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# Maritime Criminality and Transnational Security Cooperation in the Bakassi Peninsula, 2000 - 2024

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## Abstract

*The Bakassi Peninsula has remained a hotspot for maritime criminality due to its strategic location along the Gulf of Guinea, its disputed sovereignty between Nigeria and Cameroon, and its fluid maritime borders. Since 2000, maritime criminality in the disputed territory has been a major concern for transnational security cooperation, as the tenuous maritime environment makes it difficult for authorities to galvanise efforts to apprehend perpetrators and protect victims. This paper critically examines the dynamics of maritime criminality in the Bakassi Peninsula and the efforts of regional and international organisations to combat the threats it poses. The study utilised primary and secondary sources, including historical documents, reports from international organisations, and interviews with key actors in the region, and qualitatively analysed the contentious issues. Findings indicated that maritime criminal activities such as armed robbery, hijacking, kidnapping for ransom, and illegal fishing have led to significant disruptions in the socio-economic activities of the local population, as well as the rise in militant activities in the region. The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of strengthening regional and international cooperation and capacity-building efforts to effectively address maritime criminality and improve maritime security in the area. It recommends increased regional coordination, capacity-building for maritime law enforcement agencies, stiffer penalties for sea piracy, and engagement with local communities in the fight against maritime criminality in the region.*

**Keywords**: Maritime, Criminality, Security, Bakassi Peninsula, Regional cooperation.

## Introduction

In the last two decades, there has been increased awareness and concern about maritime safety and security, with particular attention towards the dangers that insecurity poses to global commerce and peace at sea. This increased awareness

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has prompted reflections on the reawakening of conventional wisdom regarding sea geopolitics and how it fits into existing policies and actions within national, regional and global analytical frameworks.[3] The Bakassi Peninsula is a low-lying region bordered on the west by the Cross River estuary, on the north by the Akpayafe River (Akpa Ikang), on the east by the Rio del Rey estuary, and on the south by the Gulf of Guinea. The Peninsula itself consists of a series of islands covering approximately 50 square kilometres. It is occupied for the most part by long-established Nigerian communities.[4] The confluence of two important ocean currents, the eastward-flowing warm Guinea current and the northward-drifting cold Benguela current, creates large breakers and shoals, making navigation at the entrance to the Cross River estuary difficult.

This confluence also enriches the region with plankton, making the waters around the Peninsula rich in fish and other marine life. Otora[5] noted that the absence of effective maritime cooperation among the Gulf of Guinea nations and the near absence of a functional naval force in the Bakassi Peninsula are drawbacks to maritime security and safety in the region. The lack of an effective naval and maritime police presence has encouraged the incidence of armed robbery, hijacking, kidnapping for ransom, and illegal fishing in the Bakassi region. These activities most often occur far out at sea, making it difficult for authorities to apprehend the perpetrators and protect victims. Moreover, criminal syndicates often exploit variations in existing legislation, weak legal systems, and cross-border cultures and traditions, thereby scuttling states' efforts to respond effectively to maritime criminality in the region.[6]

Drawing on the above, the study examines the dynamics of these issues and the efforts of various regional and international organisations in combating maritime criminality in the region. In doing this, the paper examines the nature and causes of maritime criminality in the region and the impact of these activities on national, regional and global communities, given the region's geostrategic importance to the West and Central African States. Some world powers, such as the United States, France, Germany and Canada, whose multinational corporations and citizens are involved in oil prospecting in the region,[7] are also of geostrategic importance to Nigeria and Cameroon, whose colonial boundary heritage set the stage for territorial disputes between the two countries upon the discovery of large oil and gas deposits in the disputed territories.[8] Similarly, criminal activities such as armed robbery, hijacking, kidnapping for ransom, and illegal fishing have led to significant disruption in the socio-economic activities of the local population, as well as the rise in militant activities in the region. The study will be of immense benefit,

[3] Ukeje, C., & Mvomo Ela, W. African Approaches to Maritime Security: The Gulf of Guinea. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2013, p. 4.
[4] International Court of Justice. Case concerning the Land and Maritime Boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria: Preliminary Objections. Vol. 1, 1995. p. 5.
[5] Otora, O. A. Maritime Boundaries and Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea." MA Thesis, University of Calabar, 2014, p. 69.
[6] Ukeje, C., & Mvomo Ela, W. African Approaches to Maritime Security…, p. 7.
[7] Otora, O. A. Maritime Boundaries and Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea…, p. 74.
[8] Okolie, A. Nigeria and its immediate Neighbours: A Critical Analysis of the International Court of Justice ruling over the Bakassi Peninsula. *Journal of Political Science and Administrative Studies.* 12(3), 2004, p. 123.

contributing to our understanding of the broader implications of maritime criminality for regional security and stability, as well as its impacts on social and economic development.

The paper is divided into eight sections. After the introduction, section two will set the tone with the historical and geopolitical context of the Bakassi Peninsula; section three will clarify the concepts used in the study. Section four will present the study's theoretical framework; section five will examine the nature of maritime criminality in the Bakassi region. Section six will discuss the various efforts of regional and international actors in the fight against maritime criminality; section seven will examine the socio-economic impacts of maritime criminality in the region; and section eight will conclude the paper and suggest possible measures to combat maritime criminality and improve transnational security cooperation in the region.

**Historical and Geopolitical Background of the Bakassi Peninsula**

The evolution of the Bakassi Peninsula is intertwined with the imperial activities of the British, Germans and French in the area during the late 19th and 20th centuries.[9] Germany had proclaimed a protectorate over Cameroon on July 15, 1885. After the First World War, the League of Nations mandate divided the territory into four-fifths under French administration and the remainder under British administration. The British sector comprised two separate territories: the southwest and Northern Cameroons, along the eastern border of Nigeria.[10] The Southern Cameroons were joined into a single administrative union with the Eastern Province of Nigeria, while the Northern Cameroons were linked to the Northern Province of Nigeria. By the end of the Second World War, the League of Nations mandates were converted into United Nations Trust Territories, still under British and French administration. The trusteeship of Cameroon under French administration was terminated by the United Nations General Assembly on January 1, 1960, when Cameroon became independent within the limits of the area under French administration.

