

From the Gulf of Aden to the Gulf of Guinea: A New Maritime Mission for NATO?

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Map 1: The Broader Gulf of Guinea Region - Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA) Member States.

Source: NDC, derived from <http://www.amssa.net/framework/MOWCA.aspx>



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Introduction

Later this year, the mandate of one of the most successful NATO maritime missions in history – counterpiracy operations off East Africa in the Gulf of Aden region – will expire. The question presently facing NATO's 28 member states is whether to subsequently retain a presence in a region where the threat is now considerably reduced,² or alternatively, refocus resources to where they are conceivably needed more to secure Allied interests. This paper makes the case for judicious consideration of a potential rebalance to Africa's new maritime hotspot: the Gulf of Guinea to the continent's West where threats to regional, Euro-Atlantic and international security and prosperity are on the rise. While recognizing that any decision to realign strategic priorities is ultimately a political one, this paper explains why the factors to justify greater Alliance capacity building (Cooperative Security) in the Gulf of Guinea region already exist in four vital respects: (1) Allied interests at stake; (2) international legitimacy for action; (3) established strategic guidance for the employment of Allied maritime and other means outside NATO territory; (4) relevant Allied operational competencies and expertise.

1. The Gulf of Guinea: A New Strategic Hotspot

1.1 Opportunities

The Gulf of Guinea, in geopolitical terms, conceivably stretches from the shores of Dakar, in Senegal, to the Central African Republic in the East, to the coastline of Angola in the South; this area corresponds roughly to the membership of the Maritime Organization of West and

Central Africa (MOWCA).³ [See Map 1] The economies of MOWCA countries rely heavily on maritime transport and transit. Twenty are coastal states located along the northern and southern coastal fronts of the Atlantic Ocean. The remaining five landlocked countries are regularly served by West African ports.

The region is an area rich in natural resources like iron ore, gold, diamonds, cobalt, copper, columbine-tantalite, uranium, chrome, tin, manganese, nickel, platinum, lead, coal, bauxite, cocoa, as well as forestry and fishery products, much of which make their way to European and North American markets. The energy sector is particularly significant. Three of the top natural gas and oil producers in sub-Saharan Africa are situated within the area – namely, Nigeria, Angola and Equatorial Guinea. With respect to oil, the region has several advantages:

- it produces mostly light sweet crude oil, which is easier and cheaper to refine than Middle Eastern oil;
- light sweet crude also complies closely with United States (US) environmental considerations, because it has a sulfur content below 0.5% and lower levels of other impurities;⁴
- the region's relative proximity to two of the world's main consumers of energy, North America and Western Europe, reduces the costs of transportation. By 2015, it is projected that the US will import 25% of its oil needs from this area.⁵ Among European countries, Portugal, for instance, already imports 20% of its oil and 40% of its natural gas from Nigeria alone.⁶ For Europe as a whole, the Gulf of Guinea currently accounts for 13% of oil and 6% of gas imports to the European Union (EU).⁷

According to the African Economic Outlook (2013), one

² In 2013 (as of 25 November) only 13 piracy-related incidents including 2 hijackings had been reported according to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), See: <http://www.icc-ccs.org/piracy-reporting-centre/piracynewsfigures> (accessed 10 December 2013).

³ Although in existence since the 1970s, beginning in the 1990s MOWCA has "aimed at strengthening the national capacity of Member States to increase their efficiency and competitiveness ... so that they benefit from the liberalization of market access. MOWCA [has] also embarked on programs for the implementation of policies for safe navigation and environmental protection." See: <http://www.omaoc.org/EN/politiques.php>

⁴ David L. Goldwyn and J. Stephen Morrison, *A Strategic U.S. Approach to Governance and Security in the Gulf of Guinea*, Washington D.C, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005, p. 5.

⁵ James M. Bridger, *Act Now to Forestall West African Piracy*, Atlantic-Community.Org, 07 Nov 2011, http://www.atlantic-community.org/index/Open_Think_Tank_Article/Act_Now_to_Forestall_West_African_Piracy (Accessed 3 Feb 2013).

⁶ Catarina Mendes Leal, *As Relações Energéticas entre Portugal e a Nigéria: Riscos e Oportunidades*. IDN Cadernos nº 3, Lisboa, Instituto de Defesa Nacional, Maio de 2011, pp. 65-66.

⁷ This figure is rising, demonstrating the importance of these energy flows to the EU. Some European countries like Portugal, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands are increasingly dependent on oil and gas imports from this African region.



optimistic projection is that the region will continue its rapid growth with a rate of 7.4% in 2014.⁸ It has already become the fastest growing region on the continent. This is driven not only by the oil and mineral sectors, but also by agriculture and services.

