



# Maritime security and development in Africa



THREE NARRATIVES FOR A STRATEGY FOR DENMARK

Ulrik Trolle Smed





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*This analysis is part of the Centre for Military Studies' (CMS) policy research service for the Danish Ministry of Defence. It aims to clarify the maritime security challenges in Africa facing Danish, African and international maritime interests. This sets the stage for a debate about whether the next Danish counterpiracy strategy should broaden its approach and view these challenges through a lens of maritime security and development in Africa.*

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*ISBN: 978-87-7393-780-8*



# Executive summary

Africa is suffering from growing pains. Since 1994, the collective African population has grown by about 60 percent to over 1 billion people in 2014. Moreover, according to the UN, the African population will double by 2050. This development seems likely to continue and provides both opportunities and challenges for the African states and external stakeholders. The African states are already making an effort to handle this demographic pressure, but they will have a hard time meeting the challenges alone. This analysis outlines how demographics are already affecting Danish, African, and international maritime security interests in and around Africa, how they might do so in the future, and how Denmark can contribute to handling the challenges associated with them.

Problems at sea generally originate on land. Crime, smuggling, and armed attacks at sea stem from many of the same challenges as on land. The demographic development in Africa means that there is a risk of existing security challenges at sea expanding in volume and in breadth – especially in fragile states – because governments are failing to deliver basic public services to their growing populations.

East African and West African states have different conditions for handling the current demographic development. In broad terms, West Africa has a more solid foundation to build on than East Africa despite the variation in the two regions. Therefore the solutions must also be differentiated.

As a contribution to Danish considerations and as a basis for recalibrating the Danish counterpiracy strategy, this analysis unfolds three narratives about future maritime security in Africa, which systematically show different potential threats and challenges. The scenario-based narratives

are built around different actors on land and the varying influence of the primacy of land over the maritime domain. *The Money Machine* narrative focuses on local criminal syndicates and international private investors, *The Silk Road* narrative on transnational smugglers and international organizations, and *The Terror Trap* narrative on terrorist and rebel groups with Western states.

The narratives group specific types of challenges, each illustrating a unique dynamic. This enables three types of reflections and a discussion about how one can mitigate the risks described in the analysis. The first set of reflections is organized systematically around narrative-specific security challenges and protection requirements for exposed areas at sea. The next two sets of reflections are aimed at actors on the international and Danish levels, respectively.

The recommendations are process-oriented. Combined, they illustrate a policy window for Denmark. Succeeding the Danish counterpiracy strategy, Denmark has an opportunity to utilize its counterpiracy experiences from East Africa to establish a discussion platform for a broader agenda on maritime security and development in Africa. The security challenges will be more multiple and diverse, and it follows that the solutions should be as well. The interest of the international community in the Danish counterpiracy approach together with its prominent status among maritime nations provides Denmark with a unique set of opportunities and opens a Danish policy window. Denmark now has the opportunity to initiate and promote the development of a new international agenda on maritime security and development in Africa to the benefit of Danish, African, and international maritime interests.

# 1. Three narratives about maritime security and development in Africa

The piracy problem in East Africa received global attention in 2007 and stimulated interest in African maritime security challenges. Following a dramatic increase in the number of hijackings, international and regional actors established a large and focused framework for cooperation. Much of this framework contributed to the fact that East African piracy is almost non-existent today. The root causes remain, however, and the international community is gradually recognizing that piracy merely represented one symptom among many and that was part of a greater challenge.

At the same time, Africa is currently experiencing a dramatic population increase. From the Danish perspective, this provides both opportunities and challenges. The former includes Danish companies possibly contributing to the growth of African markets, where they can cooperate with local companies to create jobs and prosperity to the benefit of Denmark and the African countries alike. The main challenge is that African countries are coming under pressure from their own population growth in many cases, as they often lack the necessary capacity, competence, or (occasionally) commitment to deal with this demographic development. This challenge will continue to shape the future maritime security of the continent. This analysis therefore examines how demographic challenges might potentially lead to maritime security challenges that have implications for Danish interests in and around Africa in the not-so-distant future.

The main message of this analysis is that the African maritime security challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be

shaped by how well young Africans, especially men, are included politically and economically in the civil society and the formal economy on the continent. The demographic development in Africa might possibly lead to an increase in the volume of existing maritime security challenges in and around the continent. At the same time, a change in how Africans view the maritime domain and its potential use could mean that the challenges will also broaden, including issues from piracy to terrorism.

Maritime security includes the protection of maritime trade, resource utilization, environmental protection, and the jurisdiction of accountable authorities; in other words, important elements for Danish maritime interests off the African coast. The need for maritime security and development in Africa has grown over the past decade, particularly due to increasing pirate activity in the Gulf of Aden, attacks on oil installations and vessels in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as refugee and migration flows across the Mediterranean. Security and development off the African coast is primarily an African responsibility, but the challenges are global in scope and therefore require international engagement.

The top of Figure 1 illustrates some of the key challenges related to maritime security and crime in Africa, which African and international actors have long been working to handle.

At the bottom of the figure are the traditional tools used by international, African, and Danish partners to promote and protect their interests. From an international perspective, however, the problems are becoming gradually harder

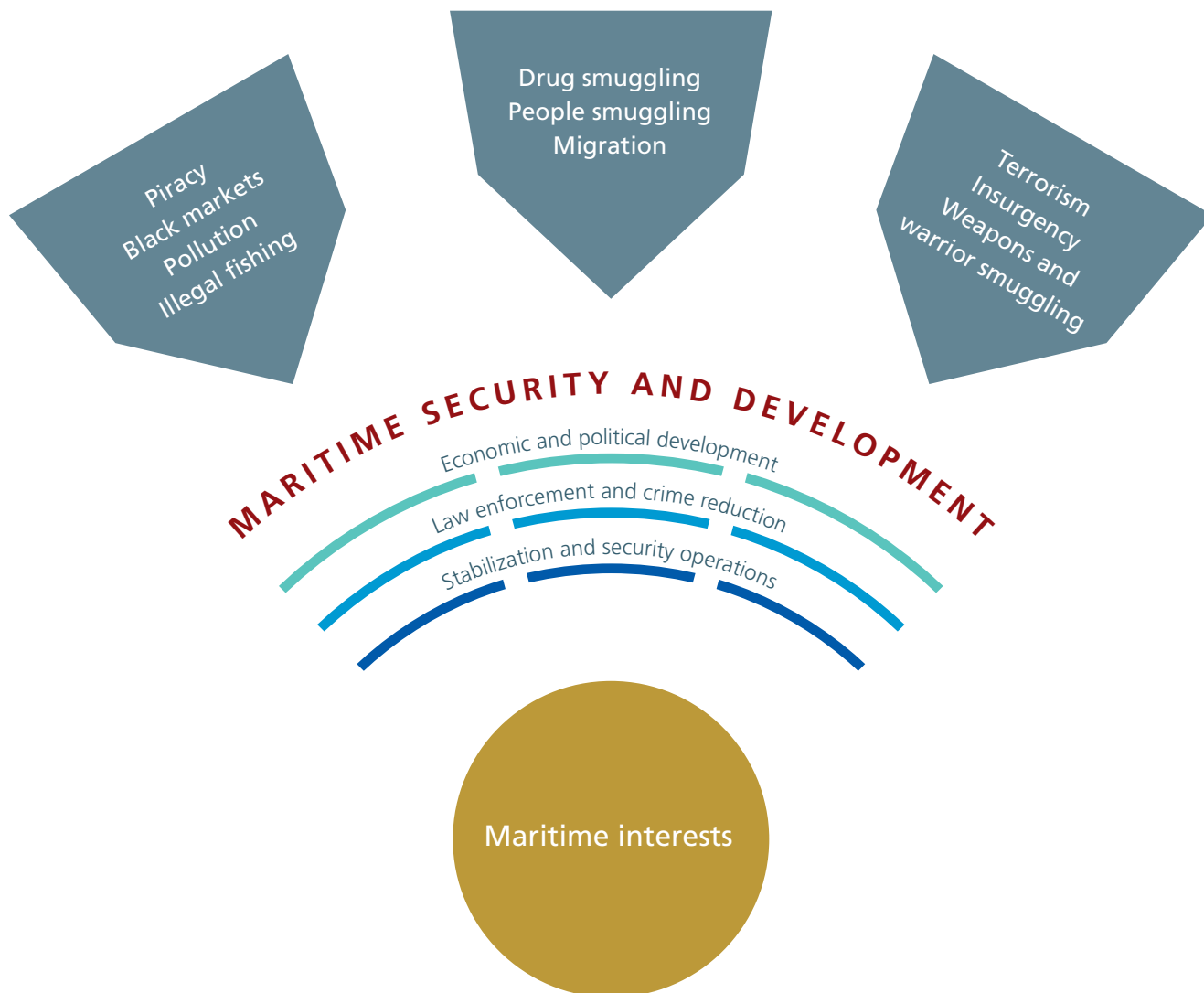


Figure 1: Security challenges and solutions to the order at sea off the African coast.



to isolate from each other geographically and functionally, since they overlap or derive from the same root causes. Maritime security and development is a comprehensive approach to how the geographic and functional separation of the African maritime security problems can be lifted. Simultaneously, it pieces together parts of the traditional tools to meet the different challenges. This more holistic approach to the tools seeks to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of both Danish and international efforts.

The purpose of this analysis is to contribute to the ongoing debate on what should follow the current Danish counterpiracy strategy. This involves a discussion of the wider range of maritime security challenges in Africa as well as Danish interests, responsibilities, and opportunities to exert influence on the international response to these challenges.<sup>1</sup>

Denmark has a special interest in the freedom of navigation at sea, as about 10 percent of maritime world trade is transported by Danish-controlled ships.<sup>2</sup> Danish society – including government and private actors – has a responsibility to support the maintenance of free trade and open, safe seas. This is an international public good, which Denmark, as a small and open economy, benefits from and already actively contributes to in collaboration with allies and partners. Denmark also has a unique set of opportunities for influencing international maritime issues due to its lengthy maritime traditions and central role in coordinating international maritime security solutions – including the counterpiracy efforts off the Horn of Africa and later Operation RECSYR off the coast of Syria. From a healthy and strong tradition follows competence and a niche-specific opportunity to assume a leading role in the maritime community, including on issues such as marine technology, climate, environment, and piracy. Denmark has a tradition for using these competencies to the benefit of both national interests and those of the wider maritime community. This provides

a particular and positive international responsiveness to Danish ideas, and subsequently unique opportunities for Denmark.

