

Oiling the Guns and Gunning for Oil: Oil Violence, Arms Proliferation and the Destruction of Nigeria's Niger-Delta

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Abstract: *This article explores the volatile security situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as it relates to what Watts (2001) conceptualizes as 'petro-violence' vis-à-vis Small Arms and Light Weapons proliferation within the context of the country's Fourth Republic (May 1999—). The prevailing precarious situation is examined to ascertain the potency of democracy and its influence in ameliorating the conflict trajectory in this resource rich region. Specifically, the paper addresses the following questions; what are the socio-economic and political factors that account for arms proliferation in Nigeria's Niger Delta? Are there effects, either positive or negative, of arms proliferation on local conditions and the oil-bearing communities? How can the situation be improved? What are the civilian government's policy prescriptions to improve the dangerous politico-military situations in the oil delta? Thus, the central argument of this paper is that it is the failure of the social contract (in general and of arms in particular) on the part of the Nigerian government that leads to the challenge, by the people of Niger Delta, of the state's legitimacy and its monopoly of the instruments of violence. The paper concludes by stating that since violence and arms proliferation in the Niger Delta are consequences of the breakdown of the social contract, then the solutions lie in reconstituting the social contract by addressing the root causes of the grievances of the oil-bearing communities.*

Keywords: Oil Violence. Arms Proliferation. Niger Delta. Ethnic Nationalism. Marginalization

1. Introduction: Scope of the Problem

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) proliferation has become one of the most endemic problems of our time and generally accounts for a greater proportion of human mortality in the world. Armed conflicts have led to the loss of lives of tens of thousands of innocent civilian population each year, while the number of wounded and disabled people resulted from the consequences of SALW proliferation and misuse is 13 times greater than those killed (Small Arms Survey, 2003: 57)¹. In addition to fatalities from war, there are countless cases of indirect deaths and injuries occurring from increased pervasive security situations, increased disease morbidity, reduced easy access to health services and malnutrition. In 2003 for example, it is estimated that more than 639 million of SALW were proliferating in the world out of which 60% of this arsenal was in the possession of the civilian population (Small Arms Survey, 2003: 13), while a further estimate of, between seven and eight million, new weapons are added to the world stockpile every year. Estimate of illicit SALW in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is put at one out of every five in the world. In this context, Bah (2004: 33) contends that “of the approximately 500 million illicit weapons in circulation worldwide, it is estimated that 100 million of these are in SSA with eight to ten million concentration in the West African sub-region alone.”

The situation in Africa is frightening because the region is the most backward in term of development and most vulnerable as far as peace, security and stability are concerned. One of the world's highest concentrations of SALW is in Africa. This is a paradox. Why does a poor continent have such a magnitude of stockpiled small arms? What is the bone of contention that leads to conflicts in Africa? Perhaps, what explains this contradictory situation between economic underdevelopment (poverty) on the one hand and gun proliferation and armed conflicts on the other is the “strongest expression of the injustice in the paradox of wealth that characterizes situations of conflicts in Africa—the fact that those who produce wealth are the poorest and those who are wealthy take the wealth by force” (Ibeanu,

¹ See also Small Arms Survey, 2004, 2005.

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2005: 37). This implies that the main reason for people to arm themselves is not only located in their appalling socio-economic conditions but also exclusion, injustice and exploitation that they are subjected to and clearly, SALW (guns in particular) perform two functions, viz, they abet in sustaining injustices and also offer hopes for redressing injustices, thereby confirming Naylor's assertion that the demand for SALW is a "surrogate for demand for social justice, and the firearm is the capital good intended to bring that objective" (cited in Dominick and Olonisakin, 2001; see also Naylor, 1995; Badmus, 2009a&b).

Nigeria is one of the Third World countries where the proliferation of this arsenal is manifested in crisis proportions and its society has become fully militarized and enmeshed in the culture of the gun. Perhaps, more than any other areas of the country, the Niger Delta region exhibits this tendency with a high degree of intensity where different oil-bearing ethnic minority groups, through their various social movements, are constantly contesting exploitation and as a result, *oiling their guns as well as gunning for oil in the region*, and fighting for the soul of the country's treasury of natural resources. Nigeria's oil delta has been a site of constant struggles over access to power, authority, and resources (oil wealth) among the recognized/identifiable forces, viz, the Nigerian state (represented by the Federal Government-FGN), the global capitalist forces (represented by the various multinational oil companies—MNOCs), and the ethnic minority nationalities (represented by local leaders and organizations). The Niger Delta region is the source of the country's oil and over the last four decades, it has been able to produce the bulk of national wealth as oil fuels for the nation's economy and its survival. With the availability of this gift of nature, one would expect Nigeria in general and the Niger Delta in particular to be economically developed and industrialized. Paradoxically, oil has encouraged corruption, rent-seeking, conflicts, with all their fissiparous tendencies for the Nigerian post-colony. Dishearteningly, in lieu of development, environmental apocalypse, ecological destruction and poverty are now synonymous with the region in question. This scenario has made the oil basin restive with pockets of insurrection and armed rebellion where such

ethnic minority groups as the Ijaw and Ogoni are challenging the central state and its business partners (MNOCs). Consequently, the Nigerian state has now institutionalized a regime of social repression and corporate violence to silence dissenting voices in order to protect oil exploration and its revenues. Today, the Niger Delta is confronted with social inequality, arms proliferation and pervaded by protracted violence championed by state security forces, ethnic militia movements, disgruntled youth, armed gangs, pirates, cultists, and robbers.

Following from the preceding analysis, this study examines the volatile security situation in the Niger Delta as it relates to what Watts (2001) conceptualizes as 'petro-violence' vis-à-vis SALW proliferation within the context of the Nigeria's Fourth Republic (May 1999--). I examine the prevailing precarious situation to ascertain the potency of democracy and its influence in ameliorating the conflict trajectory in this resource rich region. Specifically, the paper addresses the following research questions; what are the socio-economic and political factors that account for SALW proliferation in Nigeria's Niger Delta? Are there effects, either positive or negative, of SALW proliferation on local conditions and the oil-bearing communities? How can the situation be improved? What are the civilian government's policy prescriptions to improve the dangerous politico-military situations in the oil delta? Thus, my thesis is that, it is the failure of the social contract (in general and of arms in particular) on the part of the Nigerian government that leads to the challenge, by the people of Niger Delta, of the state's legitimacy and its monopoly of the instruments of violence.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Statements

I have argued earlier that it is the failure of the Nigerian state (especially under military rule) to meet the basic needs of the people (i.e. human security) that led to the collapse of the social contract, which eventually puts the state and society at loggerheads. Then to really fathom this collapse and the emergence of what is generally referred to as the "Hobbesian Niger Delta", one need to search for its etiology within the context of both the endogenous and

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exogenous factors. This is because the international socio-political and economic contexts have overbearing effects on the local conditions especially in Nigeria's oil basin.