1.2 Threats

Nevertheless, there are an increasing number of threats to the economic promise and social stability of the Gulf of Guinea region. These include a growing number of piracy attacks, hijackings, armed robberies at sea, drug trafficking, illegal fishing, illegal migration flows, and terrorism. [See Map 2] In a recent interview, the Director of the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), Pottengal Mukundan, stated:

There has been a worrying trend in the kidnapping of crew from vessels well outside the territorial limits of coastal states in the Gulf of Guinea; in April 2013, nine crew members were kidnapped from two container vessels, one of which was 130 nautical miles from the coast. Pirates have used mother-ships, some of which were smaller off-shore supply vessels hijacked by pirates to conduct the attacks. There continues to be significant under-reporting of attacks – a phenomenon highlighted by the IMB year on year. This prevents meaningful response by the authorities and endangers other vessels sailing into the area unaware of the precise nature of the threat.⁹

The rise in piracy and other challenges stems from the poor ability of the affected states to exercise sovereignty and control over their territory including the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The corruption of officials by sophisticated illicit syndicates, rather than a failed state (as in the case of Somalia), is a key element in this lack of adequate governance and control. In contrast to the Gulf of Aden, maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea is also almost exclusively motivated by oil theft. As the

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) notes:

Much of the piracy that affects West Africa is a product of the disorder that surrounds the regional oil industry. A large share of the recent piracy attacks targeted vessels carrying petroleum products. These vessels are attacked because there is a booming black market for fuel in West Africa. Without this ready market, there would be little point in attacking these vessels. There are indications that oil may also be smuggled outside the region.¹⁰

The human costs of the crime are considerable since the pirates there tend to commit brutal acts of armed robbery rather than hold hostages to ransom, as is the case in the Gulf of Aden. Even without the factor of the high cost of ransoms, the potential negative consequences for the regional economy are an additional cause for concern. While the situation in the Gulf of Guinea is for the moment less critical than it was off Somalia when the piracy problem there was at its height, there are some worrying trends. Benin is a case in point:

The wave of attacks in 2011 led international maritime insurance adjusters to place Benin's waters in the same category as Nigeria's, greatly increasing the costs of shipping to the country. According to the navy chief in Cotonou [Benin's largest city and economic center housing a major port], there was a 70% decrease in maritime traffic in the third quarter of 2011 due to these increased costs. This implies a possible 28% loss in government revenue ... The adjustment also affects the cost of living for all citizens of Benin, by increasing the cost of imports and decreasing the competitiveness of exports.¹¹

Moreover, Lloyds of London already counts regional maritime oil theft to number in the millions of dollars.¹²

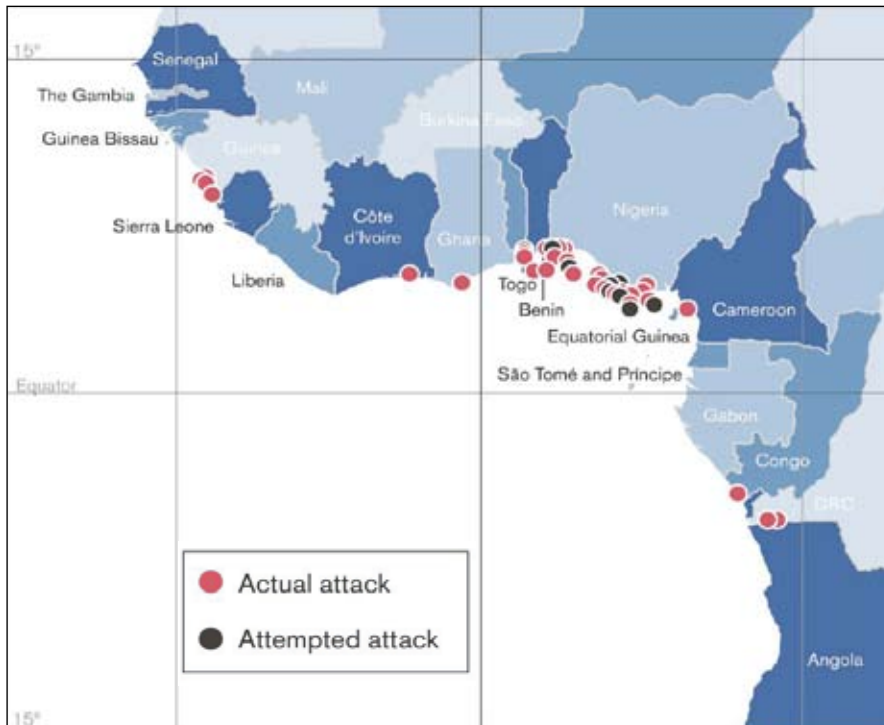
⁸ African Development Bank et al., African Economic Outlook 2013 – Regional Edition Western Africa. http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fileadmin/uploads/aeo/PDF/Regional_Edition/West_Africa_2013_en.pdf (accessed 26 November 2013), p. 3.

⁹ ICC Commercial Crime Services, *IMB Piracy Report highlights violence in West Africa*, 15 Jul 2013, <http://www.icc-ccs.org/news/865-imb-piracy-report-highlights-violence-in-west-africa> (accessed 20 Sep 2013).

¹⁰ UNODC, *Maritime Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea*, 2012, http://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTAWestAfrica/West_Africa_TOC_PIRACY.pdf (accessed 4 December 2013).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*



Map 2. Actual and attempted incidents of piracy/armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea, 2012.

Source: www.ics-ccs.org/piracy-reporting-centre/live-piracy-map.
 Apud http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Africa/0713pp_maritimesecurity_0.pdf (accessed 20 Sep 2013).

