

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE MARITIME SECURITY IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

Omoniyi Bukola Akinola*

Abstract

Maritime security has become one of the most critical issues confronting Nigeria's maritime industry, particularly in Southern Nigeria, where the country's coastline, major seaports, offshore oil installations, and inland waterways are located. Despite several legislative, institutional, and operational reforms, including the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act 2019 and the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure (Deep Blue Project), maritime crimes such as piracy, sea robbery, illegal bunkering, oil theft, smuggling, kidnapping of seafarers, illegal fishing, and environmental crimes continue to pose serious threats. The paper adopted a doctrinal research methodology by examining domestic and international laws, judicial decisions, and legal scholars' opinions. The paper found that though piracy incidents have declined significantly in recent years in Southern Nigeria, sustaining these gains requires stronger institutions, effective law enforcement, improved regional cooperation, and greater community participation.

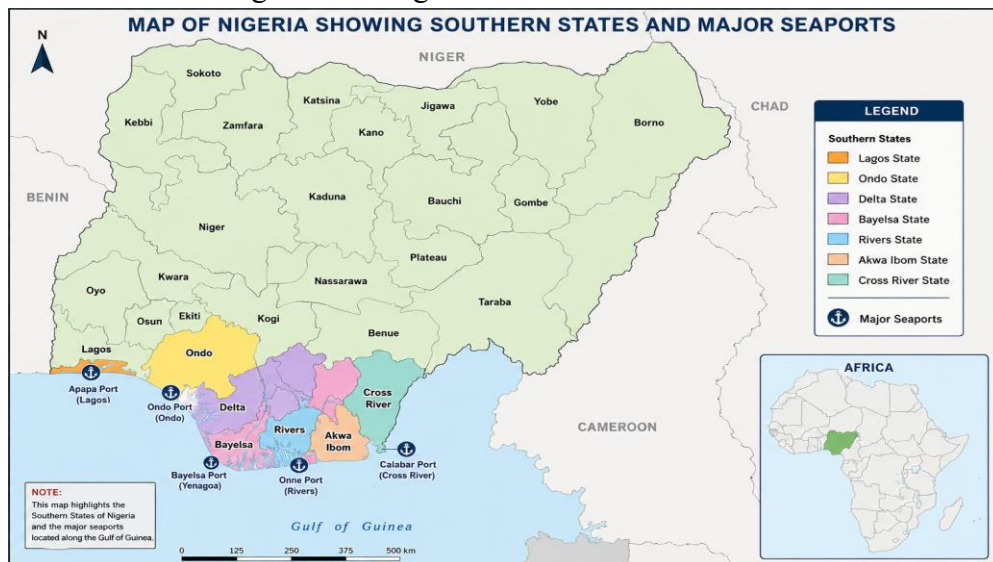
Keywords: Maritime Security, Gulf of Guinea, Piracy, Blue Economy, Nigeria, SPOMO Act, Deep Blue Project.

1. INTRODUCTION

Southern Nigeria occupies a strategic position along the Gulf of Guinea, extending from Lagos through Ondo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers,

* LL.B (Hons), LL.M, PhD, Barrister at Law and Professor of Law, Faculty of Law, Baze University, Abuja. Former Dean of Law, Faculty of Law, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria. Former Dean of Law, School of Law, Kampala International University, Uganda and Former Deputy Director of Academics, Nigerian Law School. Email Address: profobakinola77@gmail.com, omoniyi.akinola@bazeuniversity.edu.ng

Akwa Ibom, and Cross River States. It hosts Nigeria's principal ports (Apapa, Tin Can Island, Onne, Warri, Calabar), offshore oil and gas infrastructure, and a large share of West Africa's maritime trade. Over 90% of Nigeria's international trade moves by sea; maritime security is essential for economic growth, energy security, international commerce, and national security. Historically, the Gulf of Guinea was regarded as one of the world's piracy hotspots, with attacks on commercial vessels, kidnapping of crew members, oil theft, and armed robbery at sea. Recent reforms have improved the situation considerably, but new threats, including cyber risks, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and organized transnational crime, continue to challenge maritime governance¹.



¹ Yercan, F. , Cetin, O., and Conguloglu(2026). The economic impact of piracy: a critical assessment of maritime security and trade disruptions in the Gulf of Guinea. *Maritime Economics & Logistics*, Volume 28, pages 163–187 (2026)

2.0 CONCEPT OF MARITIME SECURITY

Maritime security is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the protection of a nation's maritime domain against threats that could undermine its sovereignty, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, and national security.² In Nigeria, maritime security is particularly significant in the southern region because it hosts the country's entire Atlantic coastline, major seaports, offshore oil and gas installations, fishing grounds, inland waterways, and the bulk of Nigeria's international maritime trade. Southern Nigeria comprises the coastal states of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River, all of which border the Gulf of Guinea and serve as strategic gateways for international commerce.

