



Public Release: OBP Working Group Meeting Summary

In the run-up to the upcoming African Union Maritime Summit in Lomé, Togo, the Oceans Beyond Piracy project convened a meeting of 35 maritime experts to discuss the current state of maritime piracy off the east and west coasts of Africa. The meeting included representatives from the maritime nations, the shipping industry, international organizations, and civil society groups. The frank discussions focused on the coordination of international support to regional nations in four key areas to deter piracy: (1) Operational Response, (2) Rule of Law, (3) Vessel Self Defense and (4) International Support.

Gulf of Guinea: The upturn in kidnapping for ransom incidents observed in the last quarter of 2015 and the first quarter of 2016 appears to have been reduced through a combination of increased patrols by the Nigerian Navy, increased use of contracted security and a refocus of attacks away from piracy at sea and more towards inland infrastructure.

Operational Response: While the waters in the Gulf of Guinea remain dangerous, regional nations are increasingly able to respond to piracy attacks through operational coordination across the zones developed through the Yaoundé process. Recent examples of these successes include the Nigerian Navy's armed response to pirate attacks on the MT Maximus in February and the Vectus Osprey in August of this year. International actors are supporting the regional states by coordinating Maritime Situational Awareness for merchant vessels through the Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea (MDAT-GoG) framework.

Rule of Law: There is considerable frustration that regional justice systems are still not able or willing to hold pirates accountable. As evidenced off the Horn of Africa, the commitment to arrest, prosecute and incarcerate pirates was essential in building trust between the shipping industry and regional states as well as sending a signal of regional resolve to address the issue based on the rule of law.

Vessel Self Protection: Concern was raised by the group over the number and variety of armed protection teams and schemes that are offered by coastal states to protect vessels calling at ports in the Gulf of Guinea. Participants suggested that states would reap more sustainable economic benefits by focusing more on establishing a safe environment for maritime commerce.

International Support: The group noted that the G7++ coordination group could be an ideal mechanism to build trust between the international community and regional states by encouraging frank discussions that address differences and identify common goals. The group also noted that it was important to engage additional nations and non-traditional actors to ensure universal support for achieving practical outcomes.

Horn of Africa: While OBP has recorded a decline in international counter-piracy spending from \$7 Billion in 2010 down to \$1.3 Billion in 2015, an effective deterrence has been maintained due to more cost-effective counter-piracy measures and the overall decline in pirate activity. However, participants



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agreed that piracy gangs are still organized and retain the capability and intent to attack international shipping. These criminal networks are currently focused on other criminal activity, but are watching to see if conditions at sea become favorable again for piracy attacks.

Operational Response: In spite of emerging maritime crises elsewhere, international forces remain committed to support countries in the Horn of Africa/Western Indian Ocean region to deal with piracy. It is hoped that support for operational issues can be increasingly provided by regional partners and so-called “independent deployers.” It was also stressed that capacity building plans for regional forces are still many years from effectively suppressing piracy on their own.

Rule of Law: Gains made in establishing a regional prosecution model for piracy based on the rule of law were achieved remarkably quickly and enabled the apprehension, prosecution, conviction and incarceration of more than 1,000 pirates. The success was based on a focused international effort, but concerns were raised that the first convicted pirates were now completing sentences and efforts should be put towards reintegration. To sustain deterrence, the international community needs to maintain support for all links in the chain in order to provide a credible guarantee that rule of law institutions can carry out full sentences and that there are sufficient vessels to detain and arrest future suspects.

Vessel Self Protection: As commercial shipping patterns return to pre-crisis norms, there is concern that a growing number of vulnerable vessels are not following recommended procedures such as transiting through the Internationally Recognized Transit Corridor in the Gulf of Aden. There are also clear indications that the use of armed guards is decreasing in all areas of the High Risk Area (HRA). These developments may risk creating opportunities for pirates to reassert piracy business models. Shipping organizations still implore their members to remain vigilant and follow BMP4 recommendations while the HRA remains in effect.

International Support: The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, along with other institutions, such as the IMO and the UN, made significant progress in coordinating international support to suppress piracy at its height. These international mechanisms now need to carefully monitor threat levels to ensure that; (1) core functions of counter-piracy coordination remain at adequate levels to ensure deterrence, (2) counter-measures remain cost-effective and sustainable, and (3) the Contact Group remains ready to quickly re-engage the International Community if the piracy threat returns.

The Lomé Summit: The discussion of the upcoming Summit focused on the desire for the proposed Charter to produce concrete and practical steps that would make African waters safer for seafarers and better able to support the economic goals of African states related to the Blue Economy. There was also hope that the Summit would encourage a spirit of inclusion and cooperation across all maritime stakeholders.