

Black Gold, Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea: Daunting Task for the Navy Along the Coast of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The Gulf of Guinea (GoG) is now a hotspot for maritime piracy and armed robbery. The interest in this region is bothered on the Modus Operandi of the pirates in these waters. The attacks are well planned and executed, and though sometimes vicious, their focus is mainly on getting their hands on the ship's cargo mostly oil. The term 'Petro Piracy' has evolved because of this practice. Additionally, Pirate Action Group (PAG) attack and Kidnapping For Ransom (KFR) frequently occur in these areas. The maritime situation does not end with piracy and armed robbery alone but other acts such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, trafficking of illegal drugs, people and firearms. Keeping these sea lanes remains a daunting task for navies and coast guards in this region who have logistical challenges and technical support to effectively engage head-on with these pirates. With the recent oil finds in the Gulf of Guinea and the coast of Ghana in particular, the situation has become even more precarious as pirates in this region become better equipped and emboldened. Ghana has her oil offshore and is drilled using the Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) system. The Offloading part makes the FPSO very vulnerable to attacks by armed robbers. This paper considers the challenges faced in maritime security along this sea corridor and the efforts by the Ghana Navy, Regional and Foreign Navies in their joint coordinated strategies to curb this overarching threat.

Keywords: Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO), Gulf of Guinea, Kidnapping For Ransom (KFR), Pirate Action Group (PAG)

INTRODUCTION

The Gulf of Guinea is a vital maritime route for oil and gas, as well as cargo, between Central and Southern Africa. There are around 1500 fishing vessels, tankers, and cargo ships traveling its waters on any given day. Piracy, armed robbery at sea, seafarer kidnappings, illicit fishing, smuggling and trafficking, and transnational organized crime all pose serious threats to the Gulf of Guinea's maritime security and, as a result, the region's economic development [1].

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

According to Okafor-Yarwood, as reported by [2], fish accounts for up to 80% of the animal protein ingested by the population in the Gulf of Guinea, and is frequently the only source of animal protein consumed by coastal communities. West Africa is a hotspot for illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing around the world. Nearly 40% of the fish captured in west African waterways is illegally caught. This issue is rarely mentioned in debates about marine security in the Gulf of Guinea, but it is critical in terms of economics for West African nations, which lose up to \$1.5 billion annually due to IUU fishing [3]. The failure of states to

supervise the fishing activities of their vessels and to implement rules and regulations leads to IUU fishing. Fishing without a valid license, not documenting or communicating catch data, fishing in prohibited regions, targeting unapproved species, targeting undersized fish, and other IUU fishing behaviours are all common. IUU fishing is endemic in the Gulf of Guinea, as the UK Chamber of Shipping correctly points out, and poses a threat to local fisheries as well as the food and employment security of people in the region [4].

Petro-piracy

Petro-piracy has increased in the Gulf of Guinea due to an unregulated oil industry. Tankers carrying crude oil and gas from West Africa's hydrocarbon-rich region are being targeted by petro-pirates. Nigerian petro-pirates are responsible for the majority of attacks in the Gulf of Guinea. The Nigerian navy estimates that 200,000 barrels of crude oil are stolen each year, costing the country \$200 billion per year [5]. With the hijacking of the UK-flagged MT Barrett in Cotonou anchorage, Benin on January 10, 2018, petro-piracy, which had been inactive for the preceding two years with just two attempted hijackings for oil theft instances documented, appears to have returned to the area. Nigerian pirates kidnapped 35 sailors from vessels in the Gulf of Guinea between January and June 2018, according to research by security services firm EOS Risk Group. The survey also stated that petro-piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is unlikely to return to the levels seen between 2011 and 2013 [6].

