Resurgence in the Niger Delta and the Discourse of Terrorism in Nigeria

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Abstract
Studies have shown how over-dependent Nigeria has been on the proceeds from oil thus making oil and gas the lifeblood of the nation's revenue, economy and national survival. Hence, there exists a clear awareness between government and citizens that whatever happens to oil production can have immense effects on the country's economy. To this, militant groups' activities in the Niger Delta region has become a growing concern for both scholars and policy makers. Against this background, it has been noted that while there have been an avalanche of studies on the Niger Delta crisis, most have mainly described this phenomenon from the perspective of 'agitation for self-determination', 'pirate activities', 'insurgency', 'armed rebellion', 'militancy' among others. But considering the motives, targets and methods employed by these groups, in addition to the resurgence of threatening attacks in the region after notable era of relative peace, this study therefore tries to establish compelling arguments on why the Niger Delta crisis can further be understood from the perspective of 'terrorism' largely due to the fact that the eventual employment of violent means in bring home their demands is nothing short of an instrumental technique of political violence. Additionally, considering the nature of a return to violent attacks by the armed groups, brings to mind, how the armed groups have consciously adopted violence as a prolific mechanism for policy change and achieving their goals.
Keywords: Niger Delta, Militancy, Terrorism, Insecurity in Nigeria, Niger Delta Avengers, MEND

Introduction

A critical appraisal of the level and dimensions of insecurity in Nigeria tells a compelling story of an increase over time, which constitutes serious threat to lives and properties, hinders business activities and discourages local and foreign investors, all which consequently stifles and retards Nigeria's socio-economic development (Ewetan and Urhie, 2014). This rising wave of insecurity has not abated but has assumed a dangerous dimension which even threatens the corporate existence of the country as one geographical entity. Amidst the deteriorating security situation in the country, Nigeria is also confronted with daunting developmental challenges which pose serious threat to socio-economic development of the country. These developmental challenges have for so long been identified as, high rate of unemployment, inadequate physical and social infrastructure, debilitating youth unemployment, unstable and deteriorating exchange rate, high inflation rate, low industrial output, endemic rural and urban poverty, very large domestic debt, and rising stock of external debt among others.

Again, on the economy discourse of Nigeria, so many studies have shown how over-dependent Nigeria has been on the proceeds from the oil industry thus making oil and gas the lifeblood of the nation's revenues, economy and national survival (Ikelegbe, 2005; UNDP, 2006; Orogun, 2010). To this extent, oil is central to the development of Nigeria and constitutes the backbone of the economy. In the early 1990's petroleum production accounted for 25% of GDP, oil exports accounted for over 95% of its total export earnings, and about 75% of government revenue. Petroleum production in fact provides the only immediate hope for the development of the rest of the economy. With this therefore, there is a huge tendency that whatever happens to oil production can have immense effects on the Nigerian economy at large. More so, armed groups' activities in the Niger Delta region has become a growing concern for the Nigerian economy.

Since the work of Dike (1956) and Ikime (1969) there have been an avalanche of studies on the Niger Delta region. Among these numerous works, scholars have discussed the activities in the Niger Delta region in different perspectives. For instance, it has been discussed as generally restive, with pockets of insurrection and armed rebellion, Ikelegbe (2005); agitation for self-determination, Ukiwo (2007); mere insurgency, Ukiwo (2007) among others. But considering the methods of operation of the armed groups, which includes kidnapping and hostage taking (with over 200 foreign nationals as victims), blowing/shutting down of oil installations and facilities, setting off of car bombs, and illegal oil bunkering (estimated at between 80,000 and 300, 000 bbl/day) (Nwogwugwu, Alao and Egwuonwu, 2012), it is therefore important to expand our thought on this phenomenon.

Additionally, considering the nature of a return to violent attacks by the armed groups after a significant period of relative peace, it is therefore worthy to bear in mind that the Niger Delta armed groups have consciously adopted violence as a veritable instrument for policy change and achieving their goals.

