

CONFLICTS IN THE NIGER DELTA AND GULF OF GUINEA: IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

The protracted conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta area in Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea harbours complex implications for security in the region. At the centre of the conflict is the agitation by the mainly Ijaw and Ogoni ethnic nationalities for mineral resource control, national self-determination and/or more robust constitutional integration into the Nigerian state, environmental rights and mitigation of extant degradation, as well as quest for institutionalisation of genuine federal fiscal policy and practice. Relying on the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), with its emphasis on human and environmental security as compared with traditional state-centred security, the article argues that if allowed to exacerbate, the conflict portends grave danger and transnational security challenge for Nigeria, the West African sub-region and the entire continent, considering the huge population and the geo-strategic status of Nigeria. The efforts of the Nigerian state in addressing the lingering crisis and the role of external powers in engendering peace in the region also come under focus. The authors call for holistic proactive measures to stem the conflicts from escalation and spread to the entire region. The paper is divided into five sections: Firstly, it presents the concept, meaning and nature of RSCT; secondly, it justifies the application and relevance of RSCT to the study and understanding of security threats; thirdly, it examines the characteristics of RSC; fourthly, it explains regional security challenges and then suggests mechanisms to deal with those in the West African region; and fifthly, it assesses the effectiveness or otherwise of the measures adopted by the Nigerian state to confront the challenge as well as suggest policy options for an enduring peace in the Niger Delta area and the Gulf of Guinea.

KEY WORDS: Niger Delta, regional security complex, security, transnational challenge, conflict, peace, oil

Introduction

Conceptualizing security is always a contested issue. While some scholars view security as primarily concerned with the preservation of the state and its core values, others in the 'comprehensive security' genre have argued for the broadening of the concept to include non-state entities and personalities. This article is concerned primarily with Nigeria's national security in the Niger Delta and its implications for regional security. However, a conceptualization of national security will be in order. Ullman argues that "a threat to national security is an action or sequence of events that (1) threatens drastically and over a relatively brief span of time to degrade the quality of life of the inhabitants of a state, or (2) threatens significantly to narrow the range of policy choices available to the government of a state or to private, non-governmental entities (persons, groups, corporations) within the state" (Ullman 1983). No doubt, the two aspects of security highlighted by Ullman are sufficiently present in the Niger Delta debacle which has defied all solutions as it seems to come alive each time the agitations looked simmered.

As observed by Carmody (2005), "investment in oil production can fuel conflict, as there is political competition to control access to oil rents, and governments can afford to buy new

arms.” In most cases, “only negligible proportions of oil revenue are reinvested in source areas, which have to bear the negative environmental consequences of oil flaring and spills” (Camody 2005). The case of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is no longer a local issue as it has assumed international dimensions. The environmental degradation in the Niger Delta is legendary despite producing massive oil wealth.

Carmody asserts that “Ogoniland, in Nigeria, has no water or electricity infrastructure,” adding that “these conditions may generate local resistance.” Besides, human security needs to be operationalized in line with the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) definition of human security. This comprises “two mutually reinforcing concepts: (i) protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life and (ii) safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression” (Salih 2001:68). The Delta area is suffering from these twin concepts and the efforts to mitigate it have not met with the expectations of the community thereby fuelling incessant conflicts. For Tieku (2004), “security is interdependent and multi-dimensional as a result of increased interdependence, globalization and internationalization”. Therefore, this paper looks beyond the conflict area and examines the broader implications for peace and security in the sub-region.

The international community, which derives energy source from the Niger Delta has also paid lip-service to efforts aimed at alleviating the plights of the locals. Seager and Macalister (2004) posit that the conditions prevalent in Niger Delta “may generate local resistance movements, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of Ogoni People (MOSOP).” They argued that “suppression of MOSOP and the execution of its leaders in the early 1990s led to the development of violent movements, such as the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF), which successfully reduced Nigeria’s oil output by half, pushing global oil prices higher.” Poorly managed oil wealth can “lead to further conflict between state and society and a crisis of national development as in Niger Delta” (Seager and Macalister, 2004).

Regionalism offers one of the most appropriate analytical framework for the study of international security dynamics through tools such as Barry Buzan’s concept of a ‘regional security complex’ defined in terms of identifiable security interdependence that sets a group of (usually, but not necessarily), neighbouring states apart from the rest of the world by virtue of the intensity of their security interaction in relative autonomy from the rest of the world. Unlike during the Cold war era characterized by conflicts between and among state actors, events after 1989 and the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States have demonstrated that current global crisis management has become more complicated and less promising than that of the Cold War period that was dominated by a bipolar structure.

Departing from the state-centric approach, therefore, regional arrangements are being wrought to respond to these multifarious security challenges. In this vein, states in the northern hemisphere are generally believed to possess the structures and institutions designed to prevent conflicts between themselves and other states, although they are less well prepared for armed conflicts with non-state actors in so-called asymmetric wars. Expectedly, regional arrangements readily fill the power vacuum although this also poses questions as to whether smaller states do become the objects or victims of power politics in a region where such regional groups are dominated by regional hegemonies.