Piracy and Armed Robbery

The current wave of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is currently centred in Nigeria, particularly the Niger Delta; but it is expanding throughout the region. Pirate organizations in the Niger Delta, according to Pigeon, are directly responsible for destabilizing Gulf of Guinea seas by targeting vessels and kidnapping crew members [2]. Piracy attacks are more common in the Gulf of Guinea during the dry season, which runs from October to March, when sea conditions are calmer. As a result, major industry associations have issued a warning to masters operating in this region, advising them to follow the BMP West Africa rules to the letter. BIMCO, ICS, INTERCARGO, INTERTANKO, and OCIMF released a joint statement on October 21, 2020, recommending vessels operating in the Gulf of Guinea to pay special attention to maritime security threats when planning their voyages [7]. In the first nine months of 2021, 97 vessels have reported incidents to the IMB PRC. In the first nine months of 2021, 28 events were recorded in the Gulf of Guinea region, including the kidnapping of one crew member and the abduction of 31 crew members in five distinct occurrences [8].

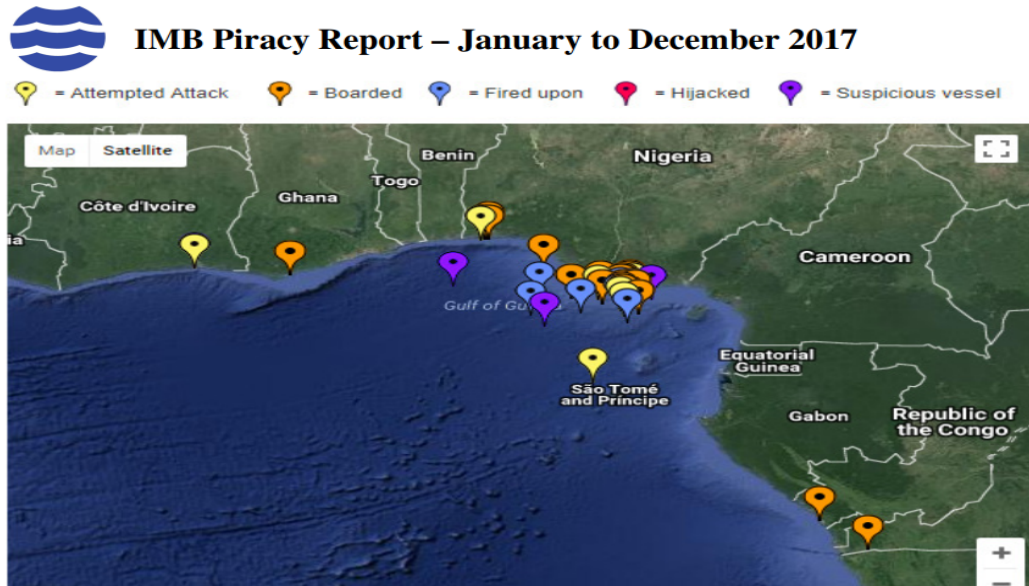
Trafficking of illegal drugs, people and firearms

Many of the Gulf of Guinea's bustling seaports are under-regulated. Corruption can erode apparent capacity, allowing smuggling avenues to establish themselves. According to UNODC estimates, 50 tonnes of cocaine worth \$2 billion that is bound for Europe passes via West Africa each year. Guinea-Bissau, sometimes referred to as a "narco-state," exemplifies the potential destabilizing effect that illegal commodities trafficking might have on West African states with low incomes and lax law enforcement [3]. The 15-member Council heard from Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), who briefed them via video teleconference from Vienna. The Office seeks to combat cocaine and heroin trafficking, migrant smuggling, piracy, and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea, with its reach extending from the sea to coast guard offices, courtrooms, and prisons. He praised INTERPOL and the

International Maritime Organization for their efforts, and asked governments to increase technical aid so that criminal kingpins can be brought to justice [9].

