

## **Information and Communication Technology, Security Matters and Maritime Piracy in Contemporary Africa\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The processes of globalization have severe implications for the social State; national governance and security matters, inter alia: the resurgence of maritime piracy in contemporary Africa. Maritime piracy is the step-child of the failure of weak, failing and the failed States' inability to fulfill its traditional role and quintessential functions of security provision. Worsened by the processes of globalization, discontentment in the form of militancy and social unrest on the part of the alienated and marginalized individuals, and especially with respect to existential realities, have coalesced to unleash violence and organized crime in the form of maritime piracy. It was the contention and findings of this study that the resurgence and rise of this phenomenon is directly connected to the processes of globalization as well as the States' failure in Africa. It is with respect to this scenario that this study proffers some robust recommendations to address some of the threats posed by maritime piracy to the continent's overall security architecture.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization and the Information Technology revolution have speeded up processes to such an extent that people in general and planners in particular have forgotten that certain processes, by their very nature, have long gestation periods. The processes which cannot be normally curtailed without leading to severe distortion include inter alia: education, research, infrastructural development, regeneration of degraded environments and the like. Majority of them, if not all, require a gestation period of between fifteen to twenty-five years for the best to come out of them. When it is so, the shock wave of economic dislocation shatters the social cohesion of large segments of society, leading to unrest and even terror (Saighal, 2003).

It has been observed that where the majority of the people regard the conditions of life in their country as equitable, these become the best guarantors of social peace. Conversely, examples abound of what can happen if societies

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lack social cohesion. As a matter of fact, the true implications of globalization have not been spelt out for the people of the developing countries by institutions, whose credibility is not in doubt. Globalization, as it stands for the present, has different meanings for different regions, countries and peoples. The process of globalization is not creating conditions for social equilibrium.

A country's social peace is an essential ingredient of economic development and prosperity. In the same context, the correlation between poverty and criminality needs to be more fully explored. Evidently, poverty cannot be defined only in absolute figures. It has to be seen in relation to the existing social environment and the economic base of society. The developing countries generally see globalization as seeking to destroy all autonomies through internationally mandated discourse, definitional strategies, sponsored agenda and organizations like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) Group; all of whom are seen by many to be the 'Trojan Horse' of the new colonial imperialism of the U.S.A and other Western countries.

Globalization, which does not seem to have benefitted a large mass of the population in the developing world and has created all sorts of insecurities and anxieties around the world (Saighal, 2003) is especially associated with the rise and resurgence of the phenomenon of maritime piracy in contemporary Africa. A stepchild of a very complex matrix of historical processes of a larger outcome of both global and local in explanations, the roots of maritime piracy in contemporary Africa are those problems that are inherently internal to the states concerned namely: weak, failing and failed, as well as of those that are externally linked to transnational and global processes; and of structural changes in power relations due to the phenomenon of accelerated globalization; the end of the Cold War; technological advances (the result of huge revolution in ICTs), proliferation of arms; ransom payments; patchy or poor legislation, international regimes and judicial instruments; including poor and sometimes inadequate maritime security systems and equipment (Uadiale and Yonmo, 2010a).

Situated within this context and scenario therefore, is the hitherto existing and already fractured nature of Africa States' failure to fulfill their quintessential role and traditional functions of security provision, and their ineffectiveness in wielding or forging both internal and external order is responsible for, some stark realities in the continent's security equation. Indeed, the African continent is plagued by a host of intra-state instabilities, lawlessness, criminality, civil wars, ethnic clashes, recurrent coup d'état, armed insurgencies, factional fighting, etc. Thus, the African continent exemplifies manifold forms of non-state violence; and the declared absence of the state's monopoly over force and

all forms of organized violence are clear signs of the Africa State's ineffectiveness and non-durability of security provision (Uadiale, 2010a).

Factored into the above scenario, however, is the over-arching role of the alienated individual in search of a state and society in which he can live a life of creative happiness within himself, of love and friendship with his fellow men, and peace and harmony with nature, and for which the search appeared to be in vain and futile; the individual begins to prosper on the extreme side of the state and society.

