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Review Article

Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

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ABSTRACT

Piracy has emerged as one of the emerging and dominant obstacles to maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea in recent years. It has become a major threat to the safety of the passage of ships, vessels, cargo, and passengers that ply the vast Gulf of Guinea for business, transportation, fishing, oil and gas exploration, etc. Similarly, countries in the Gulf of Guinea that are dependent on the economic opportunities available in the Gulf have to contend against this existential threat to the economic advancement of countries in the region. With reference to the recent rise in the incidence of piracy in the region, this study aims to offer deeper insights into the huge economic potentials imbedded in the Gulf, the emergence of and causes of piracy in the region, and the implications and consequences of piracy for the economies of the countries in this region. This study consulted secondary sources in its findings, predominantly online articles, journals, and other scholarly publications. It is significant because it investigates the issues of piracy in the region and the efforts that have been put in place by international agencies, international maritime organizations, as well as state and non-state actors in the Gulf of Guinea to tackle this crime of piracy in the region.

KEYWORDS: Gulf of Guinea, Piracy, maritime security, Maritime Crimes

1. INTRODUCTION

The Gulf of Guinea represents one of the most important maritime routes for the majority of the countries in West and Central Africa. The region is vast and covers a total of 6,000 km of route from Senegal to Angola. It links the countries of West and Central Africa to international markets and the flow of goods coming from North and Central America and Europe. In the past, the Gulf of Guinea was one of the hotspots for the kidnapping, trafficking, and transport of African slaves from the continent to Europe and the new world. However, in recent times, the Gulf has become the economic lifeline of the countries in this region, both coastal and landlocked. The region is also of strategic importance to the global economy, as it is vital for global energy production. On this note, several studies have shown that the international waters of the Gulf of Guinea account for 10% of the global GDP. The economies of the countries in the Gulf of Guinea are equally dependent on the immense economic opportunities that the Gulf offers. Therefore, based on the immense importance the Gulf of Guinea holds to the economic survival of countries in this region, it has attracted various forms of maritime criminals and non-state actors whose nefarious activities, such as armed robbery, piracy, kidnapping for ransom, ship hijacking, vessel and cargo offloading, etc., have affected the growth and economic stability and prosperity of the countries in this region. With a special focus on piracy, this paper will offer an in-depth analysis and

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conceptualization of piracy, its history, evolution, current trends, causes, and effects. Furthermore, the paper will examine the opportunity cost of piracy in the region and the immense damage piracy causes to the internal political and economic stability of the countries in the region, as well as the global economy at large.

What and where is the Gulf of Guinea?

The Gulf of Guinea is located on the coastline of West and Central Africa, as well as in the territorial waters of the Atlantic Ocean, which faces the western and eastern parts of the continent of Africa. Abubakar (2016) described the gulf as having more of a political dimension than a geographical one, which has led to the extension of its borders beyond Ghana in West Africa to Gabon in Central Africa. The United Nations Permanent Advisory Committee on Security Issues in Central Africa defined the limits of the Gulf as stretching from Angola to Cote d'Ivoire, with Angola, Ivory Coast, Togo, Ghana, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of the Congo as members of the Gulf of Guinea Nations. Meanwhile, ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) included Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger as members of the Gulf of Guinea Nations, even though these countries are landlocked, which reflects the political undertones behind this, as stated above. Furthermore, it is known that the region is one of the world's richest and under-exploited places, holding about 35% of the world's petroleum reserves as well as many minerals and natural resources such as diamonds, tin, bitumen, uranium, copper, manganese, gold, silver, phosphate, granite, gas, marble, quartz, oil, etc., as well as a very rich rainforest zone that accounts for 20% of the world's total rainforest and much of the oxygen-generating source of the entire globe. The Gulf is a natural habitat for a large portion of the world's biodiversity, like humans, animals, microorganisms, etc. With these vast reservoirs and economic prospects found in this region, the Gulf of Guinea is indeed one of the richest regions of the world and holds vast economic potential for the countries in that area.

