CHAPTER 1

A Complex Case of Maritime Insecurity

1.1 A Strategic Maritime Profile

The Gulf of Guinea forms part of the Atlantic Ocean and its maritime system.1 The sea lanes of the Gulf of Guinea connect maritime traffic from multiple continents while the region’s central location, particularly its proximity to Europe and America, makes it an important artery of global trade. The Gulf of Guinea is endowed with valuable goods, commodities and minerals, which historically made it the centre of intense European scramble, expansionism and colonialism.2 This geostrategic importance has endured into the post-colonial period, and especially so in the last decade due to increasing global dependency on the region’s offshore energy resources.3

The maritime profile of the Gulf of Guinea is equally making an enormous contribution to the social-economic development of the region. In 2010, the Gulf of Guinea was the only developing region that registered an average growth rate of six per cent, with high-income gains of about ten per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of some States.4 This growth is grounded in favourable international trade, with the shipping industry being the primary vehicle. The World Bank Report of 2011 shows that offshore oil and gas

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1 Chapter 2 reviews different definitions and conceptions of Gulf of Guinea and adopts a working definition for the book.


resources have substantially contributed to positive economic indicators in the region, including increased capital inflows.\textsuperscript{5} Fisheries are also a major source of employment, especially in coastal communities, and substantially contributing to poverty alleviation and food security across the region.\textsuperscript{6}

1.2 A Rising-Complex Piracy

The maritime opportunities of the Gulf of Guinea are, however, being drowned in the waves of multiple maritime crimes epitomised by ravaging piracy.\textsuperscript{7} Piracy has been on the rise since 2005, with the region’s maritime space being described as “Africa’s other dangerous waters” and “pirates . . . new territory”.\textsuperscript{8} In 2011, the Gulf of Guinea ranked second after the Indian Ocean in terms of frequency of piracy attacks.\textsuperscript{9} The attacks are very violent, compared to Somalia, constituting a serious threat to global trade and regional security and stability.\textsuperscript{10} Indeed, while Somalia qualifies as a piracy enterprise, the Gulf of Guinea can be appropriately classified as a ‘piracy complex’.\textsuperscript{11} The region has a complicated piracy profile, with dynamics and evolutionary tracks that is posing serious law enforcement and jurisdictional challenges. Counter-piracy responses must therefore be apposite, innovative and comprehensive.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} See case study of piracy in chapter 6 of this book.
\item \textsuperscript{9} See IMB, Reports on Acts of Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships Annual Report—2011, IMO, MSC.4/Circ.180, 1 March 2012. See also IMB, Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships Annual Reports from 2005–2010. Page 26 of the 2008 Report (which analysed global piracy trends), indicated that Nigeria has the second highest number of serious piratical attacks in the world.
\item \textsuperscript{11} See chapters 6 and 7.6.
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