



## Post-Amnesty Security Situation in Nigeria: Challenges and Consequences of Military Operations in the Niger Delta

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**Abstract:** Niger Delta is a region that is strategic to the Federal Government of Nigeria and states because of the availability of crude oil, which is a major source of government revenues, there. Different approaches have shaped government's intervention with the aim of enhancing the security situation of the region. This paper examines the nature of post-amnesty security situation in the Niger Delta. With secondary sources, the paper responds to the following questions: What is the current security situation in post-amnesty Niger Delta? How is military deployment relevant to the security situation in the region? What are the challenges of military deployment? The actors of security provision are security agencies, such as military, paramilitary forces, police, civil defence, local vigilantes and other private security providers. These actors have worked tirelessly to sustain the gains achieved through the amnesty programme, which prevented the existence of ungoverned spaces, especially in the creeks, forest areas, communities and highways. These agents of security provision have engaged with outlaws that seem to be unrepentant armed groups.

**Keywords:** Amnesty, Security, Military operations, Niger Delta

### 1. Introduction

Like other human needs, security is crucial for human survival because existence is tied to safety. The disturbances in different parts of Nigeria did not begin in the 21st century. The nature of security threats that manifested in the form of conventional criminal behaviour in Nigeria shows that the country suffered militancy and insurgency, human and drug trafficking, cybercrime, political violence, ethno-religious conflicts, and resource-based conflicts among others (Dambazau, 2012). The inability of successive government to address the youth unemployment crisis is a major challenge to security initiatives in many parts of Nigeria. The rate of unemployment increased from 13.3% in the second quarter of 2016 to 13.9% at the end of the third quarter (Onuoha and Okolie-Osemene, 2019). It is not disputable that there is connection between unemployment and crime that manifests in the form of insecurity.

The Niger Delta is one of the regions in Nigeria that have witnessed security threats occasioned by issues that are linked to resource control and intergroup relations. The youth have been at the centre of many issues while leaders at various levels are main actors. The young and restive youths draw inspiration from the action of Isaac Boro, whose resistance against the military government of Yakubu Gowon in 1966 motivated the Kaiama Declaration of 11th December 1998 that questioned the exclusion of Niger Delta from oil resources and development (Nwobueze, 2015; Siloko, 2024). Prior to the amnesty, many operations recorded casualties when troops were deployed with gunboats and helicopters to curb disturbances and proliferation of militant camps in the

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area (Okolie-Osemene, 2015). The activities of the security forces also created the perception of conquest in the minds of youths because of allegations of human rights abuses.

It is almost impossible to analyze security issue in the Niger Delta without considering environmental sustainability and the place of oil companies. There are notable consequences of oil exploration and exploitation activities on the environment in the Niger Delta. One of such is degradation of ecosystem by a high degree of toxic contaminants in waterways and on land, with about 600,000 barrels of water produced by daily oil production activities being disposed of in the Niger Delta environment (Bassey, 2020, cited in Siloko, 2024). Many development plans have not materialized as desired and have therefore not made significant impact on humans. This is one of the motivations for violence and threats to government interests (Nwobueze, 2015).

Security is a concern in the Niger Delta because, while the national amnesty programme was organized for those who accepted the offer, some young people in militant groups could not embrace the offer to be disarmed and reintegrated into the larger society. The challenges to national security include inappropriate deployment of security agencies, exploitation, greed, deprivation and corruption (Aliyu, 2012). While many of these challenges have been plaguing the Niger Delta since the 1960s, the ones that have remained the drivers of insecurity are unemployment, deprivation, and exploitation, which are linked to corrupt practices and related offences.

Security is the concern and priority of every human being who values his safety, as well as governments that are interested in protecting the people in their territories. The premium for security provision explains why budgetary allocations are provided for the purchase of security equipment, training programmes and distribution of welfare packages for security agencies. It has been observed that the failure of security governance in many parts of Nigeria is responsible for the advent of challenges in the security sector, which now affect civilians and government officials.

