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# **OIL AND MILITANCY IN THE NIGER DELTA**

## **Terrorist Threat or Another Colombia?**

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# **OIL AND MILITANCY IN THE NIGER DELTA: TERRORIST THREAT OR ANOTHER COLOMBIA?'**

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In the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the Iraq war, the geo-political significance of Nigeria to the United States has sharpened. As a major supplier of oil, the conflicts surrounding the April 2003 elections, and the militancy across the Niger Delta that radically disrupted oil production in March and April 2003, has reinforced the notion that Nigeria, and the new West African “Gulf States” in general, are matters of US national security. Against this backdrop, the recent Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC Policy brief (CSIS Africa Notes “*Alienation and Militancy in Nigeria’s Niger Delta*”) by Esther Cesarz, Steve Morrison and Jennifer Cooke is of signal importance. As they properly say, the recent oil crisis highlights “more profound national challenges” that are now facing the re-elected President Obasanjo and his government. In their view, the recent conflicts in the Delta mark a watershed, distinguished in particular by the prospects of “an upward spiral of violence”. The new levels of weaponry and criminal activity of a “frustrated and angry youth”, suggest “new ambitions and capacities” among the Ijaw who are nothing less than an armed militia. The specter of Colombia is now haunting Nigeria says the CSIS brief. US companies, they note, will become targets of terrorist activity, and Nigeria’s national stability and cohesion threatened. We believe that this account is wrong-headed on a number of accounts. It misdiagnoses the nature of the political crisis in the Delta, fails to understand the political dynamics of the Ijaw and minority politics in general, makes unsubstantiated comparisons with the likes of Aceh and Colombia, and rather astonishingly ignores some of the key actors (the oil companies being a case in point) and downplay a number of fundamental political problems to be faced. None of this is to suggest that the issues the CSIS brief mentions in passing – federalism, resource allocation, minority rights and so on – are not of immediate and unequivocal concern, but their analysis of how such issues relate to the Niger Delta and the Ijaw in particular seem to us to be radically wanting.

## **The Niger Delta and National Security**

A year before the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the US Department of State in its annual encyclopaedia of ‘global terrorism’ identified the Niger Delta – the geographical heart of oil production in Nigeria – as a breeding ground for militant and “impoverished

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<sup>1</sup> This brief is in part a response to, and a continuing dialogue with, the CSIS Africa Notes #16 May 2003, “*Alienation and Militancy in Nigeria’s Niger Delta*”, The Africa Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC.

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ethnic groups” for whom terrorist acts (abduction, hostage taking, kidnapping and extra-judicial killings) were legion (<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2000>). A CIA report published a year earlier (2000), warned of the catalytic effects of “environmental stresses” in the oil-rich southern Delta on deepening “political tensions” at a time when Nigeria – currently the 6<sup>th</sup> largest producer of petroleum - was providing almost 14% of US American petroleum consumption (<http://www.eia.gov/emeu/cabs/nigeria.html>). Throughout the last decade or so Nigeria has supplied around 8-10% on average of US oil imports and within a decade, as the deep-water fields are exploited (and as new reserves are discovered), Nigeria could be producing annually far in excess of Venezuela or Kuwait. Nigeria had, of course, become an archetypal “oil nation:” by the 1970’s. Oil revenues currently provides for 80% of government revenues, 95% of export receipts, and 90% of foreign exchange earnings. The geo-political significance of Nigerian oil to the US, particularly against the backdrop of rising prices, tight markets and political instability in the Gulf, Indonesia and parts of Latin America, is widely understood. Even before September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Petroleum Finance Company (PFC) presented to the US Congressional International Relations Committee Sub-Committee on Africa a report of the strategic and growing security significance of West African oil whose high quality reserves and low cost output – coupled with massive new deepwater discoveries – required, in the view of PFC, serious attention, and substantial foreign investment. In the wake of the Al-Quaeda attacks and the Gulf War, Nigeria and West African producers have emerged as “the new Gulf oil states” (Servant, *Le Monde diplomatique*, January 13<sup>th</sup> 2003). By January 2002 the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies provided a forum for the Bush administration to declare that African oil is “a priority for US national security” (<http://www.iasps.org>). In the last year, the ugly footprint of Africa’s black gold – in Gabon, Sao Tome, Angola, Equatorial Guinea – are rarely off the front pages. Oil and blood, as Jon Anderson (2000) put it in the *New Yorker*, And all this haunted by the spectre of terror; the “nightmare” as the *New York Times* noted (October 14<sup>th</sup> 2001: III, p.1) of “sympathizers of Osama Bin Laden sink[ing] three oil tankers in the Straits of Hormuz”.

