

Maritime Security Challenges: Appraisal of the Nigerian Navy in the Protection of Nigerian Maritime Domain

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Abstract—This paper undertakes a critical examination of maritime security threat, maritime safety and insecurity in Nigerian maritime Domain. The security of the maritime domain has been a major concern and Nigeria's vulnerability to security threats and other transnational maritime crime has increased significantly. This paper critically examines the role of the Nigerian Navy in maritime security. The paper; using the doctrinal research methodology, examines the operational capabilities of the Nigerian Navy, policing roles of the Nigerian Navy, the impact and effectiveness of the Nigerian Navy, challenges and operational difficulties. It also considered the weak enforcement of rules, resource constraints, corruption, logistics, technological weakness and faulty recruitment process into the Nigerian Navy. The paper proposes legal and policy frameworks, institutional measures and reforms, capable of strengthening and fortifying the Nigerian Navy. The paper concludes with the averment that a secure maritime domain is not merely a defence imperative but that there is need for legal harmonization, institutional capacity structure, investment in maritime surveillance, coastal community engagement to balance the role of the Nigerian Navy for safeguarding Nigeria's waters and unlocking the full potential of the maritime Blue Economy.

Keywords— Nigerian Navy, Security, Blue Economy, Maritime Domain, Corruption.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's maritime domain, stretching over 853 kilometers of coastline and encompassing an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about 200 nautical miles, is one of the most strategically important in Africa. It is a critical gateway for international trade, accounting for over 70% of West Africa's trade volume. The maritime domain is also

a crucial source of resources such as oil, gas, and fisheries, making it vital for Nigeria's economy.

The Gulf of Guinea, in which Nigeria plays a dominant geopolitical role, accounts for a substantial proportion of Africa's maritime trade and remains integral to the global energy supply chain, particularly through crude oil and liquefied natural gas exports. Owing to this economic significance, the security of Nigerian territorial waters is essential not only for national development but also for regional and international maritime stability, and trans border socio economic relations.

Despite this importance, Nigeria's maritime environment has historically been beset by profound and evolving security challenges. From the early 2000s to the late 2010s, the country was widely recognised as the epicentre of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, with incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea. Criminal activities have diversified beyond piracy to include illegal oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, smuggling of small arms, human trafficking, and maritime pollution. These activities not only result in billions of dollars in economic losses annually but also threaten energy infrastructure, food security, and the safety of seafarers and coastal communities. The persistence of such threats highlights the centrality of maritime security to Nigeria's overall national security framework.

A major challenge lies in the fragmented nature of Nigeria's maritime governance architecture. Multiple agencies including the Nigerian Navy, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency

(NIMASA), the Marine Police, the Nigerian Ports Authority and the Nigerian Customs Service operate within the maritime domain, often with overlapping mandates and insufficient inter-agency coordination. This fragmentation has historically resulted in duplication of efforts, inefficient resource allocation, jurisdictional conflicts and slow decision-making. The absence of a single unified maritime security command structure has limited the effectiveness of Nigeria's response to complex, transnational maritime threats.

Given these dynamics, scholars and policymakers increasingly argue that Nigeria must re-think its approach to maritime security by adopting a more holistic, intelligence-driven and forward-looking strategy. Traditional security models largely reliant on naval patrols, criminal interdiction and reactive force deployment have proven insufficient in addressing the multifaceted nature of contemporary maritime threats. Modern maritime security requires an integrated framework that combines legal reforms, technological innovation, community engagement and institutional restructuring.

In addition, the role of coastal communities and non-state actors cannot be ignored in any comprehensive strategy. Many criminal activities, such as illegal bunkering and piracy, draw support from coastal populations who perceive involvement in such acts as a source of economic survival in environments plagued by poverty, underdevelopment and environmental degradation. Thus, rethinking maritime security entails not only military and legal interventions but also socio-economic development, communal engagement, youth employment programmes, environmental protection and the integration of coastal communities into maritime surveillance and intelligence networks.

1.1 Maritime Security in Nigeria

Maritime security in Nigeria refers to the protection of the country's territorial waters, offshore assets, ports, and maritime routes from threats such as piracy, smuggling, oil theft, human trafficking, and trafficking in small arms and light weapons. Nigeria's strategic location along the Gulf of Guinea, with over 853 kilometers of coastline and substantial maritime resources, makes it a significant maritime hub in West Africa. However, the same geographical advantage also exposes it to numerous security

threats that undermine national stability, economic prosperity, and regional peace and stability.

The maritime environment in Nigeria is critical to its economy, particularly through the oil and gas sector, which relies heavily on offshore production and the export of crude oil via maritime routes. Furthermore, maritime trade accounts for over 90 percent of Nigeria's international trade. This economic importance underscores the necessity of an effective legal and institutional framework to combat maritime threats and maintain the rule of law in Nigerian waters.

Maritime security challenges have intensified due to weak enforcement mechanisms, lack of inter-agency collaboration, porous maritime borders, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. These challenges have far-reaching implications not just for national security but also for international maritime law and regional stability.

For instance, the 2019 hijacking of the vessel MT Nave Constellation off the Coast of Bonny Island highlighted the scale of the maritime insecurity problem in Nigeria. Nineteen crew members were kidnapped, sparking international condemnation and raising questions about Nigeria's capacity to protect its waters.

In response to these challenges, the Nigerian government has enacted several legal frameworks and has ratified international conventions aimed at addressing maritime insecurity. The effectiveness of these laws and the capability of the agencies charged, with enforcement are pivotal to achieving maritime safety and national security.

1.2 Historical Background of Maritime Insecurity in Nigeria

The issue of maritime insecurity in Nigeria dates back to the colonial and early post-independence periods, but it became more pronounced with the discovery and exportation of crude oil in the Niger Delta region in the 1950s and 60s. The strategic economic importance of oil intensified the use of maritime routes and, correspondingly, the vulnerability of Nigerian waters to criminal exploitation.

In the early years, maritime crimes were largely limited to smuggling, illegal fishing, and minor thefts. However, over time, particularly from the late 1990s into the 2000s, Nigeria began to experience a sharp increase in sophisticated maritime threats including piracy, illegal bunkering, oil theft, trafficking in persons, and the proliferation of small

arms and light weapons (SALW). These threats were driven by economic desperation, militant agitation, and organized criminal networks operating both locally and internationally.

One landmark moment in Nigeria's maritime security history was the rise of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the mid-2000s. MEND and other militant groups used maritime routes to launch attacks on oil installations, kidnap expatriate workers, and smuggle arms and oil. Their operations exposed serious gaps in Nigeria's maritime surveillance and legal enforcement capacity.

The international community grew increasingly alarmed, especially given the importance of the Gulf of Guinea as a vital maritime corridor for global trade. In response, Nigeria began to receive support from foreign governments and institutions to strengthen its maritime security and address the threat of SALW proliferation. The Nigerian government enacted various laws, set up specialized agencies, and participated in regional maritime security initiatives such as the Yaounde Code of Conduct.