During the Cold War, especially in the immediate post-independence years, African states were economically buoyant and this empowered them to provide adequate social services to the populace. Also, African states received huge financial assistance from the international financial institutions (IFIs), while the super powers did not relent in their pursuit of hegemonic interests and ideological supremacy, which saw the continent in a vantage position for financial and military aid from Moscow and Washington. To be sure, these sources of assistance, coupled with the 'relative' economic boom of the early independence years, enabled African governments to maintain peace as a result of the state-driven expansionism in the socio-economic sector. The economic prosperity of the late 1960s and early 1970s, started to show signs of wear and tear by the late 1970s/early 1980s due to a plethora of negative socio-economic factors. Thus, Africa's economic downturn sooner or later ballooned into a full-blown economic crisis; thanks to the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 that made oil price rise and fluctuate. The effects of the economic crisis were such that the capabilities of African governments to guarantee citizens' welfare were completely weakened and eroded their legitimacies. In order to rescue the situation, African states responded by borrowing from the Bretton Wood Institutions with the acceptance of the neo-liberal, anti-statist, anti-developmental Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) for the stabilization and recovery of their economies. SAP as policies work against the state; they are anti-state in that they call for the privatization of public enterprises, removal of subsidies and welfare support from social services, etc (i.e. its insistence on 'Rolling Back the State'), and they also call for neo-liberal market reform based on the belief that the state was blocking economic growth and development by spending too much on welfare benefits in health, education and other subsidies (Vasudevan, 1999: 11-28).

The implementation of SAP became counterproductive as it further weakened the state's legitimacy by aggravating the pre-SAP social crisis. Furthermore, the gap between the

rich and the poor became widened, thereby reinforcing uneven development, which matches up to clear regional and ethnic divisions in a manner amplifying political tensions. Poverty in the rural areas led to ever increasing teeming populations of urban poor caused by rural to urban drift of people in search of employment and better life circumstances to support their families. Worse still is the social instability fuelled by a teeming population of disenchanting, marginalized and extremely pauperized people who can only become a ready pool of recruitment for ethnic zealots who fed on the dissatisfaction and insecurity (in terms of Human Security) of the majority of the citizenry (Badmus, 2006). The loss of control of the economies by the African governments and the state's inability to rescue its sapping population, apparently fractured the basis of national unity, put the state and the society at dagger-drawn opposition to each other, and above all, compelled the masses to look for alternative structures (constructed around ethnicity and religion), to re-strategize their options, and saw these new structures as workable mechanisms for coping with the worsening economic crisis, of which privatization of security (i.e. acquisition of SALW for their own protection and as instruments of negotiation) is fundamental (Jega, 2000). Thus, African states (Nigeria inclusive) lost their power, legitimacy, and national cohesion since they failed to fulfill their own promises of the social contract. The social contract theory of arms postulates that citizens transfer the *possession* of weapons to a constituted authority (i.e. the sovereign and the state) with the agreement that the state will provide and guarantee people's security (in all its connotations) while the *ownership* of such weapons is in the hands of the people which gives them (i.e. citizens) the opportunity to withdraw and reclaim self-defense when states fail to honour their own obligations of the contract. In this context, *ownership* of arms is exercised¹

¹ Once again, Ibeanu expatiates further on the similarities and differences between 'ownership' and 'possession' with respect to social contract theory of arms. According to Ibeanu (2005): "ownership and possession are related but distinct. The former refers to the right in the last analysis to decide the ends to which society's instruments of violence are to be put legitimately. Possession on the other hand, refers to the capacity to

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as ‘the General will’ and not as ‘the Will of All’, which refers to the combination of sectional will that makes up the society. Since violence and arms proliferation in the Niger Delta are the result of the breakdown/collapse of the social contract (and of arms in particular), then the task is to “reconcile differences in the *possession* of these instruments of violence between the state and the populace until the social contract is reconstituted or resumes proper functioning. In so far as the legitimacy of the state at the local, state, and federal levels remain contested by a vast majority of people in the Niger Delta, they will continue to contest the right of the state and its agencies to monopolize society’s instruments of violence” (Ibeanu, 2005: 53),

In addition to the collapse of the social contract, the proliferation of arms and the intensity of the violent conflicts in Nigeria’s oil delta are attributed to the aftermaths of the twin forces of the end of the Cold War and the effects of globalization. The end of the hyper-militarization of the Cold War years, the collapse of the Soviet behemoth and its snowballing effects on the states of the former Eastern bloc, their state structures became dysfunctional which, inevitably, forced the former East European countries to reform their security sectors and downsize their military postures. These compelling realities provided one of the social contexts for weapon proliferation to the Third World countries of which Nigeria is no exception. These weapons were given free to many African states, especially conflict-prone societies. The glut of SALW led to their misuse, privatization of security as well as the consequential weapons proliferation and criminalization of the society (Lock, 1999). The recent developments in the Niger Delta have shown that SALW proliferation has increased the intensity of armed struggles and as a result leads to further arms proliferation with telling effects on the security situation of the region. SALW are cheap, rugged, and easy to

actually put those instruments of violence to use. It is possession that government exercises through its coercive apparatuses. However, it is the citizens that are the owners of society’s instrument of violence, who confer possession on governments. Once citizens confer possession on government, it is sustained in so far as government incarnates.”

operate, transport and conceal. These features encourage their presence in the Niger Delta. The illegal trade in arms on the black market by local militant groups also encourages proliferation. Compounding the issue of SALW proliferation in the Niger Delta is the fact that it becomes more difficult to distinguish between licit and illicit trade in arms because weapons once officially sold to state statutory security forces are often stolen by military personnel only to re-appear on the black market as illegal weapons, thereby affecting the intensity and duration of conflicts in the Niger Delta.

3. Oil and the Nigerian State

Oil is important to the Nigerian economy and its survival¹. Nigeria is the world's seventh largest oil producer and is among the lowest-cost sites of oil exploration in the world (Ikelegbe, 2005: 1). Oil accounts for about 40% of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and between 70-80% of Federal Government revenues. In 2003, about 80.6% of total Federal Government revenues came from oil and gas (Lawal, 2004). The Nigerian state has enacted various laws that empower it to control the oil sector while the government petroleum corporation holds majority of the shares in both onshore and offshore ventures. The operation of the oil sector of the economy is being run by the various MNOCs of which Shell is the primary player under the state military umbrella. MNOCs operate in joint ventures with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). In the 1970s, the Obasanjo military government embarked on indigenization policy that allowed the state to acquire 80% equity in Shell BP and 60% equity in other major MNOCs. The effects of the indigenization policy, unfavourable to foreign business interests, led to the cessation of operations by some oil companies; a sorry situation that led to downward trends in foreign investments in the country. In

¹ On the significance of oil to Nigeria, literature is rich, see among others: Forrest, 1995; Turner and Peter, 1980; Watts, 2001; Watts, 2004 a&b; Watts, Okonta and von Kemedi, 2004. Oyefusi, 2001; International Crisis Group, 2006a&b; Human Rights Watch, 1999, 2002, 2003 and 2007; Ogunmola and Badmus, 2010.

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1988, having realized the negative effects of the indigenization policy on the economy, the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida moved towards partial deregulation as well as commercialization of the oil sector with the creation of 11 subsidiaries. The Nigerian government has now deregulated the oil industry. This arrangement has, writes Zalik (2004: 404): “meant that individual government agents can profit immensely through ‘rent’ or bribes accruing from oil contract kickbacks while in terms of productive capital and as an agent of development and security, the Nigerian state has remained largely incapacitated and often a force to be feared.”

