

THE IMPACT OF MILITARIZATION OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The main thrust of this paper discussed the impact of militarization of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Niger is Delta famous for crude oil production, but it is crises prone which results to the region been highly militarized. The militarization of the Niger Delta have provided the situation whereby there is a high military presence in the region, which leads to occasional confrontation between the armed forces and other para-military units in the Niger Delta with organized militant movements and dissenting element in communities that are also interested in benefiting from the resources in the region. The paper relied on secondary sources of data collection method. The results of findings show that the militarization of the Niger Delta have considerably adverse impacts on national security and economic stability, formation of armed groups, public service delivery, oil companies and the international community. Therefore, the paper recommended that government should adopt measures that encourage peaceful resolution of conflict in order to de-militarize Niger Delta for enhanced economic and socio-political development of the region.

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

INTRODUCTION

Elsewhere I have argued that the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is over militarized, which was attributed to the struggle by both internal and external forces over its resources. As it was in the past, the contest for Niger Delta resources is the reason for the militarization of the region by contending forces whether local or foreign. At every phase of the contest for its resources it degenerates to the use of weapons to dominate the region. In the years before colonial conquest, the struggle

was over land, fishing rights, traditional leaders' political jurisdiction, slave trade and the palm oil trade was the issues of contest, but since the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in the region the dominant conflict in the Niger Delta is oil and gas resources based. This has led to various dimension of conflict that borders on use of military weaponry. Thus, the 'overview of the militarization of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria' listed the various phases of militarization of the region commencing from pre-colonial period to the recent assault by the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) on federal government's economic facilities in the region (Paki, 2018: 71-97). It has been observed that militarization of the Niger Delta have adverse impacts on the federal government, the inhabitants, oil companies and the international community.

Therefore, in this piece, the main objective is to simply examine the impacts of militarization of the Niger Delta. In order to achieve the aim and objective of this paper, it is divided into five sections. The introduction is followed by conceptual analysis of militarization. The third section is the method of study, which is followed by the discussion of the impacts of militarization of the Niger Delta. And the paper end with conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF MILITARIZATION

It is said in the literature that "militarization" is used interchangeably with "militarism". The terms are used with "awkward" or "pejorative" undertones in academic discourse as rigorous organizing concepts that help us to think more clearly about the influence of war and the military model have on different aspects of society (Kraska, 2007). Militarization involves "a set of attitudes and social practices which regards war and the preparation of war as a normal and desirable activity" (Mann, 1987: 36). In practical terms, "militarization consists of 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).

Vagts (1959: 12) classic interwar study set out the history by which militarization "has connoted a domination of the military over the civilian, an undue preponderance of military demands and emphasis on military considerations, spirits, ideals, and scales of value". A "militarized"

state of affairs therefore occurs when “violence becomes a crisis of everyday life, is disenfranchising and politically, physically and economically debilitating” (Turshen, 1988: 7). In the tradition of political/strategic thought, domestic militarization was associated with an aggressive foreign policy, backed up by an unwarranted and threatening military build-up, giving the capacity to exercise a preference for the use of force in resolving conflicts. The same emphasis appears in Klare (1987: 121) definition:

we can define 'militarism' as the tendency of a nation's military apparatus (which includes the armed forces and associated paramilitary, intelligence and bureaucratic agencies) to assume ever-increasing control over the lives and behavior of its citizens; and for military goals (preparation for war, acquisition of weaponry, development of military industries) and military values (centralization of authority, hierarchization, discipline and conformity, combativeness and xenophobia) increasingly to dominate national culture, education, the media, religion, politics and the economy, at the expense of civilian institutions.

Broadly categorized, the four under listed dimensions clearly defines national or domestic militarization of a polity, while the fifth is mostly directed at the external relations of nation. Thus, Tanter (1984) said a state or society will be understood to be undergoing a process of militarization if it exhibit at least one of the following five characteristics:

- An increase in the size, cost and coercion capacity of a nation's armed forces, police and security agencies;
- A greater political role for the military;
- An increase in the state's reliance on organized force, domestically and abroad, to secure its

policy goals, rather than ideological hegemony and bargaining;

- A change in the culture in the direction of values and beliefs that most effectively support organized state violence; and
- Increasing external offensive military alignment or alliance with other states or use of force externally.

