Forum: United Nations Security Council

Issue: Pirate activity in the Gulf of Guinea

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Introduction

Along the coast of West Africa, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has become a complicated and enduring problem, resulting in an unstable marine environment. An increase in pirate occurrences has taken place in the region, characterised by a range of criminal acts directed towards cargo boats. These assaults have affected fishing boats, cargo ships, and oil tankers. They typically involve kidnappings, robberies, and hijackings. It is well known that the Gulf of Guinea is among the riskiest seas for sailors and maritime traffic. Weak maritime law enforcement skills, economic challenges, and political instability all play a part in the increase of piracy in the region.

Pirates using skiffs for more strategic and swift attacks

The political environments of the coastal nations are frequently marked by instability and problems with governance, serving as an oasis for criminal organisations. Economic hardships and wealth gaps add to the desperation that pushes some to turn to piracy as a source of income. Furthermore, pirate organisations are able to operate in the Gulf of Guinea with a fair amount of impunity due to the absence of efficient law enforcement and navy patrols.

The pirates frequently use cunning strategies, such as the employment of guns, speedboats, and occasionally even cooperation with dishonest officials. Beyond just causing short-term financial losses, piracy also affects regional stability and international commerce routes. International and regional initiatives have been made to prevent piracy in the Gulf of Guinea in response to this growing menace.

Increased naval patrols, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building programs are examples of collaborative activities aimed at strengthening the impacted nations' maritime security capabilities. The difficulty nevertheless exists in spite of these initiatives, highlighting the necessity of long-term and all-encompassing plans to deal with the underlying reasons of piracy and improve security in this crucial maritime route. The threat of piracy has cost the region lives, stability, and over $1.9 billion in financial losses every year.

Definition of Key Terms

Piracy

Piracy is the act of theft performed by attacking ships. Piracy is still alive in many maritime regions including the Gulf of Guinea. Piracy usually takes place in order to steal natural resources such as oil and gas which are transported through the region.

Gulf

A gulf refers to a very large area of sea which is surrounded by a coast on three sides. In the context of this agenda item, the Gulf of Guinea is a very important zone for shipping of oil, gas and goods from central and southern Africa.
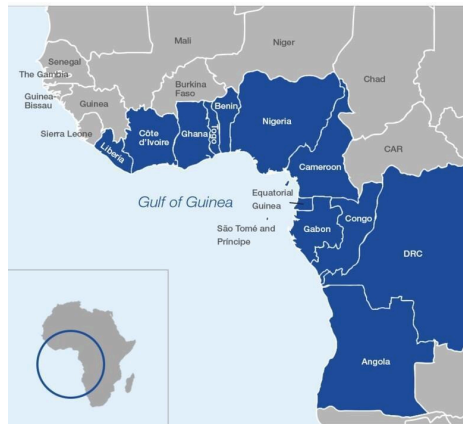
Maritime Security

Maritime security refers to national security on a maritime level. This may relate to the security of goods entering the country by the sea, and the protection of ships from terrorism and piracy

Littoral state

Littoral states are states which border the sea. In this case the states relevant to the issue will mostly be states littoral to the Gulf of Guinea.

Background Information

Historical context

The Gulf of Guinea, which is home to 11 nations, including five major fuel producers and 8 with known oil reserves, was named the world's most hazardous maritime region in 2020. The image is a result of attacks on oil tankers, which have increased dramatically in the last several years. incidents that many of the region's governments are still finding difficult to contain. Following the lead of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), maritime piracy arose with the first armed insurgency activities against the Nigerian federal government and oil firms in the Niger Delta. The Gulf of Guinea is also a very important zone for international fishing.

Benin, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Togo, and the archipelago of Sao Tome and Principe collectively account for over 45 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's GDP, with a total GDP of $866.343 billion in 2021. Important interests are at stake in the region for Angola, Cameroon, Senegal, and Nigeria, the uncontested economic superpower of the continent. International investors are becoming aware of Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Togo as emerging economic hubs. The area has abundant natural resources, fisheries, and hydrocarbon reserves. The region has surpassed the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden, where Somali pirates formerly operated, to rank among the global hotspots for maritime piracy during the past 15 years. A change of circumstances led to a sharp rise in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea as conditions on the east coast improved. Attacks using weapons, hijackings and boarding of ships, kidnappings, and crew member assassinations increased in frequency. Out of the 135 marine kidnappings that occurred globally in 2020, 130 of them happened in the Gulf of Guinea, which is a record number for the area. In addition to these additional assaults, the area was responsible for 95% of abduction cases and nearly half (43%) of all recorded pirate occurrences worldwide in the previous year.

