

REPORT

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CRIMINAL CONVERGENCE ON CAMEROON'S COAST

Financing conflict and sustaining
violence in the Gulf of Guinea

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Contents

Acronyms and abbreviations.....	ii
Executive summary.....	1
Methodology.....	3
Definition of concepts.....	3
Geographic scope.....	4
Maritime piracy trends in Cameroon	6
The evolution of modern piracy.....	6
Organization and location of pirate groups operating on Cameroon's coastline	9
The means, targets and modus operandi of pirates in Cameroon.....	13
The cohabitant flows of maritime piracy in Cameroon	18
Hostage-taking	18
Extortion and illegal taxation.....	21
The effects of piracy on the financing of armed conflict and the perpetuation of violence.....	23
Socio-political effects	23
Economic effects.....	25
Recommendations.....	28
Notes.....	31

Acronyms and abbreviations

AMC	Africa Marine Commando
BFF	Bakassi Freedom Fighters
BIR	Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide (Rapid Intervention Battalion)
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GGC	Gulf of Guinea Commission
IMO	International Maritime Organization
MCC	Multinational Coordination Centre
NDDSC	Niger Delta Defence and Security Council
SNH	Société Nationale des Hydrocarbures (National Hydrocarbons Corporation)
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime





Executive summary

Maritime piracy has become one of the most urgent security issues in the Gulf of Guinea, including Cameroon. This area is currently ranked as the second-most affected worldwide, after East and South East Asia. This report provides an overview of the current and emerging trends in maritime piracy and the associated flow of criminal activities in Cameroon. It tracks the evolution of statistics regarding attacks on and off the Cameroonian coast, detailing the methods employed by individuals commonly referred to as pirates.

The analysis focuses on the timing of these attacks, the implementation processes, and the routes and targets involved. Additionally, it explores other criminal activities that bolster the resilience of pirates, such as hostage-taking, extortion and illegal taxation. The typology of targets – civilian, military and administrative – significantly influences the tactics used by hostage-takers both at sea and in hidden coves.

Although incidents such as vessel boardings, attempted attacks, hijackings and kidnappings of crew members have generally decreased in recent years, there has been a simultaneous increase in illegal activities that provide alternative income sources for pirate groups, especially during times when they are not directly involved in kidnapping for ransom operations.

The purpose of this research is to shed light on the current and emerging trends in maritime piracy and related criminal activities. Specifically, it investigates how practices such as hostage-taking, extortion, and illegal taxation evolve, which sustain pirate economies and strengthen their resilience. The study aims to identify the most affected regions, classify the criminal actors and networks involved, and analyze their operational strategies, including transnational methods, key transit points and sanctuaries.

Ships anchored off Douala. In recent years, the region has seen an increase in pirate attacks on boats waiting to enter the port.

Photo supplied



The findings reveal that maritime piracy in Cameroon is perpetrated by various groups that frequently change names in response to shifts in leadership. Notable groups include the Bakassi Freedom Fighters (BFF), the Africa Marine Commando (AMC) and the Niger Delta Defence and Security Council (NDDSC), along with other organized factions named after their leaders. An examination of the sociological characteristics of these groups has uncovered their typical organizational structures – characterized by key figures often referred to as border kings, or kingpins in major cities – and specialized task forces set up for large-scale operations. There is also a clear gendered division of roles within these networks.

Through interviews conducted in maritime regions, literature reviews and analysis of unclassified security data, this report identifies various sanctuaries of pirate groups operating in Cameroonian waters. The evidence shows that pirates can conduct operations far from their bases, with logistical capabilities varying according to their targets. It also reveals the influence of spiritualism and rituals in magico-religious practices common among these groups.

The broader impacts of these maritime crimes are also considered, particularly their role in funding armed conflict in Cameroon's anglophone regions and the Niger Delta. This emphasizes the links between piracy, organized crime and insurgent violence, thereby redefining maritime insecurity as a local and international threat.

Maritime piracy and its cohabitant flows¹ contribute to the ongoing cycle of violence in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, as well as the Niger Delta. There is a concerning collaboration between Cameroonian separatists and Nigerian pirates, which threatens the state's interests at sea, particularly in oil exploration and exploitation, industrial and artisanal fishing, and the cross-border movement of people and goods.

Several recommendations are made regarding the need to strengthen efforts against maritime piracy and the related criminal activities that support it. The Yaoundé Code of Conduct² urgently needs updating to include crimes such as extortion, illegal taxation and hostage-taking in coastal and mangrove areas within the scope of organized maritime crime.

The study offers policy recommendations aimed at addressing crimes of concern not only to Cameroonian authorities but also to their regional and global partners. Cameroon and Nigeria should turn their existing political and strategic goodwill into concrete action and cooperate tactically to dismantle pirate hideouts off the Cameroonian coast. The two countries should also set up a bilateral intelligence-sharing system to overcome the limitations of the Yaoundé framework on maritime security.³ Moreover, both nations need to work on enhancing capacity-building initiatives for local communities.



The Yaoundé meeting of West and Central African leaders on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea established the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Safety and Security.

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Methodology

This report diverges from the traditional focus on piracy and armed robbery at sea, taking a broader viewpoint that enables the understanding of maritime threats in a wider context.⁴ It adopts an infrastructural approach⁵ that goes beyond legal considerations, recognizing that maritime piracy is closely tied to broader infrastructures⁶ and various criminal activities, collectively referred to as cohabitant flows.⁷ This approach allows stakeholders to move beyond conventional interventions that focus solely on countering piracy at sea and also examine the dynamics on land.

The research presented here employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative⁸ and qualitative methodologies. It draws upon a literature review on crime in Cameroon's maritime domain, utilizing academic studies, reports, and local and international news sources. In June and July 2025, individual interviews were conducted and focus group discussions were held in Douala, Limbé, Kribi, Idenau, Jabane, Akwa and Idabato. Primary data was produced from questionnaires completed by key stakeholders, including defence officials, local authorities, civil society representatives and former hostages. Additional insights were obtained through telephone interviews. The study also incorporated administrative and security archival documents, including transcripts from debriefings of ex-hostages and incident reports. Many of the dynamics discussed in this paper were directly observed during field trips to Cameroon's coastal areas between June and August 2025. The diversity and richness of the data on these subjects enabled a triangulation of these various sources, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of criminal activity in the region.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, ensuring participant anonymity and implementing a robust data security plan to safeguard all collected information.⁹ Although some formal authorizations were secured before this study commenced, most information was obtained under the commitment to maintain the anonymity of informants. As disclosing the date and location of documents and interviews could jeopardize the anonymity of the informants, where necessary, locations have been anonymized and personal names categorized. For instance, the term 'military and security sources' refers to insights gained from interviews and documentation.

Definition of concepts

This work addresses the issue of maritime piracy alongside the traditional acts of maritime brigandage. International law, both customary and treaty based – such as the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Code of Practice for the Investigation of Crimes of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships – draws a distinction between maritime piracy on the high seas and armed robbery within territorial waters. In Article 101 of UNCLOS, maritime piracy is defined as any illegal act of violence, detention or depredation committed for private gain by the crew or passengers of a private ship or aircraft, aimed at another ship, aircraft or individuals and property on board, and taking place on the high seas or in areas beyond any state's jurisdiction. This definition also encompasses participation in and incitement or facilitation of such acts.

The IMO defines armed robbery against ships as 'any illegal act of violence or detention or any act of depredation, or threat thereof, other than an act of piracy, committed for private ends and directed against a ship or against persons or property on board such a ship, within a state's internal waters, archipelagic waters and territorial sea.'¹⁰ Inciting or intentionally facilitating these acts is also included in the definition.

While this distinction made by international law is relevant to assigning responsibility for responding to these criminal activities, it tends to be relatively narrow¹¹ and fails to acknowledge that 80% of attacks occur within the jurisdiction of coastal states. The distinction between pirates and armed robbers on Cameroon's coastline is blurred, since the same individuals frequently carry out similar offences in various maritime areas. Geographically, the groups operating off Cameroon's coastline have three main areas of focus: the land, the mangroves and the sea. These groups can also adapt or modify their strategies as necessary. For these reasons, several criminal activities discussed in this work do not fall under the UNCLOS definition. Additionally, local media and authorities often overlook the distinction made by international law, instead labelling armed criminal groups operating at sea, on the coasts and in the mangroves as pirates.

In this context, maritime piracy is understood as any violence perpetrated by non-state armed groups against a ship or its crew, or against economic, military and security infrastructures at sea, along the coasts or within mangrove areas. This definition aligns with what is typically outlined in commercial contracts, encompassing all acts of violent theft or attempted theft committed anywhere at sea.¹²

Geographic scope

The coastline of Cameroon serves as the geographic framework for this study (see Figure 1). This region, part of the Atlantic coast, is the nation's primary maritime gateway. It is divided into three distinct zones: the Northern zone, the Southern zone and the Western zone.¹³ With a length of 402 kilometres, Cameroon's coastline stretches from the southern edge of the Campo River estuary, which borders Equatorial Guinea, to the northern banks of the Akwayafe River, adjacent to Nigeria.¹⁴

The region spans three administrative areas: the South-West region, the Littoral region and the Ocean department within the South region. The coastal plain is divided into three distinct areas: the Mamfe basin, the Douala basin and the Ndian basin. The Mamfe basin opens to the west onto the coastal plain of Nigeria. The Ndian basin consists primarily of the marshy Rio del Rey delta, featuring creeks and mangroves. This is the most oil-rich region in Cameroon, with significant hydrocarbon – oil and gas – deposits and minerals, such as iron, found in Kribi. The area also has substantial hydraulic potential.¹⁵ The four coastal ports of Douala, Kribi, Limbé and Tiko make Cameroon's coastline 'a real maritime platform for international trade'.¹⁶ There are also naval bases at Douala, Kribi and Limbé.