Thus, the scenario of individual isolation and alienation is clearly and succinctly enough to explain the midwife of the phenomenon of maritime piracy in a 'modernizing' and 'industrializing' contemporary Africa (Uadiale, 2010). Indeed, with the leverage of the ICT revolution, criminals, and particularly, pirates have been able to operate without hindrance with great precision and prudence. It is however, against the backdrop of this fractured security architecture that the alienated, marginalized and ostracized individual ventures into criminal enterprises such as maritime piracy. Hence, the pirates who are in possession of modern communication and technology begin to take advantage of the luxury of this novelty equipment to perpetrate their criminal activities at sea. This nonetheless has informed the background for the worsening incidence of the deadly resurgent of maritime piracy in Africa.

## **ICT REVOLUTION AND GLOBALIZATION**

The origin of the information revolution has been argued to date as far back as to the inventions of the radio, the telephone, and even the telegraph. A more realistic timeline would be at the origins in the 'Colossus', the world's first working computer, created during the Second World War by the British code-breakers at Bletchley Park. ICT is so advanced today that such a crude device is now outperformed by a simple handheld calculator. ICT is heralded today as the greatest global transition since the industrial revolution. It is transforming the world's most advanced nations from industrial societies to information based societies. Today, citizens, firms and governments have to increasingly rely on high-speed and high-quality information to conduct their daily functions and operations.

With the advent of wireless communications such as the global system of mobile communication and the internet, there are a variety of advantages for those connected to ICT. While it is argued that technological threats such as cyber-terrorists, hackers and asymmetrical attacks are not yet significant enough to cause damage to state security on a large scale. ICT, nonetheless, created

vulnerabilities and expanded the scope of criminal activity. Also, accesses to information through new information technologies such as the internet and commercial satellites have to a point leveled the playing field in intelligence collection between public and private entities. Today's intelligence consumer has many new choices, even as public institutions, like the vaunted National Security Agency find themselves falling behind the latest technological developments.

One of the real consequences of globalization on ICT is that Nation-States can no longer easily protect the non-physical security aspects which are the protection of information and technology assets. This means that the greater your military power is, the more you have to work to protect your information technology from theft.

Nevertheless, one of the challenges posed by globalization is that individual states can no longer control the movement of technology and information. Furthermore, the arms industry is now mostly held by private sectors and this brings about the trans-nationalization of defense production and reduces the state control of information regarding security and defense. Trans-nationalization has blurred the division between internal and external security, such that the states can no longer ignore the effects of globalization in forming their security policies.

ICT can also affect national security in the age of globalization by the emergence of information based-economies which reduces the importance of national industries. This is by the increase of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in local economies by the Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) and this in turn decreases State control on domestic economy, making the state more vulnerable to international crisis and intervention, while threatening the economic security of the State.

Information revolution has also enhanced the advancement of communication technologies in the media. This has been carried as far as the internet where a simple hand held digital camera or even a phone can record events in real-time and upload to the World Wide Web (www) for all to see. This increases political awareness of security matters and it is platitudinous that resulting public pressure can always positively or negatively affect security matters. For example, during the Kosovo conflict, after the broadcast of mass deportation and casualties on the television broadcasts, the conflict became impossible to ignore, creating international public pressure for intervention. On the other hand, this might be also dangerous in some cases. With the power of information and media technology, the powerless can become powerful (Obahiagbon, 2010).

## **ICT, GLOBALIZATION AND SECURITY MATTERS**

Globalization is currently one of the most fashionable concepts in several academic disciplines: International Relations, Sociology, History, Cultural Studies, Geography and Anthropology, with less frequent guest appearances elsewhere. Inevitably, the vast outpouring of writings on the subject from such diverse fields has produced a wide range of definitions, interpretations, explanations and predictions. Yet if there is a common core to this literature, it is the argument that various processes of globalization threaten the sovereign state by making it meaningless if not obsolete (Armstrong, 1998).

The differing ideas among realists, liberals and structuralists about globalization entails 'social relations acquire relatively distanceless and borderless qualities, so that human lives are increasingly played out in the world as a single place'. Globalization suggests a significant intensification of global connectedness and a consciousness of that intensification, with a corresponding diminution in the significance of territorial boundaries and state structures. It is simply the process of increasing interconnectedness between societies such that events in one part of the world more and more have effects on peoples and societies far away (Mayall, 1998).

