

A Retrospect On Oil, State And Insurgency In Niger Delta Region And Its Implications For Nigeria's National Security

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Abstract

This study examines oil, state and insurgency in Niger Delta. Nigeria's Niger Delta region is not only home to greater part of Africa's largest mangrove forest, but also source of Nigeria's oil wealth. Here, in this amazing network of creeks, and an aquatic splendour comprising marine, brackish and freshwater ecosystems, lie the operational bases of ethnic militia and insurgent organization dedicated to the socio-economic emancipation of the Niger Delta peoples. Thus, the Niger Delta area has become a hot bed of violence, insurgency, kidnapping, hostage-taking, oil pipeline sabotage, crude oil theft, gang wars, so much else by way of anarchy, chaos and other forms of criminality. The study examines some of the drivers of insurgency in Niger Delta to include: the nature of politics, greed, alienation, government repressive policies and actions, poverty, foreign strategic interest, institutionalized corruption, environmental disaster among others are the key drivers of insurgency in the Niger Delta. In addition, the paper also highlights some of the implications of insurgency on national security to include: diversion and loss of national resources, environmental challenges, human rights violation etc. To this effect therefore, for a viable peace in the region, the state must make concerted efforts to the region's key demand.

Keywords: Oil, State, Insurgency, Security, Niger Delta.

Introduction

In the past, rarely a day passes by without the International and Local News Media report on the growing insurgency by armed Militias in Nigeria's oil rich province, the Niger Delta, which accounts for most of Nigeria's estimated oil production of 2.46 million barrels per day and natural gas of 22 million tonnes per year with annual earnings of \$ 4 billion. Which are mostly exported to the United States and other Western countries (EIA 2000; Lubeck et'al 2007; Obi, 2007b:94-98).

There are two undisputable facts about the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. First; it is a region of strategic importance to both the domestic and international economics. Secondly, it is a region of great and troubling features; as an environment of great wealth as well as inhuman poverty. Niger Delta serves as one of the biggest oil deposits on planet earth of about 34 billion barrels of black gold (Robinson, 2006) plays a phenomenal role in the health of global political economy especially that of the most powerful nation of the earth, the United States of America. Presently, the hydrocarbon resources of the region have made Nigeria the largest oil producer in Africa and the seventh largest in the world (Ajanaku, 2008). It is therefore less surprising that the region's security has become a major issue to the global community.

It is also instructive to note that the importance of Niger Delta territory to the global economy goes beyond contemporary times: the region played a phenomenal role in the slave trade, and later with the advent of trade in palm oil, it became a major Lubricant of the industrial revolution in England in the 18th and 19th century. The state of insecurity of oil exploration activities in Niger Delta is even more telling on the socio-economic well-being and political stability of the Nigerian state. There is no doubt that oil has brought Nigeria to world reckoning.

Since it was first exported in 1958, the black gold has ostensibly, catapulted the country from a struggling independent to an economically independent and buoyant country. With oil wealth, the country was able to build two capital cities of enviable standard-Lagos and Abuja respectively. But the bulk of the people of the Niger Delta still live in severe and visible poverty (Robinson, 2006). Secondly, an indisputable reality is the fact that despite its invaluable contribution to the sustenance of the Nigeria state, the people wallowed in extreme poverty, worst cases of environmental destruction, severe neglect and abandonment, political and economic desperation, mindless looting of revenue generated from the region, joblessness, biochemical poisoning

through pollution, and brutal militancy assaults. It is due to this unpleasant reality of the Niger Delta region, coupled with the unjustifiable refusal of the Nigerian state to respond to the peaceful and genuine agitations of the oil-bearing communities that have created an environment of frustration, anger and desperation in the region (Preye & David, 2010).

Result into lingering and volatile restiveness and insurgency as well as demand for local ownership and control of oil resources under a truly restructured federal system in Nigeria. Political agitations and violence are nothing new but the act of criminalization by unscrupulous individuals and cult groups especially have become a source of concerns. Hence, it is pertinent that we make distinction between insurgency and criminality. Insurgency is a movement within a country dedicated to overthrowing the government. An insurgency is a rebellion against authority. Therefore, an insurgent could connote as a person who rises in forcible opposition to lawful authority, especially a person who engages in armed resistance to a government. Criminality on the other hand, connotes the state of being a criminal.