Denmark therefore has an interest in establishing a broad strategic discussion about contemporary trends and how they may shape the future of African maritime security and thus also for the collective interests of Danish, African, and international maritime stakeholders. While we do not know what the world will look like in the future, we may project what is at stake from examining contemporary trends. Based on a number of selected trends – including demographic, political, and economic – the analysis produces three narratives, each based on the projection and interplay of these contemporary trends to help illustrate possible future challenges off the coasts of East and West Africa. Other trends could rightly be included in a broader analysis, but scenarios – such as the narratives here – can be a useful source for providing decision makers with systematic background analysis on possible options and potential consequences.

The analysis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents some important differences between East and West Africa together with the demographic pressure that may end up creating an increased risk against maritime interests in Africa in the years to come. The second chapter introduces three narratives about maritime security and development in Africa that illustrate different aspects of the same possible future: the Money Machine, the Silk Road, and the Terror Trap. The third chapter introduces a number of reflections, means, and opportunities relevant to the international and Danish contexts, respectively, including how to follow up on contemporary developments, which events and trends should be tracked, and which measures might be implemented. Finally, the Appendix provides a brief explanation of how the narratives were created and used.

## East and West Africa in a maritime security perspective



East and West Africa in a maritime security perspective  
The African states are already working to come to grips with the maritime security challenges. Together, they have developed maritime strategies that serve as platforms for the employment of military, political, and economic measures (see background sections below). More can be done, however, to minimize the risks against international, Danish, and African maritime interests. The debate currently focuses on how African states suffer from 'sea blindness';

a lack of interest and perspective for problems at sea as well as the inadequate utilization of maritime resources.<sup>3</sup> The concept illustrates how new attitudes could help contribute to solutions. As the sea blindness of both governments and civil societies disappears, however, there is also risk that illegal actors will see new opportunities for exploiting their access to the maritime domain. This would mean the potential widening of the challenges in the waters surrounding Africa.

The states of West and East Africa have different conditions for dealing with maritime security, which vary with regards to their respective capacities and practical instruments, the key regional states, and the surrounding security environment. Naturally, there are nuances between the states within the two regions, but the analysis will examine three overarching regional differences below.

### **CAPACITY AND PRACTICAL INSTRUMENTS**

First, there are vertical and horizontal differences with respect to the available instruments in the two regions. In this case, 'vertical' refers to the different levels involved (from local to international), whereas 'horizontal' refers to the different types of actors (e.g. state and non-state).<sup>4</sup> Vertically, West Africa has a better underpinning of both national and regional actors, making the region more resilient to maritime security challenges than East Africa.<sup>5</sup> Despite years of intense counterpiracy efforts, a lack of government capacities remains in key countries in the Horn of Africa region (e.g. in Somalia, Seychelles and Yemen). Elsewhere there is a need for a more active use of this capacity (e.g. Kenya) as well as greater trust among East African States that might facilitate collaboration and leadership at sea. The naval partnership of the region remains driven by international naval forces, and there are few East African units available that are up to the task. In short, the perspective, the will, and the interest are not yet there.<sup>6</sup> West Africa, on the other hand, has proven itself capable of establishing maritime security measures on several levels. West African states are strengthening their naval capabilities and maritime institutions in order to establish security within their territorial waters and contribute to regional initiatives. This is the case with smaller countries like Benin and Ghana as well as major countries like Cote d'Ivoire, Angola, and Nigeria.<sup>7</sup>

Horizontally, West Africa also stands stronger than East Africa. In West Africa, a growing spectrum of state and

non-state actors is seeking to come to grips with the maritime security issues. Private security companies are used for more passive tasks, such as guarding oil installations and training security forces, but they are also performing police duties more actively and combating illegal fishing for governments. Moreover, since the late 1990s, regional institutions have sought to prevent pollution, overfishing, and security and border disputes in the Gulf of Guinea by engaging with both coastal and landlocked states in the region.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, private security companies have mostly been used aboard merchant ships in the counterpiracy context in East Africa. There are also examples of private military trainers helping to establish militias aimed for carrying out police and coastguard duties in the Somali region of Puntland, among others, but some observers are skeptical of the results.<sup>9</sup> Historically, most of the military and civilian counterpiracy efforts in East Africa have also been driven by international players engaged on local and sub-national levels.<sup>10</sup> This scenario is quite likely to repeat itself in the future, since circumstances have changed little since then.

### **THE SURROUNDING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THE MARITIME DOMAIN**

The regions also differ in their surrounding security environment and how their respective risk areas connect to the maritime domain. In East Africa, long stretches of uncontrolled coastline provide illegal groups with the opportunity to expand their areas of influence from land to sea. For one, it is uncertain how the insurgents and terrorists in Yemen will use their access to critical maritime hubs such as Bab el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, illegal flows are increasing together with the increase of refugees, weapons, and militants crossing the waters to and from East Africa,<sup>12</sup> and they partially exacerbate the war between AMISOM and al Shabaab. At the same time, the former pirate networks are presumed to continue to be operating



on land with armed militias.<sup>13</sup> Together, Yemen and Somalia technically control longer and more internationally significant coastlines than the other East African countries collectively. Taking into account the extremely porous borders and weak state institutions of the two countries, there is a risk that maritime security issues in East Africa might escalate more significantly and quickly than in West Africa.

In West Africa, maritime order seems to be threatened more from pockets of lawlessness on land in more capable states, including Nigeria and Cameroon, than statelessness.<sup>14</sup> For example, the densely populated Niger Delta in Nigeria is a central hub for piracy in the region and has developed into a hiding place for illegal, armed groups. Maritime security problems in the Gulf of Guinea therefore remain rooted in the lack of *effective* government institutions and a prolonged ‘sea blindness’ rather than the fundamental absence of institutions.<sup>15</sup> Combined with political corruption, this has created a complex mix of rebellion, crime, and piracy, which results in maritime insecurity, especially around Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, some of these criminal and destabilizing activities – including oil theft, smuggling, and illegal bunkering – must be viewed in a transnational perspective, since they are the product of collaboration between African and international criminal networks.<sup>17</sup>

### **PATTERNS OF STATES**

Finally, the regions differ with regards to the number of states involved and in terms of which states are central to regional developments. In East Africa, the regional economic institutions that have the potential to facilitate maritime cooperation and security around the Horn of Africa include some eight states. In reality, however, only the Kenyan and Tanzanian governments have the potential to make a (maritime) difference in this region.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the country with the longest coastline and largest concentration of criminal syndicates, Somalia, is essentially without effective

government institutions.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the West African collaborative processes for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea include at least fifteen coastal states, and a number of landlocked countries are also engaged through regional economic institutions.<sup>20</sup> Nigeria is both the largest and one of the more capable countries in the region, as well as a hotbed for numerous regional maritime security issues.<sup>21</sup> In West Africa, the problems are often associated with the formal state, and its facilities might actually be a necessity for criminal activities. These problems stand in contrast to those of the more fragile states, Somalia and Yemen, which represent the key challenges for East Africa.

### **WEST AFRICA HAS A BETTER BUFFER**

The counterpiracy efforts in East Africa helped create more effective inter-state and private frameworks for resolving maritime security issues. But a lack of capacity remains at the national level – especially in Somalia and Yemen – and a lack of regional cooperation, which requires both national leadership and responsibility. In the future, there might be an increasing, perhaps even dramatically increasing, need for international governance and private solutions in East Africa if the solutions are to keep up with the potentially escalating problems in the region. West Africa, by contrast, has a better foundation to build on for managing maritime security challenges than does East Africa. West African states are building and organizing the necessary capacity in both breadth (horizontally) and depth (vertically). Furthermore, serious security problems on land (e.g. insurgency and terror) remain relatively isolated from the maritime domain in the west, and there are both numerically more and more capable states at the center of developments, such as Nigeria and Cameroon. External contributions in the West can therefore focus on supporting the regional development and improving the conditions of African nations to implement their own initiatives.

# Counterpiracy in East Africa


East African piracy became an international problem towards the end of the 2000s when Somali pirates dramatically escalated the frequency of their attacks on merchant ships in the Gulf of Aden. From 2006 to 2008, the number of attacks off the Horn of Africa almost doubled from 84 to 160, while the number of hijackings increased almost nine fold from 5 to 44.<sup>22</sup> Somali piracy thus represented roughly 86 percent of worldwide hijackings and half of all piracy incidents. Over the next few years, ransoms increased and the shipping industry paid an estimated \$300 million between 2008 and 2012.<sup>23</sup> Piracy in East Africa has been waning for several years and has reached an unprecedented, low level. The development is attributed to a combination of international efforts, protective measures by the shipping industry itself, African stabilization efforts on land, and a shift in the attitudes towards piracy among local Somalis. However, the root causes are still present in the region and represent a future risk.<sup>24</sup>

With the 3,205 km long Somali coastline, pirates had ample access to the approximately 20,000 merchant vessels passing the Horn of Africa every year. Several years of civil war had weakened Somali law enforcement during the 1990s and local warlords offered armed protection to foreign fishing vessels. With the UN withdrawal in 1995, Somalia fell out of the limelight of international politics. Coastal communities experienced increasing maritime insecurity and foreign overfishing, while the economic incentive of piracy increased. On the back of the locals' experience with political and economic marginalization, Somali pirates could justify themselves as coastguards who were protect-

ing Somali waters against international exploitation.<sup>25</sup> The problems particularly originated in the parts of Somalia that were struck by the 2004 tsunami, which devastated the coastal economy of the area.<sup>26</sup>

The UN Security Council expressed serious concern about the problem when the pirates began hijacking merchant vessels carrying aid to Somalia.<sup>27</sup> This triggered international interest and, over time, a comprehensive approach to countering such acts of piracy. Militarily, multinational naval forces deployed to the Horn of Africa to fend off attacks and arrest suspected pirates in international and later Somali territorial waters.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, East African states – especially Kenya – began developing their naval capabilities,<sup>29</sup> while other states sought to prevent piracy from branching off to the south.<sup>30</sup> From 2008 to 2015, Denmark has deployed naval forces to combat piracy in East Africa for a collective period of almost 4 years, maritime surveillance aircraft for 1 year, and command of multinational naval task forces for nearly 2 years.<sup>31</sup>

Politically, an international contact group was established to develop and coordinate a comprehensive strategy for combating piracy in the wake of the growing multinational naval presence.<sup>32</sup> In parallel, East African and other regional states organized themselves in a new partnership,<sup>33</sup> while a maritime strategy was developed for the entire continent under the African Union.<sup>34</sup> Denmark took responsibility to lead the legal work and propose a coordinated maritime law enforcement effort off the Horn of Africa. Together with other initiatives, this resulted in a concerted effort to strengthen the courts, naval forces, and prison capacities



of the region, as well as the development of government framework agreements for the use of private armed guards on board merchant vessels and industrial guidelines for combating piracy.<sup>35</sup>

Economically, the international community rallied around development programs and capacity building for Somalia, particularly through the UNODC maritime crime program. Denmark has long been one of the biggest financial contributors to efforts on development together with the capacity building of the judicial and military sectors in the region. Among other things, international funds facilitated the training of police and coastguard units for deterrence and arrests, the development of local courts for prosecution, and the building of prisons for incarcerating pirates.<sup>36</sup>