Piracy in the area first began in the 1980s but only became a global issue around 2011, and the attacks reached an all time high when 996 sailors got attacked.

Main causes of the piracy

While it is argued that the piracy in the region occurs for the sole reason that any crime occurs. However, there has been discussion in literature, especially coming from local NGOs and activist groups, as to what the real cause of the issue is. With advanced military gear, armed organisations are active in the region. The organisations are also well-versed in the delta, where they engage in brigandage primarily targeting oil assets, including pipeline sabotage. However, the majority of their activities occur in international seas. Other residents of the Delta see them as a bunch of "Robin Hoods," and others even lend their support to the organisations because they agree with their fight for a more equitable sharing of the oil bonanza. A local chief claims that since fishing and farming are the only jobs available to young people in the area and are now hindered by oil spills, maritime piracy is becoming more and more of a necessity. In June 2013, a regional initiative on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea was launched at the Yaoundé summit, which brought together the countries of the region, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC). The primary target of pirates in the Niger Delta is medium-sized tankers that come to take supplies off the Nigerian coast. While hijacking of tankers is one of the most well-known activities, kidnapping of crew members continues to be the largest and most profitable. The summit outlined a distinct division of labour between the states in charge of operations and the regional organisations in charge of strategy. Subsequent conferences and meetings have transpired, and the choices made during the Yaoundé summit are currently being executed. To try to stop the occurrence, an international force has been organised and is now stationed in the Gulf. The French Navy established it.

Current situation

Currently the situation continues to be as big of a threat as it has been for the past decade, which shows that the past solution attempts have not been successful. The EU's involvement and launched programmes, as well as the surveillance programmes launched by Nigeria have been the biggest efforts to combat the issue. Piracy in the area continues to take away huge revenues from the countries in the area, lowering the standard living quality of the civilians in the area.

Countries and Organisations Involved

Nigeria

Nigeria generates more than half of the regional GDP and has half of the region's population. Up to 80% of Nigeria's budgetary income and 95% of its foreign exchange gains come from oil. The region's most significant sector has been under danger from transnational organised crime for the past 20 years. Nigeria continues to be among the world's poorest nations, with oil earnings of US$ 52 billion in 2011. The country is ranked 156th out of 187 in terms of human development. If there was no ongoing criminal exploitation of the oil business, revenues would be substantially greater. Nigeria has previously adopted the Falcon Eye unit in its navy which plays a big part in the area's maritime surveillance.

Somalia

Somali coasts have been targets of piracy for many years, even prior to the gulf of Guinea. Beyond the Gulf of Aden and Somalia, Somali pirates are now active in the southern Red Sea, the east coast of Oman, the Bab el Mandeb Straits, and further and deeper into the Indian Ocean. Pirate incidents off the coast of Somalia have only been curbed, but the underlying reasons of piracy— The issues of weak governmental land management, a lack of legitimate economic possibilities, and a lack of the rule of law remain unresolved. Thus, should naval patrolling diminish, piracy off the coast of Somalia may quickly rise once more. Even if the central governments of most West African nations have not collapsed as severely as that of Somalia, the state has not been present in most coastal areas long enough to establish a monopoly on violence.

Benin

Due to its close proximity to important shipping waterways, Benin is especially vulnerable to maritime crime. The waterways surrounding the nation have been designated

as a hotspot for piracy, with pirates frequently focusing on hijackings, kidnappings for ransom, and the theft of precious goods. Crew member kidnappings have been a frequent technique, which makes Benin's security issues worse. As a result, Benin and its neighbours have coordinated their efforts to combat piracy by taking part in cooperative patrols and regional campaigns. The country has concentrated on developing its law enforcement and navy capacities in order to enhance its ability to combat piracy and to support wider initiatives to improve maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Ivory Coast

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and off West Africa has reduced dramatically since its peak in 2020-21, when pirates regularly targeted commercial ships, bulk carriers, cargo ships, and their crews. However, Ivory Coast has fallen victim to highjacking of this sort twice in 2023, after pirates hijacked a tanker off Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo, on March 25.

Timeline of events

2008	Operation Atalanta was launched when the crisis was at its worst (Somali piracy) , by the EU as a joint effort of its Member States in support of UN Security Council Resolutions to combat Somali piracy at its source.
2010 to 2013	A rise in piracy cases occurred in the Gulf of Guinea which alarmed the global public.
2013	The Yaoundé Code of Conduct, which drove a decline in West and Central African piracy and charted a course for what transnational security collaboration can accomplish around the continent, was adopted.
2015	In order to combat piracy and other marine crimes, Nigeria formed the Falcon Eye unit of the Nigerian Navy, which is

specialised to maritime surveillance.

