



## Militant or Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) During/After The Resolution of The Bakassi Conflict

Stephen Achuo Kpwa

University of Yaoundé 1, Cameroon

Corresponden Author. E-mail: [stephenachuokpwa@gmail.com](mailto:stephenachuokpwa@gmail.com)

**Abstrak:** Konflik Semenanjung Bakassi dan penyelesaiannya telah menyerap sebagian besar oksigen sosio-politik dan ekonomi Kamerun dan Nigeria dan komunitas internasional pada tahun 80-an, 90-an, dan dekade pertama abad ke-21. Setelah pertempuran militer antara Kamerun dan Nigeria tentang semenanjung itu, konflik akhirnya diselesaikan melalui putusan Mahkamah Internasional (ICJ) pada tahun 2002 dan Perjanjian Pohon Hijau (GTA) 2006. Tujuan utama dari makalah ini adalah untuk memeriksa beberapa kelompok militan atau kelompok bersenjata non-negara (NSAG) yang beroperasi selama dan setelah penyelesaian konflik Bakassi. Dokumen ini juga bertujuan untuk memeriksa alasan mengapa NSAG ini muncul secara singkat. Artikel ini menerapkan metode penelitian kualitatif dan, dari itu, konsolidasi historis, analisis konten dan studi kasus. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan tujuh NSAG terkemuka yang muncul selama / sesudah penyelesaian konflik Bakassi. Keputusan ICJ tahun 2002 dan GTA tahun 2006 adalah salah satu alasan utama mengapa NSAG ini muncul. Studi ini juga menemukan bahwa keinginan untuk mengendalikan sumber daya alam daerah, melawan kekerasan jenderal Kamerun, dan pemukiman miskin dari orang-orang yang kembali ke Bakassi juga berfungsi sebagai landmark untuk munculnya NSAG ini. Melalui rekomendasi-rekomendasi, makalah ini akan membantu pemerintah Kamerun mendefinisikan kembali kebijakannya untuk memastikan dan mempertahankan perdamaian yang berkelanjutan di Semenanjung Bakassi – memahami alasan munculnya NSAG, tren-trendnya, dan cara terbaik untuk menanganinya mereka.

**Kata Kunci:** Darurat, Militansi, Semenanjung Bakassi, Cameeroon, Nigeria, Kelompok.

**Abstract:** The Bakassi peninsula conflict and its resolution had absorbed most of Cameroon and Nigeria's socio-political and economic oxygen and the international community in the 80s, 90s, and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Following military clashes between Cameroon and Nigeria over the peninsula, the conflict was finally resolved through the International Court of Justice (ICJ) verdict in 2002 and the Green Tree Agreement (GTA) 2006. The main thrust of this paper is to examine some militant or Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) that operated during and after the resolution of the Bakassi conflict. This paper also aims to examine the reasons why these NSAGs emerged briefly. This paper applied the qualitative research method and, from it, historical consolidation, content analyses and case studies. The study's results revealed seven prominent NSAGs that emerged during/after the resolution of the Bakassi conflict. The ICJ verdict of 2002 and the GTA of 2006 were one of prominent reasons why these NSAGs emerged. The study also found that the desire to control the area's natural resources, fight against Cameroon gendarme brutality, and the poor resettlement of the Bakassi returnees also served as springboards for the emergence of these NSAGs. Through its recommendations, this paper will help the Cameroon government redefine its policies toward ensuring and maintaining lasting peace in the Bakassi peninsula- understanding the reason for the emergence of the NSAGs, its trends, and how best to handle them.

**Keywords:** Emergence, Militancy, Bakassi Peninsula, Cameroon, Nigeria, Groups.

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## INTRODUCTION

Often referred to as close brothers, sharing similar socio-cultural affiliations, Cameroon

and Nigeria almost got involved in a deadly fight over a piece of land. Due to colonialism, border quarrels and civil wars have been unfortunate legacies in Africa. July 1884, and September 10 1884, saw Cameroon and Nigeria being annexed by Germany and Britain, respectively, in the form of a treaty (Funteh, 2015). This singular act of colonialism would set a pace for Cameroon and Nigeria to enter into confrontations over the Bakassi peninsula. Aghemelo and Ibhasebor (2006) opined that the dispute over the Bakassi peninsula was a fallout of colonization. Sone (2014) and Alobo et al. (2016) all revealed that the Bakassi conflict was associated with the colonial exploration of the West African coast and the haphazard fixing of European boundaries.

