The NSD-S HUB was established at Allied Joint Force Command Naples in order to improve NATO awareness and understanding of the opportunities and challenges from the South, while contributing to the overall coordination of NATO activities and efforts. NSD-S HUB products are developed with open-source information from governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, academic institutions, media sources and military organizations. By design, NSD-S HUB products or links to open-sourced and independently produced articles do not necessarily represent the opinions, views or official positions of any other organization.

This paper has been drafted on the basis of background research conducted by the Hub combined with the findings of a workshop held in November, 2019. Selected subject matter experts from UNOWAS, UNODC, KAIPTC and ECOWAS contributed to improving the knowledge and understanding of the regional security domains as well as the existing opportunities for economic and human development.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Gulf of Guinea is one of the World’s richest yet still under-developed regions. It produces about 5 million barrels of oil per day and about 600 thousand tons of fish are caught every year. There are 1.2 million hectares of mangroves, large reserves of minerals and other natural resources such as gas, diamonds, gold and uranium as well as a very rich rain forest, accounting for 20% of the world’s total, which provides shelter and protection to a large portion of the World’s biodiversity. The region is also a major maritime highway for world trade which, considering the abundance of raw materials, further increases its relevance for rich and industrialised countries.

- In sharp contrast to this promising landscape, the region is well below the global average in terms of economic and human development. Weak institutions, poor governance, uneven distribution of wealth and poor education are among the internal factors hampering the economic potential of regional states. At the same time, significant security issues continue to pose a threat to domestic and regional stability. While transnational terrorism seems to be less virulent than in other parts of Africa, there are nonetheless many politically and economically motivated conflicts which deeply impact local societies.

- Since the drivers of regional insecurity are multifaceted, it is difficult to develop a single, all-encompassing response. Therefore, governments and regional institutions, together with the wider international community, should develop a holistic approach instead of tackling them individually to help the region drag itself out of crippling poverty to secure a brighter future for all, especially the younger generation.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .................................................................................................................. 3

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................ 5

CHALLENGES TO REGIONAL SECURITY ..................................................................................... 6

1. Terrorism .................................................................................................................................. 6

2. The Farmer/Herder Conflict ................................................................................................. 7

3. Conflict in the Niger Delta ...................................................................................................... 8

4. Piracy and Maritime Armed Robbery .................................................................................... 9

RESPONSES TO MARITIME INSECURITY .................................................................................. 11

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT ....................................................................................... 14

MAIN CONCLUSIONS ................................................................................................................... 17

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATO ............................................................................................... 

Error! Bookmark not defined.
INTRODUCTION

The Gulf of Guinea is a vast and diverse region. Several definitions apply to this area, which can be referred to from various perspectives. Historically, it was the “slave coast” and covered the coastal regions of what is now Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Togo and the Niger Delta. Geographically, it is the Atlantic coast stretching from Senegal to Angola. Institutionally, it includes the eight members of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) created in 1999: Angola, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and São Tomé and Príncipe. The transnational nature of many of the security challenges facing the area often leads to some central parts of Africa being included in the region.

The following existing and emerging drivers of instability in the Gulf of Guinea are only the symptoms of much more deeply rooted issues in the structure of the States: piracy and armed robbery at sea; the farmer/herder conflict; terrorism and human, narcotics and other illicit and illegal goods’ trafficking. Unemployment and poverty, intensified by weak law enforcement and corruption, are critical factors which allow the drivers of instability to prosper.

However, the Gulf of Guinea does have significant economic potential which would be capable of adding to and sustaining future growth and development while also contributing to the structural transformations necessary to address the origins of the instability drivers. In this regard, the ‘Blue Economy’ concept has come to the fore in recent years as the numerous opportunities it offers could potentially create the much needed jobs and greatly improve livelihoods.

The struggle to combat the pressure on stability is on-going with some cross-regional cooperation initiatives being developed. Unfortunately, they tend to focus on maritime security alone, rather than a holistic approach to tackle all security issues.

---

3 The UN recently released figures for quality of life worldwide and many of the countries in the region are at the bottom of the list. http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi
CHALLENGES TO REGIONAL SECURITY

The histories of some conflicts, often originating in Nigeria but with a risk of spilling over to the whole region, are relevant and have to be scrutinized in depth. The Boko Haram crisis, the farmer/herder conflict, the Niger Delta situation and the acts of piracy, to name but a few, have not appeared overnight. Rather, they have been growing over time in reaction to profound and lasting injustices.

