

DRAFT: Comments are welcome

‘Selling Security’ or Engendering Conflict? Transnational Private Security Actors in Nigeria’s Oil-rich Niger Delta¹

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Introduction

This paper explores the role of transnational private security actors (PSAs)² in the conflict-ridden oil-rich Niger Delta, which accounts for the bulk of Nigeria’s oil and gas production and exports. Until the recent respite, following the announcement of a general amnesty and attempts by the federal government to co-opt/buy out the leaders of some militias,³ the Niger Delta had between 2006 and July 2009 been in the grip of a full blown insurgency. Local armed groups: militia’s, vigilantes, and criminal gangs had laid siege to oil installations owned by Oil Multinational Corporations, inflicting damage, or kidnapping foreign oil workers for ransom, often resulting in the disruption of the flow of oil to global oil markets (Marquardt 2006; Obi 2009a: 101-102).

While a lot of the focus on violence in the Niger Delta has been on the activities and threats posed by resistance groups, militias, criminal gangs, and the high handed response of the police as well as the combined military-security forces unit—the Joint Task Force (JTF), the activities of foreign private security actors in the region have largely remained invisible. This paper interrogates this ‘invisibility of PSAs,’ in most of the on-going debates on insecurity in

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² The term Private Security Actor (PSA) is used interchangeably with Private Security Company (PSC) in this paper.

³ The Amnesty was targeted at all armed groups in the Niger Delta willing to drop their arms in exchange of peace and rehabilitation by the Nigerian federal government. The groups were given between August 6 and October 8, 2009 to report to designated camps for disarmament, demobilization and re-integration.

the Niger Delta, and goes further to explore the likely implications of the expanding ‘market’ for security in Nigeria’s oil-rich region.

It should also be noted that the oil-related threats and the market for security go beyond the territory of the Niger Delta, and re-defines the region transnationally. Apart from being a site for transnational oil production and contestations over oil, the Niger Delta is also a site for illegal ‘oil bunkering’ involving well organized local and transnational criminal networks. According to the most recent United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report on transnational trafficking in West Africa, between 100,000-200,000 barrels of oil per day is stolen by highly organized syndicates, resulting in a loss of between 5-10 per cent of official Nigerian oil production (UNODC 2009: 24-26). Given the high stakes involved and the reported implication of highly placed officials in government, oil companies, the security forces, and violent gangs, illegal oil bunkering has had both local and transnational security implications.

Apart from robbing Nigeria and its Petro-Business partners, the Oil Multinationals, of a substantial amount of oil revenues, ‘illegal oil bunkering’ feeds into the proliferation of arms, armed groups and violence in the region. This loss of revenues and the damage to, or destruction of oil pipelines constitute a major loss in resources that may have gone into national development efforts. They are also perceived as serious security breaches to the main source of revenue to the oil-dependent Nigerian state.

While local armed groups and militias have also come under attack from government security forces protecting oil installations and intent on neutralizing the threats posed by such armed groups, foreign Private Security Actors (PSAs) have since the beginning of this decade also entered the fray, providing a range of services including “security and risk consultancy” services to foreign oil companies and their expatriate staff, in spite of the Nigerian state’s legal monopoly over the provision of security in the country. This implies two developments. The first being the commoditization of security in Nigeria as a service that private companies can ‘sell’ to foreign oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, while the second deals with the transnationalization of security in the Niger Delta by local, state and foreign private actors. It shows how, in spite of the official downplaying or denial of the presence of transnational private actors in what should be the exclusive preserve of the state—security, both state and foreign private actors have been able to operate a transnational security

partnership that more or less reproduces the relationship between the Nigerian state and oil multinationals.

This paper critically examines the role of PSAs operating in the Niger Delta. In this regard, it analyzes the ways their activities promote the security of the transnationalized oil industry to which it ‘sells’ its services. This relationship raises several questions. To what extent can the security services PSAs deliver address the existing threats, and deeper roots of the violent conflict and insecurities in the region? What does it mean for the relationship between the Nigerian state and foreign oil capital? In what direction will the state, oil companies and PSAs move if the threats in the Niger Delta persist? And what are the prospects for peace and development in Nigeria’s oil-rich, but impoverished region?

