The Current Status of Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea

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ABSTRACT

Piratic activities create significant disruptions for maritime transport; this paper examines the maritime security situation within the Gulf of Guinea (GOG) region, focusing on Nigerian waters. It investigates facts regarding the current level of pirates' attacks and assesses the effectiveness of existing policies/strategies aimed at addressing this multifaceted challenge. It deploys a combinatory quantitative method; a survey involving stakeholders from the region is working with unison with various statistics from authoritative sources like the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) and the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) databases. Results revealed a significant decline in piracy attacks and other sea crimes in Nigerian waters; this success is most likely related to the collective cooperation of several organizations such as NIMASA, the Nigerian Navy, and G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea (G7++FoGG) Navies. These combined efforts have clearly enhanced security and minimized criminal activities in Nigerian waters. This could also be a result of pirates trying to evade prosecution under the recently introduced Nigerian Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offenses (SPOMO) Act. But on the other side, there has been a shift of criminal activities towards other parts of the GoG. Improving the livelihoods of coastal communities, promoting Blue Economy initiatives, enhancing surveillance capabilities, combating corruption within law enforcement/armed forces are all crucial components of an integrated strategy aimed at suppressing piracy and other maritime crimes in the GoG.

1. Introduction.

The Gulf of Guinea (GOG) is heavily facilitating trade; shipping activities has been a key driver of the wider region's growth, shaping its history and identity (Broohm, 2021). However, in recent years, the GOG has been facing maritime security challenges, with piracy/sea robbery, kidnapping of crewmembers (for ransom), as well as oil theft/illegal bunkering in the vicinity of Nigeria's waters clearly standing out. It is not a coincidence that (until quite recently) the waters in the vicinity of Nigeria were considered as the most dangerous area of the GoG, since 80% of piratic attacks were taking place there (Fig. 1) (Babatunde & Abdulsalam, 2021). Piracy has been a major

problem in Nigerian waterways since the early 2000s, seriously hurting the economy and damaging the reputation of the nation abroad.

Figure 1: Piracy and sea robbery activities in GOG during 2020.
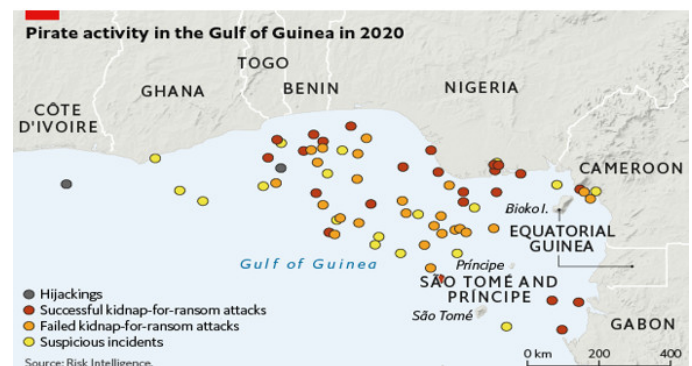
Source: EIU (2021).

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There is little doubt that poverty and deprivation in the Niger Delta region, corruption, inadequate law enforcement, weak laws and conflicting jurisdictions, were contributing factors to the rise in pirate attacks and illicit activity in the vicinity of Nigeria (Ezeozue, 2019). As an effective response was urgently needed, the country's officials have increased naval patrols and worked with international organizations to supress piracy in the Nigerian waterways (Dalaklis, 2022). Nonetheless, occurrences of attacks on ships continue, despite concentrated efforts. To restore Nigeria's reputation and to minimize the economic losses caused by insecurity and illegal activities in Nigerian waters, it is therefore, necessary to investigate the situation and come up with effective solutions.

This paper is based on the content of Masters dissertation drafted at the World Maritime University (WMU) that came under the title *"Dissecting the Relentless Maritime Security Situation in Nigerian Waters- An Investigation"*. The specific research effort was initially conducted by using secondary data from a literature review which included books, journals, and articles as well as reports, logs, internet data, and government documents. Questionnaires were deployed to the area of study (Nigeria) to obtain primary data which were combined with unpublished secondary data for analysis. The questionnaires contain mainly closed-ended questions, along with one open-ended question to expand the range of responses from different spectrums of the maritime industry. The questionnaires were sent to the Search and Rescue unit of NIMASA, which facilitated further dissemination to the targeted participants. The total number of questionnaires sent out was 60 (distributed among maritime professionals, civil servants, and security operatives); 53 responses were received back and then quantitatively analysed (statistical and comparative analysis).