ACTUAL AND ATTEMPTED ATTACKS FROM 2017-2021

Fig 1



Total attacks Gulf of Guinea – 36

Source: [10]



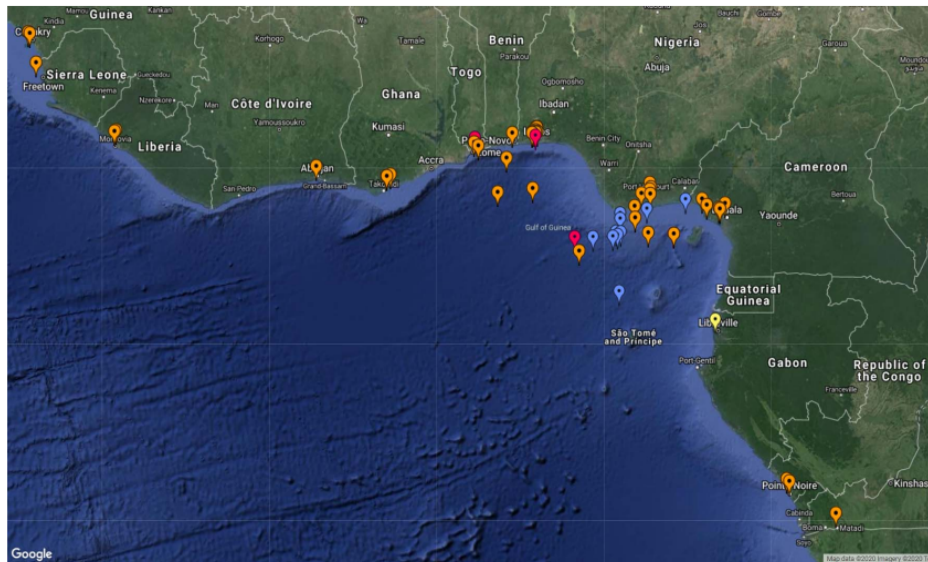
Total attacks Gulf of Guinea and neighbouring countries – 79

Source: [11]



IMB Piracy Report – January to December 2019

= Attempted Attack
 = Boarded
 = Fired upon
 = Hijacked
 = Suspicious vessel



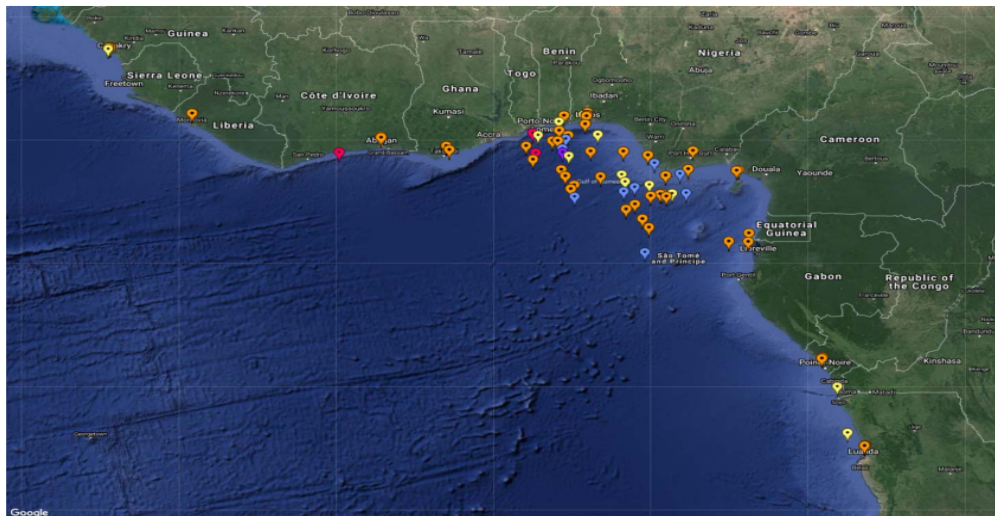
Total attacks Gulf of Guinea – 64

Source: [12]