In addressing the foregoing issues and questions, this paper is organized into four broad sections. The introduction defines the aims and scope of the paper, while the conceptual section explores the connection between globalization and privatization/commoditization of security. It is followed by an analysis of the role of PSAs in the Niger Delta, while the concluding section examines how the current developments reflect upon the role of the state in the region, alongside the prospects for peace and development in the context of the intensification of the globalization of the Niger Delta as a site for oil extraction, accumulation, and resistance, and a space for the transnational securitization of oil.

Globalization and the Commoditization of Security: Some Conceptual Issues

Globalization is a highly contested concept in international relations. It can be described as “a multicentric, multiscalar, multitemporal, multiform, and multicausal process” (Jessop, 2002: 97). Globalization also involves a growing trans-global enmeshment and interdependence “among actions, organizations and institutions within different functional systems and the life world that lies beyond them” (Jessop, 2002: 97). Gills rightly notes, that the nature of globalization cannot be fully understood outside of the expansionist logic of capital (2000: 4-6). Mittleman’s view that globalization is characterized by the “increase in interconnections, or interdependence, a rise in transnational flows, and an intensification of processes such that the world is, in some respects becoming a single place” (2000), assumes greater significance in the Niger Delta where the process of enmeshment takes place at various levels, loci and space(s).

Following in this logic, this article focuses on a phenomenon that Abrahamsen and Williams (2009: 1-17) refer to as “global security assemblages”. This suggests certain emerging developments in the post-Cold war world: the privatization of security, the rapid growth in the commercial private security market, and global private security companies. They also point to the ways global and national structures are being re-articulated in the context of changes attendant to globalization. This relates to the view that globalization does not imply the unconditional retreat or erosion of the state. Rather, the state responds to global transformations by re-defining itself to assume new roles in the promotion of capitalist globalization. Abrahamsen and Williams (2009: 3) posit that the “notion of a dual process of state disassembly and (global) reassembly provides a powerful heuristic for analyzing security privatization, and for capturing its implications for contemporary security governance,” and further argues that “security privatization is part of a broader restructuring and reconfiguration of public-private and global-local relations.”

Thus, globalization has clear implications for the proliferation of PSAs across the world. PSAs are connected both to the domestic base and state (military) in securing the ‘homeland’, and the outward thrust of hegemonic Western powers in protecting highly valued interests abroad. This trend has assumed greater significance in the context of a global war on terror and in the quest to secure economic, geo-strategic and energy interests. The privatization and globalization of security have also featured in the efforts of non-state corporate actors seeking access to valuable resources and markets, and protection in distant and ‘dangerous’ places.

In this quest by global capital to guarantee access and control of markets, resources and spaces of extraction, production and accumulation, transnational private security actors have emerged to peddle security of a particular kind—but nonetheless directed at protecting capital and the transnationally-compliant state. As private enterprises operating in the age of globalization, security companies do not compete against, or contest the Weberian notion of the state’s monopoly of the legitimate use of the means of violence, but actually complement and re-define its role in two ways: through the commodification and marketization of security, and the deregulation of the state’s monopoly of violence in a manner that does not threaten the state.

The state in advanced capitalist societies has resorted to deregulation and outsourcing of some security functions, services and structures. This has opened up a new market for the expansion of capital, while also reducing the cost of security for the state, as the public now pays for

security as a service, and the investors stand to make profit by supplying or providing security as a service. Although the point has been made that the privatization of security need not be at the expense of the state, but can indeed serve the interests of a state-private sector partnership, it should be noted that in its globalized form, the transformation of security from a public or social good to a privately provided service has much wider implications, particularly in resource-rich developing countries.

The Commodification of Security and the Logic of Global Expansion

In the opinion of Abrahamsen and Williams (2009: 5), commodification “constitutes security as a technique and a form of expert knowledge that, while specialized, is by no means the sole purview of public (or national) authorities, making PSCs legitimate experts in the technical and managerial dimensions of security promotion”. They also note that this enables PSCs to draw upon the “logics of free trade” to penetrate “new markets”. Krahmman (2008: 387) relates commodification to the transformation of security into a “product that can be sold for profit”. This view is further extended by relating it to “seven questions that Baldwin identified with regard to the definition of security: security for whom, security for which values, how much security, from what threats, by what means, at what cost and in what time period? (Baldwin 1997: 13-17)”. By providing the answers to Baldwin’s questions, Krahmman draws out the implications of the commoditization of security for society.

