

Policyweekly

Reflections on Security Contracts to Ex-Violent Actors: Issues of Trust, Continuing Tensions and Sustainability of Peace



(Photo credit: [Theconversation.com](https://www.theconversation.com))

Policy Recommendations

- 1 The Nigerian government should broker a deal with the mega pipeline contractor to take charge of addressing contract-related agitations from aggrieved ex-militants and their leaders.
- 2 The government should invest resources in training officers of the Civil Defence Corp in protecting public infrastructure, including pipeline security.
- 3 The government should cease using ex-militants for security beyond pipeline protection.
- 4 There is also a need to enhance the training, recruitment, equipment and reward system of the Nigerian Police.
- 5 There is a need for government and security authorities to bring to book Non-State Armed Groups who openly brandish weapons.
- 6 There is a pressing need for relevant authorities to mop up illicit arms and establish the right brokerage and gunning licensing system for registered private security companies.

Introduction

Recently, [Mr Asari Dokubo](#), leader of an ex-militant group in Nigeria's Niger Delta, claimed that he was contracted by the regime of former President Muhammadu Buhari, which lasted from 2015 to 2023 to provide security services in the country. Precisely, he claimed to be in charge of the crime-ridden Abuja-Kaduna expressway as well as [Plateau, Niger, Anambra, Imo and Rivers states](#) of the country. According to Dokubo, [his security outfit works alongside the military](#), though the [army](#) has debunked the claim. Asari's further claim, which could not be confirmed, is that he owns a [private military company](#). While he may have an armed organization, the license to operate in Nigeria as a military company is difficult to be supported by Nigerian laws.

The Federal Government also concedes [security of the pipelines](#), mostly in the Niger

Delta, to former militant organizations. One basis for giving the security contracts to the ex-militants is an assumption that they have undergone transformations and can now be relied upon to provide security to the infrastructures they had been attacking in their days of militancy. Also, Jobs connected to the oil industry was a part of the [amnesty deal](#) in which the warlords were promised a lifeline to end attacks on the oil installations. In addition, it is believed that it is natives of the oil communities through which the pipelines traverse that are best suited to secure the installations. Thus, the ex-militants who had spent time as combatants in the environment over some years are considered a good choice of contractors to enhance pipeline security. The fundamental background to sourcing alternative security is that the conventional security personnel protecting the oil infrastructure before the concession were ineffective in stopping attacks on the oil infrastructure and were accused of being involved in [oil theft](#).

The contract, however, has become a basis of contention among former militant leaders in the Niger Delta because it is not all of them that were included. There is a general sense that one of the ex-commanders of the militants, Mr. Government Ekpemupolo alias Tompolo, virtually has a monopoly on the pipeline surveillance contract. Before the latest renewal of his Tantita company security contract, there were arguments that the contract should be [decentralized](#) for the various groups to monitor pipelines that pass through their communities. These development raises a red flag about the sustainability of peace in the Niger Delta as the groups that feel excluded have threatened to [return to the trenches](#).

A few issues arise from the foregoing. The first is that the concentration of the contract on one organization despite the existence of several ex-commanders of former militant organizations renders the peace achieved in the Delta a tenuous one, as there may be a resurgence of crisis in the near future. Secondly, the state trusted the transformation of the ex-militants with child-like naiveté, which made it ignore retraining and capacity building for its conventional security apparatuses to be able to provide the same security in case the deal with ex-militants cannot be sustained. Thirdly, the claims of Mr Dokubo, an ex-militant leader, about his security collaboration with the government beyond oil infrastructure protection are disturbing, especially concerning the nature of security collaboration between the state and former violent non-state actors. Thus, in this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly, we engage the security relationship between the state and former violent non-state actors in the Niger Delta with a view to exploring remedial measures.

Transformation of Former Violent Non-state Actors, Tenuous Trust and Sensitive Security Contracts

Nigerian authorities prefer to assume that the ex-militants have now transformed into civil organizations that can have relationships or even collaborate with state actors. Some of their leaders, like Tompolo, have registered a private security outfit with a government license to operate. His company, Tantita Security Services, was awarded a security contract for protecting the pipelines in the Niger Delta. The contract is worth [48 billion](#) Naira and covers over 80 kilometers of oil pipeline. The reason for pipeline protection is to curb the high incidence of oil theft, which robs the government of revenues. [In 2021, Nigeria lost 1.96 trillion Naira](#) to oil theft. Over a period of 11 years (2009 to 2020), it is estimated that Nigeria's crude oil losses amount to about 16.25 trillion Naira. Besides, the country has consistently failed to meet its OPEC daily production quota due to insecurity. The oil surveillance contract was a necessary outcome of the monumental heist on the commonwealth of Nigerians through violence and crude oil theft.