In pursuit of a lasting solution to the Bakassi conflict, both countries decided to wait on the decision of the International Court of Justice. The Court's October 10, 2002, verdict did not immediately lead to a halt in hostilities. The crisis still ensued, which further caused backwardness domestically and internationally. Seeger and others (1988, 231) opined that crises have four defining features: specific, unexpected, and non-routine events or series of events that create a high level of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization's high-priority goal. They argued that these features could be seen as a surprise, create uncertainty, threaten important goals, and the need for change. The Bakassi Peninsula is between latitudes 4.26 and 4.5 degrees north and south of the equator and longitudes 8.30 and 9.08 degrees east and west of the Greenwich meridian at the eastern end of the Gulf of Guinea. Found in the Ndian Division, the Bakassi Peninsula is estimated to have a population of between 150,000 and 300,000 people and has a surface area of about 826.070 km<sup>2</sup> (Beckly, 2013). It mostly comprises the Efik, Efut, Ibibios, the Bakole people, the Barombi, the Balondo, and some Bayanui (Beckly, 2013).

It is encouraging to see that a lot has been written about the Bakassi peninsula conflict between Cameroon and Nigeria. However, there seemed to be lapses in this literature because none has outlined the types of Non-State Armed Groups that plagued the area. A few studies have, however, tried to outline militant activities in the area. Sama and Ross (2006) discussed the fight of the Bakassi people to claim their land. On his path, Dos Santos (2014) tried to pinpoint the problems caused by the resolution of the Bakassi conflict and the possibility of a more violent militant approach if countermeasures are not taken. Yerima and Singh (2017) advanced some reasons militancy emerged in the Bakassi peninsula and advanced measures to end this militancy. Funteh (2019) came close but only talked about one of the NSAGs in the Bakassi peninsula- the Bakassi Freedom Fighters. Even though aspects of militancy were touched, no literature has been able to give a proper rundown of the different militant groups that plagued the region during/after the resolution of the conflict.

Against this background, this paper seeks to outline the militant groups or NSAGs that operated during or after the resolution of the Bakassi conflict (from 2002 to 2020). This time frame was chosen because the ICJ verdict in 2002 halted the conflict. The GTA of 2006 put in place modalities of a peaceful settlement of the conflict even though militant activities ensued right up to 2020. The paper also seeks to briefly outline why these NSAGs emerged to understand their trends and advance measures that can benefit the Cameroon government. That is, some policies if well implemented, will not only prevent future NSAGs emergence and activities but create a conducive economic environment in the Bakassi peninsula. This paper has four sections: Introduction, Research Methods, Results and Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This paper adopted the qualitative methods and, from it, historical consolidation and content analyses in data collection. Content analyses, specifically the thematic analyses

approach, were used in this paper to examine and appreciate previous research on the Bakassi saga. They helped to decode, understand, and identify some NSAGs during/after the resolution of the Bakassi conflict. The collection of data was based on secondary sources relevant to the study; books, journal articles, blog publications, online newspaper publications, and unpublished works, amongst others. Ugwuowo (2012) held that secondary data sources refer to data gathered or authored by another person, usually obtained from another source, either in documents, survey results, or code books. So many Cameroonian and Nigerian authors have analyzed the conflict from diverse and, in some cases, complementary angles. These authors have discussed the reasons for the conflict, and clashes between the Cameroonian and Nigerian military, others have analyzed the judgment of the ICJ, and others have looked at the reaction and lapses towards this decision. One noticeable fact is that most of these authors have weighed less on the human rights violations in the peninsula during this conflict.

Data validity in a qualitative research method can be done with source credibility or confirmability. The credibility norms involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. Meanwhile, the confirmability criteria involve establishing data validity on a subject based on corroboration or confirmation by others, usually renowned researchers who bring a unique perspective to the study (Trochim, 2022). Triangulation involves using multiple data sources to comprehensively understand phenomena and solidify the data's validity (Carter et al., 2014). Specifically, the investigator triangulation approach was adopted, which involves analyzing data from two or more researchers participating in the same phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014). Hence, the data acquired from previous research results were collected and analyzed by different revelations on the different NSAGs that operated during or after the resolution of the Bakassi conflict.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Historical Overview of the Bakassi Conflict*

Controversially, one scholarly account held that the kingdom of Bakassi was founded around 1450 by the Efik people, who later became an integral part of the Old Calabar kingdom of Nigeria (Ngalim 2016:3). Another account held that the Isangele people of Cameroon founded the Bakassi Kingdom in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and that Bakassi was coined from the Isangele dialect, 'Obakassi' meaning 'sea with a variety of fish'. This sovereignty was later crossed when European countries started rushing to Africa to acquire territories to meet their socioeconomic and political demands.

Subsequently, On July 14, 1884, Germany successfully signed treaties with the Kings of Akwa and Bell town in Douala, Cameroon, making Cameroon (Kamerun) a German protectorate (Mbuh, 2004). This act angered the British, who hastily went and signed their treaties with the Obong of Old Calabar between July 23 and September 10, 1884, putting the Efik Kingdom under British protectorate. Other kings and chiefs of the region, including those of Bakassi, signed treaties acknowledging that their territories were subject to the authority of Old Calabar and consequently under British protection (Funteh, 2015). All these treaty arrangements between Germany/Cameroon (Kamerun) and British/Old Calabar were recognized during the Berlin Conference 1885.