In answering the question, ‘security for whom’, it is noted that “commodification and marketization of security are likely to shift the focus from the collective to the individual level” (2008: 388). Drawing on the report for the US Congress it is shown that “by 2003 the number of private security guards had risen to 1million compared to 1.5 million US armed forces personnel and about 650,000 US police officers (Parfomak 2004, cited in Krahmman 2008). In real terms, security for who, translates into security for those: individuals, corporate organizations and contractors that can afford to buy or pay for it. In relation to the kind of values that it promotes, Krahmman is of the view that it is based on the profit motive and competition, in which “private security suppliers can be expected to promote individual over collective values” (2008: 389). This answer links up to that of how much security is necessary, by arguing that “profit oriented firms have an interest in the expansion of their market, and it is to their advantage to overstate the need for security” (2008: 390), noting that the commercial security market can also feed upon the fears of the people or its clients.

With regard to the question of 'by what means', Krahnmann (2008: 393), is of the view that PSAs are "more likely to offer deterrence or protection than the prevention of threats, and they are more likely to address security risks in terms of cost and consequences than their causes." Although it is argued that privatized security is cost-efficient, Krahnmann takes an opposing view by showing, drawing on figures from the UK to show the costs of private security have risen over the years. In the same regard, it is argued that private security can at best offer temporary protection (2008: 395).

From the foregoing, it is possible to glean the growing influence of private security in post-Cold war Western society, and its ability to ride on the waves of free market globalization to connect other parts of the world within the expansionist logic of capital. However, it should be understood that private security essentially caters for the interests of its clients, ranging from individuals to corporate organizations and governments. The commodification of security however transforms it from a public good to a private or corporate 'thing' that responds to the market rules of demand and supply. This carries with it the real risk that the profit motive may override the collective good, without addressing the roots of insecurity. More fundamentally perhaps, it suggests a strong organic linkage between the activities of transnational PSAs, the governments of the world's hegemonic powers and the protection of strategic and economic assets linked to global capital. It is in this context, that the presence, activities and impact of PSAs operating in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta shall be analyzed.

Private Security Companies in the Niger Delta: Protecting Globalized Oil?

The growing presence of transnational Private Security Companies (PSCs) has most recently caught the attention of the Nigerian media. In this regard, Ibekwe's (2009) article in a Nigerian newspaper reports on a rather alarming note that "the Niger Delta is crawling with British and American private paramilitary companies providing security services for clients in the oil and gas industry, in clear violation of Nigerian law". He further goes on to identify the specific transnational security companies as Control Risk, Erinys International, G4Securicor (G4S), and Triple Canopy, which operate mostly in partnership with Nigerian companies or through local subsidiaries, providing a raft of security, risk analysis and security support and training services to clients in Nigeria. This is against the background of their provision of "counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism services, personnel security and anti-piracy activities" in other parts of the world.

The entry of these transnational “security giants” into Nigeria coincided with the escalation of the protests in the Niger Delta into a full-blown insurgency since late 2005, including attacks by heavily armed militias on oil installations alongside the increased incidents of the kidnapping of foreign oil workers. This escalation of violence was also reinforced by a global media blitz by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) an Ijaw ethnic minority militia which successfully attacked oil interests in the region, in its professed fight for the control of oil for the benefit of local people (Ukoha 2007; Courson 2009; Obi 2009a, b). The successful acts of sabotage which cut Nigeria’s oil exports and abduction of foreign oil workers, including daring raids on offshore oil installations, by MEND and its allied militia groups in a bid to demonstrate that the “Nigerian state could not protect the oil multinationals” added in large measure to the spread of fear within the industry and created conditions of entry for the PSCs. Therefore, this paper focusses on transnational PSCs operating in the ‘Nigerian security market’, but primarily those serving oil multinationals operating in the Niger Delta.

A look at the websites of the PSCs operating in the Niger Delta shows that they mostly originate from the UK and the US, but have since the end of the Cold war and 9/11 expanded their operations world-wide. Such operations have spanned the world’s ‘trouble-spots’ such as the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone, among other places. The PSCs clients have included the US military, dignitaries, foreign commercial, mineral and oil companies.

