



NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

STRATEGIC TRENDS

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EMERGING CHALLENGES

Maritime security: Nigerian developments

Nigeria is an excellent observation point in order to understand current and future trends both of fluctuation of oil market and security threats in the Gulf of Guinea region. What is happening in Nigeria has implications for shipping, energy security, sustainable fisheries as well as international, national and regional security.

Current oil low prices are decreasing armed robbery and other crimes involving tankers in West Africa. In fact, it has been observed that oil companies are reducing the number of operations in the area although international security measures had been taken in the past (see the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the US Navy training programme, etc.). The temporary effect of disincentive dictated by low prices is forcing organized crime groups to reconsider their efforts in piracy activities irrespective of results. Nonetheless, we can expect a burst of pirate attacks in the future as soon as stated by Bob Dudley (BP Group Chief Executive and Director) oil prices will rise in the second half of the year as demand increases from America and China due to the failure of the “shale oil and gas revolution”.

The government of Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea on the 15th of March signed an agreement on the establishment of a combined Maritime Policing and Security Patrol Committee. Furthermore, Germany's Deputy Defence Minister Ralf Brauksiepe confirmed during his last visit in Abuja that Germany will assist with technical training in building military capacity to guarantee maritime security. Accordingly both these events are expected to enhance security in the Gulf of Guinea related to maritime crimes.

Unfortunately violence in Niger Delta continues: a pirate attack and an ambush occurred in the last weeks. Since the beginning of 2000 the area is well known to be plagued by rebels who attack oil pipelines and kidnap workers of international oil companies as part of a campaign for independence.

On the 23rd of February two sailors of the French flag MV Bourbon had been killed after a shooting; however the ship was rescued by the Nigerian Navy soon after the attack. In the last days suspected pirates killed two soldiers.

It is evident how the three-day operation of the Nigerian Navy conducted during the 17th of March, aimed at displaying all its gunboats and warships, can be useful for domestic propaganda and to assure the International Community about the effort of the central government to guarantee maritime security. However, in the current context, it can only give rise to greater doubts about the effective willing and pragmatism of the central authorities to fight piracy.