On the other hand, at the instance of the UN General Assembly, plebiscites were held in two sections of northern and southern Cameroon, which were under British administration as a trusteeship. The majority of votes in the Northern Cameroons in the 1961 plebiscite favoured joining the Federation of Nigeria, while in southern Cameroon, the result favoured joining the independent Republic of Cameroon. Consequently, the trusteeship over northern Cameroon was terminated on June 1, 1961, when it joined the Federation of Nigeria, while the trusteeship over southern Cameroon was terminated on October 1, 1961, upon joining the Republic of Cameroon. In other words, when the northern section of the trusteeship under British administration opted for Nigerian sovereignty and the southern section for Cameroon sovereignty, the hitherto administrative line separating the two sections became the international

[9] Bonchuk, M. O. International Boundaries and Divided People: A Case Study of Boki and Ejagham Communities in the Cross River Area, 1884–1994. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Calabar, 1997, p. 62.
[10] Bonchuk, M. O. International Boundaries and Divided People…, p. 62.


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boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon from the Kombon Mountain to the Gumana River.[11]

After gaining independence in the 1960s, both Nigeria and Cameroon inherited these colonial boundaries, leading to strained relations between the two countries as a result of differences concerning their shared border, especially the 2,300 kilometres of land boundary extending from Lake Chad to the Bakassi Peninsula, as well as the maritime aspect of the boundary located in the Gulf of Guinea. The region's strategic location and resources, particularly its rich fishing grounds and potential oil reserves, made it a focal point of territorial claims by both nations. The issues at stake had always been the delineation of the boundary from North to South, rights over the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula and sea reserves, and the fate of local populations along the stretch of the border.[12]. Baye[13] noted that over the years, the claims by both countries to the Peninsula have engendered tensions to the extent that in 1981, the two countries were on the brink of War. This scenario was to play out again in the 1990s as Nigerian and Cameroonian troops clashed severely, leading to Cameroon's formal application to the ICJ to intervene in 1994.

The ICJ, in its 2002 ruling, awarded sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon, based on historical treaties and the principle of *uti possidetis juris*, which upholds colonial borders unless otherwise agreed. In Nigeria, the ICJ's decision was initially met with resistance from both the government and the local population in Bakassi, who identified as Nigerians.[14]. However, in June 2006, Nigeria signed the Green Tree Agreement (GTA), which marked the formal transfer of authority in the region, and the Nigerian Army partially withdrew from Bakassi. Baye[15] argued that the move was fraught with challenges, including local resistance, security concerns, and the displacement of thousands of residents who chose to relocate to Nigeria rather than become Cameroonian citizens. The Bakassi Peninsula remains of strategic interest to global powers due to its energy resources and shipping routes. The area is also a hotspot for maritime criminality, including piracy, illegal fishing, and smuggling, which has implications for regional security and International maritime cooperation.[16]

**Conceptual Clarification**

To place the study in an appropriate perspective, it is imperative to conceptualise key concepts such as maritime criminality, maritime security, maritime strategy, and transnational security cooperation. Maritime criminality

[11] Chukwurah, O. Nigeria's International Boundaries. *The Nigerian Forum,* 1(7–8), 1981: 253–254.
[12] Ariye, E. C. Nigeria, Cameroon and the Bakassi Territorial Dispute Settlement: The Triumph of Bilateralism. *International Affairs and Global Strategy,* 38, 2015: 4–16.
[13] Baye, F. M. Implications of the Bakassi conflict resolution for Cameroon. African. *Journal on Conflict Resolution,* 10(1), 2010: 43–46.
[14] Ariye, E. C. Nigeria, Cameroon and the Bakassi Territorial Dispute Settlement…, pp. 4 – 8.
[15] Baye, F. M. Implications of the Bakassi conflict resolution for Cameroon ..., p. 36.
[16] Garuba, B. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea with emphasis on Nigeria. MA Thesis, World Maritime University, Malmö, Sweden, 2022, p. 23.

is a broad concept which encompasses various illegal activities at sea, including piracy, smuggling, trafficking (drugs, weapons, and humans), illegal fishing, environmental crimes, and violations of maritime regulations. Essentially, it covers any unlawful act that occurs in the maritime environment. These crimes pose significant threats to regional and global maritime security and the safety of international waters. Generally, the thriving global maritime economy has invariably led to corresponding maritime insecurity. Ukeje & Mvoma[17] assert that the reason is not far-fetched: first, oceans are, by nature, grey areas; for the most part, they often escape state control, and their immensity makes them impossible to manage. Second, since 2008, maritime areas have become easy channels for criminal activity, aided by the vulnerability of many states that have been unable to impose controls on their territory. Such "ungoverned zones" become production sites or transit routes for sundry criminal activities, particularly the trafficking of arms. Maritime criminality in the Bakassi peninsula is a complex issue that reflects the region's geopolitical and socio-economic realities, influenced by its strategic location and the rich natural resources in its waters. The Peninsula has long been a disputed territory between Nigeria and Cameroon, with tensions escalating until the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in Cameroon's favour in 2002. The dispute contributed to ineffective governance and law enforcement, creating a vacuum in which criminal activity thrived in the region.

Piracy is a specific type of maritime criminality. It involves attacking and robbing ships at sea. According to the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLO) which establishes a legal framework for all marine and maritime activities, piracy is defined as (a), any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by crew or passengers of a private ship or aircraft, or against a person or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any state, (b), any act of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or an aircraft with knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft, (c) any act of inciting or intentionally facilitating an act described in subparagraph (a) or (b).[18] Piracy is one of the most significant forms of maritime criminality in the Bakassi Peninsula. Armed groups often attack vessels, particularly oil tankers and fishing boats, to steal cargo, hijack ships for ransom, or extort money from shipping lines.[19] The Gulf of Guinea, which includes the Bakassi region, has been recognised as one of the most dangerous maritime areas for piracy, surpassing even the Somali coast in recent years.

In other words, maritime security is a broad subject that integrates many policy areas and lacks a single, unified definition. The United Nations Secretary-General's report for 2008 indicates that there was no consensus on the meaning of maritime security. The report, however, enumerated about 7 items that constitute or pose risks to maritime security. They include (a) armed robbery and piracy at sea, (b) onslaught on the maritime installations, (c) smuggling of

[17] Ukeje, C., & Mvomo Ela, W. African Approaches to Maritime Security ..., p. 24.
[18] United Nations, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 2004, p. 86
[19] Otora, O. A. Piracy and Maritime Criminality: Implications for a Transborder Maritime Security Regime in the Gulf of Guinea. *Ilorin Journal of History and International Studies,* 4 (1 & 2), 2014: 207–225.


