

The Gulf of Guinea (GoG) and Maritime Security

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Volume 7 | Number 1 | Winter 2022



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by emailing us at:

Oke.Thorngren@act.nato.int

Georgios.Kotas@act.nato.int

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The Gulf of Guinea (GoG) and Maritime Security

Open Contributing Authors: Dr Stavros Karamperidis, Lecturer in Maritime Economics and Head of Maritime Transport Research Group, University of Plymouth, UK & Dr Fotios Moustakis, Associate Professor in Strategic Studies and Director of the Centre for Sea Power and Strategy, University of Plymouth, UK.

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1. Introduction/general information for the GoG

The Gulf of Guinea (GoG) stretches from Senegal to Angola. Consisting of 18 sovereign states, it is a vast and diverse region covering approximately 6,000 km of coastline¹. The GoG is a massive maritime zone of 2.35 million square kilometres². Within that area significant economic activity which is closely linked with the Blue economy³ takes place⁴. The GoG is an important shipping area for transporting oil, gas and other goods from central and southern Africa and represents 25% of the African maritime traffic (ibid). Approximately 1,500 vessels (fishing, tankers, cargo) are navigating in its waters every day⁵. The main economic activities of the GoG are petroleum exploration (35% of the world's total petroleum reserves are in the GoG), mining (diamonds, uranium, copper, manganese, gold, etc.), port operations and fishing⁶. Consequently, the GoG is a strategic area for the global economy and prosperity as, while it is not a main shipping route such as Suez, the activity and its economic impact are massive.

Regardless of its contribution to local economies, several experts have mentioned that the deteriorating state of security of the GoG is creating a burden for the economic development of the region. Due to the huge maritime-related economic activity and the lack of regional coordination in terms of security, deficiency of good governance, absence of economic opportunities elsewhere and high levels of unemployment, the GoG has become fertile ground for various illegal activities, the most infamous of which is piracy. However, other activities such as illegal fishing, smuggling and trafficking, and transnational organised crime present a major threat for the region's maritime security and,

¹ EEAS (European External Action Service), 2021. EU Maritime Security Factsheet: The Gulf of Guinea. Source: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52490/eu-maritime-security-factsheet-gulf-guinea_en, accessed 10/10/2021.

² World Atlas, (2021). Gulf of Guinea. Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/seas/gulf-of-guinea.html>, accessed 22/9/2021.

³ Several organisations (e.g., EU, World Bank, etc.) provide different definitions for the term Blue Economy. We will use the UN definition which describes Blue Economy as “an economy that comprises a range of economic sectors and related policies that together determine whether the use of ocean resources is sustainable” (UN, 2021).

⁴ Morcos, P., (2021). A Transatlantic Approach to Address Growing Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Source: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transatlantic-approach-address-growing-maritime-insecurity-gulf-guinea>, accessed 22/9/2021.

⁵ Op.cit, EEAS (European External Action Service), 2021. EU Maritime Security Factsheet: The Gulf of Guinea. Source: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52490/eu-maritime-security-factsheet-gulf-guinea_en, accessed 10/10/2021.

⁶ World Atlas, (2021). Gulf of Guinea. Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/seas/gulf-of-guinea.html>, accessed 22/9/2021.

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consequently, its overall economic development⁷. Therefore, action is required for the stabilisation and security of trade activities in the GoG region.

For smooth operation of global trade, and to maintain international peace and security, a safe maritime environment is required⁸. Various terms are used to report piracy attacks. The main distinction concerns whether the attack took place within the territorial waters or not⁹. For simplicity, we will refer to all attacks as pirate attacks. INTERPOL¹⁰ also separates maritime crime into: 1) Piracy, kidnapping and armed robbery (these are all immediate threats to merchant vessels and seafarers); and, 2) Transnational crime at sea (organised crime groups traffic weapons, drugs and human beings). In this paper we will tackle both forms of maritime crime as we want to provide a holistic view.

The blue economy, according to The World Bank¹¹, includes many activities, some of which comprise: Maritime Transport, Fisheries, Energy (Renewable), etc. The aforementioned activities have been directly hit by maritime crime; therefore, tackling maritime (blue) crime¹² could significantly contribute to Africa's economic development and sustainable future growth. Nevertheless, to achieve this goal, African governments should continue tackling maritime threats and invest in better governance¹³. Several Western countries (e.g., US and France) have strategic interests in the region¹⁴, as they are interested in blue economy sectors (e.g., energy and maritime transport)¹⁵.

One key sector for the blue economy is ports. African ports are much higher than the global average in terms of their operations, as their dwell time (average turnaround times) is above 20 days¹⁶. In

⁷ EEAS (European External Action Service), 2021. EU Maritime Security Factsheet: The Gulf of Guinea. Source: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52490/eu-maritime-security-factsheet-gulf-guinea_en, accessed 10/10/2021.

⁸ INTERPOL, (2021). Maritime Crime. Source: <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Maritime-crime>, accessed 11/11/2021

⁹ Kamal-Deen, A., (2015). The anatomy of Gulf of Guinea piracy. Naval War College Review, Vol 68, Issue 1, pp.93-118.

¹⁰ INTERPOL, (2021). Maritime Crime. Source: <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Maritime-crime>, accessed 11/11/2021

¹¹ The World Bank, (2021). What is the Blue Economy? Source: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2017/06/06/blue-economy>, accessed 1/11/2021

¹² "Maritime crimes affect the freedom of navigation and world trade and pose a threat to international security and individual safety" (INTERPOL, 2021).

¹³ Benson, J., (2018). Africa's blue economy. Source: <https://www.stableseas.org/post/africa-s-blue-economy>, accessed 22/9/2021

¹⁴ Tull, D., (2013). Gulf of Guinea: a summit meeting for more Maritime Security? Source: <https://psc.fes.de/e/gulf-of-guinea-a-summit-meeting-for-more-maritime-security/>, accessed 13/10/21.

¹⁵ U.S. Government Printing Office, (July 15, 2004). The Gulf Of Guinea and U.S. Strategic Energy Policy. Source: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-108shrg97231/html/CHRG-108shrg97231.htm>, accessed 1/11/2021

¹⁶ UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), (2020). Review of Maritime Transport 2020, Geneva. Source: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/rmt2020_en.pdf, accessed 18/11/2020.

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African ports, the ports *per se* are not the only stakeholders responsible for delays; factors such as congestion in road networks at or near the port, customs procedures, port-container stripping, storage agreements, etc. (ibid) could also have a major impact. To tackle such a key issue, which is closely linked with trade, ports need investment to help them increase efficiency while also facilitating trade (ibid).

African ports, mainly Nigerian ports, are also facilitating the export of oil products. Nigeria has two thirds of the oil reserves in the GoG and oil counts for 90% of total exports and foreign exchange, and 75% of state revenue¹⁷¹⁸. Regardless of the huge importance of oil for the country it is reported that, on a daily basis, more than 120,000 barrels are stolen which roughly equates to 6% of Nigeria's production¹⁹. Although the Nigerian container port is considered one of the most efficient in the region, as noted by UNCTADstat²⁰, it is also experiencing an increase by 50% in dwell time due to the COVID pandemic; that is the highest recorded (ibid) and demonstrates the need for further investment in the region in order to secure the smooth flow of goods needed for the prosperity of the local and regional economy.

The proximity of the GoG with North America and Europe (compared to the Middle East) and the aforementioned large quantities of oil and gas that exist there, increase its importance as a strategic area²¹²².

The purpose of this paper is to assess the following research aim: "Understand the anatomy of insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea and its security and development implications in the region in order to propose solutions to NATO". To achieve the aforementioned aim, a review of the blue crimes²³ history in the GoG is demonstrated in section 2, while in section 3 the implications of blue crime in the GoG security and development are demonstrated. Section 4 demonstrates the regional/local capacity

¹⁷ Reuters, (Aug, 2019). Oil theft cost Nigeria 22 million barrels in first half -NNPC. Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-uk-nigeria-oil-theft-idAFKCN1VK1NT-OZATP> accessed 22/9/2021.

