
International Dimension of The Niger Delta Crisis: An Insight into Nigeria's Foreign Policy Challenges

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***Abstract:** The Niger Delta region of Nigeria with its tremendous natural endowment of oil and gas was a theatre of plunder, war, hostage taking, vandalization of oil pipe line and flow stations. The restiveness in the region was a direct result of historical deprivation, oppression, marginalization and dispossession. Revenue from the oil sector were subjected to distortions and malformation. There was lack of transparency in the administration of oil sales proceeds. Because of its natural endowment the region is also a critical region for the international community. It was therefore not surprising that the Niger Delta crisis attracted international attention. This work thus examines the international dimension of the crisis and its implication on Nigeria's external image. The work invariably examines the challenges posed by the crisis on Nigeria's foreign policy. In this era of international economic meltdown and restructuring, a holistic restructuring of Nigeria's federal structure will be a better starting point to solving of the numerous problems facing the Nigerian nation and the Niger delta crisis in particular. The amnesty programme may just be a palliative.*

Keywords: Niger Delta crisis, Nigeria's Foreign Policy, International Dimension

1. Introduction

The international system as a collection of independent political units interacts with each other and in the process attempt to react to the policies or events emanating from other units. Coplin (1971:331) describe the international system as a decentralized political system dominated by competing relatively autonomous, territorially based political organizations. The crucial areas of such interactions include

economic, social, and political. Ojo (1985:52) however explains that economics as an issue area in international relation is both an independent and a dependent variable. He went on to acknowledge the fact that African States within the international system are engaged in a struggle for economic survival and economic independence. Karl Marx in his expose virtually reduced all external interactions and relations to economic determinism.

Consequently, it is pertinent to observe that events in one unit are bond to attract reactions from other units. This simply explains the linkage theory as propounded by scholars like James Rosenau and Arthur Stein. The linkage theory is explained as a state policy of making its course of action concerning a given issue contingent upon the behavior of other states. It is on this premise that the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria would have impacted on other units (states) within the international system. In essence it did to certain extent influence Nigeria's external policy.

Nigeria's Niger Delta region is a geopolitical zone which is the main centre of Nigeria's oil industry. The region therefore has witnessed oil exploration and exploitation. Crude oil is an important material input not only within the Nigerian state but in international politics. Consequently, issues surrounding its production directly affect the international community.

It is against this background that this work seeks to examine the challenges posed by the Niger Delta crisis on Nigeria's external relations. In essence the work is out to discuss the internationalization of the Niger Delta crises. The strategic importance of the Niger Delta to the global oil supply makes any unrest in the region a concern of the international community. It is also pertinent to mention that the secrecy and corrupt practices in the administration of the oil sector contributed in attracting international attention.

2. The International System

Rourke and Boyer (2003: 24) explain the concept of international system as the notion that the world is more than just the sum of the part. And that world politics is more than just the sum of the individual interactions among those parts. Akinboye and Otttoh (2007:99) identified international system as the arena of world politics. World politics they posit is often plagued by several participants, the most important being nation-states.

Interactions within the international system are based on policies formulated by the different political units (states). These policies which are referred to as foreign or external policies are the goals and objectives which a state sets or designs to achieve beyond its national frontiers. Holsti (1977; 145-151) argued that routine foreign policy decision-making tends to centre more on the national interest of the state. Hence states attempt to influence the behaviour of other states in desired direction (See Utete 1985:44)..

It is also of importance to note that it is in such routine interests or middle range issues that class interest tend to have a decisive influence on policy-making. Hence foreign policies tend to be invested with an overlay of ideological rationalization (See. Utete, 1965:44). Consequently, foreign policy can be viewed as an extension or complement of domestic policy. Above all, foreign policy relation is guided by certain factors such as; (a) Societal structure and force, including social classes, ethnic composition cultural and psychological factors at work in the society (b) Contingency and situational factors, including political and economic crises, coups, elections, violence etc. (c) The State System, including the government machinery of decision-making and (d) Leadership which refers to the way in which state power is used by office holders and decision makers(Utete 1985, quoting Brucan, 1978: 3).

In discussing the Niger Delta crisis the above factors and analysis become relevant, the Niger delta crisis being a domestic issue assumed an international dimension or rather had attracted certain external reactions. Borrowing Wallerstein world system theory it can be argued that all the elements within the international system are interlinked. Accordingly, they exist in a dynamic relationship with each

other. To understand the attributes, function or behaviour of one element(unit), one must understand its position within the whole(See Hobden and Jones, 1997:130). The pertinent question arising from above is; what is the nature of Nigeria's foreign policy and what were the challenges occasioned by the Niger Delta crisis? The next section will thus examine briefly the fundamentals of Nigeria's external or foreign policy.