Southern Nigeria's maritime domain extends beyond territorial waters to include internal waters, ports, estuaries, offshore oil fields, pipelines, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and other maritime infrastructure that supports economic activity. Given that over 90% of Nigeria's international trade by volume is transported by sea, maritime security is not merely a defence issue but also an economic imperative. It facilitates safe navigation, uninterrupted trade, energy security, environmental protection, and the realization of Nigeria's Blue Economy aspirations.³

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) views maritime security as the protection of ships, ports, offshore facilities, cargo, crew, and passengers from intentional unlawful acts such as piracy, terrorism, armed robbery, sabotage, and smuggling. Similarly, the United Nations identifies maritime security as encompassing all measures aimed at ensuring the safe, secure, and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and coastal resources while combating transnational

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

crimes and preserving marine ecosystems. In the Nigerian context, maritime security refers to the protection of Nigeria's maritime environment against threats such as piracy, illegal oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, sea robbery, illegal fishing, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, marine pollution, and other activities capable of disrupting maritime commerce and national security.

3.0 MARITIME SECURITY IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

Southern Nigeria occupies one of Africa's most strategic maritime corridors. Stretching from Lagos in the west to Cross River in the east, the region contains major commercial ports, oil terminals, naval bases, and coastal communities whose livelihoods depend largely on maritime resources.⁴

The Gulf of Guinea, which borders Southern Nigeria, has historically been one of the world's most strategically important maritime routes because of its abundant petroleum resources and growing international shipping traffic. Consequently, protecting this maritime space has become a national priority.

4.0 COMPONENTS OF MARITIME SECURITY IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

Maritime security in Southern Nigeria comprises several interconnected dimensions.

a. Port Security

Ports serve as gateways for international trade and are therefore vulnerable to criminal activities such as cargo theft, smuggling,

⁴ Major maritime assets in Southern Nigeria include Lagos Port Complex (Apapa), Tin Can Island Port, Lekki Deep Sea Port, Onne Port, Warri Port, Calabar Port, Escravos Oil Terminal, Bonny Oil Terminal, Brass Oil Terminal, Qua Iboe Terminal, and Offshore oil platforms. Numerous jetties and inland waterways.

terrorism, and sabotage. Port security involves protecting port infrastructure, vessels, cargo, and personnel through surveillance systems, access control, cargo screening, and compliance with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code.

b. Offshore Energy Security

Nigeria's economy depends heavily on offshore crude oil and natural gas production. Maritime security includes protecting offshore platforms, pipelines, Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) facilities, and oil export terminals from vandalism, piracy, and terrorist attacks.

c. Shipping Security

Shipping security ensures the uninterrupted movement of merchant vessels through Nigerian waters. It includes escort operations, vessel traffic monitoring, search and rescue operations, and protection against piracy and armed robbery.

d. Fisheries Security

The protection of Nigeria's marine fisheries from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is another essential component of maritime security. Effective fisheries protection promotes food security and sustainable exploitation of marine resources.

e. Environmental Security

Maritime security also involves preventing marine pollution arising from oil spills, illegal waste disposal, ship-generated pollution, and environmental degradation caused by illegal refining activities.

f. Coastal Community Security

Many coastal communities rely on maritime resources for fishing, transportation, and commerce. Maritime security therefore extends to

protecting these communities from criminal activities while promoting socio-economic development.

5.0 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF MARITIME SECURITY TO SOUTHERN NIGERIA

Maritime security is indispensable to Nigeria's socio-economic development for several reasons. Some of the reasons are succinctly explained below:

i. Economic Growth

The maritime sector contributes significantly to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) through shipping, oil exports, fisheries, customs duties, and port operations.

ii. Energy Security

Nigeria is one of Africa's leading oil-producing countries. Effective maritime security protects offshore petroleum infrastructure that generates a substantial proportion of government revenue.

iii. Trade Facilitation

Efficient maritime security ensures uninterrupted import and export activities, thereby promoting international trade and regional integration.

iv. Investment Promotion

A secure maritime environment attracts foreign direct investment in ports, shipping, logistics, tourism, and offshore energy development.

v. Employment Creation

Maritime industries create employment opportunities in shipping, fisheries, logistics, oil and gas, customs services, marine engineering, and port management.

vi. National Security

Maritime security prevents criminal organizations from using Nigerian waters for terrorism financing, arms trafficking, and transnational organized crime.

6.0 OVERVIEW OF THREATS TO MARITIME SECURITY IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

The maritime domain of Southern Nigeria faces numerous security challenges, including:

Piracy and armed robbery at sea; Illegal oil bunkering and crude oil theft; Pipeline vandalism; Kidnapping of seafarers and oil workers; Human trafficking; Drug trafficking; Smuggling of small arms and ammunition; Illegal fishing; Marine pollution; Sea robbery within territorial waters; Cybersecurity threats targeting ports and shipping systems. These threats undermine national revenue, discourage foreign investment, increase shipping costs, and damage Nigeria's international reputation.

6.1 Contemporary Maritime Security Initiatives

Nigeria has introduced several initiatives to strengthen maritime security, including the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act 2019, which provides a legal framework for prosecuting piracy and related crimes. The Deep Blue Project integrates maritime surveillance through special mission aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), interceptor boats, armoured vehicles, and a command-and-control centre. Enhanced collaboration among the Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Marine Police, Customs, and intelligence agencies. Regional cooperation under the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, promoting information sharing and coordinated patrols among Gulf of Guinea states. These initiatives have contributed to a notable reduction in reported piracy incidents in

Nigerian waters in recent years, although challenges such as oil theft, illegal fishing, and maritime cyber threats remain.

