Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs (CUJPIA) Vol. 1, No. 2, December, 2013.

Oil and Gas: National Sovereignty, Foreign Interests and Local Bunkering in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) (*)

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(*) Revised version of a paper commissioned by the ECOWAS Commission and presented during a workshop on the Gulf of Guinea Conflict System, 21-23 August 2013 at Lome, Togo.

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Introduction & the *Problèmatique*

The abiding paradox of plenty in Africa is that whereas the continent is rich its people are poor – in many cases extremely so. Africa is extravagantly endowed not only with much-coveted energy resources such as oil and gas, but also with huge deposits of mineral resources, including those, such as uranium, that drive the great powers' armament and nuclear industries. In the Gulf of Guinea (GoG), abundant oil and gas resources and their massive petro-dollars spin-offs have yet to transform any of the states from poverty to wealth spiking tension, conflict and violence. Only by engaging in true and holistic transformation of the political economy of oil and gas can national sovereignty become meaningful, foreign interests attenuated and peace and security won and consolidated.

Much of the literature speaks to 'resource curse'; the main argument being that "the extraction of oil by countries in Africa and other parts of the developing world nearly always leads to political repression, corruption and violence" (Klare and Volman, 2006: 625; See also Soysa, 2011:36 and Donner, 2009: 22-24). Weszkalynys (2009, 2011) blames crude oil for the underdevelopment of oil-rich African states and the common denominators of instability and violence in those countries. Pervasive sleaze and graft in the oil sector explains much, but not all, of so-called 'resource curse'. In the GoG states, there is paucity of information about how oil contracts are awarded and how much major transnational oil companies (TOCs) pay to African governments. Also, these companies often fail to play by the rules of the game. Thus, there is nothing deterministic about the so-called 'Dutch disease'. As Terry Karl (in Southall, 2009: 29) has argued, "the Dutch disease is not automatic. The extent to which it takes effect is largely the result of decision-making in the public realm".

By most accounts, Africa in general and West Africa in particular, are witnessing an "unprecedented boom in oil and gas investments" (Southall, 2009: 10). It is the era of the second scramble for the continent's enormous energy and mineral resources. As was the case during the first scramble for Africa's territories and wealth in the late 19th Century, the majority of African people have gained precious little and lost enormously. The new scramble is spear-headed by resource-hungry great powers such as the US, China, EU, Japan with several emerging powers – such as Russia, Brazil, Mexico, Malaysia, Indonesia and Venezuela – following their lead. The scramble is taking place within the context of the US-led post 9/11 militarization and securitization policies and alliances in which several national and supranational actors and forces are unevenly implicated. These include international financial institutions (IFIs), states, TOCs and national/state corporations. Others are indigenous companies, African petro-elites and oil-bearing/producing communities (Obi, 2009: 190). The latter include the Niger Delta (Nigeria), the Cabinda region (Angola) and the Bioko Island (Equatorial Guinea). Little attention has been paid to the welfare of the local or indigenous people and to their immediate ecology (Southall, 2009: 15).

Virtually all the great powers, as key external actors, exhibit a combination of what Southall (2009) refers to as "good intentions, self-interest, naked imperialism and outright hypocrisy". This largely explains the yawning gap between precept and practice; between Mane (2005: 3)'s characterization of the GoG as "endowed with abundant natural resources which, if carefully managed, can contribute to global prosperity" and the stark reality of mass poverty and deepening underdevelopment on the ground. Thus, while the scramble for the continent's resources has apparently boosted foreign investment in the extractive sector – three GoG states feature among Africa's top ten FDI destinations between 2011 and 2012: Nigeria (6.2 per cent, 4th); Angola (5.2 per cent, 7th) and Ghana (3. 7 per cent; 9th) – this has done little to ameliorate the material lives of the people. On the contrary, the scramble for more oil and gas has made things worse for Africans. This is because it merely extracts natural resources but does not develop the local economy (Southall, 2009: 10; Yohannes, 2003: 12). The net effect is that GoG states have "a very rich share of the riches natural capital but not physical and human capital" (Soysa, 2011: 36).

The section of West and Central Africa with an impressive outlay of oil and gas resources is referred to in global energy strategic terms as the Gulf of Guinea (Obi, 2009a). The scrambling for Africa's oil and gas can hardly be separated from the general scrambling for Africa. For Obi (2009: 198), "the scramble for oil in Africa was literally embedded in the scramble for Africa". This scramble has also been enmeshed with trans-global processes and actors.

The major *problèmatique* of this piece is that the GoG is a highly contested and complex terrain and context in which foreign interests often outmuscle national sovereignty with unpleasant consequences. The epicenter or centre of gravity is the Niger Delta where it appears 'boys' and 'barons' operate freely. Illicit bunkering is a reaction of the commons – the activities of the 'boys' are only a tip of the iceberg compared to those of the 'barons', that is, a coterie of key state, military and TOCs' officials – to the hallowing out of the state since the mid-1980s and its lamentable absence from the social provisioning of basic public goods and values. African governments have their work cut out for them: they should put their houses in order; become more effective relative autonomous actors in the global stage and work for the good of the greatest number of their people.

Profiling the Gulf of Guinea (GoG)

The Gulf of Guinea (GoG) region is the north-east most part of the Tropical Atlantic Ocean. It is almost as vast as the Gulf of Mexico and provides shipping lifeline for no fewer than twelve nations (Schneider and Vircoulon, 2013). The region and its conflict system consist of fourteen states: Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial-Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, Sao Tome et Principe and Sierra Leone. This region which traverses West and Central Africa excels as one of the globe's top oil and gas exploration sites. New offshore oil was recently discovered in Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana.

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) boasts of about 80 billion barrels of oil. 24 billion of this – that is, 30 per cent of the total, representing eight per cent of the world reserves -- is found in the GoG. This makes the region potentially "the world's leading deep water offshore production centre" (Servant and Forster, 2003: 140). The region is ahead in terms of both average reserves and productivity of the sub-sea wells. It is estimated that by 2020 some 770 million barrels of West African oil would be consumed by the US (Yohannes, 2003: 10). One in every four barrels of oil produced comes from this region with Nigeria and Angola accounting for nearly four million barrels per day (bpd), that is, almost half of Africa's output (Watts, 2008: 28).

With about 5.4 million bpd of crude oil produced in 2012, Nigeria and Angola accounted, respectively, for

47 and 34 per cent of the output (Okafor and Ezeobi, 2013). Nearly 40 per cent and 29 per cent of oil consumed, respectively, in North America and Europe pass through this region. Ten years ago, it was predicted that the GoG's estimated reserves of 24 billion barrels of oil would become the world's leading deep water offshore production centre (Servant and Forster, 2003: 140). By the end of 2012, the region held some 4.5 per cent of the world's oil reserves and three per cent of proven gas reserves much of which remains untapped.

