Oil pipeline sabotage in Nigeria: Dimensions, actors and implications for national security

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**Introduction**

If situated within the Cold War era conceptualisation of national security, oil pipeline sabotage does not seem to fit in properly. However, when viewed from a new paradigm of national security, recent manifestations of oil pipeline sabotage and its implications hold out serious threats for national security in Nigeria. A recent study commissioned by Royal Dutch/Shell put the amount of oil stolen each year by bunkerers or vandals in Nigeria at between 100 million and 250 million barrels. At an average of US$60 per barrel, the theft translates to a loss of about US$15 billion each year (Mumuni & Oyekunle 2007:12). This is in addition to other costs to the Nigerian state.

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In the present paper an attempt is therefore made to sketch the three main dimensions of oil pipeline sabotage in Nigeria, namely oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism/fuel scooping and oil terrorism, from the perspective of national security. First a conceptual clarification of the meaning of ‘oil pipeline sabotage’ and ‘national security’, as used in this context, is provided. This is followed by an overview of the oil pipeline network in Nigeria. Then three dimensions of oil pipeline sabotage is discussed with a view to highlighting the actors and objectives behind them. In the next section the implications of oil pipeline sabotage for national security is examined. The paper concludes with possible recommendations on how to curb the growing incidence of oil pipeline sabotage.

Conceptual clarifications

The concepts of oil pipeline sabotage and national security are pivotal to this discourse and as such, their meanings deserve to be clarified.

In terms of the Nigerian constitution, all minerals, oil and gas in Nigeria belong to the federal government. Section 44(3) states that ‘notwithstanding the foregoing provisions of this section, the entire property in and control of all minerals, mineral oils and natural gas in, under or upon any land in Nigeria or in, under or upon the territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone of Nigeria shall vest in the Government of the Federation and shall be managed in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly’ (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999). Oil extraction outside the framework of an agreement with the federal government is illegal, as is the possession of crude oil by anyone not licensed to do so. Specific crimes have also been created relating to damage to oil installations (including for the purpose of siphoning off crude oil or petroleum products) (Human Rights Watch 2002:27–28).

In Nigeria, oil pipeline sabotage is prohibited in section 1 of the Petroleum Production and Distribution (Anti-Sabotage) Act (Act 353 of 1990). The Act defines a saboteur as any ‘person who does; aids another person; or incites, counsels or procures any other person to do any thing with intent to obstruct or prevent the production or distribution of petroleum products in any part of Nigeria; or wilfully does anything with intent to obstruct or prevent the procurement of petroleum products for distribution in any part of Nigeria; or wilfully does anything in respect of any vehicle or any public highway with intent to obstruct or prevent the use of that vehicle or that public highway for the distribution of petroleum products’. Hence, the responsibility to ensure the security of these pipelines is part of the duties of the various security agencies such as the police, armed forces and Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps.

Oil pipeline sabotage, as referred to here, concerns the illegal or unauthorised act of destroying or puncturing of oil pipelines so as to disrupt supply or to siphon crude oil or its refined products for purposes of appropriating it for personal use or for sale on the black market or any other outlet. It includes such acts as oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism/fuel scooping and oil terrorism. In this sense, any person(s) or company involved in such an act is considered to be guilty of economic sabotage.

The term ‘national security’ has long been conceptualised from a narrow, militaristic and strategic perspective. The amassment of arms and ammunition was then seen as a key strategy for guaranteeing national security. In this context, then, the nation-state was the key referent object that dominated security discourse and policy. From this perspective, Hartmann (1983:13) defines national security as ‘the sum total of the vital national interest of the state, and because a vital national interest is one for which a nation is willing to resort to force or war either immediately or ultimately, concepts of national security will vary from state to state in direct proportion to their individual willingness to risk either conflict or war at any given time’.

Against the same background, Lipman (1943:123) argues that a ‘nation is secure to the extent that it is not in the danger of having to sacrifice core values, if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by victory in such war’. Hence, national security is couched in esoteric terms, and equated with the security of the state or the regime in power. Although the narrow conceptualisation of national security dominated the Cold War era, the need for its expansion has long been canvassed or challenged by scholars (see, among others, McNamara 1968:192; Falk 1975; Prins 1984, chapter 7:23; Al-Mashat 1985:50; Thomas 1987).