The mythos of oil and oil-wealth has been of course central to the history of modern industrial capitalism. But in Nigeria, as elsewhere in, the discovery of oil, and annual oil revenues of \$40 billion currently, has ushered in a miserable, undisciplined, decrepit, and corrupt form of ‘petro-capitalism’. After a half century of oil production from which almost \$300 billion in oil revenues have flowed directly into the Federal exchequer (and perhaps fifty billion promptly flowed out only to ‘disappear’ overseas), Nigerian per capita income stands at \$290 per year. For the majority of Nigerians, living standards are no better now than at independence in 1960. A repugnant culture of excessive venality and profiteering among the political class - the Department of State has an entire website devoted to so-called 419 fraud cases - confers upon Nigeria the dubious honor of sitting atop Transparency International’s ranking of most corrupt states. Paradoxically, oil-producing states in the federation have benefited the least from oil-wealth. Devastated by the ecological costs of oil spillage and the highest gas flaring rates in the world, the Niger Delta is a political tinderbox. A generation of militant ‘restive’ youth, deep political frustrations among oil producing communities, and pre-electoral thuggery all combine to prosper in the rich soil of political marginalization. The massive election rigging across the Delta in the April 2003 elections simply confirmed the worst

for the millions of Nigerians who have suffered from decades of neglect. It was the great Polish journalist, Kapucinski, who noted in his meditation on oil-rich Iran: "Oil creates the illusion of a completely changed life, life without work, life for free....The concept of oil expresses perfectly the eternal human dream of wealth achieved through lucky accident...In this sense oil is a fairy tale and like every fairy tale a bit of a lie" (1982: 35). It is this lie that currently confronts West African oil producers, and the Nigerian Niger Delta in particular.

It is, then, perhaps no accident that the Middle East historian Robert Vitalis (2001) has recently suggested that the rapid, complete and irreversible rise of American dominance in Saudi Arabia can shed much light on why "the Niger Delta is currently in crisis". And indeed it is. Since March 12<sup>th</sup> 2003, mounting communal violence accounting for at least fifty deaths, and the leveling of eight communities in and around the Warri petroleum complex, has prompted all the major oil companies to withdraw staff, to close down operations and reduce output by over 750,000 barrels per day (almost half of national output). President Obasanjo has dispatched large troop deployments to the oil-producing creeks prompting Ijaw militants, incensed over illegal oil bunkering in which the security forces were implicated and indiscriminate military action, to threaten the detonation of eleven captured oil installations. The strikes on the off-shore oil platforms – a long festering sore that rarely reaches the media – were quickly resolved but nobody seriously expects that the deeper problems within the oil sector will go away. Relatively new to delta politics, however, are a series of assassinations, the most shocking being the killing of Chief Marshall Harry, a senior member of the main opposition party and leading campaigner for greater resource allocation to the oil producing Niger Delta. Fallout from the Harry assassination has already become a source of tension in his native oil producing state of Rivers where supporters of the main opposition party, the ANPP and another opposition grouping of activists and politicians, the Rivers Democratic Movement, have linked the ruling party to the assassination. With good reason, the business-as-usual character of the gubernatorial election victories across the oil-producing states, has led some to believe that the rubicon has been crossed.

