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EXAMINING THE EVER-PERSISTENT CHALLENGES OF MARITIME PIRACY IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Maritime piracy continues to pose a significant and complex security challenge to Africa, particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, which are vital maritime routes for global trade. Despite the continent's strategic location and the importance of its shipping lanes, piracy persists, disrupting trade, threatening the safety of seafarers, and causing substantial economic and humanitarian impacts. This enduring problem is rooted in a web of sociology-political and economic factors such as weak governance, political instability, high unemployment, and poverty, which create an environment where piracy can thrive. The study addressed the persistent nature of maritime piracy in African waters, which remains a threat despite various local, regional, and international counter-piracy efforts. It investigated the historical background, root causes, and evolving trends of maritime piracy in Africa, with a focus on the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. The study also examined the effectiveness of security measures and the challenges that continue to hinder lasting solutions. The research is anchored in the Pirate Cycle Theory, which explains piracy as a cyclical phenomenon driven by socioeconomic and political grievances, escalating when profitable and subsiding only temporarily with enforcement, but likely to recur if underlying causes remain unaddressed. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach, relying on secondary data such as scholarly articles, official reports, and piracy

Key Words: Security, Maritime piracy, Africa, Regional cooperation, Legal frameworks

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databases, and uses comparative case studies and thematic analysis to draw insights. Findings indicate that while multinational naval patrols and regional cooperation have reduced piracy in some areas, the threat persists due to unresolved structural issues including inadequate maritime governance, fragmented legal systems, and socio-economic marginalisation. The study recommends a comprehensive approach that combines stronger regional and international cooperation, harmonised legal frameworks, improved maritime security capacity, and targeted socio-economic development in coastal communities to sustainably disrupt the cycle of piracy in African waters.

Introduction

Maritime piracy Maritime piracy has been one of the most enduring and complicated security threats facing Africa Africa has a long coastline, key maritime choke points, and vast natural resources that have long made its waters an attractive prize to pirate networks. Horn of Africa and Gulf of Guinea maritime routes are considered the arteries of world trade, as they transport up to 90 percent of African imports and exports (Fuller, 2022; UNCTAD, 2023). Piracy that leads to the disruption of these sea lanes does not only endanger the safety of seafarers and ships, but also poses wide-ranging economic and humanitarian impacts that transcend beyond the direct victims.

The issue of piracy on African waters is firmly embedded in an intricate interrelation of socio-political and economic drivers. Weak governance, political instability, high unemployment rates, and poverty provide good grounds through which piracy flourishes (Ginga, 2020). In places like Somalia in the Horn of Africa, where decades of state failure and anarchy had created a piracy incubator, the problem reached its peak between 2005 and 2012 when more than 200 attacks were reported per year (IMB, 2013). In a similar fashion, the Gulf of Guinea has become the global hotspot of piracy activity since the mid-2010s, with almost 90 percent of all kidnappings at sea reported in recent years (Osas et al., 2023; Omar, 2025). In this case, piracy has been commonly associated with illegal oil bunkering, armed robbery and hostage-taking due to economic desperation and felt marginalisation of coastal populations (Olofin et al., 2021).

Although there have been some positive gains as a result of intense local, regional and international efforts, including the reduction of Somali piracy activity due to multinational naval patrols and the establishment of better governance, piracy in African waters has proven to be a tenacious threat (Mitra et al., 2025). It has a severe economic implication because cut across increased insurance premiums, re-routing of vessels, and disruption of maritime trade are adding to the cost of goods and services that impact both regional and global markets (Arisabor et al. 2022; World Bank, 2022). There is also a humanitarian cost

to kidnapped seafarers and their families, as well as environmental harm caused by illegal practices related to piracy, which only worsens the situation.

Piracy has nonetheless adapted and evolved in spite of numerous counter-piracy measures, such as the development of regional cooperation mechanisms, like the Yaounde Code of Conduct and international naval task forces, to fill governance gaps. Thus, the paper aims to investigate historical background, root causes, and developing trends of maritime piracy in Africa, with a particular case study of the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. Through examination of the security architectures, international and regional reactions and the challenges that have continued to persist, this research undertaking will offer a profound comprehension as to why piracy has become an ever-present danger and propose practical suggestions as to what can be done to lessen its impact through more efficient strategies.