So far, the [performance evaluation of the first oil protection contract is quite high](#) and has been renewed for the same Tantita Security Services belonging to Tompolo. They have arrested vessels used for oil theft, including one that the Navy escorted in August 2023. The renewal of the contract is a source of security concerns because of the threat from ex-militants who feel excluded. Should attacks resume on oil installations, then the purported transformation of the ex-fighters was merely built on temporary purchase of calm with contract and other material settlements. Two main points from the current situation are that the pipeline contractor must work hard to stave off the possible obstacles occasioned by other aggrieved ex-fighters or subcontract the pipeline protection to them if they accept.

Connected with the nature of the pipeline contract award is the whole issue of trust, which is at the heart of contracts. The state was unable to see that working with just one organization would not resolve the crisis in the Niger Delta. It trusted that a single massive contract is the only settlement that eliminates security obstacles to petro-business. Unfortunately, this thinking takes it for granted that it is only the established political and bureaucratic elites in Nigeria that bear rent-seeking behaviour. The militants are equally rent-seeking in orientation, and their struggle over the years is for integration into the benefits of oil rents. Therefore, the concession of pipeline surveillance was one such move towards fulfilling their rentier interest. Formalization of contract processes through business registration does not substitute ethical orientation to do good and avoid harm to public properties. The willingness to prevent damages to public oil infrastructure is therefore borne out

of motives of rentier profit. Once the sustaining factor of profit is removed, the artificiality of the transformation becomes clear. While the reward system in Nigeria led to this approach of forceful demand for integration into the rentier circle, the point is that it is difficult to lay claim to any sustainable trust driven by ethical motivation to avoid resorting to violence without monetary benefits. This is evident in the threats of those who feel excluded from the direct benefits of the rents.

Beyond pipeline security, recent information regarding the extent of engagement of the ex-militants of the Niger Delta bears attention. The claims of Mr Asari Dokubo that he was contracted to provide security in the Abuja-Kaduna expressway as well as five states of the country is yet to be debunked or interrogated. That he owns a private military company and, of course, a [public display of an automatic assault weapon](#) while issuing warnings and threats to a group in the country are sufficient grounds for security concerns. The Nigerian laws tightly control the right to bear arms. On this note, the Federal Government may be acting on innocent error or engaging in an intrigue of regime survival by the degree of latitude it permits some of the former violent non-state actors. The point is that this group of actors may achieve results in one sector. However, engaging the ex-militants' security services extensively yields a paradox of seeking security through sources of insecurity. The long-term implication, which is the weakening of the state and leveraging adversarial interests that are not driven by public interest, is worrying.

Recommendations

In light of the need for sustainable security over petro-business, the Federal Government took the pragmatic step of using the source of insecurity to achieve security. However, it has not quite managed the challenges of that approach. On that note, the following steps could be useful in managing some of the outcomes of that security approach:

1. The government should make it a part of its deal with the mega pipeline contractor to take charge of addressing contract-related agitations from aggrieved ex-militants and their leaders. Since there is a coalition of ex-militants, it is a possible point of engagement through which they discuss their concerns. On that note, an informal understanding with the contractor is that

they should accommodate other interests to prevent the rise of further multiple agitations.

2. Without prejudice to the first suggestion, the government should invest resources in training officers of the Civil Defence Corp, which is constitutionally charged with protecting public infrastructure, including pipeline security. Such training is necessary for successful operations in the terrain of the Niger Delta. This would offer a fall-back option in moments of challenges and threats to the understanding between the government and ex-militants.
3. The complex attitude of one of the ex-militants who openly displayed automatic weapons while threatening a Nigerian group is quite disturbing. It is even more disturbing that he is given sensitive security contracts beyond pipeline protection. Therefore, the government should cease using ex-militants for security beyond pipeline protection.
4. There is also a need to enhance the training, recruitment, equipment and reward system of the Nigerian Police, which should be deployed for civil security situations along the highways. In extreme cases where the military is made a part of the operations, they should be sufficiently equipped to achieve results to avoid engaging former violent non-state actors.
5. The open display of arms by groups not considered as Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs), with government or security authorities not swinging into action to arrest such actors, sends wrong signals to other groups. Such inaction could also be considered as elements of state failure.
6. Mopping up illicit arms in the country and working to establish the right brokerage and gunning licensing system for registered private security companies providing regulated private security services should be considered by the Office of National Security Adviser (ONSA), the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and Nigeria Civil Defence and Security Corps (NCDSC). This will likely reduce the illegal and high appetite by private citizens for the use of Nigeria Police Force Officers and those of NCDSC.

