
ARMED EXTRACTION

The UK Military in Nigeria



Researched and written by
Platform.

Email: info@platformlondon.org

Phone: +44(0)207 403 3738

Platform, 7 Horselydown Lane, London,
SE1 2LN, UK. Charity no. 1044485,
Company no. 2658515

[facebook](#), [twitter](#): @platformlondon

Design by Sara Nilsson

Cover image:

UK warship HMS Ocean and Lynx helicopters in
Lagos 30 September 2010.



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Key facts

This briefing examines the role of the UK Government in fuelling human rights abuses and conflict in Nigeria and its relation to controlling access to fossil fuel resources. It highlights issues that UK Parliamentarians may wish to raise with the UK Government and provides recommendations for how the UK could play a more positive role in Nigeria.

This report finds that:

- The UK has spent close to £12 million in military aid to Nigeria since it revived its ties with the regime in 2001
- Despite documented cases of human rights abuses by the Nigerian police and military the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) approved a range of exports to Nigeria including £60,000 worth of machine guns and equipment, sixty AK47s and £492,298 worth of grenades, bombs, missiles
- Shell successfully lobbied for increased UK military aid to Nigeria in order to secure their oil fields
- An MOD Government official was unable to confirm whether or not their military assistance programme screened for human rights abusers despite Ministers claiming the programme had “a strong theme throughout of respect for the rule of law and human rights.”
- Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s offer to increase UK military aid to protect UK oil interests led to a collapse of the ceasefire in the Niger Delta

Introduction

Controlling access to Nigeria's oil and gas reserves is a significant strategic concern for global policy-makers. Nigeria extracts more crude oil than any other African country, 61% of which is exported to Europe and the US.¹ It is the fifth largest LNG exporter in the world with two thirds going to Europe.² It is also the third largest supplier of LNG to the UK, and with the UK Government's on going 'dash for gas', these shipments could increase.³ However, in Nigeria, 100 million people live on less than a dollar a day⁴ and 72% of the population use wood for cooking.⁵

The UK has given rising amounts of aid to the Nigerian military. Meanwhile, Amnesty's assessment of the country is that the human rights situation has "deteriorated" with "hundreds of people... unlawfully killed" by the police and military forces.⁶ The UK Government has not provided evidence to rule out that its military aid was used to commit human rights abuses or fuel conflict.

In January 2013, the UK Government provided 200 soldiers to train forces in Anglophone West African countries,

including Nigeria and Sierra Leone.⁷ This is the newest installment in on going military aid supposedly aimed at "containing terrorism". However, a March 2013 Memorandum of Understanding reveals that the threat of terror is seen as lying in "oil bunkering, illegal refineries, vandalism of pipelines".⁸ This conflation of terrorism with conflicts over oil and gas resources and revenues, raises questions about where the line will be drawn in UK troop involvement in oil conflict.

By offering support for troops patrolling the oil-rich Niger Delta who have committed serious and sustained human rights abuses, and by escalating its military presence in the Gulf of Guinea where strategic oil and gas installations and shipping lanes are located, the UK Government leaves itself open to accusations of prioritising energy company profits over human rights. At the same time, it has actively supported arms traders and private military and security companies who profit from Nigeria's oil conflict.

