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A Nigerian red cross worker looks down a vandalised street towards ethnic groups fighting in Lagos 26 November 1999.

PART II



NIGERIA

OVERVIEW

Nigeria, West Africa's most populous country, is beset by widespread and recurrent ethnic and religious tensions and hostilities. Of the more than 370 ethnic groups,¹ five major ones—the Hausa and Fulani (in the north), the Yoruba (in the south-west), the Igbo (in the south-east), and the Ijaw (found across the coast of the Niger Delta region)—represent the majority of the country's 130 million people.

Corruption and economic mismanagement, which reached their height during the military dictatorship that ended in 1999, has enfeebled the nascent civilian government. This has simultaneously strengthened the resolve of many states and citizens' groups to take advantage of the more permissive democratic atmosphere to assert themselves through force of arms. It is in this context that an increasing number of armed groups have emerged, either as a direct challenge to state authority or to provide support to political figures or state security apparatuses. The growing prominence of these groups reflects not only ethnic and religious rivalries

but also economic deprivation, political manoeuvring, and long-standing tensions in the oil-rich Niger Delta.² More than half of Nigeria's 36 states have suffered violence owing to the activities of these various militias, resulting in thousands of deaths and the displacement of tens of thousands of people.

The ready availability of small arms and light weapons contributes significantly to outbursts of violence; central government efforts to restore order are woefully ineffectual. Moreover, the armed groups listed in this section are merely the tip of the iceberg. Of the more than 100 militias believed to be active in Rivers state alone, only the two largest—the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF)—are recorded here. Information is hard to come by and even more difficult to verify. Group membership is fluid; contradictory reporting is rife; denials of armed activity are common; and misinformation—whether deliberate or the result of deep-seated mistrust or carelessness—is the rule rather than the exception. Nevertheless, a disturbing picture is clearly discernable: the number of armed groups has ballooned since 1999 and, with it,

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impunity and a tendency towards brazen acts of violence.

ARMED GROUPS

O'odua People's Congress (OPC)

Origins/composition:

In August 1994 the OPC emerged in the wake of the annulled June 1993 national elections that Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba chief, is widely believed to have won. The organization, which is active in south-western Nigeria, was established to protect the interests of the Yoruba ethnic group. There are at least 20 OPC 'zonal commanders', each claiming to lead 200 armed men.³

Leadership:

Frederick Fasheun, a medical doctor by profession, was one of the founding members of the OPC and initially was universally recognized as its leader. In 1999, however, the OPC effectively split into two factions, with Fasheun leading the moderates and Gani Adams heading the more radical militant wing. In 2003, there were two parallel and competing structures.⁴ It is understood that in early 2005 this situation persisted.

Areas of control/activity:

The OPC is active in the six south-western states of Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Ekiti, as well as Kwara state in north-central Nigeria. It has not been active in Kogi state.⁵

The militia is engaged in violence against other ethnic groups, vigilantism, crime fighting, and robbery. It has also clashed with police and launched attacks on police stations.

Sources of financing/support:

Contributions from bus drivers and residents who solicit the OPC to protect them from thieves cover a significant portion of the OPC's operational expenses. The OPC claims a membership of more than five million Nigerians at home and abroad.⁶ It collects membership fees and also significant sums of money from many leading Yoruba politicians who believe it politically expedient to be identified with a group that appears to enjoy such wide popular support.⁷ The OPC also enjoys the patronage of some state government authorities, including the governor of Lagos state,⁸ who is believed to have employed militia members to secure his party's 2003 political victory.⁹

Status:

Active. Although Human Rights Watch reports that by early 2003 killings by

OPC had declined, the armed group remains 'active and visible'.¹⁰ The government placed a ban on the OPC in 1999, forcing the group to go underground in some areas; but in others it continues to operate in collaboration with local authorities.¹¹ Furthermore, Fasheun and Adams are regular participants in Yoruba political leadership platforms.¹²

Arewa People's Congress (APC)

Origins/composition:

The election of Olusegun Obasanjo (a 'southerner'), along with the activities of the OPC, provided the impetus behind the creation of the APC in December 1999—ostensibly to safeguard northern interests.¹³ More significantly, unlike other ethnic militia groups such as the OPC and the Bakassi Boys, the APC is also a manifestation of discontent on the part of the former military elite at losing its privileges. The group has, moreover, asserted its intention to counter southern-initiated violence against northerners.¹⁴

Leadership:

Sagir Mohammed, a former army officer, heads the APC.