3. Fundamentals of Nigerian Foreign Relation

Africa today occupies the peripheral position in the world system, decades after independence. Colonialism and imperialism had their impact on African Countries and thus made them dependent. Dependency theory assumes that group of countries have their economy conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subject(Offing 1980:73). According to Ojo (1985) dependency analysis emphasis economic factors as being decisive in shaping the kind of relationship an under develop-country might have with a powerful industrially developed state. This has led to the concept of 'Core' and 'peripheral' world system.

Consequently, it has been argued that the foreign policies of African states are conditioned by the needs of the dominant economies of the world. In Offiong's (1930:73) view the international system of which Africa is a part, implies a structure of institutions, classes and power arrangements which inevitably limit their freedom of action. It is from this stand point do we understand and analyze the internationalization of the Niger Delta crisis.

Asobie(2002) had observed that the approach of successive Nigerian governments to the world, especially since 1986, has been the achievement of much deeper and more extensive integration of the Nigeria economy into the global capitalist economy. This he stated is pursued through trade liberalization, de-regulation of the financial system and privatization of public enterprises. The policy under which these measures were implemented during the Babangida military regime was the Structured Adjustment Programme (SAP).

Again, another thrust of Nigerian foreign policy designed to achieve the above objective was the membership of international organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the accession to the American initiated African Growth and Opportunity Act (A.C.O.A). For these reasons Nigeria had to rely increasingly on the United States and Britain to promote its economy, Olusanya and Akindele (1986:9) asserted that Nigeria's image of the world systems social structure is like a two-side portrait with one side showing the fundamental cleavage between the colonized and the colonizers and the other side depicting a confrontation between the economically developed and the economically under-developed. Both authors however claim that Nigeria has not missed the striking feature of the portrait which is that the colonizers are also the economically developed and the colonized are the economically under-developed.

The Niger Delta Crisis

The Niger Delta is a zone of demographic minorities and at the same instance accounts for more than 90% of earning from oil and gas, of federally distributed revenue in Nigeria. Egborge (1999:16) explain that the region has over 10,000km of pipe lines, over 100 flow stations, 10 gas plants, 3 oil terminals, 1,500 oil-producing wells and 3 refineries. This statistics was for the year 1999.

All of these make the Niger Delta a critical region for Nigeria and the international community. Consequently, the region embodies political, economic and security interests internally, nationally and internationally. Apart from the fact that the region has been laid postate by massive oil based environmental degradation and gas flaring, it is deprived and disinherited of her national resources and the accruable benefit through progressive Nigerian Federal government policies that took over the rents (Ikelegbe., 2004:162).. In essence there is an absence of a concrete and realizable development policy for the region.

Hence, the restiveness and subsequent militant struggle of the people in the Niger Delta are the direct result of historical deprivation, neglect, oppression and dispossession

of the regions natural endowment. The willink commission of 1958 report shows clearly that the Niger Delta region has been neglected. In Kupolokun's (2004:41) view therefore, the underserved and pervasive neglect, couple with the failure of successive governmental interventions to gender processes and modes of development in the region produced a restive and crises ridden region. These problems he claim led to many negative reactions such as communal crises, attacks an oil and gas infrastructure and hostage tasking, seizure of drilling rigs and sabotage of pipelines.

While Sagay (2004:35) attribute the Niger Delia crisis to the absolute ownership of minerals by the Nigerian Federal Government, Darah (2004:43) identified oil companies as part of the problematic equation. These companies he claim fuel and fire the conflict in the Niger Delta. In Sagay's(2004:14) view governments action had turned the Niger Delta into a theatre of plunder. The Niger Delta militants attacked flow stations and other oil installations, kidnapped foreign workers and vandalized oil equipments.

Government response to these various acts was to militarize the zone, an attempt to use government might to intimidate, harass and subjugate any agitation. Government action only succeeded in escalating the crisis. The Nigerian government subsequently deployed soldiers and warships to dislodge the militants and to protect oil installations. In the process several Niger Delta communities, such as Odi and Gharamatu were raised to the ground by the federal troops.

For those who dare to challenge government openly such as Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogonis belonging to the Movement for the survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) were arrested and executed. This act couple with the kidnapping of foreign nationals attracted international attention. Hence there were international responses and Nigeria's reaction to these responses.

