

THE GULF OF GUINEA: THE FUTURE AFRICAN PERSIAN GULF?

Yoslán Silverio González¹

Different African regions have not stopped being at the epicenter of games and influences from capitalist powers, mainly from former European metropolises, such as France, and the United States, due to the fact that each one of them has significant importance in the international relations' context, because of either their geographic position or their natural resources². In the last decades, guaranteeing energy supply has become a matter of natural security for all countries, especially for those with high levels of consumption and industrial development. Projections for the next years show that there will not be viable alternatives to replace hydrocarbons as the main energy source. Therefore, oil will continue to be the center of the whole industrial productive base. As consumption increases and supply decreases, competition for its control will grow.

Here is where the Sub-Saharan African oil producing regions start to play a strategic role. The African continent has always been subject to developed capitalist countries' greed, whose oil companies, supported by their governments, continue to seek licenses to explore crude oil and gas reserves, in what has been called the new scramble for Africa. Countries such as the United Kingdom and Norway have found in Africa an alternative to the deterioration of their supply zones in the North Sea. The US has managed to take France's place in controlling this sector, and Chinese companies have increased their presence in the oil and gas business, which is "worrying" US and European businesspersons, who perceive China's

1 International Politics Research Center's (CIPi), Africa and Middle East Group (GAMO), Havana, Cuba. E-mail: yoslan@cipi.cu

2 Africa possesses around 12% of world's oil reserves. It counts with 90% of the world's cobalt reserves, 90% of platinum, 40% of gold, 98% of chromium, 64% of magnesium and a third of uranium reserves. See: María Castro. *África: el legado imperialista de guerras, miseria y horror*. 12 March 2007. Available at: <http://argentina.elmilitante.org/internacional-othermenu-33/frica-othermenu-35/2313-frica-el-legado-imperialista-de-guerras-miseria-y-horror.html>

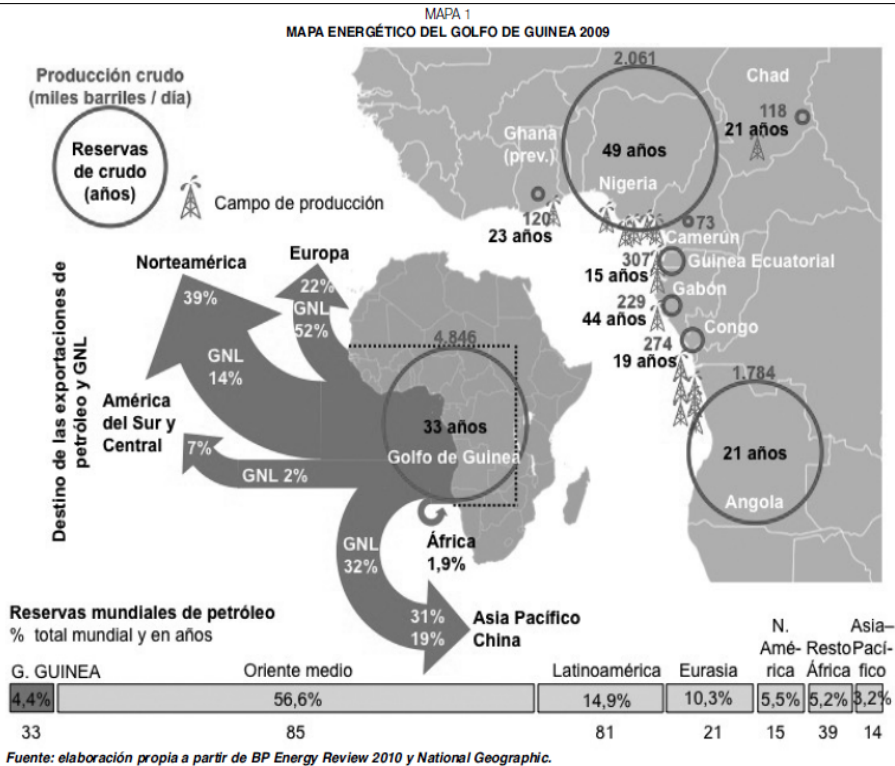
advances as a menace to their economic hegemony. For these reasons, they tend to present China as a new “imperialism”, much more contaminating and exploitative, an ill-intended focus that looks to hide what European and US capitalism have done for decades in the continent.

Given the tumultuous context of political instability happening in the historic oil zone in the Middle East, one of the areas that has become more attractive to the interests of the great transnational capital in recent years, due to its economic, geographic and political characteristics, has been the Gulf of Guinea (GG), located in the confluence of Western and Central African Coasts, in the Atlantic Ocean. According to a strictly geographical delimitation, the Gulf occupies an area from Cape Palmas, in the Liberia-Côte d’Ivoire border, to Cape Lopez in Gabon, bathing the coasts of Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, Santo Tomé and Príncipe, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

In the Atlantic African Coast, where this geographical accident is located, there are abundant fishing, mineral, forestry, hydrocarbon and gas resources. At the same time, it is through this region that most of Africa’s maritime trade moves. Sub-Saharan Africa’s two largest fluvial systems, the Niger and Congo rivers, flow into the Gulf, which are fundamental to internal trade of countries located in their respective basins. In the Western coast, one can find the main maritime ports where a great volume of goods are transported, mostly exports and imports from landlocked African countries, such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad and Central African Republic. The Gulf’s amplitude avoids risks to maritime transit such as accidents.

The zone’s main resource continues to be oil, which is located in the GG’s deep waters and on the Niger Delta’s coastal areas. Oil production in this area dates back to the 1970s in the coast of Nigeria, Angola and the Republic of the Congo. In this sphere, Nigeria has continued to be the largest producer-exporter. Since the last decade of the 20th century, other nations have joined in the oil production, such as Cameroon and Gabon. With the advances to deep waters prospecting techniques, even more nations became oil producers, like Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon, the later also being a transit zone for oil exports from Chad. During the analyzed period, Ghana’s relative importance as a crude oil producer in the Western Coast has also increased. Therefore, GG is the largest zone where African oil resources are located and, consequently, the main region where crude oil is produced and traded. Nowadays, excluding the Persian Gulf, one in every four barrels that are sold in the world comes from GG.