Areas of control/activity:

The APC is active in the Hausa-Fulani areas of northern Nigeria. It does not

so much 'control' areas as make ad hoc use of unemployed youth known as 'Almajiri boys', who are found throughout the northern states. Almajiri boys, usually recruited at local mosques, are deployed to 'inflict pain and unleash terror'. The APC has been known to sometimes furnish Almajiri boys with weapons.¹⁵

Sources of financing/support:

Key backers are believed to include active and retired army officers.¹⁶ The APC does not appear to struggle financially. Amadu Sesay et al. speak of the Congress's 'financial muscle' and note that, while the APC does not have a 'large membership' or deploy 'armed cadres' along the lines of the Bakassi Boys, the OPC, and the Egbesu Boys, it does possess the means to purchase arms and ammunition on a significant scale.¹⁷

Status:

Active.

Onitsha Traders Association (OTA)

Origins/composition:

The Onitsha Traders Association was created in the late 1990s in response to criminality. (It had replaced the Onitsha Markets Amalgamated Traders Association, which the mili-

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tary government in Anambra state had previously dissolved.)¹⁸

Areas of control/activity:

The OTA was active in Onitsha in Anambra state.

Sources of financing/support:

The Anambra state governor brought the detachment of the Bakassi Boys to replace OTA.¹⁹

Status:

Disbanded. In 2000 the Bakassi Boys replaced OTA in response to popular disenchantment with the OTA's perceived inability to stem the rise of banditry.²⁰

Bakassi Boys

Anambra State Vigilante Service (AVS)
Abia State Vigilante Service (AVS)
Imo State Vigilante Service (IVS)
ASMATA Boys

Origins/composition:

The group that, in 1999, eventually became known as the Bakassi Boys emerged from a number of disparate vigilante groups active in Abia state between 1997 and 1998, among them the Onitsha Traders Association. Initially, many lauded the 'Boys' for successfully stemming a growing tide of armed robberies that was terrorizing merchants and banks

throughout the city. Others subsequently hired the young vigilantes and 'by mid-2000, the Bakassi Boys had become an accepted part of daily life in large cities throughout the south-east'.²¹ Although later also known as Anambra State Vigilante Service, the Abia State Vigilante Service (both known as AVS), and the Imo State Vigilante Service (IVS), the Bakassi Boys has its roots in Aba, Abia state. The group was formed in response to long-standing violence and intimidation by a group of criminals called 'Maf' (for 'mafia').²² In November 1998, some local shoe traders cobbled together a group of youth to counter the harassment and extortion to which they had long been subjected. The ensuing altercation resulted in a victory for the traders. In appreciation of the youths' bravery and effectiveness, the services of the group of armed young men were extended. The group became known as the 'Bakassi Boys' because 'Bakassi' was the name of the area in the market where the shoe traders sold their wares.²³

Leadership:

Gilbert Okoye, the leader of the Bakassi Boys, was arrested in March 2001.²⁴ It is not clear who, if anyone, succeeded him. A report by Human

Rights Watch (HRW) and the Nigerian Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN) noted that between September and October 2001 Camillus Ebekue was the chairman of the Anambra State Vigilante Service, and Onwuchekwa Ulu the chairman of the Abia State Vigilante Service and the IVS under the command of Imo State Police Commissioner Ahmed Abubakar.²⁵ Chinwoke Mbadinuju, the Anambra state governor, is understood to have exerted considerable control over the Anambra Vigilante Service (AVS) and its successor, the Anambra State Markets Amalgamated Traders Association (ASMATA), known as the 'ASMATA Boys'.²⁶

Areas of control/activity:

The Bakassi Boys and their successor groups have been active in the states of Abia, Anambra, and Imo in south-eastern Nigeria.

Sources of financing/support:

The Bakassi Boys enjoyed the support of governments in the three states in which they operated, and were provided with offices, uniforms, and vehicles, as well as salaries.²⁷ The government of Anambra state has gone the furthest in terms of open support for the Bakassi Boys, by introducing them to the state assembly and

ensuring the passage of a law in August 2000 that officially established them as the Anambra State Vigilante Services. The law outlines the groups' functions and powers, effectively transforming them into a fully fledged law enforcement agency. Traders in the major markets in Abia, Anambra, and Imo states contributed significantly to the upkeep of the Bakassi Boys through a monthly levy. Businesses, local governments, and other institutions were also asked to contribute taxes, but not all did so willingly. Rates varied. In Anambra state, for example, the monthly levy in October 2001 was reportedly 2,000 naira (approximately USD 15 at the time) for offices, 10,000 naira (USD 76) for schools and hospitals, and 50,000 naira (USD 385) for banks; *okada* (motorcycle taxi) drivers had to pay 20 naira daily. In Abia state stores were reportedly asked to pay 250 naira (approximately USD 2). Onwuchekwa Ulu, chairman of Abia State Vigilante Services, acknowledged that levies collected from the public, as well as contributions from the state government, helped finance group activities. The amount of remuneration paid directly to individual 'boys' is still unknown.²⁸