# Counterpiracy in West Africa

Piracy in West Africa stretches back to the 1970s and has evolved from the robbery of personal belongings to highly organized and violent hijackings of large merchant vessels. With some variation, the number of hijackings has increased since 2000 from a few to about 20 a year in 2013. The pirates have access to information from port authorities for planning attacks on predetermined targets and subsequently sell the cargo on black markets. Since 2005, their geographical range has expanded from Nigerian territorial waters throughout the Gulf of Guinea region – although with a tendency towards particularly high risk and violence in the waters near Nigeria, Benin, and Togo.<sup>37</sup>

The Gulf of Guinea comprises about 6,000 km coastline and 20 sovereign states from Senegal to Angola, but the piracy problem stems particularly from the Nigerian Niger Delta.<sup>38</sup> Coastal communities in this densely populated swamp and wetland area have experienced economic marginalization after the prolonged oil pollution of neighboring agricultural and fishing areas. Piracy has been perceived to represent the frustration of groups that feel politically marginalized due to ethnic, religious, or economic reasons. This provides a recruiting ground for criminal syndicates and rebel groups. At the same time, none or very few of the West African coastal states have the right capacity or legislation to deal with the current problems. Furthermore, some political elites use revenues from oil theft for personal enrichment and to maintain patron-client systems, further highlighting the complex range of factors involved.<sup>39</sup>

Since 2011, the UN Security Council has called for cooperation between regional states and external active players in the region.<sup>40</sup> Militarily, the United States, France, and to some extent the United Kingdom exercise a permanent naval presence in the region in order to support the development of West African naval capabilities for upholding

maritime order. Several African coastal states in the Gulf of Guinea already participate actively in regional exercises with international partners, plan to purchase new patrol ships,<sup>41</sup> and hire private security companies for police duties and security forces training. Denmark was part of a major naval exercise in the region in March 2015,<sup>42</sup> but Danish operational experience in the region remains limited.<sup>43</sup>

Politically, major actors such as the US,<sup>44</sup> the EU,<sup>45</sup> and the UN<sup>46</sup> have formulated long-term strategies on how to develop West African legislation and capacity to meet the regional maritime security and development needs in cooperation with regional states. Recent African policy initiatives have also laid the groundwork for improving security in the Gulf of Guinea,<sup>47</sup> including Ghana, which recently allowed for the greater use of private armed guards aboard merchant ships in its territorial waters.<sup>48</sup> Denmark puts special emphasis on the political and strategic discussions in the intergovernmental forum G7 ++ Friends of Gulf of Guinea (G7 ++FoGG), where a number of key interested countries are represented, as well as the Yaoundé Process and supportive initiatives with Portugal, Spain, and France.<sup>49</sup>

Economic support has been a long time coming to West Africa, especially due to concerns about corruption and the misuse of funds. However, economic means are about to be scaled up with contributions from the IMO and EU, among others. Denmark contributes to combating maritime crime in the region via the Peace and Stabilisation Fund.<sup>50</sup> This aid is intended for the development of the regional maritime surveillance capability with the newly opened Regional Coordination Centre (ICC) in Yaoundé and the civil information-sharing center in Accra (MTISC).<sup>51</sup> Finally, Denmark is also investigating possibilities for supporting the implementation of updated legislation and military capacity building.<sup>52</sup>

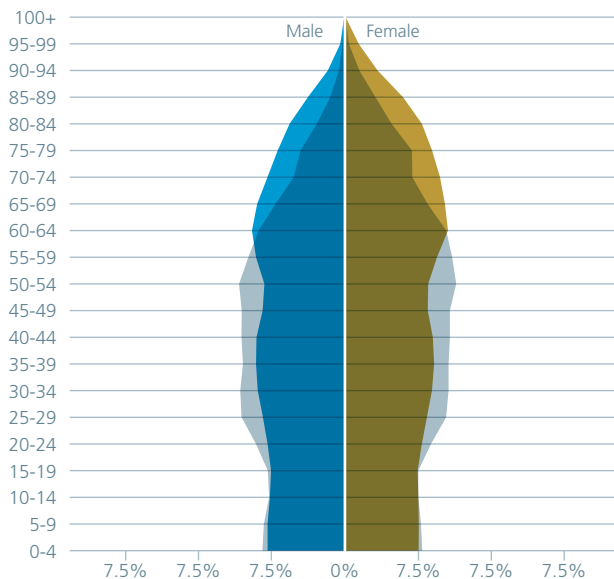
# Demographic developments and maritime security challenges in Africa

Today, Africa hosts one of the world's ten most populous countries: Nigeria. In 2100, the UN estimates there will be five: Nigeria, Congo, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Niger.<sup>53</sup> This section discusses the challenges that this demographic trend is currently creating and the challenges it is likely to cause in the future. One must keep in mind that this development should be seen in conjunction with other trends such as climate change, weak governance and state capacity, and political and economic marginalization.<sup>54</sup>

The massive demographic development in Africa has been

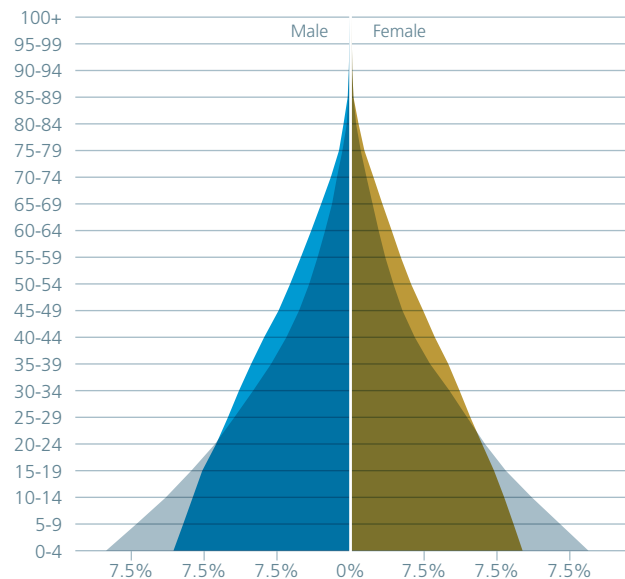
a long time coming. The total African population reached 1.1 billion people in 2014 after growing more than 60 percent since 1994. By comparison, the populations in Europe and Asia grew by just below 2 and 25 percent, respectively.<sup>55</sup> Fast forwarding to 2050, the UN estimates that about half of the global population growth (some 2.4 billion people) will take place in Africa.<sup>56</sup> Looking beyond 2050, according to these same projections, Africa will account for more than 80 percent of global population growth.<sup>57</sup>

The demographic trend clearly varies between African



## Europe and Central Asia

2000: 726 m      2015: 738 m      2050: 706 m



## Sub-Saharan Africa

2000: 642 m      2015: 962 m      2050: 2.123 m

Figure 2: UN projections of demographic trends in Africa and Europe towards 2050. Africa is estimated to account for up to 50 percent of total global population growth, approximately 2 billion people, until 2050 (Grey = 2015 Colored = 2050).

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision (medium variant)



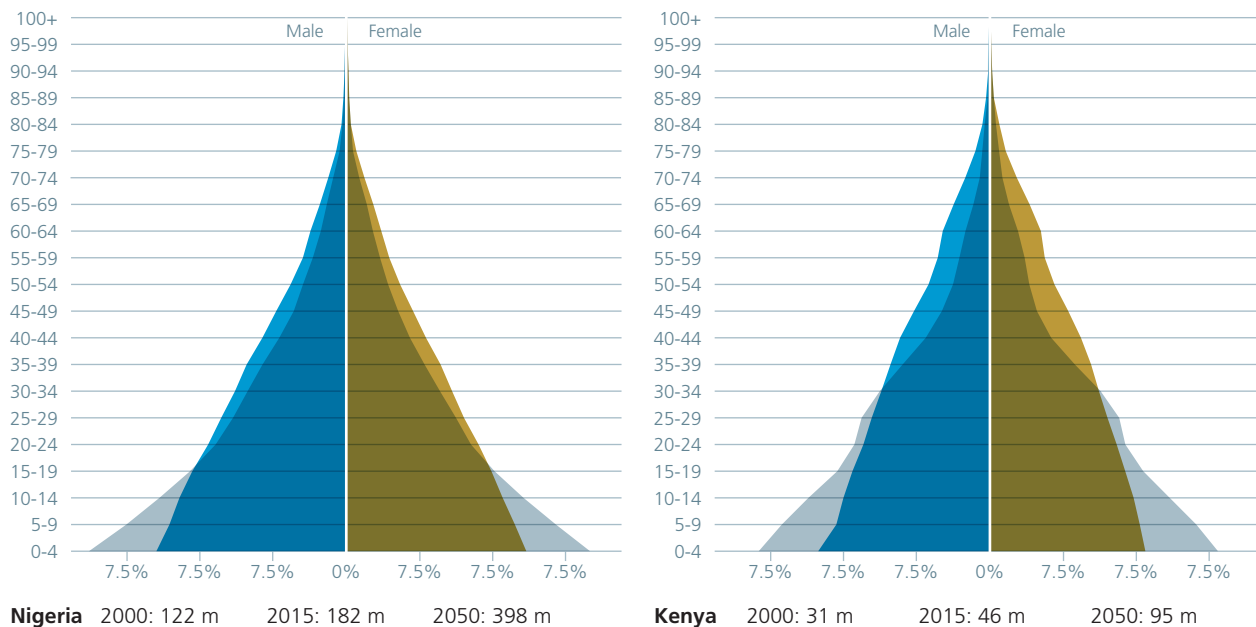


Figure 3: UN projections of demographic trends in Nigeria and Kenya towards 2050.

countries but adds up collectively, as illustrated by the population pyramids in Figure 2. The vertical axis shows age (5-year cohorts) and the horizontal axis shows the percentage of the total population. The gray pyramid indicates the current age grouping while the colored area represents the projection for 2050. The numbers below the pyramids show estimated populations for 2000, 2015, and 2050.