The RSC theory broadens the concept of security by identifying five general categories--military, environmental, economic, societal and political security. This broadening extends the concept of security beyond the state by including human beings and the environment as referent objects. For the Copenhagen School, which pioneered the broadening, the key

security issue is survival and the concerns about security hinges on existential threats. The CS model retains the security-survival logic and in the process, the securitization model offers analysts “a framework to determine how, why and by whom a specific matter becomes securitized” and thereby differentiates between security and non-security threats (Emmers, 123).

The new wave of regionalization, which started in the late 1980s, posed fresh challenges in the realm of theory as well. This ‘new regionalism’ transcended the structures of formal inter-state regional organizations and institutions and is: characterized by its multidimensionality, complexity, fluidity and non-conformity, and by the fact that it involves a variety of state and non-state actors, who often come together in rather informal multi-actor coalitions. It is therefore now appropriate to speak of regionalisms in the plural rather than the singular. This plurality is true in terms of both the variety of regionalization processes and the ‘new’ theoretical approaches. The CS asserts that “Comprehensive security analysis requires that one takes particular care to investigate how the regional level mediates the interplay between states and the international system as a whole” (Buzan 1991, 188).

Zoleka Ndayi (2003) argues that “regionalism is a body of ideas, values and concrete objectives that are aimed at creating, maintaining or modifying the provision of security, wealth, peace and development within an identifiable area characterised by geographic contiguity.” The main defining feature of the new regionalism as opposed to having no geographic limitations is actually typified by geographic contiguity with complementarities between sub-regional and continental perspectives within the same continent. Soderbaum’s (2000) assertion of a region as mainly constituting a “body of ideas, values, and concrete objectives that are aimed at creating, maintaining or modifying the provision of security and wealth, peace, and development”, suggests that where there is a region, regionalism will automatically follow.

Ideological expansion in the region as well as organisational growth, in terms of accommodating new countries that subscribe to the same ideology in response to the widening scope of the purpose, are other elements of regionalism. And therefore, it is not the region that changes or expands, rather the purpose of the region and regionalism or subscription to the ideology held in the region at that particular time (Ndayi 2006, 11). Meenai (1998) refers to regionalism as the ‘feeling of belonging arising out of commonalities, based on geographic contiguity, culture, language, history or socio-economic factors.’ Mansfield and Milner (1999) say “Disputes over the definition of an economic region and regionalism hinge on the importance of geographic proximity and on the relationship between economic flows and policy choices.”

The Concept, Meaning and Nature of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

The collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union and the subsequent end of the Cold War brought in its wake security challenges which diverge from the military sphere hitherto handled either unilaterally by one of the superpowers or through multilateral arrangements. This new development has forced states whose security are interlinked in a security complex to come together at the regional levels to address the myriad of global security challenges. When compared to the old regionalism that emphasised economic and military spheres, new ‘regionalism’ transcends the structures of formal inter-state regional institutions and is characterized by multi-functionalism covering societal, environmental and cultural aspects as well as the inclusion of a variety of non-state actors, who oftentimes come together in informal multi-actor coalitions.

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is essentially built on the Constructivist assumption of a systemic regional arrangement. Here, security complex is defined as 'a set of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another' (Buzan, 1991, 190; Buzan et al. 1998, 11-12). This definition emphasizes three key characteristics as prerequisites for a complex to be evolved. These are: geographical proximity, distribution of power and historical relations of amity or enmity. In a regional security complex,

[A]ll of the states in the system are enmeshed in a global web of security interdependence. But because most political and military threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, insecurity is often associated with proximity. Most states fear their neighbours more than distant powers; consequently, security interdependence across the international system as a whole is far from uniform. The normal pattern of security interdependence in a geographically diverse, anarchic international system is one of regionally-based clusters, which we label security complexes (Buzan et al., 1998, 11-12).

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Buzan claims that "Security complexes are an empirical phenomenon with historical and geopolitical roots. In theoretical terms, they can be derived from both the state and the system levels" (Buzan 1991, 191). He explains that that when viewed from the bottom up, "security complexes result from interactions between individual states," adding that if "seen from the top down, security complexes are generated by the interaction of anarchy and geography." (Buzan 1991, 191). He, however warns that the security dynamics of the complex are not solely determined by the members as "external actors can change the power structure of a local complex in two ways: either joining it, if they are adjacent, or by making alignments within it, whether they are either adjacent and/or members of a higher-level complex" (Buzan 1991, 212). Once a security complex takes shape, external powers move directly in a process that Buzan calls "overlay" into the local complex and seek to suppress the "indigenous security dynamics (Buzan 1991, 220).

