Securing the Gulf of Guinea: Evaluating Nigeria's Anti-Piracy Initiatives for Enhanced Maritime Governance

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Abstract

Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) has long been a pressing concern; threatening regional security and economic stability. Nigeria, located at the epicentre of pirate activities, has taken decisive steps to combat this menace and enhance maritime governance. This paper delves into Nigeria's comprehensive efforts in countering maritime insecurity and assesses the sustainability of its ongoing counter-piracy measures. By examining normative frameworks, operational mechanisms and regional collaborations, this research sheds light on Nigeria's achievements and challenges in enhancing maritime governance. The findings underscore the crucial importance of dedicated resource allocation and of robust inter-agency collaboration and cooperation, both domestically and internationally, as key success factors in curbing maritime criminality in the GoG. Nonetheless, the findings also emphasize the necessity of avoiding redundancy in maritime surveillance systems and an overly militarized approach to piracy threats, and of probing the root causes of criminality. It raises policy-relevant questions about the sustainability of these measures and their contribution to the GoG's maritime security. This study provides valuable insights into effective maritime governance in the GoG; offering practical lessons for countries grappling with similar challenges.

Keywords: Maritime governance, Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria, Anti-piracy measures, Regional security.

Introduction

Between 2008 and 2021, Nigeria attracted global attention as the hotspot for pirate activity in the world.[1] However, the latter part of 2021 saw this apprehension transform into a cautiously optimistic outlook with headlines that were more positive. Indeed, piracy was gradually adjusting into a detrimental pattern within the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) maritime domain; mirroring the recurring violent incidents where prioritizing symptom management took precedence over tackling the underlying causes.[2] Extensive literature has explored the latter issues, often linking them to poverty and grievances, especially among Niger Delta residents. In response to the continuous exploitation and degradation of their environment due to crude oil production activities, some have turned to militancy as a means to retaliate against government complicity and secure a means of livelihood. For instance, it is recorded that nearly seven decades of oil exploration with its attendant oil spills and gas flaring has transformed the Niger Delta into one of the most polluted places on earth.[3] Faced with increasingly desperate prospects, many young men in the Niger Delta have turned to militant violence.[4]

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) characterizes GoG pirates as encompassing a spectrum of riverine, coastal, low-reach, and deep offshore operatives.[5] They document the methods these pirates employ and their extensive networks, which often involve collaboration with both local communities and corrupt state officials.[6] This has resulted in about 648 kidnap for ransom cases leading to high insurance premiums for ships traversing the GoG maritime domain.[7] The destabilizing effects of the practice of kidnap for ransom on regional security and the lack of a common position on it regionally, has also been highlighted in some literature.[8] The UNODC further estimates the annual amount of ransom paid for the release of abducted seafarers at about USD 4 million.[9]

Piracy in the GoG also leads to a sequence of indirect costs including financial damages to coastal economies caused by the threat of piracy and by the imposition of counter-piracy measures. In this respect, the indirect costs to the region include reduced shipping traffic to high-risk areas, increased cost of shipping insurance premiums—with the latter raising the import bill and hampering the export competitiveness of both coastal and inland states—and decreased fishing activity.[10]

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[1] The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) records within this period indicate that Nigeria was the epicentre for pirate activities.

[2] The Gulf of Guinea (GoG) region is a 6,000 km coastal stretch from Senegal in West Africa to Angola in Central Africa.

[3] Alozie, Modesta T, "Niger Delta: Young Men Face Exclusion and Violence in One of the Most Polluted Places on Earth," The Conversation, August 10, 2020, https://theconversation.com/how-young-people-in-the-niger-delta-are-being-left-out-of-development-143642

[4] Alozie, "Niger Delta."

[5] This classification explains the nature and reach of pirates in the Niger Delta who operate at three levels around rivers or the sea as follows: the first level is along the inland rivers in the country; the second along, the coast around anchorages; and the third, on the high seas.

[6] "Pirates of the Niger Delta: Between Blue and Brown Water," UNODC Maritime Crime Global Programme, 2021, https://www.unodc.org/res/piracy/index_html/UNODC_GMCP_Pirates_of_the_Niger_Delta_between_brown_and_blue_waters.pdf

[7] Afua Lamptey and Frank Okyere, "The Political Economy of Maritime Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea: Dissecting the Kidnap for Ransom Menace," KAIPTC – Danish Maritime Security Project, March, 2022, https://kaiptc-danishmaritimesecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/The-Political-Economy-of-Maritiem-Piracy-in-the-Gulf-of-Guinea.-Dissecting-the-Kidnap-for-Ransom-Menace-3.pdf

[8] Lamptey and Okyere, "Political Economy."

[9] UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme, "Pirates."

[10] "Situation of Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea in the Gulf of Guinea and its Underlying Causes: Report of the Secretary General," United Nations Security Council, 2022, https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2F2022%2F818&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False

Exploiting weaknesses in response mechanisms within the region, pirates have posed significant threats to the economies, livelihoods and overall security of the area. In 2010, the then-President of Benin, Yayi Boni, appealed to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for assistance in repelling pirates who were targeting the nation's free ports.[11] Notably, the inception of the Yaoundé Architecture in 2013 has played a pivotal role in shaping collective efforts to address maritime challenges in the GoG. As the necessary structures have been established, encompassing political, strategic, regional, multinational, and national dimensions, the GoG region, at least in theory, seems well-positioned to significantly reduce maritime insecurity within its waters.

Nigeria has taken concrete steps to transform these theoretical aspirations into operational frameworks, primarily through the concerted efforts of its Navy and the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). These agencies have assumed leadership roles in spearheading endeavours to combat maritime criminality in the country. These efforts have, since late 2021, yielded a noticeable decrease in piracy attacks across the region; prompting questions by industry observers and stakeholders about the reasons behind the reduction in piracy, and the methods responsible for this substantial decline. This paper provides some answers to these questions by examining Nigeria's specific actions in response to the piracy challenge. Drawing upon a review of existing literature and insights gained from interviews with key officials from Nigeria's maritime agencies, notably the Nigerian Navy and NIMASA, the paper posits that enhanced maritime governance can indeed play a pivotal role in bolstering maritime security within the GoG. The paper is structured as follows: the first section sets the stage by providing an overview of the context in which maritime piracy arises. The second section offers a concise evaluation of the maritime security threats that have confronted Nigeria with a focus on the past decade; illustrating trends and delineating the impact of piracy incidents within the GoG. Following

this, the third section appraises the countermeasures implemented to combat maritime piracy. The fourth section briefly analyses the sustainability of these countermeasures. Finally, the fifth section of the paper concludes by summarizing key findings and proffering recommendations aimed at enhancing maritime security in the GoG.

