

Africa's Ungoverned Seas: A Comparative Analysis of Trends and Challenges of Combating Maritime Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and Gulf of Aden in Africa

Gereald E Ezirim¹ and Freedom C Onuoha²

¹University of Nigeria, School of General Studies, Nsukka, Nigeria

²National Defence College, African Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, Abuja, Nigeria

chufreedom@yahoo.com

With a coastline measuring about 39,000 kilometers, Africa's maritime domain has been caught in-between affluence and afflictions. Its maritime domain is surfeit with rich aquatic and mineral resources critical to the survival of its people and states, both for subsistence and for economic mainstay. These resources are also vitally important in the security-development nexus for both the continent and the international community. At present, Africa's prime offshore mineral resources are hydrocarbons. Others are rare metals, diamonds, sand, and gravel, and increasing prospects for copper, nickel, zinc, cobalt and manganese. In addition, Africa's unique position provides a strategic sea line of communication linking two continents: Asia and Europe. Paradoxically however Africa's waters offer transit routes for transnational organized crimes like arms smuggling, narco-trafficking, cigarette smuggling, oil bunkering, human trafficking, among others, and are plagued with several threats such as piracy, illegal fishing/poaching, environmental pollution and dumping of toxic wastes by local and foreign fleets. Regrettably, in the wake of the 21st century Africa's waters have now overtaken traditionally dangerous areas such as the Strait of Malacca in the Southeast Asia in terms of visibility in the global map of piracy. The threat of piracy cut across virtually the entire African maritime domain. However, of particular concern is the recent increase in the frequency and range of pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea in the South Atlantic Ocean and off Somali Coast and Gulf of Aden in the Indian Ocean. This article analyzes the trend and patterns of pirate activities in these regions in the last decade (2000 – 2010). It focused on these regions essentially because they have recorded the highest incidences of pirate attacks in African waters. Its main objective is to develop a conceptual matrix on maritime security indices that aids a comparative analysis of similarities and differences evident in pirate incidence in these separate regions. It used data from the International Maritime Bureau to assess the dynamics and trend maritime piracy has assumed in these waters. It further discusses the factors behind the new wave of pirate activities and highlights the common and different challenges confronting states in the region in their quest to promote maritime security. It concludes that only through the adoption and effective implementation of a common African maritime security strategy that addresses the vulnerability of Africa's maritime domain to the entire spectrum of maritime violence that the scourge of piracy can be sustainably addressed.

