

Security Consolidation in the Gulf of Guinea: The Need to Engage AFRICOM Better Through the SECLOMTS Model

Nicholas Okai

Faculty of Academic Affairs and Research, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Ghana.

nicholas.okai@kaiptc.org

Abstract

The problem of maritime piracy has assumed very disturbing dimensions in recent years. For Africa, developments off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden have shown that the menace can pose real challenges to the development of whole regions. As the international community focuses attention on maintaining maritime sanity in the Gulf of Aden, the menace of piracy, this time with its associated evils, are gradually creeping into the Gulf of Guinea. Several scholars have advanced strategies intended to help halt this trend, but have failed to recognize the need for the proper engagement of AFRICOM in this enterprise. This paper highlights the immense negative socio-economic impact that bad order at sea is having on the Gulf of Guinea and concludes by reiterating the need for the Gulf States to engage AFRICOM in a more proactive manner based on the SECLOMTS model.

Keywords: Piracy, AFRICOM, West Africa.

1. Introduction

With a coastline stretching about 6,000 kilometers, the Gulf of Guinea is endowed with several natural resources, making it a very important geographical space within the West African sub-region. The Gulf is currently the source of around 5.4 million barrels of oil per day. According to Chatham House (2012), this level of production is more than the total amount of crude oil imported by 27 European countries in 2008 (4.9 mbb/d) and also represents more than half of the crude oil imported by the United States of America in that same year, which was around 9.8 mbb/d. The net hydrocarbon deposit in Nigeria alone is estimated to be between 40 to 50 billion barrels (Musah, 2009). Countries like Ghana, Cote d' Ivoire and those in the Mano River Union (MRU) basin have huge hydrocarbon potentials. Experts like Onuaho (Onuoha, 2012) forecast that by 2015 deep water drilling will account for 25 percent of the regions offshore oil production. The region is also one of the best-endowed fishing grounds in the world with a very high diverse fish and invertebrate fauna largely due to an upwelling along the coast of Senegal and Mauritania and other parts of the gulf (Ndiaye, 2013). According to Ndiaye, apart from providing revenue to governments through royalties and other fees collected under various fishing agreements by countries in the region, fisheries resources also play an important role in meeting the nutritional needs of populations with low purchasing power. It also provides full time employment to more than 3 million West Africans, representing more than 10 percent of the region's workforce (Ndiaye, 2013).

2. Current Challenges

The Gulf of Guinea currently faces an array of very pressing security challenges such as piracy, bunkering, drug trafficking, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and marine pollution. Since the attack on the *Seabourn Spirit* off the Somalian coast in November 2005, the incidence of piracy in Africa as a whole has assumed a rather disturbing proportion. Between 2005 and 2011, a total of 237 ships were attacked by pirates with millions of dollars collected as ransom payments (Schubert & Lades, 2013). With the increase in international anti piracy naval operations along the Somalian coast, this trend has reduced significantly, but Schubert demonstrates that the average ransom (per vessel), however, continues to grow: from around 150,000 USD in 2005 to approximately 4.7 million USD in 2011 with the total ransom payments reaching an all-time high of 135 million USD in 2011 alone (Schubert & Lades, 2013). The Gulf of Guinea is gradually beginning to see an increase in pirate activities. According to the United Nations Security council (2013), the incidents of piracy and related criminal activities have risen significantly, making the region the second most dangerous piracy zone on the African continent. The Security Council report (2013) shows that a total of 58 attacks were reported in the region during the first 10 months of 2011, which was an increase from the 45 attacks recorded in 2010. Twenty-one of the reported attacks in 2011 occurred off the coast of Benin, 14 off the coast of Nigeria, 7 off the coast of Togo, 4 off the coasts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2 off the coast of Ghana and 1 off the coasts of Angola and Côte d'Ivoire. In 2010, Nigeria reported 25 attacks, Guinea 6, Cameroon 5, Côte d'Ivoire 4, the Democratic Republic of the Congo 3, and Congo and Liberia 1 respectively. This increase in frequency, apart from being alarming is made more paradoxical by the fact that, relatively, unlike the rather lawless situation in the horn of Africa, the countries bordering the gulf region have relatively very stable and

functioning governments in place, a situation which should make it very difficult for this canker to be entrenched in the region.

A threat assessment conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2013) shows that the Gulf also presents a very safe transit passage for the trafficking of narcotics from South America through West Africa to North America and Europe. Findings from the assessment show that the current flow of cocaine through the region is around 18 tons a year and worth about US \$ 1.25 billion. The UNODC assessment also indicated that countries in the region have begun to feel the impact of the drug routing in several ways. The most affected was Guinea Bissau, which is yet to come out of the destabilizing effects of cartel interests in that country.

