

THREATS TO CRUISERS

A Look at Threats Faced by
Cruisers in the Caribbean Sea

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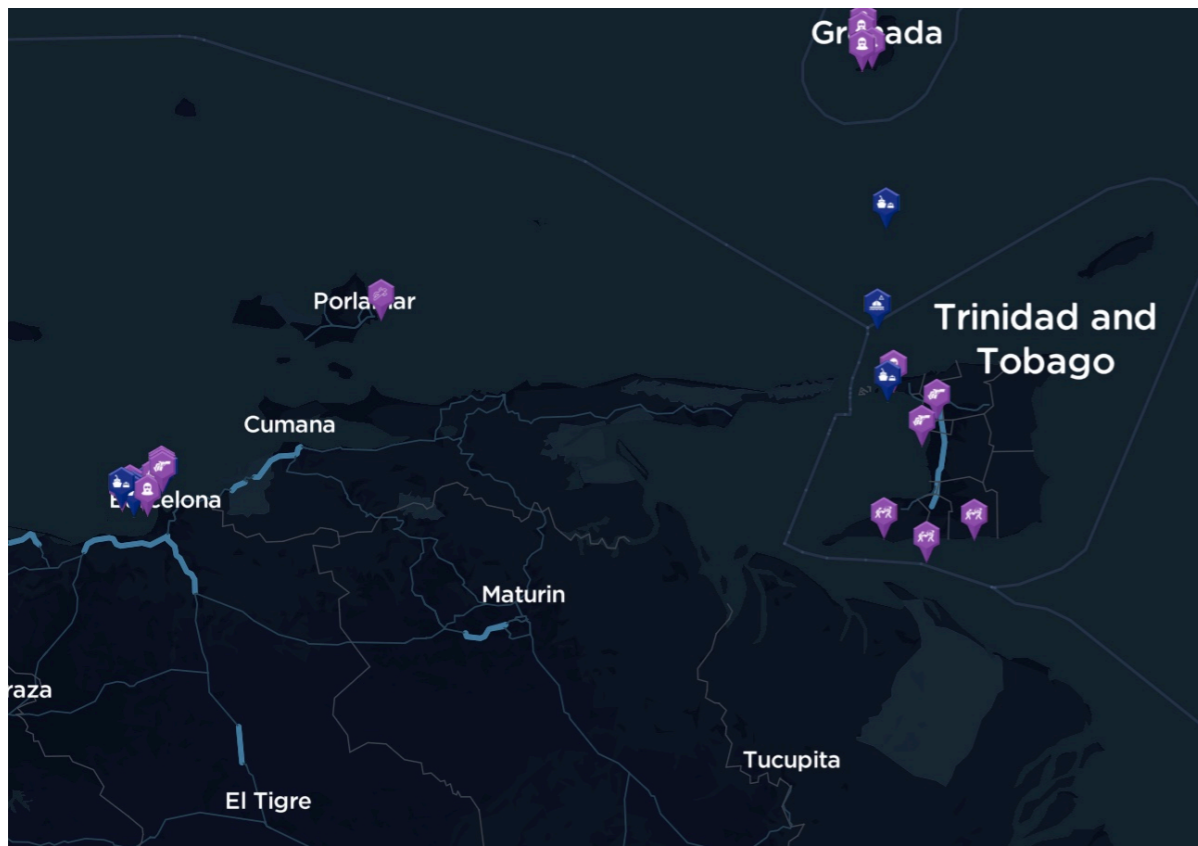
INTRODUCTION

On the morning of 14th of April 2019, a United States flagged 53-ft monohull yacht, traveling to Grenada, was attacked by a group of eight pirates approximately 16 nautical miles northeast of the Hibiscus gas platform, north of Trinidad and Tobago. The suspects, armed and reportedly speaking Spanish, fired warning shots to try and get the yacht and its two occupants to stop. However, the yacht maintained full speed and began zig zag maneuvers to prevent the suspects from being able to get too close. Due to the high seas and evasive maneuvers, the suspects aborted their boarding attempt, but not before firing several shots at the yacht causing damage to various parts of it. The occupants were unharmed and managed to make it to port in Grenada.

In response to the incident, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard said it would increase patrols in the waters around the island. The incident is a reminder of the piracy threat that has increased in recent years in the Caribbean.



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While the threat of piracy is strongest off the coast of Venezuela, other incidents have been recorded within the Caribbean Sea and the threat is but one of many that can impact cruisers within the region.