To avoid problems between them, these colonial masters (Britain and Germany) entered into several agreements to delimit their boundaries. This singular act led to the demarcation of boundaries without interior knowledge about African boundaries. In those days, the Europeans took a blue pencil and ruler and drew a line from Old Calabar to the Yola (Aghemelo & Ibhasebhor, 2006). What is more, these European powers, without firm knowledge about the interior and with only a few impediments, gave mountains, rivers and lakes to each other by

imagination (Akinyemi, 2014). Thus, the African frontiersmen now discovered that traditional boundaries have now been replaced with beacons, pillars and cross points, making them to be apart from their kith and kin (Fanso, 1986).

Some treaties that the Europeans signed powers defined the boundary lines between Cameroon and Nigeria around the Bakassi peninsula and the maritime from Old Calabar to Western Cameroon. These included: The Anglo-German Treaty of April-June 1885; The Anglo-German Treaty of July-August 1886; The Anglo-German Treaty of July 1, 1890; The Anglo-German Treaty of April 14, 1893; and The Anglo-German Treaty of 1913. All these treaties delimited and demarcated the boundary lines between Cameroon and Nigeria around the Bakassi area from the Akwayafe River-Rio Del Rey River- Cross River. This condition thus put the Bakassi peninsula under German sovereignty and subsequently under Cameroon's.

Even though the Bakassi peninsula conflict was remote as a result of the vestiges of European colonization of Africa (Nicholas & Baroni, 2010), the primary reason why Cameroon and Nigeria fought over the Bakassi peninsula was due to the discovery of oil, gas and maritime resources in the area (Baye 2010). The Bakassi peninsula is a resource-rich area, containing as much as 10% of the world's reserves of oil and gas (Anyu, 2007; Shaibu et al., 2015). Still, the peninsula is of immense strategic importance and a gateway to the economic survival of the Calabar port (Okoi, 2016; Shaibu et al., 2015). The resource-rich and strategic prowess of the Bakassi peninsula drew much attention from Cameroon and Nigeria who had once considered the area to be marshy, swampy, and having a non-consequential population (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2012).

### ***Background to the International Court of Justice's verdict and the Green Tree Agreement***

The events leading up to the adjudication process over the 2300km boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria are a culmination of events predating as far back as 1960. Though a cordial relationship existed between the border towns, there were pieces of evidence of little squabbles here and there (Njoku, 2012). Unfortunately, things took an awkward turn when both countries became independent, and the quest to showcase military prowess and control of natural resource areas gave birth to military skirmishes, especially in the Bakassi peninsula. Cameroon and Nigeria almost entered a protracted war over the Bakassi peninsula following the May 1981 saga where Cameroonian forces in the Bakassi waters killed 5 Nigerian soldiers. In the first four years of the 1990s, military attacks and counterattacks were common in the Bakassi peninsula leading to the loss of lives and property (Kam-Kah, 2014).

Following the above developments, Cameroon took the bull by the horns. On March 29, 1994, Cameroon filed a case against Nigeria to the World Court, asking the court to address the question of sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula, Nigerian aggression, and for the court to determine the course of the land and maritime boundaries (Baye, 2010; Oluda, 2011; Nwoko 2018). In pursuit of legal territoriality in the Bakassi peninsula and the continuous skirmishes that occurred in the peninsula, the government of Cameroon, on June 6, 1994, filed an additional case file. The subject of this additional application that concerned the Bakassi peninsula was the problem of sovereignty (ICJ Report 1994). The case before the ICJ still witnessed a rise in hostilities in the Bakassi peninsula (Kam-Kah, 2014).

After hearing from both the plaintiff and the defendant, and with a thorough fact-finding mission, the intense rivalry, show of intelligence and grandiloquence by Cameroon and Nigeria at the World Court lasted for eight solid years. The International Court of Justice pronounced its judgment on October 10, 2002. The court adjudged and declared sovereignty over the Bakassi peninsula laid with Cameroon. The court also fixed the boundary from Lake Chad to the maritime zones, agreeing mostly with Nigeria on the maritime boundary equidistance (Bekker, 2003). To enforce this decision, the court declared that Cameroon and Nigeria are

under obligation to expeditiously and without condition to withdraw any administration or military or police forces that may be present in the territories which fall within the others' sovereignty (ICJ Report, 2002).