¹⁸ Morcos, P., (2021). A Transatlantic Approach to Address Growing Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Source: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transatlantic-approach-address-growing-maritime-insecurity-gulf-guinea>, accessed 22/9/2021

¹⁹ Reuters, (Aug, 2019). Oil theft cost Nigeria 22 million barrels in first half -NNPC. Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-uk-nigeria-oil-theft-idAFKCN1VK1NT-OZATP> accessed 22/9/2021.

²⁰ UNCTADstat, (2021). Median time in ports (hours), containerships. Source: https://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/ReportFolders/reportFolders.aspx?IF_ActivePath=P%2C11, accessed 13/10/2021

²¹ U.S. Government Printing Office, (July 15, 2004). The Gulf Of Guinea and U.S. Strategic Energy Policy. Source: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-108shrg97231/html/CHRG-108shrg97231.htm>, accessed 1/11/2021

²² Tull, D., (2013). Gulf of Guinea: a summit meeting for more Maritime Security? Source: <https://pscc.fes.de/e/gulf-of-guinea-a-summit-meeting-for-more-maritime-security/>, accessed 13/10/21.

²³ Any criminal activity organised by transnational criminal networks at sea against maritime structures, vessels and illegal transportation of persons or illegal substances is classified as blue crime (UNODC, 2021).

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to cope with blue crimes in the GoG and section 5 provides a review of the external actors and their support to regional maritime capacity-building. Sections 6 and 7 provide recommendations for NATO, the key results and conclusions of the paper.

2. Blue crimes history in the GoG

Europe and the United States have been conducting joint naval operations for many years in the GoG; however, recently security, has been deteriorating. Therefore, both the US and EU should renew their partnership, which could demonstrate the benefits of their collaboration²⁴.

Various initiatives related to inter-regional cooperation were established in the region. The first initiative was the Gulf of Guinea Commission which was established in 2001, with the objectives of maintaining peace and increasing security amongst others. Later, the initiative focused more on building regional maritime security architecture²⁵. The architecture was established in 2013 during the Yaounde summit. The Yaounde summit was the first summit to cover the region of the GoG and its main topic was exclusively on “Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea”. Twelve heads of state and government officials participated in the summit (the first in Africa devoted exclusively to the issue of maritime security)²⁶.

In the meantime, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency was established in 2006, *“The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) is the apex regulatory and promotional maritime agency. The Agency was created from the merger of National Maritime Authority and Joint Maritime Labour Industrial Council (former parastatals of the Federal Ministry of Transport) on the 1st August 2006”*²⁷.

In 2014, the EU adopted a strategy to create an action plan for 2015-2020 for the GoG which aimed to enhance collaboration within Western and Central Africa in fighting maritime (Blue) crime. The strategy was an outcome of the summit in Yaounde in 2013. The strategy had four main objectives: *“building a common understanding of the scale of the threat; helping regional governments to put in place robust multi-agency institutions; supporting the development of prosperous economies;*

²⁴ Morcos, P., (2021). A Transatlantic Approach to Address Growing Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Source: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transatlantic-approach-address-growing-maritime-insecurity-gulf-guinea>, accessed 22/9/2021.

²⁵ European Council on Foreign Relations, (2021). Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC). Source: <https://ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/gulf-of-guinea-commission/>, accessed 13/10/2021

²⁶ Tull, D., (2013). Gulf of Guinea: a summit meeting for more Maritime Security? Source: <https://pscc.fes.de/e/gulf-of-guinea-a-summit-meeting-for-more-maritime-security/>, accessed 13/10/21

²⁷ NIMASA, (2021). About NIMASA. Source: <https://nimasa.gov.ng/about-us/> accessed 1/10/2021

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*strengthening the cooperation structures*²⁸. Regardless of the various initiatives which specifically focus on blue crime, unfortunately the region still has high levels of blue crime. In 2019 the area with the most pirate attacks in the world was West Africa (please see Figure 1) where 34.7% of global incidents took place²⁹. The epicentre of the problem is Nigeria (please see Figure 2), as kidnapped crew are held hostage in the Niger Delta³⁰.

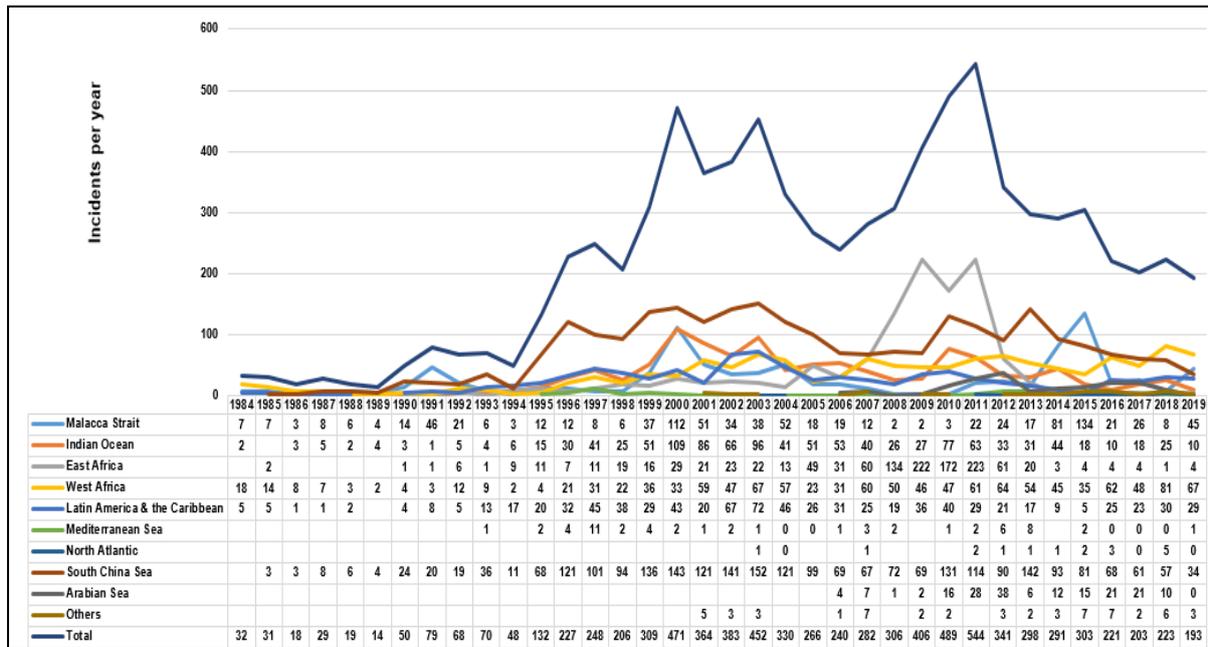


Figure 1: Yearly statistics of piracy and armed robbery incidents which occurred since 1984 (regionally and globally)

Source: IMO³¹

For various reasons, the GoG was the area mostly affected by piracy and maritime robbery worldwide in 2019:

- 1) Traffic patterns are different from those in other areas. Pirates target vessels close to port or anchorage or within the territorial waters because vessels cannot increase speed to avoid

²⁸ Council of the European Union (2015). Council conclusions on the Gulf of Guinea Action Plan 2015-2020. Source: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21521/st07168en15.pdf>, accessed 10/10/2021

²⁹ IMO, (2020). Reports On Acts Of Piracy And Armed Robbery Against Ships: Annual report 2019. Source: <https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/OurWork/Security/Documents/MSC.4-Circ.264%20Annual%20Report%202019.pdf>, accessed 25/9/2021.