Contextualizing the Origins of Maritime Piracy in Nigeria

Maritime piracy is not new to the GoG region, as maritime trade is a key source of income for the coastal states of West and Central Africa and, similar to oil, is subject to predation.[12] Before 2008, most incidents had been nothing more than maritime robbery, but this has evolved over the years to piracy with its associated kidnapping for ransom. Nigeria, as the regional hegemon in West Africa and with a population of over 200 million people, ranks 163 out of 191 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),[13] which is a contradiction given its huge potential for growth and development. The country relies primarily on oil exports through the GoG maritime corridor for much of its revenue and foreign exchange earnings. However, maritime threats cost it an estimated USD 26.3 billion annually.[14] Nigeria, until recently, also accounted for 75 per cent of crimes in terms of incidents in the GoG; particularly, piracy.[15] The relative on-shore permanence of piracy can be traced to the continued underdevelopment of the Niger Delta Region as persistent pollution of the Niger Delta, lack of infrastructure, schools, jobs, and electricity has often been highlighted in the literature.[16] This lack of improvement has become a legitimating factor or motivation for individuals to engage in piracy, especially, as this is juxtaposed with the proliferation of weapons in the Niger Delta, which enables violent criminal enterprises in the region.[17]

In West Africa, sophisticated piracy both preys upon and arises from the formal economy; specifically, the international oil industry.[18] As a result, piracy networks often mirror and draw from the formal institutions in Nigeria—both those used to regulate and protect

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[11] This plea triggered a series of resolutions, frameworks and engagements aimed at addressing the piracy threat.

[12] "Transnational Organised Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment," UNODC, February 2013, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West_Africa_TOCTA_2013_EN.pdf

[13] "Human Development Report 2021/2022. Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping our Future in a Transforming World," UNDP, 2022, https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf_1.pdf

[14] Freedom C. Onuoha, "Nigeria's Ambitious New Maritime Security Project Must Avoid Old Traps," The Conversation, July 21, 2021, https://the conversation.com/nigerias-ambitious-new-maritime-security-project-must-avoid-old-traps-163989

[15] "Nigeria Accounts for 75% Crime in the Gulf of Guinea —FG," Nigerian Tribune, May 18, 2021, https://tribuneonlineng.com/nigeria-accounts-for-75-crime-in-the-gulf-of-guinea-fg/

[16] Ifesinachi Okafor-Yarwood and Maisie Pigeon, "Stable Seas: Gulf of Guinea," Stable Seas, April 16, 2020, https://www.stableseas.org/post/stable-seas-gulf-of-guinea

[17] Okafor-Yarwood and Pigeon, "Stable Seas."

oil production, and those engaged in oil production, processing, distribution, and transportation.[19] Pirates are, therefore, economic actors engaged in a perverse form of rent-seeking economic activity. In so doing, they are constrained by the formal and informal institutions that govern and make up the "legitimate" political economy.[20] In this regard, some scholars contend that it is not poverty that explains maritime piracy in the Niger Delta, but political corruption and the oil wealth that attracts all sorts of miscreants—blue and white collars alike.[21]

Thus, both the criminalization of politics and the politicization of crime have contributed to the modernization of maritime piracy in the Niger Delta.[22] On the one hand, the struggle for regional control of oil resources is certainly political, as the militants advocate the so-called derivation principle and oppose the "federal character" of the Nigerian Republic, whereby richer states (in the South) are supposed to fund poorer ones (in the Muslim North).[23] On the other hand, nobody can deny the criminal dimension of fighters who are made-up of sea robbers, street gangsters, and mafia-like 'cultists' belonging to secret societies. By all standards, the population of the region is richer than the inhabitants of the Sahel in Northern Nigeria. Yet, if poverty was a proper explanation, then countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mozambique should also record high levels of maritime piracy, which is not the case. In the same vein, one could argue that wealth does not always attract pirates, as in Angola, where oil production is mainly off-shore and more difficult to reach.[24] Still, greed and frustration can go together with political grievances, in explaining modern piracy.

Indeed, impunity and the diversion of public funds are the heart of the matter. Corruption, thus, explains why "increasing decentralization of oil wealth and rapid economic growth spurned by the rising prices of crude oil since 1999 have failed to bring peace and security to the people of the Niger Delta."[25] Revenue allocation has undeniably, remained consistent and contentious as ever. The people of the Niger Delta Region have always hinged their quest for accelerated development on the formula for sharing national revenue and have argued for the derivation principle.[26] A system of revenue distribution exists whereby the Federal Government transfers some petroleum revenues to all the 36 states and 774 local government councils in the country.[27] Under this arrangement, an attempt is made to pay 13 per cent of petroleum revenues into the derivation fund for oil-producing states, as stipulated by the 1999 Constitution.[28] However, the fate of revenues and the derivation fund have continued to be sources of controversy and tension between the Federal Government and state governments. The issue is not really whether the 13 per cent of oil revenue is adequate or not but rather, what is more important is the question of how funds allocated have been used.[29] The problem is that regional governors have not been transparent and accountable; highlighting the challenge of poor local governance.[30]

Maritime piracy and violence in Nigeria are intricately tied to political dynamics and the exploitation of oil resources. Elections serve as a catalyst with politicians supporting armed groups to suppress opposition, as witnessed in 2003 and 2007.[31] After elections, those in power allegedly divert public funds for personal gain while their criminal backers turn to piracy under the guise of 'freedom fighting.'[32] Some pirates cite illegal foreign fishing and oil pollution as motivations, as these factors disrupt their livelihoods.[33] Additionally, attacks on offshore targets often result from grievances against oil companies failing to honour agreements with coastal

[18] Justin V. Hastings and Sarah G. Phillips, "Maritime Piracy Business Networks and Institutions in Africa," *African Affairs* 114, no. 457 (2015): 555-576.
[19] Hastings and Philips, "Maritime Piracy Business Networks."
[20] Hastings and Philips, "Maritime Piracy Business Networks."
[21] Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "Maritime Piracy in Nigeria: Old Wine in New Bottles?," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, nos. 7-8 (2012): 531-541.
[22] Pérouse de Montclos, "Maritime Piracy in Nigeria."
[23] Pérouse de Montclos, "Maritime Piracy in Nigeria."
[24] Pérouse de Montclos, "Maritime Piracy in Nigeria."
[25] Pérouse de Montclos, "Maritime Piracy in Nigeria."
[26] Oluwasuji C. Olawole, "National Question, the Niger Delta and the Politics of Revenue Allocation in Nigeria," *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science* 6, no. 7 (2018): 19-33.
[27] Olawale, "National Question."
[28] Olawale, "National Question."
[29] Olawale, "National Question."
[30] Olawale, "National Question."
[31] Akinsola Jimoh, "Maritime Piracy and Lethal Violence Offshore in Nigeria," IFRA-Nigeria — Nigeria Watch, June 30, 2015, http://www.nigeriawatch.org/media/html/WP2Jimoh.pdf
[32] Jimoh, "Maritime Piracy."

communities. This intersection of politics and crime has driven the modernization of maritime piracy. Another economic challenge contributing to maritime piracy is the Government's mismanagement of oil wealth. Despite abundant petroleum resources, this wealth has not translated into essential conditions for citizens' economic potential. Further, it is estimated, that more than 80 per cent of oil and gas revenues benefit just one per cent of the population, leaving 90 per cent with only 20 per cent.[34] This wealth inequality underscores the concept of 'resource control' and fuels piracy in the region.