Anger, hate, disdain and disenfranchisement characterized Nigeria's atmospheric condition following the ICJ's ruling. The Nigerian press championed this reaction, as seen in their numerous vilifying articles a day after the verdict (Fombo, 2006). Interestingly, though the atmosphere in Nigeria was stiff following the ICJ verdict, the Nigerian government rightly ruled out the possibility of a hostile takeover in the Bakassi peninsula, albeit military strategists in some quarters continued to discuss the possibility of war (Fombo, 2006). Though a euphorically inclined atmosphere as per the ICJ verdict, it is interesting to know that the reaction from Cameroon was two-pronged. Cameroonian media outlets and politicians applauded the judgment of the ICJ. Ironically, popular Cameroon Anglophone separatist groups disapproved of the ICJ verdict (Orisakwe 2006).

The disenfranchisement that followed the pronouncement of the ICJ verdict, especially from Nigeria and the Bakassi indigenes, forced the then UN Secretary-General to summon a meeting in Geneva between Obasanjo and Biya on November 15, 2002. It was at this juncture that both leaders, backed by the UN, decided to create the Cameroon- Nigeria Mixed Commission (CNMC) and also revived the Joint Cameroon-Nigeria Border Commission (Kamto, 2008). This commission was entrusted with several tasks: Reflect on the means of executing the ICJ judgment and move the process forward; demarcating the land and maritime boundaries between the two countries; protect the rights of people affected in both countries; make recommendations on supplementary confidence-building measures (Konings, 2005; Kamto, 2008).

Following this development, the Mixed Commission held 14 alternating meetings and finally developed the Green Tree Agreement on June 12, 2006. This agreement gave the Nigerian government to maintain their civil administration and police force for a non-renewable period of two years. After the final withdrawal, Cameroon shall apply a special transition regime for a five-year non-renewable period. The special transitional regime period gave Nigerians who opted to stay in the peninsula a conducive atmosphere. Last, after the transition period on August 13, 2013, Cameroon was to exercise full sovereignty over the Bakassi peninsula. Subsequently, to ensure that the clauses of this agreement are kept, a Follow-up Committee, comprising representatives of Cameroon, Nigeria, the UN, and witness states, was created. Following the implementation of the ICJ verdict and the Green Tree Agreement, the atmosphere has become tense, though at a minimal frequency.

As earlier mentioned, the ICJ verdict sparked a new manner of movements in the Bakassi area. Taking things into their hands and having their voices heard no matter what it took was inclining to pirate and militant actions; and taking control of what they called their political future. Sporadic attacks by unidentified gunmen and ethnic strife became common currency in the area leaving the military embarrassed, official diplomacy humiliated, the inhabitants insecure and the prospects of a durable peace in jeopardy (Ngwane 2010). Briefly speaking, some reasons why most of these NSAGs sprung up were; the ICJ verdict of 2002, the control of Bakassi's natural resources, the non-consideration and maltreatment of the Bakassi indigenes by Cameroon gendarmes, and the poor resettlement of the Bakassi returnees by the Nigerian authorities. In affirmation, Sama and Ross (2006) posited that these separatist and irredentist movements were based on ethnocultural foundations but manifested most often in struggles for resource control. The proceeding subthemes will clearly describe some of the NSAGs during or after the resolution of the Bakassi conflict, and these groups had a common trend. From the results, these groups carried out arson attacks against the military, piracy on oil tankers, kidnapping of administrators and foreigners, declarations of self-determination,

intimidation of non-supporters to their cause, and public protest to achieve their objectives.

***Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).***

Although the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was not directly involved in guerrilla warfare in the Bakassi peninsula. It had become an umbrella for other militant groups there. It emerged in late 2005-early 2006, targeting the oil infrastructure in the area and abducting and holding oil workers for ransom (Global Security 2016). The group claimed to be fighting for local control of oil resources in the region. MEND's other goals included localizing control of Nigeria's oil and securing reparations from the federal government for pollution caused by the oil industry. However, it was also accused of engaging in criminal activities, committing extortion and stealing oil for its benefit. The majority of MEND members were reported to be from the Ijaw ethnic group, which is the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta (Olabode 2018). MEND's methods included kidnap-for-ransom of oil workers, staging armed assaults on production sites, pipeline destruction, murder of Nigerian police officers, and draining off of oil and selling it to the black market.

The Jamestown Foundation, a research institution based in Washington, DC, indicated that MEND, which draws members from communities across the Niger Delta, differs from other cults and ethnic militias, "placing its struggle in a social rather than ethnic context". It is assumed that Henry Okah is the leader and founder of MEND (BBC 2013). In 2009, an amnesty program was initiated by President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua and later finalized by President Goodluck Jonathan. Consequently, MEND eventually faded away after this amnesty program and the ex-militants were given monthly stipends and some enrolled in training programs. Allegedly speaking for the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), self-identified spokesperson "Jomo Gbomo" announced on January 30, 2010, the end of MEND's October 25, 2009, cease-fire (Harvard Divinity School Not Dated). Lately, militant activities have continued to escalate in the Niger Delta region, with some militant groups associating themselves with MEND. However, MEND had completely disassociated itself from any militant group currently carrying guerilla warfare in the region (Premium Times 2016).

