



POLAC ECONOMICS REVIEW (PER)
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCE
NIGERIA POLICE ACADEMY, WUDIL-KANO



COUNTERTERRORISM WARFARE: THE VICTORY AND CHALLENGES OF JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST MILITANTS IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study seeks to examine the antecedents of Joint Military Operations of the Air Force, Army, Navy, Police, Nigerian Securities and Civil Defense Commission, and the Department of State Security Service in the fight against militancy in Nigeria's oil-rich zone of the Niger Delta. It explores the trajectory of joint military deployment in Nigeria's oil-producing conflict-affected zones and examines the structure and modus operandi of the Joint Military Task Force (JMTF) deployed in the Niger Delta. The study further espouses some epochs of the Niger Delta terrorism vis-a-vis the joint military operations and interrogates the impact of these activities in the Niger Delta. It further explores that the fight against the persisting terror groups has encountered challenges as the military approach in the region has not quelled the crises but still continues to engage the militants in active warfare. The paper analyses Joint Military operations deployment in the context of two observable events of the Niger Delta insurgency: the active military combat operations and the presidential amnesty program. The study concludes thus that the joint military operation has achieved successes in the course of the crisis-era but has continued to fight militants to this day because the cogent factors that necessitated the crises in the first place have not been addressed, further showing that the action of the joint military operation in the region is a reactionary measure on the path of the government rather than a proactive one.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, Terrorism, Joint Military Operations, Militancy, Niger Delta

Introduction

According to Nwankwo¹ before Nigeria was declared a major oil producer in 1973, principal agricultural products such as cocoa, palm produce, and groundnuts flourished through regional specialization of production. Northern Nigeria featured prominently in groundnut production, Eastern Nigeria was noted for palm produce production, while Western Nigeria excelled in cocoa production. Nwankwo maintained that the export value of these products was 70- 80

percent in foreign exchange. Apart from these export crops, the domestic food needs of the country were virtually satisfied with the encouraged cultivation of cassava, rice, millet, yam, beans, vegetables, et cetera. Though that agricultural economy was structured to satisfy the imperial needs of the colonialists, abandoning it for oil even after independence, as the sole sustainer of Nigeria's economy, has remained a deteriorating sore in the country. With the divide-and-rule tendencies of the capitalist multinational companies that control the oil industry in Nigeria, the troubles created by oil in the country became too complex without solutions in sight.²

¹Nwankwo, A. A. "After Oil, What Next? (Oil and Multinationals in Nigeria)" Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd. 1982

²Odeke, F.C., Obinna, A.K. and Obiaku, C.C. The Niger Delta in Historical Perspective, 1800-1960. International

The 1990s heralded waves of spectacular forms of local resistance and globalized protest against oil exploitation and environmental pollution in oil-producing regions of the developing world. One of the most spectacular local uprisings against global oil multinationals was led by the Ogoni people who were protesting against the exploitation and marginalization of oil-producing ethnic minority communities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. However, the hanging on November 10, 1995 of nine Ogoni ethnic minority and environmental justice activists, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, only served to exacerbate protests in later years. Within a decade, dozens of locally rooted insurgent groups emerged in the Niger Delta and construed themselves as part of the social movement for ethnic minority rights and environmental justice which dates back to colonial times. However, the trajectory of the revolutionary momentum has changed over time, reflecting a mix of progressive, opportunistic and retrogressive trends.³

This study provides a critical study of the trajectory of joint military operations in the Niger Delta since it was first institutionalized in 2009, paying attention to the activities of the joint military task force of Operation Restore Hope; its successes in curbing the crisis in the region and also the challenges it faced. The paper also analyses recent developments linked to the shift from local resistance, to the rupturing of the Presidential Amnesty peace deal (largely to the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) and the continuing efforts of the joint military task force in enforcing peace and order in the region. The paper critically identifies the nature of the region's political economy, socio-economic trends and trajectories for almost two decades since the formation of Joint military operations in the region.

