

# Oiling Regional Insecurity ?

The implications of the Niger Delta Crisis  
for Security and Stability in the Gulf of  
Guinea and West Africa

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# OILING REGIONAL INSECURITY? THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS FOR SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA AND WEST AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

Since 'Oil Policy in the Gulf of Guinea: Security and Conflict, Economic Growth and Social Development' (Traub-Merz and Yates, 2004), the regional complexities and implications of the deepening crisis in Nigeria's volatile Niger Delta region has drawn lesser attention in scholarship. This paper argues that the dangerous twist of events in Nigeria's delta- notably the June 2008 surprise attack on Shell-operated Bonga offshore oil platform located deep into the Atlantic Ocean- has turned the Gulf of Guinea straddled between West and Central Africa into a putative security quandary. To grasp the diverse regional ramifications of insurgency activities in the Niger Delta, the paper interrogates the following questions: In what different ways, is the delta insurgency driving the militarisation and securitisation of the Niger Delta, Gulf of Guinea and West Africa? What would the ongoing attempts toward greater integration of West Africa into a transnational and globalised security arrangement by key western countries portend for national and regional security? As the epicentre of world oil production shift to weak and unstable developing countries in the region, and elsewhere across Africa, how might this shift affect the security needs and concerns of countries in the Gulf of Guinea? In the specific case of the oil producing countries within the Gulf of Guinea that are currently experiencing varying degrees of governance failures and regimes instability, how is the Niger Delta crisis compound their domestic security problems? How might they, individually and collectively, pursue their security needs with/out excessive external manipulations and considerations? What role, if any, should ECOWAS (and other pan-Africa organisations) play in addressing the far-reaching security concerns arising from growing insurgency in the Niger Delta?

# OILING REGIONAL INSECURITY? THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS FOR SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA AND WEST AFRICA

*"Oil can be a force for development or it can be a major impetus for war... The issue is how to make sure that oil is a force for development rather than the excrement of the devil."<sup>1</sup>*

## INTRODUCTION

In February 2008, the Brookings Institution published its Index of State Weakness in the Developing World (Rice and Patrick, 2008)<sup>2</sup> on which 32 African countries featured among the 50 worst performers. Surprisingly, countries in the later band included African oil producers such as Sudan, Angola, Chad, Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria which ranked 28 on the list of "critically weak" states.<sup>3</sup> The Report insisted that the performance of Nigeria, the most important oil producing country in the Gulf of Guinea, "matters enormously to the West African region, and its further faltering or even potential failure would have far-reaching regional and international ramifications."<sup>4</sup> Oil is partly at the heart of this concern about the governance and developmental misadventures facing Nigeria (Martina Ottaway cf. Schubert, 2006: 64; Lynn and Gary, 2004; Lynn, 2005).<sup>5</sup> Some of the country's fallings, ascribed broadly to the "paradox of plenty," are distinguished by the appalling combination of political alienation, economic marginalisation and environmental devastation in the Niger Delta; the region that accounts for virtually all the crude oil and gas production sustaining Nigeria's accumulative base since 1970. There is already a rich scholarship on critical aspects of the contradictions of oil-based accumulation and the Niger Delta Question (NDQ). This, in turn, is fuelling a vicious militarisation of the Niger Delta as underscored by the growing inability of the state to maintain law and order, and effective political authority across the Niger Delta. In the context of what I described elsewhere as the "de-authoritisation" and "de-legitimisation" of state power, the in/actions,

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Karl Lynn, cited in African Oil Policy Initiative Group, African Oil: A Priority for US National Security and African Development, 2002: 6.

<sup>2</sup> See Susan Rice and Stewart Patrick, Index of State Weakness in the Developing World'. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2008-08-12

<sup>3</sup> These are countries falling within the bottom quintile on key issues such as inflation, rule of law, control of corruption, conflict intensity, gross human right abuses, incidences of coups, political instability and absence of violence, child mortality, access to improved water and sanitation.

<sup>4</sup> 'Nigeria 'Critically Weak', says Brookings report', ThisDay Online, 11-03-2008

<sup>5</sup> Samuel R. Schubert, Revisiting the Oil Curse', Development, 49, 3, September 2006: 64

of the Nigerian state is taken as central to understanding the genealogy and changing character of violence and disorder in that region.

Even if some of the ideas are still exploratory and tentative, my 'modest' intent in this paper is to draw critical attention to some of the complex external ramifications of the Niger Delta crisis, and how they are complicating security and stability in the Gulf of Guinea. Since '*Oil Policy in the Gulf of Guinea: Security and Conflict, Economic Growth and Social Development*' (Traub-Merz and Yates, 2004) was published, the regional scope and complexities of the crisis in Nigeria's delta region have still not been sufficiently interrogated in scholarship.<sup>6</sup> On aggregate, what has been produced is disproportionately focused on two strands. First, and predominantly, is the school of thought persuaded that the current regime of anarchy and disorder across the ND poses a fundamental challenge to peace and stability only within the immediate region, or at best, within Nigeria only. The second perspective draws attention to how the Niger Delta crisis is threatening global energy security and the overall geo-strategic interests of key global players<sup>7</sup>; principally the United States and its Western European allies, but also emerging powers such as China and India. Instead, this paper argues that in-between these two broad focuses is an often ignored but third strand: i.e. the complex thrusts and implications of the ongoing crisis for regional security in the Gulf of Guinea and West Africa. My point is that given the dangerous turn of events in the ND in recent times, the outlines of a putative security quandary are resonating throughout the proximate regions; from the coast of West Africa to Central and Southern Africa.

Against the latter backdrop, several questions become central to understanding the multiple and complex regional ramifications of insurgent activities in the Niger Delta. In what different ways, for instance, is delta insurgency serving as the undercurrent for the militarisation and securitisation of the GoG and West Africa? What would the creeping integration of the regions into transnational and globalised security arrangements by key western countries portend for national and regional security? Out differently, to what extent are these attempts likely to strengthen and/or further undermine national and sub-regional security in the GoG and West Africa? As the epicentre of world oil production gradually shifts to weaker and unstable developing countries in the Global South, what security needs and concerns are emerging and needed to be met? Given that the oil producing countries within the Gulf of Guinea were already experiencing varying degrees of governance failure and regime instability, how is the Niger Delta crisis compounding their respective internal security concerns? How might the affected countries, and the region at large, pursue their security needs with/without overarching external manipulations and

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<sup>6</sup> Two notable exceptions in this respect are: Nicholas Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells: The Dirty Politics of African Oil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; Richardo Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*. London: Hurst and Company, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> CSIS, *Security in the Gulf of Guinea...*

considerations? What role, if any, should ECOWAS play in addressing the far-reaching security concerns arising from insurgent mobilisations and violent conflicts?

In the next chapter, this paper provides a short template for understanding the politics of oil vis-à-vis the chronicle of disorder in the Niger Delta. Second, it considers the character of oil states in the GoG, and how some of the internal contradictions they face, individually and collectively, is shaping and redefining the political economy of regional security. The third section explores the nexuses between the crisis, security and stability in the GoG. The logic underlying this section, and indeed the entire paper, is simply that in a highly interdependent but volatile regional complex that is the GoG, the security dilemma facing individual member-countries cannot be contained within but must, with time, spill-over national boundaries with profound implications. For instance, there is an ominous parallel between the early genealogies of the Liberian civil war and the trajectory of similar wars in neighbouring within the Mano River zone (Sawyer, 2005). My intention therefore is to bring into sharper focus some of the salient relationships between insurgent activities (such as the one in vogue in Nigeria's delta) and their spill-over into GoG countries, and on the flipside, go further to show the various ways in which the ongoing crises in Nigeria's delta are connected with and fuelled by a range of regional security issues and problems. The final section examines the feasibility of a regional security approach in the GoG, and the alternative futures for peace and stability in that region.

## OIL AND THE POLITICS OF DISORDER IN NIGERIA'S DELTA: A SYNOPSIS

The sheer scale of oil industry operations in the Niger Delta is overwhelming: with at least 7200 kilometres of pipelines, 159 oil fields, and 275 flow stations (O'Neill, 2006: 3). In *'The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria's Delta Unrest'*, the International Crisis Group, ICG, (2006: i)<sup>8</sup> argued that a "potent cocktail of poverty, crime and corruption is fuelling a militant threat to Nigeria's reliability as a major oil producer", and one might add, the banality of state power in the country.