Qualitative data allows participants to provide more detail in response to the questions being asked, whereas quantitative data is frequently confined to "yes or no" or many pre-chosen options that participants can choose from (UK Statistics Authority, 2022). In this research effort, the quantitative method was selected, as it allows for a greater number of participants to be included. Following this brief introductory section, the second part introduces the maritime security problem in the GoG underscoring Nigeria and the methodology utilised for the research. Next, the necessary literature review of documents relating to maritime security in Nigeria and the GoG is taking place, including a discussion of the related international legal framework. Then, the status of the security situation in the GoG is analysed, along with a discussion of the relevant maritime security policies and strategies in Nigeria. Finally, a conclusive discussion of the findings and the recommendation of measures to effectively deal with piracy and other maritime crimes is provided.

2. Background of Maritime Security in the GOG/Nigeria.

Around 90% of global trade is transported by sea; any disruption to seaborn transport can impact negatively on the global supply chain, as well as on political and social stability (UNCTAD, 2023). In terms of geography, the GoG covers a vast area of coastline stretching from Senegal to Angola, encompassing over 20 sovereign West African coastal states and islands. It serves as a crucial shipping corridor for oil and cargo transportation between the Niger Delta and central/southern Africa (Dalaklis, 2019). This region is associated with about 4% of the global oil supply and significant quantities are exported to Asia and Europe (Dalaklis & Ndze, 2017). Unfortunately, the GoG took over from the Horn of Africa in terms of piratic activities in 2013, with the highest number of piracy attacks and armed robbery against ships, representing a fifth of all global maritime incidents (Osinowo, 2015). In the GoG, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) are the regional economic communities that have the security structure to address maritime insecurity. Furthermore, institutions like the Maritime Organisation of West and Central Africa (MOWCA) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) were specifically created to ensure cooperation in dealing with maritime activities in the region (Jacobsen & Nordby, 2015).

Nigeria is a country in West Africa that spans a land area of 923,768 square kilometres between the latitudes of 4 degrees and 14 degrees and the longitudes of 3 degrees and 14. It has an 853 km long coastline (Nigerian High Commission, 2009). In addition to that, offshore oil reserves are the primary marine natural resource operations that significantly boost Nigeria's economy (Ateme, 2021). Presently, Regulations concerning Nigerian shipping, maritime labour, maritime capacity building, and the execution of coastal state obligations including maritime security are handled by NIMASA, formerly the National Maritime Authority (NMA) (Bekesuomowei, 2020). Additionally, Nte et al. (2022) correctly highlight that the largest naval force in the GoG is the Nigerian Navy; related vessels can provide a very powerful tool for law enforcement.

3. Analysis.

3.1. Analysing the Status of the Maritime Security Threats in the GoG.

Maritime security threats encompass a wide range of issues that pose risks to the safety and security of ships, ports, and coastal regions, as well as the normal functioning of the global economy. These threats can be divided into several categories, such as piracy and armed robbery at sea, terrorism and sabotage, smuggling and trafficking, Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, maritime territorial disputes, Cyber threats, and Environmental threats (Morris & Paoli, 2018). However, piracy is standing out because of the risk it poses to the safety of navigation, ships, cargo, and crew as well as the ability to adversely impact economies and disrupt the global supply chain. A common universal definition of the maritime security concept has yet to be agreed upon by consensus (Avila-Zuniga-Nordfjeld et al., 2023). Understandably, piracy has been described by Kerchove (1961) as robbery, murder, or forcible depredation on the high sea, without lawful authority, in the spirit and intention of universal hostility (Ezeozue, 2019). Piracy

has been a persistent threat to maritime security, especially in regions like the Gulf of Aden, the GoG, and the waters around Southeast Asia. Pirates often target ships for their cargo, crew, or both, causing significant financial losses and jeopardizing the safety of seafarers (Pristrom et al., 2013). In 2014, 41 incidents resulting in 5 kidnappings were recorded in Nigerian waters alone (Warner & Kaye, 2016). Consequently, the cost of piracy to the global economy is estimated by global insurer Allianz to be $12 billion annually, and yet, most people outside the maritime and insurance industries are unaware that piracy is still an expensive risk in the twenty-first century (Dalaklis, 2022).