Map 1 - Gulf of Guinea's energy map in 2009³



Further south, beyond the limits of what is considered to be the GG, there is Africa's third largest oil exporter: Angola. If one adds Angola's participation and the export of Chadian oil through Cameroonian coast, it can be said that there is a geostrategic zone that goes beyond the GG geographical limits. This allows us to say that the continent's entire Atlantic coastal area has a pivotal importance to Western powers that seek to guarantee political stability in their economic dominance areas, mainly France and the US.

Many transnational oil companies explore crude oil from the sea at depths from 1,000 to 3,000 meters. Among these, one can find the sector's most influent companies: ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell (British-Dutch), British Petroleum (BP), ChevronTexaco and French Total. These companies,

3 Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Ministry. Spanish Economic and Commercial Bureau in Malabo. *Petróleo y gas en África central y occidental. El Golfo de Guinea*. Boletín económico de ICE nº 3011 del 1 al 31 de mayo de 2011, p. 18. Available at: http://www.revistasice.com/CachePDF/BICE_3011_17

together with Chinese state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), are the ones with the most interests in GG's African region. Royal Dutch Shell, based in London, is the largest operator in Nigeria, mainly regarding high seas extraction technology through oil platforms use.

In 2008, Chevron attained profits in the order of US\$ 23,000 million, half of which came from Africa. ExxonMobil yielded US\$ 45,200 million, 43% of which were originated in the African continent, the same origin of a third of BP's imports. In 2004 there were 46 platforms operating in West African waters. In 2009, the number reached 60, and nowadays it surpasses the amount of 80, together with hundreds of aid ships. The industry expects that this kind of infrastructure will continue to grow in the following years. That the number of platforms has doubled in less than a decade answers the fact that the region possesses the largest oil reserves in deep waters, with more than 14.495 billion barrels⁴.

Nigeria is, no doubt, the center of the attentions as it holds the main hydrocarbons' reserves in the continent. Producing around 2 million oil barrels per day (bpd), the country receives 12 billion US dollars annually for oil sales. Proven reserves are in the order of 16 billion barrels, but other sources estimate 24 billion. The African nation also possesses around 3 billion tons of carbon and 3 billion metric tons of iron mineral and extracts other minerals such as gold, precious stones and zinc. Crude oil exports represent 85% of its GDP and 65% of State income. In 2002, it was the fifth supplier to the US with 600 thousand bpd, while nowadays it is its fourth supplier. Meanwhile, 56% of the crude oil that goes to Europe from the Cotonou Agreement participant countries has origins in Nigeria, whilst 90% of Nigerian gas is exported to Europe.

The region that is responsible for those production levels is the Delta zone, where different Western transnational companies operate, among them are Shell, Chevron, British Petroleum, Total and ExxonMobil. Total extracts 140 thousand bpd and 6 million cubic meters of gas. Chinese companies' presence has also been growing in the region⁵. Chinese companies have won a small number of oil concessions between 2005 and 2007, guaranteeing a participation in the Nigerian production, and have conducted new negotiations with the government to build refineries in the

4 See: Johannes Dieterich. "The geo- strategic importance of the Gulf of Guinea". In: *Oil policy in the Gulf of Guinea*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, p. 32. Available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/02115/dieterich.pdf>

5 On Chinese participation in the Nigerian oil industry, see: Foster, Meter. *China seeks a sixth of Nigeria's oil reserves*. 29 September 2009. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/china-business/China-seeks-a-sixth-of-Nigerias-oil-reserves.h>

country⁶. However, Shell keeps the position of largest company operating in the Delta. This consortium is the main responsible for provoking, for many years, generalized contamination and environmental damage to the area.

Nigeria has lost 1,200 million dollars monthly due to theft from oil ducts, what amounts to 400,000 barrels. Official data point out that stolen oil meant a 17% fall in crude oil sales in the first trimester of 2013. Nigeria's Shell subsidiary, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) has had to close the Nembe Creek Trunk oil duct, in the Southern state of Bayelsa, to repair it due to damages caused by 'oil thieves'⁷: the indigenous population sees the crude oil flow without receiving any tangible economic benefit. Although there have been some attacks to oil facilities in Nigeria, these are not comparable to violence levels in Iraq and to the problems they mean to normal oil exploitation.

In **Equatorial Guinea**, oil discoveries occurred between 2002 and 2004. As a result of it, ties between Washington and Malabo have deepened when the US reopened its embassy in the country – in October 2013. The US company ExxonMobil has 70% of the nation's wells concessions, what indicates that most of the contracts have been signed with US companies. Spanish-Argentinean company Repsol YPF also participates in the business. Equatorial Guinea provides the market with 810 thousand bpd.

Marathon Oil has increased its presence by buying assets from smaller companies, such as CNS Energy – in 2002 – and Globex – also in 2002 –, reaching the mark of 63% of Alba block's, near Malabo, shares and 47% of D Block's. Other companies operating in the country are ChevronTexaco, Vanco Energy, South African Energy Africa and Malaysian Petronas. Equatorial Guinean State's participation is still very small, only 3% of Alba's deposit (Marathon Oil), 5% of Zafiro's (ExxonMobil) and 5% of Ceiba's (Amerada Hess)⁸.

As previously shown, interests in the region are practically exclusive from the US, as there are other business actors from Malaysia and Australia, but from smaller companies, whilst French influence is declining due to the exhaustion of Gabonese resources. In spite of that, French company ELF-Aquitaine, before joining Total Fina, continued to obtain more than half of its world production from sources in the GG, where it controlled 58%

6 Johnson Trevor. *China firma acuerdo petrolero por \$ 23 mil millones con Nigeria*. 28 May 2010. Available at: <http://translate.google.com/cu/translate?hl=es&la&u=http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/>

7 *Nigeria pierde \$1.200 millones al mes por robo de petróleo*. AFP, 13 August 2013. Available at: http://www.nacion.com/mundo/afrika/Nigeria-robo-petroleo-OPEP_o_1359664270.html

8 Carlos Tablada, Roberto Smith y Francois Houtart. *África codiciada: el desafío pendiente*. Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, Havana, 2007, p. 206 y 208.

of Gabonese deposits. 45% of Gabonese production is exported toward the US. French-Belgian firm Total (result of the merger of Fina and ELF) is the largest operator in the Republic of the Congo's seas. Congo-Brazzaville produces 300 thousand bpd. A strong opponent has been China, whose oil companies dedicate themselves not only to crude oil exploration-exploitation-commercialization, but also to building infrastructure tied to this industry. Its presence encourages the competition climate with other sector entities, which are strongly consolidated in Africa.