Certainly, the Niger Delta stands at the crossroads of contemporary Nigerian politics. Even with the growth of oil-revenues to the delta states – now standing at 13% - the region remains desperately poor, and it is the deepening material and political grievances that stem from the region's exclusion that place the Niger delta at the confluence of the four most pressing political issues in the federation in the wake of the April 2003 elections. First, the efforts led by a number of Delta states for "resource control," which in effect means expanded local access to oil and oil revenues. Second, the struggle for self-determination of minority people and the clamor for a sovereign national conference to rewrite the federal constitution. Third, a crisis of rule in the region as a number of state and local governments are rendered helpless by militant youth movements, growing insecurity and intra-community, inter-ethnic and state violence. And not least, the emergence of what is called a South-South Alliance linking the hitherto excluded oil producing states in a bulwark against the ethnic majorities.

## **A Threshold Crossed?**

Does the current crisis in the Niger Delta represent a watershed, some sort of “threshold crossed” which “departs fundamentally from prior patterns” (of conflict) as the CSIS brief suggests? Do recent events mark, as they say, “a new point of crisis”? We think not. This question must be placed on the larger canvas of recent, and especially post-military, history. Obasanjo’s presidential victory in 1999, in the wake of the darkest period of military rule in Nigeria’s forty year post-Independence history, held much promise. An internationally recognized statesman and diplomat imprisoned during the brutal Abacha years, he inherited the mantle of a massively corrupt state apparatus, an economy in shambles, and a federation crippled by the longstanding ethnic enmity. Committed to reforming a corrupt and undisciplined military - the largest in Africa - and to deepening the process of democratization, Obasanjo was confronted within months of his inauguration by militant ethnic groups speaking the language of self-determination, local autonomy and resource control (meaning a greater share of the federally allocated oil revenues). In an incident widely condemned by the human rights community, some 2000 persons were slaughtered in Odi, Bayelsa State after federal troops were dispatched in response to clashes between local militants and the police. Obasanjo has consistently refused to apologize for the murders and there has been no full inquiry. Last year the military was involved in yet another massacre, this time in the Middle Belt, in Benue and Taraba States, in what was the most serious communal conflict since the clashes which preceded the outbreak of the Biafran civil war in 1967. On President Obasanjo’s watch, over 10,000 have perished in ethnic violence. He has failed miserably to address the human rights violations by the notoriously corrupt Nigerian security forces.

In reality a number of glaring democratic deficits compromise the institutions of democratic rule that are being painstakingly constructed. A broad consensus believes that the 1999 constitution is deeply flawed. Crafted by the departing soldiers, the constitution provided no opportunity for ordinary Nigerians to debate what they consider the central conundrum of the national crisis: the terms of association in a multi-ethnic polity. The rise of ethnic militias and communal vigilante politics flourished during the Abacha years (1993-1998) when Nigerians experienced the most severe political repression and economic hardship in the country’s history. The O’odua Peoples Congress (OPC) for example was established in the Yoruba-speaking southwest in 1994 largely to protest the annulment of the 1993 elections in which Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim, had seemingly won the presidency. Led by disenfranchised and impoverished youth, the organization claimed that a ‘northern cabal’ in the Army had denied Abiola victory and aggressively pressed for Yoruba political autonomy. Two vigilante groups, the Bakassi Boys and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), emerged in the Igbo-speaking southeast two years later. MASSOB claimed that the Nigerian state and its functionaries had systematically oppressed the Igbo since the end of the civil war and sought to secure self-determination by resuscitating the Republic of Biafra, whose bid to secede from the Federation was crushed by Nigerian troops in 1970. Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) emerged in the north in 1999 as a reaction to the killing of northern elements in Lagos and other Yoruba cities and towns by OPC cadres, and as a foil to the new Obasanjo

government which many northerners viewed as a 'Yoruba regime.' APC claimed that the harassment of northerners in the southwest was part of a Yoruba plan to secede and establish an O'oduwa Republic,' that President Obasanjo was sympathetic to OPC's goals, and that the North would go to war if necessary to prevent national dismemberment. These and other ethnic forces have come to play a transformative role in political life largely as party thugs, enforcers, and champions of local interests.