Constructivists argue that the corporate identity of the state will generate four core interests. These are physical security; ontological security or predictability in relation with the world to guarantee stable social identities; recognition as an actor by others above and beyond survival through brute force; and development through meeting human aspirations for a better life. (Wendt 1994, 386). In terms of collective action against security threats, Wendt distinguishes between alliances and collective security arrangements. He posits that alliances are temporary coalitions by self-centred states designed to deal with a specific threat, thus it finds utility in instrumental objectives and reason. As a corollary of the motive for its establishments, alliances do not outlive the threat and they immediately disband once the threat is over. On the contrary, collective security systemic states undertake "commitments to multilateral actions against non-specific threats." (Wendt, 386). He argues that "[C]ollective identity is neither essential nor equivalent to such a multilateral institution," although it provides the key foundation for it through increasing the willingness to act.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report, 1994 views human security as a nexus between freedom from fear and freedom from want. The report defines human security as “safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression” as well as “protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life.” In this vein, Alan Collins (2007, 2) asserts that “security is a matter of high politics; central to government debates and pivotal to the priorities they establish.”(p.420). He postulates that the determination of a security challenge and threat is usually constructed through constructive inter-subjective and discursive approach albeit using ‘high politics.’

Post-positivist study of security, which aims to broaden our knowledge of security studies and its various dimensions, stretch the concept beyond the narrow and one-dimensional analysis of positivist theory of national security (Buzan and de Wilde 1998). These post-positivist scholars, also called constructivists, have been accused of twisting and stretching of the idea (of security) far beyond the rational bounds (Jackson, 194). Thus broadening of the spheres of security has been criticised by scholars who maintained that the approach makes defining security amorphous. For example, Jackson (2003) insists that “the elastic use of the notion of ‘security’ or ‘threat’ is all too common among IR scholars nowadays. The predictable result is loss of clarity and the spread of mist and fog in studies of security” (Jackson, 195).

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that there are ongoing debates on the desirability or otherwise of conceptually marrying welfare and security, or ecology and security as has been demonstrated in constructivist notions of security. Jackson believes that “the expressions ‘economic security’ or ‘environmental security’ are instances of category mistakes; they conflate two different ideas and thereby foster academic confusion and disorganization. Unfortunately, this practice is widespread in positivist social science and in some branches of post-positivism, for example constructivism.”(p. 195). These criticisms, notwithstanding, constructivism has been found to be relevant in analysing security issues in the pos-cold war era because of its insistence on the salience and importance of ideational factors and inter-subjective approach in understanding security and IR studies.

Characteristics of RSCs

The SCT perspective originally forwarded by Buzan retained the state-centred approach to security studies as well as the pre-eminence of military threats and it places greater emphasis on perception and the processes of securitization/de-securitization. The latest version of RSC, which is a synthesis of Buzan’s original work and Weaver’s ideas as outlined in his article “Securitization and De-securitization” (Weaver, 1995, 46-8) led to the publication of “Security: A new framework for analysis. In it, SCT was defined as “a set of units whose major processes of securitization and de-securitization or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another” (Buzan, Weaver and de Wilde, 201). This new definition has been acclaimed to have moved the SCT away from state-centrism with a renewed emphasis on perception and processes of securitization/deseuritization.

Scholars generally agree that security is concerned with “threat to survival’ although there is a shifting paradigm on the referent object, that is, what is to be secured. The state has traditionally been the referent object frequently deploying the military might to ensure its security. Equally important in the analysis of securitization is the central role that institutions play as they ‘institutionalize’ the process. In 2003, Buzan revised the definition of a regional security complex as “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization,

or both, are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another”. According to the editor of the volume in which the revision appeared: “The revised theory is a reflection of Buzan’s attempt to move beyond state-centric assumptions and also take into account the constructivist method. The units can be states, but also other units can be predominant, and security complexes are not givens but constructed in the process of securitization.”

Explaining the regional security complex theory, Sheehan (2006) asserts that it “represents a group of states whose interests and destinies are sufficiently interlinked that each state’s security cannot be understood except in relation to the other states in the complex.” He further argues that such complexes are held together not by the positive influences of shared interest, but by shared rivalries and security here operate across a broad spectrum of sectors—military, political, economic, societal and environmental. Robert Jervis (1983) notes that, “Security regimes occur when a group of states cooperate to manage their disputes and avoid wars by seeking to mute the security dilemma both by their own actions and by their assumptions about the behaviours of others.”

A security community is a prerequisite to security regime. Deutsch (1968) asserts that “a security community is a group of people which has become ‘integrated’. By integration we mean the attainment, within a territory of a ‘sense of community’ and of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure...dependable expectations of ‘peaceful change’ among its population. By a ‘sense of community’ we mean a belief...that common social problems must and can be resolved by processes of ‘peaceful change’.” The Palme Commission Report of the United Nations (1982) also gave a tacit approval to regional security community as a way of reducing the risks of war, armament and nuclear proliferation and its associated consequences. It says:

Acceptance of a common security as the organizing principle for efforts to reduce the risk of war, limit arms, and move towards disarmament, means, in principle, that cooperation will replace confrontation in resolving conflicts of interests. This is not to say that differences among nations should be expected to disappear...The task is only to ensure that these conflicts do not come to be expressed in acts of war, or in preparations for war. It means that nations must come to understand that the maintenance of world peace must be given a higher priority than the assertion of their own national, ideological or political positions.