Furthermore, oil revenue distribution to the federating states through a derivation-based allocation (known in Nigeria as the ‘derivation formula’) has been continuously declining. The Federal Government has, to the detriment of the ethnic minority nationalities, distorted the derivation formula. This is because during the 1950s when agriculture was the mainstay of the Nigerian economy; the constitution recognized 100% derivation as the basis for revenue allocation. The situation became different in the 1960s when derivation was reduced to 50%. It declined further to 45% in 1970; 20% in 1975; 1.5% in 1982, and 3% in 1992 respectively (see Table 1 and National Concord, 11 December 1992). Under the 1999 constitution, there appears to be an appreciable development when derivation was increased to 13% consequent on the agitations of the oil-bearing ethnic nationalities. Sadly, the derivation formula is, apparently, disenfranchising the people of the oil-delta since the region is home to Nigeria’s oil resources.

Table 1: State and Federal Shares of Petroleum Proceeds, 1953-present

| | Producing State (percent) | Federal Account including DPA (percent) |
|-----------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1953-1960 | 100 | --- |
| 1960-1969 | 50 | 50 |
| 1969-1971 | 45 | 55 |
| 1971-1975 | 45 minus offshore proceeds | 55 plus offshore proceeds |
| 1975-1979 | 20 minus offshore proceeds | 80 plus offshore proceeds |
| 1979-1981 | --- | 100 |
| 1982-1992 | 1.5 | 98.5 |
| 1992-1999 | 3 | 97 |
| 1999-- | 13 | 87 |

Source: UNDP 2006

The perceived marginalization by the people of Niger Delta has further intensified efforts for the increase in derivation to 50%, which became a hot issue during the 2005 National Constitution Conference. In addition to the downward trends in the derivation formula to the detriment of the ethnic minority nationalities in the oil basin, derivation budget monitoring is unsystematic and chaotic. It was reported in 2002 that only 7.8% of the accrued revenues from oil resources was paid to the Niger Delta states¹ by the federal government (A 2002 Report to the Federal Government cited in Manby, 2002). This state-of-affairs makes government statistics/figures on oil production and

¹ Nigeria is made up of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The Niger Delta's geopolitics concerns 9 states and they are regarded as oil producing states.

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sales dubious. This perceived marginalization and lopsided state policy in the distribution of oil revenues have increased the anger and fanned the fire of hatred of the people of the region towards the Nigerian state and its ruling elite. Ironically, people outside the region are the ones benefiting from lucrative employment in the oil sector (Zalik, 2004). The rage towards the Nigerian state has created a situation of insecurity in the region, to which the Federal Government responded through the use of force (Omeje, 2004). The state's security operatives have mercilessly handled the situation with negative consequences of human rights violations (Frynas, 2000; Manby, 2002). However, as the Nigerian state relies on the primitive accumulation from oil to reinforce its dominant position, the government becomes unpopular in the eyes of the marginalized ethnic minority groups (Watts, 2001).

4. Understanding the Conflict in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region is an area of about 70,000 sq. km of which 50% is wetland. It extends "from Forcados in the West to the Bonny River in the East, a distance of about 350 km and from the apex of the delta at Abo to the coastline which is about 150km; the delta has also a narrow coastal strip varying in width from a few metres to about 5km. Most of the 10,000 sq. km. of the delta is made up of swamps, with a few island of solid read earth, treading North-South, which forms the only firm dry land; the mean elevation of these islands is c.20 m" (Akintola, 1982: 8). The Niger Delta's geopolitics concerns 9 states viz, Rivers, Cross River, Ondo, Abia, Edo, Imo, Akwa Ibom, Delta, and Bayelsa, while such ethnic minority groups as Ijaw, Kalabari, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko, Nembe, Ibibio, Ndom, Efik, etc peopling the area. Since 1956 when oil was first discovered in Oloibiri village by the Anglo-Dutch group, Shell d'Archy, the region has continued being the heart of Nigeria's oil industry as the country is now a major oil exporter and constitutes the fiscal base of the Nigerian state. From earnings as meager as \$250 million in 1970, oil production revenues soared to \$11.2 billion in 1974 (International Crisis Group, 2006a). The

phenomenal growth of the oil sector and its displacement of other sectors of the economy are revealed by the fact that the country generated about \$300 billion between 1970 and 2002 (Omotola, 2006: 10). Since the late 1970s, oil has displaced agriculture as the backbone of the economy. Omotola (2006: 8) argues that, “from less than 1% in 1960, the contribution of oil to GDP rose to 14.6, 21.9 and 26-29% in 1970, 1975, and 1979 respectively. By 1992, it had risen to 46.8%. Oil contribution to export earnings has been much higher. From 58.1% in 1970, it rose to 95.6% in 1979. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it remained very high, accounting for ₦210 billion or 96.1% of total export earnings in 1996.” The importance of oil to Nigeria is vividly shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Crude Oil and Non-oil Export Earning in Nigeria, 1988-1996

| Year | Export of Goods and Services | Oil (%) | Non-oil (%) including invisible | Non-oil (%) excluding invisible |
|------|------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1988 | 31.7 | 89.5 | 10.5 | 8.8 |
| 1989 | 63.2 | 87.0 | 13.0 | 4.7 |
| 1990 | 120.1 | 88.8 | 11.2 | 2.3 |
| 1991 | 132.4 | 88.3 | 11.7 | 3.5 |
| 1992 | 226.9 | 88.3 | 11.2 | 1.9 |
| 1993 | 245.7 | 87.0 | 13.0 | 2.0 |
| 1994 | 215.5 | 93.2 | 6.8 | 2.5 |
| 1995 | 875.5 | 92.0 | 8.0 | 2.3 |
| 1996 | 1186.1 | 93.2 | 6.5 | 1.7 |

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, 1997

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Despite the position of oil in the economy and huge revenues accruing to the central state from its sales, oil production has made the oil-bearing communities experiencing the so-called *paradoxes of the plenty*; they are implying that they are dwelling in an environment rich in mineral resources but suffer socio-economic injustices and deprivations, which should not be the case seeing that the oil is derived from their traditional homelands. Thus, oil exploration has brought sufferings and mishaps to the oil-bearing ethnic nationalities in many ways.

