:35).

Since 2007 when African waters overtook waters off Southeast Asia – Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Philippines – as the traditionally dangerous hotspots of global piracy, much of the international attention and efforts at countering piracy in Africa have been on Somali maritime piracy. This is understandably so, because piracy off the Somali coast accounts for more than half of pirate attacks recorded annually in Africa, if not globally. For instance, there were 439 piracy attacks worldwide in 2011, more than half of which were attributed to Somali pirates operating in the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and off the coast of Oman (Alessi, 2012). The spike in attacks prompted the deployment in 2008 of an ongoing international coalition of navies to fight Somali piracy.

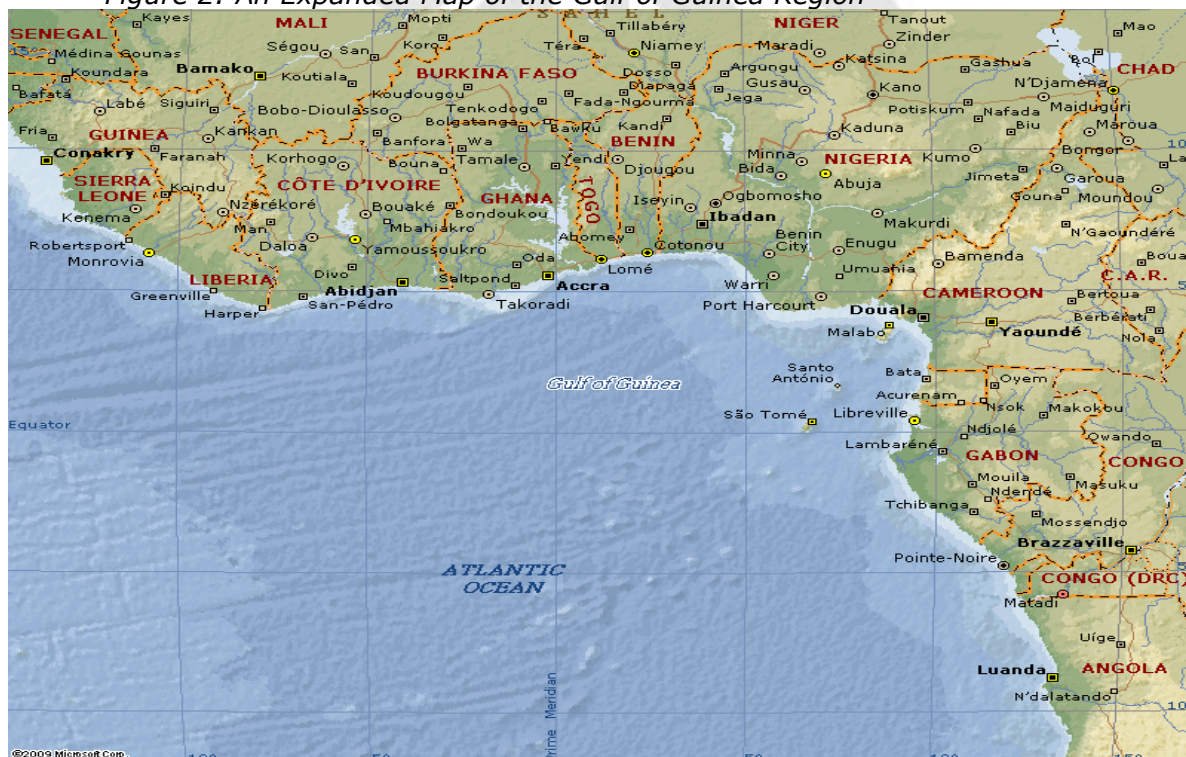
Yet violence at sea is also brewing in another African gulf: the Gulf of Guinea (GG). The increase in the number of attacks in 2011 in the GG and the fear that this would further increase in 2012 have prompted analysts to question whether foreign

navies will intervene to shore up maritime security in the region as they did in waters off the coast of Somalia (Baldauf, 2012). It is in this light that this article examines the dynamics of piracy in the GG region by highlighting, the trend in piracy in the region, contributing factors underlying the scourge, implications of piracy for the region and efforts being made to suppress violence at sea in the region.