Virtual all these characteristics except the fifth one are observable in Nigeria, especially the Niger Delta region. Similarly, (Ebo (2005: 10) suggested that the militarization of Nigerian polity through prolonged military rule, within the context of economic decay, injustice and social malaise (including drug abuse and the glorification of violence through films and popular music) has resulted in a gun culture in which small arms have acquired a reputation as a fashionable means of addressing social issues and disagreements. On his part, Courson (2009: 19-20) observed that 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”. Therefore, the thinking of the military hierarchy in the country is that the resolution of the Niger Delta crisis lies in maximum military expenditure and used of strong arms tactics in the region even though it will result in innocent loss of lives and property. In tandem with the militarized approach to enforcing security in the region, the Nigerian government and the oil corporations with some logistical support from some foreign countries, have deployed more troops into the creeks to neutralize the “militants” (ibid).

As the dispossessed people and communities in the Niger Delta demand for development, corporate responsibility, environmental, economic and social justice, resource control and proper compensation, their protests have been met with violence including extra-judicial killings and mass murder, torture, rape, the burning of homes and property, and increased military presence. As such, the Niger Delta has become completely militarized and “secured” by unrestrained and unaccountable Nigerian military personnel (Ekine, 2001).

METHOD OF STUDY

The study adopts secondary sources of data collection method. Similarly secondary data was obtained from books, journal articles, conference papers, magazines and newspapers. The information obtained was analyzed using descriptive methods and the results indicating the existence of the phenomenon in the Niger Delta.

IMPACTS OF MILITARIZATION OF THE NIGER DELTA

The militarization of the Niger Delta has had many consequences on Nigeria's national life, which can be seen in many ways. It has considerably adverse impacts on national security and economic stability, formation of armed groups, public service delivery, oil companies and the international community, as discussed below:

a. Impact on National Security and Economic Stability

The militarization of the Niger Delta has led to adverse impact on national security and economic stability. For instance, apart from the high budgetary allocation for security in the region, the formation of Joint Task Force (JTF) on the Niger Delta has led to confrontation with militant groups. This has further resulted to proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). In all cases, the post-colonial security forces like its colonial counterpart are designed to facilitate the political and economic aims of the state. Unfortunately, the use of military might dramatically escalated violence in the Niger Delta, as new militant groups emerge to resort to the use of arms ostensibly to assert their control over territory; thereby provoking bloody clashes with federal troops deployed to contain violence, to drive home their point of deprivation and marginalization. Furthermore, the impact of militarization of the Niger Delta has led to inter and intra ethnic contests for oil benefits, intra community struggles for chieftaincy space, emergence of cult groups and the struggle to control illicit drug business, struggle for supremacy of bunkering space and party policies and electoral space.

Thus, the militarization of the Niger Delta has cost Nigeria dearly. The increasing availability of SALW has helped to aggravate criminality in the Niger Delta; armed robbery, sea piracy, kidnapping and hostage taking, terrorism, illegal bunkering, oil theft, illegal refining of crude oil, violent crimes and conflicts. Small arms and light weapons proliferation is a serious challenge to the sustenance of peace and stability of any

society and undermines the authority of the state (Ayuba&Okafor, 2015; Uwa& Anthony, 2015; Usang, et al, 2014). This has strained the security forces of Nigeria in crime control; thereby leading to drafting of more security personnel to crisis prone areas of the Niger Delta. Besides, the amount money that government spends on security during such crises and their aftermath is high (Uwa& Anthony, 2015). In the opinion of (Ukeje, 2011: 93) militarization offers fresh insights into how the unfolding paradigm of pacification is inescapably leading the state towards the articulation of 'security' in an overtly militaristic sense.

Related to the issue of national security is corruption of security personnel. The militarization of the Niger Delta offers opportunity for corruption of security agents drafted to operational areas in the region. Tamuno (2011: 75-76) observed that in hot pursuit of militants by units of the JTF (the Army, Navy and Air Force), occasionally compromised the goals of their official missions through involvement in clandestine illegal crude oil bunkering. Quite often, they compelled payment of tolls for loading of trucks on land and barges at sea. They also extort money from individuals and communities affected by conflicts.

