

# Economies of Violence in the Niger-Delta and Regional Security in the Gulf of Guinea

Williams Glad Ule & Edmund F.Obomanu

Department of Political and Administrative Studies  
University of Port Harcourt

**Abstract:** *This study investigated economies of violence in the Niger-Delta and its impact on regional security in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG). The study adopted the relative deprivation theory and posits that oil-rich Niger-Delta has massive mineral resources, however its extraction has resulted in inconsistencies, including environmental dangers and the denial of rights to oil-producing communities. This has led to oil violence where Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta(MEND)- a sub-group of militants in the Niger Delta armed struggle emerged with the objective to shut down the oil industry in Nigeria. The spate of violence made government to grant amnesty to the militants. Activities of MEND in post-amnesty period changed from massive destruction of oil facilities to kidnapping, piracy, oil theft, trade in hard drugs and proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) in the Niger-Delta, growing local cult-related occurrences with spiral consequences extending the area of the Gulf of Guinea. Increase in piracy and kidnapping in post-amnesty activities of MEND with its regional networks in the GoG increases regional insecurity along the coastal lines leading to loss of revenue among member states in the Gulf of Guinea. This has huge ramifications for regional security, energy stability and trading partners of the Gulf of Guinea states. The study suggests strict prosecution and enforcement of anti-sabotage and piracy laws with punishment for those implicated in oil sabotage in Nigeria. More coordination between Gulf of Guinea and international oil partners is needed to tackle the demand and supply pull components of illegal oil trading.*

**Keywords:** MEND, Regional Security, Gulf of Guinea, Oil theft, Piracy ,Niger Delta

## Introduction

The Niger-Delta contains vast reserves of crude oil and natural gas. These vast mineral resources are both economically valuable and strategically important for the world energy supply. Nigeria had gained approximately \$230 billion from crude oil and other sources between 1999 and 2011(Amuwo,2012).

Despite the vast sum of money made from the sale of crude from the Niger delta, it is a region plagued by administrative neglect, failing social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, and endemic conflict (UNDP, 2006, International Crisis Group, 2006,Francis, Lapin&Rossiaco,2011). According to Amuwo(2012,p.178), "the ruling elites embezzled \$400 billion between 1960 and 1999".With the exploitation of crude oil in large quantity, it was expected that there would be improvement in the lives of the oil bearing communities in Niger Delta as a result of the oil benefits. What followed was disappointment amidst marginalization and environmental degradation that graced the Niger Delta coupled with political exclusion from corridors of power. This heightened the fears of the Niger-Delta people in the wake of Nigeria's independence warranting the setting up of Willinks Commission in 1957 to allay the fears of the people of Niger-Delta which never yielded any positive effect in post-independent Nigeria.

The Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Land Use Act of 1978 were principally aimed at Niger-Delta people who had been deprived of their resources in a process Watts called "accumulation by dispossession" (Ukiwo,2011,p.5). As pointed out by Ukiwo(2011), this alienation feeds upon the lopsided federal structure that favors centralization and distribution of resources. The inhabitants of the Niger Delta are not pleased with the nationalization of oil. Okilo(1980) as cited in Ukiwo (2011, p.6)stated:

This is more heinous than apartheid... Some sections of the country have the freedom to utilize minerals discovered there, while others are prohibited by a slew of rules. Some Nigerians are allowed to utilize solid minerals wherever they are found, and residents in those places do so. However, if you obtain liquid minerals (potopoto), Nigerian regulations would catch up with you. When you are fortunate enough to have solid minerals, however, no legislation applies to you.

Niger Delta people suffered as a result of this alienation, since oil from their own backyard is utilized to develop areas and states far from where the golden egg is laid. The resources gotten from Niger Delta area are not used in its development. Externalities resulting from oil-related operations have an impact on the area. The declining trend in the benefits accrued to the oil-bearing areas, for example, has been a source of conflict since the military took over the reigns of government, and it reached a climax under Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's dictatorship. The much-anticipated promise of a better deal in the 1970s and 1980s did not materialize, and the

Ogoni, a Niger Delta oil-producing community, became increasingly dissatisfied with their damaged environmental, social, and economic means of survival. Intervention agencies such as “the Niger-Delta Development Board, the River Basin Development Authority, the Presidential Implementation Committee, and the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), which increased derivation to 3% were mired in a cesspool of corruption(Omotola&Patrick,2010,p.120), failing to address the area's development deficiencies in clear terms. Ojo,(2015) stated that

Ken Saro Wiwa, an environmentalist, brought the Ogoni situation to the attention of many international organizations, including the United Nations sub-committee on Human Rights Commission on Prevention of Discrimination Against and Protection of Minorities, the Green Peace Organization, and the African Human Rights Commission, Rain Forest Action Group, marking a watershed moment in the Niger-Delta crisis' history (.p.8).

