

**The Danger of Gun Violence in 'Peace time' in Nigeria:
Tracking Gun Violence in Nigeria from March to May 2009**

By

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Introduction and Background

The rate of gun violence in Nigeria today is so high that it is difficult to overlook it as we claim to be in peace, especially outside of the Niger Delta region. Guns are used in almost all the homicides, assaults, threats, robberies, sexual offences and suicides, committed in this country. Firearms are clearly a common tool for perpetrating societal violence. The impacts of gun violence, however, are not limited to fatal and non-fatal firearm injuries, but include a wide variety of small arm-related crimes committed either by individuals or by the state (police and paramilitary) and these can threaten the community's physical, economic, social, political, and cultural security. The impact of such violence on access to infrastructure, employment, healthcare, education, social welfare and development is profound, and overwhelming.

As we review the impact of gun violence, it is getting imperative that we also look at the causes of this dangerous dimension of the use of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).

In 2004, a group of medical doctors headed by Dr. Ime John conducted a research on the use of SALW during the ethno-religious riots in Kano, a prominent city in northern Nigeria. They conducted detailed literature and media reviews on gun violence in Nigeria, and analyzed a retrospective chart review of injuries at a trauma centre in Kano, during a 3-month period of intense communal violence in 2004, focusing on those caused by small arms and light weapons (SALW). A total of 731 injury cases were reviewed, 28 were victims of ethno-religious riots, 7 had injuries due to SALW, 17 from blunt instruments or cutting blades, and 4 suffered injuries while fleeing the riots. According to their research, of all injuries due to SALW, 58% occurred in the context of communal riots, 66% were left with disabilities and had a median hospital stay of 21 days. Riot victims with other injuries had fewer permanent disabilities (24%), and a median hospital stay of 7 days.

According to Ime and group (2004), many social, economic and political factors contribute to gun-related violence in Nigeria. Their review of these factors and careful analysis revealed that there are 3 major factors that contribute to gun violence in Nigeria: a militarized society that responds to violence with violence, high levels of poverty and economic disparity, and growing tensions between different ethnic and religious groups since the end of military rule in 1999.

Why 'Peace time' in Nigeria

The choice of the title "Peace time in Nigeria" was made because there is an erroneous belief that there is no armed conflict in Nigeria, except in the Niger Delta region, and therefore, Nigeria is a safe community. But studies like this help to show that both state and non-state armed groups use guns to militarize the society with the subsequent impact on poverty and development, even when the country is not engaged in an internal conflict.

This study also shows what can happen in a country when the government is unable or unwilling to control gun possession and provide security to large sections of the population. Studies conducted between 1999 and 2005 shows that there were over 50 major community level armed violence outbreaks in Nigeria; Lagos State alone accounting for at least 15 of these cases. Government security agents were heavily implicated in armed violence in many of the cases throughout the country.

The biggest challenge facing Nigeria security sector today is since the preparation for 2007 election when the Police through the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Sunday Ehindero, announced to the nation that the Police planned to procure 40,000 pieces of AK-47 rifles with 20 million rounds of 7.62x39mm ammunition, 30,000 pieces of K2 rifles with 10 million rounds of 5.56x45mm ammunition, and 10,000 pieces of Pistol Bereta with 2 million rounds of .9mm ammunition.

Many Nigerians queried the need for this level of military preparation for a civic assignment. Even with that worry, the Minister of Police Affairs, Alaowei Broderick Bozimo confirmed that the Police had procured arms and ammunitions to the tune of N50 billion. All these show the level of the militarization of the polity by government security agents, and definitely, the private individuals will seek similar preparation or protection.

Tracking Gun Violence

The urge to track gun violence in Nigeria started after the 2007 election during which the government security agents and politicians flooded the polity with guns for political activities. There is no record of demobilization of any sort; meanwhile, killings and violence are on the increase.

Olive Branch, having participated actively on Conflict Tracking Dossier project of Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA, Nigeria) for 2007 election, thought it important to track gun violence in Nigeria, at least to raise awareness on the danger of gun violence and increased cases of fatal robberies which should be checked. Although, this tracking is not detailed enough, because it was self funded, and the challenges of the epileptic power supply and poor internet availability compounded the extent of the research. However, we were able to track fourteen stories, using four online editions of the newspapers. The Papers are: This Day, Tribune, The Sun Newspapers and Daily Trust.

Analysis of the Tracking

Before the start of this research, it was not clear how dangerous the gun violence was until now. Within a space of 3months, with very limited resource, self sourced and funded, by two of us, using only 4 newspapers in a country with over 30 newspapers, we are able to record that between 20th of March and 13th of May 2009, (55 days) a total of 61 persons were killed by gun violence which is an average of 1+ persons a day.