³⁰ One Earth Future (2019). The State of Maritime Piracy 2019, Broomfield CO, USA.

³¹ IMO, (2020). Reports On Acts Of Piracy And Armed Robbery Against Ships: Annual report 2019. Source: <https://wwwcdn.imo.org/localresources/en/OurWork/Security/Documents/MSC.4-Circ.264%20Annual%20Report%202019.pdf>, accessed 25/9/2021

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piracy attacks as would be the case on the open sea. In 2019, 68 incidents out of 98 took place in territorial waters (70% of the overall attacks took place in territorial waters)³².

- 2) As vessels are attacked within the territorial waters, armed guards should only comprise national security personnel rather than armed civilians.
- 3) As the attack takes place close to the coast, pirates can also steal goods (e.g., oil). Pirates prefer oil tankers (in 2019 41% of their attacks was on tankers (ibid)) as they can sell the oil on the black market, enabling continued financing for their business. Nigeria, as mentioned earlier, has a thriving black market for oil (Section 1) as, on a daily basis, more than 120,000 barrels end up there. So, it is easy for the pirates to distribute the stolen quantity of oil into the black market.

Pirates, after years of operations, have reduced attacks on locals as they believe they can achieve higher ransoms for international crews; consequently, they undertake active selection³³³⁴.

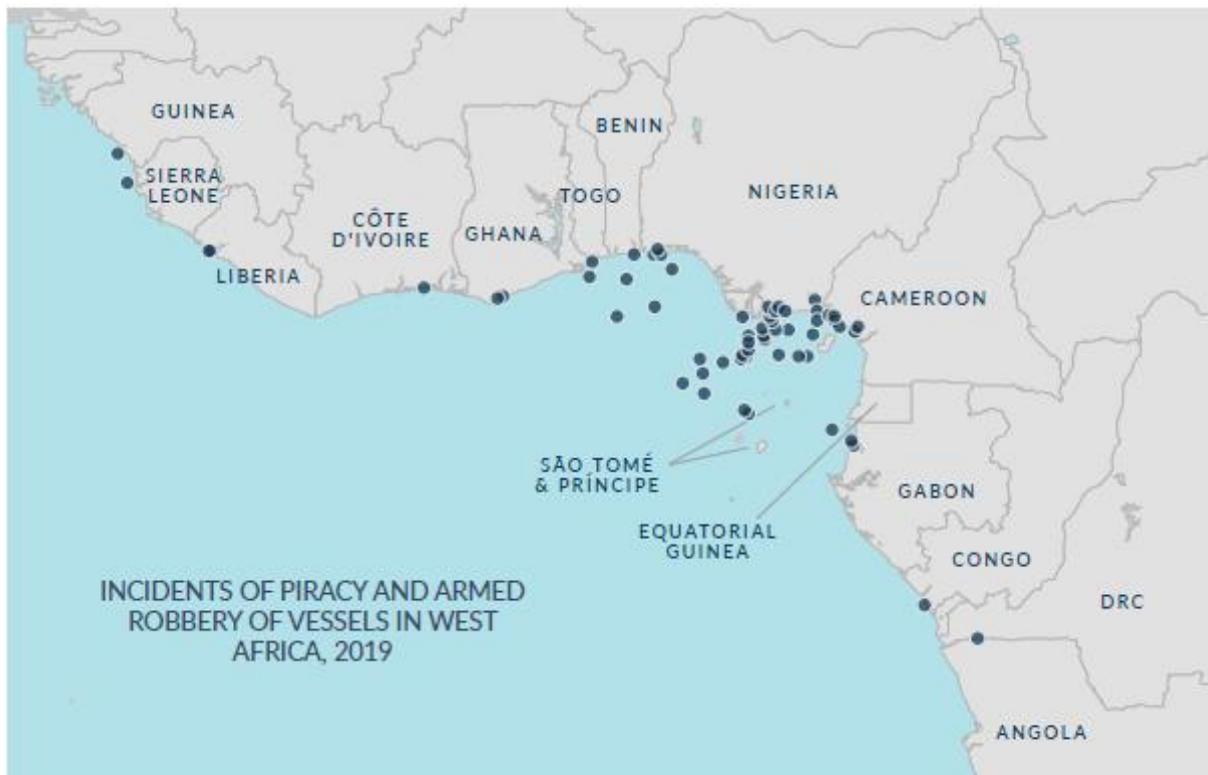


Figure 2 Incidents of piracy and armed robbery of vessels in West Africa (2019)

Source: One Earth Future (ibid)

³² One Earth Future (2019). The State of Maritime Piracy 2019, Broomfield CO, USA

³³ One Earth Future (2013). The State of Maritime Piracy 2013, Broomfield CO, USA

³⁴ One Earth Future (2019). The State of Maritime Piracy 2019, Broomfield CO, USA

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According to experts, the resilience of piracy in the GoG is expounded by the fact that the military response was not as robust as it was in other regions where piracy has been observed (e.g., Somalia). “West African piracy has not elicited the kind of international military response that Somali piracy has, and the costs associated with international responses reflect that reality” (ibid, 54). As demonstrated in Table 1 and Figure 3, when military presence was reduced the number of attacks and seafarers affected increased. To elaborate further, Figure 3 on the left-hand side axis demonstrates the number of attacks and seafarers affected from piracy. In the same Figure, on the right-hand side the percentage of military costs and the percentage of total security response costs is demonstrated. As it is demonstrated in 2013 when military was solely responsible for tackling piracy in GoG, when the spending for tackling piracy was increased the following year the number of piracy attacks was reduced. However, from 2015 we had more stakeholders being involved for maritime security. Those stakeholders by 2017 they were responsible for 80% of the overall costs related to piracy expenditure, while the percentage of military costs dropped to 8%. Unfortunately, regardless of the generous funding provided the number of attacks has increased. As seen in Figure 3, the new model after 2015 was imposed which included contractors. That was not as effective as the preceding model, which was entirely dependent on military forces. Figure 3 also demonstrates that the volume of funding allocated to military response had a major impact on the decline of piracy incidents. When private maritime security operators were utilised after 2015, their impact was minimal, despite the large sums of money allocated.

Table 1: Piracy attacks, seafarers affected and piracy cost (million \$) in West Africa.

Gulf of Guinea	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Attacks	43	100	67	54	95	97	112	98
Seafarers affected	966	1,871	1,035	1,225	1,921	1,726	2,012	1,689
Piracy Cost (millions \$)	807	623	865	720	794	818	N/A	N/A
Military response costs (million \$)	125	359	455	276	281	68	N/A	N/A
Contracted Maritime Security					355	367	N/A	N/A
Counterpiracy organisations						225	N/A	N/A
% of military response costs	15%	58%	53%	38%	35%	8%	N/A	N/A
% of total security response costs	15%	58%	53%	38%	80%	80%	N/A	N/A

Source: One Earth Future³⁵⁻³⁶

³⁵ One Earth Future (2012). The State of Maritime Piracy 2012, Broomfield CO, USA

³⁶ One Earth Future (2019). The State of Maritime Piracy 2019, Broomfield CO, USA

