
AN OVERVIEW OF THE MILITARIZATION OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract: *This paper examined the militarization of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It observed that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is an over militarized region. This is as a result of the contest for the resources in the region by internal and external forces. In the years before colonialism, it was the consolidation of city-states, the slave trade and later the legitimate trade in palm oil, but today the issue of contest is crude oil and gas resources. This has led to high military presence in the region and confrontation between the armed forces and other para-military units in the Niger Delta with organized militant movements and dissenting element in communities, which has led to the destruction of oil bearing communities. Therefore, the paper suggested that government should address the demands of the people of the resource rich Niger Delta with the aim of demilitarizing the region.*

Keywords: *Overview; Militarization; Niger Delta Region; Nigeria*

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Fidelis A.E. Paki (2018), An Overview of the Militarization of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. *J. of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, Vol. 10, Number 1, Pp. 71-97

INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is an over militarized region. This is as a result of the contest for the resources in the region by internal and external forces. Such contests have become the fate of resources rich

states of the world, especially in Africa where “resource conflicts” or “resource wars” are fought in the continent, with its attendant adverse effects on the people. During the Cold War era, rebel movements were sponsored from outside Africa to fight their governments, but with the end of the Cold War, the rebels now have turned to generating the much needed financial resources internally and many of them turned to illegal exploitation of resources (Albert, 2017). Africa’s resource wars have been attributed to long-standing pervasive political and social ills; poor governance, corruption, the breakdown of law and order, and collapsing economies have led to the diversion of large quantities of arms from government armories and security forces into the hands of civilians, warlords and criminals (Oche, 2005; Sesay and Ismail, 2003). The effect is the militarization of resource rich regions of Africa. The case of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is unique. In the years before colonialism, it was the consolidation of city-states, the slave trade and later the legitimate trade in palm oil, but today the issue of contest is crude oil and gas resources. But what do we mean by militarization?

By militarization we mean “a set of attitudes and social practices which regards war and the preparation of war as a normal and desirable activity” (Mann, 1987: 36). This involves “the use of the threat of violence to settle political conflicts, the legitimization of state violence, the curtailment of freedom of opinion, the domination of military values over civilian life, the violation of human rights, extra judicial killings and the gross repression of the people” (Chunakara, 1994). Therefore, the “militarization of the Niger Delta involves the use of maximum military force rather than political action by the Federal Government to stamp out militancy using coordinated military counter-insurgency tactics and operations” (Courson, 2009: 19-20).

The main objective of this paper is to describe an overview of the militarization of the Niger Delta. Such descriptive approach is historical in orientation as it x-rays the phenomenon from the past to the present. The central argument is that it is the struggle over the

resources in the Niger Delta that is responsible for the militarization of the Niger Delta. To this end the paper is divided into four main sections. The next section is the pre-independence period. This is followed by the post-independence period and the concluding remarks end the paper.

Pre-Independence Period

Historically, the militarization of the Niger Delta can be traced as far back in history to the emergence and consolidation of city-states in the coastal region of Nigeria, which was largely motivated by struggle over the resources in the region. This can be traced to the interplay between internal and external forces (Dike, 1956; Talbot, 1983). Internally, for instance, at times Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) were required to settle disputes over land and fishing rights, as well as over traditional leaders' political jurisdictions (Talbot, 1983:143). However, the interest of external forces in the resources in the Niger Delta brought another dimension to conflicts in the region. For instance, the slave trade and the trade in palm produces also involved trade in arms and ammunition (Alagoa, 1964). Evidently, it was the clash of interest between internal and external forces that led to the deportation of King Jaja of Opobo (1887), Nana of Itsekiri (1892), King Ibanichuka of Okrika (1896), King Overnarambe of Benin (1897) and that of the King of Brass (Joab-Peterside, 2007). The clash was precipitated by struggle over control of commercial and political rights between traditional rulers and colonial agents (the Royal Niger Company).

Kalu (1980) in the account of the British expedition against the Brass people of Nembe for destroying the Royal Niger Company, mentioned the range of firearms retrieved as including 106 cannons, a machine gun, 445 blunder busses with swivels for mounting on war canoes, 1500 flintlock guns, 14 tons of gun powder and 100 case shots made of bamboo and filled with iron balls and pieces of scrap metals. As Joab-Peterside (2007: 3) noted that the;

... military adventurism derived from establishment, expansion and consolidation of the Southern Nigerian Protectorate between 1900 and 1913 by brute force through protectorate troops and police, were either directly used in punitive expeditions, patrols, and escorts or maintained as threat against the people of Niger Delta.