Thus, the activities of criminal elements of the Niger Delta Militancy is causing the Nigeria state so many headaches leading to the rise in violent insurgency which is adversely affecting the output of oil production of about 675,000 bpd (Obi 2009:106) and created a state of insecurity to the region and Nigerians as a whole, such as kidnapping of about 120 foreign nationals and 2 were killed between 2006 – January 2007, sabotage of oil installations and bunkering, ransoming of oil workers, disruption of oil exports etc (Obi 2009:105). It is in the light of the foregoing that this paper will attempt to examine oil, state and insurgency in Niger Delta.

In order to give scope and direction, the paper is divided into four sections. Namely: Introduction, brief overview on oil exploration and exploitation, drivers of insurgency in Niger Delta, implications on national security and above all, recommendations and conclusion.

Oil Exploration and Exploitation in Niger Delta

The common reference to oil as “black gold” is apt. Apart from that, gold connotes wealth and what is worthwhile, black is associated with “evil”. Oil has brought a lot of wealth to the nation, as it is a major foreign exchange earner for Nigeria. Oil exploration within the Deltaic region of Nigeria commenced in the early 1990s, by a German entity referred to as the Nigeria Bitumen Corporation”, which began their activities in the Araromi area of the then, western Nigeria (Akuodu, 2011). Though, the first commercial oil well was discovered in 1956 at Oloibiri in present Ogbia Local Government of Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta region. This

discovery opened up the oil industry in 1961 in Nigeria, bringing more oil firms like the Agip, Mobil, Safrap (now Elf), Texaco and chevron to petroleum prospecting both in on shore and off shore areas of Nigeria (Nigeria National Petroleum corporation, (Akuodu, 2011). Between 1956 and 1958, more oil fields were discovered at Afam, Bonu, Ebubu and later Ugheli and kakori and the production capacity steady rise. By this period, oil has become so prominent that the search for more of it had intensified in various communities in the region. Ironically, this was the genesis of the series of problem which have begun in earnestly in 2006.

Oil and gas resources account for over 85% of Nigeria gross domestic product (GDP), over 95% of the national budget and over 80% of the nation's wealth. Paradoxically, the Niger Delta remains the poorest region as earlier mentioned, due to the ecologically unfriendly exploitation of oil and gas and state policies that expropriate the indigenous people of the Niger Delta, of their rights to these natural resources. Ecological devastation, which is occasioned by the activities of Multinationals Oil Companies (MOCs) have rendered useless farming and fishing, which was previously the mainstay of the Niger Delta rural populace. The Niger Delta environment is not developed to further sustain the people after.

The height of it is that the environmental degradation continuously occur through oil exploration activities such as gas flaring, oil spills, canalization to oil fields, seismic explosives detonation etc. thereby creating artificial challenges to development but the region is not considered for holistic development, rather the concepts of wider, national and internal power struggle to control meagre funds for the development of the Niger Delta including that of the Niger Delta Development Commission are always been politicized. Hence, the area remains in dire need for development.

Drivers of Insurgency in the Niger-Delta

The prolong military rule and even the return to civil rule in May 1999, the peoples of the Niger Delta have experienced no real sense of political participation or responsiveness of leadership at the various levels of government. For instance, the appointment of non-indigenes as Military Governors, prebendal politics gave rise to insurgency as a result of the powerlessness and frustrations that the ordinary people of the region, especially the youths, feel in the face of a persistent absence of the sense of belonging, contrary to the stipulated role of state posit as "The most essential function of any government is to provide peace and security for its people" (NNSS 2011:4) perceived as a pre-condition for sustainable development tag as sovereign good and improving the lives of its citizens

from within. Thereby deterring, disrupting and dismantling threats to peace and build people confidence in the government.

The Nigerian National Security Strategy (NNSS) outline four (4) vital interests to include; Maintaining peace and security within Nigeria, maintaining the territorial integrity, creating an enabling environment for national unity and securing and developing Nigeria's national assets (NNSS 2011:15). However, the state seems to have adopted deterrence posture by the deployments of armed security personnel to be confrontational against perceived adversaries (her own citizens). The apparatus of state was deployed to ensure increased and steady oil production. Nigerian politics became dominated largely by shifting coalition of the ethnic majorities, prebendal and exclusiveness (Joseph, 1986; Emuede 2014).

