

CONTRADICTIONS OF SECURITY PARADIGMS AND STATE REPRESSIONS IN THE NIGER DELTA SUB-REGION OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The human security paradigm places premium on the security of people; its concern is with how people live, how much access they have to opportunities and whether they live in peace or conflict. This contrasts sharply with the traditional militaristic conception of security that lays emphasis on the protection of the state and the regime in power. The Nigerian state subscribes to the narrow militaristic concept of security. This explains its concern only with unimpeded access to crude oil at very cheap costs; notwithstanding the adverse impacts of oil activities on the environment and the people of the Niger Delta. The people of the Niger Delta on the other hand, places premium on the concept of human security. Thus, to the Niger Delta people, security means the recognition that ecological damages from oil activities are a threat to their livelihoods and resources. This has given rise to contradiction of security, which is hinged on the opposition between perceptions and conditions of security advanced by the state on the one hand and that advanced by the Niger Delta people on the other. With a premium on human security, the people of the Niger Delta have protested against the adverse effects of oil activities in the region, which often, impede oil activities. In response, the state has mostly resorted to repression and militarisation of the region to ensure unimpeded oil flow. The paper concludes that until this contradiction is resolved, violent conflicts may continue in the Niger Delta.

KEYWORDS: Human security, State repression, Niger Delta

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that due to its crude oil production and reserves estimated at over 34 billion barrels (Robinson, 2006), the Niger Delta is strategically significant to both the domestic and international economies. Nigeria is the largest producer of oil in Africa and the seventh largest in the world (Ajanaku 2008). Oil has for over four decades, been the linchpin of the Nigerian economy (Ikein 1990; Khan 1994; Lewis 1996). Oil in 2006 accounted for 80% of state revenues, 90% of foreign exchange earnings, 96% of export revenues and almost half of GDP (Watts 2008; ICG 2006b:19; Agbu 2005:82; Powell *et al.*, 2005:9; Karl and Gray 2003:26). Current oil production runs at about 2.4 million barrels daily. The oil is lifted mostly from about

250 onshore fields dotting the landscape of the Niger Delta. Oil activities have adversely impacted on the environment, with dire ramifications on health, livelihoods and indeed the survival of the people. The state and the oil multinationals have failed to appreciate the region's plight. The oil multinationals consider the oil-host communities irrelevant in the scheme of things, as such; they do not consider their well-fare relevant. For instance Shell, the foremost oil multinational spent only a paltry 0.000007% of the over \$30 billion of oil it extracted from the region on community assistance in 25 years (Rowell 1994). In like manner, the state also used less than 3% of the \$183.1 billion revenues it realised from oil from 1970 to 1978 in developing the region (Saro-Wiwa 1992; Dappa-Biriye *et al.*, 1992). The Nigerian state has earned estimated

\$600 billion revenues from oil since 1956 (Watts, 2008) yet, the Niger Delta, to use the words of the Willink's Commission (1958) remains "poor, backward neglected". Stringent calls for resource control and escalation of conflicts in the Niger Delta since 2003 are clear indications of the lack of improvement in the region.

The reaction of the people to this neglect has turned the Niger Delta into a state of generalised insecurity that snowballed into an insurgency that forced Shell to sell two oil fields to Chinese oil firm, CNOOC as it embarked on divestment from the country (Wall Street Journal, 2007). At the height of the crisis before the on-going amnesty, over 123 hostages were taken between January 2006 and early March 2007 (CSIS 2007), while 42 attacks were carried out on oil installations (Watts, 2007). By December 2007, the number of kidnapped foreign oil workers rose to 216 (36 Britons and 180 other nationals) with one casualty, a Briton (Makinde, 2007). By April 2009, the above tally increased with the kidnap of over 1,000 Nigerians oil workers and one additional death (a Shell Community Officer) (BRS, 2010).