Maritime

The term maritime piracy originates from the Latin maritimus, meaning "of the sea". It refers to anything associated with the sea or waterways connected to the sea. It encompasses activities such as navigation, shipping, trade, and commerce conducted on or via the sea. Maritime can also describe regions located near or bordering the sea, as well as human activities related to living near coastal areas (Church, 2024).

Piracy

Piracy is robbery or criminal violence exercised by perpetrators on ships or vessels against other ships or coastal targets. Piracy has historically been associated with theft of goods and wealth, frequently in strategic maritime chokepoints like narrow waterways that funnel shipping lanes. Piracy in international law is a standalone crime with considerable worldwide economic repercussions that encompasses (Riaz et al., 2022).

Pirate Cycle Theory

The historical origin of the theory is identifiable with British naval historian Philip Gosse, who is said to have established the theory in his now classic book The History of Piracy (1932). Gosse noted that, piracy is not random but according to a pattern set by larger socio-political and economic circumstances. Piracy, in his view, starts as a reaction to some grievance, for example, economic stagnation or political turmoil, increases in scope and sophistication as it proves profitable, then dies down as a result of heightened enforcement or the transmutation of those initial circumstances. Building on Gosse's original hypothesis, modern researchers have used the Pirate Cycle model in modern contexts.

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Notably, Edward R. Lucas employed the theory in analysing Somalia piracy in his 2013 article Somalia's "Pirate Cycle": The Three Phases of Somali Piracy published in the Journal of Strategic Security. Lucas identified three main phases in Somali piracy history. Phase one (1991–2000) came into being following the disintegration of the Somali state, during which Somali fishermen started targeting foreign ships taking advantage of Somali waters. The initial attacks used to be portrayed as acts of protection of maritime resources or self-defence. Phase two (2000–2008) was the expansion phase, during which piracy developed into a highly organised criminal enterprise. Pirates were increasingly strategic, using advanced methods and focusing on global shipping lanes, resulting in a steep rise in the number of attacks. The third period (2008–2011) saw a spectacular drop in piracy thanks to heightened international naval patrols, heightened maritime security measures, and alterations in shipping practices.

However, Lucas cautioned that the underlying causes of piracy, such as poverty, weak governance, and lawlessness, were not tackled to a large degree and therefore leave the door ajar for a potential revival. Pirate Cycle Theory offers several theoretical observations that are particularly helpful to policy and academic analysis. It emphasises that piracy is not only a criminal activity but a process that is influenced by structural and environmental factors. Piracy development has root causes in economic marginalisation, political instability, and social exclusion. As time goes on, since piracy is profitable, it gets more players and is organised further. Yet suppression alone, and not causes, can have but temporary impacts, with piracy most likely to recur once the circumstances are once more conducive. This is a cyclical understanding that is required to implement sustainable anti-piracy measures which deter the criminal practice but also tackle its socio-economic and political roots.

Methodological Perspective

This study uses a qualitative and exploratory research design to address the multifaceted challenges of maritime piracy in Africa, with specific reference to the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. Considering the complexity of interactions between sociopolitical, economic, legal, and security issues that support piracy, a qualitative paradigm provides the opportunity to conduct a detailed study of preconditions and contextual processes that might be missed when using quantitative methodologies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The main aim is not just to report on the continuity of piracy but to examine the reasons as to why it remains persistent despite the various counter-piracy measures both locally, regionally and internationally.

The study is substantially dependent on secondary data, such as scholarly articles in journals, reports by government and non-government organisations, policy briefs, and official databases of piracy incidents. At the heart of the data collection lies the

International Maritime Bureau (IMB) Piracy Reporting Centre that offers detailed empirical data on piracy incidents, trends, and patterns (IMB, 2024). In addition, United Nations, regional (like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union reports and publications provide useful information on governance and security structures in place to deal with piracy. These sources can be analysed documentary to gain a closer acquaintance with the development of piracy and its specifics in the two regions of interest.