The Gulf of Guinea Region in Geostrategic and Maritime Perspectives

Before delving into the dynamics of piracy in the GG, it is apposite that we understand the area referred to as the GG. There is no universally agreed geographical definition of the GG. The region is defined here as the part of the Atlantic Ocean southwest of Africa. Almost too obtuse to be a gulf, the region encompasses over a dozen countries from West and Central Africa, namely; Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo (see figure 2 below). It is located more strictly by the intersection of Latitude 0° (Equator) and Longitude 0° (Greenwich Meridian) (Anene, 2006:40).

Figure 2: An Expanded Map of the Gulf of Guinea Region



Source: Adapted from http://encarta.msn.com/map_701512832/quinea_gulf_of.html

The region's geostrategic and maritime potentials are quite attractive. The GG is endowed with enormous mineral and marine resources such as oil, diamond, gold, and fishes, among others. In particular, it is home to huge hydrocarbon deposits. Nearly 70 percent of Africa's oil production is concentrated in the West African coast of GG. Experts forecast in 1999 that Western oil companies will invest between \$40 billion and \$60 billion in the GG alone over the next 20 years. It is estimated that deepwater drilling will account for 25 percent of offshore oil production by 2015, compared to just nine percent in 2007 (Onuoha, 2010:372). By 2020, oil production in GG is expected to surpass the total production of the Persian Gulf nations: 25 percent of the global production as compared to 22 percent from the Persian Gulf (Paterson, 2007:28). Among the major oil-producing countries in the region are Nigeria, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, and Gabon. Since Chad's oil is connected to Cameroon, analysts are wont to add Chad as a player to the region.

In December 2010, Ghana joined the league of oil producers in the region, when it commenced the production of oil from its "Jubilee" field, located some 60 km offshore.

At the shore of Sierra Leone also, an oil field “Venus”, stocking around 200 million barrels was discovered in 2009. There is also a recent report of new discoveries off Liberia; further raising optimism for other countries of the region yet to discover oil in their territory. Thus the region holds the prospects of supplying significant quantity of oil to the global economy as we progress into the 21st century.

The GG contains 50.4 billion barrels of proven reserves and it produces 5.4 million barrels of oil per day. Its low-sulphur oil and proximity to Europe and the US further raise its strategic importance in global energy supply. The US currently obtains 15 percent of its oil imports from the GG and this could increase to 25 percent over the next five years. The region has the fastest rate of discovery of new reserves in the world. The ‘discovery ratio for oil wells in the US, for instance, is normally about 10 percent, in West Africa the same ratio has been almost 60 percent (Dietrich, 2004:28). The huge oil reserve of the region is thus the magnet drawing oil majors from America, Europe and Asia.

Its over 6,000 kilometre coastal arc which stretches from Senegal in West Africa, through Cameroun in Central Africa to Angola in Southern Africa, embodies its value as an area of global geo-maritime importance as well as its vulnerable security. Devoid of any strait or chokepoint that constrains shipping and increases vulnerability to accidents or attacks, the GG is a key hub of commercial maritime activities – exports of hydrocarbons and imports of manufactured goods and food items. The growing investments in the region, especially in offshore oil infrastructure, mean that coastal trading and maritime traffic are bound to increase in the region.

The region’s maritime affluence however co-exists with a litany of maritime afflictions. Its maritime afflictions can be broadly categorised as economic, political, and environmental. Amongst many of the economic threats are drug trafficking, illegal oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, piracy, poaching, and sea robbery. The environmental threats include coastal erosion and maritime pollution - dumping of toxic wastes and accidents from oil industry. Resource-insurgency is a major political threat in the region. There is also real threat of proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) and possible threat of maritime terrorism.

Particularly growing in nature and frequency of these afflictions is sea piracy. Thus, for a region of such geostrategic and maritime significance, ensuring that good order at sea prevails is a matter of absolute necessity for the GG states and extra-regional powers with growing economic interests in the region. This explains why the rapid increase in incidents of piracy in the region has attracted the attention of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The UNSC has adopted two resolutions - 2018 (October 2011) and 2039 (February 2012) – calling for more regional coordination and logistical support to regional security initiatives to counter the growing menace of piracy in the region.

Dynamics and Trends of Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

For much of the past seven years, maritime piracy has been on the increase around Africa in spite of growing national, regional and international efforts at improving maritime security in these sea routes. Based on statistics from the International Maritime Bureau’s (IMB) *Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships Annual Reports*, there were a total of 1434 incidents of piracy in Africa between 2003 and 2011 (see Table 1). Beginning from 2007, the number of attacks has been on the increase. It jumped from 61 in 2006 to 293 in 2011. The reason for this astronomical rise was the outbreak of piracy off the coast of Somalia and Gulf of Aden.

