

NIGERIAN SECURITY AGENCIES AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

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Abstract

The Niger Delta is an economically significant and strategic region in Nigeria. It houses most of Nigeria's oil resources. A good proportion of the country's revenue is derived from the petroleum resources in this region. Regardless, Niger Delta is one of the regions in Nigeria that is internally and security challenged. This study identified three major security issues in the region: militancy, sea piracy and pipeline vandalism. In attempting to discuss these security issues of the region, this study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Statistical and non-statistical data used in the study were generated mainly from secondary sources, viz., books, articles, newspapers and organizational reports. Tables, maps and plates were equally used for a deeper understanding of the subject matter. In addition, the study investigated the roles of various security agencies in addressing the Niger Delta insecurity situation and concluded by noting that the Nigerian army, the Police and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) are all actively involved in engineering a country uncomfortable for the operation of militants, vandals and pirates.

Keywords: Militancy, Piracy, Pipeline Vandalism, Internal Security, Niger Delta, Security Agencies

Introduction

As a nation, there is a plethora of security challenges that Nigeria is faced with. In the northeast region, the nation swims in the ocean of insurgency and terrorism. Coming down to the regions of South-South and South-East, one finds a nation struggling with the problems of kidnapping, secessionist agitations and armed robbery. In the Middle Belt region, Nigeria encounters the issues of cattle rustling, banditry and sectarian conflict or ethno-religious clashes. As a region in the country, Niger Delta is not left out; it has its own internal security challenges¹. Taking a quick glance at the region, one would identify the issues of militancy, piracy and pipeline vandalism. Seeking to explain the ubiquity of insecurity in the country,

former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan noted, while writing the forward of the November, 2014 National Security Strategy:

We equally have had security challenges in the South-South, South-East, North-West, North-Central and South-West, suggesting that no part of this country is immune to insecurityⁱⁱ.

Having acknowledged and identified the security challenges of Nigeria, it should equally be mentioned that the country, particularly Niger Delta, has not fared well in economic, social and humanitarian terms as a result of the security issues it is confronted with. According to Ilufoye S. Ogundiya, insecurity in the Niger Delta has led to thousands of deaths. It has also caused displacement of thousands and even destruction of private and public propertiesⁱⁱⁱ. To be more exact, the region recorded 546 deaths in 351 violent incidents in 2018 and over one thousand deaths in 416 violent incidents^{iv}.

In any case, Nigeria has several security agencies saddled with the responsibility of protecting lives and properties of the citizenry, combating crime and upholding peace and stability. Among such are the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC). Exigently, and as the title of this paper suggests, the objective is to cast a panoramic gaze at the various security challenges confronting the Niger Delta and to investigate the performance, or rather the efforts of the security agencies in addressing the region's security issues. Before that, however, this study will briefly look at the Niger Delta as a region within Nigeria



The Region of Niger Delta

Source: Researchgate.net

The Niger Delta in Nigeria



Source: Researchgate.net

The Niger Delta is situated in the Gulf of Guinea. It is located in West Africa between latitude 3° and 6° N and longitude 5° and 8° E^v. The region, since the year 2000, incorporates the 9 oil-producing states in south-south and south-east namely: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. It covers an area of 75,000 km². Demographically, it has human population of 32 million^{vi}. This figure constitutes 22% of Nigeria's total population. 62% of the Niger Delta population is below the age of 30^{vii}.

As a region, the Niger Delta moves in the vehicle of ethnic of heterogeneity. It is made up of over 40 different ethnic groups who speak about 120 languages. The notable ethnic groups within the region are the Ijaw (the largest), the Itsekiri, the Urhobo, the Ibibio, and the Efik. As a coastal region, fishing is the predominant occupation of the people. Besides, the people also engage in other agricultural activities like farming^{viii}. The infant mortality rate is 120 per thousand while estimated youth unemployment (ages 15-24) is 40%. As at 2004, the region had 43% poverty rate; however, 75% perceive themselves as "poor". It is also reported that 76 to 80% of population in rural areas and 50 to 55% of population in urban areas do not have access to safe drinking water. The primary source of energy is firewood (73%). It is only 34% of population that has access to electric power, when available^{ix}.

Very importantly, the Niger Delta happens to be the headquarters of Nigeria's crude oil resources. According to Thomas A. Imobighe, "the [Niger] Delta accounts for almost all of

Nigeria's gas and oil production which in turn represents 80% of government revenue, 95% of export receipts and 90% of foreign exchange earnings.”^x The richness of the region in crude oil resources is the cardinal reason for the presence of numerous local and international mining and extraction companies in the region. For a better understanding of the wealth of the region in oil and gas production, recourse is made to the table below.