(See tabulation of events as shown in appendix. It explains the order of events between the Federal Government and the Niger Delta militants).

The International Dimension of the Niger Delta Crisis

The strategic importance of the Niger Delta region to the global oil supply market makes any unrest in the Niger Delta a concern of the international community. It is trite to note that the activities of the militant had direct and indirect effect on the international environment. For instance, destruction of flow stations and other oil installations and equipment greatly hampered production. Thus, reducing the number of barrels exported and available in the international market. A situation that brought about an increase in the price of oil.

Furthermore, the kidnapping of foreign workers brought much concern to their home government who felt that the Nigerian government ought to provide for the protection of foreign nationals. For instance, some foreign workers that were kidnapped vowed not to come to Nigeria again (See Sunday Vanguard, April 26, 2009). The Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole was, therefore, regarded as unsafe for investment. The multinational oil corporations such as Shell and Chevron owned by foreign nationals and governments began to consider the safety of their business.

To draw the attention of the international community to the crisis, the various movements, groups and organizations in the Niger Delta, even the militant groups at one time or the other carried their message abroad. Saro-Wiwa's MOSOP, took their message beyond the shores of Nigeria to the United Nations in New York. The movement was accorded the much needed international attention after presenting its case. It is on record that MOSOP received an endorsement from the international environmental groups such as the Greenpeace and the London Rain Forest Action Group. Besides, MOSOP won its case against Shell instituted in the U.S for which Shell was asked to pay a large sum of money as compensation to the Ogoni people.

The execution of the Ogoni nine by the Federal Government portrayed Nigeria as lawless and notorious. In response the international community imposed sanction on Nigerian government while several human rights organizations and other bodies condemned the act. The

invasion of Odi in 1999 and Gharamatu in 2009 received no less a condemnation. The brutal and repressive nature of the military personal in the region, coupled with the underdeveloped nature of the region, despite the huge revenue accruing to government from the region, attracted sympathy from the some sections of the international community. As a result of the military actions of the Nigeria military Joint Task Force (JTF) in the region the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) urged the United Nation (UN) to investigate the alleged extra-judicial killings and rape by troops of the JTF. The Commonwealth was the first international organization to react to the execution of the Ogoni nine activists. An eight-member commonwealth Ministerial Action Group(CMAG) was set up to look into the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his group. The commonwealth also suspended Nigeria from the commonwealth and at the same time gave Nigeria two years to comply with the terms of the Harare Declaration.

The United Nations General Assembly in response to the crisis adopted resolution 50/199 which noted the poor human rights record of Nigerian government. It condemned in strong terms the Nigeria's violation of human rights while encouraging members to impose sanctions on Nigeria. By April of 1996, the U.N Secretary General sent a fact-finding mission to Nigeria for on-the-spot investigation of human right abuses particularly as it concerns the Niger Delta. The U.N. Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur Commission headed by the Indian Attorney-General Soil Jehangir Sorabjee to assess the Human Right situation in Nigeria.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) responded to Nigeria's situation by esterblishing a commission of inquiry to also investigate the continued incarceration of labour leaders in the oil sector. Unfortunately, the commission could not make direct contact with the Nigerian government. Furthermore the European Union member states agreed to impose visa restrictions on members of the Nigerian Provisional Ruling Council and the Federal Executive Council and their families

The international community faulted Nigeria's oil sales by observing a wide gap between what is declared and what the actual sales return should be. For instance, the Economist of London noted that given the known oil production and world oil prices, the gap between what the NNPC a Nigerian oil company, should have earned, and what the government says it earned was about 2.7 billion (Soremekun, Olowu and Williams 1999:102). This situation portrayed Nigeria as lacking in transparency in the administration of oil sales proceeds. An indication of corrupt practice by the government in oil sales.

Soremekun et al (1999:102) also remarked that even the Breton Wood's twins, the IMF and the World Bank, were stoned-walled when they attempted to have an insight into the mechanics of oil sales administration and expenditure. The issue of gas flaring and oil spillage attracted the interest of international environmentalist. The C.N.N. cable network came out with a documentary on the deprived and degrading nature of the region where billions of dollars were collected as revenue by the Nigerian government (Bolaji 2008:601). Shell, Chevron and other companies exploring oil from the region are accused of waging ecological war against the people (Enaharo and Ehi-Ebewele 2008).