The EU-UNODC (2014) reported that the Gulf of Guinea covered an estimated 6000 km of coastline stretching from Senegal to Angola, which is an important shipping zone transporting oil and gas as well as goods to and from Central and Southern Africa, with an estimated 1500 fishing vessels. Tankers and cargo ships are navigating across its waterways. Equally significant is the fact that the Gulf of Guinea is a key shipping route for most countries in the sub-region of West and Central Africa due to their overdependence on imported goods. The Gulf of Guinea is also said to contain 10% of the world's oil reserves and acts as a key route for ships transporting oil and other commodities to and from the region. Shaojie Liu (2024) ^[9] further described the Gulf of Guinea as the economic lifeline for many African economies, both at the coast and in the landlocked hinterland. It is also equally of strategic importance to the global economy because the region is vital for global energy production; it is also vital for West Africa's fishing industry and the trafficking of narcotics, arms, and ammunition. The Gulf is an equally important region and hub of international trade, with a high traffic of vessels plying the route

on a daily basis, either for the importation of manufactured products from Europe and North America or for the export of oil, gas, energy, and other mineral resources. As for Tedongmo, Ludvine Nadege (2024) ^[12], the Gulf of Guinea is not the most dangerous maritime zone in the world, but it remains an area where the scale of insecurity and threats to stability are on the rise. Describing the region as vulnerable against the backdrop of its booming oil and international shipping.

Anyimadu (2013), ^[11] while tracing the historical origin of the Gulf of Guinea, opined that in the pre-colonial era and in the period of trans-Atlantic slavery, the Gulf of Guinea and the West African waterways became known for the trafficking of humans and African slaves, trade in opium, arms, etc., which suggests that historically, the West African waterway has always been a vital aspect of the global economy. It is from this sea route that many ships from Europe and Asia engaged in various forms of trade, both in commodities and humans. From the 14th century on, it was recorded that many ships and voyages/expeditions of discovery navigated through the West African waterways, reaching as far as the Cape of Good Hope, in order to engage in trade with West, Central, and Southern African societies and to also acquire new lands for settlement and colonization.

Popoola & Olajuyigbe (2023) asserted that the coastline of West Africa or the Gulf of Guinea has a market size of 300 million consumers, with a multilingual diversity comprising of Anglophone, Lusophone and Francophone countries. It is also estimated by them that in recent times, the Gulf of Guinea accounts for a high volume of the Global oil and gas industry, with many crude oil exploration and offshore drillings ongoing at the Gulf. This high volume of oil drilling and exploration of mineral resources ongoing in this region has made it susceptible to crimes of various forms and these offshore and onshore drilling and explorative activities accounts for the major share of the national revenues in Nigeria and Angola.

Anyika, V. O. and Ojatorotu, V. (2022) ^[2] asserted that the Gulf of Guinea is the northernmost portion of the tropical Atlantic Ocean which is located off the western coast of Africa. Although the Gulf is not a major international shipping route, it however represents 25 percent of African maritime traffic and it nearly 20 commercial seaports in operation. The Gulf of Guinea in recent years have been viewed as the hotspot of piracy and armed robbery and a dangerous zone infested with very violent and well-armed pirates and robbers. In a report by the International Maritime Bureau, the Gulf of Guinea since 2018 has contributed over 50 percent of the global piracy incidents. Due to the declining incidence of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Guinea has become the next hotspot of piracy in Africa and in the maritime world at large. Similarly, Anyika and Ojatorotu (2022) ^[2] stated that Pirates in the Gulf of Guinea are known for committing the tripartite crimes of ship hijacking, stealing of cargoes and kidnapping of crew members for ransom.

Olofin, O. Usman, I. Ihiabe, D. & Jaja, A. (2021) described the Gulf of Guinea as a region endowed with vast proven oil and assets, as well as untapped mineral resources found in its deep waters. Furthermore, the region is known as one of the most important shipping routes which connects regions between the

Indian and Atlantic Oceans, it is also regarded as a major artery for import and export to and from West, Central and Southern Africa to the rest of the world. Additionally, the Gulf of Guinea is also home to and encompasses several islands including Bioku, Elobey Grande and Elobey Corisco and Annobon in Equatorial Guinea, Bobowasi off Ghana and the Island of Principe and Sao Tome in Sao Tome and Principe. Furthermore, the region is viewed as a strategic maritime route for commercial shipping and it also hosts several natural harbours which are operational throughout the year. The Gulf of Guinea is known to account for 5.4 million barrels of crude oil per day. It has also emerged in recent years as the new hub for global energy supplies. The crude oil production in this region also serves European, North American and Asian markets.