Table 1: Actual and Attempted Attacks against Ships in African Waters, 2003- 2011

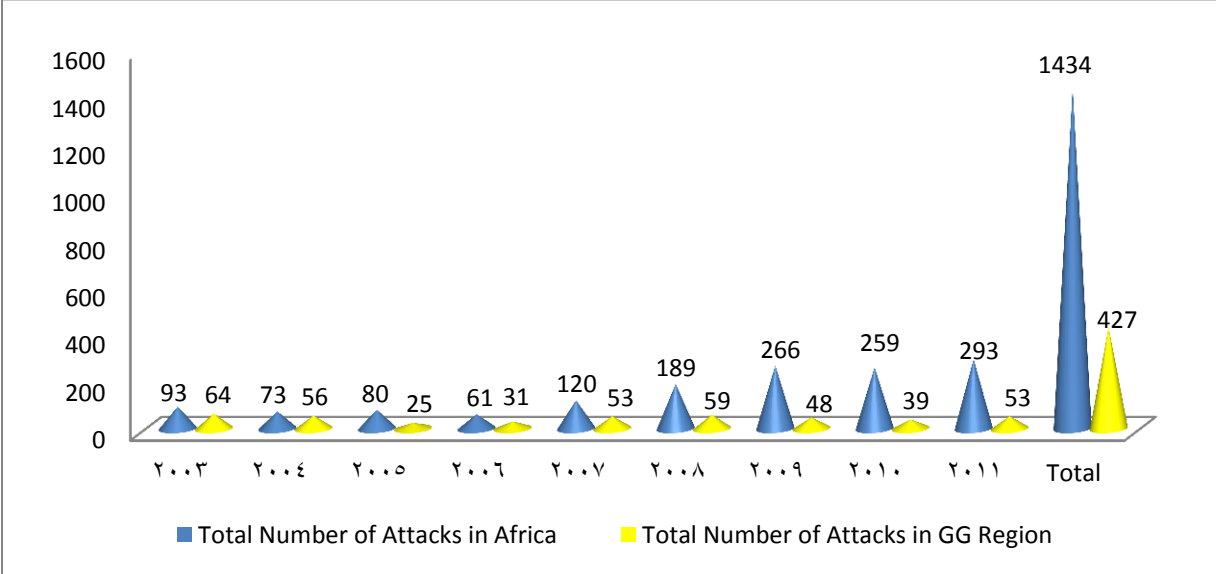
Africa	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Angola	3			4	1	2			1	11
Benin	1						1		20	22
Cameroon	2	4	2	1		2	3	5		19
Congo DR				3	4	1	2	3	4	17
Egypt					2			2	3	7
Equatorial Guinea						1				1
Eritrea		1			1					2
Ghana	3	5	3	3	1	7	3		2	27
Guinea	4	5	1	4	2		5	6	5	32
Guinea Bissau							1			1
Gulf of Aden	18	8	10	10	13	92	117	53	37	358
Ivory Coast	2	4	3	1		3	2	4	1	20
Kenya	1	1			4	2	1		1	10
Liberia	1	2			1	1		1		6
Madagascar		1	1		1					3
Mauritania		2	1	1						4
Morocco			1		1	1				3
Mozambique	1				3	2				6
Nigeria	39	28	16	12	42	40	29	19	10	235
Red sea							15	25	39	79
Senegal	8	5								13
Sierra Leone		3		2	2				1	8
Somalia	3	2	35	10	31	19	80	139	160	479
South Africa	1									1
Tanzania	5	2	7	9	11	14	5	1		54
The Congo						1		1	3	4
Togo	1			1		1	2		6	11
Total	93	73	80	61	120	189	266	259	293	1434

Source: Adapted from IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships Annual Reports, 2003-2011

However, attacks off the coast of GG constitute a fair share of the high incidents of piracy recorded in Africa. As shown in Figure 3, the GG accounted for 427 of the 1434 attacks in African waters between 2003 and 2011. The frequency of attacks in the GG, while not as high as those of the Somali coast, is however on the rise. The GG pirates are known to be violent, as they usually deploy sophisticated arms and weapons like AK-47s. The traditional modus operandi of pirates operating in the region had largely involved the use of speedboats to attack and dispossess shipping crew of cash, cargo and valuable, when the vessel is at anchor or in harbour, but mostly close to shore.¹

¹ The attacks in the GG and off the coast of Nigeria occur in territorial or coastal waters, and therefore do not technically and legally qualify as "acts of piracy" as defined in Article 101 of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982). Suffice it to state that we will not go into the definitional debate here.