Piracy and hijackings notwithstanding, an additional challenge the region faces is drug trafficking and its consequences. West Africa is a major transit point for cocaine en route to Europe, now the world's second largest market for the drug, valued at \$36 billion and only \$4 billion smaller than the US market.¹³ [See Map 3] In a region already affected by poverty and pandemics, drug money is subverting fragile economies and eroding society. Using threats and bribes, drug traffickers are infiltrating state structures and operating with impunity.¹⁴ The case of Guinea-Bissau is a well-known example of how drug money can weaken state structures and make the whole of society fragile, thus exacerbating political conflicts and transforming the country into a potential safe haven for terrorist networks.

The perils of this situation were well illustrated in a recent New York Times article:

Narco-corruption imperils the continent's recent unprecedented economic boom, which averaged 5 percent an-

*nually over the last decade ... Likewise, roughly 60 percent of African countries are now on a democratic path, a trend that could easily be reversed with the instability brought on by drug networks. Trafficking also threatens to destabilize an increasingly vital supplier to global oil and gas markets, including a fifth of U.S. oil imports. Ominously, Africa's growing drug trade is also amplifying a range of international security threats. Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have become involved in narco-trafficking. They earn millions from Africa's cocaine trade. Much of this money may go to purchasing the sophisticated weaponry that has flooded Africa's black markets following the fall of the Qaddafi regime, including Semtex explosives popular with terrorist groups that were recently seized by Nigerian security units following a battle with Al-Qaeda militants.*¹⁵

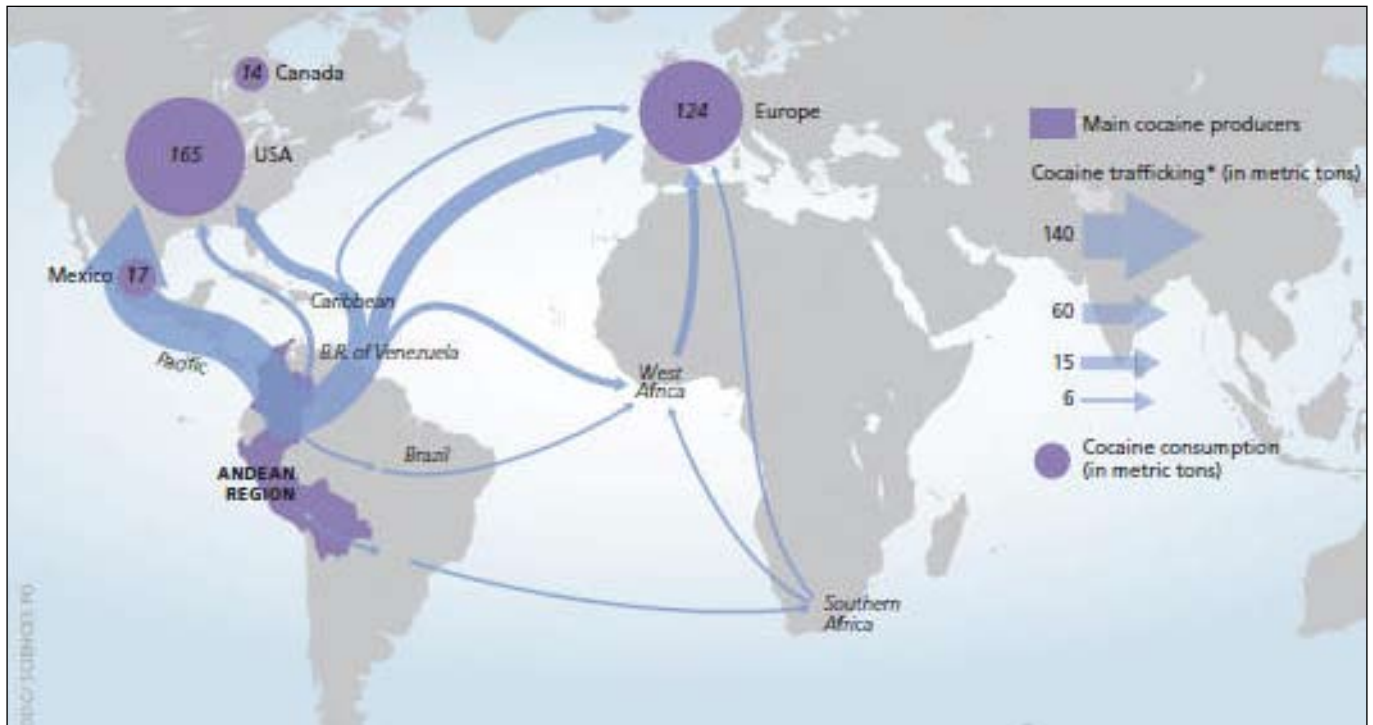
To these concerns could also be added the social ills inflicted upon European societies by cocaine trafficked through the Gulf of Guinea region.¹⁶

¹³ Hanna Wolf, *Cocaine's Journey to Europe*, Fair Observer, 14 September 2012, <http://www.fairobserver.com/article/cocaine%E2%80%99s-journey-europe> (accessed 4 December 2013).

¹⁴ Amado Philip de Andrés, *Organized Crime, Drug Trafficking, Terrorism: The New Achilles Heel of West Africa*, FRIDE, 2008, http://www.fride.org/download/com_achilles_heel_eng_may08.pdf (accessed 12 Dec 2013).