In similar vein, the Gulf of Guinea is also noted for its high level of fishing activities. Guilini (2021) reported that the Gulf of Guinea and its waterway has focused on supplying abundance of fish to distribute to European markets. As many societies that live off the coast of the Gulf of Guinea were historically fishing communities before the discovery of oil and other mineral resources in this region. This has made the region one of the main suppliers of sea products worldwide. With many of the coastal communities bordering the Gulf from Ghana, to Togo, to Benin, to Nigeria, Senegal, etc. earning sizable revenue from fishing activities. Fishing and the supply of sea products is equally one of the major and thriving industry in the Gulf of Guinea, which accounts for both internal and external trade in these countries.

Emergence of Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

Greminger, T. and Al-Al-Rodhan, Nayef (2022) ^[6] traced the history of piracy to ancient times from Cilician Pirates who constantly hijacked olive oil cargoes from Roman ships to Corsairs who sought spoils along North Africa's Barbary coast, to buccaneers attacking Spanish treasure ships in the Caribbean, the list goes on. However, in recent years, the Gulf of Guinea has grown to become the current hotspot of maritime piracy in the world, with reference to the various maritime crimes that have been committed in this region for the past fifteen years. Similarly, Fiorelli, Matthew (2014) ^[5] traced the history of piracy to the aftermath of the American independence from Great Britain in 1783, the newly formed United States had to face the Barbary Pirates based at Tripoli. This motivated the then President Thomas Jefferson to impose laws on the land where Pirates are based in order to create peace at sea. Furthermore, he asserted that historically, it is known that Pirates most often times operated in countries with unstable governance situations, high rate of insecurity and mostly in coastal states.

Piracy has many definitions and meanings and might sometimes be confused with armed robbery on the high seas. It can be described as kidnapping for ransom, as it is common off the coast of Somalia. Piracy is also the hijacking of vessels with the intention of stealing the cargo on those vessels, as is the case in the Far East. In West Africa, piracy is most often simple maritime armed robbery. The League of Nations Committee of Experts for the Progressive Codification of International Law in 1926 defined piracy as a robbery at sea and a crime against the security of

maritime trade. The London Treaty of 1930 and the Nyon Treaty of 1937 regarded piracy as encompassing acts committed by warships and submarines. In 1956, the International Law Commission of the United Nations (ILC) saw piracy differently by regarding it as driven by private purposes and also involving private vessels. The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defined piracy by highlighting what constitutes acts of piracy in Article 101 of the UNCLOS: any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and which is perpetuated on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, against persons or properties on board a ship or aircraft, against a ship, aircraft, persons or properties in a place outside the jurisdiction of any state. Secondly, piracy is any act of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or of an aircraft with knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft. Thirdly, it was also defined as an act of inciting or intentionally facilitating an act of hijacking or the depredation of a ship or aircraft. However, many governments and people across the world have continuously critiqued this definition as unsuitable and obsolete in contemporary times.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) of the UN defined maritime robbery/piracy in its Resolution A 1025 (26) as any illegal act of violence or detention or any act of depredation, or threat thereof, committed for private ends and directed against a ship or against persons or property on board a ship, within a state's internal waters, archipelagic waters, and territorial sea. It is also any act of inciting or intentionally facilitating an act described above. Therefore, from the assertion above, it becomes plausible to suggest that maritime crimes that are perpetrated in the Gulf of Guinea are within the category of piracy. Most of the maritime crimes committed within the territorial waters and exclusive economic zones of the member states of the Gulf of Guinea are described as maritime armed robbery. This points out the fact that both piracy and maritime armed robbery are two sides of the same coin.