For example, Erinys International on its website reports that it was registered in 2003, with its headquarters in Dubai, and an office in the UK, and has executed significant contracts in Iraq and the Gulf region. The company also has subsidiaries in the UK, South Africa, DRC and the Republic of Congo, while it operates with associated companies in Iraq and Nigeria. On its website, Erinys reports that in late-2005 it got a contract for “security consulting and training support to a major international oil company operating in the Niger Delta (2006-2009)”, and claims to have “had a significant effect on the project area” in terms of a “significant reduction in bunkering and sabotage activity”. It also recently won in 2009, a British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) contract to provide security services to the British High Commission in Nigeria (Erinys International Latest News).

In the case of Control Risk, its website describes it as “an independent risk consultancy with 27 offices in five continents” which “enables its clients to succeed in complex or hostile

business environments”. Its Nigerian subsidiary offers services that include, “security training, security manpower delivery, electronic security and security consultancy” (Risk Control Nigeria 2009). Without stating it explicitly, Control risk is also involved in the Niger Delta, working for an unnamed “large oil producer” (Ibekwe 2009), just like Erinys International.

G4S regards itself as the “world’s leading security solutions group”. The result of a 2004 merger between Securicor plc and Group 4 Falck, with operations in over 110 countries, the company is listed on the London Stock Exchange and announced a turnover in 2008 worth £5,942.9 million (G4S website 2009). It has on-going operations in oil-fields in Indonesia, Kazakhstan, and Nigeria’s Niger Delta. With regard to the latter, it is reported that “in 2005 senior managers from G4S’s global Risks Team identified the support of oil companies in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region as the most challenging task facing the company from a security perspective.”

In seeking to satisfy the demands of its client, Chevron Nigeria Ltd (CNL), the local subsidiary of G4S, Outsourcing Services Ltd (OSL), had a contract which included “providing security support to Chevron Nigeria Ltd’s off-shore production platforms and pipelines in the Escravos region of the Delta” and “the CNL’s administrative headquarters in Warri and Lekki, as well as the company’s gas liquefaction facilities” (G4S 2008). In the same document it is unambiguously reported that “OSL employs around 600 security guards”, and “in 2007 acquired two high speed patrol boats to serve as escorts for offshore transfers, enabling the movement of armed rapid reaction force personnel to deter those seeking to disrupt CNL’s work.” Thus, G4S and OSL play a critical role in ‘supplying’ security both onshore and offshore to Chevron. In clear terms, the presence of G4S in the Niger Delta cannot be separated from the reading of the Niger Delta as a ready market for offering protection against ethnic minority militias, insurgents and criminal elements that have taken to attacking oil interests in the region.

The other known company operating in the Niger Delta and linked to the protection of oil assets and personnel is Triple Canopy. According to the company’s website, it was established in 2003 by “former US Army Special Forces veterans.” In 2007, it established ‘subsidiaries in Abu Dhabi, Nigeria, Peru and Uganda, offering services spanning fixed-site and mobile security, security design and planning and support services integration’ (Triple Canopy website). It is instructive that the same website carries a statement, proclaiming that

“our risk management, security and support services are tailored to meet the needs of oil majors and service companies worldwide”. It is therefore no surprise that it has found a ready market in Nigeria volatile oil region. While the interests of PSCs operating in Nigeria are broad, it can be argued that a significant proportion of their ‘market’ lies in the Nigerian oil and gas industry and in the Niger Delta region in particular.

The foregoing clearly point to the global nature of the private security companies—mostly veterans of other conflict regions, where they have been involved in risk analysis, provision of personnel safety, defence of assets, training and the execution of military contracts, and counter-insurgency operations. Their presence in the oil-rich Niger Delta, a region immersed in political and socio-economic tensions, and agitations linked to the depredations of the Petro-business alliance, and the rise in the activities of ethnic militias like MEND, imply a transnational thrust by ‘private’ merchants of (violence) security to protect oil companies, their strategic assets and personnel. This raises several questions of which three are critical: Why the Niger Delta, Why now, Whose security? Closely linked to these questions, is the important issue of the nature of the relationship between these global private security giants and the Petro-business alliance in Nigeria: State and Oil Multinationals, and the implications of their operations in the Niger Delta.

Why the Niger Delta, Why Now? The Globalized Securitization of Niger Delta Oil

The presence of PSCs in the Niger Delta cannot be separated from the strategic importance of the region as one of the world’s most strategic sources of oil and gas supplies. With Nigeria as Africa’s largest, the world’s 12th largest oil producer, and 8th largest exporter, the importance of the Niger Delta, which accounts for most of Nigeria’s estimated daily oil production of 2.46 million barrels most of which goes to the United States and other Western oil importing countries (EIA 2009; Lubeck, Watts and Lipschutz 2007; Obi 2007: 94-98) cannot be overstated. Most of Nigeria’s oil is produced by oil multinationals working in partnership with the Nigerian state, largely through joint-venture contracts.

