

# The Niger Delta Militancy and the Boko Haram Terrorism: A Comparative Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This paper compares the Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram terrorism. The reason for comparing the two groups is due to the growing demand from some prominent groups and individuals, mainly from the Northern part of Nigeria. A brief history of the two groups shows that they are spatially and ideologically differentiated. While, the Niger Delta militants were fighting against the state for developmental neglect and degradation of their land, the Boko Haram terrorist group is fighting to Islamise the country. It is the opinion of this paper, that both groups (Niger Delta militants and Boko Haram terrorists) pose the greatest security threat to the country since the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. In granting amnesty for the Niger Delta militants, the paper disagreed with those calling for amnesty for the Boko Haram terrorists on the ground that Niger Delta militants were granted Amnesty, because the two groups were not propelled by the same reasons as stated above.

Keywords: Niger Delta Militancy, Boko Haram, Terrorism, Insecurity, Amnesty.

## INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is to attempt a comparative study of the Niger Delta Militancy and the Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria. Today, Nigerians, especially North Eastern Nigerians are facing the risk of attack, destruction, death and carnage as result of Boko Haram terrorism. This is happening at the time Nigerians are settling from incidences of kidnapping, hostage-taking, bombing, vandalization of pipelines and militancy carried out by Niger Delta Militants. Suicide bombers and terrorist gangs or militias have claimed many lives and properties of Nigeria citizens in the Northern part of the country. States like Boruno, Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, kano, Kaduna and others are no go areas, because of Boko Haram terrorist activities. The trauma caused by terrorism in Northern Nigeria and the consequences thereof are incalculable. Many Southerners, especially Youth Corps members are not willing to go to the Northern part of the country any more. While many people from these states have abandoned their homes to relocate to other peaceful states, including Edo state far away from the North East. This terrorist Islamist group (Boko Haram) is regarded as a serious security challenge to the corporate existence of Nigeria

today, hence the need for the Federal Government of Nigeria to quickly tackle this problem of treat to the corporate existence, peace, security and development.

The motive for comparing these two groups i.e. the Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria is as result of the growing agitations from certain notable persons and groups mainly from the Northern part of the country, that the Boko Haram insurgents be granted amnesty just as the Niger Delta militants. Some of such important voices in favour of granting amnesty to Boko Haram insurgents are the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar and the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) a Northern oriented group.

Also, the idea of granting amnesty to Boko Haram insurgents has been justified against the background of amnesty granted to the Niger Delta militants from 2009 to 2010. According to Okpi (as cited in Samson, 2013) argues that:

*"if the Niger Delta militants could be granted amnesty despite the wanton destruction of oil facilities and indiscriminate killings of innocent citizens..... then, an olive branch should equally be extended to Boko Haram. They are both militant groups with destructive tendencies. So, what is good for the goose is also good for gander."*

In the light of the above, this paper will compare the activities of the Niger Delta militants and the Boko Haram insurgents taking into consideration the Federal Government amnesty programme offered to the Niger Delta militants.

### **The Niger Delta Struggle**

According to Ikelegbe (2005) The Niger Delta struggle is motivated by the demand for resource control and equitable wealth distribution and protest against the flagrant and damaging (ecological) activities of oil multinational companies (MNCs)operating in the region. He went further to say

*"Decades of oil exploitation, environmental degradation and state neglect has created an impoverished, marginalized and exploited citizenry (leading to) a resistance of which the youth has been a vanguard".*

The Niger Delta struggle predates the discovery of oil and political independence (Sampson, 2013; Oluwaniyi, 2011). However, its non-violent protest has transformed into what Ikelegbe(as cited by Nwankpa2014) describes as

*a region of intense hostilities, violent confrontations and criminal violence...pervaded by a proliferation of arms and institutions and agencies of violence ranging from the Nigerian Armed Forces to community, ethnic and youth militias, armed gangs and networks, pirates, cultists and robbers.*

In response, the Nigerian government has largely favoured the use of force, as carried out mostly by the nation's Joint Task Force (JTF) (Ojakorotu & Gilbert, 2010; Tessier, 2009). There is evidence also of non violent counter terrorism (CT) approaches as would be represented by several government development policies. The Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) established in 1961 by the Niger Delta Development Act, the Oil and Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) created by Decree 23 of 1992, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) set up in 2000, and the Ministry of Niger Delta formed in 2008, are some examples of the development approach adopted by the Nigerian government in countering the insurgency. The 2009 amnesty is the latest of such development strategy. (Nwankpa, 2014).