The Heart of the Matter: Trends in Maritime Piracy in Nigeria

In March 2023, just a month after Exercise Obangame Express[35] 2023, Nigeria marked one year since the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) removed it from the list of piracy-prone countries.[36] This feat followed the IMB's Global Piracy Report of July 2022, which revealed Nigeria's lowest recorded piracy and sea robbery levels in 27 years.[37] The country had been a hotspot for piracy, mainly originating from its Niger Delta Region; evolving from maritime muggings to petro-piracy and maritime kidnapping for ransom since the early 2000s.[38] Between 2010 and 2020, the IMB recorded 600 piracy attacks, resulting in 648 kidnap-for-ransom cases, mostly linked to Niger Delta pirates.[39] Figure 1 maps the trends in both actual and attempted piracy incidents in the GoG's 429 nautical mile (nm) coastline.

Figure 1: Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Domain: 2010-2022
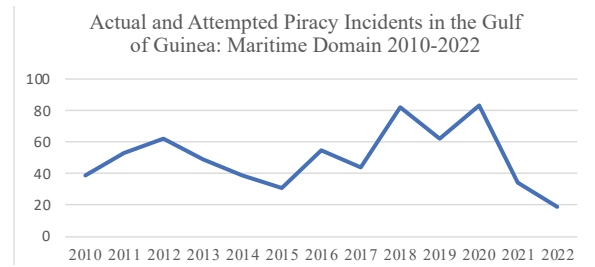
Source: IMB data compiled by author

The IMB data reveals a significant decline in pirate activities within the GoG since 2021. In 2021, Nigeria accounted for 17 per cent of reported incidents compared to 42 per cent in 2020, and notably, there were no reported incidents in 2022. Overall, IMB data indicates a 40 per cent reduction in piracy and armed robbery incidents across the region. A noteworthy shift is that, in 2021, most incidents occurred within anchorages, ports and harbours; emphasizing the need for heightened security management in these areas.[40] Figure 2 illustrates the piracy incident trends in Nigeria since 2010.

Figure 2: Piracy Trends in Nigeria: 2010-2022
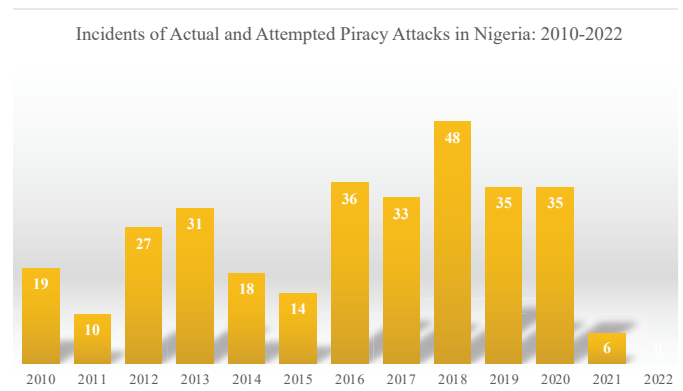
Source: IMB data compilation by author

The decrease in piratical activity has also resulted in a corresponding significant improvement in crude

[33]Pérouse de Montclos, "Maritime Piracy in Nigeria."

[34]Kiana Wilburg, "Eighty Percent of Nigeria Energy Revenues Only Benefit One Per Cent of the Population," Kaieteur News, January 1, 2020, https://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2020/01/01/80-percent-of-nigeria-energy-revenues-only-benefit-1-of-its-population-world-bank-finds/

[35]The Obangame Express is a maritime exercise (led and sponsored by the United States Africa Command) conducted at sea which is geared towards improving cooperation among participating nations in order to increase maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea.

[36]Aanu Adegun, "Maintaining Nigeria's Momentum in the Fight Against Maritime Criminality by Musa Ilallah," Legit, March 17, 2023, https://www.legit.ng/nigeria/1525741-maintaining-nigerias-momentum-fight-maritime-criminality-by-musa-ilallah/

[37]Adegun, "Maintaining Nigeria's Momentum."

[38]Lamptey and Okyere, "Political Economy."

[39]International Maritime Bureau (IMB) 2010 to 2020, data compiled by the author.

[40]"Nigeria to Implement IMO Whole of Government Approach to Maritime Security Programme to Build on Progress Made," IMO, November 9, 2021, https://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/PressBriefings/pages/IMOWholeof-Government-Approachto-MaritimeSecurity.aspx

[41]Adegun, "Maintaining Nigeria's Momentum."

oil production.[41] Weeks after the March 2022 IMB announcement on Nigeria exiting the Piracy List, the Nigerian Navy launched one of its biggest operations in years—*Operation Dakatar Da Barawo* (stop the thief)—aimed at curbing crude oil theft and vandalism in the creeks of the Niger Delta.[42] The Operation, launched in partnership with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation Limited (NNPC), recovered more than NGN 80 billion worth of stolen petroleum products with hundreds of arrests made.[43]

Maritime Governance in Nigeria

Nigeria has adopted a top-down approach to maritime governance, exemplified by three distinct strategies. Firstly, it has enacted comprehensive maritime security frameworks. Secondly, it has allocated resources to strengthen maritime infrastructure. Lastly, Nigeria has actively engaged in regional and international collaborations. This section aims to underscore significant facets within these three domains.

Maritime Security Frameworks

Nigeria has committed to various international and regional maritime governance frameworks, alongside the establishment of crucial national frameworks. The country ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1986, but it was not until 2019 that UNCLOS was explicitly integrated into domestic law through the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act 2019. However, this Act primarily provides an overarching framework without addressing specific UNCLOS provisions; leaving room for further clarification and improvement by signatory states.[44]