The Cameroonian coast is part of the Bight of Biafra, also known as Bonny Bay, situated in the Atlantic Ocean at the north-eastern edge of the Gulf of Guinea. This area stretches from the mouth of the Niger River in Nigeria to Cape Lopez in Gabon. The region is characterized by a complex interplay of maritime zones and continental shelves shared by Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe.¹⁷

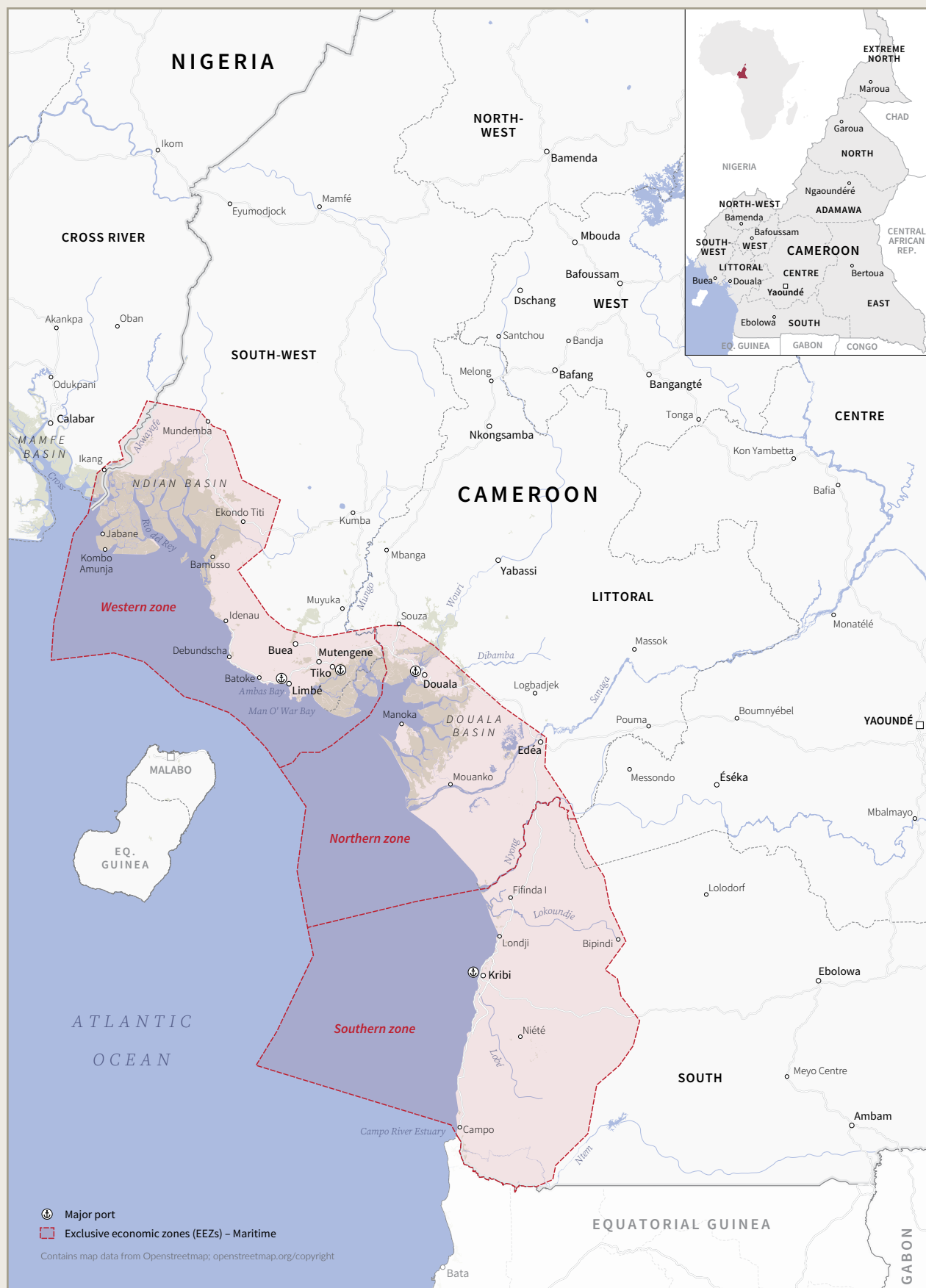


FIGURE 1 Cameroon's coastal zones.

SOURCE: Adapted from the UN/Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea/Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation Programmes of Assistance



Maritime piracy trends in Cameroon

A statistical approach to maritime piracy on and off the coast of Cameroon reveals a gradual decline in the number of incidents involving vessels, as well as changes in modes of action and routes, which demonstrates the ability of pirates to operate far from their Nigerian refuges.

The evolution of modern piracy

A historical examination of piracy along the coast of Cameroon reveals that it is a long-standing issue.¹⁸ The modern form of piracy can be traced back to 2007, when armed groups began launching attacks on Cameroonian military positions to procure weapons and ammunition.¹⁹ Following a period of relative calm, which was mainly due to the presence of Nigerian and Cameroonian troops engaged in operations in the Bakassi Peninsula, the withdrawal of Nigerian forces – as part of the 2006 Greentree Agreement – has opened the door for a resurgence of criminal activities. After 2007, these assaults escalated to targeted strikes on banks and public institutions, as well as on vessels operating in Cameroonian waters. Generally, pirate groups utilize three main operational environments: land, mangrove areas and the open sea. Additionally, they can adapt and shift their strategies remarkably well as needed.

Although incidents of piracy have declined in Cameroon, there has been a resurgence in violent attacks and abductions targeting cargo ships, such as these moored in Douala. © Daniel Beloumou Olomo/AFP via Getty Images



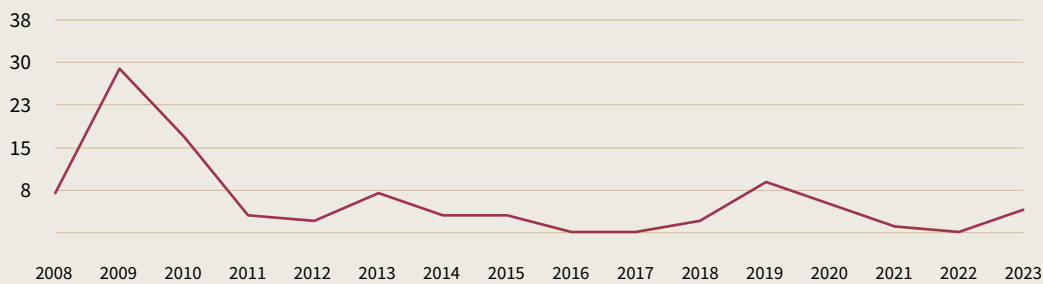


FIGURE 2 Number of piracy incidents, 2008–2023.

SOURCE: Based on data from the Multinational Coordination Centre (MCC) of Zone D and reports from oil companies operating in Cameroon

In terms of traditional piracy, there has been a significant decline in incidents involving ships in and off Cameroonian waters over the past decade, as illustrated in Figure 2. After a peak in maritime incidents in Cameroon between 2008 and 2010, there was a notable decrease in attacks on ships since 2011. Overall, piracy rates throughout the Gulf of Guinea have dropped to historically low levels.²⁰ This drop is attributed mainly to effective counter-piracy measures that have curbed kidnapping for ransom in the region. For example, the Cameroonian navy established marine rifle battalions – Bataillon des Fusiliers Marins – in Campo, Ekondo Titi and Mundemba, and a specialized unit of combat divers – Compagnie des Palmeurs de Combat – in Isongo to enhance combat effectiveness. The expansion of combat and surveillance flotillas, alongside the acquisition of advanced resources such as fast boats, radar systems and drones, has significantly improved counter-piracy operations.²¹

In addition to these initiatives, a 2007 Cameroonian decree²² laid the foundation for a more coordinated national approach to state actions at sea. Cameroon further reinforced its commitment in December 2022 by enacting legislation targeting piracy, terrorism aboard ships and threats to maritime navigation and offshore platforms.²³ Complementing these legal measures, the Delta Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide (Rapid Intervention Battalion – BIR)²⁴ – was tasked with securing Cameroon’s maritime space and safeguarding the nation’s vital interests at sea in collaboration with other stakeholders. By 2012, this unit evolved from a battalion structure into a modular regiment, rebranded as Force BIR Côtes.

The lull in piracy observed since 2011 also reflects the increased efforts of the Nigerian navy²⁵ in deploying patrol boats and resuming Operation Restore Hope in southern Nigeria. In 2013, the Nigerian Joint Task Force’s Operation Pulo Shield successfully dismantled a pirate camp at Efut Esighi near the Bakassi Peninsula, which had been a launch point for piracy and hostage-taking on Cameroonian territory.²⁶ The same year, Nigeria further enhanced its maritime security by establishing a forward operating base at the Calabar naval base near Dayspring Island, opposite Kombo Abedimo in Cameroon.²⁷ Due to this intensified pressure, Nigerian pirate groups began to operate further afield,²⁸ venturing into waters off Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon.

Despite fewer cases occurring on and off the coast of Cameroon, kidnapping-for-ransom incidents have involved increasing violence, as highlighted by the security firm Dryad Global.²⁹ Following a lengthy period of relative calm, there has been a resurgence in violent abductions, particularly those targeting cargo ships, with pirates utilizing multiple boats and engaging in shootouts with naval escorts without hesitation.³⁰

On 14 August 2019, a group of pirates attacked a vessel anchored in Douala, successfully abducting eight crew members, three of whom were Russian nationals.³¹ In 2022, only one case of kidnapping was reported.³² In 2023, three attacks – involving fishing vessels and a cargo ship near the Douala port – resulted in 14 crew members being kidnapped.³³ On 30 June 2023, pirates assaulted a vessel at anchor in Douala and took some of the crew hostage. From January 2024 to March 2025, an additional 14 crew members were kidnapped by pirates off the coasts of Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, leading expert Martin Kelly, head of advisory at EOS Risk Group, to label this area as a ‘new stomping ground for pirates in West Africa’.³⁴ On 10 October 2024, pirates hijacked a cargo ship in Equatoguinean waters, capturing three hostages.³⁵

Since the start of 2025, four pirate strikes have been reported in Equatoguinean or Gabonese waters that coincided with ships venturing into Cameroonian waters. On 31 January 2025, the trawler *Amerger 7* was attacked off the coast of Libreville, leading to the kidnapping of three crew members. The following day, the *JSP Vento*, transporting French military equipment from Chad, was attacked off the coast of Equatorial Guinea. On 17 March 2025, off the coast of Bata, three pirates armed with AK-47 rifles boarded the tanker *Bitu River* and kidnapped 10 crew members. On 21 April 2025, the tanker *Sea Panther* was ambushed by a group of six pirates near Bata, and on 31 May 2025, the cargo ship *MV Orange Frost* was attacked off the coast of São Tomé.³⁶ This surge in incidents underscores the resilience of maritime criminals, who are diversifying into other illicit activities while awaiting the opportunity to resume their primary operations.

