



The Niger Delta Crisis: A Focus on Post-Amnesty Militancy and National Security

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Abstract

The government-sponsored Amnesty Programme for militants disrupting oil production in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has resulted in relative peace in the area. Consequently, Nigeria's oil production which dropped from 2.6 million barrels a day to about 1 million at the peak of the Niger Delta crisis between 2006 and 2009 has now risen to 2.1 million barrels daily. But recent events have raised doubts as to whether Amnesty Programme can tame the monster of militancy in the Niger Delta. This is because post-amnesty militancy has assumed even more frightening dimensions. The twist in the current wave of militancy, which now extends the battle outside the creeks, going upland and sometimes to the seats of government, portends a larger threat to the nation's security. This article submits that the olive branch, which the Amnesty Programme presents, would not sufficiently assuage the restive minds in the region. This is because anything short of owner-control or at least owner-participation in the management of the resources of the Niger Delta region would remain mere palliatives.

Key Words: environmental issues, resource management, amnesty, militancy, national security.

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Résumé

Le Programme d'amnistie parrainé par le gouvernement pour les militants qui perturbent la production de pétrole dans la région nigériane du Delta du Niger s'est traduit par une paix relative dans la zone. En conséquence, la production de pétrole du Nigeria, qui avait chuté de 2,6 millions de barils par jour à environ 1 million au plus fort de la crise du Delta du Niger, entre 2006 et 2009, est remontée à 2,1 millions de barils par jour. Mais de récents événements ont fait naître des doutes quant à la capacité du Programme d'amnistie de dompter le monstre du militantisme dans le Delta du Niger. Cela, parce que le militantisme qui a suivi l'amnistie a pris des dimensions encore plus effrayantes. Le changement dans la vague de militantisme actuelle, qui porte maintenant la bataille hors des criques, jusqu'aux hautes terres et parfois aux sièges du gouvernement, laisse présager d'une plus grande menace à la sécurité de la nation. Le présent article soutient que la branche d'olivier que présente le Programme d'amnistie ne va pas suffisamment calmer les esprits agités dans la région. En effet, toutes mesures autres que le contrôle par les propriétaires ou, tout au moins, la participation des propriétaires dans la gestion des ressources de la région du Delta du Niger resteraient de simples palliatifs.

Introduction

It is a little over a decade since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999. Of Nigeria's thirty-nine years of independence up to 1999, the military ruled for twenty-nine. The consequence has been that even in the current democratic dispensation (that is, since 1999), vestiges of military authoritarianism are yet apparent. The obvious gross breaches of democratic ethos since 1999 have resulted in Nigeria's current democratic experiment being disparaged and often described as a militarised democracy or, in the words of Al-Bashir (2008:17), as 'democracy which knows no rules'. The new phase of the Niger Delta agitation is giving militant expression 'to the fundamentally political question that [over] fifty years of uncontrolled oil exploitation, massive corruption, and cynical exploitation of the local communities have raised' (Okonta 2006:3). In separate negotiations with government, the rights groups or 'militants', as they have come to be known, have argued that the roots of their grouse 'go beyond mere provision of electricity and water and focus on the political marginalisation of the Ijaw' who have been excluded 'from meaningful political participation in the Nigerian project' (Okonta 2006:4).

Recently, under President Yar'Adua, the agitations of the Niger Delta people assumed frightening dimensions with armed combats in the Niger Delta creeks between the militants and the Joint Task Force on the Niger Delta (JTF) between 13 May 2009 and 4 October 2009 (the deadline for embracing the Federal Government Amnesty Programme). This outbreak of renewed violence posed serious threat to the nation's economy and, by implication, its security. This paper is borne out of the need to re-examine the issues involved in the renewed fighting as a means of pointing up the way forward. Okonta (2006:5) sums up saying that 'the journey to peace and prosperity in the region can only commence when the civic is brought back in'.

To demonstrate government's commitment to the Niger Delta issue, within one month of former President Yar'Adua's assumption of office (precisely on 28 June 2007), the then Vice-President (now President) Goodluck Jonathan visited the Ijaw towns of Okerenkoko, Oporoza and several other communities to consult directly with the agitating leaders of the region (Amaize 2008a:14). Immediately after this, on 2 July 2007, a Presidential Committee on Peace and Conflict Resolution in the Niger Delta led by Senator David Brigidi was inaugurated. Thereafter, at a Presidential Retreat for Ministers, Special Advisers, and Federal Permanent Secretaries on 16 August 2007, former President Yar'Adua spoke of efforts to 'get the militants' leaders to come to the table for dialogue' (Agande 2007:1) with the Vice-President leading government side. On 24 August 2007, nine nominees of the Ijaw Youth Leadership Forum (IYLF) were inaugurated at the Presidential Villa, Abuja, to constitute a committee for consultation on the Roadmap to Peace Implementation on the Niger Delta.