One among the many requests was local autonomy for the Ogoni people to govern themselves and control their resources. All of these efforts were ignored. The federal government and Shell, a petroleum company, retaliated by deploying force against the Ogonis. Ojo (2015, p.8-9) pointed out that:

Saro Wiwa led a crowd of 300,000 Ogoni people in a violent demonstration against Shell's oil activities and the devastation of the area's ecosystem as a result of multinational oil firms' exploration and extraction of oil and gas. This large protest was unusual in attempted responses to environmental devastation in the Niger Delta, since it represented a turning point in the region's physical demonstrations.

Following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election and the aftermath of that election, Gen. Babangida stepped down and established the Interim National Government(ING). Through a coup, Gen. Sani Abacha deposed the ING and took the post of Head of State. The late General Sani Abacha's government was autocratic with less regard to rule of law. Saro Wiwa and the other eight Ogonis were tried in military tribunal and found guilty of treasonable felony and were sentenced to death by hanging (Ogali,2012, Ojo2015, Watts, 2005)

On December 11, 1998, Ijaw Youths issued the Kaima Declaration, which was a watershed moment in oil violence. It made a number of demands, including that:

Ijaw communities own the land and natural resources (including mineral resources) inside Ijaw territory, which are the foundations of our survival. It went on to demand that all military forces in Ijaw land be evacuated, and that any oil firms that use military forces in Nigeria to safeguard their operations be considered enemies of the Ijaw people." ..... (Tamuno, 2011,p. 329).

Many other attempts, such as the Urhobo Economic Summit resolutions, the Oron Bill of Rights, the Warri Accord and the Egi People's Declaration, were many of the peace initiatives and efforts by people in the Niger Delta to wrestle oil benefits from the state and oil multinationals within their domain (Ekine,2000, Tamuno, 2011). Apart from economic progress, these protests switched to political demands such as restructuring, self-determination, and resolving the political problems through a national convention.

Lack of development and government failure to address the issues in Niger Delta, unemployed youths were radicalized by the Nigerian state's indifference to address the problems in Niger Delta resulting in economy of violence. Emergence of Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) around late 2005, resulted to economies of violence in the Niger-Delta. By economies of violence, following Watts(2005&2007), we mean those oil-related violence from the insurgents over control of the oil space for accumulation of wealth. The activities in this classification cut across the issues of kidnapping, hostage-taking for ransom, illicit oil theft, piracy and proliferation of arms which fuel insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea.

The crux of the matter is that in the post-amnesty era, the violent attack on oil infrastructure by MEND has reduced but this does not rule out the security issues it has raised as many of its members turned to illegal oil trade, piracy and kidnapping in the region of Niger-Delta with serious consequences for the Gulf of Guinea

In brief, by 2011, Niger Delta Liberation, an affiliate of MEND bombed an oil facility in Eket belonging to Elf oil company and the pipelines vandalization in Brass and Nembe in 2010 and 2011(Katja Giuseppe&Hugues,2021). Simbine and Neji(2018) stated that MEND activities in oil theft and piracy is not contested. MEND high jacked an oil vessels in the Gulf of Guinea. Ukeje and Wullson(2013) reported the incident that took place on 23 July 2011 where attack on 02 MONGO MEYEN 1&2 trawlers in Equatorial Guinea were attributed to pirates from Niger Delta(p,16). On October 9 2011, there was another attack on Gendermerie unit from Isangle in the Bakassi Peninsula. These pirate's attacks were highly linked to the activities of MEND in the post-amnesty era(Ukeje&Wullson,2013).

This situation created a greater threat to the Gulf's energy demands and the securitization of the Gulf of Guinea with severe costs in security spending for surveillance by the states and oil companies. Curtis Jon, Jay, Joubert, Ifesinachi, and Tarila (2021) stated that defence spending in the Gulf of Guinea has increased tremendously. The Military Balance(2021) hinted that the expenditures of both Ghana and Togo on defense doubled what it used to be in 2012. In the case of the Republic of the Congo and Democratic Republic of Congo, it rose to 50% while it rose to ten to twenty per cent. This is necessitated by the increase in the activities of insurgents in the post-amnesty period. Kidnappings, and trans-shipment of illicit weaponry and other hard drugs across the regional Gulf of Guinea state's borders, complicate the security dynamics of the Gulf of Guinea(Bolarinwa, 2017, Ukeje&Wullson, 2013). According to the report from the Congressional Research Service(2019 cited in Curtis et al,2021) relying in the report of the Earth Future Foundation, stated that the estimated cost of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea region in 2017 was estimated to be \$818.1 million in 2017 due to increased piracy and kidnapping. As the report stated, it signaled an increase from its previous cost of \$793.7 million in 2016. According to North Atlantic Treaty Organization(NATO), in its South Strategic Direction(2020) pointed that a US diplomat in the United Nations, suggested that Nigeria may lose \$1.5 billion per month due to piracy, armed robbery at sea and oil theft.