Prior to the 1990s, Niger Delta communities articulated their grievances within the framework of a peaceful but assertive demand for greater political and administrative autonomy, devolution of power and state creation. They believed these to be the best routes to bringing government closer to the people and setting the stage for sustainable political, economic and social development. Although there is still a strong undercurrent of politically-defined agitations, the tactic has changed to that of a vociferous demand for greater fiscal allocations based on a reworked revenue allocation formula granting oil communities larger shares of oil revenue, and to resource control, i.e. the right of

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<sup>8</sup> International Crisis Group, *The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria's Delta Unrest'*, Africa Report No. 115, 3 August 2006: 36pp

communities to own oil wealth while paying rent and royalty to the state. There are, of course, some justifiable grounds for these increasingly assertive demands. In the first instance, after almost five decades of oil exploration and production, the oil communities have become miserably impoverished far more than other parts of the federation. Secondly, host oil communities have watched as huge revenues accruing from crude oil over that period went disproportionately towards the physical development of other regions, and caused reckless squandering by other regional elites, and their own too. Third, years of unregulated and irresponsible oil production have left many communities in irreversible ruins, even as their access to basic subsistence opportunities is undermined. Fourth, the oil communities' argue with justification that prior to the advent of crude oil, the different regions developed on the basis generous annual fiscal allocations based on the principle of derivation. But with oil displacing other commodities, the revenue allocation formula has steadily nosedived: from 100% to 50% and presently, 13%.

It is a curious irony that communities hosting the oil and gas industry in many weak and developing countries often lived in abject poverty, unemployment, poor health, etc (Widener, 2007: 85-86). Peel (2005: 3) has argued that in the case of Nigeria's delta conflict is "the product of human self-interest rather than of some atavistic, visceral rivalry of the type that some outsiders lazily and insultingly describe as the sources of conflicts in African countries." Idemudia and Ite (2006: 402)<sup>9</sup> believed that the paradox of oil wealth is the by-product of structural deficiencies inherent in the Nigerian State; precisely the types that former UNSG Kofi Annan claimed are forcing local populations "excluded from discussions on access and control of natural resources" to see little benefit from them (cf. Lindsay, 2005: 4).

The groundswell of new community- and grassroots- based protests had started to coalesce during the late 1980s, partly in response to the biting effects of IMF/World Bank-imposed Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which significantly eroded the capacity of the citizenry to live the most basic but decent life. These protests also matured in the context of a nationwide anti-military and pro-democracy clamour for a quick return to civilian rule, and the global mood which favoured minority and environmental rights movements and their emancipatory rhetoric, Given the trend of events in recent times; the spate of gang wars, cult activities, kidnappings and hostage taking, arson and attacks on oil personnel and infrastructure, the delta region is becoming the epicentre of a notorious security conundrum in Nigeria, in the broader Gulf of Guinea and across West Africa. According to the UNDP, the Niger Delta currently plays host to 120-150 'high risk and active violent conflicts in the three key oil producing states of Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa (Watt, 2007: 639). This last interface is, unfortunately, least interrogated even though the transnational character of oil is responsible for defining the pattern of global accumulation in unprecedented scale and intensity.

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<sup>9</sup> Uwafiokun Idemudia and Uwem E. Ite, 'Demystifying the Niger Delta Conflict: Towards an Integrated Explanation', ROAPE, 109, 2006; 391-406

Precisely, then, the point is that that what is happening in contemporary Niger Delta is the culmination of many years, even decades or centuries, of state neglect and underdevelopment regardless of huge revenues from oil. Still, the state is by no means the only culprit in the surge of violence in the delta region as multinational oil companies are also implicated since they are often locked in a rather opaque and obtuse relationship with the state. They have exploited the poorly regulated Nigerian oil industry as an attractive climate for huge returns on investment. Secondly, in the context of a weak and eroding capacity of the state to meet vital developmental responsibilities to oil communities, multinational oil companies have become the government that the communities know, feel and relate with on daily basis. Finally, because oil companies routinely place distress calls for assistance to the state and its security agencies, the continued exploitation of oil is only possible continuous security protection. Oil companies operating in the country have had a long history of romance with the police, military and other state security services, and such relationships in conjunction with other factors drive insecurity and instability in the delta.

This is not in any measure to exonerate the state. Contrary to the expectation that a civilian administration would be more sensitive in managing the delta problem, for instance, the Obasanjo administration authorised punitive military action against Odi community on the eve of Christmas in 1999 (HRW/Africa, 1999); only a few months after its inauguration in May (Ukeje, 2001).<sup>10</sup> This type of even-handed, excessive and premeditated military response to what is a normal law and order problem has become the rule than exception, and a major source of irritation between troops and local communities. Thus, as government's response shifted towards greater use of coercive military force, an array of predatory tendencies are elevated into the public domain. Undoubtedly, the presence of a large and aggressively disposed military is exacerbating tensions and violence in resource-rich communities, making them one of the primary motivators of the conflict (McCulloh, 2003: 8-9). The final phase matured during the early 2000, against the backdrop of the recruitment of young men, and women, from a widening cesspool of unemployed youths, by politicians during the build-up to the 2003 and 2007 General Elections respectively. This phase is marked less by community activism than by assertive militancy, and increasingly, banditry and criminality. It is resulting in the slide of urban spaces such as Port Harcourt and Warri into what had been described in another context as the "labyrinth of lawlessness" with different armed gangs and cult groups openly engaging themselves in violent contestations for spheres of influence and control through kidnappings, killings, sabotaging of oil infrastructure, and sometimes, the pursuit of sheer vendetta.

Perhaps what is unfolding now is that the Nigerian petro-state is burdened by a "volatile mix of forces" giving shape to "the oil complex" (Watt, 2007: 643). In terms of the ramifications, therefore, we are seeing the interplay and convergence of a whole range of

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Ukeje, 'Oil Communities and Political Violence: The Case of Ijaws in Nigeria's Delta Region. *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*, 13: 4, Winter 2001: 15-36 (London), Frank Cass Publishers

actors operating within the Nigerian oil complex: military (foreign, local, private and state) and other security forces; local and global civil society entities deploying discourses of human, minority and environmental rights; trans-national oil businesses; local political forces such as ethnic militias, paramilitaries, cult groups, separatist movements; multilateral development agencies and financial corporations; and finally, those in the shady world of drugs, oil bunkering, and arms dealing. It is an ominous interplay that is turning the delta region into “embattled zone of the most primitive accumulation”, or simply “ungoverned spaces<sup>11</sup>” (Watt, 2007: 644). This “ungovernability” is accentuated by at least two other factors that continue to have profound salience today. The first one, relating to the water-logged topography of the Niger Delta has ensured that lawlessness and criminality by armed gangs could take place along the creeks and waterways without detection or interdiction by the state whose writ, in any case, is too short and thin.<sup>12</sup> It is not new that the state faces a herculean task in maintaining effective patrol of the poorly charted waters of the delta, and its elongated coastline stretching about 286,000 square kilometres of water (almost one-third of the total land surface of Nigeria).<sup>13</sup> Kemedi (2006: 3)<sup>14</sup> had warned that the “geography of the Nigerian Delta, a maze of creeks and swamps, and its marginalisation from state transportation and communication infrastructure, make the region extremely difficult to police.”<sup>15</sup> Because of the very limitations of the state (Ibid., 2008: 190-191), attacks by militants often exposed the security underbelly that Nigeria lacks “offshore security capability” despite the fact that huge investments are taking place in its deep waters (AOPIG, 2002: 15).

The porosity of the Niger Delta has also made it a lot easier for the spread of dangerous a variety of small arms and light weapons used by armed gangs. Historically, the phenomenon of small arms and light weapons proliferation has a much longer colonial antecedent than scholars of the contemporary history of the Niger Delta region have acknowledged (Burn, 1921; Ikime, 1972; Ume, 1980; Asiegbu, 1984; Sesay and Simbine, 2006). Throughout the long years of colonial rule, weapons and firearms were some of the

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<sup>11</sup> The notion on “ungoverned spaces” is credited the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for African Affairs, Teresa Whelan. (Cf. Watt, 2007: 644).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Navy Reiterate Readiness to Ensure Waterways Safety’, The Tide online, Sunday, July 22, 2007; ‘RSG to Assist Navy Fight Criminality in N’Delta’, The Tide Online, Sunday, July 22, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Ahomefula Ogbu, ‘Naval Chief: Warships Not for N’Delta’, ThisDay, 08-04-2008. [www.thisdayonline.com](http://www.thisdayonline.com) Accessed 06/08/2008 at 18.04 hours.