IMB Piracy Report – January to December 2020

= Attempted Attack
 = Boarded
 = Fired upon
 = Hijacked
 = Suspicious vessel



Total attacks Gulf of Guinea – 82

Source: [13]



Total attacks Gulf of Guinea – 34

Source: [14]

THE GULF OF ADEN EXPERIENCE AND LESSONS LEARNED

For years, piracy emanating from Somalia has dominated policymakers' worries about maritime security around the world. For more than a decade, sporadic attacks on commercial vessels have occurred near the Somali coast, but concerns about the security of the busy shipping routes running across the Indian Ocean and through the Gulf of Aden grew in 2008, as the number of successful hijackings, the scope of the pirates' area of operation, and the amount demanded in ransom payments all increased dramatically [3]. According to data published by the International Maritime Organization, 11 pirate attacks occurred in the region in the first quarter of 2008, rising to 23 in the second quarter, 50 in the third, and 51 in the fourth. In total, 135 incidents occurred in 2008, resulting in the piracy of 44 ships and the kidnapping and holding for ransom of over 600 seafarers.

However, according to the IMB's Piracy Reporting Centre's Annual Piracy Report, 222 occurrences happened in East Africa in 2009. It appears that Somali pirates were responsible for 217 incidents in 2009, with 47 vessels stolen and 867 persons kidnapped. Thus, Somali pirates were responsible for more than half of the 406 episodes of piracy and armed robbery against ships reported globally in 2009 [15]. Typical attacks occur during low-light hours such as dawn or dusk, with dawn being the most common. Small open skiffs, capable of speeds of up to 25 knots, are used by the attackers. Although these craft can operate from the shore, they are increasingly being deployed from a larger mother-ship. Pirates are commonly armed with AK-47 assault rifles and RPG-7 grenade launchers, and ladders or grappling lines are utilized to gain access to the ship's upper deck. Once the pirates have successfully boarded the ship and taken control of the crew, they travel to a safe haven off the coast of Somalia run by a pirate syndicate, where a ransom is negotiated and given [16].

The shipping sector has reduced the designated High-Risk Area due to a continuous pause in recorded pirate occurrences off the coast of Somalia and the wider Indian Ocean, according to [17]. However, on the 16th of October, an Iranian warship escorting two oil tankers in the Gulf of Aden thwarted a pirate raid. This would be the region's sixth reported approach by 2021.

Most Gulf of Guinea governments' political regimes and governance differ significantly from Somalia's in that they have established rule of law, functioning state institutions, and reasonably competent governance. As a step to combat this threat, the ECOWAS, ECCAS, and GGC should increase national and regional capacity building and coordination. In addition, the deployment of private armed security professionals aboard commercial ships, as well as the participation of joint regional and international naval patrols, should be enhanced. Finally, the majority of commercial ship owners with boats transiting through the high-risk area of the Gulf of Guinea should adhere to BMP GoG as a counter-piracy tool to limit the number of occurrences in the area [3].

PREPAREDNESS OF THE GHANA NAVY TO COMBAT MARITIME PIRACY

The Ghana Navy has begun to deploy armed guards for major fishing vessels operating in the Gulf of Guinea, and has re-strategized by expanding patrols on the high seas to curtail pirate operations, according to the Chief of Naval Staff at a press conference. He went on to say that the campaign had generated some outcomes, with one of them being the incident on October 11, 2021, when two suspected pirate speed boats were fended off by armed guards about 105 nautical miles south of Aflao. Rear Admiral Yakubu said that the government had authorized a budget for the purchase of four offshore patrol vessels for the Ghana Navy, as well as four rapid patrol boats to supplement the Ghana Navy's fleet [18].