In comparison, the pirates in the GoG are more sophisticated than those in the Gulf of Aden. For example, the Somali pirates are known for kidnapping for ransom, while the Nigerian ones are known for their more lucrative and advanced "modus operandi", which involves the hijacking of an entire vessel for its cargo/oil. Nigerian pirates typically use small skiffs with powerful outboard engines that are manoeuvrable and suitable for quick attacks, boardings, and escapes which reflects the fact that their targets are closer to the coastline or mother ships compared to Somali pirates (Peters & Paoli, 2020). Jimoh (2015) established that the discovered corruption and shady dealings inside the security system represent a defeat in the war against piracy. By deliberately relaxing naval surveillance, the security agents who are supposed to defend the vessels expose them to attacks and render aboard guards ineffectual. Security officers also occasionally directly participate in violent crime. Particularly the Nigerian military has a history of making murky arrangements with insurgents to split the spoils. Jacobsen et al. (2021) also emphasized that although pirates are always armed during their operations, when they work along with the related security personnel, they face no resistance. In any case, maritime companies and multinational oil companies almost always opt to hand over ransoms to pirates knowing they may not receive recompense or legal redress.

3.2. Factors Contributing to Maritime Insecurity in Nigeria.

The origin of the security threats in Nigerian waters is said to be linked with the discovery of oil. According to reports, Bayelsa state in the Niger Delta was where oil was first discovered in Nigeria in 1956 (UNEP, 2017). In 1960, Nigeria gained its independence and since then, corruption and political instability have been a major issue (Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014). Oil exploration/exploitation in the Niger Delta have serious adverse effects on the region's farmlands, rivers, and coastal waters, leading to the destruction of the livelihoods of communities that rely on fishing and agriculture. Despite community complaints, corruption has allowed multinational oil companies to continue their unchecked activities without implementing measures to clean up the environment, control pollution, or provide compensation for affected communities. The resulting unemployment, poverty, and hunger have driven some to resort to militancy, vandalism, robbery, and piracy in desperation.

Is the Nigerian Navy involved in corruption and collusion with pirates? These are significant factors in aiding organized crime, such as piracy and the oil theft industry. This is particularly true among powerful individuals like former militants,

and sponsors of piracy. According to a study by the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), pirate groups in the Niger Delta are bribing members of official security forces to ignore their criminal activities (Jacobsen et al., 2021). This may explain the reason for the inconclusive investigations and the delay in response time to certain piracy incidents. According to Jacobsen et al. (2021), in the statement made by the Nigerian former Chief of Naval Staff in February 2021, the high command of the Nigerian Navy is seriously concerned about the allegations raised against the Nigerian Navy of corruption practices and collusion with pirates and shall deal decisively with any Naval officer found guilty of such act. Additionally, a specialist in an interview during the creation of the UNODC report mentioned that; *"we had a case of a hostage release where they [abductors] told us that the waterways were safe because a high-ranking law enforcement officer had been paid off to do no checks for the next 24 hours – and if anyone stopped us [the release team], we should just tell them to call him"* (Jacobsen et al., 2021).

3.3. Statistical Data Analysis.

A total of 53 participants responded to the survey; 83% were males, while only 17% were females. A total of 16 respondents had been victims of piracy or had a direct encounter with victims of piracy activities (including those in the armed forces). This is a clear indication of the lack of participation of women in Nigerian maritime enforcement and the maritime sector in general. The 83% of the respondents are predominantly senior officers and managers between the ages of 30 to 49. They are from different walks of life within the Nigerian Maritime Domain which includes Nigerian fisheries, armed forces, maritime private sector, seafarers, and civil servants. The participants are mostly well educated, with 32.1% having either master's or doctorate degrees. The participants were carefully selected based on their exposure, knowledge or experience in the law enforcement of Nigerian maritime security. For example, the selection in NIMASA is mainly between the ISPS unit, the Regional Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (RMRCC) and the NIMASA Deep Blue Project (DBP) Staff. A very important point to note is that the result shows that out of the 53 respondents, 79.2% (19 public servants, 10 armed forces, 10 private sector, and 3 self-employed) are satisfied with the Nigerian Armed Forces' capabilities. Probably, the majority of respondents (72.7%) in the research survey who expressed satisfaction with the Nigerian security forces' ability to handle maritime security were influenced by their awareness of the assets, personnel training, and operations of the DBP, as well as the significant decline in piracy incidents in 2022 and 2023.

- 45.2% of public servants, 23.8% of Armed forces, 23.8% of private sector workers and 7.1% of self-employed respondents are satisfied with the efforts of Nigerian Security forces capabilities (questionnaire Q11).