Given the rate of oil theft, piracy, kidnapping and movement of small arms and light weapons, this study attempts to examine the economies of violence in the post- amnesty Niger-Delta and regional security in the Gulf of Guinea. The GoG is a verse, different and strategic region with sixteen countries strung together in about 6000 kilometers of the coastal line in West Africa(Ukeje&Wullson,2013,p.10). These countries are crude oil producers with vast maritime route as a key gateway to the world in international trade and commerce especially as the Arab Gulf area is more costlier and unsafe due to wars in the Middle East. It is an important region due to its proven crude oil and gas deposits which make it an important area of attention for global energy requirements making it a second frontier in the scramble for Africa for control of the newly found hydrocarbon ( Ukeje&Wullson,2013). However, the GoG is an area with proven bio-diversity of rain forests resources as timber and aquatic fish making the area an important fishing terrain. The geo-strategic significance makes the study of GoG very important.

The attention will be to look at the impact of MEND in regional security of Gulf of Guinea states. This work is divided into four portions. The theoretical tool is located in the first section, which provides the background introduction. The second portion contains a review of significant subjects in the literature, the third section contains an analysis, and the fourth section contains the conclusion and recommendations.

### **Theoretical framework**

Relative deprivation is concerned with the gap between what people want, their value expectations, and what they really get and their capacity to accumulate value. Yates (1962) and Ted Gurr and Runciman Walter are the prominent proponents of this idea. According to Gurr (1970), men are driven to violence by the tension that emerges from dissatisfaction with the "expectation" and "outcome," and so a high level of frustration leads to violence.

Individuals are more prone to revolt when they lose hope of reaching social values according to Gurr, and the quantity of discontent/frustration (varies) with the severity of depression and inflation. The natural basis for mobilizing anti-government resistance, according to Gurr (1970), is ethnicity. According to Gurr (1970), the greater the amount of frustration, the greater the political instability; he also argues that raising the average level or intensity of expectations without expanding capabilities increases the intensity of misery (Gurr, 1970).

Relative deprivation suggests that some people are intended to have access to basic necessities but are restrained to do so, hence deprived, while others have those same needs which are met provide a feeling of denial. This can lead to rage and even violence. In comparison to other people or groups, they may believe that they are not getting what they deserve, hence the feeling of deprivation which may predispose one to violence(Shedrack,2006, Coen,2017). Relative deprivation proposes a subjective state that influences emotions, thoughts, and actions. Poor physical health and political participation in group protests are examples of relative deprivation( Ewelie, 2019).

People in a geographically defined State experience societal uneasiness when they believe their identity is threatened. A communal sense of relative deprivation, whether social, economic, political, or cultural, could initiate and amplify this perceived threat. The idea is that there is widespread economic and political insufficiency, which leads to state insecurity. Yates(1962), as cited in Coen(2017), concurred that the prevalent explanation for violent behavior stems from individuals and organizations' incapacity to meet their expected demands, as in the case of Darfur. Their reasoning is based on the psychology idea of motivation, which views humans as capable of aggression but dormant until stimulated by success or necessity.

This theory is used in this study because it provides an explanation and insight into the causes that contributed to the creation of oil violence in Nigeria's Niger-Delta region. It demonstrates that the youngsters' grievances stem from marginalization, environmental instability, and government and oil company negligence.

### Literature Review

**Security:** The concept of security predates the state. The state's primary goal is to maintain security. In his social contract, Locke maintained that the primary goal of men banding together to form government is to protect lives, liberty, and property. The Federal Republic of Nigeria's Constitution, as revised in section 14(b), stipulates, among other things, that "the primary goal of government should be the security and welfare of the people".

Security in the post-Cold War global system has become so complicated that objective conception is impossible. When viewed in a broader context, particularly from the standpoint of continental Africa, it goes much beyond military issues. Security, according to Ogonor (2001, p.169):

....a society's and its constituent groups' overall socioeconomic well-being in the face of external and internal dangers. To a group within a nation, security may refer to the freedom granted by law and enforced by the state, which allows the group or organization to seek and defend its rights or interests without fear of retaliation.

At the level of the individual, he went further to argue that security "May refer to freedom from arbitrary detention, debt, a filthy environment, extrajudicial killings, malnutrition, famine, poverty, and all vices associated with it, such as communal conflicts, unemployment, high death rates, and misery" (Ogonor, 2001,p.169).