The study uses a comparative case study design to compare the dynamics of piracy in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. The approach allows identifying common and distinctive factors that drive piracy, including governance gaps, economic deprivation, and maritime security issues (Yin, 2018). It is based on this comparative relationship that the study makes wider inferences on the cyclical nature and the persistence of maritime piracy in African waters.

Content and thematic analysis of data was used and that includes coding and categorisation of the information gathered into major themes, such as: governance failure, economic marginalisation, security challenges and international intervention. This scientific method reveals common trends and connections that justify why piracy has remained persistent despite suppression measures taken. The ethical aspects are observed through strict referencing of all the materials used and maintaining objectivity in the course of analysis.

Maritime Piracy in Africa: A Historical Perspective

African maritime piracy has a long history that is entrenched in the strategic maritime geography and socio-political intricacies of the continent. Traditionally, African coastal states have a long history of piracy, ranging Barbary corsairs of North Africa raiding European ships in the Mediterranean in the 16th to 19th centuries, to contemporary pirate syndicates off the Horn of Africa and in the Gulf of Guinea (Zuidhoek, 2022; Arisabor et al., 2022). The coast of the Indian Ocean, particularly the waters of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden has been a piracy hot-spot over the decades (Akhahenda et al., 2024). The fall of the central government in Somalia in the early 1990s resulted in a security vacuum that enabled piracy to thrive and that reached a climax between 2005 and 2012 when hundreds of attacks were reported each year (Ondigi, 2023; IMB, 2024). The Somali pirates were involved in ship hijacking, hostage taking and ransom demands which crippled one of the busiest shipping routes in the world, the route linking the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Multinational naval forces and regional operations have greatly diminished Somali piracy since 2012, yet the risk still exists. As recent as 2024, the IMB recorded at least eight incidents of piracy in Somali waters involving hijacking and hostage-takings, showing that the pirates still have the capability of operating, and in fact, they frequently employ

hijacked "mother ships" to increase their range to as far as 1,000 nautical miles out to sea (Alsawalqa & Venter, 2022; IMB, 2024). This revival demonstrates the vulnerable maritime security situation in the Horn of Africa and the continued threat to international shipping. In the meantime, the Gulf of Guinea has become the most hazardous piracy hotspot in the world since the early 2010s. The area is responsible of most of the kidnappings at sea worldwide and is dominated by armed robbery, ransom kidnapping, oil theft, and ship hijacking (Ezeozue, 2021; Fuller, 2022). In 2024, the IMB reported 18 incidents of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, a slight decrease compared to the previous years yet a serious concern, as all 11 crew kidnappings worldwide in the first half of the year happened there and 21 crew members were kidnapped in one incident (IMB, 2024; Global Upfront Newspaper; 2025). In this area, piracy is commonly associated with organised criminal groups taking advantage of poor maritime security and economic instability, especially in areas off Nigeria, Benin and Cameroon.

Piracy activities in the two regions involve boarding of vessels, hijacking, taking of hostages and violent assault on crew members. Such actions have dire implications on maritime trade and security in the region. Piracy causes the escalation of shipping prices by increasing insurance premiums and vessel re-routing, supply chain disruption, and destabilisation of the economy of coastal states. There is also the humanitarian aspect on the seafarers who are subjected to violence, kidnapping and psychological trauma (Alvarez, 2020). The threat has also been persistent to test the regional security architectures and requires the constant international cooperation and effective maritime governance to reduce the risks.

Although the overall number of piracy incidents reported worldwide in 2024 has declined, to the lowest in 30 years, according to IMB, the safety of crewmembers is a paramount issue. There have been 111 crew members taken hostage and 11 kidnapped in the first nine months of 2024 worldwide, with weapons including guns and knives being increasingly used in the attacks (IMB, 2024). This highlights the fact that, the rate of attacks might be going down but the intensity and threat to human life is great especially in African waters.