1. Terrorism

Recent attacks in the southern regions of Burkina Faso, near its borders with the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Benin, and the recruiting of members in the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea, are evidence of a growing terrorist threat in this part of the region.⁴

Boko Haram remains the most active terrorist group in this part of Africa. Created in the northeastern part of Nigeria in 2002 by a Salafist cleric named Mohammed Yusuf, it has since spread throughout the Lake Chad region to the point where some of the surrounding countries are threatened, such as Niger, Cameroon and Chad. Its founder called for the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria and wanted to achieve this goal without the use of violence.⁵ The group abhors western education, culture and the standard behaviour of Muslims, especially the Nigerian elites who promote western ethics.

But the organisation has matured over time in reaction to exogenous events to become what it is now: a violent non-state actor. By its acts of violence (including massacres, the burning of entire villages, torture and abduction on a massive scale), thousands of civilians have been displaced and,

---
⁵ Boko Haram: The Counter Extremism Project, 2019
according to UN estimates, since 2018 nearly 8 million people in the area are in need of some sort of assistance. Porous borders have certainly facilitated the spread. For this group, as with other violent armed groups, the very concept of borders is vague.

The terrorist group seems to instinctively understand what the populations want. They are building up their power by playing on long-standing grievances, rooting themselves in the communities’ structures by providing essential public services such as electricity, health care, justice and education but also by offering salaries to their members. Even worse, their relationship is often furthered by forced marriages and forced pregnancies. By their interaction with the local population, the fabric of society has very often been broken down. Justice is a major issue too, because the legitimacy of the decision makers is often more important to the public than the laws in question.

The population has expectations in terms of social and economic development, governance and security which have to be met by the state institutions. The people’s survival priorities are such that at some point they cease to care about who will deliver the survival tools or even the morality of the process.

Poor governance, encompassing a variety of situations from corruption, deceit, inequitable policies and a lack of transparency and accountability for arbitrary policy making, has been a root cause of instability, causing: economic marginalisation of certain parts of the population; growing unemployment rates especially in the often poorly educated youth population; weak law enforcement institutions; national elections without credibility and political crises.

2. The Farmer/Herder Conflict

Even though the issue of Boko Haram is certainly an important regional matter, it must not be forgotten that the number of deaths due to this organisation is much lower than the number of deaths caused by the farmer/herder conflict. Many authors have scrutinized this conflict in connection with the Nigerian political, social and economic landscape. But it is not a country specific phenomenon since it relates to competition across North Africa and the Sahel for increasingly scarce resources (land and water) due to climate change, polluted drinking water, the growth of agro-pastoralism, the invasion of farmlands by cattle, burning of grazing lands and livestock theft.

---

6 Herders against Farmers: Nigeria’s Expanding Deadly Conflict, Crisis Group Africa Report N°252, 2017
In Nigeria, conflicts used to be concentrated mainly in the Middle Belt but violent conflicts between these two groups have spread out and escalated in recent years, resulting in increasing numbers of deaths on both sides. In former times, both groups used to work and live together to their mutual benefit. Conflicts were usually solved by traditional conflict management mechanisms during which leaders from both communities would sit together and negotiate a solution and, if needed, compensation. The traditional justice structures have unfortunately very often been replaced by a dysfunctional state legal system which results in crime often going unpunished and has encouraged both farmers and pastoralists to take matters into their own hands. The increased availability of firearms (both locally produced and smuggled in from abroad) has aggravated the situation. Therefore, since local dispute resolution had been quite effective, reintroduction and better incorporation of the traditional governance systems should be evaluated.

3. Conflict in the Niger Delta

Despite the fact that the Gulf of Guinea is one of the world’s richest regions, it is still largely under-developed and its wealth is not equally distributed. This uneven distribution is best reflected in the case of the Niger Delta, referred to by some scholars as, ‘the epicentre of violence’ in the region.