With the end of the Cold War threats to security such as disease, natural disasters, poverty and hunger as well as terrorism, gained new importance. The narrow perspective of national security gradually began to give way to a more comprehensive and broad definition that reflects the multi-dimensional nature of security, and takes cognisance of economic, cultural, technological, political, environmental and military variables. As Tyoden (2005:172) rightly argues, ‘while security considerations are still (and will continue to be) priority considerations for all States and while conceding that the conception of security qua military security has its strategic relevance, a more holistic security framework approximates better reality’. From this perspective therefore, Ullman (quoted in Bassey 2001), defines national security as ‘[t]he capacity of society to protect individuals, groups and the nation-state from physical and socio-economic dangers and from the threat of such danger created by both systematic and attributional conditions’.

Another generally accepted definition is that national security is the ‘readiness and capability of a country to contain internal and external threats to its existence and well-being (the military dimension), and ensure the socio-economic welfare of its peoples (the developmental dimension)’ (Tyoden 2005:173). The new emphasis on an expanded definition of national security does not suggest that the idea is a new one, but rather that
contain instability, control crime, eliminate corruption, enhance genuine development, progress and growth, and improve the welfare and well-being and quality of life of every citizen (Tyoden 2005:172–173).

In this sense, national security is an ensemble of two broad focal elements: state security and human security. It entails the preservation of the safety of Nigerians at home and abroad and the protection of the sovereignty of the country and the integrity of its assets (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2006:2). Thus a country is secured to the extent that the political leadership is able to anticipate, recognise and respond effectively to these threats, using the available national resources to ensure the safety of life and property of the citizens, and guarantee the integrity of its territorial boundaries as well as its strategic assets, both within and outside its territory.

The oil pipeline network in Nigeria: An overview

Nigeria has a monocultural economy that greatly depends on the petroleum industry for survival. The petroleum industry in Nigeria was established about 50 years ago, in 1956, when oil was first discovered in Oloibiri, in the present-day Bayelsa State. Nigeria’s oil sector has now been developed into a vast domestic industrial infrastructure, consisting of more than 300 oil fields, 5 284 wells, 7 000 km of pipelines, ten export terminals, 22 petroleum storage depots, 275 flow stations, ten gas plants, four refineries, and massive liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects (Smith 2006).

To enhance the distribution of crude oil products from the oil-rich region of the Niger Delta to other parts of the country, a grid of oil pipelines was constructed to link some of the states at strategic locations. The network consists of multi-product pipelines and crude oil pipelines that criss-cross the country and form a grid that links the 22 petroleum storage depots, 275 flow stations, ten gas plants, four refineries, and massive liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects (Smith 2006).

The Pipeline and Product Marketing Company (PPMC), a subsidiary of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), uses this system of oil pipelines to transport crude oil to the refineries in Port Harcourt (I and II), Warri and Kaduna – a total distance of 719 km. The multi-product pipelines are used to move products from the refineries and import-receiving jetties to petroleum storage depots all over the country. The storage infrastructure, which consists of 22 loading depots linked by pipelines of various diameters ranging from 6 to 18 inches, has combined installed capacities of 1 266 890 (PMS), 676 400 (DPK), 1 007 900 (AGO), and 740 000 (ATK) m³ tonnes (Special Committee on the Review of Petroleum Product Supply and Distribution 2000:10).

its relevance was greatly undermined by security doctrines and strategic considerations that shaped the idea of security during the Cold War era.

