



# Special Report: Piracy in Gulf of Guinea

Persistent Attacks Prompt Increased Regional  
and International Initiatives

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## Introduction

The Gulf of Guinea experiences the highest number of maritime armed robberies throughout the world. The Gulf now exceeds the number of recorded cases in the coastal waters of the Horn of Africa, which were considered to be highly volatile before the decrease in Somali piracy following concerted international security efforts. In 2014, there have been several attempted and successful piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea, including attacks as far northwest as Ghana to Angola in the south. These attacks occurred in spite of increased attempts at regional and international cooperation to counter the rising incidents of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. This report will discuss the current initiatives being taken to counter piracy in the region as well as the potential for improved anti-piracy measures through cooperation between African and broader international joint training and monitoring.

## Background

According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) an estimated 50 cases of piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea are reported each year. However, given that a large number of incidents go unreported, the current rate of piracy in the waters off of West Africa is hard to define. Furthermore, UN sponsored agencies claim that these statistics most likely reveal only 50% of actual attacks. While these piracy attacks have largely been carried out off the coast of Nigeria, the maritime threat persists throughout the Gulf and extends to nations that share the Atlantic Gulf coastline, from Senegal in the north to Angola in the south.

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has traditionally largely emanated from the oil-rich southeastern Niger Delta region of Nigeria, and statistics released by the Nigerian government suggest that up to 15 cases of piracy are reported on a monthly basis in the Niger Delta alone. The specific targeting of oil tankers has emerged as an economically lucrative means of income for criminal elements and militant groups in the poverty-stricken Niger Delta region, fueled by the absence of an anti-piracy law. Yet, these experienced Nigerian pirates have gradually expanded activities beyond the country's territorial waters, and many piracy incidents in the wider Gulf of Guinea region are reportedly carried out by pirates based in Nigeria.



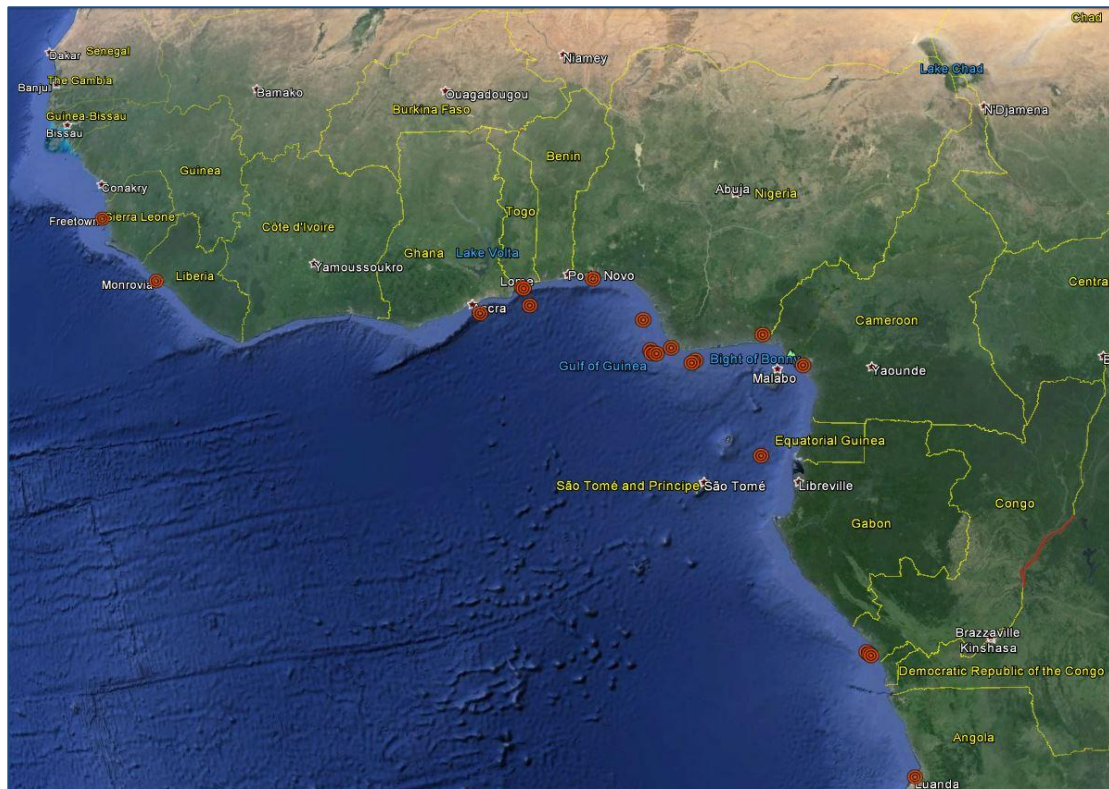
*Pirates from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)*