Ndiaye (2013) argues that the fishing industry in Africa earns the continent about 10 billion dollars a year and serves as the means of livelihood to millions of fisher folks along its coastal stretch. The current threat posed by Illegal, uncontrolled and unreported (IUU) fishing in the Gulf of Guinea is also becoming very alarming and seriously affecting the annual projected earnings of coastal states from fishing. The livelihoods of about 2 million artisanal fisher folks are also being affected negatively. Because of the drastic reduction in fish stocks in the open ocean due to IUU, most people living in fishing communities along the coast are now forced to fish in the marine reverine areas. According to the Environmental Justice Foundation 2012 report, global IUU has a net value of between \$10 billion and \$23.5 billion per year. The practice in the gulf of guinea is the highest in the world and accounts for over 30 percent of the total fish catch from the gulf. According to the report, the fishing industry plays a very critical role in the development and survival of countries within the gulf region: In Senegal, it accounts for 7 per cent of the GDP, representing about 30 percent of exports and contributes almost 75 percent of the protein needs of the population; fish also provides 64 percent of the animal protein needs of the people of Sierra Leone and serves as the only source of protein for coastal communities in most countries in the gulf.

Closely related to IUU are problems bordering on marine pollution. The Gulf of Guinea is also plagued with Illegal ballast discharge from ships leading to the release of a variety of biological materials negatively affecting the aquatic ecosystems and the fauna. The Interim Guinea Current Commission highlights the environmental effect of direct oil spillage into the gulf through the activities of criminals. Available data indicate that Nigeria alone recorded 3,203 oil spillages between 2006 and 2010, about 45 percent of which could be attributed to direct vandalism by criminal elements. An article by Jon Gambrell in the *Washington Post*, 20th July, 2013 edition argues that, Illegal oil bunkering, which is very prevalent in Nigeria and gradually spreading to other countries in the Gulf region, is a dangerous development which has the potential of entrenching the impunity of sea-borne criminal elements in the gulf. According to the *Washington Post article*, about 200,000 barrels a day (equivalent to 10 percent of Nigeria's oil production) are stolen through illegal bunkering. The discovery of more oil and gas deposits in the coastal and offshore regions of the countries bordering the gulf is gradually leading to an increase in the number of exploratory platforms and a corresponding increase in the number of oil tankers and ships traversing the region. According to the Interim Guinea Current Commission, the patterns of offshore winds and ocean currents depict that any massive oil spill from any of the offshore or shore-based petroleum activities will lead to a major environmental calamity within the Gulf region.

As already highlighted, the gulf of guinea plays a very crucial role in the socio-economic activities of countries in the region and ensures the direct survival of millions of artisanal fisher folks and thousands of communities along its 6000 mile stretch. The recent discovery of more crude oil in commercial quantities in different parts of the gulf and the rather disturbing increase and sophistication in criminal activities in the area warrants very swift actions. The resultant impact of these activities, if not checked, will have very far reaching consequences on countries in the region. On 19th October, 2012, during an open debate in the Security Council on the subject of '*Peace and Security in Africa: Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea*', convened by Nigeria in its capacity as President of the Security Council, the devastating effects of piracy on maritime navigation and on the economies of the countries in the region was well highlighted. During the deliberations it was concluded that the fight against piracy should be a collective responsibility. The Permanent Representative of Benin to the United Nations also stressed that:

"If piracy was not addressed properly, it could jeopardize socio-economic development and foreign investment in the region".

The most disturbing scenario is well highlighted by the work of Jensen-Jones, who establishes a possible link between piracy and criminal actors engaged in the smuggling of people, arms and narcotics within West Africa and other criminal and terrorist organizations in the region such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the

Niger Delta (MEND), Boko Haram and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Jenson-Jones, 2012). The importance of ridding the gulf of guinea off the rapidly creeping scourge of piracy and making it a very difficult area for criminal actors cannot be over emphasized. This calls for a strong and tightened maritime security and good order at sea. Francois Vreÿ has demonstrated that maritime security warrants a deeper co-orporation between different actors in the realization of national and international interests in securing the seas (Vreÿ, 2010). The sub-region has witnessed several good initiatives on the part of stakeholders aimed at addressing issues pertaining to maritime security: these include the African Maritime Transport Charter; the Maritime Transport Plan of Action; and the Durban Resolution on Maritime Safety, Maritime Security and Protection of the Marine Environment in Africa. The Durban Resolution for example, encouraged member states to harmonies and review maritime, port and inland water way legislations to let them conform to international norms. It also gave prominence to the importance of information sharing in matters relating to piracy and other criminal activities at sea and encouraged member states to establish a maritime communication network to enhance better organization of maritime traffic. The current security architecture for the Gulf of Guinea has very notable organizations such as the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), the Maritime organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) playing what should be complementary roles in ensuring that the Gulf of Guinea is protected and made safe for general maritime purposes and the extraction of its natural resources for the development of the region. However, the expected positive impact from this collaboration is not so encouraging. According to Baker (2013), although some of the policy directions enshrined in concerted actions assign responsibility and timelines for measures at the state and regional level, they fail to identify how the set targets could be achieved in a more systematic and planned order. Simply put, there are challenges with the implementations and proper coordination of these policies. The economic challenges that Benin went through between 2008 and 2011 is a classical example that highlights the need for serious actions to be taken in securing the Gulf of Guinea. In Benin, revenue from activities at the port of Cotonou alone accounts for about 70 per cent of the national gross domestic product and 80 per cent of national fiscal revenue. The Port also handles an estimated 90 per cent of the country's trade with foreign countries. Because of the ascendancy in pirate activities off the coast of Benin, the country was added to the list of high-risk countries, leading to increased insurance rates for vessels operating in its waters. As a result, the number of ships entering the Port of Cotonou declined by 70 per cent. The tonnage of cargo handled at the port reduced significantly, resulting in an estimated loss of \$81 million in customs revenue in 2011. In addition, the country also experienced an average monthly loss of about \$1 million in its fishing sector.