Conceptual Issues

In order to answer the question of Joint Military operations in tackling the Niger Delta Oil-induced

crisis, it is pertinent to clarify some key concepts or terms that make up this study. The term **Joint Military Operation** is in essence a form of combined arms warfare on a larger, national scale, in which complementary forces from a state's army, navy, air, coastal, space, and special forces are meant to work together in joint operations, rather than planning and executing military operations separately. Its origins can be traced to the 1938 establishment of the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the world's first joint higher command structure in the United States of America. Prior to this, the only form of 'jointness' in the military was the U.S.A Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁴ Other world military forces followed suit in the execution of military operations by way of joint operational efforts. In the context of Nigeria's climate, as well as the Niger Delta crisis which is the focus of this study, joint military operations is usually the combination of military personnel and combatant troops gotten from the Nigerian Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Police and the State Security Service (SSS) who were deployed to the Niger Delta in May, 2009. This creation was also termed the Joint Task Force and code named "Operation Restore Hope."

The term **militancy** means using violence or aggressiveness, usually to support a cause. The current conflict in the Niger Delta first arose in the early 1990s over tensions between foreign oil corporations and a number of the Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups who feel they are being exploited, particularly the Ogoni and the Ijaw. Ethnic and political unrest continued throughout the 1990s despite the return to democracy⁵

The paper establishes that militancy as a veritable component of small wars or low intensity conflict is an act of **Terrorism** and not insurgency. The US Army Joint Publication 3-26 (2014) on counterterrorism

Journal of Research in Humanities Arts and Literature. 9:4, 2021.

³ Obi, C. and Oriola, T.B. The Unfinished Revolution in Nigeria's Niger Delta: Prospects for Environmental Justice and Peace. London: Routledge. 2018

⁴ Hayward, J. "A case study in early joint warfare: An analysis of the Wehrmacht's Crimean campaign of 1942". Journal of Strategic Studies. 22 (4): 103–130. 1999.

⁵ Siarhei B. "Belarusian Military Cooperation With Developing Nations: Dangerous Yet Legal" Belarus Digest, 5 December 2013.

doctrine addresses terrorism as the unlawful use of violence or the threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political. Furthermore, the manual considers terrorism as a tool of irregular warfare while **Counterterrorism** activities and operations are taken to neutralize terrorists, their organizations and networks.⁶

The **Niger Delta** is the delta of the Niger River sitting directly on the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean in Nigeria.⁷ It is located within nine coastal southern Nigerian states, which include: all six states from the South-South geopolitical zone, one state (Ondo) from South West geopolitical zone and two states (Abia and Imo) from South East geopolitical zone.⁸

The Niger Delta is a very densely populated region sometimes called the Oil Rivers because it was once a major producer of palm oil.⁹ The area was the British Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 until 1893, when it was expanded and became the Niger Coast Protectorate. The delta is a petroleum-rich region and has been the center of international concern over pollution that has resulted principally from major oil spills of multinational corporations of the petroleum industry.¹⁰

Geography of the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta, as now defined officially by the Nigerian government, extends over about 70,000 km² (27,000 sq mi) and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. Historically and cartographically,

it consists of present-day Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States. In 2000, however, Obasanjo's regime included Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers State, Edo, Imo, and Ondo States in the region.¹¹ The Niger Delta and the South-South geopolitical zone (which contains six of the states in the Niger Delta) are two different entities. The Niger Delta separates the Bight of Benin from the Bight of Bonny within the larger Gulf of Guinea.¹²

An Overview of the Niger Delta Crisis

The identity of the Niger Delta (ND) people as the 'minority' ethnic group with its huge implications for socio-economic development and political power rights is believed to be a core issue in the Niger Delta crisis. Another main cause of hostility is the struggle for resource control accruing to the region which accounts for over 95% of national income. The agitation for self-determination and the calls for exclusive political space have lasted for over 50 years. Oil was discovered in large quantities in the Niger Delta in the late 50s and since the 70s, over 80% of Nigeria's oil revenue and export earnings have been produced in the land. With the collapse of agriculture as a foreign exchange earner, oil is today the mainstay of Nigeria's economy contributing over 46.8% of GDP in 1992, and accounting for about 96.2% of total export earnings since 1996.¹³

The increase in oil revenue in the early 70's coincided with increased centralization of political power in

The increase in oil revenue in the early 70s coincides with increased centralization of political power in Nigeria. Before 1967, the regional governments exercised considerable executive powers; however, the creation of twelve states by the military government amplified the powers of the central government. This

⁶ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-26 Counterterrorism*, 24 October 2014, p. vii.

⁷Hogan, C.M. "Niger River", in M. McGinley (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Earth* Archived 2013-04-20 at the Wayback Machine, Washington, DC: National Council for Science and Environment, 2013.