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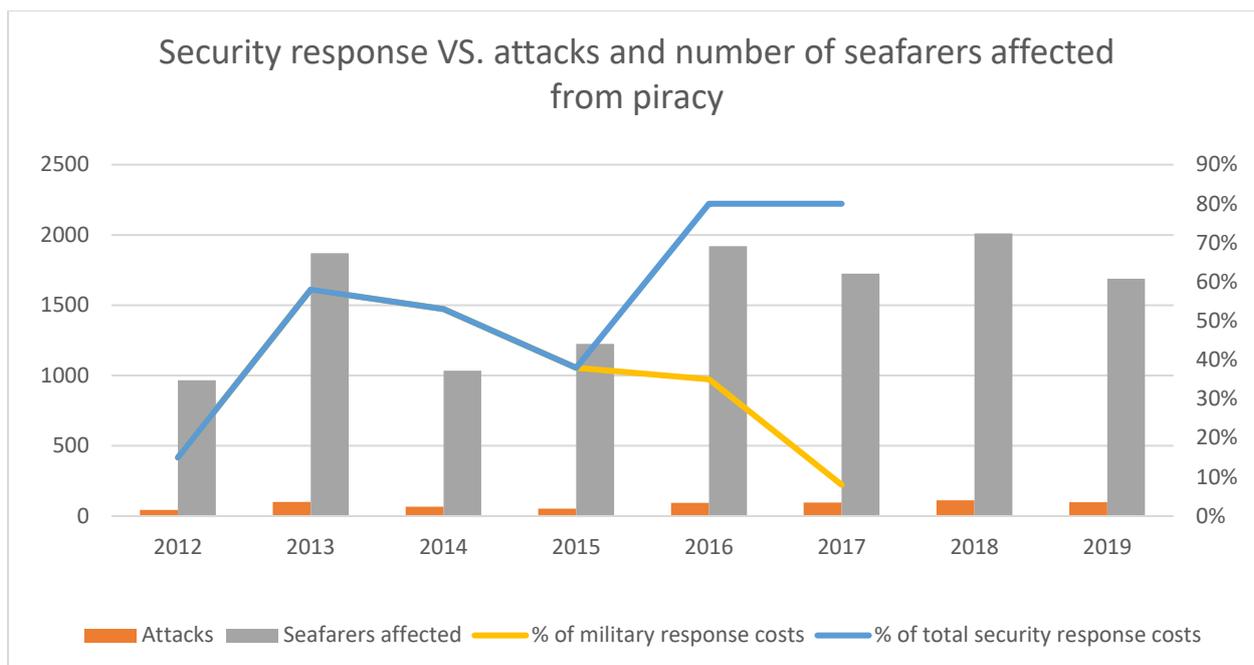


Figure 3: Security response versus attacks and number of seafarers affected from piracy

Source: One Earth Future (ibid)

Organised crime and terrorism has increased in the GoG area; thus, several countries are concerned³⁷.

3. Implications of blue crime in the GoG for security and development

Any criminal activity organised by transnational criminal networks at sea against maritime structures, vessels and illegal transportation of persons or illegal substances is classified as blue crime³⁸. When it is violent this could threaten safe navigation, physical integrity and the life of seamen (ibid). Such criminal networks attempt to enhance instability in the region in order to more easily manipulate the GoG, which has rich maritime activities³⁹. These activities attract non-state actors (criminals) as the region is affected by poverty, high levels of unemployment (in general lack of economic opportunities), weak legislation, theft of oil and the existence of a black market for oil⁴⁰ and, above all, corruption at

³⁷ Tull, D., (2013). Gulf of Guinea: a summit meeting for more Maritime Security? Source: <https://psc.fes.de/e/gulf-of-guinea-a-summit-meeting-for-more-maritime-security/>, accessed 13/10/21.

³⁸ UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), (2021). Maritime Crime and Piracy. Source: <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/newrosenwebsite/TOC/maritime-crime-and-unodc.html>, accessed 2/11/2021

³⁹ Wilson, G., (2014). The Nigerian State and oil theft in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol 16, Issue 1, pp. 354-365

⁴⁰ According to Wilson (2014) both foreign and indigenous personnel are involved with illegal oil bunkering (oil bunkering is the illegal siphoning of oil products and sold to interested dealers in high seas). The impact of oil theft is threefold: 1) Affects primarily Nigeria's development (as it is the biggest oil producer in GoG), which

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a regional level^{41,42}. The aforementioned factors further boost regional instability and lead criminals to engage in blue crimes.

Criminal networks such as these could have different appearances, not all of which would be the “typical” pirate; however, they still worthy of attention as they could be a vital part of the “criminal supply chain”. Criminal actions at sea could derive from organised teams that are able to achieve great collaboration and perform impeccable outcomes as they work synergistically and complementarily. According to Holmes⁴³ pirates may be:

- Old fisherman; they are extremely precious, thus their nickname is “brain”, as they have extreme knowledge of the sea and how to operate in those environments.
- Veterans; they have good knowledge of arms, and the knowledge and strength to enforce power.
- Technical experts; they have great knowledge of technical issues. They are experts in computer usage, military equipment, satellite phones and GPS systems. As evident from the increase in the level of sophistication of attacks over the years (e.g., targeting mainly tanker vessels with foreign crews in order to increase their ransom demands and manage oil bunkering) technical expertise is increasing; therefore, it is harder to identify the gangs.

On several occasions pirates have kidnapped fishing vessels operating in the region which are then used as mother vessels to facilitate their attacks⁴⁴. The GoG experienced an approximate 50% increase in kidnapping for ransom between 2018 and 2019, and around 10% increase between 2019 and 2020⁴⁵. Therefore, a holistic approach should be undertaken. Thus, we present illegal activities related to fishing, drugs/trafficking and piracy in the following sections.

includes loss of human and material resources, 2) Reduction in revenue generated from oil, 3) Increase in state insecurity (Wilson, 2014).

⁴¹ Wilson, G., (2014). The Nigerian State and oil theft in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol 16, Issue 1, pp. 354-365

⁴² Morcos, P., (2021). A Transatlantic Approach to Address Growing Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Source: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transatlantic-approach-address-growing-maritime-insecurity-gulf-guinea>, accessed 22/9/2021

⁴³ Holmes, J. R., (2011). A Founding Era for Combined Maritime Security?. *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 35, Issue 3, pp. 417-426

⁴⁴ ICC Commercial Crime Services, (2021). Gulf of Guinea remains world's piracy hotspot in 2021, according to IMB's latest figures. Source <https://www.icc-ccs.org/index.php/1306-gulf-of-guinea-remains-world-s-piracy-hotspot-in-2021-according-to-imb-s-latest-figures>, accessed 23/9/2021

⁴⁵ EEAS (European External Action Service), 2021. EU Maritime Security Factsheet: The Gulf of Guinea. Source: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52490/eu-maritime-security-factsheet-gulf-guinea_en, accessed 10/10/2021

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3.1. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

Monitoring of fishing vessels is important for maritime security as they are used to cover illegal activity⁴⁶. Through the support of good ocean governance, joined-up monitoring, control and surveillance activities and effective enforcement fisheries agencies play a crucial role in delivering maritime security in West Africa. Sustainable fishing and maritime security are vital for ocean health and blue growth (ibid).

Fish production has doubled in Africa in the last 20 years. Fishing is a profitable sector with a global first sale value estimated at USD 401 billion⁴⁷. In Africa fishing comes mainly from marine areas and secondarily from inland waters. Africa's fishing vessels represent 20% of the global fleet (280,000 motorised vessels), while those of America represent only 10%. Africa has the second largest number of fish workers in the globe. Specifically, the GoG is number 35 in the world in terms of percentage catch on a global scale (ibid). Therefore, we can understand that fishing plays a key role in Africa, and specifically in the GoG, in terms of economic activity but also in terms of nutritional value for the populations living the coastal areas. Although in Nigeria the fishing industry employs more than 10,000 Nigerians, pirate attacks on vessels are threatening the viability of the sector, resulting in fishermen being afraid of working in such an environment⁴⁸.

One of the greatest threats to marine ecosystems is illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing which undermines the efforts to sustainably manage fisheries and to conserve marine biodiversity⁴⁹. According to the FAO (ibid, 131) "*IUU fishing threatens livelihoods, exacerbates poverty, and augments food insecurity*".