Figure 3: Attacks in Gulf Guinea in relation to Attacks in African waters, 2003 – 2011



Source: Adapted from IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships Annual Reports, 2003-2011

Pirates are however, increasingly modifying their tactics by hijacking fishing vessels, particularly within Nigerian waters, and using same to attack other vessels operating off the coasts of neighbouring countries like Benin and Cameroun. Recent attacks have extended further out at sea and have focused largely on oil-laden vessels, to steal the petroleum product. As noted by Malaquais (2012), “the GG piracy is the organized, sometimes highly sophisticated, illicit taking of oil. They steal the oil, make a couple of black market circles of the stuff, and then deposit it back into the global supply”.

The current focus on oil vessels is not unconnected to the hike in oil price, especially in Nigeria. It is believed that a powerful transnational mafia – people with vast knowledge of the operation of the oil industry – is financing and facilitating the operations of pirates that target oil tankers, by giving them vital information such as names of ships, the course they will take, value of cargo and extent of insurance cover (Rasheed 2012). When taken hostage by GG pirates, the period of captivity lasts an average of ten days as compared to six months for Somali hijackings.

As can be seen in table 2, piracy in the GG has not been evenly distributed. The incidents of piracy in the region decreased from 64 attacks in 2003 to 56 in 2004 and 25 in 2005. It increased from 31 in 2006 to 53 in 2007 and 59 in 2008. Although it declined from 48 in 2009 to 39 in 2010, it has picked up again with 53 cases recorded in 2011. The majority of the attacks recorded between 2003 and 2011 occurred in Nigerian waters (55 percent), even as most attacks in Nigerian waters go unreported. Between 2003 and 2005, there was a decline in the number of attacks in Nigerian waters, and overall in the GG. However, there was an increase in the number of attacks between 2007 and 2008. The increase is mostly related to the upsurge in the activities of ethnic militants in Nigeria’s oil-rich Niger Delta region, who were protesting perceived marginalisation of the region by successive governments in Nigeria. Characteristic of the militant protests was the emergence and activities of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), among other groups. The operational tactics of the militant groups included hostage-taking of oil workers, sabotage of oil facilities, attacks on oil vessels, illegal oil bunkering, kidnapping and ransom receipts, among others.

Table 2: Actual and Attempted Attacks against Ships in the Gulf of Guinea, 2003-2011

GG States	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Angola	3			4	1	2			1	11
Benin	1						1		20	22
Cameroon	2	4	2	1		2	3	5		19
Congo DR				3	4	1	2	3	4	17
Eq. Guinea						1				1
Ghana	3	5	3	3	1	7	3		2	27
Guinea	4	5	1	4	2		5	6	5	32
Guinea Bissau							1			1
Ivory Coast	2	4	3	1		3	2	4	1	20
Liberia	1	2			1	1		1		6
Nigeria	39	28	16	12	42	40	29	19	10	235
Senegal	8	5								13
Sierra Leone		3		2	2				1	8
The Congo						1		1	3	4
Togo	1			1		1	2		6	11
Total	64	56	25	31	53	59	48	39	53	427

Source: Adapted from IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships Annual Reports, 2003-2011