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weapons of any capacity, (d) drug peddling by sea, (e) human trafficking via oceans, (f) illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and (g) deliberately harming the marine ecosystem.[20] Therefore, any activity undertaken by a nation or state to mitigate any of these seven risks may be considered an effort to enhance maritime security.

Maritime strategy is an aspect of strategy concerned with the disposition of maritime forces. However, Hicks[21] noted that the concept of maritime strategy is not synonymous with naval strategy. In this study, maritime strategy should not be considered exclusively naval, because it necessarily includes naval, air and ground combat and supportive forces, operating in the maritime context to bring these forces to bear on maritime criminals at the decisive point. Within this framework for a maritime strategy to yield positive results, it must be prosecuted in three phases: (a) the defensive, (b) the period of balance, and (c) the logistics or transport phase. In addition to the above, a credible maritime strategy must possess three elements: strength, transport and technology.[22] In other words, a maritime strategy that would favour sub-regional security cooperation in the Bakassi Peninsula would no doubt lead to bigger roles for sub-regional navies and force expansion in all dimensions, so far over what is needed for coastal defence and surveillance of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ).[23] Such a strategy derives from a comprehensive, well-articulated sub-regional strategy for economic, political and military objectives.

Transnational security cooperation refers to the collaborative efforts between multiple countries to address security challenges that transcend national borders. These challenges, often referred to as transnational threats, include terrorism, organised crime, cybercrime, human trafficking, drug smuggling, piracy, etc.[24] It is worth noting that transnational security measures involve not just the governments of various countries but also efforts of transnational non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) to address security threats that transcend national borders. These actors play a significant role in shaping security governance and influencing security outcomes at the local level.[25] The concept of transnational security recognises that security is not solely the responsibility of states and state agencies, but also involves the actions and choices of non-state actors. Multilateral responses are seen as more effective in addressing transnational threats, as they provide the necessary authority, legitimacy, resources and burden sharing to tackle these

[20] Klein, D. *United Nations: Piracy and Organised Crime Perpetuate Poverty in West Africa.* OCCRP, 2021, p. 7. Retrieved from https://www.occrp.org/en/news/un-piracy-and-organized-crime-perpetuate-poverty-in-west-africa, on 15/12/2025.
[21] Hicks, A. G. Air power: A Contribution to Maritime Operations, 8–15. In K. Mason edited *War in the Third Dimension: Essays in Contemporary Air Power* (United Kingdom: Brasseys Pub. 1986), p. 15.
[22] Clark, P. Maritime Strategy and Maritime Defence, 12–24." R. W. Komer edited *Military and Political Policy: Maritime Strategy – U.S. Coalition Defence.* (Washington: Department of Foreign Affairs, 2005) 13, p. 18.
[23] Otora, O. A. Maritime Boundaries and Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea…, p. 31.
[24] Reveron, D. S. & Mahoney-Norris, K. A. *Human and National Security: Understanding Transnational Challenges,* 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 46.
[25] Härter, K. Security and Cross-border Political Crime: The Formation of Transnational Security Regimes in 18th and 19th-century Europe. *Historical Social Research,* 2013, p. 14.

complex challenges.[26] Transnational security cooperation is crucial in the Bakassi Peninsula because the region's maritime criminal activities, such as piracy, smuggling, and illegal fishing, often involve actors from different countries. Such cooperation enables intelligence sharing, joint naval patrols, and coordinated law enforcement, thereby enhancing individual states' capacity to tackle these crimes.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study situates itself within the theoretical framework of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which provides insight into regional security dynamics and the challenges of maritime governance. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) was developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies and advanced in their work, *Regions and Power: The Structure of International Security.* Regional Security Complex theory provides a framework for understanding security issues as interdependent across regions. It emphasises that security threats such as maritime criminality, terrorism, and insurgency are not confined to a single nation but affect the entire region. Proponents of the Regional Security Complex theory assert that international security should be examined from a regional perspective and that relations between states and other actors exhibit a regular, geographically clustered pattern.[27] They stress the importance of adopting a regional perspective rather than the predominant global system and of paying more attention to security actors beyond states.

Buzan and Wæver[28] noted that the major argument is that neighbouring countries are interconnected, and their security is shaped by geographical proximity and shared vulnerabilities. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides a framework for understanding transnational maritime criminality that poses a security threat in the region. The fight against maritime insecurity requires a cooperative, transnational approach among countries in the region. The concept of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) centres on regional cooperation and transnational security. Thus, regional collective security efforts such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GOG) emphasise the role of regional security in combating maritime threats in the Bakassi region.

Though the Regional Security Complex Theory is popular for its contributions to understanding regional security dynamics, it is often criticised for its Eurocentric perspective, grounded in European security dynamics. Critics argue that the theory's assumptions do not capture the complexity of security dynamics in other regions, especially in Africa, where state sovereignty is often

[26] Al-Rodhan, N. R. F. Multilateralism and Transnational Security: A synthesis of win-win Solutions, 2009, p. 12.
[27] Gupta, M. *Indian Ocean Region: Maritime Regimes for Regional Cooperation.* Springer, 2010, p. 5.
[28] Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. *Regions and powers: The Structure of international Security.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 14.

weaker, and regional integration is less structured.[29] Furthermore, RSCT tends to emphasise regional security dynamics at the expense of global systemic factors. In an increasingly globalised world, the influence of global powers and international organisations such as the United Nations, NATO or major economies like the United States and China cannot be ignored in shaping regional security. For instance, the presence of global actors, such as France, Germany, and Britain, and their vested interests in the oil-rich Bakassi region complicates regional security arrangements.

Nevertheless, RSCT provided, and continues to provide, the analytical framework for a vast array of subsequent literature on African security dynamics, as it has for another part of the World[30]. Walsh[31] noted that RSCT can be improved by including a clearer articulation of how African leaders assert influence within and shape regional security dynamics in Africa. Doing so allows for a better understanding of how Regional Security Complexes come into being and can serve as a veritable framework for analysing transnational security threats in Africa.[32]

**Maritime Criminality in the Bakassi Peninsula**

The Bakassi Peninsula, due to its strategic location and complex maritime environment, has become a haven for various forms of maritime criminality. These criminal activities are facilitated by the region's complex networks of waterways, insufficient law enforcement and economic disparities. This section examines the diverse forms of maritime crimes in the Bakassi Peninsula, exploring the factors that contribute to their occurrence and the broader security implications for the entire Gulf of Guinea. Piracy is one of the most significant forms of maritime criminality in the Gulf of Guinea. The International Maritime Bureau categorised the Gulf of Guinea, including the Bakassi region, as the second-most disturbed waterway after Somali waters. Since the 1990s, the Gulf has been ranked among the World's top piracy hotspots.