The first two pyramids illustrate how the Sub-Saharan African countries are undergoing drastic population growth (approx. 120 percent), while the population growth of Europe and Central Asia will turn negative towards 2050 (approx. 5 percent decrease). The development also shows a so-called 'youth bulge' in Africa, understood as a significantly larger group of young people (15-24 years) relative to the total population.<sup>58</sup>

The next two pyramids in Figure 3 illustrate the demo-

graphics for one of the main players in East Africa and one in West Africa. The population growth in Nigeria has been similar to the African average, while Kenya for a period experienced an extended downward fertility rate due to family planning programs. Today, however, both countries and their neighbors display an average fertility rate of 5-6 children per woman.<sup>59</sup>

The two final pyramids in Figure 4 focus on the development of geographically and population-wise smaller but politically important countries in the two regions. In Ghana, where the living standard is high and the state relatively strong, the projected population growth is somewhat lower than the African average. Conversely, Somalia is expected to almost triple its population size despite challenges relating to civil war, insecurity, and periodic famine. This projection should be interpreted with caution, however, in

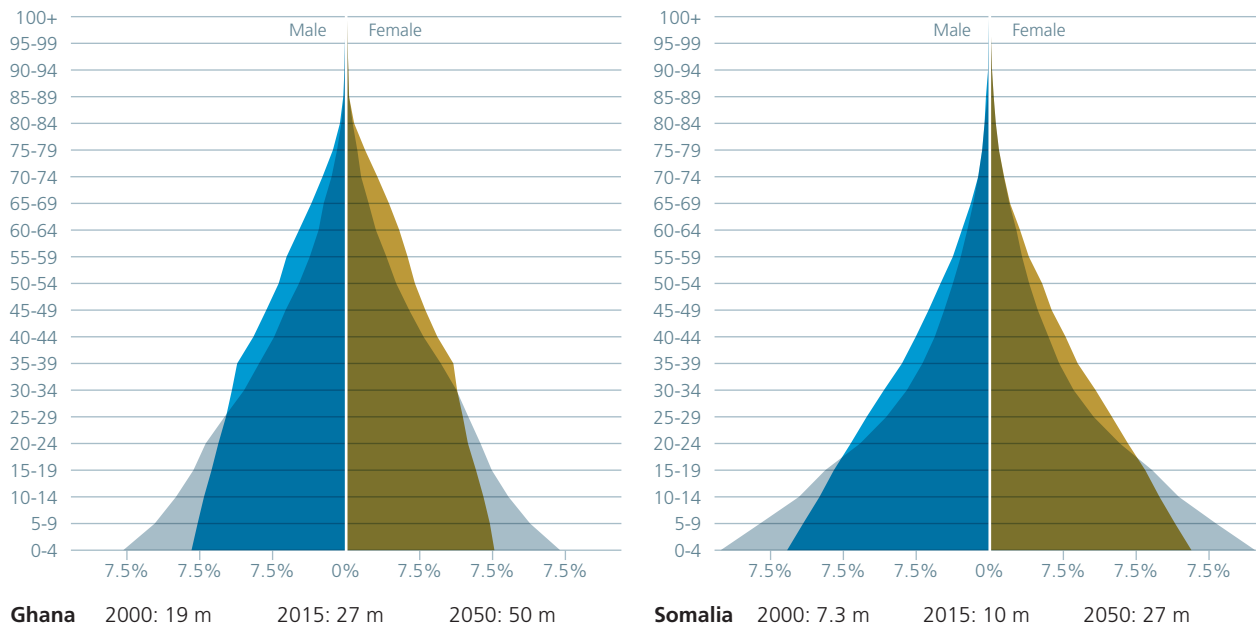


Figure 4: UN projections of demographic trends in Ghana and Somalia towards 2050.

light of the somewhat lower population growth between 2000 and 2015.

From an optimistic perspective, Africa has great potential to become an attractive market for consumption and production. Towards 2050, African workforces are expected to double or even triple. This entails an increase in the continental demand for, among other things, Danish goods and services.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, half of the population is currently younger than 25, and the growing young African labor groups are attractive potential consumers and a source of labor for the world market, which might set up production facilities in Africa or invite African workers to produce in other countries.<sup>61</sup>

But there will also be challenges. The demographic pressure will mean an increased demand for food, water, energy, and jobs.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, many African coun-

tries still experience a lack of efficient institutions and suffer from widespread corruption, a large informal labor market, and rising economic inequality. An estimated 80 percent of Africans are employed in the informal sector, and experience shows that they will only gradually move into the formal sector.<sup>63</sup> Inequality has increased in Africa over the past two decades, but the degree of inequality varies and is higher in coastal states such as Kenya and Nigeria.<sup>64</sup> Certain groups of young Africans are dissatisfied with their future prospects, since the likelihood of finding work and creating a better life than their parents seems remote. In a handful of countries, this likelihood even seems to be deteriorating.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, international actors are sometimes perceived to be part of the root causes that exacerbate problems in the absence of effective law enforcement through pollution, smuggling, illegal fishing, and corruption.<sup>66</sup>

The demographic pressure is likely to increase the magnitude of existing problems, such as causing an increase in the volume of the activities that threaten safety at sea and on land. This is not to say that there is a direct connection between a growing and increasingly younger population and maritime insecurity. This development must be seen in conjunction with other trends, including climate change, as noted by several observers and above.<sup>67</sup> African states might actually also succeed in handling the demographic pressure in many ways. Population growth can be both a benefit that drives economic prosperity and a challenge that intensifies security problems and puts African institutions under pressure.

From a security perspective, the demographic development might accelerate insecurity when combined with instability, climate change, weak governance and state capacities, as well as political and economic marginalization. In fragile states, this might lead to increased conflict. Meanwhile, the states that merely see their positive development stagnate might look forward to an increased volume of criminal activities, as in relation to urbanization.<sup>68</sup> Poor youth groups with few qualifications and limited work opportunities risk becoming marginalized economically and politically, and will therefore have greater incentive to pursue alternative ways of living.<sup>69</sup> There is a risk of large numbers of poor, young Africans possibly creating an increased labor supply for, among others, armed groups and criminal syndicates, which is likely to increase the volume of these groups' activities.

The problem is already prevalent both on land and at sea in a number of African countries and can be divided into three categories. The first is local criminal syndicates that feed off of activities passing under the radar of the international community. In East Africa, the problem has been piracy and kidnappings at sea for ransom, and parts of these incidents have affected or involved local commu-

nities.<sup>70</sup> On the other coast, West Africa is experiencing a more complex dynamic between the demand for specific commodities on black markets (including oil products), piracy, and corruption.<sup>71</sup>

The second category involves transnational smuggling networks that profit from trafficking illicit goods across the African continent and beyond, including to Europe. These networks deal in drugs and women and control lucrative migrant routes, which create revenues that surpass the defense budgets of several governments in the region.<sup>72</sup>

The third category involves insurgent and terrorist groups that are fighting government forces, radicalizing communities, and contributing to insecurity more generally through attacks on civilians and other activities. In East Africa, al Shabaab exerts a strong pull on young Somalis,<sup>73</sup> while across the Gulf of Aden both Houthis and al Qaeda control large stretches of the Yemeni coastline relatively undisturbed.<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile, groups like Boko Haram, AMC, and (now dissolved) MEND recruit in similar ways in Nigeria and Cameroon.<sup>75</sup>

The three categories summarize how a handful of African challenges on land do not stop at the coastline. No analysis will be able to predict exactly how these will affect the future. Nevertheless, it might be useful to reflect on some broader aspects of the dynamics that are likely to result from increased demographic pressure on African states.

As mentioned, there is no direct correlation between a growing population and maritime insecurity. But the demographic development risks increasing the volume of existing maritime security challenges in Africa. On this basis, the analysis will systematically portray different sides of one possible future using the three categories to shape three narratives. The narratives represent an isolated analytical reality of each of the categories – they are neither entirely independent nor dependent, but separated for analytical reasons. With them, we might discuss how we can better organize ourselves in the present.

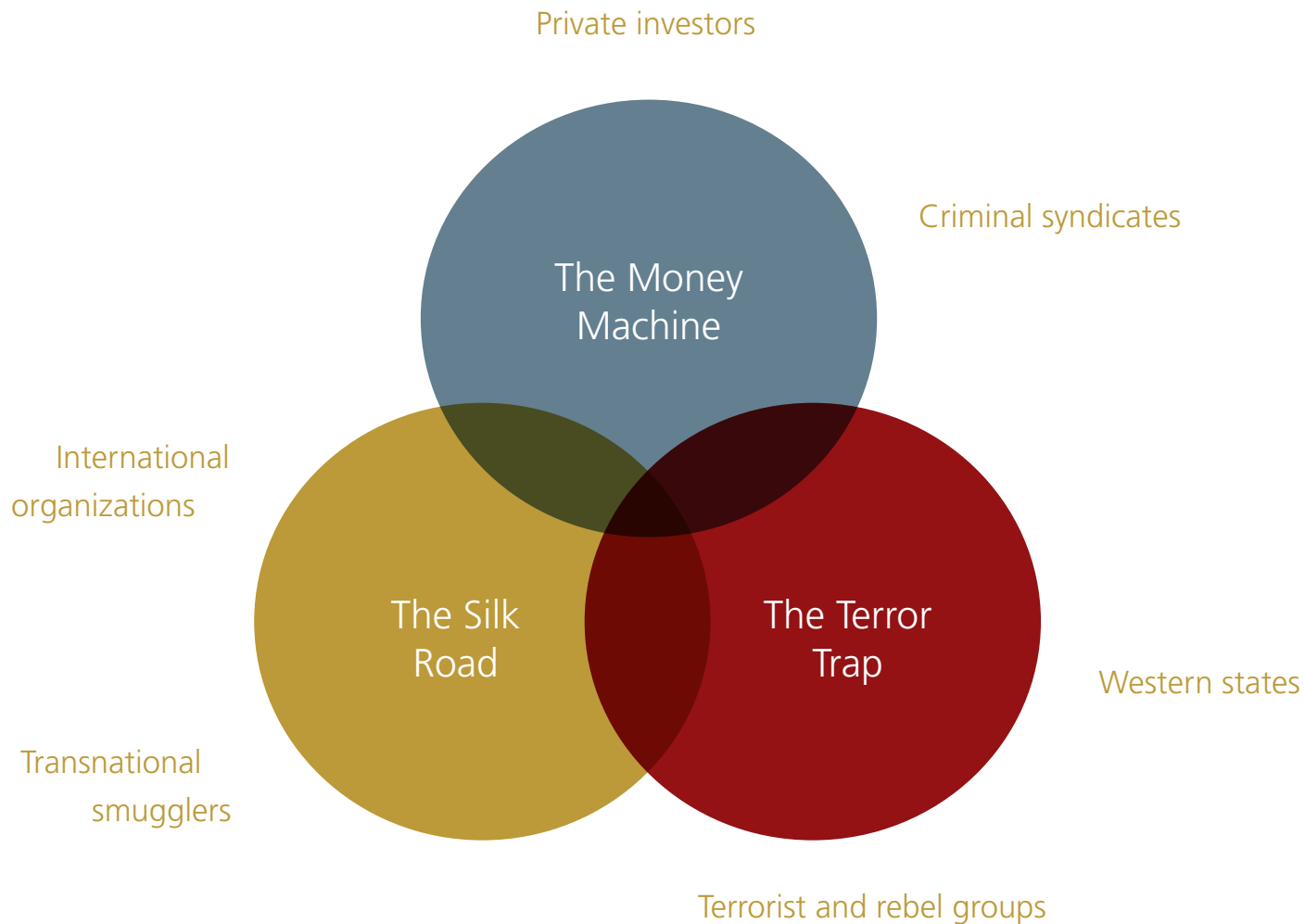


Figure 5: Three partially overlapping narratives on maritime security and development in Africa.