But not long afterwards, the ceasefire in the region became threatened as violence resumed once again, leading to attacks on oil facilities in the region. This prompted President Yar'Adua to order the JTF on 20 June 2008, to fish out the militants responsible for the attack. What worsened the situation the more was that the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) had on the previous day 19 June attacked the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) Bonga Field in Ekeremo, Bayelsa State, simultaneously with another militants' attacks on the Chevron-Texaco oil pipelines in the Delta State creek settlements of Abiteye and Olero. Four days before that, militants from Egbema had blown up Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) pipelines at Iyera village in Edo State. The militants had called the bluff of the President's order to the JTF and threatened to 'declare an oil war if the military attacks any militant position' (Amaize 2008b:1).

With this development, tension again heightened in the Niger Delta. The Defence Headquarters via the JTF vowed to execute the presidential direc-

tives, and the battle line was drawn. A spate of militants' attacks on oil facilities raged in the creeks, and the JTF responded in counter operations which led to the Gbaramatu Debacle that broke out on 13 May 2009. From 26 June when government offered the militants amnesty through the 4 October deadline for the militants to embrace the amnesty offer, the war had dealt a crippling blow on the nation's economy as Nigeria's crude oil production declined from about 2 million barrels a day to about 1 million. The Amnesty Programme had been credited for bringing some respite as peace returned to the area and the nation returned to its former production level of crude. Not too long afterwards, however, there was a resurgence of militancy and this rightly raises the question as to why the Amnesty Programme has been unable to assuage the restiveness of the Niger Delta militants.

Theoretical Assumptions

In recent years, the existence of natural resources in developing countries has been seen as a source of conflict and, therefore, a threat to national security (Okogu 2007:56). The 'resource curse' theory developed by Professor Jeffery Sachs (Okonta 2006:5) seeks to 'explain the seeming inability of resource-rich states in Africa and Latin America to industrialise and prosper like their counterparts in South-East Asia' (Okonta 2006:5). The argument is that as authoritarian regimes (including civilian ones) deploy instruments of state at their whims and hijack state resources, the citizens become 'powerless spectators unable to drive economic development or participate effectively in the political arena. Poverty, corruption in high places, and religious and ethnic violence are usually the result' (Okonta 2006:3). All these add up to become a threat to national security.

Resource Curse theory argue that resource-rich countries like Nigeria inevitably degenerate into authoritarian and corrupt rule because it is easy for the elites to hijack the oil field by force and redesign political institutions to sustain the new regime of praetorian government (Okonta 2006:3).

Within the context of democratic theory, Page and Barabas (2000:339) contend that 'persistent gaps between the policy preferences of leaders and those of citizens are problematic' and thus 'constitutes *prima facie* evidence that democracy is not working well' (Page and Barabas 2000:340). The notion of democracy implies popular power. That is, governments' responsiveness to citizens' aspirations in policy decision-making. If popular power is an inference from the postulate democracy; such an inference can only apply if the postulate is tenable in the first place. Evidence since 1999 has shown that

Nigeria is practising ‘militocracy’; that is a situation where democratic structures exist but the rule of law is ignored. The consequence is violence, restiveness, rights agitations and subsequent threat to national security. In this wise, Okonta (2006:5) draws attention to Anna Zalik’s treatise called ‘Petro-Violence’ and ‘Partnership Development’ whose main thrust is ‘the problematic of development strategies devoid of democratic and participatory structures in oil-bearing communities in the region’. While it is true that under this kind of situation the development argument has gained priority over the democratic, the problem is that it is becoming harder for authoritarian regimes ‘to get away with a mode of forced development’ (Hague, Harrrop and Breslin 1988:36).