¹⁵ David O'Regan, *Narco-States: Africa's Next Menace*, New York Times, 12 March, 2012.

¹⁶ UNODC, *Europe's Cocaine Problem is a Curse ... and not only for Europe*, Conference on Cocaine, Madrid 15 November 2007, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/speeches/2007-11-15.html> (accessed 7 December 2013).



Map 3: Main Global Cocaine Flows

Source: UNODC World Drug Report 2010, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/> (accessed 20 November 2013).

1.3 The International Community’s Call to Action

Given the inability of individual Gulf of Guinea states to adequately manage their maritime security, the international community has increasingly called for regional approaches and external support. The UN Security Council has approved two resolutions: Resolution 2018 of 31 October 2011, and Resolution 2039 of 29 February 2012. These documents emphasize international concern over the threat that piracy and armed robbery at sea pose to the security of maritime lines of communication. Both resolutions express the need for the coordinated development of a comprehensive strategy to counter piracy including international assistance to states and regional organizations, as well as the establishment of an information-sharing network between countries. Excerpts from Resolution 2039 give a clear indication of these priorities:

*The Security Council...
Expressing its deep concern about the threat that piracy and*

armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea pose to international navigation, security and economic development of states in the region ...

Also noting the need for international assistance as part of a comprehensive strategy to support national and regional efforts to assist States in the region with their efforts to address piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea ...

Encourages international partners to provide support to regional States and organizations for the enhancement of their capabilities to counter piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea, including their capacity to conduct regional patrols, to establish and maintain joint coordination centres and joint information-sharing centres, and for the effective implementation of the regional strategy ...¹⁷

As one legal expert has observed, where territorial waters are concerned, consent of a local nation’s government is sufficient to facilitate such engagement by the international community: “Chapter VII [of the UN Charter] is not needed to permit consensual operations” there.¹⁸ As

¹⁷ [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2039\(2012\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2039(2012)) (accessed 4 December 2013).

¹⁸ Douglas Guilfoyle, *Piracy off Somalia: a sketch of the legal framework*, 20 April 2009, EJIL: Talk! Blog of the European Journal of International Law. <http://www.ejiltalk.org/piracy-off-somalia-a-sketch-of-the-legal-framework/> (accessed 9 December 2013).



regards the High Seas and the EEZ, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) already obliges signatories to cooperate and the Gulf of Guinea is no exception:

Article 100 of UNCLOS provides 'All States shall cooperate to the fullest possible extent in the repression of piracy on the high seas or in any other place outside the jurisdiction of any State.' ... Article 86 [of] UNCLOS prima facie excludes the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from being part of the high seas ... However, Article 58(2) provides that 'Articles 88 to 115 and other pertinent rules of international law apply to the exclusive economic zone in so far as they are not incompatible with this Part.' This makes it plain that the provisions of the high seas regime (including all provisions on piracy) 'apply to the exclusive economic zone in so far as they are not incompatible with' UNCLOS provisions on the EEZ.¹⁹

More recently, initiatives encouraging greater regional and international approaches to address maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea have emerged in Africa itself. On 24 and 25 June 2013, the Heads of State and Government of three key regional organizations in the Gulf of Guinea – the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) – gathered in a summit, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, to discuss maritime security and safety in the region. There, they adopted the “Code of Conduct on the Prevention and Suppression of Acts of Piracy, Armed Robbery against Ships, and other Illicit Activities carried out at sea in Central and West Africa”.

In his opening speech, President Paul Biya of Cameroon stressed that maritime insecurity “poses a serious threat to the peace and stability of African States [as] it undermines the people’s development and well-being.”²⁰ At the Summit’s closing, he went on to emphasize, “I would also like to commend the African Union’s initiative to draw up the 2050 Africa’s Integrated Maritime Strategy [2050 AIM Strategy].”²¹ The Strategy, formally endorsed in December 2012 by African Ministers with responsibil-

ity for maritime-related affairs, encourages international support in its implementation. It specifically calls for an “enhanced collaborative, concerted, cooperative, coordinated, coherent and trust-building multilayered approach among the AU, RECs/RMs [Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution], relevant African organizations, Member States, the private sector as well as international development partners, in order to promote the AU’s objectives.”²²

Similarly, the “Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa”, agreed in June by ECCAS, ECOWAS and the GCC, states: “The support of all strategic partners at the international, bilateral and multilateral levels, is envisaged in the implementation of this Memorandum.”²³

1.4 Ongoing International Efforts in the Region

Not surprisingly, international monitoring of, and engagement in the Gulf of Guinea region have been stepped up in recent years. The following examples are illustrative.

The US Combatant Command with responsibility for Africa, AFRICOM (Africa Command), has developed a Subordinate Campaign Plan for the Gulf of Guinea region under its chapeau Theatre Campaign Plan. As Ambassador Christopher Dell, then AFRICOM Deputy Commander for Civil Affairs explained in 2012, the plan was based on the premise that the solution to addressing regional security problems lay first and foremost in building partner capacities:

This involved strengthening the laws and the legal system of West African states, training their law-enforcement authorities (whether coastguards, navies or some other units) in the conduct of maritime law-enforcement operations such as ship boarding and searches, and working with the African Union and the sub-regional organizations such as ECCAS and ECOWAS to promote both African leadership and regional

¹⁹ United Kingdom Parliament, Commons Select Committee Foreign Affairs, *Piracy off the coast of Somalia*, Session 2010-12, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmfaff/writev/1318/m06.htm> (accessed 10 December 2013).