Following from above, Nigeria's National Maritime Security Strategy (NMS) seeks to emplace a framework for exploiting the opportunities for national wealth creation, while overcoming the inherent challenges in the maritime environment.[45] The NMS was initiated in 2016 in light of the complexity of Nigeria's maritime space. It presents for the first time, in a single codified strategic document, all of Nigeria's national maritime aspirations, interests, strategic vision and objectives of sea use as well as the foremost imperative of wealth creation using Blue Economic principles. It also contains a Strategy Implementation Plan and Schematic, which is crucial to the overall implementation of the NMS. The Harmonized Standard Operating Procedures on Arrest, Detention and Prosecution of Vessels and Persons in Nigeria's Maritime Environment (HSOP) is another key document that addresses the issues of overlap of responsibilities of agencies as well as provides a consolidated guideline for harmonious management of arrests, detention and prosecution of vessels and suspects as well as seizure and forfeiture.[46] Under the terms of the HSOPs, agencies are guided by Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on how to coordinate inter-agency operations; thereby, avoiding duplication and reducing judgement debts incurred as a result of infractions of human rights. In the HSOPs, the Nigerian Navy and the Nigeria Police Force have the mandate to intervene directly in piracy and or armed robbery at sea, with the Navy taking the leading role and handing them over to the police afterwards. Nevertheless, the HSOPs have been criticized for having no legal potency or operational clarity. This is because it has been argued that different statutes regulate the operation of different agencies; thus, a proper attempt to harmonize rules will be based on an appreciation of the similarities and differences of the statutory provisions governing detention, which apply to each of the relevant agencies—an area in which the HSOPs unfortunately falls short.[47] Nonetheless, they serve some useful purpose in reducing turf wars somewhat, and allowing the different maritime agencies to be aware of the area of responsibilities of their sister agencies.

The development of effective legal frameworks applicable to maritime crime prosecution is fundamental to the delivery of maritime security governance in the GoG.[48] Therefore, the framework on the SPOMO Act of 2019 is critical to ensure a legal finish to maritime crimes. It aims to prevent and suppress piracy, armed robbery and other unlawful acts against a ship, aircraft and any other maritime craft, however propelled, including fixed or floating

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[42]Adegun, "Maintaining Nigeria's Momentum."

[43]Adegun, "Maintaining Nigeria's Momentum."

[44]Ekundayo O. Babatunde and Mutiat M. Abdulsalam. "Towards Maintaining Peacefulness of the Sea: Legal Regime Governing Maritime Safety and Security in Nigeria," *Beijing Law Review* 12, no. 12 (2021): 529-559.

[45]Nigeria Maritime Security Strategy 2019.

[46]Emeka Akabogu, "Nigeria: Ship Detention Gone Rogue: A Critique of the "HSOP" for Ship Arrest and Detention," Mondaq, February 22, 2018, https://www.mondaq.com/nigeria/marine-shipping/675910/ship-detention-gone-rogue-a-critique-of-the-hsop-for-ship-arrest-and-detention

[47]Akabogu, "Nigeria: Ship Detention."

[48]Naila Salihu and Kwaku Danso, "Ensuring Effective Prosecution of Maritime Crimes in the Gulf of Guinea: A Focus on Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone," KAIPTC – Danish Maritime Security Project, March, 2022, https://kaiptc-danishmaritimesecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Ensuring-Effective-Prosecutin-of-Maritime-Crimes-in-th-GoG.-A-Focus-on-Cote-dIvoire-and-Sierra-Leone.pdf

platforms. Nigeria is the second GoG Member State, after Togo, to have a single-standing local legislation on ocean piracy. The Act gives effect to the provisions of the UNCLOS of 1982 and the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA) of 1988 and its Protocols.

Table 1: Selected Maritime Security Frameworks in Nigeria

No.	Name	Year	Details
1	National Security Strategy	2014 and 2019	Aims broadly at ensuring that Nigeria's sovereignty, territorial integrity, national interests, the well-being of its people, and its institutions are preserved, protected and enhanced
2	Harmonized Standard Operating Procedures on Arrest, Detention and Prosecution of Vessels and Persons in Nigeria's Maritime Environment (HSOP)	2016	Provide a consolidated guideline for harmonious management of arrests, detention and prosecution of vessels and suspects as well as seizure and forfeiture
3	Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act	2019	Seeks to prevent and suppress piracy, armed robbery and other unlawful acts against a ship, aircraft and other maritime crafts, howsoever propelled, including fixed or floating platforms; it provides a legal framework for the prosecution of piracy and other maritime crimes
4	National Maritime Strategy	2019	Aims at improving maritime value creation and ensuring Nigeria's emergence as a globally recognized maritime hub, where all clusters of maritime activities and their inter-dependencies are domiciled in country
5	Deep Blue Project	2021	Seeks to prevent illegal activities in the Nigerian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), enforce maritime regulations, enhance safety of lives at sea, and prevent illegal activities in the inland waterways

Source: Compilation by author

Challenges

As a stand-alone law that operates independently of other domestic laws such as those governing firearms, kidnapping and money laundering, the SPOMO's effectiveness is limited in the face of evolving crimes like piracy; thus, also making complying with international conventions such as UNCLOS and SUA difficult. Another challenge with the SPOMO Act is its lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities. Section 17(3) states: "law enforcement and security agencies" will be responsible for gathering intelligence, patrolling waters and investigating offences but the law is not specific on which law enforcement agencies are responsible for these functions—an oversight that may deepen inter-agency rivalry. Still, there is the challenge that the Armed Forces Act of 1993 makes the Nigerian Navy responsible for securing the country's maritime domain. Yet, Section 17(1) and (2) of the SPOMO Act seems to have tasked NIMASA with coordinating all maritime activities and security including "to prevent and combat piracy, maritime offences and any other unlawful acts prohibited by this Act." Most fundamentally, the law does not deal with proceeds from piracy, kidnapping and armed robbery at sea. Although it provides, as punishment, the forfeiture to the Federal Government of Nigeria of whatever the person obtained or gained from commission of the crime, this may not be an adequate deterrent.

Notwithstanding these few challenges, the SPOMO Act positioned Nigeria as the first country in the GoG to prosecute pirates. However, maritime courts dedicated to a fast and speedy resolution of such cases will also be very critical going forward together with the accelerated training of judges and magistrates in maritime security. It is important to note that the establishment of maritime courts has been mentioned in the country's maritime security strategy. Violators found guilty of offences under the Act will receive punishments from the Federal High Court of Nigeria, including fines of up to NGN 250 million, life in prison and restitution to the owner. In accordance with the SPOMO Act, 10 pirates were apprehended on July 15, 2019, and each was sentenced to 10 years in prison and NGN 200,000 by the Federal High Court of Nigeria in Ikoyi, Lagos, for stealing the Chinese fishing boat FV Hai Lu Feng II in May 2020.[49] They were arraigned under the SPOMO Act and found guilty of three crimes related to piracy. In some cases, piracy in Nigeria involves armed robbery at sea and kidnapping crew for ransom. In July 2020, the Deep Blue Project (DBP) along with NIMASA arrested nine persons in connection with the kidnapping of the crew of MV Elobey VI off the coast of Nigeria.[50] They were ordered to pay a fine of NGN 20 million each

under the new Act.[51]

Building and Resourcing Maritime Infrastructure

Normative frameworks often suffer from a common issue—they remain mere documents on paper; lacking real-world impact. Frequently, there is inadequate commitment and a shortage of resources, both human and material, dedicated to translating these frameworks into operational structures on the ground. Therefore, effective policy frameworks necessitate not only sufficient resources but also political determination to implement challenging decisions.[52] As stated earlier, in Nigeria, two agencies—NIMASA and the Navy—are spearheading maritime security in the country. In this vein, the DBP has been established under the Federal Ministry of Transportation and the Federal Ministry of Defence. Implemented by NIMASA with participation from the Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Army, Nigerian Air Force, Nigeria Police Force, and the Department of State Services, the DBP seeks to prevent illegal activities in the Nigerian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). It also hopes to enforce maritime regulations, enhance safety of lives at sea and prevent illegal activities in the inland waterways. In February 2022, the Federal Government added the Secure Anchorage Area (SAA), off the coast of Lagos, to the areas under the protection of the DBP.