The western multinationals depend on the supply of high-quality sweet crude of the Nigerian variety to satisfy the demands of an energy thirsty world in an era of tight global markets. As such the uninterrupted supply of oil is important both to their profit calculations and the energy security interests of their home countries. Of note is the United States which depends on Nigeria for an estimated 12 per cent of its daily oil imports, the EU countries as well as

emerging Asian powers like China and India which get some of their oil imports from Nigeria.

The energy dependence of the world's powers on the oil from the Niger Delta and the profit-motives of western multinationals underpin the Petro-Business alliance that binds the Nigerian state to the oil multinationals and the global energy security calculations of the West. This alliance defines the Niger Delta in very high strategic terms as a space that is critical to local-national: as a source of revenues on which the state is wholly dependent, and to the global: as a source of energy, whose uninterrupted supply is critical to strategic energy security calculations of the world's powers (Obi 2006).

It is also important to note that by its location on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, the Niger Delta region is adjacent to international sea-lanes of the Atlantic Ocean and critical to international shipping, including the supply of oil and gas to Europe and the Americas. The presence of some of the world's largest and most sophisticated oil multinationals in the oil-rich region, which paradoxically is one of the most under-developed parts of the country, means that they need to use the sea lanes to move the oil to global markets. This strategic location underpins the formidable presence of the 'global' in the 'locale', and raises the stakes both of access to oil, securing the sea lanes necessary to move the oil to global markets and off-shore refineries, and the securing of the space(s) of extraction, production and accumulation.

Another point relates to the nature of the oil fields of the Niger Delta which tend to be small and scattered over a wide area, necessitating a wide network of oil pipelines and installations criss-crossing the entire region. Most of these (old) pipelines are exposed (above the ground) poorly maintained and susceptible to damage and interference. The pipelines sometimes pose environmental risks to the people when they explode, or are ruptured by illegal 'oil bunkerers' leading to massive environmental pollution that destroys local people's farms, fishing waters, and sources of drinking water. This situation threatens local livelihoods and lead to grievances against the companies and the government. However, as a result of the critical role that these pipelines play in the extraction, collection, production and exportation of oil, they are akin to the arteries of the oil industry whose protection is directly tied to the fortunes of the Petro-Business alliance.

The Niger Delta as the source of Nigeria's main revenue earner and the home of many ethnic minority groups has been immersed in politics linked to struggles over the control of, and distribution of oil revenues in a multi-ethnic federation. The ethnic minority agitation in the region has a long history (Omeje 2005; Ikelegbe 2006; Ukeje 2001). It found expression in the protests of the ethnic minorities against the control of the oil revenues (and profits) produced from under their ancestral lands and waters, by a 'distant' federal government, dominated by (non-oil producing) ethnic majorities and the foreign oil companies (whose activities also impoverish the people and pollute the Niger Delta environment). After the Nigerian civil war in 1970, these non-violent protests grew more strident in the early 1990s, largely on account of the non-response of the Petro-Business Alliance to the demands of the people (Obi 2007).

The globalization of these protests by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) on behalf of the Ogoni ethnic minority group of the Niger Delta, from 1991 and the subsequent hanging of MOSOP leaders including the charismatic writer and Ogoni rights campaigner, Ken Saro-Wiwa in November 1995 on the orders of a special tribunal, sustained military repression in the region, as well as the subsequent crushing of an Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) led protest in December 1998, contributed to the violent turn that the politics of protest assumed thereafter.

Apart from the activities of ethnic minority movements like MOSOP and the IYC, environmental and human rights groups also emerged to engage in a global campaign against abuses of the State-Oil alliance, particularly as they related to environmental destruction and military repression of local people, both challenging the 'licence of the oil companies to operate' in violation of international standards, and the legitimacy of the Nigerian state to take the oil, while its citizens suffered neglect and abuse.