It is our aim in this work therefore, to expand the scope of terrorism discourse so as to accommodate some other dimensions such as 'economic terrorism', which we would thereby later critically situate the Niger Delta armed groups' activities and as on the discuss the concept activities of the Niger Delta Militant groups from the perspective of terrorism (since the goal of their activities is simply to draw public and government attention)

Defining Terrorism

Terror seems to be a brute and speechless act that defies verbalization. Acts of terror can be told and retold, described and analyzed. They are deeds of violence. The performative qualities of terror seem to be restricted to utter destruction, plain and simple. But that is not the case with terrorism (Weichlein, 2011). Basically, terrorism seems to follow an indirect strategy to motivate others. Terrorism has a political dimension. The use of bombs or hand grenades itself is terror, but terrorism goes beyond that.

Despite the continuing manifestation of terrorism in domestic and international life, however, the term still seems nebulous and sometimes controversial and there is currently no comprehensive, concise, and universally accepted legal definition of the term. In most cases, their characterisation can depend upon the person or institution using the label and may even change over time. To give two striking examples, Conte (2010) suggested that the list of most wanted terrorists kept by the United States featured, at one time, Yassir Arafat and Nelson Mandela, both of whom were subsequently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize: this is a simple evidence that the categorization of terrorism could sometimes be a highly political and controversial issue. In the months prior to his death, Yassir Arafat was again described as a terrorist by the United States Administration. It is worthy to also recall how the U.S once hailed Osama bin Laden and his comrades as freedom fighters in the 1980s, it is no longer news that that stance has changed. Again, while the US has classified the Lebanon-based Hezbollah, a pro-Syrian movement, reportedly funded by Iran, as a terrorist group, the European Union (EU) on the other hand, resisted for long the pressure to outlaw Hezbollah as a terrorist group not until 2013 when it officially labeled Hezbollah's military wing as a terrorist organization.

The difficulty in defining what terrorism really is, also lies in the instance where during George Bush's address to Americans shortly after the 9/11 attacks, he used the terms "terror," "terrorism," and "terrorist" thirty-one times without ever defining what he meant (Best and Nocella II, 2004). To this ambiguous and controversial dimensions, it is again not surprising that Palestinian militants call Israel terrorist, Kurdish militants call Turkey terrorist, Tamil militants call Indonesia terrorist; and, of course, the nation-states call the militants who oppose their regimes "terrorists".

Like "beauty", "terrorism" is in the eye of the beholder. One man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist. Hence, the difficulty in a universal definition of 'Terrorism'. This maxim (of beauty and terrorism) is also true when one considers how scholars have classified the Niger Delta armed groups which are largely no way near calling it terrorist.

In spite of this lack of universally accepted definition, we critically considered some popular definitions. For instance, Peter Chalk defined terrorism as the "systematic use of illegitimate violence that is employed by sub-state actors as a means of achieving specific political objectives (Chalk, 1999:151). Some other definitions take an indirect political strategy as the defining characteristic of terrorism that sees it beyond just the use of political violence. For instance, Schmid and Jongman (1988:28) describe terrorism as "an enxiet-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-)clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main target."

From a more African perspective of terrorism, the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism defined terrorism in Article 1(3) as;

(a) any act which is a violation of the criminal laws of a State Party and which may endanger the life, physical integrity or freedom of, or cause serious injury or death to, any person, any number or group of persons or causes **or may cause damage to public or private property, natural resources**, environmental or cultural heritage and is calculated or intended to:

(i)   intimidate, put in fear, force, coerce or induce any government, body, institution, the general public or any segment thereof, to do or abstain from doing any act, or to adopt or abandon a particular standpoint, or to act according to certain principles; or

(ii)   disrupt any public service, the delivery of any essential service to the public or to create a public emergency; or

(iii)   create general insurrection in a State.

(b) any promotion, sponsoring, contribution to, command, aid, incitement, encouragement, attempt, threat, conspiracy, organizing, or procurement of any person, with the intent to commit any act referred to in paragraph (a) (i) to(iii).