Calculating the amount of global IUU fishing is a complex matter which depends upon various factors such as the availability of information and the fishery (ibid). For the aforementioned reasons it is hard for us to estimate the value of IUU fishing in the GoG. Some regional mechanisms have recently been set up, for example the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (member states: Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria)⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ FCWC (Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea), (2019). Maritime security and sustainable fisheries development. Source: <https://fcwc-fish.org/resources/factsheets> , accessed 22/9/2021.

⁴⁷ FAO, (2020). The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020. Sustainability in action. Rome. Source: <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9229en>, accessed 22/9/2021

⁴⁸ One Earth Future (2013). The State of Maritime Piracy 2013, Broomfield CO, USA

⁴⁹ FAO, (2020). The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020. Sustainability in action. Rome. Source: <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca9229en>, accessed 22/9/2021

⁵⁰ FCWC (Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea), (2021). Member States. Source: <https://fcwc-fish.org/>, accessed 22/9/2021.

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3.2. Illicit drugs and arms trafficking

Insufficient maritime security enforcement has also helped the development of illicit drugs and arms traffic, actions that are “subsidised” by the illegal oil trade⁵¹. As aforementioned, more than 120,000 barrels of oil are stolen on a daily basis⁵². The GoG has become a major transshipment point for Latin American cartels’ drugs where Europe is the final destination⁵³.

West Africa has become a sanctuary for drugs trafficking from South America into Europe, according to reports. Cocaine is the most common illegal substance transported via sea routes⁵⁴. Drug trafficking gangs have devised sophisticated systems for transporting and distributing illegal substances⁵⁵. The Atlantic Ocean acts as a single transportation route with little opposition from West African law enforcement. Guinea's Conakry, on the western coast of the GoG, provides a poorly policed maritime zone, allowing drug cartels to move easily from the sea into West African sub-regions. It has been shown⁵⁶ that West Africa is used as a transit route for cocaine from South America into Europe and heroin from the Middle East into the United States⁵⁷. The cause seems to be that cocaine consumption has been dropping in the United States since the early 1980s. Furthermore, the present Mexican drug war has increased the risk of trafficking cocaine into the United States. The number of cocaine users in Europe, on the other hand, has risen leading traffickers to divert some of their shipments elsewhere⁵⁸. Traffickers discovered that West Africa was a profitable and less-monitored route to this market in the early 2000s.

Although West Africa lacks the capacity to manufacture military-grade weapons, the region's recent wars and conflicts have maintained a demand for them. Libya’s implosion and the increased presence

⁵¹ Morcos, P., (2021). A Transatlantic Approach to Address Growing Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Source: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transatlantic-approach-address-growing-maritime-insecurity-gulf-guinea>, accessed 22/9/2021

⁵² Reuters, (Aug, 2019). Oil theft cost Nigeria 22 million barrels in first half -NNPC. Source: <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-uk-nigeria-oil-theft-idAFKCN1VK1NT-OZATP> accessed 22/9/2021

⁵³ Chalk, P., (2011). *The Latin American Drug Trade: Scope, Dimensions, Impact, and Response*. Rand Corporation

⁵⁴ Abiodun, T. F. and Dahiru, Y., (2020). Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea and the quest for security intelligence deployment in combating the menace. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research, Social and Management Sciences*, Vol. 6, Issue 4, pp. 79-99.

⁵⁵ Ellis, S., (2009). West Africa’s international drug trade. *African Affairs*, Vol. 108, Issue 431, pp. 171-196.

⁵⁶ In April 2013, Rear Admiral J.A. Bubo, the former Chief of the Navy of Guinea Bissau, was apprehended at sea in a narcotics sting operation and extradited to the United States to face charges.

⁵⁷ Abiodun, T. F. and Dahiru, Y., (2020). Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea and the quest for security intelligence deployment in combating the menace. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research, Social and Management Sciences*, Vol. 6, Issue 4, pp. 79-99.

⁵⁸ UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), (2021). Maritime Crime and Piracy. Source: <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/newrosenwebsite/TOC/maritime-crime-and-unodc.html>, accessed 2/11/2021.

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of Jihadist groups in the vast Sahel region of West Africa have opened up new sources of weapons right on the doorstep of the area. According to a Small Arms Survey, conducted in October 2020, illicit weapons and ammunition follow the same pathways as other illicit products and are frequently carried jointly, primarily through the ants trade method. Banditry, the need for self-defence in communities, traditional hunters, and artisanal and small-scale gold mining all contribute to the need for illicit firearms⁵⁹.



3.3. Piracy/armed robbery

In the first three months of 2021 nearly half of all reported piracy attacks took place in the GoG. The region has accounted for all the crew fatalities and kidnapped crew reported. Despite a drop in the number of reported piracy incidents for Q1 2021, violence against crew is on the rise in comparison to previous years⁶⁰. Therefore, as ICC Commercial Crime Services (ibid) comments, the GoG is *“particularly dangerous for seafarers... Pirates operating within the Gulf of Guinea are well-equipped to attack further away from shorelines and are unafraid to take violent action against innocent crews”*. Thus, the IMB director, Mr Howlett, demonstrates the importance for seafarers to remain vigilant and cautious when they sailing in the GoG area and report any incidents to the Regional Authorities and the IMB PRC as only knowledge, which will be generated through collaboration amongst all stakeholders, could reduce the risk for seafarers in the region (ibid). Pirates board the vessels of

⁵⁹ Novak, M. and Sollazzo., R., (2020). Tri-border Transit: Trafficking and Smuggling in the Burkina Faso–Côte d’Ivoire–Mali Region, Small Arms Survey, October 2020. Source: <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/resource/tri-border-transit-trafficking-and-smuggling-burkina-faso-cote-divoire-mali-region> accessed 23/10/2021.

⁶⁰ ICC Commercial Crime Services, (2021). Gulf of Guinea remains world’s piracy hotspot in 2021, according to IMB’s latest figures. Source <https://www.icc-ccs.org/index.php/1306-gulf-of-guinea-remains-world-s-piracy-hotspot-in-2021-according-to-imb-s-latest-figures>, accessed 23/9/2021.

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interest for three main reasons⁶¹. The first is for theft, that encompasses anything of value which may be left unattended on deck, any valuables belonging to the crew and cash they may find in the Master's safe. They board and disembark quickly and disappear with their loot.

The second reason is oil piracy. Here, the vessels of interest are oil tankers which are targeted for their cargo. Pirates board the vessel and keep the crew under arms. Often, crew members are injured during such attacks. The pirates will neutralise vessel's Automatic Identification System (AIS) as well as her Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) and they will force the crew to take the vessel to a pre-arranged spot where the cargo will be transhipped to other vessels and eventually sold in the black market. After a few days, when the cargo transfer is completed, the pirates leave the ship and the crew retakes control of the vessel.

The third reason is kidnapping the crew for ransom. Depending on the resources available to them, pirates will abduct a number of crew members, or all the crew, they will transport the victims to facilities ashore and will keep them as hostages until arrangements are made, sums agreed and money delivered to the pirates. The crew members who were able to survive their captivity will then be returned to their families. Up until the late 2018, the most prominent areas of piracy and the most violent attacks were taking place in Nigerian waterways including river estuaries such as Escravos and Bonny River. However, this has changed since 2018 and in 2021 high-profile pirate attacks and abductions were taking place throughout the GoG and particularly in the waters of Lomé and Cotonou⁶².

The piracy attack on the Curacao Trader in July 2020 encapsulates the situation in the GoG accurately. The fact that pirates felt at ease operating in international waters indicates a significant and alarming increase in pirate activity. Such kidnappings can cost tens of millions of dollars. The Nigerian government's treatment of this case demonstrated that they are unwilling and/or unable to deal with the problem (ibid). This attack was successfully addressed due to the vessel's managers'/owners' perseverance and determination. The authorities very conveniently hid behind private efforts and took credit for successful hostage releases (ibid).