1.3 The Role of Nigerian Waterways in National Security

Nigerian waterways play a pivotal role in the country's national security, both in economic and strategic terms. With an extensive coastline stretching over 853 kilometers and a network of inland waterways spanning more than 10,000 kilometers, these maritime routes are essential for trade, energy export, transportation, and national defense. However, their vastness also makes them vulnerable to misuse by criminal elements, insurgent groups, and arms traffickers.

The Nigerian maritime domain, which includes territorial waters and the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), is rich in oil and gas reserves. Nigeria exports over 90 percent of its crude oil and natural gas through its waterways. This makes maritime security an indispensable element of national security, as disruptions in maritime transport can cripple the national economy. Furthermore, key oil installations, pipelines, and terminals are located offshore, making them targets for sabotage and piracy.

Waterways are also a gateway for the trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW), illegal drugs, and human trafficking. The use of rivers and coastal creeks by militant groups in the Niger Delta has demonstrated how these waterways can be exploited to evade security forces and move illicit goods. The

activities of groups like the Niger Delta Avengers, which sabotaged oil installations and engaged in arms smuggling, serve as a strong illustration of the threat posed by unsecured waterways.

In a 2018 report by the Nigerian Institute for Security Studies, it was noted that over 70 percent of arms seized in Southern Nigeria were trafficked through rivers and coastal routes. The report further emphasized that some arms were offloaded at unregistered jetties and private docks, then transported inland using smaller boats.

The strategic importance of the waterways has led to several national security operations. Notably, Operation Delta Safe and Deep Blue Project are state-led efforts to curb maritime crimes and safeguard critical infrastructure. The Nigerian Navy, in collaboration with the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), has increased patrols and surveillance efforts in high-risk areas like the Bonny Channel and Calabar waterways.

Statutorily, the Nigerian Navy is empowered under the Armed Forces Act, Cap A20, LFN 2004, to maintain maritime defense. In addition, NIMASA derives authority from the NIMASA Act 2007 to regulate shipping activities and ensure maritime safety. The Nigerian inland Waterways Authority (NIWA) also plays a role in inland waterway transportation and security.

The judiciary has also recognized the significance of maritime security in safeguarding the country's sovereignty. In *NIMASA v. Hensmor Nigeria Ltd*, the Court of Appeal held that NIMASA had a statutory duty to ensure compliance with maritime safety regulations and protect national economic interests.

II. MARITIME SECURITY IN SEARCH FOR A MEANING.

Maritime security, can first be understood in a matrix of its relation to other concepts, such as marine safety, sea power, blue economy, and resilience. Second, the securitization framework allows to study how maritime threats are made and which divergent political claims these entail in order to uncover political interests and divergent ideologies. Third, security practice theory enables the study of what actors actually do when they claim to enhance maritime security. Together these frameworks allow for the mapping of maritime security.

The United States pioneered the development of maritime security when launching a national

maritime security, policy in 2004. The concept of 'maritime security' gained initial salience after the terrorist attacks of September 11th and the associated fears over the spread of maritime terrorism.

The breakthrough for maritime security came with the rise of piracy off the coast of Somalia between 2008 and 2011. The dangers of piracy, for international trade brought the maritime dimension of security to the global consciousness and lifted it high on policy agenda.

2.1 Maritime Security Theory

Maritime security theory conceptualises the ocean as both a space of opportunity and vulnerability. It posits that the safety of maritime spaces depends on the capacity of states to exercise control, enforce laws, and determine transnational crimes. Bueger identifies four analytical components of maritime security: national security, marine environment, economic development, and human security

This theoretical lens is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where maritime insecurity manifested in piracy, armed robbery, and illegal oil activities has both economic and environmental implications. The theory underscores that maritime security is not solely a military or naval concern but a multidimensional issue that integrates law enforcement, governance, and socioeconomic resilience. These three theoretical perspectives collectively provide the intellectual scaffolding for the Nigerian Navy. They guide the analysis of Nigeria's ocean protection mechanisms and their impact on the sustainability of the blue economy.

2.2 The Concept of Maritime Security

Security has been in the list of factors influencing the performance of the Nigerian maritime sector over the years. Others include infrastructure, bureaucracy, laws, corruption, capital for investment and maintenance of ships, incentives for investors, availability of indigenous carrier vessels, sea worthiness of such indigenous vessels where they are available, etc. Security in any objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values and in a subjective sense the absence of fear that such values will be attacked. The definition of the term maritime security varies and while no internationally agreed definition exists, the term has often been used to describe both existing, and new regional and international challenges to the maritime domain. Maritime security is an umbrella term informed to classify issues in the maritime domain that are often

related to national security, marine environment, economic development, and human security. Some of the practical issues clustered under the term of maritime security include crimes such as piracy, armed robbery at sea, trafficking of people and illicit goods, illegal fishing or marine pollution. War, warlike activity, maritime terrorism and interstate rivalry are also maritime security concerns. Maritime security also encompasses a vast range of policy sectors, information services and user communities, including maritime safety, search and rescue, policing operations, operational safety for offshore oil and gas production, marine environmental monitoring and protection, and navy operations support. Maritime security is concerned with the maritime integrity of all the elements that form the basic and essential features of the maritime domain and the safety of all foreign objects existing in or making use of the maritime domain. Maritime security may, therefore, be defined as those measures employed by owners, operators, and administration of vessels, port facilities, offshore installations, or other marine organizations and establishments to protect against, seizure, sabotage, piracy, theft, terrorism activities and hostile interference with lawful operations.

In another context, maritime security concerns the absence of acts which negatively impact on the natural integrity and resilience of any navigable waterway. Such acts impacts on the maritime environment by undermining the safety of the operations in the seas and the security of persons conducting lawful transactions in international waters. Similarly, the term was defined as the grouping of preventive and responsive actions to guard the maritime sphere against threats and intended illegitimate acts. This definition focuses on efforts towards avoiding acts that will be detrimental to effective maritime business operations.

2.3 Maritime Security in Nigeria and a Stable, Maritime Environment

Maritime security in Nigeria has evolved significantly over the past five decades, shaped by economic pressures, political instability, international obligations and regional security dynamics. Nigeria's maritime environment is one of the most strategically significant in Africa. The Gulf of Guinea, in which Nigeria occupies a central position, is a global maritime corridor linking West Africa to Europe, North America and Latin America. Over 1,500 merchant vessels pass through Nigerian

waters annually, handling crude oil exports, refined petroleum imports, general merchandise and container shipments.

Nigeria's maritime environment is complex because it combines high economic value with security volatility. Historically, maritime insecurity in Nigeria evolved from low level smuggling and illegal fishing in the 1970s to organised oil theft and piracy in the 1990s and 2000s. The rise of militancy in the Niger Delta during the early 2000s catalysed modern piracy trends. Criminal groups began attacking offshore platforms, hijacking vessels and siphoning petroleum cargoes. These groups later expanded into armed robbery at sea, kidnapping of crew members and attacks on tankers transiting between Port Harcourt, Bonny, Brass and Lagos.