It is noted that violent protests are not new in the Niger Delta but all attempts made by the people to draw attention of the state and oil multinational to the situation of the region were silenced. For instance, Isaac Boro and his 53-man Niger Delta Volunteer Services (NDVS), declared the Niger Delta People's Republic on February 23, 1966. The insurrection ended 12 days, later on March 6, 1966 (Tebekoami 1982). The state hounded relations, wives and associates of the insurgents, who were arrested, tortured and detained in its effort to crush the insurgency. Boro emerged from Odi creeks with his followers to save their relations and friends from suffering. They were tried for treason and sentenced to life imprisonment. The high handed reaction of the state to the insurgency revealed the mindset of the state, which was to teach the insurgents a lesson to stem future occurrence. Since then, the state's trademark response to protests in the Niger Delta has been viciousness. Similarly, Ken Saro Wiwa led Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), also attempted to draw the attention of the Nigerian state and the international community to the plight of his people through peaceful protests but he was hanged with eight of his kinsmen by late General Sani Abacha' regime in 1995.

However, since 1997 protests in the Niger Delta have acquired a very violent

dimension and also a vivid transformation. The new dimension was introduced with the entrance of volatile youth militias that elevated the ante of conflict and violence with the state and oil companies. As it were, state repression in the region shut-out other means of communication, making resort to arms the only way to be heard. Thus, according to Okonta (2006), "Behind the mask of the MEND militia is a political subject forced to pick up an AK47 to restore his rights as a citizen".

Contradictions of Security in the Niger Delta: A Conceptual Framework

Traditional security defined from the narrow state-centred and militaristic views, is the sum total of the vital national interest of the state (Clausewitz, 1908). Its emphasis is on the protection of the state and the regime in power. Threats to states' security are blamed on external aggression or external enemies of the state as externalities, thus foreclosing threats from within. The state therefore, is the only referent object of security, meaning that the security of a state rises and falls with its ability to deter or defeat an aggression from another country (Wolfers 1966). However, by the end of the Cold War policy makers and scholars began to construe security as something more than the military might of a state (Buzan 1983; Cable 1995; Mastanduno 1998; Nye & Lynn 1998; Paris, 2001). This arose from the inability of many states especially in the developing countries to respond appropriately and timely to internal conflicts within the ambit of traditional security, thus, some became failed states in the late 1980s. This forced most scholars and analysts to reconsider the meaning of the term 'security', and the appropriate referent object of security: is it the state or the people? (Bernstein 1988; Brown *et al.* 1995; Lipschutz 1995; Brown *et al.* 1997; Krause and Williams 1997; Buzan, *et al.* 1998). This is because as Lloyd and Curley (1999:44), has asserted, "The state-centric notion of security as it were became inadequate in the determination of either a state's power or peace". Besides, the state as Imobighe (2001:40), aptly opined, should ensure that "Security must impact positively on people by providing the right atmosphere for self improvement and actualisation".

Therefore, human security is people centred. It means safety from threats such as hunger, diseases and repression. It includes, protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life - whether in homes, in jobs

or in communities (UNDP, 1994). Human security is concerned with how people live and how much access they have to opportunities and whether they live in conflict or peace. Though repression began during the era of military rule in the Niger Delta, repression has continued and indeed intensified in the region under successive democratic rule. Repression started at Umuechem in 1990 when 80 persons (including the King) were killed and over 350 houses burnt by men of the police mobile force invited by Shell to stop a peaceful protest by the people at the gate of its flow station in the town demanding social amenities; school, clinic, road from Shell for the community. However, the paradigmatic case of protest in the Niger Delta was the Ken Saro-Wiwa led Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) that embarked on protests of passive resistance to draw attention of the Nigerian state, the oil multinationals and the international community to the harmful effects of oil activities in the Niger Delta and Ogoni land in particular. In reaction, the state set-up the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force that ensured the economic strangulation of Ogoni land, systematic and vicious torture and killings of the Ogoni people. The activities of the Task Force headed by a Major Okuntimo; who boasted of knowing over 120 ways of killing a man, climaxed with the judicial murder of Saro-Wiwa on trump up charges in 1995.

From the foregoing, it becomes necessary to examine the root causes of conflicts and security problem in the Niger Delta sub-region. What specifically are the roles of the state, the oil companies and the Niger Delta people?