The current crisis in Warri, in which three thousand Nigerian troops have been deployed to 'restore law and order', cannot be grasped outside of these powerful political forces. The profile of a militant faction of Ijaw youth has been unjustly amplified to justify the size of deployment. Reports from refugees fleeing the creeks indicate the military are engaged in scorch earth violence designed, like the Odi massacre, 'to teach the Ijaws a lesson'. There have been conflicting accounts of the immediate cause of the violence one of which is linked to a disagreement between elements of the Nigerian military and an oil baron over the proceeds of illegal oil bunkering. Central to the Warri crisis however is poverty amidst unfathomable oil wealth. The oil producing communities seek to control 'their oil' but this legitimate claim is refracted through the lens of ethnic difference as Urhobo, Ijaw and Itsekiri people struggle over the delineation of electoral wards (as a precondition to claim state oil revenues) and overlapping claims on oil-rich land. Warring factions and the army have so far been responsible for many deaths and the destruction of scores of communities.

In sum, it would be naïve to deny the growing violence in the Delta and the extent to which democratization has deepened the ethnic spoils politics that has been central to the political landscape of post-colonial Nigeria. But it is far too apocalyptic to read into these troubling trends some sort of historical precipice over which Nigeria is about to tumble.

### **Bigger Ambitions, Better Capacities?**

What marks the current political moment in the Niger Delta, according to the CSIS brief, is the enhanced political ambitions and capacities of the Ijaw marked by violence and criminal leanings.. With their eyes firmly on the national prize says CSIS, they are armed and willing to use them, and transformed from a "loosely organized ...movement" into an "armed ethnic militia". Is this a plausible argument? In fact, the focus of Ijaw leaders has always been national even as they work to address pressing problems in their immediate locality: the Niger Delta. Their 1958 submission to the Willink Commission, - set up by the British on the eve of formal independence to enquire into the fears of Nigeria's ethnic minority groups, for a more inclusive federal state in which they would enjoy the fruits and also the obligations of full citizenship to the present - framed their grievances in ways in which the national arena was an audience and site of struggle.

Such issues as flaws in the electoral process, resentment of Nigeria's national army and inequities in the allocation of oil receipts have engaged the attention of Ijaw leaders since the late 1950s when the politics of the Eastern region was dominated by a single

political party, (the NCNC) which not only had centralizing ambitions but also excluded significant ethnic minorities, including the Ijaw, from the regional government which was the source and distributor of patronage and strategic resources. Indeed, questions concerning Nigeria's fundamentally flawed political process, whether in the guise of military rule or electoral politics, has always been top of the agenda in the Delta since oil became a significant player in the country's political economy. These grievances now appear to be 'new' because the terrain of struggle has, since May 1999, shifted from a vicious military dictatorship that sought to stifle all legitimate dissent by clamping down on civil society, to an elected civilian government still dominated by a single political party but which offers some room for mobilized communities and interest groups, including Ijaw leaders and militants, to press their demands on the state.

There is no factual evidence to support the claim that Ijaw militants have displayed "lethal new capacities" as the CSIS brief states, and a willingness and skill in using them. The events of March 2003 in the Warri area was merely an escalation of a long-running grievance, turning on the delineation of electoral wards which Ijaw leaders see as deliberately skewed in favour of the Itsekiri. Clashes between Ijaw and Itsekiri militants has been regular since the late 1990s as a result of this perceived injustice. The explosion of violence on the eve of the April 2003 elections was fundamentally, the handiwork of rival local politicians desperate for success in the polls and mobilising all available resources, including festering grievances like the electoral ward issue, to achieve this objective.