The recent phase of the Niger Delta militants-government face-off (that is, since The Gbaramatu Debacle) was preceded at the dawn of the current democratic dispensation by a subtle agitation by oil-bearing states under the aegis of ‘resource control’ – for a true federal structure of administration that would ensure fiscal federalism. With no appreciable result in this regard, militant groups began to spring up, the principal ones being the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) of Asari Dokubo and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Even though these groups insist that their objective ‘is to destroy the facilities that are being used to generate funds’ for government (Amaize 2009c:8) and ‘as freedom fighters to liberate the region from the stranglehold of the Nigerian state’ (Oyadongha 2009:9), expression of high profile violence only began with government’s incarceration of their principal officers – Asari Dokubo of the NDPVF and Henry Okah of the MEND in 2005 and 2007 respectively. Thus, violence had not always been there. In point of fact, when in 2003 the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) came into existence and in a war of attrition against Nigeria demanded ‘a reversion of the federal structure to the old 1963 type and a revision of the legal instruments of ownership that communalised their privately-owned property’, their grouse was,

that the destruction of their environment, the undermining of their occupations and threats to their continued existence, all emanating from negligent seismic, excavation and drilling activities, are all collateral damages accruing from the seizure and assumption of their proprietary rights over resources they had owned totally when Nigeria started off as a nation (Owubokiri 2009:19).

Amnesty and Economic Prosperity

Over time, and in the course of the negotiations between government and the militants over the Niger Delta crisis, the issue of amnesty had been touted. For

instance, on 27 July 2007, when former Governor Dipreye Alamieseigha of Bayelsa State was released after over two years in detention (he was arrested on 15 January 2005) on graft charges; the gesture was counted as number two (next to the release of the leader of the Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Forces (NDPVF), Alhaji Mujahid Asari Dokubo), out of the three main demands of the militants in order to lay down their arms and dialogue. The third was the withdrawal of military forces from the region. In between these, the militants demanded 'amnesty for those that have been declared wanted so that they can participate in the process of negotiation' (Aziken, Usiegebe & Oyadongha 2007:16).

In fact, the Vice President Jonathan who now heads the Federal Government Committee on the peace process in the Niger Delta was told pointedly by some members of the IYLF [Ijaw Youth Leadership Forum] that the government should grant amnesty to the militants for militancy to stop (Amaize 2008b:23).

Later added to these was the demand for the release of Henry Okah; firstly from an Angolan prison and then from Jos prison.

The propriety of the term 'amnesty' under the ensuing circumstance is of no pertinence here even though it has generated a bit of debate as its etymology is associated with criminals; which the Niger Delta agitators insist they are not. For the purpose of this discourse, let its pertinence reside in the search for peace to secure Nigeria's political stability and national security. Amnesty here should be a discerning of a political will to right the wrongs of the past which, for this article, is more than government embarking on massive development initiatives in the region, say, in the form of infrastructural development. This without prejudice to the argument that government could have used high concentration of development projects in the Niger Delta region as a deliberate strategy to achieve peace there such that it would be clear to all that any restiveness there would be considered criminal and dealt with accordingly. But government insisted on complete cessation of violence and the creation of an enabling environment (of peace) as a condition precedent to any genuine development initiative. This is partly because multinational construction giants are known to have abandoned contracts awarded to them in the region on the grounds of insecurity. So, government considered it better to push the amnesty agenda, get all the categories of militants to surrender their arms, and then rehabilitate the militants while government start work on the development projects.

Government's idea of a post-amnesty programme for the development of the Niger Delta region rests essentially in 'engendering enduring infrastructural and social development in the region'. This is because the problems in the region are essentially human and development-related. In this vein, the

Secretary General of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) notes that ‘the challenge is now for the Federal Government to develop the Niger Delta following the surrendering of arms by the militants’ (Oyadongha 2009b:8). This was just as the stakeholders in the Niger Delta affairs ‘advised the Federal Government to immediately embark on massive construction of roads and bridges linking all the riverine oil communities in the Niger Delta, especially now that the amnesty has expired and militants have surrendered their arms’ (Oyadongha 2009c:8).

Upon receiving amnesty, ex-militants ‘were registered and given cards and have been collecting salaries as ex-militants’ (Nnochiri 2010:20). The Federal Government Amnesty Committee has continued to dismiss claims that the Amnesty Programme has failed by citing tangible evidence, among them the mobilisation of ex-militants for various training programmes in Nigeria and in overseas institutions. Over 7,000 ex-militants are said to have so far been allocated to both local and international off-shore training centres since August 2010 and 480 of those already trained are awaiting deployment to off-shore facilities.