Cases of abductions of maritime personnel across the Gulf of Guinea have been on the rise since 2011. According to reports the trend of violent kidnappings for ransom increased by 85% in 2013 when compared to the previous year. The high levels of violence have drawn more attention from the international community, as the degree of violence correlates to an increase in the risks posed to foreign maritime staff operating across the Gulf of Guinea. In

response, a new Central Naval Command (CNC) was established in 2012, in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, to monitor the recent joint naval operations organized by US Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet, which have proved to be the largest maritime security exercises in the region thus far.

### **Geographical Expansion of Attacks: Spread of piracy to territorial waters of additional countries beyond Nigeria indicative of deficiencies of past preventative security measures**

The notable piracy attacks in 2014 off of the coast of Angola and Ghana underscore the increasing trend of piracy incidents beyond Nigeria's coastal waters. On January 18, a Greek-owned oil-tanker disappeared off the coast of Luanda, Angola, marking the most southern piracy incident in the Gulf of Guinea to date. Meanwhile, the International Maritime Bureau reported on June 6 that the MT Fair Artemis, a Liberian-flagged Greek tanker, which was transporting oil and gas, was hijacked off of Ghana's coast, near Accra. The ship was found on June 12 in Nigerian waters with its 24 crew members unharmed on board. The crew's personal belongings as well as 3,500 metric tons of diesel had been stolen by suspected hijackers. Furthermore, the territorial waters of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Congo-Brazzaville have also recorded piracy attacks in January 2014.



*Reported piracy attacks in Gulf of Guinea in 2014 - [Click here](#) to enlarge*



These attacks underscore that the geographical scope of the threat has begun to expand and attacks have been increasingly recorded on the eastern coast of Nigeria, Cameroon and Congo, and towards the west, with a relatively lower frequency in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. This expansion is indicative of the pirates' capacity to operate in the territorial waters of neighboring gulf countries in search of new oil exploration sites. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is strongly linked to the active black market for oil, and thus the sale of stolen material at very high prices helps to fuel these criminal organizations, which are reportedly capable of extracting at least three million barrels of oil on a daily basis.

Attacks in the gulf typically occur in territorial waters, legally making them armed robberies and thus the responsibility of individual states according to international law. This has served to discourage the region from creating a unified and "single response" force. The long-time absence of sea patrols and effective maritime security, coupled with the slow response time of neighboring countries in joining agreements involving West African states, have been key to the pirates' operational success.



*Cameroonian soldiers on training exercise*

Furthermore, the lack of on-shore security patrols in territories where the pirates reportedly hold their bases has contributed to the continuously growing operations of pirates. Additionally, the lack of state-run protection within territorial waters has fueled the rise of maritime crime. Moreover, the infrequent security patrols, as well as the minimal services provided by the coastguards who are poorly trained and lack adequate onboard equipment, have maximized the risk of operating along the West African coasts. Vessels traveling across the gulf have to independently provide and finance their own surveillance and deterrence methods which significantly increase their operational costs.

Moreover, the prevailing insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea has been further highlighted by the absence of a reliable international trading route equivalent to the "Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor" which was established in the Gulf of Aden off of Somalia's coast to ensure protection and surveillance against maritime crime by military escorts for commercial vessels across the gulf. The success of this Transit Corridor at providing a secure route for shipping underscores the possibilities for improved security in the Gulf of Guinea should a similar initiative be undertaken involving deployment of additional security patrols on and offshore, particularly in the Niger Delta's territorial waters from where piracy persistently emanates.

## Emerging Initiatives: Persistent threat of piracy prompts increased regional cooperation, raises potential for international involvement

Given the persistent threats of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, West African states have attempted to increase regional cooperation over the last year. Thus, on June 24-25, 2013, leaders the Economic Community of Central African States, (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (CGG), held a summit in the Cameroonian capital of Yaounde to address the threat posed by piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea.