One of the countries characterized by its political stability, servings as reference in West Africa, is, no doubt, **Ghana**. The country received a strong boost economically due to the discovery of oil reserves in 2007. The Tullow Oil company made the discovery. Since January 2010, infrastructure works have started with the arrival of specialized ships to install submarine structures and floating platforms. Until this date, 17 wells have been drilled and it is hoped that these would produce between 120 and 150 thousand bpd. Proven reserves are estimated between 300 and 600 million barrels. Jubilee's deposits, 60 km from the coast, have been the largest discovery in high seas in the last decade and were the first to start exploitation. The International Monetary Fund has foreseen that total oil and gas income will amount to 20 thousand million dollars between 2012 and 2030, from Jubilee's camp only. These numbers depend on oil barrel's price flotation and on the gains the government can attain as foreign investors have secured theirs. Crude oil exports will amount to 60% of total exports and 27% of the country's income. These will exceed the mining sector as foreign currency source.

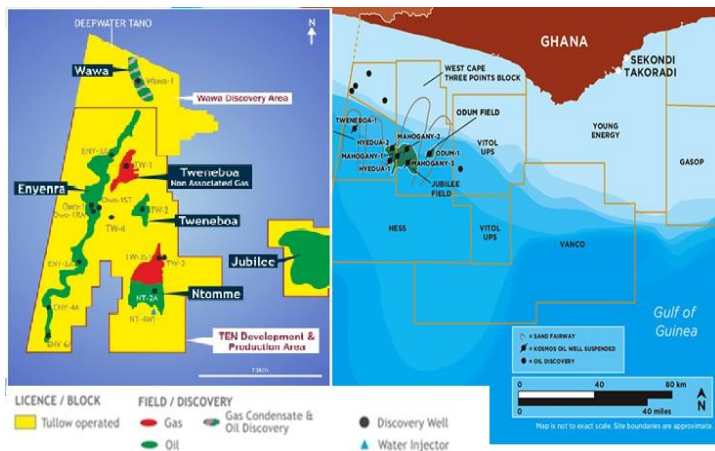
The oil production began in December, 15th, 2010, after three years of the discovery. Ghana's oil potential is still being tested due to the release of new off-shore discoveries, mostly concentrated in the area near Ivory Coast. In March 2010, the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) announced the discovery of the Dzata 1 oil well. The Russian company Lukoil and its partner Vanco Energy based in Houston, USA, found it. The Dzata 1 is located 100km from the Jubilee oil fields and in front of river Tano's basin, which separates the border between the Ivory Coast and Ghana.

Maritime borders had never been strictly delimited according to the Ivorian government's claims after supposed violations of its maritime space, what has caused a dispute against Ghanaian government. These discrepancies were produced silently, but were increased with the discovery of new deposits in the border zone. Anadarko Petroleum Corporation announced in July 2010 another discovery in high seas: the Owo block, in

the Tano zone⁹. This would be the third significant discovery after Jubilee and Tweneboa. Owo-1 has been drilled at a total depth of around 4,685 feet, around 6km west from Tweneboa. It is estimated that it possesses between 70 and 550 million barrels of crude oil¹⁰.

In the beginning of 2010 there was a conflict of interests, which involved different oil companies and produced great tensions between Ghana and the US. The dispute took place as US company Kosmos tried to sell its shares for 4 billion dollars to ExxonMobil, which made the Ghanaian government react. This situation has led the government to launch an investigation against national company Equality Opportunity (EO), Kosmos main partner in the country, for money laundering and economic damage to the State. Kosmos and the EO Group got favorable licenses during President Kufuor government, which made them the Jubilee Camp's largest shareholders. The Ghanaian government has denied the sale of those shares, which could only be sold to GNPC. For a moment during the dispute, it was suggested that the shares should be sold to Chinese businesspersons, which led the US to become even more worried. This is only an example of how tensions between Chinese and US companies for oil zones' control in the region can deepen.

Map 2 - Oil deposits' location in the Ghanaian Coast¹¹



⁹ Anadarko Announces Discovery Offshore Ghana. Available at: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?>

¹⁰ Another Major Oil Find off Ghana. Available at: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive>

¹¹ *Cuánto se tarda en desarrollar un campo petrolífero*. 16 de febrero de 2012. Available at: <http://menceymacro.blogspot.com/2012/02/cuanto-se-tarda-en-desarrollar-un-campo.html> and at: <http://www.cwcghana.com/ten-project/>

Tullow company obtained in 2013 authorization from the Ghanaian government to start developing a second camp: TEN – whose name derives from the wells' initials: Tweneboa, Enyenra and Ntomme, 20 km from Jubilee. Until this point, it was working on drilling the wells and assembling high seas' facilities. Its production shall start in the second semester of 2016, and its reserves are estimated at around 300 to 500 million barrels, with a production pace of 76 thousand bpd¹².

Tullow company has 35.5% of Jubilee Camp's shares, while other share-holders are state-owned company GNPC with 13.6%, Kosmos Group with 24.1%, Anadarko Petroleum Corporation with 24.1% and Sabre/PetroSA with 2.7%¹³. Iranian companies National Iranian Oil Company and Iranian Offshore Oil Company, as well as Singapore Petroleum Company and Singaporean Petro Seraya, together with Vetro Energy, have declared their interest in assisting the Ghanaian state-owned company in terms of platform building materials and high seas drilling¹⁴.

Jubilee and Saltpond Camps were the only which were functioning in 2013. From January to September 2013, 27,060,737 barrels were extracted. During this period the average production was of 102,503 bpd¹⁵. According to GNPC, in 2014 daily production levels were around 110,000 bpd. Fluctuations were the product of structure maintenance works, delays on some of the constructions, such as the duct that transports the gas to land. Since 2010, when oil production in commercial levels started, until June 2014, Ghana has extracted 86.93 million barrels, as well as 140 to 200 million cubic feet of gas. Income in 2011 was of 470 million dollars, in 2012 it was of 567 million, and in 2013 it rose to 730 million. In the first half of 2014, 400 million dollars were generated. This supposed continued increase in revenues faces the challenge of the recent fall of oil barrel prices in the international market.