²⁰ <http://pages.au.int/maritime/events/summit-heads-state-and-government-maritime-safety-and-security-gulf-guinea-yaounde-cameroon> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² African Union, *2050 AIM Strategy*, <http://pages.au.int/maritime/documents/2050-aim-strategy-0> (accessed 4 December 2013).

²³ ECCAS, ECOWAS, and GGC, *Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Safety and Security in Central and West Africa*, 25 June 2013, <http://pages.au.int/sites/default/files/MEMORANDUM%20%20VERSION%20ANGLAISE.pdf> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).



*cooperation in the area of maritime safety and security. The role of the international community was to support African capacity building by advising, training and equipping local security forces and by promoting regional and international coordination.*²⁴

While the US currently does not conduct counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Guinea, it continues to engage there with maritime assets under its so-called Africa Partnership Station (APS) launched in 2007 and overseen by AFRICOM's subordinate command US Naval Forces Africa (NAVAF). APS is NAVAF's flagship maritime security cooperation program with Africa, focused on building maritime safety and security by improving maritime awareness, response capabilities and infrastructure. As its overarching vision states:

APS and partner nations in Africa, the United States and Europe want to answer African leaders' requests to build a prosperous Africa. We all want to achieve safe borders, stability and prosperity.

*This project is about enabling African nations' militaries to stand on their own. Our goal is to empower African nations to stop maritime crime and the movement of illegal goods at sea on their own.*²⁵

A number of European NATO member states have contributed assets and personnel to APS on an individual basis over the years, including in the Gulf of Guinea.

AFRICOM is also active in the area through maritime exercises that serve to build capacity and interoperability. The recently organized "Exercise Obangame Express 2013" focused on counter-piracy and maritime security operations in the Gulf of Guinea, with participation from Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, France, Gabon, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Spain, Togo and the United States.²⁶

For its part, in January 2013, the EU launched a €4.5 million initiative to combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea:

"The Critical Maritime Routes in the Gulf of Guinea Programme (CRIMGO)" will help governments across West and Central Africa to improve the safety of the main shipping routes by providing training for coast guards and establishing a network to share information between countries and agencies across the region."²⁷ In addition, the EU Development Fund has initiated a project on the "harmonization of safety regulations, emergency responses and port efficiency" in support of ECCAS. As with US AFRICOM and a number of European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom), the EU also sent observers to the June 2013 summit in Yaoundé on Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea. To this backdrop, the EU is soon to release an overarching strategy for the Gulf of Guinea region.²⁸

Lastly, like the UNODC, INTERPOL (International Criminal Police Organization) now also includes Gulf of Guinea piracy in its analysis of organized crime in West Africa.

With all these international initiatives underway, it is not unreasonable to pose the question as to what NATO could contribute. If, as described above, the legal basis to legitimize action is broadly in place (i.e. UNSCRs, UNCLOS, anticipated consent of the local parties as required based on the expressed African interest in international partnerships), does the strategic guidance and operational competence exist within the Alliance to warrant engagement in the Gulf of Guinea? The remainder of this paper endeavours to provide some answers.

2. NATO: From the Gulf of Aden to the Gulf of Guinea?

2.1 Strategic Guidance

A survey of contemporary strategic guidance for the Alliance would appear to countenance possible NATO en-

²⁴ Chatham House, *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea*, Report of the conference held at Chatham House, London, 6 December 2012, March 2013, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Africa/0312confreport_maritimesecurity.pdf (accessed 27 November 2013), p. 30.

²⁵ US Sixth Fleet, *About Africa Partnership Station*, <http://www.c6f.navy.mil/about%20us.html> (accessed 7 December 2013).

²⁶ Jason Howard, *Obangame Express 2013 Comes to a Successful Close*, 1 March 2013, <http://www.africom.mil/Newsroom/Article/10389/exercise-obangame-express-2013> (accessed 27 Nov 2013).

²⁷ European Commission, *New EU initiative to combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea*, 10 January 2013 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-14_en.htm (accessed 30 Sep 2013).

²⁸ ISN ETH Zurich, *Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea*, 5 Sep 2013, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Special-Feature/Detail/?id=168552&contextid774=168552&contextid775=168559&tabid=1454419462> (accessed 3 December 2013). discrimination legislation was not very effective.



agement in the Gulf of Guinea. At the NATO Lisbon Summit of November 2010, the Alliance adopted its current Strategic Concept that emphasizes “Cooperative Security” as one of NATO’s core tasks alongside Collective Defense and Crisis Management. Cooperative Security means that “the Alliance will engage actively to enhance international security, through partnership with relevant countries and other international organizations ...”.²⁹ This could encompass working with international partners to address the kinds of threat which are emerging in the Gulf of Guinea: “Instability or conflict beyond NATO borders can directly threaten Alliance security, including by fostering extremism, terrorism, and trans-national illegal activities such as trafficking in arms, narcotics and people”.³⁰ The document equally stresses the importance of “the vital communication, transport and transit routes on which international trade, energy security and prosperity depend”³¹ and which are under increasing threat in West Africa as discussed earlier.