Alongside these maritime piracy incidents, there has been a notable uptick in other criminal activities. In the Bakassi Peninsula alone, from January to May 2025, authorities recorded nine acts of robbery, four engine thefts, three illegal timber seizures, 113 instances of illegal fishing and two hostage-takings. In 2024, there were two pirate attacks, 30 incidents of robbery, 25 engine thefts from canoes, eight timber seizures, 344 cases of illegal fishing, two illicit medicine confiscations, seven hostage incidents, and 10 smuggled rice and cocoa seizures. In 2023, there was one reported act of maritime piracy, along with five robberies, 10 engine thefts, 10 timber seizures, and 25 discoveries of smuggled rice and palm oil.³⁷



Illegal logging in the Bakassi Peninsula, an area known for polycriminality. *Photo supplied*

Organization and location of pirate groups operating on Cameroon's coastline

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) classifies pirates in Nigeria into three main categories: deep offshore pirates, coastal and low-reach pirates, and riverine criminals. There is considerable overlap between these groups, reflecting the fluid nature of piracy in the region.³⁸ Cameroonian authorities categorize offenders based on their organization, weaponry and targets, distinguishing between armed gangs and organized bandits. The boundary drawn between pirates and bandits often feels artificial and doesn't fully capture the real-life dynamics at play; in practice, the same individuals may act as pirates when the situation calls for it, only to revert to banditry. According to a former intelligence official from the Bakassi Peninsula, banditry can be more lucrative than piracy and should not be seen merely as a survival strategy. This demonstrates the complex infrastructure surrounding maritime piracy and its interrelated activities and a division of labour based on the skills of those involved.

In Cameroonian waters and along its coast, acts of piracy are carried out by various groups, including the AMC, BFF, Marine Dragons, Black Marines, Borders Rivers and the NDDSC. These groups frequently change their names based on leadership shifts, leading locals to refer to them collectively as the 'bad boys'.³⁹ Typically, these individuals operate hooded, often under the influence of drugs.⁴⁰

The first significant attacks against Cameroon's maritime interests were launched by militant groups⁴¹ such as the BFF and the NDDSC. Initially, these groups aimed to resist the handover of the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon after the Greentree Agreement. The BFF and NDDSC quickly recognized the potential to exploit the anti-Greentree feeling and narrative among certain political elites and most residents of the Bakassi Peninsula.⁴² By 2009, the two leaders of the BFF, known as 'General' AG Basuo and 'Commander' Ebi Dari, had entered an amnesty programme. Another member – Lato Ighohbo, also known as Lato Marine – founded the Bakassi Freedom Movement, which primarily focused on looting. This group was reminiscent of the AMC, which was established in Rivers State and operated as far as Cameroon's maritime coast. The AMC, sometimes referred to as Lato Marine Force or Border Boys, was made up of Cameroonians and their accomplices and operated along the Cameroonian coastline.⁴³ It was responsible for the kidnapping of the subdivisional officer for Kombo Abedimo in March 2011. Although the current role of militant leaders in piracy has diminished, groups such as the Biafra Nations League remain active. The Biafra Nations League is led by Princewill Chimezie Richards, with Henry Edet serving as the chief operating officer, and recently announced significant operations in the Bakassi Peninsula.⁴⁴

The primary actors involved in maritime insecurity are brigands who can morph into pirates depending on their needs. Historically, these groups consisted of various factions, each comprising at least 80 militants. For instance, the BFF, as the privately-owned Cameroonian daily *Le Messenger* reported, consisted of 17 factions.⁴⁵ Each faction established its own camp, with amenities such as televisions and generators. Although some of their sanctuaries were destroyed by the Nigerian Joint Task Force in 2013, they were quickly rebuilt.⁴⁶ A former intelligence official from the Bakassi Peninsula and many former hostages describe the camps as organized, with a leader and the necessary resources to ensure a livelihood and ongoing operations. Sometimes, a nurse is present to provide care for hostages. Women do not remain in the camps full-time; younger male pirates take on cooking duties. Those in the camps are indoctrinated with ideologies surrounding violence and political grievances, often through protest songs and public speeches delivered primarily in the Ijaw language. The narratives of the Movement for

the Emancipation of the Niger Delta are deeply ingrained.⁴⁷ The criminal actors maintain connections in local fishing settlements across the Bakassi Peninsula, facilitating operations within Cameroonian territory.

At present, the major groups operating off the coast of Cameroon are based in the Apka Irok (also called Peacock Crossing) area. Interviews with soldiers, administrative officials and local leaders from the Bakassi Peninsula reveal that the closest group to Cameroon comprises about 250 fighters, led by a 'border king' who has a spiritual adviser providing guidance and protective amulets. This group of pirates is organized into nine operational sub-units, each consisting of around 30 men and led by a 'general'. Each unit has its designated area in the nearby coves. Although these small units generally operate independently, they can unite for acts of piracy. In such cases, the border king selects the most capable members from each unit, particularly those skilled in using weapons or operating specific boats. This assembled task force is responsible for executing piracy actions and other significant operations under the border king's command.⁴⁸

On 30 June 2023, four groups around Enitan, not far from Apka Irok, formed a task force of approximately 20 individuals and attacked the Wouri River channel. A large-scale operation such as this is carefully planned. It begins with spiritual preparation, involving a three-day fast followed by daily prayers. Then comes the logistical groundwork: maintaining weapons, gathering ammunition, overhauling boat engines and securing fuel.⁴⁹ Reports from the Cameroonian army and interviews with defence and security forces investigating this attack indicate that each of the two boats used by the pirates carried 1 750 litres of fuel, neatly divided into seven 250-litre drums.

The pirates operating in this region are predominantly Nigerian, many of whom were born in Cameroon's Bakassi Peninsula, which was under Nigerian occupation from 1993 to 2008. These individuals, who have ties to both Nigeria and Cameroon, are particularly valuable to pirate groups due to their extensive knowledge of the Cameroonian coastline, especially the hard-to-reach coves of Bakassi. Their fluency in French also makes them highly sought after. These actors play key roles in planning operations and facilitating movements from Nigeria to their targets in Cameroon and they are responsible for recruiting local guides. According to a former intelligence official from the Bakassi Peninsula, some of these individuals have family ties in Cameroon as well as shared cultural backgrounds and historical links. Some maintain connections with both nations and have engaged in illegal trade across the border before, during and after the Bakassi conflict.⁵⁰

When conducting attacks on ships, the pirate groups typically organize themselves into two to three task forces, each operating from a boat. Each group has a designated leader, primary pilot and secondary pilot. Mechanics, guides and informants are also involved. Pilots are selected based on their familiarity with the area and ability to navigate shallow coves that can be challenging for Cameroonian military boats.⁵¹ The shallow waters pose an operational challenge for Cameroonian soldiers, as their heavy 250 horsepower engines require deep water to function effectively. For significant operations, pirates deploy high-speed boats equipped with at least 200 horsepower outboard engines,⁵² but bandits who target merchants utilize smaller vessels with engines ranging from 25 to 75 horsepower, allowing them to navigate the creeks even during low tide.⁵³

Rival pirate factions have clashed at times. On 23 October 2009, some 15 members of the BFF engaged in a fierce gun battle with a dozen members of the Ijaw Youth Council. The conflict arose over a shipment of arms intended for the federal government as part of an amnesty programme, which the BFF had misappropriated.⁵⁴



Piracy groups have put industrial and artisanal fishing at risk. © Ann Johansson/Corbis via Getty Images

In addition to these organized pirate groups, various bandits operate in Cameroon's fishing settlements. These criminals target traders and fishermen in villages or along sea routes, extorting money and forcing locals to pay taxes. Armed with homemade weapon, clubs and bladed tools such as machetes, they set up on shipping lanes to seize cash and valuables. Some bandits patrol the creeks, demanding taxes from fishing settlements under threats of kidnapping or even death. This criminal activity often serves as a recruitment ground for more structured pirate groups. Notable hotspots for these bandits include Kombo Amunja, Ndo Location and Jabane.⁵⁵ Recently, two of these bandits were caught by local youths in Kombo Awase. They were found in possession of an AK-47 and occult charms reminiscent of those used by Nigerian pirates.⁵⁶

Women have occasionally been arrested for their roles in hostage-taking.⁵⁷ In July 2015, two women suspected of providing intelligence to pirates involved in the kidnapping of a Cameroonian gendarme in the Bakassi Peninsula were detained.⁵⁸ These women, often viewed as 'pirate concubines', are utilized to gather intelligence on potential targets and are entrusted with the surveillance of female hostages within the camps.⁵⁹

In addition to Nigerian bandits from whose ranks pirates are recruited, small groups of local criminals sometimes appear in border localities, such as the Isangele–Tinkoro–Ekoma Mindo–Ekondo Titi quadrangle. They mainly operate on market days near Akassa and Messogo Selle.⁶⁰ They are also found in the locality of Originang on the road between Isangele and Akwa. They attack traders travelling by road to the Ikang market in Nigeria.

Pirates operating off the coast of Cameroon were originally mostly individuals who refused to join the disarmament, reintegration and amnesty programme for rebel groups in Nigeria in 2009. Some pirate groups surrendered only a portion of their weapons to federal authorities and continued to engage in criminal activity. A Cameroonian military source tracing the dynamics of pirate groups on the border with Nigeria indicated that a back and forth movement takes place between amnesty camps and criminal

activities in the Bakassi Peninsula. Another source stated: ‘Many youths have developed an interest in easy money and there are too many weapons that circulate in Nigeria’s uncontrolled territories. Experiences have shown that reintegration of weapons is never total, as groups hide part of their weapons and are ready to return to the sea.’⁶¹ The African Marine Commando was reputed to have Cameroonians as well as Nigerians in its ranks and a substantial number of accomplices along the Cameroonian coast.⁶²

A sociological examination of criminal groups operating in the subregion distinguishes between kingpins and sponsors, group leaders, negotiators, specialized team members, attack teams, camp guards and people assuming an onshore support role.⁶³ Based on Cameroonian security archives, a sociological approach to these groups shows a hyper-masculinization of positions, with an average age of 30, although there have been older group leaders. In July 2024, a man aged over 60 was arrested in Jabane, along with three others aged 29, 45 and 46.

