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**The Gulf of Guinea and its Strategic Center Point: How Nigeria  
Will Bridge American and African Cooperation**

by

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## **Abstract**

The United States and the nations of the Gulf of Guinea sit at the doorstep of tremendous opportunity. The region's vital resources offer legitimate solutions to American energy requirements and could be the engine that starts West and Central Africa on a path toward increased stability. Despite the vast economic possibilities, the Gulf of Guinea is an area marked with widespread maritime instability. Piracy and illegal fishing account for millions of revenue dollars lost each year. The threat of terrorism and illegal trafficking push the region further into distress. Building a cooperative environment aimed at achieving maritime security galvanizes shared interests and promotes strategic partnerships, bridging a new era of American and African cooperation. Nigeria stands capable and ready to lead the region, partner with the US, and promote an international coalition aimed at instituting safe and secure seas. Nigeria's economic power, military might, and international commitment solidify its position as the regional hegemon and a strategic linchpin in obtaining coastal security. Nigeria's numerous advantages are accompanied with just as many hurdles that must be addressed and overcome in order to move forward. To head a successful endeavor the United States must follow a process that emphasizes lasting relationships and development of host nation maritime capabilities. Creating such an enterprise initiates a regional cooperative effort underscored with the political will to confront common maritime security challenges and to shore up national strategic interests for both Africa and America.

## **Part I – Introduction**

The Gulf of Guinea region is at a crossroads of development. It is laden with resources; its economic potential astounding. Large reserves of strategic minerals, forests, natural gas, and oil are ripe for exploitation. Nigeria, Angola, Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe are all hydrocarbon producers with expectations for future growth. Nigeria and Angola, the two most established producers, provide the United States with amounts approaching Persian Gulf totals. The geographic position of the Gulf of Guinea provides a unique advantage to western markets—access with no oceanic choke points. President George W. Bush, in his 2006 State of the Union Address, identified a goal to reduce Middle East oil imports 75 percent by 2025.<sup>1</sup> The potential oil reserves in the Gulf of Guinea provide one possible solution to America’s need for oil diversification. Africa now stands as a geo-strategic area. As globalization evolves, Africa, with specific focus on the Gulf of Guinea, encompasses a region vital to American security interests. A region devoted to freedom and committed to confronting hard choices promotes stability, both on a local and global scale. American interests lie in “an African continent that knows liberty, peace, stability, and increasing prosperity.”<sup>2</sup> The expectations are numerous and the road ahead is difficult. Success can be achieved only through partnership and collective effort.

Despite the vast economic possibilities and strategic significance, the Gulf of Guinea is an area marked with widespread instability. In a keynote address at the Gulf of Guinea Ministerial Conference, Jendayi Frazer, United States Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, expressed concern over the current environment: “The lack of maritime safety and security in the Gulf of Guinea has had a negative impact on stability, human security and economic development in the region.”<sup>3</sup> Piracy, crime, and illegal fishing account for millions of lost

revenue dollars each year. The threat of terrorism, human and arms trafficking, and illegal narcotics push the region further into distress. Unless African nations within the region can counter these threats, stability is unlikely. Yet, the Gulf of Guinea provides the United States with a tremendous opportunity to secure strategic resources and provide a safer and more secure Africa, beneficial for both parties. Nigeria is the crux of the Gulf of Guinea and has been at the forefront of the region's emergence on the global scene. A regional hegemon, Nigeria stands as the most capable ally for the United States and a bridge to mutual interests. The United States must develop a partnership with Nigeria that enables the Nigerian people to lead a regional and international coalition to respond to the Gulf of Guinea's maritime security threats. Creating such an enterprise allows for regional cooperative effort emboldened with the political will to confront their security challenges, thereby, securing safety of the seas and shoring up national strategic interests for both Africa and America.

## **Part II – The Gulf of Guinea: A Maritime Environment**

The Gulf of Guinea is a unique and diverse region. The region can be defined as twelve nations that share roughly 3000 miles of common coastline (see figure 1). Starting from the northwest the countries are Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, and Sao Tome and Principe (an island nation 200 miles off the coast of Gabon). The body of water, known as the Gulf of Guinea, has played a significant role in shaping each nation's history, culture, and economy. The region's vast coastline offered early European traders easy and cheap access to an abundant resource base and forever influenced the local landscape. As early as the fifteenth century, the Gulf of Guinea lured Portuguese mariners in search of gold. They discovered unique wind patterns on the west coast of Africa that opened up

the Gulf region to maritime exploration, leading to an eruption in trade.<sup>4</sup> By the end of the 1700s, the slave trade dominated the Gulf of Guinea, which saw nearly 80,000 slaves exported per year.<sup>5</sup> In the 1800s, due to British anti-slavery laws, palm oil and timber replaced the slave trade as the primary commodities. Today, the region's maritime environment remains a vital link to its character. Accessibility and clear trade routes, significant in its development as a global maritime hub, provide a domain for both positive and negative economic, political, and social activity. Emerging reserves of oil and natural gas seem abundant offshore and hold the key to future development. However, the region also acts as a significant hub for drug, arms, and human trafficking. Maritime contact continues to be the interactive link with the rest of the world. Therefore, the United States must continue to recognize the Gulf's potential and its influence, both positive and negative, on America's national strategic interests.

### **Part III – A New Playground of Strategic Importance**

#### **Oil**

Over the last ten years, the Gulf of Guinea has emerged as a maritime hotspot with regional oil, natural gas, and rare mineral deposits drawing interest. The true significance of the region, however, rests in its oil reserves and is fundamentally the prism through which most outside actors view it.<sup>6</sup> The amount of oil the area can provide is estimated at roughly 54 billion barrels, just about 5 percent of the world's proven reserves, of which 80 percent belongs to Nigeria and Angola.<sup>7</sup> Although 54 billion barrels seems miniscule, there is universal confidence that this number is an underestimate. With current production nearing 4.5 million barrels a day and expected to reach the 7 million mark by 2010, the region's energy production is rapidly increasing.<sup>8</sup> Robust economic growth over the last decade, especially in China and India, has spurred a considerable demand for energy. This growth, along with America's current Middle

Eastern political climate, increases the attractiveness of African oil. America currently imports 15 percent of its oil supply from the Gulf of Guinea, with Nigeria ranking as the fifth largest supplier of American oil imports.<sup>9</sup> Future estimates anticipate an even greater role, with contributions nearing 25 percent.