<sup>14</sup> Dimieari von kemedi, ‘Fuelling the Violence: Non-State Armed Actors (Militia, Cults, and Gangs) in the Niger Delta’, Niger Delta Economies of Violence Working Papers No. 12, 2006, University of California, Berkeley, USA.

<sup>15</sup> Michael J. Watts, ‘Antimonies of Community: Some Thoughts on geography, Resource and Empire’, *Trans Inst British Geogr*, 29, 2004: 195-216.

most prominent articles of trans-Atlantic trade between coastal middlemen and European merchants. The trouble then, and also now, is that none of the groups could vouchsafe for the sincerity of government to find a definitive solution to the myriad developmental challenges facing the Niger Delta. Indeed, there is an informed strand of opinion believing that government is merely acting up, pretending to be serious whereas notable functionaries still sponsor armed gangs to intimidate political opponents, and accord them political cover in the event of arrest. Some even claimed that government's cash-for-arms initiative in 2005 was more of a façade to showcase to the public that it was doing something. The overall implication is that government is yet to take counsel from its past mistakes in pursuing present and future arms collection arms collection initiatives in the Niger Delta; a task that can only commence and be pursued to a logical conclusion after government might have successfully gained the goodwill, trust and confidence of the people.

Although figures are not readily available, there may have been an increase in the amount of weapons and ammunitions now held by militant groups. The arrest of Henry Okah, believed to be a major supplier of weapons and ammunitions to militants in far-away Luanda, Angola, in September 2007, and his subsequent extradition to Nigeria to face charges of gun-running and treason, is particularly instructive. Similarly, the discovery that weapons in safe keep at the national armament depot may have been sold clandestinely to militants raise even graver concerns about the complicity of top military and government functionaries in arming delta militants.

## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF OIL STATES IN THE GULF OF GUINEA

Less than half of the over 200 countries of the world have proven oil reserves, and of that 18 are located in Africa. As the epicentre of world oil production shift from the Global North to weaker and less stable developing regions in the Global South, the GoG oil states come into bolder view. This is particularly because the oil reserves of some of the most powerful countries in the world are not large enough to meet their ever increasing demand for energy at least for now, and perhaps also in the near future forcing them to rely substantially on importation (Lindsay, 2005: 1).<sup>16</sup> Presently, three African countries: Nigeria, Angola and Algeria, are among the top ten countries that supply 88% of the crude oil consumed in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Available data indicate that Africa's share of the global oil market is still smaller, compared to that of the Middle East which seats on an estimated

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Lindsay, 'The Security Threat to Oil Companies in and out of Conflict Zones', Business Briefing: Exploration and Production, The Oil and Gas Review, 2005, Issue 2: 1-5.

<sup>17</sup> See, 'Crude Oil and Total Petroleum Imports Top 15 Countries', Energy Information Administration, Official Energy Statistics from the U.S. Government, March 12, 2008. [www.eia.gov/pub/oil\\_gas/petroleum/data\\_publication](http://www.eia.gov/pub/oil_gas/petroleum/data_publication) Accessed June 10, 2008

700 billion barrels of oil, it is definitely on the rise as new oil field (Dieterich, 2004: 31).<sup>18</sup> From the table below, for instance, all the regions of the world have experienced an increase in proven reserves buoyed by improved technology but the most significant discoveries are taking place in Africa as more offshore oil blocs in the deep water of the GoG come on stream.

*FIGURE 1: GLOBAL PROVED OIL RESERVES IN 1000 MILLION BARRELS (2007)*

Region	2002	2007
Middle East	685.6	775.3
Europe and Eurasia	97.5	143.7
Africa	77.4	117.5
South and Central America	98.6	111.2
North America	37.3	69.3
Asia Pacific	38.7	40.8

*SOURCE: BP STATISTICAL REVIEW OF WORLD ENERGY 2008*<sup>19</sup>

The GoG, according to Oliviera (2007) is not a well-defined geographical coverage or region.<sup>20</sup> It covers the area from the coastlines of Nigeria in West Africa to Angola in Southern Africa. In between this stretch is smaller oil producing countries namely Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Islands of Sao Tome and Principe, and Congo Brazzaville in Central Africa. Besides Chad whose oil fields are connected to Cameroon coastlines by the 1000-kilometre long Doba-Kribi pipelines, GoG oil is mostly located offshore on the Atlantic Ocean coastlines. In all, they hold 5-7% of the world's proven petroleum reserves and supply 15% of US imports.<sup>21</sup>

Douglas Yates (2004: 48-49) has offered a distinction between oil-dependent economies (e.g. EG and Gabon) and oil-dependent states (Angola, Nigeria, Congo Brazzaville).<sup>22</sup> Figure 2 below shows the degree of dependency by GoG countries in terms of oil as a percentage of GDP, oil as a proportion of government revenue, and oil vis-à-vis the proportion of export. The GoG countries, except Cameroon, are heavily dependent on oil to meet national needs. According to the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Angola has a proven oil reserve estimated at 9.04 billion barrels, and natural gas reserves standing at

<sup>18</sup> Johannes Dieterich, 'The Gulf of Guinea and the Global Oil Market: Supply and Demand', in Traub-Merz and Yates (2004: 28-37).

<sup>19</sup> See: [www.bp.com/liveassets/bp-internet/globalbp](http://www.bp.com/liveassets/bp-internet/globalbp) Accessed 09/09/2008.

<sup>20</sup> Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea. London: Hurst and Company, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> It is estimated that this figure would rise to 25% by 2015. Oliviera, 2007: 3.

<sup>22</sup> Douglas Yates, 'Changing Patterns of FDI in the Oil Economies of the Gulf of Guinea', Traub-Merz and Yates, 2004: 38-50.

270 billion cubic metres while Nigeria's estimated oil reserve is about 36.22 billion barrels and 5,215 billion cubic metres of natural gas.<sup>23</sup> Whereas petroleum exports account for \$42.00 billion of the \$42.85 billion total exports by Angola, it represented \$57.90 billion of Nigeria's total export of \$61.50 billion.<sup>24</sup> In 2006, Luanda overtook Saudi Arabia as China's chief oil supplier (Shaxson, 2007: 3), and for a brief period after the shut down of the Shell-operated Bonga Offshore Fields in June 2008, surpassed Nigeria as Africa's leading producer. In cumulative, the GoG now surpasses the Persian Gulf in oil supplies by 2:1 (AOPIG, 2002: 15).

*FIGURE 2: OIL DEPENDENCY: RANKING OF GULF OF GUINEA COUNTRIES*

	Proportion of the GDP	Proportion of Government Revenue	Proportion of Total Export
1	Equatorial Guinea	Angola	Nigeria
2	Gabon	Nigeria	Congo-Brazzaville
3	Congo Brazzaville	Congo Brazzaville	Angola
4	Angola	Equatorial Guinea	Gabon
5	Nigeria	Gabon	Cameroon
6	Cameroon	Cameroon	-

*SOURCE: DOUGLAS YATES, 2004: 48-49*

The GoG overlaps three sub-regions: West Africa (Nigeria), Central Africa (Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, EG, STP) and Southern Africa (Angola). Some of the political and security implications of this overlap shall be addressed shortly. For now, it is only useful to acknowledge that the offshore location of the oil reserves of the GoG is of several strategic advantages for the key importers such as the US. According to Traub-Merz and Yates (2004: 14), apart from been direct, the West African sea-lane boasts of no chokepoints like the Suez Canal. Until recently also, none of the offshore oil fields was encumbered by the spate of protracted communal violence around the vicinity of onshore oil sites. Due to weaker national and institutional regulatory framework by national oil companies such as the NNPC in Nigeria, and Sonagol in Angola, multinational oil companies are better able to attract favourable investment conditions and favourable tax exemptions. Politically, also, the GoG countries are deeply marred democratic deficits occasioned by entrenched autocratic rule. In those countries, fatally flawed internal distribution of oil-related benefits is raising the spectre of daily and violent conflicts.