7.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Maritime security has evolved beyond its traditional military focus to encompass economic security, environmental sustainability, human security, and good governance. In Southern Nigeria, maritime security is closely linked to the protection of strategic national assets, including seaports, offshore oil and gas facilities, fisheries, and maritime trade routes. Because maritime security involves multiple stakeholders—including governments, navies, port authorities, private shipping companies, coastal communities, and international organizations—no single theory adequately explains all its dimensions. This study therefore adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework comprising Securitization Theory, Human Security Theory, Blue Economy Theory, and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) Theory.

i. Securitization Theory

Securitization Theory was developed by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, particularly by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998). The theory posits that an issue becomes a security concern when political leaders successfully portray it as an existential threat requiring extraordinary measures beyond ordinary political processes.

Applied to maritime security, securitization explains why piracy, oil theft, illegal fishing, maritime terrorism, and attacks on offshore infrastructure have become national security priorities in Nigeria. The designation of piracy as a security threat justified measures such as the enactment of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act 2019, the deployment of naval assets, and the implementation of the Deep Blue Project.

The theory is particularly relevant because maritime insecurity in Southern Nigeria threatens national revenue, foreign investment, energy infrastructure, and Nigeria's international reputation. However, critics argue that over-securitization may result in excessive militarization while neglecting the underlying socio-economic causes of maritime crime.

ii. Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory emerged through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (1994). Unlike traditional security, which focuses on the protection of the state, Human Security emphasizes the protection of individuals and communities from economic deprivation, violence, environmental degradation, and social exclusion.

The theory is particularly applicable to the Niger Delta, where poverty, youth unemployment, environmental pollution, and underdevelopment have contributed to piracy, illegal bunkering, kidnapping, and pipeline vandalism. Many scholars argue that sustainable maritime security cannot be achieved solely through naval patrols and law enforcement. Instead, addressing socio-economic grievances, improving livelihoods, and promoting inclusive development are essential for reducing incentives for maritime crime. This perspective broadens the understanding of maritime security by linking it to community welfare, environmental justice, and sustainable development.

iii. Blue Economy Theory

The Blue Economy Theory promotes the sustainable utilization of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and ecosystem conservation. It recognizes the oceans as engines of development and advocates balancing economic exploitation with

environmental sustainability. Nigeria's Blue Economy includes shipping and maritime transport, Port operations, Offshore oil and gas, Fisheries and aquaculture, Coastal tourism, Marine biotechnology, and offshore renewable energy.

Maritime security is indispensable to the success of the Blue Economy. Persistent insecurity discourages investment, disrupts maritime trade, increases insurance premiums, and undermines the sustainable exploitation of marine resources. Consequently, strengthening maritime security is essential for realizing Nigeria's Blue Economy objectives.

iv. Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) Theory

Maritime Domain Awareness refers to the effective understanding of all activities associated with the maritime environment that could affect security, safety, the economy, or the environment. MDA emphasizes Continuous surveillance, intelligence gathering, Information sharing, inter-agency coordination, satellite monitoring, coastal radar systems, early warning mechanisms. Nigeria's Deep Blue Project represents a practical application of Maritime Domain Awareness by integrating aerial surveillance, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), interceptor boats, and command-and-control systems.

7.1 Relevance of the Theoretical Framework

The combination of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for analysing maritime security in Southern Nigeria:

- i. **Securitization Theory** explains the elevation of maritime threats to matters of national security.
- ii. **Human Security Theory** highlights the socio-economic drivers of maritime crime.
- iii. **Blue Economy Theory** demonstrates the economic importance of secure maritime spaces.

- iv. **Maritime Domain Awareness Theory** emphasizes technology, intelligence, and coordinated enforcement.

Together, these theories support a holistic understanding of maritime security that integrates legal, economic, technological, and governance perspectives.

8.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Maritime security has increasingly attracted the attention of legal scholars, security experts, economists, political scientists and international organisations because of the strategic importance of oceans to international trade, energy production, food security and national development. The literature shows that maritime insecurity is not limited to piracy and armed robbery. It also encompasses crude-oil theft, illegal bunkering, kidnapping, trafficking in persons and narcotics, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, environmental pollution, maritime terrorism and cyberattacks against ships and port infrastructure.

For Southern Nigeria, these issues are especially important because the region contains Nigeria's coastline, major seaports, offshore petroleum facilities, export terminals and extensive inland waterways. The literature reviewed below is divided into conceptual literature, empirical literature and legal literature. Twenty major works and institutional materials are critically examined.

Christian Bueger's⁵ article, *What is Maritime Security?*, is one of the most influential conceptual works in contemporary maritime-security studies. Bueger argues that maritime security has no single universally accepted meaning. Rather, its meaning is derived from its relationship

⁵ Christian Bueger, *What Is Maritime Security?* (2015) 53 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270107474_What_is_maritime_security

with four interconnected concepts: national security, marine safety, the blue economy and human security.

