

The Gulf of Guinea in Nigeria's Foreign Relations: The Role of the Nigerian Navy

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Abstract

The region known as the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) has become a very important area in the world, largely as a result of its enormous natural resources. Today, its sea lanes are conduits of international trade. Because of this profile, it has become a major draw for criminal elements and security threats like, sea piracy. Given the importance of trade and energy security or ensuring the uninterrupted flow of trade and energy needs via the GoG, its state, is constantly a source of concern for nations in the region. This has led to bilateral and multi-lateral exchanges between not only nations within the region, but those without, thus impacting foreign relations of nations. Also, the given the nature of environment, Navies of nations in the area, seem to be playing a crucial role in not only driving the relationship of their various nations, but also ensuring that the region is secured-in particular, the role of the Nigerian Navy (NN) becomes critical in this regard. Through the use of mostly secondary sources, the study discovered that the nature of sea piracy poses a threat to security in the GoG, and that these threats have not only severely undermined the geo-strategic environment of the GoG, but it is also playing a key role in how nations relate in the region. The study further found out that while the NN, has been an effective tool to drive Nigeria's foreign relations in the region, it is still undermined by limited resources. Going forward, the paper calls for strengthening of the NN and building viable regional cooperative structures with states in the GoG.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Foreign Relations, Gulf of Guinea, Maritime Security, Nigerian Navy, Strategic Interests.

Introduction

The central pillar of the Nigerian national security policy is the Protection of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Nigerian state. The policy also has within it, principles on the fight for African unity and independence, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, and, regional economic development and security cooperation. Subordinate goals included military self-sufficiency and regional leadership. To amply buttress these, the thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy, according to former President Olusegun Obasanjo, is to regain respectability and relevance in the international community. The main objective being "peace, security and prosperity through friendship". The goals to be achieved are among others: a) Economic integration of ECOWAS; b) Responsibilities in Multilateral organisations - UN, AU, the Commonwealth, the Gulf of

Guinea Commission, OPEC, NAM, and G-77; c) Promotion of Foreign investment and trade (Mohammed, 2001).

In defining Nigeria's geo-strategic situation, its location in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) region, is key. In the region, it straddles western and equatorial Africa, with long land and coastal boundaries, and immense offshore oil deposits. Her British colonial heritage made her an island among Francophone neighbours, an historical accident that has affected the local security milieu. Nigeria's relations with the major powers were shaped, in the case of Britain and France, largely by this colonial heritage. Regarding the major powers, whose interests in the region until the late 1980s were functions of their global rivalry and resource needs, Nigeria deliberately balanced her relations with Washington and Moscow. Throughout the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union were interested in Nigeria because of her size, population, economic and military potential, and especially for the United States, her oil.

The significance of oil to the Nigerian polity cannot be overemphasized, with 90% of export earnings and 80% of government revenue derived from it. Also, the area of the Gulf of Guinea accounts for the bulk of Nigeria's oil and gas production. It is no wonder then that the area of the Gulf of Guinea would take on strategic importance in the furtherance of Nigeria's security and foreign policy objectives.

This study, therefore, seeks to bring to light the geo-strategic relevance of the Gulf of Guinea region to Nigeria. It examines Nigeria's strategic interests in the Gulf of Guinea, the threats to these interests and the measures that could be taken to forestall them, especially the role of the Nigerian Navy in this regard. Finally, the paper looks at the relations between Nigeria and States in the Gulf of Guinea region and the impact of these relations on Nigeria's strategic interests.

The Geo-Strategic Relevance of the Gulf of Guinea

The last three decades have witnessed an incremental and gradual global awakening to the significance of Sub-Saharan Africa at humanitarian, political and economic levels. Sub-Saharan Africa represents a massive continental landmass, with a population of 1,038,627,178 billion in 2018 (World Bank Data, 2018), rich in natural and hydro carbon resources, but characterized to a large extent, with fragile economic and political institutions. Within this geopolitical landscape, one particular sub-region, the Gulf of Guinea (GoG), is the main focus.