The plan is part of the government's continuous attempts to put in place a framework to handle the increase in Pirate Action Group (PAG) attacks and Kidnapping For Ransom (KFR) incidents in the Gulf of Guinea. He also stated that the government will ensure that the Naval Personnel are properly trained and cared for so that they may perform at their best and stay professional in their responsibilities [19]. To strengthen its operational competence and capability, the Ghanaian Navy has reached out to national, regional, and international security forces. The Ghana Navy's role as a model leader in the Gulf of Guinea will be bolstered by the effective integration of contemporary technologies into such a marine zone. Modern surveillance systems such as AIS, LRIT, and VTMIS, which are interoperable with other maritime surveillance systems, are available to the Ghana Navy. In accordance with the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCoC), the Ghana Navy continues to build confident control of its maritime domain, with increased capacity and competence to share information and cooperate locally and regionally [20].

THE OIL FIND ALONG THE COAST OF GHANA, FPSO AND THE NAVY'S SECURITY STRATEGY

Ghana's petroleum history may be traced back to the turn of the twentieth century. Small-scale production began in the Tano and Keta basins in the early 1900s, and the Saltpond field has been operational since the 1970s. The offshore Jubilee field, which has an estimated 700 million barrels of oil (MMbo) and 800 billion cubic feet (Bcf) of gas, put Ghana on the map as a major oil and gas producer in 2007. Tullow Oil and Kosmos Energy, a US-based corporation, partnered to produce this extraordinary find [21].

With the discovery of the offshore Jubilee field, Ghana became a full-fledged commercial oil and gas producer. The construction of the production site began immediately, and oil production began in December 2010. Since the Jubilee field began producing oil in 2010, two further offshore projects in Ghana have been developed. The first project, the Twenneboa, Enyenra, and Ntomme (TEN) fields, began production in August 2016 with an estimated 240 MMbbl and 396 Bcf of gas. The Sankofa, Gye, and Nyame fields, with an estimated 500 million barrels of oil and 1.45 trillion cubic feet of gas, began production in May 2017 [22].

The FPSO (Floating Production, Storage, and Offloading) is an offshore oil and gas asset that is used for hydrocarbon production, processing, storage, and offloading. They can be brand new or converted from tanker ships, generally VLCCs, and they run for a long time, often exceeding 20 years. Ghana currently has three FPSOs operating offshore in various oil and gas areas. The FPSO Kwame Nkrumah MV21 is moored in around 1100 meters of water on the Jubilee Field, one of the largest oil fields discovered offshore West Africa in the last decade. On November 28, 2010, it completed the maiden oil commissioning off the coast of Ghana. It has the capacity to process over 120,000 barrels of oil per day, as well as inject over 230,000 barrels of water per day and create 160 million cubic feet of generated gas per day (mmscfd). On the TEN (Tweneboa, Enyenra, and Ntomme) fields in the Deepwater Tano area, the FPSO Prof. John Evans Atta Mills is operating in roughly 1500m of water depth. In August 2016, it completed the maiden oil commissioning off the coast of Ghana. It can process over 80,000 barrels of oil per day and 180 million cubic feet of generated gas per day. On the Sankofa and Gye Nyame fields, the FPSO John Agyekum Kufuor is operating at a depth of about 1000 meters. In May of 2017, it completed the first oil commissioning off the coast of Ghana. It can process over 80,000 barrels of oil per day and 180 million cubic feet of generated gas per day. On the Sankofa and Gye Nyame fields, the FPSO John Agyekum Kufuor is operating at a depth of about 1000 meters. In May of 2017, it completed the first oil commissioning off the coast of Ghana. It has the capacity to process over 58,000 barrels of oil per day, inject over 55,000 barrels of water per day, and create 210 mmscfd of produced gas [23].

REGIONAL AND INTEGRATED APPROACH TO COMBAT PIRACY ALONG THE GULF OF GUINEA

The threat of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has been evident for some time, with attacks on ships exposing the region's lack of maritime security. The formation and action of several other regional and subregional bodies, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), The Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), and the Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA), in the fight against maritime security threats in the Gulf of Guinea, has been necessitated by this situation (De Ceita, 2020). In 2013, the IMO assisted three regional multilateral bodies (ECOWAS, ECCAS, and GGC) in passing the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, which aims to create shared maritime domain awareness among regional states through enhanced information-sharing in order to combat maritime security threats in the Gulf of Guinea. This was the East African analogue of the Djibouti Code of Conduct, which was passed to combat maritime piracy and violent robbery on ships in the Gulf of Aden.