In addition to the Strategic Concept, the March 2011 Alliance Maritime Strategy (AMS) also emphasizes the importance of addressing threats to “the maintenance of the freedom of navigation, sea-based trade routes, critical infrastructure, energy flows, protection of marine resources and environmental safety [which] are all in Allies’ security interests”.³² It goes on to affirm “Cooperative Security” as a core task for Allied maritime forces in promoting safety and security at sea:

Alliance maritime activities ... offer valuable opportunities to prevent conflicts and develop regional security and stability through dialogue, confidence building, and increased transparency. ... These activities are complementary to what nations conduct themselves and have the added value of demonstrating the Alliance’s intention to support partners and of drawing on a wider set of assets and capabilities.

The Alliance’s maritime operations and activities can strengthen the Alliance’s partnerships, dialogue, and cooperation with others through:

1. *Engaging in diplomatic activities, including through*

port visits as part of the routine activities of the Standing NATO Maritime Groups.

2. *Contributing, where appropriate, to partner capacity building by improving the capabilities of our partners to address security threats in the maritime environment and to operate there effectively.*

3. *Conducting joint training, seminars, and exercises with partners.*³³

If required, more direct engagement both within and outside NATO’s treaty area, is additionally presented as a core task for Allied navies under the term “Maritime Security”:

*As part of broader efforts to address security threats arising in the maritime environment, NATO maritime forces can contribute to the maintenance of a secure and safe maritime environment given their unique capabilities and routine blue water activities ... In accordance with international law (including any applicable treaties and customary law), the contribution of Alliance maritime operations and activities to maritime security will entail: Conducting maritime security tasks within the framework of a specific, NAC [North Atlantic Council] approved operation either within or beyond the North Atlantic Treaty area. In the latter case, an authority could also be given to conduct additional maritime security tasks beyond surveillance and patrolling.*³⁴

Thus, in addition to the international legitimacy for action, the strategic guidance providing the policy rationale for a possible NATO contribution to securing the Gulf of Guinea would appear to be in place. So, notwithstanding the issue of political will, the question remains: what about NATO’s operational competence and expertise to make a viable contribution?

2.2 NATO’s Operational Precedents in the Region

The Atlantic Alliance has, in fact, already proven its operational reach in the proximity of the Gulf of Guinea: in June 2006, NATO held a large-scale, two-week military exercise in the West African island nation of Cape Verde,

²⁹ NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defense - Strategic Concept For the Defence and Security of The Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, 2010, <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf> (accessed 12 July 2013).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² NATO, *Alliance Maritime Strategy*, 2011, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-41426331-6494A785/natolive/official_texts_75615.htm (accessed 13 Jul 2013).

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*



a country with a singular geostrategic position between three continents – Africa, Europe and the Americas. Codenamed “Steadfast Jaguar”, the exercise was NATO’s first in sub-Saharan Africa. Involving almost 8,000 troops from 25 of the Alliance’s then 26 members, it demonstrated the Alliance’s capacity to deploy troops and materiel over long distances in West Africa.

Moreover, in July 2007, an Alliance flotilla, the Standing NATO Maritime Group One (SNMG1), deployed from the Spanish naval base of Rota and started the first circumnavigation of Africa under the NATO flag. The flotilla was made up of USS *Normandy* (an American Ticonderoga-class cruiser, and the SNMG1 flagship), HNLMS *Evertsen* (a Dutch Zeven Provinciën-class air defence and command frigate), NRP *Alvares Cabral* (a Portuguese Vasco da Gama-class frigate), HDMDMS *Olfert Fischer* (a Danish Niels Juel-class corvette), the FGS *Spessart* (a German Rhone-class replenishment tanker), as well as HMCS *Toronto* (one of Canada’s Halifax-class frigates). This historical enterprise, which included presence operations in the Gulf of Guinea, was deemed a success:

*For NATO, there were two principal objectives of the trip around Africa. The first was to demonstrate that NATO was able to deploy a large and capable maritime force outside of its traditional AOR (Area of Responsibility) in the North Atlantic and Mediterranean. ... The second objective of the Africa circumnavigation was to develop NATO’s Maritime Situational Awareness (MSA) around Africa. NATO’s interest in MSA ranged from the simple gathering of climate and oceanographic data in support of future operations to more complex assessments of the security situation around Africa and the capabilities of African coastal states in terms of maritime security.*³⁵

If these two operations alone clearly demonstrate the Atlantic Alliance’s maritime reach into West Africa, what of the kind of engagement that could conceivably be required in the Gulf of Guinea today? Here too, there are relevant operational precedents.