With the foregoing, it is clear that the conceptualization of the terrorism is better understood in the context of trends and patterns, targets and based on the tactic and strategy the perpetrators employ in such violence. In employing this definition, we discussed the nexus between Niger Delta armed groups activities and terrorism.

However, in spite of the adoption of this definition, there is need to further clarify some tenets showcased in most other definitions of terrorism.

Restricting terrorism to the targeting of civilians and non-combatants for the purposes of political violence (Goodwin, 2006), or the usage of violence in order to create an atmosphere of psychological and moral disorganization (Schmid and Jongman, 1988), is not sufficient.

This analytic strategy fails for two reasons: first, it is overly exclusivist, leaving out a large part of ―routinized terrorist activity that does not aim to produce extraordinary and shocking events, but which is closer to guerrilla warfare and is still directed at the state and its symbolic representatives. Second, it is overly narrow, in that it does not suffice to make terrorism distinctive from inter-state war at the level of empirical observation and behavioral interaction. After all, the killings of civilians, the targeting of non-strategic symbolic targets (such as famous landmarks), or sustained bombings of cities for demoralization purposes, are all strategies that have been put to use during interstate war, but are not usually branded as terrorist (Graham 2004). Furthermore, most definitions of terrorism had ultimately presented the concept in too derogatory and negative sense. This has undoubtedly not given much room for systematic evaluation of politically violent groups which are yet to be christened as terrorist to be in reality, terrorist goals and in action.

Historiography of Niger Delta Crisis: From Agitation to Terror

Historically, the Niger Delta has been a protest prone zone. The protests are generally not unconnected with the inborn will of the people to resist oppression, exploitation and servitude. The likes of Jaja of Opodo and Nana of Itsekiri, are established cases of resistance to imperialism, domination and exploitation (Etemike, 2009). Being a major economic gateway during colonial days as well as post-colonial periods, the tendency for regime exploitation and marginalization was always there. Force and coercion were often been utilized to silent the voice and curb opposition from the people, but this evidently had only strengthened others to reignite new phases of struggle.

One first name that comes to mind in the agitation for a better Niger Delta in independent Nigerian State is that of Isaac Boro and his Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS), which was launched in February, 1966 with the aim of creating a State of the Niger Delta people in order to address the human and infrastructural development problems of the area (Omotola, 2006:17). It can be said that the failure of the Nigerian Government after independence in giving the desired attention to the development of the Niger Delta region in spite of its enormous contributions to the wealth of the country stimulated Boro's dream for self-determination. It was against this background that Boro mobilized his Niger Delta Volunteer Service against the Nigerian Government in a war of liberation and declared a Niger Delta republic on February 23 1966 (Boro, 1982). Boro and his group were finally subdued by the forces of the federal government (Etemike, 2009).

The picture of boroism is a clear indication that the region had for long been politically, socially and economically marginalized and deprived, and the discovery of oil had only aggravated their demands. The state of marginalization even before oil discovery can be traced to a clearer scenario where the Willinks Commission (Minorities Commission) of 1957 reported that;

> The needs of those who live in the creeks and swamps of the Niger Delta are very
> different from those of the interior… it is not easy for a government or legislature
> operating from the inland to concern itself or even fully understand the problems
> of the territory where communications are so difficult, building so difficult,
> building so expensive and education so scanty in a country which is unlikely ever
> to be developed (Etemike, 2009: 154 - 155).

The region by the 1990s was one of the least developed and poorest. But more unfortunately, increasing oil exploration had made the region economically and socially prostrate, courtesy of extensive environmental degradation and ensuing socio-economic disruptions and poverty. The circumstance led to a slow heightening of a somewhat second phase of the struggle (Ikelegbe, 2005). This second phase of the struggle sprang up decades after the defeat of the Boro movement when another revolutionary movement called Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People led by Ken Saro-Wiwa emerged from the Niger Delta region. MASOP unlike NDVS that was widely described as guerrilla warfare, started on the premise of intellectual warfare through constructive criticism and dialogue by way of demands and protests against the exploitation of the Ogoni land by Shell and the Nigerian Government (Osaghae, 1995; Isumonah, 1998; Ogbogbo, 2005).