***Bakassi Movement for Self Determination (BAMOSD).***

Bakassi Movement for Self Determination (BAMOSD) was founded in 2006 as a pressure group whose objective was to advocate for the minority people of Bakassi whose voices and wishes were killed and shelved aside through the apparatus of International Politics (Facebook 2021). BAMOSD being a fallout group from Bakassi Self Determination Front founded in 2003, which Sen. (Princes) Florence Ita-Giwa led, contested the Green Tree Accord before the Federal High Court in Abuja through its Counsel Barrister Femi Falana and secured an order restraining the Federal Government of Nigeria from expelling the people of Bakassi from Nigerian State without the ratification of the said Treaty by the organ of the Legislature (NASS). Unfortunately, the order was ignored by President Olusegun Obasanjo because of the immense economic gains that he would attend for himself and his cohorts from that deal. BAMOSD, since then, has used every available and necessary means to advance its cause (BAMOSD Website).

Significantly, on August 6, 2006, BAMOSD evoked Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of 1976; Articles 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1976; Article 20 of African Charter on Human and People Right of 1986 and other relevant UN charters, declared a Unilateral Independence for the REPUBLIC OF BAKASSI by her Leader Elder Tony Ene Asuquo (late), who and other Generals became the first Martyr for the Struggle of Self Determination of Bakassi people. The

decision to declare the independence of Bakassi was made at a meeting held on July 2, 2006, in Yenagoa, in the Nigerian state of Bayelsa; the city of Akwa Obutong was chosen as the capital of the new republic. Still, many traditional Nigerian chiefs originally from Bakassi supported this decision to declare independence. In the fight for the independence of Bakassi, the BAMOSD has entered into alliances with organizations such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Southern Cameroons Peoples' Organization (SCAPO) (Refworld 2010).

### ***Bakassi Strike Force (BSF).***

The Bakassi Strike Force, or BSF, was another non-state armed group located in the Cross River States in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, comprising indigenes of the Bakassi whose homeland was ceded to Cameroon. The BSF was founded in 2006. Since then, it has been agitating against the poor implementation of the Green Tree Agreement after ceding Bakassi to Cameroon, leaving Nigerians resident in the peninsular without proper resettlement (Deolu 2016). They were also out to seek self-determination since, according to them, the Nigerian government had abandoned the Bakassi people. One important aspect of this militant group was that they never resorted to vandalism and destroying national assets. Consequently, they were against the presence of Nigerian security forces in their community, thus resulting in frequent attacks against the Nigerian and Cameroonian security forces (Areo 2016). However, following strong reprisals from the Nigerian security forces in the Cross River States, the BSF surrendered and begged for amnesty from the Nigerian government on November 10, 2016.

Interestingly, in 2018, over 1000 agitators of the BSF surrendered their arms and themselves for rehabilitation at the old Akpabuyo Local Government Area Secretariat. During this ceremony, the Governor of Cross River State, Ben Ayade, asserted that "BSF was not originally meant to be a criminal group, but because of the attendant pains following the ceding of Bakassi, they had to venture into crime to survive". Still, speaking at the event, Commander of Operation DELTA SAFE, Rear Admiral Apochi Suleiman, said: "We shall grant you amnesty unconditionally. Ours are sacrifice to our fatherland for peace to reign..." Last, during this event, the leader of the Bakassi Strike Force, Benjamin Ene, a.k.a 'G1', reiterated that the group had laid down their arms with a view never to return to arm struggle again (Okoro 2018). Thus, under the guise of anger, pain, and suffering after the ceding of the Bakassi peninsula to Cameroon, poor resettlement of the Bakassi refugees and poor implementation of the Green Tree Agreement, the BSF sought manifest nationalism and irredentism as their only option for perpetual peace.

### ***Bakassi Freedom Fighters (BFF)***

The group was formed in 1996 by local traders in the peninsula. Their main objectives were to repress armed thefts plaguing the area and disrupting the smooth functioning of trans-border businesses. These locals believed most of these bandits were either defunct or veteran Cameroonian and Nigerian soldiers. This vigilante group was provided a headquarter and regular salaries and money to purchase arms by the traders. The group was well-organized and comprised about 700 vigilantes of Cameroonian and Nigerian origins. Aspiring vigilantes who wanted to join the group had to undergo certain initiation rites by the High Priest and should be 16 years and above. However, the group took a different approach following the ICJ ruling of 2002 and the GTA of 2006. Their objective from fighting crime(vigilantism) to fighting for self-rule(separatism). The group became publicized in 2006, and some Cameroonian and Nigerian elites allegedly provided them with sophisticated equipment. Interestingly, the group comprised highly learned individuals with a hierarchical chain of command and an efficient communication system.

