

A Discourse on Nigeria's Security Interests in the Gulf of Guinea in the Twentieth Century

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[0163] Abstract

The study discussed Nigeria's interests in the Gulf of Guinea in the 21st century by pointing out that the region is vital for the country's economy because of its oil and gas, maritime trade and other resources. At the same time, the region's wealth from the sea is accompanied by many maritime problems and the current issues are mainly about West African States, Piracy, Foreign Interests from outside Africa, Maritime boundary disputes, the Gulf of Guinea States and poaching. The purpose of the study was to look at the current problems in the Gulf of Guinea and how they have affected Nigeria's security and economy in the region. The study used political realism to explain the discourse. The theory is useful because it points out that state power, national interests and the lack of global order are key factors in shaping Nigeria's security in the Gulf of Guinea. The study found that while some maritime crimes have decreased, the main problems of social and economic issues, new criminal methods, legal and operational challenges and the connection between different illegal activities still make it hard to maintain maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. It was suggested that dealing with these issues requires efforts in maritime security, greater cooperation among countries, better governance and law enforcement and addressing the reasons behind maritime crime.

Keywords: Gulf of Guinea, Maritime Boundary Dispute, Piracy, Poaching and Transnational Crime.

Introduction

The Gulf of Guinea is understood differently by different scholars and this depends on their perspective and the way they try to define it. The coastline is five and a half thousand kilometers long and starts in West Africa, goes through Central Africa and ends in Angola. It is limited to the area set by the Gulf of Guinea Commission treaty which now covers the eight states of Angola, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe (Piate, 2013, Eze, 2010). The treaty on the Gulf of Guinea is designed by the state parties to support cooperation, development and the peaceful resolution of conflicts that may arise from dividing maritime boundaries in the overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of member states (Tukur, 2010, Piate, 2014). The Gulf of Guinea has attracted worldwide attention mainly due to its large oil reserves. The area's strategic and maritime features are very appealing. The Gulf of Guinea has a wealth of minerals and marine resources, including oil, diamond, gold and fishes. In the past few years, the region has become one of the most important emerging areas in the world mainly because of technological progress in offshore oil and gas, higher world oil demand and prices and political stability and democracy in the region, compared to the tension and political instability found in the Persian Gulf's main suppliers. Many people believe that America, Europe and China's new focus on the Gulf of Guinea is a new version of the "Scramble for Africa," aimed at securing energy for their countries. The Gulf of Guinea is attractive to the United States and Europe because none of the member countries, except for Nigeria, are part of OPEC (Eze, 2010, Piate, 2017). The United States has a long-term goal to reduce OPEC's power over energy supply and one way to do this is to persuade some countries to leave the organization. In 2002, the United States Government

applied subtle pressure on Nigeria to leave OPEC and Nigeria has also threatened to leave OPEC to get a larger share of oil production (Eze, 2010). Another benefit is that most of the oil fields in the Gulf of Guinea are located offshore, so they are not affected by civil and border wars, coups, rebellions or revolutions. In addition, it is believed that these conflicts would not become so ideological or religious that they would result in an oil embargo, causing an energy crisis and damaging western interests (Eze, 2010; Tukur, 2010 and Piate and Eminiue, 2022).

For Nigeria, the Gulf of Guinea which is part of the South Atlantic, is its most important strategic and security area, since it is open to attacks by sea and could threaten the country's economy. The area is known to be important for Nigerian trade, as it is the main route for shipping in the Atlantic corridor (Piate, 2024). The involvement of foreign interests makes this important security area more susceptible to threats from outside. Again, Equatorial Guinea is a neighboring country whose trust should not be assumed, as there has always been mutual mistrust between it and Nigeria (Ate and Akinterinwa, 1992 and Piate, 2025). Being the biggest coastal state in West Africa, Nigeria has much to gain from a well-managed and peaceful use of the ocean. Nigeria's oil and gas wells are mostly offshore and her coastal waters are known for fishing as well as being a key route for merchant ships, military activities and other important interests. In addition, because Nigeria is a developing country with limited borders, its ocean frontiers are significant for foreign policy.