This research did not capture all the reported incidents in the over 30 newspapers in the country and still the little we did revealed a very alarming and frightening report. There is a need to capture all the reported cases of gun violence and take time to share the information for awareness creation for advocacy for policy change in the security sector.

Further breakdown of the data reveal that the Police and Joint Task Force (JTF) of the Federal Government of Nigeria killed 32 persons (militants and robbers), robbers killed 27 persons (17 police and naval officers and 10 persons), while hired assassins and a private security officer killed 1 person each.

The following report amplifies this situation:

“Police Using Violent Means to Tackle Militants, Says Amnesty” (This Day) By Yemi Adebowale with Agency Report, 04.18.2009

“Amnesty International yesterday drew attention to the fact that the Nigerian Police in the Niger Delta region is increasingly using illegal and violent means to tackle suspected militants and criminals in the area, “including enforced disappearances, torture, and illegal killings.” Aster van Kregten, Amnesty International’s Nigeria researcher said: “We are seeing what appears to be a worrying rise in the use of extreme violence by the police in the Niger Delta.....”.

A careful analysis of Olive Branch’s gun-violence tracking reveal that the government agents (JTF and Police) are using excessive force in the discharge of their duties and this is very unacceptable. The report shows that the government agents killed more than 52% of the total deaths recorded, and this is alarming. They are followed by the robbers who killed 44% and finally, private security officer killed one man and hired assassins killed one woman. From this report, Nigerians are not safe in the hand of government agents.

Also, the high rate of robbery is an indicator of unemployment and poor economic conditions in the country. The killing by the private security officer in a hotel calls for review of what is acceptable in terms of bearing arms. Are they supposed to bear arms? If so, are they properly trained for such assignments? These are some of the issues that could be addressed by the report of this research. The case of the lady who was killed calls for how should issues of threats be handled? Can the assassins be traced and captured? Many issues of security must be looked into in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Even though we have done this study on our own, we recommend that more work be done or is required to fully understand gun violence situation in Nigeria, in order to be able to proffer relevant solution to the issue of security.

Even the small work we have done should be made public, as it can start a conscious activity in the security sector, including better training for government agents.

We recommend improved policy change for private security gun handlers, which should involve training on gun handling and anger management and finally,

There is a need to develop a better security system that will deter gun violence

Reference

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Appendix

Shoot-out in Nigeria leaves eight dead. www.inet.co.za - 3/20/2009 6:59

Six police officers and two alleged robbers have been killed after a shoot-out following a robbery of a money exchange bureau in the Nigeria. (Guardian) (Daily Trust) From Adamu Abuh, Kano.

KANO, Nigeria - Six police officers and two alleged robbers were killed on Thursday after a shoot-out following a robbery of a money exchange bureau in the Nigerian city of Kano, authorities said. "We lost six men...while our men succeeded in killing two of the robbers who attacked the WAPA bureau de change," Kano police commissioner Aminu Yesufu told journalists.

Gunmen kill 43-yr-old man (Tribune) Olayinka Olukoya, Abeokuta - 20.03.2009

People suspected to be assailants on Thursday in Olosan area of Abeokuta, Ogun State, killed a 43-year-old man, identified as Mr. Johnson Oguntade. Nigerian Tribune learnt that the deceased was shot in the head by the hoodlums through the window in his two-room apartment. The late Oguntade was described by neighbours as "an easy-going fellow, who could not hurt a fly."

One Killed in Militant, JTF Gun Duel (This Day) From Omon-Julius Onabu in Warri 04.01,2009

The person suspected to be a militant, was yesterday killed and quantities of arms and ammunition recovered, following a gun battle between an armed gang and members of the security Joint Task Force (JTF) a.k.a. "Operation Restore Hope," in Warri. The bloody encounter took place at Ugbokodo, a riverside community in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, when some armed men reportedly besieged the place in five speedboats.

One killed, three injured in JTF, militant clash (Tribune) From Sylvester Idowu, Warri 05.04.2009

Operatives of the Joint Task Force (JTF) code-named Operation Restore Hope, in the early hours of Friday killed a suspected militant at Alkali Street in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. Three others sustained various degrees of injuries at the end of a fierce gun battle with the soldiers who tried to frustrate the hoodlums from snatching their rifles.

Immigration officer killed on his wedding day (Tribune) Adelowo Oladipo, Lagos - updated: Tuesday 31-03-2009

TRAGEDY struck in Lagos as a Deputy Super-intendent of Immigration, attached to Idiroko border in Ogun State was shot dead at a close range by a security guard in a hotel. Crime and Security gathered that the 35-year-old deceased, Olugbenga Oti, was said to be an indigene of Iju, Itaogbolu in Ondo State was observing his honeymoon with his new wife, identified as Tolani, at the hotel, during the incident.