A point of concern is that only 20.7% of our respondents believe that the information being reported regarding the maritime situation is accurate as shown in Figure 3. This leads to

Figure 2: Respondents Satisfied with Q11 According to Profession.
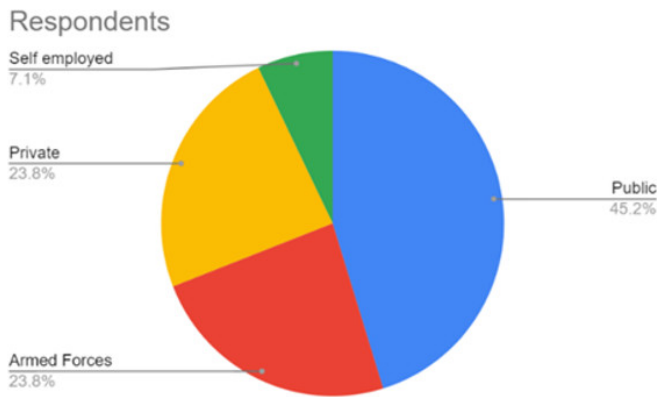
Source: Authors.

the conclusion that there could be the distortion of information either by the security forces which could be an indication of corruption/collusion or by the shipping companies to avoid delays by coastal states due to investigations. The possibility of corruption and collusion also shed light on the question regarding the reasons for the gaps in policy implementation.

- 64.2% of respondents concur to Q5 (regarding the accuracy of incident reporting)

Figure 3: Responses to Q5.
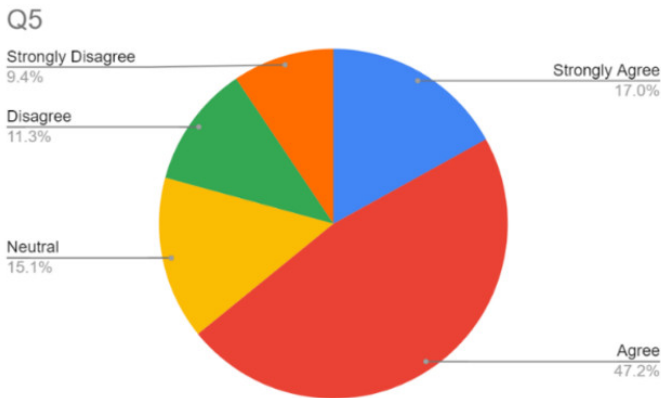
Source: Authors.

According to Jacobsen et al. (2021), both the IMO and IMB have their specifications for information gathering, which are frequently dependent on reports from ships, ship owners, flag states, MOC, MMCC, and other elements of the inter-regional maritime security framework. The IMB Piracy Reporting Centre keeps track of all attacks and attempted attacks on ships flying any flags, whether they are berthed, at anchor, or at sea. The majority of the incident data collected by the IMB comes from voluntary reports from ships, ship owners, and/or flag states, hence not all incidents may be reported to the IMO/IMB. It's important to note that the database excludes incidents that hap-

pened in Nigerian waterways, against local ships, or to oil and gas infrastructure.

Secondary data, which can be obtained from published sources or the original data, are analysed by individuals who were not involved in the data collection process (Church, 2002). For the purpose of this investigation, GoG piracy data from January to June 2023 (Table 1) were obtained from the IMB.

Table 1: January - June 2023 Piracy Activities in the Gulf of Guinea .

	Actual		Attempted	
Location	Boarded	Hijacked	Fired Upon	Attempted
Angola	2			
Cameroon	1		2	
Gabon	1			
Ghana	3			
Guinea	1			
Ivory Coast		1		1
Nigeria	1			
The Congo		1		
Subtotal	**9**	**2**	**2**	**1**
Total	**14**			

Source: ICC-IMB (2023).

2021 piracy log (Table 2), 2022 and 2023 NIMASA Operational Log were also obtained from the NIMASA C4i Centre. As shown in Table 1, it can be assumed that piracy has moved from Nigerian waters to other countries of the GoG in answer to the research question regarding the current state of affairs in Nigerian waters. According to the UN Secretary General´s 2022 report on piracy in the GoG, pirate groups, primarily located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, have expanded their operations to the waters near Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe for operational reasons, such as avoiding the heightened patrols of Nigerian naval assets (UN Security Council, 2022). Cameroon recorded two vessels being fired upon which is an indication that the pirates in the Cameroonian waters are more prone to violence and it should be taken into account by response and patrol teams.