It was with the use of superior fire power that the British and its agents forcefully conquered and annexed the emerging city-states in the Niger Delta and join with other segment of the country to form the Nigerian State.

The Post-Independence Period

The militarization of the Niger Delta region during the post-independence era takes various manifestations as indicated in the under listed categorizations:

i. The Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) Rebellion

After the pacification of the Niger Delta and the subsequent formation of the Nigerian state in 1960, there was a lull in the militarization of the region until 1966 when Isaac Jasper AdakaBoro with his lieutenants, Samuel Owonaro and Nottingham Dick, formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) and declared the southern part of the present Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States as independent Niger Delta People's Republic (NDPR), citing development neglect arising largely from ethnically-based political domination as the reason. Isaac Boro (later rose to major in the Nigerian Army) and his compatriots were provoked by what they saw as social neglect, ethnic chauvinism, political marginalization and economic deprivation, orchestrated by Nigeria's post-independent ruling elites presided over by elements of majority ethnic groups in the country. This much was made clear by Boro, while addressing his men (Tebekaemi, 1982:116):

Let us examine with some latitude whether the state of development is to any extent commensurate with a tint of the bulk of

already tapped mineral and agricultural resources...Therefore, remember your seventy-year-old grandmother who still farms before she eats; remember also your poverty stricken people; remember too your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom.

However, the Boro's rebellion last for only twelve days (from 23 February to March 6, 1966) and crumbled under a "police action" declared by the Federal Government (Azaiki, 2007; Asuni, 2009; Ibaba and Etekpe, 2013). Federal troops routed the gang when Isaac Boro, Samuel Owonaru and Nottingham Dick were arrested, tried for treason, convicted on 21 June, 1966 and sentenced to death. The trio was saved by the military putsch of 29 July, 1966 which led to the emergence of Colonel Yakubu Gowon as head of state. Eventually, when civil war broke out in the country, as part of effort to illicit support of the minority ethnic groups in the eastern region, Gowon granted the convicts pardon (Egbowole, 2010).

As Alagoa (1969:7-8) correctly pointed out that, "the forms of struggle in the region have continued to change with time as the antagonists and protagonists also change with time." The discovery of crude oil in the Niger Delta has added another dimension to the militarization of the region as the struggle shifted to crude oil and associated resources. Crude oil exploration and production activities has led to agitation of rights of oil bearing communities and emergence of ethnically based group that fight for resource control rights. It was reported that "a commander of the Federal Third Marine Commando during the war who became a military and later civilian head of state – Olusegun Obasanjo – opined early in 2001 that the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) was fought over oil" (Ikporukpo, 2002: 210-211). This was because by this time proceeds from oil has started making significant contribution to the national coffers.

ii. The Ogoni Uprising

From the 1990s a cycle of protest, sometimes violent against the Nigerian state and the multi-national oil companies (MNOCs) and repression had led to the militarization of large parts of the Niger Delta, with widespread deployment of army, air force, navy, and paramilitary Mobile Police Units, mostly at oil facilities across the delta (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Such protests have been organized by community organizations, ethnic groups and civil society organizations (CSOs). For instance, in the 1990s, oil was a major factor that led to the mobilization of the Ogoni ethnic group, with the formation of Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), issued the Ogoni Bill of Rights, championed by Ken SaroWiwa that brought the issue of marginalization, environmental rights, self-determination, atrocities of MNOCs and ethnic cleansing to limelight (Saro-Wiwa, 1996; Suberu, 1999; Isumonah, 2001).

Alapiki (2008: 33-34) documented that the Ogoni people specifically demanded for the following; the restoration of the devastated environment, that Shell should bury all pipelines, stop gas flaring, restore mangrove forest and rejuvenate destroyed land, provide hospitals, pipeborne water and electricity to all of Ogoniland, and pay land rent for all land appropriated by Shell in Ogoni since 1958. The MOSOP waited for two years after submission of the Bill of Rights without meaningful dialogue or response from the state and Shell and on 31 December, 1992, sent a letter of ultimatum to Shell to pay royalties and compensation within 30 days or quit Ogoniland. At the expiration of the ultimatum, the MOSOP staged a non-violent protest on 4 January 1993, which involved about 300,000 protesters. During the Ogoni Uprising, Ken Saro-Wiwa had effectively mobilized the youth wing of MOSOP through large matches and demonstrations attracting hundreds of thousands of people to highlight the plight of the Ogoni people against the Nigeria state and MNOCs (especially Shell) operating in Ogoni land, which was acknowledged internationally, that later perceived as a threat to even

other Ogoni liberal kinsmen and the subsequent death of four Ogoni prominent chiefs.