The DBP has three categories of platforms to tackle maritime security—land, sea and air. The land assets are as follows: the Command, Control, Communication, Computer, and Intelligence Centre (C4i) for intelligence gathering and data collection; 16 armoured vehicles for coastal patrol; and 600 specially trained troops for interdiction, known as the Maritime Security Unit.[53] The sea assets include two Special Mission Vessels and 17 Fast Interceptor Boats. The air assets comprise the following: two Special Mission Aircrafts for surveillance of the country's EEZ; three Special Mission Helicopters for search and rescue operations; and four Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. Figure 3 provides a pictorial representation of the DBP.

Figure 3: The Deep Blue Project
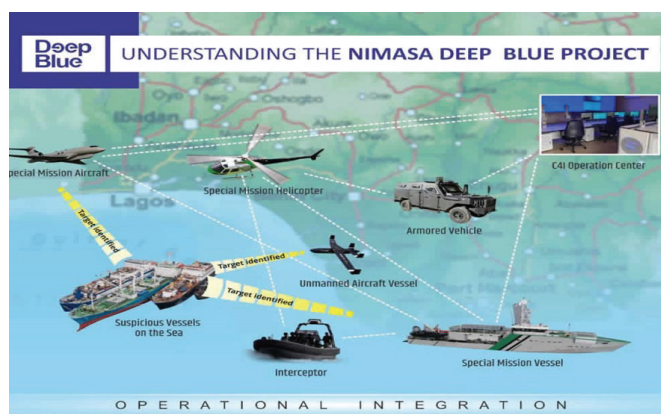
Source: NIMASA

The DBP assets are deployed to prevent pipeline vandalism, oil theft, illegal bunkering, arms smuggling, drug trafficking, human trafficking, and illegal fishing. They are also expected to be deployed for pollution prevention and control in the Nigerian maritime environment. The Project, in line with the country's total spectrum maritime security strategy, is anchored on four pillars—namely; situational awareness, response capability, law enforcement and local partnerships, and regional cooperation. According to the Director General of NIMASA, Dr. Bashir Jamoh:

> With the deployment of the assets of the Deep Blue Project, we are entering another level of national security designed for total spectrum maritime security and better domain awareness using some of the latest technology. This effort to secure our waters would give Nigerians more leverage to harness the enormous resources of our maritime environment and aid the drive towards economic diversification.[55]

The DBP is the first integrated maritime security strategy in West and Central Africa with the aim of tackling the incidences of piracy, sea robbery and other crimes at sea. As also highlighted by then-President Muhammadou Buhari during the commissioning of the DBP:

> The Deep Blue Project is coming at a time the globe has become concerned about piracy and maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea. This project displays the concerted efforts to

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[49]Bashir Jamoh, "Pirates' Conviction: Triumph of SPOMO Act," The Guardian, July 28, 2021, https://guardian.ng/business-services/maritime/pirates-conviction-triumph-of-spomo-act/

[50]Philip Kyanet, "Antipiracy War: Nigeria Secures Premier Conviction under SPOMO Act," August 12, 2020, https://nimasa.gov.ng/antipiracy-war-nigeria-secures-premier-conviction-under-spomo-act/

[51]Kyanet, "Antipiracy War."

[52]Emma Birikorang, "Transforming for Effectiveness: The Defence Sector and Maritime Insecurity," KAIPTC – Danish Maritime Security Project, March, 2022, https://kaiptc-danishmaritimesecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Transforming-for-effectiveness_the-Defense-sector-and-maritime-insecurity.pdf

[53]Focus group interview with Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) Deep Sea Blue Project (DBP) staff, Lagos, November, 2022.

[54]Focus group interview with NIMASA DBP staff.

guarantee security and it is a demonstration of the government's resolve to diversify the nation's economy and harness Blue economy potentials. The 195million USD project is a testament to the strong determination of the country's leadership to end the piracy scourge in Nigeria.[56]

As intimated above, policy frameworks with dedicated resources and political will, as well as strong inter-agency collaboration is key to efforts at maritime governance in the GoG. The political will has fed into dedicated resources seen in the commissioning of logistics, such as ships, to support the Navy achieve its statutory responsibilities.[57] Inter-agency collaboration is demonstrated by the concerted action[58] by leaders of the Navy and NIMASA in particular, which has been instrumental in Nigeria's current ongoing gains in reducing maritime piracy, especially in its waters. As noted from the Navy:

> A renewed leadership and a change of baton in January 2021 of the Chief of Naval Staff from Vice Admiral Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas to Rear Admiral Auwal Zubairu Gambo[59] led to new strategies. Coupled with the strong support from the former President more than ever before, past efforts and ongoing strategies have coalesced to ensure good progress at sea.[60]

President Buhari also inaugurated the Falcon Eye Maritime Domain Awareness System—another maritime security project built by the Office of the National Security Adviser at the naval headquarters in Abuja in June 2021. The Falcon Eye uses a number of electro-optic systems and cameras, operated from a command centre, to detect and pinpoint vehicular and human movements. Nigeria's system has a range of up to 35 nm from the coast and uses six electro-optical stations to monitor vessels, aircraft and offshore platforms.[61] The Nigerian Navy continues to collaborate with NIMASA to deploy and effectively put to use the assets of the DBP across the South West, Central and Eastern Zonal operations to enhance patrol of the Nigerian maritime domain.[62] The Nigerian Navy's increased naval patrols as a result of investments in more ships, has also had a deterrent effect on maritime piracy in the GoG. This is in tandem with improved cooperation with regional counterparts.