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Even after the government had formally outlawed first the Bakassi Boys and then the Anambra State Vigilante Service, both continued to operate with the support of the Anambra state governor. In 2003, however, Mbadinuju lost his bid for re-election, and the Bakassi Boys/AVS went underground. The reason for this volte-face on the part of the authorities and the public was relatively clear: the Bakassi Boys had gone too far in exercising their 'mandate' and stood accused of extreme acts of violence, including arbitrary executions, detentions, ill-treatment and torture.²⁹ While it is no longer active, it is believed that its structure still exists and that the group could still be called upon in the event of a crisis. In Imo and Abia states governors sympathetic to the Bakassi Boys were re-elected, but they heeded public opinion, which had by that time turned against the Boys.³⁰

Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC)

Origins/composition:

The origins of the FNDIC date back to 1997, when a series of bloody ethnic clashes between the three main

Delta state ethnic groups—the Ijaw, Itshekiri, and Urhobo—erupted in Warri, a major commercial city. Oboko Bello and Chief Abel Ugedi, both Ijaw leaders, appealed to their people to defend Ijaw interests with their blood, if necessary. The public response was immediate and widespread, and the FNDIC was established soon thereafter.³¹ Today, the fighting continues over local political influence and representation, and is fuelled by resentment concerning the perceived inequitable distribution of oil revenues. The FNDIC seized oil-pumping stations and threatened to blow them up in March 2003.³² In February 2003, the FNDIC reportedly comprised some 3,000 youths.³³

Leadership:

Oboko Bello is the president of FNDIC. Other officials include George Timinimi, spokesman; Kingsley Otuaro, secretary; and Dan Ekpebide, adviser.³⁴

Areas of control/activity:

Throughout the southern coastal areas of the Niger Delta region, particularly in the surrounding areas of Oporoza, Eghoro, Oghoye, Ogidigben Ajudaibo Ugboegwugwu, Akpakpa, Ugogoro Ajakosogbo, Ugbogbodu, Deghole, Utonlila, Wakeno, Tobu, and Kolokolo.³⁵

Sources of financing/support:

The FNDIC draws its support from many Ijaw in Delta state.

Status:

Active.

Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA)**Origins/composition:**

Although there is much confusion and disagreement concerning the genesis of the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), there is general agreement that they are made up of militant youth that banded together around the time of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) established in December 1998. Some experts note, however, that the Egbesu Boys were active in the Ijaw-Itsekiri conflict as early as 1997.³⁶ The IYC itself was created following a meeting in Bayelsa state of more than 5,000 youths from 25 associations, and was set up as an umbrella organization to promote Ijaw interests and challenge those of the various oil companies active in the Niger Delta.³⁷ Some analysts believe that the EBA is essentially the military wing of the IYC, representing a collection of like-minded youth from various IYC sub-groups rather than a standing force per se.³⁸ Others, such as Cyril Obi, contend that, although a formal

relationship between the IYC and the EBA cannot be established, the IYC leadership did use Egbesu—an Ijaw deity of justice and war—to motivate, mobilize, and embolden its youth to fight for the cause: greater control of the region's oil wealth. According to Obi, it is difficult to categorically determine whether the Egbesu Boys ever existed as a corporate entity or as a distinct 'group'.³⁹ Besides the reported IYC link, the EBA is also reported to follow the will of the Ijaw's chief priest, who the faithful believe communes with, and speaks on behalf of, the deity Egbesu.⁴⁰

Leadership:

Sesay et al. claim that the Egbesu Boys 'consult' the chief priest of the Egbesu shrine at Amabulou before and during major operations.⁴¹ This may be true, but does not suggest that the chief priest, Augustine Ebikeme, is a leader of the group or active in their operations. According to Justus Demeyai, the EBA's only leader was Alex Preye, who died in 2001.⁴²

Areas of control/activity:

The EBA was active throughout the south coast of the Niger Delta region, especially in Bayelsa and Delta states.