In response to MOSOP's protests, the Federal Government established a special security force, named the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force (RSISTF), which was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Ogonis during the period it occupied Ogoniland, from 1993 to 1998 (Human Rights Watch, 2002). It was virtually a military occupation visited on Ogoniland. Some observers have described the manner of response by government security forces as "genocide in Ogoniland" (Alapiki, 2008: 33-34). For instance, international human groups have accused the Nigerian government of responsibility for the death of about 1,000 Ogoni people. In one incident in Kaa community, at least 35 men, women and children were massacred by soldiers and over 5,000 people rendered homeless (*ibid*).

The MOSOP leader, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and 8 other Ogoni human rights agitators were arrested, tried by a military tribunal for treason and other trump-up charges and sentenced to death. On 10 November, 1995, they were executed by hanging at the Port Harcourt prison, Rivers State, a death that attracted international condemnation (Human Right Watch, 1995). The crisis in Ogoni further led to conflict with their neighbouring ethnic groups, the Andoni and Okrika. It was claimed that over 1,000 Ogonis were killed in clashes with the Andoni and Okrika ethnic groups in 1993 (Frynas, 2001). However, (Human Rights Watch, 1995: 11) has provided evidence that the government played an active role in "fermenting such ethnic antagonism" and that "some attacks attributed to rural minorities were in fact carried out by army troops in plain cloth". Such views were "plausible because Andoni leaders interviewed denied having any problems with their Ogonineighbours" (Osaghae, 1995: 337).

The effectiveness of MOSOP in resisting the Federal Government and Shell, and the international condemnation which followed the murder of the Ken SaroWiwa and 8 other Ogoni kinsmen, gave

impetus to other oil bearing ethnic groups in the Niger Delta with similar problems to agitate for their rights. For instance, the Aklaba Declaration of the Egi people, the Oron Bill of Rights, the Urhobo Economic Summit Resolution, etc (Azaiki, 2007: 142). In addition, a major national event which transformed the thinking of youths in the Niger Delta was the self-succession bid of General Sani Abacha, in which youths from all local government area in the country were invited to Abuja on a "two million-man march". The Niger Delta youths who attended the event saw the impressive splendor and magnificence of the federal capital and the realization that it was partly developed with proceeds from the oil resources extracted from their region, returned to agitate for the development and self-determination of the Niger Delta people.

iii. The Kaiama Declaration

Another ethnic group which activities significantly led to the militarization of the Niger Delta was the Ijaw. Similarly, various groups in Ijaw organized a meeting and present at the meeting were several members of the Ijaw Council for Human Rights (ICHR), the Movement of the Ijaw in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), the Chikoko Movement (CM), the Movement for the Restoration of Ogbia (MORETO), Elimotu Movement, Meinbutu, the Ijaw Justice Association, Arogbo Freedom Fighters, Ogbe-Ijoh Justice Front, Ijaw National Congress in the United States of America (INCUSA), the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA) and the Ijaw Peace Movement. Others were the Okpolom Imo Engenni, the Nembe 1895 Movement and the national Union of Bayelsa Students, etc. These groups had organized the All Ijaw Youth Conference (AIYC) which attracted over 5,000 youths drawn from over 500 communities met on December 11, 1998 at Kaiama in Bayelsa State and proclaimed the "Kaiama Declaration" (KD), demands that were similar to that of the Ogoni Bill of Rights. The AIYC was initially non-violent, but the way some activities of the AIYC were conducted was likely to lead to violence and the inability of government to curtail and suppress their agitations led to the formation of militancy movements subsequently.

One significant outcome of the AIYC was the formation of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) to implement the KD. The KD attributed the degradation of the Niger Delta eco-system, the prevailing insecurity and political crisis in the region to systemic internal colonialism and called for the withdrawal of military forces stationed in the region, and warned oil companies which relied on military protection that they would be regarded as enemies (Alapiki, 2008). The KD demanded among others includes the following;

... the immediate withdrawal from Ijaw land of all military forces of occupation and repression by the Nigerian state. Any oil company that employs the services of the armed forces of the Nigerian state to protect its operations will be viewed as an enemy of the Ijaw people. Family members of military personnel stationed in Ijaw land should appeal to their people to leave the Ijaw area alone (Azaiki, 2007: 202).