Bueger proposes a maritime-security matrix for understanding how piracy, trafficking, environmental degradation, illegal fishing and maritime accidents interact. He also introduces the idea of maritime-security practice, emphasising that the concept must be understood through the activities of navies, coastguards, port authorities, shipping companies and international organisations.

The relevance of this work to Southern Nigeria lies in its broad approach. Maritime insecurity in the region cannot be reduced to attacks on vessels alone. It also includes threats to oil platforms, pipelines, fishing communities, port installations and coastal ecosystems. However, Bueger's framework is predominantly conceptual and does not sufficiently address the peculiar problems of weak institutions, corruption and poverty that characterise maritime governance in developing states⁶.

Basil Germond⁷ examines maritime security from a geopolitical perspective. He argues that maritime-security strategies are shaped by geography, national interests, access to resources and the desire of states to project power beyond their land borders. Maritime spaces are therefore not merely economic routes but strategic arenas in which states seek to defend sovereignty and influence.

This perspective is useful in explaining the strategic importance of Southern Nigeria within the Gulf of Guinea. Nigeria's offshore petroleum reserves, export terminals and commercial shipping routes

⁶ Bueger, C. (2015). What is maritime security? *Marine Policy*, 53, 159–164

⁷ Basil Germond, The Geopolitical Dimension of Maritime Security. *Marine Policy* (2015) 54, 132 - 154

make the region central to the country's geopolitical and economic interests. The deployment of naval assets and surveillance infrastructure can consequently be understood as an assertion of state authority over strategic maritime spaces.

Nevertheless, Germond's analysis focuses largely on the strategies of developed states and regional institutions. It gives less attention to situations where the capacity of a coastal state to exercise effective control is weakened by corruption, inadequate resources and non-state armed groups⁸.

Natalie Klein approaches maritime security through the international law of the sea.⁹ She argues that maritime-security threats challenge traditional divisions between national jurisdiction and international cooperation. Piracy, trafficking, terrorism and illegal fishing frequently cross maritime boundaries and therefore require coordinated legal and operational responses. Klein demonstrates that coastal-state powers differ according to whether an incident occurs in internal waters, territorial waters, the Exclusive Economic Zone or the high seas. This distinction is highly relevant to Southern Nigeria because many attacks commonly described as piracy actually occur within Nigeria's territorial or internal waters and are legally classified as armed robbery at sea. The strength of Klein's work lies in its detailed legal analysis. Its limitation is that it concentrates more on international jurisdictional questions than on the domestic institutional and socio-economic causes of maritime insecurity.

⁸ Germond, B. (2015). The geopolitical dimension of maritime security. *Marine Policy*, 54, 137–142.

⁹ Natalie Klein (2011) *Maritime Security and the Law of the Sea*. 2020, Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2012.760280>

Geoffrey Till conceptualises maritime security as part of the broader idea of maintaining “good order at sea.”¹⁰ According to him, oceans must remain safe for navigation, trade, resource exploitation and legitimate governmental activity. Sea power is not restricted to warfare but includes constabulary operations, surveillance, law enforcement, search and rescue, and the protection of economic interests.

Till’s framework helps explain the role of the Nigerian Navy in Southern Nigeria. Its responsibilities extend beyond defending Nigeria against foreign military threats to combating piracy, protecting petroleum facilities, supporting civil authorities and securing maritime trade.

However, a naval-centred approach may overemphasise coercive capacity. Maritime insecurity in the Niger Delta is also connected to unemployment, environmental harm, community grievances and political exclusion, which cannot be resolved solely through naval enforcement.

Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde explain that an issue becomes “securitised” when political authorities present it as an existential threat requiring exceptional measures.¹¹ This theory is useful for understanding how piracy, crude-oil theft and attacks on offshore installations have been elevated from ordinary criminal matters to threats to Nigeria’s national security.

The enactment of the Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act 2019, the acquisition of military and surveillance assets

¹⁰ Till (2018): Sea Power and Good Order at Sea. *International Journal of Progressive Sciences and Technologies* 38(1):456 April 2023, DOI:10.52155/ijpsat.v38.1.5249

¹¹ Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998): *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998

under the Deep Blue Project and the creation of inter-agency security structures reflect the securitisation of Nigeria's maritime domain.

A major criticism of this approach is that securitisation may encourage militarisation and emergency responses while neglecting structural factors such as poverty, environmental degradation and weak governance. In Southern Nigeria, an exclusively security-based response may suppress criminal activity temporarily without addressing its underlying causes.

The UNDP's *Human Development Report 1994* broadened the meaning of security from protection of the state to protection of individuals from fear, deprivation, disease, poverty and environmental harm.¹² Human security includes economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security.

This approach is important to Southern Nigeria because maritime insecurity affects fishing communities, coastal residents, seafarers and workers in the petroleum industry. Oil spills, illegal refining, piracy and kidnapping destroy livelihoods and expose communities to violence and environmental hazards.

