

Oil Exploration and Terrorism in Nigeria: The Experience of the Oil Producing States

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ABSTRACT

It is a fact that there is terrorism in the Oil Producing States of Nigeria. Daily, pipelines are vandalized, oil wells constructions are halted, oil workers are held hostage, lives are lost and property destroyed. The purpose of this study is to bring into focus this ugly situation, and lay bare the plights of the Oil Producing States, arising from the effects of oil exploration, socio-economic and political problems; as well as socio-psychological problems that enabled terrorism to thrive. Factually, terrorism is rooted in the political economy, which does not give people equal opportunity to participate in the share and distribution of their national cake. The irony of the whole situation is that while majority of the people live in penury and environmental degradation, the custodians of State political apparatus grow fat in uncontrollable affluence and wealth. Gradually, terrorism which is nurtured by misery sneaks into the marrow of the society. This study, therefore, takes a critical look at the ugly situation, identifies vent of anger by mostly the youths of the affected areas as a result of negligence as one of the major problems that have led to this situation. Based on this premise, it is recommended that the Nigerian States should rise up to its responsibilities to the Nigerian people and Oil Producing States in particular.

Keywords: Politics, oil exploration, terrorism, Oil Producing States

INTRODUCTION

For some years now, terrorism in the Oil Producing States of Nigeria has been central in our national discourse. Nigeria is without doubt the largest crude oil producer in Africa and the sixth largest within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Nwankwo, 1983). Technically speaking, Nigeria has been able to produce 12.6 million barrels of crude oil per day (bpd). It is a fact that crude oil export accounts for about 97.5% of Nigeria's total foreign exchange earnings (Brick, 1971). This means that Nigeria absolutely depends on export from crude oil for her foreign revenue (Gilbert, 2004).

The irony of the whole situation is that with almost sixty years of oil exploration, Nigeria has accrued up to \$500 billion net profit from the sales of this crude, yet the States that lay the golden egg wallow in abject poverty (Nnoli, 1994). There is environmental degradation, abject poverty and squalor. Malnutrition, high mortality rate, high level of juvenile delinquency and poor infrastructural development are now the order of the day (Sagay, 2001). With the dominance of ignorance and inability of government to deliver dividends of democracy to the Oil Producing States, aided with the conspiracy by the

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multinational oil companies has seriously aggravated the situation. This situation of total neglect, hunger unemployment and poverty has given room for youth's restiveness and terror (Lawal, 2000). This situation has also given room for oil workers being taken as hostages, oil wells construction halted and most worrisomely, under-aged children hijacked for ransoms, etc. Furthermore, oil bunkering, pipeline vandalization and all other forms of terror are now becoming the order of the day (Etekpe, 2000). To the perpetrators, it is a good riddance for bad rubbish, as it is now an avenue for making wealth. The risks of death never deter the people from scrambling to source oil from leaking pipelines. It is evident that many lives have been lost in the resultant inferno that has followed many of the accidental explosions in various parts of the Oil Producing States. These actions have paralyzed government activities in the States concerned, stopped oil exploration and have seriously damaged the image of Nigeria and reducing her as a nest for terrorists in the comity of nations. It is therefore, disheartening that while other petroleum exporting countries are reaping the fruits from oil exploration, Nigeria is battling with how best to contain the malaise of terrorism.

A litany of interpretations has been given to the word terrorism. For a social scientist, a terrorist of yesterday may be the hero of today; while a hero of yesterday may become the terrorist of today. One person's terrorist may be another person's freedom fighter (Erida, 2007). To other liberal scholars, terrorism is a modern day barbarism or at best a form of political violence (Oyige, 1984). Terrorism is a life-threatening action perpetrated by politically frustrated individuals and motivated by self appointed sub-groups (Aina, 2003). It implies the use of terrorizing method of resisting government which involves the use of coercive violence that is not only illegal, but also extra judicial in outlook (Webster, 2004). On its part, encyclopedia Britannica perceives terrorism to be a systematic use of terror or unpredictable violence against government, public or individuals to attain political objectives (Encyclopedia, 1978). Therefore, on a global perspective, the impression given about terrorism is to kill and destroy the enemies. The understanding is that terrorism increases in arithmetic progression with an increase in deprivation, marginalization and subjugation. At the heart of this feud, is the urgent need to eulogize violence, hatred, arson, suicide and the need to overcome the enemy at all cost (Okoko, 1998).