The semblance of stability in some of the GoG countries, however, conceals deeper economic and political fractures and frustrations. Within them, profound economic, political and social contradictions exist, and are reproducing contradictory results. Like Nigeria, one

<sup>23</sup> Angola joined OPEC in 2007, while Gabon maintained its membership between 1975 and 1994 when it withdrew from the cartel (Traub-Merz and Yates, 2004: 14).

<sup>24</sup> See: [www.opec.org/library/annual statistical bulletin/interactive/fileZ/worldmapz.htm](http://www.opec.org/library/annual%20statistical%20bulletin/interactive/fileZ/worldmapz.htm) Accessed 09/09/2008.

of the most obvious and profound perversions of the oil-based economies of the GoG region is that huge revenues from oil have not translated into concrete and meaningful improvement in the welfare of the people. On the most basic human development indicators, for instance, out of the 20 African countries with the highest infant mortality rates (that is the number of deaths per thousand live births), Angola tops the worldwide list with 182.31, followed by Chad 100.36%, Nigeria 93.93%, and Equatorial Guinea 83.75%.<sup>25</sup> The GoG countries are also among the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) in sub-Saharan Africa confirming the view that oil exporting countries with relatively high per capital income mask larger disparities in social indicators comparable to those of lower income African countries. Instructively, the “benefits of Africa’s oil are not bottom-up, but top-down” (2007: 40). The experience of Equatorial Guinea whose PCI rose from \$368 in 1990 to over \$2000 in 2000 while the country slumped down the UN/HDI is worth highlighting. Despite the backdrop of excruciating poverty, Libreville, the capital of Gabon, is rated as the world’s 5<sup>th</sup> most expensive city to live after Tokyo, Osaka, Hong Kong and Zurich (Shaxson, 2007: 81). With less than 2 million people, that country, like others in the GoG is heavily indebted and poorly. .

By every measure, the GoG oil producers are becoming the proverbial beautiful brides in the highly competitive global lending and volatile oil markets (Shaxson, 2007: 2). Apart from the fact that skyrocketing oil prices have substantially increased their revenues, they are also preferred destinations for substantial foreign direct investment and favourable multilateral financial institutions because their loans are backed by petro-dollar (Karl and Gary, p. 38; Watts, 2007: 639). Because all the major countries and their multinational oil companies already have or are jostling for new business opportunities in the oil sectors, the GoG is steadily and inexorably linked to a global political economy (Dieterich, 2004: 33). The transformation is coming so quickly if one bears in mind that even very recently, the most informed analysts of global energy trends still believed that “[There] is no way around the Persian Gulf’s domination of oil markets in the foreseeable future” (Traub-Merz and Yates, 2004: 10).<sup>26</sup>

In a 2006 ranking of 114 oil exploring and oil-producing countries, Frynas and Paulo (2007: 241) showed that nine African oil producers scored very high in terms of attractiveness: Congo (Brazzaville) 8<sup>th</sup>, Angola 9<sup>th</sup>, Nigeria 11<sup>th</sup>, Libya 12<sup>th</sup>, Mauritania 17<sup>th</sup>, Sudan 18<sup>th</sup>, Cote d’Ivoire 29<sup>th</sup>, Gabon 23<sup>rd</sup>, and EG 24<sup>th</sup>. Because major African oil producers receiving oil-related FDI are themselves in the throes of serious governance crisis at the national level and pockets of tension within their oil producing areas, they have also become a dumping ground for all kinds of external offers for help to manage insurgent violence. Even as

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<sup>25</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Fact Book 2008 [Rank Order- Infant Mortality Rates]. [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rank...](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rank...) Accessed July 14, 2008

<sup>26</sup> Rudolf Traub-Merz and Douglas Yates eds, Oil Policy in the Gulf of Guinea: Security and Conflict, Economic Growth, Social Development. Bonn: Fredrich Ebert Stiftung, 2004.

returns on investment are still attractive, the spectacular re-intensification of foreign direct investment is coinciding with greater disposition on the part of the major oil importing nations<sup>27</sup> to restructure and refocus their national energy and security policies around the need to protect existing, new and future oil fields (Dunning and Wirpsa, 2004: 82; Peel, 2005: 6).

In each of the GoG countries, therefore, pockets of insurgencies have challenged the authority of central governments and provoked a spiral of internal security concerns. In Chad, it manifest as distrust and division between the north and south; while in Angola, it is evident in the substantive political ambitions of the Cabinda separatists. In Cameroon, an insurgent/ separatist movement in the predominantly Anglophone southwest bordering the Bakassi Peninsula is active, while in Nigeria, it is marked by vociferous grassroots mobilisation and militant insurgencies in the Niger Delta (2004: 15). Despite token democratic opening in many GoG countries,<sup>28</sup> some of Africa's most ruthless and sit-tight dictators continue to preside over the affairs of their respective countries: from El Hadj Omar Bongo who came to power in 1967 to Ngueso Nguema (1979), dos Santos (1979) and Paul Biya (1982) in Gabon, EG, Angola and Cameroon respectively (Shaxson, 2007: 4). Each of the leaders maintain themselves and their tiny cabal of close relatives and associates in power through expenditures that go further in securing their tenuous regime's malleability and survival. It is partly for these complex reasons that Ricardo Soares referred to them as "successful failed states"- one in which strong leadership is maintained with stupendous oil wealth side-by-side with fractured and deformed societies. In those countries, modern governmental structures are only a smokescreen masking the ebb and flow of the real/real hidden power (Shaxson, 2007: 6, 40). Lastly, the GoG oil state feature prominently on the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (measured by the degree of corruption as seen by business people and country analysts- from 10 (highly clean) to 0 (highly corrupt). According to its 2007-08 figures, the DRC and Equatorial Guinea are the worst performers with 1.9 (or 168<sup>th</sup>), followed by Congo Brazzaville 2.1; Nigeria and Angola 2.2 ((147<sup>th</sup>); Cameroon 2.4 (138<sup>th</sup>); STP (118<sup>th</sup>) and Gabon 3.3 (84<sup>th</sup>).

These perspectives however hide the dire situations many of the oil states face individually. In the case of Angola, for instance, civil war broke out soon after the abrupt termination of

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<sup>27</sup> For global geopolitical dynamics and great power rivalries for African oil, see Vijay Prashad, 'A New Cold War over Oil', Global Policy Forum, New York, August 11, 2007 <[www.globalpolicy.org/empire/intervention/2007/0812](http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/intervention/2007/0812)> accessed on 19/6/2008 at 16.30 hours; see also, Dillip Hiro, 'The Power of Oil: Scrambling for Diminishing Resources Shapes Global Relations, YaleGlobal Online, Yale Centre for the Study of Globalisation, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> On September 5, 2008, for instance, Angola held its first multiparty legislative elections since 1992 contested by 10 political parties fielding 5,198 candidates jostling for 220 parliamentary seats. Presidential elections is scheduled for 2009 by which time President dos Santos would have been in power continuously for 30 years. See Indira Campos, Angola's Election: A Democratic Oil Giant? Africa Programme Paper 09/01 Chatham House, London. September 2008.

Portuguese colonial rule in 1974; a thoughtless development that played a major part in that country's lapse into a protracted and bloody civil war that locked the main warring factions into the proxy wars of the Cold War era. With the repudiation of armed struggle by Jonas Savimbi-led UNITA in the 1990s, the daunting task of post-war reconstruction commenced. The war however did not affect the country's oil reserves which were safely offshore, except for the attempt by the separatist movement, the *Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda*, in the northern coast separated from Angola by a narrow strip of territory owned by Congo. Even though the 9<sup>th</sup> largest oil supplier to the US at 300,000 bpd (out of its 750,000 total production), and the second largest non-OPEC supplier outside the western hemisphere (Volman, 2003: 575), huge revenues from oil are still not fairly and equitably distributed; in a lot of cases, they are lost to corruption in high places.

At the time of writing, however, the first multiparty elections since 1992 has taken place to elect members into the national assembly, with plans to hold Presidential elections in 2009; after three decades of President Dos Santos rule.