Large oil companies, too, seek opportunities and open markets now unavailable in Middle Eastern states. Oil activity continues to rise and reserve amounts seem only to increase. Numerous companies are flooding the area, investing their money, eager to dip their hand into the promise that lies beneath the soil. “About \$52 billion will be invested in deepwater African fields by 2010, with approximately 32 percent coming from the United States.”<sup>10</sup> However, tapping into the Gulf of Guinea’s oil reserves is not without its challenges. The large deposits are located in areas known as ultra-deep water, currently classified at 5,000 feet of depth, thus, extraction is extremely difficult and expensive, challenging for all but large companies.<sup>11</sup> The extreme depths also limit the ability to determine the actual number and size of reserves. That being said, forecasts of available crude continue to rise as additional sites are found. In April 1996, the French firm Girassol discovered the first ultra-deep water site, Angola’s Girassol giant oilfield in the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>12</sup> Within four years, there were 43 additional discoveries, the highest rate of any location in the world.<sup>13</sup> Deep-water oil fields provide the region and potential investors with a distinct advantage over shallow and onshore drilling—a physical location removed from political instability and security issues. Deep offshore sites provide a buffer from regional turmoil. Despite the threat of occasionally unstable situations, investors consider the region a politically safe alternative to the radicalized oil exporters in the Middle East. Although members of OPEC, neither Nigeria nor Angola has sought overly restrictive policies to

production or development.<sup>14</sup> As a whole, the region continues to work outside the typical OPEC strategies: production quotas, price fixing, and restricted investment.

Another advantage of Gulf oil is its extremely high quality. Crude oil is evaluated through a scale known as API gravity.<sup>15</sup> The industry average is 30.2 degrees, while the Gulf of Guinea consistently measures close to 40 degrees, a significant difference.<sup>16</sup> This higher API gravity directly translates into reduced refining costs. The level of sulfur in extracted oil is another marker of crude quality, and the region's reserves contain small amounts by international standards.<sup>17</sup> The potential for continued discoveries of high quality crude oil is extremely likely, spurring interest and development in the region.

The geographic position of the Gulf of Guinea proves extremely favorable to the western oil markets. West Africa's proximity to Europe and North America provides western consumers a comparative edge through reduced shipping costs. Furthermore, the region "benefits from the absence of narrow shipping lanes," known as "chokepoints."<sup>18</sup> In 2007, world oil production totaled approximately 85 billion barrels per day: nearly one-half, or over 43 million barrels, transited through chokepoints.<sup>19</sup> Figure 2 illustrates this flow through global chokepoints and the significance involved with freedom of navigation through these vital parts of the world.<sup>20</sup> Since modern societies and their energy requirements have become reliant on oil, any interruption would be intolerable, causing the petroleum-dependent global economy to collapse. Thus, region presents many promising opportunities in the oil market.

### **Natural Gas**

The strategic significance of the Gulf of Guinea does not rest on oil alone. Africa now accounts for 8 percent of the world's total natural gas reserves, with estimates well over 100 trillion cubic feet under the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the US Agency for International

Development (USAID) and the US Export-Import Bank are actively pursuing assistance opportunities within the region to bolster production. Current programs are underway to provide the framework necessary for controlling natural gas exploration and electricity generation in the countries of Ghana and Nigeria, as well as the development of a natural gas pipeline to transport gas from Nigeria to Benin, Togo, and Ghana.<sup>22</sup> It is unlikely that the natural gas industry will provide any noteworthy export in the short-term; however, continued investment will go a long way to shoring up clean energy needs within the region and to supporting future supply.

### **Strategic Minerals and Other Resources**

Since World War II, the United States' dependence on foreign production of critical minerals has grown. Strategic minerals, those that are not available domestically in sufficient quantities to meet military and civilian industrial demand, are the most critical.<sup>23</sup> The US imports 21 of the 24 major minerals currently used in industrial production around the world, Africa being a major contributor to their global production.<sup>24</sup> The Gulf of Guinea is home to large mineral deposits of manganese, iron ore, copper, tin, uranium, colton, and cobalt. The Gulf region is the second largest producer of a metal called columbine-tantalite, a key component used in the production of cellular phones, satellites, telecommunication hardware, and computer microchips.<sup>25</sup> The US government identified columbine-tantalite, commonly referred to as colton, as a "strategic and critical" mineral in the Critical Materials Stockpiling Act of 1946.<sup>26</sup> Further, the DRC, along with Angola, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Liberia have significant reserves of gold and diamonds. Logging, another vital source of employment and revenue for the entire region, is second only to oil in export percentages. In Cameroon 80 percent of forests, outside of protected areas, are zoned for commercial purposes with Gabon close behind at 50 percent.<sup>27</sup> Timber accounts for 28 percent of Cameroon's non-hydrocarbon export revenues.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the

Gulf of Guinea offers the world and specifically the US a great deal more than oil: it holds a vast supply of strategic resources, critical to America's technologically advanced economy.

### **Part III – Threats to the Gulf of Guinea and Its Maritime Domain**

With so much potential for growth and development, the Gulf of Guinea seems incapable of seizing control of its destiny; still, the region holds in its hands the tools necessary, through vast strategic resources to emerge from the political, economic and social struggles that constrict its people and foster instability. Any effort to capitalize and leverage its resource base is undermined by a multitude of domestic, regional, and international threats. A lack of regional and international involvement to solidify maritime stability in the region has created a pervasive environment of criminal activity and terrorism. Historically, the Gulf of Guinea's security structure was centered upon area dominance and regime perpetuation, not maritime control or security.<sup>29</sup> Naturally, maritime infrastructure has suffered, causing a severe inability to maintain maritime domain awareness and security.<sup>30</sup> The Gulf countries are severely limited in their ability to achieve maritime domain awareness, let alone effectively control or secure their waters. Without a capability to identify, monitor, and interdict potential threats, the region will continue to remain hostage to acts of lawlessness.