It is reported that between 2002 and 2007, piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea exceeded recorded incidents in the rest of Africa. Unlike other parts of the African continent, the majority of attacks in the Gulf of Guinea are said to have involved actual boarding.[33] The nature of piracy has changed significantly. Unlike pirates, sea bandits in this region use satellite technology to track their prey, sneak up on ships in speedboats armed with automatic weapons, rocket launchers and grenades and board vessels with grappling irons.[34] As a result of the security gap in the maritime area, militant groups are infiltrating the region.

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[29] Walsh, B. Revisiting the Regional Security Complex theory in Africa: Museveni's Uganda and Regional Security in East Africa. *African Security,* 13(4), 2021: 300–324. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2021.1873507, 17/12/2025.
[30] Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security,* pp. 14–17.
[31] Walsh, B. Revisiting the Regional Security Complex theory in Africa, p. 303.
[32] Walsh, B. Revisiting the Regional Security Complex theory in Africa…, p. 303.
[33] Gilpin, R. Enhancing Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea. *Strategic Insights,* 6 (1), January 2007. Retrieved on 12/12/2025 from https://www.globalsecurity.org/
[34] Carpenter, C. Securing the Seas, 11–15. In J. S. Goldstein & J. C. Pevehouse, edited *International Relations, 9th ed.* (New Delhi: Longman, 2011), p. 11.


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Information gathered from the *International Maritime Bureau* indicates that about 90% of pirates and sea robbers that operate in the Gulf of Guinea come from Nigeria, mostly from the Niger Delta, including the Bakassi Peninsula. In 2016, out of 31 actual attacks in the Gulf of Guinea, 14 were carried out by Nigerian pirates; in 2017, out of 55 pirate attacks recorded in the region, 36 were carried out by Nigerian pirates; in 2018, out of the region's 82 piratical attacks, 48 was by Nigerian pirates; in 2019, out of the 63 incidents recorded in the region, 35 was by Nigerian pirates; and out of the 21 incidents recorded from January to March 2020 in the Gulf of Guinea, 11 was by Nigerian pirates.[35] There was also a report of similar attacks made earlier in 2009, as gunmen said to be members of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) attacked a tanker, MT Meredith, carrying 4,000 tons of diesel fuel with dynamite.[36] It is also believed that several incidents of pirate attacks in and off the Nigerian maritime domain were unrecorded. The above report ranked the Gulf of Guinea Waters second-most dangerous waterway in the World, after the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Somalia.

The insurgency and criminality in the Niger Delta spilt over to another part of the Gulf of Guinea, for the most part in the Bakassi Peninsula and neighbouring Republic of Cameroon. Informant reports that armed groups such as Bakassi Strike Force (BSF) and Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) often attack vessels, particularly oil tankers and fishing boats, to steal cargo, hijack ships for ransom, or extort money from the local fishermen and shipping companies.[37] Since the return of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon, several armed groups opposed to the handover of the former disputed territory have emerged in the region. These groups have carried out several coordinated attacks along Cameroon's coast. The Bakassi Freedom Fighters (BFF), one of the groups opposed to Nigeria's return of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon, attacked an oil tanker in 2008, kidnapping the crew and detaining them for ten days before negotiating a ransom payment.

Another group, the Africa Marine Commando (AMC), kidnapped a Chinese fishing crew in 2010 and extorted a ransom for their release.[38]. This trend grew significantly after the Green Tree Agreement, which heralded the transfer of the Bakassi Peninsula to the Republic of Cameroon in August 2008.[39] It has been claimed that these groups seemed to have acquired an indirect strategic understanding, and perhaps through logistics support from militants and criminal groups in the Niger Delta.[40] Over the years, such lapses in the security environment of the region have also been exploited by Southwest Cameroon's Anglophone secessionist group (Ambazonia) in the quest for regime alteration in the Republic of Cameroon. However, in recent times, piracy in Nigeria's

[35] International Maritime Bureau, *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships: Annual and Quarterly Reports,* March 2020, p. 24-32
[36] Ellah, T. O. *Nigeria's Security Interest in the Gulf of Guinea: A Response to the US-AFRICOM Project.* (Berlin: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011), p. 6, Otora, O. A. Piracy and Maritime Criminality…, p. 214.
[37] Atingha, personal communication, May 2, 2026.
[38] Kamal-Deen, A. The Anatomy of Gulf of Guinea Piracy. *Naval War College Review,* 68(1), (2015): 93–118.
[39] Ellah, T. *Nigeria's Security interest in the Gulf of Guinea*…, p. 7.
[40] Otora, A. Maritime boundary and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea…, p. 45.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) has decreased following the deployment of Deep Blue Project assets. It aims to eliminate such incidents and protect Nigerian waters up to the Gulf of Guinea.[41]

Oral information gathered from personnel of the Nigerian Customs Service and the Nigerian Drugs Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) reveals that another serious security challenge in the Bakassi region that is worth noting is the trans-shipment of narcotics.[42] The porous borders and the disputed status of the Bakassi Peninsula have made it a hub for smuggling and trafficking. Criminal networks engage in the smuggling of weapons, drugs and other contraband. A considerable quantity of high-profile Cocaine confiscated by the Spanish security agencies in areas designated "the new drugs triangle between Cape Verde, the Canary Islands, and Madeira" is shipped through the Atlantic seaboard, in boats driven by crews from the Gulf of Guinea.[43] There is also another criminal conduit that networks Colombian narcotic products, including weapons and diamonds smuggling, with the North and West African criminal refugee population known as "Highway 10."[44]

A great deal of Cocaine carried into Europe is moved by sea along the West African Coast, where it is further transported along the coast of North Africa into Western Europe. The Atlantic sea course is navigated via the Gulf of Guinea, which facilitates collaboration between criminal organisations in Latin America and Europe and undoubtedly holds high stakes for Islamic terrorist organisations that are using the Gulf of Guinea as a conduit connecting North Africa to prospective targets in Europe.[45] A report in the Daily Trust Newspaper shows that in the last quarter of 2024, officials of the NDLEA impounded hard drugs valued at 17.9bn at the Tin Can seaport in Lagos and the Onne seaport in Port Harcourt. Within the same period, a total of 447 cartons of tramadol 225mg containing 29, 840,000 pills of the opioid, as well as 380, 000 bottles of codeine from India, were impounded in Port-Harcourt. The substance was valued at 8.9 billion. All these reflect the growing profile of the Gulf of Guinea as a route for drug trafficking, of which the Bakassi Peninsula is an integral part.[46] There seems to be a link between drug trafficking and money laundering as organised criminal groups can filter through the borders the earnings of drug trafficking, contraband, smuggling and other cross-border crimes. Worst still, militant groups use money laundering routes to sustain their clandestine activities, which further affects socio-economic development in the region.