Equatorial Guinea, on the other hand, has one of the fastest growing GDP's in the world since joining the league of oil producers in 1996.<sup>29</sup> With a total population of 486,000 inhabiting five small islands ensconced between Cameroon and Gabon, commercial production of crude oil began when the French multinational oil company, TotalFinaElf, along with ExxonMobil, drilled the Ekanga fields. Like Angola, the revenue that accrued from crude oil also created an illusion of wealth in a country where 65% of the population of the 500,000 still live in abject poverty (Leech, 2007: 118). Since the coup that brought him to power in 1979, President Teodoro Obiang Nguesso has ruthlessly suppressed the opposition, ran a regime that is patently dictatorial and even gained notoriety for perpetrating one of the world's worst human rights record. In 1995, the US shut its embassy in Malabo over allegations that its ambassador was involved in witchcraft; and only months afterwards the country struck oil (Oliveira, 2007: P. 229). Angola also faces a host of internal threats: a festering crisis of political succession in the post-Nguesso era to the threat of destabilisation from the secessionist movement, *Movimiento de Autodeterminacion de la Isla de Bioko* (MAIB) against Fang majority rule, and threat from those within the innermost caucus at the presidency (Oliveira, 2007: 225-226). An attempted mercenary coup in 2004 to topple President Nguesso from power was linked to well known personalities, including Mark Thatcher, the son of the former Prime Minister of Britain.

The Islands of Sao Tome e Principe (STP) has a total population of 150,000, making it one of the smallest in Africa. Prior to the discovery of oil in offshore deep sea blocs contested by Nigeria in the 1990s, the entire country was a huge cocoa plantation (Oliveira, 2007: 233). Politically, the country received its earliest baptism of fire in 2003 when disgruntled army officers staged a botched coup d'état taking advantage of President Fradique de Menezes

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<sup>29</sup> Sunday Dare, 'The Curious Bonds of Oil Diplomacy', The Centre for Public Integrity. [www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report/](http://www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report/) Accessed 19/06/2008 at 17.03.

official trip abroad (Ibid., 2007: 238-239). Having played a major role in restoring him to power, President Menezes has maintained a cordial relationship with Abuja and favourable disposition towards the Joint Development Zone created in February 2001 to exploit the contested acreage: with a proviso that a Joint Development Authority be based in Abuja to administer the JDZ for 45 years during which oil revenues will be shared 60-40 in favour of Nigeria (Oliviera, 2007: 236). In Cameroon, President Paul Biya has ruled since 1982, with another mandate to remain in power until 2011. During that period, his country experienced some of the worst economic downturns and political repression; the type that precipitated the February 2008 riots against rising food cost of food and fuel in Yaoundé and Douala as well as in other urban centres. A separatist movement, the Southern Cameroon National Council, has sprung up in the western provinces adjacent to the disputed Bakassi Peninsula.

Out of all the GoG oil states, Gabon is by far the most 'stable' as El Hadj Omar Bongo has held on to power since 1968. Based on estimates, the country's proven oil reserve increased from 1.3 million barrels in 1996 to 2.5 billion in 2004- making it the third largest in Africa (Leech, 2007: 119). Paradoxically, only about one percent of total land area of the country is under cultivation, making the country overly dependent on agricultural and consumer goods (Karl and Gary, n.d. 38). This is by no means an extreme basket case as bigger African oil producers squander oil wealth on similar kinds of import. Finally and despite oil wealth, Gabon is rife with some of the worst inequalities in the country of 1.2 million people (Leech, 2007: 120). The country maintains a national army comprising 1320 soldiers, 120 and 100 naval and air force personnel respectively that are poorly trained, poorly motivated and hardly to be trusted.<sup>30</sup> This, no doubt, is too miniscule to provide adequate security to oil workers and installations (CPI, 2008: p. 3 of 5). It was against this backdrop that the government in Libreville contracted Military Professional Resources Incorporated based in Virginia, to help upgrade the armed forces in 1998. In March 2003, Gabonese paramilitary police occupied the island of Mbagne, a tiny territory in the oil-rich waters in the Bay of Corisco claimed by both Gabon and Equatorial Guinea since 1970 (Volman, 2003: 575).

What conclusions might be distilled from the synopsis of the political economy of the GoG oil states? In the first instance, they are experiencing quite similar types of governance and economic crises Secondly, because of their oil wealth they are easily able to leverage external support precisely because the external policy environment is tolerant and better disposed towards rewarding over-dependence (Karl and Gary, *The Global Record*, p. 41). This, in part, is why it is generally believed that in such countries, oil is a strong factor impeding democratisation and sustaining a long line of authoritarianism. From the country cases, it is obvious that the very nature of oil helps to irrigate political power towards a unitary and oppressive centre while sustaining this pattern requires reliance on force/coercion/intimidation. Thirdly, because they are surrounded by an aura of

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<sup>30</sup> It is reported that the Presidential Guard comprised of 350-strong Moroccan troops). See, 'Making a Killing', The Centre for Public Integrity. [www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report.aspx](http://www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report.aspx).

illegitimacy and regime insecurity the regimes discussed have had to invest heavily on security to wade off and suppress internal dissent. Fourth, in the context of a limited writ and weak capability, maritime security has become a major problem as demonstrated by the high number of pirate attacks along the coasts of Southern Cameroon and the GoG which are much more than the African average.

There is also a clear nexus between conflicts and criminality/banditry. It is not by coincidence, for instance, that there is a nexus between criminality and banditry as countries along the GoG sharing maritime boundary with those of the coast of Cape Verde are responsible for more than half of all African cocaine seizures in West Africa and transshipment point for drugs from South America to markets in Western Europe (ARB, July 1-31, 2007: 17175A). The fifth point is that the civil societies in each of the countries are becoming critical and assertive in their engagement with governments despite the risks of repression. Finally, because the oil-rich countries of the GoG present “a politically pliant alternative” (Oliviera, 2007)<sup>31</sup> to other volatile oil regions, worldwide attention and interest in the region has grown significantly despite heightened unrest and lawlessness. What, then, are the regional security implications of these complex developmental mazes?

## THE NIGER DELTA CRISES, SECURITY AND STABILITY IN THE GULF OF GUINEA

The conclusion that “local and regional conflicts are becoming less relevant in the Gulf of Guinea, as oil exploration and production is increasingly moving from onshore locations further out to the sea” is no longer tenable (Straub-Merz and Yates, 2004: 8). Clearly, a number of developments then and now, proved this assertion off target. My intention in this section is to take on two key issues: first, to what extent is the insurgency in Nigeria’s delta region accentuating insecurity in and the securitisation of the GoG? This important question is underscored, in part, by two crucial factors: One, is that as the epicentre of world production shifts to poorly governed and unstable countries traditional security mechanisms become inadequate or outright obsolete, and the need for new ones urgent. Second, because the fate of Nigeria has profound implications for the sub-region in particular, and the entire continent of Africa (Boker and Minter, 2003: 26),<sup>32</sup> it is critical that scholarship and policy started interrogating the different aspects of the unfolding security dilemma provoked by the Niger Delta crisis. In both cases, my opinion is that even though they overlap three sub-regions, they still share contiguous maritime boundaries and a complex security zone linked by the southern Atlantic Ocean.

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<sup>31</sup> Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and Politics in the Gulf of Guinea*. London: Hurst and Company, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Salih Booker and William Minter, ‘The US and Nigeria: Thinking Beyond Oil’, *Chimera: A Publication of the USA-Africa Institute*, 1, 4, Winter 2003: 26-36.

More important for our purpose is the fact that a robust but predominantly informal network of relationships historically tied communities living in Eastern Nigeria and along the Atlantic seaboard with those inhabiting the littoral states of the GoG. This wave of seasonal migrations of labourers during the colonial era from Igbo-speaking eastern Nigeria, the Niger Delta, and from the Cameroons to work on cocoa plantations in *Panya*, the popular name for Equatorial Guinea among the labourers. Presently, there are several generations of descendants of migrant labourers of Nigerian and Cameroonian extraction domiciled in Equatorial Guinea. It was in fact the need to provide them consular support that Nigeria maintained a labour office in Malabo, the capital. Indeed, for such a long period of time, labour matters- in the context of allegations of harsh treatment of Nigerian and Cameroonian labourers) was to become a major irritant in Nigeria-Equatorial Guinea relations (Obadare, 1995). Similarly, commercial and trade routes continue to thrive between Nigeria and Cameroon, despite occasional disputes. The point of emphasis therefore is that when certain incidences occur that seemed to unsettle bilateral and multilateral relationships among countries in the GoG as we shall demonstrate shortly, they must be understood in the context of these long-standing historical realities and their current ramifications.