Benin has maintained for a long time hope to possess some offshore hydrocarbon resources. Since December 2008 there have been some prospecting studies. In 2009 Cotonou authorities signed a deal with Norwegian cartography and seismic analysis company TGS-NOPEC, which

12 *Ghana's Jubilee oil field nears output plateau –operator*. 10 de abril de 2013. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/23/ghana-jubilee-idUSL6NoDA59S20130423?irpc=932>

13 *Ghana oil output to hit up to 110,000 bpd in 2014*. Reuters, 8 de abril de 2014. Available at: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/04/08/ghana-oil-idUKL6NoNo1ZJ20140408>

14 *Iran pledges assistance to Ghana's oil and gas sector*. 9 de enero de 2013. Available at: <http://graphic.com.gh/General-News/iran-pledges-assistance-to-ghanas-oil-and-gas-sector.html>

15 Kwabena Adu Koranteng. *Ghana exceeds \$2billion revenue from oil*. 25 de junio de 2014. Available at: <http://www.myjoyonline.com/opinion/2014/june-25th/ghana-exceeds-2billion-revenue-from-oi.php>

has a vast experience in the West African coast, in the search for oil¹⁶. In 2009 Benin announced the discovery of significant amounts of offshore oil near Seme¹⁷, a town in the border with Nigeria, which reactivated the possibility of developing its extractive industry and reopening Seme, albeit at much inferior levels than its oil producing neighbors. Benin depends significantly on energy imports from neighboring Nigeria.

In January 2011, Brazilian firm Petrobras informed about its acquisition of 50% of the participation in block 4, located on the Beninese coast, previously owned by *Compagnie Béninoise des Hydrocarbures* (CBH), subsidiary to *Lusitania Petroleum*, which still holds the remaining 50%, maintaining the hope of finding oil in commercial amounts¹⁸. Finally, in 2013 the discovery of an 87 million barrels deposit behind Sèmè-Podji was announced, in the country's Southeast. The exploitation of the coastal account had been granted to the Nigerian company South Atlantic Petroleum (Sapetro). Sapetro announced that the deposit should be explored for a 14-year-long period, producing around 7,500 bpd. They have also started prospecting in another zone of Sèmè's coastal basin to confirm the existence of another reserve, estimated at 100 million barrels¹⁹.

In **Sierra Leone**, African Petroleum and Anadarko companies found oil in its coastal zone in the beginning of 2013, but there was need for more proves to check the commercial viability of the findings. Both oil companies have hastened to get to the region for the last five years, when one of the largest African oil deposits was found in Ghanaian waters. In the Sierra Leonean case, it consists on the discovery of Jupiter-1. Anadarko operates in 55% of the deposit, being the rest explored by the block co-owners: Repsol Exploration Sierra Leone with 25% and Tullow Sierra Leone B.V with 20%. Anadarko Petroleum Corporation counted with approximately 2.54 million barrels of proven reserves in the end of 2011, which made it one of the

16 *Comienza la exploración de petróleo en aguas de Benín*. Afrol News, 17 April 2009. Available at: <http://cp.wanafrica.net/articulo.php?id=4276>

17 Benin started to produce a modest amount of oil in Sèmè's offshore deposit in October 1982. Around 1998 production was interrupted, and the deposit remained closed, between 1986 and 2004, oil production reached a peak of 8,000 bpd.

18 This block covers an area of 7.4 thousand km², with a water depth that varies from 200 and 3,000 meters, and a distance of around 60 km from the coast. CBH remains the operator of this block. However, Petrobras holds the right to take over the operation. If the area's exploratory potential is confirmed, the consortium promised to drill three wells. See: *Petrobras adquire bloque exploratorio en Benín, África*. Rio de Janeiro, 22 January 2011. Available at: http://www.latibex.com/act/esp/empresas/hechosrelev/2011/TRACNhecho20110222_1624.pdf

19 *Descubierto un yacimiento de petróleo en Benín*. 4 November 2013. Available at: <http://www.africafundacion.org/spip.php?article15722>

largest independent companies in the world²⁰.

Other engineering works, such as oil and gas ducts, were also developed. US company ExxonMobil, the most noteworthy in the region, championed the investments in the Chad-Cameroon oil duct, which is 1,050 km long, the largest of its kind in Sub-Saharan Africa, going from Kome region to the Cameroonian port of Kibri. The oil duct was finished in 2004 and in 2009 it already transported 225 thousand bpd. ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco contributed with almost 65% of the total 3,500 million dollars. The project's total gains will be of 12 billion in a period of 28 years. From this amount, Chad will only receive 2.5 billion in the same amount of time.

Besides oil, gas has been another reason for the incremental interest of developed capitalist countries, as an energy source cheaper than oil. It is estimated that gas demand will be greater in the future. According to BP statistics, SSA has proven reserves of almost 12 trillion m³, representing 8% of world's reserves²¹, from which 1/5 is located in GG. Nigeria is the main natural gas and liquefied gas producer, seconded by Algeria. Other gas producers, in order of importance, are Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, Angola and Equatorial Guinea. Gas industry has started to develop in Equatorial Guinea with the installation of a plant that will allow transforming associated gas into liquefied gas. The project was boosted by Marathon Oil Company at a cost of 1.4 billion. Even so, gas exploitation in the region is not in its top capacity, because there is need for facilities to process and then transport gas. An example of the steps which were taken toward this goal is the construction of West Africa's largest gas duct: WAGP²².

West Africa's Gas Duct goes from Slaves' region on the Niger Delta through Lagos' Itoki terminal. This section in Nigerian territory is onshore. From Lagos it heads toward Benin, Togo and to the port of Takoradi in Ghana. Its construction started in 2005 under Willbros company control. The whole gas duct's section between Lagos and Takoradi is offshore and was completed in 2006. Its construction total cost reached 974 million of dollars. The gas duct operator is ChevronTexaco. The project transports 120 million cubic feet of gas daily and is oriented to satisfy the demand from residential and industrial sectors, as wells as foreign markets.