According to data obtained from the International Maritime Bureau, 90% of pirates and maritime armed robbers who operate in the Gulf of Guinea come from Nigeria, most specifically the Niger Delta, with many incidents of piracy attacks in and off the Nigerian coasts not recorded. In the Cameroonian area, the incidence of piracy has been on the increase around the Ideano and Duala areas. Around the coastline of Equatorial Guinea, incidences of piracy are less frequent, with the only recorded incidence occurring in 2019 around 40 nautical miles from Luba. In Ghana, there has been an incidence of piracy and armed robbery around Takoradi anchorage, with two vessels attacked in 2015, three attacked in 2016, one in 2017, ten in 2018, and three in 2019. In Ivory Coast, there has been a significant drop in the number of recorded pirate attacks, with one recorded case taking place from 2015 to 2019. The coastline of the Democratic Republic of Congo is another risky area in the Gulf of Guinea, with cases of sea robbery, vessel hijacking, and kidnapping of crews having been recorded. In 2015, three attacks were recorded; two were recorded in 2016; and one incident occurred each in 2018 and 2019. Generally, the Gulf of Guinea have grown to

become a risky maritime zone for shipping companies due to its infestation with violent Pirates and sea robbers who are from different states in the region. As was stated above, apart from the recorded cases of piracy that is known in the Gulf of Guinea, most of the incidence of piracy in this region are unknown and unrecorded.

Olofin, O. Usman, I. Ihiabe, D. & Jaja, A. (2021) described piracy as an old phenomenon in international trade, as it has been in existence since the advent of sea trade. They further associated piracy with a violent, bloody and ruthless practise that occurs on international and inland waters just the same way armed robbery occurs on land. They equally believed that most often times, pirate activities might not necessarily be bloody or involve bodily harm or death of seafarers, but only in kidnap of victims and seafaring vessels in order to demand for ransom. With this assertion, they defined piracy to mean an act which consists of illegal acts of violence or use of force, detention or any act of depredation and boarding or attempting to board any ship with the apparent intent to commit theft, done for private ends by the Crew or passengers of a private ship and directed on the high seas or anywhere at sea against another ship or persons or property on board that ship.

Over the years, the nature and dimension of piracy have changed, with the issue of maritime piracy reaching its peak level in 2010, with around 445 reported incidents worldwide. In the first three quarters of 2013, the Gulf of Guinea recorded over 40 piracy attacks, with 802 crew hostage situations, and seven hijacked vessels. Therefore, they reported that from all available records, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea accounted for nearly 30% of all attacks in African waters between 2003 and 2011. In a similar vein, the International Maritime Bureau defined piracy as the act of boarding or attempting to board any ship with the intent to commit theft or any other crime or the capability to use force in the furtherance of the act. Similarly, it was in 2012 that the Gulf of Guinea surpassed the Gulf of Aden as the region with the highest number of Pirates attacks in the world, with these attacks tending to have assumed violent dimensions. Due to the limited maritime security presence off the West African coast, the region have become an attractive hub and transit route for South American narcotics traffickers. Oil theft and bunkering are also regular occurrences in the Gulf of Guinea, with Nigeria alone reportedly losing 40,000 to 100,000 barrels of oil a day to oil theft. Nilasari, Lorna Steele (2022) regarded piracy as an ancient crime that is in existence in modern times. As for Laifer, Alan (2024) [8], modern-day maritime piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea began to be perpetuated from the mid-2000s which coincided with the emergence of insurgency in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Due to the huge number of foreign investments and companies in the oil and gas industry of Nigeria, piracy in the Niger Delta became a recurring issue. The cause of this can be linked to the instability in the region which is caused by widespread unemployment among the youths, social deprivation and administrative neglect in the region. These challenges in the Niger Delta of Nigeria motivated the youths in the region to form different militant groups who engage in various forms of crimes such as oil bunkering, hijacking of oil faring vessels, kidnapping, etc. as they constantly demand for their rights to have access to