The Nigerian State

Oil came into national reckoning by about 1976, taking over from agricultural produce that had for almost a century sustained the Nigerian economy. The state took control of all oil resources and the erstwhile derivation based revenue allocation formula was changed from the hitherto existing derivative principle and weighted on other factors such as population and landmass, which were severely lacking in the Niger Delta. By this action, the state denied the Niger Delta, the gains enjoyed by other regions such as the North, East and western regions when agriculture was the pivot of the country's economy (Emuedo and Ebohon, 2009). This was further exacerbated in 1978, when the state promulgated the Land Use Decree that transferred land ownership under customary laws

in the Niger Delta from the people (original owners) to the Nigerian state. The Niger Delta people were not favoured by the Act because focus of the Land Use Act was obvious from its technical distinction between payment for land (a property of the state) and compensation for investments such as buildings, economic trees and farm crops, which stood on land. The Act as applied to post-1978 land acquisitions abolished the transfer fees hitherto paid by the oil companies to landowners. The evident disadvantage of the Act to the customary rights of the people was completed with the ouster of the courts from inquiring into the provisions of the Act. The Act worsened the already poor conditions of the people and it would seem its only intension was merely to enhance oil production in the Niger Delta. It is worthy of note that in the North all land ownership rights are traditionally vested in the Emir, as such the Land Use Act seems not to apply though to the northern part of the country.

The state therefore, prioritised its alliance with the oil companies and oil revenues above the well-being of the Niger Delta people. As a result, protests over adverse impacts of oil activities; pollution and gas flaring on livelihoods, income, health and personal safety in the Niger Delta were seen as treasonable acts by the state. Thus, since 1985 the state embarked on an agenda of repression, as such, the state's responses to protests in the region have been described as high handed, suppressive, repressive, brutal, coercive and aimed not at solution of the problem but coercing the people to submit to the might of the Federal Government. Repression therefore, appears to be the only intent of the state in the Niger Delta (Na'Allah 1998; Okonta and Douglas 2001). This is evidenced by the setting-up over the years of convoluted security architectures (military task forces) to ensure oil flow in the region. These include; Rivers State Special Task Force on Internal Security, Operation Andoni, Operation Hakuri No.1 and No. 2, Operation Restore Hope, Joint Task Force, Operation Sweep, Operation Fire-For-Fire, Operation Flush 1, 2, and 3, Rapid Response Squad, Emergency Response Squad, Operation Thunder, Operation Strike Force in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states. Collectively they are known as the Joint Task Force (JTF) and they are an apt mirror of the repressive mood and tendencies of the State in the Niger Delta sub-region.

The repressive intent of the state in the

Niger Delta was also manifested in the manner the task forces were composed. The Commanders, the Officers, Spokes persons and members of the task forces were usually composed of persons outside the Niger Delta sub-region and contiguous states. The first southern Commander of the JTF was only appointed by President Jonathan early 2011 after the facts of the destruction at Ayakoromo community was exposed. This is in tandem with the general pattern of repressive states worldwide; this ensures that there is utter disparity: social, ethnic or racial between the user and target of repression. The *raison d'être* is that the security forces would use force when ordered, readily visit mayhem on their targets whether persons, groups, communities due to the lack of common identity between the security forces and their targets (Huntington 1991). Distance of security forces on duty during unrest from the area of civil disorder ensures that their duties are not interfered with by sympathy for the locals (Horowitz, 1985:447). Government Task Forces have therefore, left woeful tales of wanton killings across the Niger Delta; Umuechem 1990, Ogoniland, Saro-Wiwa 1995, Yenagoa 1998, Choba 1999, Odi 1999; Uwheru 2004; Odioma 2005; Afiesere 2006; Okerenkoko and neighbours 2003 and 2006; Gbaramatu Kingdom, 2009, Ayankoromo 2010 and 2011 and many more.

These repressive acts have been visited on the Niger Delta people because the state misconstrue the conflicts that sometimes impair oil activities in the region as a rejection of its hegemony by the people, rather than as a means by the people to guarantee their continued existence. To support the view that the Niger Delta conflict is a security issue, the state has selectively blamed the people for communal activities against oil companies, militant youth activities, the killing of state security personnel, attacks on and destruction of oil facilities, vandalisation of pipelines and abduction of oil workers. Thus in the 2008 Budget, over ₦444 billion was allocated for the maintenance of these security task forces, while a paltry ₦87 billion was allocated for the region's development.