Constructions like these, albeit controlled by great transnational

20 *Descubrimiento de petróleo en Liberia y Sierra Leona*. Afrol News, 22 February 2013. Available at: <http://www.afrol.com/es/articulos/37908>

21 *Ibidem*. p. 35.

22 West African Gas Pipeline was built with the participation of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Royal Dutch Shell, Volta River Authority, Société Togolaise de Gaz, and Société Beninoise de Gaz.

companies, have helped promote a better economic integration of the sub regions, fundamentally West Africa. In other subcontinent areas, different infrastructures are also being built – new oil ducts and rails –, aiming to encourage economic interconnection among African countries. These projects, necessary to African economy, have the consent from the African Union and other economic integration regional mechanisms. Most investors continue to be concentrated in the hydrocarbon sector.

US projection toward the sub region

US policy has been kept almost invariable during the last three administrations, especially regarding the War on Terror and the search for more control over strategic resources such as oil and gas. The US has maintained a policy toward the region that was summarized in three moments: in 2003 with the Pan Sahel Initiative, in 2005 with the War on Terror Trans-Saharan Initiative, and in 2007 with the creation of the AFRICOM. All was aimed at attaining its economic and political-military goals.

US strategic projection, in this sense, is more present since Bush's Administration, when Undersecretary of State for African Affairs, Walter Kansteiner, stated that "African oil is converting swiftly into a national strategic interest"²³. Between 12 and 15% of US crude oil imports come from Africa. National Intelligence Council has foreseen that the Gulf of Guinea will supply 20-25% of US total oil consumption by 2020. To reach this goal, there is a plan to invest around 10 billion dollars in activities related to oil sector, deep water prospecting and security matters. A large part of this capital is already implemented.

In 2001, Dick Cheney presented an inform to President Bush in which he suggested concerning oil supply diversification and the increase of foreign provision. He also signaled that a significant interruption to supply could threaten US economy. Departing from this political initiative, one can understand US government offensive to guarantee oil imports – what led, for instance, to starting the Iraq War. Now, the problems which the US has had to face in the Middle East and this region's own volatility have served to make them start to work on diversifying such suppliers. The strategy of amplification toward other producing zones was began during the G. Bush administration and was when the focus was redirected toward Africa, particularly toward the GG.

23 Felipe Real. *Estados Unidos y África: Emociones y razones*. Available at: http://www.almamagazine.com/opinion-estados_unidos_y_frica-emociones_y_razones

According to Luis Amaro, this was the great oil multinational firms' objective and was the Council on Foreign Relations' proposal when it affirmed that "the search for different oil suppliers beyond the Persian Gulf should be encouraged". Recent years' trend has been that of the decline of Saudi Arabia's great oil camps. Here it could reside one of the reasons for the increased interest in searching for new extracting places, which were concentrated around West and Central African countries, with Atlantic coasts, as an alternative, especially in moments of great tension in the Middle East. In this sense, Luis Amaro points out many reasons in favor of the region:

- "Forecasts about the amount of existing oil are currently the most important ones; perspectives are huge in what concerns Nigeria, Angola, Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville.
- Competition is weak, as China centers its interests on East African countries, but even so Chinese, Brazilian and Indian growing presence in Africa explains this strategy change in US foreign policy regarding the continent, regardless of whether who occupies the White House is Republican or Democrat.
- Crude oil is of 'high quality and with little sulfur, ideal to be refined on the East Coast' of the US.
- Governments' docility regarding multinational firms makes this region an ideal place to be transformed into US new backyard.
- The amount of investments in infrastructure, whose last example was an investment in the amount of 3,500 million dollars, in the construction of an oil duct that ties Chad to Cameroon"²⁴.

The US, as the world's greatest oil consumer, has needed to guarantee a constant flow of oil suppliers and it has been precisely in the GG zone where prospecting works have not stopped. Oil business' amplification have opened up possibilities for companies from different parts of the world to try to attain one percent of the gains. The arrival of new actors to the business has caused worries in the US. In this sense, the GG has become very attractive to the US establishment and businesspersons due to the proximity of both coasts.

The Gulf's geographical position is great for US interests, as its ships can arrive fast and directly to the US without the contingencies they

²⁴ Luis Amaro. *África Occidental, la nueva aventura de los imperialismos estadounidense y europeo*. 11 December 2010. Available at: <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=118409>.

usually endure when navigating from the Persian Gulf or the Gulf of Aden, due to the continuous “Somali pirates” attacks. The route between this part of Africa and US Eastern refineries is salvable by a supertanker in only a week, through a maritime route with no possibilities of suffering “terrorist” attacks. The investment risks are much smaller, as deposits are located offshore, that is, beyond the reach of possible “loutish” actions, social disturbances or internal wars, besides there would not be the need to build many facilities in the coast as oil ducts to transport it.

The geographical position contributes to eliminating the high costs in terms of transportation between producing zones and consuming markets in Western Europe, the US, Latin America and the Caribbean²⁵. The existence of neoliberal governments with great political relations with the West is a guarantee to foreign investments by transnational companies, which, relying on the existing corruption in many of those countries and on their economic influence, continue to obtain greater gains, privileges and guarantees, and where the subject of nationalization is unthinkable. Republican Ed Royce, President of US Chamber of Representatives’ African Subcommittee, stated regarding this matter that “our best partners are located in West Africa for many reasons, West Africa is closer, what makes it easier to move products from here to there and its resources, in most of the cases, are not on dry land. Things usually work better if you are located in deep waters”²⁶.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies used to state that “given recent strategic interests in the region, we suggest that the US converts security and governance in the Gulf of Guinea into an absolute priority of US foreign policy regarding Africa, supporting a firm policy for the region”. The launching by Bush Administration of the African Command in 2007 answered US interest that suddenly awoke in Africa. Since then, AFRICOM’s budget has not stopped growing. From 2010 to 2012, AFRICOM used 836 million dollars while expanding its reach “as mentor, counselor and tutor to African military forces”²⁷.

The initial excuse for its creation was the War on Terror, but its objective is to increase US presence to support its economic and military

25 The maritime distance between Luanda and Rio de Janeiro is 3,489 miles. From here, a ship travelling at 30 knots would take only a bit more than four days to connect both port cities; it would take the same to connect Abidjan to Port of Spain in Trinidad and Tobago, in the Caribbean.