## 2. Towards 2025:

### Three narratives about maritime security challenges in Africa

Demographic pressure onshore increases the risk of problems at sea. The following chapter describes three negative narratives about how such risks can take form and the possible implications for maritime security in Africa. This chapter therefore focuses on the risks, while the next chapter emphasizes mitigation measures and long-term solutions. Moreover, the immediate focus is on maritime security and security policy, meaning that others facets – such as marine environment and economic development – will only support this perspective.<sup>76</sup>

The narratives arise from existing trends. Based on different key players, they provide three stories each with their own maritime security challenges, mitigation measures, and solutions. The narratives are not mutually exclusive nor represent the only possible future; instead, they each emphasize different but partially overlapping aspects of one possible future.

The narratives are developed around some basic questions, which are listed in the Appendix. Concurrently, imaginary telegrams support the narratives – two for each narrative, one for East and West Africa, respectively – as examples of significant challenges to be expected in the two regions. Following the narratives, a table summarizes the analytically separated maritime security challenges and needs and provides the separate considerations and means to counter them.

The three narratives on maritime security challenges in Africa are briefly described below and will be elaborated on more thoroughly in the next sections. In the Money Machine narrative, criminal syndicates control the development together with private investors who seek to address the issues where states fail to do so. In the narrative the Silk Road, smugglers and international organizations drive the development. The smugglers use well-established informal transnational trade routes to generate considerable revenues. Finally, the Terror Trap describes a development characterized by security and energy policy, which is driven by terrorist and insurgent groups fighting against African states that are supported by the international community.

Figure 5 illustrates the three narratives with each of their key players. In reality, the narratives are expected to overlap. For instance, terrorist groups are likely to finance themselves by transnational smuggling, and international organizations sometimes receive strong support from Western states. This creates an overlap between the different narrative dynamics, meaning that they might reinforce each other. Further analysis can help place various African countries in the figure, depending on which risks they are experiencing. This kind of categorization entails a specific set of considerations and actions. Countries that are placed in the middle of the figure are likely to have the most complex combination of security and development challenges; the measures for coping with the complex risks should be adjusted accordingly.



An aerial photograph of a coastal region, showing a river or estuary flowing through a landscape with patches of green forest and sandy or light-colored terrain. The water is a pale blue-grey, and the land is a mix of dark green and light tan. The overall scene is somewhat desaturated, giving it a historical or documentary feel.

# THE MONEY MACHINE

The year is 2025. Local crime syndicates and international private investors are driving the development in Africa from a raw economic logic. The escalating demographic pressure means that a group of young Africans is at risk of being recruited by the syndicates. The syndicates hire them to procure goods for emerging local markets, which serve communities that have been forgotten or not included in the economic growth of society at large. Crime (including violent crime) is increasing and economic development is stagnating in several places. Other areas are wallowing in economic decline. The ability of the African governments to handle these problems is hampered by political corruption, allowing syndicates a parasitic existence with the state. The activities of this self-regulating system are thus passing under the radar of the international community. Private investors are seeking to solve the problems themselves with armed guards, increased security, and bribery. Consequently, the government and societal development is deteriorating. At sea and in port areas, stakeholders commonly experience theft, robbery, illegal fishing, corruption in African maritime institutions, and piracy and hostage-taking for financial gain. Security is privatized and other problems, such as pollution, involve both local and international responsible parties. Bribery and corruption among politicians, authorities, and the employees of multinational companies provide easy access to abundant goods, while local groups without the proper means use violence to gain such access.

Local markets exercise a smooth transition between the (merely) informal market and the black market with stolen goods. For many Africans, the local informal market is often the only buyer and provider of the goods available in the area. The black markets receive products from young men who find them wherever they can, including port terminals, pipelines, and commercial vessels. In other words, world market prices and local supply and demand have an impact on the syndicate activities, ranging from petroleum products to consumer goods. Meanwhile, regular kidnappings aimed at ransoms escalate towards regional and national elections, particularly in Nigeria, where cash is needed for bribery and campaigning.

In West Africa, the multinational companies are distancing themselves from the locals physically by fortifying themselves in private, top-secured port facilities outside of the cities. Private companies are trying to reduce the risk of losing stock or leaking information to the syndicates. Companies wish to maintain their presence but find themselves in a vicious spiral of using foreign guards, rough security checks, misunderstandings, sudden layoffs, and a growing mistrust between employees and employers. This has created a self-fulfilling prophecy with local reprisals, including theft, major robberies, piracy, and occasional gunfights. A handful of companies have gone so far as to get rid of local labor and are now using workers from other African countries for less-skilled tasks, while an international work force takes care of management tasks. This development is exacerbating the existing marginalization of the African coastal communities, which are



becoming further isolated from the resource extraction going on around them and view the syndicates with a mix of sympathy and frustration. At the same time, oil spills have become a widespread pollution problem for fisheries and agriculture in coastal areas. Syndicates are also polluting when they are stealing and processing crude oil, when moving the oil from one container to another, or when processing it at their makeshift jungle refineries. Pollution pulls rural communities even further into a vicious circle of insecurity as regards their food and agriculture industry, where many traditionally have been employed.

East African pirate networks have learned from their West African colleagues. Somali pirates have gained a better information overview of merchant ships in the area and their cargo. Piracy has evolved into planned and focused attacks on specific ship types across the Indian Ocean instead of the former, opportunistic model of viewing the sea as more of an 'open hunting ground'. Robbery and the sale of oil from merchant vessels is the next step for the pirates in East Africa, but it will take time to establish a well-functioning sales chain. For the time being, the pirates therefore carry out a combination of robberies and kidnappings for ransom. The extraction of Somali and Kenyan offshore oil by multinational companies looks to become a highly centralized process in collaboration with the East African political elites. The fear of losing income to theft simply dampens the interest to involve and develop the capacity of local communities, thus reinforcing marginalization. Meanwhile, illegal foreign fishing vessels are moving in where they can, sometimes with armed guards hired from the local security providers of the syndicates.

The victims of this development are the private maritime stakeholders and the African local communities. The former must pay for security, while the latter feels excluded from economic opportunities and experiences a decreasing incentive to participate in law-abiding activities. The international community is informed about the problems through industry associations and development-oriented NGOs, which in turn represent the international voice of each of their groups. The capacity of the African states is hamstrung by corruption, while concerned Western states are pushing for solutions from the outside. In West Africa, the international community particularly supports small, designated frontrunner countries such as Togo, Benin, and Ghana. But progress is lagging because the revenues are too tempting for a number of corrupt individuals in Nigeria, especially in the absence of major international attention. In East Africa, cooperation is barely materializing at the regional level. At the same time, there are large gaps in government territorial control, particularly in Yemen and Somalia, which renders it difficult to handle the challenges without stronger international support.

**GANG HUNT IN NIGERIA AFTER MASSIVE OIL THEFT**  
WEST AFRICA. TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2025.

**20,000 barrels of oil spilled into the Gulf of Guinea. Thieves on the run with security guards at their heels.**

Private security guards are chasing a Nigerian gang in the wetlands near Port Harcourt by helicopter and three patrol boats after the perpetrators escaped with crude oil amounting to roughly 40,000 barrels from an underwater pipeline. Government security forces issued a press release, explaining how they lack the capacity to support the guards. Uncertainty remains about how long the thieves have been tapping the pipeline, which has reportedly spilled at least 20,000 barrels of oil into the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Guinea. Bellotex Enterprises regrets the incident with reference to the lawlessness in the area and reports that the pipeline has been closed and awaits repair.

This event is merely one of many cases of oil theft and related pollution off the coasts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Angola, and increasingly Kenya and Somalia. The activity seems to fluctuate with oil prices. Last year, the Nigerian government closed two illegal refineries and black markets, but this was reportedly only because they stopped making bribery payments. The demand for oil is high in these countries as they regularly experience fuel shortages, power failures, and fluctuating growth in their large urban generator-driven economies. In a report from 2023, the UN estimates that up to 80 percent of the residents in the Nigerian coastal town of Lagos deem the black markets more reliable suppliers as well as more legitimate than the white market, because they create jobs and growth. Meanwhile, rusty pipes, old oil barrels, and tanks end up as waste off the coasts or on nearby farmland.

**PIRATES AGAIN ESCAPE WITH OIL CARGO**  
EAST AFRICA. SATURDAY, JUNE 21, 2025.

**Somali pirates robbed oil from tanker, presumably with the help of Kenyan support ships and local port authorities in Mombasa.**

Last night, around 30 pirates were involved in the hijacking of the oil tanker M/T Sunrise 789 only two hours after it had left the port of Mombasa. The crew said that they were beaten by men armed with guns and knives. The pirates destroyed the communications system and robbed oil and other goods on board before leaving the ship on Saturday morning. Three minor support vessels rotated in to siphon 4,000 tons of oil out of the Sunrise and left it with a quarter of a full tank. The captain says that the pirates were Somalis, while the support vessel crew were likely Kenyan. The company is investigating why the crew did not bring private guards on board, as procedures prescribe.

After a long period of decline, the Indian Ocean has again become hunting grounds for East African pirates. The pirates, however, are selective and only hijack merchant vessels with an expensive or easily removable cargo, such as oil or mobile phones, which can be sold to black markets. This has also been seen in West Africa. According to the ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB), the East African pirates have become better organized, with new equipment and boats, as well as increased information from corrupt local port and police authorities. This tendency has been clear since the hijacking of the M/V Blue Caucasian in 2021, where the ship barely reached open water before the pirates forced it back and unloaded the goods in the same port that the vessel had just come from, says a spokeswoman. The problem stretches from Mozambique to Yemen and further over to the Indian coast.









# THE SILK ROAD

The year is 2025. Transnational smugglers and international organizations are driving the development. Demographic pressure means that a group of young Africans are at risk of being recruited by smugglers. They facilitate drugs, women, and migrants across Africa and to other continents by well-established trade routes not under state control. The African states are divided on numerous issues. Resourceful and educated youths are leaving Africa for the world, while sending home large remittances. Political and military elites vie for the control of revenues from the illegal flows, particularly drugs, while a broad coalition of international organizations work together with individual Western states to solve the problems. At sea, the smuggling and transport of illegal goods is common, with parts of the international maritime industry involved – and corrupted. The industry is also experiencing strong investment uncertainty in countries undergoing preludes to coups and is involuntarily becoming a political and humanitarian actor in relation to migration and refugee flows. Meanwhile, African navies alternate between being inactive and actively participating in the smuggling of illicit goods.

