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# Institutional Responses to Maritime Insecurity in Benin

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**ABSTRACT:** The security of maritime transport is essential in coastal countries, especially those of the Gulf of Guinea. Benin has experienced several acts of maritime insecurity in recent years. These acts have made Benin aware of the need to provide adequate responses. This study attempts to present the institutional responses provided by Benin and then to propose solutions to improve the mechanism for securing vessel traffic in Beninese waters. The methodological approach is based on documentary research, observation and interviews with actors involved in State action at sea. The data collected was analysed using the SEPO model (Success, Failure, Potential, Obstacles). The results show that Benin has been experiencing regular attacks in the waters under its jurisdiction since 2009. The institutional responses are the establishment of the State Action at Sea mechanism as well as the acquisition of operational naval means for the benefit of administrations operating at sea. Nevertheless, reforms such as the establishment of a ministerial structure model, cooperation with neighbouring countries and international partners, the creation of a maritime information collection centre and the reorganization of the use of the private sector will contribute to further guarantee the security of Beninese maritime waters.

**KEYWORDS:** Maritime piracy, cooperation, insecurity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The sea is nowadays the most widely used means of transporting goods in the world. It is generally accepted that 90% of the goods transported in the world is done by sea. This strong maritime traffic induces enough consequences on the safety of ships.

(BADOU, 2017, p. 4) writes that "Benin, like other countries in the Gulf of Guinea, has seen an increase in acts of insecurity in its waters. The growth and diversification of maritime activities leads to an increase and evolution of risks. Benin's maritime areas record most of the known threats in the Gulf of Guinea. They are multifaceted in terms of intensity, severity and urgency: various traffics, smuggling, obstacles to maritime navigation, illegal transshipments, pollution and overexploitation of maritime resources, illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, maritime terrorism, armed robbery and maritime piracy (GONSALLO, 2014, p. 11).

The increase in attacks against maritime traffic has led Benin to take institutional and operational measures to better secure its maritime space.

The objectives of this study are to assess the institutional responses made by Benin to address maritime insecurity and then propose solutions for improvement in order to effectively respond.

## II. GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF THE STUDY

The area covered by this study is the marine and coastal environment of Benin. It is attached to the continent by the Beninese coastline, a transition zone with intense interactions between the Atlantic Ocean and the continent. This continental part of southern Benin is home to several types of water such as Lake Nokoué and the Mono River which communicate with the sea. It includes the five coastal communes namely: Sèmè-Podji, Cotonou, Abomey-Calavi, Ouidah and Grand-Popo. Figure 1 shows the Beninese maritime façade.