The area known as the Gulf of Guinea, stretches from Angola to Senegal and lies between Latitude 4°33'North and 8°40'South and Longitude 8°10 East and 13°8' West (Mane, 2000). The maritime environment of GoG covers approximately 574,800 square nautical miles (sq nm) with a total coast length of about 2874 nm (Mane, 2000). It is laden with huge hydrocarbon deposits, solid minerals, fishes and forestry. The countries of the GoG comprise of 15 member States, namely Angola, Benin Republic, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo excluding

landlocked countries (Ayamasaowei, 2010). The area of the GoG shares close proximity with the United States of America (USA) east coast, where there is an open sea route when compared to the Middle East chokepoint, thereby making it a desirable shipping route for commerce. The often complex and dynamic nature of international energy politics and the activities of non-state actors in the region have ushered in, security concerns, which necessitate the need for a regional security mechanism where these resources abound.

Furthermore, the region, in recent times, has been experiencing high growth rate in its oil reserves, making many industrial experts to speculate that in the not too distant future, the region will account for 10-15 percent of the world's conventional oil and gas reserves, and an even larger share of US energy imports (Yoslán, 2016). The consequence of this is that, the region of the GoG, will be an area of note, in the international system.

Aside the economic dimension, the rise of the profile of the GoG region in the international system, has also been propelled by some political factors. For one, the US has been keen to lessen OPEC's influence, especially from dependence on politically-sensitive countries like Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. And alternative sources of supply like the Caspian pipeline, Central Asia producers, and Siberian exports have been slow to materialize. So it is no surprise that the development of Gulf of Guinea energy has been receiving high priority in the entire Western hemisphere. As the attempted coups against the Presidents of Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe (in 2004 and 2003 respectively) indicate, they are also receiving increased attention from the world's "oil mafia" and their attendant mercenaries. The idea therefore, that GoG oil has conduced to neutralizing the not to palatable aspects of actual or perceived dependency on Persian Gulf oil, is in and of itself, a tremendous asset to the world oil market. There can be little doubt that the GoG's emergence as a major energy producer and exporter has transformed the world oil markets. With the Gulf of Guinea region receiving all this attention, by virtue of being an emerging global oil power and a new centre of gravity, vital to Western and particularly US interests, it is no wonder that the U.S. is re-evaluating and re-assessing the borders of its regional Commands. It used to be that Africa fell under the responsibility of U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) while the South Atlantic falls under the responsibility of U.S. Atlantic Command (USACOM). But, in recent times, Africa falls directly under the Africa Command (AFRICOM). It would seem that, the U.S. strategy, is to have a clear and seamless military area of responsibility in the South Atlantic region with an east-west orientation rather than the traditional north-south orientation, in an effort to push a sound and consistent policy focus that will support vital U.S. interests. Essentially, this would not only better reflect the geo-strategic realities of the Post-Cold War era, but would also permit the U.S. Navy and Armed Forces to more easily project power to defend American interests and allies in the Gulf of Guinea. While also maintaining and safeguarding the increasing maritime shipments of petroleum products from these states.

Nigeria, as the biggest producer of oil in this region, and for this reason is well placed to become the regional stabilizer. A status like this, with capability backing intention, would help all the countries of the region, to secure the proper political and investment climate,

so as to maximize their revenues for programs of economic development and democratic reforms. In principle, the region's new oil discoveries should also provide a gigantic windfall to the 41 million long-suffering inhabitants of these otherwise-impoorished other Gulf of Guinea states. Where life expectancy now averages just 46 years, and more than half of them still survive on less than US \$1 per day (Yoslán, 2016).

Nigeria's Strategic Interests in the Gulf of Guinea

In geo-political terms, the South Atlantic, where the Gulf of Guinea is situated, is now commonly referred to as Zone of Peace by the United Nations Resolution 41/11 of 1986, and encompasses roughly 20° and 65° latitude and 20° and 65° longitude. On the African coast, it stretches from Nigeria to Angola, according to the treaty establishing the Gulf of Guinea Commission. As it were, Nigeria's territorial waters are located in the South Atlantic basin, making her rely, almost wholly, on seaborne trade for her economic well-being. These unique characteristics, confer on Nigeria a key strategic position as a South Atlantic maritime state. This geographic placement imposes enormous responsibility on Nigeria for defending not only her territorial waters, but also seeing to it that her off-shore oil and natural resources are not left vulnerable to exploitation by external powers. The importance of having the Gulf of Guinea as zone of peace, one that is, for instance, devoid of such unfair and irresponsible habit of environmental pollution and dumping of nuclear wastes, including, sea piracy, kidnapping and poaching, exemplifies the fulcrum of Nigeria's national security interests in the post-cold war era.