2.3 NATO’s Operational Precedents in Counter-Piracy

Between 2008 and 2009, NATO launched three operations in East Africa, each with UN sanction. Operation *Allied Provider* (Oct-Dec 2008) “involved counter-piracy activities off the coast of Somalia. Responding to a request from UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, NATO naval forces provided escorts to UN World Food Programme (WFP) vessels transiting through the dangerous waters in the Gulf of Aden, where growing piracy has threatened to undermine international humanitarian efforts in Africa”.³⁶ This was followed by Operation *Allied Protector* (Mar-Aug 2009): “a counter-piracy operation, to improve the safety of commercial maritime routes and international navigation off the Horn of Africa. The force conducted surveillance tasks and provided protection to deter and suppress piracy and armed robbery [...] threatening sea lines of communication and economic interests”.³⁷ This in turn was succeeded by the ongoing Operation *Ocean Shield*, with a focus on at-sea counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa. “Approved on 17 August 2009 by the North Atlantic Council, this operation is contributing to international efforts to combat piracy in the area. It is also offering, to regional states that request it, assistance in developing their own capacity to combat piracy activities”.³⁸ [See Map 4] In 2010, the UN Security Council unanimously acknowledged the Alliance contribution to counter-piracy: “Commending the role of ... the North Atlantic Treaty Organization operations *Allied Protector* and *Ocean Shield* ... in suppressing piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of Somalia.”³⁹

In addition to providing maritime platforms and aircraft to the international effort there, NATO participates in the international Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) as well as periodically chairs the so-called “Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE)” meetings among multinational actors engaged in counter-piracy activities. The NATO Shipping Center also works with industry in contributing to the implementation of

³⁵ Angus Topshee, *Circumnavigating Africa, A Sign of Things to Come?*, Frontline Defence N° 3, May 2008, http://www.frontline-canada.com/Defence/index_archives.php?page=1611 (accessed 3 February 2013).

³⁶ NATO, *NATO Operations and Missions*, 2011, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52060.htm (accessed 6 December 2013).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1918\(2010\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1918(2010)) (accessed 4 December 2013).



Map 4: NATO Operation *Ocean Shield* Area of Operation

Source: NATO

the “Best Management Practices for Protection against Somalia Based Piracy (BMP4)” including the use of the “Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC).”⁴⁰ Given these significant counter-piracy precedents, it is therefore not too improbable to foresee a potential role for NATO maritime forces in similarly helping to combat piracy and other threats to Africa’s West – especially when they are on the rise there. So what might a NATO contribution look like?

2.4 Cooperative Security

Consistent with current US AFRICOM and EU approaches, any NATO contribution should in the first order be focussed on Cooperative Security – capacity

building to forge African leadership of the security situation in the Gulf of Guinea – rather than a new, dedicated counter-piracy operation similar to Operation *Ocean Shield*. Such capacity building is, after all, a more prudent investment than the direct intervention of Allied forces over the long term. As one study recently noted:

*With the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa now poised to eclipse Somalia as the world’s most pirate-prone waters, it is important that NATO and other security actors internalize the lessons learnt off the Horn of Africa in order to develop more effective policies that target the crime’s enabling factors there as well. Though it requires a proactive approach, preventing piracy today is far more cost effective than combating it tomorrow.*⁴¹

For instance, through NATO’s Senior Military Liaison

⁴⁰ *Best Management Practices for Protection against Somalia Based Piracy*, August 2011, <http://www.shipping.nato.int/Pages/BMP.aspx> (accessed 7 December 2013).

⁴¹ James Bridger, *Safe Seas at What Price? The Costs, benefits and Future of NATO’s Operation Ocean Shield*, Research Paper n° 95, September 2013, NATO Defense College, p.8. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=386> (accessed 21 Sep 2013).



Officer (SMLO) team in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (home to AU Headquarters), Allies could offer, on a rotating basis, a maritime liaison officer(s) to assist the AU Commission staff working on the implementation of the aforementioned 2050 AIM Strategy. Additionally, greater information exchange with West African partners to improve maritime domain awareness in the Gulf of Guinea could be considered. NATO standards and operational evaluation – the unmatched enabler of multinational interoperability – could also be shared with local maritime forces to build effective regional approaches to security. Consistent with the AMS, joint training, exercises and seminars on maritime safety and security, could be made available on a case-by-case basis to interested individual Gulf states or relevant regional organizations like ECOWAS, ECCAS and the GGC. Relevant lessons learned from the Alliance's years of cooperation in the multinational counter-piracy effort in East Africa could also be imparted. Coordination of some Alliance capacity building efforts with US APS could also be considered to better leverage European contributions. As one senior US NAVAF official recently observed, "in some respects it would be easier to coordinate the contribution of European assets [to APS] by working directly with NATO rather than individual countries."⁴²

The Standing NATO Maritime Groups could be at the center of many of these Cooperative Security efforts. As their mandate states:

*The Standing NATO Maritime Groups are a multinational, integrated maritime force made up of vessels from various allied countries. These vessels (including their helicopters) are permanently available to NATO to perform different tasks ranging from participating in exercises to actually intervening in operational missions. These groups provide NATO with a continuous maritime capability for operations and other activities in peacetime and in periods of crisis and conflict. They also help to establish Alliance presence, demonstrate solidarity, conduct routine diplomatic visits to different countries, support transformation and provide a variety of maritime military capabilities to ongoing missions.*⁴³

Alongside military assistance, the Alliance could also harness its civilian competencies to help secure the Gulf of Guinea region as part of a wider international effort. For example, Allies could consider enlarging the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme from North Africa to the Gulf of Guinea region on a case-by-case basis. The Alliance's long-established use of civil science to forge partners' capacities in areas ranging from counter-terrorism and border and port security, to energy and environmental security, for example, is of direct relevance to combating many of the threats and risks faced in contemporary West Africa as described earlier.⁴⁴ The Alliance could by the same token leverage its established competencies in civil emergency preparedness and response to help secure the Gulf of Guinea. There is no reason why the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), for instance, could not be posited as a potential model for regional approaches to civil emergency preparedness and response to natural- or man-made disasters.