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In 2004, some youth gangs still called themselves 'the EBA',⁴³ but many believed the EBA as an organized armed group was not a cohesive force and no longer 'active'. Four factors explain why this might be so. First, no one appears to have assumed the role of Alex Preye's after his death. Second, the 2003 national elections and their aftermath have provided additional political patronage that has drawn some youth away from EBA activities. Third, the arrival of powerful vigilante groups such as the NDV and the NDPVF (described in greater detail below) have also drawn EBA members or participants into their ranks. And fourth, the growth of organized crime, especially oil bunkering, has also reduced the influence of the EBA as members are increasingly choosing to take advantage of more lucrative opportunities with other gangs.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the Egbesu deity continues to exert a powerful hold on unemployed Ijaw youth. The IYC, the chief priest of the Egbesu shrine at Amabulou, some other charismatic figure, or another Ijaw organization could conceivably rally disaffected youth for a common purpose—including taking up arms—in the name of Egbesu.

***Niger Delta Volunteer Force
(NDVF)***

Origins/composition:

There is little agreement about the origins of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), which has appeared under several names.⁴⁵ The name NDVF is derived from that of the armed resistance group that Major Isaac Boro created in 1967.⁴⁶ Many reports suggest that the group was established around 1998. However, one informed observer posits that the group's origins date back to the 1980s.⁴⁷ Sesay et al. describe the NDVF as 'one of the main armed wings' of the IYC and closely associated with the EBA.⁴⁸ The NDVF has been active in the general struggles involving the Ijaw youth movement. Its demands have included a significant increase in oil revenues, as well as commitments from companies to employ many thousands of local youths.⁴⁹

Leadership:

Bello Orubebe, a lawyer from Warri in Delta state and an Ijaw, is widely reported to have revived and led this group. Demeyai, however, notes that Ikiome Zoukumor was the 'president' of the NDVF back in the 1980. He adds that Zoukumor no longer holds

this title and that Orubebe serves as the group's 'national coordinator'.⁵⁰

Areas of control/activity:

The NDVF was active in the Niger Delta, particularly in the state of Bayelsa and its capital, Yenagoa.

Status:

Many analysts believe this group is effectively dormant, with some noting that it essentially folded in 2003. The NDPVF of Mujahid Abubakar Asari Dokubo and the NDV of Ateke Tom appear to have sprung up around the same time, but apparently there was no link between Orubebe's NDVF and either of these two organizations, although some members associated with the NDVF may have joined the NDV and NDPVF. Demeyai, however, reports that the NDVF remains active under Orubebe's leadership.⁵¹

Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV)

Origins/composition:

The NDV is essentially a new name for a large armed group that has been active in Rivers state for many years. It has been known by various names, including the Germans, German 2000, Icelanders,⁵² and Okrika Vigilante dating back to 1998.⁵³ The new name surfaced in 2003.

Leadership:

Ateke Tom is the leader of the NDV. He is from Okrika in Rivers state.⁵³

Areas of control/activity:

The NDV is active throughout Rivers state.

Sources of financing/support:

Illegal oil bunkering provides generous funding for the NDV.⁵⁴ Ateke also received logistical support and protection from prominent local politicians of the People's Democratic Party in exchange for his assistance in countering the efforts of the opposition All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) during the 2003 state and federal elections.⁵⁵ More recently, some smaller groups of armed youth—or 'cults', as such groups are called—have joined the NDV.⁵⁷

Status:

Active.

Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF)

Origins/composition:

Mujahid Abubakar Asari Dokubo, a member of the Movement for the Survival of the Ethnic Ijaw Nation (MOSEIN), became vice-president of the IYC and, with Rivers state Governor Peter Odili's support, president of the IYC. Upon stepping

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down as IYC president, he formed the NDPVF. He fashioned the armed group on the basis of Issac Boro's group from the 1960s. It had no link with Bello Orubebe's organization.⁵⁸ Asari left the IYC in July 2003.⁵⁹

Leadership:

Asari is the leader of the NDPVF. He was born on 1 June 1964 in Buguma, Rivers state.⁶⁰

Areas of control/activity:

Asari's control of territory is centred on the riverine parts of Rivers state around Buguma.⁶¹

Sources of financing/support:

Asari draws support from the Kalabari ethnic group.⁶² Illegal oil bunkering provides generous funding for the NDPVF.⁶³ The NDPVF also receives support from the cult Dey Gbam.⁶⁴ Asari claims to receive generous support from Ijaws and residents of Port Harcourt, noting, for example, that in one week alone he received 20 million naira (about USD 155,000) from public donations.⁶⁵

Status:

Active.