Maritime Piracy and the Security Architecture of African States

The maritime security environment experienced by African coastal states is complex and dynamic due to weak naval capabilities, disjointed legal systems, and inability to coordinate in the region. However, most African states are unable to effectively enforce maritime law because of a lack of naval capabilities, ageing surveillance equipment, and inadequate institutional capacities despite the importance of the continent as a whole to global commerce because of its long coastlines and strategic shipping routes. According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), there were 116 incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea reported worldwide in 2024, of which a large percentage occurred in

African waters, especially off Somalia and in the Gulf of Guinea (IMB, 2025). What makes this worse is that a significant number of attacks happen when vessels are anchored or steaming, which is when they are most vulnerable.

The legal frameworks of the African states are diverse and in most cases, they have not been harmonised with the international maritime law including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code (Rembe, 2022; Mensah, 2023). Such legal fragmentation obstructs prosecution and deterrence of piracy and other crimes. Indicatively, although country such as Kenya have progressed in revising their maritime legislation and enhancing the level of port security according to the recommendations of the IMO, a significant number are yet to overcome the challenge of adopting comprehensive laws and facilitating their implementation (Munyao, 2024; IMO, 2025). Such legal and operational vulnerabilities provide safe havens in which pirate groups can operate relatively safely. With those challenges being realised, the regional economic communities have assumed important roles in the governance of maritime security. Regional organisations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) have been at the forefront of organising efforts to conduct joint maritime patrols, exchange intelligence, and capacity-building initiatives (Ajeagah, 2022). One such advancement is the introduction of the Combined Maritime Task Force (CMTF) in the Gulf of Guinea, which was approved by the African Union Peace and Security Council in 2025 (African Union, 2025). The CMTF is designed to offer a unified, quick-reaction system split into functional areas to encompass the northern, central, and southern Gulf and consequently optimising cross-border collaboration and efficiency in operations (Hailu, 2025). Also, the African Union Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS 2050) provides a continental platform to enhance maritime governance and security, whereby it is noted that there is a need to coordinate the efforts of member states and regional organisations (Walker, 2020). However, this has been realised slowly because of financial constraints and lack of a powerful lead country to drive the agenda. In addition, there is still poor coordination between regional structures like the Yaounde Architecture that deals with intelligence sharing and early warning and operational structures like the CMTF. Such fragmentation frequently results in slow response time and failure to interrupt piracy attacks before they happen (Walker, 2025). A naval element is also being developed within the African Standby Force, and exercises like Amani Africa III are aimed at improving interoperability and collective maritime response capabilities between participating states (Hailu, 2025).

Statistically, there has been a slight reduction of piracy cases in the Gulf of Guinea, with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) recording 17 incidents in 2024, a drop of 23 per cent compared to 2023, but the area is still the most risky in the world regarding

kidnappings at sea (Ahorsu et al., 2024; IMO, 2025). Piracy activity is still a concern off Somalia; in 2024, the IMB reported eight incidents, including hijacking and hostage-taking more than 500 nautical miles out and which showed the persistence of the operational capability of the Somali pirate groups (IMB, 2025).

Efforts in Controlling Maritime Piracy in Africa

Maritime piracy has been a major issue of international security concern as it has grave impacts on maritime security, international trade, and the well-being of seafarers. To counter this, the international community has adopted various counter measures to ensure the protection of maritime activities and to ensure the safety of the world oceans against piracy. Such multinational operations have proved especially important in African waters, where piracy hot zones like the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea have attracted prolonged international interest.

The fight against maritime piracy in Africa has taken an international, regional and national turn. Internationally, the United Nations has been the central actor in the creation of a legal and operational framework to fight piracy. The legal framework that establishes the basis of defining piracy and authorising states to act upon it on the high seas is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Riaz et al., 2022; Kanwel, 2024). In addition to UNCLOS, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has come up with other regulations like the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, which has improved the level of maritime security worldwide (Stavroulakis et al., 2024). Also, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) maintains a Piracy Reporting Centre which gathers and shares real-time information on piracy attacks as a way of enabling coordinated interventions. On a different note, the presence of different international naval patrols, spearheaded by world powers such as the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) in the Indian Ocean and multinational task forces in the Gulf of Guinea has helped to deter pirate activities due to the constant naval presence in strategic maritime routes (IMB, 2024; UNODC, 2022).