The politics thus became one of resistance to the Petro-Business alliance. The politics of local resistance was couched in the rhetoric of "resource control": the demand for local autonomy (within a restructured and decentralized Nigerian federal state) and control of the natural resources of the Niger Delta by the indigenes/ethnic minorities of the states and communities in the region. It pitched the people of the region against the Nigerian federal state that took over control of oil and oil revenues during the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) and the oil multinationals that exploit the oil in the region in partnership with the Nigerian state

From 2006, there was a noticeable escalation in the attacks on oil installations, kidnapping and ransoming of foreign oil workers and the disruption of oil exports as a result of mounting attacks by heavily armed militias. Some articles and reports profile these militia groups such as the Nigeria Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), and the most noted, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), either as ethnic militias, insurgents or terrorists groups (Ukiwo 2007; Ikelegbe 2006; Courson 2009; Pham 2007).

By 2008, their attacks against oil installations had forced the shutting in of estimated 25 to 40 percent of Nigerian's oil production and exports leading to the substantial loss of revenues and profits to the State-Oil Transnational's alliance. Thus, from a daily oil production of 2.5 million barrels of oil in 2005, by mid-2009 the figure had dropped to about 1.9 to 2.1 million barrels as a result in the disruption to production and supply. This led to significant losses in revenues to the Petro-Business alliance. Also over a hundred foreign oil workers were kidnapped and ransomed by these and other groups in the region, ostensibly to put pressure on the companies to attend to the demands of the people. However, it was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between the activities of ethnic militants and those of criminal gangs cashing in on the situation in the region.

Apart from activities of oil companies, the military and ethnic minority militias, criminal elements linked to West African transnational criminal networks involved in the theft and trade in stolen crude, arms proliferation, also operated from the restive Niger Delta. The extensive network of poorly protected above-surface pipes in the region was also an easy prey for such networks, which also had a ready market in the adjacent gulf of Guinea or beyond.

From the foregoing, the Niger Delta as a source of global oil and gas, host to globally integrated oil giants, and its strategic location as a source of supply critical to the energy security of the western powers, ranks high in the globalization of oil capital. Its proximity to the oil markets of Europe and the US, and its strategic importance as a supplier of crude oil has in a post-Cold war world has also contributed to its being located at the core of the post-9/11 security discourses (Obi 2006: 87-103), both a possible site for potential attacks by terrorists hostile to western oil interests, thereby threatening vital energy security interests. The Niger Delta is also a site for the increased competition between the established western

Oil Majors and new entrants—the Asian state oil corporations from China and India, thereby raising the stakes in gaining access to the oil in the region (Obi 2009b: 190-212).

Such concerns have been amplified by security analysts concerned that a ‘failing’ Nigerian state could not adequately protect western strategic energy interests in the Niger Delta and that the West, indeed the US had to act to secure its maritime and energy interests both in the Delta and the surrounding Gulf of Guinea (Pham 2007; Morris 2006). Given the escalation of ethnic minority protest into clearly insurgent proportions, the region is seen as ‘unstable’ harbouring threats posed by insurgent groups opposed to, and attacking the Nigerian state—a regional power and valued ally of western governments. It is in this context and for the foregoing reasons that the oil, as well as the entire region of the Niger Delta has been increasingly securitized and militarized.

Whose Security? Corporate versus Peoples’ Interests

From the discussion in the foregoing sections of this paper, there is no doubt that the PSCs operating in the Niger Delta provide security and protection services for their clients—the oil multinationals and their personnel operating in what they consider a high-risk environment. By catering for private interests in a region immersed in “the paradox of plenty” and seething ethnic minority grievances, and which has been subjected to prolonged military repression, the PSCs as global actors to some extent become ‘localized’, even if this is to serve and protect vertically integrated global clients with the sole purpose of “getting the oil out as efficiently and quickly as possible” with minimum losses and optimal gains.

As private actors, their business has little to do with providing security to the members of the Nigerian public in their areas of operation, just as they are not concerned with the roots or causes of the threats—other than to find ways of protecting their clients from such perceived threats. In this regard, PSAs, given their forays into roles normally reserved for the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Security Services and the Police, and local security companies, have had to establish a relationship with the Nigerian state. Both Abrahamsen and Williams (2005: 9-15; 2009: 10) and Ibekwe (2009) note that under Nigerian law—*Private Guard Companies Act of 1986*, PSCs are not allowed to carry arms. However, Abrahamsen and Williams (2005: 9-10) point out that some local PSCs were opposed the entry of transnational PSCs, citing the Act which “stipulates that all PSCs must be wholly Nigerian owned”. In spite of such initial protests, the transnationals have continued to come in and operate legally in the country.