Further, gas reserves and total gas production are put at over 80 billion cubic meters with Algeria accounting for two-thirds (Southall, 2009: 14). A quarter of Africa's eight per cent of the world's proven reserves of natural gas are located in the GoG. Nigeria has the largest reserves in SSA and is second only to Algeria as the continent's most important gas exporter. The gas reserves in Nigeria's Niger Delta region are thought to be at least one and a half times that of oil in energy terms with its development still in its early days (Olusakin, 2006: 221). The Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) production capacity is estimated at about 73.7 billion cubic meters and is bested only by Qatar (BMI 2013). So significant is the natural gas here that there have been high-level political talks about constructing a Trans-Sahara pipeline to take natural gas from the Niger Delta to Algeria with a view to reducing Europe's energy dependence on Russia.

For the great powers, the GoG has emerged as the new Persian Gulf in terms of its capacity to meet their oil demands (Obi, 2009: 94). It is, for example, likely to supply a quarter of US oil imports by 2015 (*The Economist*, 25 May 2013). This explains why these countries have sought to access and control the reserves by both fair and foul means with scant regard for the national sovereignty of the oil-rich states and the human security of their growing population. According to Obi (2009: 88), the US' abiding interest in West and Central Africa's rapidly expanding source of oil and gas has led it to decide that the region's extreme instability deserves to be prevented "from becoming a site for terrorist attacks against western interests".

The international geo-strategic importance of the GoG's oil and gas reserves lies in several mutually reinforcing factors: attractive oil fields many of them off-shore and deep off-shore, far removed from conflict zones in the oil-bearing states; fine, sulphur-free and sweet quality oil that highly recommends itself to key major markets in the US, EU and Asia; and a relatively stable oil production environment. The GoG oil has been described as "lighter, higher-valued crude oils that are tailor-made for US East Coast markets" (Volman, 2003: 574). Obi (2009: 207) adds that "oil in West and Central Africa is one of the most highly prized strategic interests in the world today".

Perhaps the most important factor is that, for all the conflict in much of the region, the conditions stipulated in oil contracts by the states are arguably the most lucrative and most profitable globally. Also, the risk-reward equation in doing business in Africa, particularly in resource-rich states, is very attractive because, for Ernst and Young (2013), "the returns remain among the highest in the world". Extremely generous contract terms have, undoubtedly, attracted the major TOCs to the region. The 'Big Six' – Exxon Mobil, Shell, BP, Total, Conoco, and Philips – control about 63 per cent of the subsea market projects in West Africa. Off the Angolan coast alone, Exxon Mobil reportedly controlled, in 2003, some 12 acres of oil in concessions which contained 7.5 billion barrels of oil (Yohannes, 2003: 7-8). Similarly, oil, gas and other natural resources have driven high economic growth since 2000, but foreign direct investments (FDIs) in non-extractive industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction and services have also played a key role in the growth (Roll, 2011; Melber and Southall, 2009: xix; Ernst and Young, 2013). Political instability and violence appeared, however, to have taken their toll over the years (Farrell and Rodgers, 2007: 10).

Oil and Gas

- *Nigeria*

Nigeria has been described as "the most important producer of oil and gas on the (African) continent and petro-state of most geo-strategic concern to the US" (Watts, 2008: 27). By 2011, Nigeria was Washington's fifth largest oil supplier, after Canada, Saudi Arabia, Mexico and Venezuela. In 2012, the country's crude represented five per cent of share of US oil imports. Depending on the sources, by 2010, the country's proven oil reserves were estimated at either between 16 and 22 billion barrels or above 37.2 billion barrels. The latter figure represents 2.68 per cent of global reserves. Nigeria is the largest producer of sweet oil in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC), created in 1979, is the state oil corporation through which the country participates in the petroleum industry. It currently holds 60 per cent participation in the industry (Ajayi, 2013). It has been plagued, over the years, by inefficiency, waste, opacity and endemic corruption. It has built up a sordid reputation for under-reporting the country's oil sales and revenues. Shell, which began operation in Nigeria in 1936, is the foremost TOC in the country. The other high-profile companies are Chevron, ExxonMobil, Agip, Total and Texaco.

Nigeria's proven natural gas reserves are estimated at about 200 trillion cubic feet (tfc), about 2.82 per cent of global reserves and three times as substantial as oil reserves. By 2010, it had become a major exporter of LNG to the EU and the US. Particularly coveted is the Bonny Island Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) plant, which has an annual output capacity of 17 million tons; an annual output of 2.5 tons of liquefied petroleum gas (PLG) and a million tons per annum of condensates. New plants, such as Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) Project, Escravos Gas-Gathering Project and Oso Natural Gas Liquefied Project, are either currently operational or are in the pipeline (Ajayi, 2013). In 2011, while the NLNG exports to the US substantially declined, its exports to Japan more than tripled (USEIA, 'Nigeria').

Nigeria is, by far, the GoG's major oil and gas player with the Niger Delta as its epicenter, as already indicated. Between 2009 and 2011, the country earned $ 143.5 billion in equity crude sales, royalty, signature bonuses and taxes. During the same period it lost over 136 million barrels of oil estimated at $109 billion to oil theft and sabotage. 10 million barrels valued at $894 million were also lost as a result of pipeline vandalism in onshore operations (NEITI-EITI Core Audit Report of Oil and Gas, 2009-2011).

- Angola

Africa's third biggest economy, after South Africa and Nigeria, with a GDP of over $104 billion in 2011, Angola was also one of the fastest growing economies in the first decade of the 2000s. This was due to significant FDI capital inflows into the country's vast oil and gas industry. Steady investment in the energy infrastructure since the end of the devastating 27 year civil war (1975-2002) has gradually modernized the sector. The official goal of the country's current National Development Plan (NDP), 2013-2017, is to create a new Angola by giving priority to private investment to diversify the economy and create jobs. Unlike Nigeria, several industries have developed around the oil and gas industry. Over $40 billion in FDI between 2003 and 2011 – mainly from the US, the UK, France, China and Brazil – has boosted the country's economic diversification. In the past decade, dependence on oil exports has been reduced from 98 to 75 per cent of government revenues. Sonangol, its national oil company, created in 1976, operates nearly twenty subsidiaries in the oil, natural gas and allied industries. (USEIA, 'Angola').

Angola's oil and gas are essentially offshore. It has proven oil reserves of 9.5 billion barrels, medium-to-light crude with low sulphur content. It more than doubled its oil production from 896,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 2002 to 1.84 million bpd in 2011, the largest shares -- 38 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively -- going to China and the US. The government plans to produce 2 million barrels per day by 2014.

