



RiskIntelligence

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea: Are the current efforts working?

Updated threat analysis and trends

Whitepaper | July 2021

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Gulf of Guinea piracy: Are the efforts working?

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Introduction:

Piracy attacks continue to be a major threat in the Gulf of Guinea, even though the number of attacks has been relatively low in recent months. Overall, it should be noted that the situation has not escalated out of control over the past 12 to 24 months, even though many headlines suggest that. Nevertheless, some trends are a major concern for seafarers and merchant ship operators.

The most important issue is that all types of ships may be attacked. In recent months, successful boardings have even taken place on vessels underway with a high freeboard. Furthermore, the area under threat has spread and now covers large parts of the Gulf of Guinea, in line with transnational organised crime in the region.

This whitepaper looks at some aspects that ship operators must consider for operations in the Gulf of Guinea. That includes the distance of potential kidnap-for-ransom attacks from the Nigerian coastline, as well as increasing concerns among seafarers, highlighted by reports about suspicious activities.

Current efforts to improve maritime security in the region, including the Deep Blue project in Nigeria, are unlikely to lead to short-term improvements. Operators therefore have to consider additional security measures, taking into account several considerations.

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Spread of attacks throughout the Gulf of Guinea

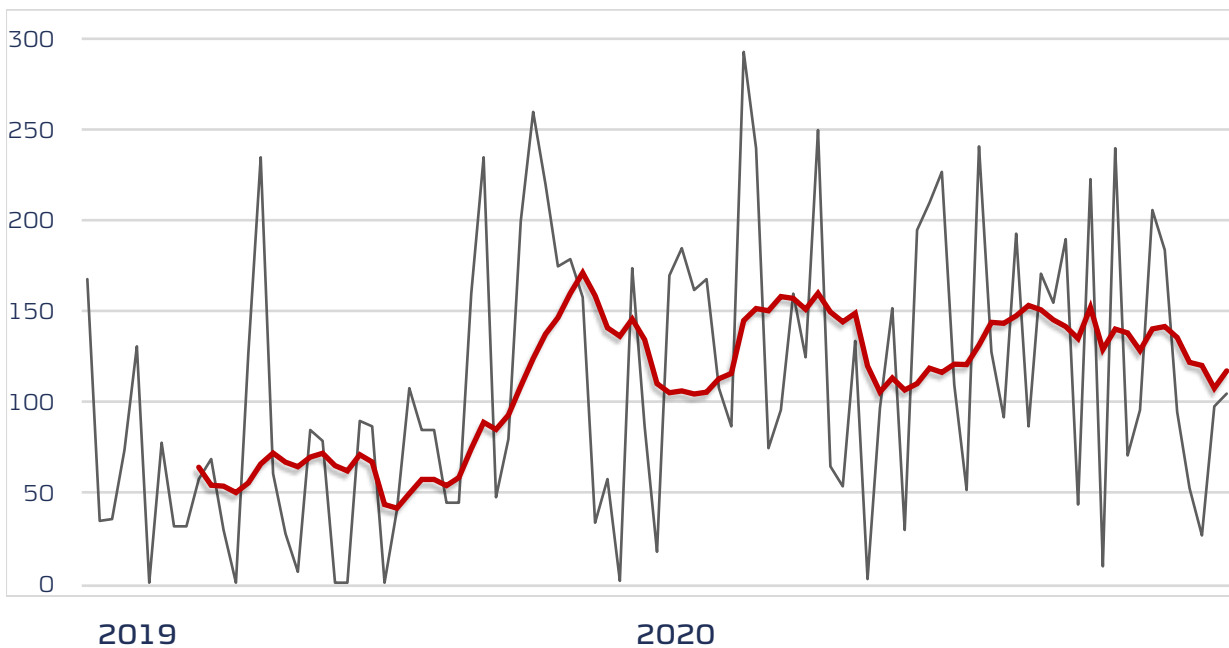
The most concerning trend for merchant ships operating in the Gulf of Guinea has been the spread of attacks over a relatively large area.