Oil extraction has adversely affected the delicate balance between land, water, and life (Rowell, 1994) as the socio-economic and environmental costs of oil production to the Niger Delta's oil-bearing communities are enormous. Oil production in the region has led to the destruction of flora and fauna resources, the aquatic ecosystem, biodiversity, and farmlands. Water and air pollution are prevalent in the region with serious health hazards suffered by the hapless population. More often than not, the level of pollutions caused by gas flaring, oil pipeline leakages and oil waste dumping are worrisome going by the level of ecological and physical damages experienced in the Niger Delta and their negative consequences on the socio-economic well being of the local population. It is estimated that 75% of gas produced in the oil delta are flared annually (World Bank, 2005). The environmental degradation and the destruction of the region can be attributed to bad oil production practices by the MNOCs. Gas and oil pipelines are badly laid above ground all over the Niger Delta's villages without constant maintenance by the oil companies. Most of the time, these pipelines explode while oil leaks into the soil and water interfering with local subsistence economies, sustainable livelihoods and causing environmental degradation as well as ecosystem decline. For example, between 1976 and 1990, Agbu (2003) asserts that "about 3,000 oil spill incidents were reported by the oil companies operating in Nigeria. Indeed, within this period over 2 million barrels of oil spilled into the country's terrestrial, coastal and offshore marine environment." The effects of oil spillages are negative as the drinking water in most places is heavily contaminated. The ground water of the costal environment of the Niger Delta is

polluted to the extent that there is increase in the maximum permissible concentration (MPC) of crude oil found in the ground water. It is reported that, according to Agbu (2003), in 1987, the MPC in Port Harcourt groundwater is estimated to be 1.8 milligrams per litre far above the 0.1 milligrams per litre recommended by the World Health Organisation.

Furthermore, the oil companies have been accused of being responsible for the oil spills since they are insensitive to the environmental concerns of the local population as there is a lack of consultation between the MNOCs and the oil-bearing communities before the commencement of oil exploration. The consequences oil production become more frustrating going by this shocking revelation:

According to an independent record of Shell's spills from 1982 to 1992, 1,626,000 gallons were spilt from the company's operation in 27 separate incidents. Shell indeed admits that there are at least 200 spillages of different sizes in a year in recent times. Of the number of spills recorded from Shell—a company, which operates in more than 100 countries—40% were in Nigeria. According to Shell, though they are committed to containing and cleaning up spills, it is almost impossible to take effective measures short of burning off the oil altogether, thereby annihilating a large part of the surrounding forest (cited in Agbu, 2003).

Thus, this environmental degradation and its negative physical and socio-economic consequences have been the sources of constant struggles by the people of the region that eventually put them at loggerheads with the central state and MNOCs. The objectives of the two forces are diametrically opposed as the local populations are yearning towards the environmental protection of the region as well as securing their socio-economic and human development. The state and its business partners on the other hand aim at undisrupted oil production and maximize profit there-from. (See Boxes 1&2 for analysis on the effects of oil spills and gas faring in the region).

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Box 1: Oil Spills in the Niger Delta

Between 1976 and 2001, a total of 6,817 oil spills have been recorded in the Niger Delta with only 70% of the oil spills being recovered (UNDP, 2006). This has had a huge impact on marine life with negative consequences for local livelihoods dependent on fishing and for human health consuming contaminated seafood (EIA, 2003). Decades of inadequate or non-existent environmental regulation have allowed oil companies to operate their facilities without incorporating the costs of environmental damage into their decision-making. Spills can occur for a number of different reasons. Shell measures the number of oil spills annually at its facilities along specific criteria: whether the spills were the result of corrosion, operational failure (machinery or human error), or sabotage. In recent years there appears to have been an increase in the number of oil spills caused by deliberate attempts to damage oil facilities. According to Shell, 69% of the 241 total oil spill incidents recorded in 2006 occurred as a result of sabotage (Shell, 2006).

Source: *Francis and Sardesai, 2008*

Box 2: Second Largest Gas Flaring Operation in the World

Gas flaring is a process whereby the associated gas from oil production is burned so as to dispose of it. The second largest gas flaring operations in the world, after Russia, occur in the Niger Delta; they are a significant source of greenhouse gas and particulate matter emissions, exposing communities to a number of harmful pollutants including sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and carcinogenic substances. A thorough study of the region has not yet been carried out, however, it is widely accepted that these pollutants are linked to a series of significant health problems (ERA, 2005).

The exact percentage of associated gas that is flared is disputed. According to the NNPC, Nigeria flares 40% of its annual natural gas production (EIA, 2007). The World Bank estimates that the figure is closer to 75% (World Bank, 2005). Shell and other energy companies operating in the region attribute the extent of flaring in the Niger Delta to the lack of local and regional markets for gas, as well as to the lack of adequate gas infrastructure. Gas export is identified as the main solution to the problem and has become a central part of Shell's efforts to decrease its flaring operation (Shell, 2006).

In 1996, the Nigerian government agreed to end gas flaring in the Niger Delta by 2008. However, the penalties imposed for flaring have been too modest to achieve this goal (ICG, 2006b). In its most recent annual report, Shell Nigeria has set a deadline. By this time the company states that it will have either found ways to gather associated gas, or it will shut in production from the fields where associated gas cannot be gathered (Shell 2006). Chevron Nigeria is also working towards eliminating gas flaring from its operations but does not set itself a firm deadline. All new Chevron developments in the Niger Delta, however, are being designed as

“zero flare” projects (Chevron Nigeria, 2007). The World Bank/UNDP 2004 Strategic Gas Plan for Nigeria identified the gas sector as an area of huge growth potential for the country and underlined the importance of bringing an end to flaring as the first step in tapping this potential (ESMAP, 2004).

Source: Francis and Sardesai, 2008

Beyond the environmental apocalypse suffered by the people of Niger Delta, it is possible to locate the tensions in the region within the context of the lopsided state policies and distributive federalism that are to the detriment of ethnic minority groups. Apart from the fact that the current oil revenue sharing formula is to the ethnic minority groups disadvantage, their rage also stem from the fact that the region has been neglected and alienated for years with lack of basic infrastructure facilities such as pipe borne water, electricity and health care facilities with high rate of unemployment among the youth (Ukeje, 2001a). This perception is being aggravated by the claim that the proceeds from their God given mineral resources (oil in this case) are being used to develop other parts of the country that are non oil producing states. The consequences of these frustrations led to confrontations between the local population and the state with its business partners.

Ethnic nationalism and ethnic politics have added their flavours to, and at the same time aggravate, the conflict situation in the oil-basin. Ethnic nationalism has impacted on Nigeria in so many ways but one important area that is of interest to this study is the creation of Local Government Areas and the sitting of their headquarters and how this has increased the tempo of ethnic nationalism and conflicts in the region. Under the military, especially during the authoritarian rule of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, more Local Government Areas were created. In 1997, crisis erupted in Warri, a town in Delta state between ethnic Ijaw and the Itsekiri over the newly created Warri South Local Government Area. The Ijaw/Itsekiri ethnic clashes, rooted in the relocation of the headquarters of the newly created Warri South Local Government from Ogbe-Ijoh to Ogidigben, resulted in many deaths, displacement and property worth millions of naira destroyed. As part of their ethnic nationalism, the Ijaw have clashed with other ethnic

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minority groups such as the Ilaje, Urhobo, etc in the region over land and other issues (Fregene, 2000).

5. Contesting Exploitation: Armed Violence and the Proliferation of SALW in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta has been a site of constant struggles where the state and local communities were at each other's throats but the scale of violence witnessed in the 1990s became worrisome to the international community. In the 1990s and the decade that followed the region witnessed the emergence of social movements that were at the forefront of resistance against exploitation. Prominent among these movements are the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Ijaw National Congress (INC), the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), and the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA) (Badmus, 2009c: 29-36). The activities of these groups, despite the fact that they have been able to place their demands on the national agenda and become popular beyond the shores of Nigeria have as a result become threats to the survival of the Nigerian post-colonial state. The nexus between and among armed violence, state repressions and the proliferation of SALW in the region will be more comprehensible by analyzing, in *extenso*, the activities of the two prominent social movements in the region, i.e. MOSOP and INC and their implications for the Nigerian state.