4. Nigeria's Foreign Policy Response

Following the reactions of the international community as a form of retaliation the Nigerian government relocated from London to Paris the European office of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC). The wasteful and corrupt practice in the oil administration sector attracted foreign comment. A journalist from the Financial times of London reported that a huge portion of the five billion dollars which Nigeria realized from the increased sales of oil during the Gulf war could not be accounted for. Nigeria's response to the report was to throw the reporter out of the country and declared him persona- non-grata (Soremekun, 1999 quoting Tell Magazine 1994) Furthermore, based on Nigeria's inability to subdue the militants, the Nigerian government launched a massive propaganda on image laundering. First,

was the government's high powered propaganda portraying the militants as criminals. The ministers of Niger Delta Affairs and that of Foreign Affairs were in Washington, the United States at a special session organized by the centre for strategic and international studies (CSIS) to clarify and justify the Nigerian government military action in the region. The Minister of Niger Delta affairs, Ufot Ekaette reiterate that the operation in the region was to flush out the criminal elements and pave way for genuine peace and development. The Foreign Affairs Minister, Ojo Maduekwe remarked that the Nigerian government would not allow any group or individual to plunge Nigeria into avoidable conflict while appealing to the international community to allow Nigeria take steps to resolve the problem posed 'criminals' in the Niger Delta (See The Nation, June 17, 2009).

The Nigerian Government further came up with what it termed re-branding Nigeria. The programme was meant to redefine Nigeria's image in the international community. A whopping sum of amount was budgeted for the re-branding project. On the other hand Nigeria's petroleum resources Minister of State Odien Ajumogobia while addressing newsmen lamented that Nigeria had not received enough support from the international community in the battle to stop the illicit business of oil theft. He went on to state that the Nigerian Government was not comfortable with the non-committal posture of the international community.

It is also pertinent to mention that the battle with the Niger Delta militant raised brought to the fore the flawed electoral process. The elections of 1999, 2003, and 2009 were described by the international monitors as seriously flawed. The elections were characterized by violence, political assassination, rigging, thuggary, ballot snatching and manipulation of results. All of these raised the challenge of legitimacy. The crises that engulf the Nigerian state during the period prompted the United States central intelligence agency to come out with a report in March 2005 predicting the "outright collapse" of Nigeria within 15 years. The United States secretary of state Hillary Clinton also condemned Nigeria on its flawed elections and the high rate of corruption. President Obama of the United States had also in

his speech in Egypt and Ghana commented on the same line while admonishing African leaders to imbibe democratic tenets.

In this respect Nigeria's President Obasanjo embarked on a shuttle diplomacy. Ya Adua's presidency introduced the issue of amnesty. What is indicative in much of the foregoing was that the Federal Government wants to portray itself in another light to the international community. As simplistic as the immediate actions of government might appear, it was meant to pacify the western countries and to prove that government was doing something to resolve the problems of the region. It was also aptly illustrative that the Nigerian government was being humane in tackling the instability in the region. The pertinent question is: can the amnesty program succeed in solving the regions problems?

5. Conclusion

The Niger Delta crisis demonstrated the growing fragility and the pervasive instability of the Nigerian state. There was the hash economic environment with raising rate of poverty and unemployment. The economy was such that it found it difficult to meet the needs of globalism and the progressive movement towards making foreign policy an important tool in increasing the welfare of Nigerians (Saliu 2010). This dismal situation prompted the prediction that Nigeria was heading towards becoming a failed state. In the face of a dwindling economy the Nigerian foreign policy showed a wide gap between required and actual resources mobilized and deployed to its 106 foreign missions.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the downstream oil sector in Nigeria can be identified as a major sector of corruption and conflict. Hence, attempts made so far to resolve and solve the problem are just palliative measures. The Nigerian government seems powerless against the oil cabals because majority of the oil cabals are in government.

Most importantly Nigeria's foreign policy during this period was confronted by a number of challenges which

include security. Hence it requires rehabilitating. Consequently, the issue of amnesty is hardly the solution to the crises. Soyinka(The Nation Newspaper(Nigeria) July 2009:13) noted that the crisis in the Niger Delta region can only be solved holistically. He called for the restructuring of the nation on a more equitable basis. In essence the distortions of the federal structure since independence should be corrected. Adding their voice to other calls, the apex Igbo socio-cultural organization Ohanaeze Ndigbo regretted that the amnesty measure did not address the contentious issues that forced the people of the oil rich region into conflict. The organization identified the failure to adhere strictly to the principles of true federalism, the rejection of resource control and an inequitable system of revenue sharing as the causes of the Niger Delta conflict (Nigeria) July 27,2009:41). Hence several policies put in place by government have failed to resolve the Niger Delia crisis including the establishment of interventionist agencies. Logically, therefore, the restructuring of the federal system is imperative. Resolving the Niger Delta crisis would go a long way in improving Nigeria's external image.