After plotting the coordinates highlighted in Table 2, it can be observed in Figure 4 that piracy and kidnapping occur both in Nigerian territorial/inland waters and at the high sea adjacent to the Nigerian Baseline. Pirates who operate in the waterways have a higher success rate in kidnapping and hijacking due to their familiarity with the terrain, allowing them to set up ambushes and take hostages to their hideouts in the mangrove creeks. Security patrols may be more concentrated in the open sea to safeguard merchant shipping routes, leaving vessels in the waterways more exposed. Alternatively, it could be that the pressure from security forces like JTF and special forces

Table 2: 2021 Piracy Attacks in Nigerian Waters.

Sn	Vessel's name	Flag	Vessel's class	Date of Event	Location	Nature of the attack	Nature of Event	Successful	Crew kidnaped	Source
1	N/A	N/A	PASSENGER BOATS	05/01/2021	04 30N 007 16E	BOARDED HIJACK	SEA ROBBERY	Yes	NIL	IMB
2	MANTA ASLI	MARSHALL ISLANDS	BULK CARRIER	08/01/2021	03°38N 006°17E	ATTEMPTED BOARDING	PIRACY	No	NIL	IMB/ MDAT
3	MAERSK CARDIFF	SINGAPORE	CONTAINER	13/01/2021	02°23'36N-005°39'48E	ATTEMPTED BOARDING	PIRACY	No	NIL	IMB/ MDAT
4	N/A	N/A	CONTAINER	21/01/2021	03:31N – 005:29E	ATTEMPTED BOARDING	PIRACY	No	NIL	IMB/ MDAT
5	SPEED BOATS	N/A	SPEEDBOATS	09/02/2021		KIDNAPPING	SEA ROBBERY	Yes	6	IMB
6	BOURBON EVOLUTION	LUXEMBOURG	SUPPLY VESSEL	14/03/2021	02:58N – 002:53E	BOARDED HIJACK	PIRACY	No	NIL	IMB/ MDAT

Source: NIMASA, C4i.

patrols has forced pirates to operate closer to their hideouts in the waterways. Furthermore, the pirates' lack of sophistication is evident from the failed boarding attempts on container ships and bulk carriers, highlighting the effectiveness of present-day large vessel security measures.

Figure 4: 2021 Piracy Attacks in Nigerian Waters.

Source:Authors.

3.4. Dark Activities Analysis.

The NIMASA C4i centre, under the DBP, is responsible for monitoring vessels entering Nigerian waters. This is done using an intelligence system that detects any suspicious activities (Dark Activities). The system tracks the history of the vessel, including its voyage. Any questionable activities are investigated/analysed to establish the facts. These include issues such as shady ship-to-ship transfers, turning off the AIS, frequent change of initials, and sudden stops among others. The system detects vessels as far as 400 km from Lagos which is an indication of the current state of improved government effort. With this level of surveillance and tracking, piracy activities which

mostly rely on a network of ships (pirate mother ships and cargo transfer vessels) can easily be detected and dealt with. It is apparent perhaps why the record of piracy and crimes in Nigerian waters has seriously declined. Figure 5, below, summarizes the number of dark activities recorded in the first half of 2023. The high number indicates that currently, apart from piracy, numerous illegal activities are also taking place in Nigerian waters and indeed the GoG.

Figure 5: Dark Activities in Nigerian Waters.
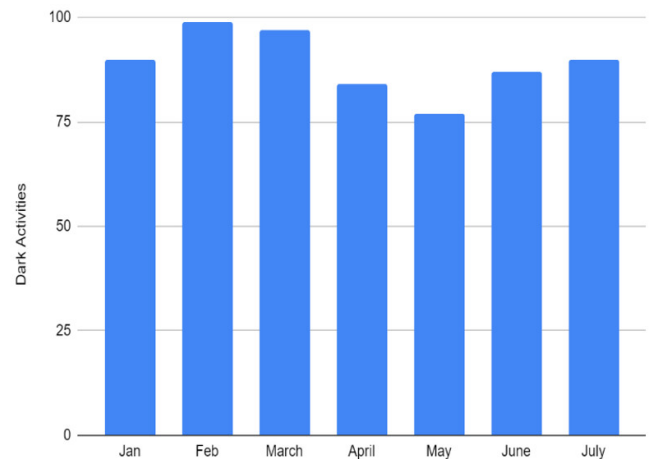
Source:Authors.