Human-security theory therefore supports the argument that maritime security must include employment creation, environmental restoration, community development and access to public services. Its weakness is that its broad scope can make it difficult to identify precise legal and operational priorities.¹³

¹² United Nations Development Programme: Human Security (1994)

¹³ Bueger and Edmunds (2020): The Concept of Blue Crime. 1294. *International Affairs* 93: 6, 2017

Bueger and Edmunds developed the concept of “blue crime” to describe transnational organised criminal activities occurring at sea.¹⁴ They argue that maritime crimes should not be treated as isolated offences because piracy, smuggling, illegal fishing, environmental crime and trafficking are frequently interconnected through common networks, routes and financial structures.

This concept is relevant to Southern Nigeria, where criminal networks may participate simultaneously in crude-oil theft, illegal bunkering, arms trafficking, kidnapping and money laundering. Treating these crimes separately may therefore produce fragmented and ineffective responses.

The authors advocate integrated intelligence, law enforcement and regional cooperation. Nevertheless, their conceptual model requires adaptation to local realities, especially the involvement of community actors, politically connected individuals and corrupt officials in illicit maritime economies¹⁵.

Freedom Onuoha examines piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, using Nigeria as a microcosm of the wider regional problem. He identifies weak governance, unemployment, poverty, corruption, oil-related criminality and the proliferation of small arms as major drivers of piracy.¹⁶

The study demonstrates that piracy in Nigerian waters is closely linked to the political economy of the Niger Delta. Criminal groups often possess knowledge of petroleum operations, vessel movements and

¹⁴ Ibid. (n 8)

¹⁵ Bueger, C., & Edmunds, T. (2020). Blue crime: Conceptualising transnational organised crime at sea. *Marine Policy*, 119, 104067.

¹⁶ Onuoha (2013): Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

local waterways. The research therefore challenges explanations that treat piracy merely as opportunistic criminal conduct. The limitation of the study is its age. It predates the SPOMO Act 2019 and the full implementation of the Deep Blue Project. Nevertheless, its explanation of the structural causes of maritime crime remains relevant.

Raymond Gilpin argues that maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea is rooted in governance deficits, corruption, weak law-enforcement institutions and economic marginalisation.¹⁷ He observes that illegal oil markets and poorly regulated maritime boundaries allow criminal networks to operate across national jurisdictions.

Gilpin recommends improved regional cooperation, professionalisation of security agencies and stronger coastal governance. The study remains valuable because it treats maritime crime as a regional governance problem rather than a purely Nigerian problem. Its principal limitation is that it was produced before the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and recent domestic anti-piracy reforms. It therefore does not assess whether later regional mechanisms have overcome the institutional weaknesses identified.

Garba's study investigates the effectiveness of national and international strategies used to combat maritime piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, with particular attention to Nigeria.¹⁸ The research evaluates enforcement, surveillance, legal frameworks and regional cooperation. The study finds that several strategies have improved maritime awareness and operational response, but persistent problems remain in coordination, prosecution, information sharing and sustainable

¹⁷ Gilpin Raymond, *Enhancing Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea*. Strategic Insights 6(1) (2007) 1

¹⁸ Garba B., *Effectiveness of Maritime-Security Strategies*. 42 Ghana Maritime Authority, 'Maritime Security' (GMA, 2022)

financing. This reinforces the view that acquiring security assets without building strong institutions may produce only temporary improvements. Garba's work is particularly relevant because it evaluates post-SPOMO initiatives. However, as a dissertation, its geographical and methodological scope may limit the generalisation of its findings¹⁹.

Eke examines international maritime-security threats in Nigerian waters, focusing particularly on piracy and oil theft in the coastal areas of Delta and Rivers States.²⁰ The study finds that these activities negatively affect maritime businesses, community livelihoods and economic security. Its significance lies in its focus on specific states within Southern Nigeria rather than treating the Gulf of Guinea as a single undifferentiated region. It demonstrates that maritime insecurity has direct local consequences, including income loss, fear, disruption of transportation and reduced investment. A limitation is that the study concentrates mainly on piracy and oil theft and gives less attention to illegal fishing, environmental crime, port cyber risks and trafficking²¹.

Emenyonu *et al* evaluate the relationship between maritime-security threats, maritime-security measures and blue-economy development in Nigeria.²² Using time-series data covering 1990–2022 and a structural-equation model, the study assesses piracy, kidnapping, crude-oil theft and other maritime threats. The authors find that maritime-security conditions have a significant relationship with blue-economy

¹⁹ Garba, B. (2022). *Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea with emphasis on Nigeria*

²⁰ 3.3.4 Eke (2023): Piracy, Oil Theft and Economic Security

²¹ Eke, A. International maritime-security threats in Nigerian waters and their implications for coastal economic security. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies* (2023) 44

²² Emenyonu, M, U; Onyemenchi C. and Emeaghara, G.C (2024). Maritime security and blue economy development in Nigeria: A structural equation model. *Maritime Technology and Research* 7

development. The study supports the proposition that insecurity discourages investment and reduces Nigeria's ability to benefit from shipping, fisheries, tourism and offshore resources.