### **The Boko Haram Insurgency**

Since 2009, Boko Haram has gained relevance as a notorious insurgent group. Its notoriety is internationally recognized as it has been proscribed by the United Kingdom and blacklisted as a terrorist organization by the United States. (Nwankpa, 2014). Boko Haram whose original name is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad ("People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad") has carried out a campaign of attacks on symbols of authority such as the police and military. Police stations, military barracks and other government buildings and establishments as well as media houses and international organizations (attack on the United Nation's building in the nation's capital-Abuja) have been attacked. There have also been sustained attacks on Christians and their places of worship, market places and other public places. Suicide attacks, bombings, assassinations, and recently, kidnapping of foreign nationals, feature as some of their methods of attack. It is worth noting that most of its attacks are confined to the Northern states (mainly northeastern states such as Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe), including Kano, Kaduna and Sokoto. (Nwankpa, 2014).

According to Adesoji, (2011) It is widely acclaimed that Boko Haram was formed in 2002 by a radical Islamist cleric known as Mohammed Yusuf, however, some commentators argue that the group has been in operation before 2002 and has operated under different names such as the Nigerian Taliban, and Yusufiyya. It is also widely believed that Boko Haram terrorism is an offshoot of the Maitatsine sect of between 1980 and 1985. According to Adesoji, (2011) Boko Haram bears strong resemblance to the Maitatsine riots of the 80s in its vitriolic criticisms and attacks on the Nigerian state (including the police and military) and perceived moderate/ambivalent Muslim clerics, and level of damage (about 5000 people died between 1980-1985 even after Mohammed Marwa or "Maitatsine"- "The one who damns" was killed in 1980) (Adesoji, 2011). Adesoji,

(2010) argues that there is also very little difference between the socio-economic conditions that facilitated the emergence of Maitatsine and Boko Haram.

The main objective, as claimed by Boko Haram is to transform the Nigerian state into an Islamic nation. However, Boko Haram's religious explanation of its act of violence (as with most religiously-motivated groups) has been challenged as having no basis in Islam, especially its intolerance of people of other religions Achtar, (as cited by Nwankpa, 2014).

The Nigerian government has responded strongly to the threat posed by Boko Haram by favouring a strong military counter-terrorist strategy carried out by the JTF. Other non-military counter-terrorist approaches include the use of counter-narratives and, of particular relevance to this paper, the commissioning of a committee to advise on dialogue with Boko Haram insurgents, with possible amnesty granted to the group. (Nwankpa, 2014).

### **The Niger Delta Amnesty**

On 25th June 2009, the late former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Musa Yar' Adua, in exercising his constitutional power under Section 175 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, granted amnesty and unconditional pardon to the Niger Delta militants. The pardon was effective for a period of 60 days (25th June-4th October, 2009), requiring the militants to surrender every weapon and ammunition in their possession and to publicly denounce militancy. With constant increase in oil production and consequently increase in oil revenue, and a significant reduction in violence in the region, many commentators have described the amnesty programme in glowing terms. Interestingly, supporters of amnesty for the Boko Haram insurgent group have referenced the Niger Delta amnesty. It becomes therefore crucial to evaluate the implication of this connection between the Niger Delta and Boko Haram, especially in the light of perceived differences in their motivations. (Nwankpa, 2014).

According to (Jamestown Foundation, 2013; Alike, 2013), the Niger Delta amnesty programme has been hailed by local and international commentators as largely successful. It is tempting to accept this popular view, especially when we compare the relative peace in the Niger Delta region to the incessant violent attacks and militancy from 2000 to 2009. Since 2009, relative peace has returned to the region and there is an increase in the production of oil (from 700,000 barrels per day to between 2.4 million and 2.6 million barrels per day) and, consequently, increase in the generation of oil revenue.