While it is true that the parochial objectives of self-serving politicians feeds the wider strategic goals of Ijaw leaders and militias alike for self-determination by dispensing funds to the latter, there is nothing to suggest that these developments represent a fundamental departure from the normal trajectory of political agitation in the area. Machine guns, satellite phones, and speedboats are standards in the arsenal of military troops deployed by the Nigerian state to pacify the oil-producing communities. Royal Dutch/Shell and the other oil companies also supply these weapons, through a variety of sophisticated fronts, to security operatives and mercenaries they retain in the Niger delta, including local youth, fallout of the effort of the Nigerian state and the oil companies to contain the legitimate demands of the Ijaw by militarizing the Niger delta. There is a widespread presence of arms in the Delta – and this is a subject of much concern – but at the very least one must appreciate its origins and dynamic links to state and corporate actors.

Recent media reports drawing attention to a 'weaponised' Ijaw, and vengeful and bloodthirsty militants, is a classic case of giving the dog a bad name in order to hang it. The claim that Ijaw militants are now deliberately targeting and killing oil workers is controversial, to say the least. Some oil workers were caught in the crossfire as Ijaw and Itsekiri insurgents battled for supremacy in Warri last March. It is, however, significant that the deceased were killed, not in the oil fields, but within Warri metropolis, a large urban conurbation. While kidnapping of oil workers for ransom is a favored tactic of the militants, abuse and killing is rare. Working in isolated flow stations in the dense swamps which in most cases are poorly guarded, oil company personnel are very vulnerable, and

indeed easy target for these militias were it a new policy to target and kill them. That there is, as yet, no independent and credible media reports of mass killings of these oil workers in the Niger delta. Indeed history suggests that these sorts of rumors and insinuations – oil corporations taking full-page advertisements in the Nigerian dailies suggesting a descent into terrorism - work to paint to paint picture of a fully armed and dangerous Ijaw militia out for blood sets the stage for yet another cycle of ethnic cleansing reminiscent of Odi.

What is most striking, however, is current discussions (including CSIS) of the security problems in the Niger Delta is the total invisibility of Shell and other powerful corporate international actors in deepening and sustaining the crisis in the Niger Delta. Several independent human rights organizations, most notably Human Rights Watch, have linked the oil company to the spate of killings, rapes, and inter-communal feuds that have crippled social and economic life in the Niger delta since 1993. Shell's links to powerful and corrupt Nigerian state officials is also well-known. The company's unrelenting attack on the human ecosystem on which the local communities rely for sustenance has been copiously documented by environmental groups. The fact that a case against Chevron was recently heard in San Francisco Federal Court speaks powerfully to these issues of corporate practice. Indeed detailed local community studies in Nembe, Peremabiri and Ke/Bille by the authors (Kemedi 2003) have documented the need for new forms of corporate accountability. Not a single one of the industrialized countries that makes use of Shell's oil has called for sanctions to be imposed on the oil companies operating in the Niger delta. Any serious attempt to address the problem of alienation and militancy in the area must focus on the global, not just the local.

### **A New Colombia?**

Amidst the political corruption, the deepening crisis of governance, and the escalating violence in and around 'resource control', does it make sense, as the CSIS brief suggests, to draw a parallel between a 'better positioned Ijaw' and the revolutionary violence in Colombia. Do the Ijaw "resemble "in an unsettling way the FARC and ELN" as the CSIS brief states? There *are* obvious correspondences operating at the level of what one might call the political economy of extraction. Colombia has emerged since the mid-1980s as a significant oil producer (oil revenues now account for 35% of legal exports) and a significant supplier to the US market. Conflicts between indigenous communities – the U'wa most famously – and the state and multinational oil companies are legion. And the links between the military, security and resource extraction – what can best be understood as a militarized oil complex – are structurally analogous to anyone familiar with Nigeria. Indeed both Colombia and Nigeria have to be grasped regionally (the Andean oil region, and the West Africa petro-zone) in which, to use the language of Michael Klare (2001), an "economization of international security affairs" is at work.