4. Discussions on Relevant Maritime Security Initiatives.

Piracy, and other illicit activities in Nigerian territorial waters and the GoG have been a concern for the Government. To address these issues, the Nigerian government and other GoG regional stakeholders have launched several initiatives, such as regional cooperation (Yaounde Code of Conduct (YCC)), joint

patrols and JTF, MDA, policy and initiatives, capacity building, and community engagement among others (Anozie et al., 2019). In the Nigerian context, these strategies are the responsibility of NIMASA in collaboration with the Nigerian Navy and other law enforcement agencies.

4.1. Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCC).

The YCC was signed in 2013 by 25 West and Central African countries to enhance regional maritime security and safety through cooperation, information sharing, and capacity building (Warner & Kaye, 2016). Based in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the YCC and promoting cooperation among regional organizations, such as the ECOWAS and ECCAS. The African Union aims to prevent regional crises and maintain peace and security on the continent. To achieve this, CEMAC works closely with ECCAS, and the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa (CRESMAC) was established to connect ECCAS with ECOWAS (Dalaklis & Ndze, 2017). Other regional maritime security centres are located in various countries in the region and are tasked with coordinating maritime security operations, such as surveillance, patrolling, and response to incidents. In addition to the YCC, other regional initiatives and organizations, such as the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS) and the G7++FoGG, also contribute to enhancing maritime security in the GoG. The most recognised of these initiatives is the G7++FoGG.

According to MSC 102/INF.22, 2020 (page 3) the G7++FoGG organization was established in 2013 in response to the international community's ad hoc responses to the resurgence of piracy in the GoG. The G7++FoGG's goals are to support the GoG nations in improving the security of their maritime domains, unifying the diverse legal frameworks used to combat maritime crime, fostering interstate collaboration, and advancing the blue economy. It was created by three regional organizations, GGC, ECCAS, and ECOWAS to support the marine security framework created under the YCC regarding the menace of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and Illicit marine Activities in West and Central Africa. The G7++ FoGG's presidency is a rotating office.

On November 5 and 6, 2019, in Accra, Ghana, the annual plenary meeting of the G7++ FoGG was hosted under the theme "Working Together for the Common Security of the GoG" by the holders of the 2019 G7++ FoGG chair, France and Ghana as described in MSC 102/INF.22 (page 3). Some of the outcomes from the meeting were as follows: (1) Participants praised the international community's intervention and demanded that efforts to assist maritime security in the GoG be better coordinated; (2) Participants acknowledged the crucial roles of non-governmental organizations and maritime businesses (IMO, 2020). Additionally, UK (2022) reported that the UK and Senegal jointly headed the second ministerial meeting of the G7++ FoGG, which was held in Dakar from November 24 to 26, 2021. At the end of the session, a major recommendation concerning international cooperation and support was noted as follows: A practical and focused approach to funding and enlisting the assistance of international partners, including mak-

ing sure offers of assistance are in line with the needs noted by the GoG states, improving communication and coordination to prevent duplications, and taking sustainability of initiatives into account.

According to Yücel (2021), the issue of piracy in the GoG continues to be a major source of concern, underscoring the urgent need for effective transnational collaboration. Nevertheless, the existing YCC for cooperation is plagued by certain limitations stemming from issues of sovereignty. Overcoming these limitations will be of utmost importance to unlock the full potential of transnational cooperation and guarantee the timely implementation of the indispensable measures. The Yaoundé Architecture must clarify the roles of its various organizations to ensure effective network coordination. Social elements such as education must be revised. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the Yaoundé Architecture is hindered by a lack of implementation, funding, and trust between maritime actors, but it can guide member states towards improving the structure even though it is unlikely to expand the YCC mandate (Warner & Kaye, 2016).

4.2. Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offenses (SPOMO) Ac.

A key step in Nigeria's counterpiracy efforts was the adoption of the SPOMO Act in 2019 (Anele, 2023). The SPOMO Act is derived from the provisions of UNCLOS,1982, and the SUA, 1988 Convention and its protocols. Before the law was passed, it was difficult to prosecute anyone in Nigeria accused of engaging in sea piracy since it looked like no domestic law specified the offense. It ended the debate over whether sea piracy is a crime covered by any municipal statute and granted the Federal High Court full authority over cases involving armed robbery and other illegal activities at sea.

According to NIMASA (2022), a list of 18 maritime offenses and illegal acts at sea, including armed robbery at sea and crimes besides piracy perpetrated within Nigerian waters, is provided in Section 4 of the SPOMO Act. Such crimes include hijacking a ship, an aircraft, or a fixed or floating platform; damaging or vandalizing a ship, an installation, or a navigation facility; or interfering with the operation of a ship, an installation, or a navigation facility. The Federal High Court is the only court with jurisdiction to hear and decide any case involving the SPOMO Act, according to Section 5(2) of the Act. In addition, Section 10 stipulates that, despite the terms of any other act, anyone who engages in, or attempts to engage in, an act of piracy or any other maritime offense or unlawful act in violation of the act will be subject to any penalties or punishments stipulated by the act upon conviction.