One of the main drivers of the resurgence in piracy in the Caribbean Sea has been the Venezuelan political, economic, and humanitarian crisis. A failing economy, compounded by continued sanctions from the United States, has not only caused millions of Venezuelans to leave the country, but also left those remaining in the country to find new means of income. Some of these new sources include smuggling and piracy, particularly for people in areas such as the state of Sucre, whose once thriving fishing industry has now been decimated leaving fishermen to resort to illicit activities, similar to Somalia and Nigeria.



Drug and weapons smuggling have been two of those activities that has attracted individuals as a means of income. These activities have particularly affected small Caribbean countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, where the influx of guns and drugs have been blamed for the rise in murders and gang-violence. Other countries like St. Lucia have also faced rising gun crime due to weapons flowing through the Caribbean.

These smuggling routes are then protected, leading to increased criminality, including attacks on fishing vessels operating within those routes.

With its economy failing, its infrastructure crumbling, and its government with little reach to control the more remote areas of Venezuela, it has left many small fishing villages to be havens for smugglers and pirates, allowing for little repercussions for their actions. While Venezuela remains a hotspot for piracy, whether in the waters separating it from Trinidad and Tobago or at anchorages off Puerto La Cruz and Barcelona where crude oil tankers and bulk carriers are targeted, other countries have also faced their own incidents of piracy such as off Honduras, Nicaragua and St. Lucia, with those incidents mainly targeting cruisers.

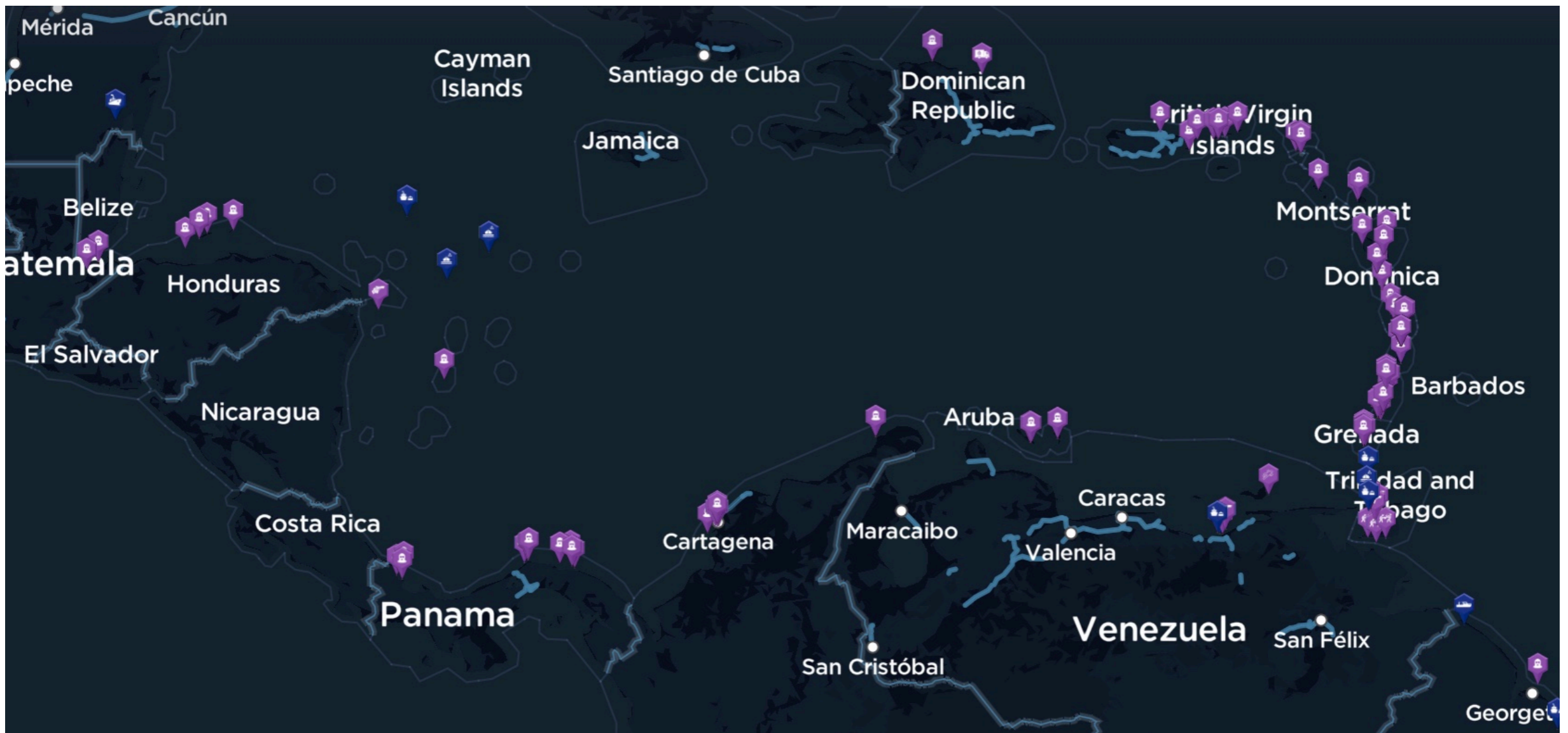
SECURITY THREATS SINCE THE START OF 2018