Besides, the demand for 100% 'resource control' struggle of the people of the Niger Delta for self-determination and local autonomy, due to the perceived federal marginalization in the distribution of power, and from the benefits accruing from the exploitation of the natural resources in the region. Firstly, evolved from the Boro-led Niger Delta Volunteer Force's (NDVF) failed secession of 1966 followed the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR) which demand for the 'Ogoni control of Ogoni oil'. The 1998 Kaiama Declaration by the Ijaw Youth Council which asserts in Paragraph (5) that 'Every region should control its resources 100 per cent from which it will allocate funds for running the central government', Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Survival Movement (NDSM) and the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC). These shows that the insurgence claimed community grievance but their primary motivation lies in opportunities to plunder resources to actualize visions of a better life for themselves because of its proliferation and identity (Reno 2000; Collier et al. 2006; Oyefusi 2007). These gave rise to the demand-driven proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) as well as the growth of insurgency. The payments from oil MNCs to some militias for 'stay-at-home, surveillance or security contracts', and payments to the military for 'special allowances/welfare' and security/protection, have gone into arms purchases or acted as incentives to engage in violent activities as well as 'rogue' military personnel and state elites cooperate with the insurgents engaging in illegal oil bunkering and kidnapping to providing funds for arms proliferation.

In addition, social alienation and despair, or 'accumulation by dispossession', as being at the heart of the violent conflict. The technologies and politics of dispossession fuel alienation and grievance,

have underpin the transition from ethnic minority civil protest to insurgency in the Niger-Delta. The process is also alienating in the sense that the people have nothing to do with the inputs and outputs of the company. The company has no connection with the local market. The people contrast their experiences of alienation and exploitation in their relations with government and oil companies with their previous relations with the global market. Regionalization transformed Niger Delta ethnic groups into ethnic minorities in the Eastern and Western regions. Surpluses appropriated by regional governments through the marketing boards furthered class formation and capital accumulation among elites of the emergent major ethnic groups in the regions. The nationalization project has been alienating to oil-producing communities in all its ramifications. The citizenry alienated from the State, adopted a survival strategy of avoidance leading to exclusionist politics. This latter characteristic produced two regimes, prebendal and kleptomaniac. Exclusionist politics gave rise to strident agitations leading to frequent constitution reviews that were not only controversial but difficult to classify (Emuede 2014:22).

Furthermore, the outcome of decades of military rule (1966–79 and 1984–98) and the culture of violence that accompanied it completely militarized the society because of systematic target of individual opponents and groups and encourage violence response from populace. The culture of violence and militarism became entrenched, in which coercion is favored over persuasion in order to achieve goals of the State (Ebo 2005; Ibeanu and Mohammed 2001). The Nigerian government has adopted a mixture of methods, which range from coercion through co-option to the establishment of various commissions and ended with the amnesty program of late President Umaru Musa Yar'adu administration in managing the Niger Delta crises. Since the 1990s, when protests became pronounced in Ogoniland and other troubled areas of the Niger Delta, thousands of regular and mobile policemen, complemented by battalions of soldiers and plainclothes security agents, have been deployed to the region. The enactment of the Petroleum Act of 1969, Land Use Act of 1979 that make all land belongs to the state. The revenue allocation formula allowed the regions from which cash crops were derived to retain 50 per cent of the revenue derivation principle which was later reduced to about 10%, although presently at 25%. State repression of protests is evident from military campaigns against places such as Umuechem and Ogoni, Odi, Gbaramatu, in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states (Naanen 1995; Osaghae 1995; Emuebe 2014).