The quantitative approach is an important contribution. However, the interpretation of causal relationships requires caution because national time-series data may conceal differences among Lagos, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers and other coastal states²³. IMO reports provide important empirical evidence on piracy and armed robbery in West and Central Africa. According to reports submitted to the organisation, the Gulf of Guinea recorded 87 incidents in 2020, with 112 crew members reported kidnapped or missing. This illustrated the seriousness of the region's maritime-security crisis before the subsequent decline in recorded incidents.²⁴ IMO materials also show that maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea requires coordinated national and regional action, including implementation of the Yaoundé architecture, reporting of incidents and capacity building. The principal strength of IMO reports is their reliance on official incident notifications. Their limitation is that underreporting by shipowners and coastal communities may prevent the statistics from capturing the full extent of maritime crime.

The KAIPTC study evaluates Nigeria's anti-piracy initiatives and finds that the SPOMO Act significantly improved the country's capacity to prosecute maritime offenders.²⁵ It notes that Nigeria became the first Gulf of Guinea state to secure piracy-related convictions under dedicated anti-piracy legislation.

The study nevertheless identifies weaknesses in punishment, judicial speed and enforcement consistency. It recommends specialised

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ International Maritime Organization Reports on the Gulf of Guinea

²⁵ Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre Study (2024)

maritime courts or dedicated judicial arrangements for faster resolution of maritime offences. This work is valuable because it links legal reform to operational outcomes. However, piracy prosecutions alone may not adequately address oil theft, illegal fishing and the wider networks financing maritime crime.

Churchill and Lowe provide a foundational examination of the international legal regime governing maritime zones. They explain the rights and obligations of coastal states in internal waters, the territorial sea, contiguous zone, Exclusive Economic Zone and continental shelf.²⁶ Their analysis is important for determining Nigeria's jurisdiction over maritime offences. The legal powers available to Nigeria depend on where an offence occurs. Within territorial waters, Nigeria possesses extensive enforcement jurisdiction, while conduct on the high seas may require reliance on universal jurisdiction or international cooperation. Although the work remains authoritative, it predates recent developments relating to maritime terrorism, cyber threats and modern transnational criminal networks.

Treves examines piracy under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and highlights the principle of universal jurisdiction.²⁷ He argues that although every state may seize pirate vessels on the high seas, effective prosecution depends on adequate domestic criminal legislation, evidential procedures and international cooperation. This analysis exposes an important weakness that previously existed in Nigerian law. Before the SPOMO Act, Nigeria lacked a comprehensive domestic statute expressly criminalising piracy in accordance with UNCLOS.

²⁶ Churchill R R., and Lowe A V., *The Law of the Sea* (3rd edition, Juris Publishing, Manchester University Press) ISBN 0 7190 4382 4

²⁷ Treves T., *Piracy and International Law of the Sea*. *The European Journal of International Law* Vol. 20 No. 2 © EJIL 2009

However, classical piracy law is limited because many attacks in Southern Nigeria occur in territorial or internal waters. Such conduct falls outside the technical UNCLOS definition of piracy and must be prosecuted as armed robbery or another domestic offence. In addition to her conceptual contribution, Klein provides a detailed legal analysis of jurisdiction over maritime terrorism, piracy, trafficking and weapons proliferation.²⁸ She emphasises that maritime-security enforcement must respect freedom of navigation, flag-state jurisdiction and the rights of coastal states.

For Nigeria, this means that maritime-security operations must be conducted within the jurisdictional limits established by UNCLOS. The work also supports cooperation with neighbouring Gulf of Guinea states where offenders, vessels or evidence move across national boundaries. Its limitation is that it does not analyse Nigeria's subsequent domestic anti-piracy legislation.

Anele examines the historical difficulty of prosecuting suspected pirates in Nigeria.²⁹ He observes that Nigerian security agencies frequently arrested suspects but failed to secure convictions because of legislative gaps, weak evidence gathering and poor cooperation among enforcement and prosecutorial institutions. The paper argues that effective suppression of piracy requires more than naval arrests. It requires a complete criminal-justice chain consisting of lawful arrest, evidence preservation, competent investigation, prosecution and judicial determination. The paper is valuable in understanding why enactment of the SPOMO Act was necessary. However, the law's practical effectiveness still depends on sustained institutional capacity and judicial interpretation.

²⁸ Ibid. (n 8) Klein

²⁹ Anele K K Theoretical Analysis of the Causes of Piracy off the Nigerian Coast. *Academia Letters* August 2021, p. 1

Enebeli and Njoku critically examine the SPOMO Act and conclude that it represents a major improvement in Nigeria's anti-piracy regime.³⁰ The Act domesticates relevant provisions of UNCLOS and the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation.

The authors nevertheless identify implementation challenges, including overlapping institutional mandates, inadequate prosecution expertise and weak coordination. Their central argument is that legislation, although necessary, cannot by itself suppress maritime crime. The paper is directly relevant to Southern Nigeria because the Federal High Court, NIMASA, the Nigerian Navy and other institutions must cooperate effectively in dealing with offences committed in and around Nigerian waters.