By the end of 2011, Angola had proven reserves of natural gas of 10.95 trillion cubic feet (tcf), second only to Nigeria. The production of natural gas has grown from 98 billion cubic feet (bcf) in 1990 to 379 bcf in 2011. Its LNG, a partnership between Sonangol (the state oil corporation), Chevron, ENI and Total, is expected to last for at least 30 years. The first LNG cargo was shipped in June 2013.

- Equatorial Guinea (EG)

The Oil and Gas Journal indicates that by January 2012 Equatorial Guinea (EG) had proven oil reserves of 1.1 billion barrels and produced about 320, 000 barrels of oil per day in 2011. This makes her the third largest oil producer on the African continent. Like Nigeria, the energy sector represents over 90 per cent of government revenue and nearly 98 per cent of export earnings. Oil production is expected to peak at 331, 200 barrels per day in 2016 after which decline would set in except there are new discoveries as well as new exploration and production investments (BMI, 2013). EG has a Gross National Product (GNP) per capita of a little over $25,000. Yet, according to the World Bank, 78 per cent of the citizens live beneath the national poverty line and most on less than a dollar a day (Shook, 2013).

The Ministry of Mines, Industry and Energy regulates the oil industry, but a national company, the GE Petrol, became operational in 2002. Sonagas, the national gas company, was created in January 2005. By January 2012, EG had an estimated 1.3 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of proven natural gas reserves. Its production increased from a billion cubic feet to 238 bcf between 2001 and 2010, as new projects got underway. The country's main LNG exports are to Asian and Latin American countries as well as to Kuwait. Like Nigeria – but unlike Angola – EG is an EITI member, but, according to Mouawad (2009), this may be no more than a fig leaf for dictatorship.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

There are interesting conceptual and theoretical linkages in the GoG between, on the one hand, national sovereignty, foreign interests and local bunkering and, on the other, space, resources and states over which TOCs, foreign governments, IFIs and petro elites project their power and compete. It is a dynamic and complex relation of hegemony and subordination potentially creating both a potentially explosive conflict system.

For one, sophisticated and powerful TOCs, whose monopoly of the relations of production gives them significant power and leverage, have become habituated to deploying increasingly significant resources in the lucrative oil and gas industry at the expense of the state and the local oil-bearing/producing communities (Obi, 2011: 107). "Power", writes Cronin (2008: 238), "is fluid, dynamic and relational. It is like electricity; you use it or lose it. It cannot be stored away indefinitely. Power is not a fixed, isolated object to be possessed or secured …"

For another, as more West and Central African states discovered and produced more offshore oil and gas, the GoG has become "one of the most dangerous maritime areas in the world" (International Crisis Group, 2012: i). The region has witnessed the destabilization of the maritime economy and coastal states by violent trans-national crime and growing piracy activities as well as an upsurge in the activities of criminal groups along the coasts of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Benin and Togo (ibid.).

The response of the big oil companies has been, first, to police their immediate environment and, second, to get their home governments to articulate militarization policies to ensure energy security for themselves in the region. This is a largely physical security response, shorn of a basic human needs approach vis-à-vis those most victimized by the gas and oil industry in the region. It has proved inadequate to address what the west refers to as a 'new threat paradigm' present in so-called ungoverned spaces (Watts, 2008:27) in the GoG geo-political zone and the Sahelo-Saharan belt. Looming large both in the background and in the foreground is the danger supposedly posed, in these spaces, to western interests by emergent political/radical Islam and supposedly weak and failing African states (Obi, 2009: 89, 91).

The central governments in the GoG have been too fragile to rein in the TOCs and the great powers. Already paralyzed by various regimes of the economic structural adjustment programs (SAPs) stipulated by the World Bank and the IMF since the mid-1980s, the states and the TOCs have become extremely "wedded together in transnational extraction and sharing of oil profits" (Obi, 2011: 107). Abundant oil revenues have strengthened the ruling elites in these countries against critical domestic constituencies to the extent of ignoring their legitimate aspirations and demands. They have become so extraverted and beholding to the oil companies, their parent governments and to the World Bank and the IMF, among others, that they lack the capacity and the will to rein them in to respect their national sovereignty and territorial integrity. There is little or no trade-off between sovereignty and the collective good; it is an apparent case of 'neither nor'. The 'resource curse' finds fullest expression here. Oliveira (in Roll, 2011) has argued that the GoG is the 'worst case scenario' among resource wealthy states: "every structural pre-requisite is missing for sound use of oil revenues" (p. 13). Worse, while the GoG states may control the oil fields, they do not own them.

State fragility suggests lack of meaningful relationship and fellowship between the state and the citizens. In an era of blossoming electoralism – elections are generally held when and as due, even though many of them are hardly free and fair, let alone free from fear – this lack of trust has birthed a distrustful and cynical citizenry. Venerated political economist, Samir Amin, (2004: 1) has argued that "democratization demands that its reach is felt in social and economic spheres, not to be restricted to just the political sphere". The state's democracy and legitimacy deficits have resulted in a type of democracy that is devoid of social justice, social citizenship and social distribution of goods and values. Many GoG governments have lost the moral right to collect taxes from the citizens thus missing out on the possibility of a healthy relationship with the citizenry through taxation (Shaxson, 2007: 1126). Also lost is the important lesson that tax collection has, historically, contributed to the emergence of strong states, democratic institutions and human development.

A major response to the state's paucity and leanness in political economy terms is the use, by non-state actors, of economics of entitlement and political agitation for resource control as a major mobilization tool. This dynamic is most entrenched in the Niger Delta, but it is a general pattern in the GoG, notably in Angola's Cabinda conclave (Watts, 2008: 27). It explains what, for some, are criminal activities such as pipeline vandalism, illegal bunkering, kidnapping for ransom and piracy but which, for others, are no more than bold, if often violent and destructive, expressions of pertinent issues of disenfranchisement, disempowerment, alienation, resource control and class/political struggle.

National Sovereignty

In legal and theoretical terms, the notion of national sovereignty stipulates that states have suzerainty over their public space and territorial integrity and are masters of their own destinies. In functional democracies, sovereignty belongs to the people who in turn delegate it to their elected representatives. In the real world, however, states are more or less sovereign depending on the extent of their strength or fragility in domestic and external terms. Max Sesay (1995: 187) has made the important point that "when state institutions and the national interest are subordinated to the interests of groups or individuals in society, state paralysis is inevitable". He adds that "with roots in the colonial period, weak state capacity in the 3rd world is the outcome of a complex interaction of both internal and external forces".

Two major factors account for this development. The first is the evolving nature of sovereignty in the contemporary era where, according to Hardt and Negri (2000 cited in Southall, 2009: 24), empire has replaced imperialism. They define empire as a "decentred and deterritorialising apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers". They add that in the empire of the post-modern era, sovereignty consists of "a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule". These operate within an interlocking regulatory framework.