26 Johannes Dieterich. *Ob, cit.*, p. 33.

27 Nick Turse. *África: otro fracaso del poder militar norteamericano*. 20 de junio de 2013. Available at: <http://www.elpuercoespin.com.ar/2013/06/20/afrika-otro-fracaso-del-poder-militar-norteamericano-por-nick-turse/>

interests. Former Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, stated, when referring to this command, that its main tasks would be to strengthen the association in terms of security; to increase receiving countries' skills in antiterrorist tactics; to support sub regional organizations' security structures; and, if needed, to conduct military operations in the continent²⁸.

In terms of foreign policy, there have not been observed big differences between the guidelines established by Bush and the policy followed by Obama. In this sense, there have been continuity and complementation. Currently, the US Africa Command is involved in almost 38 African countries with a training to antiterrorist forces agenda, for instance Chad, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania and Sierra Leone. US interest in the command's boost can be seen through the magnitude of the military base established in Djibouti.

US president Barack Obama's visit to Ghana, the first African State he visited after his 2009 election, shows the importance that US attributes to this nation, as they try to legitimize its political development paradigm. These conceptions can be witnessed in many ideas expressed by US president before Ghanaian Parliament as has been explained. The following words are an example of the way in which Ghanaian political and economic model is being promoted: "Ghana has projected itself as a politically stable and democratically viable country and as West African sub region most economically healthy nation. A new image will convert Ghana in Africa's economic and charming queen"²⁹.

Gulf of Guinea's securitization

The development of economic activities previously presented, regarding GG's vast maritime zone, has stimulated the consolidation of phenomena like illegal fishing, which causes annual losses to fishing companies, drug trafficking along with criminal networks linked to weapons and human trafficking, and sovereignty disputes over territorial spaces. As maritime trafficking regarding oil production grows, pirate attacks have also proliferated in a fashion similar to the Somali coast. This phenomenon is perceived as a threat to maritime security, which has motivated the adoption of international actions by capitalist powers with interests in the area, that seek to diminish this kind of actions.

28 Hedelberto López Blanch. *AFRICOM, la nueva versión neocolonial*. Rebelión. 19 July 2011. Available at: www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=132539.

29 Marcus Mensah. "Ghana needs new image to repackage her ambitions investment programme". In: *Business Watch*. Volume 4, no 2, p.28.

The International Maritime Bureau presented in its report on piracy regarding 2013's first trimester how the Gulf of Guinea represents a worrisome area, with a total of 15 incidents being reported only in this period. Among these there are many kidnappings, mainly in Nigeria and the Ivory Coast, which are the most affected countries. In these occasions, great tank ships were assaulted by pirates, and many aid ships were also victim to these attacks. The document adds that, while unrest has decreased around Somalia, it is now increasing in this other African zone.

In 2012 there were 55 incidents with ten kidnapped ships. The attacks to supertankers have grown recently in enclaves such as Benin and Togo. The Chamber adverts that pirates act differently from Somali assailants, who have kidnapped crews in order to obtain millionaire ransoms. Gulf of Guinea's assailants usually keep these ships' sailors for around ten days to get the product they transport while destructing communication equipment. Piracy rose in 41% between 2011 and 2012, which has provoked an increase in the costs of transport due to need for insurance to imports and exports.

To protect supply lines in the Gulf of Guinea, the US has considered the establishment of naval bases in the region and has Navy's ships patrolling the Gulf of Guinea's waters constantly. In 2003 the Sao Tomé and Príncipe islands signed a deal that authorized the US to establish a military base in its territory³⁰. These islands offered a strategic advantage in the region as it is located near deposits in Nigeria and Angola. Also, it is a key point for maritime control and for ensuring crude oil commercialization through Gulf's waters. From this territory it is possible to monitor the movement of tankers, as well as protect platforms. Also, Sao Tomé and Príncipe islands have become more attractive to the US in terms of oil reserves and conduct drilling activities. Hillary Clinton visited the archipelago as a sign that this small country is in US priority agenda in the region.

Additionally, the US launched the African Partnership Station 2010 Program³¹, destined fundamentally to providing maritime security in the region, starting in November 2007 with the goal of increasing maritime security and collaborating with the instruction and training of West African countries' military naval forces. The program includes US Navy ships and planes' visits, troops training, equipment consultancy and professional courses during almost the whole year, focusing on creating Coast Guard, Navy and Army response capacities in the involved nations to resist illegal

30 *US expands military presence in Africa*. A News, 23 de septiembre de 2013. Available at: <http://www.afrol.com/articles/14269>

31 Gema Nieves. *African Partnership Station 2010, mayor seguridad marítima en el continente africano*. 11 de abril de 2010. Available at: <http://www.revistatenea.es/revistatenea/revista/articulos/Gestionasp>

fishing, human, drugs and arms trafficking, under the pretext of fighting piracy³². As part of the Africa Partnership Station, Sao Tomé and Príncipe have received US ships' visit. Cameroonian, Gabonese and Equatorial Guinean governments have signed deals with Washington allowing for US armed forces to use their airports.

French Navy forces have been present for more than twenty years in the zone through the *Corymbe* Mission, which seeks to protect French interests in the vast region of the Gulf of Guinea, mostly oil resources and more recently the fight against piracy actions, since 2010. This military mission is on duty – *Corymbe 128: Warning Cdt L'Herminier* – since April 27th, 2015. France implements the reform of the maritime security sector in the Gulf of Guinea through the “ASECMAR” project, which was already applied as of 2011 and a supporting plan to protect maritime spaces in the area³³.

Spain has also been one of the European countries with economic interests in the Gulf zone. 25% of the gas and 10% of the oil that Spain imports come from Nigerian coasts³⁴. It is noteworthy that in the La Luz port, in the Canary Islands, activities related to the complex reparation of oil platforms and assisting fleet are conducted. Besides it guarantees its supplies, refueling, storage of fuel and specific materials to this market, and the establishment of offices to aid its unfolding to Southerner countries. Gran Canary's capital is located at a key logistical point for these companies, which operate in an ever more conflictive environment in the GG waters³⁵. So, the Spanish port of La Luz is already located inside the sector because of its shipyards, repair shops, supplies, and judicial security in its assistance to transnational companies.