Therefore, the bone of contention in the environment of the Oil Producing States is the prevailing search in terms of resource endowment, which is the available natural resources that are grossly misappropriated and cannot satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of the inhabitants (Uchegbu, 1983). It is evident that the terrorists are nurtured gradually by misery and want. It grows with the evil of poverty and strives; especially, when the stress-free life of the people has collapsed (Sagay, 2003). It is evident that the wealth yielding part of Nigeria lives in squalor, hunger, disease, malnutrition and penury; while the gate keepers of our economy and machinery of State and their cronies grow fat in affluence. The implication is that the un-profiting youths, educated unemployed from the Oil Producing States vent their anger on the States, due to negligence. This situation has given room to all sorts of evil such as kidnapping, raping, pipeline vandalization, maiming, destruction of private and public property and ultimately violence against the State.

BACKGROUND HISTORY OF OIL EXPLORATION IN NIGERIA

The petroleum industry in Nigeria and indeed the world covers the exploration and production of crude oil; as well as refining, distributing, servicing and marketing of petroleum, gas and other by-products. Its development in Nigeria started with the exploration activities by a German firm, the Nigeria Bitumen Corporation in 1908 (Uduma, 2009). Later in 1937, a prospecting license was granted to Shell D'Arcy exploration parties. This company carried out geological survey, drilled three deep wells in the former Western Region of Nigeria (Ikein, 1991). Their activities were stopped in 1938 due to the outbreak of the World War II (Uduma, 2010). In 1946 they resumed operations again, and in 1951 at Ihuo in present day Imo State they discovered oil. However, in 1956, the first discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities in Nigeria by shell D'Arcy was at a town called Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State.

And by 17th February, 1958, the first export of crude oil left the shores of Nigeria for Amsterdam (Ikime, 2001). There were further discoveries of oil at Afam and Boma and this established Nigeria as an oil producing nation. In 1961, the Federal government issued ten oil prospecting licenses to five multinational companies (Huge, 2000). With these generous concessions full scale onshore and offshore exploration began. By April, 1967, oil from Nigeria had reached two million barrels per day (Wardley, 1979). But the civil-war hindered the full exploitation of this great oil potential. In fact, it is proper to say that the civil-war was more of oil war, as control of the oil wells was paramount in the hearts of the combatants. To cope with this volume of production, create job opportunities and conserve foreign exchange, government awarded contract for the construction of a refinery at Eleme in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, and the job was completed in 1965 with a production capacity of 35,000 barrels per day (bpd).

Between 1970 and 1978, Nigeria experienced an upsurge averaging yearly increase of 23.4 percent (Okoko, 1998). Thus in 1978, the Warri refinery was officially opened with a total capacity standing at 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) (Harrison, 1987). By 1979, Nigeria's refining capacity stood at 160,000 barrels (Aminu, 1994). Again, the continued demand for the black gold led to the building of a third refinery at Kaduna in 1978 with an initial capacity of 100,000bpd with a potential capacity of 260,000 (bpd). Today, a forth refinery has been built in Port Harcourt with a promise by government to build more (Watt, 2008).

However, it should be remarked that by 1961/62 other companies such as Mobil, Gulf, Texaco, Agip and ELF had appeared on the Nigeria oil market. Though the initial quantity was small, within a decade after the outbreak of civil war, the production had reached about 2 million barrels per day (bpd) (Ikein, 1991). Nigeria simultaneously rose as a major world producer of crude oil. The following year, Nigeria joined OPEC thereby turning the attention of government to creating attractive environmental law and incentives to bring in investment in oil exploration to maximize revenue. The emergent data indicate that oil revenue alone was N196.4m in 1970 and by 1974 it had plummeted to N4133.8m (Chinwehu, 1994). According to Babangida, oil constituted about 25.9% of the total revenue in 1970, and the share, by 1974 had risen to 80.8% (Babangida, 1993). It has

been estimated that between 1990 and 2000 Nigeria got about \$199.35. This large sum of money physically changed the fortunes of the country (Aina, 1986). Nigeria became the 6th exporter of petroleum in the world with profound externalization and dependent economy (George, 1996). Multinational oil companies and those in the oil servicing sector became influential in the country's oil business. With this development, one can now say that Nigeria has arrived as a major oil producer in the world.