In more recent times, several factors internal and external to the Niger Delta are accentuating the challenges to peace and stability in the GoG. Only four would be highlighted or their far-reaching security implications. The waxing capability of militant groups in Nigeria's delta to engage in activities beyond the country is assuming a frightening dimension. In relation to this, several recent developments come to mind. In an opinion piece published in the increasingly popular electronic journal, *SaharaReporters.Com*, Alhaji Asari Dokubo, the controversial leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) asserted that in March 2005,<sup>33</sup> a group of armed militants from the Bush Boys camp stormed his residence to complain that he was leaving them out of a recruitment exercise to hire mercenaries to topple the government of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema in Equatorial Guinea (CSIS, 2005: 2; Dokubo cf. *Saharareporters.com*, February 6, 2008). The boys, he claimed, had indicated complained that the first batch of recruits received the sum of N500, 000 (about 2500 EURO) and were already heading towards Malabo before he tipped off the Nigerian Navy to intercept and arrest them.

Of course, the veracity of this claim is as important as the fact that such a plan is perfectly feasible given the "cash-at-hand" mercenary disposition of armed militants. In any case, the delta region has become a cesspit of redundant and angry youths for whom the chance to "escape" and earn money from the most dangerous and suicidal exploit in the process, is a comic and rewarding relief. Even without the extra cash, there is the backdrop of strong affinity and sympathy between the Ijaws in the Niger Delta and their kindred domiciled in

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<sup>33</sup> In 2005, an alleged coup plotting against EG using mercenaries from the ND (CSIS, 2005: 2).

but subjected to harsh and xenophobic treatments in Equatorial Guinea.<sup>34</sup> Next, the capability of the militants to strike beyond the coastal shorelines was recently confirmed with the attack on Bonga deepwater oilfield located almost 120 nautical miles inside the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>35</sup> Although the main operator of the multi-million Dollar platform, Shell, claimed that the facility which produces around 200,000 bpd has a mechanism for self-shutdown, the fact that militants of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) could braze all the elements to reach it is particularly instructive. The attack was obviously well orchestrated as it coincided with a window of opportunity provided by the withdrawal of the fleet of Nigerian Navy warships for a three-day sea exercise code-named "Exercise Sentry."<sup>36</sup> What that attack simply but gravely suggested is that the militants might also have the capability take the delta conflict dangerously close to other Gulf of Guinea countries such as Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Gabon, and the twin Islands of Sao Tome and Principe, at the least.

The 'export' potentials of Niger Delta insurgency in neighbouring GoG countries can be further gleaned from the incessant reports of attacks and killing of Cameroonian gendarmes on patrol along the disputed Bakassi peninsula, east of the Niger Delta.<sup>37</sup> In November 2007, the authorities in Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon announced the attack on occupants of a speedboat around an army post leaving 20 soldiers and 10 assailants dead. Again, in on June 15, 2008, Cameroonian authorities reportedly found the bodies of five "mutilated and bullet-riddled" persons believed to be that of at least six people abducted during previous in the same location on June 9.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the militants had issued a threat to make the Bakassi peninsula ungovernable for Cameroon despite the signing of the Green Tea Agreement and the formal handing over of the disputed territory to Cameroon in late August 2008. If that threat is consummated, it may no longer be possible to foreclose a spill over into Equatorial Guinea and Gabon that share contiguous maritime boundary with Cameroon (CPI, 2008: p. 5 of 5). The aspirations of the Southern Cameroon National Council, the Anglophone separatist movement in the western provinces sharing borders with Nigeria is similar to the one among Niger Delta militants. Theoretically, one of the salient attributes of this type of violence is that it creates a window of opportunity for groups experiencing similar

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<sup>34</sup> The estimate is that the Ijaws, mostly fishermen and artisans constitute the single largest foreign ethnic group in Equatorial Guinea.

<sup>35</sup> It is estimated that between November 2005 and May 2007, an estimated 100 million barrels of oil exported from Bonga, an oil field of common interest to Britain/Shell (55%), United States/ExxonMobil (20%), France/Elf (12.5%) and Italy/Agip (12.5) respectively. In the aftermath of that attack, the price of crude oil went up by 91cents (The Guardian, Friday, June 20, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> 'Navy Holds Sea Exercise', ThisDay Online, 23-06-2008.

<sup>37</sup> ARB, 1-30 November 2007: 17319-17320a-c.

<sup>38</sup> 'Cameroon finds mutilated bodies after pirate raid', Reuters, 15 June 2008. [www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L15550173.htm](http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L15550173.htm) Accessed on 19/06/2008 at 16.13.

situations in other contexts to emulate “earlier risers” in order to draw attention to their own plight.

Furthermore, it is not by coincidence that the GoG countries are also some of the biggest military spenders on the continent. As the pace of militarisation in response to armed insurgencies increase, however, they are likely to further widen existing social and political fault-lines and exacerbate regional insecurity. The rankings of African countries based on military expenditures as percentage of GDP is most revealing in this regard. Angola, which also sits on top of the world’s list of countries with the highest infant mortality rate, tops that of Africa’s biggest military spenders. Based on 2006 estimates, Luanda spends 5.70% of its GDP on military expenses while other African oil producing countries namely Libya, Gabon, Egypt, Algeria, Republic of Congo and Sudan, are within the top 50 spenders on their militaries worldwide.<sup>39</sup> Also, at the same time that key European countries, most especially those with colonial ties with Africa are scaling down their military presence on the continent, Libreville continues to host a 650-strong French military garrison to protect President Bongo (Shaxson, 2007: 94). In those countries, in particular, as elsewhere, militarisation is reflected in the nexus between petro-dollar and increasing government repression, the fact that oil producers are spending more money and greater percentage of their oil revenues on the military and security forces than others, and lastly, that petrodollar is supporting authoritarian rule, and in the extreme circumstance, civil war (Terry Lynn Karl and Ian Gary, *The Global Record*).<sup>40</sup>

Because of their vast oil deposits, disputes over maritime boundaries occur from time to time. These disputes do not only speak to the fact that maritime in the region are either poorly charted or policed; but also that they could very easily create opportunities for armed banditry and piracy along the coasts. Between 2000 and 2007, according to the *World Defense Review*, more maritime attacks occurred in the GoG than the rest of Africa, while the International Maritime Organisation ranked the West African sea lane as the most dangerous after the Strait of Malacca. The GoG countries, and those off the coast of Cape Verde are also believed to be responsible for more than half of all African cocaine seizures in West Africa apart from serving as transshipment points for drugs from South America to markets in Western Europe (ARB, July 1-31, 2007: 17175A). Finally, the proliferation of firearms in the Niger Delta has been linked to the broader spread and perennial problem associated with small arms and light weapons from the civil wars in adjacent countries; from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d’Ivoire in West Africa, and from far-away Angola in the

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<sup>39</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Fact Book 2008* [Rank Order- Military Expenditures-percent of GDP]. [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rank...](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rank...) Accessed July 14, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Between 1984 and 1994, OPEC countries share of annual military expenditure as percentage of total central government expenditure is thrice as much as developed countries (Karl and Gary, *The Global Record*).

southern African region. The arrest of Henry Okah, believed to be one of the major sponsors of MEND is germane here but also suggests that the delta conflict has a wider regional ramification than previously contemplated. Having fought a long and devastating civil war, it was recently estimated that Angola is still awash with almost 2.5 million small arms and light weapons in the hands of civilians (Campos, 2008: 5).

Due to the vastness and porosity of the maritime boundaries shared by the GoG countries, policing is particularly tedious for logistical and other reasons. First, apart from the Nigerian Navy, none of the other GoG and West African countries has a sizeable and well-equipped navy (or coastguard capability). On many occasions, the naval authorities in Nigeria have frankly acknowledged that paucity of funding continues to make it difficult for them to repair broken down patrol boats and service ships, or to acquire new ones capable of meeting the growing demands of sea patrol, interdiction, and counter-insurgencies. This is mainly why the GoG countries have become major beneficiaries of external military largesse; principally from the United States, but also other major countries. In December 2004, for instance, the Nigerian Navy received 15 patrol boats supposedly for securing its coastline and creeks.<sup>41</sup> Still, controversy continues to trail this type of donations as they are believed to be meant for hunting down militants that have literally taken over the creeks and waterways, and are undermining governmental authority.