The Ogoni resistance, championed by MOSOP, is interweaving around the struggles against environmental degradation and social marginalization. The struggles clearly unveil the intensity of the restiveness of the local population as well as its negative implications for the Nigerian state. The struggles that started as a peaceful demonstration took a dangerous turn in 1990 with the issuance of the Ogoni Bill of Rights by MOSOP, which was presented to then military government of General Ibrahim Babangida. In the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the Ogoni people demanded adequate compensation for the destruction of their land and water and a reasonable share of the \$30 billion that Nigeria has received from the sale of crude oil derived from Ogoniland

since 1958 (MOSOP, 1992). According to the Ogoni Bill of Rights, poverty, environmental hazards, lack of health facilities and social amenities are synonymous with the issues experienced by the people of Ogoniland (Badmus, 2009c). The Ogoni ethnic nationalism gained momentum when, in August 1991, MOSOP presented an addition to the Ogoni Bill of Rights which internationalized their struggles and reaffirmed their non-violence approach to conflict resolution. In December 1992, the Ogoni people issued an ultimatum to the military government. In the ultimatum, the Ogoni demanded that both the MNOCs and the NNPC have to pay compensation within a month to the Ogoni people or stop operations and leave their land. The failure of the Nigerian military government to acquiesce to the Ogoni demands saw, at the expiration of the ultimatum, extraordinary peaceful demonstrations in which more than 30,000 took part. The importance of this demonstration was that it brought the Ogoni issue on the national agenda and also through these struggles; it caught the attentions of the international community.

The aftermath of this peaceful protest was the serious clampdown on protesters and, arrests and detentions without trial of MOSOP leaders. The leaders of the organization were subjected to all sorts of inhuman treatments, while the lucky ones fled the country to avoid persecution. Throughout 1993, the Ogoni people were restive with the state relying on brute force and imposition of fear to suppress the uprisings. In addition to force, the then military regime weakened the cohesion among the Ogoni people as the government's divide and rule method actually yielded dividends. Consequent on government's divisive tactics, a face-off ensued between the radical and the moderate elements within MOSOP, a situation that encouraged the proliferation of deadly weapons and the use of mercenaries in the region (Renner, 2002: 46). State violence against the Ogoni people and its divide and rule policy also saw the upsurge in violent conflict between the Ogoni and their neighbours. Superficially, this may appear as ethnic conflicts and used by the government as an excuse to deal with the Ogoni people with the use of violence (Nsirimovu, 2005: 162). But a close look at the nature and occurrence of conflicts among the former peace loving people as well as the

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type of weapons used convey a clear message that "...broader forces might have been interested in perhaps putting the Ogoni people under pressure, probably to derail their agenda" (Ake cited in Human Rights Watch, 1995: 12). Prominent among these conflicts were the ones in Andoni (July 1993), Okrika (December 1993), and Ndoki (April 1994) in which many lives were lost and property worth millions of naira equally destroyed.

Reverting to the division among the Ogoni leadership, the internal division reached its zenith in May 1994 with the killing of four prominent Ogoni leaders; barely a year after the military junta passed a decree stipulating a death penalty for all acts of treason. Thus, with this tensed military situation in the Niger Delta, the military saw the golden opportunity to deal with the Ogoni crisis once and for all. The government did not waste time to arrest and execute the radical leaders of MOSOP, Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders, after the Special Military Tribunal found them guilty of the murders on 10 November 1995 (Rowell et al, 2005; Renner, 1996; Renner, 2002: 46). The death of Ken Saro Wiwa could be, probably, regarded as the end of the Ogoni struggles against state marginalization since it lost the dynamism and militancy associated with it due to lack of unity among the Ogoni leaders.

Another important conflict in the oil delta is the ethnic Ijaw struggles against perceived state suppression and socio-economic marginalization. The rise of Ijaw struggles was coincided with the seemingly decline of the Ogoni resistance following execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and others and direct state repression of the Ogoni. The Ijaw-state-oil companies face-off centered on years of injustice and socio-economic neglect of the oil-bearing Ijaw nation. With the sad experiences of the Ogoni struggles in their minds, one would expect the Ijaw resistance to be more violent. Unsurprisingly, when in August 1997, over 10,000 youth of Ijaw origin demonstrated at Aleibiri village in Bayelsa State¹ demanding an end to Shell activities in the oil Delta, the Ijaw people

¹ Though the Ijaw ethnic group, spread across the Niger Delta region, are majorly found in Bayelsa State. The state was created in 1996 while Yenegoa is the capital.

vowed to liberate themselves from the bondage of exploitation. The state, oil companies and Ijaw youth confrontations intensified especially in Bayelsa State due to environmental destruction by Shell and other MNOCs operating in the area that are threatening the livelihoods of the local population. Between 1998 and 1999, the Ijaw youth became more restive and most of these agitations occurred in Bayelsa State and culminated in the first *Egbesu*¹ war (Ibeanu, 2005: 45; Omeje, 2004). The origin of the war could be traced to the detention without trial of an Ijaw youth leader for distributing 'seditious' documents against the then Military Governor of Bayelsa State. Thus, the militant *Egbesu* Boys reacted by liberating their detained leader from the Government House in Yenegoa having disarmed the soldiers on sentry. Ibeanu (2005: 46) contends that "the success of the first *Egbesu* war obviously enhanced the profile of the youths and cult, and encouraged more people, many of whom were unemployed, to join the protests. In a matter of weeks, the invincibility of the *Egbesu* had spread throughout Bayelsa State and beyond, and the success of the *Egbesu* youth in the 'first war' fed into wider demands by the Ijaw for more petroleum revenues."

The death of General Abacha in office in 1998 and the rise of General Abdulsalami Abubakar (1998-1998) had direct impacts on the Ijaw wars. Immediately after General Abubakar took over, he embarked on reconciliatory agendas to solve the internal political deadlocks that marked General Abacha's dictatorship. In this context, the already militarized and reduced political space opened up and people's fundamental human rights were guaranteed. With this development, the Ijaw youth became more vigorous and assertive in the pursuit of their demands. At the Ijaw Youth Convention in Kaiama town on 11 December 1998, a document, popularly known as the Kaiama Declaration, was issued that was addressed to the military government in which they requested for increased local control of oil revenues and better environmental practices (http://www.ijawcenter.com/kaiama_declaration.html). In

¹ *Egbesu* connotes the Ijaw god of war that protect them during armed conflicts and wars since the olden days.