Insecurity is caused by the threats posed by these fatal vices. "The strength of a nation, whatever its constituent aspects are, must necessarily serve the objective of security," it must be emphasized. When the state fails to ensure the safety of its inhabitants' lives and property, insecurity becomes a threat, and the consequences ripple throughout the state. As a result, we define insecurity as the absence of safety, risk, hazard, uncertainty, lack of protection, and lack of safety (Olabanjo and Ese, 2014). "Insecurity" was defined by Beland (2005, p.3) as "a condition of fear or anxiety caused by the absence or lack of protection." It depicts a condition in which man is unable to control his surroundings. A state of constant anxiety and uncertainty about what will happen next as a result of the stress of our daily lives. At the state level, insecurity could mean that citizens are not adequately protected from foreign attacks or threats from within the polity. It could be a threat posed by the government and its agents to its citizens. This is terrorism by the state.

Security, according to Garga(2015,p.5), is a dynamic situation that involves a state's relative ability to counter threats to its basic values and interests. According to McGrew (1988), a nation's security is based on two important frameworks: (a) maintaining and protecting socio-political and economic conditions that minimize internal and external threats, and (b) establishing and promoting an international order that counteracts threats to core values and interests, as well as the domestic order. This led Ogonor (2001) to advise that any security threats continental Africa faces should be examined through the lens of the global system.

After the Cold War, security-insecurity thinking shifted from a state-centric perspective to one that included everyone. This has allowed for a variety of viewpoints, including human rights, globalists, developmentalists, feminists, and Marxists (UNDP,1994). Marxists, for example, advise us to consider:

structure of international system as been dominated by the dominant capitalist class who exploit the proletariats. It logically follow that the proletariat source of insecurity stems from its dependence on the capitalists and the contradictions arising from the relations among them as the sources of insecurity to the proletariats(Roth, 2004, cited in Vrato,2015,p.87).

A closer examination at the Niger-Delta will reveal more about the global influences affecting the region's security dynamics. Crude oil and the ensuing poverty of oil-producing areas are the key underlying factors that breed endemic security concerns in the region. In Nigeria, poverty is widespread and generates societal violence. Poverty, according to the United Nations(1998,P.1), is defined as:

A violation of human dignity is the denial of choice and opportunity. It denotes a fundamental inability to contribute successfully in society. It involves not having enough food and clothing to feed and clothe a family, not having access to a school or clinic, not having land to grow food or a work to earn a living, and not having access to credit. Individuals, households, and communities face insecurity, powerlessness, and marginalization. It denotes vulnerability to violence, as well as living in a marginal or vulnerable area with no access to safe drinking water or sanitation.

There is a fiercely contested debate on the correlation between poverty, low per capita income on insecurity such as armed conflict or civil war.

Collier and Hoeffler (1998, 2004), Fearon and Laitin (2003), Blattman and Miquel (2005), Stewart (2005), Graff, Lewis and Rice(2006), for example, have established a strong association between low-income countries and conflict in numerous works.

According to statistics, countries in the fifth percentile of GDP, such as Iran, are more likely to experience conflict. This concept is relevant to political institutions since economic development has an impact on their capacity and resilience. Violence and low per capita income, according to Blattman and Miguel (2010), could go either way, highlighting the fact that conflict has bad health impacts, destroys lives and property.

According to Miguel, Satyanath, and Serqenti (2004), cited in Vrato (2015,p.35-36), countries with a GDP per capita of \$250 face a 15% risk of war within five years, countries with a GDP per capita of \$600 face a 7.5 percent risk of war, and countries with a GDP per capita of \$5000 face a less than 1% risk of war within the same period. As a result, lower annual economic growth raises the risk of civil disturbance the next year. They maintained that poverty, unemployment, and inequality are triggers for social violence. Poverty and unemployment are causing people to be frustrated. Fearon and Laitin (2003) claimed that "countries with \$579 GDP per capita are at 17.7% risk of war in a year, countries with \$2,043 GDP per capita are at 10.7% danger of war within a year, and countries with \$9,466 GDP per capita are at less than 1% risk of war." The average GDP per capita for nations that had war within 5 years is \$10,000, according to Collier, Lance, Hegre, Hoeffler, Reynal-Querol, and Sambanis (2003), while the average GDP per capita for countries that did not experience war within 5 years is \$5,764.

The point to be made here is that the differences in the outcomes are due to the political system in question, which also leads to differences in the conception of internal conflict. In contrast, wealth per capita is linked to the length of civil war, according to a World Bank analysis published in 2003(Collier, et al 2003).

Poverty, violence, unemployment, and environmental challenges all worsened insecurity, according to the UN Report on Human Security 2003. The point is that all of these variables appear to be symptoms rather than causes. The fundamental underlying cause of insecurity is thought to be those elements that disempowered and marginalize individuals and communities. Social isolation, lack of access to engage in community decision-making, and socio-economic marginalization are all proven to enhance insecurity in all human societies, according to this line of reasoning.