In North Africa and East Africa, migration flows from populous countries have increased, particularly due to an influx of young people looking for work in Europe and the Gulf States. The flows stream out of Africa on board small, crowded ferries and boats. They are handled by inexperienced or unreliable boat drivers, who are often either migrants themselves or armed smugglers abusing and trading the migrants. Moreover, merchant vessels commonly pick up migrants and refugees from the overcrowded boats in the Mediterranean. In the narrow Gulf of Aden, the concern is that the crowded migrant boats are sailing too close to the larger merchant vessels and thereby risk collision or being sailed down unwittingly. At other times, at very short notice, the private armed guards on board the merchant ships must assess whether the armed people on the smaller vessels are smugglers or pirates and whether or not they pose a threat. Migration has become big business, not only for the smugglers but also for African states with large shadow economies, practically living off the large and continuous remittances. This has created a partial dependence on the migration industry, leading to regular accusations by international organizations and a number of Western states that African governments are ignoring the problem.

West Africa has again become a distribution center for cocaine trafficking between South America and Europe. Shipments are facilitated by large container ships, small cargo ships, and fast-going motorboats. They usually cross the Atlantic and arrive in Africa with either the two former ship types or private jet and are then transported to Europe with motorboats. The industry has tightened its cargo control procedures but finds it difficult to enforce them when the police forces in several countries are small or lack the necessary competen-

cies. The smugglers are innovative and well informed about the destinations of the vessels. They hide their small boats from radars by crossing the oceans in the shadows of larger commercial vessels. Alternatively, divers attach packages with cocaine on the side of these same vessels without the crew's knowledge and then collect them at the next destination. There is a grave need for strengthening port control, but political and military corruption is making it difficult for companies to navigate between the many different considerations necessary to conduct business on the African markets and through African ports.

West African cocaine smuggling and corruption has fluctuated since the African military and political elites got a taste of the profit as intermediaries in the 2000s. Young African men are securing the drug trade interests of their leaders as soldiers or paramilitary forces. Among their diverse tasks, they receive and protect the drug supplies in ports or at sea on board merchant ships and are therefore more or less voluntarily subjected to such protective escorts. These young men dream of advancing to get a piece of the pie. However, this leads to continuous instability in the West African states – especially when there is an imminent showdown between those already benefitting and those not. This sometimes also leads to armed clashes between the military, police, and paramilitary forces. Meanwhile, a handful of key regional states remain sea blind, including most importantly Nigeria. Elites merely desire the continued existence of the state, and maritime security receives limited attention. Consequently, maritime companies feel economically and physically insecure, especially those that do not supply proper bribery in the form of goods or cash. The widespread corruption among the West African political and military elites is imitated by lower societal levels, to whom this is a common source of income. In effect, it functions as a parallel system to government fees, which only major companies have the local elite network to break. Still, there is uncertainty about how much of the drug sale revenue is distributed to African intermediaries and how much remains in the transit country. Nevertheless, several coups have been attempted – some successful, some unsuccessful – rooted in disagreements over the well-established drug trade, which continues to influence the development of African states.

The Western states that suffer from these problems – migration and the trafficking of women and drugs – have long sought a solution, but they are not prioritizing the issue enough to break the collective paralysis. Regional cooperation in Africa has improved gradually with the continuous and long-term support of international organizations. Consequently, there is some progress, especially among European countries, towards placing greater economic means and responsibility with dedicated cooperative frameworks between international organizations and African states. The organizations have previously proven extremely effective but are constantly understaffed and underfunded. The risk is therefore that the problem will remain unsolved rather than disappear.

## **GHOST BOAT WITH REFUGEES NEARLY COLLIDED WITH TANKER**

EAST AFRICA. FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2025.

**Observers fear that refugees have drowned after a near-miss collision with tanker off the coast of Yemen.**

A crowded boat carrying assumed refugees and migrants barely escaped collision with a merchant vessel in the Gulf of Aden. There is still uncertainty whether a number of refugees have fallen overboard and into the rough seas. The captain raised the alarm shortly after the maneuver and brought the ship to a full stop, but the crew has limited options for helping from the large container ship. At the same time, the coast guards in both Yemen and Somalia are known to be slow and have few resources. International NGOs have stressed the responsibility of the maritime industry to rescue shipwrecks, while the industry is appealing to British and French forces in Djibouti for help. The company THOR Tankers says that, in addition to the financial losses, there are a number of security risks associated with helping the shipwrecked refugees, particularly since there is no telling how the situation will develop on board the merchant vessel with a small crew.

The development in the Gulf of Aden is the latest chapter in a broader general migration and refugee problem, which is also apparent in the Mediterranean. The sea-borne migrant flows have been rising in East Africa since 2019 with Africans seeking work and security. Recent years have shown a degree of confusion about refugee boats with potentially fatal consequences. Several armed guards on board merchant ships in the Gulf of Aden have found it difficult to distinguish between small boats with armed smugglers and pirates. In May 2024, Italian guards shot at a fast boat with four armed smugglers and refugees and migrants when they came too close to the merchant vessel without making themselves known. In other cases, refugee vessels often lack proper radio equipment, and the individual steering the boat does not speak English or is inexperienced.

## **SMUGGLERS CAUGHT RED-HANDED WITH CARGO FULL OF COCAINE OFF THE COAST OF COTE D'IVOIRE**

WEST AFRICA. WEDNESDAY, JULY 30, 2025.

**Cote d'Ivoire police forces have seized a large amount of cocaine on board a French ship and arrested the crew.**

This morning, police forces in Cote d'Ivoire seized 800 kg of cocaine and arrested six crewmembers, including two French nationals, with the help of the regional branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). A UNODC spokesperson said earlier today in a press release that there were indications that the company had been aware of the smuggling and possibly used smuggling networks to acquire lawful orders through military channels. Crewmembers will be brought before a Cote d'Ivoire court, while the UNODC together with local authorities investigate the shipping company in France.

The circumstances indicate that parts of the international shipping industry are consciously involved in the smuggling of drugs and people. In previous cases, local African police forces have discovered similar quantities of cocaine in containers during routine inspections, despite drug traffickers having kept a low profile in recent years after growing media attention in the early 2010s. Cote d'Ivoire has thus far avoided issues connected to drug trafficking. Liberia, on the other hand, recently experienced its second military coup in 6 years. Politicians and some military leaders are currently fighting for control over the revenues of the illicit trade that passes through the country to Europe. Since its first coup in 2019, Liberia has seen international development assistance fall dramatically and found it difficult to attract private investments. Guinea-Bissau has had similar problems since its military coup in 2010.





MSC AFRICA  
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POLICE



# THE TERROR TRAP

The year is 2025. Insurgent and terrorist groups are driving the development together with Western states. Demographic pressure means that a group of young Africans is at risk of being recruited by armed groups. They fight against the African states and international presence in Africa for political rather than economic reasons, while the recruits themselves are motivated by both. What the West considers a matter of international security and energy security is at the local level a mix of terrorism, insurgency, and smuggling of arms and warriors. Part of the issue is whether the formal state treats all people equally. Western states are helping build the capacity of African security forces and institutions. They regularly reflect on the necessity of expanding their efforts from military capacities to improve police capacities further as well. At the same time, Western states seldom hesitate to deploy drones from local airports and special operations forces to conduct or direct attacks on non-state actor training camps and ammunition depots.

At sea, armed attackers aim at destroying vessels or hijacking them as a platform for further destruction, sometimes directed towards on-land targets. These armed groups threaten maritime interests by attacking ports, offshore platforms, and merchant ships awaiting port visits (particularly oil tankers) with improvised bombs and small arms. Other common problems include hijackings and kidnappings in exchange for political influence, the release of prisoners, the withdrawal of government troops from special territories, etc. Warriors and weapons are smuggled along the coast more frequently than before, and attacks, kidnappings, and other illicit activities take place in areas previously considered peaceful. Everything essential to maintaining an internationally oriented economy is at risk. The objective of these groups is, among other things, to scare away enough investors to weaken the government while keeping the economy and local communities afloat. The sovereignty of African states and the capability of their security forces are weakening. This development contributes to sustained sea blindness and a lack of official maritime capabilities. The threat is therefore quite palpable to international and local stakeholders in coastal areas and at sea.

Over the past decade, these armed groups have gained ground among the marginalized Africans. This marginalization has increased their feeling of injustice and lack of identity in the highly unpredictable and unequal world they inhabit. Some groups provide a strong religious brotherhood and local communities are voluntarily cooperating with them. Other communities are controlled by warlords who forcefully obtain recruits, logistical support, and supplies in the villages through threats. There is a fluid transition between terrorist and insurgent groups, such as Boko Haram and al Shabaab, both of whom draw on a wider range of global discourses as well as motivations and dissatisfaction concentrated in local settings.

At one end of the spectrum are extreme Islamist terror groups with a predominantly global perspective and ideology, who are financed by international (and particularly Arab) oil magnates. They include al Qaeda and

Islamic State. The civil war in Yemen has left a network of lawless coastal cities, from which small, fast boats regularly depart to pursue targets such as cruise ships for hostage taking or gas tankers and ammunition ships that can be used as weapons against nearby coastal cities in an enlarged 9/11 scenario at sea. Numerous private maritime stakeholders – particularly in Kenya, Somalia, and Nigeria – feel vulnerable to suicide attacks against a range of different targets, from off-shore platforms to smaller ferries in port areas. Moreover, small African maritime nations – such as Togo, Benin, and Seychelles – are particularly concerned about these developments, which they feel unable to handle if the borders of their neighbors become too porous and multinational companies potentially cease their activities in these countries. At the other end of the spectrum are locally based rebel groups who feed off local discontent in order to establish military influence in the areas around them. This type of group strives for independence, political influence, the withdrawal of government troops from selected territories, the release of prisoners, etc. These include the varying rebel constellations in southern Nigeria and the Houthis in Yemen, and Boko Haram is also known to use some of these tactics. Local warlords make up the third group and are independent of political and religious motives, working solely for personal gain. These groups are often major arms suppliers for other groups and a potential mercenary base whenever the interests of the group leaders are not colliding. At other times, they travel between coastal territories to impose taxes on economic activity. The African states may even have to pay them some sort of wage to keep them calm. When the groups carry out attacks, this is often to punish coast guard and police forces who have disrupted their economic activities. In such situations, they easily overpower smaller garrisons and police stations and the officials are humiliated, beaten, or even executed.