At the regional level, African states have attempted to enhance collaboration by pioneering efforts like the 2013 Yaounde Summit and the 2016 Lome Summit that were centred on joint action against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea (Ginga, 2020). A legal and operational framework of joint maritime security operations was put in place by the Yaounde Code of Conduct, signed by 25 West and Central African states under the auspices of ECOWAS, ECCAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (Ajeagah, 2022; Olaoluwa, 2023). It focused on the coordination of national laws, improved information exchange, and the creation of joint military and law enforcement strategies to fight piracy and other sea crimes (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2023; PSCC, 2023). These commitments were further strengthened through the Lom e Summit which discussed the

issue of implementation and encouraged the mobilisation of resources to enhance maritime security. Kenya and Seychelles, also, have set up specialised courts to help prosecute piracy cases. Seychelles especially has earned a reputation in prosecuting pirates and sentencing them to long prison terms, which has sent a strong message to potential perpetrators (UNODC, 2021).

On the national front, the affected African states have invested in capacity building of their navies and coast guards, as well as, legal reforms to criminalise piracy and enhance prosecution success. A case in point is Nigeria, which has improved its maritime surveillance capacity and passed laws that meet international standards and has led to more pirate boats being interdicted and convicted (UNODC, 2022). These are reflected in the recent development such as the Nigerian Navy June 2025 commissioning of three new state-of-the-art warships, NNS SHERE, NNS FARO, and NNS IKOGOSI, and three AW109 Trekker helicopters as part of its fleet recapitalisation and modernisation program. This is a major investment that enhances the ability of Nigeria to patrol and protect its territorial waters and the wider Gulf of Guinea, which is a key region to regional and global trade (**THISDAYLIVE.** 2025). Nigeria has also installed sophisticated satellite surveillance systems, including the NIMASA Command Control Computer Communication Information System (C4i) and the Falcon Eye system of the Nigerian Navy. These systems offer real-time surveillance and intelligence exchange to facilitate quick action against maritime crimes (Lew, 2024).

In June 2019, Nigeria became the first country in the region to enact a dedicated anti-piracy law that meets international standards, namely the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (POMO) Act. The POMO Act has been actively applied to prosecute pirates. As an example, in July 2021, a Nigerian court convicted 10 pirates to 12 years in prison in the hijacking of the fishing vessel Hailufeng II, the first landmark conviction under the new law (Ogbonnaya, 2020).

Another counter-piracy measure comprised the deployment of the Combined Maritime Task Force (CMTF) in the Gulf of Guinea, which was authorised by the African Union Peace and Security Council in 2025. The CMTF is intended to offer a swift-reaction, integrated maritime presence in the northern, central and southern areas of the Gulf. It boosts operational synergy between ECOWAS, ECCAS, and AU member states (PSC, 2025; Hailu, 2025). The initiative is based on the experience of international naval operations off Somalia and seeks to adjust it to the realities of the Gulf of Guinea politics and security environment.

The other significant international countermeasures has been the use of multinational naval operations. These missions involve warships of different nations operating together to protect important shipping routes and prevent pirate actions. One such force is Task

Force 151, created in 2009, that combines naval resources of the United States, the European Union, and states of the region to carry out combined patrols and interdiction operations in the Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin (UNODC, 2021). Likewise, the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Operation Atalanta has been instrumental in escorting vulnerable ships and disrupting piracy activity off the coast of Somalia, with its continuous patrols and escort missions (Deeble, 2021). Such naval operations are enabled by intelligence-sharing systems, including the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) mechanism, which enables real-time coordination between naval forces, regional organizations, and industry stakeholders to monitor pirate activity and effectively respond (Deeble, 2021).

The issue of private security measures has become a serious supplement to the public ones. The use of Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) on board ships transiting through high-risk waters has proven to greatly decrease the number of successful attacks by the pirates. These licensed and armed security details serve as a strong deterrence to boarding parties particularly in the Gulf of Guinea where piracy is still common (Bueger, 2019). Another measure taken by shipping companies is a detailed vulnerability assessment and physical security upgrades in the form of barriers, alarm systems, and better lighting (UNCTAD, 2021).