⁶¹ Onuoha, F. C., (2013). Piracy and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea: Trends, concerns, and propositions. *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*. Vol 4, Issue 3, pp.267-293

⁶² Vlachandrea, E., (August 2020). Why is NATO naval military intervention crucial for the protection of merchant ships against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, MA dissertation in Applied Strategy and International Security, University of Plymouth

4. Regional/local capacity to cope with blue crimes in the GoG

Corruption, ineffective law enforcement and poverty are major reasons of piracy⁶³. These factors indicate that Nigeria's piracy problem can be traced back to a government-sponsored scheme. Furthermore, Nigeria's piracy problem is linked to the country's broken oil sector and the Niger Delta's turbulent politics. Despite being the world's eighth-largest oil producer, Nigeria is beset by refined gasoline shortages⁶⁴.

Regional states have attempted to combat maritime piracy in various ways. The African Regional Economic Communities⁶⁵ have realised that allowing maritime piracy and maritime crime to flourish puts the region's blue economy and blue growth in jeopardy. Maritime security challenges are clearly jeopardising the possibility for blue growth. A stable and sustainable blue economy will assist West African coastal countries, as well as surrounding landlocked countries that rely on coastal economies for many aspects of their economic and social growth.

In an attempt to address maritime crime, according to Kuppen⁶⁶, several institutions have been active in combating piracy in the region such as:

- The Gulf of Guinea Commission (GCC) created in 2001 but only operational in March 2007, when its Executive Secretariat was set up in Luanda.
- The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).
- The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).
- The Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA) established to ensure a cost-effective shipping service for sub-regional countries focusing on safety and combating pollution.

In 2008, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) created an integrated Strategy for Maritime Security (ISMS), which advocated for a single regional framework for regulating maritime activity off the coast of Central Africa in response to the growing maritime threat. The Regional Coordination Center for Maritime Security in Central Africa (CRESMAC) at Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo, was boosted in 2009. CRESMAC is responsible for commanding three multinational

⁶³ Ben-Ari, N., (2013). Piracy in West Africa: a bumpy road to maritime security. <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2013/piracy-west-africa>, accessed 17/10/2021.

⁶⁴ Economist, (2019). The Gulf of Guinea is now the world's worst piracy hotspot. Source: <https://www.economist.com/international/2019/06/29/the-gulf-of-guinea-is-now-the-worlds-worst-piracy-hotspot>, accessed 19/9/2021

⁶⁵ For more information see <https://au.int/en/organs/recs>, accessed 17/10/2021.

⁶⁶ Kuppen, J., (2016). Measures to eradicate piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Haganum Model United Nations. General Assembly 1.

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coordination centres (CMCs) under the ISMS. The primary goal of this effort is to improve information exchange and authorisation mechanisms for tracking suspicious vessels across maritime borders.

The Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) and the Nigerian Navy (NN) formed the Maritime Guard Command to police Lagos coastlines on a regular basis, while the Nigerian Marine Police protect inland waterways.

The Secure Anchorage Area (SAA), which extends security to vessels in a specific area off Lagos Port, was launched in May 2013 with the help of two special maritime security companies and the NN. For vessels desiring to anchor or conduct ship-to-ship transmission activities offshore, the SAA offers armed preservation. NIMASA announced a Satellite Surveillance Centre in 2014, in partnership with the NN and the Nigerian Air Force (SSC). The SSC keeps track of all ships in Nigerian waters and can identify their IMO numbers⁶⁷.

As mentioned before, in June 2013, 25 Central and Western African States came together and signed the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, a code of conduct concerning the suppression of piracy, armed robbery against ships, and illicit maritime activity in West and Central Africa and which will be achieved by the development of regional maritime cooperation which, in turn, will lead to a stable maritime environment that can contribute to the prosperity of the region⁶⁸. The states involved comprise the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) countries. The idea was that the Central Africa Regional Maritime Security Center (CRESMAC) and the West Africa Regional Maritime Security Center (CRESMAO), the two regional maritime security centres in the area, would work together to enforce their maritime strategy by gathering intelligence and assessing relevant data, which would then be shared and used to combat maritime crime. All signatories pledged to cooperate fully with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the various Maritime Flag Administrations. Although The Yaoundé Code of Conduct is a commendable, non-binding project with a lot of promise, regrettably, marine crime in the area has increased rather than decreased during the last seven years.

⁶⁷ Fattah, M. M. A., (2017). Piracy in Gulf of Guinea causes, efforts and solutions. *Regional Maritime Security Institute*. Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331036118_Piracy_in_Gulf_of_Guinea_causes_efforts_and_solutions, accessed 16/10/2021

⁶⁸ EEAS (European External Action Service), 2021. EU Maritime Security Factsheet: The Gulf of Guinea. Source: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52490/eu-maritime-security-factsheet-gulf-guinea_en, accessed 10/10/2021

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According to EEAS (ibid) the EU has participated in a series of projects with a total cost of €92.68 million in order to increase maritime security in the region, as summarised below:

- The Critical Maritime Routes Monitoring, Support and Evaluation Mechanism (CRIMSON) project which is funded by €2 million and its aim is to connect and promote understanding of all the components of the Critical Maritime Routes. The programme is currently implemented in the GoG and in the Indian Ocean.
- In 2015 the €6 million Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP), was launched with the aim to tackle illicit maritime traffic in the region.
- In December 2016 the Gulf of Guinea Inter-Regional Network (GoGIN) project was launched. This is a €9.3 million project which aims to improve safety and maritime security in 19 countries of the region.
- In 2016 the €12 million project entitled: Strengthening Criminal Investigation and criminal justice cooperation along drug trafficking routes (CRIMJUST) took place.
- In 2018 the €15 million Improved Regional Fisheries Governance in Western Africa (PESCAO) project was launched with the aim to enhance sustainable use of fishing management including IUU fishing.
- In 2019 a project of €28 million aimed to support the West Africa Integrated Maritime Security (SWAIMS) project which pays particular attention to improve governance frameworks and law enforcement, capacity and implementation.
- In 2019 €10 million of support to the Central Africa region was provided to support the programme of the Maritime Security Strategy in Central Africa which aims for cross-border maritime cooperation.
- In 2019 the €8.5 million project entitled West and Central Africa Port Security (WeCAPS) was launched, aiming to improve port security in the region of West and Central Africa.
- In 2019 the €1.88 million project tackling Ports' Customs and Operations Efficiency in African ports (IPCOEA) was launched.

In June 2021, Nigeria marked the official launch of its highly anticipated Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure, also known as the Deep Blue Project. The \$195 million Project is West and Central Africa's first comprehensive maritime security policy to combat piracy and robbery. 16 armoured vehicles for coastal patrol, two special mission vessels, 17 fast interceptor boats, two special mission aircraft for surveillance of Nigeria's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), three special mission helicopters for search and rescue operations, and four unmanned aerial vehicles are

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among the Nigerian assets that will be deployed. Six hundred well trained men make up the Maritime Security Unit.

Nigeria has also established a central command and control centre in Lagos to coordinate the efforts, which will also communicate with other regional security efforts. In this context, the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act of 2019, which has revolutionised the battle against insecurity in Nigeria's waterways, is so important. Maritime cases can now be prosecuted in court thanks to the new law. This was previously impossible due to the difficulties of obtaining evidence in court for crimes committed on the high seas⁶⁹. Moreover, the current NIMASA administration established the Maritime Intelligence Unit (MIU) with the goal of better understanding and adequately assessing the behavioural and operational trends of young people involved in maritime crime.

Furthermore, the formation of the NIMASA Joint Industry Working Group provides maritime industry operators with a regular chance to engage with the agency on matters relating to maritime safety and security. The group's monthly forum allows for open dialogue with key stakeholders such as BIMCO, INTERCARGO, and INTERTANKO, among others, to help shape policies that affect maritime security initiatives and seafarer security.