The African states are targeting the most dangerous armed groups. The less likely but overriding risk is that radicalization will escalate and the radicals take over the state in a situation similar to the upheavals in 1970s Iran or 1990s Afghanistan. The sea-blind African states continue to focus on land issues as long as that is where the primary regime threats are coming from. East Africa is once again experiencing a strong international naval presence and increased use of private armed guards on board merchant ships. Meanwhile, a few smaller states in West Africa show great interest in protecting themselves against threats from the sea. They share a concern for their politically important coastal cities and major maritime interests, and they are supported by international capacity-building elements. The strong self-interest of these countries has turned them into regional frontrunners, and their example seems to be an important driving force for other states. The international community is trying to strengthen the capacities of African states, since they cannot accept the presence of large, uncontrolled areas used for terrorist and rebel group training camps. They are therefore training African armies for larger confrontations, as well as urban and jungle warfare. They are also encouraging the African governments to address their marginalization and inequality problems, however, which have started the problems in the first place and have remained in place while security issues intensified. The appeal of terrorist groups, including in the respective diasporas, are causing concern in European capitals, where the attacks in Paris and Brussels a decade earlier are still remembered. Acting on this concern, they strongly support the fight in Africa with the deployment of drones and special operations forces for collecting information, targeting, hostage liberation, and threat elimination.



**DANISH OIL TANKER ESCAPES TERROR FATE AS BOMB SHIP**

EAST AFRICA. MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 2025.

**13 suspected terrorists were about to hijack a small oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden when a warship scared them off.**

Once again, suspected terrorists tried to hijack a small coastal gas tanker from two speedboats on Monday afternoon off the al Qaeda-controlled part of the Yemeni coast. The attackers were not scared away by the four armed security guards on board the M/V North Star, who fired several hundred shots during the two-hour firefight. The guards barely managed to keep the attackers at bay until the nearby French warship La Fayette arrived at the scene and them away using its cannon. The attackers then retreated back to Yemen in the twilight. At least two attackers are believed to have been hit. The crew is unharmed, but the North Star's bridge is damaged and a security guard is receiving treatment for gunshot wounds.

The attack represents the third time suspected terrorists have attempted to hijack smaller cargo ships carrying explosive materials through the Gulf of Aden. Last December saw eight similar cases, including near Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Al Mukalla, and Aden. The international community has had a strong presence in the Gulf of Aden since the gas tanker M/V Belokamenka ended up as a bomb ship in Aden harbor on June 1, 2021, resulting in about 2,000 deaths and 9,000 wounded due to flying debris, fires, and collapsed buildings.

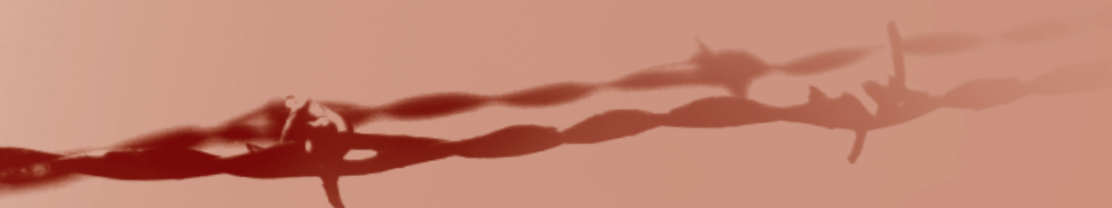
**HOSTAGE SITUATION AT PORT HARCOURT**

WEST AFRICA. THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2025.

**Nigerian rebels have killed seven and taken at least 20 hostages in Port Harcourt after attacking the harbor.**

Militants formerly associated with the Nigerian rebel group MEND have attacked two terminals in Port Harcourt over the past two days. Seven have reportedly been killed thus far. Nigerian security forces pushed back the attackers last night with the help of private armed guards. After a brief standstill, clashes have reportedly resumed Thursday morning. The rebels have reportedly barricaded themselves in one of the terminals with at least 20 hostages, including two Norwegian and three British engineers.

The attack comes at a time when President Desmond Igunikeme is participating in a peace conference in Addis Ababa. The government has long suppressed public demonstrations following years of highly centralized economic growth and urban planning. The lack of inclusion of slum areas like the Niger Delta, whose population the attackers proclaim to represent, frequently leads to violent clashes, with the rising urban warfare reaching Port Harcourt last year. The most recent attack symbolically marks the third anniversary of the hostage situation at the Ocean View resort on Sao Tome in 2022, where a Cameroonian rebel group kidnapped three Portuguese tourists and later let them go in exchange for the release of 35 rebels in Cameroon. Similar attacks on cruise ships as well as tourist and shopping areas in coastal areas have also been seen in East Africa, particularly Kenya.



# The three narratives and their maritime security challenges

The narratives represent three scenarios for the future, and the following section summarizes their differences and commonalities. Once again, it is important to emphasize that the narratives are not mutually exclusive nor represent the only possible future. The aim is to create a framework for understanding possible future security challenges and – with this understanding as a springboard – to create a strategy for mitigating their impact on Danish and international maritime interests.

Figure 6 contains three columns, one for each narrative, to be read from top to bottom through the three categories. The first category shows a number of exposed areas at sea and near coastal regions, such as merchant vessels and port facilities, which the narratives have in common. The next category shows how these areas experience various security challenges and security needs. In the Money Machine narrative, merchant vessels are subjected to piracy and kidnapping for ransom, partially facilitated by corruption in African maritime structures, whereas these are more likely to be armed attacks aimed at destruction in the Terror Trap.

Furthermore, each set of security challenges and needs connects with a handful of analytically isolated considerations about means and approaches to solutions. These considerations are gathered in the third category. In relation to the Silk Road narrative, one would benefit from examining the internationally accepted guidelines for the handling of sea-borne migration flows and cooperation between

state and industry maritime institutions more closely. These considerations should be seen as suggestions for further development rather than recommendations. They require additional input and expertise from a wide range of Danish, African, and international governmental and private actors.

Be aware that the challenges in each of the narratives might reinforce the other two. For example, the issues in the Money Machine risk creating uncertainty about trade and investment resulting in lower growth and – together with illegal fishing, dumping of waste, and oil spills – increases the marginalization of local communities, leading in turn to radicalization. The perspective is long-term but also stresses the need to pay attention to the present.

One might think that narratives are ‘horror scenarios’ that leave out a potentially positive development. This is the intention, to some extent. While the narratives draw up potential challenges, the following chapter discusses how to address them while balancing the overlapping interests of African, Danish, and international stakeholders.

Figure 6 provides an overview of how the existing, potentially increasing risks resulting from demographic pressure might be organized and addressed separately. The following chapter discusses some reflections, means, and opportunities for addressing the risks described. The discussions are aimed at international and Danish actors, but must naturally be complemented by and coordinated with the efforts of African countries.

	THE MONEY MACHINE	THE SILK ROAD	THE TERROR TRAP
Exposed areas at sea	Port facilities / Vessels in port / Vessels calling port / Vessels in transit / Off-shore platforms and related installations		
Security challenges	<p>Theft, robbery, economically motivated piracy, and kidnapping</p> <p>Privatization of security</p> <p>Pollution problems</p> <p>Corruption in African maritime structures</p> <p>Illegal fishing and dumping</p>	<p>Smuggling and transport of illicit goods</p> <p>Involvement of maritime industry in migration and refugee streams</p> <p>Internal tensions after coup d'états and international reactions</p> <p>Corruption in international parts of the maritime industry</p>	<p>Armed attacks aimed at destruction</p> <p>Politically motivated hostage situations</p> <p>Smuggling of weapons and fighters</p> <p>Hijacking as a platform for further destruction</p> <p>International sanctions following coup d'états by armed groups</p>
Considerations and means	<p>Preparation and need for the analysis of the consequences for local communities of the increased use of private armed guards on land and at sea as well as the increased use of technology, outsourcing, and remote control of former local jobs.</p> <p>Development of private guidelines for use of armed guards in collaboration between the maritime industry and interest-driven states with the aim of entering into dialogue with local coastal communities.</p> <p>Inclusion of local populations and support for growth in African coastal communities.</p> <p>Development of internationally supported regional regimes for environmental protection, maritime awareness capability, and coast guard and emergency readiness for protection against oil spills, dumping, illegal fishing, etc.</p>	<p>Development of readiness action plan in case of coup d'états, including mechanisms for mitigating the potential effects of reduced growth, international sanctions, or reignited conflict.</p> <p>Update international and national industrial guidelines in cooperation with government maritime institutions for handling migration and refugee streams.</p> <p>Strengthen procedures internally in maritime companies for the verification of illicit goods and to strengthen the relationship between the maritime industry, interest-driven states, and relevant international organizations.</p> <p>Strengthen procedures for the maritime industry's monitoring of possible corruption with its own members and strengthen the cooperation with international organizations in this regard.</p> <p>Build capacity and good procedures with African coast guards together with maritime government institutions for counterdrug efforts.</p>	<p>Development of guidelines for vessels with particularly destructive potential, such as oil tankers and weapon transports, for e.g. strong citadels and the remote control of sailing routes in case of hijacking.</p> <p>Development of stronger cooperation between maritime actors in the private sector, government, and the international society for strengthened monitoring and follow-up on suspicious vessels and events at sea in order to identify weapon smugglers, routes, and development.</p> <p>Capability building (capacity and ability) of units on land and at sea for securing coastal areas and territorial waters against spillover from conflicts on land, including armed attacks.</p> <p>Capability building of special forces for handling complex maritime security situations, including hostage situations or hijackings.</p>

Figure 6: Outline of security challenges towards exposed areas at sea with considerations and means associated with each of the three narratives



### 3. Conclusion: Reflections, means, and opportunities



*Figure 7: Maritime security and development as a tailor-made, comprehensive approach in the crossover between existing policy agendas.*

The maritime security and development perspective proposed here embraces diverse security issues that threaten the maritime order off African coasts today. For one, piracy will not be the only threat to Danish, African, and international maritime interests in the future.

The current demographic development in Africa entails a risk that African maritime security challenges will expand and accelerate in places where states are unable to deliver basic services to a growing and increasingly younger population.

The narratives above have shown three specific ways for how this development might unfold and how it can be expected to affect the maritime domain. The future might not fully resemble any of the three narratives, but they portray how the security challenges in Africa risk becoming an interwoven mixture of conventional military challenges, terrorism, and crime.<sup>77</sup>

The narratives also give rise to a number of reflections. There is a risk in the coming years that there will be an increased need for managing security challenges that threaten Danish and international maritime interests in Africa. Some of the negative developments can be mitigated through efforts starting today. The next natural step is therefore to direct our attention back to the present for a discussion of how Denmark and the international community can seek to mitigate the risks that have been outlined here.

Figure 7 shows three solution-oriented agendas that the maritime security and development perspective draws upon conceptually. Common to East and West Africa is the fact that there may be a need for a tailored combination of military, police, and capacity building efforts. The figure illustrates the opportunity to strike a balance between initiatives in the different regions, sub-regions, and countries, including why this balance will be effective at solving the problems at hand.