Sovereignty appears delimited and limited by supranational institutions and key external actors over whom fragile African states exercise little or no control. Strong and powerful states remain dominant and hegemonic under an increasingly globalized system. They call the shots everywhere and the fragile states, excessively weaned on FDIs and donor funding, suffer what they must in their hands. Many states in the latter group have little more than pro-forma, putative or formal sovereignty. This alludes to the point made earlier about GoG states controlling but not owning the oil wells in their own soil. Within this perspective, Shaxson (2007: 1125) misses the point when he claims that "nobody in Angola's oil industry would dispute that today it is the Angolan oil company, *Sonangol*, not ExxonMobil or BP or Sinopec that calls the shots".

Although very problematic because of GoG governments' excessive dependence on giant oil firms for revenues and the backing these firms enjoy from powerful western powers (Harshe, 2003: 115), international or foreign assistance to police or pacify conflict zones is not foreclosed. As Obasi (2011: 71) has argued, however, "such assistance must be weighed carefully … to ensure it does not contribute to the suppression of legitimate protests or to further human rights violation …" GoG states would also have to deal with a further erosion of their sovereignty: the "minimal accountability of multinational companies and donors to host governments" (Southall and Comninos, 2009: 360). More or less effective national sovereignty demands no less.

The second major factor relates to the history of sovereignty loss in many an African state. The deregulation and privatization policies and measures dictated by the World Bank and the IMF in the mid-1980s and imposed on much of Africa severely undermined the continent's economic sovereignty and the strength of the state. Sovereignty appears extremely dubious and superfluous without a strong, legitimate and democratic state. In the same vein, "a necessary corollary to the principle of territorial sovereignty is the principle of territorial integrity" (Lagoni, 1979: 217). Ordinary Africans have been sentenced to a regime of permanent austerity and sacrifice. Similarly, the ruling and policy elites in these countries have been forced to play little more than a 'comprador role' on behalf of global capital (Southall and Comninos, 2009: 359). Many of them appear to enjoy this role as they regularly cut deals with key transnational actors that, in the words of Southall (2009: 30), "are of advantage to them but operate at great cost to the general welfare of their fellow African citizens".

GoG states are expected to materialize their national sovereignty differently within the context of oil rent receipts and a debilitating rentier mentality. This is because they experience different levels of vulnerability. Some make themselves available for neo-colonial exploitation more than others. They are at contrasting depths of the corruption morass, with many of them featuring in the unenviable league of the globe's most corrupt nations. They are also bound together by the copious absence of purposeful, visionary and missionary political leaders who could act as effective agents of change and gradually build strong, democratic institutions for the public good. Many political elites in the GoG petro-states have proved unable and unwilling to rise above their personal self-aggrandizement and elite interests to do this. "Oil in itself means nothing", writes Terry Karl (in Yohannes, 2003: 15). "What matters are the social and political and economic institutions in which it is inserted. Oil can be a force for development or it can be a major impetus for war". Obi (2011: 113) underlines the point that "oil is what those with power make it, not what it makes them, Oil can't 'act' independent of intervening factors".

Thus, Equatorial Guinea which sends two-thirds of its oil to the US has allowed the oil companies to keep 87 per cent of the oil receipts. This generosity hurts national sovereignty and interest compared to 50 per cent in many other developing nations (Yohannes, 2003: 9). The country also reportedly obtained in the recent past only a meager 39 per cent of the revenues raised from oil in a typical contract. This figure compares very unfavorably with 78.4 per cent (Gabon), 76 per cent (DRC) and 70.2 per cent (Nigeria), with the caveat that the last two examples related, respectively, to deeper, offshore water areas.

In Nigeria, the deregulation of the mining sector under the Nigerian Investment Promotion Council (NIPC) Decree 1995 allowed for a 100 per cent foreign ownership of mining operations and related enterprises. It also allowed free repatriation of capital, profits and dividends (Olusakin, 2006: 23).

In Angola, journalist and human rights activist, Rafael Marquel de

Morais, brought a complaint in August 2013 against the Vice-President, Manuel Vincente, accusing him of breaking the country's law on conflict of interest by not relinquishing his position as a director in China Sonangol International Holding, a Chinese-owned company with extensive oil and related interests in Angola (*Africa-Asia Confidential*, September 2013).

There have been some attempts to win back part of the lost sovereignty. The advent of national oil companies (NOCs) in countries such as Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea and Angola has enhanced the bargaining power of petro states "to demand more in exchange for access to their oil reserves" (Obi, 2009: 203). Since 2000, the Nigerian state has taken some important decisions in an attempt to control its oil industry. These include: increase to 70 per cent of the industry's local content by 2007; divestment of state shares in the downstream sector; and the reservation of a 10 per cent quota for indigenous participation in each oil mining license (OML) granted to foreign investors. Others are the sale of oil companies to indigenous investors, notably Conoil and Oando and attempt by the government to get Shell and Exxon Mobil to make outstanding payments valued at over \$1 billion on production sharing contracts (PSCs) signed with the NNPC for the Bonga and Erha oilfields (Obi, 2009: 206).

In September 2013, Chad froze the activities of the China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) for illegally dumping waste oil in the Bongor Basin (*Africa-Asia Confidential*, September 2013). The Angolan government has passed a legislation to increase local participation and ownership to a minimum of 35 per cent in all foreign investments. Foreign oil companies are also mandated to give preference to local staff and resources (USEIA, "Angola").

The Nigerian Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), described as "the first attempt to restructure the Nigerian oil industry to enforce sustainability, transparency and greater control over her natural resources" (Rasheed, 2011) is the country's boldest attempt since juridical independence in 1960 to make the industry truly serve national interest. But nearly ten years after it was first introduced in the National Assembly, it has yet to be passed into law and its contents have, by most accounts, been watered down. Among others, the Bill seeks to increase the royalties payable to the Nigerian state by the TOCs and to determine the crude outputs at the points of production rather than at the points of export, the current practice. It also provides for the payment by oil majors of ten per cent of their oil earnings to the oil-bearing and producing communities.

A coalition of foreign and local interests which considers the Bill's provisions too radical has sought to frustrate its passage to law. Both the presidency and the National Assembly have been under intense pressure to either wholly jettison the bill or pass a hallowed-out version that will be inconsistent with its original intention. The Bill has also pitched the Nigerian government and oil majors against each other with the latter appearing to have the upper hand with the active support of their home governments. They want the *status quo* to remain because it is extremely skewed in their favor, insisting that "a contract is a contract that must be respected by all parties" (Rasheed, 2011).