This paper, using secondary sources, responds to the following questions: What is the current security situation in post-amnesty Niger Delta? How is military deployment relevant to the security situation in the region? What are the challenges of military deployment? The paper suggests ways of sustaining peace beyond military deployment.

#### Conceptual Issues and Theoretical Framework

Post-amnesty refers to the period after the proclamation of amnesty for repentant militants in the Niger Delta when youth restiveness became a major threat to peace and security (Nwobueze, 2015; Nwobueze & Okolie-Osemene, 2018). The amnesty offered opportunity for the repentant militants to undergo transformation and rehabilitation programmes which facilitated their change of mindset from violence to non-violence. The post-amnesty period was marked by advocacy for sustenance of new life for the repentant militants whose lifestyles encouraged aggression against the state. It was characterized by activities that aimed at consolidating amnesty gains, focusing on the ex-militants, their well-being and rehabilitation efforts. It also prioritized actions that discouraged resurgence of militant groups (Nwobueze & Okolie-Osemene, 2018), for the enhancement of regional development and stable operations.

Security, which is concerned with the freedom from fear, danger, hostility and violence, has gone beyond the military aspect to encompass economic, political, environmental, social and other aspects that address the safety needs of society (Nwolise, 2012). The concept of creek security became synonymous with national security, which prioritizes the safety of all locations where there are oil companies and their workers, with the intention of countering threats against the continuous flow of crude oil.

The causes of militancy, which contributed to insecurity in Niger Delta, were analyzed with Relative Deprivation Theory and Frustration-aggression Theory. These theories explain the motivation for deviance and violence when young people are denied the economic opportunities they deserve. The human needs that could not be

provided for them made it difficult for the government to address the problem until both government and oil companies began to give adequate attention to their needs, with consideration for environmental protection. The Human Security Theory considers the efforts made to guarantee human dignity and survival without destruction of the sources of people's well-being, by making sure that people-centred development is the main human security initiative (Nwobueze, 2015; Siloko, 2024). Military operations, if conducted with focus on the peace and conflict transformation, will protect the people and promote peaceful atmosphere.

#### Amnesty in Niger Delta: The Journey So Far

Before the amnesty period, fishing and farming suffered setback, as security of the environment and its various subsystems became less of a priority in the region. This heightened the risks posed by environmental change to the people, thereby increasing their vulnerability. One of the manifestations of vulnerability is poverty, which threatens sustainable development in a region where the rich get richer while others get poorer (Siloko, 2024). Many of the people that are poor have suffered lack in the midst of plenty of resources. Multinational oil companies, government and individuals close to the petroleum industry greatly benefit from these resources.

Because of the issues that were not properly handled between the people of the Niger Delta and successive governments, youths became restive, engaging in anti-social actions that were regarded as anti-government activities (Onwunyi & Mba, 2019). Such activities led to the avoidable military presence, with joint security operations that exposed the residents to more risk of being caught in between the confrontation of security forces and the outlaws.

The fear created by the proliferation of criminal groups, especially militants, like the involvement of the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), which also adopted kidnapping as one of its tactics, thereby complicating the security situation in the area, before Federal Government's intervention (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). According to Dambaza (2014), the tactics of Niger Delta militants involve the destruction of oil platforms and kidnapping of oil workers, among other acts of violence. The security situation in the region has improved; people now move freely without any form of hindrance. The post-amnesty situation has been characterized by high awareness of the risks associated with insecurity, kidnapping and activities of violent non-state armed groups.

Understanding the security situation in any part of Nigeria has become necessary as a result of the state of general insecurity and perceived federal insensitivity and inaction on security threats (Badejo, 2020). One cannot objectively claim that government never responded to rescue the situation; however, its actions were not effective. A country where successive governments established special operations to curb the menace of insecurity cannot be said to have irresponsible governments.

#### Security Situation and Challenges of Military Operations in the Niger Delta

Through the National Amnesty Programme, relative peace was restored to the Niger Delta as a result of the activities of different stakeholders at community, state and national levels. Their efforts focused on supporting the people to find lasting solutions to the crisis that has been plaguing the region since the 1990s, when it became obvious that the people could no longer pretend that all was well with them and their environment.