The discovery of vast offshore petroleum deposits also globalised Nigeria's maritime security concerns. Multinational corporations such as Shell, Chevron, Total and ExxonMobil operate within Nigeria's maritime domain. Offshore platforms such as Bonga and Agbami require extensive security protection because attacks on these installations threaten national revenue.

In the Nigerian context, maritime security is shaped by the country's dependence on offshore oil production, its status as a major shipping hub, and the proliferation of transnational maritime crimes in the Gulf of Guinea. The security of Nigeria's maritime domain therefore carries strategic implications for energy supply, foreign investment and coastal community livelihoods. Maritime security, for Nigeria, is thus not simply the prevention of crime at sea, but the assurance of a stable maritime environment capable of supporting national development and regional integration.

2.4 Distinction between Maritime Safety and Maritime Security

Although often used interchangeably, maritime safety and maritime security are distinct concepts with different legal, operational and policy implications. Maritime safety primarily concerns the protection of life, property and the marine environment from accidental or natural hazards. It includes issues such as ship collisions, mechanical failures, navigation errors, search and rescue operations, marine pollution incidents and safety standards governing vessel construction and operation. The regulatory framework for maritime safety is largely technical, standard-based and preventive.

Maritime security, in contrast, is concerned with deliberate unlawful acts that threaten the maritime domain. These include piracy, armed robbery at sea, maritime terrorism, trafficking and other forms of organised crime. Unlike maritime safety, which focuses on accidental harm, maritime security focuses on intentional harm perpetrated by hostile actors. The International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, adopted after the 9/11 attacks, underscores this distinction by providing states with security protocols to prevent acts such as terrorism and sabotage.

In practice, safety and security overlap in various ways. For example, inadequate safety standards can create vulnerabilities that criminals exploit, while security incidents can trigger safety risks for ships, crew and the environment. Nonetheless, maintaining conceptual clarity between both concepts is important for policy formulation. Effective maritime governance requires both strong safety mechanisms such as regulatory compliance and accident prevention and security mechanisms such as surveillance, law enforcement and intelligence operations.

2.5 Impact of Maritime Security on Economic Development

The main transportation mode of most of the imports and exports across the world is through the sea and therefore maritime security is vital to all states. The security of the littorals is as important as any other dimension of national security and raises several issues and challenges for states. Maritime export plays a crucial role in Nigeria's economic development. Costs of insecurity in Nigeria could be in terms of direct loss of income from weakened hydrocarbon exports and fisheries. It could also be indirectly through increased transportation and structural costs, tourism and foreign direct investment. Added to this, is the importance of maritime offshore, where economic and environmental factors could have adverse effects to the maritime potentials of Nigeria. There is also need to acknowledge the significance of growth potential, where flow of imports cannot be restricted and the need for an effective maritime security to coordinate the inflow of such products is essential. Ikpechukwu, Olowolagba and Yomi aptly captured the various contributions of the maritime sector to the Nigerian economy. They noted that shipping generates much needed foreign exchange to the Nigerian economy in form of ship repairs, levies, taxes, port fees and charges among others. They also submitted that the

Nigerian Maritime Administrative and Safety Agency (NIMASA) collects a levy on the gross freight from any vessel that calls at Nigerian ports for export and import purposes to boost Nigerian merchant shipping fleet for effective lifting of her cargo. In addition, shipping has provided opportunity for inland water way transport, coastal and high sea trading and has also made it possible for Nigerians to develop skill for fish and shrimps trawling enterprise. Shipping has engendered employment for sizeable number of Nigerian in various maritime related occupations. It has accounted for the urbanization and industrialization of the nation as well as given a boost to Nigeria's trade and commercial relation with the outside world.

However, it is important to note that since there can be no development without security, the impact of the maritime sector cannot be felt if the nation's maritime spaces are not effectively secured. Such security is needed to provide a fertile ground for any meaningful maritime trade and business to be conducted, supported and sustained. This is, therefore, the reason behind the numerous efforts made at national, regional, international and global levels towards ensuring adequate security of the waters.

2.6 Contemporary Maritime Criminality in Nigeria

In the contemporary era, Nigeria has emerged as a global hotspot for maritime criminality, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea. According to the International Maritime Bureau, this region accounts for over 40 percent of global piracy incidents. The primary forms of maritime criminality include:

1. Piracy and armed robbery at sea: Attacks on commercial vessels, oil tankers, and fishing boats for ransom or cargo theft.
2. Illegal oil bunkering: Theft of crude oil from pipelines or vessels, often linked to organised criminal networks.
3. Human trafficking and smuggling: Exploitation of maritime routes for illegal migration and drug trafficking.
4. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing: Depletion of fish stocks by foreign and domestic actors, undermining livelihoods.

The persistence of these crimes has been exacerbated by socio-economic conditions in coastal communities, including poverty, youth unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure. Criminal networks are often well-organized, utilizing

sophisticated navigation and communication technologies, making enforcement increasingly challenging.

The Nigerian government has recognized these threats through policy instruments such as the *SPOMO Act* 2019, the Deep Blue Project, and the National Maritime Security Strategy. However, implementation gaps, institutional overlap, and corruption remain significant barriers to effective maritime governance.

2.7 Drivers of maritime Criminality

Analysis of historical and contemporary data reveals multiple drivers of maritime criminality in Nigeria as follows:

1. Socio-economic factors – Poverty, lack of education, and limited economic opportunities in coastal communities create incentives for criminal engagement.
2. Weak institutional capacity – Insufficient surveillance, understaffed naval forces, and fragmented legal frameworks undermine enforcement.
3. Political patronage and corruption- Criminal network often operate with tacit political support, complicating law enforcement.
4. Geographical and technological factors – Nigeria's complex riverine and coastal geography facilitates concealment, while modern communication technologies enable criminal coordination.

The drivers are interrelated, forming a complex ecosystem in which maritime criminality thrives. Addressing these root causes is essential for sustainable maritime governance.

2.8 Socio-Economic Impacts

Maritime criminality has substantial economic, environmental, and social consequences:

1. Economic losses – High insurance premiums, ransom payments, and disruption of trade routes increase the cost of maritime commerce.
2. Environment degradation – Oil spills from bunkering and sabotage damage marine ecosystems, affecting fisheries and biodiversity.
3. Social instability – Coastal communities experience heightened vulnerability to crime and reduced livelihood opportunities, reinforcing cycles of poverty and criminality.

The impacts demonstrate that maritime criminality is both a security and a developmental challenge, directly affecting the sustainability of Nigeria's blue economy.