Typically the JTF rotates its security agents every two weeks and by special arrangement operators of illegal refineries in a creek pays every JTF security bit in charge of a particular creek where illegal refining sites are situated about one million naira every two weeks. However, large barges which load crude oil in the Niger Delta to sell to ships in the high sea attracts bribe that amounts to millions of naira. This explains why illegal bunkering, oil theft and artisanal refineries are unabated despite security presence in the region (Amaize&Omafuaire, 2010; Purefoy. 2010; Haruna, 2016; Ameh, 2016; Soriwei, 2016; Paki, 2017).The unique features of the Niger Delta environment noted for asphyxiating and unfriendly terrain comprising thick mangrove forests and swamps criss-crossed by creeks, rivers and canals make it possible for bunkering business to prosper. Human Rights Watch(2003) said that effective policing of the water-ways of the Niger Delta is made impossible because retired and serving security officers constitute the nucleus of oil bunkering cartel. The opportunities for other JTF acts of gross misconduct include indiscipline, indiscriminate arrests, extra-judicial killings, rape, stealing, and destruction of properties. These activities of security operatives clearly undermine national security.

Therefore, the militarization of the Niger Delta undermines Nigeria's economic stability. The country's economic stability for several years critically depends on proceeds from the Niger Delta and at any time that there is major confrontation between government security forces and militant groups the economic fortunes of the country dwindle. For instance, when the NDA attacked critical national oil infrastructure in 2015, the country's oil production dropped from 2.2 million barrels per day (mbpd) to about 1.4 mbpd. This has caused reduced government earnings (Ezuikwu, 2016).

Also, the militarization of the Niger Delta has led to reduce the supply of gas to local plants, thereby reducing the country's power grid. At every time that there is confrontation between militants and security forces in the Niger Delta, the oil facilities are targeted. This often leads to reduced supply of gas to electrical plants, which reduces the country's power grid. For instance, (Onuoha, 2016) reported that the NDA assault on oil infrastructure has led to a decline of electricity generation from about 4.800 megawatts in August 2015 to 1000 megawatts in May 2016. This has affected productivity and service delivery in the nation's economy.

b. Impact on the Formation of Armed Groups

The militarization of the Niger Delta has led to the formation of armed ethnic militant groups that rejects the authority and legitimacy of the state and federal governments, and operates effectively outside traditional governance institutions, resists perceived state violence and brutality, and give militants muscle to demand for resource control (Joab-Peterside, 2007). This Cesarz, Morrison & Cooke (2003) averred that:

They (militants) have brought to the confrontation new assets: rocket-propelled grenades, AK-47s, machine guns, satellite phones, and speedboats. They demonstrated a willingness, and ability, to kill oil company and Nigerian military personnel and credibly threaten oil sector infrastructure. Quickly, they proved their dominance of Delta waterways and ability to impede the passage of security agents.

Joab-Peterside (2007: 5) attributes the success of ethnic militias operations in the Niger Delta to have been derived from better organization, superior equipment, better funds and growing linkages with state political actors and other key stakeholders.

It has enhanced the demand for sophisticated SALW in the region. The fact that the impact of militarization of the Niger Delta offers opportunity for free in-flow of sophisticated SALW to militant groups and out-flows of stolen crude oil through collusion between militants, corrupt politicians, oil company workers, and security agents and the proceeds thereof used to finance militant activities in the Niger Delta. The SALW use and proliferation in the Niger Delta could be described as a situation that "could tip towards outright warfare" (UNDP, 2006: 18). Furthermore, militarization increases the capability of militant groups, as they increasingly possess the capacity to attack offshore and onshore oil installations, and neighboring countries. Kegley (2007: 23) averred that; "when valuable natural resources are discovered in a particular region of a country, the people living in such localities suddenly have economic incentives to secede violently if necessary ... conflict is more also likely in countries that depend heavily on natural resources as rebel groups can extort the gains from this trade to finance their operations."

The militarization of the Niger Delta has broadened the social field of violence to encompass a number of differing agents, actors and dynamics. A large body of research (Ikelegbe 2006, Langer & Ukoha, 2009; Obi & Rustad 2011; Oyefusi 2007, 2012; Joab-Peterside, Porter & Watts, 2012) has pointed to the following ⁵³ types of conflict:

- Violent conflicts between oil companies and community youth groups (over compensation, employment, and access to cash payments);
- Conflicts between communities and companies over host community status, spill compensation (or ritual/cultural site desecration) and MOUs (Ugborodu, Soku);
- Electoral violence and political thuggery (the 2003 elections, and the 2003-4 violence, NDV, NDPVS);
- Vigilante groups (Bakassi Boys);
- Intra and/or intercommunity conflicts over rights to oil bearing lands;

