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MarSec Agora GoG - Panel Session

"Are the Gulf of Guinea Pirates Gone or Are They  
Just on Vacation?"

November 9<sup>th</sup> 2021



AGORA NEXUS

 I.R. CONSILIUM

— VA —  
VIRTUAL AGORA

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### “ARE THE GULF OF GUINEA PIRATES GONE OR ARE THEY JUST ON VACATION?”



On 9 November 2021, Agora Nexus partnered with I.R. Consilium to deliver the MarSec Agora GoG (Virtual session titled: “Are the Gulf of Guinea Pirates Gone or are they Just on Vacation?” The event explored the current state of piracy in the regions of West and Central Africa, the reasons for changing trends, and what must be done to find a sustainable approach to preventing attacks at sea.



As with all Agora sessions, the modus operandi is: Chatham House Rule -unrecorded, unreferenced, pre-qualified participants, no media allowed.



Before starting the discussion, however. Dr. Ian Ralby of I.R. Consilium, who moderated the event, paid tribute to two senior naval officers from the Gulf of Guinea who passed away in October 2021, CAPT Pedro Nguema of Equatorial Guinea who served as his country's representative to Multinational Maritime Coordination Center (MMCC) Zone D in Douala, Cameroon, and CDR Yussif Benning of Ghana, the Director for MMCC Zone F. Both were tireless champions of cooperation within the region and CDR Benning was one of the lead voices for creating more holistic public-private cooperation to enhance maritime security. They will be missed, but their legacies will carry on.



CAPT Pedro Nguema



CDR Yussif Benning



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The panel included:



- **CAPT Charles Bamele** of Côte d'Ivoire, a naval officer, director of operations for the Permanent Inter-ministerial Secretariate for State Action at Sea (SEPCIM), and National Operational Point of Contact for the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Security.
- **Mr. Chuks Enwereji** of Nigeria, the West African Security Manager for Shelf Drilling.
- **Ms. Sarah Thompson** of the United Kingdom, the Global Maritime Security Advisor at Chevron.
- **Mr. Bud Darr** of Switzerland, Executive Vice President for Maritime Policy and Government Affairs at MSC Group.
- **Mr. Simon Cassey** of the United Kingdom, Senior Vice President of Chesterfield Insurance.



The panel agreed that piracy is most decidedly **not gone** in the Gulf of Guinea. Any downturn in figures is temporary at best, but a lot of factors have contributed to that downturn including:



- The cooperation within the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Security;
- The improvement of regional law enforcement capacity;
- The presence of foreign navies;
- The prosecution of piracy cases;
- The use of private security companies;
- The increases in capacity in Nigeria including with Falcon Eye and Deep Blue;
- The weather conditions making it more difficult to conduct attacks; and
- The pandemic – a situation in which hostages can kill the captors through contact.



But none of these factors address the root of piracy, and that can only be done on land. As a result, all of the speakers felt that, in short order, piracy in the region could resume its 2020 pace. Even now, though, recent attacks show that the problem is far from gone. In fact, in some ways, it has just been pushed to new territory as the risk reward calculus in the immediate vicinity of the Niger Delta has changed.



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Furthermore, panelists noted:



- A single incident could reverse the positive trend of 2021;
- The main problems are on land, and the pandemic may have created new issues that will manifest as attacks on the water;
- The value chain of piracy remains intact and until that is truly addressed, there will be a looming threat of a resurgence, but some pockets in the value chain are getting dry and intelligence suggests there are likely to be new attacks;



- The revenue from securing against piracy is worth more than the piracy itself and creates an incentive to maintain the threat;



- Collusion and corruption are also challenges that are likely to perpetuate the piracy problem;



- All sectors - the navies, offshore companies, oil companies, shipping companies, insurance providers and beyond - do not trust that all stakeholders are actually working to address the threat.



The issue of trust was a major theme in the discussion of how to address the long-term issues. Trust between countries, between navies, between navies and the private sector (including private security companies) and trust between both public and private actors and local communities. No one was naïve about how difficult building trust will be, but all emphasized that trust, born of engagement and genuine relationships, would be a deciding factor in ensuring the Gulf of Guinea is not a permissive environment for piracy.



In addition to trust, there needs to be will - particularly political will - and all actors have a role in building it. The will to address the problem needs to increase, as it does not appear sufficient. At the moment, roughly 350 pirates have been allowed to wreak havoc on the region and the global economy to which it is tied.



The only way that can happen is if will to stop those individuals is lacking.



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Throughout the discussion, participants had the opportunity to pose questions and share comments, and the chat was active with engagement. With questions about maritime domain awareness, the Yaoundé Architecture, public-private information and intelligence sharing, and the economic value of security services to the Nigerian Navy, and comments about trust, financing of piracy, equipment and capacity, and community engagement, the participants were actively involved in enriching the conversation. The comments both during and after the session indicated that there was a lot of value in having such conversations between stakeholders of different backgrounds and perspectives.