The International Oil companies

The oil multinationals seem to share the same view with the state on the oil induced conflicts in the Niger Delta. In their opinion the conflicts arise from opposition by groups and individuals in the region against their legitimate economic activities. The oil multinationals, like the state, draw attention to incidences of: communal disruption of their operations, attacks on oil facilities, pipelines vandalisation and abduction of oil workers while performing their legal rights to freely do business based on agreements signed with the state. In their attempt to put an end to the conflicts, the oil companies have also adopted repressive measures such as supply of arms to the security agencies (Manby, 1999a); provision of equipment to enhance naval operations in the Niger Delta (*The Comet*, April 26, 2000:16), provision of funds for the sustenance of the military in power (Obi, 2001:173), financing of the security forces on repressive duties in the Niger Delta; offering logistic support to the security forces (Manby, 1999b); arrest and detention of environmental activists; instigation of intra- and inter-community conflicts; secret payment of funds to youth groups, co-optation of vocal individuals into the comprador elite in the region, as well as acts of denial; silence and defiance. Thus, despite the persistent protests, the operations of the oil multinationals have remained the same; gas flaring, oil spillage, reckless canalisation and slapdash waste dumping in the Niger Delta. The operations of the oil multinationals as it were, driven by beliefs of relationship with the people; premised on the inexorable pursuit of profit without regard to the impacts of oil activities on the people. The oil multinationals appears to have entirely ignored environmental *safety* in their extraction of the region's petro-dollars. As a result, most of the over 7,000 kilometres of pipelines criss-crossing almost the entire landscape of the Niger Delta are laid above the ground or just beneath it. These aged and ill maintained pipelines have caused series of oil-related fire disasters that brought avoidable deaths to thousands of peasants across the region, such as, Jesse, Ekakpamre, Bayana and several other oil-host communities, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Some Prominent Oil Pipeline Fire Disasters in the Niger Delta 1998 – 2004

Date	Place	State	Casualties	Impacts
17/10/98	Jesse	Delta	Over 1000	Pollution, damage to farm lands, over 400 people seriously injured
22/04/99	Bayana	Delta	10	Water and air pollution, damage to farm lands
13/10/99	Ekakpamre	Delta	12	Environmental pollution, damage to farm lands, flora and fauna
14/01/00	Gana	Delta	12	Environmental pollution, damage to farm lands
03/06/00	Adeje	Delta	15	Destruction of forest, high tension power cables of 2 electricity plants, youth/ police clash
20/06/00	Okuedjeba	Delta	25	Environmental pollution, damage to farm lands
10/07/00	Adeje-Okpe	Delta	150	Environmental pollution, damage to farm lands
10/07/00	Oviri Court	Delta	300	Environmental pollution, damage to farm lands, injuries to scores of people
06/01/04	Elikpokwodu	Rivers	Unknown	Damage to over 200 ha of farm lands and properties worth millions of naira

Source: Compiled by author from various sources

The Niger Delta People and Coping Strategies

The Niger Delta people have for decades borne the brunt of oil exploration and exploitation activities in the region. Despite its oil wealth the Niger Delta has remained in its traditional setting; making the environment very vital to the people. Their livelihoods rest on the environment that serves as source for fishing, farming, hunting, rituals and medicinal purposes. This is why environmental security and sustainability are two major issues of concern to the people of the sub-region. The land sustains the subsistence agrarian practices of farmers in the region. Traditionally every family holds its own land and farm it for the economic survival of its members. They take a little of what is produced for the family up-keep and the rest for the market to earn income but this was before the advent of oil pollution and environmental degradation. The network of rivers serving various purposes; water usage, fishing and religious practices have been devastated. The devastations have led to severe deprivations, acute threat to livelihoods and constriction of the peoples full economic potentials. To the people, all these have occurred because the regime of laws regulating oil activities is skewed against them and has virtually legitimised environmental abuses, oil spills and gas flares. The express intent of the existing oil laws tends to give the oil companies unlimited access over the region’s oil and gas resources to ensure maximum production at minimal costs.