4.3. NIMASA Deep Blue Project (DBP).

According to NIMASA (2021), the DBP, launched by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Transportation and the Federal Ministry of Defence, is being effectively carried out by NIMASA. Its purpose is to safeguard Nigerian waters and the GoG by utilizing multiple platforms to tackle maritime security on land, sea, and air. The ground assets are made up of a highly

trained Maritime Security Unit of 600 personnel, 16 armoured vehicles for coastal areas patrol, and the Command, Control, Communication, Computer, and Intelligence Centre (C4i) for data collection and intelligence gathering. The marine assets consist of two Special Mission Vessels and 17 Fast Interceptor Boats. The air assets comprise three Special Mission Helicopters for search and rescue missions, two Special Mission Aircraft for surveillance of the nation's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and four Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. Moreover, the DBP is the first integrated maritime security policy in West and Central Africa, aimed at combating piracy, sea robbery, and other maritime crimes (NIMASA, 2021).

4.4. Nigerian Navy Falcon Eye Centre.

According to Akpan (2021), the Falcon Eye Project provides a reliable and secure solution for monitoring Nigeria's EEZ. It aims to streamline operations for naval and aviation maritime forces, from identifying potential threats to responding quickly. The project achieves this goal by integrating advanced intelligence tools, a sophisticated Command and Control System, cutting-edge detection and classification sensors, and a team of highly trained operators and commanders. While not directly affiliated with the DBP, the Falcon Eye Project collaborates and shares information with it. Nte et al. (2022) further explained that the Falcon Eye, developed by Asia Global Technology in Israel, was successfully manufactured by Falcon Eye Technology in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Thanks to its high-frequency AIS and satellite AIS, it is capable of identifying ships that are transmitting incorrect voyage and AIS information, engaging in ship-to-ship activities, deviating from their course, approaching other vessels rapidly, stopping abruptly, and conducting ship-to-ship operations while in Nigerian waters. It is apparent that the drop-down in attacks is an indication of success for both NIMASA DBP and the Nigerian Navy Falcon Eye.

It is clear that piracy incidents have declined around Nigerian waters as illustrated in Figure 6. This is due to the measures taken by the Nigerian government such as the deployment of high-grade technology for onshore and offshore surveillance, patrol, and enforcement. For instance, the DBP C4i Centre is said to be effective in enforcing maritime security and safety measures. By prioritizing MDA, intelligence gathering, and reconnaissance, the Centre guarantees successful outcomes. It serves as the primary source of data for other aspects of the DBP, including situational awareness and intelligence. The Centre boasts several components, such as the C4i System Stations, Maritime Intelligence System, Aerial Mission Management System with Multi-Sensor Integrated System (MSIS), Communication Systems, and Satellite Communication System, all of which contribute to its high efficacy. Furthermore, these systems are integrated into the GoG Interregional Network's Maritime Multinational Coordination Centre, Zone E, providing security and assistance in SAR operations. Moreover, they are externally connected with Lloyd's List and the NAVY Falcon Eye systems, ensuring high performance and reliability (NIMASA, 2021).

Figure 6: 2021-2023 Piracy Attacks in Nigerian Waters.
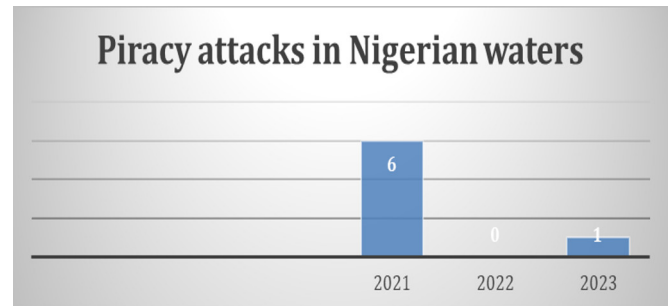
Source:Authors.

Capacity-building strategies such as domestic/foreign training and drills by NIMASA and the Nigerian Navy for the fight against piracy and other maritime offenses have proven to be effective. The primary research also revealed that the same method of overwhelming patrols by international forces in the Gulf of Aden has been deployed by the members of the G7++ FoGG such as the UK and the French Navy which has contributed to the decline in the number of incidents especially in Nigerian Waters. Additionally, the prosecution of maritime offenders by the Nigerian Federal High Court through the implementation of the SPOMO Act has been quite successful due to the Nigerian Navy's active participation in the provision of witnesses and evidence for judicial proceedings (Jacobsen et al., 2021).