# The international level

Problems at sea derive from problems at land. Consequently, it would merely be treating the symptoms to address the maritime security challenges individually – crime, terrorism, piracy, etc. Conversely, a narrow focus on the root causes would lie beyond a perspective focused on maritime security. The solution entails both the political and economic development of the affected African countries, which might enable them to better deal with the consequences of increased demographic pressure. The craft lies in identifying a set of tools that are legitimate, effective in both the short and long term, and tailored to meet specific challenges. A handful of reflections aimed at the international level are presented below.

The root causes can only be solved by the African states themselves. Nevertheless, these challenges on land create problems at sea, which risks threatening Danish maritime interests in the future. Furthermore, the individual dynamics of the narratives contribute to the continued existence and development of one another towards more complex, interwoven socio-economic security problems. Hence, there is a need for continued international engagement, which bundles instruments together across actors and regions to support the conditions of the African states for upholding their maritime order. This is also in their interest.

For the development of international policy, one might also keep in mind that different regional conditions shape and create different problems; the tools must therefore be shaped accordingly. In East Africa, one would expect an increasing demand for a wide range of international governmental and private solutions, because the regional states lack both capabilities and leadership for an effective regional cooperation. In West Africa, on the other hand, external contributions can usefully focus on supporting the ongoing regional development, because the regional states are developing their national capacities in both breadth and depth. There are also more capable states at the center of the development, and serious security problems are isolated deeper inland so far.

Any international approach should identify, cultivate, and build on the experiences of African countries with the greatest maritime interest and tradition. The political will exists. But the breadth, depth, and pace of the implementation of these activities will depend on whether pioneers can demonstrate the benefits of employing them – benefits in terms of strengthened institutions and greater attraction of private investments. This could create a positive spiral of success stories with a handful of frontrunner countries, which can then be communicated within the rest of the region.

Some security challenges cannot be prevented before it is too late. It will therefore be important for the world community, European countries, and others to identify and develop solutions that focus on resilience against certain challenges rather than avoidance. This involves tracking the development of the threat and creating solutions that later can be phased out in case the longer-term solutions come into effect. One example is Nigeria, where some form of resilience will be necessary in the absence of sufficient political and economic development.

Finally, one should consider how China will respond to the growing security challenges to its human and material investments in Africa. China has become an economically important player in Africa and is now the largest commercial trading partner and fourth largest government investor on the continent.<sup>78</sup> China has partially abandoned its traditional non-interference policy by participating in the combat against piracy off the Horn of Africa, facilitating peace talks in Sudan and South Sudan, setting up a military logistics center in Djibouti, and deploying peacekeepers to Mali.<sup>79</sup> Will China become increasingly involved with more than just economic investments and take a wider responsibility? It is crucial to consider in which areas China will display an interest, perspective, and competence in order to involve them early in relation to the handling of maritime security challenges in Africa.





# The Danish level

Maritime security and development in Africa can usefully replace piracy as the focal point for the next Danish maritime security strategy for the continent. The solutions should be just as diverse as the security challenges. Small states like Denmark must engage with other states and actors to solve common problems. But this is by no means the same as not being able to shape the course of events or not contribute with solutions to the international agenda.

The three narratives and Figure 6 show maritime security challenges that partially exist today. They risk accelerating over the coming years – in both volume and breadth – and are increasingly drawing the attention of international and regional actors. This creates a policy window of which Denmark should be taking advantage.

The Danish government is already providing maritime security and development. Denmark supports African institutions that have developed broad maritime strategies, which strive for more than counterpiracy (including ECOWAS, IGAD, AU).<sup>80</sup> Other African institutions have expressed a desire to do the same (DCoC).<sup>81</sup> The maritime awareness project in the Danish counterpiracy strategy (2015-2018)<sup>82</sup> also offers a good example of how experiences from land can be applied to the maritime domain. Similar small-scale initiatives are emerging under the umbrella of the Danish Peace and Stabilisation Fund.<sup>83</sup>

The Danish approach to fighting piracy in East Africa has given Denmark a unique set of opportunities. With a comprehensive and innovative effort Denmark shaped the agenda there together with a selected group of partners.<sup>84</sup> The following recommendations can serve as inspiration for how Denmark can contribute to a new international agenda for maritime security and development in Africa.

Denmark could benefit from:

1. Broadening the Danish debate and thinking from counterpiracy to maritime security and development in Africa in recognition that the challenges at sea stem from root causes on land.
2. Taking advantage of the lessons learned in East Africa on how one might carve out a central role on global maritime security agendas for Denmark – by staging Danish thinking about problems and solutions in practice through continuous presence (political, economic, military), synthesis work, and the formulation of ideas.
3. Using the three analytical narratives to isolate problems (as in Figure 6), map existing initiatives of actors in the regions, and reconsider them in a joint effort to strengthen maritime security proactively (for building capability) and reactively (for readiness).
4. Reflecting on the opportunity to solve deeper problems in the long term through public-private partnerships, thereby seeing businesses as a potential source of protection as well as the treatment of the root causes.
5. Searching for new methods to formulate solutions, including through continued, active involvement of the private sector and academic resources at the Royal Danish Defence College, Danish Institute for International Studies, and Centre for Military Studies in long-term, broad-spectrum analytical tasks.

# Appendix

The narratives in this analysis are based on contemporary trends and have been shaped by the series of questions presented in the box to the right. The questions have not necessarily been answered in the same order and the different African regions have been drawn forward when relevant rather than giving them equal space.

The analysis draws on the concept of scenario thinking. Figure 8 demonstrates how the different parts of this concept have been combined into a forward-looking description of potential challenges and solutions. General trends (e.g. demographic developments) are considered more reliable and point in a broader direction than varying trends (e.g. US involvement in security operations in Africa), which are associated with lower probability and less clear outcomes.

Scenario thinking can be divided into two levels. The first is abstract and passive. Viewed through this lens, scenarios should challenge our worldviews, assumptions, and immediate priorities in the medium (10 years) and long term (30 years).<sup>85</sup> This tool makes decision-makers – including the business world – better able to strategically position their organizations and take advantage of otherwise unforeseen possibilities; that is, able to latch on to the right trends.<sup>86</sup> The second level is more practical and is actively seeking to shape the trends instead of simply latching onto them. This typically involves states or organizations that are large enough to believe that they are able to influence develop-

ments (with some justification). For example, the US National Intelligence Council (NIC) drew up a number of mutually exclusive potential futures in 2012 based on the idea that – at this historic crossroads – the United States could push the development towards the good instead of the bad worlds.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, NATO sought to create a (slightly less ambitious) platform in 2009 for continuously transforming the organization so that the bad futures would not hit as hard as if one had been unprepared.<sup>88</sup>

This analysis draws on both perspectives and chooses to focus on three aspects of one possible future on a narrow topic: the connection between maritime security and development challenges in Africa. Illusions aside, a small state like Denmark will not be able to shape greater trends, and perhaps not even varying trends. Danish policy will largely be a matter of latching on to the right trends. However, there are a handful of areas where Denmark has the right combination of willingness, resources, skills, and networks to shape thinking on how Western partners and allies will prepare and intervene, for example in conflicts. Maritime security operations is one of these areas and the broader development and stabilization agenda is another.<sup>89</sup> Together, the two can create a strong Danish voice in terms of what maritime security and development in the 21st century might look like, and this lays the basis for the visionary approach taken in this analysis.



## THE NARRATIVES ARE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

Who might do what and who might be the key actors?

How could this lead to security problems?

For whom might this become a problem?

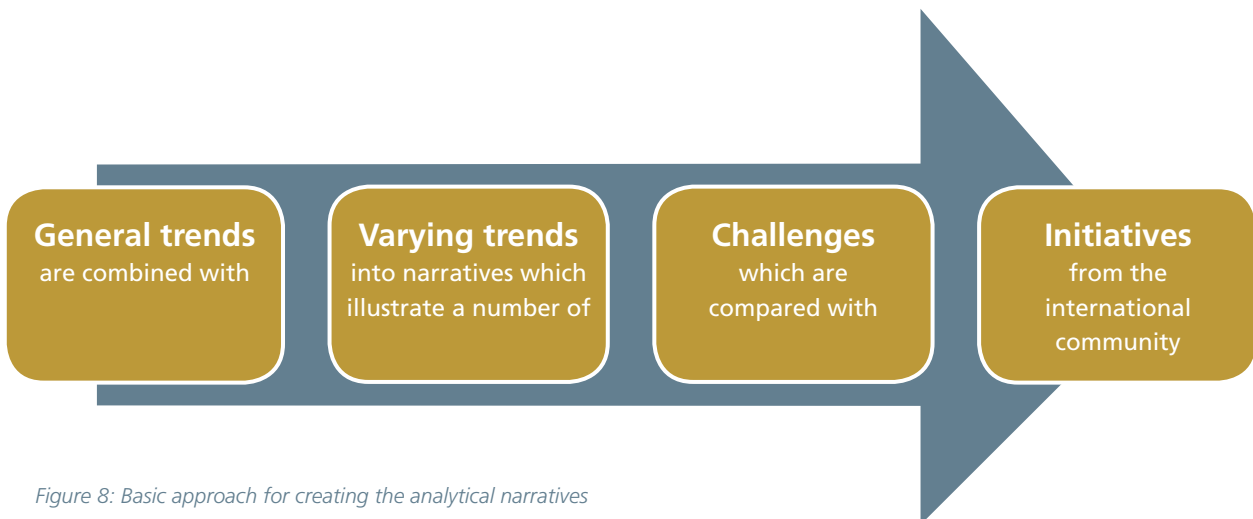
What costs would this have and who would it hurt the most, relatively speaking?

Which special maritime challenges would this raise?

What would be the special regional or international aspects inherent in the solutions?

What would an appeal for help to the West and the international community look like?

When would this become something that actors would render more or less serious?



*Figure 8: Basic approach for creating the analytical narratives*

# List of photo illustrations

Front cover: Somali pirates on their way to the boats (*Copyright: Véronique de Viguerie, Getty Images*).

Page 9      Ghanaian Chief of the Naval Staff, Rear Adm. Geoffrey Mawuli Biekro, speaking at the closing ceremony of the multinational military exercise 'Obangame Express' in March 2015 (*Copyright: U.S. Navy*).

Page 13      HDMS Absalon (L16) off the Horn of Africa (*Copyright: Danish Defence*).

Page 14      Special Boat Team from the Nigerian Navy participating in the 'Obangame Express' exercise 2015 (*Copyright: Bundeswehr/Steve Back*).

Page 38:      Debate in the Danish Hall of Parliament 2010 (*Copyright: The Danish Parliament/Anders Hviid*).

Back cover: Militants from the former 'Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta' (MEND) patrolling the delta of the Niger River (*Copyright: Véronique de Viguerie, Getty Images*).

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