The Caribbean Sea is bordered by the coasts of the Yucatan Peninsula and countries of Central America to the west, by the Greater Antilles to the north, the Lesser

Antilles to the east, and the north coast of South America to the south. The area is just one of many around the world visited by cruisers, those whose lifestyle involves traveling and living on yachts, heading from destination to destination.

Cruisers face a variety of threats during their journeys whether while in transit, moored, or docked at a marina. Since January 2018, most incidents of yachts being approached or boarded while in transit have come off the coast of Honduras, near the border with Nicaragua, as well as off the northeast coast of Trinidad and Tobago.

There were multiple approaches of yachts off the coast of Honduras in January and April 2018, where one or more small vessels would be spotted setting course to intercept the yacht. In each of the incidents, the cruisers were able to use evasive maneuvers and the wind to gain speed, prompting the suspects to abort any attempts to approach. More recently, in April 2019, a Canadian flagged yacht heading to Isla Providencia, Colombia from Roatan, Honduras, was approached by two fishing boats. After asking for food and drink, the boats moved away from the yacht, only for two other boats to approach shortly after, and all four boats encircled the yacht. The suspects, upwards of 25 men, boarded the yacht and destroyed the



Incidents of piracy recorded by Intelligence Fusion around the Caribbean since January 2018. Includes thefts, armed robberies, attempted boardings, hijackings, suspicious maritime activity and murder.

navigation equipment and the sails, while the crew locked itself inside the cabin. The suspects stole electronics and diving equipment among other things and then fled the scene towards the coast of Nicaragua. The cruisers made it to Isla Providencia where they filed a report with the various authorities. No one was harmed in the incident.

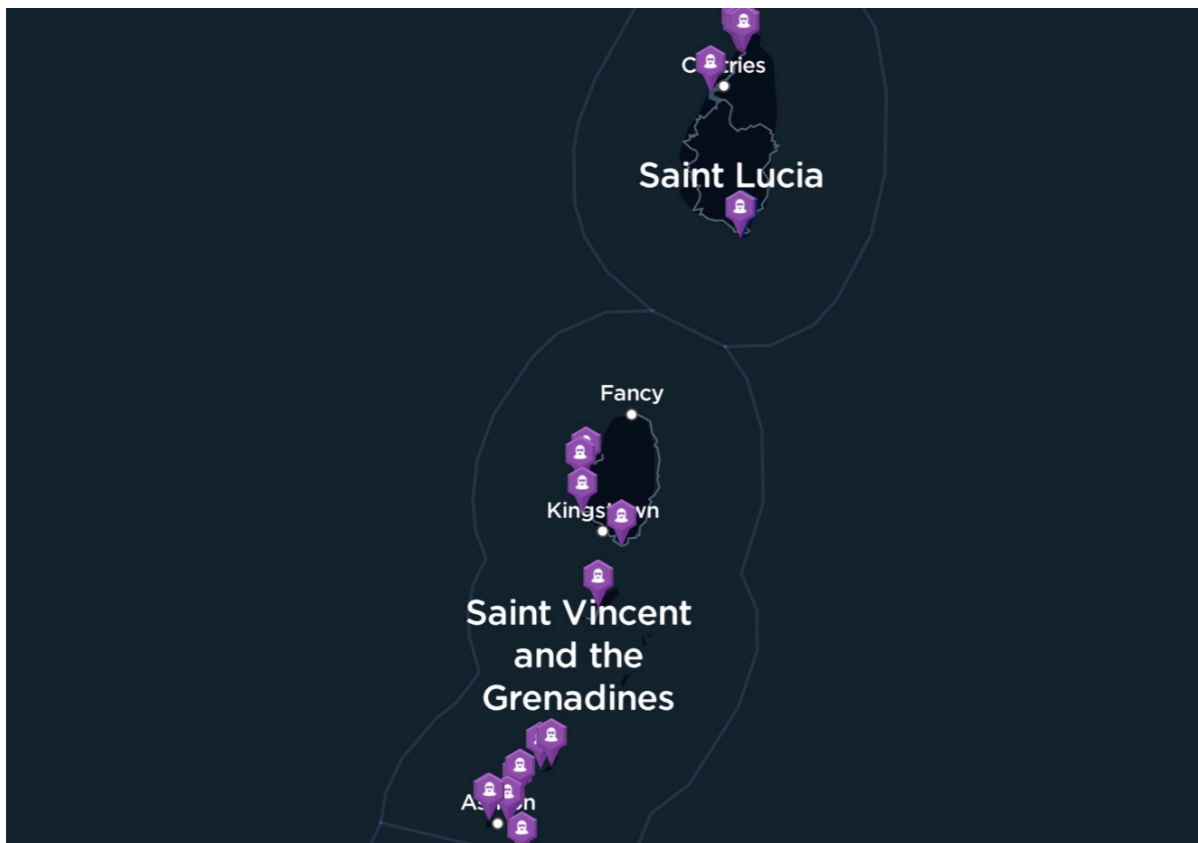
In Trinidad and Tobago, the threats to cruisers come from Venezuelan pirates operating east of Venezuela and northwest of Trinidad and Tobago, near the Hibiscus gas platform as previously mentioned, while local thieves and armed robbers threaten vessels while moored and docked. Multiple yachts were burgled while moored off