Hisbah Groups**Origins/composition:**

Hisbah groups are Islamic vigilante groups that support adherence to

Sharia (Islamic law), which several states in northern Nigeria have adopted in recent years (the civil code, covering wills, marriage, and so forth, has been in force across the federation since 1979).⁶⁶ According to Human Rights Watch, these groups 'do not usually' carry firearms, but are more likely to carry sticks and whips, as well as knives and curved weapons with a blade known as a '*barandami*'.⁶⁷

Leadership:

According to one source, the various Hisbah groups do not operate under any central command and are not well organized.⁶⁸ Darren Kew, however, notes that many governors and leading political figures in Sharia criminal code states hold significant sway over Hisbah groups. In some cases, he adds, these groups were instrumental in influencing the outcome of the 2003 elections.⁶⁹

Areas of control/activity:

Hisbah groups are active in at least Kaduna,⁷⁰ Kano, Katsina, and Zamfara states.⁷¹

Sources of financing/support:

According to Africafirst.org, '[m]ost of the Hisbah groups are sponsored by state governments that practice Sharia, and draw their membership from the army of the unemployed in those states.'⁷²

Status:

Active.

**Zamfara State Vigilante Service
(ZSVS)**

Origins/composition:

The Zamfara State Vigilante Service wears red uniforms and has been described as a 'ragtag volunteer army' that patrols Zamfara state arresting anyone suspected of violating Islamic law.⁷³ In a style reminiscent of Hisbah groups in other states but more organized,⁷⁴ the ZSVS operates in six-person teams and was likely established only after the state adopted Sharia law in November 1999.⁷⁵

Leadership:

The governor of Zamfara state has been the driving force directing the ZSVS and organizing its funding, even though its continued disorganization allows for significant decentralized decision-making on an ad hoc basis.⁷⁶

Areas of control/activity:

ZSVS is active in Zamfara state.

Sources of financing/support:

The state government authorized several Zamfara Sharia Implementation Monitoring Committees with powers to arrest suspected criminals,⁷⁷

which apparently covers the activities of ZSVS.

Status:

Active.

***Al-Sunna Wal Jamma
(Followers of the Prophet, also
known as 'Taleban')***

Origins/composition:

Al-Sunna Wal Jamma was formed sometime around 2002. Its objective is the establishment of Nigeria as an Islamic state; its adherents are predominantly Maiduguri university students from the north-east region. Some 200 members apparently took up arms for the first time in December 2003,⁷⁸ possibly in response to the attempt by the governor of Yobe to disband the group.⁷⁹ So fervent is its adherence to a fundamentalist notion of Islam that locals have dubbed it 'the Taleban' in recognition of the group's admiration for the former Afghanistan government, toppled by coalition forces in 2001.⁸⁰ Indeed, Al-Sunna Wal Jamma once replaced the Nigerian flag with the Afghan flag on a state building it briefly occupied during an altercation with police.⁸¹

Leadership:

So far it is unclear who actually heads the militia. The Nigerian police claim

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that a man called Mohammed Yusuf was the group's leader and that he has since fled to Saudi Arabia.⁸² Another report notes that the leader was locally known as Mullah Omar in deference to the deposed Taliban Afghan leader.⁸³

Areas of control/activity:

Al-Sunna Wal Jamma attacked two towns in the north-eastern state of Yobe in December 2003. Followers subsequently skirmished with Nigerian security forces on the outskirts of Maiduguri, the capital of neighbouring Borno state.⁸⁴ A Nigerian police spokesman said that a September 2004 attack had been staged from Niger.⁸⁵

Sources of financing/support:

The group is believed to have minimal support among the local population.⁸⁶ Nigerian authorities detained the head of the Kano-based Almundata Al-Islam Foundation for allegedly financing the group. Wealthy Saudis reportedly fund the Foundation.⁸⁷ Nigerian security sources report that the group possesses sophisticated weapon systems and communication equipment, which suggests access to sources with 'very deep pockets'.⁸⁸

Status:

Active. By one account the government 'neutralized' the group, killing 18 of its members and arresting many

others during a series of skirmishes sparked after the group failed to occupy Damaturu, the capital of Yobe state.⁸⁹ In September 2004, militia members attacked a Borno state police station,⁹⁰ and in March 2005 threatened to attack Christian settlements.⁹¹

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS*Stockpiles***Small arms:**

Despite the repeated denials by leaders of the Bakassi Boys that their members possess or use firearms, numerous and consistent eyewitness accounts convincingly suggest otherwise. Indeed, the police have confiscated firearms during arrests of Bakassi Boys.⁹² The Egbesu Boys carry a variety of firearms.⁹³ Eyewitnesses report that members of the OPC carry 'long guns', 'sophisticated weapons', and 'pistols', despite leaders' protestations to the contrary.⁹⁴ The FNDIC have some military rifles.⁹⁵