In mid-2006, President Obasanjo gave a “force for force” order and the Nigerian navy in early 2007, embarked upon its biggest sea maneuver in

decades deploying 13 warships, 4 helicopters and 4 boats to the region to strengthen its operational capability. As the result there was witnessed the largest number of attacks on oil facilities in the region. President Yar'Adua, even though, is credited for amnesty program, ordered the JTF to rout the insurgents and return normalcy to the region. From May 13-14, 2009 the JTF launched coordinated attacks; air, land and sea on Gbaramatu Kingdom, suspected insurgent stronghold. Over 2,000 persons were killed and 20,000 others displaced. For 3-months, the JTF set a security cordon on riverine areas of Delta, Bayelsa and River States; attacked and destroyed all suspected insurgent camps without resistance. Thus, the JTF claimed with delight that insurgency in the Niger Delta has been decisively crushed which was later proved to be contrary. The pauperization and disempowerment of oil-producing communities, worsens the urban unemployment situation and contributes to the intensification of numerous social pathologies. Prominent among these are cultism, gangster activities, and a growing sex industry, high rates of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, spontaneous violence, and family instability, which have all become prominent features of life in urban centers due to migration across the region. Comprising over a fifth of Nigeria's total population of over 150 million, the inhabitants of the Niger Delta are spread across nine states, residing mostly in largely rural communities in dispersed village settlements. The region's unemployment levels are higher than the national average (put at 5 per cent in 2000), reaching 16–19 per cent in three of the constituent states and manifesting as one in every seven young people in the region being unemployed (FGN 2009). And while its adult literacy rate (78 per cent) is significantly higher than the national average of 54 per cent, more than a third of the region's under-five children are either severely or moderately malnourished, a strong indication of high levels of household poverty (UNDP 2006).

The global hegemonic forces such as the U.S sees the oil as a vital "globally-needed" resource, whose continued "uninterrupted" flow along with the safety of (transnational) oil investments and oil workers must be protected at all costs, including military means. The import of Nigeria to the oil multinationals and their home countries is exemplified by the role of Nigeria's oil to their profits. In 2007, Exxon Mobil announced profits approximating \$40.6 billion, Royal Dutch Shell made \$27.56 billion profits, while Chevron Texaco recorded \$18.7 billion profits (Emuebe 2014). Indeed, America's premium on Nigeria's oil and the strategic importance of the Gulf of Guinea to its oil security is demonstrated by the fact that America military activity increased from almost no activity in 2004 to "104 ship days" in 2006 (Skorka, 2007:9). As

such, the oil companies, in their activities and relations in the Niger Delta they cannot continue with “business as usual” often, which intensify insurgency in the Niger Delta, the State sees it only as a security problem. Hence, Nigeria approached China in 2006 for arms to crush militias in the Niger Delta, when America refused its request (Roughneen, 2006).

China promptly sold 12 F-7NI Fighter jets, 3 FT-7NI Trainer jets and allied equipment worth \$251 million to Nigeria (Azaiki, 2006; Defense Industry Daily, 2005). In return, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) acquired; two oil blocks; a 45% stake in an oil-for-gas field for US\$2.27 billion and a 35% share of an oil exploration license for US\$60 million. China’s entry was not unnoticed in the region. On April 29, 2006, militias detonated a car bomb at a trailer park near the Warri refinery in Delta State.

Mehlum et al. (2006) argue that the economic performance of resource-rich countries is highly dependent on the quality of institutions. Few months later, nine Chinese workers (on contract to Agip), were abducted at Sagbama, Bayelsa state (watt, 2007, Olaniyi, 2007a; China View, 2007). Subsequently, Notwithstanding, Nigeria-China relations have blossomed. On July 14, 2013, President Jonathan visited China accompanied by 13-ministers; Foreign Affairs, Finance, Petroleum, Works, Agriculture, Aviation, Solid Minerals, Transport, National Planning, Trade and Investment, Niger Delta, Justice, Culture and Tourism, Defence; 4-State Governors and 2-national Assembly members (The nationonline. July 15, 2013; Emuede 2014:27-28). The Nigerian government has not only welcomed international military support for safeguarding oil production (Asuni 2009) but has also deployed serving and retired military officers to troubleshoot in the region.⁷ Massive troop deployments to the region have made the ratio of security personnel to oil workers expand beyond affordable and sustainable limits.