The waters around the Bakassi Peninsula are rich in marine resources, making them targets for illegal fishing. Information gathered from local fishermen in the Atabong community reveals that foreign and local fishing vessels often engage

[41] Garuba, B. Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea with emphasis on Nigeria…, p. 43
[42] Ovie, personal communication, June 10, 2026
[43] Umoren, R. "World Bank Arms Navigating in Gulf of Guinea Disputes" Inter Press Service, September 19, 1995. P12
[44] Mogridge, D. Piracy Storm Brews in West Africa: Gulf of Guinea Under Maritime Siege. *Defence IQ,* August 18, 2010, p. 12.
[45] Mogridge, D. Piracy Storm Brews in West Africa: Gulf of Guinea Under Maritime Siege…, p.13.
[46] Babafemi F. NDLEA Impounds N17bn Drugs at Lagos and Port Harcourt Ports. *Daily Trust,* September 1, 2024. p. 26.


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in illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing, depleting fish stocks and threatening the livelihoods of local communities.[47] Such acts that are inimical to the maritime environment result from the region's failure to effectively manage its maritime area, which has denied it the expected benefits from the considerable fisheries wealth in its exclusive economic zones.[48] Available statistics from the United States Naval Postgraduate School indicate that poaching by trawlers from Asia, Europe, and other African states results in a significant loss of about USD 370 million in annual revenue to the sub-region. Apart from capital losses, poaching also has human security implications. Households and individuals are directly affected by the unavailability of seafood in local markets. Information gathered from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Annual Regional Report suggests that fish nutrients contribute to protein intake in nearly all Gulf nation-states, of which the Bakassi Peninsula is an integral part. In Ghana, for instance, it is 63 per cent; in Nigeria, 68 per cent; in Equatorial Guinea, 62 per cent; and in São Tomé and Príncipe, 62 per cent. Poaching also has several indirect effects, including drastic reductions in income and the loss of livelihoods in the region's fishing communities.[49]

The Bakassi Peninsula is close to major oil-producing areas, and illegal oil bunkering and crude oil theft are significant security challenges in the region. Criminal groups often take advantage of the poor and weak maritime policing in the region to tap into pipelines or hijack oil tankers to steal crude oil and sell it on the black market.[50] The scandalous elements responsible for crude oil thefts in the creeks also facilitate the proliferation of small and light weapons (SALW) in the region. Information gathered from the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) in the Niger Delta reveals that such military hardware is becoming more sophisticated and deadly in controlling these criminal elements, especially as they seek ways to elude the Navy and other security agencies at the nation's borders.[51] The activities of these criminals often lead to substantial economic losses for the country.

Recently, the Director General of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Dayo Mobereola, said that Nigeria loses approximately $25.5 billion annually to illegal maritime activities and another $1.3 billion to illegal bunkering.[52] The activities of these criminals also cause severe environmental damage through oil spills and related activities. The Abuja Declaration on Pollution and Marine Ecosystem reemphasised the issues raised by the FAO, indicating that the mismanagement of fisheries resources in

[47] Ekabong, personal communication, June, 13, 2026
[48] Otora, O. A. Piracy and Maritime Criminality…, p. 216
[49] Food and Agriculture Organisation. *Implementation of the International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.* (Rome: FAO Press, 2002), pp. 1-23.
[50] Otora, O. A. Borderlands of Insecurity: A Paradigm Shift Towards a Sub-regional Peace and Security Regime in the Gulf of Guinea. *Journal of African Politics and Society (JAPS),* 3(2), 2013: 1–16.
[51] Ignatius, personal communication, June, 13, 2026
[52] Garuba, B. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea with Emphasis on Nigeria…, p. 10.

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the Gulf has led to stock depletion, distorted ecological balance and environmental degradation.[53]

The declaration further observed that many nation-states in the sub-region have not ratified the 1990 Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation, even when the International Maritime Organisation and the International Petroleum Industry Conservation Association (IPIECA) are collaborating with African countries to promote the endorsement and institutionalisation of the significant conventions; these efforts seem to be counter-productive. Again, the petroleum industry is identified as the major destroyer of the marine environment; inappropriate household and industrial waste dumping is also posing a serious challenge to marine and environmental security in the Bakassi Peninsula.

Kidnapping for ransom has become a significant security threat in the Bakassi Peninsula in recent times. Kidnapping for ransom in Bakassi is often linked to piracy and other forms of maritime crime. Criminals in the Gulf of Guinea, including the Bakassi Peninsula, have shifted tactics from hijacking ships to kidnapping crew members for ransom.[54] Similarly, several militant groups, including splinter factions from the Niger Delta, have expanded their operations into the Bakassi Peninsula. These groups see kidnapping as an easy way to generate revenue, given the region's proximity to oil companies, wealthy individuals and maritime shipping lanes. In August 2012, a group of criminal gangs known as the Lapto Marine Force operating around the Bakassi waterways kidnapped twenty-eight local oil workers, and a ransom of one hundred million Naira was demanded before their release.[55]

Similarly, in November 2021, a medical doctor, Edmund Akpaikpe, was kidnapped around Esigi village in the Bakassi Local Government Area. The lack of effective maritime patrols and weak coordination between Nigerian and Cameroonian security forces have made it difficult to tackle the issues of kidnapping for ransom in the region. Kidnapped victims are often held in remote locations within the dense mangrove forest, making it difficult for security operatives to carry out rescue operations. Although efforts to improve security through transnational cooperation, such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, and the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS), have yet to yield significant reductions in kidnapping incidents.