the resources in their land. The Niger Delta youths who have been agitating against the continuous pollution and contamination in their land due to oil and gas explorations operated as a loose group of different militant groups who engage in many maritime crimes in the process of carrying out their activities, most especially piracy within the creeks of the region. In recent times, pirate groups now have the ability to intercept seafaring vessels at greater distances from the shores. They have grown to possess sophisticated weapons and communication networks which has proliferated their activities. Pirates in Somalia and the East Coast of Africa usually use their control base to smuggle weapons and dangerous ammunitions into East, Central and North Africa. In West Africa, many pirate groups also engage in smuggling of hard drugs through the sea or marine environment, thus evading capture due to their mastery of the terrain they operate in.

Piracy under international law is known to be a major threat to global maritime security. It is known to endanger the welfare of international seafarers, the security of navigation commerce, and it equally affects the balance of global economy, with the resultant effects of causing loss of life, physical harm or hostage taking, financial losses to ship owners, increased insurance Premiums and security costs, increased costs to consumers/producers and it causes damages to the maritime environment.

Ali, Kamal-Deen (2015) asserted that piracy has historically been a threat to maritime trade and the good order of the world's ocean, he further stated that piracy in the Gulf of Guinea stands as the most dangerous maritime area in terms of the success rate of violence and attacks. He noted that piracy has become one of the most pressing security threats in the region, citing June, 2013 in the aftermath of the code of conduct of repression of piracy which was adopted by the Gulf of Guinea states, which also had wide international support, a Maltese flagged-vessel named Cotton was hijacked off the coast of Gabon, as an example of the emerging and imminent threat of piracy. This same year also witnessed high rate of piracy and attacks in the Gulf of Guinea than in previous years. The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas described piracy as an act of depredation which must have taken place on the high seas. Furthermore, piracy and armed robbery on the high seas were described as posing similar threats to safety and security on international waters. Although, the Gulf of Guinea have had a long history of piracy and sea theft in the past, but it was in recent years that it has become a major threat. From 2005 to 2006, the issue of piracy rose from 23 to 60, from 2010 to 2013, the incidents of piracy in the region increased to 64. However, Kamal-Deen (2015) believes the incident of piracy reported is less than the actual incidents of piracy that occurs annually in the Gulf of Guinea, as half of these incidents are not reported or known. From 2009, the Gulf of Guinea has been identified as the new piracy territory, while discarding Somalia which has been one of the piracy hotspots in the world for a considerable longtime. He also pointed out that the piracy that occurs on the high seas of the Gulf of Guinea can be categorized into three areas or spots; *Hotspots, enclaves and zones of low risks*. He described piracy hotspots as areas where there are great risks and danger of attacks, while the piracy enclaves are where pirates are based and operate from, zones of low risks on the other

hand are where there is hardly any report of attacks, he cited Angola and Cape Verde as zones of low risk and danger. However, the hijacking of the tanker; *Kerala in February, 2014* was the first reported case of piracy off the coast of Angola. Cote D'Ivoire and Sierra Leone were noted as piracy hotspots due to the nature and level of violent attacks off their coast. Guinea is a piracy hotspot and enclave. The coast of Nigeria, Benin Republic and Togo are equally dangerous piracy hotspots in the region. Niranjana Jose (2022)^[7] stated that the situation of piracy in West Africa is compounded by the increased activity of sea pirates whose targets are not only riches and natural resources, but their activities also serve to disrupt regular commercial and maritime activities/transit roads within the Gulf of Guinea. Therefore, piracy poses a great danger to the lives of people and cargo and also increases the risk of an environmental disaster if pirates seize ships carrying chemicals, oils or nuclear waste, as well as weapons/dangerous ammunitions. Similarly, while piracy and armed robbery which seems similar can occur in maritime space, piracy on its own exclusively occurs outside a country's 12 nautical mile territorial limits. Most Pirates who hijack and unload seized merchandise most often times oil into coastal boats after the stolen ship enters the pirates' home country's territorial seas/international waters incapacitate the ability of international patrols to pursue such suspected pirates into the territorial waters of their country due to issues of sovereignty. Also citing political instability on land and among governments of the Gulf of Guinea countries as one of the major factors that have made piracy to persist in this region.