Many armed groups rely primarily on weapons other than firearms, although there is evidence that those that traditionally have owned few

guns now possess them in greater quantities. The Almajiri boys, for example, are mainly armed with clubs, machetes, bows and arrows, but also have guns.⁹⁶ The ZSVS reportedly carries pistols along with home-made machetes and whips.⁹⁷ According to David Pratten, who has been following the development of some small armed groups in Akwa Ibom state for some ten years, there has been a 'marked increase' in the use of locally made pistols in recent years.⁹⁸

Assault rifles and other 'sophisticated weapons' are widely held. Bronwen Manby writes that an AK-47 assault rifle is 'easily available to the smallest local gang leader.'⁹⁹ Itsekiri and Urhobo vigilante groups possess small arms including assault rifles.¹⁰⁰ Al-Sunna Wal Jamma have stockpiled AK-47 assault rifles.¹⁰¹ Asari claims that his NDPVF has more than 3,000 guns in its arsenal, including many assault rifles.¹⁰²

Light weapons:

The secretary-general of a Nigerian Islamic group has alleged that armed groups from the Christian Tarok ethnic group have used 'machine guns' in their attacks on Muslim Fulanis in Plateau state.¹⁰³ Nigerian security sources report that the group Al-

Sunna Wal Jamma possesses sophisticated shoulder-launched weapon systems,¹⁰⁴ although this could not be independently verified. Armed combatants participating in the conflict between the NDV and the NDPVF told HRW that along with a variety of small arms they also used machine guns and rocket launchers.¹⁰⁵

Sources

Domestic:

Nigerian police and military firearms 'constitute [a] notable source' of small arms circulating in the country through seizures or illicit sales, as do weapons brought back by peacekeepers serving abroad.¹⁰⁶ In January 2004, Al-Sunna wal Jamma seized guns and ammunition from two police stations in the towns of Geidam and Kanamma in Yobe state.¹⁰⁷ They also reportedly carried away 'large amounts of weapons and ammunition' from attacks on police stations in Borno state.¹⁰⁸ Retired military officers from the Niger Delta region have also reportedly provided arms to Ijaw youth.¹⁰⁹ The OPC has seized weapons belonging to the police or suspected criminals apprehended by the group¹¹⁰ and the FNDIC has reportedly seized a number of military rifles from secu-

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rity personnel.¹¹¹ Itsekiri and Urhobo vigilante groups obtain weapons by seizing Nigerian police and armed forces stocks.¹¹²

Communities at the level of village councils will sometimes pool resources to procure weapons in support of local vigilante groups.¹¹³

Weapons also circulate among the armed groups themselves as well as local markets. The Istekiri and Urhobo vigilante groups, for example, also obtain weapons from their Ijaw adversaries and from local sources that have smuggled arms into the Niger Delta.¹¹⁴ Asari claims that his group seized over 200 rifles from the NDV.¹¹⁵ Weapons are also easily available at local markets; for example, one 2003 study reported that in Warri in Delta state a shotgun cost USD 570, a Kalashnikov USD 850, and a bazooka USD 2,150.¹¹⁶

Blacksmiths represent 'a significant source' of small arms in the country, producing mostly single- and double-barrelled shotguns as well as various models of pistols. Vigilante groups and members of ethnic militias are increasingly turning to these artisans for weapons.¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch reports that interlocutors in Warri indicated that craft-produced small arms are fabricated in Nigeria, 'especially in the industrial zones in

the south-east, including Aba and Awka'.¹¹⁸ (Aba is in Abia state and was a capital of the secessionist state of Biafra during the 1967–70 civil war; Awka is the current capital of Anambra state.) Nigeria also produces a variety of small arms and ammunition at its Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON), but there are no reports that any Nigerian armed groups receive these weapons directly.

Foreign:

No reports of foreign governments providing weapons directly to Nigerian armed groups currently exist. Cross-border smuggling, however, is rampant. Weapons reportedly enter Nigeria overland from Benin (with arms originating in Ghana and Togo¹¹⁹ as well as in Burkina Faso),¹²⁰ and from Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.¹²¹ Weapons are also known to arrive from sea, especially in the Niger Delta region via oil bunkering activities.

Recovered**DDR:**

In response to the quickly escalating crisis in 2004 in Rivers state, which pitted Ateke's NDV against Asari's NDPVF, President Obasanjo invited

both men to meet with him in Abuja in an effort to reduce tensions and control the conflict. A deal was worked out whereby both protagonists agreed to a ceasefire as well as to disband their militias and disarm.¹²² While many analysts have cynically, and perhaps accurately, described the programme as little more than a ineffective (and, at USD 1,800 a weapon,¹²³ an expensive) gun buy-back scheme, it is included here because it was politically negotiated at the highest levels and included commitments that are common to many DDR programmes. The lack of sincerity on the part of the protagonists and the lack of planning on the part of the convener and implementer do not disqualify it.