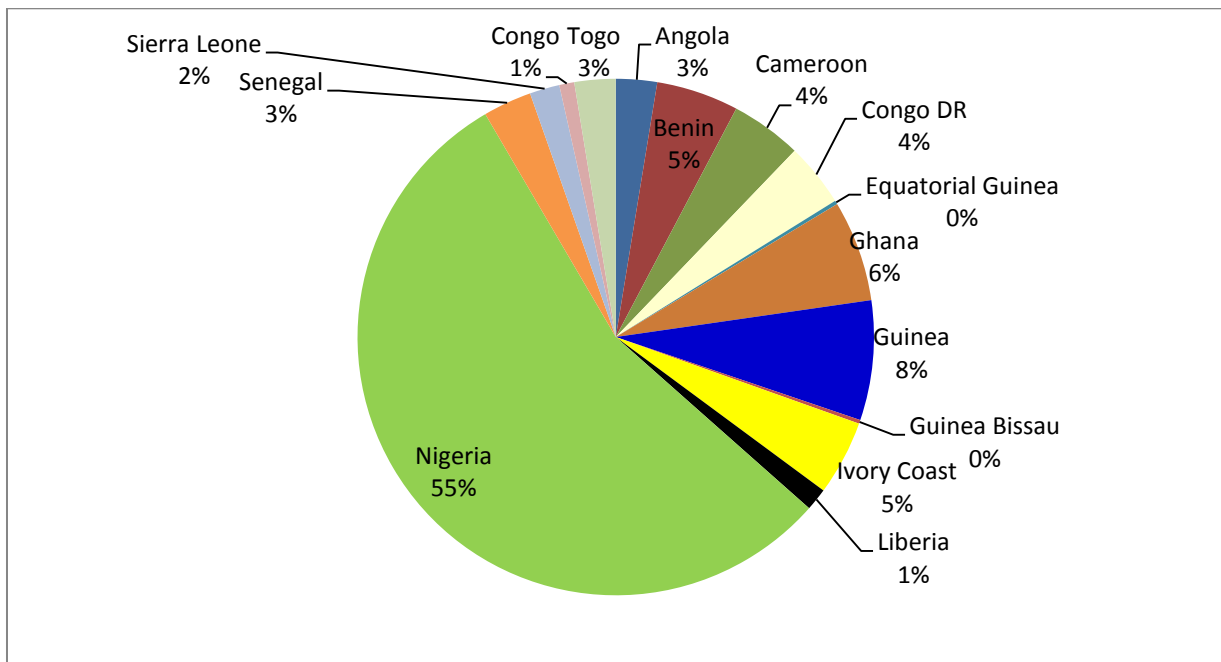
In a bid to contain the destructive and disruptive activities of militant groups, the Nigerian government granted amnesty to militants in August 2009, to free them from prosecution for participation in different acts of violent criminality in the region. The amnesty initiative saw over 15 000 militants surrender large cache of arms and weapons: about 2 760 assorted guns, 287 445 ammunitions of different caliber, 18 gun-boats, 763 dynamites, 1 090 dynamite caps, 3 155 magazines and several other military accessories, such as, dynamite cables, bullet-proof jackets and jack-knives.

The acceptance of amnesty by most militants partly accounted for the decrease in the number of attacks witnessed in 2009 and 2010. However, the rejection of the amnesty by a faction of MEND may partly explain the resurgence of pirate attacks beginning from 2011. According to the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), there have been 10 reported piracy incidents in the first two months of 2012 alone², an indication that piracy threat remains high. In early March 2012, MEND claimed responsibility for shooting four police officers on a boat patrolling the Nembe River in Bayelsa state, while indicating ties with pirates groups in the region (Alessi, 2012).

Besides Nigeria, other countries with high number of incidents include Guinea (8 percent), Ghana (6 percent), Ivory Coast (5 percent), and Benin (5 percent) for these years (see figure 4). The case of Benin is quite startling. There was only one incident off Benin waters in 2003, while none was recorded between 2004 and 2008. In 2011, however, Benin had 20 cases of pirate attacks. Analysts attributed the upsurge in piracy off the coast of Benin to Nigerian pirates who are now extending their attacks further out at sea. For example, it was alleged that the pirates that attacked and killed one of the crew of the *Cancale Star* on 23 November 2009 were from Nigeria. The Monrovia-flagged oil tanker was attacked some 18 nautical miles (33km) off the coast of Benin, in what is believed to be the country's first such attack.

² Statistics on pirate attacks by the IMO is usually higher than those captured by the IMB.

Figure 4: Percentage Distribution of Attacks in Gulf of Guinea, 2003-2011



Source: Adapted from IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships Annual Reports, 2003-2011

In many ways, Nigeria is a microcosm of the rest of the GG and even the African continent itself (Paterson, 2007:30). It is not only Africa's most populous nation, but also its largest oil producer. Nigeria's economy is highly dependent on the oil and gas industry, which is based principally in the Niger Delta region. The oil sector accounts for some 80 percent of government revenue, 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, 40 percent of GDP and four percent of employment (Tell, 2008:33). Nigeria is not only an economic giant compared to its neighbours (its economy is second only to South Africa in all of sub-Saharan Africa), but also a regional security stabiliser given her enormous military might and contributions to regional and global peacekeeping.