Arguably, the demand for amnesty for the Boko Haram insurgents comes short of an attempt at political correctness, and, significantly, reveals a Nigerian State that is politically divided along ethnic and religious lines and biases. (Nwankpa, 2014).

## Militancy and Terrorism

Militancy denotes a combative and aggressive activism or engagement regardless of the use of physical violence or pacifist methods in a struggle for identified causes (Ikelegbe, 2006: 92). According to Ebienu (2010) militancy is precipitated by a governance crisis arising from grievances over a lack of popular participation, marginalization, exclusion, alienation and exploitation of a vast majority of the populace in terms of resource allocation cum distribution or development promotion. While, Collier (2000) noted that militancy is driven more by greed than grievance especially in natural resource contexts where rebels are motivated by self-regarding agendas rather than the quest for justice. But in contrast to the greed/grievance dichotomy, it has been argued that in most conflicts the phenomena of greed and grievance often reinforce each other rather than being mutually exclusive. (Aghedo and Osumah, 2014).

Also Schmid and Jongman (1988), defined terrorism as 'an anxiety-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 targets'.

Post (as cited by Aghedo and Osumah 2014) identifies four ingredients of terrorism namely: (i) the presence or threat of violence; (ii) a political or social motive; (iii) a broadening of audience beyond the immediate victims; and (iv) coordinated and often well-executed attacks. Both militancy and terrorism are sources of security threats. And it is possible for an otherwise militant struggle to metamorphose into a terrorist action as the Niger Delta militancy and Boko Haram insurgency exemplify. The strategic operations of both groups are similar in several respects. Despite the variations in terms of impact and frequency, both groups adopt insurgent tactics such as kidnapping, bombing, attacks on security formations and jail breaks.

## Comparison of Niger Delta Militancy and Boko Haram Terrorism

A comparative study of Niger Delta Militancy in the south-south and Boko Haram terrorism mainly in the north-east is not easy. However, giving the recent call by some prominent northerners for amnesty be given to the dreaded Boko Haram terrorists on the ground that the Niger Delta militants benefited from an amnesty programme, it has therefore become very imperative to undertake a comparative study of the two groups.

According to Aghedo and Osumah (2009) the Niger Delta militancy was driven by the demands for remediation of environment and distributive equity. The Niger Delta contains the crude oil which since 1970 generated over US\$400 billion in revenue for Nigeria and more billions in profits for oil companies. To Aghedo and Osumah, (2012); Ishaya, 2011) oil communities are mired in poverty and pollution. This paradox stirred militancy in the region which initially

adopted legal instruments, party formation, and dialogue in the 1970s and armed rebellion in the early 2000s with hostage-taking and attacks on oil facilities. Though some of the militants in the Niger Delta still hang on, there has been considerable decline in their combative activities since the declaration of amnesty for repentant fighters in 2009. On the other hand, the Boko Haram insurgents evolved in the early 2000s with sporadic attacks on police stations, though a serialized offensive began to make local and international headlines from June 2009. In its narratives of grievance, the radical Islamic sect opposes Western education. Indeed, the Hausa translation of the phrase 'Boko Haram' means 'Western education is evil'.

LeVan, (2013), Soria, (2012) posited that the foot soldiers of both groups have essentially been the unemployed, poor and uneducated. However, unlike the Niger Delta militants which comprised essentially the Ijaw people, members of Boko Haram were initially drawn from the Kanuri nationality; this has now been broadened to include recruits from other nationalities in the north and some illegal aliens from other African countries such as the Republics of Benin, Chad, Niger, Sudan, Somali and Mauritania.