The Petroleum Profit Tax Ordinance of 1959 gives the Multinational Corporation some concessions in tax, which enhanced their profit margin; while the petroleum ownership and control of all oil under or upon any land in Nigeria to the State. Other legislations include land use decree of 1978, the Oil Pipeline Decree of 1990 and Oil Navigable Water Decree of 1974 (Godwin, 2001). All these decrees were not only anti-people, but it protects the interest of multinational oil companies. The complementary relationship with the oil companies is enhanced against the interest of Oil Producing States. It is therefore, important to state here that since the start of exploration activities of oil in Nigeria from 1908 to date; more controversies have been generated as the federal government policy of deregulation in the oil sector is being implemented. To hasten the appropriation of petrol-wealth, the federal government, during the reign of military in Nigeria, promulgated a number of draconian decrees which completely alienated the people from participating in the consumption of resources coming from their States (Ake, 1981). The exclusion over the years provided avenue for intrigues, bickering, anger, contestation and youth restiveness, particularly within the Oil Producing States (Dasman and Olagunju, 1978).

The Impact of Oil Exploration and Terrorism on the Oil Producing States

The controversy surrounding oil exploration in the Oil Producing States has been a very critical issue. This is so because the present socio-economic and political imperatives prevalent in the country are manifestations of its colonial tutelage. The post colonial Nigerian States emerged as an appendage of the colony. The government became anti people and partial because of lack of relative autonomy, legitimacy and power to command the respect of the people. On the other hand, the dubious attitude of the comprador ruling class who sees the apparatus of States as an instrument to enhancing their economic fortune thereby relied on leviathan principles of coercion, rather than hegemony and consensus in delivering dividends of democracy (Uchegbu, 1983).

The lack of capabilities to democratize and ensure transformatory process in the society has been responsible for the backwardness and suffering of the people which translate into marginalization, domination, exploitation and regressions (Saro-Wiwa, 1993). In the face of this tragedy, force became an instrument for legitimacy and appropriation of resources. This is why quite often the Nigerian State aligns with the multinational corporations to use maximum force against innocent and defenseless people for protesting against their precarious and pathetic condition (Brume, 2000). In addition, laws and other conventions are invented to consolidate states and primordial division invented and militarization of the political institution. By the time Nigeria started earning money from oil, it was clear that this acquisitive and predatory class in charge of the State apparatus would not use it for good

purposes other than their own selfish end (Amune, 1979). It is therefore interesting to note that when oil was discovered in Oloibiri in 1956, the agrarian industry began to die out (Philips, 1975). By 1970, when Nigeria experienced an unprecedented oil boom as petrol-dollars flowed freely into the country, Nigeria made more money in the oil industry than it could spend. It was on the basis of this boom that the various gigantic projects were initiated. These were: four billion second development plan of 1970-74; hosting of Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) of 1977, World Scout Jamboree and Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1976, were some of the pipes that drained the oil revenue into the pocket of Comprador ruling class and their allies. Since then, the Oil Producing States has been contributing the major wealth for the well being of Nigeria (Akain, 2004).

The exploration of oil has been associated with terrible environmental hazards which have left almost nothing for the people's economic and social existence. It is now a total negation and alienation of the inhabitants. This has been the major cause of agitation of concerned elites and youths of the Oil Producing States for self determination which has attracted battering from the high and mighty in Nigeria. The people have been passing through suffocating and deplorable conditions arising from the emission of seismic toxin caused by exploratory and drilling activities of oil companies. This deplorable condition prompted Saro-Wiwa to posit that:

Mangrove forest have fallen to toxicity of oil and are being replaced by anxious nypa palms, the rainforest has fallen to the axe of the multinational companies, all wild lives dead, marine life is gone, the farmlands have been rendered useless by acid - rain and the once beautiful Ogoni country side is no longer a source of fresh and green vegetation (Saro-Wiwa, 1999:16).