The Ogoni People through a Bill of Right demanded among others the political self-determination for themselves, the right to control and use their economic resources to develop Ogoni land, payment of reparations by government of Nigeria and petrol-businesses, compensation for the pollution and destruction of their living environment, as well as the right to protect the area from further degradation. Yet again, the government never took the non-violent group serious, rather, responding with brute and force which culminated in the execution of the amiable minority rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and other eight Ogoni kinsmen, and the invasion and destruction of innocent lives and properties even later on in communities such as Odi, Odioma, Ayakoroma,

Gbaramatu kingdom, Oporoza and many others (Paki and Ebienfa, 2011).

The continuous suppression of peaceful agitations as witnessed largely during the second phase of the struggle - an era of intellectual warfare-, left youths in the region with no option than to militarize the struggle to match force with force. The umbrella group for the later highly proliferated armed groups in the region was the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) which launched itself to international stage in January, 2006 (Hasson, 2007). The MEND group and other aligned groups like the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), an Ijaw militant group led by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta (COMA) and the Martyr's Brigade perpetrated devastating attacks on oil facilities (see Ikelegbe, 2005; Ogundiya, 2005; Asunni, 2009, for timeline of attacks by the groups). Yet, were able to maintain its secrecy because of sympathy for the group among locals. However, government crackdowns only bolstered that sympathy and driven more recruits.

At this particular stage, militants in the Niger Delta have demonstrated the ability to destroy large parts of the oil production facilities in the country. And even the Nigerian military has found it difficult to achieve a decisive advantage over them due to the guerrilla tactics they adopt, the terrain of the swamps where the militia camps are located, and the dispersed infrastructure of oil pipelines and production facilities in the delta.

Again, the armed groups have been able to sustain attacks and membership majorly through the proceeds from illegal oil refining and bunkering. The groups have graduated from amateurs who utilize crude methods in the extraction of refined petroleum products and crude oil from the distribution pipelines of the MNCs to advanced technologies to tap refined petroleum products and crude with the aid of sophisticated communications equipment and transportation means across creeks, rivers and rivulets.

The insurgency came to an end when President Yar'Adua offered amnesty, vocational training, and monthly cash payments to nearly 30,000 militants, at a yearly cost of about $500 million. This program brought relative peace to the region, and petroleum exports increased from about 700,000 barrels per day (bpd) in mid-2009 to about 2.4 million bpd in 2011. Several ex-militant leaders such as Asari Dokubo, Gen. Ebikabowei "Boyloaf," Victor Ben, Ateke Tom, and Government Ekpumopolo (alias Tompolo) were rewarded with lucrative contracts to guard pipelines. The amnesty program was intended to end in December 2015, but was later extended to December 2017 by President Buhari.

The Nexus between Niger Delta Armed Groups' Activities and Terrorism: An Instrumentalist Approach
We adopt the instrumental approach of terrorism majorly because it provides fundamental arguments that are critically capable of helping to differentiate terrorism from every other type of political violence. This instrumental approach is also very similar to some other perspectives of terrorism, such as; games-theoretic model (Sandler, et. al, 1983; Sandler and Arce, 2003), goal-centered and rational choice perspectives (Wittman, 1979; Bueno de Mesquita, 1981; and Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, 1992; Fearon, 1995).

Generally, the instrumental explanations of terrorism suggest that the act of terrorism is a deliberate choice by a political actor. According to this approach, the terrorist organization acts to achieve political ends. According to Crenshaw (1995), violence is assumed to be intentional for a terrorist organization. Therefore, violence is not the ends in itself as suggested by some other approaches like the psychological theories (Ozdamar, 2008).

This approach assumes that, terrorists are not lunatics who violate for the sake of violation. Rather, terrorism is a tool for these actors to achieve political ends. So governments and other actors are perceived as rivals whose actions are taken strategically and a terrorist organization aims to change other actors' decisions, actions, and policies by using force. As deduced from our adopted definition, terrorism is a deliberate action aimed to change government policies; it is not a kind of typical warfare in which parties try to destroy each other militarily.