Security is about being safe from harm and about threats to a nation's ability to protect itself, promote its important values and support its people's well-being (Imobighe, 1990; Piate, 2025). Security can be studied at three different levels. They are found at the individual, national and international levels (Barry, 1982). At the personal level, individuals usually try to secure values such as life, health, status, freedom and wealth. Security is viewed differently at the national level. At this point, the concept of national security is introduced which means a nation's ability to defend its internal values from outside threats. At this point, Barry recognizes three types of values that are the targets of security and are therefore defended from threats. This means the emotional sense of being a nation among the people, the government's institutions and the state's population, land and resources. At the international level, security is often seen as the balance of power among a group of countries. The balance of power in a region can be achieved through equal strength among the states or by one state being much stronger than the others. The main factor in a state's security is its national interest which is centered on the self-preservation of the state (Peters, 2011).

At the same time, the region's wealth from the sea is accompanied by many maritime problems which can be grouped as economic, political and environmental. Some of the economic threats include drug trafficking, illegal oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, piracy, dumping toxic wastes and accidents in the oil industry. Resource insurgency is a significant political problem in the Region. There is a real danger of small arms and light weapons (SALWS) being used more widely and there is a possible threat of terrorism at sea. The region's natural resources and biodiversity have been negatively affected by the environmental damage caused by population, growth and fast industrialization, especially in oil exploration and exploitation by companies like EXXON Mobil, Chevron, Shell, Agip and Total. Since gaining independence, many countries in the Gulf of Guinea have faced corruption, poor use of resources, political unrest, civil wars, activities by militants, kidnapping, human trafficking, piracy, crimes across borders, drug trafficking and military coups. These countries have not been able to grow their economies, mainly because of the undemocratic and totalitarian governments they have had. However, the region's strategic role is mainly because of the growing worldwide struggle for limited natural resources. The rise in demand in different economies and the instability in oil and gas supplier countries have made the USA, Europe and China look for new, dependable sources of energy. As a result of this search, there is now a chance for increased cooperation or conflict in the Gulf of Guinea. Basically, it is becoming clear that the Gulf of Guinea's resources and potential are being threatened by a range of domestic, regional and international issues (Piate and Nekabari, 2025). In this context, the study looks at the current issues facing

the Gulf of Guinea and the effects they have had on Nigeria's security and economy in that region. The main argument of this study is that insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea is a major obstacle to economic growth and development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Explication of the Discourse

The study used political realism as its main approach to understanding the subject. Political realism is a key theory in international relations that helps us examine Nigeria's security interests and the discussions about them in the Gulf of Guinea in the 21st century. Realism believes that states are the main players in international politics, guided by their main interests of survival and security. Nigeria's involvement in the Gulf of Guinea is mainly to secure its borders, boost its economy (mainly from oil and gas) and maintain its influence in the region. The international system is also characterized by anarchy and the need for countries to help themselves. In such a situation, countries must depend on their own resources for protection. Since Nigeria is threatened by piracy, illegal fishing and other crimes in the Gulf of Guinea, it should strengthen its navy, coast guard and intelligence and consider forming alliances to protect its interests. Realism in power politics stresses the importance of power in international affairs. Nations are always trying to increase their power to protect themselves and accomplish their goals. Since Nigeria is a major power in West Africa, it is expected to pay attention to the balance of power in the Gulf of Guinea and try to influence events to protect its interests. Realists believe that states act rationally, weighing the pros and cons of their actions to benefit themselves. From a realist point of view, Nigeria's security policies in the Gulf of Guinea would be designed to provide the most security and benefits at the lowest cost. The theory is useful because it gives a strong structure for analyzing Nigeria's security interests and the discussions in the Gulf of Guinea. In other words, it points out that the importance of state power, national interests and the chaotic nature of the international system continue to influence Nigeria's security policies in this region. If we pay attention to these main realist ideas, we can learn a lot about what influences Nigeria's actions and the situation in the Gulf of Guinea.

Contemporary Challenges Confronting the Gulf of Guinea and Its Impact on Nigeria's Security cum Economic Interest in the Region