Babagan (2016) associated piracy in the Gulf of Guinea to the theft of oil cargo and kidnapping for ransom, who are often heavily armed criminal enterprises. In this regard, according to a report by the Control Risks Group, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea by November 2013 had constantly maintained a steady level around 100 attempted hijackings in that same year. He also linked the Niger-Delta militants in Nigeria who have been agitating for a better share and dividend of the oil exploration in their land with piracy and kidnapping. With pirates attack in the Niger Delta region often happening around the creeks, territorial waters, terminals, harbours and even oil rigs rather than in the high seas or Open Ocean as compared to the piracy happening in Somalia or the Gulf of Eden. From 2003 to 2011, the Gulf of Guinea accounted for 427 of the 1434 recorded attacks in African waters. The pirates in the Gulf of Guinea are known for their violence and use of sophisticated arms and ammunitions like AK-47s. However, the use of speedboats is one of their most favoured means of operating. The speedboats are used to attack and dispossess ships and their crew of cash, cargo and valuables, when the vessels is at the anchor or in harbours or when the vessels are close to the shore. The pirates in this region also modify their tactics by attacking fishing vessels and using those same fishing vessels to attack other vessels, particularly in Nigeria's territorial waters and in neighbouring countries like Benin, Togo and Cameroon. Malaquais (2012) further described the Gulf of Guinea's piracy as the organized and sometimes highly sophisticated illicit tacking of oil and subsequently distribution in the black market. Some of the consequences of piracy is that it has

seriously affected the economies of countries in the region, with the cost of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea due to stolen goods, security and insurance been estimated to be about USD \$4 billion in 2015.

Causes and Implications of Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

According to a 2022 report by Amani Africa highlighted the causes of piracy in the region to include; absence of economic opportunities and government deficit. Other causes of piracy are widespread poverty and poor public services, combined with rampant illegal fishing by foreign trawlers.^[10] Pelz, Daniel (2021)^[11] suggested that some other possible causes of piracy in the region, while citing the case of the Niger Delta which is an impoverished region in Southern Nigeria which is home to a vast oil reserves and where most of the Pirates operating in the Gulf of Guinea comes from is the effects of oil drilling which has affected the two most important economic sectors in the Niger Delta which is fishing and farming, thus, the people, most especially the youths in that region have turned to piracy and other maritime crimes as possible sources of income. Further emphasizing on this point, Kamal-Deen Ali who is the Executive Director of the Centre for Maritime Law and Security in Africa, Accra, stated: *When you have an environment where you can easily recruit criminal networks because they have livelihood concerns, then this is a major problem to confront.*

Furthermore, on the causes of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, a 2023 This day live editorial article listed ineffective governance structures, weak rule of law, precarious legal frameworks and inadequate naval coastguards and maritime law enforcement as some of the possible causes of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and Nigeria specifically. Additionally, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) traced the causes of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea to the disorder that surrounds the region's oil industry. This is reflected in the large percentage of recent piracy attacks in the region which was targeted at oil vessels due to the booming black market for oil in West Africa. Most incidents of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is believed to have emanated from the Niger Delta region. In addition to this, what compounds piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is that unlike the seas near the horn of Africa, the Gulf of Guinea is not patrolled by major foreign fleets, due to weak national fleets, and the thriving illegal market for crude oil which further exacerbate the issue of piracy in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea.

Anyika, V. O. and Ojatorotu, V. (2022)^[2] highlighted the causes of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea citing the rising insurgency in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, high rate of unemployment, government neglect of the coastal areas, underdevelopment of the coastal areas, environmental degradation and cultism as some of the immediate causes of piracy in the region. However, they viewed the continuous neglect of the Niger Delta communities of Nigeria by the Federal government of Nigeria as the most important reason why there was a surge in the activity of piracy in the region. The neglect of these communities that holds a major chunk of Nigeria's oil, gas and energy reserves in one reasons why the youths in that region took up arms to defend themselves and equally fight for their interests and the development of their region

which has been affected by the contaminations and pollutions brought about by oil/gas drilling and exploration activities.