Within the context of this paper, national security refers to the capacity of a state to promote the pursuit and realisation of the fundamental needs and vital interests of man and society, and to protect them from threats which may be economic, social, environmental, political, military or epidemiological in nature. In this sense, it has both qualitative and dynamic dimensions. Qualitatively it encapsulates the unending drive of the state for improving the safety of, and protecting the lives, property and resources within its defined territorial boundaries. It is dynamic in the sense that its broad contours oscillate with emergence of new threats or the transformation of old threats, which may come from within or outside its environment (Onuoha 2007a:4). Therefore threats to national security are not static, but dynamic, and just as the political, economic, military and social causes of threats change, so does the national security posture of a country change (Okodolor 2004:211). In the context of Nigeria’s national security considerations, President Olusegun Obasanjo contends that:

The primary objective of national security shall be to strengthen the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to advance her interest and objectives to
To ensure the safety of these pipelines, which transverse the length and breadth of the country, the government acquired a 3.5 m wide right of way on each side of the pipelines before they were laid, and the pipes were buried a metre deep to prevent accidental contact. However, recent experience has shown that their integrity and safety have been compromised by vandals who now unremittingly tap into this huge artery of the lifeblood of Nigeria’s economic wealth.

**Oil pipeline sabotage in Nigeria: Dimensions, trends and actors**

The tampering with oil pipelines and installations has assumed huge dimensions and a variety of forms in Nigeria. Various terms, such as *oil bunkering*, *oil theft*, *pipeline vandalism*, *fuel scooping*, and *oil terrorism*, have been used to describe the various forms of theft of crude oil and its refined products in Nigeria. In this section, these concepts are treated as different variants under an umbrella concept of ‘oil pipeline sabotage’. There are however three major identifiable forms, namely oil bunkering, oil pipeline vandalism/fuel scooping, and oil terrorism, which are briefly discussed so as to highlight the peculiar nature, trend and processes, the underlying objectives and the key actors involved in each.

**Oil bunkering**

Oil bunkering is effectively Nigeria’s most profitable illegal private business in the petroleum industry. ‘Bunkering’ is a term used to describe the process of filling a ship with oil (or coal). ‘Illegal oil bunkering’ is therefore a euphemism for theft of oil (Human Rights Watch 2003), which involves tapping crude oil directly from the pipelines. Illegal oil bunkering is a hazardous process that is very pervasive in the creeks of the Niger Delta where oil pipelines criss-cross the region like a grid. Thieves build a temporary enclosure around a small section of underwater pipe. Water is then pumped out from the enclosure and a hole is drilled into the steel casting of the pipe through which the crude passes. The hole is fitted with a pipe and control valve. The creek water is allowed to flow back and fill the enclosure so that the set-up is underwater and therefore hidden from oil company inspectors (Junger 2007:56). When crude oil is being pumped through the pipelines, sometimes at a pressure of 600 pounds per square inch, the bunkers are able to fill up to a 1 000 metric tonne barge in a matter of hours. The barge is then moved offshore to a transport ship and the oil is sold on the high seas.

Oil bunkering has become a sophisticated operation that does not require the cooperation of oil company staff to operate equipment at wellheads or allow access (though there are reports that some are indeed involved in the theft). The bunkerers now tap directly into pipelines at a site removed from oil company facilities, and connect the pipes to barges that are hidden in small creeks under cover of mangrove forests (Human Rights Watch, 2003). It is estimated that over 10 per cent of the oil exported from Nigeria every year has actually been bunkered.

Because oil bunkering is a huge and lucrative business in Nigeria, with a whole demand and supply chain, a network of actors have emerged to sustain the activity. These include, but are not limited to, cult leaders, politicians, serving and retired security agents, shipping lines, international oil dealers, and youths conscripted by the cult leaders to puncture the pipelines as well as provide security during the transportation of the oil to the market. Two examples serve to illustrate the magnitude of the operation: in August 2003 the navy announced that it had arrested ten foreigners (among them Senegalese, Burkinabe, Togolese, Ivorians and Beninois) and a number of Nigerians for involvement in oil smuggling, and seized four ships; in late October, several more ships were impounded, with a reported combined cargo of oil worth several hundred million dollars (Human Rights Watch 2003).

Oil bunkering operates on two levels. On the one hand are the small-scale operations that flourish at the local level and on the other the highly organised oil theft that is perpetrated by syndicates or cartels. These cartels are always assisted by disreputable ship owners and corrupt government officials that benefit from the illicit trade.