The DBP appears to be the game changer in this sense as it includes maritime security platforms that facilitate rapid response to piracy, kidnapping, oil theft, smuggling, trafficking of drugs and in persons, and other crimes within Nigeria's territorial waters and the EEZ. The inter-agency approach adopted, buoyed by frameworks such as the HSOPs, has helped Nigeria's maritime actors to drive this process. For instance, several operations launched to combat maritime security threats resulted in 378 illegal refineries destroyed in 2019, 62 speedboats impounded, 463 wooden boats destroyed, and 275 suspects arrested.[63] Furthermore, increased maritime law enforcement presence in the estuary regions and enhanced intelligence and engagement with the people of the Niger Delta, are also perceived to be contributory factors to the decline in piracy in Nigeria. For example, in a Deep Blue rescue operation, the Nigerian Navy successfully released eight crew members who had been kidnapped by pirates from the container ship Tommi Ritscher in Benin.[64] On April 19, 2022 as the ship was docked in the Port of Cotonou, pirates attacked it. Additionally, 11 crew men were successfully rescued from the ship's defences and South Niger Delta-based hijackers during the rescue operation.[65]

Further, the country has equipped its Navy with additional ships and other logistics that enable them to operate and stay longer at sea. Over the last six years, the Nigerian Navy has acquired a total of 378 platforms comprising 172 patrol boats, 114

[55] Philip Kyanet, "President Buhari Launches Deep Blue Project in Lagos," Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency, [2022], https://nimasa.gov.ng/president-buhari-launches-deep-blue-project-in-lagos/

[56] Kyanet, "Deep Blue Project."

[57] Jesutomi Akomolafe, "Buhari Commissions Made-in-Nigeria Navy Ship, Others to Boost Maritime Security," The Guardian, December 9, 2021, https://guardian.ng/news/nigeria/buhari-commissions-made-in-nigeria-navy-ship-others-to-boost-maritime-security/

[58] Interestingly, the Regional Center for Maritime Security in West Africa (CRESMAO), based in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC) Zone E (covering Nigeria, Benin, Niger, and Togo)—two critical operations centres within the Yaoundé Architecture—are currently headed by Nigerian naval officers. This further strengthens the country's determination to ensure good order at sea.

[59] In October 2022, President Buhari awarded him with the National Honour of Commander of the Federal Republic (CFR), and a month later he was in Banjul, The Gambia, to receive the Award of Most Outstanding Naval Chief in Africa, presented at the 17th Edition of the Africa Security Watch Awards and Conference (ASWAC). Read more at: Adegun, "Maintaining Nigeria's Momentum."

[60] Interview with Nigerian Navy officer, Abuja, November, 2022.

[61] "Nigerian Navy's Falcon Eye Maritime Surveillance System Fully Operational," defenceWeb, June 30, 2016, https://www.defence-web.co.za/sea/sea-sea/nigerian-navys-falcon-eye-maritime-surveillance-system-fully-operational/

[62] "Deep Blue Project: Navy Affirms Deployment and Functionality," Maritime Insider, July 26, 2023, https://maritimenig.com/2023/07/deep-blue-project-navy-affirms-deployment-and-functionality/

Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boats(RHIB), two Seaward Defence Boats, 12 Manta class boats, three Whaler boats, three tugs, and two barges. Other platforms acquired included 22 fast attack boats, 14 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), four helicopters, 14 River Town class boats, 12 house boats, and four capital ships.[66] It is also important to note that Nigeria complements its externally bought fleet with locally manufactured boats. For instance, in December 2021, President Buhari commissioned a seaward defence boat NNS Oji,[67] locally made in Nigeria by men of the Nigerian Navy, and a helicopter in Lagos.[68] Thus, the culmination of unprecedented naval and maritime security investments by Nigeria through such initiatives as the Falcon Eye Maritime Domain Awareness System, C4i systems and the acquisition of several new platforms,[69] has helped enormously in Nigeria's maritime safety and security progress.

Challenges

It is worth noting that Nigeria currently appears to be operating two maritime security projects; namely—the DBP and the Falcon Eye project. As highlighted earlier, these initiatives were inaugurated by former President Buhari in 2021 and both aim to address similar maritime security challenges but fall under different agencies; specifically, NIMASA and the Nigerian Navy. While there have been discussions regarding the integration of these projects through information-sharing arrangements, they still remain distinct endeavours with unique designers and manufacturers; creating challenges for seamless integration.[70] The Falcon Eye project, originating in Israel and developed by Asia Global Technology, was manufactured by Falcon Eye Technology in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).[71] Yet, the DBP was constructed with the assistance of a foreign private company—HLS Limited.[72] This dual-platform approach presents challenges due to the existence of two separate systems and it is essential to consider potential turf wars between the two agencies involved.

Another issue of interest is how the DBP was funded from the Cabotage Vessel Financing Fund (CVFF) that was created under the Coastal and Inland Shipping Act, otherwise known as the Cabotage Act of 2003, to promote indigenous tonnage.[73] The Fund provides for a two per cent contribution by ship owners involved in the coastal and inland shipping trade in Nigeria.[74] It was set up so that Nigerian ship owners could borrow money from the Fund at single digit interest rates to acquire vessels for Cabotage trade. However, despite presidential approval granted for the disbursement, a member of the House of Representatives in December 2021 accused the then-Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Amaechi, and NIMASA of diverting USD 195 million from the CVFF to fund the DBP without approval by the House. This is against the fact that no ship owner has been able to borrow from the Fund for the almost two decades of its establishment.[75] This raises some questions about the allocation and sustainability of the DBP evidenced in an appeal from NIMASA itself in 2023 to the Federal Government to review the modalities for raising the funding needed to sustain the safety of the nation's waterways; noting that the cost of keeping the personnel operating the DBP assets alone is already impacting heavily on NIMASA.[76] Citing previous examples under the Olusegun Obasanjo[77] and the Goodluck Jonathan[78] administrations, where monies meant for fighting maritime security did not achieve its intended purposes, it is a real concern that the DBP may meet a similar fate.[79]

Collaboration and Cooperation with Partners

At the regional level, the Yaoundé Architecture processes have been instrumental in guiding maritime security operations and fostering collaboration within the 26-member countries and at the regional and international level, since its inception in 2013. One notable example of successful cooperation under

[63]defenceWeb, "Falcon Eye."

[64]defenceWeb, "Falcon Eye."

[65]'Kidnapped crew of Tommi Ritscher freed", Jasmina Mandra, May 27, 2020, https://www.offshore-energy.biz/kidnapped-crew-of-tommi-ritscher-freed/

[66]Guy Martin, "Nigerian Navy Records Substantial Number of Recent Acquisitions," defenceWeb, April 8, 2021, https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/nigerian-navy-records-substantial-number-of-recent-acquisitions/

[67]NNS Oji was built by engineers of the Nigerian Navy and is the third of its series to be indigenously built at the Naval Dockyard Limited after NNS Adoni and NNS Karaduwa, which were built in 2016.

[68]Akomolafe, "Made-in-Nigeria Navy Ship."

[69]This includes a brand-new hydrographic survey ship—NNS LANA—as well as a new warship—the Landing Ship Tank (LST) NNS KADA—whose inaugural operational assignment was a mission to Guinea Bissau to support the ECOWAS Stabilization Force there, in August 2022.