When it comes to ethnicity, Ijaws from Bayelsa hold leadership positions, while pirates from the Ibibio, Andonni and Oron ethnic groups occupy subordinate positions assigned to brigandage tasks. Small-scale brigands who operate off the Cameroonian coast are generally Ibibio,⁶⁴ although the Ibibio of Akwa Ibom State are mainly farmers and fishermen.⁶⁵ This ethnic division of labour is explained by the control exercised by the Ijaw over criminal maritime routes in the immediate vicinity of Cameroon and their establishment in the swampy and hard-to-reach creeks that enable the development of illicit activities in Cross River State. In addition, the strong mobilization of the Ijaw in the insurgent dynamics in south-eastern Nigeria from the early 1990s enabled them to develop military and logistical skills that give them a preponderant role in the criminal groups operating off the Cameroonian coast.⁶⁶ A former intelligence official from the Bakassi Peninsula suggested that many Ijaw recruits merely shifted their areas of operation after the amnesty.⁶⁷ Finally, the Ijaw are known as feared fighters, which provides them with symbolic capital in criminal networks in Nigeria.⁶⁸

A division of labour exists among members of criminal groups, based on their skills. Groups deploy their members in the field according to performance and the specific nature of tasks at hand. Beginners typically engage in more manageable tasks, such as pulling in fish or operating equipment. As they gain experience, they progress to more complex roles, including hostage-taking. Advancement within these groups requires individuals to demonstrate their capabilities over time.⁶⁹

All activities are coordinated by a figure called the border king. Each group has its specialization: some focus on bringing in fish, while others deal with traffickers to secure food supplies. The groups responsible for highway piracy must gather intelligence on shipment departures from Ilang in Nigeria or from various locations in Cameroon, including Ekondo Titi, Mbonguè and Mundemba. When targeting fuel traffickers, informants are positioned at petrol stations or clandestine refineries.⁷⁰

Above the border king is the kingpin, who oversees operations, provides strategic insights and funds missions. The kingpins connected to groups operating along the Cameroonian coast are generally based in major Nigerian cities. Reports from Cameroonian media and security archives indicate that the March 2011 attack on the Ecobank branch in Bonabéri, Douala, was orchestrated from Port Harcourt, Nigeria, by a man named Anda Alphaeus Eperenwie, along with two accomplices, all of Ijaw descent.⁷¹

An analysis of Ecobank’s post-attack report revealed a structured division of labour among the pirates, featuring roles such as guides, transporters, logisticians and flight crews. For this attack, the pirates had assistance from three locals – two Nigerians and a Cameroonian with Nigerian lineage – who helped accommodate the group in local hotels and hired a carrier. The driver, recruited a month before the attack, was forced to transport the pirates to the bank at gunpoint. A guide with knowledge of the local waterways was also hired.⁷²

Pirates operating off Cameroon's coast are primarily based in Nigeria, particularly in the under-policed regions of Cross River State. Cameroonian security reports show that camps south of Ikang have long been the planning hubs for pirate attacks. The locations of these hideouts have shifted over time, influenced by actions taken by the Nigerian military. In the 2010s, notable pirate sanctuaries near Cameroon included Mbare Kpa, west of Dayspring Island,⁷³ Utan Iyata, Enitan, Nsesere, Ita Oroch and the Ibaka area (James Town). The AMC's camp has long been located south-east of Ikang, directly across from the Cameroonian town of Kombo Abedimo.⁷⁴

In recent years, the main pirate camps near Cameroon, from which most attacks on its waters are launched, have been those in the Apka Irok area. They are spread across seven fishing settlements – Mbarakwet, Eron, Ine Iho, Nato, Indele Ibum, Akpam Field and Akpamba⁷⁵ – and are concealed beneath dense vegetation, complicating aerial surveillance. Each base is heavily fortified, with a single entrance and various traps, including river mines. Families, including women, children and the elderly, reside in some of these camps, making aerial assault operations challenging. Gaining access on the ground involves navigating through several settlements, making surprise assaults by the Nigerian military difficult.⁷⁶

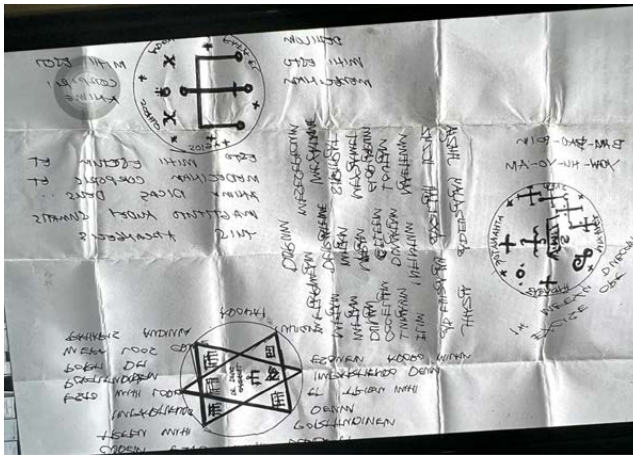
Beyond the pirate sanctuaries in Nigeria, the Cameroonian fishery of Jabane 1, near the command post of the BIR, is notorious as a refuge for maritime brigands. After carrying out attacks in Nigeria, pirates often retreat to Jabane 1, Jabane 2 and other towns in Cameroon, to evade the Nigerian army's pressure. For instance, in July 2024, four people involved in separatist attacks in Akpabuyo sought refuge in these areas.⁷⁷

These pirate groups exhibit formidable capabilities, allowing them to operate well beyond their bases. They conduct activities on the high seas and in shallow waterways, robbing communities like maritime highwaymen.⁷⁸ Their adaptability enables them to function effectively at sea, on land and in mangrove areas. Interviews with traders in the Bakassi Peninsula and insights from security forces suggest that these groups are progressively asserting control over fuel and weapon smuggling operations. Some of their members participate in exploiting fisheries and forestry resources while also engaging in kidnappings and acts of piracy against commercial and offshore platform vessels.⁷⁹

The means, targets and modus operandi of pirates in Cameroon

Pirate groups operating along the Cameroonian coast utilize fast, high-powered boats with two engines capable of reaching 250 horsepower. They are armed with 12.7 mm and 7.62 mm machine guns, light anti-tank weapons and AK-47 rifles.⁸⁰ Heavy small arms are typically mounted at the front of the vessels, and they sometimes carry machetes, war rifles and even homemade firearms.⁸¹ Additionally, they make use of commercial explosives. The pirates use binocular night vision equipment, which gives them a tactical advantage in situations where the Cameroonian army may lack such technology.⁸²

One striking feature of the piracy prevalent in the region is the increasing incorporation of spiritualism and rituals, known as magico-religious practices, in their operations.⁸³ Clues left by pirates during their attempted assault on the *Sea Panther* on 21 April 2025 shed light on the esoteric practices they employ.⁸⁴ In the same vein, after a clash on 19 March 2011, equipment seized from pirates by Cameroonian soldiers included a fetish – a bottle containing a brick-red liquid and adorned with a cross. Interviews with former captives have revealed that the pirates conduct rituals before their missions, including a three-day fast and prayers upon breaking the fast.⁸⁵ Similar to practices in Nigeria, these prominently display visual elements, typically in red hues, as well as the tying of string to weapons.⁸⁶



Pirates' cabalistic writings and illustrations (left) and an amulet. *Photos supplied*

Pirates sometimes tie red and white ribbons around their arms and heads, often incorporating a red band adorned with three cowrie shells. Many also wear amulets around their necks, which frequently resemble a human skull or a buffalo head. Additionally, some pirates wear silver or bronze rings believed to offer protection.⁸⁷

The tactics used by pirate groups typically involve crew kidnappings, vessel hijackings, violent armed boardings and robberies at sea. Generally, pirates prefer to strike at night, capitalizing on the element of surprise, the reduced effectiveness of maritime surveillance and easier boarding conditions. However, a few incidents have occurred during the day. Out of five recorded attacks off the coast of Cameroon in 2025, four took place between 9 p.m. and 9.30 p.m., often under moonlight, while one attack occurred at about 4 p.m.⁸⁸ This pattern aligns with the higher failure rates experienced during daylight hours.⁸⁹

An analysis of tide patterns reveals that all pirate attacks occurred during high tide, facilitating their access to coves where they can find refuge – more challenging to accomplish at low tide. These attacks mainly happen close to the coast, particularly as ships are approaching ports. Pirates tend to target slower vessels, using caving ladders to board ships as they slow down to about 10 knots.

In Douala, pirates are increasingly focusing on boats waiting to enter the port. Informants provide tips on the presence or absence of security boats or guards aboard these vessels. This tactic has prompted Cameroonian authorities to maintain a military presence as a deterrent.⁹⁰ During an attack in Douala on 30 June 2023, an unexpected military response forced the pirates to retreat to offshore Equatorial Guinea.⁹¹

Usually, pirates set out from their bases in Nigeria and take refuge in nearby fishing villages while waiting for the opportune moment to strike. Their operational traits are speed and cunning. They operate fast boats and, when necessary, disguise themselves as ordinary fishermen. According to a military source: 'You might spot a boat with two or three men who look like fishermen with nets. But in their vessel, they are armed with a machete and homemade weapons, trying to blend in. When they near a real fisherman, they pull out their machete and seize the fish.'⁹²



FIGURE 3 Pirates operating off Cameroon’s coast are primarily based in Nigeria, particularly in parts of Cross River State. The locations of their hideouts have shifted over time.

Pirate groups depart in the early afternoon from Nigerian towns, including Ibaka, Orong and Ikang, for larger operations within Cameroonian waters. Following the implementation of anti-piracy measures by the Cameroonian army, they have stopped taking routes between Malabo and the Cameroon coast, opting instead for longer, riskier and costlier journeys. This often requires them to carry significant fuel supplies, so any boat equipped with two powerful engines and at least four fuel drums raises suspicion among patrolling soldiers.