Relevance of RSCT to Explaining the Niger Delta Conflict

A security complex combines both the physical and ideational characteristics of international relations to determine the interplay of power relations and the spheres of security cooperation and non-cooperation. Bae and Moon observe that ‘a security complex can be reinterpreted as the combination of physical arrangements of component parts and underlying ideas and impulses affecting interactions among those parts’ (Bae & Moon, 2005). Strong states build their national identities based on national or society-wide consensus, while the reverse is true of weak states (Buzan, 1983). This observation may well apply to the study of nationalism and national identity vis-a-vis ethnic diversity in the Niger Delta although Nigeria as a major player and regional hegemon in West Africa has built a strong military establishment which is recognized as major player in security and stability in the region.

There is an increasing awareness of the need to tackle secessionist agitations at its roots which demands not only economic prosperity and more financial resources at the disposal of governments, but more equitable distribution of wealth and better governance.

Democratization and the rule of law therefore cannot be avoided in the pursuit of security broadly defined. Cheng (2006) argues that many regional governments “understand that economic growth alone may not be sufficient to ensure political stability; they must pay more attention to more equitable income distribution, poverty alleviation, the strengthening of the rule of law, the combat of corruption, etc. In summary, comprehensive security must include good governance.” Green (2000) insists that “Security Complex Theory allows external and systemic influences to be compartmentalised, (thereby) revealing the ‘natural’ course of regional security dynamics,” even as he assumes a durable structure of regional security based on identifiable securitizing actors, security referent objects and threats (Green, 2000).

One of the usefulness of the securitisation approach to security analysis is that it affords the researcher the “possibility of comparing the importance of other sectors without privileging the military above all the others” (Herring, 2007, 136-7). Kaski (2000) argues that although there are five levels of comprehensive security (military, societal, economic, political, and environmental) as popularised by Buzan et al.(1998), security complex can be theoretically analysed in three broad aspects: the power complex, the functional complex and the historical-cultural complex, which represent the anarchic relations, functional linkages, and historical amities and enmities, respectively. He notes that this typology notwithstanding, “the security complex is essentially one entity, a regional system that could be argued to be more than just the sum of its component parts.”

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Regional Security Challenges in the Niger Delta, Gulf of Guinea and West Africa

Abdelwahab El-Affendi (2009) says, “Convinced that threats to security in the post-Cold War era derived mainly from domestic or regional dynamics, the leading industrial powers wanted to subcontract the burden of safeguarding neighbourhood security to designated regional bodies.” The latter were also expected to promote “cooperative security arrangements based on mutual reassurance, rather than deterrence, and also promote economic and political cooperation” (El-Affendi, 2009).

He argues that the United Nations and other major powers felt that the role of regional bodies could help mitigate ethnic and communal conflict by severing the “historic link between sovereignty and self-determination” through the creation of broader regional identities, which would de-emphasize state sovereignty and offer disadvantaged minorities a broader framework within which they could meet dominant national minorities on the basis of equality. (p. 2). In the United Nations Secretary-General’s 1992 report *An Agenda for Peace* and in the follow-up report of 1995 (Supplement to an agenda for peace), regional organizations were acknowledged as having a significant role in peacemaking and peacekeeping, a role the Secretary-General saw both as a form of functional decentralization needed to unburden the overstretched UN system, and as an effective democratization of the system.(Boutrous-Ghali, 1992).

The Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP) lists thirty (30) contemporary security threats, euphemistically referred to as transnational crimes faced by most African countries, although the document also distinguishes between those threats that are internal to Africa and those that are externally influenced. The internal threats are grouped under four headings: interstate conflicts/tensions, intrastate conflicts/tensions, unstable post-conflict situations, and other factors that engender insecurity. Haacke and Williams (2003) note that although transnational challenges such as terrorism and proliferation in small arms and light weapons were not explicitly identified, they were subsumed under the category of “other factors engendering insecurity” and these include the insecurity exacerbated by refugees problem, the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW), infectious diseases (such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis), human trafficking, drug trafficking, and money laundering.

The CADSP also identified common external threats to include transnational challenges, such as the negative effect of globalization, weapons of mass destruction-related issues, and cross-border crimes. Haacke and Williams assert that African states have implicitly transnational threats fuelled through “aggression” by non-state actors, contextualised as actions “involving the use, intentionally and knowingly, of armed force or any hostile act against the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, and human security of the population of a signatory state.” Haacke and Williams say that based on the AU documents, it is safe to conclude that the regional body has securitized four transnational threats namely: the trafficking of SALW, terrorism, infectious diseases, and aggression by non-state actors, maybe due to their potential negative effects on security in the continent.