Significantly, Kaiama Community where the AIYC was held is the home town of late Major Isaac Boro and the meeting revived the "Boro spirit" for the implementation the KD and launch an armed struggle against government and MNOCs in the Niger Delta.

iv. The Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) Uprising

Initially, Felix Tuodolo, a liberal, was elected as the IYC president. After his tenure, a radical, Alhaji Mujahid Abubakar Dokubo-Asari assumed leadership of the IYC. It was Dokubo-Asari who after his tenure as president of IYC that hijacked the Niger Delta struggle by forming the Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) to agitate for self-determination. Earlier Dokubo-Asari and two of his friends had gone to Libya, received military training and got converted to Islam to return to Nigeria to start militancy activities. It was almost at the same time that Ateke Tom formed the Niger Delta Vigilante

(NDV) for similar motives. Both militia leaders had earlier used their supporters as thugs to support the Rivers State governor, Dr. Peter Odili, who was the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate in the 2003 governorship election. Shortly after the election, Dogubo-Asari had major disagreement with the governor and became arch enemies and attention was instead shifted to Ateke Tom who had enormous patronage from the Rivers State government and was able to raise enough arms and troops to engage Dogubo-Asari in violent conflict of supremacy. With the emergence and support from other numerous splinter groups in Rivers State, attacked each other's bases with several people killed and property worth millions of naira destroyed in Buguma, Okrika, Port Harcourt and its environ. On October 1, 2004, Dogubo-Asari threatened guerrilla operation code named "Operation Locust Feast", if oil companies operating in the Niger Delta did not shut down (Asuni, 2009b: 15). This announcement sparked panic in world oil markets as the price of crude oil shot up to \$50 a barrel, a record high at that time (ibid).

The armed forces, in an attempt to stop the spate of violence in Rivers State, carried out air raid on suspected bases of militia groups. However, the government suppression of militia movements in the violence was directed mostly at the NDPVF. Albert (2017: 16) reported that the forest gave the NDPVF such tactical advantages that its leader, Dogubo-Asari, once boasted:

We own this place, this Niger Delta, these creeks of Ijawland, these mangroves and swamps. We were in this creek for eleven months, the soldiers were flying all over with their helicopters, they were going with their hi-tech boats and radars, but they didn't see us.

Attempts to fight the militants around the forests proved costly for the Nigerian military. The forests enabled the militants to ambush,

capture and sometimes kill their adversaries. Most of the hostages taken by the militants were kept in the highly forested creeks.

The NDV and NDPVF only disarmed with a negotiated settlement, which led to the submission of 937 assorted arms and 5,706 rounds of ammunitions by the two factions and associated groups (Oche, 2005:73-79; Nsirimovu, 2005:164). With their militancy movements dissolved, Dogubo-Asari and Ateke Tom aligned their aspirations to Chief Government Ekpemupolo alia Tom Polo.

v. The Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) Insurgency

Asuni (2009b: 16-17) observed that by 2005, certain political events in the country led to the uniting of militant leaders and subsequently militarization of the Niger Delta, namely the arrest of Chief DSP Alamiyeseigha, the former governor of Bayelsa state, Dogubo-Asari, leader of the NDPVF and Olo, a leader of the Klansmen Konfraternity (KKK) in River state. This made Farah Dagogo and Victor Ben (Boy Loaf) to leave Rivers State for the safety of Delta State, due to the sense of insecurity, to join forces with Tom Polo, who became the arrow head for the formation of the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Thus, in 2006, the MEND was formed to continue the self-determination drive of members of the Ijaw ethnic group. Though it was believed to have been headed by Henry Okah, an international arms dealer, discussions with ex-militants indicates that he joined the MEND in later days and headship was only conceded to him because of his vast knowledge and international connections that were thought to be a plus to the arms struggle. He however had no control over troops. It was Tom Polo who was referred to as the general officer commanding (GOC). Tom Polo, a successful business magnet and his friends formed groups that later metamorphosed to the MEND.

Prior to the formation of MEND, Tom Polo in 1998 had formed an association known as "Akerenkofebaghaogbo", which literary meaning is "association of Akerenkoko people that death cannot destroy". There was also the formation of the Federation of Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), where Dr. Oboko Bello was president and political spokesperson, while Tom Polo was the mobilizing officer. The FNDIC spoke of Ijaw self-determination, while blaming oil companies and the Federal Government as its enemies and perceive the Itsekiris as major beneficiary of government and oil company policies (Asuni, 2009a).