Conclusions and Recommendations.

Piracy incidents in Nigerian waters focus on the theft of crude oil. Nigerian pirates are primarily driven by economic motivations, seeking to hijack vessels transporting crude oil cargo. Once in control of a vessel, they siphon off the valuable crude oil and subsequently sell it in local black markets, which are part of a thriving illegal oil trade network. This illicit trade not only provides a lucrative source of revenue for the pirate groups but also contributes to the larger issue of oil theft and illegal bunkering in Nigeria, which has profound economic and environmental consequences. It is also true that the differing objectives of these pirate groups reflect the unique economic and geopolitical contexts of their respective regions. Somali piracy emerged in response to a volatile political landscape, the absence of effective governance, and economic deprivation in Somalia. In contrast, Nigerian piracy is closely linked to the country's oil-rich resources, and the theft of crude oil is intertwined with broader issues of economic inequality, corruption, and criminal networks.

An interesting conclusion is that as piracy incidents in Nigerian waters declined, these activities in other GoG member states like Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tome and Principe have increased. This is because of the pirates' efforts to avoid the heavy Nigerian Navy patrol assets in the Nigerian waters and prosecution under the SPOMO Act. According to Broohm (2021), similar to Nigeria, Togo's commitment to ratifying and

signing international maritime accords is commendable and crucial for the region. From 2014 to 2017, the country demonstrated its dedication by approving multiple legal instruments. These included a new criminal code that adopts the updated definition of marine piracy, granting Togo universal jurisdiction to prosecute any crime committed beyond its territorial seas, regardless of the nationality of the parties involved or the location of the crime. Additionally, Togo passed an antipiracy law and other laws to combat unlawful acts on the high seas, affirming its authority to exercise maritime policing powers unlike most of the countries of the GoG (Broohm, 2021).

In relation to the necessary steps to improve the situation further, the issue of corruption practices and collusion with maritime offenders by security forces remains an important concern. The governments of Nigeria as well as other GoG countries must take drastic measures to deter corruption practices, especially within their own security forces. Apart from punishment measures, awareness training on the negative impact of corruption and collusion should also be a major part of the security agencies' academic syllabuses. It is also essential for the government to hold accountable any politicians and civil servants who are implicated in corruption or collusion with criminal groups in the region. Future research must include a thorough investigation into the issue at all levels of government.

While piracy in Nigerian waters is decreasing, the ongoing poor economic conditions of coastal communities remain a pressing concern. To address this issue, the Nigerian government should increase its efforts to enhance the livelihoods and living conditions of the Niger Delta region's residents. This can be done through infrastructural development such as roads and hospitals, technical skills acquisition programs, investment in agriculture and fisheries and employment of capable members at all levels of the oil industry. This approach will not only foster economic development but also promote stability and deter piratical activities.

On a different direction, fish stocks in Nigerian waters have been on a decline due to oil spill pollution and IUU fishing thereby increasing the poverty level of the coastal communities. The protection of the Nigerian and the GoG marine ecosystems must be on the agenda of the regional governments. These include effective MARPOL enforcement, hi-tech surveillance, massive coastline clean-ups, and the establishment of marine aquacultures as well as Marine Spatial Planning and Marine Protected Areas. In addition, the Nigerian government should ensure that oil companies operating in the country adhere strictly to global best practices in oil exploration and avoid any activities that could lead to environmental degradation. To achieve this, the highest fines possible and in extreme cases, revoking of license should be administered to violators.

Finally, the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) by all the states for maritime patrols and surveillance can significantly bolster monitoring capabilities which would consequently deter piratical activities. Furthermore, creating a dedicated "regional piracy reporting centre" could be a viable option that could greatly benefit the GoG region. That centre should be equipped with state-of-the-art technologies for monitoring and tracking activities throughout the entire region. To ensure wide participation, its personnel should include experts and staff from all over the region. This initiative would enable effective coordination and information sharing among members as well as enhance surveillance, armed patrols and operations. At the same time, it would be advisable to increase the frequency of joint regional security forces drills and training, such as the "Obangame Express Exercise". This type of activities should involve the participation of all GoG countries. Such initiatives can foster collaboration, enhance capacity building, and create a level playing field within the region.

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