Thus, the Niger Delta people have insisted that injustice by the state and the multinational oil

companies is at the heart of the conflict. This injustice is encapsulated in operational methods of the oil companies; weak laws regulating oil activities; ecological disaster; acute militarisation of the region; wanton killings of the people, judicial murder of environmental activists and obtuse neglect and pervasive poverty in the region. These repressive forces and mechanisms tend to force the people as a last resort into some coping strategies such as petition writing, legal action against the oil companies and the state, disruption of oil activities, demands for fiscal federalism and resource control, stoppage of gas flares, environmental remediation, and payment of compensation for ecological damage, among others. All these actions and demands have always been met with brutal repression by the state notwithstanding the enthronement of democratic governance in Nigeria.

Democratic State Repressions in the Niger Delta

Repression since 1985 has been the trademark of state policy in the Niger Delta. However, the return to democratic rule in 1999 raised the hope that vital issues agitating the region; oil pollution, gas flaring, pervasive poverty and the obtuse neglect would be tackled. Instead, state repression escalated with the total destruction of Odi on November 20, 1999, killing 2,483 persons comprising of 1460 men and 1023 women (ERA/FOE 2002; Ibeanu 2002; Omeje 2004). The Odi attack was initially viewed as episodic, but Femi Fani-Kayode the Special Assistant on Political Affairs to then President Obasanjo,

declared it a state policy when he said; "... We were very tough when it came to Odi town the federal government literally levelled the whole place. And the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It has never happened again since that time. So, I think that policy works" (Fani-Kayode, 2006:7). Indeed state induced repressive strategies in the Niger Delta like the ubiquitous oil pollutions and gas flares have become statecraft.

This is evidenced by the multiplicity of state repressive activities across the Niger Delta since the nascent democracy in 1999. Some of these activities of the state are here presented and three of the cases are briefly discussed in detail, so as to bring to the fore, evidence of state repression as continued policy of state against the Niger Delta sub-region.

Table 2: Acts of State Repression in the Niger Delta 1999 – 2010

Year	Place	Operating Force	Repressive Actions Carried Out
November 1999	Odi	Nigerian Army	The entire community destroyed as only one house remained standing after the attack. 2,483 persons killed.
March 2003	Okerenkoko Axis	JTF*	72 persons killed, over 200 injured, 5 communities; 3 Itsekiri and 2 Ijaw sacked
January 2004	Uwheru	JTF	20 persons Killed and 11 houses burnt down
July 2004	Egbema	JTF	A total of 13 communities destroyed, over 500 buildings razed and over 200 persons, mostly women and children, feared dead
August 2004	Olugbobiri and Ikebiri	JTF	About 16 peaceful and unarmed persons killed.
February 2005	Odioma	JTF	The entire community destroyed, 1500 persons killed and about 3000 persons held hostage by the soldiers.
February 2006	Okerenkoko	JTF	15 women and children killed in their homes
October 2006	Afiesere	Police	Over 80 houses burnt and 20 persons killed
May 2009	Gbaramatu	JTF	10 communities destroyed, over 2500 persons killed and over 20000 displaced, the area was cordoned off for over 3 months preventing the living from getting food and the injured from medical help, steadily the attacks covered the entire region.
December 2010	Ayakoromo	JTF	The entire community destroyed, over 500 persons killed, over 3000 persons displaced, the area condoned off for over two weeks precluding the living from accessing food and the injured from medical treatment.
May, 2011	Ayakoromo	JTF	The community was attacked again on Thursday, May 12, 2011 under the guise of looking for John Togo. It lasted for two days. Like before, the JTF used maximum force and acted with impunity. Seven persons were killed, several houses destroyed and the entire community displaced from their homes.

Source: Compiled by author 2011

* JTF: Joint Task Force

Case 1: Odioma, Bayelsa State

The Odi episode of 1999 was re-enacted in Odioma, an oil-host community and a neighbour to Odi by the JTF on Saturday,

February 19, 2005. On Sunday February 20, 2005, when the then Deputy Governor of Bayelsa state, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, led a team to the place that was once

Odioma town, the team was confronted by a scene of burnt down houses, barns, churches and shrines in all parts of the town. Over 90% of the buildings in the community were burnt down, over 1500 persons were killed and about 3000 others were arrested by soldiers. The devastation was carried out by members of the JTF deployed to the area to maintain law and order due to tension triggered by the claim over the ownership of land (Owukubu), where Shell was to build a flow station named Toru-9. The ownership tussle was between Odioma community on one hand and Obioku and Bassambiri communities on the other hand.