### **Piracy**

The continued rise in pirate attacks and the apparent inability to counter the threat has grabbed worldwide attention.<sup>31</sup> Recent high profile attacks off Somalia have demonstrated increased firepower and an alarming capability to attack farther out to sea. Public outcry and fear within the shipping industry is only now driving states to action. In an apparent effort to turn the tide and protect valuable assets, US, Chinese, and Russian warships now sit off the coast of Somalia. The current IMB's annual report on Piracy and Armed Robbery against ships, a

2008 report, saw an 11 percent increase in reported piracy incidents over 2007.<sup>32</sup> Global attacks number 293, with the African continent leading the world with 165 (see figure 3).<sup>33</sup>

The Gulf of Guinea area itself, reporting 54 incidents, had the second highest number of any specific region, falling behind only the Gulf of Aden.<sup>34</sup> It is important to note that IMB records only reported incidents, with a general understanding that many go unreported. The Piracy Reporting Center of the IMB lists unconfirmed regional attacks for 2008 at approximately 100.<sup>35</sup> An analysis of data from 2003 until present indicates that the problem is consistent. The significant number of piracy incidents in West Africa clearly result from an inability of local governments to address the threat. The coast of Nigeria is widely accepted as the most dangerous maritime environment in the world. It alone had 40 reported piracy incidents, all of which involved physical violence, including hostage taking, kidnapping, injuries, and death.<sup>36</sup> The IMB addressed the situation stating, “that unless continuous worldwide pressure on the law enforcement agencies and governments is exerted the [local] governments will not give this crime the priority that it requires.”<sup>37</sup> Successful suppression is achieved only through a combined vigilance to maritime domain awareness (patrolling, law enforcement, and interdiction) and enhanced shipping security measures.

### **Terrorism**

After 9/11, the average American understood the full impact of terrorism. No longer could America hide behind the expanse of two great oceans and disregard the insecurities and instabilities building throughout the world. Citizens and policy makers received a quick lesson on the effects of globalization and the dangers imposed on open and free societies. Radical groups intent on destroying western society have now achieved freedom of movement and vital sanctuaries, two keys to their success. *The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*

published in September 2006 outlines a capability to “deny terrorists control of any nation they would use as a base and launching pad for terror” as a critical priority of action.<sup>38</sup> Sanctuaries are most notable in areas of poor or no governance, not limited by controlled borders. The Gulf of Guinea provides ideal sanctuary, but African leaders rarely mention combating terrorism as a priority in their agendas. General Fulford, director of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, relays a common theme heard from West African leaders: “Terrorism is a problem and a threat to the stability and security of my country, but I have more urgent problems to focus on right now.”<sup>39</sup> The vast coastlines and porous borders, coupled with poor control of the environment and widespread poverty, make the region vulnerable.

At present, the region seems devoid of significant al-Qaeda activity; however, the increasing attacks in East Africa set the stage for future migration to the west. According to a Congressional Research Service report, published in 2003, al Qaeda has already begun building tenuous connections in parts of West and Central Africa.<sup>40</sup> Further involvement by the United States in the Gulf of Guinea will likely increase radical Muslim antipathy creating another battleground. The establishment of AFRICOM, for example, is a symbol of American power and influence and its noticeable presence in and around the Gulf of Guinea establishes motive and focus for terrorist activities. Osama Bin Laden, apparently recognizing the region’s importance to America and its energy needs, marked Nigeria for “liberation” in a release posted 11 February 2003 on al-Jazeera television station.<sup>41</sup> Nigeria’s large Muslim population, nearly 50 percent of its 146 million citizens, offers radical Muslim groups a substantial recruiting base for the global jihad.<sup>42</sup> Populations throughout the Gulf of Guinea are disenfranchised, desperate, and hopeless; regional enclaves, ethnic minorities, and religious groups are beset with grievances and therefore vulnerable to terrorist influences.<sup>43</sup> Insurgent groups, like Nigeria’s MEND, and

transnational crime networks provide al Qaeda with a foundation on which to build. They facilitate a mechanism to move weapons, personnel, and money—components vital to their operations. As the Long War progresses, the Gulf of Guinea will become more strategically important, thereby increasing further likelihood of terrorist activity.

### **Other Criminal Activities (Human Trafficking, Narcotics, and Illegal Fishing)**

The Gulf of Guinea region is replete with violence and illegal activity. Poor governance and insufficient law enforcement affords a situation where “crime does pay”. In fact, life in the maritime region has become synonymous with lawlessness. Governments have suffered from two contributing factors: first, a lack of genuine motivation and vigilance towards the mission seems pervasive in leadership circles; second, even when legitimate effort is applied to fighting criminal activity, a shortfall of funds, resources, and experience generates meager results. Local economies, unable to compete, find illegal activity to be much more profitable resulting in an almost insurmountable challenge to security.

Human trafficking has become an alarming business in the Gulf of Guinea. It is a source, transit, and destination region for women and children, primarily sought for forced labor and sexual exploitation. In Nigeria alone, the International Labor Organization estimates that roughly 12 million children between the ages of 10 and 14 have been victimized.<sup>44</sup> The high percentage of agricultural based economies in West and Central Africa consistently demand high volumes of cheap labor, providing conditions ripe for trafficking, while sex rings and prostitution rackets in Europe provide lucrative compensation and exacerbate the illegal trade.

The maritime accessibility of the Gulf of Guinea to the lucrative markets of Europe and the Americas also makes it a prime hub for illegal narcotics. The 1993 Narcotics Growing Areas and Trafficking Routes report illustrates the extent of the region’s participation in global trade.

Local countries act as a transfer station, taking in drugs from South America and East Asia and distributing them to Europe and the United States. An Interpol-estimated 200-300 tons of cocaine is smuggled into Europe alone, 27 percent of which flows through the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>45</sup> The vast open space and immense coastlines coupled with limited resources and inadequate oversight create virtually open borders. An increasing number of recent seizures indicate a growing problem with shipments now routinely reaching sizes of 2,500 kgs.<sup>46</sup> In an effort to curb future activity, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Mediation and Security Council developed a proposal to regional Heads of State for adoption of a naval strategy focused on security threats in the Gulf. The recommendation, titled the “Political Declaration on the Prevention of Drug Abuse, Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in West Africa and the Regional Plan of Action,” addresses drug control issues, improvement of forensic capabilities, and a system to confront existing and emerging threats.<sup>47</sup> Criminal activity is a recognized severe threat; however, no suitable response is apparent.

