



A Natural Jewel Threatened by Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea

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ABSTRACT

The Gulf of Guinea, an area rich in natural beauty and natural resources such as oil, gas, and fisheries, faces serious threats from widespread maritime piracy activities. The region is an important economic center, but maritime insecurity threatens its economic stability and development. Numerous regional and international initiatives have been undertaken to enhance security in these waterways, such as the Nigerian government's "Deep Blue" project and collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The UN Security Council has also passed a resolution to address this threat. Despite this, challenges remain significant due to the high number of attacks and significant economic impact. Addressing this issue requires continued cooperation between countries in the Gulf of Guinea region and the international community to ensure security and sustainable exploration in this region.

INTRODUCTION

The Gulf of Guinea is an area known for its rich natural resources, including abundant oil, gas, and fisheries reserves. Its strategic location on the west coast of Africa makes it an important center for global economic activity, especially in the fields of energy exploration and maritime trade. However, despite its great potential, the Gulf of Guinea faces serious challenges in the form of maritime insecurity caused by high rates of piracy and other illegal activities in these waters.

Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has increased significantly in recent years, making the region one of the world's major hotspots for maritime criminal activity. These attacks not only endanger the safety of seafarers and the security of cargo but also disrupt international trade routes and cause huge economic losses. The governments of countries around the Gulf of Guinea, together with the international community, have made great efforts to address this issue through various regional security and cooperation initiatives.

Nevertheless, the challenges faced are still very large. Success in overcoming the threat of maritime insecurity relies heavily on effective collaboration between coastal states, regional organizations such as ECOWAS, and support from the international community. Only through concerted and sustained efforts can security in the Gulf of Guinea be improved, enabling sustainable exploration and use of natural resources and encouraging stable economic growth in the region.

This article will review in depth the condition of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, the efforts that have been made to overcome this problem, and the challenges that still need to be faced to achieve better maritime security in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea

Research by Marine and Coastal Policy Research (MCPR) highlights that the Gulf of Guinea is the world's main maritime piracy hotspot (Sukma, 2022), with more than 95% of global maritime kidnappings occurring in this region in the last year (Puspaningrum, 2021). Activities This piracy not only endangers the safety of seafarers but also has a significant impact on the global economy.

Regional Efforts to Overcome Piracy

An article published by the Diponegoro Journal of International Relations examines the cooperation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in dealing with maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. ECOWAS, in collaboration with regional and international actors, strives to maintain maritime security through various initiatives. However, research shows that despite significant efforts, major challenges remain as piracy attacks continue and large economic losses remain (Ardi, 2017).

National Security Project

The Nigerian government launched the "Deep Blue" project designed to protect and secure Nigeria's waterways from the threat of piracy. A study from Stable Seas estimates that pirates in the Niger Delta make about \$5 million a year from theft and hostage-taking. This project aims to reduce maritime criminal activity and increase security in the wider maritime environment (Sukma, 2022).

The Role of the United Nations in Maritime Security

The UN Security Council, with support from Ghana and Norway, passed a resolution to increase focus on maritime security threats in the Gulf of Guinea. This resolution emphasizes the responsibility of coastal states in dealing with piracy and maritime robbery and encourages international cooperation to strengthen security stability in the region.

Economic and Security Analysis

Other research highlights the economic impact of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, noting that this insecurity is disrupting international trade and impacting maritime insurance prices. This analysis underscores the importance of maritime security to maintaining economic stability in the region and globally as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this article is descriptive qualitative. This type of qualitative descriptive research is to display the data as it is without any process of manipulation or other treatments. This research aims to present a complete picture of an incident or is intended to expose and clarify a phenomenon that occurs (Rusandi, 2021). This article adopts a qualitative approach to understand in depth various aspects of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. This approach allows the author to dig deeper into the factors that influence maritime security and the efforts that have been made to overcome them. A descriptive methodology is used to provide a comprehensive picture of the state of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, including the number and types of piracy attacks, as well as the economic and social impacts of this insecurity. Data were collected from relevant previous reports and studies.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Beauty and Natural Wealth of the Gulf of Guinea

The Gulf of Guinea is a region that is very rich in natural beauty and biodiversity. This bay is located in the western part of Africa, precisely along the coast of Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Ghana. The Gulf of Guinea is known for its wide white sandy beaches, clear sea water, and beautiful coral reefs. In addition, the Gulf of Guinea also has abundant tropical rainforest and is home to various endemic plant and animal species (Boyer).