This raises the point about the basis for the recent global interest towards the Niger Delta, and how that is contributing to the militarisation or securitisation of oil in the GoG. Because oil is a commodity now “intimately intertwined with national strategies and global politics and power” (Lindsay, 2005: 2), the petro-states of the GoG have become notable beneficiary of a growing international engagement with major oil importing countries in North and South America, Western Europe and Asia. Indeed, what is witnessed increasingly-- which is qualitatively different from the benign neglect of the 1990s-- is that Africa fast is becoming an arena of different kinds of geopolitical calculations and competition between western and emerging powers seeking new oil sources to meet critical domestic needs. It is beyond the scope of the paper to dwell on the content and dynamics of that relationship. Instead, the point is that such global quest-- especially by the United States, and to some extent, China-- to gain control of the GoG is also driving the deployment of hard-power (a militarist, zero-sum approaches to oil security) rather than soft-power (assisting weak and underdeveloped oil producers to meet their socio-economic and developmental needs) (Obi, 2005: 40).

Since 2002 when President George W. Bush declared African oil as to be of strategic importance to the United States, meaning in the extreme that Washington would be willing to go to war to protect its source(s), there has been considerable scaling up of that country's military presence in the GoG (Volman, 2003: 574). Indeed, the largest chunk of US foreign

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<sup>41</sup> African Oil Policy Initiative Group, African Oil: A Priority for US National Security and African Development. Washington D.C.: CSIS, 2002.

direct investment and military assistance to African countries are going to oil states like Angola and Nigeria. This, in itself, might not be a new development but it is certainly one that is assuming renewed salience in contemporary times. Under the Clinton Administration for instance, the US had anticipated and responded by setting up the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) to train the militaries of selected African countries.<sup>42</sup> MPRI also secured contract to 'professionalise' the military in Nigeria (CPI, 2008: p. 3 of 5).<sup>43</sup> Increasingly, Washington's is tilting towards a more robust engagement by designing policies to strengthen the security forces of GoG oil producing countries through the sale of arms, building their military and naval capabilities, and maintaining a visible presence in the region as a possible deterrence (Volman, 2003: 577). It has been estimated that the US Navy only spent 10 ship days in the GoG in 2004, but by the end of 2007 the forces spent 365 ship days.<sup>44</sup>

Apart from oil, there is a growing concern in the United States and among its key allies in the global coalition against terrorism that festering political instability and monumental developmental tragedies are radicalising the large Muslim population in many parts of Africa, including West African Sahel (Ukeje, 2007)<sup>45</sup> In a very invidious manner, the rhetoric of the present global war of terrorism is steadily percolating into the security language of GoG countries, most especially Nigeria which from time to time describe militants as terrorists as a way of gaining the sympathy and support of the West. Given the nexus that is unfolding between energy security and the fight against terrorism, then, there is now what Obi (2005: 38) described as the rapid 'securitisation' of development in West Africa manifesting in the protecting the market by military means.<sup>46</sup>

It is useful that the panel on regional security in Africa of the Washington-based Centre for Security and International Studies (CSIS) had argued six years ago that: "[The] importance of US oil production in the Gulf of Guinea points to developing a strategy to protect this production from terrorism, and this raises critical concerns about the role of the US military in the region and its relations with African militaries" (AOPIG, 2002: 15). Yet, there are

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<sup>42</sup>'Making a Killing', The Centre for Public Integrity. [www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report.aspx](http://www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report.aspx).

<sup>43</sup> This contract involving the Nigerian military was openly criticised by high-ranking military officers, most notably then CoAS, Lt. General Victor Malu, who questioned the propriety of MPRI proposal to slash the army from 100,000 to 50,000, and request for sensitive information about military formations. This open criticism of earned him retirement by the Obasanjo administration.

<sup>44</sup> Mark J Sorbara, 'The United States and Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea', *Petroleum Africa*, July 2007: 56-58.

<sup>45</sup> Sunday Dare, 'The Curious Bonds of Oil Diplomacy', The Centre for Public Integrity. [www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report/](http://www.publicintegrity.org/bow/report/) Accessed 19/06/2008 at 17.03.

<sup>46</sup> Cyril Obi, 'Oil, US Global Security and the Challenge of Development in West Africa', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 3-4, 2005: 38-40.

numerous and equally compelling reasons why this securitisation could further undermine security and stability in the region. It does not seem, for instance, that this externally-driven process has much to do with the genuine desire to support the aspirations of the GoG countries than the enlightened self-interest of key western countries. Much of this support, in any case, are funded and deployed against the backdrop of Washington's (and western) perception of threat to its vital interests in the region than any other factor(s). As Obi (2005: 39-40) insisted, this overwhelming strategic engagement with the GoG and West Africa is directed at "controlling both the territorial space and the resources within it...it masks a 'new' continuity in the subordination of the region to the interests of the world's sole superpower, and its allies."

It is also creating a brand of securitisation that is predominantly driven by narrowly defined notions of security than any broad-based vision for the sustainable development and empowerment of countries and peoples in the GoG. Besides, such steps share the tendency to view the challenges facing the continent from the category of risk/fear/threat than that of development.<sup>47</sup> If this trend continues, it is likely that more and more people would cultivate anti-America and anti-Western sentiments and feelings. In other words, such a high-profile presence in the GoG has the potential of sowing the seed of discord among member countries than otherwise. As western governments mount politico-diplomatic pressure on GoG governments to ensure the safety of oil personnel and infrastructures, they are also advisedly encouraging a sense of siege in the mentality of such governments and putting their own resources in the service of a sensitive political enterprise that might boomerang over time. In July, for instance, Prime Minister Gordon Brown made a controversial pledge to assist Nigeria deal with insurgent activities in the Niger Delta during the July 2008 G-8 Summit in Japan, and later that same month when President Umaru Yar'Adua paid a State Visit to the United Kingdom. Already, at the nudging of some key countries GoG oil producers are accepting unconditional but questionable military privileges assistance packages. In August 2002, for instance, President Fradique de Menezes of Sao Tome and Principe announced that he has reached an agreement with the US to build a naval base in the island-nation as a "harbour for aircraft carriers...patrol boats and for Marines stationed in the region," an action that highly unpopular among neighbouring countries that see it as just the beginning of greater US military presence in the Gulf.

Since there seems to be a convergence of views that the 2000 nautical miles of the GoG waters is too unsafe,<sup>48</sup> it might only be a matter of time and more pressure before Washington realised its ambition to find a suitable location for the proposed Africa Command (AFRICOM) as a number of countries, notably Liberia, have agreed, in principle, to host it. During the 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of ECOWAS Committee of Chiefs of Defence Staff in Monrovia in November 2007, for instance, Vice President of Liberia, Honourable Joseph

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<sup>47</sup> Rita Abrahamsen, 2004: 1- ROAPE, 677-684.

<sup>48</sup> Eugene Agha, 'Gulf of Guinea: Britain, Nigeria Meet on Security', ThisDay Online, 16/6/2008.

Boakai, claimed that the development was a good thing and that his country would appeal to African brothers to support it to host the site.<sup>49</sup> In the final analysis, there are prospects that greater U.S. and Western military presence and interests could open an unwanted window of opportunity to militants and would-be terrorists to cast their distant gaze towards western interests in the region. In the short and long terms, these perspectives would naturally suggest a new and fundamental rethinking of how the security challenges facing the GoG countries are likely to unpack in the near future.