Consequently, following the ICJ ruling of 2002 and as earlier noted, the Bakassi Freedom Fighters changed from an armed vigilante group to an armed separatist movement. They were bent on terrorizing coastal towns and waters in the peninsula and called for creating an independent state of Bakassi. To achieve this, they carried out simultaneous and non-stop attacks in villages and towns on the peninsula. To them, this was a means to inform the international community, especially the UN, about their rejection of the ICJ verdict and to force the Cameroon government to respect their republic claims. To carry out their nationalistic and irredentist maneuvers, they carried out pirate attacks, looting, and hijacking of nationals and foreigners in the Bakassi zone. In short, the Bakassi Freedom Fighters constantly raided the towns of Limbe and Buea. The leader of the BFF group was the self-designated 'General' A. G Basuo. Before the final transfer to Cameroon on August 14, 2008, the group announced a merger with the Niger Delta Defense Security Council (NDDSC) to 'burn Bakassi to the ground' and crumble its economy if the handover ceremony pulled through. However, the government of Cameroon carried out stringent measures to stop the activities of the BFF (Funteh 2019, 340-345).

### ***Bakassi Self Determination Front (BSDF).***

The Bakassi Self Determination Front (BSDF) was a militant/separatist group that existed and operated just in the lipoatrophy areas of the Bakassi peninsula. It was founded in 2003 by the self-acclaimed 'General' Ekpe Ekpenyong Oku, and it was alleged that some Nigerian politicians were sponsoring the group. The BSDF, like other militant groups operating in the Bakassi peninsula, aimed to create an autonomous Bakassi state (Sunday Independent 2012). They were bent on using whatever radical means available to them to achieve this. However, as time passed, the BSDF started facing criticism from other militant groups. One militant group known as the Bakassi Patriotic Front (BPF), which claimed to be a real militant wing representing the interest of the Bakassi people, criticized their activities. According to the self-acclaimed leader of the BPF, 'General' Ephraim Ekpe, the activities of the BSDF had been at variance with the interest of the Bakassi people, and their activities had been threatening the lives and property of the indigenes who refused to move out of Ikang.

The BSDF had been operating from their Headquarters in Calabar and would carry out one or two attacks in the peninsula to state their cause. Still, some critics also opined that the activities of the BSDF had made the Cameroon military more vigilant and circumspect in conducting checks and searches on Nigerians, especially local villagers who still resided in the peninsula. On August 6, 2012, the BSDF created a pirate radio station at Dayspring Island, Calabar, to propagate their aspirations of an envisaged Bakassi nation. The Dayspring Island was supposed to be a resettlement camp for the displaced Bakassi people. This radio operated on 4.2MHz, and 5.2MHz Short Wave bands and Efik and English languages were used to disseminate their radical ideas and activities. That same month, the BSDF hoisted a Blue-White-Red liberation flag dotted with stars at Dayspring Island (Agbakwuru 2012). The group also promised to carry out major disruptions in the area if the people were not granted independence (Okinkalu & Ebo'o 2012).

### ***Africa Marine Commando (AMC)***

The Africa Marine Commando (AMC) was a maritime spin-off group from the Bakassi Freedom Fighters that operated in the Bakassi peninsula. They had similar objectives and actions to the Bakassi Freedom Fighter group. The hardline group broke away from BFF in 2009 in a dispute about whether to open up to dialogue with the Cameroon government. The AMC became so active and fearful from 2009 until 2016 that it was regarded as the most dreaded militant group operating in Bakassi then. AMC saw a significant drop of about 13



percent in oil production in the area in 2009 and stalled investment in the energy sector. The founder and leader of the Africa Marine Commando was Jerry Owei, who vowed to continue the works of the Bakassi Freedom Fighters in a more radical approach and outrightly refused to enter into any dialogue with the government of Cameroon. The AMC had joined other heavily armed militants in Nigeria's Niger Delta to launch attacks on oil installations, vessels and coastal towns in the Bakassi peninsula (Tansa Musa 2012).

### ***Biafra Nations League (BNL).***

Today, the Biafra Nations League was first labeled Biafra National Youth League and Biafra Nations Youth League successively (Culled from BNL Official Facebook page). The latter was changed to engulf the youths in the hypothetical Biafra nation and everyone within this area. The Biafra Nations League, BNL, is a grassroots organization with an operational base in the Bakassi Peninsula of Cameroon and Nigeria, on the Eastern end of the Gulf of Guinea. The BNL was established on August 3, 2013, in the popular city of Port-Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, following agreements by the founders to uphold the unity of the various ethnic nations in the Bight of Biafra. The group had been operating outside the Bakassi peninsula. Not until 2016 were they moved their base to the Bakassi peninsula. Since then, the group has joined other militant groups in the Biafra territory to pursue their objectives. BNL has ruled out several reasons why she emerged. First, to actualize the plans of the 1960's Eastern Nigerian leaders of creating a Biafra State: Second, to retake the Bakassi peninsula from both Cameroon and Nigeria: Last, though in contention, to be in full control of the natural resources found in the area. The last premise has been strongly refuted by the BNL leaders, who declared that the Bakassi struggle is not about the control and ownership of oil. However, their words and actions seem to contradict their words and actions as the group has been tackling oil companies in the peninsula.