In addition to vast reserves of oil and strategic minerals, the Gulf of Guinea boasts some of the world’s richest and most abundant fisheries, another resource plagued with problems. According to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, \$350 million in revenue is lost annually to illegal, unreported, or unlicensed fishing.<sup>48</sup> These abusive fishing practices reduce vital fisheries by perhaps up to 30 percent, undermining the local fishing industry and impacting landing fees, licenses, and taxes, a necessary revenue source for the community.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, in many countries fish is a critical food staple. In Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome and Principe, for example, fish accounts for over 60 percent of the population’s total protein consumption.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, an inability to monitor and manage local economic exclusion zones further deteriorates the region’s security and directly affects the livelihood and health of

the local people. Consequently, as profits decrease and situations become hopeless, local fishermen are increasingly turning to drugs and illegal trafficking to boost their meager incomes.

#### **Part IV – Nigeria: The Linchpin in the Gulf of Guinea**

The United States needs to approach the Gulf of Guinea with a strategy founded in collaboration, partnership, and joint initiated programs. Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice initiated a strategy of Transformational Diplomacy designed to encourage foreign citizens to “better their own lives, build their own nations, and transform their own futures.”<sup>51</sup> This strategy founded on a principle of partnership seeks to develop internal leadership and institutional capacity. To be effective, US strategy must take a holistic view and focus on each aspect of national, regional, and global realities. Emerging powers, armed with diplomatic, economic, and military power, must be nurtured and developed with the capacity to shape future security environments. The Federal Republic of Nigeria provides such an opportunity.

#### **Strengths**

The question at hand then is, why Nigeria? What does it provide in the fight for maritime security? To begin with, Nigeria is open to the idea. Located in the heart of the region and home to more than half of the population, Nigeria’s recent elections show democratic success. It has been an instrumental member and leader in regional organizations such as ECOWAS, the Maritime Organization of West and Central Africa (MOWCA), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. The 2008 World Bank report on the African Development Indicators continues to place South Africa and Nigeria as the two dominant economies on the African continent.<sup>52</sup> Nigeria ranks second with a GDP of \$328 billion.<sup>53</sup> That is a substantial amount considering Angola, the next closest country in the region, has a GDP of only \$114 billion. In addition, in

terms of size and potential, many believe that Nigeria has the capacity to overtake South Africa to claim Africa's strongest economy.

Nigeria also boasts the region's largest and most capable military force. Active duty personnel number approximately 76,000 members, 8,000 of whom serve in the Navy and Coast Guard.<sup>54</sup> The Nigerian navy maintains the most significant naval presence in West and Central Africa. It has two primary commands: the Western Command based in Agapa, Lagos and the Eastern Command in Calabar, as well as five forward operating bases in Bonny Island, Forcados, Egueme, Ibaka, and Igbokoda. The naval fleet is comprised of one frigate, one corvette, two fast attack crafts and 15 patrol boats.<sup>55</sup> Numerous additional vessels are in service; however, most have minimal capacity. A comprehensive refit, started in 1999, is working to improve the seaworthiness of the entire fleet. Nigeria also maintains a small naval aviation capability that includes two Lynx Mk 89 maritime patrol type aircraft.<sup>56</sup> The coast guard has been limited to brown water operations, maintaining 38 small craft acquired in the 1980s.<sup>57</sup> In addition to the navy and coast guard, Nigeria utilizes a marine police force and a port security police. They function completely independently of the military and provide inland waterway and port security.

### **Challenges**

Despite Nigeria's political, economic, and military strength, there remain many challenges that must be addressed to achieve successful collaboration. Corruption is endemic and institutionalized at all levels of government. Nigeria's parliament impeached its president, the third ranking politician in the country, after corruption allegations.<sup>58</sup> In addition, Nigeria has seen its senior ranking police officer, three ministers, two judges, two rear admirals, a state governor, and the top customs official all charged and removed for corruption offenses.<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, government institutions and programs are grossly underfunded and consequently poor governance is the norm. The Index of State Weakness in the Developing World ranks Nigeria 28<sup>th</sup> in the world and classifies it as a “critically weak state.”<sup>60</sup> Its political indicator, which assesses the quality of a state’s political institutions, including accountability, rule of law, corruption, and effectiveness is rated as a “weak state,” an indication that it struggles to establish and maintain political institutions that meet the basic needs of its population.<sup>61</sup>

Nigeria’s economic sectors suffer from significant shortfalls as well. Conceivably, losses of investment capital constitute the largest issue. An insecure maritime domain has driven transportation and insurance premiums too high for medium and low level companies. As previously discussed, \$3 billion are lost annually because of oil theft and violence in the Niger Delta region. As a result, many companies are unwilling to suffer through these risks.

Despite Nigeria’s relative regional strength, its naval capabilities also pose severe challenges. The military as a whole is underfunded, receiving only 1.5 percent of the country’s GDP.<sup>62</sup> The Navy’s director of information admitted that Nigeria had an “acute shortage of patrol boats for anti-piracy operations and that the 15 boats in her inventory could not be deployed at the same time due to operational and logistical demands.”<sup>63</sup> Many experts question the readiness and functionality of the navy to accomplish basic security tasks. Personnel are undertrained and suffer from low morale. The current Chief of the Nigerian Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ganiyu Adekeye, suggested that “regarding the state of the Nigerian Navy in respects of our constitutional responsibilities, I will put [our operational capability] at about 60 to 65 percent.”<sup>64</sup> In the current state, Nigerian naval forces are incapable of independently providing an effective maritime security force for the region.

Similarly, Nigeria's regional neighbors have significant shortfalls. The Ghana Navy of 2,100 personnel has been the recipient of moderate praise for its efforts to patrol and manage its economic exclusion zone. However, its four fast attack craft and two patrol vessels have produced little in the fight against illegal fishing, causing some to question their effectiveness.<sup>65</sup> Cameroon maintains a naval force of 1,250 personnel and a naval strength consisting of two combat patrol vessels, three coastal patrol vessels and roughly 30 smaller inshore type patrol craft.<sup>66</sup> Gabon is limited to 600 personnel, with two patrol craft and one fast attack craft.<sup>67</sup> Equatorial Guinea had a nonexistent naval force in the late 1990s; however, recent acquisitions of Danish and Ukrainian coastal patrol craft have given it some capacity. It currently maintains seven patrol craft in its inventory.<sup>68</sup> The remaining Gulf of Guinea states maintain no more than a brown water or river capability.