According to Robinson(2013)comprehensive citizen participation in communal decision-making is a step in the right direction towards reducing insecurity Many others questioned this method, claiming that it failed to capture the complexities of what generates unease. "Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Some Responses," by Galtung (1985), was a groundbreaking study. Insecurity is caused by institutional violence, according to Galtung. As Galtung says (1985,p.145-146):

Insecurity is generated by violence, which is harm done to people, and it develops over time as poverty and starvation corrode and kill people. This is how people react to insecurity. Another reason offered by Galtung is "systemic violence"... .....this type of violence reveals itself as unequal power relations between individuals and groups that are ingrained in society's structure. To be sure, his concept of violence provides a clear understanding of how violence, both direct and indirect, feeds back into society as insecurity.

When one examines the current international system, one can see the structural imbalance in the exercise of power among states, as well as how international institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organizations have been used to the detriment of the global south. Because of this power imbalance, the south has found it impossible to change the structure and international systems that might reduce their vulnerability. From this vantage point, it is easy to see how most third-world societies are helpless to address poverty, inequity, and environmental vulnerability.

Regional security is has to do with maintaining the core values of the countries of the Guinea which encompasses the protection of lives and property, stability of the region and its energy infrastructure as well as provision of basic services to its citizens. The regional threats in the Gulf of Guinea are multilayered in the sense that what constitute insecurity from the perspective of United Nations Development Programme(1994) . One can look at insecurity from the global forces operating in the Gulf of Guinea which has worsened poverty, destroy local economies and heightens environmental insecurity. Today, the core threat to insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea is rooted in piracy in Niger Delta as the core area where maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea originates and is sustained(Vrey,2016;Steffen,2017,Simbine&Neji,2018). For example, Very(2016) pinpointed among other causal factors of insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea to include poor governance deficits, porous borders lacking effective policing, natural resource dependence which fuels petro-violence and weak state capacity among others.

Wasiu(2021) hinted that oil theft has to do with "... different complex and overlapping roles and activities, including pipeline tapping, refining, vessels hijack, loading and ship-to-ship operations, and sale of stolen refined petroleum(p.8). According to him, its mechanisms of operation is determined by the volume of trade, people and investment required to carry it out(Wasiu,2021). Wasiu(2018&2021) stated this oil trade take place in layers from the small, medium and large scales. They pointed out that it is at the large scales that you see the barons and most influential actors across the Gulf of Guinea with networks far beyond the region. They have small vessels which take the crude to the bigger ones at high sea. The result of this is massive robbery of the states within the region of Gulf of Guinea millions of dollars to their national treasury. What constitutes security threats to Gulf of Guinea is petro-

piracy. According to Dua(2019), this entails illegal taking of oil after vessel hijacks. This is often times executed with the use of mother-ships where the cargo is disposed off in Europe and America with huge financial rewards(Dua,2019).

### **The impact of MEND in regional security of Gulf of Guinea states**

The failure of the amnesty programme in Nigeria given its numerous challenges could not contain the spate of violence and criminality from MEND activities in the Niger-Delta. What happened was that the dynamics of economies of violence(Watts,2005&2007) turned from attack to oil infrastructure to a new trend where piracy, kidnapping for ransom and oil theft become an economy of its own(Katja et al,2021, Ukeje&Wullson,2013). In the post amnesty era, the rate of attacks to oil facility from MEND was not audacious like in the pre-amnesty period. It is on record that MEND bombed Eagles Square when the Peoples Democratic Party(PDP) was conducting their National Convention in 2010(Adeniyi, 2017). This attack was a shock to Nigeria and many countries in the world. The incident was traced to Henry Okah, the MEND leader.

National Bureau of Statistics(NBS) (2016,p.3-4) revealed that between 2010 and 2015, the following records of pipeline vandalism were documented in the Niger-Delta which were attributed to activities of MEND and Niger-Delta Avengers. The data is in order:

In 2010, there were 836 attacks with a total loss of 94.43 million barrels. In 2011, there were 2768 instances, resulting in the loss of 157.82 thousand barrels of petroleum and 12526 million naira in income. In 2012, there were 2230 pipeline attacks, resulting in a loss of 181.62 thousand barrels of crude oil worth 21484 million naira. The total number of occurrences in 2013 was 3505. A total of 327.87 thousand barrels were lost, with a financial loss of 38881.27 million naira.