As mentioned earlier, the Gulf of Guinea is vital for Nigeria's economy because of its oil and gas, trade routes and other resources. Still, the region encounters major problems and the current realities include the nature of West African states, Piracy, Extra African Foreign Interest, Maritime Boundary Dispute, the Gulf of Guinea States and Poaching. West Africa consists of 16 different countries. All the other countries are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), except Mauritania. The area includes a range of states that differ in their land area, colonial background, economic power, unity within and connections with other countries. There are eight francophone countries, five Anglophone and two Lusophone countries in the region (UNODC, 2009). Although the region is diverse in terms of its countries' sizes and resources, it all faces multiple layers of insecurity due to conflicts and crimes that can affect communities and nations, sometimes spreading across borders and having regional effects (Bryden, N'Diaye and Olonisakin, 2008). Consequently, the region is known for being unstable and its recent history is marked by many internal conflicts, long civil wars, disputes between countries, coups and organized crimes that cross borders (Zabadi and Onuha, 2011). The West African region deals with several security issues, each with its own characteristics, including transactional terrorism, the spread of small arms and light weapons, oil bunkering and smuggling, human and drug trafficking, as well as unconstitutional changes of government, insurgency and fragile states. Most of the security issues in West Africa caused by non-state actors are due to transnational organized crime. According to the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, West Africa is at risk of organized crimes such as human trafficking, oil bunkering, maritime piracy, smuggling, illegal dumping of toxic waste, drug trafficking and terrorism. These crimes are drawn to and increase the unique risks faced by the region. Terrorism greatly hinders

the development of Africa and West Africa, affecting the economy, society and political situation. The challenges caused by terrorism and similar threats like banditry, kidnapping and insurgency in West Africa make us ask, what is the nature of terrorism and what drives it? The reason terrorism continues in West Africa is due to old rivalries, disputes over who is in charge, fights over resources, extremist beliefs, poor intelligence, little cooperation among the multilateral joint task force, lack of strong national unity among West African States to enforce their counter terrorism strategy and open borders (Piate, 2025). Small arms and light weapons are often linked to transnational terrorism. The rise of small arms and light weapons in West Africa and the gulf of guinea greatly increases insecurity, leads to more conflicts, criminal acts and humanitarian issues. This is especially worrying since the region deals with climate change, people being displaced and instability which makes it more likely for criminal networks to exploit it. Because weapons are easy to get, non-state actors can now take part in violent activities such as insurgencies, banditry and kidnapping. The spread of arms can also increase existing conflicts, weaken state institutions and make it harder to keep law and order. When there is a lot of violence and instability due to arms proliferation, it can discourage foreign investment and slow economic growth. Because of weak governance, corruption, economic difficulties, open borders and high unemployment and poverty in West Africa, illegal arms trafficking and crime are more common. As Zabadi and Onuoha point out, small arms are the most common weapons used in armed robberies, fights between communities, local wars, insurrections, rebel activities and terrorism. They are also commonly used to help with drug trafficking, smuggling and other similar crimes. According to a study titled African's missing Billions, the use of small arms and light weapons in the fifteen years of conflict from 1990 to 2005 resulted in Africa losing around \$300 billion (IANSA, 2007). It is also clear from the evidence that 95 percent of the weapons used in most African conflicts are imported and Africa alone is thought to have more than 60 million illegal weapons which is 75 percent of the world's total. In West Africa, it is estimated that eight to ten million small arms exist and more than half of them are held by insurgents and criminals (Zabadi and Onuoha, 2011). The increase in SALW helps to make conflicts more serious, longer-lasting and more widespread which blocks efforts to build peace and provide aid (Zabadi, 2009, Ginife, Bourne and Greens, 2004 and Piate, 2025). Non-state actors are also linked to the problem of oil bunkering and smuggling. The continued theft of oil in the Niger Delta is still a danger to law and order in Nigeria and to the security of West Africa. Shell Nigeria's report suggests that bunkerers or vandals steal around 100 million to 250 million barrels of oil annually, with each barrel worth about US\$100 which adds up to a loss of about US\$25 billion each year. As Onuoha pointed out, the money made from oil bunkering and piracy in Nigeria's coastal areas is sometimes used to buy advanced weapons. Their actions are tied to the spread of SALW, as they try to buy and develop advanced weapons to compete with and defeat their enemies (Onuoha, 2008). As a result, the activities of oil bunkering are helping to spread and circulate SALW in the region which is a factor in the rise of maritime piracy along the West Africa Coast. In addition, West Africa is involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking and smuggling, dumping of toxic waste and the sale of counterfeit medicine. Along with poverty and unemployment, criminal transnational trafficking has played a role in making the region less stable and secure.