It is worth noting that since the Deep Blue Project assets were deployed in February 2021, the number of incidents of piracy on Nigeria's waterways has been steadily declining on a monthly basis. The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) report, released in July 2021, stated that piracy fell to its lowest since Q2 2019⁷⁰, however it remains the highest number in the world. The IMB had logged 26 piracy incidents in the region in 2021 as of September 24⁷¹. Finally, it seems that the international efforts have started to be fruitful against maritime incidents in the region; nevertheless, those actions need to be intensified based on the recommendations offered in Section 6 to further reduce blue crime in the region as it is more complex, here, than other regions around the globe.

⁶⁹ Jamoh, B., (16 June 2021). Deep Blue Project: Signed, sealed and delivered, The Guardian. Source: <https://guardian.ng/business-services/deep-blue-project-signed-sealed-and-delivered/>, accessed 17/10/2021.

⁷⁰ For more information on the report see <https://nairametrics.com/2021/09/28/gulf-of-guinea-piracy-un-praises-nimasa-and-fgs-effort-in-combating-piracy/>, accessed 16/10/2021.

⁷¹ For more information see 'Regional maritime security co-operation tackles Gulf of Guinea piracy' <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/regional-maritime-security-co-operation-tackles-gulf-of-guinea-piracy>, accessed 8/10/2021.



5. External actors and their support to the regional maritime capacity building

It is true that the significant efforts of the European Union's Operation Atalanta, NATO's Operation Ocean Shield, and Combined Task Force 151 are major reasons why piracy in the Gulf of Aden has nearly disappeared in the past five years. However, piracy at sea was on the rise in 2020 and increased by 20% year over year, with increasingly sophisticated and aggressive attacks. According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), 130 crew members were kidnapped in 22 incidents, with over 90% occurring in the GoG, a global pirate hotspot.

In the first half of 2021, there were 21 pirate attacks off the coast of the GoG and Gulf-adjacent countries, spanning practically every country from the Ivory Coast to Angola, according to the IMB. To help reduce this, the IMB recommends that vessels stay at least 250 nautical miles away from land at all times⁷². So far this year, the numbers have, thankfully, been lower, with the Davide B and Mozart

⁷² For more details see, Safety and Shipping Review 2021: Security and sanctions safety concerns mount, <https://www.agcs.allianz.com/news-and-insights/expert-risk-articles/shipping-safety-21-security-sanctions.html>, accessed 12/11/2021

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occurrences being the most famous. However, piracy in the region continues to be a "*severe and urgent threat to global trade and the safety of seafarers*" according to the IMO⁷³.

To this end, in August 2021 the US military held a series of exercises and a planning meeting in the GoG to demonstrate their commitment to maritime security. The activities were in support of the global initiative as well as the Nigerian government's programmes to tackle the rise in merchant ship assaults and hijackings in the region. The Expeditionary Sea Base USS *Hershel "Woody" Williams*, led the maritime security exercise with the participation of the Nigerian Navy, the Spanish Navy, and members of Ghana's Special Boat Squadron. The three-day at-sea training exercise consisted of maritime interdiction operations, visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) scenarios, fleet manoeuvring, and helicopter insertion and casualty evacuations.

The United States has maintained a maritime presence in the region under the authority of US Africa Command (AFRICOM), which regularly deploys warships in the region and organises a major annual exercise called Obangame Express⁷⁴. Washington takes a strong diplomatic role in the region as the co-chair of the G7++ in 2020, and has offered significant bilateral support to local navies.

The United States joins other members of the international community in emphasising the importance of improving regional maritime safety. France has had a long-standing presence in the region, with pre-positioned forces in Senegal, the Ivory Coast, and Gabon, as well as a constant presence at sea through "Operation Corymbe" since the 1990s. The French Navy, which deploys one or two ships in the Gulf each year, arranges three to four regional exercises each year, culminating in the Grand African Navy's Exercise for Maritime Operations (NEMO). The NEMO 2020 exercise brought together 30 ships and planes from 14 countries, including the United States.

Due to historical and commercial ties with the GoG, other European countries are also involved. Portugal and Spain maintain a strong presence at sea, while Italy, the United Kingdom, and Belgium deploy their navy occasionally. The Danish government has recently deployed a frigate to the region.

In January 2021, the European Council launched the first pilot case of the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept in the GoG⁷⁵. The CMP mechanism aims to increase the EU's capacity as a reliable partner and maritime security provider, offering greater European operational engagement,

⁷³ Marine Professional, (2021). US Navy steps in to help tackle "serious" Gulf of Guinea piracy, September 2021. Source <https://www.imarest.org/themarineprofessional/on-the-radar/6216-us-navy-steps-in-to-tackle-serious-gulf-of-guinea-piracy>, accessed 18/9/2021.

⁷⁴ For more information see <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transatlantic-approach-address-growing-maritime-insecurity-gulf-guinea>, accessed 18/10/2021

⁷⁵ Council of the European Union (2015). Council conclusions on the Gulf of Guinea Action Plan 2015-2020. Source: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21521/st07168en15.pdf>, accessed 10/10/2021

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ensuring a permanent maritime presence and outreach in Maritime Areas of Interest as established by the Council, and promoting international cooperation and partnership at sea.

As evidenced by the most recent high-profile piracy incidents, regional and international measures remain insufficient. Rising maritime insecurity in the GoG will necessitate better transatlantic collaboration, leveraging the deployment of limited naval forces, and opposing the increased influence of regional competitors like China.



6. Recommendations

Piracy is a direct or indirect result of events on land. It is, therefore, critical to recognise that if we address the situation on land, the problem at sea will be properly addressed. Some suggestions are as follows.

6.1. Local and regional level response

In the GoG, the relationship between government and piracy is crucial. Poor governance creates a toxic environment that pirates and international criminal networks can capitalise upon⁷⁶. It is critical to provide basic necessities such as food, housing, sanitation, education, healthcare and employment to the people of the region in order to ensure maritime security. It is also vital that the region's states

⁷⁶ Katherine, S., (2011). Targeting the Source. *Global Security Studies*, Vol. 2, no. 3, pp.22–29.

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establish social programmes for local populations in order to help provide employment options. As a result of such options, individuals will be less likely to engage in criminal behaviour.

The existing legal framework must be reinforced and made more effective in order to deter maritime crime. To deter people from becoming pirates, prosecution rates for these offences must increase⁷⁷.

To be effective, regional maritime security cooperation mechanisms must address concerns including low prosecution rates and ensuring that offenders do not traverse borders to avoid punishment. Such laws may need to be changed to fill in any gaps that exist.

Illegal oil bunkering is a common occurrence in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. Despite the government's and multinational oil companies' enormous financial costs, the perpetrators of this crime continue to extend their operations in the waterways. In the Niger Delta, illegal oil bunkering has become a thriving business. Different local militant groups in creeks, commodities traffickers, military people, international businessmen, and certain indigenous oil servicing corporations are thought to be involved⁷⁸. All types of offshore bunkering activities should be treated with zero tolerance. This would put an end to shady dealings with "Brent tycoons", thereby reducing vessel attacks. Legalising bunkering, as Nigeria has done, will make it difficult for security services to distinguish between legal and illicit bunkering.

As aforementioned, pirates may use fishermen for their seamanship. According to the FCWC⁷⁹ the following actions should be undertaken by governments if they want to reduce blue crime and, specifically, piracy in their waters:

- Authorities should share information on fishing vessels authorised to operate in their water.
- Adapt a national policy and legal frameworks to support regional action.
- Develop information sharing based on national interagency cooperation agreements.
- Build a national infrastructure to perform inspections and due diligence.

Those actions will help to boost both security in the area but also increase the feeling of safety for fisherman.