Although illegal oil bunkering has taken place since the 1980s, it was only in 2000 when it became so extensive that it threatened the nation’s OPEC quota supplies, that the Nigerian state instituted rigorous measures to curtail the theft. Even then, up till 2002, the navy could only intercept and arrest barges (Ikelegbe 2005:223). The intensification of naval patrols and the intervention of the Nigerian navy since 2003 have had some positive effects on the illegal bunkering. In 2003 the Nigerian oil industry was losing an average of 160 000 barrels of crude oil per day to criminal elements. This figure has been brought down to less than 30 000 barrels per day (according to NNPC figures) or 10 000 barrels (according to the Nigerian navy) (Egu 2006:1, 7). Recently, the Nigerian navy claimed to have arrested over 236 ships, tugboats and barges engaged in crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and other illegal activities on the high seas, resulting in about an 80 per cent reduction in crude oil theft over the last three years (Omonobi 2007:5).

**Oil vandalism/fuel scooping**

The vandalisation of oil pipelines, particularly the pipelines for premium motor spirit commonly known as petrol or fuel, became commonplace in the terminal stages of military rule. However, in recent times it has assumed alarming proportions in Nigeria. A closer look at the nature and trend of pipeline vandalism in the country reveals three important dimensions, namely an increase in the frequency of attacks on these pipelines, increased sophistication in the technology used, and concentration on the three axes that are crucial to petroleum products distribution in the country.
In the early and mid-1990s, vandals, mainly unemployed youths operating in remote areas and communities through which oil pipelines pass, punctured the pipes or took advantage of ruptured or leaking pipes to siphon fuel or other petroleum products into drums, plastic containers or storage cans for sale on the black market. The technology employed was quite rudimentary, involving the use of funnels, drilling tools and plastic hoses to siphon the products. Furthermore, only few cases of vandalisation occurred. For instance, in 1995 there were only seven reported cases of vandalisation, and in the next three years 33, 34 and 57 were recorded (Special Committee on the Review of Petroleum Product Supply and Distribution 2000:34).

The return to democracy in 1999 witnessed an unprecedented increase in the rate of oil pipeline vandalisation. From 497 cases reported in 1999, it increased to 909 cases in 2000. From 2001 to 2003 the numbers declined considerably, but it started rising again in 2004 (to 971 cases) and increased sharply to 2,258 cases of pipeline vandalisation in 2005 (Onuoha 2007b:101; Africanoiljournal.com 2007). According to recent statistics released by the group managing director of NNPC, Port Harcourt, which recorded about 600 line breaks in 2003, had about 1,650 line breaks from January to September 2006. During the same period the Warri area had 600 line breaks (up from 100 in 2003) and the Mosimi area had 375 (up from 50 in 2003). In the north, where such occurrences used to be rare, the Kaduna and Gombe areas have registered frequent line breaks, too (Amanze-Nwachukwu & Ogbu 2007:14).

The rise in incidents had been accompanied by more technologically sophisticated methods, and complicity of government officials and security agents also seems to have grown. Ahmed (2007) puts it as follows:

They no longer use simple funnels and buckets. For instance, it has been determined that the vandals at the Egborode, Oviri Court broke the pipeline through hot tapping, a process restricted to experts in the oil industry.

Apart from the issue of changes of technology, there are increasing allegations of complicity between oil marketers, traditional rulers, politicians, security agents, and NNPC staff in the growing incidence of vandalisation. Such complicity has been confirmed in confessions by vandals, and suspected vandals caught by the police at Awawa in October 2006 for example confessed that a local council chairman gave them money, arms and tools to vandalise pipelines (Abubakar 2006:32). In the same vein, there are growing allegations that security agents connive with vandals to steal oil from the pipelines. In a presentation to President Obasanjo in February 2007, officials of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria and the National Union of Petroleum and Gas Workers of Nigeria submitted that:

Experience has shown that security agencies have abdicated their responsibility of providing security for the pipelines ... We believe that there can hardly be a successful vandalisation without security connivance (cited in Chiedozie 2007).