Pirates exploit the sizeable Nigerian communities who live in challenging and unsanitary environments along the coasts of Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, taking the time to observe before launching their attacks.⁹³ Field data reveals that the attackers behind the incident in Douala on 30 June 2023 had been preparing for several weeks. They received support from individuals living in Cameroon who communicated fluently in French.⁹⁴

Typically, pirates leave their camps and sail offshore to evade the night patrols of the Cameroonian army. On 19 March 2011, a BIR patrol intercepted about 30 pirates racing at high speed in two boats. They had left their base in Nigeria, walked along the border and entered Cameroon at Isu, where they spent the night in an uninhabited cove. The next day at dawn, they moved to the creeks of Bimbria and Mabeta to reach Cape Cameroon, where they spent their second night in Cameroonian territory. They launched the operation at about 8.30 p.m. and each of the two boats moved towards its target: the ship *Oya 1* for the first boat and two trawlers for the second.⁹⁵ Similarly, before the June 2023 attack in Douala, a pirate group navigated out to the border area between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, spending the night at a Cameroonian location known as Pirate Island.⁹⁶

An analysis of unclassified archival documents reveals three primary routes used by pirates to access Cameroon:

- They cross the Akwayafe River, enter the Bakassi Peninsula and navigate through creeks to reach the Rio del Rey River. From there, they can access various destinations in Cameroon while avoiding detection by Cameroonian army patrols.
- They depart Nigeria from the Akwayafe River and the Calabar Channel, making their way directly through Kita before proceeding to the mouth of the Atabong River and then on to Debundscha.
- They slip between Moudi Terminal Port and the border with Equatorial Guinea. Once in Cameroonian waters, they launch attacks on petroleum vessels and fishing trawlers and conduct kidnapping operations. Occasionally, they enter the Atabong River mouth from the Moudi terminal and emerge at Hecuba Creek in the Rio River. After these assaults, they seek refuge in the fishing settlements between the Atabong River mouth and the Rio River mouth, including Shell Creek and Nawumse Wan. They lie low until the next day, when they return to their camps in Nigeria.⁹⁷

On all these routes, the pirates rely on informants to provide them with updates on the Cameroonian army's night patrols.⁹⁸ Following the Ecobank attack in Douala in March 2011, they have developed a strategy of indirect retreat after their operations, first taking refuge in creeks predominantly inhabited by Nigerian communities.⁹⁹

While pirates have occasionally attacked ships belonging to oil companies, such incidents have become increasingly rare due to enhanced security measures. One notable case occurred on the night of 28 August 2008, when pirates abducted 10 crew members from the Bourbon Sagitta, a training vessel. On 16 November 2010, pirates attempted to board the tanker *Moudi*, belonging to the oil companies Pecten and Perenco, but the security crew successfully repelled the attackers.¹⁰⁰

Pirates have also targeted trawlers. For example, on the night of 12 September 2013, two Nigerian boats flying the Cameroonian flag were attacked off the coast of Idabato, in Cameroonian waters, by a group of six armed men from Nigeria in a speedboat. The captains of both vessels were kidnapped during this attack.¹⁰¹

Chinese fishing boats are particularly favoured targets for pirates, as they are believed to carry cash from illegal fishing and fuel-trafficking operations.¹⁰² Reports suggest that some Chinese trawlers venture out to sea without an escort due to their involvement in these illicit activities.¹⁰³ Following the kidnapping of seven Chinese fishermen in March 2010 off the coast of Bakassi, security for these ships was stepped up with the involvement of the BIR and later the navy, leading to a decrease in such incidents.¹⁰⁴

Pirates have frequently attacked military posts along the Cameroonian coast. The deadliest incident occurred on 12 November 2007, when about 60 members of the BFF launched an attack in the Rio

del Rey, resulting in 21 fatalities and a number of injuries, along with the theft of a significant stock of weapons and ammunition.¹⁰⁵ Between 2007 and 2012, there were five such assaults, often aimed at resupplying these groups with arms, ammunition and boats.

Pirates sometimes carry out land attacks close to the Cameroonian coast, reaching as far as Douala, the country's economic capital, and Limbé, a prominent seaside town. Although these acts do not fall under the strict definition of maritime piracy, they are carried out by individuals who also engage in maritime piracy and who are considered pirates by the local media and the Cameroonian authorities.

On the night of 27 September 2008, about 30 AMC members used explosives and sledgehammers in three attacks on banks in Limbé. One of the banks reported a loss amounting to FCFA232 million (approximately €354 000).¹⁰⁶ And on 18 March 2011, the AMC targeted the Ecobank branch in Bonabéri, Douala. Armed with heavy weaponry and explosives, they broke through the bank walls¹⁰⁷ and stole close to FCFA170 million (€260 000).¹⁰⁸ This operation resulted in five deaths and eight injuries.

Although these attacks have not been seen in Cameroon's coastal cities for more than a decade, many believe the risk still lingers. Overall, while there has been a decline in the number of maritime piracy incidents along the Cameroonian coast, the issue is not entirely resolved. Instead, it has been contained. The drop in piracy-related statistics in the Gulf of Guinea, particularly off the coast of Cameroon, should not overshadow the emergence of other criminal activities that pirates engage in to sustain themselves between sporadic acts of piracy. These groups are increasingly investing in alternative criminal enterprises due to the challenges posed by traditional maritime piracy. More failed attacks means more debt owed to the sponsors who provide fuel and equipment for such forays.¹⁰⁹ In Cameroon, the implementation of exceptional measures following a wave of attacks in the 2010s has driven pirates to explore other ventures, particularly land-based hostage-taking for ransom and criminal activities in mangrove areas.



The cohabitant flows of maritime piracy in Cameroon

Cohabitant flows is a term used to describe the interplay of onshore and offshore flows as well as the legal and illegal activities and spaces that coexist with maritime piracy. These dynamics encompass the material and social flows that both shape and accompany maritime piracy, often co-constituted in relation with this form of criminality.¹¹⁰ The traditional methods employed by pirate groups primarily include crew kidnappings, vessel hijackings, violent armed boardings and robberies at sea. However, abducting or extorting locals in mangrove regions and on the mainland are also part of their agenda.

Hostage-taking

Hostage-taking contributes to the resilience of pirates. These incidents can occur at sea or on land. Pirates primarily target public officials, shopkeepers, church leaders, expatriates and law enforcement members, as these individuals typically have the financial means to pay substantial ransoms. One of the first abductions involving Cameroonian administrative authorities occurred on 6 June 2008, when pirates kidnapped and killed the subdivisional officer of Kombo Abedimo, Fonya Félix Morfan, the second-in-command of the Northern Operational Group, the brigade commander of Akwa, the head of the military security detachment and two gendarmes from the operational unit.¹¹¹ Subsequently, on 7 February 2011, the new subdivisional officer, Ayuk Edward Takor, was taken hostage by the AMC along with 11 others, including the mayor of Akwa and his deputy on Massanjo Island. They were released on 16 February 2011, in exchange for 23 pirates in custody in Cameroon.¹¹² On the night of 30 September 2024, about a dozen armed men attacked the residence of the subdivisional officer of Idabato, Ewane Roland, kidnapping him and a municipal worker, Etongo Ismael.

Such abductions are an indication of political as well as financial motives.¹¹³ Members of the mainly Nigerian populations on the peninsula often express discontent at measures enforced by the administrative authorities, particularly restrictions on fishing in certain areas known for their rich

resources and heavy taxation. Reports suggest that families of prison inmates may pool resources to fund the kidnapping of Cameroonian officials to negotiate the release of their relations.¹¹⁴

The governor of the South-West region suggested that Roland's kidnapping was orchestrated by Nigerian businesspeople who resisted complying with Cameroonian tax laws.¹¹⁵ This belief likely prompted the total lockdown of the area for three weeks following the incident.¹¹⁶ Occasionally, these abductions serve as a means of settling scores, such as the case in which a deputy mayor was targeted due to his connections with timber trafficking.¹¹⁷

Pirates also abduct fishermen, travelling traders, currency exchange operators, boat crews and others.¹¹⁸ In May 2025, a pastor and two of his followers were kidnapped in Idabato. They were released after a ransom of ₦5 million (approximately €557) was paid.¹¹⁹ Hostage-taking of traders and travellers between Rio del Rey in Cameroon and Ikang in Nigeria has become commonplace. While some of these kidnappings appear random and opportunistic, many are premeditated. These activities enable criminal groups to remain viable even when they are not actively engaging in maritime piracy. The funds acquired sustain them in their camps and enable them to procure boats and weapons while waiting for favourable conditions to resume their traditional operations. Ransoms collected also serve to repay sponsors following unsuccessful pirate attacks.¹²⁰

Operating methods

The regions most vulnerable to hostage-taking incidents include areas along Shell Creek, the Pastor fishing port and the Ikang entrance. This last area is a notable hotspot for cross-border trade, as it is a gateway for people and goods moving to and from Nigeria.¹²¹

The tactics employed by hostage-takers vary depending on their target's profile. High-value individuals, such as government officials or affluent business owners, are approached differently from those deemed less significant, such as small traders or fishermen. For lower-value targets, kidnappings can occur at any time, with pirates keeping a close watch on army patrol routes and waiting for an opportune moment to strike once the patrols have passed by. When it comes to high-value targets, careful reconnaissance is key. Pirates meticulously collect intelligence about their targets, particularly in areas with minimal military presence. They often take considerable time to observe the routines and habits of these individuals.¹²²

In the case of the abduction of the subdivisional officer of Idabato, the pirates claimed they had been planning the operation for two years. They arrived in the city on a boat with two 200 horsepower engines. At about 2 a.m. on 1 October 2024, they broke into the compound and took two hostages as well as a significant amount of cash. They fired warning shots at the Idabato gendarmerie brigade near the subdivisional officer's residence to deter interference.¹²³ The mayor, his wife, the deputy mayor, his wife and son and a municipal employee living at the same residence were not kidnapped, leading to speculation that the hostage-taking was linked to ongoing local tensions over the methods used to collect fishing tax.¹²⁴

Once ready to act, pirates execute their plans at night, using swift boats and teams of about 10, armed with AK-47s or PKM machine guns. These operations are typically over within five minutes. The captured individuals are then taken to the remote and perilous mangroves in Nigeria or to fishing settlements in Cameroon's Bakassi Peninsula, where escape becomes exceedingly difficult.¹²⁵