Becoming a member of the Biafra Nations League is by choice. Though most of its militants are of Igbo descent, BNL has militants from nearly all the ethnic groups within the acclaimed Biafra Nation. Still, militants within the Bakassi peninsula are mostly sourced from the Internally Displaced Persons and disgruntled Bakassi youths tired of Cameroonian and Nigerian dominance. However, the BNL created a website where members willing to join could register. Moreover, the BNL leaders conducted offline and online campaigns to galvanize Biafra indigenes to join their cause. Generating funds by the BNL is carried out on two fronts. First, there are calls for people who cannot support financially, to support with material equivalence. The BNL appeals to its militants, followers and supporters to provide things like Biafra flags, flyers, documents, expert services, and boats, to name a few. Last, the BNL appeals to its audience for financial support to carry out its operations. Therefore, people are encouraged to support via Bitcoin or PayPal. Moreover, the BNL runs online campaigns to rally funds for their cause. Interestingly, the BNL has denied any allegations that it is a sponsored militant group and has constantly denied any sponsorship.

Biafra Nations League is currently led by Princewill Chimezie Richard alias Prince Obuka of Imo State and Ebuta Akor Takon of Cross River State (not to be mistaken by the former Deputy, Ebuta Ogar Takon). At the helm of this Non-State Armed Group (NSAG), we have the National Leader, Deputy National Leader, Chief of General Staff, Head of Operations, General Administrative Officer, Regional Leaders, and Operational Commander. The group has about sixteen branch offices termed "regional chapter". Each regional chapter is led by a regional leader answerable to the National Leader. As earlier stated, the group has since 2013 operated outside the Bakassi peninsula. On November 05, 2016, BNL finally moved its operational base from Ikom to the Bakassi Peninsula, where they became enemies of Nigeria and Cameroon. Still, BNL has a subunit that contains only the displaced Bakassi youths, and

it is being led by the Chief of General Staff, Linus Essien. Subsequently, the Biafra Nations League has organized a series of combined Akwa-Cross Elders and Youths Congress in Esit Eket, Eket and Onna in Akwa Ibom State where Chiefs, clan heads, women group and youth leaders adopted the BNL as a household Organization.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Bakassi conflict was a maritime border dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria over the resource-rich Bakassi peninsula. Though a product of colonialism, the outbreak of this conflict was due to the discovery of large deposits of natural resources in the Bakassi peninsula during the late 60s. During these military skirmishes, both countries engaged in serious human rights violations via their military personnel. Despite the conflict resolution by the ICJ and through the Green Tree Agreement, human rights violations still ensued, now championed by NSAGs, and Cameroon security agents. The groups described above either operated from outside of Bakassi or from inside the Bakassi area. The fight for self-rule for the Bakassi indigenes, full control of the area's natural resources, and retaking Bakassi from Cameroon and Nigeria motivated these groups to act. At times, it became difficult for the governments and military to identify these groups because of the non-cooperative attitude, mutual ethnic suspicion and covert hostility from the civilian population (Ngwane, 2010).

As earlier accentuated, some reasons gave rise to these NSAGs during and after the conflict resolution. Firstly, the desire to control the natural resources in the region was hitherto the leading reason. With its abundant natural resources, the region attracted Cameroon and Nigeria, who at one time had no interest in the area because it was considered remote and had an impoverished population. Moreover, even with the presence and extraction of these resources, the people still live in misery and penury. These NSAGs took it upon themselves to control these resources to enrich their land (Baye, 2010). Secondly, these NSAGs had/have as objective to fight against Cameroon gendarme brutality on the indigenes. Nigerian residents in the Bakassi Peninsula had been constantly harassed and brutalized by Cameroonian security and law enforcement operatives (Yerima & Singh 2017: 69). These acts took physical and indecent assaults, incessant arrest, detention and imprisonment, illegal taxation and collection, beating, plundering and extortion, burning, killing and murder, shooting, destruction and vandalism among others (Akak, 1999).