It remains to be seen when and to what extent the Nigerian government will give effect to its reputation of not condoning "a security response like the one offshore Somalia where western forces dictate planning and execution" (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 48).

Foreign Interests

Nothing suggests, in theory, that there can be no meeting ground between national interests and foreign interests. Ideals and principles, however enunciated, drive policies. But the Africa policy of the great powers hardly espouses, let alone defends, any great ideals, principles or normative values which, ordinarily, should protect everyone, including the most victimized. In practice, there is an aggressive pursuit of national geo-strategic, economic and political interests often out of sync with grand public rhetoric on human rights, democracy and the rule of law (Yohannes, 2003: 13). The US and its key European allies intervene in conflicts either to protect their investments or create opportunities to invest. Indeed, the highest rates of foreign investment (and economic growth) are not found in African countries with rising democratic credentials, but in those, such as oil producers Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria and Sudan and mineral-rich countries such as the DRC, "whose governance credentials are highly dubious but which possess resources that are most in global demand" (Southall and Melber, 2009: 411).

This explains the phenomenon of the looting and plundering of African resources by foreign capital, including foreign assistance, in alliance with ruling elites. According to the *Africa Progress Report* (BBC News Africa, 10 May 2013), a combination of tax avoidance, secret mining deals and financial transfers bleeds Africa of its resource boom. The practice whereby companies shift profits to lower tax jurisdictions costs the continent about $38 billion annually. Kofi Annan claims that "Africa loses twice as much money through these loopholes as it gets from donors". He compares its effect to "taking food off the tables of the poor" (BBC News Africa, 10 May 2013). While Southall and Melber (2009: 418) emphasize the "wholly unproductive expropriation of economic surplus by local elites and the export of huge commissions and profits to financial havens overseas", Watts (2008: 32) argues that "the pillaging and privatization of the state and the African Commons is the most extraordinary spectacle of primitive accumulation by dispossession, all made in the name of foreign assistance".

As already indicated, the main concern of the 'international community' – an extremely vexed and nebulous umbrella terminology that shields the US and the European Union (EU) from international contestation, ridicule and opprobrium -- has been to secure its energy interests and prevent a regional spread of instability everywhere (Obi, 2011: 116). Thus, since the 1990s, the Anglo-American powers have, for instance, opted for energy security and corporate profits with the spread of democracy used as bait (Harshe, 2003: 115). On balance, their activities are not so much about promoting good governance and supporting democracy as they are about business as usual, keeping the wretched *status quo* intact. It is also about international investment and oil majors securing a niche in the GoG states (Roll, 2011: 15). For the sake of oil, the US struck out Equatorial Guinea from a list of fourteen countries with a questionable human rights record and re-opened its consulate which had been shut down during the Bill Clinton presidency supposedly on budgetary grounds (Servant and Forster, 2003: 141). These powers are undeterred by criminal behavior and deteriorating security situation in some of the states (McSherry, 2006: 37).

Ambiguity is the name of the game here: the great powers blame the oil states for the destabilizing effects of their narrow oil and broader domestic policies, but continue to bolster and enhance the military capacity of these states through sundry military-driven capacity building and training programs. The African High Command (AFRICOM) that came on stream in 2007 (see below) is arguably the best known, but the list is a long one. This includes Africa Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA), Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI), Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) and State Partnership Programs (SPP). These Washington-inspired programs and structures are entrenching militarism without any corresponding policies on accelerating those conditions that favor "democracy, social justice, equity, production and redistribution of wealth and popular rule in Africa" (Obi, 2011: 116).

KEY ACTORS

The United States of America

It has been argued that before the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the US on 11 September 2001 (or 9/11), Africa had an inconsequential strategic significance for the US. While still arguably the least prioritized in Washington's strategic plans and reviews, the post 9/11 period has witnessed an expansion of US military engagement in Africa (Piombo, 2007).

Yet, the US has always appeared paranoid about Africa's natural resources, which explains why nearly 80 per cent of total American investment in SSA is in the energy sector (Yohannes, 2003: 2, 12). This comes in the form of both public and private funds, with the US government working in concert with oil companies. The latter invested over $40 billion in the GoG between 1994 and 2004 and projected spending about $30 between 2005 and 2010 (Watts, 2008: 28). With about five per cent of the world's population, the US is responsible for about 25 per cent of annual global oil consumption.

The centre-piece of Clinton's Africa policy between 1992 and 2000 was the enablement of US transnational companies to control Africa's natural resources. The securitization of the continent's oil fields through military policies and alliances is the brain child of sundry US think tanks. These advocated a special partnership between Washington and the GoG states to articulate an energy policy to include the discrete deployment of US forces to the region to oversee political stability and secure the oil fields (Yohannes, 2003: 2, 10). AFRICOM is emblematic of the militarization of US energy policy in Africa (Watts, 2008: 29; Heine, 2007; Isike, Uzodike and Gilbert, 2008). Through this structure, the US provides military assistance to 'friendly' GoG states. AFRICOM, structured to operate through multilateral and regional initiatives (Klare and Volman, 2006: 616), was officially presented as a tool to foster Africa's development and security, strengthen the US security cooperation with Africa and create new opportunities to bolster the capacity of African states to deal with threats to their stability and security. As in the Caspian Sea, the sole requirement on the part of the Africans is their willingness to participate in the anti-terror war.

The lack of emphasis on the use of 'soft power' for the creation of a people-friendly development, security and governance ecology/framework and the articulation of a balanced or non-zero-sum partnership with Africa raises fundamental questions about the true intentions of the military command structure. To the extent that different value and reference frames inform the security concerns and interests of the GoG states and the US, it is necessary to articulate an alternative basis for genuine and mutually beneficial partnership (Amuwo, 2009: 244).

The George Bush Jr's administration (2000-2008) perceived African oil as a "strategic national interest and thus a resource that the US might choose to use military force to control" (Keenan, 2005: 403). While American, British and French navies patrolled the GoG, the administration also sought to revamp and re-equip the navies of the states in the region under its maritime security cooperation agreements (Schneider and Vircoulon, 2013). Its policy on the procurement of African oil resulted from the National Energy Policy of 17 May 2001, the final report of the National Energy Policy Development Group (NEPDG) or the Cheney Report, named after the vice-president, the group's chair (Klare and Volman, 2006: 612). This report identifies the GoG as a foremost source of oil and gas for the US market (Obi, 2009: 193). Washington has also shown keen interest in the World Bank-driven Chad-Cameroon Petroleum Development and Pipeline Project (CCPP) and the West Africa Gas Pipeline Project (WAGPP). In addition to guaranteeing constant oil flows, the US government is also concerned to "stem transnational threats like narcotics and arms trade, piracy and illegal fishing" (Obi, 2009: 195).