Some argue that trust is an issue and neighboring countries might be unwilling to cooperate and work together as an integrated force. They point to a lack of political will and mutual trust and highlight the IMO's failed attempt to bring the Gulf of Guinea states together in a collaborative effort to implement a search and rescue capability.<sup>69</sup> Although this appears to be consistent with past sentiments, recent statements and joint initiatives by heads of states and regional organizations have indicated a renewed commitment to partnership. M. T. Addico, Secretary-General of MOWCA has called for a West and Central African partnership between the navies, coast guards, and maritime administrators to develop a competent maritime security force.<sup>70</sup> Presidents Yar'Adua and Mbasogo, speaking for Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea, met in April of 2008, calling for accelerated development of a regional guard force amongst the members of the Gulf of Guinea Commission.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, any successful effort will require

regional cooperation and international assistance and members of the Gulf of Guinea are now committed to that process.

Nigeria's willingness to participate with America also raises questions. Nigeria recognizes its position of dominance within the region and is naturally averse to any challenges to its influence. Initial reactions to AFRICOM were negative, fearing increased American presence. Rolake Akinola, a West African analyst with Control Risks Group suggests, "Nigeria has always guarded its national security interests and there is an underlying sentiment in the Nigerian government that increased US involvement will not be a welcome thing."<sup>72</sup> Citizens' emotions are mixed, with many hesitant to see large-scale US involvement. However, Nigerian President Yar'Adua is working hard, attempting to change Nigerian acceptance of American interaction. Visiting President Bush in December of 2007, Yar'Adua commented that the people of Nigeria are "grateful for the great friendship and assistance received from the United States."<sup>73</sup> He has indicated further good relations, promoting US support in the establishment of a maritime protection force in meetings with the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Vice Admiral Adekeye has echoed his president's tone, stressing in recent statements "that the US has always been of immense assistance to Nigeria."<sup>74</sup> Despite underlying fears of US involvement, Nigeria's leadership appears committed to future coordination. Still, the US must move forward with caution, protecting further engagements through wise diplomacy and well thought out activity.

### **Part V – The Road Ahead**

Despite the challenges and struggles inherent with Nigeria, the country remains the most capable change-agent within the region. Atop the region politically, economically, and militarily, its resource base and potential far outweigh any other member of the Gulf community.

Furthermore, since the United States cannot force a new mindset upon the people of the region, it is imperative that the Gulf nations determine for themselves that security and stability are necessary for the development of their common good. By encouraging Nigeria to carry that mantle to its neighboring countries, the opportunity for success is exponentially higher.

The *U.S. National Security Strategy*, outlined in March 2006, rests on two fundamental pillars applicable to Africa: first, to promote freedom, justice, and human dignity; and second, to lead a growing community of democratic nations through the difficult challenges that face the world.<sup>75</sup> Nigeria's position as the regional hegemon provides the political and economic influence necessary to spur development of a secure maritime environment. The US, in concert with Nigeria, can leverage Nigeria's potential and regional influence to foster a strategic maritime security initiative that reflects a regional and international joint effort. The Department of Defense Security Cooperation Guidance outlines four strategic actions for US involvement with foreign partners: 1) improve information exchange and intelligence sharing; 2) develop relationships that promote US security interests; 3) build host nation capabilities for self-defense and joint operations; and 4) provide US forces with peacetime and contingency access required for common interest.<sup>76</sup> The first three actions are key components to the discussion of increasing Nigeria's maritime capacity and will be the focus of further analysis, as any progress obtained in these three areas naturally promotes US access. These actions develop a vision and steer future engagements toward an integrated approach, working for the ultimate goal of regional maritime responsibility and self-sufficiency. By developing a region capable of managing its own maritime domain, the United States promotes a collection of stable allies directed against a host of mutual security threats.

### **Information Sharing and Building Lasting Relationships**

First, the US must build a conduit of information sharing within Nigeria. This involves critical information to develop threat assessments and generate appropriate responses. Exchanges of intelligence and law enforcement information will create a system that leans forward and actively pursues illegal activity. Arming Nigeria with intelligence establishes an informed region that can maintain situational awareness and achieve unity of effort. The National Strategy for Maritime Security outlines initiatives toward this end. It calls for expanding systems, processes, and trade-data information on vessels to provide more transparency, developing means for rapid intelligence sharing, and adopting streamlined procedures to verify nationality.<sup>77</sup> The US must promote measures that increase Nigeria's information base and support regional organizations, such as the AU, ECOWAS, CEEAC, and MOWCA to achieve situational awareness and management capacity within the maritime domain.

The second and arguably most essential tenet is developing partnerships. Maritime security is an international effort and no country alone can sustain and foster a domain free of security threats. Nigeria is no different. As the US moves forward, a two-leveled approach is necessary involving a holistic vision of independent American activities in conjunction with international and regional effort. American action begins by encouraging engagement opportunities and developing relationships that meet shared interests. For example, the US cannot expect to garner Nigerian support unless specific attention is given to Nigerian interests. Any attempt to focus merely on perceived US goals could compromise the primary aim of gaining maritime security. In the past, the US has limited engagements to a series of operations designed to show American presence. In many cases, these opportunities to "show the flag"

have had merit; however, they rarely allocate any capital to enhance maritime security or develop relationships. Future Nigerian engagements must have more substance and promote shared thinking and direction for maritime security. They should promote development and solidify common goals. Former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith provides insight into the types of activities necessary to ensure effective alliances that focus on common themes. These activities center on “combined exercises, training and education, military to military contacts, and international acquisition projects.”<sup>78</sup> It is through this type of interaction that the US and Nigeria can begin to develop an open and free exchange of ideas, thereby creating a mechanism that will foster stronger ties.

The new Africa Partnership Station (APS) initiated by the US promotes this type of exchange. APS is designed to promote multinational engagements and shared maritime visions, including maritime domain awareness, maritime control, and law of the sea through partnership and collaboration.<sup>79</sup> By the end of 2008, APS vessels had hosted four West and Central African nations—Cameroon, Cape Verde, Ghana, and Senegal—in specific operations designed to conduct information sharing.<sup>80</sup> The 2007 deployment by the USS Fort McHenry exemplifies the type of success these engagements can produce. During a seven-month period, the APS visited 19 ports and 10 countries, training 1500 maritime professionals—an unprecedented accomplishment in the region.<sup>81</sup> Local leaders commented on the significance of APS, indicating it had an “important impact on building the capacities and capabilities of the Gulf of Guinea Navies, which help them in regards to maritime safety and security.”<sup>82</sup> These types of integrated opportunities build lasting alliances.