Hostage-taking on Cameroon's coastline is infrequently lethal. Rarely are hostages killed. The kidnappers only shoot if they flee. The hostages are generally released after the payment of a ransom, except in the case of the 2008 Cameroonian victims, who were all killed.¹²⁶ A participant of this research was kidnapped, with his boat and passengers, while returning from Ikang on 2 December 2023. Eight armed kidnappers intercepted them aboard a flying boat. The passengers dissuaded the researcher from trying to flee, fearing the pirates would shoot at them. For not having quickly complied, he was whipped with a machete.¹²⁷ Hostages are safer in the absence of soldiers because of the risks associated with the exchange of fire.¹²⁸

For targeted hostage-takings, pirates often go to their victim's home or workplace. Depending on the case, they may also intercept their victims on the water, boarding an identified boat and asking by name for the people they want to kidnap. Opportunistic hostage-taking is random. For instance, on 12 June 2025, five people – three shopkeepers, the driver and the guide – were taken hostage in a boat.¹²⁹

Hostages are typically blindfolded, placed in speedboats and taken to camps where pirates live with their families. Accounts from former hostages indicate that these camps are well organized and run with discipline. There have been reports of hostages being held in the Bakassi Peninsula, but local authorities believe that hostages can be concealed there only for a brief period.¹³⁰ A military intelligence officer said on this subject:

Hostages can be hidden in a Cameroonian fishing settlement for one or two days. Many fishing settlements in the area are predominantly inhabited by Ijaw people, who can provide shelter for their kin. However, it is not common for a hostage to be kept for too long since someone might happen by, spot them and report it. We maintain communication with all the fishing settlements' managers within our operational area and have informants stationed in every fishery. Additionally, we hold monthly meetings with local chiefs, who keep us updated on the security situation. Hostages are not held in one location for more than a week.¹³¹

Hostages are usually transported to Nigeria. As a prelude to kidnapping, the pirates build a hut guarded by a dozen armed fighters. The camps are booby-trapped with explosives and they have an intelligence network in the fishing settlements along the creeks. After each hostage-taking, the pirates move their place of detention and build a new one.¹³²

As soon as they return from the operation, the pirates must hand over their weapons and charms to an armourer. The kingpin, sometimes called 'general', does not usually live in the camp, but coordinates activities throughout the area. He also does not participate in the operations. Typically, kidnappers seize their victims' phones to examine the contents of their e-wallets and their exchanges. Often, for the first few days, the hostages are deprived of food. Regularly, they are beaten and filmed to put pressure on the families. A debriefing report from an ex-hostage stated that they are sometimes transported to Efut Esighi, an hour's sail from their place of detention, to meet the general of the group that kidnapped them. The general contacts and negotiates with the families or the company. After calling the families and making their demands, the kidnappers sometimes cut off contact for a few days before entering into negotiations.¹³³

The ransom demanded fluctuates based on the financial standing and nationality of the victims. The affluent are valued more highly than those who lack resources, and hostages from the US or UK typically command higher ransoms than those from China or the Philippines. Initial demands from kidnappers often indicate a strategy to inflate the price; negotiations can see requests drop dramatically, from ₦10 million to just ₦1 million (about €600) by the end.¹³⁴

This criminal activity also carries a significant gendered aspect. Former hostages have recounted instances of women being raped in captivity. Furthermore, the gender dynamics of pirate hostage-taking, especially around the coast of Cameroon, also involves the mobilization of women to gather intelligence on potential targets and to monitor female hostages.¹³⁵

Extortion and illegal taxation

Extortion and illegal taxation is the second criminal activity that allows pirates to sustain themselves when they are not actively engaged in piracy. In this case, their action modes depend on the target type.

The targets

Pirates often send their recruits out to bring back sustenance for the crew. Fish are seized from local fishermen, who are coerced into relinquishing a portion of their catch to avoid losing their engines and suffering greater losses.¹³⁶ In many cases, pirates confiscate outboard motors and abandon them in the open sea. Fishermen can either contact the thieves to buy their engines back or agree to pay a monthly fee, allowing them to fish without harassment. Some fishing settlements along the Bakassi Peninsula make monthly payments to pirate groups in Nigeria to ensure peaceful fishing in Cameroonian waters. Known locally as *awasha*, these fishermen also pay protection fees to guarantee the return of stolen items or the safe release of any relations taken hostage. Non-payment of these illegal taxes have led to raids on fishing settlements in Cameroon. In June 2025, armed groups from Nigeria attacked the town of Shell Creek near Idabato three times, looting houses and stealing boats and valuables.¹³⁷



Pirates often seize commercial cargo boats known locally as *cotonou*.
Photo supplied

Pirates position themselves as surrogate authorities, setting up informal checkpoints at the maritime border between Cameroon and Nigeria. They extort money and goods from travellers and force local businesspeople to pay illegal taxes. Each transport boat typically pays around FCFA30 000 (about €45) monthly to guarantee safe passage at sea.¹³⁸ Some groups even provide receipts for these informal taxes. For instance, in the 2010s, Lato's pirate group issued tickets to patrons who had paid for their safety while travelling from Ijan beach to Ikang.¹³⁹

Smugglers operating in or near Cameroonian waters also face extortion. Pirates particularly target traffickers of palm oil, fuel and cocoa, seizing their goods and negotiating ransoms for their release.¹⁴⁰ They also capture cargo boats, locally called *cotonou*. Shipments of rice and sugar are frequently raided to satisfy the food needs of pirate groups. An example of this occurred on 29 May 2014, when a *cotonou* from Ekondo Titi ran out of fuel while navigating the Akwayafe River and was attacked by bandits aboard three boats.¹⁴¹ In some instances, these criminal groups seize traffickers' fuel supplies to sell in Nigeria, where they have established a vast network.¹⁴² When a trafficker stops paying royalties, it often leads to attacks on their shipments.¹⁴³ According to a former head of the Cameroonian army's intelligence services, pirates receive significant sums from fuel smugglers: 'The money that transporters and other players in the petroleum business pay is what fuels the livelihoods of these pirates.'¹⁴⁴

Operating methods

Extortion and illegal taxation by individuals associated with pirate groups primarily occurs in the fishing areas along the Akwayafe River, extending to the sea, particularly between Iking in Nigeria and Kombo Abedimo in Cameroon. Apka Irok is a known hideout for various pirate factions in the region.¹⁴⁵

These pirates often target fishermen heading out to sea in the early morning hours. This timing allows them to seize five or six boat engines before escaping.¹⁴⁶ The groups have informants who keep them updated on the movements of Cameroonian army patrols, which helps them evade capture. They position themselves along sea routes to rob boats, stealing engines, cash and other valuables from passengers travelling to and from local markets in Nigeria. They also sometimes seize fishing vessels.¹⁴⁷

The strategy these groups employ varies depending on the specific operations they undertake. Typically, they venture out in canoes, armed with weapons, and approach fishermen. They usually operate in teams of three or four in a single boat.¹⁴⁸ After executing their attacks, the pirates retreat to secluded coves in Cameroon to evade army patrols, as military ships often struggle to navigate shallower areas. The diverse and repeated actions of these groups have had a profound effect on funding armed conflicts and perpetuating violence in the Niger Delta and the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon.



The effects of piracy on the financing of armed conflict and the perpetuation of violence

Maritime piracy and its cohabitant flows on Cameroon's coastline play a significant role in the funding of armed conflicts and contribute to ongoing violence in the country's anglophone regions, as well as in neighbouring Nigeria.

Socio-political effects

Organized crime is fuelling the resilience of armed groups in Cameroon and Nigeria. Many of the individuals arrested for piracy and maritime robbery by Cameroon's defence forces were previously beneficiaries of Nigeria's 2011 amnesty programme. A former member of the BFF, who had taken part in this programme, was apprehended in the Bakassi Peninsula in July 2024 and subsequently handed over to Nigerian authorities. The insecurity in the peninsula is further exacerbated by Biafran independence activists who seek refuge there to escape pressure from the Nigerian military. In June 2024, several Biafran activists were arrested at Jabane 2 and also turned over to Nigerian authorities.¹⁴⁹

The piracy along Cameroon's coastline feeds into the persistence of these insurgent groups in south-eastern Nigeria. Beyond the financial incentives, a report from the Cameroonian army sheds light on the political motivations driving these criminal activities: 'The small-scale piracy is not the main objective. Their actions are political, aimed at destabilizing the incoming government. They intend to make the Niger Delta ungovernable.'¹⁵⁰ Thus, abduction piracy can be seen as a strategy to sustain camps and prepare fighters for larger operations.

Members of these pirate groups, many of whom are recruits from Nigeria, are also connected to pro-independence factions in Cameroon's anglophone regions. These recruits are often criminals associated with pirate groups, shifting between confronting Cameroonian forces, committing abuses, extorting local populations and engaging in maritime crime. For example, a man from Oron, Nigeria, was involved in criminal activities in the anglophone Mukoko and Mbonguè sectors of the South-West region from 2017



An abandoned vessel near the port of Kribi, in one of Cameroon's main oil-producing sedimentary basins. The threat of piracy in these areas has caused concern among industry stakeholders.

© Adrienne Surprenant/Bloomberg via Getty Images

to 2020, under a figure known as Commander Lovet. After his group was dismantled by the Cameroonian army in 2021, this man migrated to the Bakassi Peninsula and resumed his criminal undertakings. He was arrested in September 2024 and handed over to the Nigerian military unit in Ikang.¹⁵¹

There is considerable evidence of collusion between leaders of armed groups in the subregion and pirate factions operating along Cameroon's coastline. In May 2025, a pirate general known as Twelve O'Clock publicly declared an alliance with anglophone separatist leaders in a video aimed at orchestrating attacks in Idabato and Diamond.¹⁵² This partnership not only facilitates attacks against Cameroon's interests but also provides separatists access to the pirates' logistical networks for resupplying weapons and ammunition. Furthermore, this collaboration enables the separatists to profit from the racketeering and looting undertaken by pirates.