Regardless of how you define or measure it, globalization is real and its impact on state power is significant. There are big fin-de-siecle transformations underway in the world at large, which can be laid at the door of something called globalization. This new era popularized as 'world without borders' and symbolized by the dismantling of the Berlin-Wall ostensibly came into its own where the Cold war left off. Globalists of all shades see a new world order in the making, marked by the de-territorialization of economic and political affairs, the ascendance of highly mobile, transnational forms of capital, and the growth of global forms of governance.

By the same token, globalization skeptics, scrutinizing very similar empirical terrain, continue to pose the same insistent question. The dispute between globalist and skeptics is not about the reality of change; it is about the nature and significance of the changes underway as well as the driving forces behind them (Weiss, 1999).

These developments have weakened the state in some areas but strengthened it in others (Mayall, 1998). While few would want to deny that the growth of the global economy, the revolution in I.T., and the diffusion of political and cultural ideas beyond the original homelands, have had and will continue to have profound political implications, there are intractable structural obstacles to the withering away of the State (Mayall, 1998).

The products of globalization are not all good. This process is also producing powerful backlash from those brutally left behind by this new system. Negative integration is the breaking down of trade barriers or protective barriers such as tariffs and quotas. On the security side of the globalization analysis, state security has become complex and multidimensional with the result that traditional national border setting and security perceptions are less capable of recognizing new threats that transcend national borders. In some instances, globalization is creating the basis for democracy and greater prosperity, while in others; it is contributing to greater turmoil and chaos (Obahiagbon, 2010).

It is, indeed, sad that when the concept of globalization is discussed, the security implications of it are rarely mentioned. Even in the parameters used to assess the progress of globalization, security is not factored. The so-called global village which is the close integration of the countries in the world in the global system has implications for national security.

Another impact of globalization on the state is the spill-over effect of international issues on national security. The increasing oneness of the world has created a new security environment that enhances the ability of non-state actors to function beyond territorial borders. Non-state actors such as crime syndicates, drug lords and in particular terrorist organizations have become more transnational in character, operating relatively easily across permeable state boundaries. This is particularly rampant with weak and failed states.

Globalization has enabled terrorists to move easily across frontiers, make alliances with other states or other terrorist groups, exploit instant communication and the mass media, and have the potential to gain access to and utilize weapon systems that would have been inconceivable during the Cold war. These products of globalization, more than ever before, allow terrorists to pursue their war against a particular state, community or system on the world state.

The most important forms of transnational crime today are organized crime. These are crimes committed by groups of people equipped with stable, generally hierarchical organization which perpetrate illegal actions, usually with violent means, in order to enrich themselves without considerations for international frontiers (Obahiagbon, 2010). Transnational crimes are serious threats to national stability and security. The elements of globalization such as information and telecommunications revolution, the opening of international borders and other factors provide enabling environment for transnational criminals and for legal transnational businesses. Growing interdependence between states, improved international transportation, deregulation within states, and the explosion in information technology is the brochure of the distribution



systems that support transnational business operations. These distribution systems carry more products, people, currencies and information across them at rates that exceed the ability of nation-states to either monitor or control them.

These transnational criminal organizations have also become globalized in themselves by forming strategic alliances. These alliances are particularly disturbing in that it could well pervade weakening regional states. The implications of this is the potential development of criminal activities such as smuggling aliens, money laundering and drug trafficking that might then be directed to a country. These activities cause problems for the states themselves (Obahiagbon, 2010). The proliferation of Small and Light Weapons (SALW) has resulted largely in the increase in the last few years in region suffering from political instability and violent conflicts, and has proven to be a major obstacle toward genuine national, regional and international peace, security, sustainable development, humanitarian works as well as efforts at re-building war-torn communities (Uadiale, 2010b). Globalization has been implicated in the process because manufacturers and arms dealers can connect buyers and end users easily through the use of information and communication technology. The recent militancy and hostilities in the Niger Delta showed the implications of SALW to national security.