Other US governmental organizations have a critical role as well. Initiatives like the Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy (GGESS), Anti-Terrorism Assistance program (ATA), the

African Coastal Security Program, and the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) provide conduits for information sharing, partnership building, and a means to facilitate funding, training, and equipment acquisition. USAID must continue to carry this mantle. USAID seeks as a primary priority the development of strategic partners. This vision is accomplished through programs to enhance political, economic, social, and humanitarian conditions. For example, USAID sponsored programs within Nigeria, the natural gas and electricity generation initiatives, the gas pipeline project, and life saving radio broadcasts (as part of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) are forging stronger ties between the American and Nigerian people.<sup>83</sup> These types of programs foster dialogue, interaction, and stronger ties that translate into more effective collaboration. Continuing USAID efforts to build strategic partnerships are a key component to US involvement.

Nigeria's further integration into the world community is vital as it builds global relationships and moves forward as the leader within the Gulf of Guinea. On an international level, the US can address organizations such as NATO, the UN, the G8, and the AU to promote democracy, economic reform, and security within the region. The US can support Nigeria as it continues to seek good governance and rule of law, with the idea of instituting a cultural change in how governments operate. In 2005, the GGESS, a joint Nigerian, US and UK initiative that seeks to build an international effort to fight security concerns in the Niger Delta, was born. In the last three years, the mandate has expanded to develop strategies aimed at controlling all criminal activities and achieving maritime domain awareness, with use throughout West and Central Africa. Successful operations have increased interest and membership, now including the governments of France, Canada, Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland.<sup>84</sup> GGESS provides yet another example of how a cooperative, collective effort can produce positive results. This

needs to be the goal not just in Nigeria, but also within all the nations of the Gulf of Guinea, and eventually all of Africa. Security, regardless of the domain it involves, starts with the basic tenets of good governance, rule of law, and humanitarian services.

On the regional level, increasing ties between ECOWAS and the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) will facilitate improving regional interaction and set the stage for maritime cooperation. The Gulf is comprised of nations divided between the two organizations: Nigeria and countries to the west are members of ECOWAS, while Cameroon and countries to the south belong to CEEAC. In many instances, poor interaction results from a lack of coordination or dialogue between neighboring organizations. The US can increase the potential of both organizations by working with Nigeria to strengthen coordination and their ability to conduct joint enterprises. Each of these organizations maintains a security brigade, designed as a regional peacekeeping alert force, as part of the African Union Standby Force that provides another potential avenue to address maritime concerns. The AU, working with each regional organization, directs brigade forces to respond to security issues as demonstrated during conflicts within Liberia and Sierra Leone. Each of these regional ASFs is established but with varying degrees of capability. Using existing ASF foundations provides new organizations like MOWCA and their proposed regional maritime force a structure for support and cooperation. Interaction and coordination with the AU, MOWCA, and each regional ASF will be critical to any successful maritime effort. Otherwise, the area will continue to see limited resources pulled in too many directions to be effective. President Yar'Adua pressed this issue in his meeting with President Bush, asking for the US "to help the African Union establish its planned 'African Standby Force' (ASF), to be used for peacekeeping, and to assist West African nations to set up a 'Gulf of Guinea Guard Force' to secure their maritime security."<sup>85</sup> Any advancement the US

can make in pulling these organizations together and enabling them to operate in a unified purpose will promote a secure Gulf of Guinea. The task of developing a secure maritime environment is truly a global effort and success can be achieved only through international and regional coordination.

### **Building Host Nation Capabilities**

Developing Nigeria's and the region's capacity to provide security for and maintain its own maritime domain is the third tenet. To facilitate this type of self-sufficiency the US must focus on four target areas: 1) developing maritime professionalism; 2) building maritime infrastructure; 3) achieving maritime domain awareness; 4) developing an interdiction capacity.

To aid Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea in developing a secure maritime domain, the US must cultivate maritime professionalism. The challenges here are to develop a region that understands the importance of its maritime domain and how best to control it. To achieve this end, the US has a few options. Africa Partnership Station is uniquely suited to this type of work. APS opportunities in 2008 rendered over 1700 courses of instruction in skills ranging from small boat handling, damage control and maritime law to port security, vessel interdiction, and basic seamanship.<sup>86</sup> The mobile nature of APS and its breadth of knowledge act as a floating schoolhouse that can be stationed continually off the coast of any nation upon request. Furthermore, the program is not limited to large US vessels; small mobile training teams, aircraft detachments and foreign partners can provide the same type of assistance on a smaller scale.

Another DOD initiative, the African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) has developed a charter to increase dialogue between the US and its African counterparts to address security issues and develop solutions mutually beneficial to both. Other US government agencies have capacities to contribute in the role of education and development. The State Department,

working through USAID and internal country teams have established relationships and contacts that already support existing programs and will prove instrumental for future professional development forums. Each of these organizations promotes professional growth and development through ministerial conferences, open discussions, and targeted training, seeking to increase maritime oversight and law enforcement.<sup>87</sup> As a partner nation, French sponsored military schools and advisors present a large foundation of professional development capability. As of 2005, they supported 15 military training schools in West and Central Africa.<sup>88</sup> In any of the above cases, the product is enhanced professionalism and effective doctrine. Whether the mechanism is APS, ACSS initiatives, or State Department programs the US must make each a priority and allocate resources necessary to strengthen a nation (and region) to create the confidence and political will to achieve security.