The natural wealth of the Gulf of Guinea is not only found on land but also in its waters. This bay has very high marine biodiversity, including various types of fish, sharks, turtles, and other marine mammals. Visitors to the Gulf of Guinea can also enjoy diving and snorkeling activities to explore the amazing underwater beauty. The Gulf of Guinea is also known for having various interesting archaeological and historical sites. Along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, there are various ruins and historical remains from ancient kingdoms such as the Ashanti Kingdom, the Kingdom of Dahomey, and the Kingdom of Benin. Tourists can visit these sites to understand more deeply the history and culture of the Gulf of Guinea region (Luis MP Ceriaco, 2022).

Apart from that, the Gulf of Guinea also has abundant natural resources, such as petroleum, natural gas, and tropical forest products. This resource is one of the main factors for the economy of countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea. However, it is important to maintain the sustainability of the Gulf of Guinea ecosystem so that these natural resources can be utilized sustainably (Mane, 2005).

Apart from its natural beauty and wealth of natural resources, the Gulf of Guinea is also home to various tribes and ethnicities who have rich cultures and traditions. Visitors can interact with local people and learn about their daily life and beliefs. With all its natural beauty, a wealth of natural resources, historical sites, and cultural diversity, the Gulf of Guinea is an attractive tourist destination and has the potential to continue to develop in the tourism sector.

Threat of Maritime Insecurity

The Gulf of Guinea, especially off the coast of West Africa, is renowned as one of the most dangerous maritime regions in the world. Various maritime security threats lurk in this region, endangering the safety and livelihoods of coastal communities, hampering economic activity, and undermining regional stability.

Maritime piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea began to rise in the mid-2000s, and this coincided with the emergence of an insurgency in the Niger Delta in southern Nigeria. The geographical and political background of the rebellion is interconnected with the process of oil exploration and production in the region. The Gulf of Guinea includes two major oil and natural gas producers, Nigeria and Angola, which are cumulatively responsible for about 3% of global oil production and have a similar share of proven natural gas reserves. The resource-rich Niger Delta, which attracts foreign investment and companies in the oil and gas industry, later became a flashpoint for the insurgency (Laifer, 2024).

According to 2023 International Maritime Bureau data, the success rate of perpetrators in boarding ships reached more than 75% in the Gulf of Guinea region. In the early years of maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, pirates would primarily rob ships and make off with the loot (Japan P&I News, 2024). Until the mid-2010s, most successful attacks resulted in the hijacking of oil tankers, especially oil tankers, to prearranged locations on land. Since 2016, with global oil prices falling, the pirates' main tactic has shifted to kidnapping crew members for ransom. According to the UN Secretary General's 2022 report on piracy, the direct and indirect costs of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea region amount to approximately \$1.9 billion annually. Annual ransom payments to pirate groups amount to around \$4 million, while the value of goods (mainly oil) stolen in piracy has declined from around \$2 million per attack in the early 2010s to likely less than \$1 million per year in 2021 (Laifer, 2024).

Apart from piracy, theft at sea is also rampant. Criminals steal various items, such as engines, food, and fuel, from ships. These thefts cause significant financial losses for ship owners and operators, as well as endangering the safety of ship crews. Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) damage fish stocks in the Gulf of Guinea region and endangers the livelihoods of coastal communities. This can also lead to conflicts between local fishermen and foreign fishing vessels. The Gulf of Guinea is a center for other illegal maritime activities, such as drugs, weapons, and human smuggling. This activity endangers regional security and stability (Ngounou, 2023).

Maritime threats in the Gulf of Guinea have significant impacts on countries in the region such as economic losses with loss of income from fishing, tourism, and trade due to maritime security disturbances. Poor maritime security creates a climate that is not conducive to investment and development, which can hinder investment growth. Seafarers and coastal communities are at high risk of experiencing violence, kidnapping, and exploitation because security is threatened. In the face of rising crime and instability at sea, African countries collaborated to strengthen security, culminating in the Yaounde maritime security architecture. The framework was developed in 2013 following a special meeting of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Several multinational centers have been built throughout the region for collaboration, information sharing, and intelligence (Carlota Ahrens Teixeira, 2022).

Efforts to overcome maritime threats in the Gulf of Guinea continue, such as regional cooperation in the region by increasing joint maritime patrols and sharing intelligence information. There is international assistance by assisting in the form of training, equipment, and funding. Law enforcement efforts to arrest and prosecute perpetrators of maritime crimes. And increase economic opportunities for coastal communities to reduce involvement in illegal activities.