Because the Gulf of Guinea has gained a high profile in international affairs, it has affected quite a number of vital aspects of Nigeria's security, especially in the sense that it could be prone to sea-borne intrusions. It has, over the years, become quite a draw for some external powers like the US, Russia and France to post their maritime presence there. From the prism of the economy, most of Nigeria's oil resources which account for over 90 percent of her external earnings, is exploited off-shore. Furthermore, the region also contains some of the world's largest deposits of scarce minerals like gold, manganese, chrome, diamonds, bauxite and uranium. It is also a vital route for Nigeria's trade with the world, particularly with North and South America. As a consequence, the Gulf of Guinea region, is effectively defining the defence and foreign policies for the countries of the South American and African continent in many and multifaceted ways. For African maritime states such as Nigeria and South Africa, for numerous and often similar purposes, it confers on them key positions in any policy from the angle stretching from Cape Blanco in the Saharaoui Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), right down to the Cape Horn in Argentina across the South Atlantic to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and then across the Indian Ocean.

Moreover, the problem of offshore oil rights is also a constant issue for countries in the GoG. These may become a source of territorial disputes, when oil fields cross national maritime boundaries or where oil is found in areas that have never been recognized or properly delineated by maritime borders. Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea are two contiguous states, for example. And as it were, the role of Equatorial Guinea is of paramount importance to

Nigeria with regard to Nigeria's coastal defence and security. Off note, the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) overlap between the two nations, and the maritime region between the two countries is said to have a high concentration of mineral resources. The area is said to be not only one of the African continent's richest oil and gas areas, but also one of the richest fishing and shrimping grounds in Africa. However, there is a lot of friction in that area due to lack of delimitation of maritime boundaries.

It should be noted, however, that the case with Equatorial Guinea is only one component of a major problem in the region that extends to the dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula (also located in the area) and even to the region of Lake Chad. The region's sensitivities and strategic relevance to Nigeria, now asserts that the country steps up its efforts, in the national interest, to follow the path of mediation through joint committees/commissions to settle these disputes.

Threats to Nigeria's Strategic Interests in the Gulf of Guinea

Without a doubt, the security issues and threats to Nigeria are originating from several places. As it is, the dependency of the nation on the production and export of oil has been exacerbated by naval deployments by external powers along the South Atlantic and Gulf of Guinea maritime transit routes. This was, for example, in reaction to the obvious danger and the increase in South Atlantic tension. For example, two nations, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, were involved in civil wars between some of these oil producing states in the region. Angola, only then, emerged from a similar conflict and is still battling a small insurgency in its northern Cabinda enclave. Angola's neighbor, the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville) has experienced a traumatic conflict between feuding militias, while Nigeria's armed forces have been battling sea pirates and insurgents in the oil producing Niger/Delta region for years.

All these, have been further heightened by the presence of the United States naval fleet in international waters of the Gulf of Guinea. The excuse being, the ungovernable nature of the region and the pressing need to fill it. In effect, the U.S. navy is becoming very visible in the South Atlantic. Besides, one of the shared theses for this development was the burgeoning interest with which series of American administrations, past and present, have been showing in the oil chest of the Gulf of Guinea as a source of its strategic energy supply, especially as the oil fields of the Middle East are increasingly coming under severe threat and sabotage.

By reason of having long ocean frontiers, which comprises an extensive coast line of 420nm from the borders with Cameroon to Benin Republic, and an Exclusive Economic Zone of 300nm into the sea, thereby constituting a maritime area of 84,000sq.nm, within which abound diverse maritime resources (Blake, 1998). Nigeria is a coastal state with an interest in the assertion of jurisdiction and enforcement of rights over her coastal waters. There is therefore an urgent need for surveillance of the South Atlantic and for the assertion of sovereignty in the territorial waters of Nigeria, including jurisdiction over an economic zone stretching at least 300 miles to the sea. The increasing militarization of the South Atlantic,

has made at least 1,500 miles of Nigeria's coast very vulnerable to great power machinations.