III. NIGERIAN ARMED FORCES

The *CFRN* 1999 and *Armed Forces Act* both provide for the establishment of the Nigerian Armed Forces which shall consist of an Army, a Navy, an Air Force and such other branches of the Armed Forces of the Federation as may be established by an *Act* of the National Assembly for the purpose of defending Nigeria from external aggression, maintaining its territorial integrity and securing its borders from violation on land, sea, or air, suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President and performance such other functions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly. The Nigerian Navy (NN) which is an arm of the Nigerian Armed Forces charged with enforcing and assisting in coordinating the enforcement of all customs, laws, including antibunkering, fishery and immigration laws of Nigeria at sea, enforcing and assisting in coordinating the enforcement of national and international maritime laws ascribed or acceded to by Nigeria, making of charts and coordinating of all national hydrographic surveys; and promoting, coordinating and enforcing safety regulations in the territorial waters and the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) of Nigeria.

3.1 Evolution of the Nigerian Navy: Historical Background

The origin of the Nigerian Navy could be traced to the Marine Department of the Royal Navy as a quasi-military organisation, which combined the duties of the present-day Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), the Nigerian Inland Waterways Authority and the Nigerian Navy. Elements of the Marine Department took part in military operations against the Germans in Cameroon during the First World War between 1914-1918. However, the colonial administration did not consider it necessary to establish a proper navy, as they believed that it was the duty of the Royal Navy to give naval protection to Nigeria. Also, the Marine Department was considered adequate to look after security of the ports and coastal approaches and provide harbour services for Royal Navy ships on West African patrols. This was the situation until the end of the Second World War in 1945.

After the war, the colonial administration preferred that emphasis be placed on port-related duties for the Marine Department. A proposal was then made to establish NPA. The officers of the Marine Department, who belonged to the Royal Navy Reserve, did not give up on the idea of a navy and therefore continued to press for the establishment of a naval force.

With further pressure from our nationalists, the colonial administration disbanded the colonial Marine Department. Sequel to this action, 250 officers and men of the disbanded Marine Department were put together to form the nucleus of the Nigerian Naval Force (NNF) in April 1956. The Force was later renamed Naval Defence Force (NDF) of Nigeria. Efforts of the Marine Department officers eventually led to the policy statement by the Colonial Government of Nigeria contained in the Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1956 for the establishment of a Naval Defence Force (NDF). However, as Nigeria moved towards independence, the need for a more robust maritime force became apparent.

On 1 June 1956, the NDF commenced operation with 11 assorted ships and craft inherited from the erstwhile colonial Marine Department of the Royal Navy. On 1 August 1956, the first legislation on the Navy was passed by the House of Representatives and was assented to on 5 September 1956 by Sir James Robertson, the Governor-General of Nigeria. It was called the Nigerian Navy Ordinance.

In 1963, when Nigeria became a republic, the prefix "Royal" was dropped and the name became the Nigerian Navy (NN). The modern day NN came into being legally through the *Act* of Parliament No 21 of 1964. At inception, the NN was statutorily required to patrol only 3 nautical miles, which was the limit of the territorial waters. The post-independence *Navy Act* of 1964, formally established the NN and removed the limitation of the NN operations to the country's territorial waters.

But as of today, the NN is currently structured into 11 Branches at the Naval Headquarters, 6 commands and a number of autonomous units. The 6 commands are made up of 3 operational commands - Western Naval Command, Central Naval Command and Eastern Naval Command with Headquarters located at Apapa, Yenagoa and Calabar, Naval Training Command with Headquarters at Onne as well as the Logistics and Naval Doctrine Commands with Headquarters at Oghara and Lagos respectively.

The newly formed Nigerian Navy was tasked with defending Nigeria's territorial waters and supporting

the nation's economic interests, especially given the increasing importance of oil exploration in the Niger Delta.

The 1960s and 1970s were pivotal decades for the Nigerian Navy. During the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), the Navy played a critical role in blockading the secessionist state of Biafra, thereby ensuring the supply lines and economic stability of the Nigerian government. Post-war, the Navy focused on rebuilding and expanding its fleet, incorporating more technologically advanced ships and training programs. This era also saw the establishment of various naval commands, which enhanced operational efficiency and regional coverage.

The late 20th and early 21st centuries brought further modernization and challenges. The Nigerian Navy expanded its focus to include combating piracy, oil bunkering, and other forms of maritime crime, which were becoming increasingly prevalent in the Gulf of Guinea. International cooperation became a cornerstone of the Navy's strategy, with joint exercises and training programs with navies from other countries enhancing its operational capabilities. Additionally, the Navy invested in modern surveillance and communication technologies to improve maritime domain awareness.

Today, the Nigerian Navy stands as a formidable force in West Africa, reflecting decades of growth and adaptation. Its historical development from a colonial marine force to a sophisticated naval power underscores its critical role in national and regional security. Continuous efforts in modernization, strategic partnerships, and personnel training ensure that the Nigerian Navy remains capable of addressing contemporary maritime threats and contributing to global maritime security.

3.2 The Roles of the Nigerian Navy in Securing the Maritime Domain

The Nigerian Navy plays a crucial role in securing Nigeria's marine domain, which is vital for the country's national security, economic stability, and regional influence. Its multifaceted responsibilities span from safeguarding territorial waters to engaging in humanitarian missions, all aimed at ensuring a secure and stable maritime environment.

The provisions of the 1999 *Constitution* by virtue of *Section 217*, as well as *section 4* of the *Armed Forces Decree* (AFD) 105 of 1993 as amended stipulate the roles and functions of the NN. Sub-section 4(a) further tasks the NN with enforcing and assisting in

coordinating the enforcement of all customs laws, including anti-illegal bunkering, fishery and immigration laws of Nigeria at sea. Additionally, it is responsible for enforcing and assisting in coordinating the enforcement of national and international maritime laws ascribed or acceded to by Nigeria. Furthermore, the making of charts, coordinating of all national hydrographical surveys, promoting, coordinating and enforcing safety regulations within the territorial waters and EEZ are within her jurisdiction. It is apparent therefore that the NN roles which cover military, policing and diplomatic are primarily concerned with the protection of the nation's maritime interests and activities. Notably, also, the NN was the only institution charged with responsibility for maritime security by the Constitution, other related agencies evolved with contemporary developments. The principal roles assigned to the NN are as follows:

- a. Military Role: The military roles include projection of force and balance of power functions.
- b. Diplomatic Role: Diplomatic role includes negotiation from the position of strength, manipulation and prestige.
- c. Policing Role: The policing role includes coastguard responsibility and duties including nation building functions.

Subsequently the NN in fulfillment of these objectives is guided by the following amplified tasks as contained in the *Armed Forces Act*:

- a. Military Tasks: The military tasks are:
 - (1) Combat operations against the enemy forces and defence of own forces.
 - (2) Evacuation operations, gunboat diplomacy and peacekeeping-and peace support operations.
- b. Diplomatic Tasks: The diplomatic tasks are:
 - (1) Defence diplomacy.
 - (2) Flag showing visits.
 - (3) Combined naval exercises and exchange programmes with navies of other nations.
- c. Policing Tasks: The policing tasks include:
 - (1) Anti-piracy operations, fishery protection, drug interdiction and contraband operations, for example anti-smuggling and anti-bunkering patrols.
 - (2) Oil and gas field protection patrols.
 - (3) Maritime counter terrorism and counter insurgency operations.