According to National Nigerian Petroleum Corporation(2016), Nigerian Navy (2016), there were 41 pipeline blowouts and vandalisms in the area in 2014, while 88 and 109 occurred in 2015 and 2016, respectively. Only 34 of the 402 pipeline vandalism instances that resulted in oil spills in 2013 were caused by equipment failure, while the rest were caused by insurgent attacks and rupture for illegal refining of petroleum. This paints a bleak picture for Nigeria's national existence and security. In 2011, Niger Delta Liberation, a core member of MEND attacked oil facility in Eket belonging to Elf oil company and the pipelines vandalization in Brass and Nembe in 2010 and 2011 were credited to MEND( Katja et al, 2021). MEND attacked a vessel, BBC Polonnia on July 2,2010 in southern part of Bonny island. It carried out another pirate attack on Marianne Schulte, a vessel on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010 in southern and Fourseas on 13<sup>th</sup> October in southern part of Lagos respectively(Katja et al, 2021,p.22).

The defeat of former President, Goodluck Jonathan in the 2015 presidential election and the General Muhammadu Buhari's anti-corruption crusade where Chief Government Ekpemupolo well known as 'Tompolo' was invited to answer for corrupt charges was welcomed with bombings from MEND in Warri in 2015(Simbine&Neji,2018).

It has to be stated that with the post amnesty relative peace in the Niger-Delta, the activities of militants resorted to oil theft , piracy, kidnapping and high jacking of oil vessels and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea. Simbine and Neji(2018,p.10 citing Dryad,2014) reported that:

Pirates from the region of Niger-Delta hijacked flagged tanker from Liberia, MT Kerala, from its anchor in Angola at 900nm from Nigerian waters.... three product tankers were hijacked for their cargo of fuel or oil during 2014, five were hijacked in 2013 and seven in 2012. It further made the point that the picture could have been a different one with a further five tankers unsuccessfully attacked by heavily armed gangs during the year.

The crux of the gist is that with the proven capability of the Niger-Delta to extend their operations into the nearby countries of Gulf of Guinea, it has the potential to worsen regional stability of the states in the region. Curtis et al(2021), pinpointed the increasing cost in the defense spending from the oil companies and states in the Gulf of Guinea for surveillance and protection of company staff. To be sure, there is a changing pattern in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea as it has moved more to kidnapping since 2016. The abductions offshore got up slowly from 2015 and 2020. International Maritime Bureau reported that 121 abductions took place offshore in 2019 and 130 offshore in 2020, which differs slightly from the 142 abductions reported in GOG in 2020(Maritime Information Cooperation and Awareness (MICA) Center(2020 cited in Katja et al,2021).

"Oil theft or illegal oil bunkering," according to Obasi(2011) as cited in Oladonu, (2015, p.3) stated that it, "encompasses all the process, not simply an unlawful loading of ships, but also any act or acts that cut through the network of illicit crude diversion from one chosen destination to another."

Ikelegbe(2005 as cited in Oladonu,(2015,p.3) states that:

Crude oil is traded illegally on a massive scale both locally and internationally. This has evolved from a few amateurs extracting petroleum from pipelines in the 1980s to a highly complex enterprise that uses modern technologies to tap crude and sophisticated communications equipment to traverse the maze of hundreds of creeks, rivers, and rivulets. On the high seas, oil theft syndicates have progressed from boats and barges to

ships and huge oil tankers. Since the late 1990s, crude theft and smuggling has become widespread and large-scale.

This was done with the help of a network of persons from the security department, oil companies, politicians, and community leaders. It has a large network that includes global syndicates in various parts of the world. Katsouris and Sayne (2013, cited in Wilson, 2014) described three operational methods for oil theft, which included, among other things,:

- (1) direct hacking into pipelines or tapping with a hose from the wellhead through practical removal of the Christmas tree'; and (3) excess lifting of crude oil beyond the licensed amount, utilizing forged bills of loading at loading terminals (P.5).

Due to the situation, militants built a transnational network for oil bunkering, selling the earnings to faraway Europe, Asia, many other African countries, and Latin America (Legaloil.com quoted in Nils,2011) For countries in the Gulf of Guinea, illegal and artisanal refining is posing serious environmental and economic concerns. Since their demobilization in 2009, the militants have turned to criminality as a source of income through oil bunkering.

Simbine and Neji(2018), Usim(2014) pointed out that statistics from the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) in its 2013 report, expressed concern that Nigeria pirates had entered into waters of Gabon, Togo and Ivory Coast in 2012. In this period, they were linked with about hijacking of seven vessels with crude oil. Steffen (2017) stated that from 2007-2015, average figure of incidents in West Africa maritime security were 122, about 87 of the attacks occurred in Nigerian waters. The militants who were demobilized branched into criminality as a means of making money thus fuelling the economies of violence associated with piracy.

In 2018, the Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency International published "Stemming the Cost of Oil Theft," which detailed data on oil theft in the country. According to NEITI(2018) reported in Premium Times (July 21,2021):

Nigeria has lost \$41.9 billion in crude oil and refined goods in the last ten years. It went on to say that between 2009 and 2018, the country lost \$38.5 billion in crude theft alone, \$1.56 billion in domestic oil, and another \$1.8 billion in refined petroleum products. According to the report, Nigeria loses an average of \$11 million per day, \$349 million per month, and \$4.2 billion annually due to unwholesome activities such as stealing, procedural errors, and pipeline damage..