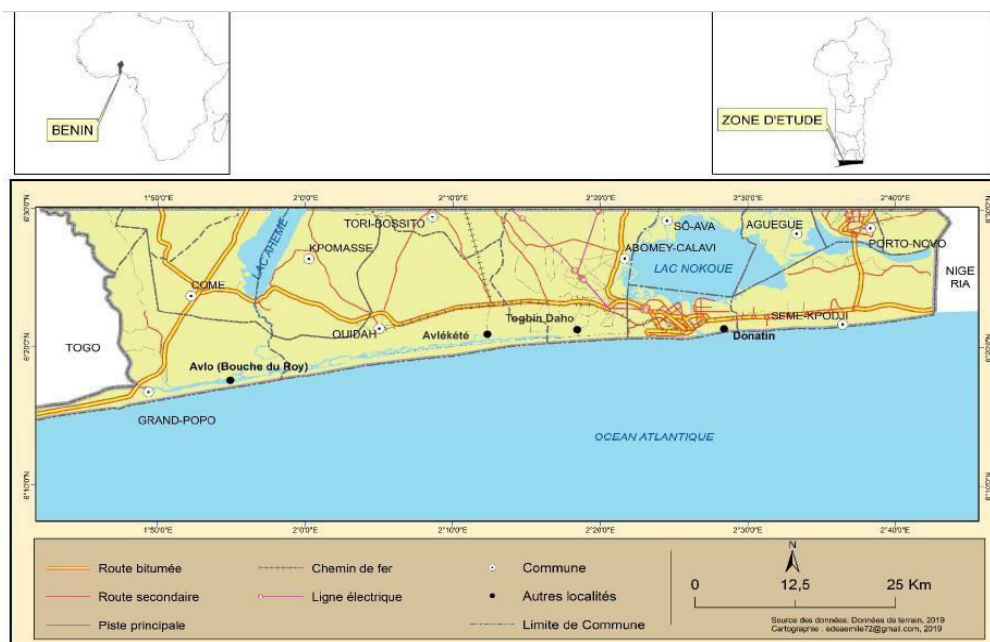


Figure 1 : Beninese maritime façade

Benin's coastline extends over a width of 125 km between the Togo and Nigeria borders and on the high seas over a distance of 200 nautical miles, or about 322 km (ABeGIEF, 2020, p. 7). The maritime part of the study area is called the Beninese exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which is 200 nautical miles long. It has been acquired by Benin in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 10 December 1982 (ABeGIEF, 2020, p. 11). This geographical space of about 7.7% of the national territory on which more than 50% of the population and 80% of Benin's industries are settled is endowed with a very dense hydrographic network and important populated wetlands.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach is based on documentary research, observation and interviews with actors involved in the State Action at Sea. The fieldwork took place from June to December 2021.

The data collection techniques were based mainly on documentary review and field surveys. The documentary research allowed us to take information of the knowledge on vessel traffic and maritime insecurity. To this end, the archives of the Maritime Prefecture, the Beninese Naval Headquarter, the ECOWAS Zone E Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC) and various online resources of foreign strategic research institutes were consulted.

The fieldwork consisted of participant observation during maritime patrols on board the Navy patrol boats, observation of ships presents in the anchorage area, participation in the management of maritime incidents and operations from the operations room of the MMCC Zone E and the Beninese Navy. Interviews were also conducted with some maritime actors including marine fishermen in the Grand-Popo and Cotonou areas in order to better understand their perception of the impact of the institutional reforms.

The data collected was analysed using the SEPO model (Success, Failure, Potential, Obstacles.).

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 1. Evolution of maritime insecurity in Benin

According to various dictionaries, insecurity refers to the lack of security; anxiety caused by the possibility of danger. In the maritime domain, it refers to the lack of security at sea. It includes, among others: acts of piracy and brigandage at sea, unregulated and unreported illegal fishing, illegal transshipment operations at sea, maritime pollution, illicit trafficking (human trafficking, migrant trafficking, drug trafficking), sabotage of maritime infrastructures, siphoning, maritime terrorism, coastal erosion, dumping of toxic waste at sea, maritime cybercrime, etc.

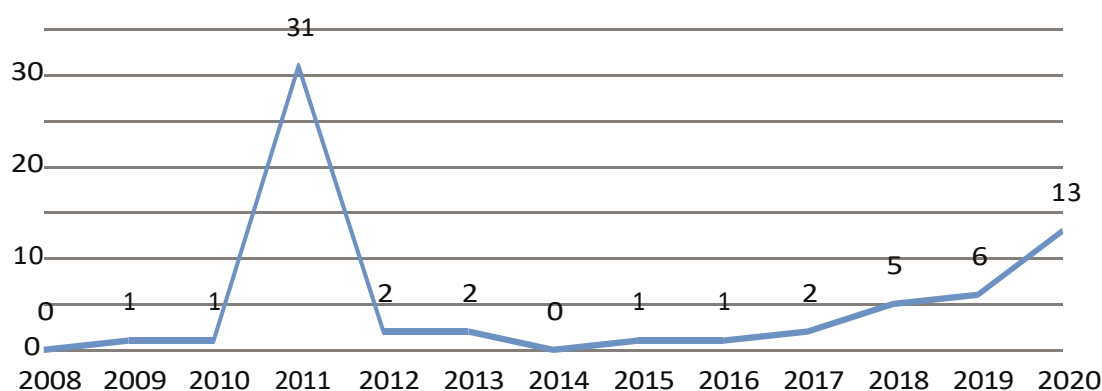
Piracy is currently defined in Article 101 of the Montego Bay Convention on the Law of the Sea (December 10, 1982) as "(...) an act of violence committed for private purposes on the high seas by a ship or aircraft against a ship or other aircraft."

But the various sources that record acts of piracy around the world no longer make a strict distinction between armed robbery and piracy. As a result, the term piracy is now used to define any attack against a ship perpetrated in waters under a country's jurisdiction.

Thus, Benin, whose anchorage area is just a few miles from Lagos, quickly found itself as an easy target because it was not totally concerned about maritime security and did not provide the Beninese Navy with sufficient means to mark its presence in a permanent and sustainable manner.

This led to an explosion in the number of acts of piracy in Beninese waters in 2011, which reached 20 attacks recorded by the International Maritime Bureau. This period coincides with a decrease in acts in Nigerian waters.