⁸Aghalino, S.O. *Combating the Niger Delta Crisis: an appraisal of Federal Government response to Anti-Oil protest in Niger Delta, 1958-2002*. Maiduguri journal of Historical studies. 2004.

⁹Otoabasi, A. *The Niger Delta Question and the peace plan*. Spectrum Books. 2011

¹⁰Dakolo, B. *The Riddle of the Oil Thief*. Lagos: Purple Shelves. pp. 117–170. 2021

¹¹Otoabasi, A. *The Niger Delta Question and the peace plan*. Spectrum Books. 2011

¹²Akpan, D. *Oil Exploration and environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. A paper presented at the first regional conference*. 2006.

¹³Omotola, S. "The Next Gulf? Oil Politics, Environmental Apocalypse and Rising Tension in the Niger Delta." Occasional Paper Series, Vol. 1(4) 3-31 2006.

had a huge consequence with regard to the oil industry as it signaled the systematic alienation of the local people from decision-making. The Petroleum Act of 1969 transferred all oil revenue to the military government which was expected to disburse the revenue to the various states. It was then hoped that the creation of Rivers state and the then South Eastern state which partly met their demand for self-determination would guarantee a significant share of control of oil revenue, but the concentration of power and resources in the Federal Government through military decrees further alienated the host oil communities.¹⁴ According to Omoweh, the issues in the Niger delta transcends beyond an agitation for the rights of the people to natural resources of the region, but the rights to participate in the decision-making process on the exploitation and production and export of the resources, the right to know the income accruing from the production of the resources and how it is spent on development projects based on the needs of the people. 'Therefore, the direct placing of oil revenue in the hands of the federal government dominated by the power-elite from the ethnic majority groups leaving the environmental consequences of oil production to the ethnic minorities espouses the dichotomy of injustice existing between both divides.'¹⁵

Environmental degradation appears to be the most devastating effect of oil exploration in the Delta region. The spates of oil spills have almost totally destroyed fishing and farming which are the people's main sources of livelihood. About 3,000 oil spill incidents were reported by oil companies operating in Nigeria in recent years; this represents over two million barrels of oil spilled into the country's terrestrial, coastal and offshore marine environment.¹⁶¹⁷ A World Bank report also reveals that almost 300 oil spills were recorded per

year between 1991 and 1993 in the Delta and River states alone.¹⁸ According to a recent report by CNN (GPS), with 300 spills yearly, about 550 million gallons of oil have been spilled in the ND in the last 50 years. This is far more than the oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico, which Shell BP is committed to cleaning and pledging about \$50 million as compensation to those affected by the oil spills. In the Delta region however, no one is apparently held responsible or held accountable for cleaning the area. Thus, oil spills and gas flaring have been a recurrent problem with serious devastating effects. Mild agitations in form of demonstrations, media protests and legal tussles appeared to be handled with lethargy by successive governments and multi-national oil companies operating in the region. It is the destruction of the land and fishing waters, health hazards caused by constant oil spills and gas flaring and the prevalence of poverty and underdevelopment in the region that are today known as the Niger Delta crisis.¹⁹

Activities and Achievements of the Joint Military Operations in the Crisis

Joint Military Operations in the region was established in 2009 by the Umaru Musa Yar'adua led government. Prior to this the activities of the military in the region was mostly limited to Army operations. Okonta and Douglas narrated that the antecedents of military occupation of the oil communities began in 1994 and marked out the Niger Delta as the first part of Nigeria where a special military occupation force took over the lives of the people, which resulted in the killing and maiming of thousands as the military troops engaged different militia groups who were determined to battle their rights to self-determination as it concerns the region in which they live.²⁰

In November 1999 the federal government also moved some army battalions from Warri in Delta State and

¹⁴Obi, C. Oil Minority Rights versus the Nigerian state: Conflict and Transcendence. 'Politics and Economics. University of Leipzig Papers on Africa. Series no. 15. 2001.

¹⁵Omoweh, D. "Resource Governance and Democratization in Africa. 'The International Journal of African Studies, Vol. 5 (1), 29-68. 2006.

¹⁶Baker, Paul 2006. Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis. London: Continuum

¹⁷Omotola, S. "The Next Gulf? Oil Politics, Environmental Apocalypse and Rising Tension in the Niger Delta."