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Chaguaramas in September 2018. The southern coast of Trinidad and Tobago is where the greatest danger lies, particularly for local fishermen. In January 2019, Venezuelan pirates kidnapped 8 Trinidadians in two incidents, and held them in Venezuela until ransoms were paid. Venezuelan pirates have been reported as the perpetrators of piracy incidents as far as the coast of Guyana and Suriname, due to the vast river networks which they are able to navigate to and from Venezuelan waters.

Elsewhere, down the coast of Central America, cruisers also face threats off the coast of Bocas del Toro province; in Portobelo Bay; and in Linton Bay, all of which are located in Panama. Most incidents have involved thefts or armed robberies of boats at anchor, particularly in the latter two locations. However, on 2nd May 2019, armed individuals boarded a yacht near Morodub Island and tried to rob family from New Zealand. During the robbery, the husband tried to defend his family and was shot and killed, while his wife was wounded with a machete. The couple's two children were unharmed in the incident. Three suspects were arrested in connection with the attack. The threat embodies the risks facing foreign cruisers in the region; however, the killing of cruisers is



rare since the start of 2018.

Less violent threats are faced by cruisers in the Upper and Lower Antilles with hotspots, since January 2018, being located in Rodney Bay, St. Lucia; in the various islands that make up St. Vincent and the Grenadines; and in the areas of Le Marin and Sainte-Anne in Martinique. The incidents recorded by Intelligence Fusion in these and the rest of the countries that make up the Upper and Lower Antilles are primarily thefts. Thefts have been reported on both unoccupied and occupied yachts, and include thieves swimming or arriving on boats up to the yachts, boarding quietly and stealing valuables that can easily be taken back to shore, or they include the theft of dinghies. The dinghies that are stolen are often recovered abandoned, but with their motors stolen.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Piracy will continue to threaten cruisers and cargo ships alike in 2019, and likely for the next few years. The Caribbean and northern coast of South America's maritime geography, including uninhabited islands, inlets and river networks; combined with countries that don't have the

capacity to combat piracy and have high corruption levels; and a deepening crisis in Venezuela that allows criminal networks to flourish and have safe harbors, all provide for a favorable environment for piracy to affect the region.

There are reports that unemployment is expected to reach as high as 44.9% in 2019 in Venezuela, with inflation continuing to increase and the country's GDP expected to contract by 25% also this year. The International Monetary Fund has also lowered its 2019 growth forecast for Latin America and the Caribbean to 1.4% down from 2%. These economic projections will likely perpetuate the conditions that lead individuals to turn to criminal networks as a source of income, particularly in Venezuela, leading to increases in the flows of illicit goods and the heavy-handed protection of smuggling routes, whether on-land or at sea.

In addition to the economic conditions, researchers are warning that overfishing, climate change, pollution and the bleaching of coral reefs will continue to have significant impacts on fish populations, which in turn will affect the livelihoods of fishermen across the Caribbean.