On the implications of piratical activities in the Gulf of Guinea, Anyika, V. O. and Ojajorotu, V. (2022),^[2] highlighted some of the consequences of piracy in the region to include high rate of insecurity this has resulted in the world at large and in the Gulf of Guinea. In addition to the high rate of insecurity in this region due to the activities of Pirates, piracy have also brought about grave consequences on the economic development in the Sub-region. It has caused significant reduction in port revenues for states in the Sub-region such as Nigeria, Angola, Benin Republic and Gabon. This also has the larger implications in undermining the efforts of the state in growing their national incomes. For example, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has led to increase in the cost of shipping across the Gulf, which has affected the competitiveness of the Sub-region's products in the international/global market.

Olofin, O. Usman, I. Ihiabe, D. & Jaja, A. (2021) asserted that Piracy by implications has become one of the pressing challenges to the global community and global maritime security, given the serious human, economic, environmental and political effects it brings. Around the world, piracy at sea is now a source of government, security and developmental concerns. In the areas around the Gulf of Guinea where piracy is most prevalent, it imposes direct effects in terms of how it restricts the free movement of goods and services, of how it raises the cost of insurance, premiums and other services. Piracy is also known to have consequences on the environment, security and development of the countries in the region.

Anyika, V. O. and Ojajorotu, V. (2022)^[2] have stated that the incidence of piracy has had dire economic consequences for the Gulf of Guinea. For example, it was reported that the Republic of Benin suffered a significant loss in Port revenue in 2011, to the tune of \$81 million due to multiple acts of piracy. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) similarly reported that in 2009, West Africa lost \$2.3 billion to maritime crime in three years. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is of grave security threat to the region and the world at large. The security threat pose by piracy have also affected the economic development in the sub-region by causing significant reduction in the port revenue of member states of the Gulf of Guinea. By extension, piracy have also led to an increase in the cost of shipping across the Gulf of Guinea which has affected the competitiveness of the region's products in the international market. This by implication have also led to an increase in the cost of importation and the attendant increase in the cost of commodities imported into countries of the region. On the issue of crime, armed robbery and kidnapping for ransom, it is suggested that since the pirates in the Niger Delta and Gulf of Guinea carries out majority of these activities, it has discouraged Investors from investing in the coastal areas because of high spate of crime and various forms of criminality which serves as a danger to their investment.

Fiorelli, Matthew (2014)^[5] believes that the causes of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea include unemployment and a lack of economic opportunities as some of the reasons that motivates individuals to venture into piracy and other maritime crimes as means of livelihood. Some of the pirates' attacks are motivated by the need

for economic, rather than political gains. Furthermore, he stated that the regional instability in the region is one major reason why the activities of pirate's flourish, asserting that the regional instability in the region is as a result of state failure and poor governance, which quickly leads to insecurity on land, and insecurity on land easily extends to the maritime environment. He additionally stated that the continuous rise of piracy in the region can be attributed to the dependence on oil production and mismanagement of natural resources.

On the issue of the consequences of piracy, Fiorelli (2014)^[5] asserts that it affects the supply of oil and the prices of shipping throughout the region, as insurance for vessels increases due to risks associated with piracy. Furthermore, in a comparison between piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Guinea, he noted that in the Gulf of Guinea, since the sub region is a major consumer market with vast resources such as cocoa, diamond, gold and timber, as well as the increased exploitation of existing reserves makes the region an emerging hub of economic activities. Therefore, without external pressure, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea will continue to increase, which is bound to have deteriorating conditions for its inhabitants, leading to dire consequences for the security in the region. The continued increase in the cases of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea may make and stop maritime insurers from insuring commercial vessels completely or it will lead insurance premiums to skyrocket. As for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, the effects of piracy is that it has revealed direct, indirect and opportunity costs to the region and beyond. The cost of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is not only limited to the coastal states, as its effects further trickles down to affect the hinterland/landlocked countries of the region. Maritime incidents and piracy are no longer restricted to territorial waters alone, but they are increasingly occurring further offshore, often outside the exclusive economic zones, with most incidents of piracy over the years in the region having turned violent. With kidnap for ransom having become the most significant risk to commercial operations in the region. Furthermore, one major implication is that of the recent linkage of piracy with terrorism, as the terrorists who operate in the Sahel are believed to be increasing their tentacles to the Gulf of Guinea.