## CONCLUSIONS: THE FEASIBILITY OF A REGIONAL SECURITY APPROACH IN THE GULF OF GUINEA

In 2005, the Washington-based Centre for Security and International Studies (CSIS) published 'A Strategic Approach to Governance and Security in the Gulf of Guinea as a trilogy to African Oil: A Priority for US National Security and African Development (2002) and Promoting Transparency in the African Oil Sector' (2003-2004).<sup>50</sup> This latest report took off from the premise that every imaginable US foreign policy interest in Africa is at play in the Gulf of Guinea, hence the zone "offers reason for hope and trepidation" (CSIS, 2005: 1). Hope, according to the report, "lies in nascent political reform efforts" with "rising awareness that successful management of oil revenues for poverty reduction will reduce instability and security threats over the long term." On the other hand, however, "[Trepidation] arises from the region's vulnerability to instability and disruption- a function of mal-governance and corruption, weak state structures, and limited regional integration (especially in the maritime sphere), the presence of large criminal syndicates based in Nigeria, organised mercenary groups able to project themselves from South Africa into the GoG, the threat of armed insurgency in Nigeria's Niger Delta, the possibility of radical Islamist action rooted in northern Nigeria or the Sahel, and uncertainty in the future succession of several autocratic governments" (2005: 1-2).

Without specifically saying so, there is an implied view that one of the most logical steps towards addressing these diverse issues should involve looking beyond individual countries. This is precisely this paper's motivation for proposing a regional approach; one in which the countries concerned, in conjunction with key development partners in the international community, pursue concerted and broad-based solutions. The question, however, is: what focus and shape should the proposed regional approach take, and within what time frame? Furthermore, what should be the role of the international community, especially the major powers such as the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and China, in the

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<sup>49</sup> AFRICOM: 'ECOWAS Defence Chiefs Have Final Say', ThisDay (Lagos), 12/11/2007.

<sup>50</sup> David L. Goldwyn and J. Stephen Morrison, A Strategic US Approach to Governance and Security in the Gulf of Guinea: A Report of the CSIS Task Force on Gulf of Guinea Security. July 2005: 38pp.

proposed initiative? Finally, what alternative futures might be envisioned for this regional framework?

One of the 14-point recommendations proposed in an earlier report by the think-tank had called for a stronger “US-Nigeria compact on regional security issues” (AOPIG, 2002: 2). Clearly, it is inconceivable that any regional approach to security in the GoG and (West Africa) would take off smoothly or invariably if the of Nigeria is not solicited. Despite the numerous governance and developmental challenges the country is facing, it is still by every measure a force to reckon with in terms of helping to mobilise support and resources for such regional initiatives. Historically, and also since the 1990s, it has played a leading role within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Organisation of African Unity/African Union, aimed at bringing peace and stability to the region and continent respectively. As a direct response to the criticisms and vehement oppositions<sup>51</sup> to the U.S. proposal to establish the Africa Command (AFRICOM), for instance, Abuja is spearheading consultations with key African leaders to establish an African Standby Force (ASF) with capability for effective patrolling of the continent’s waters.<sup>52</sup> If support for this ‘home-grown’ initiative is able to gather enough support and momentum, it might just be sufficient for the major powers, most especially the United States, to support it instead of trying to impose a parallel externally-imposed and evidently unpopular Africa Command. Already, some initiatives are in place to provide complementary support to sub-regional and regional institutions such as ECOWAS and the African Union to work out an agenda for effective policing in the GoG. As far back as August 2002, for instance, a delegation of military officers from the US, France, and GB met with representatives of the 15-member ECOWAS in an attempt to forge and expand military cooperation. The ECOWAS Monitoring Group has also been earmarked \$5.3 million worth of satellite equipments by the U.S. and EU to build a communication system, and for EUCOM to train ECOMOG peacekeepers.<sup>53</sup> What is left to be done is to facilitate the expansion of the scope to accommodate the entire stretch of the west coast of Africa and the GoG.

Nevertheless, it is a different matter entirely whether this proposal is feasible within a reasonable time-frame of, say, 10-15 years; and, if yes, what should be in place in the interim phase. A regional oil and maritime security framework for the GoG would have to navigate the complex and cumbersome policies and practices of three overlapping sub-regional groupings; that of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States ECCAS), and the South African Development

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<sup>51</sup> ‘AFRICOM: US Defence Chief Clarifies Issues’, ThisDay Online, 21/11/2007.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Yar’Adua seeks African Standby Force’, ThisDay Online, 21/11/2007.

<sup>53</sup> Global Policy Forum, ‘The Militarisation of West Africa’, West Africa, August 2, 2002. [www.globalpolicy.org/security](http://www.globalpolicy.org/security) (accessed July 20, 2008).

Community (SADC) (de Barros, 2004: 68).<sup>54</sup> The socio-political, economic and diplomatic complexities within the regions are quite immense that it might complicate the fact that the seven or so odd countries have different historical/colonial/linguistic ties they still maintain. Because ECOWAS is central as a “critical link” for the successful US regional security policy, AOPIG (2002: 16-18) had recommended that Washington’s diplomatic and military relations with ECOWAS become a priority, beginning with the appointment of a substantive US ambassador to ECOWAS. It also called for a US-ECOWAS condominium on regional security issues as a critical first-step towards overall achieving regional stability. Although it proposed that this regional-focused security assistance should entail improving base and port facilities, increasing support for regional defense attaché offices, enhancing crisis response capabilities of national and regional armies, coastal patrol, border security and brown water naval capabilities, upgrading military to military (including pilot) training as well as transferring selected military hardware, etc. (AOPIG, 2002: 18), it must also necessarily support economic growth and development in the GoG.

A model that could be as a template for the future if considerably expanded is the Joint Development Zone between Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe. Established in February 2002, the JDZ was conceived as a transnational legal framework for early-warning and the resolution of conflicts within the two countries overlapping jurisdictions in offshore oil fields. For Nigeria, was a child of necessity to avoid a repetition of the long-drawn and messy bilateral tussles with Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula. It was also an attempt to cultivate a pre-emptive bilateral relationship with Sao Tome and Principe in order to checkmate the diplomatic and security romance with the United States and other global powers in the twin-island nation (Eze and Straub-Merz, 2004: 83). A major plank of the Joint Development Zone is the Bilateral Military Commission (BMC) which is yet to be inaugurated.<sup>55</sup> It is unfortunate that the far broader Gulf of Guinea Commission that was established by treaty to ensure the peaceful exploration and exploitation of the resources of the region among member countries, tackle a range of problems such as environmental pollution, border issues, joint patrol, immigration, coordination of fishing, and to build mutual confidence and trust, is not operational.<sup>56</sup>

Even if it is convinced of the immense benefits from such a regional framework when it eventually get off the ground, Nigeria might become too overwhelmed and too distracted by mounting problems at home to scale down her regional commitments, or in the better case scenario streamline and make them better focused. Already, there is some sentiment in

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<sup>54</sup> Manuel Correia de Barros, ‘Can the Gulf of Guinea Develop a Common Regional Oil Policy?’ Traub-Merz and Yates (2004: 68-71).

<sup>55</sup> ‘Nigeria, Sao Tome to Commence Exploitation at JDZ’, The Guardian Online (Lagos), Thursday, July 10, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> The delay is due to the fact that only Nigeria and STP have ratified the treaty by 2002, short of the two-thirds signatories required (Eze and Straub-Merz, 2004: 84-85).

government circles and in the public that the era of spray diplomacy was long gone; that Nigeria is no longer in the position to throw money at problems near abroad and overseas. If this thinking creeps into policy, there is sure to be a radical and more level-headed rethinking of how Nigeria should pursue its leadership role in West Africa, and across Africa. Another direct result of the conflict in the Niger Delta for the sub-region of West Africa is that a project such as the \$500 million West African Gas pipeline expected to transport gas to neighbouring countries in West Africa might suffer. Already, even within Nigeria, part of the intractable crisis of power generation- besides the massive corruption in that sector- is that electricity generation plants designed to run on liquefied natural gas are not receiving sufficient supplies from the delta region due to the activities of armed gangs.

To conclude therefore, three alternative scenarios face Nigeria and its GoG counterparts in terms of maintaining security, especially human security. The first one is for them to rely wholesale on external dictations even as a major controversy continues on the measure/scale of such support. Secondly, there is some scope and opportunity for the GoG countries to transcend their historical, political and administrative differences in favour of greater partnerships. The final scenario is for each of them to attend to urgent domestic problems hindering the actualisation of the socio-economic and political aspirations of their citizens. In the short term, the latter might be too costly- even suicidal- for incumbent regimes in the individual GoG capitals. On the long run, however, genuine and participatory democracy, economic empowerment and the provision of social safety nets to cushion the biting effects of widespread poverty constitutes the most viable and durable antidote to insecurity and instability in the GoG and West Africa, now and in the future.