It would thus seem as if the seemingly lucrative nature of the illegal trade has opened up a new dimension to the breaking of oil pipelines to tap crude oil or its finished products, and has attracted even more participants to the business of oil pipeline vandalisation. These vandals now focus attention predominantly on three axes that are crucial to petroleum products distribution in the country, namely Atlas Cove–Mosimi, Abuja–Suleja, and Port Harcourt–Aba–Enugu–Markudi (Amanze-Nwachukwu 2007:39).

Oil terrorism

Unlike oil bunkering and pipeline vandalisation, oil terrorism is a new lexicon introduced by security analysts and scholars to describe the deliberate pipeline system attacks in Iraq and elsewhere in the world by militias, freedom fighters and insurgents. In Nigeria, oil terrorism includes such acts as the blowing up of oil pipelines, installations and platforms with explosives, and the seizure of oil barges, oil wells, flow stations, support vessels and other oil facilities in order to prevent the exploitation and/or distribution of crude oil or its refined products.

The first act of oil terrorism in Nigeria can be traced to December 2005, when the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) blew up Shell's Opobo Pipeline in Delta State (Ibinabo 2007:31). After the arrest of Alhaji Asari Dokubo, the leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (who is widely regarded as a leader of the Ijaw nation) in September 2005, militant groups in the Delta region instructed all multinational oil companies to leave the region, as they were preparing for a war with the Nigerian government. Since then militants in the region, seeking to control a greater share of the nation's oil wealth, have adopted a terrorist strategy to inflict serious damage on the Nigerian economy. Their broad objective is to impaire the capacity of the petroleum industry to export crude oil. By doing so they hope that the federal government will lose the substantial revenue needed to sustain the machinery of government, and so be forced to respond to their political, economic and environmental demands (for a list of these demands, see Okafor & Olagoke 2007:4). The following four reported cases are representative of their actions:

- On 16 January 2005 a major crude oil pipeline supplying crude to the Forcades export terminal was blown up, cutting supplies by about 100,000 barrels per day
- On 18 March 2005 militants blew up an oil pipeline operated by an Italian company, reducing flow by 75,000 barrels per day
- On 3 October 2006 militants struck at an oil vessel at Cawthorowe Channel, killing five soldiers who were escorting the vessel, and later sank the vessel
On 8 May 2007 the dreaded group MEND attacked three oil pipelines; two of these pipelines were in the territory of Akassa and the third in Twon-Brass.

It is evident from the above that the major perpetrators of this sabotage are armed groups, particularly militant groups who profess to be defending the cause of the Niger Delta people. Gradually, but steadily, these militants have developed both the tactics and weaponry that have enabled them to launch devastating attacks on onshore oil installations and near off-shore rigs.

Oil pipeline sabotage and national security in Nigeria

Governments all over the world, particularly those of developing countries, are increasingly recognising that threats to national interests/security are more likely to stem from internal than external sources. Such threats can assume different forms in different countries at different times. Against this background the question is how does one evaluate the implications of oil pipeline sabotage for national security in Nigeria?

In terms of strictly national security considerations, oil pipelines and facilities are sensitive strategic assets that must be protected at all times. Oil pipeline sabotage, regardless of whether it is perpetrated by nationals, foreigners or terrorist groups, is a serious threat to national security, particularly for a country that depends heavily on oil exports for survival. This is essentially because in a situation of war with another country, pipelines are usually one of the first targets of an enemy and preserving them could be the difference between victory and defeat (Adeniyi 2007:72). For this reason countries will expend enormous financial and material resources on safeguarding the integrity of their strategic assets. In 2002, for example, Colombia announced plans to train and arm special troops to protect a key oil pipeline. The United States government supported the initiative and requested that Congress allocate US$98 million in the 2003 budget to train, arm and provide air support for Colombian troops to defend the pipeline, which is jointly owned by the Occidental Petroleum Corporation and the Colombian state oil company, Ecopetrol (Adeniyi 2007:72).