In other words, a weak infrastructural base also constitutes a security threat to maritime security in the Bakassi Peninsula. A good number of ports and surveillance facilities are in a state of total collapse and require repairs or outright replacement. Negligence in addressing such fundamental aspects of port infrastructure for so long is said to be responsible for the dismal security

[53] Food and Agriculture Organisation. *Implementation of the International Plan of Action…,* p. 6.
[54] Otora, O. A. Borderlands of Insecurity …, p. 14.
[55] Reuters. Nigeria's Navy frees 28 kidnapped oil workers, 2012. Retrieved on 15/12/2025 from https://www.reuters.com/article/world/nigeria-navy-frees-28-kidnapped-oil-workers-idUSBRE87P0E8.


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situation across the region. According to the International Maritime Organisation, evaluation reports reveal that nation-states in the Gulf region have yet to fully comply with the minimum standards for port well-being and protection set out in the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, to which all coastal nations have consented. Even more worrisome is the fact that registered vessels and ships in the Gulf of Guinea are over 20 years old, making them more vulnerable to accidents.[56] However, in addressing the security challenges facing the Bakassi Peninsula as enumerated above, the naval forces of Nigeria and Cameroon do not possess the requisite technical and organisational capabilities to combat maritime criminality in the region. It is for this reason that several initiatives geared towards improving maritime safety and security in the region have emerged.

**Transnational Security Cooperation in the Bakassi Peninsula**

In the present era, several potentially helpful security initiatives have emerged within and outside the Gulf of Guinea to mitigate maritime criminality and build up security capabilities. Given the transnational nature of crimes such as piracy, smuggling and illegal fishing, regional and international collaboration is essential. This section examines the various frameworks and initiatives, such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, Gulf of Guinea Commission, and ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy, that have been established to foster transnational security cooperation in the fight against these threats.

**The Gulf of Guinea Commission (GOGC)**

The Gulf of Guinea Commission is a sub-regional association envisioned by the Nigerian government in 1999 and jointly established by the associate nations of Angola, Cameroon, Congo, DR Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Nigeria, and São Tomé and Príncipe.[57] Article (1v) of the statute establishing the Commission mandates it to pursue the promotion of peace and security in the Gulf of Guinea as well as the economic, social and environmental well-being of its members.[58] The Commission also functions to regulate and harmonise the exploitation of the resources of the Gulf of Guinea, including petroleum, minerals, and fisheries, in the overlapping areas of Exclusive Economic Zones, and to coordinate and articulate common positions on issues of particular interest to the enhancement of peace and stability in the sub-region. To guarantee the economic growth of member states and the welfare of their populations, the organisation has been concentrating more on developing a regional marine security strategy since 2013.[59]

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[56] Gilpin, R. Enhancing Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea…, p. 9.
[57] Goldwyn, D., & Morrison, S. J. A Strategic Approach to Governance and Security in the Gulf of Guinea. Centre for Strategic and International Studies, July, 2006. Retrieved from https://www.csis.org on 13/12/2025.
[58] Kedemeh, E. Central Africa: The Gulf of Guinea goes Functional, 2006, p. 17.
[59] ECFR. Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC): Mapping African Regional Cooperation. *European Council on Foreign Relations,* October, 2020. Retrieved from https://ecfr.eu/special/african-cooperation/gulf-of-guinea-commission, on 23/11/2025, p. 12.

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In October 2009, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) proposed the first practical framework to foster collaboration among the navies of the Commission's member states. ECCAS established the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa (CRESMAC), under the auspices of the Annual Maritime Conference of the Committee of Peace and Security. The sub-region is split into zones A and B. However, despite being founded in October 2009, CRESMAC did not start operating until October 20, 2014, and it still does not have all the intended Transnational Coordinating Centres.[60] Thus, demonstrating a Fragmented Belt Theory, which limits collaboration among the region's member nations and hinders coordination among their navies. Indeed, the zone is viewed as a sluggish naval power incapable of containing the security challenges within its marine environment.

One of the major challenges of the GGC in the fight against maritime criminality in the region is the lack of coordination between its member states. The Commission comprises countries with diverse political and security interests, making joint efforts to combat maritime crime difficult. For instance, the boundary dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over jurisdictional claims in the Bakassi Peninsula, despite the 2012 ICJ ruling, has complicated joint security initiatives in the area. Furthermore, the slow implementation of security initiatives, such as agreements and frameworks to enhance maritime security, by member states due to bureaucratic delays and a lack of political will to enforce them, weakens the region's collective ability to fight maritime crime.

**The Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCoC)**

In October 2013, twenty-five West and Central African States adopted the Yaoundé Code of Conduct for information sharing across the region's maritime domain. The Code of Conduct was developed in response to escalating maritime security threats in the region, including the Bakassi Peninsula. The YCoC emphasises regional collaboration between Gulf of Guinea States, including intelligence sharing, joint maritime patrols, and improvements to the legal framework for prosecuting criminals.[61] Consequently, to manage the exchange of information between the two regional centres in Congo and the Ivory Coast, an Interregional Coordination Centre was established in Cameroon, Nigeria, and Benin to enhance cooperation among states and to provide early warning systems for maritime threats.

One of the most important aspects of the code in the fight against Maritime criminality is the establishment of the Inter-Regional Coordination Centre (ICC), which coordinates information and facilitates real-time communication among member countries. Adejuyigbe[62] noted that the sharing of maritime information has been crucial in identifying and responding to piracy, smuggling and other illegal activities in maritime zones, including the Bakassi region.

[60] Garuba, B. Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea with Emphasis on Nigeria…, p. 14.
[61] Adejuyigbe, A. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea: An Unending Menace. *International Bar Association (IBA),* 2021. Retrieved from https://www.ibanet.org/piracy-gulf-of-guinea, on 20/5/2026.
[62] Adejuyigbe, A. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea: An unending menace…, p. 19


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Similarly, the YCoC promotes joint naval operations and patrols among the countries of the Gulf of Guinea. These operations are intended to enhance the maritime domain and ensure effective patrolling of shared maritime boundaries. For instance, there has been continuous collaboration between the navies of Nigeria and Cameroon since 2014. Each nation permits the other Navy to pursue within its waters.