This period coincided with the establishment of numerous youth groups in the Niger Delta such as Mienbutus, Musiend, Agelebagha, Egbesu Boys of Africa, Ijaw Freedom Fighters, the Atagbate Youths, the One More Rivers to Cross Youths, the Olabrakon-Opre Youths, the Oweisan-Ogbo, the Adaka Marine, the Ogbokore Youths, the Alagbada Youths of Kombo, the Tompolo Boys, etc., and other ethnic associations. According to Ikporukpo (2002: 210) the impact of the Ogoni and the Ijaw youth protests has been such that towards the end of the last century, there was hardly anywhere in the Niger Delta where there was not one form of protest or another and several social movements and ethnic based organizations emerged all pursuing the cause of the oil producing Niger Delta Region. There also emerged several ethnic youth organizations – Urhobo Youths, Isoko Youths, Ikwere Youths, Itsekiri Youths, etc., and in some cases, for example, Union of the Niger Delta and Oil Producing Communities Association.

Prior to the KD, the flash point of inter-ethnic tension with its attendant militarization shifted to Warri in Delta State, where conflicts between the Itsekiris and the Urhobos or between the Itsekiris and the Ijaws engulfed. Meanwhile, these three rival ethnic groups – the Urhobos, the Itsekiris, and the Ijaws – were already engaged in a deadly struggle for the right to win contracts, rent, and employment from the local oil companies and the issue of location

of local government headquarters further aggravated the struggle (Asuni, 2009a). Warri saw heavy fighting in 1997, 1999 and 2003. At the end of the Ijaw/Itsekiri conflict in 1999, government was able to convince warring parties to disarm, but no weapon of repute was submitted and it was these hidden arms that were to be used to further pursue the "Ijaw course" in the Niger Delta. With its superior knowledge of the creeks, Ijaw fighters dominated the war and government forces were unable to enter the creeks to effectively police the Niger Delta. At this time, Ijaw fighters were routinely engaged in conflict with other ethnic groups such as Ijeja and Urhobo. Those who were demobilized from these conflicts with no means of employment and in order to eke out a living, formed criminal gangs that were engaged in kidnapping of oil workers, theft and sea piracy in the Niger Delta.

As stated earlier, a good number of the members that formed "militant" groups had participated actively during the Ijaw / Itsekiri wars. Some individuals who participated actively in the Ijaw / Itsekiri conflict in Warri and its environ, having been convinced of the benefits of armed insurrection, later joined to form militant groups to fight for a broader Niger Delta course. During the Ijaw/Itsekiri conflict in the old Warri division, Tom Polo provided a rallying point and unparalleled leadership for members of his ethnic group. He also got patronage from MNOCs, especially Chevron that awarded surveillance contracts worth millions of Naira to him. Therefore, when the MEND was formed it became a loose coalition of Niger Delta militant groups in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States. Tom Polo directed the affairs of the MEND from his Camp 5 headquarters at Oporoza in Delta state and GOC Western Niger Delta, assisted by Victor Ben Ebikabowei alias Boyloaf as Second in Command and GOC Central Niger Delta with his camp at Agge in Bayelsa state and Farah Dagogo, headed the Eastern Niger Delta of MEND forces. In addition, MEND leaders such as Joshua Mckiver, Africa Owei, Gidson Kala, KemAgbakara, John Togo, IniloSinite, Soboma George and others

had their camps dotted all over the creeks of the Niger Delta (Etekpe, 2009; Asuni, 2009b).

The MEND's activities became public on January 11, 2006 when it attacked EA Oil field off the coast in Delta State and abducted four expatriate oil workers that were held hostage for nineteen days (Coventry Cathedral 2009: 123-124). The hostages were only released after ransom payment. On 15 January, 2006, it attacked the Benisede oil flow station, reportedly killing fourteen soldiers and two civilians (Howden, 2006). The MEND also blew up a crude oil pipeline at Escravos in Delta state which feeds the Warri oil refinery which treats about 125,000 barrels of crude per day. This caused a shutdown of the refinery due to lack of supplies. Shell's offshore oil platform and four flow stations were also attacked and damaged (Nwajiaku-Dahou, 2007). Also, in January 2006, ten Nigerian soldiers guarding oil facilities were killed and 221,000 barrels per day was lost in oil production which amounted to 10 percent (\$14.4 million) of Shell's daily production. The Nigerian Agip Oil Company's (NAOC) operational base in Port Harcourt was also attacked, leading to the death of nine people, notably 8 policemen. Still in January, six expatriate oil workers were held hostage, while on 18 February attack on Wilbros (oil servicing company) vessel laying pipe for Shell and abducted nine foreign oil workers (Alapiki, 2008: 37-38; Obi, 2008; 423).

