

# AMBREY INSIGHT: NIGERIA - POLITICAL TURMOIL, SABOTAGE AND PIRACY

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**AMBREY**  
Nigeria - political turmoil, sabotage and piracy



Trans Niger Pipeline (TNP)

## Incidents

Over the past week, there has been a political crisis, sabotage and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. On the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, President Tinubu declared a State of Emergency in Rivers State, Nigeria. As part of the declaration, Rivers State Governor Fubara, his deputy, and all lawmakers were suspended for six months, with retired Vice Admiral Ibokette Ibas appointed as administrator. Forty-eight hours prior to the declaration, on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of March, two explosions damaged the Trans Niger Pipeline (TNP), leading to its temporary shutdown for repairs. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, crew from a Panama-flagged tanker destined for Douala, Cameroon, were kidnapped by pirates off the coast of São Tomé and Príncipe.

## Context

The Rivers State contains the ports of Bonny, Okrika, Onne, and Port Harcourt. The TNP carries over 180,000 Bonny Light bopd, with a capacity of 450,000 bopd, to the Bonny offshore terminal and the Port Harcourt refinery. Up until March, Shell's subsidiary, the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) was the operator of the TNP. As Shell seeks to divest its operations in the Niger Delta, it sold this stake to the Renaissance Africa Energy Company on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March. Renaissance now operates the joint venture on behalf of the other partners: the government-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Total Exploration and Production Nigeria Ltd and Agip Energy and Natural Resources (Nigeria) Limited.

Nigerian sources tie the influence of the former Rivers State Governor, Nyesom Wike, to the political crisis. Influential Ijaw organisations in the Niger Delta, including the the Supreme Egbesu Assembly, the Ijaw National Congress and Ijaw Youth Council have called for the reversal of the decision. The President of the Ijaw National Congress stated that the "President was too hasty in declaring the state of emergency in Rivers State. The constitutional process was not followed." These organisations have made ambiguous threats should Governor Fubara be impeached.

In his declaration, President Tinubu made reference to the attacks on the TNP: "Some militants had threatened fire and brimstone against their perceived enemy of the governor who has up till now NOT disowned them...The latest security reports made available to me show that between yesterday and today there have been disturbing incidents of vandalization of pipelines by some militant without the Governor taking any action to curtail them."

There has been a cycle of kidnap-for-ransom events in the Gulf of Guinea, indicative of at least one active pirate action group. They have targeted 11 merchant vessels and commercial fishing vessels. Attacks have been offshore Benin, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Gabon.

## Analysis

One suspected "vandal" was found dead at the site of one of the blasts on the TNP. This would indicate an improvised breach. One other suspect was arrested. No militant groups have claimed responsibility. This would indicate a small-scale attempted tapping of the pipeline, as opposed to organised sabotage. Renaissance was also able to subsequently re-route crude through an alternative line as repairs were made to the main line. These incidents also came prior to the political decision to invoke a state of emergency, indicating that they were not a response to the political crisis. Reports of an explosion at the Port Harcourt Refinery were later clarified as a flare. Ambrey has observed that a tanker has since continued her voyage to the Bonny Offshore Terminal, indicating minimal disruption. So far, Renaissance, has not declared a *force majeure*.

Despite the political situation, no curfew has yet been declared in Rivers State. It is a realistic possibility that there will be protests should Fubara not be reinstated. These have led to overnight curfews and disruption to port operations. In turn, these have disrupted the provision of security escort vessels. Ambrey will monitor the situation for any further escalations.

The piracy is highly likely unrelated and has been ongoing since January 2024. The most recent kidnapping offshore São Tomé and Príncipe came 46 days after a kidnapping offshore Gabon. Ambrey assesses that this is consistent with a kidnap-for-ransom cycle, whereby a pirate action group will put to sea toward the end of a ransom negotiation. Most of the pirate activity has been in areas such as Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe, where armed security is unavailable to merchant shipping, or Gabon, where armed security is available, but is often not taken.

## Mitigations

- Ship Security Assessments (SSAs): Merchant shipping transiting the Gulf of Guinea is advised to carry out SSAs tailored to the threat of piracy, and to implement recommended and proportionate ship protection measures before sailing.
- Port Risk Assessment: Merchant shipping is advised to assess the upstream risk of interruptions.
- Voyage Risk Assessments (VRAs): Merchant shipping is advised to carry out voyage- and vessel-specific risk assessments.
- Live monitoring: Intelligence providers can link merchant vessels to others calling ports enroute and can link into military organisations to provide real-time awareness of ongoing incidents.
- Armed security: The VRA should identify where armed security is assessed to be proportionate to the risk and the specific vessel's characteristics. Armed security is assessed to be highly effective against West African pirates.

For a brief on associated risks and for a West African Guardian service, please contact your account manager or [intelligence@ambrey.com](mailto:intelligence@ambrey.com)