What led to the crisis began in 1998 when Shell invited Odioma, Obioku and Bassambiri to a meeting to intimate them of its plan to build the Toru-9 flow station at Owukubu. But Odioma community claiming sole ownership of the said land staged a walk out from the meeting to protest the invitation to the other two communities. Shell adjourned the meeting, promising to contact Odioma community later but it never did, till January 22, 2005 Shell began work on the site. This angered Odioma community who on January 24, 2005 went en-mass to picket the site demanding that Shell stop work until all issues were resolved with the community. The people of Odioma community vacated the site on January 26, 2005 when Shell suspended work on the project.

Obioku and Bassambiri community youths angered by Odioma's actions against Shell allegedly burnt down Bolobio a satellite community of Odioma. This action was intended to enhance Obioku's control over Owukubu as Odioma's claim to the ownership of Owukubu, was through its ownership of Bolobio. The situation escalated on February 3, 2005 when 12 persons including four Councillors on a peace mission to Obioku and Odioma were murdered on their way to Obioku from Bassambiri. The waterways between Odioma and Bassambiri became unsafe for travel as commuters were subjected to tedious checks at various points by youths on vigilante duties. It was at this stage, that the then Bayelsa State Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha on February 17, 2005 invited the JTF to patrol the waterways to

restore peace. Two days later Odioma was put to ruins. Both the state and federal governments denied issuing orders to the JTF to attack Odioma but till date no officer of the JTF was reprimanded for the mindless attack. As it would seem the JTF annihilated Odioma, considered to be an obstacle, so that Shell could continue the construction of the flow station unhindered. Shell indeed continued work on the project barely two weeks after the incident.

Case 2: Gbaramatu Kingdom, Delta State

Odi was destroyed on the order of then Presidential Obasanjo, while Odioma's destruction was sequel to an invitation by the then Bayelsa state governor to the JTF to patrol the waterways following escalating tension between two neighbouring communities. On some occasions however, mayhem was visited on communities by the JTF to pre-empt disruptions in oil flow. Though massive troop deployment was evident in early 2009, no one was prepared for the intensity and scale of attacks on Gbaramatu Kingdom on May 13, 2009. It was planned and executed to the minutest detail. The JTF attributed the massive attacks to the killing of 18 soldiers guarding an oil facility by militias loyal to a militant leader Government Ekpemupolo. The attacks ostensibly were targeted at Camp 5, where the militants allegedly came from. After two days of ground attacks, the JTF deployed four jet fighters, twenty-four naval gun boats and three battalions of soldiers into the war. At Oporoza, the Local Government Headquarter where a cultural festival was ongoing, at the time, the king's palace, several buildings including the community guesthouse were destroyed and scores of people killed. The attacks lasted for three months and were gradually extended to all parts of the Kingdom, such as, Kurutie, Kiangbene, Benikurukuru, Goba, Abiteye and Kunukunuma. Over 2,500 persons were killed, about 500 others were declared missing and over 20,000 persons were displaced from their homes. For over six months, the waterways and creeks were under military cordon, making it impossible for the living to get food and the ill and the injured to access medical care. In addition, all other

communities in the area including those not affected were unable to eke out a living or sell their produce through out the period of the cordon.

What is worthy of note here is that the incidence that allegedly led to the attacks was not reported by any print or electronic news media. The militia leader on his part averred that the attack was merely a calculated attempt by the JTF to drag him into a pre-planned battle for the control of oil in the region¹. The militia leader claim was given credence by the fact that the entire Gbaramatu kingdom and not camp 5 alone were attacked. Also, the attacks took place at a time when the country's daily oil production had been drastically reduced by militant activities. The Gbaramatu axis has been an epicentre of youth militancy and had been previously attacked in 2003 and 2006. This attack like previous ones was aimed at deterring militia activities in the area to enhance oil production. However, this attack led to the steady sabotage of pipelines and oil facilities by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) that virtually crippled the country's oil industry; reducing daily oil production from over 2.4 million to less than a million bpd by June 2009. The severe constriction of state revenues that accompanied this drastic reduced oil production forced the unconditional amnesty declaration for all militants in the Niger by late President Yar' Adua in 2009.