The initiative reportedly netted 854 rifles and 1,353 rounds of ammunition and a small amount of additional explosive material. Government officials claim that the NDV returned more than 600 rifles. Asari challenged this assertion, countering that Ateke submitted only eight firearms. For his part, he claimed that he furnished 196 rifles, which the government confirmed.¹²⁴ Asari effectively pulled out of the process and the initiative has been derailed.

Other:

The Nigerian government has recovered tens of thousands of weapons and hundreds of thousands of ammunition over the years from armed groups and criminal elements operating in the country. In 2002, the Nigerian Customs Service reported it had intercepted arms and ammunition worth USD 34 million at border posts during a six-month period.¹²⁵ Moreover, in 2003 during an unusually large seizure it intercepted 170,000 rounds of ammunition in a single haul.¹²⁶ During the first four months of 2004, the Nigerian government reported collecting 112,000 illegal firearms.¹²⁷ In June 2004 in Warri, the government undertook Operation Restore Hope, which through cordon-and-search operations netted 42 rifles, 1,500 rounds of ammunition, and several locally made mortar rounds.¹²⁸ The emergency Plateau state administration collected some 300 weapons over a 30-day amnesty period during the 2004 state of emergency.¹²⁹ These few examples indicate the types of activities being undertaken. They are not intended to convey the full scope of the government's initiatives.

Civil society has also undertaken programs to counter the proliferation of small arms. For example, a

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coalition of NGOs in Delta state initiated a 'Mop up the Arms' campaign in June 2003. However, the measure reportedly did not recover more than a symbolic number of weapons.¹³⁰

Relatively few examples of the weapons and ammunition recovered are destroyed. It has been reported that in July 2001 Nigeria set fire in Kaduna to some 2,400 guns seized from armed robbers, illegal arms dealers, and participants in communal conflicts. The government said that additional arms were to be destroyed in Lagos and Makurdi as part of the initiative.¹³¹ Some of the weapons that the NDV and NDPVF turned in were set ablaze during a public ceremony in November 2004. Again, this is not a complete list.

In recognition of the growing problem of the proliferation of illicit arms and the growing fears surrounding armed criminality and violence, President Obasanjo established in March 2004 the National Committee on the Destruction of Illegal Arms and Ammunition. In its first year of operation, the Committee conducted four destruction exercises. All told, some 3,000 firearms and 2,500 rounds of ammunition were destroyed.¹³²

HUMAN SECURITY ISSUES

CAFF

Extent of recruitment:

According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC), armed Ijaw youth thought to be 16 years of age and older are believed to be active in the Niger Delta region conflicts.¹³³ Many of the Almajiri boys are 15–16 years of age, with some as young as 10–12 years old.¹³⁴ The problem of child insurgents is likely fairly widespread throughout Nigeria. Nnamdi Obasi underscores the potential threat by pointing out that a Nigerian human rights organization report found that in 1999 more than two million children under the age of 15 roamed the streets in 19 northern Nigerian states capitals as beggars, and were responsible for more than two out of every three acts of urban violence.¹³⁵ Unsupervised and impoverished children are more vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups; and their large numbers could constitute a major threat to human security in the very near future.

Functions:

Although a HRW study did not define the ages of the 'youth' in Delta

state in its investigation of the crisis in Warri, it did provide an indication of what types of activity child combatants undertake and how much it costs to recruit them. HRW reported that it was alleged that politicians—including the Delta state governor—armed and hired youth to intimidate their opponents during the election campaign as well as to protect the operations of illegal oil bunkerers. The youth were not particularly generously compensated for their services. An individual could be contracted for USD 70 or less according to the report.¹³⁶

Displacement

IDPs:

Displacement owing to vigilante group activity and altercations with Nigerian security forces is common and widespread. The Global IDP Project states: ‘Since the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 ended 15 years of military rule in Nigeria, at least 10,000 people have been killed and some 800,000 displaced by outbreaks of communal violence across the country. According to government estimates, about 250,000 Nigerians remain displaced today—including up to 60,000 who fled their homes

during the latest unrest in Plateau State in May 2004’.¹³⁷

Between late December 2003 and early January 2004, at least 10,000 inhabitants of the towns of Babangida, Dankalawar, Geidam, and Kanamma in Yobe state fled their homes owing to fighting between Al-Sunna wal Jamma and government forces.¹³⁸ More recently, violence in Plateau state has forced ‘tens of thousands’ of residents to flee their homes.¹³⁹ By early 2005, most Plateau state internally displaced persons (IDPs) had returned home, with only a few thousand remaining in Bauchi state. Although the extent of internal displacement is not known, it appears to be very localized. In 2003, violence between security forces and the FNDIC reportedly resulted in the displacement of an estimated 4,000 people.¹⁴⁰