Oil and Gas Production	
Crude oil production, mid-2011	About 2.3 million barrels per day (including condensate); 3.2 million barrels per day installed capacity; supplies 95% of Nigeria's export earnings and 80% of federal government revenue.
Main international operators and principal Nigerian companies; all have onshore operations except ExxonMobil	Shell (Shell Petroleum Development Company, Nigeria, Ltd); Chevron (Chevron Nigeria, Ltd.); ExxonMobil (Mobil Producing Unlimited); Eni (Nigerian Agip Oil Company); Total (Elf) (Total E&P Nigeria Limited, formerly EPNL).
Main terminals/offshore platforms	Bonny Island (Shell), Brass River (Eni/Agip), Escravos (Chevron), Forcados (Shell), Kwa Iboe platform (Mobil), Odudu platform (Total), Pennington (Chevron), etc.
Oil reserves	36 billion barrels—11th in the world, 2nd in Africa; estimated reserve life of 41 years
Natural gas reserves	187 trillion cubic feet—7th largest gas reserves in the world
Oil/gas pipelines & fields	Over 7,000 km of pipelines; 606 oil fields
Gas plants/LNG	30; NLNG Plant with 6 trains; 2 LNG plants in construction in Brass and Olokola

Source: *Extracted from Francis, Lapin and Rossiasco, "Securing Development and Peace in the Niger Delta," 11.*

Security Challenges of the Niger Delta

Militancy, piracy and pipeline vandalism are the common internal security challenges confronting the Niger Delta. Before delving into proper discussion of these challenges, it would be quite sensible and rational to examine the factor that precipitates the challenges.

To start with, oil is the root cause of the Niger Delta crisis. Oil was first discovered in the region in 1956 and since then Nigeria's source of wealth gradually shifted to petroleum. The discovery of oil at Oloibiri village in today's Bayelsa State attracted various multi-national prospecting extraction companies. Shell British Petroleum commenced oil production and exploration in the region in February 1958^{xi}. At the beginning of its commercial oil activities, Shell produced 5100 barrels per day. Years later, its production increased to 2.4 million barrels per day^{xii}. Oil multinational corporations operating within the region have made fortune of over 100 billion U.S. dollars over the years^{xiii}. Regardless, the companies cared less about the environmental health of the region they operate in. The activities of the oil companies have resulted in environmental problems arising from oil spillages, pipeline explosions and gas flaring^{xiv}.

According to Dr. Adati A. Kadafa, a total of about 9-19 million (1.5 million tons) of oil were spilled in the Niger Delta region from the 1950s up to 2012^{xv}. A resounding oil spill in the region occurred in 1978 when Forcados Terminal tank failed, spilling about 580,000 barrels. Between 17th and 30th January 1980, there occurred an oil spill of about 421,000 barrels at Funiwa Field. The 1998 Jesse Pipeline Explosion, among the destructions it caused, led to over 1000 deaths in Delta State^{xvi}.



Plate 1: Havocs of Oil Exploration on the Niger Delta Environment

Source: Researcher's Field Work 3rd August, 2023



Plate 2: *Havocs of Oil Exploration on the Niger Delta Environment*

Source: Field materials obtained from indigenes of Bayelsa and Rivers States, March 2023.

For all of these, the people of Niger Delta were not pleased. Reports emanating from different quarters show that. The Ogoni Bill of Rights is one of such reports or documents which contain the grievances of the people. A part of the Bill raised the following issues:

- i. The search for oil has caused severe land and food shortages in Ogoni land;
- ii. Ogoni has suffered and continues to suffer the degrading effects of oil exploration and exploitation: lands, streams and creeks are totally and continually polluted;
- iii. The atmosphere is forever charged with hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide;
- iv. Many villages experience the infernal quaking of the wrath of gas flares which have been burning 24 hours a day for 33 years;
- v. Acid rain, oil spillages and blowouts are common (in Ogoni land)^{xvii}.

In his book entitled *Genocide in Nigeria: the Ogoni Tragedy*, late Ken Saro-Wiwa, a famous Ogoni-born environmentalist and the leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), elucidated the plight of his people wrote:

In 1990, the Ogoni people took stock of their situation in Nigeria and found that for all the wealth of their land, and in spite of the fact that an estimated 100 billion US dollars had been taken from the land in thirty-two years of oil mining, they had no schools, no hospitals and no roads. They found that there was intense pressure on their land and that they lived in a poisoned environment in which wildlife, etc. could not survival^{xviii}.