In line with the above unfortunate condition and the mindless grinding to a halt of the people's future, has given birth to many environmental agitators, freedom fighters, human rights activists, nationalists, etc., to protest for the restoration of the peoples' right and restore their means of veritable livelihood. Particularly, so pathetic is the Ogoni case in Rivers State and gruesome execution of Kenule Saro-Wiwa and his kinsmen by the joint conspiracy of the Abacha military junta, Shell Petroleum Development Corporation and other oil multinationals that raised eyebrows and condemnation are cases in point (Akain, 2004). To halt this ugly situation of abject poverty, negligence, deliberate destruction of agrarian and aquatic life in the Oil Producing States that has propelled people into forming resistant movements to agitate for the restoration of peoples' life, payment of compensations, mandate oil companies to implement their corporate social responsibilities and help in the development of the infrastructure of the host Oil Producing States (Akain, 1992). However, it should be noted that over the past decades, the Nigerian government has been responding to the crisis, rearing its head in the area through various commissions (Augustine, 1990). These include: Willink Commission of 1957, the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) 1992 and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) of 2000. It is unfortunate that all these commissions appear to be efforts in futility. Presently, the federal government launched a new road map tagged the Niger Delta Region Master Plan (NDRDMP) on March 27, 2007. The Obasanjo administration in Nigeria then, had

promised to make the security of lives and property in the Oil Producing States its major priorities, while ensuring that infrastructural facilities and unemployment will adequately be tackled. Yet, till the end of his tenure, nothing was eventually done.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The lingering terrorism in the Oil Producing States has economic undertone as they are historically determined. It results from the political economy that shows greater inequality and disparity in terms of opportunity and participation in the share of commonwealth on equal terms. While the wealth generating centre of the country grow in penury and squalor those who control the State apparatus live in absolute affluence. The ensuing relationship becomes exploitative, antagonistic and prone to violence of unimaginable proportion. This is highly facilitated by the character of the Nigerian States which is distortionary, tribalistic, nepotic, feudalistic and poorly organized (Ake, 1989). According to Ikein (2002), as the ruling class siphoned State resources, the MNC has been drilling oil since the discovery of oil in Nigeria. And there is no evidence of plans for a proper development of the host States. This particular part of Nigeria is completely lacking and barren in essential amenities, like good drinking water, electricity and good road network.

Therefore, there is the urgent need for provision of basic amenities. Once these inhibiting socio-economic impediments are phased out, terrorism in the Oil Producing States would certainly remain a dream of the past. This will ultimately restore normalcy, growth of commerce, industrialization and promote hospitality. Put together, it will help redeem the battered image of Nigeria in the comity of nations. It is a fact that over the years the Nigerian government has been responding to the problems in the Oil Producing States, without properly achieving their objective. This work is strongly of the view that there are key suggestions which could turn the tide for better in coping with the terrorism that is plaguing the Oil Producing States in Nigeria. In the first place, it is necessary to review the Land Ownership Act with a view to allowing owners of land to be stakeholders of what is available in their areas.

Furthermore, there is the need for an equitable distribution of projects in the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, particularly among the Oil Producing States, this will help in achieving a truly developed Nigeria. Again, the new roadmap tagged Oil Producing States development master plan should be fully implemented without further delay to ease the heightened tension in the Oil Producing States. Furthermore, the Nigerian States should rise up to its responsibilities to the Nigerian people and Oil Producing States in particular. Again, obnoxious practices, empty and unrealistic solutions and high rate of unemployment should be properly addressed. It is clear and disheartening that most youths in the Oil Producing States are unemployed, even when they are employable with requisite academic qualifications. The Oil Producing States militants should be encouraged to embrace education and desist from thinking that their problems will be solved through collective violence and organized terrorism. It has been observed that the haphazard and uncoordinated method of terrorist attack adopted by the youths has exacerbated rather than ameliorated

the problems. The militants should lay down all weapons. Also, all forms of hostage taking should be discontinued, while those in captivity should be released without delay. This will enable oil workers to go back and continue production. The total cooperation by youths from the Oil Producing States will go a long way in abating organized crimes and terrorism which will invariably usher in peace, economic stability, political growth and sustainable development. Furthermore, the educated elites, the academia, leaders of thought, religious leaders and concerned patriots from the Oil Producing States should intervene for peace to reign.

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