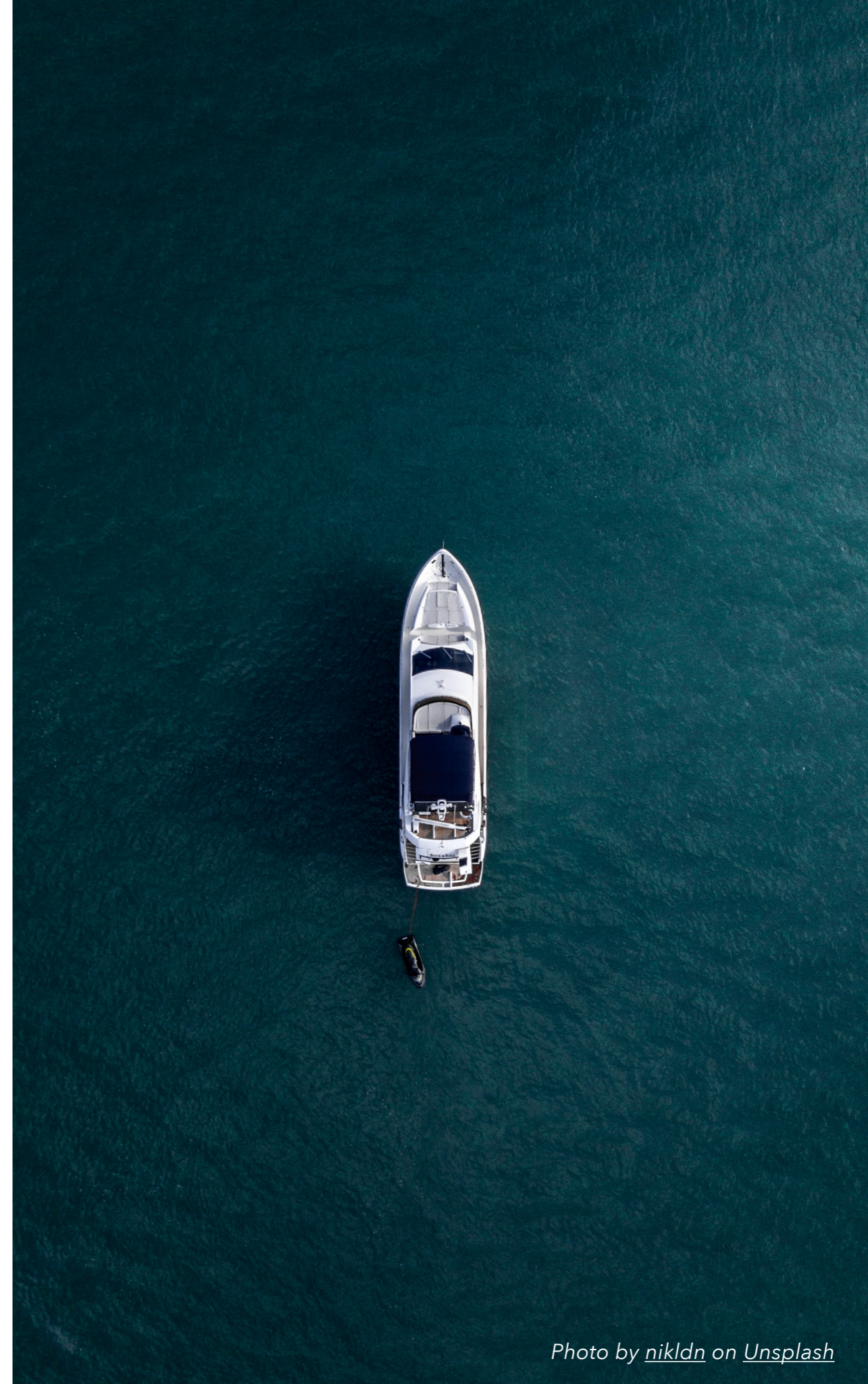
Compounded by natural hazards like hurricanes, which destroy fisheries and fishing vessels, these threats to the industry may lead, in the future, to more people finding

alternative sources of income, some of which may be criminal and may include piracy.

While the levels of piracy are not as high as in Southeast Asia and certain parts of Africa, it in no way diminishes the fact that piracy has increased in the region and requires a regional response to the problem. Some countries have already increased patrols in their own waters, not only to combat piracy, but also to stem the flow of undocumented migrants fleeing from Venezuela. While these patrols are taking place, regional cooperation should also be increased to effectively protect cruisers and local fishermen alike.

Additionally, cruisers should take precautions whenever traveling in known hotspots, such as traveling in convoys as recommended by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard. At anchor, cruisers should lock their dinghies up securely, as well as their cabins, even if they are just swimming a short distance from their yacht. In addition to offshore security threats, cruisers also face the onshore threats of each country they visit, including thefts, armed robberies, knife and gun crime.

Intelligence Fusion monitors each country to assess the various threats that could affect locals and travelers alike.



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