

EU to boost anti-piracy efforts in West Africa

LAGOS: The European Union said on Wednesday (28 August) that it was increasing security efforts in the Gulf of Guinea, the West African maritime region that has become a global piracy hotspot.



The new measures, likely to be announced in October, will not include sending warships to the region, a move that helped reduce pirate attacks off East Africa, said German Rear Admiral Jurgen Ehle, who heads an EU military working group for West Africa.

"The EU is developing a Gulf of Guinea strategy," Ehle said, adding that European leaders would probably finalise the document by the end of October.

Speaking to a maritime security conference in Nigeria's economic capital of Lagos, he said the EU's efforts will focus on helping improve co-ordination between regional navies, training and other measures, rather than deploying forces.

"The main part of the strategy is to focus on military advice rather than send ships," the German officer said.

The number of attacks in the Gulf of Guinea rose from 39 in 2010, to 53 in 2011 and 62 in 2012, according to the London-based think-tank Chatham House. Many attacks have seen tankers hijacked for the fuel cargo they are carrying, which can be re-sold on the black market.

Other instances have occurred off Nigeria's oil-producing southern coast, where industry vessels have been raided, sometimes with expatriate workers kidnapped for ransom. Many of the world's leading oil companies operate in the region, including Shell and ExxonMobil.

"It would be very stupid not to admit that we are interested in protecting energy supplies," Ehle said, underscoring the region's importance to EU nations. He also cited the EU's interest in curbing drug trafficking out of West African ports, a worsening problem, as well as combatting illegal fishing.

Ehle referred to the success of international patrols involving the EU, NATO and China in East Africa and the Gulf of Aden, where mostly Somali pirates disrupted shipping, including the transport of Middle Eastern oil.

"The Somali situation "is totally different" from the problem in West Africa," Ehle said when asked if EU ships could help in the Gulf of Guinea.

Somalia has been without a stable government for more than two decades, while the military forces in West Africa are seen as more capable of leading anti-piracy campaigns.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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