Contrary to popular expectation in Africa, President Barrack Obama has introduced no paradigm-shifting policies in favor of the continent. Since 2008, Obama's Africa foreign policy has showed neither altruism nor world-benefaction, but the old, hard-nosed, well-worn *realpolitik*. He not only "presides over a national security apparatus that in many ways resembles the one left behind by GW Bush … he has embraced and in some cases expanded the counter-terrorism policies that caused Bush to run afoul of civil libertarian rights" (Kuhnhenn, 2013).

Obama's snappy visit to Ghana in 2009 – his only African visit during his first term – presented by his advisers as a pro-democracy trip – was seen by some as meant to "negotiate big oil deals for American oil majors" (Enwegbara, 2013). Similarly, his latest pet project – the *Power Africa Project* (PAP), enunciated during his safari visits to Senegal, South Africa and Tanzania in July 2013 – targets newly-discovered oil and gas reserves and renewable energy in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria and Tanzania (Reinl, 2013; Goldman and Taler, 2013). Obama has responded to China's strategic growth on the continent with increased American military presence, including by stationing forces in some twelve countries (Samatar, 2013, Mead, 2013). Under his watch, the locus and focus of the war on terror appears to have shifted away from South and West Asia to Africa (Samatar, 2013).

EU strategic concerns in the Gulf have fed into the US interest in stemming the Niger Delta militancy. The result is the establishment of the GoG Energy Security Strategy (GGESS). In December 2005, the US Ambassador to Nigeria and NNPC's Managing Director agreed to set up special committees "to coordinate action against trafficking in small arms in the Niger Delta, bolster maritime and coastal security in the region, promote community development and poverty reduction and combat money laundering and other financial crimes" (Watts, 2008: 29). The US energy strategy thinks far afield as part of its containment strategy vis-à-vis China, arguably Washington's main rival in the GoG.

China

Washington's high-intensity militarist intrusion on the continent is rivaled by the relatively low-intensity intervention by China. In the past decade or so, China's visibility in West and Central Africa has become so pronounced that the US can no longer hide its irritation and nervousness. Having emerged from the late 2008 financial crisis as a leading actor in international financial markets, it was only a matter of time for China to become a major player in the GoG. Beijing has many things going for it. It is the globe's second major economic power and poised to overtake the US before 2030. China is the largest holder of US government securities. It also controls about 30 per cent of global reserves (UNCTAD, 2011). Its trade with Africa is about $200 billion, more than twice that of the US (Reinl, 2013).

Sino-African relations have been described as one of 'economic-driven pragmatism' in contrast to the 'political-driven idealism' of the past (Wenping, 2007). Three dominant perspectives describe the relations – China as an economic competitor, a development partner and a new hegemon.

China's Africa policy is driven by the desire to access the continent's fossil energy resources and other minerals and metals (notably aluminum, uranium, bauxite, manganese and iron ore). Between 1995 and 2005, Chinese oil consumption doubled to 6.8 million bpd, reinforcing its position as the second largest oil consumer after the US and ahead of Japan. The expansion of leading Chinese national oil companies -- such as the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and the China Petroleum Chemical Corporation (SINOPEC) -- into Africa and other parts of the globe has been greatly enhanced by the liberalization and decentralization of that country's energy sector in the past 25 years or so (Downs, 2007: 53).

Many African governments have tended to see Chinese capital as more benign and less intrusive of their sovereignty (Southall and Melber, 2009: 420). This stance suits Beijing very well, thus its investments and trade signatures litter the continent's financial landscape. China is not only the continent's leading lender and infrastructure investor; it is also its second trading partner. By most accounts, China's investment in Africa has increased by a staggering thirty fold since 2005. No fewer than

2,000 Chinese firms are present in 50 African countries. According to Africa Infrastructure and Power Forum (AIPF), "this number continues to grow at a phenomenal pace as the Sino-Africa ties grow stronger".

Chinese development needs drive its aid, trade and investment in Africa, as elsewhere. This is a threat to the continent's development. Chinese capital – not unlike its western counterpart – has the capacity to marginalize nascent African capital (Southall and Comninos, 2009: 364).

China is the principal supplier of light weapons not only to African governments but also the intra-state armed groups seeking to tear them apart. Reputed to be lethal – on average, no fewer than half a million people are felled annually by them – small arms continue to proliferate, with about 640 million in circulation by 2005. Important international initiatives appeared to have been observed in the breach. These notably include the 1998 Moratorium on the Import, Export and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa, driven by ECOWAS and the 2002 Wassenaar Arrangement Best Practice Guidelines for Exports of Small Arms and Light Weapons, endorsed by a majority of global arms manufacturers and exporters (UNDP, 2005: 173). In 2013, estimates of small arms and light weapons in circulation globally vary from 500 million (according to the AU's Peace and Security Council, 100 million of which it claims are in Africa) to 'at least 875 million', according to the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA).

China's 'soft 'power' diplomatic offensive on the continent; its rhetoric of 'historical friendship, equality and common development with Africa'; it's so-called 'special relationship', shared history', 'no political strings attached' and 'non-interference' aid policy (the 'business is business, politics is politics' approach); 'respect for dignity and sovereignty', 'the poor helping the poor' and 'win-win cooperation policy' (Wenping, 2007; Marysse and Geenen, 2009) – all of this appears to mask a foreign policy pursuit that is no less hard-nosed than the foreign policy orientations of Beijing's western competitors.

In consequence, for all of the West's critique of China's methodology of infiltration into Africa, Beijing's approach is no different from that adopted by the US, the UK and France. "All the major western powers have long used whatever means and influence available to them to secure access to African oil, including economic incentives, diplomacy and provision of arms and military equipment" (Klare and Volman, 2006: 622). The suggestion is that if China has "an almost insatiable appetite for markets" (Melber and Southall, 2009: xxiv), it shares this characteristic with the west.

A final thought in this section: where oil is involved, it is not always easy to clearly dichotomize between domestic and external interests. Both get easily mixed and blurred. Obi (2011: 11) contends that the state, the dominant ruling factions and the transnational elites and processes drive oil politics. In his study of the World Bank's involvement in the CCPP, Roll (2011: 19) concludes that "external influence is very limited and … in the end, domestic politics rules". He adds that the oil-rich states and the TOCs implicated in the project -- as well as individual consumers -- have inadvertently become "partners in exploitation and repression" (p. 22). Both the World Bank and President Idris Déby of Chad gave what turned out to be hollow promises on the project. The Bank promised Chad that oil monies would not be lost to either corruption or mismanagement and that petro-dollars would be channeled to the country's poor. At the inauguration of the pipeline in 2003, Déby assured that "the development of the crude oil will benefit the entire Chadian nation" (Keenan, 2005: 403).