Cocoa and palm oil smuggled along Cameroon's coast often originates from plantations seized from their owners by separatists. The secessionist groups take over the operations of these plantations, selling the harvested produce in Nigeria. The profits are funnelled back into acquiring military supplies and components for improvised explosive devices, among other items.¹⁵³ Their connections to groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta help the separatists to obtain weapons through this trafficking, especially from the Akwa Ibom State and the Niger Delta, where they purchase AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades.¹⁵⁴

The threat of hostage-taking and extortion at sea creates a climate of fear among fishermen, making them reluctant to cooperate with military forces due to potential retribution.¹⁵⁵ Civil servants, including nurses and teachers, are in a similar predicament. Some former teachers at state primary or high schools pay bribes to be assigned away from the Bakassi Peninsula, despite the special monthly bonuses offered by authorities for working in such a challenging environment.¹⁵⁶ Many heads of local services only visit the Bakassi Peninsula on official holidays and even administrative officials do not relocate their families there, which explains their periodic presence.

One significant consequence of the activities carried out by the armed groups and pirates launching operations from the Nigerian coast is a growing challenge to Cameroon's sovereignty. Their actions contribute to a broader campaign of destatization. This situation not only jeopardizes the safety of the local population but also threatens the state's economic interests, as attacks frequently target oil infrastructure and critical shipping lanes. The fallout has resulted in substantial loss of life and equipment damage, deterred oil company operations and raised concerns among potential investors.

Because of piracy, crews remain at risk. Occasionally, pirates assassinate crew members. During the attacks on two trawlers off the coast of Kribi in January 2009, one of the skippers was fatally wounded.¹⁵⁷

Piracy, hostage-taking, extortion and illegal taxation significantly hinder development on Cameroon's coastline. These criminal activities exacerbate the country's economic challenges by compelling the government to allocate a significant portion of its limited resources to combating piracy. Furthermore, the pervasive insecurity undermines the government's integrated development initiatives, such as development committees and resettlement projects. As a result, the construction and maintenance of essential infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals, schools, fishing ports, and electricity and water supply systems, face considerable delays.¹⁵⁸ The climate of insecurity also makes state employees, including teachers, healthcare workers and engineers, hesitant to take up permanent positions in these areas, leading to an institutional void. Local communities often find themselves in a precarious situation with limited access to public services. The atmosphere of insecurity fosters feelings of neglect, which can in turn support separatist sentiments and encourage the rise of rebel groups, thus creating a vicious cycle of instability.¹⁵⁹

These criminal activities also have broader implications for security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea. The Bakassi Peninsula is a crucial area for regional maritime security, but insecurity hampers the mechanisms for collaboration between Cameroon and Nigeria, despite the 2006 Greentree Agreement intended to bolster relations. The prevailing distrust undermines efforts to manage cross-border movements and complicates coordinated actions against piracy and the trafficking of arms, fuel, drugs and humans.

Economic effects

Maritime piracy and its associated criminal activities pose a significant challenge to the Cameroonian state's vital interests at sea, particularly concerning oil exploration and exploitation, as well as industrial and artisanal fishing, and cross-border trade. This issue is especially pressing as the country's economy relies heavily on port activities and oil revenues. The latter are responsible for contributing 45% of the national budget.¹⁶⁰ Between 2007 and 2023, hydrocarbons generated nearly FCFA8 million (around €12 200), encompassing corporate taxes and various levies.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Cameroon's coastline serves as a crucial shipping corridor for international goods transportation, fisheries and hydrocarbon resources.¹⁶² Piracy and related crimes significantly affect marine security in the Atlantic.¹⁶³ They disrupt the flow of goods and people, threatening the freedom of navigation in Cameroonian waters. They hinder cross-border trade between Cameroon and Nigeria, particularly along key routes, such as Ikang–Idabato–Ekondo Titi. These threats are compounded by the overall insecurity of river and sea routes.

These criminal activities also stifle regional economic integration. For instance, the Bakassi area could have emerged as a vital transit and trade hub linking Central and West Africa along the Calabar–Ekondo Titi–Douala corridor. However, the prevailing insecurity hampers efforts to connect the economies of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West



Merchandise from Nigeria is unloaded in Idenau on the Cameroon coast. The threat of piracy has had a significant impact on this important international transport corridor. *Photo supplied*

African States (ECOWAS), limiting the potential of industrial and port free zones that could propel industrialization and regional integration under the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Furthermore, crime has driven up marine insurance premiums.¹⁶⁴ The cost of war-risk insurance can soar to as high as US\$525 000 per trip.¹⁶⁵ There has also been significant escalation in kidnap-and-ransom insurance premiums, as seen in the Gulf of Aden.¹⁶⁶ Such criminal activities push transport rates higher and disrupt supply chains, leading many vessels to skip port calls in favour of more secure locations.

Additionally, piracy along Cameroon's coastline disrupts oil, gas and fishing resources. The country's two main oil-producing sedimentary basins,¹⁶⁷ the Rio del Rey and Douala–Kribi–Campo,¹⁶⁸ face threats from pirates that have raised concerns among industry stakeholders. As a result, both public and private companies – such as the Société Nationale des Hydrocarbures (National Hydrocarbons Corporation – SNH) – may hesitate to invest or may even suspend operations temporarily. This precarious situation is detrimental to Cameroon, which relies heavily on oil revenues.¹⁶⁹ In light of dwindling incomes, maritime piracy is a critical challenge for Cameroon.¹⁷⁰

In Cameroon, there are currently no reliable estimates regarding the costs involved in hostage-taking incidents. In neighbouring Nigeria, it is estimated that close to US\$4 million is paid annually in ransoms linked to piracy.¹⁷¹ Following the kidnapping of Idabato's subdivisional officer and a local municipal employee in 2024, the kidnappers initially¹⁷² demanded a ransom of US\$5 million, 10 generators and a 200 horsepower Yamaha engine. They finally lowered their ransom demand to US\$700 000. They also sought the release of 14 relatives held in Cameroonian prisons, including a pirate arrested during an attack off the coast of Douala in June 2023.¹⁷³

The unique geography of Cameroon, which is situated at the bottom of the Gulf of Guinea, where warm currents from Guinea meet the cooler Benguela current, makes its maritime coast especially rich in marine resources,¹⁷⁴ but artisanal and industrial fishing – crucial for food security and employment – are significantly hampered by theft, kidnapping and ransom demands, and conflicts among fishermen. The fishing industry is further threatened by organized crime.

Before the systematization of military presence on trawlers, these vessels were primary targets for pirates in Cameroonian waters and piracy remains a threat to trawlers. Pirates may seize all or a portion of the fish from these vessels during their assaults. An example of this was the attack on the trawlers *Olukun 1* and *Olukun 2* in January 2009. Trawlers may sustain damage and their captains are sometimes abducted, making proprietors hesitant to deploy them in Cameroonian waters.

Pirates launch simultaneous attacks on trawlers without hesitation. On 24 February 2010, four trawlers were boarded by eight pirates, resulting in the kidnapping of their respective captains. And on 30 June 2023, two Chinese fishing vessels were assaulted by pirates. Several of the ships targeted are engaged in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities, as was the trawler attacked by pirates on 30 December 2021, resulting in the death of one crew member and the abduction of two others.¹⁷⁵ These incidents stoke fears among industrial fishing stakeholders and impede investment in this sector.¹⁷⁶

Apart from the costs associated with ransom payments and prolonged ship detentions, pirate assaults exert a considerable economic influence on ship owners. During these assaults, pirates frequently eliminate detection and transmission apparatus. They also occasionally fire into the ship's control panel. Gunshots frequently perforate the bridge of fishing vessels and the cargo of fish is regularly seized. Pirates also appropriate currency, jewellery, radios, telephones, computers, onboard radars, cigarette stockpiles and occasionally the crew's work jackets. During the assault on the *MVAM Delta*, a Ghanaian-flagged vessel, on the Cameroonian coastline on 29 May 2024, pirates confiscated the ship's communication equipment, provisions and the crew's personal effects.¹⁷⁷

In 2010, pirates demanded a ransom of US\$25 million for the release of seven Chinese hostages abducted from the trawler *Liaoyu Shunyu 9001*, but westerners are usually the primary targets. In March 2009, pirates assaulting the *Sil Tide* enquired about the location of the safe and the number of white individuals on board. They departed with four hostages – one Ukrainian and three Filipinos – after acquiring the name and phone number of the company's contact person. Crew members of African descent have also been kidnapped. On 30 June 2023, in Cameroonian national waters at buoy 25 Wouri channel, the Panamanian-flagged cargo ship *Oya 1* was attacked by pirates who abducted five crew members – two Moroccans and three Ivorians.¹⁷⁸



Recommendations

Based on the analysis of current and emerging trends in maritime piracy and related criminal activities in Cameroon, several key recommendations emerge. These proposals primarily target Cameroonian authorities and emphasize the need to reframe the approach to maritime insecurity. Strengthening human, material, institutional and financial capacities, along with enhancing cooperation at national, zonal and interregional levels, is essential. Additionally, some recommendations focus on optimizing the involvement of Cameroon's extra-regional partners.

Moving beyond the piracy–maritime robbery dichotomy: The research community and stakeholders should abandon the artificial distinction between piracy – committed in international waters – and maritime robbery, which is committed in territorial waters. This shift would enable a more holistic approach to marine insecurity by addressing the land-based dynamics that sustain piracy networks. National and multinational maritime exercises should incorporate land components, as pirates often originate from and retreat to land after operations at sea. Cameroon and its partners should therefore integrate coastal operations into multinational exercises such as Obangame Express, recognizing that a successful maritime strategy depends on an equally robust land strategy.

Revising the Yaoundé Code of Conduct: Cameroon, along with Gulf of Guinea partners, should revisit the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to broaden its scope from piracy to include associated criminal activities, such as hostage-taking in mangroves, illegal bunkering, smuggling and trafficking, acknowledging these as part of organized maritime crime.

Creating equal focus on related criminal activities: Efforts to combat piracy should be matched by initiatives against related crimes such as smuggling, human trafficking and arms proliferation. Cameroon and Nigeria should enhance surveillance systems along their borders, increase patrols and institutionalize checkpoints and systematic searches in vulnerable areas.

Acquiring suitable patrol boats and equipment: Cameroon should procure fast-response patrol boats designed for shallow waters and creeks, complemented by modern surveillance technologies such as radar, drones and satellite systems. This would ensure persistent maritime domain awareness.

Strengthening collaboration among state actors: Coordination should be improved between the various agencies involved in maritime governance – navy, customs, fisheries services, merchant marine, police, gendarmerie and administrative authorities. An integrated command structure and clear lines of responsibility would reduce duplication and improve operational efficiency.