As a region that was characterized by oil bunkering, extortion and victimization, the Niger Delta became unsafe for the residents, expatriates and security agencies until the amnesty. The desire to kidnap people and demand ransom enables gangs or individuals to target the people they wish to kidnap. This aligns with the anatomy of criminality: desire to commit the crime, opportunity that facilitates the act and the ability to commit the crime (Okolie-Osemene, 2021). The current security situation in the Niger Delta shows that, despite the ability of youths to engage in disturbances, interventions by government made it less attractive for any group to justify crime or violence, because

any attempt to commit crime would be met with consequences. Their knowledge of the creeks is no longer abused with kidnapping of targets on daily or weekly basis. Creeks are now enclaves where criminals are separated from genuine agitators, since ex-militants have become advocates of human security and peace in the region.

The presence of the military and other law enforcement agencies has been visible. There is minimal incidence of confrontation with armed groups that are determined to continue functioning as spoilers to discredit the government through sabotage and undermine the efforts of security agencies. The safety need of the Federal Government has always been captured in defence budgets. The National Bureau of Statistics documented that, from 2020 to 2024, about ₦231.27 billion was budgeted for the procurement of arms and ammunition for security agencies; and in the fourth quarter of 2023, the government procured ₦5 trillion worth of tanks and armoured fighting vehicles for the security forces. Military operations in the Niger Delta also benefit from the defence spending of government.

Recent reports acknowledged the contribution of the military to security provision in the region. The Managing Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Dr Samuel Ogbuku, commended the military for welcoming collaboration in organizing vocational training for the youth. The General Officer Commanding, 6 Division of the Nigerian Army, Maj. Gen. Abdussalam, acknowledged the linkages between development and peacefulness of the Niger Delta region. The multi-stakeholder engagement is evident in the provision of security around oil and gas infrastructure in the Niger Delta region, covering Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Delta States (Ibunge, 2024). The security provision has enhanced safety of oil installations and workers in the petroleum industry who were previously targeted by armed militants.

With improved naval patrols and security checkpoints, many criminals have been isolated from successfully targeting oil and gas infrastructures. Security agencies have also demonstrated capacity to prevent armed groups from creating their spheres of influence for the purpose of collecting oil rents or forcing oil companies to halt operation. Those individuals or groups that previously indulged in illegal oil refining and market the illegally produced commodities unnoticed have also faced severe consequences, as the searchlight of joint security operatives caught up with them. This has made the business risky and less attractive; because when the perpetrators are caught, the refined products and facilities are usually destroyed by operatives on patrol.

The recent land conflict that culminated in violence at Okuama in Delta State showed the extent of the fragility of peace in the Niger Delta despite the intervention initiatives. It portrayed the region as having the tension that was experienced in the years before the amnesty period. In addition, the incident revealed that military force has not become a thing of the past and can be activated without notice, among other signs of disturbances, because deployment of security operatives is not witnessed in towns that are calm. However, despite the signs of insecurity, efforts were made by relevant agencies to forestall the breakdown of law and order, by attracting the attention of relevant stakeholders to sustaining the peace.

Since the end of the amnesty programme, security in Niger Delta has been characterized by a joint-problem solving approach to the problem. This allows the governments and the people to critically engage with the troublemakers. Prior to the amnesty programme, many parts of Niger Delta witnessed a high rate of criminal activities involving outlaws who struggled for supremacy and engaged in illicit security provision for some groups and communities (Okolie-Osemene, 2015; Nwobueze & Okolie-Osemene, 2017). However, since the consolidation of the gains achieved by Goodluck Jonathan's and Muhammadu Buhari's administrations, the situation has improved, with significant reduction of outlaw activities in Delta, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Rivers States. Even the states that witnessed the upsurge of lethal violence occasioned by the confrontation between security forces and criminal groups hardly record such negative incidents that could lead to loss of lives.