In addition to the dangers from transnational organized crime, Zabadi and Onuoha pointed out that West Africa is still at risk of instability and conflicts due to the characteristics of politics in some countries. There is a significant risk of unconstitutional government changes, weak states and insurgency. The frequent occurrence of unconstitutional changes of government in West Africa has often led to threats to security, peace and stability, as these changes are a result of governance failure. Coups d'état or simply coups, are unconstitutional changes of government that happen when a small group of people, often from the military or other powerful groups, take over the government by force (Piate, Sunday and Kia, 2024). They usually take over the government by force and often end the existing constitution, parliament and other democratic institutions. Article 28(e) of the Malabo protocol which forms the legal basis for the African criminal court, defines this offence as the act of committing or ordering others to commit certain

acts to gain or keep power illegally. These acts are: (a) A putsch or coup d'état against a democratically elected government, (b) An intervention by mercenaries to replace a democratically elected government, (c) Any replacement of a democratically elected government by the use of armed dissidents or rebels or through political assassinating, (d) Any refusal by an incumbent government to relinquish power to the winning party or candidate after free, fair and regular elections, (e) Any amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments which is an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government. In 1966, the National Liberation Council took over the government of Ghana by overthrowing the democratically elected government of Kwame Nkrumah. The military remained in power until elections took place in 1969. In 1971, General Idi Amin took over Uganda in a military coup that removed President Milton Obote from office. Under his rule, there was widespread abuse of human rights and political repression. The Arab spring protest in Egypt in 2011 resulted in the removal of President Hosni Mubarak from power. For a long period, the military ruled the country before elections were held again. In 2017, the military in Zimbabwe removed President Robert Mugabe from power after he had ruled for over 30 years. Emerson Mnangagwa was made President by the military after he won an election that was disputed in 2018. In 2021, General Assimi Goita led a military coup that removed President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and in the same year, Mamady Doumbouya led a coup in Guinea against President Alpha Conde. In 2022, Ibrahim Traore led a military coup in Burkina Faso against Paul-Henrisandaogo Damiba and in 2023, Abdourahmane Tehiani led a coup in Niger to overthrow President Mohamed Bazoum. If a Gulf of Guinea state makes unconstitutional changes, it can weaken.

If a state is unable to handle maritime threats such as piracy and smuggling, it can lead to more criminal activity, making the seas less secure. All in all, it leads to less democracy, more instability and violence, less cooperation among countries and a weaker maritime security. When it comes to state fragility, it means the state is unstable and unable to govern, support its people and keep its authority. It happens when there are shortcomings in one or more of the main functions of a state: authority, capacity and legitimacy. State authority in this context means the state's power to control violence. It is commonly associated with low trust, not controlling its land and failing to supply essential services. Capacity issues in fragile states usually mean they cannot handle the political, economic, environmental and social challenges in their societies. Because their governance is weak, these states cannot allow the government to keep law, order and security within their borders. Somalia, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Chad are often mentioned as examples of fragile states in Africa. Other countries in this region are Burundi, Congo, Cote d'ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Togo and Zimbabwe.

In local terms, an insurgency is a violent uprising by small groups with few weapons who fight using guerrilla tactics against a bigger authority. It is a situation where a group of people fights against their government's authority. Both insurgency and belligerency are connected to armed conflict, but they are not the same in terms of their extent and how they are recognized. Insurgency means a group is rebelling against a government, but belligerency is when the group is recognized as a party in a war. The Gulf of Guinea insurgency is a major danger to Nigeria's security and economy, mainly by destabilizing oil-producing regions and disrupting activities at sea. The lack of security in Nigeria makes it harder for the country to maintain its economy, especially since it relies on oil and can result in more dangers for trade and investment at sea.

Piracy is also a current challenge facing the gulf of guinea. Piracy refers to acts of stealing, hijacking and other harmful actions against ships in international waters. The purpose of these attacks is to steal items from the ship or to demand money from the owners or other interested parties by threatening to keep the ship or crew hostage (OCIMF, 2009). According to the UNCLOS (1982), piracy is only considered a crime when it takes place on the high sea which is beyond the twelve mile limit of a maritime state's territorial waters (Article 101 UNCLOS). As a result, acts of violence against ships, mainly those occurring in a state's territorial waters, are not considered piracy by international law, but are instead