Establishing a joint maritime intelligence fusion centre: There is a need for the creation of a dedicated Cameroon–Nigeria intelligence hub focused on piracy, smuggling and related maritime crimes. This centre would centralize intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination, ensuring actionable information reaches decision-makers and operational units in real time.

Systematizing operational procedures: Cameroon should establish standardized operational procedures for all maritime security actors, including protocols for vessel inspections, hostage rescue and communication between agencies. This should be integrated into a broader national maritime security strategy.

Increasing security presence in strategic zones: To better secure vulnerable areas such as the Bakassi Peninsula, Cameroon should reinforce its deployment of police and gendarmerie units. This visible presence would deter piracy and strengthen state authority in remote coastal communities.

Allocating special security funds: The government should earmark dedicated financial resources for defence and security forces, as well as administrative authorities tasked with supervising and protecting populations in creeks and coastal settlements.

Enhancing civil–military relations: Security operations at sea should be complemented by deliberate efforts to build trust with civilian communities. Engaging coastal populations as partners in security, through awareness campaigns and economic support programmes, will encourage them to provide timely intelligence and resist pirate recruitment.

Building capacity and provide specialized training: Cameroon should train security personnel in hostage negotiation and crisis management to improve outcomes in kidnapping-for-ransom cases. The country should also enhance the capacity of naval forces in asymmetric warfare, search and rescue, and joint operations with international partners.

Developing a maritime cybersecurity strategy: As pirates increasingly exploit digital vulnerabilities by hacking vessel tracking systems, Cameroon should adopt a cybersecurity framework to protect critical maritime infrastructure, including ports, oil terminals and vessel navigation systems.

Strengthening port security and governance: Cameroon should implement the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code rigorously in all ports. The country should also deploy advanced cargo-scanning systems and biometric access controls to reduce infiltration by pirate networks.

Introducing economic reintegration programmes for former pirates: Cameroon and Nigeria should establish structured demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programmes for people transitioning out of pirate networks, complemented by vocational training in fishing, agriculture and small-scale commerce.

Establishing maritime security courts: Cameroon should create specialized maritime tribunals in Douala, Kribi and Limbé, with trained judges and prosecutors to fast-track piracy cases. This would address delays in prosecution, strengthen deterrence and bring sentences in line with international maritime law.

Promoting public–private partnerships in maritime security: Cameroon should encourage oil companies, shipping firms and fishing cooperatives to co-invest in maritime surveillance systems, joint security escorts and community development initiatives.

Leveraging technology for coastal surveillance: Cameroon should deploy underwater sensors, coastal radar and automatic identification systems integrated into national and regional monitoring networks. The state should also encourage vessels to use tamper-proof transponders to prevent pirates from disabling location signals.

Formalizing Cameroon–Nigeria cooperation: While strategic and political collaboration already exists, both states should institutionalize tactical-level cooperation. This would strengthen operational ties between their navies, coast guards and security agencies, particularly in dismantling safe havens used by criminal groups along the maritime border.

Enhancing cross-border collaboration: Cameroon and Nigeria should deepen cooperation by granting reciprocal hot-pursuit rights in territorial waters. Where sovereignty concerns prevent this, the creation of a joint task force dedicated to combating maritime insecurity in shared waters should be prioritized.

Leveraging regional and international partnerships: Cameroon should maximize the support of external partners – including the African Union, ECCAS, ECOWAS, the EU, the US and France – for training, provision of modern equipment and technical assistance. Regional centres such as the Central African Regional Maritime Safety Centre in Pointe-Noire and the West Africa Regional Maritime Security Centre in Abidjan should be fully integrated into national operations for real-time information sharing.

Promoting socio-economic development of coastal areas: Cameroon and Nigeria should address the structural conditions that enable piracy by investing in development projects in coastal regions such as Bakassi and the Niger Delta. Expanding opportunities in education, fishing and trade would reduce the appeal of piracy as an economic alternative.

Enhancing regional naval interoperability: The navies of Cameroon and Nigeria should conduct regular joint training to improve interoperability in communication, manoeuvring and joint operations. The two armies should also standardize communication protocols to avoid delays during emergencies.

Expanding multinational maritime exercises beyond Obangame Express: The US, UK, France and other traditional bilateral and multilateral partners should develop new regional exercises tailored explicitly to the waters of Cameroon and Nigeria. These exercises would simulate piracy scenarios in creeks and mangroves, areas that Obangame Express may not fully cover.



Notes

- 1 The concept of ‘cohabitant flows’, introduced by Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Amanda Møller Rasmussen after Jacobsen’s previous research on polycriminality, describes the interplay of onshore and offshore flows as well as the legal and illegal activities and spaces that coexist with maritime piracy. These dynamics encompass the material and social flows that both shape and accompany maritime piracy, often co-constituted in relation with this form of criminality. See Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Amanda Møller Rasmussen, Piracy and the broader ‘gun business’ in the Niger Delta, *International Affairs*, 100, 4, July 2024, 1693–1712; and Katja Lindskov Jacobsen, Poly-criminal pirates and ballooning effects: implications for international counter-piracy, *Global Policy*, London School of Economics and Political Science, 10, 1, 2019, 52–59.
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- 3 Also known as the Yaoundé Architecture for Maritime Safety and Security, this framework serves as the institutional and operational foundation for a coordinated response to piracy, armed robbery against ships and other illicit maritime activities in West and Central Africa. Established by the heads of state from ECCAS, ECOWAS and GGC during the Yaoundé Summit on Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea held on 24 and 25 June 2013, this architecture revolves around the Interregional Coordination Centre in Yaoundé. It also includes the Regional Maritime Security Centres located in West Africa (Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire) and Central Africa (Pointe-Noire, Republic of the Congo), as well as various national maritime operations centres. Together, these entities aim to synchronize efforts across inter-regional, regional and zonal levels. See Kwaku Danso and Serwaa Allotey-Pappoe, Mapping maritime actors under the Yaoundé Protocol: Establishing mandates; The Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, Interrelationships, gaps and prospects, 2021, <https://kaiptc-danishmaritimesecurityproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Mapping-Maritime-Actors-under-the-Yaounde-Protocol.-Establishing-Mandates-Interrelationships-Gaps-an-Prospects.pdf>.
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- 5 Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Amanda Møller Rasmussen, Piracy and the broader ‘gun business’ in the Niger Delta, *International Affairs*, 100, 4, July 2024, 1693–1712, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae165>.
- 6 For example, the product of illegal oil bunkering in Nigeria is sold in Cameroon in the form of *fungè* – illicit and often adulterated roadside fuel. These fuel smuggling networks are sponsored by the pirates. Sébastien Thierry Régis Ombe, *La participation de marine nationale dans la lutte contre la piraterie maritime au Cameroun (1990-2018): Essai d’analyse historique*, master’s dissertation, University of Yaoundé, 2022, p 119.
- 7 Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Amanda Møller Rasmussen, Piracy and the broader ‘gun business’ in the Niger Delta,

- International Affairs*, 100, 4, July 2024, 1693–1712, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae165>.
- 8 This report presents some quantitative data, despite its inherent limitations. The incident figures are scarce and fluctuate across different sources. This discrepancy can be attributed to a lack of coordination among the various stakeholders involved – the Cameroon Mining Company, security departments of oil companies, and defence and security forces – as well as the absence of standardized reporting protocols. Nonetheless, by cross-referencing these diverse sources, this report outlines a trend regarding pirate attacks on vessels both on and off the Cameroonian coast.
 - 9 Research into maritime piracy and the associated flows is marked by a range of challenges and complexities due to the inherent dangers of the geographic areas involved. The environment not only poses risks for researchers but also creates a climate of uncertainty for the participants. The sensitivity surrounding this subject matter stems from its ties to criminal activities, which are often shrouded in secrecy. Moreover, this covert nature extends to the defence and security forces, which have played a critical role in this research endeavour. The mechanisms for surveillance and control significantly shape how data is collected and shared within this particular social group. See Julien Pomarède, *Ethnography and diplomatic-military secrecy: Reflections on participant observation of NATO counterterrorism*, *Cultures & Conflicts* 118, 2020, 37–69.
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 - 12 Ibid.
 - 13 Gasu Gideon Nyuimbe and Hervé Endomo Endomo, *La gouvernance des océans au Cameroun*, UN/DOALOS/ Norad Programmes of Assistance, 2023, p 13, https://www.un.org/oceancapacity/sites/www.un.org.oceancapacity/files/files/Projects/Norad/OGS/oceangovernancestudy_cameroon_french.pdf.
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 - 20 Katja Lindskov Jacobsen and Tarila Marclint Ebiede, *Pirates and oil theft in the Niger Delta: An analysis of connection between piracy and oil bunkering*, Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, 2022, p 5.
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 - 36 Interviews with Cameroonian navy officers and private security contractors, Douala, 22–24 June 2025. Compilation of records from the Cameroonian military, the MCC of Zone D and reports from private security firms.
 - 37 Compilation of monthly reports of the Delta BIR.
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 - 40 Individual interviews and focus group interviews with officers in Akwa, 18 June 2025.
 - 41 These activists claimed they were fighting for the rights of their people and protesting against the abuses of the Cameroonian army against the majority-Nigerian populations of the Bakassi peninsula. They carried out kidnappings and assassinations of Cameroonian authorities, took hostages and demanded ransom from the administration, and attacked defence and other security-force posts. One of their demands was that oil companies operating in the Bakassi Peninsula pay them an annual fee of 100 million CFA francs. See Clarisse Juompan-Yakam, *M. Perewei, leader de l’AMC : « Nous n’avons pas peur des balles camerounaises »*, Jeune Afrique, 11 February 2011, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/182448/politique/m-perewei-leader-de-l-amc-nous-n-avons-pas-peur-des-balles-camerounaises/>.
 - 42 BFF leaders say they do not contest the sovereignty of Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula. They claim to be fighting for the people of the Bakassi Peninsula who, according to them, are suffering enormously. Their objective is to force the Cameroonian government to negotiate to improve the living conditions of the majority-Nigerian inhabitants of the Bakassi Peninsula. *Le Messenger*, 2731, 3 November 2008.
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 - 44 Biafra Nations League, Facebook, 27 March 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17VKiLvFAL/>.
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- 78 Ibid, also confirmed by other military sources.
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