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the Kaiama Declaration, a deadline of 31st December 1998 was given to the federal government and MNOCs to meet their demands; otherwise the MNOCs should close their operations and leave the Ijaw land and the entire Niger Delta region. The declaration was followed by a peaceful demonstration in Yenegoa by Ijaw youth to give vent to their demands and also during this demonstration they passed across their grievances to the Federal Government through the Bayelsa state government. Dishearteningly, the Ijaw youth peaceful demonstration resulted in disaster when soldiers killed scores of youths leaving many injured (Ukeje, 2001b). The Ijaw youth and the entire Ijaw nation interpreted the situation as an open declaration of war by the Nigerian government on ethnic Ijaw. Thus, the Ijaw became more restive with consequential military build-up and arms proliferation made the security situation to deteriorate rapidly. The tensed situation, apparently, makes the second *Egbesu* war imminent and eventually started when the state security forces clashed with Ijaw youth who were participating in a cultural festival in Yenegoa. The clash left many dead and had chilling consequences on the Ijaw nation, especially in Yenegoa and Kaiamna (Ibeanu, 2005: 47).

The inception of the Nigerian Fourth Republic in May 1999 seems, especially during the Obasanjo's presidency (May 1999-May 2007), not to have any significant impact in reducing the spectre of conflict in the Niger Delta. The military invasion of Odi town in Kolokuma-Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa state in November 1999 confirms the above line of reasoning. This is probably why Ibeanu (2005: 47) argues that the Odi incident "confirms the fears of human rights community that it will take some time before the vestiges of the rule of the militariat in Nigeria are eliminated." The proximate cause of the Odi massacre was the abduction and subsequent killings of seven policemen that were on intelligence mission in Odi¹, the second largest

¹ The seven policemen were in Odi to uncover the plan of Ijaw youth to attack ethnic Yoruba in Lagos as a reprisal for the O'Odun People's Congress' (OPC)-a pan Yoruba ethnic militant organisation- attacks on Ijaw residents of Ajegunle Area of Lagos a month earlier.

town in Bayelsa state after Yenegoa, by some Odi youth. The killings of the policemen were interpreted by the Obasanjo's government as *Egbesu* challenge to the Nigerian state. The President gave a two weeks ultimatum to then Bayelsa state Governor, Chief DSP Alamiyeseigha, to produce the culprits, the failure of which saw the Federal Government ordered the Odi punitive military expedition (known as Operation HAKURI II) in which over 2000 people lost their lives, thousands displaced and properties destroyed (Environmental Rights Action, 2002: 7; Albert, 2003). The terrifying consequences of Odi incident did not deter the Ijaw youth as the spate of struggles in the oil delta continues unabated. Presently, the Ijaw resistance is championed by such militant groups as the Mujahedeen Asari Dokubo's led Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Tom Ateke's Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) [see Table 3 for the profiles and activities of selected militant groups in the Niger Delta]. Since 2003, NDPVF and MEND (created in 2005) have proved deadly with increased pipeline vandalism, kidnappings and taking over oil facilities in the volatile Niger Delta. Both movements claim that their activities are to seek a redistribution of oil wealth and increased local control of their God given resources. These groups are notorious for kidnappings of oil workers (especially expatriates) for ransom with negative consequences on the Nigerian state since the deteriorating security has forced some oil services firms to leave the country¹.

¹ It should stated here that the existence and activities of these movements are very important in understanding the intensity of armed conflicts and arms proliferation in the region with their negatives consequences on the Nigerian post-colony. But the scope of this study is limited to the Ogoni and Ijaw struggles within the contexts of MOSOP and INC.

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Table 3: Select Militant Groups Operating in the Niger Delta

| Group | Description | Activities |
|---|---|--|
| Egbesu Boys of Africa | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Militant arm of the Ijaw Youth Council • Seeks justice and equity for the oil-bearing Ijaw communities in the Niger Delta • Not a cohesive militant movement; members are active in other groups | Egbesu involvement in Ijaw-Itsekiri conflicts (Delta); various kidnappings and attacks on oil installations. |
| Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Forces (NDPVF) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led by Mujahedeed Asari Dokubo • Founded in 2003 • Members mainly Ijaw • Demands more control over resources for the Niger Delta states • Modelled on Isaac Boro's Niger Delta Volunteer Force (1966) | Declared all-out wars vs. Nigerian government in 2004 and was subsequently outlawed; violent confrontation with NDV mid-2003 to late 2004; kidnappings and attacks |
| Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led by Ateke Tom • Members mainly Ijaw | Violent confrontation with NDPVF mid-2003 to late 2004; kidnappings and attacks |
| Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerged December 2005 • Close links to NDPVF • Demands: 100% control of oil wealth; release of Dokubo; release of Alamiyeseigha • Elusive leadership; Jomo Gbomo communicates with media via email | Many of the recent hostage taking and attacks on oil facilities; armed clashes with security forces between 2005 and January 2006. |

Sources: Sesay et al 2003 and ICG 2006b

6. Nigeria's Fourth Republic and the Niger Delta Crisis

Since the inception of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (May 1999-), successive civilian administrations have been working towards finding permanent solutions to the Niger Delta crisis. Prior to this period, previous governments especially under military rule have also made numerous efforts to ameliorate the conflict trajectory and improve the appalling socio-economic conditions of the people of the region. But these efforts have not been able to achieve the stated goals. This situation becomes more complicated when the oil-bearing communities see the Nigerian state as perfect collaborator with MNOCs purposely to destroy the Niger Delta environment. The Babangida military administration responded to the dumping of toxic waste of Italian origin in Koko, a town in Delta state by establishing, through Decree 88 of 1988, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA). FEPA was to set up national guidelines and standards for environmental management and enforce compliance with environmental law in order to control pollution (Falomo, 1997). Though, FEPA looked promising at the conceptual level, but in practice it failed to achieve its goals of effective managing the Niger Delta ecosystem due, partly, to the ambiguities in its terms of reference, which many experts believe were too broad (Agbu, 2003). Thus, the failure of FEPA to alter the conflict dynamics of the oil delta, sooner or later led to the establishment of the National Policy on Environment (NPE) in 1988 to preserve the Niger Delta environment and also to tackle the development challenges in the area. But, NPE achieved little in terms of success. What can be described as a giant stride towards solving the Niger Delta crisis was the establishment of, by the Babangida military government, the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992. OMPADEC could have done much to improve the situation in the Niger Delta but its organizational structure and management were fraught with difficulties. This is because, the body was directly under the supervision of the presidency while its members were government appointees and only answerable to the presidency.

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Furthermore, in the area of funding, OMPADEC relied on the 3% derivation fund controlled by the federal government. I have argued elsewhere (Badmus, 2009c) that since “OMPADEC members were government appointees, they were not truly representatives of the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta, thereby serving the interests of the federal bourgeoisies and its oil minority allies...The issue of corruption was brought to the fore with the embezzlement of the contracts’ fund, politicization in contracts’ awards, and above all, the people of the Niger Delta were not part of the decision making process of OMPADEC. All these made the Commission’s effectiveness, efficiency and impacts on the conditions of the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta hardly noticeable.” The problems that encumbered OMPADEC and its inability to achieve its aims could be regarded as the background to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) shortly after Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn into office as Nigeria’s President in May 1999. After assessing the situation through first hand experience during his tour of the region, he sent the NDDC Bill to the National Assembly and its approval gave birth to the NDDC. The NDDC is tasked to prepare and implement a comprehensive multi-sector master plan for the development of the Niger Delta (NDDC, 2005). The Commission is, through its *ad hoc* structure, expected to enhance the development of the region via identifying and addressing the needs of the oil bearing ethnic minorities and through this, it is hoped that such efforts will complement the efforts of the state governments and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) contribution to the development of oil delta. It should be mentioned that the numerous Niger Delta states have also embarked on the implementation of their own programmes. These include: the Ondo State Oil Producing Area Development Commission (OSODAPEC) (http://www.ondostate.gov.ng/news_details.php?id=1529), Rivers State Sustainable Development Programme (RSSDP), Bayelsa Partnership Initiatives (BPI), the Delta State Oil Area Development Commission (DESOPADEC) (<http://www.desopadec.org/> see Francis and Sardesai, 2008: 30).