- Youth group violence over access to local oil rents and by providing protection services for the oil companies (Nembe);
- Violent chieftaincy struggles (Okrika);
- State violence and abuses by security forces (Odi, Odiana, Ogoni);
- Urban violence/electoral and ward and LGA determination (Warri);
- Struggles over oil bunkering territories (Cawthorne Channel);
- Inter-ethnic territorial conflicts (Ogoni-Andoni, Warri);
- Cult - Fraternity groups (Icelanders, Bush Boys, Greenlanders);
- Insurgent groups (MEND); and
- Organised crime and violent accumulation (kidnapping as business, piracy).

c. Impact on Public Service Delivery

The militarization of the Niger Delta has inhibited access to basic services and key infrastructure, such as health clinics, schools and markets. There is significant relationship between armed violence and deteriorating public services in the region. During conflict government services and aid programs have to be curtailed or withdrawn because of insecurity. Levels of school enrolment and literacy have declined, as have immunizations, while child and maternal mortality have increased. Over time, this has represented a huge cumulative loss in productivity and wealth (Keili, 2008).

Since the 1990s, the links between SALW proliferation, conflict, security and development have become better recognized and understood within the region. It is now accepted that sustainable development is seriously threatened by recurrent violent armed conflict. The proliferation of SALW has erased decades of development and progress; indeed, it has further entrenched poverty within. The interdependence of SALW control, security and development speaks to the core development mandates of poverty eradication, enhanced human security, inclusion and governance. Communities affected by SALW violence have become socially and economically marginalized. This has all grossly undermined progress toward the meeting the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in the country (Keili, 2008). The proliferation and misuse of SALW is endangering

personal security, undermining good governance, contributing to violations of human rights, and undermining social justice, development and peace in the Niger Delta.

This has led to adverse socio-economic effects on the inhabitants. The militarization of the Niger Delta has made socio-economic life of the inhabitants difficult. The impact of militarization on the socio-economic life of people living in conflict prone areas of the Niger Delta has taken varied dimensions; displacement and associated refugee problems, human rights abuses, rape, harassment, deliberate targeting for bombardment of the communities, destruction of settlements, destruction of properties and lives, insecurity, etc.

Relatedly, the military usually carry out exercises in the country. Recently in October 2017, there was a routine military operation of the Nigerian Army, code named "Operation Crocodile 2" in the Niger Delta, which was meant to increase the rhythm of combat readiness in its operations in the creeks and land based activities in the region, and increase the operational skills of all participants. This involves routine military activities in the creeks, rivulets and all land patrols and confidence building. The military also decided to undertake as part of the exercises a medical outreach program (community relations activity) to bridge the gaps between the army and immediate communities in their area of operation. As part of the community service, the NA donated medical items to the Obstetrics and Gynecological Ward of the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Yenagoa in Bayelsa State and also conducted environmental clean-up of the first oil well in Oloibiri in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State (Oyadongha, 2017).

However, there arose a rumor which went viral in the social media that the military was carrying out forced vaccinations and immunization of pupils in primary and post – primary schools in the Niger Delta. This led to pandemonium in Yenagoa in Bayelsa State and Port Harcourt in Rivers State as parents rushed to withdraw their wards from public and private schools. The military in response explained that the medical outreach do not forced vaccinations and immunizations, but do basic medical check-ups and offer medical materials to individuals in need and not by force. Prior to the incident in the Niger Delta, a similar rumor happened in the South-East when the NA declared "Operation Python Dance 2" in that region. This was perhaps due to lack of support for

government policy of militarization and lack of sensitization of public policies before they are implemented.

d. Impact on Oil Companies

The militarization of the Niger Delta also adversely affected oil companies (Lubeck, Watts & Lipschutz, 2007: 1-3). Joab-Peterside (2007:4) observed that "the MNOCs operating joint ventures with the state have been severely hit as vandalism of oil facilities, objection to construction of new facilities, rig blockade, kidnapping of local and international personnel, and shut down of facilities are regularly carried out". For instance, according to Shell quoted in (Frynas, 1998: 457-78) the number of community disturbances increased fivefold from 34 incidents in 1989 to 169 incidents in 1993, and then fell somewhat again. In the late 1990s, community disturbances outside the Ogoni area, mainly in the Ijaw ethnic areas, increased sharply. In 1997, oil companies reportedly lost 117 working days due to community disturbances, 67 of which were reportedly lost by Shell (Frynas, 2001: 36).

