Introduction

Piracy has been a marine security issue ever since the transportation of goods via sea became widespread. The first recorded incidence of piracy dates back to the 14th Century BC, when pirates threatened the Aegean and Mediterranean voyages. It is therefore not a new issue for humanity to deal with. However, the ancient history of piracy is not quite relevant to this, so let’s jump into more recent times. For the beginning and middle of the 20th century, piracy was not one of the main problems faced by nations, as the world wars occupied most of the attention. However, it began rapidly growing, becoming a business, in the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1980, piracy became a serious threat to commercial shipping, and has only been growing since. Like a virus, the nature of piracy changes according to external pressures. For example, the overall incidence of pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea has decreased, however the number of kidnapped crewmembers is increasing. In 2014, IHS Maritime & Trade tracked 9 kidnappings in the Gulf of Guinea, 19 in 2015, and 44 between January 1st and September 30th 2016.

Pirates are generally from countries with an unstable government and law enforcement. Due to those factors, they face zero or minor consequences even after being caught. The international community’s attention was brought on the issue of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea when pirates began directly attacking international cargo ships. Yet, even with the global community’s attention on the issue, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is still a widespread issue.

The pirates often attack ships by surprise, threatening or killing crewmembers. As mentioned earlier, kidnappings for ransom are becoming more and more common. Due to robbery and hijacking of the ships, the piracy not only infringes upon the basic human rights to life and safety, but also causes economic damage to oil corporations and countries. For example, it is estimated that Nigeria loses $ 1.5 billion a month due to piracy. That money could be used for building infrastructure, education, or health services, which are urgently needed in Nigeria. However it is lost to pirates who clearly are not interested in building schools or vaccinating children, therefore making Nigeria lose crucial resources. It makes the economic loss from piracy a human right issue as well, as the money that could be used for humanitarian assistance, education, and health infrastructure is being robbed from Nigeria. Of course, this applies to all
nations affected by the Gulf of Guinea piracy, however Nigeria is the most impacted state, as it is the largest in the region. Clearly, a specific, realistic solution is needed as soon as possible to minimise the long-term consequences of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

**Key terms**

**Piracy:**
By the definition of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, article 101, piracy is defined as any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship and directed
- on the high seas against another ship or against persons or property on board
- ii) against a ship, aircraft, persons or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State

**Gulf of Guinea:**
The Gulf of Guinea is located in the Atlantic Ocean and is surrounded by Liberia, Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe, Congo Republic, DR Congo and Angola.

**Cargo ship:**
A cargo ship is any sort of ship or vessel that carries cargo (goods carried on a ship, aircraft or motor vehicle), goods, and materials from one port to another. Those ships are often attacked by pirates, which brings global attention to the problem, as often those ships are owned by multinational corporations.

**Kidnapping:**
A kidnapping is the action of forcibly taking someone away against their will and holding them captive, often for ransom. It is becoming more and more common, and pirates often carry out the attack with certain intent to kidnap high-ranking officers or engineers. Those who are kidnapped are taken to an undisclosed area where negotiations for ransoms are carried out.

**Stakeholder:**
A stakeholder is a person, group or organisation that has interest or concern in an organisation. They can affect or be affected by the organisation's actions, objectives and/or policies. Some examples of stakeholders are creditors, directors, employees, government agencies, owners (shareholders) and so on.
Background and current situation

While piracy in general has a long history, the piracy in the Gulf of Guinea became a very serious issue in the late 20th century. However, it only gained international attention in the beginning of the 21st century. The primary red flag was the rating of the Gulf of Guinea region. In 2004, the International Maritime Organisation rated the Gulf of Guinea second in the number of pirate attacks globally. Despite that, the piracy in Somalia remained in the spotlight for those concerned with piracy in Africa, and the issue of the Gulf of Guinea received only a fraction of the attention it needed.

In 2011, however, things took a turn for the better in terms of the attention on the issue. A large part of the Gulf of Guinea became classified as a war risk zone for shipping by Lloyd’s Joint War Committee, being therefore in the same category as Somalia’s sea territories, which are considered one of the most dangerous parts of the world. In November 2011, the president of the African Union, Bon Yayi of Benin requested a United Nations delegation to assess the issue of Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. In the same month, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon deployed a team to assess the piracy threat in the Gulf of Guinea and make recommendations for United Nations support tackling this issue. The team visited states with major involvement in the issue, including Nigeria and Angola. Ban Ki-moon then urges states and regional organisations of the Gulf of Guinea to develop a strategy to combat maritime piracy. However, he did not recognise the importance of international cooperation, especially to support the states in the area with intelligence and military equipment.

With the help of that team, the United Nations unanimously adopted the United Nations Security Council resolution 2039 in February 2012, which condemned piracy and armed robbery in the region of the Gulf of Guinea and called for a strategy among all affected nations. Yet, the United Nations has not assigned a maritime security taskforce and the resolution has had very little to no impact on the security of the region. There is need for a specific resolution that would have clear steps for each party affected, as well as negotiations in order to make sure all nations concerned agree, as the United Nations does not have the power to infringe upon national sovereignty. At the heart of that region is Nigeria that is the 14th largest oil producer in the world and one of the weakest states in the world in 2011 according to the failed states index. The main cause for the thrive of piracy in the region of the Gulf of Guinea is the lawlessness of the region, easy access to small arms and political instability in the region, piracy only being a symptom of the larger issue. To cure a disease, one must deal with the cause of the disease, therefore the committee must find a way to tackle the issues mentioned above.
Key member states and NGOs involved

Nigeria
Piracy is causing devastating economic consequences for all countries in the region, but Nigeria is definitely at the top. As mentioned before, Nigeria is one of the largest oil producers in the region. By some estimates, Nigeria is even losing about $1.5 billion a month due to maritime piracy, armed robbery at sea, smuggling, and fuel supply fraud. Nigeria has put quite a lot of effort into improving the security situation in the region by increasing the militarisation of the Niger Delta region, registering vessels in Nigerian waters, introducing public education against artisanal refining etc. The Nigerian Navy has battled with many pirates and has retaken vessels from armed attackers multiple times. They have fully co-operated with the United Nations when greater aerial surveillance of the Gulf has been suggested, for example.