Williams and Savona say that transnational crimes threaten national and international security and stability; it undermines and challenges the political and legislative authority of the state, disrupts the gains of social and economic institutions and dividends of democracy, attenuates development, diverts its gains and exploits human vulnerability. TNCs threaten state sovereignty, societies and individuals, jeopardises national stability and state control, democratic values and public institutions, financial institutions, developmental process, global regimes and codes of conduct.

Impact of the Niger Delta Crisis

In their quest to force the Federal Government to listen to their agitations the militants have attacked Federal Government and multinational oil firms security forces. They have “sabotaged oil installations, taken foreign oil workers hostage and carried out lethal car bombings. At the root of the problem is a crisis of underdevelopment. The crisis has been

exacerbated by emergent issues of a gross distortion of Nigerian federalism in respect to resource control; citizenship rights and environmental degradation” (Ejibunu 2007). The Brussels-based International Crisis Group, estimated that Nigeria losses between 70,000 and 300,000 barrels per day to illegal bunkering (ICG 2006, 8), which represents the equivalent output of a small oil producing country. It added that Shell Nigeria’s annual report released in late August 2006, estimated illegal bunkering losses at 20,000 to 40,000 barrels per day in 2005, down from 40,000 to 60,000 in 2004 (ICG 2006, 8).

“Nigeria has earned over \$400 Billion as oil revenue since the early 70s (ICG 2006, 1). Despite these huge foreign exchange earnings, the economy under- performs, and the great majority of the people have not been able to derive much benefits. Poverty, unemployment, decay infrastructure, corruption at high level, misery, lack of basic human needs etc, etc seems to be the lot of the people” (Ejibunu 2007). Development initiatives often fashioned and implemented in a top down mode, have been lopsided with less satisfactory impact on the lives of the indigenous population. “Despite 40 years of oil production and hundreds of billions of dollars of oil revenue, the local people remain in abject poverty without even the most basic amenities such as water and electricity” (Ejibunu 2007).

The arrow-head of the Niger Delta struggle, late novelist Kenule Saro-Wiwa, declared in his famous speech that “In Niger Delta, scenes of abject poverty pervade the area, very similar to what you find in a refugee camp,” even when “the region fetches the government oil revenue within the region of \$100M a day” (Saro-Wiwa 1997). The most significant contributory factor in the drudgery being experienced in the Delta region is corruption and general economic mismanagement. A former Chairman of the Nigerian Anti-Graft body, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, argued that in 70 per cent of oil revenues, more than \$14 billion was stolen or wasted in 2003 (Brisibe 2007).

The International Herald Tribune asserts that “Oil companies find themselves in an uneasy position, stuck in a crisis that they, in a sense, helped create. For years, human rights groups accused them of turning a blind eye to the corruption of Nigeria’s successive military regimes while damaging the environment in the delta”. The Washington-based Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force calculated that a loss of just 70,000 barrels a day at a price of \$60 a barrel “would generate over \$1.5 billion per year-ample resources to fund arms trafficking, buy political influence, or both” (ICG 2006, 8). The body postulates that “one day’s worth of illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta (at 100,000 barrels and \$15bbl) will buy quality weapons for and sustain a group of 1,500 youths for two months.”

The negative impact of the oil resource in the Niger Delta is well known. Volman (2003) argues that “In the oil producing region of southeast Nigeria, oil extraction has done enormous damage, disrupted social stability, and provoked extensive violence by government forces and in political conflicts between local peoples, without contributing much to regional economic development.” The resource often derisively termed ‘curse’ has also ignited super power interest in the region. Klare and Volman (2006) assert that “Desperate to procure additional supplies of foreign oil (to make up for the decline in domestic output), the Bush administration has made strenuous efforts to increase the role of US energy firms in African production. But because instability in Africa is an obstacle to such investment, it has sought to boost the internal security capacity of friendly African states and has laid the groundwork for direct US military involvement in Africa.”

Nigeria can aptly be described as a weak state. These states possess one or more of the following characteristics: infrastructural incapacity evidenced by weak institutions and the inability to penetrate and control society effectively or enforce state policies; lack of coercive power and a failure to achieve or maintain a monopoly on the instruments of violence; and the lack of national identity and social and political consensus on the idea of the state. Ayooob (1995) argues that the insecurity in weak post-colonial state is symptomatic of the normal conditions and processes of state-building. He argues that the conditions of insecurity in weak states are an expression of the historical state-building process similarly trodden by European states even with more bloody phases and longer processes. He posits that essentially weak states face the state building process in an environment constrained by the experience of colonialism, a shortened time-frame and problematic international norms such as democratic principles, human rights and right to self determination, among others.