The industry standards and codes of conduct developed by professional associations, such as the International Maritime Security Contractors Association (IMSCA) and the Security Association for the Maritime Industry (SAMI), hold private security providers accountable and ensure that they operate within the bounds of the law (Bueger, 2019).

Challenges to the Adopted Measures

Multifaceted and increasingly coordinated, efforts to combat maritime piracy in Africa still suffer from serious and interrelated challenges that hamper their overall effectiveness. One of the major challenges is the lack of operational capacity and the scarcity of resources that most African coastal states possess. Most of the countries do not have sufficient naval ships, surveillance equipment, and trained manpower to monitor large exclusive economic zones, which in most cases cover hundreds of thousands of square kilometers despite their strategic value in terms of maritime zones. This inadequacy limits their capability to identify, discourage, and react in time to piracy attacks and thus leave vast regions susceptible to assault. As highlighted by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) on numerous occasions, many African navies have to work with old equipment and limited funding, hindering the prolonged maritime security operations (IMB, 2024).

Adding to these capacity issues is the absence of harmonised legal frameworks and poor enforcement mechanisms on the continent. Although the legal framework exists to authorise anti-piracy operations, with international law (United Nations Convention on

the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and regional arrangements (Djibouti and Yaounde Codes of Conduct) giving a legal framework to anti-piracy operations, many African states have not fully incorporated these provisions into domestic law or built the judicial capacity to bring offenders to justice (Boamah, 2023; Hosen, 2024). The jurisdictional gaps and inconsistency in laws provide safe havens where the pirates can operate relatively safely. In addition, difficulties related to gathering evidence, protecting witnesses, and collaborating with other countries in the legal sphere undermine successful prosecutions, reducing their deterrent effect (UNODC, 2022).

The issue of political competitions and inability to coordinate the actions of regional organisations and member states also makes the fight against piracy more challenging. Maritime security governance in Africa is characterised by a number of overlapping institutions, such as ECOWAS, ECCAS, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, and the African Union, each with different mandates and priorities (Adewumi et al. 2022; Mohammed, 2023). Such institutional complexity tends to lead to a situation of fragmented initiatives, of efforts being duplicated, and of a competition over scarce resources. The existence of political tensions between coastal states may hinder intelligence exchange, combined patrols, and combined responses, limiting the effectiveness of regional strategies in general. Indicatively, although the Combined Maritime Task Force (CMTF) was formed to centralise naval operations in the Gulf of Guinea, unequal political will and the inability to coordinate actions between member states continue to undermine operational success (Hailu, 2025).

Pirates too have adapted and found ways to avoid enforcement efforts with their tactics becoming quite advanced with the utilisation of so called mother ships which allow them to extend their range of operations well out into the ocean, as far as 1,000 nautical miles in some instances. These mother ships are floating bases, which allow the pirates to attack in regions that were previously safe and also make naval patrols difficult (Henningsen, 2021; Abubakar, 2023). Likewise, pirates are employing modern communication equipment and launching attacks with ever-growing accuracy by leveraging the weaknesses in maritime domain awareness and response (IMB, 2024).

In addition to the operational and institutional issues, there are economic fundamentals that have been feeding piracy. Coastal communities are characterised by high rates of poverty, unemployment and economic marginalisation, which provide fertile grounds of recruitment into the pirate networks (Akangbou, 2023). The illegal economy of piracy, especially the black market of stolen crude oil and other cargo, offers significant financial motives that keep criminal operations going. According to the World Bank, the disruptions caused by piracy activities cost the West African economies hundreds of millions of dollars each year in higher insurance costs, ship re-routing, and trade losses, which worsen the economic vulnerabilities (World Bank, 2022). Addressing these root

causes requires integrated socio-economic development strategies alongside security measures.

