



## KOFI ANNAN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING TRAINING CENTRE POLICY BRIEF 11/ 2013

### Lowering the Anchor on Maritime Insecurity along the Gulf of Guinea: Lessons from Operation Prosperity

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#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- There is an urgent need to cure the political leadership of its 'sea blindness' in order to get political approval or buy-in for joint operations.
- There is an urgent need for member states to initiate joint patrols within their maritime domain. Many individual states do not have the capacity (logistics or personnel) to maintain a presence at sea, but as a combined naval force they will be able to achieve and maintain a presence.
- Regional economic communities need to begin, as a matter of urgency, domesticating the "Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of Central and West African States on maritime safety and security in their common maritime domain" so it becomes fully operational in practice.

#### Introduction

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) in its 2013 third quarter piracy report stated that piracy in global waters is currently at its lowest in the third quarter since 2006. Although the worldwide figure is low, there has however been a gradual increase in pirate attacks along the Gulf of Guinea. In the first three quarters of 2013, the Gulf of Guinea region recorded over 40 piracy attacks, 132 crew-hostage situations and seven hijacked vessels. The region accounted for all the crew kidnappings worldwide, with 32 incidents off Nigeria and two off Togo respectively. The pirates in this region are often heavily armed, violent and mostly target vessels and its crew along the coast, rivers, anchorages, ports and surrounding waters. More often than not, the pirates raid the vessels and steal

the cargo, usually crude oil, money, guns, drugs and navigational aids.<sup>1</sup>

Between January and June 2012, there were 32 incidents reported in the Gulf of Guinea compared to 25 cases reported for the same period in 2011. Nigeria experienced the bulk of these incidents with 17 as compared to 6 the previous year. Togo, which had no incidents reported in 2011, reported 5 incidents in 2012, including a hijacking. The rest of

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<sup>1</sup> ICC Commercial Crime Services. Piracy at sea falls to lowest level in seven years, reports IMB. Available at <http://www.icc-ccs.org/news/873-piracy-at-sea-falls-to-lowest-level-in-seven-years-reports-imb>. (Accessed on 18 November 2013).

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the incidents occurred along the coast of Benin, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>2</sup>

The 2012 IMB report also emphasized the high level of violence meted out to members of the crew in the Gulf of Guinea, including two recorded fatalities from the attacks. At least 20 of the 32 incidents reported involved the use of guns.<sup>3</sup> This increase in numbers of incidents and extent of violence has gradually become a cause of concern for states, security analysts and people engaged in maritime commerce.

In November 2011, at the request of the African Union (AU) President, Boni Yayi of Benin, the United Nations Secretary-General sent a delegation to the Gulf of Guinea. The team was to assess the Gulf's piracy situation and make appropriate recommendations to the UN as to how the UN could assist in tackling the problem. Following the visit of the assessment team, the UN Security Council adopted UNSCR 2039 (2012) condemning all acts of piracy and armed robbery along the Gulf and emphasised the need for a comprehensive strategy among all affected nations to address the problem effectively.<sup>4</sup> This Policy Brief seeks to discuss the joint naval operation between Nigeria and Benin. Furthermore, it examines the lessons learnt from this operation and makes recommendations based on the lessons as a means of countering piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

### Maritime Insecurity along the Gulf of Guinea

For the purposes of this brief, the Gulf of Guinea will be defined as the coastal states along the West and Central African shoreline from Côte d'Ivoire

to the Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>5</sup>, with a coastline of over 5,500 kilometres. The 10 Gulf of Guinea states have a maritime domain that can be defined as territorial waters 12 nautical miles (nm) from the coast; the contiguous zone or coastal waters 24 nm from the coast; and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which is 200 nm from the coast.<sup>6</sup> In sum, each state has 200 nm of maritime domain that falls within the jurisdiction of the state to protect and ensure a continuous presence within it.

The inability of states to provide security within their maritime boundaries has allowed the growth of illegal activities within that domain. Besides the increase in piracy along the Gulf, other illicit activities such as unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) consistently occur, costing the sub-region over \$370 million annually.<sup>7</sup> This has a drastic effect on coastal towns and villages as it leads to a loss of incomes and livelihoods.

