

Corruption Will Make Suppressing Pirates Very Difficult in West Africa

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By John A. C. Cartner

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The elephant in the room in West Africa, so to speak, and the suppression of piracy is corruption.

If one takes the most recent World Bank scores for (1) government effectiveness, (2) regulatory quality, (3) rule of law, (4) control of corruption, and (5) political stability, and normalizes their means for equal comparison by state, then multiplies these means by the normalized reciprocal of Transparency International's latest Perceived Corruption Index, which works in the scalar opposite direction, the results are overwhelmingly depressing. The multiplication by the normalized corruption score is valid because corruption pervades all the dimensions the World Bank measures.

On a scale of 1-100, here is what comes out. Each score is the rank above zero compared to all states. Zero can be defined as nearing ungovernability with concomitant complete corruption.

Starting at the bottom, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea and Equatorial Guinea, <1; Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire, 2; Nigeria 3; Cameroon 4; Togo, 5; Sierra Leone, Congo, 6; Liberia 9; Gabon 13; The Gambia, 15; Benin, 19; Senegal, 20; Sao Tome and Principe, 21; and Ghana, 33. Compare these to other states situated similarly to the Democratic Republic of the Congo with rankings <1: Afghanistan, North Korea, Somalia and Myanmar.

The gold standard in this business is New Zealand, 84. The United Kingdom and the United States come in at 66 and 65 respectively, with each of these three states corrected for perceived corruption. Even renormalizing and putting New Zealand at 100 changes the scores only a little and changes rankings not any. In other words, two thirds of all states rank above the best West African state, Ghana. Some 97 percent are above Nigeria when corruption is taken into account.

We could, of course take these numbers and look at the naval capabilities of these states. In doing so we would be further depressed as to the suppression of piracy by home-grown means.

My take is that in the current state it will not and cannot be done by the West African states. Taken with the effective naval presences each state can muster, the results are stark: despite meetings and conferences and, in some cases, all the best intentions of their leaders. They cannot suppress piracy without outside help—and a lot of it. As the pirates become more sophisticated—and they will—the responses of the states will become less and less effective. This will encourage more piracy.

There can only be three outcomes.

If things stay as they are, there is a growth market for pirates.

If things decline, as they inevitably will without outside aid, there is a briskly growing market for piracy.

If there is outside assistance we are in for a long and hard slog, given the lack of funds available in Africa and the corruption that appears in many cases to be intractable.

What kinds of corruption are we talking about? One face of its distorted visage is conniving with the pirates. The reports are coming in about corrupt Nigerian governmental elements doing that already. If that is so, what does one not expect

when Nigeria, the largest exporter in value, is ten to eleven times more troublesome than Ghana in corruption?

I will put my bets on the higher-scoring states—with lots of aid. Piracy may be plaguing Nigeria but, in most cases, it is hard to tell the pirates from the thieves, grifters, con-men, connivers and out-and-out criminals in West Africa.

Further, I would not put direct money into any West African state. Experience has shown that to be a bad bet. Indirect assistance will be a far better play.

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