Refugees hosted:

In 2003, UNHCR reported that Nigeria was host to 9,180 refugees, mainly from Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Chad. In the second half of that year, over 3,000 Liberians fled to Nigeria.¹⁴¹

Other violations or abuses

Killings, rape, and torture:

The OPC stand accused of murder, summary execution, and torture. They

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have killed or injured hundreds of people.¹⁴² The Bakassi Boys have likewise been accused of murder and torture.¹⁴³ Amnesty International (AI) has charged the AVS with murder and summary execution.¹⁴⁴ The United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), citing a Nigerian academic, reported that during the first three years following the return to democratic rule, ethnic and religious unrest had claimed the lives of more than 10,000 people.¹⁴⁵ Amnesty International also reports that the OTA/Bakassi Boys also summarily executed more than 1,500 people between September 1999 and July 2000.¹⁴⁶

Other:

AI noted that various Nigerian armed groups not only were responsible for murder and torture, but also stood accused of 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment [and] unlawful detention.'¹⁴⁷ The OPC is reported to have poured acid on its victims in several cases, and to set ablaze corpses of people who they have killed.¹⁴⁸ According to HRW, while Hisbah groups are supposed to turn suspects over to the police, they have often disregarded their own guidelines and taken it upon themselves to mete out justice. Hisbah members frequently flogged

or beat suspected transgressors on the spot. HRW adds, however, that it was not aware of Hisbah members killing anyone, and notes that since 2003, abuses by the Hisbah appear to have decreased.¹⁴⁹

OUTLOOK

Long-standing religious and ethnic tensions, economic hardship, and political opportunism all suggest that armed groups remain a threat to human security.

This study has enumerated many of the larger armed groups active in Nigeria, but by no means all of them. Relatively little is known, for example, about the numerous ethnic Itsekiri or Urhobo armed groups, which compete for influence throughout the Niger Delta region. These, however, tend to be small and limited to defending their local communities.¹⁵⁰ There are important exceptions.¹⁵¹ Another concern is the existence of groups, such as the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB),¹⁵² which are not currently conducting armed attacks but which have easy access to small arms and light weapons and might well use them in the future.¹⁵³

Government crackdowns on vigilantism has yielded only limited results, and efforts to reclaim small arms and light weapons, while welcome, are insignificant in relation to the scale of the problem. The decision by President Obasanjo in May 2004 to declare a state of emergency and suspend the governor in Plateau state underscored just how dire the situation had become. But the decision to reinstate the governor should not be taken to indicate that the worst is past. Indeed, if judged purely on grounds of job performance or ability to uphold law and order, many more governors would arguably be candidates for suspension—admittedly a draconian measure with serious implications for a country that has worked hard to restore civilian democracy after so many years of military dictatorship. Obasanjo has repeatedly pledged to honour the constitution and not to seek re-election when his second term expires in 2007. Term limits will also apply to many state governors. During the 2003 election, politically inspired killings escalated sharply. In 2007 greater competition (because of a reduced number of incumbents) coupled with the proliferation of armed groups and their weapons could well spark a renewed outbreak of communal and political violence.

PART II**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

		IVS	Imo State Vigilante Service
AI	Amnesty International	IYC	Ijaw Youth Council
ANPP	All Nigeria People's Party	MASSOB	Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra
APC	Arewa People's Congress	MOSEIN	Movement for the Survival of the Ethnic Ijaw Nation
ASMATA	Anambra State Markets Amalgamated Traders Association	NDPVF	Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
AVS	Abia State Vigilante Service	NDV	Niger Delta Vigilante
AVS	Anambra State Vigilante Service	NDVF	Niger Delta Volunteer Force
CAFF	Children associated with fighting forces	OPC	O'odua People's Congress
CLEEN	Centre for Law Enforcement Education	OTA	Onitsha Traders Association
CSC	Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration	ZSVS	Zamfara State Vigilante Service
DICON	Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria		
EBA	Egbesu Boys of Africa		
FNDIC	Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities		
HRW	Human Rights Watch		
IDP	Internally displaced person		
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks		

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- 43 Pratten adds that some of these gangs include members outside of the Ijaw ethnic group. Written correspondence with David Pratten, Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex, Brighton, England, 12 April 2005.
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- 129 See Chapter 1 of this book on armed
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