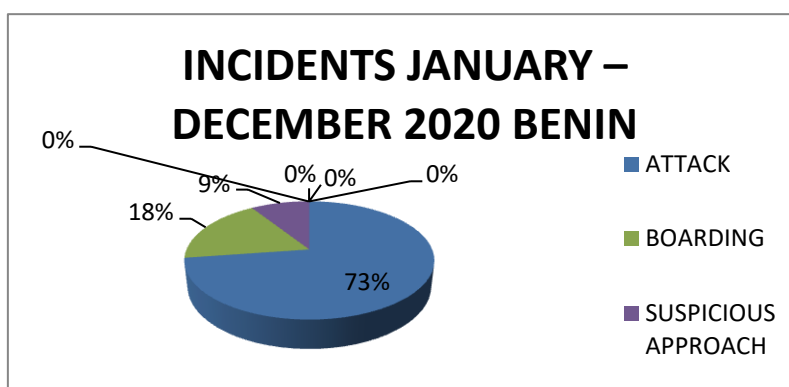
Figure 2 shows the evolution of acts of maritime piracy in Benin.



**Figure 2:** Piracy evolution in Beninese Maritime Domain

**Source:** MICA Center, 2021

In Benin, during the year 2020, 13 maritime safety incidents occurred according to the MICA Center report. The figure below shows the different types of incidents recorded in Beninese maritime waters.



**Figure 3:** Diagram of maritime incidents in Benin in 2020

**Source:** Fieldwork, Gbaguidi, 2022

The incidents range from attack that account for nearly 3/4 to boarding and suspicious approach. Acts of piracy in Benin quickly changed in their mode of action. Initially, cargo was the main objective, but over the years kidnappings and then hostage releases have become the main reason for piracy attacks.

In order to effectively limit acts of maritime insecurity, there must be a permanent presence at sea of military vessels with considerable autonomy and a range of action that can cover the Exclusive Economic Zone of Benin. Equipped with an aerial intervention capability, these vessels will be able to rapidly deploy aircraft capable of flying over an



attack zone, pursuing pirate boats and fighting them. Also, the frequent organization of maritime surveillance air patrols is deterrent for pirates.

## II. DIAGNOSIS OF BENIN'S INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

### 2.1 The implementation of the State Action at Sea (SAS) in Benin

The SAS in Benin was established by the 2013 National Strategy for Maritime Protection, Security and Safety (SNPSSM). It refers to the coordination of the different administrations with actions in the maritime domain.

The model adopted in the SNPSSM is the coordination structure model as opposed to the ministerial structure model. Indeed, in this model, the administrative organization is not based on a ministry or political level authority but rather on the existence of an autonomous institution whose primary mission is to ensure the coordination of the actions of all administrations at sea. The following figure shows the schematic of a model with a coordination structure.

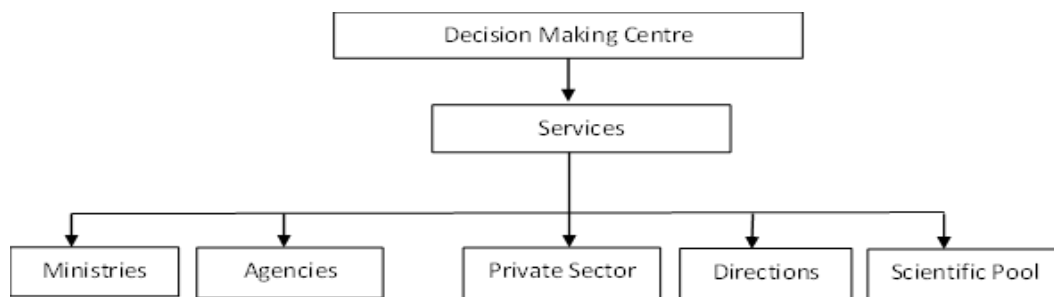


Figure 4: The "coordination structure" model

Source: Field work, Gbaguidi, 2022

This is the model that has been adopted by Benin for the structuring of the SAS. All administrations are coordinated by the National Authority in charge of State Action at Sea (ANCAEM). The following figure shows the structure of the organisation in Benin.