Consequently, security reports have centred on pockets of alertness towards early warning signs of conflict. The focus of security in the region has been improvement of early warning and response mechanisms, which now attract the attention of relevant stakeholders more than before. The military deployments which created the “crisis economy” that Mitee (2012) refers to has not made the region to degenerate into anarchy, as law enforcement agencies have succeeded in enforcing law and order in areas that were previously difficult to govern. This achievement can be summarized to be the result of a decline in inter-and intra-group conflicts over the control of oil revenues. With reduction of rivalry between warlords, that previously characterized the region, high-intensity conflict and associated large military presence declined. Continuous production and marketing of crude oil in the region benefited from the cooperation between government and other stakeholders in the oil sector.

Kidnapping for ransom, blocking of oil company facilities and militancy have reduced. This improved the security situation in the region, according to conflict tracking reports of Partners for Peace in the Niger Delta. The advantages of the situation include significant safety of oil workers and oil facilities, human security and economic development. Currently, negative reports about the region have declined, thanks to the security agencies and communities who cooperate with government.

Some of the consequences of military operations are noteworthy. The presence of special operations at any part of the world sends negative feeling of insecurity. It takes time for people to accept the reality that troops have come to stay for a long period of time until there is strong evidence of stability and that the peace achieved can last without the presence of heavily armed soldiers or paramilitary forces.

In the Niger Delta, it has become difficult to convince stakeholders that oil production can be carried out without any agitation against the interest of oil companies and government. This has remained a major concern for the government; it has to continue keeping the security agencies in oil-producing communities for the safety of the people and oil infrastructure in case spoilers plan to strike.

Many communities where soldiers visited or conducted operation never remain the same after the experience. This is because, if they target militants for example, unlucky civilians may be affected owing to the difficulty in separating violent non-state armed groups from civilians.

A major challenge to military operations in the region is that not all militants embraced the amnesty programme. The government must continue to be proactive and prioritize military preparedness for any eventuality in the form of resurgence of armed struggle, since not all parts of the region can claim to have full security and development as provided for in the Niger Delta Master Plan. In addition, the problem of youth unemployment has not been totally addressed, with many communities still struggling to overcome the economic crisis and rising inflation. Successive governments promised regional development, but many of the oil-producing communities are still in lack and cannot boast of having access to basic human needs.

Since government embarked on confronting militants, any sustainable peace must look beyond military might and consider adequate inclusion of communities and youths in addressing their problem. Development initiatives cannot ignore a bottom-top approach. Those benefiting from the presence of security forces in the region would do everything possible to ensure such operations are almost endless. This is because every military operation is associated with welfare packages, allowances and procurement of weapons. Continuous budgetary allocations for regional security when other sectors, like education and environment, are demanding the attention of the government in this era of dwindling revenues is worrisome.

If the actors change their attitudes towards one another, through community-focused conflict transformation (Nwobueze and Okolie-Osemene, 2018), most of the conflicts linked to human element and resources will disappear.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the current security situation in the Niger Delta and the roles of stakeholders in determining the atmosphere of tranquillity in the Niger Delta. As a region that hosts foreigners and Nigerians from all walks of life, the diversity in Niger Delta contributes to intergroup relations. Understanding this remains a source of development and stability.

After every disarmament programme, one of the main challenges is that the society has to deal with individuals that acquired experience in using violence to achieve their goals. Many of them have skills in handling guns and other weapons. So, discouraging them from being tempted to remember the need for guns is a task that society must accomplish. Management of criminal activities is part of the security profile of the region, and sustenance of peace remains the concern and priority of the Federal Government.

The success of military operations also determined the strength of civil-military relations in communities. Security forces should adhere to the code of conduct and avoid corruption, extortion of civilians and focus on their mandate of maintaining the peace without abusing their deployment. Since ensuring national and human security is their mandate, there is need for them to adopt a humane approach in conducting their operations, even when provoked by outlaws, in order to avoid turning the Niger Delta into a battlefield, like it was before the national amnesty programme.

No matter how challenging the situation may be, it is more profitable for the government and oil companies to avoid the use of force. They should work closely with host communities to identify troublemakers and peacefully resolve disputes between oil companies and communities rather than thinking that military might would guarantee peace.

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