More threatening are the contributions of globalization to the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Advancing technology coupled with the global spread of ideas and technologies has made it easier for states and even groups with resources to access critical knowledge, materials and technologies, pursue the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction: biological, chemical or nuclear (Obahighbon, 2010).

### **ICT, Globalization and Maritime Piracy in Contemporary Africa**

The resurgence of maritime piracy in contemporary Africa constitutes another major security challenge to the continent's security. Maritime piracy has no doubt inflicted very profound economic, political, social and strategic consequences on the continent and its peoples that it threatens the entire fabric and ramifications of the continent's security architecture. The bewildering increase in the number of the incidences of maritime piracy is unquantifiable as the damage done to the continent's peace, stability, prosperity, development, environmental, investment, revenue, humanitarian, commercial, energy, and food security terms is colossal (Uadiale and Yonmo, 2010a).

Accelerated globalization, which as a consequence has intensified and

increased global commerce, as well as the Africa's states' failure to fulfill its quintessential traditional role and function of security provisions has impacted negatively upon maritime security, and consequently, resulting in the midwife of the phenomenon, of maritime piracy. The notoriety of piratical activities in Africa is concentrated in the Gulf of Aden, the Horn of Africa - waters of the Indian Ocean, as well as the Red seas areas for the Somalia pirates; as well as the Gulf of Guinea mostly caused by Nigerian pirates. There are, however, growing fears that Africa is gradually becoming the new hotspot for such attacks, with almost half of the world's reported pirate attacks (Uadiale and Yonmo, 2010a).

It is instructive to note here that African states are anywhere between weak, failing and failed states in terms of security, good governance, the maintenance of law and order, etc are lacking. To that end, the internal forging of coercive and economic power essential to its existence and that of security provision as a measure of both state effectiveness and durability is nonexistent or even lacking. And when this fails, landward insecurity corollary causes maritime insecurity; since both are interdependent. In turn, the latter obstructs the potential benefits from good order at sea to flow to communities on land, obstructing, consequently: vibrant trade, safe sea lanes, and effective dominion. Conversely, is also the fact that weak regimes onland eventually gives rise to weak maritime regime. The resultant maritime insecurity extends from the harbor to the high seas, the latter being the most visible.

While not claiming that all developing economies are afflicted with the incidence of piracy, this study notes that the process of development and the structural disruptions this can entail, may frequently lead to high crime rates and specifically a rise in violent crime. This is nevertheless, more likely to occur at times of economic depression or following wars when recently demobilized forces are unable to find work in the 'peacetime' economy (Uadiale and Yonmo, 2010a).

We must again add here that: apart from the factors of globalization and the States' failure in engendering the resurgence of this phenomenon includes: cultural acceptance, official corruption, opportunity, as well as the end of the Cold war and technological advances. The latter has allowed pirates access to modern weaponry, fast attack boats and advanced communications technology, in increasing their probability of success and, by extension, the attraction to piracy. Others include: the payment of ransom, the Amnesty programme, neglect of maritime security, poor judicial approach, the use of fewer crew, the proliferation of arms, laxity of maritime security staff, etc. While most maritime security still remains a 'mom and pop' affair, with an emphasis on the local



technology end of the scale, some pirates are clearly making greater use of technology in their activities.

With decades of peace and stability evading the African region, countries in the region were ravaged by conflicts. Besides the fact that the major powers initially pursued their Cold war interest, thereby, added to the turbulence. The region has insufficient early warning and intelligence services, and no maritime surveillance and reconnaissance capability. Also, no credible indigenous maritime forces with mobility, flexibility and fire power necessary for sustainable operations and deterrence exists. In addition, the lack of coast guards as well as the fact that no single agency or co-ordinated body that co-operate in the maritime security issues of the region exists. Maritime security is, indeed, a quandary (Uadiale and Yonmo, 2010a). The disintegration of central government authority, the lack of maritime security has, therefore, become a grave problem. The Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea are thus symbols of “the few cases in Africa where security onland have spilled over and affected maritime security severely”. The lack of maritime security in the region and the fact that it was not possible to enforce the law and maintain good order at sea, threatened maritime communication, maritime sovereignty and stimulated piracy. While much of the insecurity mid-wifed, piracy of the Somalia coast stems from the collapse of governance, and law and order in Somalia, in the Gulf of Guinea, the situation is somewhat different. Maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is more directly politically driven. In Nigeria, politics onland directly result in offshore actions, causing