In addition to the effects of IUU, unpatrolled coastlines are now being used as transit points for other forms of transnational organized crime, be it drug or human trafficking, oil theft or oil bunkering and the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Almost all the Gulf of Guinea states are producers of oil or have begun oil and gas exploration, leading to disputes among some states over maritime boundaries. An example is the ongoing maritime boundary dispute between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>8</sup> Some of these disputes prevent

<sup>2</sup> ICC International Maritime Bureau. Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships. Report for the period of 1 January to 30 June 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> UN News Centre. UN deploys UN team to assess Gulf of Guinea piracy threat. Available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40352&Cr=Gulf&Cr1=Guinea>. Accessed on 10 June 2012.

<sup>5</sup> The other countries along the said coastline are: Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Congo.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Articles 3, 33 and 57.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Gilpin, (2007) Enhancing Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea. Center for Contemporary Conflict. Available at <http://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/07/Enhancing-Maritime-Security-in-the-Gulf-of-Guinea.pdf>. (Accessed on 15 June 2012)

<sup>8</sup> See Aikins Lord, (2013). Oil and gas at Ghana-Ivorian Border: Conflict or cooperation? Available at <http://www.myjoyonline.com/opinion/2013/November-18th/oil-and-gas-at-ghana-ivorian-border-conflict-or->

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the states from having a coordinated approach to addressing their maritime insecurities, thereby creating a window of opportunity for criminal activities to flourish in the region.<sup>9</sup>

### Operation Prosperity<sup>10</sup>

The increasing maritime insecurities and their spillover effects on the economies on the Gulf of Guinea states propelled President Boni Yayi to request assistance from the UN. However, prior to appealing to the UN, President Yayi first contacted President Goodluck Jonathan, his Nigerian neighbour, for assistance in combating piracy in their shared waters. The two presidents, noting the threats that piracy and other illegal maritime activities were causing both countries, decided to address the threat. This was the birth of Operation Prosperity in September 2011.

Operation Prosperity is a collaboration between the navies of Nigeria and Benin to ensure a secure maritime environment and strengthen their close security cooperation by maintaining maritime domain awareness. In this collaborative arrangement, the Nigerian navy provides the vessels and most of the logistics and human resources for the operation, while the Benin navy opens its waters for Nigerian naval vessels to patrol. Benin also hosts the Operation Prosperity headquarters in Cotonou.

This Operation aimed to not only to ensure secure and safe passage for ships, but also to protect the exploitation of resources in the said waters. This was to enhance the maritime transport and infrastructural capacity of Benin and offer it some

leverage to compete in the global economy. In addition, it was to assist in reducing spillover attacks from Benin waters into Nigerian waters. This aim is achieved through coordinated and joint patrols and bilateral cooperation in effective consultation, information sharing and common evaluation of the maritime domain of the two countries.

### Accomplishments of Operation Prosperity

Operation Prosperity was initially supposed to be in effect for six months from September 2011 but the success of the initiative resulted in the two nations extending its mandate for another six months. The continuous presence of the navies in the maritime domain contributed to a reduction of attacks or attempted attacks against vessels. The arrest and interdiction of vessels has aided in this reduction, with over 10 such arrests and interdictions between October 2011 and February 2012. Additionally, the Sea-Lines of Communication (SLOC) which were closed following the upsurge of illegal activities, especially in the Benin waters, was re-opened<sup>11</sup> to allow trading and shipping activities to resume. The re-opening has once again made the Benin port a hub for shipping activities for most Sahel and landlocked countries.<sup>12</sup>

Operation Prosperity gave the two navies control over their Areas of Responsibilities (AOR). Their presence not only deterred would-be perpetrators from committing crimes but the navies were also able to disrupt certain criminal activities. For example, there was the discovery of an uncharted

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[cooperation.php](#). (Accessed on 18 November 2013), and Ghana-Ivory Coast maritime rivalry worsens. Available at <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2013/November-12th/ghana-ivory-coast-maritime-rivalry-worsens.php>. (Accessed on 12 November 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Interviews conducted with stakeholders in the maritime domains of the identified states.