But it is one thing to say that the Ijaw and the U'wa have "raised the stakes" and can "embarrass government" but quite another to see "Delta ethnic militants" as Maoist insurgents or terrorists *tout court*. First, the Colombian situation is a *civil war* of

longstanding that has been compounded by narcotraffic and by oil. Political violence of many sorts is legendary in Colombia and long predates the emergence of oil as a strategic national resource. Second the fundamental role of the Armed Forces in Colombia cannot be grasped outside of the catalytic role played by the drug economy and by the massive military assistance provided by the US. During the 1990s Colombia moved near the top of the list of US foreign military aid, and in July 2000 "Plan Colombia" committed \$1.3 billion as an anti-narcotics counterinsurgency strategy. The role of the military in Nigeria (and its relation to the oil industry in particular) is obviously key, but there is no parallel to the external militarization fund in Colombia. President Clinton did commit foreign assistance to 'reprofessionalise' the Nigerian army in 1999, including the equipping and training of seven battalions at a cost of over \$1 billion. During the Bush's imperium, the presence of 200 special forces in Nigeria, including on-site training grounds in some of the most sensitive areas of the Muslim north, has generated enormous suspicion and now vocal opposition. Not unexpectedly, a number of powerful Nigerian constituencies see a beleaguered and corrupt Obasanjo regime as simply another miserable US oil colony, but this is in no way comparable to the Colombian case. Third, the extreme violence of the Colombian case emerges from the fact that the US in conjunction with the Colombian military has provided direct support to protect oil installations (most recently \$98 million in February 2002 by the Bush Administration to protect the Canon Limon pipeline), is only part of a complex of armed insurgencies, right-wing paramilitaries, and so-called legal mercenaries (or 'contractors') who operate symbiotically with the likes of Occidental and Ecopetrol. While certain elements of this mix are present in the Nigerian situation there is a qualitative difference between them. And finally, to see in the variety of Ijaw (or other ethnic) movements the seeds of revolutionary Leftism is quite preposterous. To take the Ijaw case, a number of political organization including the Ijaw Youth Council have emerged in the last decade, though the histories of these so-called ethnic minorities in the Delta can be traced back to the post-1945 period and before. The fact that disenfranchised youth groups have acted in violent ways (especially in conflicted oil producing communities like Nembe and Peremabiri) is incontestable; the presence of a secondary arms market has also unequivocally transformed the nature of the violence itself. To suggest that what passes as Ijaw ethnic militancy as secessionist, or as Left insurgency, or as a provocation or prelude to massive civil war, is to fail to see that these and other movements (some ethnic like the Ogoni political movement (MOSOP), some pan-ethnic like the Kaiama Declaration) are actively engaged in a debate about access to and control over resources within the federation, and by extension an engagement with the Nigerian Constitution and what it means to be a full citizen. The fact that massive poverty, disenfranchisement and a long dark history of military violence should produce forms of politics that are neither civil nor democratic should surprise no one. But to see in the seeds of Ijaw mobilization a 'New Terror' is a radical misreading of the current political moment in the Niger Delta.

## **The Way Out**

The strategic significance of Nigeria is incontestable. One of every five Africans is a Nigerian, Nigeria is the world's seventh largest exporter of petroleum and a key player

in African regional security, most recently in Sierra Leone. It is also home to a vast Muslim community. Since the oil boom of the 1970s, political power has shifted from the conservative Sufi brotherhoods to well-organized modern Islamist groups like the 'Yan Izala founded in 1978. Sharia'a law, of a dogmatic and literalist sort, has been adopted and implemented in twelve of the populous northern states, amidst considerable political acrimony and international censure. At least 350 people were killed in four days of terrible rioting in northern Nigeria triggered by protests against US military action in Afghanistan, including particularly bloody clashes between Muslims and Christians in Kano, Kaduna and Jos. The September 2003 debacle surrounding Miss World, in which religious controversy and political violence resulted in the competition being moved from Abuja to London, signaled the extent to which religion has entered the political arena.