Additionally, the two fleets have developed a communication system and support one another while conducting operations. As a result, the two nations have significantly decreased the number of piracy incidents in the region. In addition, they were able to deal with the issues of drug peddling and kidnapping around the Bakassi region.[63] Despite its success, the YCoC faces challenges, including inconsistent implementation across member states, inadequate funding, and varying levels of political commitment among members. Additionally, the difficult terrain of the Bakassi Peninsula makes it difficult to eliminate maritime criminality in the region, as criminals often exploit the area's mangrove swamps and inlets to evade capture.

**ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS)**

The ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy was developed and adopted in 2014. It was designed as a comprehensive regional security framework to address the increasing maritime security threats in West Africa, including piracy, armed robbery, illegal fishing and other forms of Maritime criminality. The strategy aims to foster collaboration among ECOWAS member states and to improve maritime governance, law enforcement, and economic development within the region's maritime domain.[64] Although Nigeria is the primary member, Cameroon's engagement through bilateral security agreements allows both countries to benefit from the ECOWAS maritime strategy, which focuses on collective maritime security and information sharing in the fight against Maritime criminality in the Bakassi Peninsula.

Since its adoption, the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Security Strategy has directly contributed to improving maritime domain awareness and promoting collaborative efforts between Nigeria and Cameroon. However, the absence of effective maritime patrol has enabled piracy and crude oil theft in the region. The lack of effective intelligence-sharing capabilities and an emergency response strategy across the region has also hampered efforts to address illegal activity in the Nigerian-Cameroon maritime domain.[65]

**International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Alliance with Regional Ports**

As a strategy to enhance maritime safety and ensure international best practices in Maritime administration, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has, in recent times, created a platform that would render technical support to 26 seaports in the sub-region to encourage them to conform to the minimum requirements set by the International Ship and Port Facility (ISPS)

[63] Garuba, B. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea with emphasis on Nigeria…, p. 37.
[64] Garuba, B. Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea with emphasis on Nigeria..., p. 39.
[65] Gilpin, R. Enhancing Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea…, p. 5.


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code. Goldwyn and Morrison[66] noted that the ISPS code is an efficient early warning assessment and risk management system that enables the detection and deterrence of security threats as well as the collection and sharing of information in a security-tense marine environment in an internationally organised framework. They further argued that seaports in the Gulf of Guinea, including the Bakassi Peninsula, are fragile and porous. They lack the necessary response capability to check widespread fisheries theft, piracy, drug peddling, arms trade and illegal bunkering of oil.

For instance, when the Nigerian Port Authority (NPA) initiated a programme of aerial surveillance of Lagos ports in 2005, as a march towards ISPS Code compliance, it was extensively reported in the press that all through the initial air surveillance in March 2005, the transport minister was said to have reportedly seen more than 50 vessels idling ten miles of the Tin Can Island Port which the minister concluded that "they were waiting to lift stolen crude oil from Nigeria's oil fields."[67] Despite the publication of the above reports in several Nigerian print and electronic media, the situation remained the same. While surveillance continued, the above case demonstrates the necessity of appropriate cooperation for early warning, implementation, and the political will to use available information in real time.

According to Chinedu Olisaemaka, the IMO programme is based and operates from its coordinating office in Accra, Ghana, and is managed by a few naval personnel. In this sense, therefore, the International Maritime Organisation cannot carry out surveillance and enforcement in the sub-region, including Bakassi, due to permeable borders and the presence of formidable routes for smuggling drugs, arms, ammunition, and other contrabands, which are freely peddled by criminal elements.[68]

**Economic Impacts of Maritime Criminality in the Bakassi Peninsula**

There is no doubt that maritime criminality in the Bakassi Peninsula has resulted in significant economic loss to the region. The Bakassi region is rich in oil and gas resources. Criminal activities, particularly piracy, often disrupt the extraction and production processes. Piracy and attacks on oil facilities and transport vessels have forced the government and companies to increase security expenditure, leading to higher operational costs. In some cases, these operations are halted, reducing revenue for both companies and the government. During the height of militant activities in the Niger Delta, the country lost about 61 billion dollars or 81 trillion Naira between 2006 and 2008. If the scale of losses is calculated between 200 and 2010, Nigeria would have lost close to 100 billion dollars to the crisis. The cost resulting from vandalism of oil facilities, shut-ins, oil bunkering, ransom for kidnapping and billions of dollars spent by oil companies on corporate security. If the amount lost had been spent on human security and, indeed, on socio-economic

[66] Goldwyn, D., & Morrison, S. J. A strategic approach to governance and security in the Gulf of Guinea…, p. 20.
[67] This Day Newspaper. Report on Aerial Surveillance of Lagos Ports, June 3, 2005, p. 30.
[68] Chinedu Olisaemaka, personal communication, May 20, 2026.

development in the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general, the country's economic development indices would have improved.[69]

Furthermore, piracy in the Bakassi region poses a security threat to the region and the World at large. These security threats have consequences for the sub-region's economic development. Piratical activities have led to a significant reduction in port revenues for states in the sub-region. The revenues of states such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Benin, Gabon and Angola have been negatively affected by piracy.[70]. Criminal activities in the region continue to pose a serious security threat to the economies of the region's states. Maritime criminality is increasing shipping costs across the Gulf of Guinea, thereby affecting the competitiveness of the sub-region's products in the international market. It also increases import costs, making commodities more expensive for consumers and raising the cost of living. Information gathered from local fishermen in Bakassi indicates that pirates often disrupt the local livelihoods. When the sea storm rises, and the fishermen divert to where they can land safely, pirates often attack and take away all their belongings, such as nets and boat engines, which cost about 3 million Naira. They usually attack around 2 or 3 a.m when the men go out fishing. Pirates' activities affect food security and deprive communities of essential income, further deepening poverty in the region.[71]

Similarly, illegal fishing is at the root of the unsustainable management of fishery resources, leading to poor intake of protein and other essential nutrients among coastal communities in the region, as well as major revenue losses for coastal states that previously earned substantial foreign exchange by granting fishing rights over their waters.[72] Another effect of illegal and unregulated fishing in the region is the potential endangerment of rare and vulnerable species, further undermining the coastal ecosystem and biodiversity. Information gathered also indicates that unregulated fishing poses an environmental danger to coastal communities due to the frequent use of harmful practices and toxic products.[73]