Case 3: Ayakoromo, Delta State

From December 1 -3, 2010 in attacks reminiscent of the attacks on Gbaramatu Kingdom in 2009, the JTF, using jet fighters, helicopter gun-ships, naval gun boats and infantry soldiers launched a coordinated air, land and sea attacks on Ayakoromo community in Delta State. This attack, which was carried out over a year into the period of the amnesty in the region, was according to the JTF intended to neutralise the camp of one militant Commander, John Togo, an inconsequential militant leader that failed to embrace the 2009 amnesty. This militant managed to attract some attention to himself by a failed attempt to blow up an Agip oil well in Bayelsa state. The attack resulted in heavy collateral damages;

complete destruction of the community and the death of over 150 innocent persons from shelling and aerial bombardments. Many people were killed directly by the invading forces, while others mostly children and the aged got drowned trying to escape the attacks. The JTF spokesman Lt.-Col Timothy Antigha, beaming with smiles, announced the success of the attacks to a stunned nation and denied civilian casualties and other collateral damages during the attack. He dishonestly described claims of civilian casualties in the press as mere propaganda. According to Lt.-Col Antigha,

"There is no way the JTF would kill any civilian because this operation was planned for a very long time to avoid innocent deaths, I can tell you with all honesty and assurance that if anybody was killed, that person cannot deny being a militant, because the places where the JTF opened fire were identified as militant camps" (O'Neil, et al., 2010).

The Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Azubike Ihejirika also reinforced this denial on the network news of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA, December 5, 2010). Due to the usual security cordon of the entire area, the JTF was able to sustain the propaganda for over two weeks. However, on December 21, 2010, the Ijaw People's Association of Great Britain and Ireland published in the internet, pictures of burnt down buildings with charred human remains in the community. It was only then that the Director of Military Communications admitted that heavy collateral damages had indeed resulted from the attacks.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper x-rayed the positions of the principal parties involved in the Niger Delta conflicts, the Nigerian state, the oil companies and the Niger Delta people. It would seem that the major reason for the conflict is the divergent understanding of the concept of security by the various parties. As it were security is viewed from two divergent, mutually exclusive, conceptions by the principal actors. The Nigerian state as it were, subscribe to the traditional state-centred concept of security, while the people of the Niger Delta

consider human security as paramount. The Nigerian state based on its notion of security; consider protests and impairment of oil activities by the Niger Delta people a rejection of its hegemony, rather than a means to guarantee their continued existence. Consequently, the state has continually resorted to acute repressive measures as a means of pacification. For the Niger Delta people however, the failure of the Nigerian state to compel the oil multinationals to ensure environmental safety is inimical to their livelihoods and hence their human security. The *contradiction of securities* is therefore, hinged on the opposition between perceptions and conditions of security advanced by the Nigerian state and that advanced by the Niger Delta people. The oil multinationals have exacerbated the situation by operating with palpable impunity in the region. Thus further goading the people to more acts of violence against both the state and the oil multinationals. To resolve the conflict therefore, it is vital that a consensus is reached on the nature of the conflict, as it would seem that it is the lack of consensus on the cause of the conflict that have given vent to the sundry actions and reactions that fuelled the Niger Delta conflict. Thus, if a consensus is reached by the parties, the root of the conflict would be better appreciated and desirable options proffered to end it.

Notes

1. See Emma Amaize, Vanguard Newspaper, Lagos, 24 May 2009. See also Dokubo-Asari's interview, Vanguard Newspaper, Lagos, 24 May 2009. See Oboko Bello, 'Task Force Acted on False Intelligence', The Nation Newspaper, Lagos, 26 May 2009.
2. See Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth, (2002), "A Blanket of Silence". The publication catalogues names of victims.

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