Oceans beyond Piracy
Oceans beyond Piracy is a program of One Earth Future Foundation, a non-profit organisation located in Colorado, U.S.A. Their West Africa program is working with relevant stakeholders to help the fight against all maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea. They hold working group meetings and support both the regional and international efforts being made to combat piracy in the region. They also recognise that there needs to be a strategy to address the root causes of widespread piracy in the region.

Gulf of Guinea Commission
The Gulf of Guinea Commission was established by the treaty signed in Gabon on 3 July 2001 by Angola, Congo, Gabon, Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe. It constituted in a permanent framework for cooperation for the countries surrounding the Gulf of Guinea in order to promote peace. The current member states are Angola, Cameroon, Congo, DR Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe.

United States of America
The United States currently relies on the Gulf of Guinea for 15 per cent of its oil imports, therefore they have a direct motivation for action in the region. The United States military Africa Command (Africom) began exercises with West African navies in 2012 to enhance security in the region. The training occurred on U.S. Navy ships, therefore allowing the United States to maintain a military presence in Africa without maintaining a physical naval base.
**China**

China joined the fight against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea in July 2016, when they declared they would help West African countries build necessary infrastructure to coordinate an anti-piracy fight. They have been sending patrol vessels and have been building ports in Guinea, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. They have criticised the little amount of involvement from the Security Council and have called for an open debate on the issue, as it has been four years since the last session the UNSC had on the issue of the Gulf of Guinea. The Chinese permanent representative to the UN said in April 2016 that more efforts are needed by the international community for the construction, operation and maintaining of ports, as well as training the maritime security forces of the region.

**Timeline of events**

**3 July 2001:** The Gulf of Guinea commission was established.

**2004:** The International Maritime Organisation rated the Gulf of Guinea second in the number of pirate attacks globally.

**2011:** A large part of the Gulf of Guinea became classified as a war risk zone for shipping by Lloyd’s Joint War Committee.

**November 2011:** The chairperson of the African Union, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo requested a United Nations delegation to assess the issue of Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

**2012:** The United States started military exercises with West African navies.

**29 February 2012:** The United Nations unanimously adopted the United Nations Security Council resolution 2039.

**July 2016:** China decided to get involved in the issue, began building ports and sending patrol vessels to the area.

**30 September 2016:** HIS Maritime & Trade tracked the highest number of kidnappings in the area yet.
Possible solutions

It is clear that to address this very complex issue, complex steps must be taken. First of all, the root causes of this widespread issue must be addressed. That means that the political and military instability in the whole region must be tackled, not by just writing a resolution condemning it, but by having clear steps for governments to take with the help of various NGOs and the United Nations. For example, the easy accessibility to weapons in the region and the widespread black market is one of the causes for piracy in the region. Limiting the accessibility to light arms would perhaps help lessen the armed attacks on ships. Creating teams to dismantle the black market in the area as much as possible would also be equally helpful, as often weapons are obtained illegally. International help for countries in the region to build stronger infrastructure, especially for law enforcement is crucial as well in order to create stronger nations that can then fight against piracy in a much stronger way.

It also means encouraging the nations to amend their law system to create real and serious consequences for crimes committed by marine pirates. That would discourage others from joining pirates, as if there is a high chance of getting caught and incarcerated, the “job” of a pirate would not seem so appealing anymore. As pirates are often portrayed as quite wealthy, it is seen by young people as an easy way to make money, especially if they are uneducated. Therefore education is also an important part of solving this issue.

Surveillance in the region must also be better regulated in order to be able to identify the criminals if a hijacking or kidnapping does happen and so that there could be consequences for those individuals. That requires negotiating with the member states, as those surveillance programs would take place in their territorial waters. For example, Africom has already started a program, however it does not include aerial surveillance which would help locate pirate ships even before they attack. Support from other nations could vary from military training and education specialists sent to the region, to supplying the region with the equipment necessary to fight piracy, such as drones, military vessels and so on.

It is clear that the issue of piracy in the region of the Gulf of Guinea is no longer just the issue of the nations that are directly impacted by it, but rather something that concerns the whole globe. To ease the burden on the shoulders of the nations in the region, especially Nigeria, the global community must work together to fully solve the issue, as well as its root cause—instability in the region.
UN involvement, relevant resolutions, treaties, and events

The United Nations have somewhat been involved in the issue, however there has not been enough long-term focused attention on the problem.

- 29 February 2016 S/RES/2039
- S/PRST/2013/13
- Treaty to form the Gulf of Guinea Commission, 3 July 2001

Additional useful web sites to read


Oceans Beyond Piracy’s reports on the Gulf of Guinea: http://oceansbeyondpiracy.org/matrix/west-africa


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