called armed robbery. However, as Onuoha (2010) points out, most of the cases called piracy are not actually piracy in the legal sense, since they happen in territorial waters (Pugh and Gregory, 1994). Based on the above, the study uses the definition of piracy provided by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) in 1997 which describes piracy as boarding or attempting to board a ship with the aim of stealing or committing a crime and with the intent or ability to use force (IMB, 1997). The high level of piracy in Nigeria is due to the large amount of vessel traffic in the country's waters, as crude oil is transported by sea. Nigeria does not have the ability to refine its own crude oil, so it is sent abroad for refining and then returned to the country for use. Additionally, many vessels that assist oil rigs in the country's maritime zones are at high risk of piracy attacks. Nodland (2010) and Anele (2015) pointed out that piracy in Nigeria mainly focuses on crude oil. In Nigeria, pirates sell the stolen oil at the black market which is more profitable than the ransom they receive in Somalia for kidnapped seafarers, cargo or ships. They also argued that, as an import dependent country, many merchant ships in the country's waters visit Nigerian ports. When these vessels are berthed at Nigerian ports or anchored, they are at risk of being attacked by pirates. The main reason for modern piracy, especially in Nigeria, is the dissatisfaction of the marginalized Niger Delta communities whose land is being used for oil production by the country and multinational companies. The conflict in the Niger Delta and piracy off the Nigerian coast should be understood in terms of poverty, not being able to vote and the simple access to guns and fights over oil. The activities of oil exploration in the Niger Delta cause environmental harm which negatively affects the health and jobs of local farmers and fishermen. This demonstrates that what happens in Nigerian politics on land leads to offshore activities that create the main source of insecurity. The increase in weapons in the Niger Delta is due to the political goals of the political class. The pirates were hired, given weapons and used to rig elections in different states in the Niger Delta region, but they were not disarmed after the elections. Because of this, they use the weapons they have to become pirates and support their expensive lifestyles. Piracy in Nigerian waters is also caused by the availability of weapons from civil wars in West African countries, especially Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Libya after the fall of Murrar Gadaffi. Also, some maritime regulatory institutions and security agencies in Nigeria have been involved in helping pirates hijack ships. Besides, these institutions and agencies do not have the necessary resources, funding or motivation to properly secure the maritime zones of Nigeria. The lack of action by the Nigerian government to stop piracy has helped piracy to grow in the country's waterways. Even though Nigeria has laws against piracy such as the Spomo Act of 2019, the Nigerian Navy Act, the Merchant Shipping Act 2007, the NIMASA Act and the Admiralty Jurisdiction Act 1991, the situation is still getting worse because the laws are not followed and enforced properly.

Maritime security means that no acts take place that could harm the natural condition or strength of any navigable waterway or put the safety of people, infrastructure, cargo, vessels or other conveyances at risk in or on waterways. Onuoha pointed out that maritime security consists of two main parts: the intrinsic dimension which deals with the natural condition of the maritime environment and the extrinsic dimension which covers the safety of people and property. Onuoha points out that the damage to the marine environment from dumping, leakage of toxic waste and poaching is a threat to the basic aspect of maritime security. This dimension of maritime security ensures the safety of all foreign objects that are in or use the maritime limit. This involves the safety of vessels, people and facilities that are not part of the marine ecosystem but are important to a state or entity that can use the sea. Onuoha ends by stating that piracy endangers both aspects of maritime security. Piracy creates common dangers for anyone using the sea, regardless of their nationality or what they are doing – for example, ships, other crews and tourists on oil rigs. When oil and chemicals leak into the sea, they harm the marine environment and may endanger both the food supply and the livelihoods of local people. In general, piracy harms the economic growth of the country as it targets ships carrying crude oil to be refined abroad and refined products meant for use in the country. Nigeria's export and foreign exchange earnings are mostly from oil and gas which also make up about 80 percent of the country's total revenue. Since the country's budget depends on crude oil

sales, any theft of oil products by pirates can harm Nigeria's economic growth. The presence of piracy in Nigerian waters led to more crimes such as human, arms and drug trafficking, illegal fishing, dumping of toxic waste and vandalising oil installations and these acts are often connected to money laundering, terrorism and other international organized crimes. The number of piracy incidents in the gulf of guinea has gone down in recent years, but the risk to crew safety is still high, as the region is still a major source of kidnappings. Illegal fishing and trafficking are still happening and can make security efforts less effective. The presence of pirates in the gulf of guinea seriously affects Nigeria's security and economy by disrupting trade, allowing crimes, causing major economic losses and weakening both national and human security.