Yet Nigeria is the most afflicted by maritime threats pervading the GG region. Nigeria loses about \$800 million yearly over poaching, \$9 billion per annum to piracy, and \$15.5 billion annually due to oil theft or illegal oil bunkering. Worst still, over 70 percent of about 8 million illegal weapons in circulation in West Africa are in Nigeria (Abdullahi, 2010:29). These security leakages are both the features of, and contributors to, the complexity of maritime insecurity in the GG.

Towards an Explanation of the Persistence of Piracy in the Region

Several interrelated factors underlie the outbreak and persistence of piracy in the region. It derives primarily from bad governance. Despite their vast oil endowments, most of the GG states parade worst indices of human development such as high unemployment and poverty generated by bad governance. With declining opportunities for legitimate livelihood amidst affluence, some youths in the region are easily recruited for violent conflicts or take to criminality (piracy) for survival. The case of resource-conflicts in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region and Angola's Cabinda region arising from bad governance are typical examples.

The outbreak of violent conflicts compounds the problem of SALWs proliferation in the region. Not surprisingly, out of 100 million illicit weapons in circulation in sub-Saharan Africa, about eight to ten million are concentrated in the West African sub-region (Bah, 2004). In turn, the availability of SALWs contributes to the frequency and intensity of conflicts and criminality (such as piracy) that bedevil these states. Confronted by these challenges, States tend to couch their security in terms of narrow, landward security. An obvious consequence for this narrow view of security is the

overwhelming support given to land-based forces, particularly the army, to the neglect of maritime security forces such as navy, airforce and coast guards. Statistics in Table 3 show how this discrepancy plays out in terms of personnel strength of the armies and navies of five countries in the GG.

Table 3: Comparison of Personnel Strength of the Army and Navy of Five GG States

S/No	Country	Army	Navy
1	Nigeria	62,000	8,000
2	Cote d'Ivoire	6,500	900
3	Congo DR	110,000-120,000	6,703
4	Equatorial Guinea	1,100	120
5	Gambia	800	70

Mugridge (2010).

To a large extent, the disproportionality manifests not only in personnel strength, but also in the size of budgetary allocations to maritime forces. The result is that maritime security forces are ill-equipped and underfunded to perform interdiction operations. Off West and Central Africa, for example, there are fewer than 25 maritime craft longer than 25 meters available for interdiction efforts (Vogel 2011:2).

Moreso, in a globalised world facilitated by tremendous growth in maritime transportation, the range of maritime threats requires collaboration among national navies in defence of their coast. In the GG region in particular, it is doubtful whether there is any country that has a navy powerful enough to combat piracy alone. Most of the littoral states are not only blighted with poorly equipped and trained navies, they are yet to evolve a robust maritime security strategy that would ensure full utilisation of maritime domain resources to achieve sustainable security and development.

With bad governance, violent criminality, SALWs proliferation, ill-equipped and underfunded navies, and the absence of a maritime strategy coexisting with affluence, it is not surprising that piracy is brewing in the region. The interrelated manifestation of these factors has contributed greatly to the prevalence of maritime disorder in the region.

Cost of Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea Region

The cost of piracy in the region comes in various shades. The loss of human lives and valuable property as well as infliction of bodily injuries and trauma to innocent crews and their families are the most obvious direct impacts of pirate activities. Piracy makes needed trade and investment in the region more risky and expensive. Given the risk involved in transporting goods through the region, insurance premiums have been escalating as because shippers factor in higher risks into their operating costs. The International Bargaining Forum (a global labour federation for the transportation industry representing 690 labour unions including 600,000 seafaring members) has noted that from April 2012, the territorial waters of Benin and Nigeria will be designated a high risk area. The implication is that these waters will be treated the same as the high risk areas in the Gulf of Aden and near Somalia due to increased pirate attacks. It also entails that seafarers have the right to refuse to enter these waters and are entitled to double the daily basic wage and of death and disability compensation while within the areas of risk. This has impacts on the income of regional ports and the cost of goods destined for the region.

The costs of piracy in the GG – both from stolen cargos and higher insurance premiums and security costs – are estimated to reach \$2 billion each year, compared with \$7 billion from Somali piracy (Baldauf, 2012). For economies that depend on oil from the GG, this will translate to increased pump price of gasoline.

Piracy also leads to disruption of livelihood systems as well as shortages in food supply. In February 2008, for example, the Nigerian Trawler Owners Association recalled about 200 vessels from shore due to spiralling piracy. This resulted in a temporary work

stoppage for an estimated 20,000 workers, and consequently over 100 percent increase in the prices of seafood in the local market (Onuoha, 2009b). The activities of pirates add to the volume of SALW proliferation since they use part of their ransom money to procure more sophisticated arms.