- (4) Enforcement of maritime treaties and agreements under international law.
- d. Naval Assistance to Civil Authority: These include:
 - (1) Humanitarian and disaster relief operations, non-combatant evacuation, assistance to refugees and peace support operations.
 - (2) Search and Rescue (SAR) and salvage operations.
 - (3) Ordinance and pollution control.
 - (4) Hydrographic surveying.

These Nigerian Navy roles would ensure peace and security as well as sustained economic growth and development within the sub-region. It is within this framework that the Nigerian Navy role would include the defence of the extended sea area of the Gulf of Guinea region.

The Nigerian Navy also contributes significantly to regional stability through international cooperation and joint maritime security initiatives. By participating in exercises and operations with other navies, the Nigerian Navy enhances its operational capabilities and fosters international goodwill. Collaborative efforts, such as those under the Yaounde Code of Conduct, are essential for addressing transnational maritime threats and ensuring collective security in the Gulf of Guinea. These partnerships enable the sharing of intelligence and best practices, thereby strengthening regional maritime security.

Protecting Nigeria's economic interests is another critical role of the Nigerian Navy. The nation's economy heavily relies on its maritime domain, particularly for oil and gas exports. The Navy's efforts to secure offshore oil installations and shipping routes are vital for ensuring uninterrupted economic activities. By preventing sabotage and illegal exploitation of resources, the Navy supports Nigeria's economic growth and stability. This role is particularly important given the significant contribution of the maritime sector to the national GDP.

Training and development are fundamental to the effectiveness of the Nigerian Navy in fulfilling its roles. The Navy operates several training institutions, including the Nigerian Naval College and the Nigerian Defence Academy, which provide comprehensive training for officers and sailors. These institutions focus on developing technical skills, leadership qualities, and strategic thinking necessary for effective naval operations. Continuous

training and professional development ensure that the Navy remains capable and prepared to address evolving maritime challenges.

In essence, the Nigerian Navy's roles in securing Nigeria's marine domain are diverse and critical to national and regional security. From defending territorial waters and combating maritime crime to conducting humanitarian operations and fostering international cooperation, the Navy's responsibilities are comprehensive and vital. Through ongoing modernization, strategic partnerships, and rigorous training, the Nigerian Navy continues to fulfill its essential roles effectively, ensuring a secure and stable maritime environment for Nigeria and its neighbours.

3.3 The Role of the Nigerian Navy and Maritime Agencies in the Enforcement of Maritime Security

The enforcement of maritime laws and the suppression of crimes such as piracy, arms trafficking, and illegal bunkering within Nigerian waters are primarily the responsibilities of the Nigerian Navy and other maritime security agencies. These bodies operate within the framework of domestic and international law, often in cooperation with regional and global partners.

The Nigerian Navy is the principal military body tasked with defending the country's territorial waters and maintaining maritime order. Its statutory role includes the surveillance and protection of Nigeria's maritime domain, prevention of maritime crimes, and interdiction of illicit traffic, including the transportation of small arms and light weapons. Over the years, the Navy has undergone extensive modernization, acquiring patrol vessels, offshore platforms, and surveillance technology to monitor maritime activities.

One of the major naval operations aimed at enhancing enforcement is Operation Delta Safe, which targets militancy, oil theft, and smuggling in the Niger Delta region. Another important project is the Deep Blue Project, initiated by the Federal Ministry of Transportation in partnership with the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA). The Deep Blue Project includes the deployment of air, land, and maritime assets for coordinated surveillance and response to maritime threats. These initiatives have led to the interception of arms shipments, the arrest of pirates, and the rescue of kidnapped seafarers.

NIMASA; established under the *NIMASA Act 2007*, serves as the primary regulatory agency overseeing shipping, maritime safety, and maritime labour. *Section 22* of the *Act* mandates NIMASA to enforce safety regulations and ensure compliance with international maritime conventions such as the ISPS Code and SOLAS. NIMASA works closely with the Navy to monitor vessel movements and conduct inspections on suspected ships.

Another key agency is the Nigerian Customs Service, which operates under the *Customs and Excise Management Act*. Customs officials stationed at ports and border posts are empowered to seize smuggled goods, including arms and ammunition. The Service also plays a crucial role in intelligence gathering and collaborates with INTERPOL and other international bodies in tracking illicit shipments.

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF), through its Marine Police division, conducts patrols on inland waterways and participates in anti-smuggling operations. It is often deployed to complement the efforts of the Navy in coastal enforcement activities.

The Department of State Services (DSS) also contribute to enforcement by providing intelligence and coordinating inter-agency operation.

A notable illustration of agency collaboration was the 2021 interception of a vessel named MV Chayaneenaree, carrying illegal arms and ammunition into Nigeria. The operation involved a coordinated effort by the Nigerian Navy, Customs, and DSS, leading to the arrest of suspects and the confiscation of weapons. This case highlighted the importance of inter-agency synergy in effective maritime law enforcement.

3.4 Institutional Framework and Inter-agency Collaboration

The institutional framework for maritime security and the control of trafficking in small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Nigeria is characterized by a network of agencies with overlapping functions, working both independently and collaboratively. Given the multifaceted nature of maritime crimes ranging from piracy to arms smuggling the effectiveness of enforcement depends largely on coordination among various stakeholders.

At the core of Nigeria's maritime security framework is the Inter-Agency Maritime Operation Coordination Centre (IMOC), a body established to harmonize the efforts of multiple agencies involved in maritime law enforcement. IMOC facilitates real-time intelligence sharing, operational planning, and

joint responses to maritime incidents. It includes representatives from the Nigerian Navy, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), Nigerian Customs Service, Department of State Services (DSS), and others.

The Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) plays a key coordinating role. ONSA supervises national security policies and facilitates strategic-level cooperation among security agencies. Under the National Security Strategy 2019, ONSA was tasked with improving synergy among security bodies, including those focused on maritime security and the control of SALW trafficking.

The Nigerian Navy serves as the lead maritime force, with powers under the *Armed Forces Act* to engage in maritime defense, surveillance, and interdiction. It often works in tandem with other agencies during joint operations such as Operation Delta Safe.

NIMASA, under *Section 22* of its enabling *Act*, is legally empowered to ensure compliance with international maritime safety and security conventions, including the ISPS Code. It provides domain awareness capabilities, tracks vessel movements, and coordinates response protocols with the Navy and Customs.

The Nigerian Customs Service is charged with monitoring imports and exports at seaports and is a frontline agency in the fight against arms smuggling. Its legal authority under the Customs and Excise Management Act allows for seizure of illegal arms, detention of smuggling suspects, and prosecution of offenders in collaboration with the Nigeria Police and the Federal Ministry of Justice.