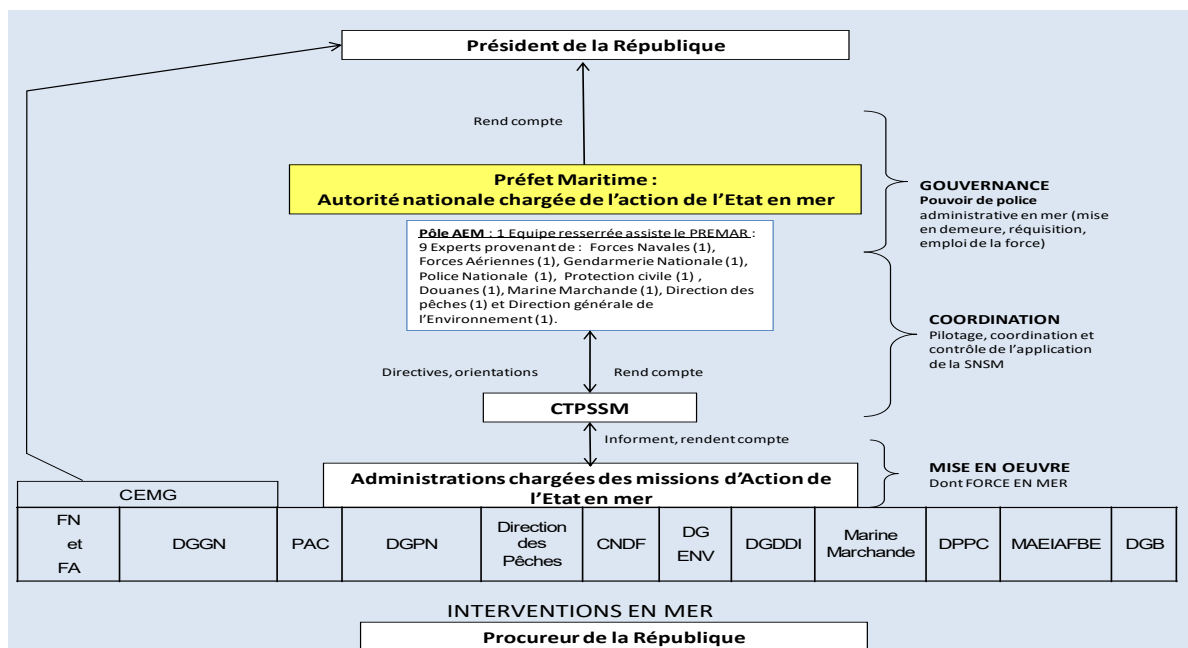


Figure 5: Organisation of the State Action at Sea in Benin

Source: Fiel work, SNPSSM, 2022

The SAS in Benin is organized around the Technical Committee for Maritime Protection, Security and Safety (CTPSSM) which is grouping the head of all administrations involved in State Action at Sea coordinated by the Maritime Prefect.

## 2.2 Strengthening the operational capabilities of the response units

At the advent of the SNPSSM, the means of surveillance, processing and sharing of maritime information and the means of intervention at sea were still limited. Until 2011, they were reduced to a semaphore and an under-equipped Maritime Operations Command and Coordination Centre, two coastal patrol boats and speedboats with very limited autonomy, not allowing for permanence at sea and adequate depth in operations.

Today, this situation has evolved. The Beninese Navy has more coastal patrol boats and fast boats. The recent acquisition of an offshore patrol vessel will put an additional dimension to the improvement of the Navy's operational capability. Similarly, the operationalization of the Grand-Popo Naval Base with its watch tower and an operation centre provides a faster coastal intervention capacity west of the Beninese maritime border and on adjacent waters. The construction of the watch tower of the Sèmè-Kpodji Naval Base is also a step forward in the surveillance of the maritime space to the east of the maritime border. The operationalization of this naval base will also constitute a factor of a fast coastal projection in case of any intervention.

The following picture shows the new patrol boat acquired for the Beninese Navy.



**Photo 1:** Newly acquired Offshore Patrol vessel

**Source:** Field work, Gbaguidi, 2022

Attacks in recent months show that pirates are moving further and further from the coast going other the EEZ limits. This new paradigm shows that the sea pirates are aware of the intervention capabilities and are moving out of this range to commit their crimes. This gives them time to escape before the arrival of the coastal states' intervention means.

In addition to equipping the navy, a special unit of river and maritime police have been created, whose main mission is to contribute in the fight against maritime crime and to improve the legal management of offences in the maritime domain. Its means consist of a surveillance centre and a few fast boats to ensure an adequate coastal navigation.

The creation of the Maritime and River Customs Service also fills the gap in the management of the State's prerogatives in its contiguous zone considered as the customs observation zone. It has been provided with basic operational means to accomplish its missions.