The operational base and activities of Boko Haram have been in major cities in the north, especially the north-east geo-political zone. The northern cities include Maiduguri, Yobe, Damaturu, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Bauchi and Abuja, the federal capital territory. On the other hand, the operational base and activities of the Niger Delta militants were mainly restricted to the Niger Delta region, particularly the swamps and creeks of Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states. One fundamental similar feature of the operational bases in the two cases is the level of unemployment, poverty, and economic destitution. (Aghedo and Osumah, 2014).

The Niger Delta militants and Boko Haram insurgents according to Agbo, (2011) in their modus operandi share some similarities and distinctions; they both adopt a franchise system whereby they claim responsibility through press releases with a central email facility after launching attacks. They both launch attacks with sophisticated weapons and explosives. Instructively, Boko Haram appears to be more coordinated in launching attacks and its targets are different from those of the Niger Delta militants.

While on his part Fabiyi, (2011) posited, though both groups adopt various violent methods to achieve their objectives, targets of their attacks vary. While Boko Haram target both soft and hard spots such as churches, market places, banks, public places of relaxation, traditional institutions and strategic government offices such as the security posts and border posts, the Niger Delta militants essentially attack hard spots such as oil installations, oil companies and security formations.

Furthermore, unlike the Niger Delta militants who used boats to navigate the maze of creeks and rivulets in their operations, the Boko Haram terrorists use

vehicles and motorcycles in launching attacks. With motorcycles, popularly known as Achaba in the north, the Boko Haram insurgents are able to meander through the crowded cities after launching attacks Suleiman, (as cited by Aghedo and Osumah, 2014). This contrast can be adduced essentially to the difference in operational terrain or geographies of violence. In addition, Boko Haram's adoption of suicide bombing makes it distinct from the Niger Delta militants whose operational strategies were more of guerrilla warfare. (Aghedo and Osumah, 2014).

Another remarkable difference is the dynamism and inventiveness of the champions of both groups. Unlike the actors of the Niger Delta militancy, the Boko Haram insurgents have been allegedly involved in the establishment of factories at various locations including Kano and Kogi states for the production of bombs and other explosive devices to aid their strategic operations. In addition, unlike the champions of the Niger Delta militancy, there is an indication that some women and other vulnerable individuals such as the Almajiri (Koranic pupils) are used by Boko Haram insurgents. (Aghedo and Osumah 2014). Notably, some women were involved in the Niger Delta struggle. However, they were only involved in street protests, occupation of oil flow stations and demands for improved socio-economic conditions. Fundamentally, there was no clear trace of attempts to radicalize women and other vulnerable individuals in the structure of the militants for the purpose of perpetrating violence. (Aghedo and Osumah, 2014)

There is a commonality in state authorities' interpretation of and response to the Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram insurgency. The Nigerian state largely interprets and responds to militants' violent activities as a grave threat to national security as shown by the deployment of a huge military presence. The heavy military presence in both areas was largely associated with repression, intimidation, abuse, mass arrest, detention, beatings, torture, killings, and destruction. In response to the Niger Delta militancy, the Nigerian state deployed a repressive counter-terrorism strategy. The administrations of Olusegun Obasanjo and Umaru Musa Yar'Adua respectively ordered military action against militants in the region. Like the Niger Delta case, President Goodluck Jonathan's administration has proscribed Boko Haram; declared emergency rule in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states; ordered heavy military operations in the hotbed of Boko Haram; and approved the deportation of illegal immigrants to some African countries. (Aghedo and Osumah, 2014).

According to Agbonifo and Aghedo, (2012), the repressive military responses of the Nigerian state which resulted in the extra-judicial murder of members in both cases have been argued as a key factor fuelling the radicalization of the conflict. The execution of some prominent leaders in both cases culminated in more vicious attacks by the non-state actors. The execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni environmental activists in November 1995 based on

trumped-up charges by the Sani Abacha regime led to the mushrooming of more militant groups in the area (Tonwe, Ojo and Aghedo, 2012). Similarly, according to Osumah, (2013a) the 2009 arrest and killing of Boko Haram leader Mohammad Yusuf and his father-in-law resulted in more vicious attacks by the sect including the use of suicide bombings.