According to Decis Hugo (2020), efforts to share information include the establishment of regional centres such as the West African Regional Maritime Security Centre (CRESMAO) in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, and the Central African Regional Maritime Security Centre (CRESMAC) in

Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo, which are coordinated through the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé, Cameroon. In June 2014, the African Union (AU) approved the African Integrated Maritime Security Strategy (AIMSS) 2050. Through efforts to establish plans and formulate policies are underway, the process continues to be hampered by a lack of resources. ECOWAS has established a comprehensive and coordinated marine policy, however its implementation is hampered by a lack of resources [25].

THE INFLUENCE OF FOREIGN NAVIES IN THE GULF OF GUINEA AND JOINT STRATEGIES TO CURB THIS MENACE

Several warships from outside the Gulf of Guinea region have committed their help to regional fleets in the battle against maritime insecurity. This includes everything from training missions, technical help to local navies, to diplomatic actions in the region's coastal governments. Denmark, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America are among these countries [26]. The European Union (EU), which established the Critical Maritime Routes Gulf of Guinea (CRIMGO) program to complement regional anti-piracy operations, has lent its political and financial support to the execution of the various maritime security systems. The G7++ Group of Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (G7++FoGG) formed with the main purpose of supporting the Yaoundé, maritime architecture in 2013 have played a pivotal role in the fight against maritime piracy and insecurity. The local navies within the Gulf of Guinea region are highly under resourced and this makes the fight against maritime piracy, armed robbery and other threats even more difficult. America and Europe have helped in the fight by stationing state-of-the-art warships on the high seas to operate in the Gulf of Guinea region [2]. The French government has shown its committed to helping fight the maritime threats in the Gulf of Guinea by not only deploying warships in targeted areas but also stationing some military groups in vantage areas such as Gabon, Senegal and Cote D'Ivoire. Almost every year, the French navy deploys one or two ships to engage in about three or four joint regional military exercises in the Gulf of Guinea region and this has given birth to an annual exercise called the Grand African Navy's Exercise for Maritime Operations (NEMO). The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) tasked with the mission of counteracting transnational threats and strengthening security forces to promote regional security have maintained a long-standing commitment in this fight. Annually, the US AFRICOM organizes a joint regional military taskforce exercise called the Obangame Express where warships deployed are used to bolster the training of local navies [27].

The Chinese government have also contributed their quota in the fight against maritime threats in the Gulf of Guinea but not from the multilateral perspective. Instead, China has been active on the bilateral front in terms of anti-piracy drills and broadly defined military support, with the purpose of bolstering neighbouring countries' capabilities. For the first time in 2014, the Chinese Navy showed their presence in the Gulf of Guinea after a joint anti-piracy taskforce exercise which included the local navy from Nigeria and Cameroon [28].

CONCLUSION

The economic activities in terms of oil finds along the Gulf of Guinea brings to the fore challenges of maritime security to enable a safe corridor in these waters and the smooth execution of maritime trade. The awareness to protect these waters has been created by foreign navy powers like France, the United States and China all of who have varied economic interest in this region. These joint naval exercises though helpful is not the remedy as the regional

navies are ill resourced and lack coordination through minimal information sharing though there set institutions that have to do so. The Ghana Navy by virtue of the oil fields along its Western Coastline needs to be very vigilant as all indications from arrest of pirates show the used of sophisticated firearms and long-range communication devices. The four rapid patrol boats procured by the Ghana Navy from Israel is a step in the right direction to argument its fleet and add the necessary fire power to combat and acts by pirates or armed robbers.

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