Ibekwe is critical of the assertion of some officials of transnational PSCs that he interviewed that their guards did not bear arms. However, it is interesting that while the spokesperson for the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) operating in the Niger Delta reportedly denied collaborating with foreign PSCs by asserting that, “we don’t have any connection with any foreign military contractor” (Ibekwe 2009), the evidence shows the contrary.

The evidence points to the collaboration between the PSCs and the Government Security Forces and the Nigerian military (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2005, 2009, G4S website) in what can be characterized as a symbiotic, rather than a competitive relationship. Indeed, various sources indicate that some Nigerian ex-military and security operatives work for the transnational PSCs operating in the Niger Delta. The nature of the collaboration between the PSCs, the Nigerian police and military has been addressed elsewhere (Abrahamsen and Williams 2009: 10-12) and will not be delved into in great detail here.

What is however important to note is the Nigerian state has come under serious pressure both internally—from the complex politics in the Niger Delta and the extensive damage caused by ethnic minority militias to the infrastructure of the oil industry, and externally—from western powers and Oil Multinationals that have been counting the heavy costs of the perennial disruptions in the flow of oil by militia attacks, and the limited success of government security forces in reigning in the rampaging militias and criminal syndicates operating within the oil region in spite of the deployment of substantial military force in the region. Such pressures have also dovetailed into the prognoses of some security and military analysts that the Niger Delta is fast becoming a major threat to western energy and maritime security, requiring a much wider, but subtle response. It is in this context that PSCs have found a market in Nigeria’s volatile oil-rich region.

What is important to note is that although these private security companies work for oil multinationals, they also have a close relationship with the security agencies of the Nigerian state, and the state itself. This implies that their influence on the security situation in the Niger Delta though largely covert is considerable. It would appear that by having the possibility to “hire” government security personnel through the request of oil companies to these agencies, the PSCs are creating a private ‘global’ space, within the ‘Nigerian’ official security sphere, transnationalizing a critical aspect of the state from within, in order to ‘sell’ security to oil multinationals in the globalized space of the oil-rich Niger Delta.

PSAs, the State and the Prospects for Peace in the Niger Delta

The operations of the PSAs are clearly directed at providing security services for the oil multinationals—their assets and personnel operating in the Niger Delta. It does imply that security in Nigeria, particularly as it relates to the oil industry, is no longer the exclusive preserve of the Nigerian state or its security agencies. But it does show a level of ambivalence, between the official denial by a spokesperson of the JTF of links to PSCs, and the actual integration of the global Private Security Actors into the Nigerian (oil) security scene.

While it may be seen as the result of the shortcomings of the Nigerian forces to curb the threats facing the oil industry in the Niger Delta, it is more likely not directed at undermining the Nigerian state. Rather PSAs are in the Niger Delta to secure the conditions for the uninterrupted extraction of oil, and oil-based capitalist accumulation, in the interest of a transnational Petro state-Business alliance.

However, there are those that remain wary, that foreign PSAs may use the leverage of operating in a strategic sector of the Nigerian economy to gain undue access and advantages, but it appears that the Nigerian state cannot do much to block the global push into its strategic oil sector, which is clearly dominated by transnational interests. The emerging transnationalization of private security both at the global and national levels is also a reflection of the transformation of global-local relations of power, where “the state becomes a node of power in a broader network of power and authority that extends beyond the national territory” (Abrahamsen and Williams 2009: 14).

While it can be argued that PSAs can offer analysis, assessments, surveillance and protection to oil multinationals, they cannot offer any of these to the people, majority of who are the victims of the contradictions spawned by the globalized oil industry in the Niger Delta. If the conditions of impoverishment and alienation of the majority, pollution and inadequate representation and political participation remain unresolved, then the security market in the region is likely to expand, but it will not likely solve the problem.

With regard to the crisis in the region and the collective human security of its peoples, it is unlikely that the ‘military solution’ will be sustainable in the long run. What the PSAs will provide can, at best be temporary protection, ‘selling’ security and engendering commoditized

protection to a few, without addressing the deep-seated roots of conflict and insecurity in the region. It will require among others “reversing the culture of impunity and lack of accountability on the part of ruling elites and oil companies to the people of the Niger Delta” (Courson 2009: 25), for sustainable collective security for development, justice and peace to take firm root in the region.

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