A case in point is France which views Africa as its sphere of influence particularly, the Gulf of Guinea region with its vast reserve of natural resources, and with French national interest set on having monopoly over these strategic minerals. France has tried over the years to wield its influence over the region through the forming of alliances or defence pacts with former French colonies in the region. One of such defence pacts was with Cameroon (also a former French colony) and it was meant among other things, to balance the power between Nigeria (which, resource wise, is one the dominant powers in the Gulf of Guinea region, but not a Francophone country) and Cameroon, which it has, to an extent, succeeded in doing. Added to that also, in the light of the dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over ownership of the Bakassi peninsula, this pact has not only acted as a deterrence to Nigeria, but more alarmingly, it has defined Cameroon as one of the most formidable challenges or threats to her national interests in the Gulf of Guinea. Buoyed by its defence pact with France, its troops used to engage in frequent cross border attacks in the area of contention. In the same vein, France can also sabotage Nigeria's oil platforms in the Gulf of Guinea using Cameroon or her pre-positioned troops in Gabon.

Aside these threats from sovereign states, is also the threat of criminal activities against oil installations and personnel. For instance, oil bunkering (the theft of oil from wells and pipelines) is assuming frightening dimensions for Nigeria and has increasingly taken up the characteristics of organized crime. For instance, in the Niger Delta, Oil-rigs and workers are kidnapped and held for ransom by militant youths. In the case of kidnappings, the number of ships crewmembers being kidnapped in the Gulf of Guinea increased by more than 50% in 2019 and in 2020 has continued with a further escalation of violence, armed robbery and kidnappings (New York Times, 2020). The crisis is deepening – pirates are bolder and taking greater number of hostages.

It is not just the numbers, however, that are worrying. The level of violence is also growing, and the deaths of seafarers and military forces have occurred both during attacks and during captivity. For example, on December 15, 2019, 20 crew members were kidnapped from the MT Duke oil and chemical tanker with one of those crewmembers, a capable Indian seaman, dying in captivity. It has to be said that, more than 90% of the worldwide kidnappings at sea occurred in the Gulf of Guinea in 2019, and the vast majority of attacks were conducted on ships from within Nigerian territorial waters (New York Times, 2020). Interestingly, criminal groups whose infrastructure is centered in the Niger Delta region frequently carry out these attacks. Here, in remote areas where hostages are held during talks, groups have a large number of camps and representatives. Additionally, there is also the problem of widespread smuggling and piracy infesting the waters of the Gulf of Guinea. Therefore, due to Nigeria's vulnerability to such subversive infiltrations, it needs to handle these security situations with care and evolve strategies to deal with them.

Regional Efforts to Counter These Threats

The danger that criminality at sea, poses to the GoG has been clear for a while now. In 2011 and 2012, the United Nations Security Council passed two resolutions (Resolutions 2018 and 2039 respectively) that paved the way for more regional cooperation to protect ships and deal with criminality in the Gulf of Guinea. In the first resolution adopted in October 2011 the Security Council requested GoG states to create and improve domestic legislation and regulations to officially criminalize pirates and armed robbery at sea and cooperate with the shipping industries, creating a framework for exchanging information that would record events in the region. Building on that approach, the 2012 resolution encouraged countries along the Gulf of Guinea to work together to develop a strategy for counter-piracy and crime that would cover West and Central Africa.

Later, in 2013, regional multilateral bodies-the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, with support from the International Maritime Organization (IMO)-jointly developed an agreement known as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, which is also referred to, as the Yaoundé Process. The Yaoundé Process', aims to tackle maritime criminal activity in a coordinated manner. Its information-sharing endeavours include the creation of regional centres for maritime security for West Africa (Centre régional de sécurité maritime de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, or CRESMAO) in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, and for Central Africa (Centre régional de sécurité maritime de l'Afrique centrale, or CRESMAC) in Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo.

The Yaoundé Code or Process, also encompasses a wide array of maritime crimes, including piracy and armed robbery. Signatory countries, including all states that border the gulf, and inland countries as far away as Burundi, coordinate using two regional information-sharing centers, the Regional Center for Maritime Security of Central Africa and the Regional Center for Maritime Security of West Africa, which are connected through the Interregional Coordination Center in Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé. The Yaoundé Code and its coordination network have already markedly improved information-sharing. The progress is perhaps best illustrated by a 2016 incident involving the MT Maximus, a Panama-flagged oil tanker that was attacked off the coast of Cote d'Ivoire in February 2016 (Reuters, 2018). Six countries spanning the region coordinated to respond to the attack, sharing information on the hijacked vessel's location that helped the Nigerian Navy board the vessel and free its hostages after 11 days (Reuters, 2018).