Unchecked piracy in the region also has the potential to undermine diplomatic relations and can as well trigger the intervention of external forces, of which the ramifications may not be in the best interest of the region. The intervention of foreign navies and private security companies (PSC) has not ended the threat of Somali piracy in Horn of Africa. There is emerging concern over human rights violations by foreign naval forces or PSC targeting Somali fishermen because it is hard for them to differentiate from pirates. The case of a controversial award of waterways monitoring contract to Global West Vessel Specialist Agency, a private security company owned by a dreaded Niger Delta ex-militant, Government Ekpemukpolo (a.k.a. Tompolo), is already generating unease in Nigeria. The entrance and weak regulation of PSC could further compound security challenges in the GG, and elsewhere in Africa.

Efforts at Countering Piracy and Improving Maritime Security in the Region

The high incidents of piracy and other maritime crimes in the region have prompted several national, bilateral, regional, and extra-regional engagements to improve maritime security. At the national level, for instance, the Nigerian government in January 2012 transformed its Joint Task Force *Operation Restore Hope*, which was initially established to combat militancy in the Niger Delta into an expanded maritime security framework, known as *Operation Pulo Shield*. The *Operation Pulo Shield* was established to eliminate, among others, pipeline vandalism, crude oil theft, illegal oil refining, piracy and all forms of sea robbery within its area of responsibility. Some other GG states like Republics of Benin and Ghana are also taking measures in the form of increased policing, provision of detection and surveillance systems, creation of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) capabilities and acquisition of requisite platforms to suppress piracy.

In terms of bilateral response, the Governments of Nigeria and Benin Republic in October 2011 set up a combined maritime patrol of their waters. Code-named *Operation Prosperity*, the bilateral cooperation was the first of its kind in the region and is in tandem with the Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA) Coastguard Function Network Initiative. It is expected that the joint patrol will be expanded to include the navies of Ghana and Togo, in a bid to increase the span of surveillance and eliminate maritime threats.

At the regional level, measures to improve maritime security have come in the form of joint training exercises among Navies of the GG states. In February 2012, the Nigeria Navy hosted *Exercise Obangame Express*: an annual naval exercise of Africa, US and Europe. The maritime interdiction exercise attended by 12 nations – Nigeria, United States, France, Italy, Spain, Cameroun, Ghana, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome & Principe, Togo, Benin Republic and Republic of Congo – was aimed at enhancing the response capabilities of the Navies in the GG. The idea was to encourage countries in the region to improve on interoperability of communications and sharing MDA information to collectively combat piracy and other maritime crimes. This was followed up with a high-profile meeting of representatives from the Economic Community of West African States and Economic Community of Central African States as well as the United Nations in Benin in March 2012, to further fine-tune collaborative regional efforts at improving maritime safety and security in the GG.

In terms of extra-regional interventions to improve maritime security in the GG, the role of the US military is very salient. Through its AFRICOM's African Partnership Station (APS) initiative, the US military has been involved in joint training exercises with navies in the region to develop proficiencies in areas such as maritime interdiction

operations, search and rescue operations, and counter-terrorism, among others. To this end, the US has expended about \$35 million in the training of naval personnel in Nigeria and other countries within the GG on how to combat piracy, oil bunkering and other maritime crimes that have plagued the region in recent times. These and other efforts are meant to improve safety and security at sea, which is vitally important in the security-development nexus for both the GG and the international community.

Conclusion

As the scale and frequency of maritime threats grow in the GG, there is an increasing desire among GG states to promote and preserve good order at sea. The desire to improve maritime security is a necessary step towards stamping out piracy and other maritime crimes. The emerging intra- and extra- regional naval collaborations need to be expanded and sustained. To this end, the GG states need to evolve an integrated maritime strategy that will comprehensively address the various threats, challenges and opportunities that confront the region. However, there is also the need for attention to move beyond the sea to the land, where the real threats at sea actually originate. The GG states should leverage on their oil affluence to address problems such as unemployment, poverty and deprivation especially in riverine communities, which incubate maritime afflictions. The fight against corruption must be made a top priority, as corruption leads to the loss of funds that could be used to improve human development, provide social services, and build capacity of security forces to counter piracy.

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