



THE IKORODU ATTACKS

What happened there?



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Our researchers employed methods such as one-on-one interviews, and desk research to collate the available data. Our editors sifted through the data and prepared the report, using various proprietary tools to fact-check and copy edit the information gathered.



Introduction

In the early hours of June 24, several communities in the Ikorodu area of Lagos were attacked by a group of people suspected to be Niger Delta militants. According to reports in the media, at least six landlords were among the casualties - variously put at between 30 and 50 persons - of the dawn raid on Bolorunduro, Ajegunle, and Oke Muti villages in what is still a mostly rural part of Lagos characterised by creeks and mangrove swamps.

Eyewitness accounts to SBM Intelligence paint a picture of an elaborate and fairly sophisticated oil smuggling and bunkering operation, possible systemic failures on the part of the security authorities and residents left living in fear in the wake of what is understood to be a reprisal operation. These reprisal attacks are the culmination of a citizen intervention, which has now spectacularly backfired. We understand that a thriving oil bunkering business was busted by the security authorities after locals got fed up, and reported the heinous activities prevalent in the area to the authorities.

Soldiers have maintained a sporadic presence in the area, often conducting patrols and surveillance mostly at night, and now, it appears that the oil smugglers are exacting revenge on those they consider as informants.

Details

According to witnesses, oil vandals killed dozens in two communities on the outskirts of Lagos last month. Residents fled their homes after soldiers swooped in to quell the crisis. Now most of the residents have still not returned and there's anxiety about the safety of people in the affected areas and the menace posed by these vandals.

There was some confusion initially about who those attackers were, and where they came from, but multiple residents who witnessed the incidents, and spoke to SBM Intelligence, have confirmed that the ethnicity of the attackers is Ijaw.

According to a resident who elaborated, **the attackers are Ijaw boys who have lived at Oke-Oko, Ikorodu for a long time**. Our source claimed that the main business of these people has been pipeline vandalism, and that they are well known to the community, and the policemen at Owutu Police Station, Ikorodu.

In terms of the mode of operation of their business, **many residents agree that the Owutu Police Station plays an important role, as the vandals have traditionally 'settled' the policemen there**, who then turn a blind eye while they make away with their product. Most of these operations happen in the evening, and all our sources were agreed on one thing - the vandals, while heavily armed, had for the most part not disturbed the residents, provided no one interfered with their business.

As a matter of fact, in periods of petrol scarcity, they'd even sold product to residents in jerry cans prior to loading their tankers and making away with the product. About three months ago however, they were dislodged by the military, and so moved further inland, to the Igbo-Olomu community, also in Ikorodu.

The intervention of the military was facilitated by the Community Development Association, and the Landlord's Association. Both bodies provided information to the military when the decision was made to end the illegal bunkering operations. This information proved helpful to the military. Unfortunately, the Army's intervention,

while leading to the arrest of some bunkerers, also led to some deaths.

When the soldiers intervened in March, they arrested some of the bunkerers, and also took away the bodies of two bunkerers who were killed at a hotel in Elepete, Ikorodu. **Crucially, nothing has since been heard about either the dead man, or those arrested.** A source claimed that in late April, the militants sent a message to the CDA demanding the release of the corpses or violence in return.

Analysis

A couple of themes have emerged from multiple interviews and visits to the area by SBM Intelligence. The first relates to the ethnicity of the smugglers – **multiple sources have confirmed to us that the attackers were indeed Ijaw**. In one instance, an allegation of rape by one of the smugglers caused considerable controversy in one of the affected areas when the victim in question confirmed to local leaders that her attacker was Ijaw. **It is condemnable that one ethnic group will unleash such terror on other ethnic groups within the country with impunity.**

The second is that the smugglers have been resident, or at least operational in the area for a substantial amount of time, **were fairly well known, and in some cases had their activities facilitated by the community**. Their modus operandi was another key finding of our enquiries – we understand that **the smugglers always arrived in the resident Ikorodu communities via the many waterways in the area and were generally never resident for more than a few months at a time** – although there was one report of a more permanent Ijaw presence at Oke-Oko in Ikorodu before the military dislodged them in April, following which, they moved their base to Igbo-Olomu.

After stealing petroleum products from the network of pipelines in the area, they moved their booty to their boats and disappeared into the creeks. This fairly organised and logistically challenging venture was prosecuted in collusion with local leaders and in at least one case, “settling the police at Owutu police station” to facilitate “easy passage” of their tankers laden with petrol products. In addition to the main smuggling enterprise, **the smugglers also maintained a fairly extensive and successful retail operation in these communities**, locals confirming to SBM Intelligence that it was often cheaper to purchase fuel and kerosene in smuggler-run petrol stations and outposts than at regular filling stations.