The Niger Delta region is Nigeria’s oil belt. The region is rich with onshore and offshore crude oil deposits and 78 of the 159 oil fields are found here, accounting for 900 of the 1,481 wells in operation in Nigeria. Crude oil provides for approximately 75% of government revenue. According to official data, the area is home to more than 42.6 million people and around 50 different ethnic groups, making up 22% of the total Nigerian population. The first oil was discovered in 1956. Before that date the local economy was based on fishing and farming and, according to existing surveys, it has been gravely damaged due to oil exploitation and the exploration economy, generating not only financial profit but also oil spills, corrosion of pipelines and tankers and pipeline sabotage, issues which have become of major concern across the Niger Delta.

The early 1990s saw the rise of tensions between a number of minority ethnic groups and foreign oil companies backed by the Nigerian government. Since then the Niger Delta has been a theatre of oil theft, pipeline vandalism, and kidnappings. Violence escalated during the peak of the insurgency between 2006 and 2009. In spite of the amnesty granted by the Nigerian government to all Niger Delta militants in 2009, the scale of oil theft and illegal local refineries has, according to Chatham

---

7 Nigeria and the Challenges of Internal Security in the 21st Century, Chris I. Nwagboso, Ph.D, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria, 2018
8 Nigeria and the Challenges of Internal Security in the 21st Century, Chris I. Nwagboso, Ph.D, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria, 2018
House, ‘grown beyond recognition as thousands of demobilised militants have turned to crime as a source of income’.  

Most publications point out that the oil sector is plagued by very low transparency levels, as all of those involved, from multinational oil companies to criminal organisations and State entities, strive to increase their share of the wealth. It is often said that the people do not see the benefits of the sale of their natural resources, a situation which leads to a general feeling of discontent which, to a greater or lesser extent, leads to social unrest. The creation of violent militant groups, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta and the Niger Delta Avengers, both of whose goals are to achieve a larger share of oil wealth, has resulted from this economic situation.

4. Piracy and Maritime Armed Robbery

Despite the gravity of all of the above issues, the Gulf of Guinea region is often best known for piracy and maritime armed robbery. On 8 July, 2019, the International Maritime Bureau Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB-PRC) reported that the seas around West Africa remained “the world’s most dangerous for piracy”. It is generally accepted that the issues which frequently manifest themselves at sea in the Gulf of Guinea with consequential effects on stability are actually a result of challenges originating on the continent.

Maritime incidents in the Gulf of Guinea, mostly confined to the Nigerian coastal areas but recently also in Benin and Togo waters, have been rapidly increasing in recent years (see Fig. 5), up from 28 attacks in 2014 to 72 attacks in 2018, with 30 attacks in just the first six months of 2019. According to ‘The Economist’, this is probably well below the true number since ship owners often prefer not to report an attack for fear of their ships being grounded during lengthy investigations. Various organizations collect reports about such incidents, yet reporting standards and the classification of incidents are quite varied, with the result that, as stated by the Danish institute Risk Intelligence in its whitepaper published in 2019: ‘Looking at the pure number of maritime security incidents in West Africa, the situation has remained remarkably stable’.

---

**Definition**

Piracy and maritime armed robbery are defined differently by U.N. Resolutions. An act of ‘piracy’ concerns ships on the high seas or in international waters which are attacked by other ships in international waters, whereas ‘armed robbery’ relates to illegal acts within a State’s internal waters, archipelagic waters or territorial sea.

---

9 *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea, Chatham House, 2013*
The most common types of crimes are: hijacking and attempted hijacking in order to steal the cargo (usually unleaded gasoline, gas oil or diesel oil); kidnapping of the crew for ransom; and armed robbery at sea or in harbours, where the perpetrators opportunistically target vessels while at anchor or moored, generally during the hours of darkness. “Regional pirate gangs have no compunction employing serious violence towards achieving their goals. The use of semi-automatic rifles and a significant weight of weapons fire against target vessels are common”.10

The cost of this maritime insecurity is high. Earth Future Foundation, which tracks annual piracy trends, estimated that maritime insecurity in the region cost $818.1 million in 2017 up from $793.7 million in 2016; that same year a US diplomat at the UN estimated that Nigeria may lose $1.5 billion per month due to piracy, armed robbery at sea and oil theft.11

---

11 Gulf of Guinea: Recent Trends in Piracy and Armed Robbery, Congressional Research Service 2019
RESPONSES TO MARITIME INSECURITY

Insecurity across the entire Gulf of Guinea is a persistent challenge. Maritime insecurity plays a huge part, not only for the countries in the region but also for the many Western countries who import a significant proportion of their energy needs from the Gulf of Guinea.