Emem appraises the definitions, offences, penalties and jurisdictional provisions of the SPOMO Act.³¹ The study recognises that the Act filled a substantial gap by expressly criminalising piracy and related maritime offences and granting the Federal High Court exclusive jurisdiction.

However, the author questions whether some provisions are sufficiently clear and whether law-enforcement agencies possess the capacity needed to investigate complex maritime offences. The study therefore recommends training for investigators, prosecutors and judges.

The principal contribution of the work is its detailed statutory analysis. Its limitation is that it was written at an early stage of the Act's

³⁰ Enebeli VN and Njoku DC, A Critical Appraisal of The Anti-Piracy Law of Nigeria. *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, (2021) Vol. 113

³¹ Emem T., An Appraisal of Nigeria's Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences Act 2019. *JIL* (2021) 19

implementation and could not evaluate a substantial body of subsequent case law.

The Afronomicslaw analysis argues that the SPOMO Act adopts a wide and flexible definition of piracy and related maritime offences.³² This breadth allows Nigerian authorities to address forms of criminality that may not fall neatly within the traditional UNCLOS definition. The analysis cautions, however, that broad statutory language must be properly interpreted to avoid uncertainty and inconsistent application. It further contends that comprehensive legislation will have limited effect unless prosecutors and courts apply it effectively. This paper is useful in examining the relationship between international piracy law and Nigeria's broader domestic approach.

8.1 Analysis of the Literature

The conceptual literature establishes that maritime security is multidimensional and incorporates state security, economic security, human welfare, environmental protection and the blue economy. Bueger's maritime-security matrix and the blue-crime concept are particularly useful in showing the connections between piracy, illegal fishing, trafficking, oil theft and environmental crime.

The empirical literature demonstrates that maritime insecurity in Southern Nigeria is driven by weak governance, economic deprivation, corruption, unemployment, criminal oil markets and inadequate enforcement capacity. Although recent security measures have contributed to a decline in reported piracy, the literature suggests that threats have not disappeared. They may instead shift towards

³² Afronomicslaw Analysis of the Definition of Piracy under SPOMO

crude-oil theft, illegal bunkering, kidnapping, smuggling and cyber-enabled criminality.

The legal literature agrees that the SPOMO Act represents a major advance in Nigeria's maritime-security framework. Nevertheless, authors consistently identify a gap between law and implementation. Effective prosecution requires trained investigators, prosecutors and judges, reliable evidence, inter-agency cooperation and regional assistance.

8.2 Useful Gaps in the Literature

Despite the breadth of existing scholarship, the following gaps remain: First, much of the literature treats Nigeria or the Gulf of Guinea as a single unit and does not adequately examine the different experiences of Lagos, Ondo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. Second, many studies focus predominantly on piracy, while insufficient attention is paid to illegal fishing, marine pollution, cyberattacks, human trafficking, port sabotage and threats to subsea infrastructure. Third, relatively few studies evaluate the combined impact of the SPOMO Act, the Deep Blue Project, naval operations and regional cooperation on maritime-security outcomes. Fourth, the relationship between coastal underdevelopment, environmental degradation and participation in maritime crime remains insufficiently integrated into legal analysis. Fifth, there is limited judicial literature examining how Nigerian courts have interpreted the substantive offences, evidential requirements and jurisdictional provisions of the SPOMO Act.

The present study therefore seeks to bridge these gaps through an integrated legal, institutional, socio-economic and security appraisal of maritime security in Southern Nigeria.

8.3 Identified Research Gap

Existing literature has contributed significantly to understanding piracy, maritime governance, and legal reforms in Nigeria. However, several gaps remain:

- i. Many studies focus narrowly on piracy while giving limited attention to other maritime threats such as illegal fishing, maritime cybercrime, environmental crimes, and human trafficking.
- ii. Much of the literature predates the implementation of the Deep Blue Project and therefore does not assess its long-term effectiveness.
- iii. Comparative analyses of the legal, institutional, technological, and socio-economic dimensions of maritime security in Southern Nigeria remain limited.
- iv. Few studies integrate contemporary concepts such as the Blue Economy and Maritime Domain Awareness into discussions of maritime security.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a comprehensive appraisal of maritime security in Southern Nigeria, combining legal analysis with institutional evaluation, technological developments, socio-economic considerations, and emerging maritime governance challenges.

9.0 FEATURES OF MARITIME SECURITY CHALLENGES IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

(a) Piracy

Piracy has historically been the most serious maritime crime in Southern Nigeria. Its manifestations include hijacking of vessels, Kidnapping of crew members, Armed robbery, Cargo theft, and vessel

hijacking. Although incidents have reduced markedly since 2021, piracy remains a latent threat that requires continuous vigilance³³.

(b) Oil Theft and Illegal Bunkering

Nigeria loses substantial revenue annually through illegal crude oil tapping, Pipeline vandalism, illegal refining, and smuggling of petroleum products. These activities also fuel environmental degradation and insecurity in coastal communities.

(c) Sea Robbery

Unlike piracy on the high seas, sea robbery occurs within Nigeria's territorial waters. Targets include fishing vessels, supply boats, barges, and passenger boats.