Abdel Fattah, Mahmoud Mohammed (2021) believes that the various factors that lead to piracy in the Gulf of Guinea are legal and jurisdictional weaknesses, favorable geography, conflict and disorder, underfunded law enforcement, inadequate security, permissive political environments, cultural acceptability and the promise of reward. In Nigeria, the rise in piracy is attributed to oil development and the resulting economic, social and environmental conditions in the Sub-region. Some of the direct costs and consequences of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea according to Barto, Peter (2024)^[3] is the disruptive effects of piracy on economic activities in the Gulf which is a regional, as well as international threat to global economy.

Tedongmo (2024)^[12] believed that the under-funding and poor conditions of the national navies of member states of the Gulf of Guinea as compared to the armies in Africa and the resultant tilted balance of military power have made piracy difficult to combat in the Gulf of Guinea. However, since 2007, the coastal states of the

Gulf of Guinea in response to the upsurge in attacks on ships and kidnappings by Pirates attempted in implementing policies and measures in combating crimes and maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Such measures are providing national navies with more equipment and weapons, stepping up maritime patrols, setting up maritime surveillance zones, as well as building a legal and institutional framework for state action at sea. In a similar vein, the United States, China, France and Great Britain which are major actors in maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea have not been able to combat the spate of piracy and maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea because the structures put in place by these countries to tackle the challenge of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea have become instruments of projection of powers by these countries, also driven by a desire to secure their competing national and economic interests, which has served to further reinforce the balkanization of the continent and Region. With different.^[4]

In a briefing on the maritime situation in the Gulf of Guinea, the Security Council Report of the United Nations in a 2023 media briefing, with reference to the *Yaoundé Code of Conduct* which was adopted on June 25th, 2013 in Cameroon became one of the maritime security architecture that aimed at coordinating efforts for preventing acts of piracy, armed robbery, and other illicit activities across the West and Central African maritime domain, which also includes the establishment of series of maritime centres across the countries of the Region. Following an increase in the incidences of piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea in 2020, which totaled about 123 incidents, targeting ships to kidnap crew ransom, the *Resolution 2634* was adopted. Since then, from April, 2021, there has been steady decline in piracy. Despite 45 incidents in 2021, the steady decline in piracy continued in 2022. With only eight incidences in the first quarter of 2023 and five incidents reported in the Gulf of Guinea in the first quarter of 2023, this has reflected the concerted efforts in tackling piracy in the region and the various setbacks which has been overcome through a regional cooperation and collaboration. However, the need to strengthen and promote more regional and existing cooperation among member states of the Gulf of Guinea will continue to lead to the decline in piracy and other maritime crimes in the years to come.^[13]

CONCLUSION

This study was able to establish piracy as one of the well-known maritime crimes in the world, tracing its origin in history to the earlier period of the Greek and Roman civilization. However, since these earliest times, the issue of maritime insecurity and piracy has exacerbated to include other crimes and it has become one of the greatest threats to maritime security and safe passage of doing business in the Gulf of Guinea. One major reason why the Gulf of Guinea has become the hotspot of piracy in the region according to this study is because of the decline in the rate of piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali coast which has led to an attendant increase in piratical activities in the Gulf of Guinea. This paper also examined the strategic importance of the Gulf of Guinea and the huge potentials and economic benefits it accrues to the countries of West and Central Africa, and the global

economy. Focusing on the emergence, causes and consequences of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, the paper pointed out the fact that despite the numerous incidence of piracy and other maritime crimes in the region over the years, in recent times, there has been steady decline in the cases of piracy and maritime crimes due to the implementation of policies and measures that has served to combat piracy so as to lead maritime security in the coastline of West and Central Africa.

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