On 29 April 2006, the MEND detonated a car bomb close to the Warri oil refinery. This coincided with the visit of the Chinese President Hu Jintao to Nigeria and the granting of four oil drilling licenses valued at \$4 billion to Chinese oil companies (Obi, 2008: 418). The 'insurgency' group was greatly armed with war boats in bases spread across the Niger Delta and embarked on a sophisticated gorilla campaign of systematically blowing up of oil pipelines and installations, terrorism and illegal bunkering (Alapiki, 2008: 37). The MEND's attacks in 2007 which targeted Shell, Agip and Chevron

facilities led to shut-in of 27 percent or 675,000 bpd out of Nigeria's estimated daily production of 2.4 million bpd (Obi, 2008: 425).

The Camp 5 was a strategic location, which was harnessed effectively to coordinate the activities of the MEND, collecting tolls from vessels due to berth at the Warri port, which constitutes an embarrassment to government (Paki and Ebienu, 2011: 141). Okonta (2006: 14-15) aptly observed that after each major attack, the MEND released emails photographs of hostages and send to the media "to focus the attention of Western governments and the world's media on the Niger Delta, exploiting the blaze of publicity generated by hostage-taking to press their grievances and demands".

The Federal Government was determined to stop the excesses of the MEND. It deployed the Joint Task Force (JTF) on the Niger Delta. This led to military confrontation between the JTF and the MEND that led to the destruction of the Camp 5 with high collateral damages. Attacks and counter-attacks by the security forces and militant youths have grown into a culture of violence in the Delta region, with emergence of organized militant groups. At the height of its campaigns in 2009, MEND's activities led to great oil revenue losses and "it is obvious that everybody has indeed lost something in the Niger Delta crisis" (Etekpe, 2009: 42).

According to Alapiki (2008) the indiscriminate use of military might by the state in the Niger Delta region does not appear to have yielded positive results. It was not military counterinsurgency approach that ended MEND's 'insurgency', rather the Federal Government used dialogue, negotiations and diplomacy. The President Umar Musa Yar'Adua administration through the auspices of the inauguration of the Niger Delta Summit in June 2008, the Niger Delta Technical Committee (NDTC) in September 2008, the establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA) in September 2008, and with implementation of the June 25, 2009 Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP) that ended the MEND's

insurgency. The amnesty program of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants had turned insurgents who were former enemies of the state, have been given rehabilitation in the post-amnesty training through series of exposure to courses in formal and informal education and are now partnering in productive ventures or enterprises in society (Paki, 2016). Between August 6 and October 9, 2009, 20,192 persons demobilized, with total of 2,909 weapons collected, 295,203 ammunition, 1,853 UXO, D-cap and dynamite and 3,454 magazines collected (Koku, 2013:32) and the second phase of the amnesty programme occurred in November 2010, which comprises 6,166 militant representing those that accepted the post 4 October 2009 amnesty offer, which total is 4,602 with 707 weapons, 1976 ammunition, 219 UXO, D-caps and dynamite and 684 magazines were collected (bid: 45). Yet, another 3,642 persons have formed the third phase, which increased the total number to 30,000 ex-militant that are involved in the programme (Oluokun, 2012:38-40).

vi. The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) Assault

Despite the Federal Government's PAP, tension resurfaced following the victory of the All Progressive Congress's (APC) candidate, Gen. Mohammed Buhari, over the candidate of the PDP, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, in the 2015 presidential election and the president's inaugural address on May 29, 2015, which revealed government's plan to significantly curtail the PAP. In June 2015, the Federal Government terminated the ex-militant's pipeline security contracts worth \$103 million a year which was awarded to Global West Vessels Specialist Ltd owned by Tom Polo and began prosecution against the former militant leader for contract fraud (Ezugwu, 2016). He is being tried in absentia in connection with \$231 million missing government fund (Ewokor, 2016). The Federal Government also cut funding to the PAP from #60 billion to #20 billion in the 2016 annual budget, citing corruption. This drastically affected the monthly stipend for ex-militants (Ezugwu, 2016). In addition, the Minister of Transportation, Chief Chubuke Rotimi Ameachi, announced to the consternation of the people the plan of government to relocate the

proposed Nigerian Maritime University (NMU) from its present place, Okerenkoko to Ibusa. These were fueled by government's failure to address local grievances in the Niger Delta region, which led to a new wave of militancy and militarization (Unouha, 2016; Umoru, 2016).