Another problem facing the gulf of guinea is the involvement of foreign countries from outside Africa. The main problem in the gulf of guinea is that the neighboring countries are competing to secure, manage and use the resources within the two hundred nautical miles of their exclusive economic zones. The presence of oil and fish in the gulf, along with the knowledge that environmental pollution can spread, have made the region's countries more concerned about their mutual threats. In addition, the frequent visits of real or perceived enemies to the gulf, supposedly to help nearby countries with their resource development, have also threatened Nigeria's national security. Being a sub-regional power, Nigeria encounters many difficulties in the region, especially since its waters are in the south Atlantic basin which means it depends mainly on sea trade for its economy and most of its oil which makes up 90% of its foreign earnings, is found offshore. Due to its location, Nigeria must be responsible for guarding its waters and making sure its offshore resources are not taken by foreign powers (Ogwu, 2004). This is true, as any disturbance in the region could impact Nigeria's key interests since its oil infrastructure is based there. The main reason for competition in the Gulf of Guinea is that the states there are interested in resources, while other countries are interested in the same resources to support their strategic interests. Because many states in the region are poor, they become easy targets for the political games of superpowers (Uchegbu, 2004). In 2000, President George W. Bush stated that Africa was not important to the United States, but in 2004, the country changed its view and said Africa was now significant in its strategic plans.

There are several factors that might have led extra-African countries, especially the United States, to be interested in African oil. Some of the reasons are the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism, attacks on oil workers and oil facilities in several Middle Eastern countries, the quality of African oil, most West African oil wells being offshore and safe from social or political issues and the gulf of guinea being far from the problems in the Persian gulf or central Asian pipelines (New man, 2004, Knickmeyer, 2004 and Agwu, 2004). This could mean that Nigeria is now facing a new situation, as Fagbohun explains, because the renewed interest of extract African powers, with all its effects, is here to stay. On the bright side, working together with other African navies and security forces can strengthen the security system in the gulf of Guinea. Working together, sharing information and responding as a team can help fight crimes such as piracy, illegal fishing, drug trafficking and arms smuggling that threaten Nigeria's oil and gas sector. However, more foreign involvement could lead to increased competition for resources, trade routes and influence in the Gulf of Guinea. This could weaken Nigeria's leading role in the region's economy and security. Again, having several actors with different security priorities and methods could make the current security system more complicated.

Again, because Nigeria has unstable relations with some countries in the region, it is understandable that the country would be concerned about foreign interests in the area, as its security could be at risk from hostile outsiders (Agwu, 2004). As it was in 1988, South African experts were present in Equatorial Guinea. At that time, Nigeria's national security was affected by the same types of threats that were common in the Gulf of Guinea. In terms of maritime boundary disputes, over the years, there has been an increase in claims and counter claims from the states in the gulf, as every state tries to gain the most from its neighbors. Yet, some worry that if maritime boundary disputes continue, it could lead to armed conflict, especially when the areas in question are rich in resources. As a result, it becomes harder for countries in

the sub-region to cooperate on common security issues. The claim is mainly based on new technology that allows oil to be extracted from deeper waters by competing multinational companies and the belief that the region has a lot of hydrocarbons. As a result, Tukur (2010) points out that most of the maritime areas in the gulf of guinea, especially those in the exclusive economic zone, are still disputed and therefore under limited use. In the gulf of guinea, Nigeria and Cameroun fought over Bakassi peninsula which was settled by the ICJ in Cameroun's favor, equatorial Guinea and Cameroun had a dispute over an island at the mouth of Ntem River, Gabon and equatorial Guinea fought over Mbane Island and Angola and Democratic Republic of Congo had a dispute over Cabinda's maritime boundaries (Eze, 2010).

Agwu (2004) states that Nigeria is the only country that has completed the demarcation and delimitation of its maritime borders and has also done so with Equatorial Guinea through a treaty on the Ekanga Zafiro oil field and with Sao Tome Principe through a treaty on the JDZ for joint exploration of resources in their common sea area. The Development Zone treaty which will last for forty five years, can be renewed after thirty years and Nigeria will own 60% of the resources, while Sao Tome will own 40%. Although the treaty shows that both countries are interested in exploring their aquatic and hydrocarbon resources in the EEZ, domestic politics and outside forces have tried to weaken the agreement. The government of Sao Tome and Principe tried to change the agreement so that Nigeria would receive 50% of the revenue and the headquarters would be in Sao Tome and Principe. It is important to mention that the United States has often stated that the documents on the joint development zone are harmful to Sao Tome and could weaken the country's sovereignty (Eze, 2010 and Tukur, 2010). All in all, maritime boundary disputes in the Gulf of Guinea greatly hinder Nigeria's security and economic interests by encouraging insecurity, preventing the use of resources, discouraging investment, disrupting trade and slowing the development of the blue economy. It is important to settle these disputes peacefully and set clear maritime borders to maintain stability, boost the economy and protect Nigeria's interests in the region.