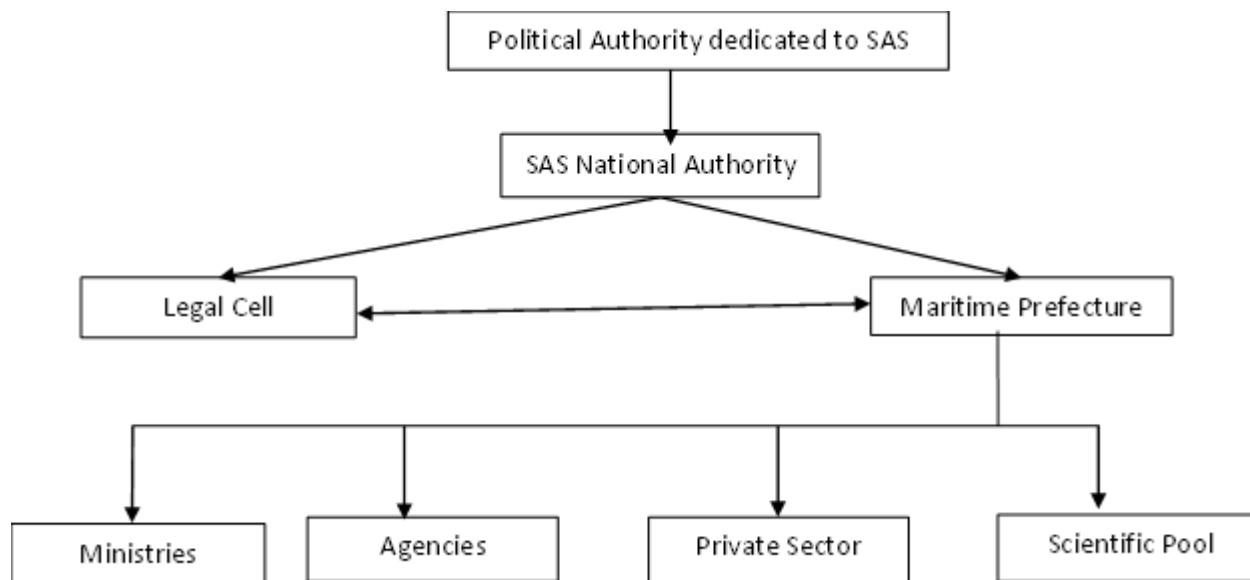
The Directorate of Fisheries Production has also been strengthened for the monitoring of fisheries by a fishery monitoring centre and the establishment of a brigade of nautical intervention to preserve and safeguard fisheries resources.

## III. PERSPECTIVES FOR THE EVOLUTION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STATE ACTION AT SEA

Analysing the institutional framework first requires a review of the political and strategic framework put in place to manage the maritime space in Benin. This framework must first be implemented through the activation of the National Commission for Maritime Protection, Security and Safety. This commission will make it possible to bring the maritime issue to the political level on a permanent basis and to force the action of state administrations at the highest level of decision-making. This will also allow the State to assert its authority beyond the disagreements between different

ministries but also to put in relation the resources, especially financial resources, necessary for a good progress of the actions at the operational level. This approach will make it possible to obtain a prospective development plan for the maritime domain. This will be implemented through the ministerial structure model.

The following figure shows schematically the organization of the ministerial structure model.



**Figure 6:** The ministerial structure model

Source: Field work, Gbaguidi, 2022

On the operational level, the Maritime Prefecture will continue to be the coordinating body, and will continue to be structured according to the model with a coordination structure. In addition to the administrations that it is supposed to coordinate, it will have to permanently associate the artisanal marine fishermen, as they are permanently present at sea and can constitute an essential source of information.

### 3.1 Creation of an autonomous maritime information fusion centre

Better management of the maritime area in Benin requires the capacity of the State to collect and process information on everything that happens there. The collection of information of maritime interest in Benin is done in a scattered manner and at the level of each operational administration.

Whether it is the Directorate of Fisheries Production, the units of the Republican Police, the Beninese Navy, the customs services, etc., each administration has its own system for collecting information and maritime intelligence.

The fishermen, who are the real maritime actors whose presence is almost permanent, are not fully associated. This collection centre will allow all non-state actors to fully collaborate in order to provide intelligence in real time on any situation that could be detrimental to the maritime domain while having the possibility to remain anonymous.

