STABLE SEAS: GULF OF GUINEA

Stable Seas: Gulf of Guinea analyzes the linkages between maritime governance themes and security challenges at sea in the Gulf of Guinea region. The study of the region’s maritime security dynamics is critical as maritime insecurity threatens sustainable development efforts and risks instability in coastal states as well as their landlocked neighbors. This report is timely for the following reasons:

- While the Gulf of Guinea region has made notable progress toward securing its maritime space through several efforts, such as the regionally-led Yaoundé Code of Conduct, the maritime environment is complicated by complex geography with multiple nations along a relatively short coastline, pervasive government corruption, numerous onshore security threats, and underdeveloped coastal welfare in many littoral states.
- The oil and gas industry offers an undeniable opportunity for economic development throughout much of the region, but growth is not always reflected in poor coastal populations. The industry accelerates environmental degradation resulting from pollution and increases the region’s vulnerability to climate change.
- While the overall number of piracy and armed robbery incidents in the region declined in 2019, the number of crew kidnapped for ransom increased by 60 percent, or 75 percent of global kidnapping incidents reported, making the region extremely dangerous for seafarers.
- Outbreaks of social and political violence in areas further weaken the rule of law and threaten stability in the wider region. Feelings of distrust and resentment of the government fuel organized political violence in the region, as well as the illicit trade of oil product, drugs, and arms.
- This report can help identify priority areas for more robust collaboration and cooperation within and across governments to stem the tide of illicit activities and nurture sustainable maritime security and governance.
The report is divided into nine issue areas, each exploring a different facet of maritime security. By examining these together, we can better understand how they intersect to impact the region’s wider maritime security.

**BLUE ECONOMY**

Blue Economy industries like fishing, offshore hydrocarbons, and shipping have become a renewed focus for sustainable economic development.

However, unsustainable fishing practices and environmental damage, and the presence of violent non-state actors pose a threat to realizing the region’s vision of a sustainable blue economy.

**ILLICIT TRADES**

The illicit trade in licit goods such as fuel, fish, rice, and tobacco sustain livelihoods in both coastal and landlocked countries, enabled by the porosity of maritime borders.

The Gulf of Guinea is both a transshipment point and a source for illicit drugs, pangolin scales, ivory, and the illegal trade of endangered species. If such trade continues unabated, these critically endangered species may face extinction.

**RULE OF LAW**

Corruption, particularly in ports, disrupts shipping, which is central to blue economy development.

Economic and political exclusion disenfranchises some coastal communities, pushing aggrieved residents to illicit maritime activities for survival; absent competent legal processes, the weak rule of law undermines gains made through improved maritime cooperation and enforcement.

**COASTAL WELFARE**

Clear security implications exist when governments prioritize economic growth over environmental protection and the welfare of communities.

Coastal poverty is a primary driver of illicit maritime activity; national maritime enforcement efforts must go in tandem with balanced and inclusive coastal development to break the cycle.

**FISHERIES**

Addressing marine pollution and establishing enforceable fisheries management frameworks will be vital to the long-term sustainability of regional fisheries.

Together with regional stakeholders, Gulf of Guinea countries have responded to IUU fishing with several collaborative initiatives. Though the gulf supports a vast number of fisheries species, overexploitation of fish stocks, especially in West Africa, puts tremendous stress on local marine ecosystems.

**MARITIME MIXED MIGRATION**

Movement of people within the region is more pervasive than migration patterns to other parts of the globe, as people often move in pursuit of economic opportunity in oil-producing states in the region.

Though there are gaps in legislation aimed at curbing human smuggling and trafficking, recent cross-border operations by Interpol resulted in the rescue of several hundred victims in border areas around the region, demonstrating the willingness of governments to address the challenge.

**MARITIME ENFORCEMENT**

Limited budgetary allocations in the region often prioritize land-based security over maritime security and regional coast guards and navies are generally underdeveloped as a result.

While enhancing maritime presence and interdiction capability is critical, improving the intelligence capacity of the maritime enforcement agencies is most vital to interdicting illicit activities in the Gulf of Guinea.

**INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

An apparent lack of political will in some Gulf of Guinea states to implement or institutionalize at the national level what has been agreed at the international level or provided by international partners may be limiting progress.

The Yaoundé Code of Conduct has shown tremendous promise for enhancing cooperation and security in the Gulf of Guinea, enabling creation of a standing regional cooperation architecture.

**PIRACY & ARMED ROBBERY**

Though the number of piracy and armed robbery incidents has dropped, the threat of kidnap for ransom remains immense in the region, with the Niger Delta area at the epicentre of these incidents.

Tactics used by actors in the region can evolve, particularly when the global price per barrel of oil is up.
One Earth Future (OEF) is a self-funded, private operating foundation seeking to create a more peaceful world through collaborative, data-driven initiatives. OEF focuses on enhancing maritime cooperation, creating sustainable jobs in fragile economies, and research which actively contributes to thought leadership on global issues. As an operating foundation, OEF provides strategic, financial, and administrative support allowing its programs to focus deeply on complex problems and to create constructive alternatives to violent conflict.

Stable Seas, a program of One Earth Future, engages the international security community with novel research on illicit maritime activities such as piracy and armed robbery, trafficking and smuggling in persons, IUU (illegal/unregulated/unreported) fishing, and illicit trades in weapons, drugs, and other contraband. These activities perpetuate organized political violence and reinforce each other to threaten economic development and the welfare of coastal populations.