¹⁸ World Bank, 1995.

¹⁹Chiluwa, I. Media Representation of Nigeria's Joint Military Task Force in the Niger Delta Crisis. Ogun: International Journal of humanities and Social Science. 2011.

²⁰Okonta, I&Oronta, D. *Where Vultures Feast: Shell Human Rights and Oil*. (London: Verso 2003).

Elele in Rivers State into Bayelsa State.²¹ Some days before, seven policemen had been killed in a clash with youths in the Odi area of Bayelsa state and in response to this act, the government sent the military troops into the area. After the military bombardment of Odi, the male youths in the town and its environs became victim to the military attacks in their attempt to go after the perpetrators. This action of the government which attracted both national and international observations and comments marked the beginning of a formal organized military activity which is the Joint Military operation of the Joint Task Force in the Niger delta region.

The successes or achievement of the joint military operation can be characterized around two observable events which are;

1. Operations in physical combats with militants that are disrupting the activities of oil exploration, such as bombing of oil installations, vandalism of oil pipelines and kidnapping of oil workers both of Nigerian descent and foreigners.
2. The second is the presidential amnesty program measure institutionalized by the government in the year 2009 so as to retrieve arms and ammunitions from the militia groups in the region by the military after pardon has been granted.

Operations in Physical Combats

The Joint military operations in the Niger Delta also code named 'Operation Restore Hope' and another division later formed known as 'Operation Flush Out' comprises of military personnel and combatant troops drawn from the Nigerian Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Police, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corp (NSCDC) and the State Security Service (SSS) who were deployed to the Niger Delta in May, 2009. They were originally charged by the Nigerian government to protect oil installations and waterways in the Delta region following recurrent reports of vandalisation of oil facilities in the area by ethnic youth

activists.²² There was considerable level of success recorded on the part of the joint military task force. There was massive deployment of soldiers to assist Nigerian police in policing internal domestic affairs in the region as it was seen in the perspective of the Nigerian government that it was nearly impossible to provide stability in the country without the presence of military forces to compliment the effort of the police force. As according to Chiluiwa, the formation and deployment of a joint military operation to the Niger Delta is also the same method adopted in combating Boko Haram terrorists at the northern part of the country as well as military interventions in many other violent internal conflicts.²³

Bassey posited that the JMTF unleashed a well-coordinated, offensive attack in the Niger Delta with the inclusion of land, sea, and air contingents of the Nigerian armed forces in 2009. This operation aimed at destroying network of militant camps and to incapacitate the ability of armed youths to engage in any subsequent operation against oil facilities. Most scholars on the subject matter describe this joint military operation as heinous and fratricidal operation planned to brutally subjugate and exterminate target group.²⁴ The operation unlike previous security measures carried out by the police or singular operation by any of the armed forces, was planned to end every possibility of militants' operation in the Niger Delta.²⁵

The successes of the joint military operations in the Niger Delta crisis can be viewed from different perspectives. Some of these successes include:

²²Chiluiwa, I. Media Representation of Nigeria's Joint Military Task Force in the Niger Delta Crisis. Ogun: International Journal of humanities and Social Science. 2011.

²³Chiluiwa, I. Media Representation of Nigeria's Joint Military Task Force in the Niger Delta Crisis.

²⁴Bassey, C.O. "Oil and conflict in the Niger Delta: A reflection on the politics of state responses to armed militancy in Nigeria". *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(11), 77-90. 2012

²⁵Bassey, C.O. "Oil and conflict in the Niger Delta: A reflection on the politics of state responses to armed militancy in Nigeria". *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(11), 77-90. 2012

²¹Ransome-Kuti, B. The Niger Delta Crises and Nigeria's future. www.humanrights.de. 1999