In the area of finance, there is appreciable development in the funding of the Commission (i.e. NDDC) when compared to OMPADEC, for this responsibility lies with both the State and MNOCs. Contributions to the Commission are as follows: MNOCs operating in the Niger Delta contribute 3% of their annual budgets; the Federal Government contributes 15% of the Niger Delta states oil revenues (i.e. 13% derivation) and 50% of the Niger Delta states ecological fund allocations (Francis and Sardesai, 2008: 31; see also ANEEJ, 2004: 22). Through this financial muscle, the Commission has been able to achieve some 'relative' successes by implementing community-development projects, put in place 'limited' social infrastructure facilities but these should not be over romanticized because like previous efforts, the Commission's activities/operations were fraught with lack of transparency, under funding and lack of proper planning that had not been able to fully achieve its mandate (Hopfensperger, 2006). Despite the activities of the NDDC in the region, popular perceptions are always against the Commission (see Box 3).

Box 3: Perceptions of the NDDC

Many local people have expressed dissatisfaction with the way that the NDDC has operated in their region. According to the UNDP 2006 Human Development Report for the Niger Delta, many view the NDDC with suspicion and do not appreciate the top-down planning approach the Commission has taken. Members of the NDDC are appointed by the federal government. As a result, local people question the commitment of the NDDC to the region. Some feel that the organisation's loyalties lie more with the federal government and oil companies than the Niger Delta and its people (UNDP 2006: 13). Discontent felt by the local people has added to an already deteriorating relationship with both the federal government and the oil companies (Hopfensperger, 2006).

The NDDC has got mixed reviews from militants. The Niger Delta Coalition for the Advancement of Peace and Progress (NIDECOPP) has advocated greater government support to the NDDC as a way of dealing with militant demands (Akunna, 2006). MEND, on the other hand, has made its opposition to the organization very clear. In December 2006, the group claimed responsibility for detonating a bomb close to the NDDC headquarters in Port Harcourt. In an online statement after the bombing, MEND referred to the managing director of the Commission as having acted "against the interest of the people of the Niger Delta" (Arubi and Onoyume, 2006). The group has also criticised the NDDC for its alleged

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corrupt practices and for executing projects outside of the Niger Delta. Other groups have also tried to draw attention to their dissatisfaction with the NDDC. For example, in January 2004 a group of Ijaw youths vandalized the NDDC offices in Warri, Delta State, as a means of protesting the marginalization of their communities (ICG, 2006a).

Source: Francis and Sardesai, 2008

The ascendancy of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to the presidency on 29 May 2007 increased the hope that the Niger Delta problems will be solved once and for all going by the commitments of the President to engage in dialogues with all stakeholders and initiate policies that are inclusive in nature. In his inaugural address to the country, President Yar'Adua stated:

The crisis in the Niger Delta commands our attention and it is a matter of strategic importance to our country. I will use every resource available to me to address this crisis in a spirit of fairness, justice and cooperation. We have a good starting point because our predecessor has already launched a master plan that can serve as a basis for a comprehensive examination of all issues.

We will involve all stakeholders in working out a solution. As part of these efforts, we will move quickly to ensure the security of lives and property and investment. In the meantime, I appeal to all aggrieved communities to suspend all forms of violence. Let us allow the impending dialogue to take place in a conducive atmosphere. We are all in this together, and we will find a way to achieve peace and justice. (Full text of the inaugural address of President Yar'Adua "Let's March into the Age of Restoration." (Retrieved from

<http://www.allafrica.com/stories/200705300657.html>

The first step that the Yar'Adua administration took to resolve the crisis was to propose a Niger Delta Summit that was initially scheduled for June 2007. The proposed Summit was intended to develop a comprehensive roadmap towards resolving the crisis. But, right from the beginning, the

proposed Niger Delta Summit was encumbered with controversy, which, on the advice of the Niger Delta leaders, was postponed by the government and eventually failed to see the light of the day. There was lack of consensus on the way to approach the Summit. While the Federal Government considered the Niger Delta's crisis as purely Nigeria's domestic affairs, the people of Niger Delta insisted on the UN and other international meditations (International Crisis Group, 2009). Furthermore, the proposed Summit was even regarded by the majority of stakeholders as unnecessary that will result in failure. The majority of Niger Delta leaders argued that the best way to address the crisis is for the government to, instead of the Niger Delta Summit; reconsider the reports of the previous committees and study groups on the Niger Delta. They urged the government to form a committee to consider the recommendations of those previous committees' reports and present them for action. Fuelling the angers of the Niger Delta people was the appointment of Professor Ibrahim Gambari as head of the Summit Steering Committee. Gambari was seen not as ideal choice by the people of the region and opposition to Gambari's appointment was based on his, as Nigeria's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in 1995, defence of the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders by General Abacha and also that he is not an indigene of Niger Delta. Opposition to Gambari's appointment even came from other parts of the country when the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) contended that: "Gambari had lost credibility by hurting local sensibilities." (The Nigerian Labour Congress Statement signed by its General Secretary John Odah, 4 July 2008). Due to stiff opposition, Gambari withdrew and the Federal Government succumbed to popular pressures and shelved the idea of the Niger Delta Summit and replaced it with, after consultations with Niger Delta leaders, the establishment of a Technical Committee to work on the needs of the region and report. According to International Crisis Group (2009: 7):

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the collapse of the summit at an advanced stage and the fact that opposition to Gambari erupted only after his appointment had been announcement indicated that, in planning for the summit, the government had not communicated and coordinated with Delta ethnic and militant leaders adequately. *More disturbingly, it meant that after over a year in office, an administration that had identified the Delta challenge, as a priority area was still the lead actor in search of a script.* (Italics added).