The recent response to this state of affairs has included a range of initiatives at international, regional and national levels, such as the UN Security Council resolutions on Piracy and Armed Robbery in the Gulf of Guinea, the Lome Charter and the Yaoundé Code of Conduct.\textsuperscript{12}

**UNSCR 2018 (in 2011) and 2039 (in 2012),** initiated by Benin and Togo, emphasise the importance of supporting partner countries and regional organisations, through the provision of training, advice, equipment and resources where appropriate, so that countries in the Gulf of Guinea can increasingly manage and/or prevent such crises independently.

The **Lomé Charter** (African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa) was adopted at an extraordinary summit of the African Union (AU) in 2016. The main goal of the charter is to protect African maritime space from criminal activity and advance economic exploration beneficial to the continent, while at the same time ensuring the sustainability of the oceans and waterways.

The **Yaoundé Code of Conduct** (the 'Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships and Illicit Activity in West and Central Africa') was adopted during the Gulf of Guinea Heads of State Summit in Yaoundé on 24/25 June 2013, where the member states of the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) showed their determination to face these challenges through a common regional approach. Regional cooperation is seen as the central mechanism when it comes to fighting maritime crime in general, and piracy and armed robbery at sea in particular.

With this code of conduct, the states involved agreed to cooperate on the repression of transnational organised maritime crime, including maritime piracy, maritime terrorism and IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing. Prior to this (2009) ECCAS had developed a maritime security strategy and established the Central Africa Regional Maritime Security Centre (CRESMAC),

\textsuperscript{12} *EU Strategy on the Gulf of Guinea, Council of the European Union, 2014*
subdivided into maritime zones with specific maritime cooperation centres (CMCs). Following the signature of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in 2014, ECOWAS established a similar structure, the West Africa Regional Maritime Security Centre (CRESMAO).

To foster cooperation between the two maritime security centres and oversee the implementation of the code of conduct in the Gulf of Guinea, the Yaoundé Code of Conduct established an Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC) which coordinates the efforts to combat piracy, armed robbery and other illegal activities in the maritime domain. The Yaoundé Architecture is composed of a political, interregional, regional, zonal and national level, as shown in the chart below:

![The Yaoundé Architecture](image)

*Fig. 7 – The Yaoundé Architecture*

The coastal waters off the Gulf of Guinea coastline have been divided into 5 operational maritime zones where activities are coordinated by five Maritime Multinational Coordination Centres (MMCC).
At the national level, Operational Maritime Centres (MOC) coordinate activities of the main stakeholders connected to the state action at sea (maritime police, customs, fishery bodies and environmental protection agencies), as well as the national navies. Remarkable improvements have been made over the past 2-3 years by creating more comprehensive and inclusive maritime strategies, thus moving away from purely naval (or “Navy-centric”) strategies.
OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Even though the Gulf of Guinea has to cope with numerous challenges, both exogenous and endogenous, the region has tremendous opportunities for the future.

It produces about 5 million barrels of oil per day and holds 5% of the world’s oil reserves. As for the production of food, about 600 thousand tons of fish are caught every year, while there are estimated reserves of 1.55 billion tons. There are 1.2 million hectares of mangroves, large reserves of minerals and other natural resources such as gas, diamonds, gold and uranium as well as a very rich rain forest, accounting for 20% of the world’s total, which provides shelter and protection to a large portion of the World’s biodiversity, including microorganisms. The region is also a major maritime highway for world trade which, together with the abundance of raw materials, further increases its relevance for rich and industrialized countries.

These resources are a huge asset for the region and create a high potential attraction for significant investors.\textsuperscript{13} The expected revenues from these resources in the near future should act as a guarantee for foreign investors to develop activities in the Gulf of Guinea region. All of these resources can, if carefully managed, contribute to general prosperity. Potential gains from increased investments would include greater government revenues, increased employment and the improvement of the quality of life.

Africa is the “youngest” continent in the world and investments could boost the employability and employment outcomes of the youth in this region thereby contributing to the economic development of their respective countries. The consequences of not fully developing and using this youth potential could be detrimental, including but not limited to significant economic loss, armed conflict and political and social upheaval and instability.

Supporting the increased inclusion of women is also vital, not only for development in this region but eventually for the economic future of the whole continent, since greater participation by women in trade and economic life will be essential for the continent’s success.