Alluding to the success of the Amnesty Programme, President Goodluck Jonathan in a speech to woo delegates at the Peoples Democratic Party presidential primaries on 13 January 2011 insists that:

If we had not addressed the challenges in the Niger Delta, our oil price would not have reached the minimum the production dropped below one-third but now we can produce above the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) quotas (Fabiya 2011:9).

Thus, while the Amnesty Programme has resulted in relative peace, such that Nigeria’s oil production which dropped from 2.6 million barrels a day to about one million at the peak of the unrest between 2006 and 2009 has now risen to 2.1 million barrels daily, recent upsurge of violence has raised doubts about the programme’s ability to tame the monster of militancy in the Niger Delta. The resurgence of violence has even assumed a more frightening dimension.

Post-Amnesty Violence: Nature and Episodes

Many observers who believed the Amnesty Programme would not work were surprised to see the larger of the militant groups embracing it, handing over their weapons and accepting ‘a larger share of revenue from the Niger Delta oilfields in return for suspending their independence struggle’ (Laing 2010:2). Surprisingly, just when people had come to believe the programme would succeed after all, remnants of the splinter groups began to sabotage it and to take the battle sometimes outside the creeks, upland and even to the seats of

government; and this portends a larger threat to the nation's security. This trend first became manifest in the Atlas Cove bombing on the eve of the commencement of Amnesty in 2009. This destroyed the capacity of this major petroleum products supply and distribution facility that takes petroleum products feedstock from ocean-going vessels and distributes same (Amaize et al 2009:1) from receiving petroleum products. This facility is the source of petroleum products' distribution to the entire south-west of Nigeria, including Lagos State, Kwara State and the South South states of Edo and Delta. The attack, conducted outside the boundaries of the Niger Delta by the Niger Delta militant group MEND, prompted the then NNPC boss, Mr. Sanusi Barkindo, to lament thus:

...it is the first time this type of incident has happened in Atlas Cove... everybody concerned was taken by complete surprise because this facility had been secured on a twenty-four hour basis, seven days a week... (Amaize et al 2009:5).

The event left military officers who were safeguarding the station dead, including a Navy Commander. The militants who carried out the operation came in as many as 15 boats early in the evening (8:15 pm), placed dynamites on a critical angle of the pipelines and blew it up without the Nigerian security system being astir (Amaize et al 2009:5).

This fits into the contention of Ylonen (2005:53) that 'these crises illustrate the weakness of the Nigerian state [as] they demonstrate the limitations of the governance structures to overcome challenges to the national government before they occur.' To further underscore the magnitude of the threat which the activities of the militants posed to the nation's security, a day after the militants bombed the Atlas Cove oil facility, President Yar'Adua immediately changed the Defence Minister. In a minor cabinet reshuffle affecting only two ministries, the Minister of Interior, Major-General Godwin Abbe a retired infantry soldier swapped positions with Alhaji Shettima Mustapha who moved from the Defence Ministry to that of Interior. 'Given the background of the new [Defence] Minister', the call to his new portfolio aimed at 'fast tracking the ongoing peace process in the [Niger Delta] region, especially critical issues that concern defence' (Idonor 2009:5). One would have expected that the gravity of the security concerns the Niger Delta crisis has created would compel the federal government's counter measures to be commensurate with them, but it all seemed rather cosmetic. By and large, government efforts ended in a debacle as a full-scale military action between the militants and the military (JTF) broke out in the Ijaw Gbaramatu creeks. According to Oyadonga:

What started as mere ill-equipped fighting band in the mangrove swamp of the Niger Delta has snowballed into a deadly war machine that would hold the nation by the jugular. From this poorly organised rag tag gang emerged a disciplined fighting machine using speedboats, machine guns and rocket propelled grenade launchers to carry out precise attack on installations in the region. The initial thinking that the military would rout the rampaging militants in a matter of days turned out to be a mirage (Oyadongha 2009a:9).