Professional education and training is one part. As we look to build regional competence, the lack of infrastructure is an equally important issue. As discussed previously, Nigerian resource capacity in the naval and coast guard organizations is inadequate. The lack of sufficient and capable vessels, aircraft, and ISR assets severely limits execution of the most basic operations. In addition, Nigeria has not shown the political will to allocate funds required for operational capacity. Technological advances designed to improve maritime domain awareness have lacked priority and therefore have not been pursued. Advances in coastal radar and vessels identification systems—often neglected—are two technologies, designed to provide maritime visibility and monitoring capabilities. The US can approach this in two ways. First, the US can promote Security Cooperation activities structured to enhance allied and friendly nation defense capabilities. DOD and the Department of State can bolster faltering regional capacity through a set of Security Assistance programs. Programs such as Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Foreign

Military Financing (FMF), and International Military Training and Education (IMET) are designed to sponsor the transfer of defense articles and services via sales, grants, leases or loans.<sup>89</sup> Second, acquisition means outside the US government are also a viable solution. Procurement options such as direct commercial sales and other foreign country programs reach the same end states. Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, and Gabon have already exercised both of these options and with an inability to offer internal manufacturing capability, appear to be the only current avenue for growth. Any maritime security effort by Nigeria or the proposed joint regional coast guard will rely on influx of capable platforms.

Unfortunately, procurement is just one facet of the problem. To be effective, training and education must follow. Once again, we face the issue of professional maritime development. In addition to the aforementioned opportunities, IMET provides an option, and centers on political, social, and technical opportunities. It has an established mobile education team already designed to take curricula, which is easily tailored to target maritime activities, forward to host nations. Specific training programs should begin with basic seamanship and boat handling, damage control, vessel interdiction, law of the sea, and port security. In addition, Africa Partnership Station has proven effective as an excellent tool for developing core maritime competencies. Continuous presence in the region will facilitate large target audiences with the greatest potential for impact. Regardless of the method, it is clear that infrastructure and education are priorities.

Any effort to achieve maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea will require maritime domain awareness. This is an understanding of all activities and events found below, on, and above the sea. The US must first focus its attention on instituting a change in the way the region views their maritime environment and then build a capacity to manage it. Understanding and achieving this kind of awareness is not a simple task; however, the development of committed

partnerships can move the region in a positive direction. The task of modifying a cultural perception of the Gulf falls into the realm of education, a topic previously addressed. As such, building the capacity for maritime security takes center stage.

A strategic approach for maritime domain awareness incorporates land and sea based initiatives. Today's technological advances offer integrated coastal systems that maintain a constant maritime picture in direct support of participating nations, organizations, and commanders. The land based surveillance program, developed by the Joint Capability Technology Demonstrations agency (JCTD), Regional Maritime Awareness Capability (RMAC) system demonstrates an ability to locate, track, and display information on surface vessels in local waters.<sup>90</sup> It combines ground-based radars and the Automatic Identification System (AIS), mentioned previously, to generate a computer based depiction of activity. The RMAC system is already operational in Sao Tome and Principe with discussions underway for installations in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Gabon. The system was also designed to integrate with the Maritime Security and Safety Information System (MSSIS), which allows users to network and achieve regional information sharing. AIS data are a crucial component of the process. It provides a continual broadcast of critical identification information such as IMO number, name, type, position, destination, course and speed, and provides collision avoidance, traffic management and transparency to receiving nations. RMAC and AIS receivers allow any participant to monitor the broadcast and develop a clear picture of the maritime environment. An AIS kit provides the mechanism to collect and display AIS data streamed from vessels. Access is extremely low cost—AIS kits require only an antenna, receiver and laptop computer—totaling roughly \$3500 per unit.<sup>91</sup> AIS units are extremely mobile and can be adapted to ground stations, oil platforms, ships and aircraft. One AIS kit mounted to an aircraft could provide Nigeria with

an accurate snapshot of all broadcasting vessels within its economic exclusion zone. Despite its many advantages, there are some drawbacks. Ship-borne AIS data systems can be manipulated or simply turned off, and real time network information is limited to available internet connections. Regardless of the few bugs, overall utility is promising. As Nigeria, MOWCA, and the regional coast guard move forward in the future, these systems provide low cost alternatives with significant advantages.

The second aspect of the strategic approach is sea-based measures. The US developed concept of “seabasing” is a Navy based program that establishes a maritime operating base. This concept allows US naval personnel to conduct maritime awareness, support, and training to any coastal nation. APS is a perfect example of seabasing. Through APS, the US can render assistance to and support the development of the proposed International Maritime Organization and MOWCA regional Coastguard Network.

The regional Coastguard Network has received tremendous support from the national, regional, and international levels. In June of 2008, MOWCA Secretary General Addico outlined a plan for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, calling for the establishment of the regional coast guard. Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea have been two of the leading proponents, with Ghana also calling for increased security measures. The framework needs to provide for an effective force that can maintain constant presence, and be competent in area surveillance, law enforcement, and interdiction. NATO, working through Operation Active Endeavor, has integrated an extremely successful maritime organization aimed at fighting terrorism and terrorist activity in the Mediterranean. The operation has been a model of collective action with diverse representation from 31 NATO and non-NATO partners, to include Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Albania. The combination of coordinated patrols (air, surface, and subsurface

units), land-based surveillance systems, and active intelligence sharing has had a visible effect on security and stability within the Mediterranean. For example, the operation has hailed more than 100,000 merchant vessels and boarded some 148 suspect ships.<sup>92</sup> In MOWCA's search for a competent coast guard force, NATO's Operation Active Endeavor stands as a successful model. Working with US and European partners, the region can begin to develop a system with potential. Regardless of its final capacity, the establishment of a guard force in combination with AIS could dramatically improve situational awareness and make significant strides in the region's effort to provide self-sufficient maritime security.

The final phase of an independent capability is acquiring the capacity to interdict and deter lawless activities. Again, this process involves training and professional development support by US and partnering nations. It also requires regional agreements that promote operational success. The right of hot-pursuit across national boundaries is one example of this type of agreement. Currently nonexistent in the region, this puts severe limits on operational capabilities. Any maritime force, whether it is sovereign or regional, must be equipped with the capacity to pursue and interdict illegal activity, or any hope of a secure environment is impossible. Interdiction is a key component in the legitimacy of any authority and creates a mechanism to deter illegal activity.