2018   Reports of incidents in the waterways between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Ivory Coast more than quadrupled, explaining six global hijackings, 13 of the 18 ships that were fired upon, 130 of the 141 hostages seized worldwide, and 78 of the 83 seafarers who were kidnapped for ransom.

Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions

Security Council resolution 2634 (2022)

The resolution, which called on Member States in the Gulf of Guinea region to criminalise piracy and armed robbery at sea under their national laws and to look into, prosecute, or extradite those who commit these crimes, as well as those who incite, finance, or purposefully facilitate them, was unanimously adopted by the Security Council. In its decision, the 15-nation body also called on Member States in the Gulf of Guinea area to respond quickly, both nationally and regionally, to requests from the relevant State, and to do so with the assistance of the international community. Additional provisions emphasised the need for national maritime security plans to be created and carried out in compliance with international law.

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_RES_2634.pdf

Security Council resolution 2039 (2012)

Highlights the need for the Gulf of Guinea States, through ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the GGC, to work toward holding the scheduled joint summit of Gulf of Guinea States in order to develop a regional anti-piracy strategy in collaboration with the African Union. This summit will be crucial in addressing piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea. Builds on previous initiatives, such as those carried out under the auspices of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), by encouraging the States of the Gulf of Guinea, ECOWAS, ECCAS, and GGC to establish and implement transnational and transregional maritime security coordination centres encompassing the entire Gulf of Guinea region.

https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/UNOCA%20SRES%202039.pdf

Security Council report 31 May 2022

According to the Secretary-General's assessment, problems with timely and efficient information dissemination, insufficient personnel, a lack of suitable equipment, logistical assistance, and predictable and sustainable finance had all contributed to the implementation of the Yaoundé Architecture's setbacks. In order to realise the full potential of the architecture, which is hindered by an unclear division of labour within its regional structures, he proposed that nations that have ratified the Yaoundé Code of Conduct should offer additional strategic guidance through the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The study emphasised that sustained efforts were needed to maintain the progress and avoid a regression.

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Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The Yaoundé Code of Conduct

Gulf of Guinea nations ratified the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in 2013. The purpose of this regional agreement was to improve marine security by means of collaboration, exchange of information, and coordinated actions among the participating governments. In order to combat piracy and other marine crimes, the Code of Conduct places a strong emphasis on cooperative measures including naval patrols and capacity building.

EIMS by ECOWAS

In an effort to strengthen marine security in the area, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) created the EIMS as a comprehensive plan in 2014. This plan calls for utilising institutional capacity building, legal frameworks, and coordinated actions to combat piracy, illicit fishing, and other marine hazards.

Possible Solutions

The main cause of piracy in the area is governmental corruption and lack of a judiciary system which would hold the said people accountable for their actions and attacks. Another very striking and obvious cause would be the economic disparities the civilian population in the area is faced with which pushes them to these extremist activities. Addressing the root causes of piracy, which include poverty and lack of economic opportunities, and promoting sustainable development initiatives in coastal communities in order to resolve this will help limit the cases of piracy as well as encourage the involvement of local communities in anti-piracy efforts to create a sense of ownership and cooperation.

Collaboration between countries in the region is key to achieve a solution which will equally benefit from. This may be similar to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct which encouraged regional cooperation. Such agreements may promote more collaborative maritime operations in the region rather than individual ones similar to ones done by Nigeria. encouraging Gulf of Guinea nations to work with foreign fleets, organisations, and stakeholders to combat piracy through intelligence exchange, cooperative patrols, and capacity building. It will also be more than adequate to establish a framework for international naval cooperation in the area to support regional initiatives.

Increasing naval patrols and presence in piracy-prone areas will help deter criminal activities. Investing in maritime surveillance technology, such as radar systems and satellite monitoring, will help enhance the ability to detect and respond to potential threats. Similarly, investments on the ends of the private petrol companies and commercial naval crafts will aid to keep the goods transported safely on their ends.

Providing law enforcement and navy personnel in the region with training and capacity-building initiatives would help them become better equipped to respond to maritime threats. Improving the coast guards' and maritime security forces' ability to board ships, carry out patrols, and handle emergencies. Additional funding from the government will make this feasible.

Strengthening domestic legal frameworks and establishing effective legal mechanisms for the prosecution of pirates, including cooperation in the arrest and extradition of suspects, supporting and encouraging regional efforts to establish specialised maritime courts to handle piracy cases will help resolve the judiciary aspect of the issue at hand.

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