By 4 October 2009 when the Amnesty offer officially ended, several militant groups had embraced the scheme while a couple (especially the MEND) did not. This was a sign that militant activities in the region was not completely over. Post-amnesty militants' activities continued with upland bombings with consequential deaths and loss of property. The first of these and which aborted a post-amnesty dialogue for stake holders in the oil-rich town of Warri occurred on 15 March 2010. Here, two explosions occurred some 200 meters outside the perimeter fence of the Delta State Government House Annex, Warri, and the venue of the summit. This facility is the alternate seat of the government of the oil-rich Delta State after Asaba, the State capital. In attendance at the conference was a former Chief of Defence Staff General Andrew Owoye Azazi (rtd) who later became the National Security Adviser (NSA). He had just ended his welcome address as the occasion's chairman when the first bomb exploded. Others in the gathering included Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan, Governor of the host Delta State; his colleagues: Adams Oshiomole of Edo State, Ikedi Ohakim of Imo State, Godswill Akpabio of Akwa-Ibom State, etc. The then acting President, Goodluck Jonathan, was represented by Ufot Ekaette, the Minister for Niger Delta among other dignitaries. The guests waived off the first blast and continued with their meeting. But when the second bomb went off at 11.15 am 'with a shattering noise that broke the outer glass of the hall and shook the building to its foundation' (Amaize et al 2010:1-5) the meeting ended abruptly as participants rushed out of the venue. One death was recorded. MEND claimed responsibility for the bombing.

Episode two happened on Independence Day (1 October 2010) when twin bomb blasts claimed the lives of 20 people, including eight security agents. This incident which occurred just about 20 meters away from Eagle Square, Abuja, the venue of the Independence Day celebrations nearly marred Nigeria's Golden Jubilee function which had a host of Heads of States and other foreign and national dignitaries in attendance. Like the Warri episode, MEND claimed responsibility for the bomb blasts. They also claimed to be protesting against government's neglect of the Niger Delta (even in the face of the Am-

nesty Programme and the stepped up process of infrastructural development in the region).

All these events constituted sufficient security breaches that resulted in the overhauling of the nation's security structure. The acting National Security Adviser to the President, Colonel Kayode Are, was dropped and General Andrew Owoye Azazi (rtd) was appointed in a substantive position. These are all pointers to the magnitude of the threat which the militants' activities posed to the nation's security (even in the face of Amnesty Programme and the ongoing development of infrastructure in the Niger Delta region). It would also be recalled that British intelligence claimed to have detected the Abuja plot in advance and sent warnings to Nigeria but this did not prevent the attack. That perhaps explains the absence of the then British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, who was billed for a key role. So far, five MEND-related suspects have appeared in court over the Abuja blasts. There were no arrests over Atlas Cove and Warri.

The United Nations Security Council on 4 October 2010 condemned the Independence Day bombings as a 'reprehensible act of terrorism' and urged all member-states to cooperate actively with Nigeria to bring the perpetrators to justice. While insisting that terrorism in whatever form was 'criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of the motive' it 'stressed the need to combat all forms of threats to international security caused by terrorist acts' (Bayagbon 2010c:6).

But these official reactions did not deter the militants nor did they stop their activities. A bloody gun duel broke out on 18 November 2010 between soldiers of the JTF and the militants who re-grouped under a post-amnesty group – The Niger Delta Liberation Force (NDLF) – under 'General' John Togo who repelled the military (Amaize 2010:5). The militants also returned to their old tactics of vandalising oil installations in order to cripple the economy.

In the renewed and post-amnesty vandalism of oil installations, MEND attacked Exxon Mobil facility in Akwa Ibom State on 14 November 2010 while threatening to resume full attack on oil installations in the Niger Delta. But why has the Amnesty Programme been unable to assuage restiveness in the Niger Delta? Government's expectation over the Amnesty Programme has been largely met: the militants have renounced violence; they have surrendered their weapons and received government rehabilitation programmes for them. Peaceful has returned and infrastructural development projects are going apace in the region. So why couldn't the new-found peace reign in the region? It seems there are still issues that the Amnesty programme has not addressed.

Causes of the Post-Amnesty Militancy

As earlier indicated, while most of the militant groups keyed into the Amnesty Programme, surrendered their arms and got their members to renounce militancy, others (particularly the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) backed out claiming that the Amnesty Programme was not far reaching enough and that the pace of development of infrastructure in the Niger Delta was too slow (Bayagbon 2010b:18). MEND ‘neither accepted amnesty nor surrendered their arms’ (Amaize 2009:5). While claiming responsibility for the Warri bomb explosion at the venue of Vanguard’s Post-Amnesty conference, MEND said ‘it was to let the world know of its continued relevance in the region’ and to further protest the alleged continued marginalisation of host people from control and management of the resources of their region ‘which have been distributed among mostly Northerners while indigenes of the Niger Delta can barely survive’ (Nnadozie 2010:6).