In this vein, different studies by Collier (2000) and de Soysa (2000, 113-136) suggest that strong states generally possess the wherewithal to manage resource control agitations as these states “tend to be less prone to internal conflicts” when compared to states undergoing “significant economic and political transitions”. The latter category, which includes Nigeria, among other third world countries, is “relatively more prone to internal violent conflict.” These studies emphasised the central role of poverty “as a causal variable in internal wars” (Barnett, 1992).

Basically, there are three assumptions in environment-security nexus researchers. The first emphasises that unequal consumption of scarce resources triggers violent conflicts especially in low income resource-dependent societies; the second stresses that rising population often have causal relationship to conflicts; and the third harps on the penchant for failure of adaptive mechanisms to environmental changes to threaten and exacerbate violent conflicts (Barnett, 1991). However, Homer-Dixon (1999) and Baechler (1999) insist that environmental change, when properly managed does not constitute an immediate cause of conflict although it sometimes exacerbates it. Both also emphasise that environmental change ‘is unlikely to be a cause of war between countries (Barnett, 1991), although they were silent on intra country violence over scarce resources.

Recent empirical studies on resource related violence, especially those pioneered by Watts (2001, 189-212), focusing on the Niger Delta region isolated “unequal outcomes of social and environmental changes” characterised by “inadequate distribution of the return from resource extraction activities”(Barnett 2007) as a catalyst to violent agitations that has in recent times characterised the Niger delta region. Similar studies focused on West Kalimantan (Peluso and Harwell, 2001, 83-116), and Bougainville Island (Boge, 1999, 211-27). According to Barnett (2007, 191), these studies show that “a range of intervening economic, political , and cultural processes that produce and sustain power are seen as more important in causing (and preventing and resolving) violent conflict than the actual material environmental changes that take place.” In the context of the Niger Delta crisis Barnett’s postulates that the structure of the state is a determining factor in devising an amicable solution to violent resource-related agitations with potent regional security implications.

In effect, “the (US) pursuit of African oil has taken on the character of a gold rush, with major companies from all over the world competing fiercely with one another for access to promising reserves. This ‘oil rush’ has enormous implications both for African oil producers and for the major oil-importing countries. For the producing countries it promises both new-found wealth and a potential for severe internal discord over the allocation of oil revenues (or

`rents'); for the consuming countries, it entails growing dependence on imports of a vital substance from a region of chronic instability, with obvious national security overtones. Both these trends are reflected in US policy towards African oil”(Klare and Volman 2006).

During his July 2002 visit to Nigeria, US Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Walter Kansteiner declared that “African oil is of strategic national interest to us” adding “it will increase and become more important as we go forward.” Volman notes that “while American interest in oil and other strategic raw materials from Africa is not new, the Bush Administration’s decision to define African oil as a “strategic national interest” and thus, a resource that the United States might choose to use military force to control is completely unprecedented and deeply disturbing.” Volman (2003) postulates that “because oil revenues are managed by central governments that are often neither democratic nor financially transparent, the money generated by oil production often does not contribute to national economic development, but is instead diverted into the bank accounts of government officials or used to finance unnecessary prestige projects. The misuse of oil revenues exacerbates political discontent and can provoke internal political violence.”

The oil-violence nexus, though controversial portends a grave danger for many African countries and the spectre is already playing out in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. Volman (2003) argues that due to “the instability and lack of democracy in most African countries and the difficulty of solving political problems by peaceful means, possession of oil is certain to continue to promote the militarization of African countries and to provoke both internal and inter-state violence. He asserts that “The possession of oil resources, and the revenues that accrue to governments from the exploitation of this resource, have had a decisive impact on the security and stability of nearly every African country that has significant amounts of oil. This has been true in the past and oil is certain to have a similar impact on those countries where it is only now being discovered and exploited.”

A continent-wide survey would illustrate the oil-violence nexus although few exceptions such as Gabon exist. “Oil production yields vast revenues for African governments. This allows them to make large arms purchases, to build up their military forces, and to strengthen internal security forces. However, it also can lead to internal political conflict and violence because it increases the stakes of political competition and encourages rival leaders and parties to resort to the use of force to gain control of the oil revenues” (Volman, 2003). He asserts that “foreign oil companies have sometimes purchased arms themselves and distributed them to Nigerian military units deployed in the Niger Delta to suppress local discontent.”

Efforts to De-escalate the Crisis

Nigeria plans to establish a security agency for the Niger Delta region (Reuters 2009), following the acceptance of a presidential amnesty offer by ‘the most prominent rebel commanders’ in the Niger Delta struggle. However, there are palpable fears that continued military presence in the region would escalate the simmering crisis. The report revealed that the maritime security agency is expected to provide “security information on oil and gas pipelines, rigs, platforms and all other established ...installations” as well as safeguard shipping and port facilities in the Niger Delta (Reuters 2009).