<sup>10</sup> This section is based on an interview conducted with some personnel of Operation Prosperity

<sup>11</sup> With the increase in illegal activities, especially piracy, many shipping vessels were reluctant to conduct business at the Cotonou harbor. Many of the shipping companies were willing to berth and offload in Accra or Lome and then transport the goods by road to their final destinations instead of risking going through the Benin/Nigeria waters. This led to the closing of the SLOC, but after Prosperity began, its operations and safety of vessels were assured and their sea trading resumed. It is speculated that the loss of port revenue was what propelled Benin to seek assistance from Nigeria.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with officials at the Cotonou Harbor

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dangerous buoy about 9 nm southwest of Cotonou. Furthermore, the presence of the navy and a number of arrests and interdictions have resulted in a reduction in IUU or poaching activities and eliminated illegal bunkering/oil theft in the Benin waters. Operation Prosperity was able to eradicate the maritime drug routes in its AOR as well as reduce the smuggling of arms and ammunition by virtue of the numerous arrest and interdictions.<sup>13</sup>

The collaboration and coordination between the two navies has resulted in improved information and intelligence sharing. It has also assisted in improving the capacity of the Benin navy through shared training with the Nigerian navy, with Beninois sailors going to sea onboard Nigerian ships helping to build confidence, trust and improved cooperation and understanding between the two navies.

### Lessons from Operation Prosperity

The greatest lesson from Operation Prosperity has been the effect of getting approval from senior policy makers and government officials. The consultative meetings between the presidents of the two countries were what resulted in the realization of this initiative. The two presidents cut out most of the bureaucracy and red tape that more often than not surrounds bilateral agreements. The success of Prosperity has also led to the ECOWAS Commission including in its integrated maritime strategy the grouping of member states into zones for coordinated patrols. Furthermore, the combined strength of the two navies has enabled them to maintain a continuous presence within their maritime domain. Their presence at sea has not only served as a deterrent but has also led to a reduction in illegal activities.

The challenges faced by Operation Prosperity offer great lessons for other states that will want to emulate the initiative. Even though Prosperity was headquartered in Benin, the majority of the

logistics for the operation were supplied by and in Nigeria. Procurement of spare parts was all done in Nigeria and vessels sail back to Nigeria for fuel every week. Secondly, most of the vessels used for the Operation were not adequate for pursuits, interdictions and arrest, being unable to match the speed of pirate vessels.

### Recommendations

Based on the lessons learnt, achievements, and challenges of Operation Prosperity, the following recommendations can be made:

- There is an urgent need to cure the political leadership of its “sea blindness”<sup>14</sup> in order to get political approval or buy-in for joint operations;
- There is an urgent need for member states to initiate joint patrols within their maritime domain. Many individual states do not have the capacity (in terms of logistics or personnel) to maintain a presence at sea, but as a combined naval force they will be able to achieve and maintain a presence;
- Even though joint patrols are being encouraged, logistical supplies should not be the sole responsibility of one state. In cases where a member state is unable to contribute logistically, arrangements should be made to ensure smooth refueling and supply of spare parts;
- Better equipped navies should use the opportunity to impart some of the required skills to their counterparts;
- Regional economic communities need to begin, as a matter of urgency, applying at domestic level the “Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of Central and West African States on maritime safety and security in their common maritime domain”<sup>15</sup> so it becomes fully operational in practice.

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<sup>14</sup> “Sea blindness” refers to the lack of general maritime knowledge among the public at large.

<sup>15</sup> This declaration was signed on 25 June 2013 in Yaoundé, Cameroun at the Joint Summit on the regional strategy to combat piracy, armed robbery, and other illicit activities committed at sea in the Gulf of Guinea.

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<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.* Operation Prosperity.

## About the Author

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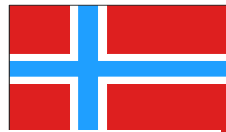
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