To this, Kydd and Walter (2006: 49) asserted that, "terrorism often works. Extremist organizations such as al-Qaida, Hamas, and the Tamil Tigers engage in terrorism because it frequently delivers the desired response." In fact, terrorism has been so successful that Pape (2005) stressed that, between 1980 and 2003, half of all suicide terrorist campaigns were closely followed by substantial concessions by the target governments. Hijacking planes, blowing up buses, and kidnapping individuals may seem irrational and incoherent to outside observers, but these tactics can be surprisingly effective in achieving a terrorist group's political aims. For instance, the United States pulled its soldiers out of Saudi Arabia two years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, even though the U.S. military had been building up its forces in that country for more than a decade. The Philippines recalled its troops from Iraq nearly a month early after a Filipino truck driver was kidnapped by Iraqi extremists (Glanz, 2004).

Terrorism works not simply because it infuses fear in target populations, but because it causes governments and individuals to respond in ways that benefit the terrorists' cause. For instance, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) bombed pubs, parks, and shopping districts in London because its leadership believed that such acts would convince Britain to relinquish Northern Ireland (Kydd and Walter, 2006). In most cases, because talk is cheap,

states and terrorists who wish to influence the behavior of an adversary must resort to costly signals (Kydd, 2005). Costly signals are actions so costly that bluffers and liars are unwilling to take them (Riley, 2001).

With these in mind, a consideration of the history, stages of agitations and differing strategies adopted during the different stages of the Niger Delta crisis, it is somewhat clear that the eventual employment of violent means in bring home their demands is nothing short of an instrumental technique of political violence. It would be recalled that, though, the first significant use of arms in the Niger Delta occurred in 1966, when Isaac Adaka Boro formed an Ijaw group, the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, and declared a republic. The group's attacks and potential attacks were significantly directly against the state militarily. His uprising was crushed by the federal government within days, but his demands for greater autonomy for the people of the region inspired later activists such as Ken Saro Wiwa and "Mujahid" Dokubo-Asari (Tebakaemi, 1982; Bagaji et al, 2011).

Armed groups in the region had majorly surfaced with attacks and publicly taking responsibilities since the return to democratic rule in 1999. Attacks by the groups have mainly been targeted towards; Pipelines, trunk lines, manifolds and other oil and gas installations/facilities; Killing of military personnel (Soldiers); Attacks on electricity feed pipelines; Civilians and Police officers (following clashes with Nigerian soldiers); Kidnapping; Illegal oil bunkering (majorly for financial sustenance); Attacks on waterways and continental waters; Organized mafia crimes.

Conclusion

At the moment, Nigeria's oil industry is producing well under capacity. Nigeria's maximum producing capacity is about 3.2 million barrels per day; however, current production is often half of that, even without OPEC quota limitations. Much of the country's production is disrupted or shut-in (the oil stays in the ground because of security threats to oil facilities and their staff). Of the oil that is produced, a significant proportion is lost through pipeline vandalism, acts of sabotage, and theft by the armed groups in the region. Needless to say therefore, that the security challenges in the Niger Delta region should be taken seriously most importantly at a time when the country is slugging it out with recession.

Again, a noticeable policy response of government to the crisis, is the allocation of 13 percent of the national oil revenue which is paid back to the oil producing states. Perhaps due to this, corruption is perceived as being more of a problem in the Niger Delta than in other parts of Nigeria. This is evident in the non-corresponding level of development and allocation to some states in the region.

However, having a second thought about the Niger Delta armed groups' activities in the region and categorizing it as a form of terrorism, definitely provides the platform to investigate inherent issues of criminality and corruption among the groups. Unlike a situation where many sections of the society have long justified their activities as a necessary response to unanswered questions of marginalization, deprivation and alienation, thus, seeing all things to be right about the groups' activities.

To a very large extent, one can argue, that the instrument use of political violence by the Niger Delta armed groups and its yielding gains is a snowballing factor to the emergence of other terrorizing groups in the country such as the erstwhile deadly Boko Haram group and the breeding of potential ones.

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