The above narrative clearly demonstrates the maiming effect that bad order at sea can have on the socio-economic development of countries in the Gulf of Guinea. There is, therefore, the need for a critical look at how best the canker could be eradicated through proper collaboration between all the relevant stakeholders and forging of strategic partnerships. Currently, the biggest problem in the fight against piracy and other maritime threats in the gulf of guinea is the lack of the needed naval capacity of the countries bordering the Gulf region and the inertia on the part of some political leaders to settle for what I call a Symbiotic Effective and Comprehensive Long Term Strategy (SECLOMTS). Several writers have delved extensively with the enormity of the challenge facing the African maritime domain. Musili Wambua describes the naval situation in Africa with these few words (Wambua, 2013):

'.....states lack vessels, aircrafts, communications systems, appropriately trained personnel or an appropriate legal infrastructure unable to play a constructive role in solving regional maritime governance issues such as piracy. Navies are not thought to be as necessary as the other branches of the armed forces and are often considered last in budgetary allocations.'

Other writers on the subject have alluded to the fact that African maritime threats are not purely naval in kind or bound to be resolved by African navies or military capabilities alone. Although this position has its merits, the absence of a reasonable presence of a naval force serves as a huge pull factor for all sorts of maritime criminal activities. One way of bridging this critical gap is through a model that I am proposing. Namely: the Symbiotic Effective and Comprehensive Long Term Maritime Strategy (SECLOMTS) Model, using the assets of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) as a partner in the Gulf of Guinea.

With its command headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany, AFRICOM is uniquely structured to promote regional security, stability and prosperity in its areas of operations. AFRICOM forms one of the six geographical combatant commands of the United States Defense Department, and has successfully partnered several African countries and other regional bodies in the rollout of very successful joint exercises military exercises such as *African Lion*, *Africa Endeavour* and the *Accord Series*, which is designed help improve the capability of regional

armies in operational areas such as peacekeeping, disaster relief and logistics planning among others. Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF), ironically based in Naples, Italy, is one of the six subordinate commands of AFRICOM specifically tasked to improve the maritime security capability and capacity of African navies. Together with personnel drawn from different countries in West Africa, NAVAF has conducted several operational level training exercises aimed at improving the skill sets and maritime readiness of naval personnel within the gulf region. The most notable among these yearly exercises is *Obangame Express*: a joint exercise conducted at sea with naval assets provided by NAVAF, and designed to boost naval cooperation and increase maritime security within the gulf of guinea. The effectiveness and success rate of these exercises clearly show that naval assets play a very important role in ensuring order at sea. Apart from Nigeria, which has relatively very few naval assets, most of the countries in the gulf lack the naval capacity needed to operate, making it very easy for marauding criminal elements to operate and ply their trade freely in the Gulf of Guinea. The increase in intensity of piracy, drug smuggling, IUU, bunkering and all the sprouting evils in the gulf are as a result this net deficit in naval assets.

3. Conclusion

Through the SECOMTS model, this capacity gap can be effectively bridged. The model is premised on the fact that the negative effects of transnational criminality transcend national boundaries and should be collectively and strategically addressed through sustainable long term collaborations, which are deeply beneficial and symbiotic in nature. AFRICOM will have to shift its focus from the current 'training' posture in the gulf to a proactive and more engaging one. Meaning, it should use its assets in such a way that they can serve as a coupler in maximizing the net naval worth of navies in the gulf region. The operationalization of the SELCOMTS model in the gulf should lead to the permanent strategic deployment of AFRICOM naval littoral platforms (preferably LCS) in the gulf of guinea. With deep radar penetration, satellite support and the ability to counter asymmetric threats, such assets will serve as the vanguard for the collective maintenance of security by the navies of countries in the gulf.

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