Notwithstanding the growing strategic interest of the great powers in the GoG's oil and gas reserves, precious little has been done by these countries to contain and curtail oil theft. While Nigeria's Niger Delta is the GoG's epicenter and its oil ranks as the finest and the best, the theft of its oil which rises as oil prices spike in the global market has received only nodding global attention. "Nigeria's oil theft is a species of organized crime that is almost totally off the international community's radar", write Katsouris and Sayne (2013: 12). "There has been no international law enforcement activity around the Nigerian oil theft … multilateral bodies are not active in the area either". Yet, the stolen oil trade touches many nations; between 2009 and 2011 stolen oil found buyers in some 37 countries (ibid, p. 13). The UK which prioritizes terrorism, piracy, armed robbery, narcotics, illegal fishing and weapons trafficking makes no mention of oil theft (ibid, p. 48). In the same vein, "multi stakeholder transparency initiatives do not seem very willing to talk about oil theft" (ibid, p. 66).

Local Bunkering in the Niger Delta epicenter

The Niger Delta region is peopled by ethno-nationalities who may or may not have always lived together peacefully in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras, but who are united by potential and actual popular political resistance against local, national and transnational exploitation of the oil and gas their communities bear. What binds these communities together is the appalling human development indices summed up by, among others, deepening poverty, social instability, poor local governance, infrastructure neglect and environmental degradation (Amuwo, 2009a). The latter is an extremely grave issue and would require, according to Kingsley Kuku, President Goodluck Jonathan's special adviser on Niger Delta, about a trillion dollar to restore. Kuku says that the devastation in the region was caused by crude theft, illegal bunkering and oil exploration activities (Nwachukwu and Eboh, 2013).

Bunkering simply refers to the process of loading or feeding oil into the tanks or engines of ships with a view to moving the product from port to destination. This simple exercise is deemed legal or licit when it is done with valid license and according to "the laws and guidelines made by the state institutions regulating shipping, oil transactions and national security" (Obasi, 2011: 57). When undertaken otherwise, it is at once illicit and illegal. This is what is referred to as oil theft, a phenomenon which appears to be both a symptom and a cause of the violent conflict in the Niger Delta (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013; Obasi, 2011; Watts, 2008). It is an extremely lucrative practice, though its financial fortunes often obey swings in oil prices. According to Collier and Hoeffler (cited in Oyefusi, 2008: 543, Note 9), organized groups in the Niger Delta earn up to a billion USD per year from large-scale bunkering. An estimate shows that between 2003 and 2012 4,779 oil thefts occurred, 180 of them in 2012 (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 15).

Several factors have conspired, over the years, to provide an enabling environment for oil bunkering and entrench the practice. The first is the complex scenario of Nigeria's oil industry characterized by high-wire politics, 'poli-tricks', politicking, sleaze and graft. Watts (2008: 38) speaks to a cocktail of bazaar type of politics, a corrupt and violent petro-state and irresponsible oil company practices. Pervasive illegality and political corruption in the legal supply of oil tapers into the illegal domain thus thinning and blurring the line between licit and illicit oil trade. NNPC's complex and opaque term-contract system of selling Nigeria's crude to the international market has attracted sundry shadowy middlemen and politically exposed and connected individuals as fronts for national and international big players (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 7). Since May 1999, Nigeria's elected governments have done precious little to ameliorate the situation. The country's oil sector is regarded as one of the least transparent globally. In a 2010 survey of 44 national and international energy companies by the Revenue Watch Institute (RWI) and TI, the NNPC brought up the rear (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 9).

The second major factor is the large pool of discontented and disgruntled young men -- and women -- in the Niger Delta for whom oil bunkering is perhaps the easiest and most lucrative means to escape grinding poverty. It is in this sense that Watts

(2008: 37) analyses local bunkering as "a financial mechanism through which militants finance their operations and attract recruits after being abandoned by their political patrons". He adds that "the theft of oil provides a lubricant for a ready existing set of grievances" (ibid.).

Oil theft takes place in all of Nigeria's six major territorial water zones, largely located in the core states of Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa. The Sombreiro-Bonny-BOT/Andoni-Opobo region in Rivers state leads the pack in terms of the sophistication of the operations. The Escravos-Forcados-Ramos-Dodo region in Delta state is arguably the most dangerous due to the number of armed and criminal groups involved and their often ferocious clashes (Obasi, 2011: 58). Illicit bunkering also goes on in the country's 24 export terminals (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 26).

The literature talks about three major types of oil bunkering ranging from small-scale through medium to large-scale operations and depicting activities carried out either by 'boys' or 'barons'. Almost intuitively, small-scale operations are the preserve of the 'boys' who know the swamps, creeks and mangroves of the Delta very well. They constitute local gangs who specialize in tapping into pipelines, stealing, diverting and smuggling oil within and outside Nigeria. About 30,000 barrels of oil are reportedly lost daily through this process. The second type is more technical, involving larger quantities of oil through 'hot tapping', loading small barges and feeding bigger trawlers offshore. It is estimated that about 200,000 barrels per day are lost, representing some ten per cent of the country's total daily exports. The third and final type is the exclusive domain of the barons who specialize in lifting oil in excess of the amounts officially licensed.

Implicated in what is a vast multibillion dollar industry are high-ranking security officials (especially police, army and navy), senior government officials and politicians, politically exposed or well-connected oil traders and merchants; local criminal elements and syndicates that are linked to international criminal networks running the illegal oil trade (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013; Brock, 2013; Obasi, 2011: 60-61, 71 and Watts, 2008: 37). The latter involves several countries, including some of Nigeria's immediate neighbors (Benin, Ghana, Cameroon, and Côte d'Ivoire) which serve as either transit or destination hubs for stolen oil. Extra-African countries suspected to be implicated are a legion: Eastern Europe (whose "ageing refineries have a reputation for asking few questions about the origins of their crude", according to Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 33); the Balkans, China, Brazil, Cuba, Singapore, India, Thailand, Indonesia and the US. The international criminal networks are master-minded by Ukrainians, Russians, Romanians, Greeks and Filipinos. As Obasi (2011: 61), has averred, "a single operation could involve a multinational network working together".

There are two sides of the coin here. On the one hand, because of apparent official complicity in oil theft, it has been suggested that this practice is a "'Nigerian political problem' which officials could fix if they wanted to" (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 20). On the other, contractors and staff of international oil companies get enmeshed in oil theft. While a recent report claims there is no clear evidence on the issue though rumors persists, the same report goes on to indicate that "a series of incidents in June 2013 around a section of the Trans-Niger Pipeline in Rivers state operated by Shell, raised the issue of misconduct by staff and contractors" (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 22). Also immersed in the oil theft matrix as accessories, facilitators and collaborators of sorts are host communities, their elders and youth organizations/leaders who get paid as 'passage communities' – akin to alleged protection payments by oil thieves to security operatives (Obasi, 2011: 60; Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 7).