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD.

Nextier SPD (www.thenextier.com/spd) is an international development consulting firm that uses evidence-based research to develop and build knowledge and skills to enhance human security, peace, and sustainable development as means to achieving stability and prosperity in Nigeria, and in the African region.

Conclusion

The security of certain public infrastructure in Nigeria is increasingly being outsourced. The contract of oil infrastructure is made compelling by the need to integrate aggrieved youths of oil-bearing communities who were excluded from opportunities in the oil industry into livelihood chances from the oil industry to curtail their anger and end attacks on the oil facilities. Incidentally, the involvement of the ex-militants in security is raising the challenges, including the non-inclusion of all shades of interest for which they threaten the revival of militancy. The other is the extension of the security role of the ex-militants to highways and states with consequences for (in)security in the state. Allowing a specific and controlled involvement of these groups in a sector like the oil industry is pragmatic. Still, it must not exceed such specialized usage to prevent its far-reaching consequences for security in the country.

Authors:

Dr Ben Nwosu is an Associate Consultant at Nextier, a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus, and a Senior Lecturer Political Science Department, Nsukka Campus.

Dr Ndu Nwokolo is a Partner at Nextier and an Honorary Fellow at the School of Government at the University of Birmingham, UK.

Nextier Sample Publications



Food, Fear, and Fortitude: Rural Women's Journey Amid Armed Conflicts in Plateau State

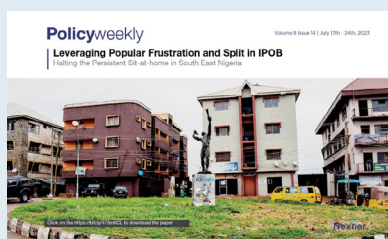
Plateau State has been under the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. The region has been grappling with an increasing threat of armed attacks, particularly in its rural areas. The aftermath of these bloodbaths...



Why is Fuel Subsidy Removal Hurting Many Nigerians?

Examining Six Ways to Reduce the Pains

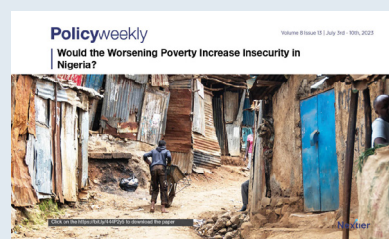
Fuel subsidy ended in Nigeria when on 29th May 2023, the newly sworn-in President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, subtly announced the end of subsidy by thanking the outgoing...



Leveraging Popular Frustration and Split in IPOB

Halting the Persistent Sit-at-home in South-East Nigeria

You are currently viewing Leveraging Popular Frustration and Split in IPOB Halting the Persistent Sit-at-home in South-East Nigeria...



Would the Worsening Poverty Increase Insecurity in Nigeria?

Third World nations in general, particularly Africa, which includes Nigeria, struggle greatly with poverty. Many individuals in Nigeria live in poverty due to the country's...



Safety of Buildings Versus Claims of Vengeance:

Exploring Issues around the Alaba Market Demolitions
On Sunday, February 18, 2023, videos were circulating about the commencement of demolitions in Alaba International Market, Ojo Local Government Area of...



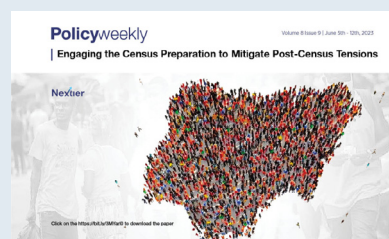
Strengthening Child Protection in Post-Conflict Communities in North East Nigeria

Children are usually the most vulnerable in armed conflict and post-conflict environments. Beyond being afflicted by humanitarian crises occasioned by armed...



Nigeria's Off-Cycle Elections and the Impending Violence

Off-cycle elections are held outside the regular elections calendar. General elections take place in the same year in Nigeria as part of the country's...



Engaging the Census Preparation to Mitigate Post-Census Tensions

Barring the last-minute suspension of Nigeria's housing and population census, scheduled to start on 3rd May and end on 7th May 2023, the country would...