Between 2016 and mid-2019, virtually all successful and failed kidnap-for-ransom attacks in the region took place relatively close to the southern and western Niger Delta, up to 120 nm from the coastline. The average distance of attacks from the Nigerian coast then started to increase in the last quarter of 2019. In 2020 and 2021 to date, attacks took place both close to Nigeria, but also at significant distances from the Niger Delta coastline, affecting countries from Ghana to Gabon.

Despite many articles and reports suggesting the contrary, it is not the first time that criminal groups from Nigeria have carried out operations throughout the Gulf of Guinea. Looking at longer-term patterns, it is obvious that very similar patterns could already be observed between 2010 and 2016, albeit with a focus on product tanker hijackings. At the same time, kidnappings of seafarers are still exclusively carried out by groups based in the Niger Delta.

There are no indications that similar attacks can be carried out from other countries in the region.

Gulf of Guinea kidnap-for-ransom attacks 2019-2020



Distance of failed and successful kidnap-for-ransom attacks from the closest point on the Niger Delta coastline (in nm). The red line shows the moving average over the previous 10 incidents (Source: Risk Intelligence System).

Seafarers are increasingly concerned

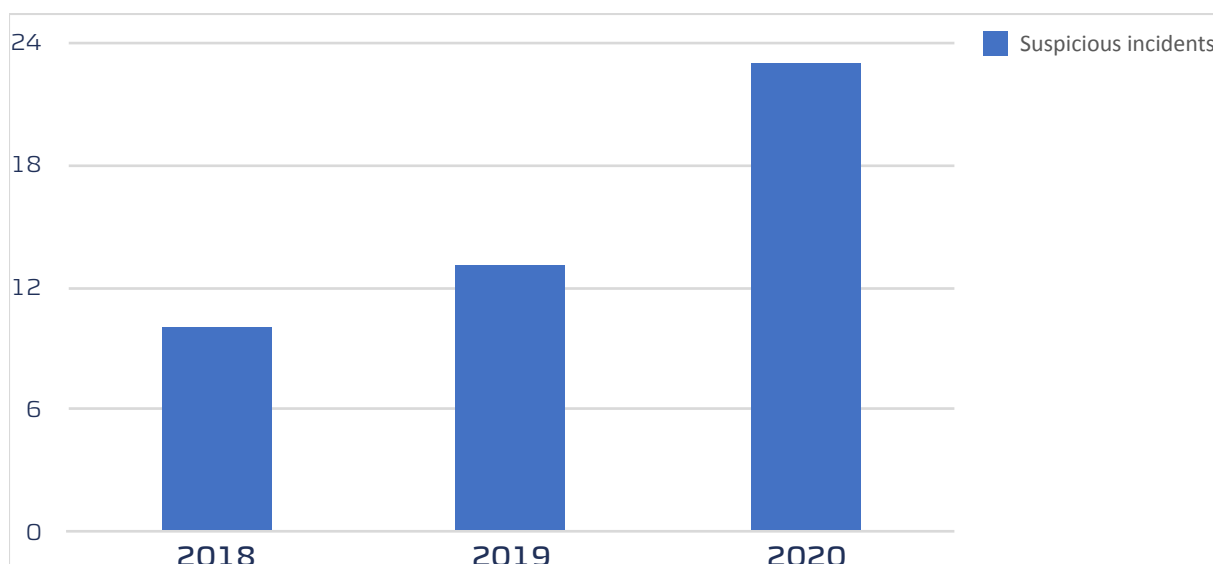
Over the past 24 months, the number of reports about activities that were at least perceived as suspicious has increased significantly. This is a clear indication that crews on merchant vessels operating in the region are increasingly concerned about potential attacks.

In many incidents that have been reported by various organisations, it has been obvious that these were merely related to normal patterns of life in the region, for example to fishing

operations which are part of the day-to-day activities in the region. These cases were not recorded as incidents on the Risk Intelligence System and are therefore not included in the figures shown here.

However, even such reports highlight the anxiety among seafarers, particularly among those who are not familiar with the situation in the Gulf of Guinea.

Total reported suspicious incidents in the Gulf of Guinea by year



Number of reports about suspicious incidents per year in West Africa (covering all countries from Senegal to Angola) as recorded by Risk Intelligence (Source: Risk Intelligence System).