Given that Nigeria has a monocultural economy that largely depends on oil exports for survival, oil pipelines and installations are the arteries and veins that supply the lifeblood of Nigeria's economic wealth – crude oil and its refined products – to various parts of the country. It follows that attacks on them, both in peace and war situations, could strangle the Nigerian state and render it incapable of defending itself against internal subversion or external aggression. The impact of the increasing attacks on oil pipelines and facilities by militants in the Niger Delta are instructive in this regard. For example, in one such attack on an oil facility and pipelines in October 2006, in the Oporoma community of Bayelsa State, it was estimated that more than 800,000 barrels of oil was lost. In addition, about 872,000 barrels of crude oil per day were lost as a result of damaged pipelines to which the oil companies could not gain access for repairs or because they could not resume operations. SPDC's share of the losses was put at 500,000 barrels while Mobil, Agip and Chevron jointly lost 372,000 barrels (Onuoha 2007a:12). More so, in view of the strategic position these facilities occupy in the political economy with regard to security and development in Nigeria, there is no doubt that Nigeria's oil pipeline network and facilities still remains vulnerable to both militant and terrorist attacks.

Another major implication of oil pipeline sabotage for national security is the huge loss of revenue by the government. Oil pipeline sabotage undermines the capacity of the government to generate resources needed to fulfil its responsibilities, of which the security of its citizens is a primary consideration. In February 2007, for instance, the NNPC estimated the nation lost about N410 billion (naira) to pipeline vandalism. The figure includes losses incurred because of damage to equipment and losses of product and equipment (Bello 2007:18). Indeed, the loss to the Nigerian government from illegal oil bunkering amounts to about US$14 billion a year (Ikokwu 2007:6). In such circumstances the government may have no option but to borrow money from international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Lamenting on the loss the Nigerian government has recorded as a result of oil pipeline vandalism, the Group Manager, Public Affairs of the NNPC, Dr Levi Ajounuma, stated:

This country is bleeding to death. The nation's economy is endangered as a result of the activities of these vandals. In the past eight weeks alone, we have lost over $100 million worth of crude oil to theft (Vanguard 2008:12).

Such funds represent lost opportunities for funding initiatives to provide basic and quality services to citizens; better equip the security forces to ensure the security of life and property; strengthen institutions that promote human rights; and undertake infrastructural development, among others. As Human Right Watch (2003) has argued, reducing illegal bunkering will not in itself necessarily improve government spending practices, but the diversion of revenues before they reach government coffers means that there is not even the possibility that these resources will be used for the public benefit. Thus threats to national wealth, such as sabotage of oil pipelines, perceived from a national security prism not only hurts the economy through the loss of sorely needed foreign exchange to finance development projects, but also erodes the base of national strength and power.

In addition, oil pipeline sabotage in the form of illegal bunkering is one of the factors fuelling insecurity in the Niger Delta region. Together with other factors such as poverty and unemployment, it adds to criminality, cult clashes, communal violence, proliferation of small arms, and political instability in the region. Efforts by the federal government to check oil bunkering activities have further triggered resistance on the part of the bunkerers who recruit and arm youths to sustain their lucrative trade. Oil bunkerers...
and pirates operating in the coastal regions of Nigeria use part of the proceeds from this illegal business for the procurement of sophisticated weapons. Their activities are linked to small arms and light weapons proliferation, in their aim to outspend and outsource perceived enemies in the acquisition of sophisticated weapons (Abayomi et al 2005:131). Consequently, oil bunkering has contributed significantly to shaping the economy of conflict in the region, which has in turn contributed to the threat to national security.

Oil pipeline sabotage is already threatening the socio-economic stability and national development in Nigeria. Blown pipelines interrupt the supply of crude oil to refineries, and refined products to strategic loading depots. One major danger of oil pipeline sabotage to socio-economic stability is its spill-over effect. First it leads to shortages that cause increases in the price of petroleum products. But sabotage of pipelines in the southern part of the country also causes serious shortages and disruptions in the northern and western parts of the country. For example, since February 2006 two strategic refineries in Nigeria—Warri and Kaduna—have been shut down as a result of the vandalisation of the Escravos-Warri pipeline which supplies crude oil to the refineries. The impact of such shortages on overall socio-economic development includes underutilisation of the refineries; loss of foreign exchange as a result of importation of fuel; disruption of the transportation of people, goods and services; escalation of prices of goods; wastage of crude oil as a result of the leakage; and loss of revenue spent in repairing the vandalised pipelines.