There are also the factors on the part of government – of delayed considerations of the issues that led to the declaration of Amnesty. Thus the renewed militants’ activities were to provoke the authorities to reconstitute the Amnesty Implementation Committee to address the specific demands of the ex-militants and make those concerned to go back to the drawing board to replan the Amnesty Programme (Aziken 2010:7). This is so because, as admitted by a member of the Post-Amnesty Committee, Dr Tony Uranta, ‘the amnesty process is a failure.’ In his view, post-amnesty violence like the bomb blast in Warri has ‘no intention to hurt people but possibly angry elements still complaining about the failure of the process of amnesty may need to be engaged’ (Amaize 2010:5&8).

This contention validates MEND’s claim to seek continued relevance and the need to get the amnesty idea right. This has become imperative given the contention of the likes of Ann’Kio Briggs that post-amnesty violence ‘shows very clearly that the Federal Government, the state governments that make up the Niger Delta, all of them have missed the point of the amnesty’ (Amaize 2010:8). ‘Captain’ Mark Anthony, spokesperson of the NDLF militants said the resumption of their activities were

to draw Federal Government’s attention to the fact that some of us who accepted amnesty before were abandoned and that they should dialogue with us but the JTF came for war... They should call a conference of ex-militants to know how the amnesty programme is going and take necessary steps to correct the deficiencies (Amaize 2010:5).

Even from the rehabilitation centres, there have been echoes of protests and threats to return to violence by ex-militants who have alleged several breaches

by government authorities of ‘most of the agreements reached between the Amnesty Committee and the former militants’ (Ahon 2010:9). In this regard, for instance, a group of former militants at the Sapele Naval Base Rehabilitation Centre had alleged incompetence on the part of the resource person engaged to train them who ‘was either ill-equipped or was cutting corners’ a situation that ‘has made them to stay idle in the past three months in the training camp’ (Ahon 2010:9).

Scepticism over governments commitment towards the Amnesty Programme were further heightened by ‘a new definition of oil producing states [which] includes states through which pipelines for evacuating crude or refined products pass. [As] they are to become beneficiaries of funds [meant] for oil producing communities’ (Bayagbon 2010a:18). Again, there were speculations during the arms-surrender exercise that not all the arms in the cache of the militants were turned in. ‘Information has it that not up to 40 per cent of the war arsenals in their possession was eventually surrendered. So, the incidents you’re getting today are to confirm that they have not totally disarmed’ (Ezema 2010:5). Further quoting Ayo Opadokun, Ezema (2010:5) notes that:

These militants have been busy engaging in bunkering and bunkering provides them with hard currencies. There is no amount that the Federal Government can give them on monthly basis that will satisfy them. So each time they are broke, they will like to do something to create confusion [and] explore the situation for their own economic gains.

For government, it needed ‘to rid the Niger Delta of criminal elements masquerading as militants’ as ‘government would not fold its arms and some criminals plunge the region into another orgy of violence’. It therefore ‘had the responsibility to nip in the bud all threats of militancy’ (Amaize 2010:5). Thus the renewed (post-amnesty) violence derived from the effort of the military to stem the resurgence of militancy in the region.

Conclusion

The Amnesty Programme secured for government a new lease to continue to mine oil resources in the Niger Delta and added legitimacy to the criminal aspects of the militants’ struggles. Genuine rights agitations had long slipped out of the agenda of most of the militant groups. Militant gangs are known to have rivalled one another for the control of the attention of government and oil exploring companies who distributed largesse to them to ensure that a congenial atmosphere prevailed for the continued oil exploitation. A common saying among the militants while the disarmament was going on was

‘money for the weapons’, meaning that the disarmament was cash-induced. If that was so, it also meant that the militants’ struggle was also mercenary. Government has astutely denied that militants received monetary inducements to disarm.

Other gang leaders were satisfied with the euphoria of being considered temporarily important and to interact with the highest level of power at the Presidential Villa in Abuja and being put on monthly stipends with further assurance of receiving patronage from government and the oil prospecting companies. Laing (2010) who noted that the militants ‘accepted a larger share of revenues from the Niger Delta oil fields in return for suspending their independence struggle’ maintained that such revenues went into individuals pockets – hence, were loots. It is not expected that such loots would last forever. They can only be replenished under a crisis-ridden environment. So, the orgy of war has to resurge. A near-permanent resolution to this trend would be to institute a true democratic culture which would ensure that powers reside in the people through an owner-control or at least host participation in the control of the resources of the Niger Delta – oil and gas. Otherwise the Amnesty Programme and other similar initiatives would remain mere palliatives.

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