The Role of the Nigerian Navy (NN)

From a national perspective, the Nigerian Navy (NN) has been the lead agency tasked to curb criminality in the GoG. To this end, in recognition of the centrality of intelligence and prompt exchange of information for effective maritime security operations, the NN holds regular meetings with major maritime stakeholders as a means of backward integration with Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies (MLEAs). The promulgation of the Harmonized Standard Operating Procedure (HSOP) on the arrest and detention of vessels and persons

in the maritime environment of Nigeria is a primary outcome of this relationship. The HSOP seeks to address the lack of mutual understanding and limited synergies between MLEAs and stakeholders and provides recommendations for the cooperation of MLEAs in the performance of their assigned maritime environment functions. To date, the maritime governance initiative, in line with the HSOP, has been supported by all MDAs and stakeholders, and the document is being considered by other countries in the region to strengthen the synergy of actions against crime at sea.

In addition, it is worth noting that, through a Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) programme, the NN has strengthened its monitoring capabilities to strengthen surveillance and interdiction efforts. Also, it is worth noting that, the complimentary systems of The Regional Maritime Awareness Capability (RMAC) and the FALCON EYE system have continued to be extended. This was clearly illustrated in the rescue of the MT MAXIMUS tanker by NN in 2016, 11 days after its hijacking by pirates in the waters of the Ivory Coast, through the maritime territories of more than 6 different nations. This experience proceeds to illustrate the efficacy of a strong internal ability dedicated to multilateral cooperation as a panacea for security problems in the GoG.

Notably, in the MT MAXIMUS case, the vessel was subsequently tracked by the NN and finally intercepted on the fringes of Sao Tome and Principe waters with 6 pirates captured and one killed, with the assistance of effective MDA systems as well as appropriate platforms and seamless cooperation between several states along the transit corridor of the criminal convoy. A strong deterrence value was incidentally established following this performance. It is worth observing that no such brazen attempt by criminals to hijack oil tankers has occurred in the GoG since that episode. It would also seem that, in order to integrate the benefits of the MDA programme, the NN, in collaboration with the US Government, recently set up a Regional MDA Training School to jointly train NN personnel and other GoG navies in order to steadily strengthen their capacity to respond collectively to security challenges in the waters of the GoG.

The NN has also demonstrated its commitment to enhancing international diplomatic cooperation as part of the GoG's efforts to boost maritime security by engaging actively in bilateral and multilateral joint security enhancement activities. This has led to the creation, at the Maritime Trade Information Sharing Centre in Ghana, of a system for sharing maritime information with regional navies and maritime regulatory agencies. In addition, the establishment of the Multi-National Maritime Coordination Centre in the Republic of Benin for the Member States of the ECOWAS Zone E under the leadership of the NN, the ECOWAS Zone E, marked a new dawn in multilateral cooperation in the region with the signing of an MOU between the Naval Chiefs of Staff of the Republic of Benin, Togo Niger and Nigeria in Cotonou and the Gendarmerie Chief of the Republic of Niger, towards a plan of action for the establishment by the Member States of a continuous joint multilateral patrol to dominate their shared maritime space by means of joint maritime and air patrol and active information collection and dissemination. It is expected that, the

operationalization of this MOU would substantially curb transnational maritime crimes in Zone E.

It would be important to also point out that, the NN organized the biennial International Maritime Conference and Regional Sea Exercise (IMCREMEX) in order to further demonstrate its commitment to operationalizing multilateral integration for the stability of the GoG. Following the inaugural EX OPIA TOHA in 2016, the second ECU KUGBE exercise, involving more than 17 ships and aircraft from 7 different countries, including the Chinese PLA Navy Ship YANCHENG, was conducted in 2018 to further consolidate the inter-regional multilateral effort to secure the GoG. It is worth mentioning that, at the Conference, Member States supported the need to harmonize all maritime security measures and legal structures through ratification of their respective national legislations, as well as the introduction of a common maritime operating procedure and the creation of a common information sharing mechanism.

It is important to note that, in order to further improve its capacity to tackle crime in the GoG, the NN has periodically conducted joint training exercises with allied nations outside the shores of the GoG. The joint training opportunities provided by various multinational exercises, such as the US-led EX OBISSA EXPRESS and the French Navy coordinated EX NEMO, have been gradually strengthened in the GoG's ability and collective response to the peace and security challenges of the region.