It is worth noting that this is a part of Lagos state that has had more than its fair share of attacks, skirmishes, clashes and general security challenges in the past. In the last decade or so, these communities were the stomping ground of a range of vigilante

groups, criminal gangs and syndicates as well as profitable, but often violent, cartels plying their trade in their own smuggling rings mixed with often deadly interventions in the local politics of the area. These areas were dominated, in essence, effectively run by the likes of such groups as the Oodua People's Congress, *Onyabo*, *Olokada*, as well as the cocktail of *agbero*, *omo onile*, area boys and cult groups that have become the staple of most deprived parts of not only Lagos, but much of western Nigeria.

However, **the arrival of the Ijaw smugglers, residents say, with their superior firepower, a fairly organised hierarchy and better economic execution, the local gangs and cartels were soon displaced** - victims of a series of often violent clashes for geographic control of potentially lucrative smuggling routes and outposts which eventually led to a reduction in their economic, and political influence in the area.

The incident which is now the subject of an official investigation can be viewed from multiple perspectives: it could be seen as yet another ugly milestone in an increasingly brazen conflict between the government and a renewed militant push to destabilise parts of the country which contribute a substantial portion of Nigeria's purse. Going by this line of thinking, the ongoing battle for the control of precious natural resources, either for ideological reasons or just as an economic survival measure has taken an ugly, deadly turn at a time when the country can ill afford another open conflagration. It is emerging that one of the defining themes of the current administration would be how it deals with a myriad of disaffected elements in the polity - a situation it is clearly struggling to come to grips with.

The attacks however, may more accurately reflect a wider breakdown of the law enforcement process in the country. Simply put, if an assumption is made that ordinary people should work in partnership with law enforcement to aid the smooth administration of law and order, guarantees have to be made that no one will suffer retaliation or unwanted attention from the targets of the state's actions, not least if such attention will lead to the loss of lives. In Nigeria however, this is not as simple in practice.

There is still a negative perception of 'disloyalty' that is attached to any informant to law enforcement that is in part, a residue of our fraught relationship with the enforcement mechanisms of our colonial masters and in part, a vestige of decades of military rule. It is a perception that in the past has hampered genuine efforts at encouraging increased citizen participation in securing peace and order in our communities. Unfortunately, our law enforcement agencies do not exactly cover themselves in glory when shoddy police and investigation work coupled with an institutional attitude that raids and busting criminal syndicates - the Nigerian Navy recently busted a massive petrol smuggling ring in Badagry, recovering 2,250 litres of petroleum products - equals a job well done blinds their eyes to the need to provide rolling, continuous surveillance as well as entrenching the presence of the state in these communities, places like Igbo Olomu, Elepete, Ajegunle, Muti, Ita Oluwo, Ogijo, Ifo, Pakisha, Ereko, Imushin & Kajola where the state is an absent participant in the lives of residents.

Eyewitnesses confirmed to us that in many of these places, there are no police stations. Simply put, you cannot be seen as a partner if you are not present. This, along with a raging kidnap problem in the Abuja-Kaduna axis, open cultism related killings in Rivers State and the Fulani herdsman violence means that the Interior Minister, under whose remit internal security lies has a lot of questions to answer.

Decades of oil bunkering and smuggling have left a negative economic footprint on Nigeria. A report by the African Economic Development Institute on "Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: a Threat Assessment" showed that the illicit income generated from illegal oil bunkering in the country amounted to approximately \$1 billion - or equivalent to the Gross National Product of Cape Verde or Sierra Leone. In March 2008, the Nigerian Senate admitted that, "No one really knows exactly how much oil is pumped out of the ground," and in 2012, the International Monetary Fund said 80 percent of petroleum products consumed in neighbouring Benin Republic was smuggled from Nigeria. The Institute concluded that without bunkering, the nation's oil production would increase by about 10 percent, with possible economic benefits such as reduced oil prices for consumers,

increases in the nation's productivity and GDP, as well as growing the government's tax base and providing it with a platform to increase social and welfare spending.

The Nigerian military, from years of dealing with a revolving door of militants in the nation's creeks and swamps, should have a clear and vivid operational memory of how these gunmen live, work and operate - soldiers destroyed nearly 500 illegal oil refineries in the Niger Delta alone in 2011 according to the website trackingenergyattacks.com.

It should be apparent to the security agencies that cartels and shady business operations the world over abide almost faithfully to the principles of payback and retribution, especially when it comes to activities that the boss of the Nigerian Shipowners Association admitted to journalists costs the nation ₦80 billion daily.

The lesson from Ikorodu and countless other communities that have essentially been held hostage by smuggling and bunkering rings is that **it should not have been too much of a stretch to foresee reprisal attacks on communities** that rattled the lucrative (estimates put the barrels of crude stolen daily by smuggling gangs in Nigeria at 300,000) but nefarious activities of these non-state actors. **A residual security presence should have been maintained at the very least.**

The Ikorodu killings are an unfortunate incident, one in which it appears that good citizens, good intentions and Nigeria as a whole, got the short end of a very unwanted stick.