In the face of the region's difficulties, some groups and individuals decided to tread the path of violence and extremism. The violence of such groups and individuals, which has

jeopardized the security of the Niger Delta, would be studied under the following subheadings:

Militancy

There are various groups and individuals in the Niger Delta who believed violence to be a means to an end. Such include the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Alhaji Asari Dokubo, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) led by Henry Okah, the Martyrs Brigade, the Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF) led by Ateke Tom, the Bush Boys,^{xxix} the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), the Red Egbesu Water Lions, Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF), Niger Delta Red Squad (NDRS) and the Adaka Boro Avengers.^{xx} These groups employ various tactics in pursuit of their objectives. They kidnap, kill, bomb and engage in hostage-taking. A total of 308 hostage incidents between 1999 and 2007 in the region were traced to various militant groups.^{xxi} Militant groups also attacked different oil companies within the region. Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC), Chevron and Total Elf (IFE) have had their staff and facilities molested and destroyed on different occasions. In addition, militants in the region attack police stations, kill and injure naval officers, police officers and soldiers, and bomb aircraft and public and private facilities^{xxii}. A report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2007 showed the seriousness of militancy in the region. The report stated that over fifty armed groups with an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 armed youths operated in the region as at 2005^{xxiii}. It is important to note, just as Prof. Sheriff F. Folarin and Faith O. Oviasogie pointed out, that economic gains are the primary motive behind the activities of the militants in the Niger Delta region^{xxiv}.

Piracy

This is another security challenge of the Niger Delta. According to International Maritime Bureau (IMB), piracy is “an act of boarding or attempting to board any ship with the intent to commit theft or any other crime and with the apparent intent or capability to use force in the furtherance of that act.”^{xxv} The UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme classified pirate groups in the region into three, viz., Deep Offshore Pirates, Coastal and Low-Reach Pirates and Riverine Criminals. The first group is “capable of operating far from the coast of West Africa and target international shipping traffic; the number...is estimated to be between four and six.” The second group “operates up to 40nm from shore, primarily targeting local vessels. These groups usually operate close to their hideouts, or bases, onshore and have a limited operational range capacity. The targets are mainly fishing vessels and cargo vessels and tankers engaged in cabotage operations.” The last group is “often referred to locally as ‘pirates’; they target local passenger vessels [and engage in] illegal oil bunkering.”^{xxvi}

Pirates engage in arms trafficking. They collaborate with various criminal organizations to move arms and ammunitions from one point to another. This exacerbates the problems of

terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria. It also threatens national development and people's fundamental right to life. Between 2006 and 2014, about 187 people died in Nigeria as a result of the activities of the pirates^{xxvii}.

The crime of piracy is common in the Niger Delta due to the geographical position of the region. In fact, "the Niger Delta accounts for about 450 km of Nigeria's coastal zone with over 75 per cent of the population living along the coastline."^{xxviii}



Plate 3: Pirates in the Niger Delta

Source: Nwalozie, "Exploring Contemporary Sea Piracy."

Pipeline Vandalism

Oil pipeline vandalism infers the "deliberate breaking of oil pipelines with the intent to steal petroleum products or to sabotage the government."^{xxix} It is arguably a lucrative career choice among miscreants in the region^{xxx}. It is perpetrated by criminal syndicates who are motivated by the desire to loot oil products for material aggrandizement^{xxxi}.

Nigeria's oil pipeline system is magnificent. Ali Okoli and Sunday Orinya captured it in this manner:

Nigeria has a total pipeline grid of 5001 kilometers. This consists of 4315 kilometers of multi-product pipelines and 666 kilometers of crude oil pipelines. These pipelines transverse the country, forming a network that inter-connects the 22 petroleum storage depots, the four refineries at Port Harcourt (1 and 11) and Kaduna and Warri^{xxxii}.

Pipeline vandalism poses a serious threat to Nigeria's development/economy, security and environment. The Central Bank of Nigeria reported in 2016 that pipeline vandalism has affected the country's output projection adversely, making it to drop from 2.2 million barrels per day to less than 1.1 million barrels per day^{xxxiii}. Between 2006 and 2016, reports had it that there were over 16,083 cases of 'pipeline tampering' and vandalism in Nigeria, amounting to a loss of 174.57 billion naira (i.e. over 500 million dollars in today's money value). In just one year also (i.e. between 2016 and 2017), the country recorded a total of 992 cases of pipeline vandalism which led to loss of 167 billion naira (or over 500 million dollars in today's money value)^{xxxiv}. The frequency of attacks by pipeline vandals and scoundrels causes domestic and foreign investors to lose interest in Nigeria's oil sector due to the security implications and effects of power generation^{xxxv}. Environmentally, pipeline vandalism leads to pollution of the Niger Delta waters, air and land. In the words of Chukwuemeka O. Otegh and R.C. Eze, the environmental effects of pipeline vandalism include:

...freshwater pollution, air pollution, chemical pollution, soil pollution, soil and land pollution, urbanization and unsustainable domestic waste management, unsustainable agricultural practice..., malnutrition and diseases, freshwater shortages, habitat and ecological systems loss and insecurity...^{xxxvi}

Intervention of Nigerian Security Agencies in Niger Delta Security Issues

Concerted efforts have been made by various security organizations in Nigeria towards addressing insecurity in the Niger Delta. Several military operations have been launched in the region. In October 2017, for example, the Nigerian Army launched Operation Crocodile Smile to fight against militancy and other crimes in the following Niger Delta states, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers. While addressing troops to signal the commencement of the Operation, Maj.-Gen. Enobong Udoh, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 6 Division, Nigerian Army, said:

Operation Crocodile Smile is not a show of force but a confidence-building patrol that seeks to reassure the people of Rivers State and the Niger Delta that the army is ready to work.

We are ready to work in close synergy and collaboration with other security services and agencies of government to ensure that there is peace and security for the people.

Our operation aims to reassure the public that we are ready to fight crimes like cultism, militancy, and kidnapping so that people can go about their business without fear^{xxxvii}.

To a considerable extent, some military operations in the Niger Delta have proved to be a success. The successes of the 133 Special Forces Battalion of Nigerian Army in the precursor

operation to Exercise Crocodile Smile in 2016 validate this point. In that precursor operation, Premium Times reported that the army gunned down five militants who attacked them and arrested about 23 suspects. The army was also able to recover the following used by militants and other miscreants in the region: an abandoned engine boat, two AK-47 rifles with 199 rounds of ammunition, 11 pump action guns, a locally made revolver pistol, 292 cartridges of live ammunition, four electricity generating sets and a camp gas cooker^{xxxviii}.



Plate4: Items and weapons recovered from militants in the Niger Delta

Source: *Premium Times*, August 27, 2016.

On its part, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) gather intelligence and mounts close surveillance on militants and vandals in the region. On November 2, 2016, the police made a significant arrest. The arrest was that of Abiodun Amos, leader of a militant group in Niger Delta, who planned to bomb 3rd Mainland Bridge in Lagos using some explosives. Some of the exhibits the police caught Amos with were two cartons of explosive devices and 125 detonators, and two AK 47 rifles. On its official website, the NPF reported:

After a painstaking surveillance and monitoring by the police (IRT) team, the principal suspect Abiodun Amos alias SENTI who is the leader of the Militant Gang planning to bomb the 3rd Mainland Bridge in Lagos was arrested on 2nd November, 2016 in a hideout at the bank of Majidun River in Ikorodu area of Lagos State and two AK 47 rifles recovered from his possession. The principal suspect is an Ijaw man and a native of Ese Odo LGA of Ondo State. He is an Explosive Expert who specializes in assembling and modifying large scale Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) for terrorist act. The suspect also volunteered confessional statement

to the police and named other members of the militant group that are still at large^{xxxix}.

As a para-military agency charged with the responsibility of protecting lives and properties, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) intervenes in the Niger Delta crisis through its anti-vandalism/illegal bunkering campaigns^{xl}. Section 3(1) (f) (i) of the 2007 NSCDC Amendment Act empowered the agency to investigate offence of oil pipeline vandalism^{xli}. The agency collaborates with the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMANA) and the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) in its activities in the region^{xlii}. Beside its fight against pipeline vandalism, the NSCDC also does the following in the Niger Delta region:

- Assists in emergency situations through its emergency response team;
- Rehabilitates and provides emergency shelters to disaster victims, especially in communities prone to fire outbreak and other natural disaster;
- Reports on areas known to be at risk of natural and/or man-made disaster;
- Assist in search and rescue operations^{xliii}.

Conclusion

From the analysis in this study, it is obvious that the region of Niger Delta is a blessing to Nigeria. To a large extent, and over some decades now, the huge petroleum resources in the region have sustained Nigeria's economy and helped to place Nigeria on the world map of highest oil-producing countries. At the same time, insecurity has bedeviled the region and Nigeria at large. As discussed in the body of the research, militancy, sea piracy and oil-pipeline vandalism are the common security challenges confronting the region. These challenges have a strong negative impact on the environment, national development, economy, and regional and national peace and stability. Nevertheless, various security agencies, as constitutionally demanded of them, have made concerted efforts towards addressing the Niger Delta problems. The result of this study shows that the Nigerian army, the police and the NSCDC are all actively involved in engineering a country uncomfortable for the operation of militants, vandals and pirates

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