The NN has also purchased more patrol vessels and aircraft to improve its response potential in the GoG waters. The ongoing fleet expansion program that led to the inclusion of many Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs), Seaward Defence Boats, the inclusion of more than 200 Inshore Patrol Boats, including the reinforcement of air bases, is noteworthy. Chinese shipbuilders designed two of the NN's recent OPVs, NNS CENTENARY and NNS UNITY. A fast patrol boat, NNS SAGBAMA, was also donated to the Nigerian government by the Chinese government. The initiative to recapitalize the fleet has thus allowed the NN to expand its scope in support of regional efforts to safeguard the waters of the GoG while allowing the NN to take better care of its domestic policing functions. Importantly, this has greatly reduced the incidence of crude oil theft and other crimes in the maritime environment of Nigeria, with the government reporting a dramatic reduction in the loss of domestic crude oil between 2015 and 2017. (Defence Web, 2018).

Between the first quarter of 2018 and the first quarter of 2019, the increased NN presence in the GoG waters also resulted in a 50 percent decrease in acts of piracy within the GoG, as attested by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB, 2019). The modest achievement of these acquisitions clearly indicates that more long-lasting ships, such as OPVs, are needed for the continued presence at sea and the security of vital assets in the deep offshore GoG areas.

Matters Arising from Nigeria and the NN's Efforts at Curbing Criminality in the Gog

Nigeria, in a bid to reduce the tension in the Gulf of Guinea, strives to take on a diplomatic posture. This involves working out bilateral and multilateral arrangements such as Joint

Venture Agreements. The weakness of the Gulf of Guinea region, however, is even more pronounced as a consequence of the fact that none of the African coastal states has a substantial naval force. In view of this evident danger, it is therefore imperative that Nigeria re-examine the position of the Navy as a military option and improve its capacity to deal with any inherent danger.

Effectively, this makes the NN a necessary arm of the diplomacy of the nation. And as part of a reliable protection, in peacetime, Nigeria should have the capacity to visibly demonstrate its economic and military strength outside its borders. The role of the navy, therefore, should not be limited to carrying out essential armed combat missions, but also to providing protection for all countries as an instrument of diplomacy in the region. However, given budget constraints, the limited funds available would determine how much and how urgent Nigeria will grow this type of navy.

The Nigerian Navy essentially needs more financial resources to reform it and equip it with adequate capacity to sustain some kind of stability in the Gulf of Guinea. In the contiguous zone and the exclusive economic zone, the Navy should also be able to establish supremacy. In the Gulf of Guinea, it must have combat power. With these as the strategic security direction, the country must reduce the cost of political administration in order to satisfy the nation's geo-political interests in the Gulf of Guinea.

Nigeria's Relations with States in the Gulf of Guinea

Nigeria has always laid much emphasis on, and given high priority to her relations with other states in the Gulf of Guinea. The strategic importance of this area to her survival and development compels her to continually keep an eye on developments in the area. To this extent, Nigeria has done much to maintain good and cordial relations with individual states in the area even in the most difficult circumstances. An example is the relations between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea over the years. Despite moments when Equatorial Guinea took actions which were calculated to hurt Nigeria, as was the case with the expulsion of Nigerians from that country in 1977/78 and the romance with Apartheid South Africa, Nigeria still helped this neighbor in all circumstances. Another case is the way Nigeria approached her relations with Cameroon in the face of their border problems. Cameroon did her best to provoke Nigeria, even treating the latter's friendly overtures with disdain (Amao, 2015). Nigeria on the other hand, refused to be provoked and instead adopted a diplomatic approach to all the issues, even when her citizens saw this as a posture of weakness.

Nigeria is adopting this posture to ensure that the Gulf of Guinea remains a zone of peace even to her neighbours. As a regional power, she stands to loose most from a conflict in the area. This has made her to put in place bilateral and multilateral arrangements that would ensure functional relations which would benefit all stakeholders in the area.

The Gulf of Guinea Commission

The Gulf of Guinea is a geographical zone crossing other areas, and none of the current regional organizations can claim membership within the region of all the coastal states. Beyond its geographical context, the Gulf of Guinea concerns the extraction of sea-based resources, including the extraction of deep-water oil. Thus, the structures that regulate the activities of states in this area must be defined or created, so that they coexist harmoniously-a popular theory to help overcome persistent problems in the region.