### 3.2 Private sector contribution to maritime safety and security management

In order to ensure the security of the ship in its maritime area, Benin has, through Decree No. 2020-270 of May 6, 2020, made it mandatory for all ships entering Benin's ports or anchorage area to have armed protection. It authorizes ships that have a private armed protection team to be able to deploy them in Beninese territorial waters and for those that do not have one to benefit from it with Beninese Navy.

This decision opens the field to the use of the private sector in the protection of vessels. For example, the private company TRIDENT has signed an agreement with Benin to set up armed private security in Benin's maritime area.

Nevertheless, the Nigerian model of private sector involvement can be implemented. Indeed, in order to prevent private maritime security companies from becoming actors in maritime crime and undermining security in the maritime space, they can be granted the agreement to set up a secure anchorage area. Nevertheless, all the means deployed by these private companies must be put at the disposal of the Beninese Navy, which will provide the crew and personnel, in addition to the personnel of the private company, in order to carry out the mission of securing the Beninese maritime space. Regarding the escort of vessel, the Beninese Navy will put on board sailors to ensure concomitantly with the embarked armed guard the security of the ship. Since Benin has a naval base on its western maritime border and

another on its eastern maritime border, the personnel deployed could come from these two entities and disembark to join the opposite base.

This method will have a double advantage in that it allows for the control of the attitude of the private security personnel, the control of the use of weapons and the conditions for fire opening as well as the prevention of various illicit trafficking that could take place. It also allows an effective collection of maritime intelligence.

Caution and vigilance must be exercised in order to reconcile in clear terms this public/private partnership in terms of maritime security.

### 3.3 Increased collaboration with regional organizations

Benin is a member of most regional and international organizations. Whether it is the IMO, the African Union or ECOWAS, Benin is present and very active in the maritime decisions of these bodies. The Yaoundé Code of Conduct coupled with the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy has led to the establishment of a sub-regional authority for the management of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The implementation of the Yaoundé which begins at the inter-regional level and therefore political, is broken down into regional and zonal maritime centres.

The missions of the MMCC are to promote cooperation between the Parties in order to enable them to combat and eradicate piracy, armed robbery at sea and other illicit maritime activities more effectively.

Thus, the pooling of surveillance and intervention resources is one of the major recommendations of all international and sub-regional organizations.

The most concrete example of this cooperation was the experience of the joint maritime operation with Nigeria code named PROSPERITY in 2011 and 2012 at the height of the piracy crisis in Benin.

Also, the air dimension in maritime security is not yet operational in Benin. Thus, increased cooperation with neighbouring countries will be essential requesting when needed their air assistance.

### 3.4 Foreign partners

Beyond purely military programs such as that of the United States with the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) since 2008 with the annual maneuvers called OBANGAME Express, or of France with the NEMO exercises, the politico-military and security activism of these two great powers has continued to grow and diversify in the Gulf of Guinea region over the years. An assessment of the maritime stakes and the need for security has led these actors to reconsider their strategies for diplomatic relations with regional states.

In addition to these regional exercises and maneuvers, NATO countries have launched a maritime presence mission called Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) since 2021 in response to the increase in piracy and kidnapping of sailors. This mission involves the permanent presence of ships from the navies of NATO countries in the Gulf of Guinea. These ships have intervened in the case of several attacks. These include the attack on several ships during which the Italian ship ITS RIZZO deployed its helicopter to pursue a pirate boat.

The following picture shows a pirate boat being pursued by the Italian Navy ship ITS RIZZO in Nigerian waters.



Photo2: Pirate boat spotted by ITS RIZZO

Source: Field work, MMCC, Zone E, 2021



Benin should take advantage of the presence of those vessels in its Exclusive Economic Zone to assign them patrol sectors so that they meet the needs of the state. Also, Benin should have sailors on board foreign warships so that they can better serve the needs of the country and have a better idea of the use of its maritime space. This agreement must be concluded at the level of the political structure in charge of ministerial coordination of the SAS.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Like all countries in the region, Benin is subject to acts of armed robbery and maritime piracy, even if the number of such acts has remained low in recent months. Its proximity with Nigeria makes Benin a prime target for pirates seeking comfort zones for attacks.

However, following the persistence of attacks, the Beninese government has taken various operational measures to secure its maritime space. This includes the establishment of the State Action at sea mechanism as well as the acquisition of operational naval means for the benefit of administrations operating at sea. Nevertheless, reforms such as the establishment of a model with a ministerial structure, cooperation with neighbouring countries and international partners, the creation of an information fusion center for the collection of maritime information and the reorganization of the use of the private sector will help to further guarantee the security of Beninese maritime waters.

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