[70]"Navy's Falcon Eye: The Duplication of Nigeria's Maritime Security Project," Business & Maritime West Africa, June 10, 2021, https://businessandmaritimewestafrica.com/navys-falcon-eye-the-duplication-of-nigerias-maritime-security-project/

[71]defenceWeb, "Falcon Eye."

[72]"Amaechi, NIMASA Diverted $195m from CVFF to Deep Blue Project Reps," Ships & Ports, December 17, 2021, https://shipsandports.com.ng/amaechi-nimasa-diverted-195m-from-cvff-to-deep-blue-project-reps/

the Yaoundé Architecture occurred in May 2020, when a Chinese fishing trawler, FV Hai Lu Feng II, was hijacked in the Ivorian EEZ. Multiple GoG states collaborated; enabling the Nigerian Navy to intercept the vessel approximately 140 nm south of the Lagos Fairway Buoy. Subsequently, the suspects were charged under the SPOMO Act. The alert about the attack was raised by local authorities and coordinated information-sharing facilitated the Nigerian Navy's swift response. Nigeria's legislative and procedural enhancements played a vital role in ensuring a successful legal and operational outcome.

Another case, which occurred in August 2022, involved the interception of a Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC) named the MT Heroic Idun; preventing its unauthorized entry into an active Nigerian oil field. Through collaborative efforts with Nigeria's regional partners via the Yaoundé Architecture, the Nigerian Navy alerted Equatorial Guinea; leading to the arrest of the vessel within the latter's waters. Subsequent investigations led to the ship owners paying a substantial fine. Equatorial Guinea then handed over the vessel to the Nigerian Navy, which repatriated it to Nigeria for legal proceedings. The case was tried in a Federal High Court in Port Harcourt;[80] resulting in conviction fines, restitution to the Nigerian Government and public apologies through print and electronic media, including the Lloyd's list. As part of a plea bargain and after fulfilling conditions, including the apology, the vessel and its 26 crew members, detained for over nine months, were released on May 26, 2023.[81] This exemplifies the country's vigilance and the willingness of regional actors in the GoG to support initiatives aimed at maintaining maritime order and security.

Nigeria and the Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé have also tried to pioneer efforts to galvanize regional and international efforts for security in the GOG. The recently floated Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum and Shared Awareness and De-confliction[82] (GOG-MCF/SHADE)[83]

in 2021, is a case in point. The GOG-MCF/SHADE is purposed to facilitate shared awareness and de-confliction of activities in the GoG. It is supposed to be open to all GOG countries with similar capacities to join on a voluntary basis. The focus on counter-piracy and armed robbery hopes to bring together regional, international, industry, and non-governmental organizations (NGO) to advance and coordinate near-term maritime activities with a view to working toward a set of common operational objectives in order to protect seafarers and ships operating off the coast of West and Central Africa.[84] Still, this partnership seems to be fixated only on piracy and armed robbery and could perhaps take a broader outlook on maritime crimes in the GoG.

At the international level, the European Union's (EU) Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) in the GoG has contributed to addressing the security challenges in the region by enhancing coordination between Members States' assets operating in this area and fostering cooperation with the coastal states and the organization of the Yaoundé Architecture to tackle piracy and criminal activity at sea. When reports of pirate attacks come through, it is relayed to the nearest ship which then follows up to the affected vessel. Up to four EU Member States' naval assets are regularly deployed in the region concurrently. Nonetheless, the withdrawal of the Danish Frigate Esbern Snare from the GoG for another mission in Ukraine in February 2022, in response to a request from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to resolve the conflict in Ukraine, was not well received, particularly by the Nigerian Navy. This follows an earlier incident involving the controversial interdiction of pirates near Nigerian waters by the Danish Frigate in 2021, where four of the suspected pirates were killed and another four arrested without much recourse to the Nigerian Navy or Yaoundé Architecture structures.[85] This 'faux pas' has strained diplomatic relations between both countries. Despite the above, the CMP has supported GoG countries

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[73]Ships & Ports, "Amaechi, NIMASA Diverted $195m."
[74]Ships & Ports, "Amaechi, NIMASA Diverted $195m."
[75]Ships & Ports, "Amaechi, NIMASA Diverted $195m."
[76]Amaka Anagor-Ewuzie, "Deep Blue: NIMASA Seeks Funding to Sustain Security on Nigerian Waters," Business Day, January 4, 2023, https://businessday.ng/maritime/article/deep-blue-nimasa-seeks-funding-to-sustain-security-on-nigerian-waters/
[77]The Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Amaechi, under the Olusegun Obasanjo administration was accused of spending between USD 300 million and USD 400 million on equipment for fighting maritime insecurity with nothing to show for it.
[78]Similarly, the Goodluck Jonathan administration used the public-private partnership model. It committed resources towards acquisition of assets to fight maritime insecurity; but, it was not sustainable.
[79]Onuoha, "New Maritime Security Project."
[80]Adegun, "Maintaining Nigeria's Momentum."
[81]Obinna Nwaoku, "FG Releases Prosecuted 3m Litres Crude Vessel to Owners after Out-of-Court Settlement," The Guardian, May 29, 2023, https://guardian.ng/news/fg-releases-prosecuted-3m-litres-crude-vessel-to-owners-after-out-of-court-settlement/

in deterring pirate activities even though concerns remain about their exclusive focus on maritime piracy to the neglect of other maritime crimes. Further, there are reports of the CMP choosing which cases to intervene in, when they are contacted.[86] With an extension of their presence to 2024 and the EU thinking of expanding this concept to other hotspots across the world, it is hoped that deeper engagement with GoG countries will ensure they respond to the broader needs at sea such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and marine pollution.

Nigeria continues to collaborate with other international organizations such as the UNODC through the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme (GCMP), which was instrumental in the formulation of the SPOMO Act as well as the NMS. Other interventions include the installation of a Ship-in-a-box[87] in Lagos to support Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) training in partnership with the Nigerian Navy and funded by the Danish Government. This is in addition to the Danish Government's regional support to criminal justice systems in responding to the threat of maritime crime in selected countries in the GoG, including Nigeria, and support to the training of maritime actors through organizations such as the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC)[88] and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).[89] The UNODC, in partnership with the United States, has also organized training programmes for selected judiciary and maritime agencies. These programmes focused on international legal frameworks on piracy and maritime crime with investigating, prosecuting and adjudication of piracy and other maritime related offences as well as the need to forge regional cooperation among nations in the GoG.[90] The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has also supported Nigeria in the development of its NMS.