Although efforts have been made, much remains to be done to address this problem effectively. Continued international cooperation, firm law enforcement, and sustainable economic development in the Gulf of Guinea region are critical to combating maritime threats and creating a safe and stable environment for all.

Factors Causing Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea

Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, particularly off the coast of West Africa, is a complex problem with historical roots and interrelated contemporary factors. Many coastal communities in the Gulf of Guinea live in extreme poverty with limited economic opportunities. This drives them to engage in illegal activities such as piracy, sea theft, and illegal fishing as a way to survive. Then the lack of adequate maritime and logistics infrastructure in this region also hampers economic development and exacerbates poverty.

Piracy and other illicit marine operations are strongly linked to poor governance. While there are variances between countries, corruption persists in the region security agencies, border control, customs, and many others in positions of power all benefit from transnational organized crime. Misusing development funds provided by overseas partners is also part of the situation. (Carlota Ahrens Teixeira, 2022).

Rampant corruption in several Gulf of Guinea countries allows maritime criminals to operate with impunity. Weak law enforcement and lack of accountability of maritime institutions also contribute to this situation. Limited maritime patrol capacity and a lack of coordination between countries in the region also complicate law enforcement efforts. High global demand for illegal goods such as drugs, weapons, and stolen oil drives smuggling activity in the Gulf of Guinea. Well-organized international criminal networks exploit maritime weaknesses in the region to facilitate this illegal trade.

Today, almost every coastal government in the region has improved its naval capabilities. However, to be effective in fighting maritime crime, they must also involve coastal communities as stakeholders, rather than simply seeing them as part of the threat (Williams, 2024). A lack of public awareness about the importance of maritime security and the consequences of illegal activities at sea contributes to the persistence of this problem. A lack of maritime education and training for maritime personnel also hinders efforts to improve maritime security.

Regional collaboration is frequently complicated by political tensions and distrust among neighboring countries. Only between ECOWAS and ECCAS does the Yaounde accord include 25 countries, each with its own political and economic agendas and regional goals, some of which have long-standing and deep-rooted disagreements and grievances. While the Gulf of Guinea governments have agreed to a multilateral maritime security framework, none of them are likely to accept external naval action in their territorial seas. Regional leadership, political engagement, and ongoing collaboration will be required to achieve results. However, sovereignty difficulties and political and economic competition may impede this purpose (Carlota Ahrens Teixeira, 2022).

Political instability and internal conflict in several Gulf of Guinea countries create space for criminal groups to operate freely. Maritime conflicts between countries in this region, such as maritime territorial disputes, can also worsen the maritime security situation. Climate change and degradation of the marine environment in the Gulf of Guinea may exacerbate poverty and encourage coastal communities to engage in illegal activities as a way to earn a living. The lack of effective cooperation and coordination between countries in the Gulf of Guinea and the international community in combating maritime crime is a major obstacle to overcoming this problem.

Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea is a complex problem that requires a multi-faceted solution. Addressing underlying factors, such as poverty, corruption, and demand for illegal goods, is critical to creating a safe and stable maritime environment in the region. Strong international cooperation, firm law enforcement, and sustainable economic development in the Gulf of Guinea region are critical to combating maritime threats and building a brighter future for coastal communities.

The Impact of Maritime Unlawfulness in the Gulf of Guinea, a Real Threat to the Economy, Security and Society.

Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, which includes piracy, theft at sea, illegal fishing, and other illegal activities, has far-reaching and complex impacts on countries in the region and the international community. This impact can be categorized into three main aspects, namely economic, security, and social impacts.

Economic Impact

Maritime insecurity discourages investment and trade, as companies and individuals are less likely to engage in activities that involve risk and uncertainty. This can lead to reduced economic growth and development in the region. Illegal maritime activities in the Gulf of Guinea cause significant financial losses for countries in the region. Piracy and theft at sea result in loss of income from maritime trade, theft of cargo and cargo, and damage to maritime infrastructure. Illegal fishing also damages fish stocks in the region, negatively impacting the livelihoods of coastal communities and the fishing industry. The presence of maritime crime increases shipping and transportation costs, as ships have to take longer routes or pay higher insurance premiums to reduce risks. These costs are often passed on to consumers, which further reduces the region's economic competitiveness (Yunusa, 2021).