Reduction in Militant Attacks: The joint military operations led to a significant reduction in militant attacks in the Niger Delta region. The military was able to identify and dismantle several militant camps and arrest key militant leaders, which helped to reduce the incidence of attacks on oil installations and kidnapping. For instance, *Camp Zairowas* was the main camp of the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), a militant group that was responsible for several attacks on oil installations in 2016.²⁶ The camp was reportedly located in the creeks of the Niger Delta and was dismantled by the Nigerian military in August 2016. Another repressed militia operation was at Camp 5, which was a militant camp operated by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), a group that had been involved in several attacks on oil installations in the past. The camp was located in the creeks of Bayelsa State and was reportedly dismantled by the Nigerian military in February 2013. According to Chilwa, Camp Zero was a training camp operated by the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM), a militant group that had claimed responsibility for several attacks on oil installations in 2016. The camp was located in the creeks of Delta State and was reportedly dismantled by the Nigerian military in October 2016.²⁷ Camp Victor Banjo was a militant camp operated by the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), a group that had been involved in several attacks on oil installations in the past. The camp was located in the creeks of Bayelsa State and was reportedly dismantled by the Nigerian military in June 2009. Operation Restore Hope successfully engaged the militia group of MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta) in a series of military attacks in seven suspected communities allegedly accused of harboring insurgents and the operation recorded many civilian casualties and environmental degradation.

Some key militia leaders arrested were; Government Ekpemupolo, also known as Tompolo, he was a former militant leader and one of the most influential figures in the Niger Delta region. He was accused of being involved in pipeline vandalism and was declared

wanted by the Nigerian government in 2016. He was reportedly arrested in January 2016. Also Johnson Igwedibia, also known as Don Waney was the leader of a notorious militant group known as the Don Waney Boys, which was responsible for several attacks on communities in Rivers State. He was declared wanted by the Nigerian government in 2017 and was reportedly killed during a military operation in January 2018. Solomon Ndigbara was a former militant leader and a member of the Rivers State House of Assembly. He was accused of being involved in several criminal activities, including kidnapping and pipeline vandalism. He was declared wanted by the Nigerian government in 2016 and was reportedly arrested in January 2017. Augustine Agulegbu, also known as General Aboywas a militant leader who operated in the creeks of Bayelsa State. He was accused of being involved in several criminal activities, including kidnapping and pipeline vandalism. He was reportedly arrested by the Nigerian military in February 2016.²⁸

Restoration of Oil Production: The Niger Delta region is the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, and the crisis had a significant impact on oil production. The joint military operations helped to restore oil production by securing oil installations and pipelines, which were previously targeted by militants.

In March 2018, the Nigerian Navy, in collaboration with other security agencies, foiled an attempted attack on a crude oil pipeline belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in Delta State. The successful operation helped to prevent damage to the pipeline and ensured that oil production was not disrupted. In September 2017, the Nigerian Army, in collaboration with other security agencies, arrested 10 suspected oil thieves and seized two vessels and several drums of stolen crude oil in Rivers State. The arrest and seizure of stolen crude oil helped to reduce the amount of oil stolen and contributed to an increase in oil production. Also in February 2020, the Nigerian Navy, engaged in some dismantling of some illegal refineries

²⁶ Bassey, C.O. 2012.

²⁷ Chilwa, Labeling and Ideology in the Press: a corpus based critical discourse study of the Niger Delta Crisis. 2011.

²⁸ Chilwa, 1. Labeling and Ideology in the Press: a corpus based critical discourse study of the Niger Delta Crisis. Frankfurt: Peter Lang. 2011

in collaboration with other security agencies, dismantled and seized a large quantity of stolen crude oil and refined petroleum products in Delta State. The dismantling of the illegal refinery helped to reduce the amount of stolen crude oil that was refined locally and contributed to an increase in oil production. In May 2019, the Nigerian Army, in collaboration with other security agencies, engaged with host communities in the Niger Delta region to address their concerns and grievances. The engagement helped to improve relations between the communities and oil companies operating in the region and led to a more conducive environment for oil production.²⁹

The Presidential Amnesty Program

On assumption of office in May 2007, former Nigeria's President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua included the Niger Delta as part of his administration's seven-point agenda. The government scheduled a meeting with the stakeholders in the region, which Reuben Abati described as "an insincere attempt to keep the people talking." The Yar'Adua administration also proposed a Niger-Delta summit that died on the ground of controversy and created the Niger-Delta Ministry to focus mainly on the needs of populations in the region.³⁰ To address the worrisome situation in the Niger-Delta, and considering the failure of previous efforts at resolving the conflict, the government set up the Niger-Delta Technical Committee, which was mandated to collate and review all previous reports and recommendations on ways of resolving the conflict.³¹ Thereafter, the Presidential Committee on Amnesty and Disarmament of Militants in the Niger Delta was mandated to design a framework of disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation or reintegration of the militants. This culminated in the presidential proclamation of amnesty on 25 June 2009, to encourage non-state combatants in the Delta to abandon violence, which lapsed on 4 October 2009, pursuant to section