(d) Kidnapping of Seafarers

For many years, Nigeria recorded one of the highest incidences of kidnapping for ransom involving international seafarers. This significantly increased insurance premiums, freight costs, and port risk classification.

(e) Illegal Fishing

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing causes loss of fisheries revenue, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and conflict with artisanal fishermen.

(f) Smuggling and Human Trafficking

Southern Nigeria allegedly serves as a transit corridor for Small arms, Narcotics, Human trafficking, and contraband goods.

³³ NIMASA. *Deep Blue Project: Facing Maritime Security Head-On*.

9.2 Domestic Legal Framework

The principal legal instruments include the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Merchant Shipping Act 2007, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency Act, Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act 2019, Nigerian Ports Authority Act, Armed Forces Act, Exclusive Economic Zone Act, Coastal and Inland Shipping (Cabotage) Act 2003

International instruments include United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), SUA Convention 1988, SOLAS Convention, ISPS Code, and Yaoundé Code of Conduct.

The SPOMO Act filled a longstanding gap by creating a domestic legal basis for prosecuting piracy and related offences and aligning Nigerian law with UNCLOS and the SUA Convention³⁴.

9.3 Institutional Frameworks

Some key institutional frameworks include the Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Marine Police, Nigerian Customs Service, Nigerian Immigration Service, Department of State Services, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission

Regional cooperation occurs through regional bodies such as ECOWAS, Gulf of Guinea Commission, Yaoundé Architecture, and IMO.

³⁴ Enebeli, V. N., & Njoku, D. C. (2021). *A Critical Appraisal of the Anti-Piracy Law of Nigeria*. *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*

9.3.1 The Deep Blue Project

Launched in 2021, the Deep Blue Project introduced an integrated maritime surveillance architecture comprising special mission aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, fast interceptor boats, armoured vehicles, command-and-control centres, and specially trained maritime security personnel.

The project has contributed to a substantial reduction in reported piracy incidents in Nigerian waters. Nevertheless, concerns remain about long-term funding, maintenance, and integration with community-based intelligence³⁵.

Some of the achievements of this project include significant reduction in piracy incidents, enactment of the SPOMO Act, improved prosecution of maritime offenders, better collaboration among security agencies, improved international confidence, and enhanced surveillance capability.

9.4 Weaknesses of Maritime Security Coordination

a. Poor Inter-agency Coordination

Overlapping responsibilities often delay operational responses.

b. Inadequate Funding

Security agencies frequently face the use of obsolete equipment, inadequate logistics, and personnel shortages.

c. Corruption

Corruption facilitates illegal bunkering, oil theft, smuggling, and illegal fishing.

³⁵ NIMASA. *Deep Blue Project: Facing Maritime Security Head-On*.

d. Weak Judicial Enforcement

Prosecution of maritime crimes remains slow, while specialized maritime courts could improve efficiency. The Nigerian justice sector reforms needs practical implementation strategies to become more beneficial to the maritime sector and enhance maritime security.

e. Community Exclusion

Many coastal communities remain marginalized.

Without community intelligence, security efforts become reactive.

9.5 Contemporary developments on Maritime Security

New threats to maritime security include maritime cybercrime, Cyber attacks on ports, autonomous vessel security, drone surveillance, artificial intelligence in maritime policing, and Climate-induced maritime migration. These issues require updated legal and operational responses.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following measures are recommended:

- a) Strengthen implementation of the SPOMO Act.
- b) Establish specialized maritime courts or dedicated maritime divisions within existing courts.
- c) Increase funding for the Nigerian Navy and NIMASA.
- d) Expand maritime domain awareness through satellite, drone, and AI-enabled surveillance.
- e) Enhance inter-agency information sharing.
- f) Intensify regional cooperation under the Yaoundé Architecture.
- g) Promote community-based maritime intelligence in Niger Delta communities.
- h) Strengthen anti-corruption measures within maritime institutions.

- i) Invest in the Blue Economy to create employment and reduce incentives for maritime crime.
- j) Regularly review maritime legislation to address emerging threats such as cybercrime and unmanned maritime systems.

10. CONCLUSION

Maritime security in Southern Nigeria has improved significantly over the past few years, particularly with the implementation of the SPOMO Act and the Deep Blue Project, which have helped reduce piracy and enhance maritime surveillance. However, maritime security remains a dynamic challenge shaped by organized crime, oil theft, environmental degradation, illegal fishing, and evolving cyber threats. Sustainable maritime security therefore requires not only stronger legal and institutional frameworks but also improved governance, regional collaboration, technological innovation, judicial effectiveness, and meaningful engagement with coastal communities. Achieving these objectives will enhance investor confidence, safeguard maritime commerce, and support the long-term development of Nigeria's blue economy³⁶. (2021)

³⁶ Yercan, F. , Cetin, O., and Conguloglu(2026). The economic impact of piracy: a critical assessment of maritime security and trade disruptions in the Gulf of Guinea. *Maritime Economics & Logistics*, Volume 28, pages 163–187 (2026)