To finish out the discussion, the panelists made a series of concrete recommendations to move the situation toward resolution. Those recommendations included:



- Regularly update the UNODC study published in 2021 [“Pirates of the Niger Delta: Between Brown and Blue Waters”](#) to account for changes in circumstances;



- Reassess the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Security to ensure it is still fit for purpose;

- Support and increase public-private-civil society cooperation and collaboration to build relationships and with them trust;



- Continue to build regional relationships so that the region has the long-term capacity to maintain maritime security;

- Work to change the risk-reward calculus to disincentivize piracy and transnational criminality;

- Enhance law enforcement onshore to root out the criminal elements at their source;



- Continue to pursue legal finish through improved judicial capacity to try and penalize maritime crime and piracy;

- Address piracy on land and learn from counter-insurgency and counter-criminality models elsewhere as in Colombia,



- recognizing that the threat of piracy will never be removed without confronting the human security issues that plague the Niger Delta and its inhabitants including land and water pollution, lack of infrastructure and basic services, and unemployment.

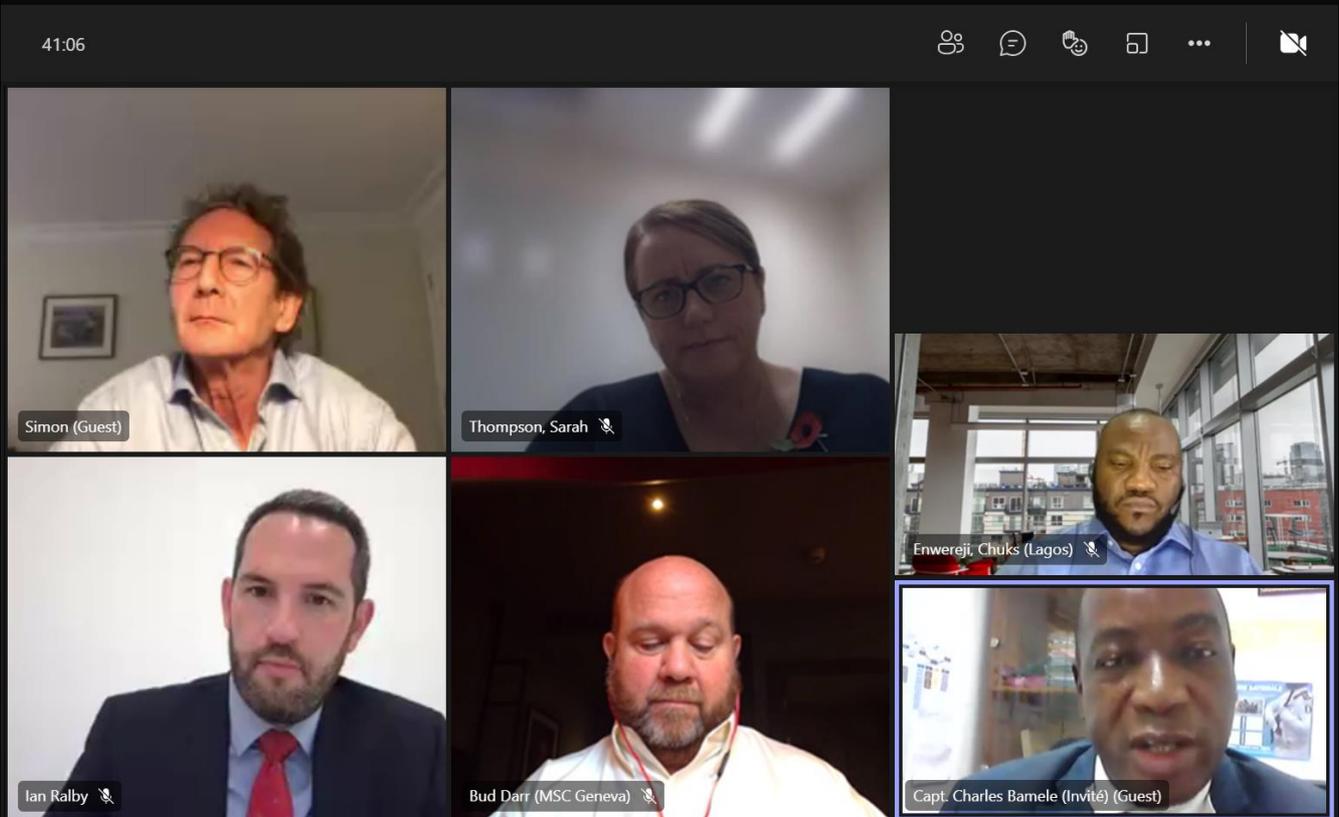


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Ultimately, both trust and will are needed, but they must be aligned and working in the same direction. The present downturn in attacks creates some breathing room to focus on trust building through engagement and mobilizing political will through effective communication. At the end of the day, we must recognize that pirates remain a threat to the region, to the seafarers who keep 90% of world trade moving, and to the global economy. Consequently, all of humanity has a shared interest in addressing Gulf of Guinea piracy.

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