The states of the Niger Delta lack the capacity to implement resource control, a situation that is worsened by corruption and internal contradictions and divisions within the Niger Delta elite. Still on the issue of state incapacity, the state’s inability to provide access to justice, and the lack of capacity of judicial institutions to provide redress for grievances and compensation for damage to property and the environment by oil operations, as important factors explaining the resort to the alternative (violent) methods of seeking redress by the aggrieved. Also there emanated the private interests of the military and police should be specifically identified as one of the drivers of the conflict because uprising is seen to some as medium of enrichment. For example, the donation of #557 million (over £2 million) by the Bayelsa state government towards the procurement of arms and ammunition for the

police. By March 2008, several months after the money had been lodged with the police authorities in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, there was an allegation in a substantive petition that the money had sunk into the bottomless pit of a highly corrupt police and state bureaucracy (Ukeje 2011). Not to talk of the corruption bedeviled the NDDC that is supposed to facilitate development, and the involvement of Traditional Rulers, Politicians, and Stakeholders in kidnapping, etc. as means of acquiring wealth.

Again, when in the 1980s the people intensified their complaints about pipes that cross-crossed their communities and intermittently leaked into their farmlands and rivers, as well as the unquenchable gas flares that generated much heat but no light for their communities, another ritual of consultation was introduced. Community activists argue that this new ritual, called environmental impact assessment (EIA), offered only an opportunity for the people to talk but not to decide whether or not the company should be admitted to their communities (Okonta and Douglas 2001; PEFS 2004; Omeje 2006a). The region has the largest percentage of Nigeria's fisheries industry, huge and diverse medicinal and forest resources, wood for energy and shelter, as well as a stable fertile soil for farming and a hospitable habitat for increasingly endangered wildlife such as the Delta elephant and the river hippopotamus. These resource endowments served to provide relatively sustainable means of livelihood for millions of people across the region. However, due to exploration without concern for the people, 1.5 million tons of oil has spilled into the Niger Delta over the past 50 years, making the region one of the five most polluted locations on earth. Oil slicks cover the region; blowouts and leaks affect creeks, streams and related traditional sources of livelihood, destroying mangrove forests, eroding soil plots, and killing aqua life. Hundreds of well-sites have flares, which come from the burning of associated gas. Resulting into sulfuric acid mists damage plants and forests. Flares pollute rainwater, cause acid rain and contribute to climate change.

Amid this pollution many Niger Delta residents suffer from oil poisoning. Oil poisoning causes respiratory ailments. In addition, residents suffer from a plethora of waterborne diseases such as malaria, dysentery, tuberculosis, typhoid and cholera. Life expectancy is low (Kew and Phillips 2007). The acute pollution have negatively impacted on the environment, putting an end to livelihoods economic practices; hunting, farming, craft-making as well as multiplicity of nutritional, health and socio-cultural practices (Omoweh 1998; Emoyan et al., 2008; Odjugo, 2010; Emuedo, 2011; Emuede 2014:26).

On the whole Nigeria's activist pan-African foreign policy in the 1970s – noting that from the 1990s its role was somewhat transformed into an instrument for the trans nationalization of the Niger Delta, manifested in the increased struggles between global extractive actors (backed by the state) and non-state forces of local resistance (backed by global activist networks). By also demonstrating how the Niger Delta crisis has reduced the potency of oil as a tool of Nigeria's diplomacy. The Nigerian state has become more amenable to the energy security interests of the world's powers, further complicating the nature and ramifications of the conflict in the oil-rich region. The ability of the state to protect its partner becomes a concern to the international community, in the wake of the escalating insurgency and insecurity characterized by acts of sabotage and kidnapping of foreign oil workers, corruption and oil theft by criminal gangs working with highly placed officials linked to transnational criminal networks, the tendency has been for the international community to seek to strengthen the capacity of the state to better protect its partners – the oil MNCs.

Implications of insurgency in the Niger Delta region on National Security

Close to 4,000 oil wells have so far been drilled in the Niger Delta and offshore areas since 1937 that constitute potentially polluted sites at which drilling wastes, drill cuttings, oily sludges and various toxic hazardous chemicals have been disposed, without concern for the inhabitants of the region. 'The patience of the people has been tried to the limit' (Guardian 1999). The oil spills and gas flaring resulted in the loss of socio-economic advantages that could have accrued to region in particular and the Nation at large.