In Nigeria the sabotage of pipelines conveying crude oil or gas to power plants has resulted in power cuts. Reliable electricity supply is critical for national development, and by extension, national security. However, the increasing rate of oil pipeline sabotage has negatively affected the supply of electricity in the country. For instance, the vandalisation of a major pipeline that transports gas to Egbin and AES thermal stations in February 2006 led to a reduction in power generation from 1,620 MW to 403 MW for more than two weeks (Godwin & Ezeobi 2007:1). The disrupted and dismal power generation contributes to the leakage; and loss of revenue spent in repairing the vandalised pipelines.

Undoubtedly, this energy crisis hurts the economy as hospitals, industries and manufacturing enterprises have to rely on generators to ensure a continuous power supply. This leads to escalating operating costs and low productivity. Furthermore, these generator sets are not produced in Nigeria, so the country has to expend foreign exchange on their importation. For instance, in 2005 Nigeria accounted for over 35 per cent (about US$152 million) of the 77 per cent share of the UK supplies of generating sets to the African market (see African Review of Business and Technology 2006:46). The overall effect is that the country cannot compete in the global market.

Another discernable implication of oil pipeline sabotage for national security is its impact on human security. Human security, as was stated at the outset, is an integral element of national security. Increasingly, the concept of human security is being co-opted into an understanding of security to serve as an early warning mechanism in order to influence policy actions. Human security is viewed in this context as freedom from actual and potential threats to human life which may arise either as a result of human actions or inactions, or from natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, famine, drought, disease, and other natural calamitous events resulting in death, human suffering and material damage (Onuoha 2007b:97).

While it may be difficult to put an accurate figure on the loss of lives associated with fire disasters resulting from oil pipeline sabotage, Amanze-Nwachukwu (2007:23) contends that no fewer than 5,000 persons, many of whom were innocent bystanders, have been killed in various pipeline explosions since 1998. The deaths and injuries resulting from such explosions impact on individual, family and community levels throughout Nigeria. It has lead to fractured family structures, children have been left without parents and husbands without wives (Brune 2006). When a family unit is disrupted, children suffer and their future outlook is often bleak. In some cases, the children migrate to cities in search of a livelihood. The lack of parental care or ability to earn a living may lead some of them to join criminal gangs, such as the groups of armed robbers that now terrorise banks and stores in cities in Nigeria (Onuoha in press). Often the injuries resulting from explosions are horrendous, with victims sustaining severe burn injuries and internal damage as a result of exposure to poisonous gas and fumes, invariably adding to the number of people unable to earn a living for themselves or their dependants. The end result is that these destitute children and families further swell the ranks of social miscreants and contribute to social conflict in the cities. Hence, for every death or injury caused by a pipeline explosion, there are many who suffer the psychological, physical and economic consequences. In this context, the poor are hardest hit (Onuoha 2007b:107).

Adding to the human cost of these explosions is the destruction of livelihoods and properties. Both at the individual and community level, oil spillage from sabotaged pipelines negatively affect the environment as well as socio-economic activities. As a result residents lose not only their properties and source of income, but also have to contend with contaminated food and drinking water. Oil spillages are known to destroy important economic crops and contaminate water formations such as streams, rivers and lakes. Accordingly, oil pipeline sabotage poses a threat to environmental sustainability, too.
Recommendations

From the foregoing it can be seen that oil pipeline sabotage poses serious threats to a country's security. To stem the tide of oil pipeline sabotage in all its forms in Nigeria the following recommendations are suggested.

First, the integrity of oil pipelines in Nigeria should be treated as a national security issue. The government should accordingly ensure effective protection and policing of the network of oil pipelines throughout the country. This could be achieved by the establishment of a special pipeline policing and protection agency, as well as the use of technological apparatus such as satellite tracking and closed-circuit television (CCTV) monitoring in strategic loading bays. This will enhance surveillance of the pipelines and make it possible to track attacks on or rupture of the pipelines.