Given the dynamics of events in the region throughout the years, economic growth would be hampered by oil-related crises that have become permanent in the region, especially given the growing power of the informal oil economy and its worldwide interconnection. The consequences include oil contamination, which encompasses environmental security threats such as, pollution of rivers which kills aquatic species that people rely on for food.

There is abundant evidence in the marine portions of the Gulf of Guinea to illustrate how the delta conflict has affected security in the Gulf of Guinea. To begin, according to Sahara Reporters.com, Alhaji Asari Dokubo, the leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), has hired mercenaries to remove Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema (Saharareporters.com, February 6, 2008). Militant strikes in the Niger Delta have claimed the lives of Cameroonian security officers on patrol in the Bakassi peninsula, east of the Niger Delta. The paper claims that:

Cameroon's government mourned the attack on passengers in a speedboat near an army post, which killed 20 soldiers and ten assailants. Cameroonian authorities reportedly discovered the bodies of five "mutilated and bullet-riddled" victims on June 15, 2008, suspected to be those of at least six people taken during a prior attack on June 9 in the same region. (Ukeje, 2008, p.18, citing Reuters, June 2008)

Despite the Green Tea Agreement that Cameroon signed with Nigeria, insurgents vowed to make the Bakassi Peninsula uninhabitable for Cameroon. The separatist movement in Cameroon's Western Province, the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC), shared a worldview with the Niger Delta, which might help the war spread to Cameroon and other Gulf of Guinea countries. According to World Defence Review, the Gulf of Guinea coast experienced more marine attacks than any other West African sub-region between 2000 and 2007. During the same time period, the International Maritime Organization ranked the West African sea lane second most dangerous after the Malacca Strait. This path becomes an accessible axis for international cocaine and other heavy drug trafficking from South America to Europe(Bolarinwa,2017). The number of pirate assaults in the GoG increased dramatically, with 30 percent of attacks (427 of 1,434) in the African coast between 2003 and 2011 attributed to increased pirate activity, and 39 incidents in the GOG alone in 2010. Armed robbery increased dramatically when the warfare in the Niger Delta became more intense. In 2012, the International Maritime Bureau on Piracy and Armed Robbery recorded 92 piracy attacks near Nigeria's, Cameroon's, Equatorial Guinea's, and Sao Tome and Principe's borders. As a result of this security danger, the GoG has been securitized, resulting in the development of AFRICOM and a large budget for surveillance from the Gulf of Guinea States. Another problem is meeting the

energy demands of international crude oil dealers. With disputes, fulfilling this commitment becomes difficult, if not impossible, fueling the energy crisis. According to Royal Institute of Foreign Affairs(RIFA)(2013, p.7),:

Energy security and trade rely on sea-based transportation to a large extent, and the region now produces roughly 5.4 million barrels of oil per day (bbl/d). This is higher than the whole quantity imported by EU27 countries in 2008 (4.9 million barrels per day) and more than half of US crude oil imports (9.8 million barrels per day). In 2011, the region's oil output was equal to 40% of total EU27 petroleum consumption and 29% of total US petroleum consumption. Angola and Nigeria produce 34 percent and 47 percent of the region's total oil output, respectively.

The Niger-Delta insurgency, according to Ukeje (2008), has made the illegal trafficking of drugs, small arms, and light weapons in the area simple to sustain. According to Hazen and Horner(2009) reported in Nils(2011,p.138), Nigeria has one million and three SALW, with the largest ratio in the hands of non-state actors, greatly outnumbering the quality of guns in police possession. The Olusegun Obasanjo arms buy-back arrangement in 2004 acknowledged the enormous number of fire arms in circulation in the Niger-Delta, indicating that several types of arms are in circulation:

The AK-47, the Czech-made SA vz.58, the Heckler-Koch G3 assault rifle, and Belgian-made FAL and FNC rifles from FN Herstal. They also utilize Beretta 12S and AR-70 pistols, revolvers, craft weapons, pump-action short guns, and light machine guns like the MAT 49, Sten MK2, Czech model 26 and 59 (Rachot), MG 36, Takarev TT, and Marakov PM pistols (Davis, 2009 quoted in Nils,2011,p.138).

The exposure of the population to long-distance trade with Europeans and the government's insensitivity to offering solutions to the Delta's concerns are linked to the growth of weaponry. Others, including Isumonah, Tantua, and Nengi (2005), identified electoral violence, chieftaincy disputes, community crises, and oil wars as major factors. With the introduction of democracy in 1999, politicians armed their customers in the hopes of retaining power in 2003. This provided them with electoral triumph while also giving them with protection against arrests. Following the elections, the guys were dumped, and the war arsenals became household tools in their hands. This covers the scenario in Rivers State and the Delta States from 2003 onwards.