Thirdly, the ICJ verdict of October 10, 2002, which gave Bakassi to Cameroon, triggered the rise of these NSAGs. Some NSAGs wanted the territory to belong to Nigeria, and others wanted the territory to be independent. The ICJ verdict rendered many homeless and also the desecration of their land. Seeing nowhere to go or turn to, these indigenes decided to take laws into their hands, hence forming militant groups (Njoku 2012; Nwoko 2015). Lastly, the poor resettlement of the Bakassi returnees by the Nigeria government led to the rise of NSAGs. Following the handover process, Nigerians in Bakassi were allowed to either stay or leave. For fear of being brutalized, killed and harassed by the Cameroonian gendarmes, some decided to leave the Bakassi Peninsula (Oluyemi, 2014). At first, the Nigerian government tried to resettle these returnees, but as time went on, these returnees were neglected and abandoned. The resettlement camps began to swell, the crime wave increased, and most of these returnees became jobless as there were no fishing opportunities in their new settlement (Nwoko 2018; Nwokolo 2020). The pain, suffering, poverty, and neglect faced by these Bakassi returnees in Nigeria led to much agitation for self-determination and, subsequently, the rise of NSAGs. Substantiating this, Ngalim (2019) opined that the affected people thus might gradually become disillusioned, disaffected, and tend to aggression, owing to their social and economic deprivation.

Based on the available literature, there are common trends that accrued to all these NSAGs

that operated/operate in the Bakassi region. It was easy for the military to brand a group as militant or bandits. For instance, kidnapping, piracy, intimidation, declaration of independence, and confrontation with the Cameroonian and Nigerian military were the common trends of these NSAGs. These NSAGs, in a bid to fight to control the natural resources in the region, targeted and kidnapped oil and government personnel. There were constant attacks on oil tankers; sometimes, these oil companies received ultimatums from these NSAGs to leave the region. Still, these NSAGs will publicly declare the region's independence and hoist the Bakassi flag.

Furthermore, these armed militants in boats and military disguises would attack Cameroon and Nigeria border patrol and military in the area to drive them away. In rare scenarios, these NSAGs will target and intimidate indigenes who do not support their agenda. It is worth noting that the militia wings of these NSAGs aimed to cause mayhem against the Cameroonian and Nigerian military in the area.

These NSAGs emerged immediately after the October 10, 2002 ICJ verdict. Even though the Bakassi Freedom Fighter group had long existed, it changed its course in 2006 to meet up with the flow of separatist movements that existed at that time in the Bakassi peninsula. Only the Biafra Nations League started its activities after the five-year transition period had expired and still carries out nationalistic and irredentist tendencies. One thing is peculiar about these militant groups- they all sort for self-rule or autonomy of the Bakassi people or peninsula. However, following the increase in NSAG activities in the region, the government of Cameroon intensified its military patrols in the area to fight them. Still, on this path to peace, Cameroon and Nigeria agreed on a joint military patrol around the maritime boundary to check the constant attacks by these pirates (Kindzeka 2015). This research has successfully outlined some prominent NSAGs that operated during or after the resolution of the Bakassi conflict. This research's only limitation is that it did not detailly outline the militant activities of these NSAGs in the peninsula.

Against this backlog, this study proffers some recommendations that can/will help the government of Cameroon and, to a lesser extent, the government of Nigeria to redefine its policies in the Bakassi peninsula better. The mechanism used to resolve the Bakassi conflict has been dubbed the most efficient way to resolve an interstate conflict. However, it is the wish of the study that if some of these recommendations are met, it will go a long way to ensure and maintain lasting peace in the peninsula. These recommendations include:

- 1) The government of Cameroon should properly intensify the implementation of the Green Tree Agreement of 2006 in terms of socioeconomic development. One of the clauses of the GTA states that Cameroon is to carry out developmental projects. However, the Bakassi peninsula still lacks many basic facilities and has a low development rate. The low rate of development can cause people to feel abandoned, thus leading to further or novel forms of militant activities. Also, Nigeria's government must explicitly and without bias explain the GTA clauses. Most of the Nigerian Bakassi indigenes have had a misinterpretation of the GTA. To them, the GTA has completely stolen away their rights to livelihood. This situation caused many to take up arms against the Cameroon/Nigeria military. In this light, Nigeria's government must carry out biannual sensitization/educational programs of the GTA in the Bakassi peninsula.
- 2) The Nigerian government has to resettle the Bakassi returnees and create thorough rehabilitation programs properly. Most of the Bakassi indigenes of Nigerian descent have not been properly resettled. This situation has caused some to feel betrayed, thereby taking up arms.
- 3) The Cameroon government needs to give a certain percentage of the oil proceeds which she gets from the Bakassi peninsula to the Bakassi indigenes. One of the general cries of

the Bakassi indigenes is that they have the richest regions, yet the poorest in the whole country. To them, the oil wealth gotten from the peninsula is solely used by top government officials who never give anything to them. This situation has forced many to take up arms to control their natural resources.

- 4) The last, but not preferable, recommendation is that Cameroon and Nigeria's governments should intensify their military and paramilitary patrol in the Bakassi region. Although it is not a model for preventive diplomacy, it will go a long way to enable the Bakassi indigenes and oil companies to enjoy peace and safety in the region.

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