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APPENDIX TABULATION OF EVENTS

February 2006

The first high-profile seizure of oil workers occurs. Militant of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), a group representing numerous militant factions, abduct nine expatriate oil workers. Persistent rebel attacks.

April 2006

President Olusegun Obasanjo inaugurates a forum of Delta activists, elders, officials and youth leaders in bid to end the crisis.

May 2006.

A Nigerian court orders oil company Shell Petroleum Development Corporation to pay \$1.5 billion in damages to a host community in the Niger Delta for years of environmental pollution. Shell files an appeal and refuses to accept the judgement.

September 2006

Soldiers invade Okochiri village, near the main oil city of Port Harcourt, said to be a hideout for suspected kidnappers of oil workers

September 2006

Oil unions launch a three-day strike over deteriorating security situation in the Niger Delta.

October 2006

Hundreds of villagers occupy four oil pumping stations in the Niger Delta saying oil company Shell reneged on a promise to give supply contracts to the host community.

October 2006

Army confirmed the killing of none soldiers in a clash with militants

October 2006 to June 2007

Kidnapping of oil workers intensifies

November 2006

Soldiers and militants clash in Bayelsa State and at least two militants die in the shootout.

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December 2006

Criminal gangs release more than 20 hostages sized some 20 days prior.

May 2007

President Yar' Adua assumes office. Four American oil workers held by militants for weeks released.

November 2007

Government troops continue sweep of restive main oil city of Port Harcourt.

February 2008

Prominent militant, Henry Okah, arrested in Angola and is extradited to Nigeria.

Jun 2008

President Yar' Adua orders a military crackdown in the Niger Delta following destroyed several oil pipelines which oil company. Chevron confirms has cut its production by 100,000 barrels per day

On 10 September 2008, Nigerian cabinet appoints a new minister for the region, the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, Obong Ufot Ekaette. Government forms Technical committee to recommend ways to reduce violence in the Delta.

November 2008

Military declare an "oil war" in which they step up attacks on oil facilities and security forces, sparking the heaviest clashes in the region in two years. On 13 September government security forces allegedly raze three villages in rivers State in search of MEND member Farah Dagogo. Dozens die in attacks, according to International Crisis Group.

December 2008

Government forces arrest militant leader Sabomabo Jackrich. Government Technical committee issues recommendations to reduce violence in Niger Delta including appointing a mediator to facilitate discussions between government and militants; granting amnesty to some militant leaders; launching a disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation campaign; and channeling 25 percent of the country's oil revenue to the Delta, up from the current 13 percent.

January 2009

Militants call off unilateral ceasefire announced in September 2008. Declaring "Hurricane Obama" step-up in attacks, linked to a government offensive on camp of rebel member Ateke T May 2009:

Clashes between government forces (the Joint Task Force) and militants break out on 13 May. Both sides deny initiating the attack.

JTF launches its biggest onslaught against militant since 2006. Rebel leader Tom Polo's compound is destroyed but he is still said to be at large.

On 14 May militants take at least 15 hostages: the JTF eventually frees most of them.

On 25 May Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) says it has om.

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Jan 30 2009:

MEND announces an end to the ceasefire and announces a large scale assault named “Hurricane Obama”

Civil society group coalition citizens President Yar’ Adua’s silence on Technical Committee recommendations for reducing violence.

February 2009

Joint task Force destroys prominent ‘Daronma militants, camp in Bayelsa State. President Yar’ Adua announces the creation of a new government committee to study recommendations of previous Teaching Committee set up in September 2008 to recommend solutions for reducing violence in region. Militant attack a civilian helicopter for first time

March 2009

President Umaru Yar’ Adua declares the government will consider a conditional amnesty for militants in the Niger Delta.

May 9 2009:

The governor of Rivers State signs a law under which anybody who takes hostages faces life imprisonment.

May 13 2009:

The security forces in the Joint Task force launch a major offensive to hunt down armed groups operating in the creeks of the Niger Delta.

June 7 2009:

MEND announces an “all-out oil war” after several weeks of clashes with the armed forces.

June 15 2009:

MEND claims more attacks against installations of the U.S oil group Chevron and extends its threat by warning FIFA against letting Nigeria host Under-17 World Cup Tournament.

SOURCE: SUNDAY VANGUARD, JUNE 21, 2009:13