Nigeria's security and economic interests in the Gulf of Guinea are also affected by its relationship with gulf of guinea states. Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe are found in West Africa, while Gabon, Angola, Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo are in Central and Southern Africa (Fagbohun, 2007). Nigeria has often been suspicious and fearful of being dominated by other Gulf of Guinea States. This is even though Nigeria has always promoted good relations with its neighbors, including those in the Gulf of Guinea, since gaining independence (Gambari, 1985 and Imobighe, 1987). The size of Nigeria and the presence of many resources, especially oil, in the maritime border areas that are disputed by several parties in the sub-region, are key factors in how the immediate neighbours view Nigeria (Ate and Akinterinwa, 1992). Fagbohun believes that the immediate neighbours are concerned about their long-term security in relation to Nigeria. Agwu further supports this by stating that before the oil was found in large quantities in the Gulf of Guinea, there was no lasting and unbreakable relationship among the states. According to Agwu, the fear of domination has always been present; this is why he concluded that the discovery of oil in the region would lead to fierce competition among countries for the oil fields which could worsen some common border disputes and make countries more desperate to claim and secure these disputed areas. Again, the lack of clear and defined borders in the Gulf of Guinea region has often caused problems in Nigeria's relations with its neighbors. There have been issues between Nigeria and these countries at different times. Nigeria and Cameroon experienced issues with their border in their relationship. The issue continued when the International Court of Justice decided in October, 2022, giving Cameroon not only Bakassi Peninsula in the Southeast, but also a large part of Nigeria's land in the Northeast. In Equatorial Guinea, the issue of not following the labour agreement with Nigeria and the alleged mistreatment of Nigerian citizens there was serious, but a more significant event in the relationship between the two countries took place in 1988 when Apartheid South Africa tried to establish a presence in Equatorial Guinea. As a result, Nigeria faced serious diplomatic and geo-political problems, since Equatorial Guinea serving as a base for Apartheid South Africa was a direct

threat to the country's safety. It revealed that the stability of Nigeria's politics could be threatened by foreign actors using nearby islands such as Malabo, Sao Tome and Principe, if Nigeria does not pay attention to its relationships with them (Fagbohun, 2007; Amakiri, 1988; Osuntokun, 1987 and Ekoko, 1992). Poaching in the Gulf of Guinea is a major danger to Nigeria's security and economy because it helps organized crime and causes instability. They are involved in illegal activities such as drug trafficking, smuggling weapons and human trafficking which makes the Gulf of Guinea less stable. The money made from poaching can be used to support other crimes which increases insecurity in the area. If fish stocks are depleted by poaching, it can seriously affect the lives of those who depend on fishing which may lead to anger and open the door for criminal or militant organizations to recruit people who need money by offering them work in illegal activities like piracy and stealing oil. Using weapons to attack ships in poaching can result in oil and chemical spills that pollute the sea and harm the environment. The damage to the environment can harm the lives of people living near the coast and may result in disputes over resources. In addition, poaching in the Gulf of Guinea is a serious security concern for Nigeria because it encourages organized crime, increases instability and weakens maritime governance.

Conclusion

The study discussed Nigeria's security interests in the Gulf of Guinea in the 21st century by pointing out that the region is essential for Nigeria's economy because of its oil and gas, trade routes and other resources. At the same time, the region's prosperity at sea is accompanied by many maritime problems. As a result, the rise in demand and instability among oil and gas suppliers have made the USA, Europe and China look for new and more dependable sources of energy. As a result of this search, there is now a chance for more cooperation or conflict in the Gulf of Guinea. The main issues today are West African States, Piracy, Foreign involvement from outside Africa, Maritime boundary disputes, the Gulf of Guinea states and poaching. The study's results indicate that while some types of maritime crime have decreased, the main challenges of social and economic issues, new criminal methods, legal and operational difficulties and the connections between various illegal activities still make it hard to maintain maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

To solve these challenges, we need to improve maritime security, boost co-operation among countries, enhance governance and the rule of law and address the reasons behind maritime crime.

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