Besides the oil, gas and mineral reserves, the fishery resources and the aquatic environment provide tremendous benefits to the Gulf of Guinea countries in their development transformation and prosperity. Fish is the most important animal protein in Africa as a whole and can be as high as 75% in some countries e.g. Senegal.

The Blue Economy\textsuperscript{14} concept may have significant economic potential to contribute to the Gulf of Guinea countries sustainable future growth and development. It offers countries the opportunity to reconcile natural resource use through conservation, to improve the quality of life through nutrition and food security and to integrate and diversify economic activities. The Blue Economy has an

\textsuperscript{13} Emergence of the Gulf of Guinea in the Global Economy: Prospects and Challenges, International Monetary Fund, 2005

\textsuperscript{14} Blue Economy Flagship, African Development Bank Group, 2018
importance on a global scale as half of the world’s population lives within 60 km of the sea, and ¾ of all large cities are located on the coast.

The Blue Economy encompasses many issues, such as: renewable energy - sustainable marine energy has the potential to play a crucial role in social and economic development; aquaculture and mariculture; maritime transport - over 80% of internationally traded goods are transported by sea which is expected to double by 2030 and quadruple by 2050; tourism - Ocean and land tourism help reduce unemployment rates and boost economic growth; and climate change – oceans are an important carbon sink and can help mitigate climate change.

According to the World Bank ‘the Blue Economy is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems’. A Sustainable Blue Economy Conference was held from 26-28 November 2018 in Nairobi, Kenya under the theme “The Blue Economy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” and shows us the rising importance of this concept. The conference gathered over 18,000 participants from 184 countries, including seven Heads of State and Government, 84 Ministers, and leaders from a wide range of sectors, including the scientific and research community, the UN and other intergovernmental organizations. Over the three days of the conference, participants actively engaged in discussions focused on how to achieve the sustainable use and conservation of aquatic resources in oceans, seas, lakes and rivers.

But to fully achieve the potential of this ‘Blue Economy’, the states along the coast must effectively deal with significant maritime security challenges including piracy, illegal fishing, illegal migration, arms trafficking, drugs-trafficking and marine pollution. A recurrent observation made by scholars is that even though maritime insecurity is a consequence of land insecurity, maritime security is definitely pivotal for a stabilised security situation in the Gulf of Guinea.

Nigeria: a case study

Rich regional countries could take the lead in the regions’ stabilisation process. Some scholars believe, for example, that Nigeria could be part of the solution and should not only be seen through the lens of regional violence, piracy and environmental degradation.

In February 2011, for example, Citigroup (an American multinational investment bank and financial services corporation) projected that Nigeria would have the highest average GDP growth in the world from 2010–2050. Its GDP in 2018 was $397,270 million which was ten times higher than that of its closest neighbour, Cameroon with $38.502 million.

Nigeria is one of the biggest oil producers and one of the richest countries in the Gulf of Guinea region and could increase its support for international, regional and national initiatives.
MAIN CONCLUSIONS

The coastal countries in the Gulf of Guinea face a wide variety of security related challenges, not limited to those developed in this report. The trafficking of drugs, human beings, arms, rough diamonds, counterfeit medicines and illegal waste coupled with the involvement of organised crime in the Gulf of Guinea region, and in West Africa in general, is interrelated in highly complex ways to maritime security.\(^\text{16}\) Africa, therefore, continues to be a major transit region for drug trafficking as well as a growing destination market for narcotic drugs.

As the triggers of these security issues are multifaceted, it is difficult to achieve a single response to all of them. The necessity of having strong, coherent and continuous governance runs concurrently with the need to develop a more holistic approach instead of tackling them individually since each one is only a symptom of a deeper illness.

Even though regional cooperation is extremely challenging, it is crucial that the current cooperative responses to maritime insecurity are adopted across the board to address all the drivers of instability. However, it is fundamental that any such collaborative approach must respect human rights.

The Gulf of Guinea countries have enormous economic maritime development potential and the concept of the ‘Blue Economy’ as an integrated approach could help realise this to the full. For coastal communities, however, the most immediate future development would be to create a sustainable living environment. Thus, care must be taken to ensure that the ‘Blue Economy’ concept is developed into practical benefits for these communities.

\(^{16}\) Fragility, Violence and Criminality in the Gulf of Guinea, GSDRC Applied Knowledge Services, 2015