Corruption is another problem that may compromise law enforcement and judicial procedures and enable pirate networks to act with impunity. The problem of environmental degradation and unlicensed fishing in coastal waters also adds to the community grievance and economic desperation, which indirectly facilitates the recruitment to piracy (*McCabe, 2023*). Moreover, the size and complexity of maritime areas, as well as the scarcity of regional infrastructure and technological capacities to achieve maritime domain awareness, impede monitoring and swift reaction.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that maritime piracy off the coast of Africa is an endemic and dynamic problem despite the many international, regional and national efforts that have been directed to curb it. The enduring issue of piracy, especially in the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, has been enabled by an intricate combination of operational constraints, fractured legal systems, political and institutional coordination failures, the advanced pirate strategies, and the fundamental socio-economic conditions of poverty and unemployment. As restated in the paper, although great strides have been achieved, with multinational naval operations, regional cooperation systems, capacity building and legal revisions, these efforts have not been adequate in eliminating piracy and completely securing African maritime areas.

The study has examined the dire need to strengthen regional collaboration among African states, backed by effective capacity building and aligned legal systems, to deal with the diverse aspects of piracy. Overcoming coordination challenges requires strengthening of political will, enhancing intelligence sharing, and enhancing joint maritime security initiatives. In addition, it is important to tackle the socio-economic causes of piracy using integrated development solutions to ensure long-term solutions. The research fits into the existing knowledge on maritime piracy by offering a comparative perspective between two of the most important piracy hotspots as well as by highlighting the necessity of multidimensional approaches to piracy that transcend beyond security-based responses.

Recommendations

Based on the identified challenges above, the study recommends has the following recommendations:

i. Since piracy is transnational, African states need to enhance cooperation within the available regional platforms like ECOWAS, ECCAS, and the African Union. This involves the improvement of joint maritime patrols, the alignment of intelligence

sharing, and coordination of operations. The Combined Maritime Task Force (CMTF) in the Gulf of Guinea must be established and operationalised with full political commitment and allocation of resources by member states to facilitate quick and coordinated responses to piracy attacks (Peace and Security Council of the African Union, 2025).

ii. There shold be an improve Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) through the use of sophisticated surveillance tools such as satellite tracking, automated identification systems (AIS), drones, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) is essential to ensure that large maritime areas are monitored. Enhancing MDA will enable the authorities to identify suspicious activities early, maximise the use of limited naval resources, and interfere with pirate activities before they can attack. Decision-making and response time can also be enhanced by the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) in the analysis of data.

iii. African countries should accelerate the process of adopting and enforcing harmonised maritime laws that are in line with international conventions like UNCLOS and regional treaties like the Djibouti and Yaounde Codes of Conduct. The creation of special maritime courts and the improvement of judicial training will increase the rate of prosecution and act as a deterrent to piracy. The cooperation between the regions in the legal sphere, such as extradition and exchange of evidence, should be strengthened to eliminate jurisdictional gaps.

iv. There is need for coastal states long-term investments in modernise their navies and coast guards, such as purchasing patrol vessels, surveillance equipment, and communications systems. It is necessary to have training programs to produce competent maritime law enforcement officers. Capacity building must also be aimed at multi-agency coordination at the state level to achieve a whole-of-government approach to maritime security.

v. The long-term decrease in piracy is possible through the enhancement of economic opportunities in coastal communities. Integrated socio-economic programs aimed at poverty alleviation, employment creation, education and alternative livelihoods should be implemented by governments and development partners. It is also important to fight illegal practices like oil theft and illegal fishing that fund piracy networks.

vi. The study recommend the establishment and enhancement of African Information Sharing Centres (ISCs) in strategic maritime areas will improve situational awareness and coordination. These centres allow real-time exchange of intelligence between states, navies and shipping companies to interdict pirate activities in a timely manner. It is crucial to expand the network of ISCs and make

them interoperable with international maritime security platforms (Africa Portal, 2023; IMO, 2013).

vii. With the growing digitalisation of the maritime industry, it is necessary to ensure the safety of navigation and communication systems against cyberattacks. The creation of marine cybersecurity systems and the education of maritime workers on cyber threat awareness will assist in protecting ships against new piracy methods that use digital weaknesses.

viii. Shipping companies are encouraged to maintain the use of Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) and extensive vessel hardening, such as physical barriers, alarm systems, and lighting. Compliance with industry best management practices, including those in the BMP West Africa guidelines, increases crew safety and minimises successful pirate attacks. The cooperation of the private security providers, industry associations, and governments should be enhanced to guarantee professionalism and adherence to the legal standards.

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