**Social Impacts of Maritime Criminality**

The most direct consequence of the prevalence of piracy and kidnapping is population displacement. Frequent violence and instability have led to the displacement of the local population. Frightened people flee from their ancestral and residential homes. They also tend to lose the assets they possess in the process. Indeed, the fear that accompanies violence is itself quite destructive, as it creates an atmosphere in which distrust and animosity grow, thereby diminishing the cooperative endeavour necessary for mutual security and progress.[74] Local communities and foreign workers are frequently victims

[69] Otoabasi, A. *The Niger Delta Question and the Peace Plan.* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2011), p. 144.
[70] Anyika, V. O., Ojakorotu, V., & Ani, K. J. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea: Trends, Causes, Effects, and the Way Forward. *African Journal of Development Studies,* Special Issue 2, 2022: 5–20. https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2022/SIv2a1.
[71] Ekamba Etete, personal communication, June 13, 2026.
[72] Ukeje, C., & Mvomo Ela, W. African Approaches to Maritime Security…, p. 22.
[73] Chinedu Olisaemeka, personal communication, May 20, 2026.
[74] Otoabasi, A. *The Niger Delta Question and the Peace Pla...,* p. 146.

of abduction and violence. The hostages and their families often endure physical and psychological trauma while struggling to pay for their release.

Undoubtedly, criminality and the issues around the Bakassi Peninsula, from its disputed status to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling in favour of Cameroon in 2002, have posed social and humanitarian challenges that have invariably strained the state and nation's economies. The compulsory evacuation of Bakassi indigenes from their ancestral homes in the Peninsula was typically carried out without regard for their human rights. The displacement makes the Bakassi settlers unable to cope with or adapt easily to changes in their new environment.[75]. The indigenes were also impoverished by the displacement. Settlers lost most of their valuable possessions and livelihoods due to displacement. So many became dependents and unemployed, accounting for the rise in militant activities and criminality in the region. In circumstances like this, the vulnerable people in society suffer the most. These include the sick, the aged, children and pregnant women. Over the years, efforts by the Federal and State governments to provide relief material and properly resettle the displaced have yielded little success. To this day, the people of Bakassi continue to struggle with the consequences of their displacement following the International Court of Justice ruling that ceded the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon in 2002.

**Political Impacts of Maritime Criminality**

Maritime criminality in the Bakassi Peninsula and other forms of criminal activity in Nigeria erode public support and national cohesion. Government support and popular unity are crucial morale factors in national power.[76]. The inability of Nigeria and Cameroon to fully control the maritime environment of the Bakassi Peninsula undermines their authority and sovereignty. Otora[77] indicated that although Nigeria and Cameroon are signatories to numerous relevant international conventions, both countries have not taken significant steps to ratify and domesticate some of the agreements. Thus, vulnerabilities are emphasised daily in domestic news reports about poachers taken into custody in the region, but are often set free after paying negligible fines. Thus, countries in the region lack clear laws governing their status.[78] These lapses are often exploited by criminal groups operating in the region, who fill the vacuum created by weak law enforcement, thereby eroding state power and governance. It has eroded the government's credibility, as citizens lose faith in its ability to maintain law and order.

Field investigations indicate that, despite the ICJ ruling on the Bakassi Peninsula, maritime crime continues to complicate relations between Nigeria and Cameroon. The continuous cross-border crimes and attacks affect efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region, potentially leading to political

[75] Egbe, I. B. Displacement Status and Welfare of settlers in Population Settlements: The case of Bakassi resettlement Programme in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Business and Social Sciences,* 5(2), 2016: 38-53
[76] Otoabasi, A. *The Niger Delta Question and the Peace Plan*, p. 147.
[77] Otora, O. A. Maritime boundary and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea…, p. 69.
[78] Gilpin, R. Enhancing Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea…, p. 7.


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tension between the two countries.[79] Finally, the activities of maritime criminals in the Bakassi region contribute to the wider instability in the Gulf of Guinea, making it a hotspot for maritime crime. The failures to address this effectively threaten regional cooperation efforts and weaken political stability within the ECOWAS and the broader Gulf of Guinea region.

**Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

The literature analysis indicates that maritime criminality in the Bakassi Peninsula poses serious threats to regional stability, economic development, and social cohesion. The strategic location of the Bakassi, coupled with weak governance and security structure, has made it a hotspot for piracy, smuggling and kidnapping for ransom. These criminal activities undermine economic growth, particularly in the oil and gas sectors and the local fishing population. The socio-economic consequences, including displacement, unemployment and increased violence, further aggravate the region's instability. It was also observed that Transnational Security Cooperation has emerged as a critical instrument for addressing these challenges. Transnational security initiatives such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCOC), the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy (EIMS), the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), and broader international efforts led by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) have demonstrated the value of regional collaboration in combating maritime criminality. These initiatives have led to improved surveillance, joint naval operations and capacity building.

Despite the successes recorded, challenges of inconsistent policy implementation, funding, and a weak legal framework for prosecuting maritime crimes and criminals continue to undermine transnational security efforts. Domestic, regional and international efforts should be synergised to strengthen regional and international cooperation to effectively tackle maritime criminality and improve maritime security in the region. The following recommendations are made based on the findings and conclusions from the study:

In the area of security, regional bodies such as ECOWAS, ECCAS, and the Gulf of Guinea Commission should enhance coordination and joint security efforts in intelligence sharing, maritime surveillance, and law enforcement across the region. The successful implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct requires full support from all member states, with a focus on increased joint naval patrols in the Bakassi Peninsula and the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria and Cameroon must improve and harmonise their legal frameworks in line with International Standards (e.g., UNCLOS) to ensure the effective prosecution of maritime criminals. Strengthening the judiciary to handle cross-border crimes and establishing specialised maritime courts can improve the region's capacity to hold offenders accountable.

The government should allocate more resources to training and equipping maritime security agencies by enhancing the technical capabilities of coast guards and naval patrols through advanced technologies such as drones and satellite tracking to improve maritime domain security in the Bakassi region,

[79] Chinedu Olisaemeka, personal communication, May 20, 2022.

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thereby supporting economic development and livelihoods. The government must invest in economic development initiatives targeting the youth, women and children in the region. Supporting local fishermen and creating alternative livelihoods can go a long way toward reducing criminal activity in the region. Engaging local communities in security efforts on the Bakassi Peninsula is essential for long-term success. The government, through the community policing initiative, should work closely with traditional rulers, youth leaders and fishermen to create an early warning system and improve community resilience against criminal activities.


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