The Marine Police, a specialized arm of the Nigeria Police Force, patrols coastal and inland waterways, supporting the Navy and Customs in joint operations. It also handles prosecution in certain maritime crimes when arrests are made on inland waters.

Regional institutions also interact with Nigeria's domestic framework. For instance, the Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC) Zone E, based in Cotonou, operates under the Yaounde Code of Conduct and facilitates cross-border collaboration between Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Niger. This institutional linkage ensures that maritime crimes with transnational elements are tackled collectively.

One illustrative case of inter-agency collaboration was the 2020 arrest of suspects involved in the illegal importation of over 1,000 rifles concealed in a container at Tin Can Island Port, Lagos. The successful interception was the result of intelligence

shared between the DSS, Customs, and the Navy. A joint investigative panel led to prosecution under the *Firearms Act* and the *Suppression of Piracy Act*.

As Chilaka explains, the Nigerian Navy's restructured operations since 2015 including the establishment of the Western Naval Command, Central Naval Command, and Eastern Naval Command have enhanced surveillance and response capabilities in the Gulf of Guinea. The Navy also collaborates closely with NIMASA under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Maritime Security Cooperation, facilitating joint patrols, information sharing, and coordinated response to maritime incidents.

The Navy's contribution to the Deep Blue Project includes the deployment of interceptor boats, surveillance aircraft, and command vessels, all integrated into the C4i network. This collaboration has been pivotal in reducing piracy incidents, with reports showing an over 80% decline in recorded attacks between 2020 and 2023.

3.5 The *Suppression of Piracy and Other Maritime Offences (SPOMO) Act*, 2019 and the Nigerian Navy

The *SPOMO Act* 2019 stands as the legal centerpiece of Nigeria's contemporary maritime security regime. Enacted to domesticate Articles 100-107 of UNCLOS, it defines piracy, armed robbery at sea, and related offenses while providing penalties, including life imprisonment and heavy fines.

The *Act's* practical significance is twofold: it establishes legal clarity and enhances deterrence. Before its enactment, maritime offenses were prosecuted under general criminal laws, which were inadequate for maritime-specific crimes. As Anele observes, the *SPOMO Act* has empowered NIMASA and the Navy to conduct joint investigations, while the Federal High Court exercises exclusive jurisdiction over maritime crimes.

One landmark case under the *SPOMO* regime was *The Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Henry Chukwu and Others* (2021), where the accused pirates were convicted for hijacking a vessel off the Bonny Island. This ruling set a regional precedent and demonstrated Nigeria's capacity to domesticate international maritime law effectively.

However, Abubakar critiques that despite legal progress, enforcement remains inconsistent due to inadequate prosecution resources, political interference, and gaps in evidence collection.

3.6 The Nigerian Navy Maritime Security Challenges

The 1999 *Constitution* of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the *Armed Forces Act* accordingly charged the Nigerian Navy with the defense of Nigeria by sea. In its role, the Nigerian Navy continuously seeks to emplace measures to optimize the nexus of domain awareness, capacity and partnership to ensure maritime safety and security.

The primary responsibility of the Nigerian Navy is to protect the nation's maritime environment of about 84,000 square nautical miles. The nation's maritime area of interest includes the entire GoG which is about 574,800 square nautical miles spanning a total coastline of 2,874nm from Senegal to Angola. Basically, securing this huge maritime space is not negotiable as it is rich in numerous hydrocarbon and mineral resources and also serves as a strategic route for maritime trade.

1. Insecurity is however a prime source of concern in the richly endowed maritime environment, as a network of oil and gas installations and associated shipping are threatened by maritime crimes such as piracy, sea robbery, crude oil theft, illegal oil bunkering, smuggling, illegal unreported and unregulated fishing, militancy and kidnapping for ransom. Piracy and maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea is one of the world's most dangerous maritime regions due to high level of piracy, armed robbery, and kidnapping for ransom. Despite continuous efforts, the persistent threat of these crimes poses a major challenge. Pirates and criminal syndicate are well-organised and often operate with sophisticated tactics, making it difficult for the Navy to effectively patrol the vast maritime area and respond swiftly to incidents.
2. Limited Resources and Equipment: The Nigerian Navy faces constraints in terms of resources and equipment. Many of its vessels and aircraft are outdated and require significant maintenance. The lack of advanced surveillance and reconnaissance technologies further hampers the Navy's ability to monitor and secure Nigeria's extensive maritime domain. Insufficient funding for modernization and expansion of the fleet limits the Navy's operational capabilities.

3. Geopolitical and Regional Instability: The broader geopolitical and security dynamics of the Gulf of Guinea region impact the Nigerian Navy's operations. Regional instability, porous borders, and the presence of militant groups exacerbate maritime security challenges. Coordinating with neighboring countries and international partners to ensure effective maritime security is essential but often complicated by differing national interests and capabilities.
4. Inadequate Training and Human Resources: Maintaining a well-trained and motivated workforce is crucial for the Navy's effectiveness. However, challenges related to training, recruitment, and retention of skilled personnel persist. Ensuring that naval personnel are adequately trained in modern maritime security tactics and technologies requires continuous investment in education and training programs. Additionally, retaining experienced personnel can be difficult due to better opportunities in the private sector or abroad.
5. Jurisdictional overlaps between NIMASA, the Nigerian Navy, and the maritime Police create enforcement ambiguities. This fragmentation leads to duplicated efforts and occasional clashes over authority during maritime operations which occasionally undermine seamless enforcement operations.
6. Trafficking in small arms and light weapons (SALW) represents one of the most pressing maritime security threats in Nigeria, particularly in its maritime domain. SALW trafficking facilitates violent crimes, insurgency, armed robbery at sea, and piracy. The availability of such weapons increases the operational capacity of criminal groups, maritime pirates, and militant organizations operating in and around Nigeria waterways.
The flag officer commanding Nigerian Navy (Western Naval command) Rear Admiral Ola Sahaad Ibrahim, blamed the worrisome proliferation of small arms in the country on illegal bunkering particularly in the Niger Delta region. According to the Naval chief, the development is gratifying

because illegal bunkering and related criminal activity were at the root of light arms proliferation in the region. The FOB's were approved for the Navy formations in the Niger-Delta to curtail the spate of militancy and vandalism of the nation's oil and gas installations in the waterways and coastal area of the Niger-Delta region.

7. Corruption that permeates every level of government in Nigeria also noticeable in the effectiveness of the Nigerian Navy. A retired navy rear admiral was indicted for allegedly embezzling government funds. Stakeholders, activists and environmentalists in the Niger Delta have called for investigation of all previous and present Joint Task Force (JTF) commanders and security operatives from former President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration to date for their role in oil theft in the oil – rich region. The JTF is a military and police operation in Nigeria, particularly active in the Niger Delta region, charged with tackling security issues, including militancy and oil theft. The task force is a combination of the various security agencies, comprising the military, police, and the Department of State Services (DSS). The stakeholders stated that oil bunkering has persisted in the Niger Delta because security operatives were shielding the big, oil theft foot soldiers, who often, escape justice because of mere technicalities. They contended that the big oil thieves steal crude oil with drums and ships at the export terminals, while the so-called oil bunkers, use cans to pilfer in the creeks.