## **Part VI – Conclusion and Final Remarks**

“Achieving coastal security in the Gulf of Guinea is key to America's trade and investment opportunities in Africa, to our energy security, and to stem transnational threats like narcotics and arms trafficking, piracy and illegal fishing—we share these interests in common with our Gulf of Guinea partners.” This statement, delivered by Jendayi Frazer at the Gulf of Guinea Ministerial Conference, underscores the scope and direction of America's interest in the

region. First, it encapsulates the strategic importance of the area. The Gulf of Guinea sits on top of an enormous resource base and acts as a vital shipping hub. An increasing supply of high quality oil, with easy access to western markets, has the potential to free America from Middle Eastern oil dependence. Strategic mineral endowments provide crucial elements for military and civilian industries. Second, it accentuates the shared security concerns within the region. A lack of maritime awareness and control has created an environment ripe for criminal activity. Incidents are rising at an alarming rate, posing threats to both African and American interests. Local and foreign industries are attacked routinely. As a result, the Gulf of Guinea squanders millions of dollars each year, money that developing nations cannot afford to lose. In addition, maritime areas void of authority harbor piracy and terrorist activity, providing radical groups like al Qaeda safe havens from which to operate. In the post 9/11 world, the US cannot allow any threats to national security to operate unabated. Finally, it highlights the magnitude of partnerships. Any effort to move the region forward requires a vision committed to cooperation. Neither the US nor any one nation within the Gulf of Guinea is capable of generating maritime stability. To achieve success the US must identify and support capable allies determined to confront the challenges ahead. Nigeria, despite plenty of challenges, offers America a strategic ally able to promote a maritime vision that unites a coalition of nations under common goals of security and stability.

Supporting Nigeria in a commitment for maritime security creates a strategic base that can promote and lead a coalition of willing participants. The US can strengthen Nigeria's capacity to lead and enhance the region's goal of a secure maritime environment. This can be accomplished through three strategic actions, which align with the Department of Defense Cooperation Guidance: instituting information exchange and intelligence sharing, developing

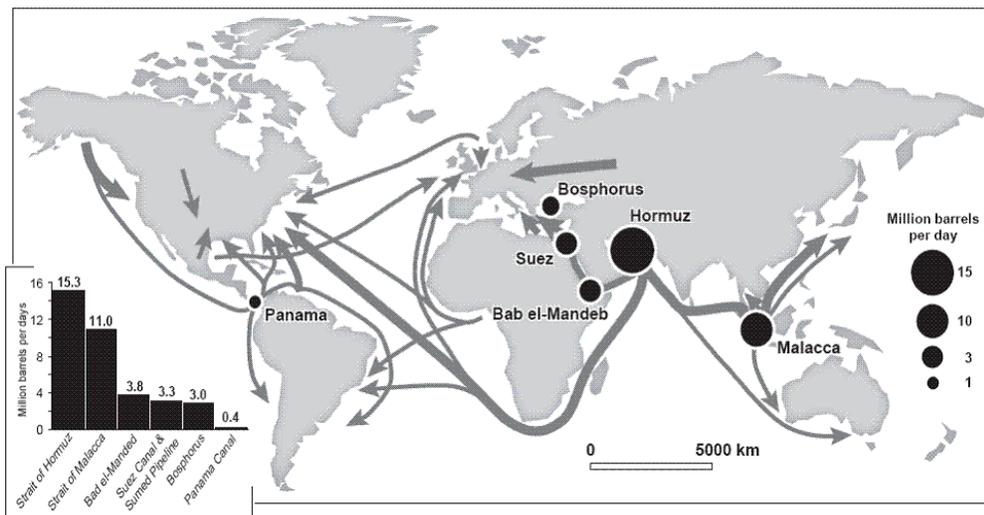
relationships that promote US security interests, and building host nation capabilities.<sup>93</sup> The efficacy of a maritime campaign relies on accurate and timely information and a system that supports a framework of exchange, critical in understanding threats and developing responses. Building partnerships is the foundation of cooperative action. Coalitions of nations and non-governmental organizations focused on maritime security overcome the inadequacies of any single nation or organization. In addition, they convey legitimacy in purpose and achieve unity of effort. Finally the US must support a program that facilitates Nigeria's growth as a self-sufficient actor striving for a secure and safe maritime domain. This involves a structured approach that targets professional development, maritime infrastructure, domain awareness, and interdiction capacity.

The United States and the nations of the Gulf of Guinea are at a crossroads. Maritime security presents an opportunity to galvanize shared interests and promote strategic partnerships, bridging a new era of American and African cooperation. Nigeria stands capable and ready to lead the region, partner with the US, and promote an international coalition aimed at instituting safe and secure seas.

Illustrations



Figure 1: Regional Map of the Gulf of Guinea.



Source: Energy Information Administration (2003)

Figure 2: Oil Flows, Major Chokepoints and Oil Transited at Major Strategic Locations, 2003.

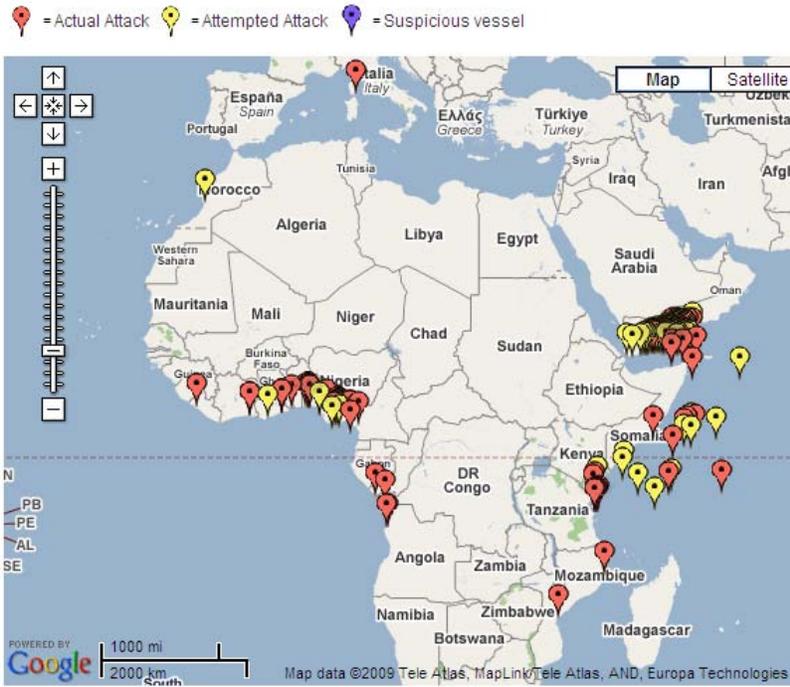


Figure 3: International Maritime Bureau Report January – December 2008.

## Endnotes

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