Spanish presence is also directed toward the military sphere, mostly in the fight against piracy. The Spanish patrol boat *Cazadora* carried out expeditions in 2011 and 2012 of more than two months of duration to guard

32 Francesca Cicardi. *EEE.UU entrena a ejércitos africanos para luchar contra el terrorismo*. 24 April 2010. Available at : <http://www.intereconomia.com/noticias-gaceta/internacional/ee-uu-entrena-ejercitos-africanos-luchar-contra-terrorismo>

33 *Francia, pionera en la lucha contra le piratería a escala mundial*. 14 de octubre de 2014. Available at: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/es/asuntos-globales/defensa-y-seguridad/francia-en-la-lucha-contra/>

34 Esteban Villarejo. *El “Relámpago” ya navega por el Golfo de Guinea: ojo avizor...¡piratas!* 11 January 2013. Available at: <http://abcblogs.abc.es/tierra-mar-aire/public/post/el-relmpago-ya-navega-por-el-golfo-de-guinea-ojo-avizor-piratas-14907.asp/>

35 *La piratería en Guinea castiga a las petroleras del Puerto*. *La Cámara Internacional de Comercio apunta al golfo como "la siguiente zona de alto riesgo" en el tráfico marítimo*. 5 May 2013. Available at: <http://www.laprovincia.es/las-palmas/2013/05/05/pirateria-guinea-castiga-petroleras-puerto/529503.html>

the Gulf of Guinea and dissuade pirates with its presence. Precisely this new piracy zone has become pressing for Spanish security. For the first time, the Spanish Navy deploys this kind of oceanic patrol boats in the context of Atlanta Operation and in joint missions with other navies, such as the US one under the guidelines of African Partnership Station, what is indicative of Spanish interests in Africa's West Coast.

The persistence of transportation threats in all GG coast as a consequence to the increase in piracy actions following the same pattern of Somali coasts has provoked the adoption of greater international actions by Western powers with interests in the zone and by local governments. This has translated into the increase of foreign military presence to secure trade through the region.

To face this, Central and West African countries plan to create a center to fight piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. A naval force will be created to secure African Atlantic coasts, through which a great part of the region's intra-African trade transits. The international force to protect the zone will be constituted by more than 2,000 militaries from ECOWAS and ECCAS member countries and was expected to be operating as of 2014³⁶. The Gulf of Guinea Commission, organization that includes Angola, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Gabon, Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has identified those factors as part of the threats that challenge the area's good economic development.

ECOWAS approved on March 13th, 2015 the creation of the Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC) as part of the implementation of the Integrated Maritime Strategy (IMS) of the same body. This center located in Cotonou will be in charge of the so-called Pilot Zone E, where the coasts of Benin, Nigeria and Togo are included, which is considered the most dangerous section of the region. This is an example of the implementation of measures to reinforce maritime security.

In conclusion, we should remember that the region's oil is much more attractive due to the physical conditions of the hydrocarbon that make it better to process it, because of its high percentage of drilling effectiveness, with a success rate of 50% while in the rest of the world it is of only 10%, and because political instability in both continent sub regions does not reach the coast and high seas. The only country that is affected by internal disturbances and has its production levels threatened is Nigeria. On the Niger Delta, armed conflicts between paramilitary groups and the Armed

36 *África central y occidental crean un centro anti-piratería en Golfo de Guinea*. EFE, 25 June 2013. Available at: <http://blogs.elconfidencial.com/ultima-hora-en-vivo/2013/06/%C3%A1frica-central-occidental-crean-centro-antipirateria-20130625-166460.html>

Forces, albeit having decreased, have not yet completely vanished. The remaining countries present a positive reality to the business.

Productive and industrial processes currently depend on oil, because energy security has become a matter of top priority to Western powers, dedicated to fighting to guarantee their imports. Africa, as a historical supplier of natural resources, keeps on playing this role in world economy. It is in this context that the Gulf of Guinea, Sub-Saharan Africa's main oil producing zone, gains utter importance. Therefore, the sector main transnational companies – mostly the US ones – will maintain their presence in the area. West and Central Africa's maritime zone appears as a source of energy supply – oil and gas – with greater pace of increase to the US market. The gas sector has not fully developed, as there still are many opportunities of exploitation by foreign capital. Although there already is a diversification of markets to which GG oil is exported, the trend is that of the supremacy of export control in the hands of US firms. Growing oil production in the US has not meant a decrease in its imports from the area.

As the region continues to supply energy, struggles for the control of such resources cannot be ignored, mainly between US and Chinese companies. The US has not abstained of taking a stance toward larger control of the resources trying to move Chinese emerging interest away from the area. China has increased its investments in the sector, being its presence ever more notable. The elements shown so far attest for the strategic importance reached by Gulf of Guinea, mainly to Western powers in their policy to guarantee energy security.

REFERENCES

- Adu Koranteng, Kwabena. "Ghana exceeds \$2billion revenue from oil" 25 June 2014. Available at: <http://www.myjoyonline.com/opinion/2014/june-25th/ghana-exceeds-2billion-revenue-from-oi.php>
- "África central y occidental crean un centro anti-piratería en Golfo de Guinea". *EFE*, 25 June 2013. Available at: <http://blogs.elconfidencial.com/ultima-hora-en-vivo/2013/06/%C3%Africa-central-occidental-crean-centro-antipirateria-20130625-166460.html>
- Amaro, Luis. "África Occidental, la nueva aventura de los imperialismos estadounidense y europeo". 11 December 2010. Available at: <http://www.rebellion.org/noticia.php?id=118409>.
- Anadarko Announces Discovery Offshore Ghana". Available at: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?>