the hub of insecurity onland in the Niger Delta region to spill into the Gulf of Guinea to promote bad order at sea. According to the maritime watchdog - the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), the waters of Nigeria are now the second most dangerous in the world, next to Somalia. The proliferation of piracy in the West African region has been of concern amongst government and the oil industry since 1999. With militant groups turning pirates in the Niger Delta, claiming that they are sabotaging the oil industry for political purposes in protest of the mismanagement of Nigeria’s oil wealth. However, these political grievances are increasingly taking on a criminal nature (Uadiale and Yonmo, 2010a).

The first outbreak of African piratical activity occurred in and around the large port of West Africa, particularly those of Nigeria in the second half of the 1970s. The boom in imports on various goods such as: processed foods, liquor, cigarettes, cars, and electronics, which saw a sharp rise in the number of foreign commercial vessels calling on Lagos, Apapa, Port Harcourt, and other major Nigerian ports. By the second half of the 1990s, however, Nigeria’s piracy

resurfaced as part of a generally social situation and increased levels of violence and criminality in the country, particularly in the Lagos and Niger Delta region, becoming more wellorganized and violent form of piracy in the Niger Delta region, and in the major distributaries of the Niger Delta such as the Warri, Bonny and Escravos rivers. Many of the attacks have involved the kidnapping of crew members that have been held for ransom and of the hijacking of vessels. Piracy in Nigeria's rivers and around the Gulf of Guinea coast was exacerbated by the activities of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), as from 2003 (Uadiale and Yonmo, 2010a).

Before any attack could be planned, pirates need to acquire information about possible targets. The more knowledge gathered, the better their chance of success. Often times, pirates target from frequent use of unsecured radio, VHF communications etc which provides pirates with an accurate and ongoing picture of ship movements and planned routine. Often time, pirates especially the fierce looking Somalia pirates use GPS to locate their targeted ships. GPS stands for Global Positioning System that was invented in the U.S. It refers to a system of satellites and receiver that allow people and devices to pinpoint their precise location in the world. It provides reliable positioning, navigation and timing. Technology allows merchant ships to beat risk via information sharing. Pirates with the use of laptops can obtain the manifest of a ship, know the cargo and destination and track a ship with GPS imagery.

The pirates are also in possession of mobile and satellite phones, extra fuel tanks, telescopic aluminum ladders, small bat radars to detect their prey particularly at night; skiffs powered with outboard motors to chase boats that are passing; high powered binoculars to make ships that are small because of distance from them to look larger. It also enables visibility (Uadiale and Yonmo, 2010).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Globalization and its consequences, has led to the emergence of discontent at the global level generating militancy and social unrest in one form or another. Very few countries are far from it. Countries with small populations and higher levels of development may cope with it better, but they cannot afford to opt out of the mainstream forces that are shaping the world. There is, however, no doubt that economic and socio-political discontentment leads to existential discontent for populations who feel that they are marginalized either as individuals in their own societies or as nations unable to cope with the economic crises (Saighal, 2003).

ICT is spearheading the current stage of globalization, which is proceeding further with fragmentation of the social state, and national governance, with wider consequences for national, regional and international security matters. Hence, the resurgence of the phenomenon of maritime piracy in contemporary Africa, the consequence of which negatively impacts on the continent's rubrics, fabrics and ramifications of security: economic, social, political, commercial, energy, environmental, humanitarian, investments, developmental, revenue, etc, is the stepchild of both local and global explanations, and dimensions which calls for urgent attention. To this end, this study makes the following recommendations:

- i Evolve a comprehensive reform of the security sector,
- ii A redefinition of the concept of state or national security,
- iii Enhancement of the approach to maritime security;
- iv Strengthen national, regional and international instruments against maritime piracy,
- v Address the underlying socio-economic issues that fuel piracy,
- vi Strengthening international co-operation on maritime security, and
- vii Taking advantage of some commercially available satellite technologies, amongst other things (Uadiale and Yonmo, 2010).

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