175 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.³²

The establishment of the amnesty program was a key component of the Nigerian government's strategy to end the conflict and restore peace in the region. The program was designed to encourage militants to lay down their arms and embrace peace, by offering them a package of incentives that included training, education, and employment opportunities. Under the amnesty program, former militants who surrendered their weapons were provided with a monthly stipend, as well as access to education and vocational training programs. The aim was to help them acquire the skills and knowledge they needed to pursue legitimate and sustainable livelihoods and to reintegrate them into their communities. The establishment of the amnesty program helped to reduce the level of violence in the Niger Delta region and contributed to the restoration of peace.³³ It also helped to create opportunities for the people of the region to participate in the oil and gas industry, by providing them with the skills and knowledge they needed to work in the sector. While the amnesty program has been criticized for not doing enough to address the root causes of the conflict, such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation, it remains an important initiative in the government's efforts to restore peace and stability in the Niger Delta region and to give credence to the efforts of joint military operations to acting proactively in ensuring the peace of the region, as the function of the military is not limited only to prosecuting military campaigns but as Sun Tzu said, "the best victory is when the enemy surrenders without bloodshed."³⁴

Challenges of the Joint Military Operation

The creation and continued deployment of a Joint Military Operation composed of Nigerian armed forces by the government and their various military operations in the Niger Delta crisis are the main arguments behind the military dimension of the crisis. According to

²⁹Omoweh, 2006.

³⁰Abati, R., 'The Niger delta ministry', The Guardian, 12 September, p.67, 2008

³¹Adeleye, S., J. Ogbodu and A. Oyetunji, 'JTF destroys second camp, militants block oil channel', Nigerian Compass, pp.1,4,6,8. 2009

³²Abati, R., 'The Niger delta ministry', The Guardian, 12 September, p.67, 2008

³³Abati, R., 'The Niger delta ministry', The Guardian, 12 September, p.67, 2008

³⁴Sun Tzu. Art of War: the Oldest Military Treatise in the World. USA: New Dawn Press. 2005

Adelakin, militarization of Niger Delta crisis has resulted to the rise of many ethnic militias such as Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF).³⁵ Dode noted that if militarization is an ideal security approach to the Niger Delta crisis, the massive military operations in the Gbaramatu Kingdom, which recorded the use of full military ammunitions such as 3,000 troops, two warships, 14 boats, and at least four helicopter gunships executed on air, land, and sea, should be more than to end the rise of militants in the region and quell their operations.³⁶

Consequently, Chiluwa argues that militarization of Niger Delta has only increased the level of violence, devastating attacks and counterattacks leading to more human rights casualties. Military attacks carried out by the JMTF on the militia groups were said to result in indiscriminate killing of the insurgents and civilians and destruction of property in the Niger Delta worth millions of Naira.³⁷ Bassey posits that the massive military operations in the region have succeeded in aggravating the situation as militants responded with more deadly attacks on the depot, pipelines, and flow stations such as Escravos (Warri petroleum products marketing company pipeline), Abiteye pipeline (Shell pipeline carrying crude oil from Billekrama to Bonny Export Terminal), Okomanifold of Chevron, Forcados offshore platform of Shell, and Atlas Cove terminal in Lagos.³⁸ Militarization of the crisis will only seem to have made insurgents grow stronger in their resolve and

become well-coordinated in their counterattacks which are not the end goal for the deployment of joint military operations.

Another problem or challenge faced by the military according to Oluyemisi that since the underlying issue of the Niger Delta has nothing to do with military forces; the violent reactions of people are a result of getting tired of the system and has resulted in many soldiers losing their lives because they cannot understand the terrain of Niger Delta more than its citizens. “The military cannot be used to force the unacceptable consequences of oil exploitation over the region” he noted.³⁹

Oluyemi further explained that the perception and feeling of the people of the Niger Delta towards the government, oil companies, and the military is that of almost constant animosity; hence he concludes that the presence of security operatives in the Niger Delta region is not for security, development or peace of the region. He thus argued that:

“They have been working to provide security for the flow of oil because of its significance to Nigerian economy that mainly depends on the oil to survive. Soldiers are working to protect pipelines, oil workers, companies, and every actor involves in oil activities. They are also used to suppressing and attacking any protest from the people. KpoiKopiam (NGO) also responded that militarization of the region will bring no stability until adequate development is put in place by the government. Kentebe Ebiaridor (NGO) explained that Niger Delta crisis is not a military issue and it has nothing to do with Nigerian armed forces. Issues are there to be addressed and military forces cannot remove those issues, and until these issues are adequately addressed, there is no

³⁵ Adeakin, I. E. *Beyond the militarist state concept: Understanding the recent security challenges on the Nigerian state*. https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/956_477.pdf 2013

³⁶ Dode R. O. Nigerian security forces and the management of internal conflict in the Niger Delta: Challenges of human security and development. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 1(3), 415–416. 2012

³⁷ Chiluwa, I. Media Representation of Nigeria’s Joint Military Task Force in the Niger Delta Crisis.

³⁸ Bassey, C.O. “Oil and conflict in the Niger Delta: A reflection on the politics of state responses to armed militancy in Nigeria”.

³⁹ Oluyemi, O.A. *The Military Dimension of Niger Delta Crisis and its Implications on Nigeria National Security*. (Journals.sagepub.com, 2020).

*chance for peace and stability in the Delta.*⁴⁰

According to Paki and Ebienfa, a major challenge is the retaliation of militants in the region to any joint military operation by vandalizing oil installations and operations. This has assumed a dangerous dimension over Nigerian economy, as for instance, the MEND had almost succeeded in crippling the Nigerian oil industry. It should be noted that any attack on oil activities is a direct attack on Nigerian mono-cultural economy; the nation is sustained basically from incomes obtaining through exportation of oil and gas produced in the Niger Delta.⁴¹ In June 2008, the militants (MEND) had a chance to attack the deep-sea operation area of Nigeria's largest offshore oil platform known as Bonga Oil Platform. At this period, Bonga oil platform was producing 225,000 barrels of crude oil per day. Another attack was launched in 2009 against the Atlas Clove oil facility in Lagos leading to depreciation in Nigerian economy. Operation Climate Change and Hurricane Barbarossa were launched in 2008 by militants with heavily armed fighters in hundreds of war boats aimed toward the destruction and deadly attacks on the oil industries. These attacks have disrupted oil production through vandalization of pipelines, pumping stations and created platforms that hindered the free flow of oil constituting havocs to Nigerian Economy. According to statistics of International Center for Reconciliation (ICR), the cost of militancy over Nigerian economy as a result of stolen crude oil (bunkering) and disrupted oil production between 2003 and 2008 alone was around 14 trillion-naira equivalent to 100 billion dollars.⁴² This is aside the cost to the nation in financing joint military operations. The constant deployment of joint operation forces of the Joint Military Task Force to Niger Delta requires huge amount of finance to purchase ammunitions, to maintain their welfare and payment of their salaries. This leads to the allocation of huge

amount of budget from the state's pocket that could be used to augment the economy to finance military operations.

Conclusion

The study has critically identified the nature of the region's socio-economic trends as it pertains to the activities of militia groups in their aggrieved battle against multinational oil companies and the federal government whose interests they believe is limited to oil exploitation at the behest of the indigenous population, making visible the fact that the Niger Delta crises is an act of terrorism politically motivated by the several Niger Delta terror groups who do not seek to overthrow the Nigerian government but to clamour for inclusion and self-determination on the proceeds of the resources upon which Nigerian economic prowess is found, and the military trajectorial response to the militias for almost two decades since the formation of Joint military operations in the region. This collection also accentuates the lessons learnt, prospects for self-determination, socio-economic and environmental justice and peace in the aftermath of the creation of the first militia group and how the crisis still persists despite the joint military activities in the region owing solely to the argument that the issues which necessitated the crisis in the first place have not been addressed to the point where they are solved and the agitation of the groups in the region duly attended to, not partially for a season in the government or for the securing of oil exploration in the region.

⁴⁰Oluyemi, O.A. *The Military Dimension of Niger Delta Crisis and its Implications on Nigeria National Security*. (Journals.sagepub.com, 2020).

⁴¹Paki F. A., Ebienfa K. I. Militant oil agitations in Nigeria's Niger Delta and the economy. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1(5), 140–145. 2011

⁴²Paki F. A., Ebienfa K. I. Militant oil agitations in Nigeria's Niger Delta and the economy.

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