[82]This follows discussions between the Director General of NIMASA, representing Nigeria, and the Executive Director of Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) Yaoundé, Admiral Narciso Fastudo Jr

[83]"ICC Yaoundé and Nigeria Announce New Framework to Tackle Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea – GoG-MCF/SHADE GoG," Maritimafrica, April 26, 2021, https://maritimafrica.com/en/icc-yaounde-and-nigeria-announce-new-framework-to-tackle-maritime-insecurity-in-the-gulf-of-guinea-gog-mcf-shade-gog/

[84]"The Launch of Nigeria's Comprehensive Maritime Security Strategy," ARX Mouldings, May 17, 2021, https://arxmouldings.com/the-launch-of-nigerias-comprehensive-maritime-security-strategy/

[85]"Danish Frigate Withdraws from Gulf of Guinea to Confront Rebels in Ukraine," EyeWitness News, [February 18, 2022], https://theeyewitnessnews.com/2022/02/18/danish-frigate-withdraws-from-gulf-of-guinea-to-confront-rebels-in-ukraine/

[86]Interview with maritime expert, Abidjan, April, 2023.

[87]This concept allows for the building of a ship and for the simulation of activities on the sea, for training purposes.

[88]Since 2019, the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), with funding from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has run a series of interventions in the GoG region including in Nigeria, where technical meetings and capacity building programmes have been held in collaboration with the Nigerian Navy and NIMASA to train national maritime actors in Lagos, Nigeria.

[89]The Danish Government is also supporting regional maritime policing in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo through a new partnership with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

[90]"UNODC Train Prosecutors of Maritime, Drug Crimes," The Nation, January 29, 2016, https://thenationonlineng.net/unodc-train-prosecutors-of-maritime-drug-crimes/

Sustaining Anti-Piracy Interventions

To ensure effective countermeasures against maritime piracy, Nigeria must prioritize social cohesion through equitable policy implementation. Failing to address the complex socio-economic and governance issues previously outlined, which are prevalent in Nigeria, may undermine the efficacy and sustainability of anti-piracy efforts. It is not sufficient to merely displace piracy into neighbouring waters, Nigeria must secure the southern Niger Delta Region currently providing havens for pirates. Additionally, the underlying conditions driving individuals toward piracy in these areas require targeted interventions and resolution.[91] In this sense, targeting vulnerable populations in interventions such as that done by NIMASA through the Nigeria seafarers programme for the youth, which seeks to tackle unemployment, should be commended. This has resulted in the sponsorship of a number of youths in overseas training programmes in India, Egypt and Greece. This NIMASA initiative, handpicks over 1000 youths per year from areas prone to maritime piracy;[92] working to address socio-economic factors that contribute to piracy and maritime security issues such as unemployment, poverty, lack of education opportunities, etc. There has also been a positive impact from an ongoing maritime education programme to provide alternate employment opportunities and scholarships for the youth in the affected areas. By training these individuals as future seafarers, fishers, maritime personnel, and marine litter marshals, the programme creates economic opportunities as well as addresses the maritime skills gap.[93]

Moreover, it is crucial to maintain sustainable practices in oil extraction that minimize environmental degradation. In this regard, oversight of maritime-related operations and business practices is essential. Notably, Nigeria's House of Representatives is closely monitoring the DBP. The House of Representatives Committee on Public Procurement and Committee on Public Petitions have conducted two investigations so far and have not identified any irregularities in the contract or the contractors' conduct.[94] This oversight ensures accountability in the implementation of the DBP. It is essential to recognize that addressing maritime piracy requires collective efforts—no single state can tackle this challenge in isolation. GoG states should leverage their oil wealth to address issues like unemployment, poverty and deprivation; particularly, in riverine communities where maritime threats often originate.[95] What is more, it is vital to avoid an overly militarized approach to countering maritime piracy, which may overlook the underlying drivers of piracy. Ensuring accountability and sustainability in current initiatives coupled with a deeper understanding of the broader criminal environment, will greatly contribute to maintaining the progress achieved in maritime security.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Maritime piracy in the GoG has been inimical to the economies of littoral countries with Nigeria's Niger Delta at the epicentre of maritime piracy for close to two decades. Against the background of unsustainable oil exploitation, poverty and unemployment, some citizens have responded adversely to eke out an existence by indulging in oil theft and vandalism as well as armed robbery and maritime piracy. Since the second half of 2021, a combination of international, regional and national efforts has contributed to a reduction of maritime piracy, particularly in Nigerian waters. The country has shown a strong determination to rid itself of this menace by improving their normative frameworks, maritime operations and investing in the relevant logistics and infrastructure such as the Falcon Eye project and the DBP. Based on the analysis presented, it is evident that political commitment, targeted resource allocation and effective inter-agency collaboration, both domestically and internationally, are pivotal in mitigating maritime criminality in the GoG. However, it is essential to exercise caution to prevent redundancy in maritime surveillance systems and an excessive reliance on military measures to address piracy threats. It is equally important not to overlook the underlying socio-economic and structural factors that enable criminal activities in the maritime domain.

Moreover, it is imperative to involve a broader spectrum of stakeholders in anti-piracy efforts as well as addressing maritime insecurity holistically. This should encompass civil society organizations (CSO), women's groups and the media, to enhance transparency and accountability. Furthermore,

[91]Amaka Anagor-Ewuzie, "Explainer: What is Deep Blue Project," Business Day, June 10, 2021, https://businessday.ng/maritime/article/explainer-what-is-deep-blue-project/
[92]Focus group interview with NIMASA DBP staff.
[93]IMO, "Whole of Government Approach."
[94]Dan Udoh, "Nigeria's Deep Blue Project Deserves Applause, Not Query," Vanguard, February 20, 2022, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/02/nigerias-deep-blue-project-deserves-applause-not-query/
[95]Freedom C. Onuoha, "Piracy and Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Nigeria as a Microcosm," Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, June 12, 2012, https://studies.aljazeera.net/sites/default/files/articles/reports/documents/201261294647291734Piracy%20and%20Maritime%20Security%20in%20the%20Gulf%20of%20Guinea.pdf

addressing any existing challenges in cooperation, coordination, and information-sharing with international partners, is vital. Consideration should also be given to the implementation of an annual African military exercise at sea; complementing donor-led initiatives. Additionally, enhancing the capabilities of African navies to sustain maritime presence is crucial for effective maritime security. Littoral states in the region must also collaborate effectively, not only in countering offshore piracy but also in addressing onshore drivers of piracy. Similarly, strengthening regional frameworks and establishing a system of collective security are paramount to achieving lasting maritime security in the GoG.

About the Authors

Afua Lamptey is a Senior Researcher at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC). Her research expertise and publications are in the areas of armed violence reduction, maritime security, border security management, gender, elections, and peacebuilding.

About the Project

The five-year project on "Integrated Responses to Threats to Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Domain in West and Central Africa (2022-2026)," is being implemented through three key approaches; namely—research, dialogue and capacity building. The project is primarily aimed at promoting a safer maritime security domain in the Gulf of Guinea. Knowledge-based products highlighting key maritime security issues are part of the research outputs in an effort to raise awareness at the policy, technical and operational levels. Overall, the project seeks to contribute to strengthened regional approaches to maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea through enhanced joined-up responses to shared threats.

About the Centre

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