⁷⁷ Barla, C. and Agarwala, N., (2020). Comparing maritime piracy along the coasts of Africa: In search of a solution for the Gulf of Guinea. *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, Vol. 16, Issue 2, pp. 13-29, DOI: 10.1080/09733159.2020.1836774

⁷⁸ Bodo et al (2020). Illegal Oil Bunkering in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Challenge to Nigeria's Development, *European Scientific Journal*, October 2020 edition Vol. 16, No. 29, URL:<http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2020.v16n29p134>

⁷⁹ FCWC (Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea), (2019). Maritime security and sustainable fisheries development. Source: <https://fcwc-fish.org/resources/factsheets> , accessed 22/9/2021

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If maritime security is increased in the region, further economic activities related to the blue economy could emerge as, for example, in the cruise ship sector. The cruise ship sector in Kenya was decreased by 95% due to pirate attacks in the Western Indian Ocean⁸⁰. Cruise ship tourism in the pre-COVID-19 era in some African countries was making more than 10% of their GDP (e.g., Seychelles, Mauritius, etc.) (ibid). Therefore, increasing maritime security could release enormous potential for coastal states by developing the tourism industry.

6.2. NATO recommendations

As it is demonstrated in Figure 3, when military operations were conducted in the region piracy attacks were reduced. As a result, NATO, which has extensive knowledge and experience in dealing with such operations, should aim to be involved in deterring piracy attacks by assuming the lead, as local agents have minimal impact on piracy management. Increased coordination and appropriate legal frameworks between countries in the region and NATO should aid in the reduction of pirate incidents at sea as well as on land⁸¹.

To combat transnational organised crime (TOC), the GoG's security agencies should aim to collaborate with NATO in security intelligence gathering techniques. To ensure an effective war against maritime insecurity, a security intelligence system that meets international quality standards is a vital tactic to apply in the prevention process. In order to anticipate potential threats to marine activities and produce threat assessments before events occur, the security intelligence system must have a method for systematic collection, collation, evaluation, analysis, and dissemination of information from a number of sources⁸².

NATO, in collaboration with regional governments could also develop bespoke training courses on cultural awareness and comprehension of the local culture, as well as improving organisations' (such as NATO, INTERTANKO, BIMKO) capacity to engage with West African communities. In addition, NATO should provide courses that focus on developing important skills and competences required to handle common maritime risks in the GoG and reflect current conditions on the ground. These training

⁸⁰ Benson, J., (2018). Africa's blue economy. Source: <https://www.stableseas.org/post/africa-s-blue-economy>, accessed 22/9/2021

⁸¹ An intense debate in Nigeria has erupted following the recent deployment of a Danish frigate on an anti-piracy patrol in Gulf of Guinea, which resulted in the death of four pirates and the capture of another four. The incident clearly demonstrated the lack of agreed legal frameworks between the local governments in the region and international partners such as NATO. See Danish Anti-Piracy Action Jolts Gulf of Guinea Maritime Leaders, *The Maritime Executive*, 5 December 2021, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/danish-anti-piracy-action-jolts-gulf-of-guinea-maritime-leaders> (accessed 23 December 2021)

⁸² Abiodun, T. F. and Dahiru, Y., (2020). Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea and the quest for security intelligence deployment in combating the menace. *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research, Social and Management Sciences*, Vol. 6, Issue 4, pp. 79-99.

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sessions are designed to improve participants' understanding of the region's maritime security concerns and the regional structures in place to enable greater collaboration and response to maritime security threats.

The GoG's littoral states must protect their internal waters and port facilities. Port officers should train to obtain an internationally recognised qualification as a Port Facility Security Officer (PFSO) from NATO countries.

The coastal states of the GOG must take strong anti-smuggling measures, with zero tolerance for such actions. Piracy in this region cannot be reduced unless the high rate of smuggling is addressed. Many abandoned vessels in the region serve as safe havens for pirates, and their removal from the waterways with the assistance of NATO must be prioritised.

Other actions that NATO and GoG states could undertake to tackle blue crime and piracy are to improve their naval capacity and organise a united maritime force.

- NATO has the ability to improve regional naval capability. The GoG's persistent volatility is also due to the inadequate capabilities of local navies and coast guards, which are ill-equipped to provide an effective deterrent, particularly beyond their territorial jurisdiction. Greater coordination of NATO effort to train and equip local navies, whether ships or maritime surveillance platforms, would benefit both parties (e.g., radar, drones). Drones, it has been asserted, can play a critical role in detecting pirate skiffs, attempting to stall them and, ultimately, preventing them from boarding⁸³.
- Organise a united maritime force. NATO should better coordinate their deployed fleets and coast guards, which generally operate in tandem, diminishing their impact and resulting in redundant or needless training provisions. Europeans have begun to prepare the groundwork for a more coordinated involvement of their ships under the European Union-led "Coordinated Maritime Presences" project. For example, the possibility of establishing a NATO permanent naval presence in São Tomé and Príncipe with the installation of an Over-the-horizon radar (OTH) should be explored with the authorities of this strategically located island. As the area of the GoG is large, the deployment of advance technologies (drones and OTH radars) for monitoring in the region is essential. Not only is the adoption of such technology

⁸³ Watanabe, K., Takashima, K., Mitsumura, K., Utsunomiya, K. and Takasaki, S., (2017). Experimental Study on the Application of UAV Drone to Prevent Maritime Pirates Attacks' TransNav. International Journal on Marine Navigation and Safety of Sea Transportation, Vol 11, Issue 4.

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suggested as a "best management practice" in the fight against piracy, it also helps to prevent piracy by allowing local authorities to monitor vessels⁸⁴.

Lastly, NATO⁸⁵ must rethink its role in combating transnational crime and piracy.

NATO will not always take the lead in addressing these issues, but it can play a critical role in facilitating and supporting national and multilateral initiatives and authorities. It has been proven that NATO was highly effective in combating piracy and maritime crime off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. A similar strategy should be considered to alleviate the instability in the GoG's waterways.

7. Conclusion

Although international cooperation offers the potential of improving maritime security in the GoG, this paper argues that a number of obstacles must be overcome, some of which require special attention. Given the socioeconomic conditions in the GoG, where several countries rank towards the bottom of the global development index, international collaborations should make a significant contribution to capacity and capability development. Because most piracy is transnational, regional coordination is critical, and individual states must resolve sovereignty issues. Furthermore, officers in charge of security intelligence in the state agencies should be taught and retrained on a regular basis, particularly in intelligence analysis and strategic intelligence. There is no doubt that technology can also play a critical role in countering maritime piracy. To this end, drones and over-the-horizon-radar must be tested and deployed to monitor the movement of oil vessels, since this will be crucial if executed correctly. It is also important that the GoG states' navies, coast guards, and maritime law enforcement agencies should conduct joint maritime operations on a regular basis, including with global partners, to standardise operational procedures, training standards, and develop interoperability. Piracy appears to have declined significantly in several regions of the world in recent years. However, it appears to have risen in the GoG, particularly in Nigeria, which is alarming for the maritime environment and the international community. When attempting to solve Nigeria's piracy problem, it is critical to tackle corruption, poverty and young unemployment. Threats to maritime security are multifaceted. They can not be dealt with only by military will or firearms. They necessitate precise and coordinated actions as well as tactical flexibility. Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea also demonstrates how seemingly local politics can have far-reaching global implications. This highlights

⁸⁴ BMP4, (2011). Best Management Practices for Protection against Somalia Based Piracy. Source: https://eunavfor.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/bmp4-low-res_sept_5_20111.pdf, accessed 15/11/2021

⁸⁵ For more details on this statement and NATO's maritime strategy, see Horrell, S., Nordenman, M. and Slocombe, W., 2016. *Updating NATO's Maritime Strategy*. Atlantic Council, accessed 11/11/2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/updating-nato-s-maritime-strategy/>

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the fact that maritime insecurity will have to be viewed as a problem that requires continuous international attention and response.