The Obasanjo government, torn between its championing of a strong and united Nigeria and powerful pro-federal and ethnic autonomy sentiments among key constituencies, has been unable to articulate a coherent policy to contain the sorts of claims emerging from the Niger Delta. Even the advent of electoral politics has deepened the appeal of popular grievances, including the ethnic militia, in the face of government's dismal failure to tackle their pressing economic and social problems. Ethnic militias, inter-communal violence, and the resurgent cries for a sovereign national conference, true federalism and resource control, all speak to a sort of tectonic fissure now separating state and society. Above all there is a profound sense that the democratic space of Nigeria is neither large enough nor deep enough to accommodate the clamor for regional and local autonomy, and new political entitlements. Nigerians remain, despite the democratic dispensation, subjects not citizens.

CSIS rightly says that "intensive mediation" and "de-escalation" is required, and that the federal government must "engage in good faith on jurisdictional boundaries, corruption, allocation of resources, economic revitalization, electoral administration" and so on. But any "path out", as they put it, must, in our view, address the citizenship question at a number of levels.

First, at the national level oil is at the heart of persistent policy failure in Nigeria. From 1970 onwards, the country's political, economic, and policy elites have put in place an authoritarian and commandist power structure to enable them centralize control of strategic resources, including the not insubstantial oil receipts. This rent-seeking behaviour has not only banished the great majority of ordinary Nigerians from the policy-making process, it has also led the power elites to pursue social and economic strategies that are shortsighted and self-serving, strategies that are not driven by the needs of the people. The consequence has been material scarcity, deepening frustration, and social unrest, in the Niger Delta as elsewhere.

Focus should now be on a just and sustainable political order and ways in which this can be brought about, giving due weight to the fears, needs, and aspirations of the various social and interest groups in the country. There is growing consensus that a unitary system of government is not suited to a socially diverse country like Nigeria. A federal democracy, turning on a measured dose of fiscal autonomy for the federating units, not unlike the provisions of the country's independence constitution, is recommended. This

will help diversify the revenue base of the country by enhancing domestic taxation as non-oil producing areas would be forced to find alternative ways to boost the exchequer.

An economically diversified polity also tends to introduce new non-oil players into the policy-making process whose interests would serve as a check on the political class, and their rent-seeking, curbing the powerful drive towards political authoritarianism. Political federalism also throws up new social forces in the regions thus serving as a countervailing force as they press their own demands on the state. Further, democracy is more likely to be

enhanced where different sets of actors with diverse social and economic bases are competing in a level playing field. And because no one group would be powerful enough to dominate the state and use its organs to pursue its narrow interests, the need of all for the institutionalization of a disinterested and efficient public service, relatively corrupt-free public agencies, due process and the rule of law, would be compelling. Most of all, those running for office, and Nigeria's government elect, must be willing to tackle the structural causes of endemic violence and mass poverty in a political economy in which oil contaminates virtually everything. In the absence of robust democratic institutions and a meaningful sense of citizenship, another oil boom - secured perhaps with the heavy artillery of American empire - will only tear Nigeria apart.

Second, in order for Nigeria's federal democracy to be meaningful to ordinary people and their social and economic needs, a new compact between state and society, in which the civic, political and social rights of the people are not only clearly spelled out but are made justiceable, will have to be worked out. A socially and economically-empowered body politic will encourage active citizens, eager to participate in public affairs. And broad and active participation in public affairs by an enlightened citizenry is the secret of good policy.