The NATO Shipping Centre's recent work with the International Chamber of Commerce and others, to develop "Interim Guidelines for Owners, Operators and Masters for protection against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea region,"⁴⁵ has been a positive step by Allies in addressing growing threats and risks in West Africa. Nevertheless, as one high-level official in the NATO Command charged with support to the AU recently observed, "we could be doing a lot more" provided African and Allied political will are to be found.⁴⁶

Any additional actions on NATO's part, however, would have to be: carefully coordinated with other international actors such as US AFRICOM and the EU; be part of a comprehensive strategy comprised of both military and civilian elements working on multiple fronts; and remain vigilant as regards corrupted local officials. As the UN-ODC has observed:

Strengthening maritime interdiction capacity would provide some deterrent to [piracy's] expansion [in the Gulf of Guinea]. It is important to keep in mind, however, the corrupting effect oil wealth has had ... In addition to building local law en-

⁴² Interview with authors.

⁴³ NATO, Maritime Command (MARCOM), <http://www.mc.nato.int/org/smg/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 12 December 2013).

⁴⁴ <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/78209.htm> (accessed 4 December 2013).

⁴⁵ *Interim Guidelines for Owners, Operators and Masters for protection against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea region*, <http://www.shipping.nato.int/Pages/Guidelines-for-Gulf-of-Guinea.aspx> (accessed 4 December 2013).

⁴⁶ Interview with authors.



*forcement capacity, measures must be taken to better regulate the local fuel trade.*⁴⁷

Or, as the International Crisis Group, has also noted:

*It is clearly necessary to build capacity among the region's underdeveloped navies and maritime police forces. But over emphasis on defence treats piracy purely as a security problem rather than a form of organised crime and a symptom of deeper governance problems onshore, namely shortcomings in the distribution of resources, economic inequity and corruption.*⁴⁸

2.5 Maritime Security

In the near-term, more dedicated Cooperative Security efforts would clearly appear the most plausible form of any NATO rebalance to the Gulf of Guinea region. Nevertheless, should the level of threat there escalate to a point where the international and regional communities call for direct intervention by outside forces, the Alliance, with its proven operational reach into West Africa, should also be prepared to contribute.

Where piracy and other maritime threats are involved, this would involve operationalizing the Maritime Security provisions of the AMS. Having honed their skills and capabilities over several years in the waters off East Africa, the Standing NATO Maritime Groups could play a direct role in assisting the Gulf of Guinea states to deter and disrupt acts of piracy, hijacking and maritime trafficking, whether outside or (if invited) within the regional states' territorial waters. This could be done on a persistent basis similar to the approach to date in East Africa, or, what is more conceivable, on a recurrent but non-continuous basis. The latter option would provide greater flexibility for the deployment of the Maritime Groups elsewhere if required. It would also allow for more "peacetime" training and exercises as part of NATO's so-called Connected Forces Initiative (CFI) when the Alliance increasingly moves from a campaigning to contingency posture in a post-2014 context, following the draw-down of its largest

operation in history in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The rich Gulf of Guinea region holds great promise for the prosperity of the states that lie around it, as well as for the export markets in Europe, North America and elsewhere that benefit from it. Nevertheless, threats to regional security and stability – and, by extension, those of the Euro-Atlantic and international communities – are genuine, on the rise, and must be addressed. As summarized at the 2013 Summit of Heads of State and Government on Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea:

*With Africa having become a major hub for global crude oil theft, money laundering, illegal arms and drug smuggling, human trafficking, human smuggling, environmental crimes, piracy and armed robbery at sea, dumping of toxic waste, and maritime terrorism, African leaders and decision-makers have realized that it is time to step up the continent's strategic approach towards maritime safety and security as the future of Africa lies in her Blue Economy, a new frontline of Africa's renaissance.*⁴⁹

Through the UN Security Council, the international community has also taken note and is already responding, in a variety of ways, to support "African solutions to African problems" in West Africa. NATO – the most accomplished multinational maritime alliance in history – should be similarly prepared to act. Its Strategic Concept and Maritime Strategy say as much. The year 2014 presents an opportunity to begin considering conceivable policy options with priority given to Cooperative Security as the best way to safeguard shared Allied and African interests. There could be no stronger message from the Euro-Atlantic community to West Africans, than the collective preparedness and willingness of the 28 European and North American democracies of NATO to help make the Gulf of Guinea more secure.

⁴⁷ UNODC, *Maritime Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea*, 2012.

⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, *The Gulf of Guinea: The New Danger Zone*, Africa Report No. 195 – 12 December 2012, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/-/media/Files/africa/central-africa/195-the-gulf-of-guinea-the-new-danger-zone-english.pdf> (accessed 12 November 2013), p. 23.

⁴⁹ <http://pages.au.int/maritime/events/summit-heads-state-and-government-maritime-safety-and-security-gulf-guinea-yaounde-cameroon> (accessed 4 December 2013).