- “Another Major Oil Find off Ghana”. Available at: <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive>
- Castro, María. 2007. “África: el legado imperialista de guerras, miseria y horror.” 12 March 2007. Available at: <http://argentina.elmilitante.org/internacional-othermenu-33/frica-othermenu-35/2313-frica-el-legado-imperialista-de-guerras-miseria-y-horror.html>
- Cicardi, Francesca. 2010. “EEE.UU entrena a ejércitos africanos para luchar contra el terrorismo.” 24 April 2010. Disponible en : <http://www.intereconomia.com/noticias-gaceta/internacional/ee-uu-entrena-ejercitos-africanos-luchar-contra-terrorismo>
- “Comienza la exploración de petróleo en aguas de Benín.”, *Afrol News*, 17 April 2009. Available at: <http://cp.wanafrica.net/articulo.php?id=4276>
- “Cuánto se tarda en desarrollar un campo petrolífero.” 16 February 2012. Available at: <http://menceymacro.blogspot.com/2012/02/cuanto-se-tarda-en-desarrollar-un-campo.html> y en: <http://www.cw-cghana.com/ten-project/>
- “Descubierto un yacimiento de petróleo en Benín”. 4 November 2013. Available at: <http://www.africafundacion.org/spip.php?article15722>
- “Descubrimiento de petróleo en Liberia y Sierra Leona”, *Afrol News*, 22 February 2013. Available at: <http://www.afrol.com/es/articulos/37908>
- Dieterich, Johannes. “The geo- strategic importance of the Gulf of Guinea”. In *Oil policy in the Gulf of Guinea* edited by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 32. Available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/02115/dieterich.pdf>
- Foster, Meter. 2009. “China busca una sexta parte de las reservas de petróleo de Nigeria.” 29 September 2009. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/china-business/China-seeks-a-sixth-of-Nigerias-oil-reserves.h>
- “Francia, pionera en la lucha contra le piratería a escala mundial.” 14 October 2014 Available at: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/es/asuntos-globales/defensa-y-seguridad/francia-en-la-lucha-contra/>
- “Ghana oil output to hit up to 110,000 bpd in 2014.”, *Reuters*, 8 April 2014. Available at: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/04/08/ghana-oil-idUKL6NoNo1ZJ20140408>
- “Ghana’s Jubilee oil field nears output plateau –operator.” 10 April 2013. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/23/ghana-jubilee-idUSL6NoDA59S20130423?irpc=932>
- “Iran pledges assistance to Ghana’s oil and gas sector.” 9 January 2013.

- Available at: <http://graphic.com.gh/General-News/iran-pledges-assistance-to-ghanas-oil-and-gas-sector.html>
- “La piratería en Guinea castiga a las petroleras del Puerto. La Cámara Internacional de Comercio apunta al golfo como “la siguiente zona de alto riesgo” en el tráfico marítimo.” 5 May 2013. Available at: <http://www.laprovincia.es/las-palmas/2013/05/05/pirateria-guinea-castiga-petroleras-puerto/529503.html>
- López Blanch, Hedelberto. 2011. “AFRICOM, la nueva versión neocolonial.”, *Rebelión*. 19 July 2011. Available at: www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=132539.
- Mensah, Marcus. “Ghana needs new image to repackage her ambitions investment programme”, *Business Watch* 4 (2): 28.
- Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación. Oficina Económica y Comercial de España en Malabo. *Petróleo y gas en África central y occidental. El Golfo de Guinea*. Económico de ICE nffl 3011, 1-31 May 2011, p. 18. Available at: http://www.revistasice.com/CachePDF/BICE_3011_17
- Nieves, Gema. 2010. “African Partnership Station 2010, mayor seguridad marítima en el continente africano.” 11 April 2010. Available at: <http://www.revistatenea.es/revistatenea/revista/articulos/Gestionasp>
- “Nigeria pierde \$1.200 millones al mes por robo de petróleo.”, *AFP*, 13 August 2013. Available at: http://www.nacion.com/mundo/africa/Nigeria-robo-petroleo-OPEP_0_1359664270.html
- “Petrobras adquiere bloque exploratorio en Benín, África.” Rio de Janeiro, 22 January 2011. Available at: http://www.latibex.com/act/esp/empresas/hechosrelev/2011/TRACNhecho20110222_1624.pdf
- Real, Felipe. “Estados Unidos y África: Emociones y razones.” Available at: http://www.almamagazine.com/opinion-estados_unidos_y_frica-emociones_y_razones
- Tablada, Carlos; Roberto Smith and Francois Houtart. 2007. *África codiciada: el desafío pendiente*. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 206-208.
- Trevor, Johnson. 2010. “China firma acuerdo petrolero por \$ 23 mil millones con Nigeria.” 28 May 2010. Available at: <http://translate.google.com/cu/translate?hl=es&la&u=http://www.wsws.org/articulos/2010/>
- Turse, Nick. 2013. “África: otro fracaso del poder militar norteamericano.” 20 June 2013. Available at: <http://www.elpuercoespin.com.ar/2013/06/20/africa-otro-fracaso-del-poder-militar-norteamerica>

no-por-nick-turse/

“US expands military presence in Africa”. A, 23 September 2013. Available at: <http://www.afrol.com/articles/14269>

Villarejo, Esteban. 2013. “El “Relámpago” ya navega por el Golfo de Guinea: ojo avizor...¡piratas!” 11 January 2013. Available at: <http://abcblogs.abc.es/tierra-mar-aire/public/post/el-relmpago-ya-navega-por-el-golfo-de-guinea-ojo-avizor-piratas-14907.asp/>

ABSTRACT

Different African regions have not stopped being at the epicenter of games and influences from capitalist powers, mainly from former European metropolises, such as France, and the United States, due to the fact that each one of them has significant importance in the international relations' context, because of either their geographic position or their natural resources³⁷. In the last decades, guaranteeing energy supply has become a matter of natural security for all countries, especially for those with high levels of consumption and industrial development. This article studies how Sub-Saharan African oil producing regions play a strategic role in this context, but also considering that the African continent has always been subject to developed capitalist countries' greed.

KEYWORDS

Gulf of Guinea; Sub-Saharan African oil; Securitization; Western powers.

Received on November 23, 2015.

Approved on May 11, 2016.

Translated by Alexandre Piffero Spohr

³⁷ Africa possesses around 12% of world's oil reserves. It counts with 90% of world's cobalt reserves, 90% of platinum, 40% of gold, 98% of chromium, 64% of magnesium and a third of uranium reserves. See: María Castro. *África: el legado imperialista de guerras, miseria y horror*. 12 March 2007. Available at: <http://argentina.elmilitante.org/internacional-othermenu-33/frica-othermenu-35/2313-frica-el-legado-imperialista-de-guerras-miseria-y-horror.html>