Thus, on February 3, 2016, a new militant group proclaimed its emergence in the Niger Delta, named the NDA, which espouses the political and military objectives to cripple the Nigerian economy (Operation Red Economy); force the government to negotiate the demands in a sovereign conference; re-allocation of Nigerian ownership of oil blocks (in favour of Niger Deltans); and autonomy / self-determination for the Niger Delta (Amaize & Perez, 2016). The group in order to achieve its objective carries out sustained attacks on the country's oil infrastructure mostly owned by foreign MNOCs and the NNPC across the region. The NDA was joined by other militant groups such as the Reformed Niger Delta Avengers (RNDA), the Niger Delta Liberation Force (NDLF), the Red Egbesu Water Lions (REWL), New Delta Suicide Squad (NDSS) and other individuals and groups excluded from the PAP (Ukeje, 2016).

On February 10, 2016, the NDA announcement claimed responsibility for blowing up the Bonny Soku Gas Export Line in Rivers State and earlier ones in the Niger Delta. Notably, earlier on January 14, barely hours after a Federal High Court in Lagos ordered security operatives to arrest Tom Polo, multiple explosions destroyed several oil installations in Gbaramatu, Opudebubor, Okpolama, Kpokpo, Chanomi Creek and Sahara behind Chevron Nigeria Limited in Warri South-West Local Government Area of Delta State. On January 30, 2016, the NAOC pipeline in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State was destroyed, causing massive oil spillage (See NDA's Timeline in Appendix B).

According to Ukeje (2016: 1) the NDA attacks on oil facilities led the state-owned NNPC to reportedly spent N4.023 billion to repair 293

pipeline breaks. These attacks disrupted oil production and forced the MNOCs to declare a force majeure, reducing daily budget benchmark oil production from 2.2 million to between 1.6 and 1.7 mbpd; a 22-year low output for the country. The activities of the NDA considerably reduced the revenue of the federal government of Nigeria. The government lost N1.3 billion (\$6.72 million) daily to NDA critical oil infrastructure attacks, which affected the implementation of the 2016 budget of N6.07 trillion (AFP, 2016; Ezuikwu, 2016). These developments coincided with a national fiscal crisis linked to dwindling global oil prices; from over \$100/barrel to around \$50/barrel. These were clear signs of unavoidable budget deficit in 2016. The NDA activities also affected gas supplies and with inadequate gas supplies, the already dire electricity situation nationwide was further compounded by a 2,500 megawatts drop in power generation (ibid). Furthermore, Nigeria lost its first position as the leading oil producing nation in the African continent to Angola. In its monthly market report for April, 2016, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Country (OPEC), stated that Nigeria produced 1.677 mbpd in March which was a decline compared with the month of February production of 1.744 mbpd. While the oil output of Angola increased from 1.767 mbpd to 1.782 mbpd thereby displacing Nigeria as Africa's leading oil producing state. Notably, this is the second time that Angola displaced Nigeria, the first being in November, 2015 (Thompson, 2016).

According to Adeosun, Ismail & Zengeni (2016: 8-9) the break-away faction of the NDA called the RNDA through its spokesperson Cynthia Whytelisted the following as sponsors of the group: Goodluck Jonathan, immediate past president of Nigeria as grand patron of the NDA, Nyesom Wike, governor of Rivers state, Seriaki Dickson, governor of Bayelsa state, Godswill Akpabio, immediate past governor of Akwa-Ibom state now a Senator of the federal republic of Nigeria, Government Ekpemupolo alias Tompolo, ex-militant warlord turned contractor, Raymond Dokpesi, founder of African Independent Television (AIT). Patrick Akpobolokeami, immediate

past director – general of NIMASA, Kingsley Kuku, onetime head of the Presidential Amnesty Programme, Kimi Angozi, and the Indigenous People of Biafra. Others named as sympathizers of the group include Edwin Clark, a prominent Ijaw leader, Daniel Alabrah, Tony Uranta, Olisa Metuh, former spokesman of the PDP, Anikio Briggs. The group's militants operatives named include Oyege Nimi Brown, Paul Bebenimibo, VIP Timothy and Joshua Macaiver. However, all the aforementioned people named by the RNDA have disassociated themselves with the NDA (Adeosun, Ismail & Zengeni, 2016: 9).

The demands of the group include; implementation of their part of 2014 National Constitutional Conference, otherwise the country will break up forcefully, apology by the President Muhammadu Buhari, Director of State Security Service and Timipre Sylva to the family of DSP Alamiyesegeha for killing him with intimidation and harassment because of its party affiliation, ownership of oil blocks must be in ratio 60: 40 (sixty percent for the oil producing people and forty percent for others non-oil producing people). Commencement of academic programme at the NMU, Okerenkoko, apology by Mr Chubuke Rotimi Ameachi to the Ijaws and the Niger Delta people for his comment on the location of the NMU, cleaning up of Ogoni land and other oil polluted areas in the Niger Delta as well as payment of compensation to them, unconditional release of Mr Nnamdi Ikanu, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra, funding and continuation of the Amnesty Programme, anti-corruption fight should be extended to members of the ruling party, the APC, release of Sambo Dasuki, erstwhile National Security Adviser to immediate past president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, and MNOC and foreign investors must adhere to its ultimatum (Durden, 2016 cited in Adeosun, Ismail & Zengeni, 2016: 9-10). However, an assessment of these demands show that some of the items listed have nothing to do with the region and this is an evidence that the group was formed to militarize at the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari by some politicians whom the present administration's anti-corruption policy did not go down well with it (ibid).