It should be stressed that a genuine process of the resolution of the crisis does not require building up military presence in the area. The views from abroad are not different from what had been widely adumbrated at home. To resolve the security quagmire that the Niger Delta

portends, the US and other stakeholders must ensure “a properly funded democratization program” in order to “secure American and Nigerian security interests and quell the insurgencies, criminality and social banditry now rampant in the Delta.” This measure would entail institutionalized free and fair elections, addressing youth unemployment, compensating communities for damages, raising living standards, empowering civil society groups to monitor public funds and negotiating local resource control (Lubeck et al. 2007).

Furthermore, Enerique Fernando Arrundell, the Venezuelan Ambassador to Nigeria, delivered a bitter truth when he visited Nigeria’s Minister of Information and Communications, Dora Akunyili in Abuja recently. Upon Akunyili’s request for assistance from Venezuela, he advised:

"Before 1999, we had three or four foreign companies working with us. That time they were taking 80 per cent, and giving us 20. Now, we have 90 per cent, and we give them 10 per cent. But now, we have 22 countries working with us in that condition...60 percent of the income goes to social programmes.

“That’s why we have 22,000 medical doctors assisting the people in the community. The people don’t go to the hospital; doctors go to their houses. This is because the money is handled by the Venezuelans. How come Nigeria that has more technical manpower than Venezuela, with 150 million people, and very intellectual people all around, not been able to get it right? The question is: If you are not handling your resources, how are you going to handle the country?

"So, it is important that Nigeria takes control of her resources. We have no illiterate people. We have over 17 new universities totally free. I graduated from the university without paying one cent, and take three meals every day, because we have the resources. We want the resources of the Nigerian people for the Nigerians. It is enough! It is enough, Minister!" (234Next Online 2009).

U.S. Role in the Conflict

Not many Americans appreciated “the scale and significance of Nigerian oil and gas production centred in the Delta and how this complex impacts American energy security” (Lubeck et al. 2007). Thus, the U.S. already faced by dwindling oil source from the Gulf occasioned by the crisis in the region, “has quietly institutionalized a West African-based oil supply strategy.” Under the American oil and energy supply plan, Nigeria, which currently provides 10-12 percent of U.S. imports, would serve as “the cornerstone of this Gulf of Guinea strategy.” Meanwhile, Nigeria remains a vital oil supplier to the US and other Western countries. According to the US National Energy Policy Development Group,

Along with Latin America, West Africa is expected to be one of fastest-growing sources of oil and gas for the American market.... Nigeria, in partnership with the private sector, has set ambitious production goals as high as 5 million barrels of oil per day over the coming decade (NEPDG 2001, 8-11).

Lubeck *et al.* argue that “the escalating political crisis in the Delta threatens American energy security, the security of Nigeria’s fledgling democracy and, indeed, the entire West African region as a source of reliable energy” (2007). The growing insecurity of U.S. oil supplies reflects what Michael Klare has called the ‘economization of security,’ (Klare 2004) an important strand of U.S. foreign policy since the 1930s, which has focused on global oil acquisition policy (Sanger 2006).

Assessing the role of the International Community in resolving the Niger Delta debacle, a Nigerian analyst on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Benjamin Akande, said, “the truth of the matter is that Nigeria may need outside help to deal with this situation. The U.S., the European Union, or the African Union could come into this conversation and help resolve this issue” (BBC News, 2007). “Fears that China is gaining control over African energy resources, e.g. Angola, are important to the new emphasis on securitization of energy policy, as well as bureaucratic competition for control over resources among the regional commands of the U.S. military” (Lubeck *et al.* 2006).

It is expected that the US would continue to do all within its powers to secure the oil source in the Niger Delta and the Gulf of Guinea although no direct intervention as is the case in Iraq is visible in the horizon even though there is a trend toward increased American military involvement in West Africa’s oil regions especially, in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. “As long as the United States’ energy security policy relies on increasing amounts of imported oil, and Nigeria depends completely on oil and gas exports to fund its mono-export economy, the security interests of Nigeria and the U.S. will remain deeply intertwined”(Lubeck *et al.* 2007).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The struggle in the Niger Delta Region is symptomatic of the failure of the Nigerian state to plough back substantial part of the resources derived from the area for its development. Pierre Trudeau’s strategy for checking centrifugal tendencies, as summarised by Wole Soyinka is as follows: “Create conditions that make fragmentation undesirable ...cultivate an overall national image that is so appealing that it makes separation unattractive” (Soyinka, 2001).

Nigeria’s federalism needs to be strengthened and practised according to the spirit and letter of the Constitution. Federal practices have been acknowledged to possess inherent centripetal characteristics that unite and galvanise the state for even development. Rosenbloom and Kravchuk (2002, 106) argue that “because the national government can act directly on the people and seek to represent them, the chances for separatist nuts to develop and be successful in a federal system such as the United States are greatly reduced.” This cannot be said of the Nigerian federalism in although the Constitution explicitly states these objectives. It is widely acknowledged that “political threats are aimed at the organizational stability of the state. Their purpose may range from pressurising the government on a particular policy, through overthrowing the government, to fermenting secessionism, and disrupting the political fabric of the state so as to weaken it prior to military attack” (Buzan 1991, 119).