According to Azubike,(2009) and Oladesu, (2009), the attacks by both the Niger Delta and Boko Haram violent non-state actors have engendered huge carnage and economic costs. In both cases there is no statistical exactitude on the costs that may have been engendered. For example, in the Niger Delta, since 2006 approximately more than a thousand people were reportedly killed and over 300 kidnapped. Between 11 January 2006 and 20 May 2006 MEND alone was alleged to have killed 24 soldiers and policemen, kidnapped 13 oil workers and caused severe damage to critical oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta. On the other hand, a recent report entitled 'START' which was conducted by the University of Maryland for the American government on global terrorism revealed that Boko Haram emerged in 2012 as the second deadliest terror group in the world by killing a total of 1132 people in 364 attacks. Only the Afghanistan's Taliban which killed 1842 people in 525 attacks was ahead of Boko Haram in the period under review. (LeVan, 2013; The Guardian, 2013).

Apart from human deaths, (Ishaya, 2011) revealed that, the violence engendered by the twin home-grown insurgencies has resulted in huge economic costs for the nation, corporate bodies and individual business owners. The unhealthy security situation provoked by the insurgencies paralyzed and shut down businesses in many cities in the two regions. For example, Boko Haram ruined many local investments and caused a group of investors from Germany, who wanted to build a cement factory in Maiduguri, to shelve the plan and moved to another African country. While Abioye, (2011) about 25 foreign airlines, that use the Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt and Kano international airport facilities are planning a boycott of some of these airports owing to Boko Haram-related insecurity.

In the Niger Delta according to Azubike, (2009:12), since 2006 the spate of militancy escalated, the economic costs have been tremendous. Between 2006 and 2008 Nigeria lost at least a quarter of its oil production due to frequent attacks on oil installations resulting from the activities of oil bunkering cartel and kidnapping for ransom in the region. The Technical Committee on the Niger Delta estimated that the nation lost about N8.84 trillion or US\$61.6 billion to oil theft and sabotage during the period (Ajearo, 2009).

Finally, both militant groups have sought involvement of international observers in dialogue with the Nigerian government. For example, Boko Haram opted to dialogue with the Nigerian government in Saudi Arabia (Aghedo and Osumah, 2012). Similarly, in the post-amnesty resurgence of violence in the Niger Delta, renegade John Togo, KeitiSese and Tamunotonye Kuna demanded



the convocation of a post-amnesty conference between them and the Nigerian government with the international community, particularly the US and the UN as external observers. Ajaero and Azubike, (as cited by Aghedo and Osumah, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

The Niger Delta militants are youths from the South-south region that resorted to the use of violence to attract attention to the deplorable conditions of their land. According to Ibaba

*“Niger Delta is a strange paradox as it represents one of the extreme conditions of poverty and lack of development in the country, despite its oil and gas resources. These grievances have motivated conflicts against the Nigerian government accused of development neglect and deprivation, and against the oil companies for neglecting corporate social responsibility.”(Ibaba 2011).*

The militants emerged when all peaceful means and agitation failed to direct government attention to the plight of the Niger Deltans. Their struggle was for a course which even the international community recognized. The Niger Delta struggle was as a result of the failure of the Nigerian state to positively respond to its constitutional responsibility. Hence amnesty was a viable option by the government to cover up for its cooperative and collaborative practices in creating the Niger Delta conditions that necessitated the agitation and militancy.

On the other hand, the activities of the Boko Haram terrorists group can be criminalized because it has proved to be nothing else but a terror group that is disturbing the peace and security of the nation. The Boko Haram insurgency is far more daring and destructive than the Niger Delta militancy.

Also the Niger Delta agitators/militants were visible and positively disposed to negotiation, those behind the Boko Haram terrorism are not visible and they are not known. In fact they are exactly the opposite of the Niger Delta militants. All attempts or entreaties by the federal government for them to accept its olive branch and come forward for a peaceful dialogue have fallen on deaf ear.

Conclusively, the amnesty option for the Niger Delta militants was a right option, while the same cannot be said of Boko Haram terrorist group.

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