The initial response of government was the promise by President Mohammedu Buhari to deal decisively with the resurgence of oil theft, sabotage of pipelines, and general insecurity in the Niger Delta. This however did not deter the NDA's attack on the country's critical oil infrastructure. The president therefore directed the military to intervene to "crush the new militant group" (Amaize & Perez, 2016). The military immediately deployed its war arsenals to the Niger Delta, scouring communities looking for militant behind the new wave of attacks boasting to "employ all available means and measures within its Rules of Engagement to crush any individual or group that engages in the destruction of strategic assets and facilities of the government in the Niger Delta or any other location" (Onuoha, 2016: 6). The deployment of military equipment and troops to the Niger Delta further militarized the region and raised the possibility of war with catastrophic consequences. It was after the deployment that the military realized that the NDA were not holding any territory and conventional warfare may not end acts of terrorism in the region. However, amidst local and international pressures, it was government's diplomacy, negotiations with major stakeholders and withdrawal of troops that ended the NDA's militancy and the militarization of the Niger Delta.

According to Amaize, Yafugborhi & Brisibe (2016), the Vice-President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, while delivering the second foundation lecture of Elizade University, Ilaramokin, Ondo State, in an address titled *The Future is here Earlier than Thought*, gave reasons why the Federal Government was not holding talks with the NDA on how to put an end to the bombing of the country's oil assets said "the so-called avengers are not freedom fighters, but fighting for their own private pockets and that is the reason why government is not talking with them". He also stated that government has instead awarded a contract of \$280 million as part of an agreement with the Saudi Arabia – led Islamic Coalition Against Terrorism to Vaxity, Anwat Esliki, a retired Major General in the Saudi Armed Forces, the

head of Blackwater, which undertakes such assignments for the Saudi Arabian government, to fight the NDA terrorists.

In a joint statement signed by representatives of a non-governmental organization named the Ijaw People Development Initiative (IPDI), Austin Ozobo and David Ezekiel, said:

We are to reiterate that bombing Niger Delta communities or wasting \$258 million to hire fighters to fight the NDA will not stop Niger Delta quest for self-determination. Rather, it will aggravate and teach aggrieved youths better warfare and how to go about acquiring modern equipment to fight back tomorrow.... We wonder why the government is so bent on wasting huge such amount of money to hire fighters from Saudi Arabia to fight a region that has fed the country for the past 58 years. We are also surprised at the president's decision to hire his Muslim allies to fight the Niger Delta people. Why not Nigerian soldiers? What happened to the 100 gun boats, 5 warships and 3 fighter jets earlier deployed to the creeks to fight the NDA, which turned into a venture intimidating innocent people and invading communities? (Amaize, Yafugborhi & Brisibe, 2016)

However, the government negotiated with important personalities and groups from the region and also rescinded the decision to commission mercenaries to fight terrorism in the Niger Delta and there is presently relative peace in the region.

Concluding Remarks

The foregoing is not the only form of military encounters in the Niger Delta. In addition to violence between the state and organized militant groups, the response of the Nigerian State and MNOCs to the agitations and demands of the oil bearing communities in the Niger Delta have led to the destruction of such communities. State repression and violence have been a common strategy deployed by successive regimes in the country in confronting uprising in the Niger Delta against communities. This often involves the drafting of armed security operatives to the region with the mandate to put such uprising under control. Instances of state violent repression and militarization oil producing communities includes Egbona crisis 1989 –91; Oburu violence 1989; Umnechem Massacre, November, 1990; Bonny Tragedy, 1992; Egi-Obaji Mayhem, 1994; Tai-Baira (Ogoni) Massacre, 1994; Ubima tragedy, 1995; Odi Massacre 1999 (Okumagba, 2012: 33).

This has led to the aversion that the Niger Delta is an over militarized region. Militarization is not good for business and MNOCs are in the Niger Delta for business and business can only prosper in a peaceful environment. It is therefore suggested that government should address the demands of resource rich Niger Delta with the aim to demilitarize the region.

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