During the June 2013 summit, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopted a new Code of Conduct to combat maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, resembling the Djibouti Code of Conduct established in 2009 to address piracy in the Horn of Africa.



The objectives of the Code of Conduct were to improve communication between states, strengthen the capacity of countries in the region so as to deter, arrest and prosecute pirates, and enforce the operational dimensions of local coastguards in the fight against piracy across borders. With this in mind, West African countries were intended to review their national legislation in order to ensure that the crime of piracy would be included in their regulations.

The meeting additionally highlighted the rising concerns of Western powers that have particular economic interests in the region. Since 40% of the oil consumed in Europe comes from the Gulf of Guinea, the persistent disruptions to the oil trade have led to a rise in prices for European customers, significantly affecting business continuity for EU corporations. Thus, following the conference, the EU announced its interest in launching a mission in 2015 to combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.



More recently, in April 2014, the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) has announced the creation of a regional coordination center, along with the establishment of training facilities in order to address the increasing instability in the Gulf Of Guinea. In addition, Cameroon has expressed its readiness and capabilities to establish an institution that can determine all operations and strategic decisions to combat maritime insecurity.

In May 2014, an additional approach has been taken by the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP). The CPLP is composed of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe, and several countries in Europe, South America, and Asia. These regional and international actors are investigating the potential for counter-

piracy operations in the Gulf of Guinea which would include the training of forces for joint patrolling along the coast. The creation of concrete jurisdictional guidelines can allow them to conduct joint investigations and consequently prosecute suspected pirates in order to protect the hydrocarbon-rich region and foreign investment and explorations.



### **International Cooperation to Aid in Fight Against Piracy: Weaknesses of regional initiatives could be strengthened by increased international involvement**

In spite of these regional initiatives, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea remains a persistent trend, as indicated by the lack of noticeable decrease in pirate attacks following the 2013 conference in Yaoundé. Furthermore, we assess that there are indications that piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is in fact expanding and thus is poised to increase, as highlighted by the expansion of activities to distant waters inside and outside of the Gulf. We assess that pirates have a strong motivation to expand given the increasing oil exploration activities and shipments of oil and gas by several West African countries due to discoveries of extensive energy reserves offshore.

We assess that regional initiatives have failed due to lack of coordination between maritime security patrols of the affected regions. This has been further highlighted by the absence of a common standard for maritime training for West African countries coupled with the continued weak commitment for information sharing between different nation's naval security forces. In spite of the June 2013 meeting in Yaoundé, few West and Central African countries have taken subsequent initiatives to follow up on commitments discussed during the conference.

Yet, we assess that the failure of these purely regional initiatives opens a window for more proactive involvement of the wider international community in coordination with African militaries, as was witnessed in the successful international crackdown on piracy in the Horn of Africa. This assessment is strengthened by indications of planned increased involvement in maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea by both the



*AFRICOM Marines train Senegalese Marines*

US and EU. AFRICOM's commitment in April 2014 to addressing rising insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea underscores the growing concern of non-African countries that have economic and security interests in the continent. As purely African anti-piracy measures in the region have failed to crack down on this increasing maritime criminality, we assess that other

international actors will be encouraged to aid in consensual security missions. Moreover, these regional and international efforts would be strengthened by the establishment of a united legal framework, as illustrated by the CPLP's initiative. Thus, West African nations could more conclusively crack down on pirates using systematic detainment, processing and incarceration of suspected pirates in regional centers located in the gulf.

## **Conclusion**

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is poised to continue increasing and expanding as indicated by persistent attacks throughout 2013-2014 and given the apparent failure of regional anti-piracy initiatives. Yet, these regional initiatives demonstrate a rising interest of African countries in the region to stem these attacks, likely due to growing economic potential from discoveries of off-shore energy deposits. The international community also shares an interest in fighting piracy also due to economic as well as security interests. Thus, we assess that signs of augmented involvement of international military personnel in joint security efforts in the Gulf of Guinea are likely to significantly aid regional nations in fighting piracy.

**Have additional questions? Contact us at [intel@max-security.com](mailto:intel@max-security.com) or phone us at +44 20 3540 0434**

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