It is hardly surprising that a sizeable proportion of the federal government's budgetary allocation to the Niger Delta since then is allocated to security, even though the military and police had among the largest chunk of the budget (International Crisis Group 2007: 6). The overall expenditure for the security surpasses what could have been use for overhaul development of the region while labours/energies that could had been channel for political, social and economic development are misused and underutilized. For instance, about 10,000 militants hidden in the creek (Obi 2009:106) are valuable national assets. The \$251 million military equipment, the daily loss of \$ 12 million due to sabotage and the donation of #557 million (over £2 million) by the Bayelsa state government towards the procurement of arms, funds used to procure arms and ammunition by the insurgents as well as ammunition for the police earlier mention, the #20,000 monthly stipend to about 8299 repented militants total estimate #165,980,000 million each month and

the re-integration daily fee of #1500 per head totally #12,448,500 million per day as well as the funds used to acquired arms and ammunition by the insurgents as retrieved by the provisional amnesty list such as 2,760 arms 287,445 ammunitions, 18 gunboats, 763 explosives, 1,090 dynamite caps and 3,155 magazines (Obi 2009:35-36).

Others are the remaining presumed 25,000 weapons, remote-detonation, night vision equipment and anti-aircraft missiles (Obi 2009:106). Similarly, the attacks on facilities such as pipelines etc, the monetary implication is sufficient to some certain extent leverage the suffering of the people. The resources utilized by both the State and the insurgent group, if properly harness and channel toward the advancement of the Nation, Nigeria in general and the Niger Delta region in particular could have been place to reckon with today.

The government has been quick to enact laws for the protection of oil installations without doing same toward the protection of her own citizens. For example, in 1975 the Petroleum Production and Distribution (Anti-Sabotage) Act was enacted, even though at the time sabotage was not a major problem in the country; and in 1984, the Special Tribunal (Miscellaneous Offences) was set up. Both of these provide for stiff penalties (the death penalty and twenty-one years' imprisonment respectively) for tampering with oil installations or otherwise disrupting or disturbing the distribution and marketing of petroleum products. Even more draconian, the Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree of 1993, under which the 'Ogoni nine', including Ken Saro-Wiwa, were tried and executed, provided the government with power to restrain any form of dissent, including disaffection with the impacts of oil pollution without alleging the fear and hopelessness of the people. Not only did these actions indicate how seriously the government intended to protect revenue from oil, and by implication the oil companies, but corresponding inaction on behalf of the communities showed its lack of interest in the suffering caused by the impacts of oil operations. Law was used to effectively label acts against oil operations as 'criminal' while the same types of legal measures were not adopted to label the polluters. Rather, what the government did in 1978 was to further erode any rights that the people had with respect to the exploitation of the resources within their communities by enacting the Land Use Act.

Loss of confidence and sense of obligation to the State: The breakdown of traditional institutions creates chaos within communities and lack of clear lines of authority for negotiation between communities, or between communities and the government and/or oil companies. The state has

failed to provide effective access to justice by not enacting laws to effectively regulate these impacts and thereby provide an efficient framework for addressing the grievances of the people. These create perception of the state as a conspirator against its own people.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Nigerian state seems to be revealing its inability to exercise non-coercive and legitimized authority to address the festering insurgency in the Niger-Delta region. This perhaps is the reason for the dislocation and disassociation/dissatisfaction that emanated over the years as people perceive as the major threat to their survival. It's worthy of note that tripartite coalition by the Federal government, Multinational companies and their home country betrayed the trust of an ordinary Nigerian, especially, those of the Niger-Delta. Though insurgency is not the solution and neither can it be medium for conflict resolution. For, two wrongs cannot make a right. The entire Nigerian people must rise against dehumanization, repressions, and every unjust means with its attendant consequence against any individual, group, party, or/and government that is bend on deployment of differences to perpetrate an unholy act on Nigerians and the State. The judiciary must stand firm in prosecuting perpetrators of evil because the rule of law remains imperative. The Niger Delta Development Commission and laws must be strengthened and supported. While both the State and the people have to synergies resources toward sustainable and people oriented developmental programs. Effective communication is key for both to succeed.

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