Former Provost Marshal of the Nigerian Army Ikpomwen (retd), Ekpoudom, Deputy Inspector General of Police, DIG (retd) and other Niger Delta stakeholders have urged the Federal Government to stop chasing oil thieves with already compromised security, officials. The stakeholders who appraised information leakage by security agents to oil thieves said thieves in military uniforms would not deter thieves in civilian uniforms; rather both would join hands together, which is currently the fad. They said some high-profile criminal gangs were conscripting their members into the nation's security forces. According to Ikponmwun, the Nigerian Navy, which is the country's lead agency in the war against oil

thieves, had no business pursuing oil thieves, which is poles apart from its primary role. According to him, “there are so many reasons why oil theft has not been solved; I do not think anybody, makes the question of tackling it seriously. We have been hearing that the military is involved; are you not aware that those who are supposed to keep the law are the ones breaking it? Savior Akpan, The Executive Director of the COMPPART foundation for justice and peace in Akwa Ibom state said, “unfortunately, the problem is associated with the recruitment process into the nation’s security forces. High-profile criminal gangs sponsor their members into different law enforcement and security agencies in Nigeria, secondly, 98 percent of those who joined the nation’s security and armed forces were not out of patriotism but because the security, sector has openings that can absorb even the starkest illiterate, who become a menace to the nation’s security, apparatus.

A recent study reveals that Nigeria loses about N1.29 trillion yearly to industrial scale theft of crude oil. Despite the involvement of the Nigerian Army, Naval and Nigerian Security and Civil Defence, the criminal activities have continued and will continue to thrive until the people rise against the cartels that are responsible. It is generally, known fact that no vessel enters or leaves the Nigerian waters without the knowledge of the Nigerian Navy. Sadly, vessels loaded with illegal crude leave this country daily without being, apprehended, except for the few that are often used to do media dressing.

Former militant warlord and Chief Executive officer of Tantita Security Service Limited (TSSL) Ekpemupolo accused the Nigerian Navy of alleged complicity in the ongoing war against illegal oil bunkering in the region. Ekpemupolo, accused the Navy, of aiding and abetting of illegal bunkering activities within its coverage areas.

Oshiomhole also asserted that, the posting of security operatives to the Niger Delta has become so lucrative that security personnel’s now lobby to join the JTF. Oshiomhole said further, “these are organised theft and we need to call on the chief of naval staff, Army staff, and the Air staff for interrogation and know the next actions to take.

3.7 The Emerging Role of Non-State Actors and Private Armed Security Companies in Protection of Nigerian Maritime Domain

There has arisen controversy and agitations lately, about the role and credibility of private security firm in pipeline surveillance contract award likewise,

about the role of non-state actors in oil pipeline surveillance in Nigeria’s maritime domain. In view of the Nigerian Navy as security, custodian of Nigerian maritime water jurisdiction considering also the provisions of extant laws which expressly prohibit the operations of private armed security companies to secured our territorial waters. In view of the escalating proliferation of small arms and light weapons and public security in Nigeria.

There are renewed agitations and calls for the contract awarded to the former leader of the dreaded movement for the Emanation of Niger Delta (MEND) Ekpemupolo, aka Tompolo, to be decentralized or modified so as to accommodate other agitators/militants. According to Oilaba, president of Ijaw National Congress (INC), he recalled that surveillance of pipelines is the statutory responsibility of the security agencies, especially the Nigerian navy who are trained and paid to carry out that responsibility with the Nigerian taxpayer’s money. He asserted further that, “over the years, however it has been realised that there are compromises, here and there, which have had negative effect on the environment and economy, hence non-state actors were engaged. The university don said further “we saw vessels the size of three football fields, carrying stolen crude from one point to another in the open glare of the security personnel. How do you stop it when the primary intention of some people there is to accumulate wealth? It has eaten deep into the psyche and blood strain of these individuals, who see it not as a privilege, but as a right”

The issue of legal status of the credibility of Tatita security services Nigeria Limited (TSSNL) came to limelight to continue to secure oil pipelines in the Niger Delta and across the country.

Many Niger Delta indigenes from across the six states of the region are agitating for the decentralization of the oil pipeline surveillance contract awarded to Tompolo’s Security Company (TSSNL), insisting that the TSSNL, and its agents have veered off its core mandate, and are allegedly, involved in aiding and abetting the stealing of millions of barrels of crude oil. Hence, the agitators are calling on President Bola Tinubu to either terminate the TSSNL, contract or decentralize it to avoid counter productivity.

Prominent among the agitating groups is the Niger Delta coalition that demanded, a decentralization of the TSSNL’s contract president-General of the coalition of Niger Delta Ethnic Nationalities, Dr.

Alaye Tari Theophilus, maintained that the decentralization of the pipeline surveillance contract will act as a deterrent to crude oil theft. Speaking on Arise Television's 'morning show' Theophilus said, "You can't ask people to stop artisanal refining when surveillance is monopolized illegal vessel load products from platforms because surveillance is monopolized with no check".

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian Navy's role in securing the maritime domain is essential for safeguarding the country's economic stability, national security, and regional influence. Nigeria's abundant natural resources and strategic location necessitate a strong maritime sector, which is pivotal for international trade and economic diversification. This historical evolution of the maritime sector and the Navy underscores their significance in global trade, contributing significantly to the nation's GDP. Despite facing numerous challenges, including piracy, resource constraints, and geopolitical instability, the Nigerian Navy continues to enhance its capabilities through modernization and international cooperation. Ensuring maritime security not only protects critical economic infrastructure but also fosters regional stability and supports broader economic development goals. As Nigeria strives for economic revival and diversification, prioritizing investments in maritime security and the operational efficiency of the Navy remains paramount for realizing the full potential of its maritime resources and driving sustainable national growth.

Strengthening the Nigerian Navy requires systematic reforms that address legal, institutional, technological and operational gaps aimed at enhancing Nigerian Navy capacity to deter, detect and respond to maritime threats. The following suggestions recommends as solutions to the problems of Nigerian Navy in Nigeria:

- (1) Modernization of Fleet and Equipment: A comprehensive modernization of the Nigerian navy's fleet and equipment, including the acquisition of advanced vessels, surveillance systems, and reconnaissance technologies to enhance maritime monitoring and security capabilities.
- (2) Enhancement of Interagency and Regional Collaboration: Strengthening coordination

among Nigerian maritime agencies and bolstering partnership with regional and international maritime forces to improve collective security and address transnational threats.