More than forty years after the Willink Commission noted that the Niger Delta is "poor backward and neglected, and in the wake of several insurrections including a devastating civil war and nine military coups all linked to the scramble for the oil resource of the Niger Delta, the communities and the people are no better off than they were in 1958. To the people of the Niger Delta who have over the years clamored for a space in the Nigerian sun, resources does not exclusively mean only oil and gas as much of the clamor for corporate and governmental control tends to suggest. Resources means primarily land for agriculture, waters for fishing, forests for collecting and air for living and the other physical and spiritual biota. Resource control is the term used to describe the desire and determination of the communities and people whose resources and or sources of survival have been taken away violently and undemocratically and therefore unjustly. It denotes the need to regain ownership, control, use and management of resources for the primary benefit of the communities and people on whose land the resources originate and for good governance and development of the entire country. The refusal of successive Nigerian governments to protect the land and people of the Niger Delta from the hazards of hydrocarbon activities such as oil spillages and seepages, human rights violations and poverty seemed to have convinced the people that the oil-military-governmental troika is not good for them and the Country.

Ironically it is a return to the Willink, a colonial report that remains ignored even as the communities clamor for true federalism, which should give local authorities significant leverage in holding government and corporations accountable for malfeasances that affects present and future survival.

The solution to the resource conflict in the Niger Delta does not lie with the government alone, as the CSIS paper seems to suggest. The government is an interested party. Avowedly entrenched in the extraction and revenue politics, this present government and others before it see no other solution but military pacification and legalism. But the problem is political and it goes as deep as the first coming of Olusegun Obasanjo as the head of a military junta between 1976 –1979 when he decreed the seizure and control of land in Nigeria. That decree gave military access to the oil companies in the Niger Delta and helped to bury true federalism in a multi ethnic and multi religious country like Nigeria. The issues of environmental security, resource control and management, corporate liability for environmental damage and human rights violations, livelihood considerations are matters now about to be buried in the bowels of alleged “international networks of criminality and violence”. The grave danger, at this moment in history, is that such a misreading of the politics of the Niger Delta and the struggle for environmental and social justice will stigmatize Africa’s major oil-producing region as simply another site in which “terrorism” must be eradicated by any means possible.

Third, there must be effective mediation at the community level to address the variety of intra- and inter-community violence. Mediation, de-escalation and intercession are indeed very central to addressing not only the Warri crisis but also to many other inter and intra- community conflicts in the Niger Delta. Any effort in this direction however will obviously have to be facilitated by an impartial party without a vested interest. Nobody should be under any illusion that the oil companies and the federal government are not the most important factors in inter-ethnic and inter-community conflicts. The federal government and the oil companies must be willing to submit to such a process. If the federal government participates in good faith in the suggested mediation process and works towards restoring federalism and resource control, it will be superfluous to suggest further that the federal government “will need to take swift and meaningful steps to enhance the region’s security”. To make such an inference runs the risk of wittingly or unwittingly play into the hands of hawks within the federal administration and the military who seek to continue the rape, looting, mass destruction and genocide that they started in Umuechem, Ogoni, Kaima, Yenagoa, Odi, and numerous other communities.

And finally there is the level of the international system. If the current situation in the Delta does not resemble Colombia, there is no reason to believe, nevertheless, that it could become such a quagmire. A militarization of the West Africa oil region under the sign of an American Empire intent on rooting out “terrorism” as outlined in the September 2002 National Security Strategy, would contribute directly to a ‘Colombianization’ of the Niger Delta. Equally, unless there is serious pressure from the US and European governments to ensure accountability and responsibility from the oil companies – many of whom are now anxious to get out of the business of

'community development' in Nigeria – the sense of historical grievance that is so widespread across the Delta will continue to fester.

The annals of oil are an uninterrupted chronicle of naked aggression, exploitation and the violent laws of the corporate frontier. Iraq was born from this vile trinity. The current spectacle of oil-men parading through the corridors of the White House, the rise of militant Islamism across the Q'uran belt, and the carnage on the road to Baghdad, all bear out the continuing dreadful dialectics of blood and oil. Nigeria bears all the hallmarks of such petrolic violence. To break with this bloody history will require a major political commitment on both sides of the Atlantic.

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