It is precisely because of these problems that the Gulf of Guinea Commission was set up, at the initiative of Nigeria, to ensure peaceful discovery and development of the region's resources. Founded under the Treaty (Treaty on the Gulf of Guinea Commission), the Commission comprises coastal states bordering the Gulf of Guinea, including Nigeria, Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Brazzaville Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome & Principe Island States.

Under Article IV of the Treaty creating the Commission, the fostering of peace and stability in the Gulf of Guinea and the economic and social well-being of its members are defined as falling within its mandate. The Commission also has the role of controlling and harmonizing the exploitation of the Gulf's resources. Article V provides that the Commission shall be a forum for addressing problems affecting members in the following areas: a) Environmental pollution of their common maritime zone; b) Border issues vis-à-vis delineation of maritime borders and other conflicts arising in the overlapping Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ); c) Security matters such as joint border patrol, Immigration and similar matters, and ; d) Coordination of fishing activities in the Gulf (The Treaty on the Gulf of Guinea Commission). Although the Treaty has not yet been completely ratified by all Member States, Nigeria has great potential as an institutional mechanism for regional Gulf of Guinea cooperation on maritime resources, including deep-sea exploitation. To this end, a number of meetings have been held by the technical sub-committee of the Commission to devise an appropriate 'action plan'. In addition, Nigeria has not only promoted the establishment of the Gulf of Guinea Commission in pursuit of its economic interests within the Gulf of Guinea, and, despite conflicting allegiances to rival organizations within the subcontinent, continues to press for the organization's goals to be realized.

Strengthening the Gulf of Guinea Commission will support the national interests of Nigeria by promoting the growth of the economy of the region, abundant natural resources and discouraging the over-reliance of States on foreign entities or countries for military, political and economic survival, thereby serving security interests such as weakening colonial divisions in the Gulf of Guinea region. At the same time, helping to end border disputes in region and promote unity. To this end, Nigeria accepted the decision by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the disputed island of the Bakassi Peninsula and, as part of the agreement to cede Bakassi to Cameroon, has so far handed over to Cameroon the majority of the communities located in that area.

Beyond all this, however, particularly in the light of the Bakassi issue, it would be crucial for the Nigerian Government to retain its stance on not capitalizing on the lack of compliance

capability of the ICJ and its perceived "military strength" in the sub-regional sense, so as not to miss the large picture. And the somewhat naive presumption that led to the calls to arms of the general public, would only intensify the often volatile condition that renders juggling Nigeria's pre-existing geopolitical propensity to enforce the rule of the ICJs very difficult for the government. The fact is that, Nigerian leaders must ensure divestiture from any regional "super-power" delusions, because in the long term, further military expansion would be catastrophic for Nigeria (assessments based solely on geopolitical factors" and not mundane estimates that would be devastating for both nations at best). Ultimately, what is needed, is a projection of our armed forces (and in this case, the NN) more as bargaining and diplomatic tool rather than a fighting one, while at the same time, vigorously pursuing initiatives (like; the revival of the Joint Cameroon-Nigeria Border Commission, adherence to the Green Tree Agreement between both nations, and Professional Military Education (PME) exchange programmes) that will not only decrease the tension between both countries but also to reduce the grey areas in the ICJ ruling. The line the Nigerian government has taken in dealing with the Bakassi dispute is a step in the right direction (through its emphasis on diplomacy). However, it can take it a step further by initiating programmes that would bolster economic cooperation between both countries, particularly in the Bakassi Peninsula. The feeling that the present situation is unsalvageable and a 'no-win' situation for Nigeria is not altogether true, the country can still protect its strategic-interests in that area, through the intensification of the current diplomatic deal wheeling and horse-trading by the government to complement its seeming disadvantageous position, based on the ICJ ruling.