Again, when the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) declared operation "Hurricane Piper Alpha" which was later upgraded to "Hurricane Moses" which targeted oil facilities in the territory and beyond by blowing up pipelines, flow-stations and oil facilities with the intent of crumbling the oil economy. These attacks reduced the oil output from 2.6 million bpd to 1.8 million bpd within a month of renewed militia attacks on oil facilities (Courson, 2009: 23); thereby adversely affecting oil companies' output. Furthermore, oil company staffs are the targets of violent attacks, terrorism, kidnapping and demand for ransom payment.

e. Impact on the International Community

Militarization does not only undermine the Nigerian state, the inhabitants of the Niger Delta and oil companies, but also affect the international community. It has exacerbated maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG). Nigeria by virtue of its geographical location by the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, history, commercial activities and trade ties, is an important maritime state. According to Jonah (2008: 16) Nigeria has rights and obligations over a large maritime domain, which

was accorded by the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 111), which include a territorial sea of 12 nautical miles (nm) (22km) from the baseline, a contiguous zone of 12nm from 12 to 24nm (22.44km) from the shore, an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from 12 to 200nm (22-377km) from the shore and a continental shelf up to 200nm or up to 350km from the shore, if certain conditions apply. With a coastline of 420nm, the zones currently comprise about 84,00sq nm (287,479sq km) of maritime area over which Nigeria has sovereign rights to all living and non-living resources therein. This is almost equal to one-third the total land mass of Nigeria.

In addition, Nigeria's maritime area of security extends to Dakar in Senegal and Luanda in Angola. This area, which essentially includes the sea referred to as the GoG, covers an area approximately 574,800sq um with a total coast length of about 2874nm; a vast maritime space which is of vital strategic and economic importance to the nation's well-being (ibid: 17). Nigeria is also a leading member of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) comprising Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Sao Tome and Principe and Benin Republic. Also, Nigeria has joint exploration venture with Sao Tome and Principe, within the GoG on cost sharing basis. Due to the weak nature of other states in the GoG, Nigeria plays leadership role in providing security and protection in collaboration with other states in the region.

The increasing militancy in the Niger Delta subjects legitimate activities in the GoG to security challenges such as piracy and sea robbery, smuggling, illegal bunkering and crude oil theft, pipeline vandalism and sabotage, drug trafficking, etc. For instance, the attack by sea pirates in the Niger Delta is a major security threat to the oil industry of Nigeria, maritime assets and infrastructure, and merchant shipping in the GoG. It has been estimated that 70% of all piracy incidents in the GoG are directly related to Nigerian criminal gangs, mostly originating from the Niger Delta. In the first quarter of 2016, at least 12 attacks were reported in the GoG including 9 in Nigeria, one in Cote d'ivoire and two in within the territorial waters of the DR Congo (Zerihoun, 2016).

The militarization of the Niger Delta has also cost price instability in the international oil market. For instance, on October 1, 2004 NDPVF's leader, Dogubo-Asari threatened a guerrilla operation code named "Operation Locust Feast", if oil companies operating in the Niger Delta

do not shut down. Asari's announcement sparked panic in world oil markets and the price of crude oil shot up to \$50 per barrel, a record high at the time (Asuni, 2009). As Courson (2009: 18-19) puts it:

Sensing that the disruption of the oil flow from the Niger Delta to the global market would have a most potent and devastating effect on the federal government, oil companies and international community, the MEND militants withdrew from the cities of the Niger Delta and went into the maze of creeks. The attacks on the infrastructure of the oil industry, particularly oil production and oil export had the effect of cutting oil production and pushing up the price of oil in the tight and nervous global market.

CONCLUSION

This paper averred that there is a high presence of the military and use of strong arm military tactics in the Niger Delta to address issues concerning oil resource politics. Therefore, it reviewed areas where militarization of the Niger Delta has adversely impacted on Nigeria's national life. These adverse impacts can be felt in the nation's national security and economic stability, formation of non-state armed groups, service delivery to the inhabitants, oil companies and the international community.

From the foregoing, it is apt to surmise that the resort to militarization of the Niger Delta has, over the years, not only aggravated the Niger Delta crisis, but has also made the military part of the problem. It is therefore now ripe for major stakeholder such as the government, inhabitants, oil companies and the international community to jettison coercive/violent methods in favor of a non-violent, participatory resolution of the conflict. Therefore, the paper recommends that the major stakeholders should put in concerted efforts in order to ensure peace and tranquility and de-militarize the Niger Delta.

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