Security Impact

Threat to seafarers and coastal communities. Seafarers working in the Gulf of Guinea are at high risk of violence, kidnapping, and hostage-taking by pirates and other maritime criminals. Coastal communities are also vulnerable to attacks and robbery by criminal groups operating at sea. Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea disrupts legal maritime activities such as trade, fishing, and tourism. This could impact global supply chains and hinder economic development in the region. Illegal maritime activities can trigger tensions and conflicts between countries in the Gulf of Guinea, especially related to disputes over maritime territory and natural resources. Porous borders and a lack of effective governance enable transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking and human trafficking. This increasingly disrupts regional stability and weakens regional security (Bilyth, 2013).

Social Impact

Instability and Humanitarian Crisis. Maritime insecurity creates an environment of fear and instability, which can lead to social unrest and political instability. This can weaken the legitimacy of governments and institutions, further exacerbating the problem (Bilyth, 2013). Coastal communities who lose their livelihoods due to illegal activities at sea are forced to look for alternatives elsewhere, which can trigger migration and social conflict. Seafarers and coastal communities who are victims of maritime violence and crime can experience psychological trauma and long-term mental damage. This can hurt their mental health and wellbeing.

Efforts to Handle Maritime Insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea.

Maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, which includes piracy, theft at sea, illegal fishing, and other illegal activities, is a complex problem that requires solutions. Various efforts have been made and continue to be made to overcome this problem, both at regional and international levels. The “Yaoundé Code of Conduct” is a code of ethics adopted in 2013, this code aims to coordinate efforts to prevent piracy, armed robbery, and other illegal activities in the West and Central African maritime region. This code established a series of maritime centers and regional structures to enhance cooperation between countries in the Gulf of Guinea (Murphy, 2023).

Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC). The GGC plays an important role in promoting regional cooperation and coordinating maritime security efforts. The GGC plays an important role in organizing regional high-level meetings and developing strategies to combat maritime crime (Amanai Africa, 2024). Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These regional organizations have been actively involved in addressing maritime insecurity through joint initiatives and capacity development programs.

The IMO Maritime Safety Committee had vital discussions on how to confront and prevent piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, allowing Member States to consider future collaboration and boost support for international, regional, and national initiatives to combat piracy. The Committee passed a resolution outlining suggested steps to combat armed robbery and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. The resolution emphasized the importance of increased cooperation with all relevant parties, including information sharing on maritime crime and illegality, response coordination, and governance options for protection solutions. IMO continues to assist training and other capacity-building programs in individual Gulf of Guinea countries, as well as regional cooperation efforts. At the request of ECCAS, ECOWAS, and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, we continue to work closely with ICC Yaoundé, supporting a series of regional expert-level online meetings aimed at assessing the implementation and sustainability of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and providing recommendations to the three organisations. (International Maritime Organization , 2021).

The IMO recognizes the progress made in concerted efforts to address the menace of piracy since 2021, as well as the reduction in the number of pirate attacks. The IMO urges continued support for the critical work of navies and regional entities within the Yaoundé Architecture to protect seafarers, as well as the operational piracy response of the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum and the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, as outlined in the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

Various efforts have been made to improve conditions in the Gulf of Guinea's waters, including those undertaken by the UN Security Council, which adopted a resolution on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Ghana and Norway sponsored the resolution; Ghana is currently a member of the UN Security Council, and one of its key objectives is the maritime security situation in the Gulf of Guinea. The adoption of the new resolution is aimed at renewing the focus of attention on growing threats in the region and emphasizing to the coastal states of the Gulf of Guinea that fighting piracy and robbery is their primary responsibility. Another effort was made by the Nigerian government by implementing a strategy called "*Deep Blue*". The project is designed to protect and secure Nigeria's waterways. Not surprisingly, a study released by Stable Seas estimates that pirates, particularly in the Niger Delta, earn \$5 million a year from theft and hostage-taking. Even so, it is claimed that the project can help maintain the security of the wider maritime environment (Sukma, 2022).

Strengthen local institutions by increasing local naval capacity. International partners, such as the United States and European countries, have provided training and equipment to local navies to improve their capabilities in fighting maritime crime (Morcos, 2021). As a strong maritime nation and a responsible actor in the maritime field, Denmark is committed to promoting freedom of navigation and maritime safety and security throughout the world. Police and Maritime Investigation. INTERPOL and other international organizations are involved in strengthening maritime policing, investigations, and evidence collection in the region. Therefore, since 2015, Denmark has also been actively involved in providing support for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Danish Maritime Security Program, Phase III (2022-2026). In the third phase of the maritime security program, the Danish Government is increasing its efforts to improve maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea through support to strengthen operational capacity and improve law enforcement institutions at national and regional levels (Johnson).