Though the Federal Government inaugurated a Technical Committee, with broad terms of reference, its recommendations have not been able to meet the aspirations of the people of the Niger Delta, especially the militant groups. Amongst others, the committee recommended amnesty for militant leaders within a context of comprehensive demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programme; increased allocation of oil revenues to the people of the Niger Delta; improvement of infrastructure and welfare services, and new institutional frameworks for the Niger Delta's long term socio-economic and physical development (International Crisis Group, 2009). Despite the comprehensiveness of the Technical Committee recommendations, many became skeptical of the government position going by the President's position that the government would implement only those recommendations that it found acceptable, and this call into question the sincerity of the federal government in solving the Niger Delta crisis (International Crisis Group, 2009: 1). Unfortunately, the inherent gaps in the Committee's reports and lack of government's sincerity failed to dampen tensions in the region as the attacks on oil installations, kidnappings, etc by the militant groups intensified. The Conference of Ethnic Nationalities of the Niger Delta (CENND) was very critical of the Committee report arguing that it disappointed the Niger Delta people because, it failed to recommend an initial minimum of 50% derivation revenue and full control of their resources. Finally, it vowed that "nothing short of control of resources, with payment of appropriate taxes to the federal

government would satisfy grievances.” (See the statement by the Steering Committee of CENND at the end of its meeting in Uzere, Delta state, 17 December 2008, cited in International Crisis Group, 2009)

Other significant initiative of the Yar'Adua administration is creation of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs. The ministry, established in September 2008, is responsible to provide infrastructure development and empower the Niger Delta youth. This is, undoubtedly, a positive development because the newly created ministry will provide a better focused and rapid implementation of programmes and projects for the well being of the aggrieved people tasking cognizance of the fact that these roles were previously performed by several ministries which created problem of coordination. Despite the fact that the creation of the ministry demonstrated a degree of commitment by the Yar'Adua administration to the people of Niger Delta, MEND contended that: “The people of the region should receive this latest dish with apprehension. It will be yet another avenue for corruption and political favouritism.” (See “Nigeria Militants Criticize New Niger Delta Ministry”, Reuters, 11 September 2008). Though the creation of the ministry can be regarded as a very important step towards addressing the crisis in the Niger Delta; unfortunately it attracted a lot of acrimony. First, the mere fact that the Technical Committee was still working on the appropriate ways to solve the crisis when the ministry was created signifies the government has a hidden agenda. The government would have waited for the Technical Committee to submit its report before taking such steps. Also problematic is that the creation of the ministry has opened door for other regional and ethnic groups to demand for ‘region-specific ministries’ which can overstretch the state.

Furthermore, the ministry's mandate and responsibilities conflict with that of the NDDC which resulted in duplication of functions since both are established to tackle the challenges of infrastructure development, environmental protection and the empowerment of the people of the Niger Delta. Coupled with this is the problem of funding. The allocation to the ministry in the 2009 budget was paltry which raised concerns in many quarters about its future. The experience of the NDDC

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reinforces this apprehension going by funding deficit that has been its dominant feature. Probably this is why Kogbara argues that: “the NDDC does not need to be replaced or eclipsed because it can do everything that a ministry can do—if it is given the human and financial resources with which to play a dynamic coordinating role. There’s a very real risk that the new ministry will largely turn out to be nothing more than a glorified version of the NDDC and a cynical, expensive window-dressing.” (International Crisis Group, 2009: 10). There was even an attempt by the government to embark on constructive engagement with the militant groups. The rationale behind this is to negotiate with the militants to form private security companies through this they will be provided with job opportunities by providing security for oil installations. The dangers in such engagements and popular perceptions that are against such idea explain why it has not yet happened.

One can argue that throughout Yar’Adua presidency, the volatile situation in the Niger Delta has not been significantly improved as acts of criminality are on the rise. With the ascendancy of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, an indigene of the Niger Delta, as President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria following Yar’Adua’s death in May 2010, the whole nation is looking to see how he (Goodluck) will solve the problems of ‘his region’

7. Conclusion and Perspective

The foregoing analysis has shown that the volatile security situation in the Niger Delta constitutes real threats to the survival of the Nigerian post-colony and it needs to be addressed by the Federal Government. Though SALW proliferation increases the intensity and duration of violence and, abets militancy in the region but they do not cause the Niger Delta crisis. Now, what is germane is to address the fundamental grievances of the oil-bearing communities. The proclamation of amnesty by the Yar’Adua administration is regarded as a palliative measure that will have no significant

effects on the conflict trajectory. As long as the Federal Government fails to tackle the root causes of the conflict, the people of the region will continue to be restive with negative consequences of arms proliferation while insecurity will continue unabated. Thus, the Nigerian state needs to, *seriously and sincerely*, attend to the problems confronting the people of the region, such as; environmental insecurity, socio-economic underdevelopment and poverty, and also address the problems associated with the country's federalism, which, in both structure and praxis, is wanton. Thus the following policy options, among others, are considered necessary to address the Niger Delta crisis.

First, the Nigerian federalism is presently skewed and marked by extreme centralization where power is concentrated in the centre at the expense of the federating states. This is disadvantageous to the oil-bearing communities because it has led to such, according to Suberu (1996: 67), "inauspicious and obnoxious outcomes as the erosion of the autonomy and security that genuinely federalists arrangements assure for minorities, the inordinate appropriation by the centre of the resources of the oil-rich Delta minority communities, and the direct and often counter-productive intervention of central authorities in those local and regional issues, such as the determination of local government boundaries, that are best left to subnational authorities or communities." Attempt by the Obasanjo administration to address the problems of Nigerian federalism through Justice Niki Tobi-led National Political Reform Conference in 2005 failed to achieve its objectives because it is believed that the conference was engineered by the government to achieve the hidden agenda of President Obasanjo. It is argued here that the best way to address this contentious issue is through a Sovereign National Conference of all ethnic nationalities. How to adequately cater for the needs of ethnic minority groups, especially the oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta region should be one of the foremost priorities of the present administration. This can be achieved through constitutional amendments where some degrees of autonomy will be accorded the federating states, especially the oil producing ones, regarding mining rights and also through initiating *sincere* programmes that can address the structural defects of the

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Nigerian federal system of government within the context of good governance, transparency and accountability.

Second, there is the need for the Federal Government to increase the derivation formula from the present 13%. Such increase in financial allocation to the oil-producing states will dampen down tensions and address the environment and socio-economic problems of the area. These efforts need to be strengthened by establishing mediatory and regulatory institutions to monitor the money spent by oil producing states' governments in order to ensure that the financial resources are used on the provision of public goods and services. The Federal Government needs to intensify its anti-corruption efforts in this regard.

Third, the destruction of the Niger Delta environment by the MNOCs should be addressed by the Nigerian state. The region's ecosystem can be protected by enacting laws that will regulate the activities of MNOCs and also agencies to monitor such activities and enforce compliance. Fourth, the Nigerian government should empower Niger Delta's youth by initiating youth empowerment schemes. Government needs to accord high priority to vocational training and invest in education (especially peace education) and also provide them (Niger Delta's youth) with job opportunities after such training. This will definitely dissuade them from joining militant groups and will inculcate in them the importance of harmonious intra- and inter-ethnic relations as preconditions for physical, socio-economic and human developments.

Fifth, Nigeria needs to improve the quality of its democratic process in order to increase the confidence of the oil-bearing communities in the Nigerian nation-state project. The perceived political marginalization and socio-economic exclusion of the people of the Niger Delta can be overcome by reforming the country's democratic process as this will guarantee their commitments to the Nigerian state. This is probably why Francis and Sardesai (2008: 48) argue that "conflict is a normal feature in any democratic society; however the disconnect between state and society in Nigeria has led to a situation in which conflict cannot be managed within the political process, leading people to increasingly turn towards violent forms of conflict. *Strengthening the voice*

of communities in the Niger Delta by working towards free and fair elections would go a long way towards restoring the legitimacy of the current administration and of democracy in Nigeria.” (Italics added)

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