- (3) Investment in Training and Development: Prioritization of investment in advanced training and development programs to elevate personnel skills in modern maritime security practices, strategic operations, and technical expertise, ensuring high standards of operational readiness.
- (4) Improvement of Resource Management and Logistics: Implementation of improvements in resource management and logistical operations to support naval activities, including the development of efficient maintenance schedules and supply chains for sustained operational capability.
- (5) Enhancement of Marine Domain Awareness (MDA): Investment in the enhancement of maritime domain awareness through upgraded and integrated surveillance systems and intelligence-sharing platforms, enabling comprehensive situational awareness and timely response to maritime threats. All areas of Nigerian Maritime Domain should be well guarded. Coast-guards, paramilitary personnel and other security agents should be properly stationed at strategic positions to patrol the port, terminals, ships, waterways, jetty, port areas, and water territory.
- (6) Develop a central maritime intelligence database: There should be a unified national maritime crime database accessible by all enforcement agencies. This will improve real-time intelligence, allow pattern detection, and enhance operational planning across jurisdiction.
- (7) Establishment of specialized maritime crime courts: The government should create designated maritime crimes courts within the Federal High Court system, staffed with trained judges and prosecutors who have expertise in piracy, arms trafficking and maritime law. The same should be replicated in the legal department of Nigerian Navy formations. This will reduce judicial delays and ensure more consistent legal outcomes.

- (8) Stricter legislations and enforcement should be made on maritime offences so as to prevent people from involving in maritime crimes.
- (9) Adequate financial funding should be allocated to the Nigerian navy to maintain ships, pay trained personnel, and improve technological capability and oversea training.
- (10) Strengthen anti-corruption measures: Independent monitoring and internal audits should be instituted at Naval formations, whistleblower protections and digital documentation will also help reduce human interference and corruption.
- (11) Strengthen inter-agency collaboration: There is a pressing need for clearer definition of roles and enhanced coordination among the Nigerian Navy, NIMASA, Marine police customs and other security agencies. The Inter-Agency Maritime Operation Coordination Centre (IMOC) should be given a statutory mandate and sufficient funding to oversee and enforce joint operations without bureaucratic delays.
- (12) Review and Harmonize legal instruments: Nigeria should undertake a comprehensive review of its maritime and arms control laws to remove overlaps and conflicts. A unified Maritime Security and Arms control bill could be considered to consolidate existing statute like the Piracy Suppression Act, firearms Act, and aspects of the Customs Act.
- (13) Public Awareness and Community Policing: Fishing communities, Niger-Delta communities, riverine communities and seafarers should be educated on the risks of unlawful possession of firearms and arms trafficking and encouraged to report suspicious activities. Community-based policing and surveillance awareness systems can serve as an early warning, mechanism, especially in riverine areas.
- (14) Promotion Regional and International Cooperation Nigeria should expand its cooperation with ECOWAS, the African union, and global maritime institutions. This include engaging in joint patrols, intelligence-sharing, mutual legal assistance treaties (MLATs) to ensure effective cross-border law enforcement. Nigeria's maritime security challenges are intrinsically regional, given the transnational nature of piracy, smuggling, oil theft, and illegal fishing. Enhancing cooperation with the neighbouring states is essential.
- (15) Legal framework for public-private partnerships to encourage private sector involvement in maritime security. Government should enact legislation mandating:
 - a. Clear procedures for public-private partnership security arrangement.
 - b. Data-sharing protocols between Nigerian Navy, NIMASA and major offshore operators.
 - c. Liability protections for private actors assisting in surveillance.
- (16) Ratify and Domesticated All Relevant International Instruments: Government should speed up the ratification and full domestication of key international conventions such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the firearms protocol, and the Lome charter. This will enhance Nigeria's ability to collaborate with foreign partners and prosecute transnational crimes.
- (17) Investment In Maritime Surveillance Systems
 - (A) Expansion of Coastal Radar and AIS Networks

Many coastal radar stations are obsolete or lack integration with NIMASA's C4i centre. Enhancing coverage requires:

 - Installation of new high-frequency radars
 - Full integration of AIS, VMS and SAR satellite systems
 - Maintenance and upgrading of existing equipment
 - (B) Satellite-Based Surveillance

Satellite monitoring enables detection of dark vessels, IUU fishing, environmental violations and suspicious movements beyond territorial waters. Government should partner with:

 - EU's Copernicus Marine Service
 - Japan's satellite surveillance platforms

- Private satellite firms offering SAR imagery
- (C) Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS)
Drones offer cost-effective monitoring of creeks, mangroves and inland waterways that are difficult to patrol with naval vessels. Investment in:
 - Long-range fixed-wing UAVs
 - Short-range quadcopter drones for rapid-response units
 - Remote-piloted training programmes
- (D) Cyber-Maritime Security Infrastructure
As ports, shipping systems and offshore installations become digitised, Government must:
 - Establish a national maritime cyber command
 - Implement cybersecurity standards for ports and oil platforms
 - Conduct regular cyber threat assessments.

(18) Legislative Reforms

Nigeria's legal framework for maritime governance remains fragmented, with overlapping statutes and insufficient clarity regarding jurisdictional boundaries. Although recent instruments such as the SPOMO Act represent significant progress, further reforms are required to ensure a coherent and enforceable legal system.

A. Harmonisation of Maritime Laws

Nigeria's maritime legislation ranging from the Merchant Shipping Act, NIMASA Act, SPOMO Act and Armed Forces Act, contains overlapping or contradictory provisions. Consolidating these into a unified Maritime Security and Governance Code would enhance clarity and operational efficiency.

B. Strengthening Prosecution Pathways

A major challenge lies in prosecuting maritime offenders due to jurisdictional disputes, evidentiary weaknesses and inadequate judicial expertise. To address this:

- (i) Standardised rules for evidence gathering at sea should be introduced.

- (ii) Legal provisions for admissibility of digital surveillance data (AIS, radar, drone footage) should be enacted.

C. Enhancing SPOMO Act Implementation The SPOMO Act should be amended to:

- (i) Provide more precise definitions of "armed robbery at sea" and "maritime terrorism".
- (ii) Incorporate cyber maritime offences, reflecting global digitalization trends.
- (iii) Strengthen sentencing guidelines for organized maritime crime networks.

4.1 Conclusion

Looking forward, the Nigerian Navy must continue to evolve to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex maritime security landscape. This will require significant investments in modernizing the fleet, improving surveillance and intelligence capabilities, and expanding training programs for naval personnel. Strengthening legal frameworks and fostering regional cooperation are also essential steps in enhancing maritime security.

The Nigerian Navy is an indispensable force in safeguarding Nigeria's maritime domain, and its role is critical to protecting the nation's economic and security interests. By addressing the challenges outlined in this paper and implementing the recommended strategies, Nigerian Navy can create a more secure maritime environment that not only protects the nation's resources and trade routes but also contributes to broader regional stability. The future of Nigeria's maritime security depends on a well-equipped and strategically focused Navy, capable of responding effectively to both current and emerging threats.

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