Addressing the root of the problem by building the economy, good governance, and maintaining human security. Addressing poverty and unemployment through economic development initiatives can help reduce the attraction of criminal activity and increase stability in the region. Improving governance and tackling corruption are critical to creating an environment that allows maritime criminals to operate with impunity. This involves improving judicial procedures and ensuring extradition or mutual legal aid. Ensuring the availability of essential services such as health care and education, as well as chances for economic advancement, livelihood security, and social equality, can help to alleviate feelings of isolation and economic hardship, both of which are major causes of instability.

Preserving the Gulf of Guinea as a Safe and Sustainable Natural Jewel

The Gulf of Guinea, with its extraordinary natural riches, has great potential to become a source of progress and prosperity for the people of the region. However, the maritime insecurity that hangs over the region is like a dark cloud that threatens the future of the Gulf of Guinea. Amid this challenging situation, hopes and aspirations to maintain the continuity of the Gulf of Guinea as a natural gem protected from various maritime threats remain strong. Some things that need to be fought for are safe and stable waters, free from piracy, theft at sea, illegal fishing, and other illegal activities. Coastal communities must also live in safety and prosperity, without fear and threats. Safe and smooth maritime trade can support economic growth and regional development.

Preserving the marine environment is also important in supporting the Gulf of Guinea as a safe and sustainable natural gem. The natural beauty of the Gulf of Guinea's marine life must be maintained and preserved for the younger generation. Marine resources are used sustainably for community welfare and nature conservation. It also minimizes the negative impact of human activities such as pollution and environmental damage to the sea. Furthermore, international cooperation and solidarity with a strong commitment from countries in the region and the international community to combat maritime crime and protect the Gulf of Guinea. Effective cooperation and coordination in maritime law enforcement, sharing intelligence information, and developing maritime capacity. Support and assistance from the international community to assist countries in the region in overcoming maritime security problems.

Sustainable economic development with better economic opportunities for coastal communities to reduce involvement in illegal activities. Development of adequate maritime infrastructure to support legal and safe maritime trade. Sustainable fishing practices to protect marine natural resources and the livelihoods of coastal communities. Increasing maritime awareness and education, coastal communities who have high knowledge and awareness about the importance of maritime security and preserving the marine environment. Quality maritime education for seafarers and other maritime personnel to increase their capacity to prevent and respond to illegal maritime incidents. Effective public communication and education to increase community participation in maintaining maritime security and sustainability of the Gulf of Guinea.

Maintaining the Gulf of Guinea as a safe and sustainable natural jewel requires collective and sustained efforts from all parties. With strong hopes and aspirations, solid cooperation, and unwavering commitment, the Gulf of Guinea can become a role model for other maritime regions in the world, showing that maritime security, environmental sustainability, and economic progress can go hand in hand to build a brighter future for all.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Gulf of Guinea is an area that has great economic potential thanks to its wealth of natural resources, such as oil, gas, and fisheries. However, this potential is jeopardized by the high level of marine instability, particularly piracy. Despite efforts to improve security, such as the Nigerian government's "Deep Blue" project and international cooperation through UN resolutions, major challenges remain. The high number of piracy attacks, significant economic losses, and limitations in the effectiveness of regional cooperation indicate that existing efforts are not enough to comprehensively address this problem.

Recommendations, strengthening regional and international cooperation. ECOWAS needs to increase cooperation among its member states as well as with other regional organizations such as ECCAS. This includes increasing maritime law enforcement capacity and more effective information exchange. Support from the international community, including through UN resolutions, needs to be increased to provide the technical assistance, training, and resources needed by countries in the Gulf of Guinea. Improving economic conditions in coastal areas can reduce incentives for individuals to engage in piracy. Economic empowerment and community development programs can be part of this strategy. Strengthen coordination between law enforcement in the Gulf of Guinea countries for joint operations and effective legal action against perpetrators of piracy.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Researchers realize that this article still has shortcomings in several aspects, such as language, writing, and presentation. This is due to the limited knowledge and abilities of researchers. Therefore, researchers expect constructive criticism and suggestions from various parties to improve this article.

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