Robbers Kill 2 Policemen, Pregnant Woman (This Day) From Christopher Isiguzo in Abakaliki, 03.24.2009

Tragedy struck weekend in Abakaliki, Ebonyi state capital as a yet-to-be identified gang of armed robbers took over the streets of the city, killing three policemen and a pregnant woman. The three policemen, according to eyewitness account, were a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) and a Constable.

14 Militants Killed (THISDAY) •Naval Rating dies as task force sinks speedboats. From Segun James in Yenagoa, 04.14.2009

A confrontation on Sun-day night between militants and soldiers of the Joint Task Force (JTF) along the Okilo Creek near Igbomotoru River, Tebideba Route, Bayelsa State, has left 14 suspected militants dead. The casualty figure on the side of the military was unknown as at press time. THISDAY gathered that at the end of the battle, the militant boats sank with all the occupants while the surviving two managed to escape.

Militants kill five naval officers, injure others in Bayelsa (Tribune) By Sola Adebayo, Olamilekan Lartey and Ibanga Isine. Published: Tuesday, 14 Apr 2009

Five naval officers were feared killed while others were alleged to have been abducted as armed militants in speedboats attacked a facility of the Shell Petroleum Development Company in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State on Monday. Sources from the creeks told one of our correspondents that several others were also injured in the attack which took place during a heavy rain.

Ife killings: Detectives yet to conclude investigation (The Sun News) By Tunde Odesola, Osogbo, Published: Tuesday, 14 Apr 2009

Seven days after three policemen killed five persons in Ile-Ife, police authorities in Osun State, on Monday, said an inquiry into the incident was yet to be concluded. The policemen, who raided a beer parlour in Irewo area of Ile-Ife, allegedly shot a customer that resisted their extortion demand and this led to a massive revolt against the police.

...Police kill six kidnappers in Lagos (The Sun News) By Paul Omo Obadan, Sunday, March 29, 2009

A gun duel between a gang of kidnappers and gallant policemen yesterday in Lagos left at least six of the bandits dead. The hoodlums were said to have kidnapped an expatriate, believed to be a Lebanese, on the mainland and escaped with him via the waterways to the Ikorodu area of the state before they were accosted by policemen acting on a tip-off.

Stray bullet victim dies in hospital (The Sun News) By NWABUEZE OKONKWO, Onitsha, Sunday, April 12, 2009

One of the three victims of stray bullets allegedly fired by a member of the Nsugbe vigilance group in Anambra East council area of Anambra State, Joseph Onyisi Udeze, has given up the ghost. He died at Multicare Hospital, Nsugbe, barely four days after he was rushed to the hospital with gunshot wounds.

Dare-devil armed Robbers Kill 3 Policemen, 1 Soldier, 5 Civillians • Cart away N50m (This Day) By Yemi Akinsuyi, 04.21.2009

Robbers yesterday killed three policemen, a soldier and five civilians in a gun duel with policemen and carted away N50 million after attacking a bullion van conveying the money from Nnobi to Nnewi in Anambra State. The gunmen were said to have initially operated in Oba in Idemili Council Area of the state after which they trailed the bullion van to Nnobi junction where they met a stiff challenge by security operatives. In the exchange of gunfire, three policemen were killed.

Killed in Church... after Several Phone Threats (This Day)By Godwin Haruna, Eugene Agha and Yemi Akinsuyi, 05.05.2009

Murdered businesswoman and philanthropist, Mrs Patricia Chidiac Hebeed, received several threat calls on a daily basis before she was killed in church last Sunday. Anyanwu Stanley Emeka, her nephew who had been living with her for years, told THISDAY yesterday at the residence of the late sole importer of Erico Air conditioner at Azare Crescent, off Liverpool Road, Apapa, Lagos, that his aunt expressed fear concerning the several threat calls she was receiving from people she did not know early last year.

Robbers attack bank, three bandits, one customer killed (The Sun News) By Agency Reporter. Published: Wednesday, 13 May 2009

Bandits on Tuesday attacked Ughelli, Delta State branch of a commercial bank and carted away millions of naira. A customer whose identity could not be ascertained was killed while three others sustained serious gunshot injuries in the daylight operation. Although the police claimed that three of the bandits were reportedly killed by the community's vigilante boys and soldiers of the Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, Operation Restore Hope, who came out to assist them, our correspondent learnt that the hoodlums escaped with the stolen funds.