Ukeje (2008) alluded to the Niger-Delta conflict' implications for regional stability when he stated that:

The proliferation of firearms in the Niger Delta is widespread and linked to small arms and light weapons used in civil wars in neighboring West African countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire, as well as southern African countries such as Angola. The arrest of Henry Okah, one of MEND's main sponsors, is relevant here, but it also implies that the delta conflict has broader regional implications than previously thought. Following a long and bloody civil war, it was recently estimated that Angola still has about 2.5 million small arms and light weapons in civilian hands ( p.5).

What is clear from the foregoing is that the many of the demobilized militants resorted to criminality as their preferred means of living complicates the challenges of regional security posed by the Niger-Delta conflict. The implosion and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the hands of ex-combatants has made it difficult to control violence in the delta which has spilled to other neighboring countries thus increasing the prevalence of violence in piracy and armed robbery in the coastal shores of West Africa. Given the poor military personnel of many of the Gulf of Guinea states, coupled with the porous borders, make the issue of border policing and interdiction very challenging and in strengthening the institutional frameworks for stability in the Gulf of Guinea. With the changing pattern of violence in the Niger-political Delta's economy, kidnappings and abductions of expatriate workers and rich sons and daughters, as well as their parents and wards, have become more common. This adds to the polarization in the Niger-Delta region. The logical result of the oil violence is the rise of the informal oil economy, which has significant implications for regional security in the Gulf of Guinea, as maritime routes are vulnerable to maritime attacks and armed robbery, making the area unsafe for international oil companies to meet up with the energy requirements. In the post-amnesty era, attacks to oil infrastructure reduced drastically compared to pre-amnesty conflict period. With the amnesty program on board, the dynamics of the economies of violence changed to piracy, kidnapping for ransom and oil theft. Piracy has become challenging as this enterprise has evolved from the Niger-Delta and extend to Ghana, Benin Republic and other parts of Gulf of Guinea where vessels with crude are hijacked, crew members kidnapped for ransom. Theft in oil is an enterprise in the GOG where divergent interests converge to perpetuate criminality on the energy market with affiliates far away from the GOG to Europe, America and Asia. A deeper understanding by stakeholders in the region's energy-maritime sector on the culture ,and context that sustains the enterprise in illegal oil trade is necessary for providing policy mix that will address the challenges that oil theft poses for the region of GOG.

However, it is possible that looking beyond Nigeria to solve the Niger-Delta crisis has been a failure. There is a need to take a regional approach since resolving Gulf of Guinea security issues have bearing in the Niger-Delta problem. This is important because the elite-centric approach to the security in the GOG is worsened by lack of development, misappropriation of oil wealth, poor

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governance have all made matter worse. This has even weakened the states to provide basic infrastructure and engaged the citizens in legally productive venture. The Gulf of Guinea states ranked low in human development index and inequality in the world.

It is important to stress that the Federal Government and the National Assembly have a critical role to play in ensuring transparency and accountability to Nigerian public. The current corruption scandals rocking the NDDC, Federal Government Officials and some members of the National Assembly is not only scandalous. This undermines development efforts and reduces the trust of the people in the institutions of governance.

Given the massive arsenal at people's disposal and the region's connectivity with the Gulf States, it's possible that terrorist networks will find willing tools in the Gulf of Guinea states. It's unclear whether the possibility exists now or in the near future.

### Overcoming regional insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea

There are complex insecurity problems in the Gulf of Guinea arising from militancy. One of the major causes of insecurity is corruption. To address the issue of corruption, there is a need for speedy prosecution and policy enforcement of anti-piracy law 2019 and anti-sabotage law in Nigeria. This is necessary because oil theft and sabotage are carried out by close networks of the military, senior oil company personnel, top politicians, and global syndicates.

In order to combat the demand side of the illegal oil trade, increased coordination between Gulf of Guinea states and international oil partners is also required. This is because demand will not function without a ready market for the stolen oil. Sufficient land-based monitoring, overhead satellite imagery, and geophones trenched pipelines, as well as modernizing its pipeline networks to decrease vandalism and crude oil theft. This will significantly boost the country's economic performance in terms of oil production capability.

It is necessary that the individual member states of Gulf of Guinea should endeavor to deal with the domestic socio-economic challenges stalling full realization of the aspirations of its citizens through socio-economic empowerment, participatory democracy that ensure equity and social inclusion for all.

There is a need for the ratification of the treaty setting up the Gulf of Guinea Commission by member states. This will help to operationalize and domesticate it. With this, it could strengthen a coherent, collaborative and home grown security policy in the Gulf of Guinea.

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