The Nigerian state must begin to address economic insecurity and other threats in various ramifications. According to Barnett (2007, 191), “Economic security entails safeguarding the structural integrity and prosperity-generating capabilities and interests of a politico-economic entity in the context of various externalised risks and threats that confront it in the international economic system.” Economic-security nexus is defined as the linkages between economic policy and traditional or politico-military security policy. Emancipation refers to the freeing of people from the structures of oppression or domination in which they find themselves.

Various forms of critical theory are driven by a political commitment to emancipation from different structures of oppression and domination. “National security cannot be considered apart from the internal structure of the state, and the view from within not infrequently

explodes the superficial image of the state as a coherent object of security” (Buzan 1991, 103). There is an almost unbreakable cord between the economy and political stability. “The link between economy and political stability generates a set of wide-ranging questions about development that could not unreasonably, be seen as national security issues.” (Buzan 1991, 129).

Fragile states portend grave danger to the regional security and global security. Thus, when more weak states are unleashed on the international community, the domestic threat will exacerbate and this insecurity will spill over into regional relations thereby creating hostile relations with neighbouring countries. Certainly, “refugees and guerrillas will cross borders, and unstable elites will seek to bolster their position by cultivating foreign threats. Outside powers will find it difficult not to be drawn into this turbulence, especially if they are competing with each other for spheres of influence, whether ideological, military or economic” (Buzan 1991, 157).

Even a civil war confined to a territory would inflict disruptions on the systemic balance of the region. Civil war is a process of severe disruption: It destroys existing structures, networks, and loyalties; it creates new opportunities for political losers, alters the size of optimal coalitions, gives rise to new entrepreneurs, and generally reshuffles politics. Therefore, it has the potential to alter the structure of cleavages and generate realignment in identity affiliations, thus destabilizing and even changing a country’s ethnic demography (Kalyvas 2008).

It is understandable why there is so much frenzy about the Niger Delta. “Although as a rule states will contest all challenges to their territorial integrity, some pieces of territory are clearly more valuable than others. This value may arise because of resources, like oil...Such territory will have much higher priority as an object of security than other areas, and some territory will have very low priority” (Buzan 1991, 92). Military intervention can only suppress but it cannot eliminate agitations and the advice by Buzan that “value of a given territory may rise or fall with changes in the technological, strategic or economic environment, or with discoveries about its resource potential. States possessing a territory with international strategic significance may easily find that it becomes a source of threat to the state because it promotes intervention or attack” (Buzan 1991, 93). Therefore, the Nigerian state must guard against subtle intervention under whatever guise. This can only be achieved through assuaging the grievances and agitations of the Niger Delta people.

If examined from its roots, as Arendt (1993) posits, we would appreciate the fact that the crisis in the Niger Delta was a reaction to age long neglect which degenerated into rage. Arendt says,

...rage is by no means an automatic reaction to misery and suffering as such; no one reacts with rage to a disease beyond the powers of medicine or to an earthquake or, for that matter, to social conditions which seem to be unchangeable. Only when there is reason to suspect that conditions could be changed and are not, does rage arise. Only when our sense of justice is offended do we react with rage....The point is that under certain circumstances violence, which is to act without argument or speech and without reckoning with consequences, is the only possibility of setting the scales of justice right again (Arendt 1993: 65-66 [1999]).

As Fortman (2007) argued, most violent conflicts are ignited by 'original injustices' and naturally the victims of the original injustices would demand that the sins be redressed by whatever means at their disposal. He says,

The point is that in all situations of violent conflict, there are original injustices that lie at the roots of it. The main reason why hostilities can be stopped in the end is that those involved realise that the violence of the war is even worse than the original injustices. But at the same time they will expect these original injustices to be dealt with after the cessation of hostilities. Expectations are raised that life will continue as it used to be but that there will be an improvement, a public path towards justice (p. 162).

As surmised by Reuben Abati, government should create employment opportunities for the 'army of unemployed, unemployable youths' in the country. The Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Youth and Social Development, Mr. Dapo Oyedokun was recently quoted as saying "Of the over 40 million youths in the country, 23 million are unemployable and therefore susceptible to crime..." This is what the Federal Government should be more concerned about. The army of unemployed, unemployable youths continues to grow largely due to bad governance and the collapse of industry and the education sector. Leadership failure is at the heart of the dilemma (*The Guardian*, Friday October 16, 2009).

Buzan argues that "secessionist movements offer a wealth of opportunity for foreign intervention, and rarely occur without importing some level of national security into the domestic arena" (Buzan 1991). The Nigerian state cannot afford to be plunged into a civil war. "Even a strong state must guard against subversive penetration of its political and military fabric by foreign agents and interests, but for a strong state the concept of national security is primarily about protecting its independence, political identity and way of life from external threats arising within its own fabric" (Buzan 1991, 103).

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