The Joint Development Zone (JDZ)

The Joint Development Zone agreement between Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe is an arrangement that acknowledges the ambiguity of control of the oil fields and sets out the conditions for the shared exploration/exploitation of the disputed area. In February 2001, the parties agreed to share oil discoveries in the contested border zone 60/40, with the bulk of the oil discoveries being obtained by Nigeria. In addition to the provisions for joint exploitation of oil and other resources, the agreement sets up a JDZ-administration and provides a legal system with its own mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution (Treaty between Nigeria & STP). It is also officially stated that the system is regulated by the treaty and that in those areas not protected by that specific treaty, general international law is regulated. While no reference is made either to the Charter of the United Nations or to the Constitutional Act of the African Union, no one questions its validity and, in any case, in reasonable circumstances, the customary and general principles of international law will apply.

Nigeria's reasons for setting up the JDZ include national security interests, occasioned by the strategic location of Sao Tome & Principe, the desire to avoid the Bakassi-type of conflict, and the diplomatic and political support it may gain. What is especially relevant, though, is the legal framework set up for any potential instances of conflict. This process

for resolving disputes is based on the principle of equality, granting complete veto rights to each side and establishing a basis for fair arbitration. Although it is never possible to rule out informal pressure, these are the normal costs of dealings between large and small countries and can tilt the oil business in favor of the Nigerian side (Rudolf, 2004). More to that also, is the fact that Nigeria, besides going into partnership agreements with Sao Tome, in 2003, it helped reverse a coup de tat in that nation through diplomatic means. Also, in 2004 it granted a multi-million dollar loan to the government of Sao Tome. Aside all these efforts, Nigeria, in furtherance of her strategic interests, has also tried to make the other states in the Gulf of Guinea "safe" friends. This is partly to reinforce boundary claims and protect human rights of Nigerian citizens who are migrant workers and partly to stabilize relations between her and these countries. For example, since 1988 it has established a strong presence in Equatorial Guinea, and has set up (similar to that of Sao Tome and Principe) a JDZ with the Equatorial Guinea, as a strategy for the effective management of the Zafiro Oil Fields, which has long been a bone of contention between both nations. In addition, the Nigerian government, in 2004, gave the Equatorial Guinea, a multi-million dollar loan (Business Day Africa, 2004).

Conclusion

What can be termed a special product, is oil. Without it, no economy will grow yet, and those nations that consume it must have it least under their soil. It is a strategic natural resource for consumers and producer states, and they must protect it at all times, for consumers. It also seems to be a gift of nature for the oil producing states, offering a rare opportunity to obtain the investment they need to avoid underdevelopment. Without a doubt, the first oil-boom decade significantly altered the Gulf of Guinea in the 1970s. However, the Gulf of Guinea has been undergoing a second oil boom since the early 2000s, with output levels doubling. This has added new strategic significance to the area.

As it is, Nigeria is the dominant force in the Gulf of Guinea with over 198 million individuals, significant mineral reserves like oil and natural gas, agricultural and manufacturing capabilities. With Nigeria firmly in the trajectory of growth-this constitutes a prospect. Since a powerful Nigeria will play a key role in stabilizing the entire Gulf of Guinea region in collaboration with the Gulf of Guinea states. A revived regional cooperation project in the Gulf of Guinea could involve between 200 and 250 million citizens, secure large-scale investment resources and prevent weapons proliferation, including missile delivery systems.

More than any other region in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Gulf of Guinea provides Nigeria with a forum to fulfil its security interests in order to reduce the levels of political instability and conflict that have plagued the region for decades. Thus, the opportunity needed to build a productive investment environment is a security-oriented engagement with the Gulf of Guinea States, complemented by bilateral partnerships geared toward critical market reforms.

Importantly, Nigeria must not replicate the mistake of the Persian Gulf producers and struggle to diversify its economic base, with 90% of its export earnings and 80% of government revenues generated from oil. Given the many constituencies of Nigeria and the still emerging national institutions, such a future could lead to high levels of political and social unrest. Although such scenarios always need to be contemplated, the current thrust to try to secure the territorial waters, by strengthening the NN and building viable regional cooperative structures with states in the Gulf of Guinea, if properly nurtured and sustained, can help avoid the worst case scenario by creating a healthy climate for investor confidence. A re-ordering, therefore, of priorities is required, seeing that so much has been left undone, due to the growing sense of misplaced priorities. With all these, properly sorted out, Nigeria could play an enterprising role in the Gulf of Guinea geo-politics in the absence of a reliable technological base or sound defence industry that could fashion out tanks and submarine weapons which, among others, Brazil and South Africa are building their profiles with. The NN should be central to this development of profile to provide security in the GoG.

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