Current efforts to limit the threat

On 10 June, Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari launched the Integrated Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), otherwise known as the Deep Blue Project.

Deep Blue combines an operations centre (C4i Centre), various land, sea and air assets, as well as a 600-strong maritime security unit.

Overall, the USD 195 million project is aimed at enhancing maritime domain awareness and improving law enforcement, both at sea and on land. Deep Blue has often been described as an important step in the fight against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

However, the Deep Blue Project has not been designed as a genuine counter-piracy project, and it should be noted that other maritime security challenges have a much more direct impact on government revenues and Nigeria's population.

At the same time, Nigerian agencies and other regional organisations want to achieve better coordination with international partners and the private sector. Arguably the most important initiative in this context is the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum (GOG-MCF) which will be organised for the first time in July 2021.



The DB ABUJA, one of two custom-built multi-purpose surveillance vessels in the Deep Blue Project. (Image: NIMASA)

Additional security measures

Demand for additional protection is particularly high off Nigeria, but also in other parts of the Gulf of Guinea. Many shipping companies have become comfortable with the embarkation of privately contracted armed security personnel (PCASP) during voyages in the Indian Ocean. PCASP have been used extensively there, but the situation in the Gulf of Guinea is fundamentally different.

Coastal states generally do not allow merchant ships to enter territorial waters with a PCASP team embarked. Detentions of security personnel – as well as of the respective vessel and potentially the master and other crew members – are possible.

Naval personnel can often be requested to be embarked as armed guards, for example on vessels at anchor off Lome (Togo), Cotonou (Benin) or Douala (Cameroon). In Nigeria, the Nigerian Navy cooperates with private companies under a Memorandum of Understanding. In these partnerships, the respective company is responsible for the operation of suitable vessels while naval detachments of seven men – including weapons and ammunition – are provided to vessels tasked with security duties around offshore oil and gas fields or as escort vessels in the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Before employing any additional security measures, however, vessel operators should consider these questions:

Questions to consider:

- ▶ **For armed guards:** Does the flag state allow embarkation of foreign military personnel? Are there any specific regulations that must be adhered to?
- ▶ **Port state regulations:** Is it legal to embark military personnel? Does the vessel operator receive written confirmation to ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations in the respective port state? Does the vessel operator receive a written confirmation regarding the length of the embarkation, ensuring that the detachment of armed guards will remain on the ship for the specified period? Are verifiable documents about training, experience and equipment of security forces personnel provided?
- ▶ **Use of force (including lethal force):** PCASP are generally bound by Rules for the Use of Force, leaving ultimate authority over the use of force with the ship's master. Military personnel are bound by Rules of Engagement which are generally not provided to other stakeholders. Authority over the use of force lies with the officer in charge of a military detachment, potentially leading to questions over liability.
- ▶ **Operational questions:** Given that a dedicated security vessel would distance the threat from the merchant ship and generally provide a higher level of deterrence, is it possible to contract a security vessel and would this be an alternative to embarking armed guards? What happens in case of short-term changes to planned vessel operations?

Considerations regarding Covid-19 measures

The Nigerian Navy as well as other navies in Gulf of Guinea countries state that any personnel earmarked for deployment as armed guards will be tested for Covid-19 and only sent on task based on a negative test result. However, medical records are generally

considered as confidential, test results will therefore not be provided. Rapid Covid-19 tests upon embarkation cannot be used because such a medical procedure involving military personnel cannot be conducted by civilian ship crews.

About Risk Intelligence

Risk Intelligence is a leading, trusted and reliable partner, providing end-to-end risk assessment and planning. We specialise in analysing threats from the interaction between piracy, organised crime, terrorism, insurgency and military conflicts - since 2001. Our team is dedicated and resourceful, drawing from international experience and a diverse range of background.

The Risk Intelligence System provides clients with real-time intelligence and situational awareness that will assist in avoidance of various types of security threats in areas of operational concern around the world.

Moreover, Risk Intelligence provides assistance to companies aiming to be better prepared for potential emergencies of all types. Among other services, this includes bespoke guidelines and procedures, internal workshops as well as risk management exercises to test internal procedures in a simulated emergency situation.

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