Second, it is imperative that the recent initiative between by the NNPC and the Plymouth University in United Kingdom, aimed at mapping out strategies to ensure that crude oil coming from Nigeria onto the international market is fingerprinted, be implemented. This would enable buyers to determine the legality of origin and characteristics of the product before putting a price on it. The federal government should back up such collaboration with the necessary political will and financial support, as this will further enhance the tracking of stolen oil from Nigeria. In addition to the fingerprinting technology, reliable meters should be installed at all oil installations, as this will enable the responsible agency to ascertain how much oil is being produced, loaded, distributed within the country, or shipped to the international market.

There is equally the need for a complete overhaul of the pipeline system. Although most of the pipes being used to convey petroleum products have a lifespan of 50 years, lack of maintenance during the past 15 years accounts for some leakage and ruptures. It is imperative that these pipelines be replaced, and perhaps they can also be buried deeper in the ground to make access by vandals more difficult. The overhaul process should go hand in hand with periodic integrity checks during the lifespan of pipelines and a comprehensive clearing of all structures that lie within the right of way along these pipelines.

Fourth, the Nigerian navy need to be supported with the necessary facilities and logistics to enhance their effectiveness in tracking the inflow of small arms, and combating sea piracy and oil bunkering in Nigeria's territorial waters. This should include capacity-building projects such as a maritime awareness capabilities programme designed to enable them use the latest patrol boats, such as US coast guard buoy tenders and defender class response boats, which would improve their ability to successfully apprehend oil bunkerers and militants.

In the fifth place, the long years of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta is part of the formative environment that contributed significantly to the rise of criminal activities, including oil bunkering, in the region. When the issue of criminality in the region is addressed, it is important to factor in the hydra-headed nature of the situation. Government must separate the genuine agitators from criminals and oil bunkerers, and evolve concrete preventive and punitive measures for fighting the crime on the one hand and addressing genuine grievances on the other. To this end the design and effective implementation of a comprehensive and redemptive development plan would contribute significantly to overcoming the problem of militancy and agitation among youths in the region.

The fight against corruption in the public and private sectors is one strategy that must be strengthened and sustained if other efforts designed to safeguard the oil pipelines are to succeed. Corruption is at the root of the problem. It is behind the rise in poverty and unemployment in the country, resulting in increasing numbers of young people without hope of making a living, which in turn makes it easy to recruit them for criminal activities. Just as corrupt government institutions over the years have allowed oil bunkering to take place on a larger scale, the lack of a comprehensive preventive programme by the federal government to arrest the situation has contributed to the persistence of the illegal business. Therefore there is the need to strengthen every institution, process and agency that promotes transparency, accountability and good governance in the country. Government should strongly encourage such initiatives as the Nigerian extractive industry and transparency initiative aimed at getting oil companies to be more accountable and transparent in their operations. Institutions such as the economic and financial crimes commission, the independent corrupt practices and other related offences commission, and other security agencies need to be strengthened to make them more effective in tackling corruption and improving the security situation in the country.

Finally, it is apposite to remark that the safety of the oil pipelines cannot be successfully achieved in the face of the growing incidence of poverty and unemployment. Therefore, it is suggested that government (federal, state and local) should judiciously use the available revenue to solve the twin problems of poverty and unemployment through a massive planned investment in public works like power, rail and road rehabilitation and construction, and large-scale farming. Through a private-public partnership government should take the lead in the development of small and medium scale industries by means of a well-designed micro-credit scheme that would create jobs and alleviate poverty in the country.

Conclusion

The incidence of oil pipeline sabotage in Nigeria has not only increased in frequency but has assumed worrisome dimensions that pose a serious threat to national security. In this paper the dimensions the crime has assumed in recent times in Nigeria, as well as the main actors and objectives behind them, have been briefly examined. It was argued that apart from being a criminal offence, oil pipeline sabotage is a serious internal threat to
national security. If concerted efforts are not made by the federal government to contain the rising incidence of oil pipeline sabotage in the country, the capacity of government to discharge its responsibilities will be seriously compromised. The author therefore advocates for the adoption of stringent measures aimed at enhancing surveillance of the pipelines; the tackling of corruption; the entrenchment of good governance in the country; and the reduction of poverty and unemployment.

References


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