While the annual value of oil stolen from Nigeria estimated at between $3 and $8 billion dollars pales into insignificance compared to $550 billion, the annual value of drugs sold globally (Brock, 2013a; Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 17), it is a huge loss to Nigeria's ailing mono-cultural economy. But the negative impact of local bunkering on the region's political economy runs deeper than petro-dollar losses. The Nigerian state's legitimacy and credibility are regularly called to question; human security is in constant jeopardy; and deepening uncertainty around the safety of pipelines and other infrastructure constantly threatens system shutdown. While the Nigerian Navy claimed that in 2012 alone it successfully destroyed over 7000 illegal or primitive refineries, detained over 900 canoes and about 40 larger vessels, oil theft appears increasingly entrenched and has blighted the country's oil earnings.

In August 2013, the Accountant-General for the Federation announced that the country's gross oil revenues had fallen by 42 per cent in July compared to June (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 19). The same month, the Finance Minister and Coordinating Minister for the Economy darkly hinted that because of persistent and significant revenue drops due, among others, to continuous crude oil theft, leakages and pipeline breaks, the federal government might soon have problems paying salaries regularly.

Perhaps more emblematic of the deeper malaise is that hardly has anyone – 'boy' or 'baron' – been successfully tried and imprisoned for oil theft in recent times. Whereas the crime carries a prisons sentence of 21 years, the last naval court martial took place in 2005 (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 19). The Nigerian state appears to lack the necessary political will and muscle to give effect to the measures, laws and structures it has put in place to stem the tide. The Inter-Agency Maritime Security Task Force (IAMSTF), set up in November 2005, to recommend strategies to police Nigeria's coastal waters has been dormant. Bayelsa state's deputy governor indicated in August 2013 that the federal government had already constituted a committee of the South-South governors, headed by the Delta state governor, to deal with the issue (*Punch*, 2013b). The Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI) charged with improving the oil industry's security and governance, has worked hard but has yet to make the desired impact. Given the deepening rot in the sector, NEITI has its work well cut out. At the regional level, neither the GoG Energy Security Strategy (GGESS) set up in 2005 to track ships with a radar system nor the GOG Guard Force meant, as from 2007, to monitor and protect common maritime interest (Obasi, 2011: 65-67) made much progress.

We have already alluded to the fact that the international community cares little about Nigeria's oil theft, seeing it as no more than "a small, ugly anomaly" (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 68). Yet, the proposal to develop a 'finger printing system' to ease the tracking of oil from the Niger Delta, already on the table, may need international support to become a reality. Same goes for the renewed appeal by Nigerian authorities to the international community to regard stolen oil as 'blood oil' (*à la* 'blood diamond' at the peak of the Liberian and Sierra-Leonean civil wars in the 1990s). Considerable diplomatic action needs to be deployed by Nigeria and other GoG member-states to follow up on the charm offensive on this issue by late President Umaru Yar'Adua at the 2008 G8 Summit in Japan (Obasi, 2011: 68).

While the call for international law enforcement to shut down the international criminal ring running stolen oil trade (Obasi, 2013: 71) as well as "improve operational capabilities and cooperation between states policing the region" (Katsouris and Sayne, 2013: 48) is in order, a more holistic approach should seek to complement a physical security approach with a human security framework. After all, if the citizenry is happy, the nation, however defined, will be okay and secure. The Nigerian government should move quickly to recompose the social contract currently in tatters and re-insert the state back into the public space and the policy matrix as a benevolent force for public good. It should also urgently address inadequate information and inconsistency in government policies that combine with prevailing insecurity in the Niger Delta to limit investment and drive up the cost of oil and gas business in Nigeria (Okere, 2013). Other GoG states should follow suit.

Conclusion

This paper has showed -- both implicitly and explicitly -- that there is nothing accursed about the GoG's rich oil and gas outlay. Greed and covetousness by the great powers and TOCs has turned a potential blessing into a veritable burden, in unbridled and short-sighted collusion with the ruling elites in the states concerned. As Obi (2007: 399) has argued, "the real threat is not from oil, it is from those hegemonic global forces to whom oil means everything – whose supply at all times must be guaranteed at any cost, if need be, by force. It is the premium that these forces – all outside Africa – place on oil, everywhere it exists in the world and the competition between them over the remaining of the world's shrinking oil reserves that are the real threat".

The great powers' narrow military solution to conflict and violence in the oil-rich GoG has not worked, is not working and is not likely to work in future. This is because the dynamic of national sovereignty and foreign interest around the oil and gas complex in the region requires not only the physical security of oil wells, business and workers, but also the human security of the people most victimized by the oil business. More specifically, the US' dominant militaristic agenda in the GoG and elsewhere on the continent which has promoted underdevelopment and violence (Ray, 2013) needs to be urgently addressed with a view to transforming it.

GoG leaders should work in concert, as well as with ECOWAS, to promote the interests of their people and the region's long-term development at the expense of short-term elite visions and gains. They should negotiate with the TOCs and foreign governments and institutions on this basis. They should be willing and able to mind their countries' interests, promote their long-term development, including by diversifying the economy to considerably reduce the overweening dependence on oil and gas revenues.

Rather than continue to lament the hard power designs of the US, the EU and China, among others, in Africa to protect and enhance their selfish interests, African governments should step up to the plate to put their houses in order, including by respecting the unwritten social contract between the state and the citizenry and implementing nationalistic socio-economic policies capable of lessening external exploitation and enhancing their nations' core interests.

In the short and medium terms, the following policy suggestions should be implemented by the GoG states to achieve the objectives enunciated above:

- Emulate oil-rich states such as Malaysia, Thailand and Iran by reducing their over-dependence on oil through diversification of their economies.

- Change tack and begin to articulate and implement public policies on the basis of social equity and wealth distribution. The aim should be to release the energy, resourcefulness and ingenuity of the citizens and stimulate and motivate them to participate effectively in public affairs and be active agents of popular and human development.
- Work with ECOWAS and the African Union (AU) to deal with the issue of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as net creditors to the rest of the world in annual capital flight. SSA's external assets are about three times more than the stock of debt owed to the world.
- Act in concert to negotiate people-friendly and improved business terms with TOCs and their home governments. Nigeria should lead by example by urgently passing a robust and nationalistic PIB and encouraging others to do so.
- Drastically improve governance, reduce corruption and poverty and ameliorate jobless growth. There is no better time than now to do so when several GoG states' economic growth is on the rise.

On their part, western and other powers should support the conditions for genuine constitutional and social democracy in the GoG. Similarly, rather than militarism and securitization, they should privilege equitable and people-centered development in their engagement with the ruling elites in the GoG.

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