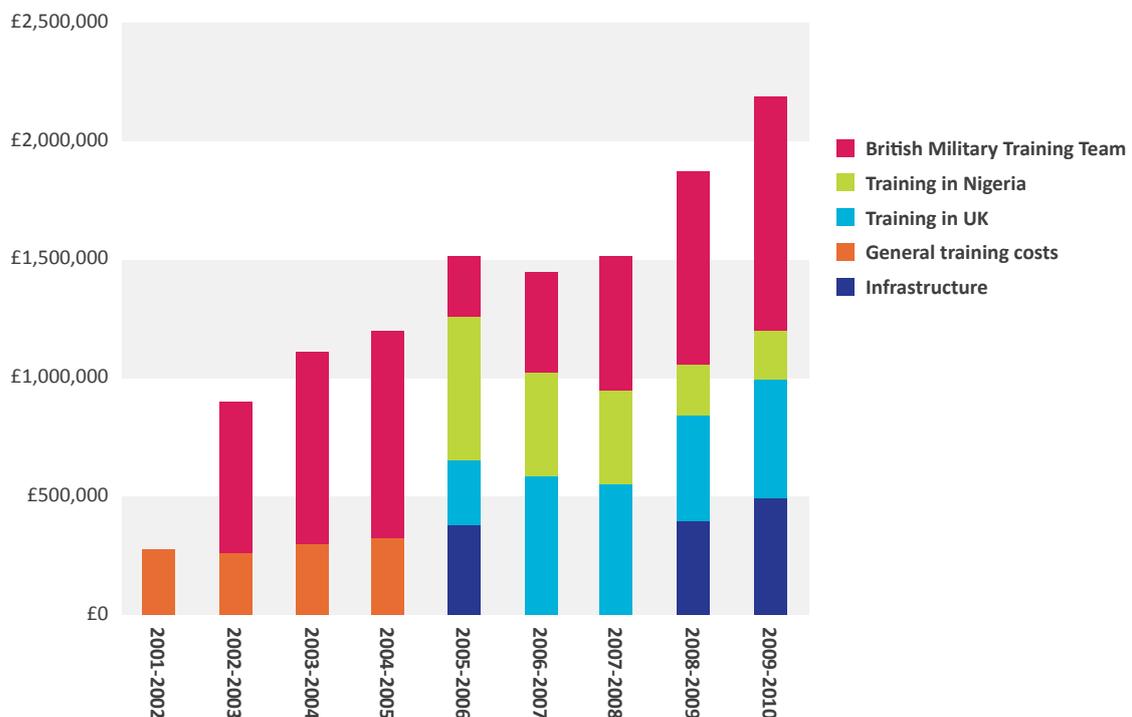
The cost of UK military aid to Nigeria

Figures released to Platform under the Freedom of Information Act show that the UK spent close to £12 million in military aid to Nigeria since it revived ties with the regime in 2001. Spending has risen consistently over the last decade.⁹

Given Nigeria's on-going "deeply entrenched human rights problems" it does not appear that the UK Government has made any demands for accountability from the Nigerian armed forces in return for military aid.¹⁰ Instead the UK has frequently turned a blind eye to Nigeria's excessive use of force. For example, on

1 December 2010, Government forces reportedly attacked a town in Delta State called Ayakoromo because there may have been a militant camp near or in the town. The number of dead is still disputed. One report claims that 100 were killed, mostly children, the elderly and women. The Red Cross says that it was barred from entering after the raids. There has been no official inquiry into the tragedy.¹¹ Though Nigerian troops have failed to resolve the Delta conflict, the UK and US have actively supported the militarisation of the area and the wider Gulf of Guinea.

Figure 1. Ministry of Defence military aid expenditure on Nigeria, 2001 - 2010



Source: Freedom of Information request, (see note 9)

Investing in conflict

Nigeria has one of the largest standing armies in Africa. More than a quarter of Nigeria's federal budget for 2012 was allocated to 'security'.¹² Instability has generated lucrative business opportunities for the private sector. The UK has been particularly eager to take its share of Nigeria's 'security' market, whose growth is "surpassed only by oil and gas".¹³

Despite the risk of complicity in internal repression, UK government departments beyond the MoD have pushed for militarisation in the Delta. In 2011, UK Trade and Investment promoted a number of "major projects" to UK businesses, such as "re-equipping the police force in the Niger-Delta region".¹⁴ Nigerian police have a well-documented record of human rights abuses, such as the reported killing of several protestors who were demonstrating against Shell in the western Delta in November 2011.¹⁵

The limited government data available shows that since 2008, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) has approved a range of UK exports to Nigeria including:

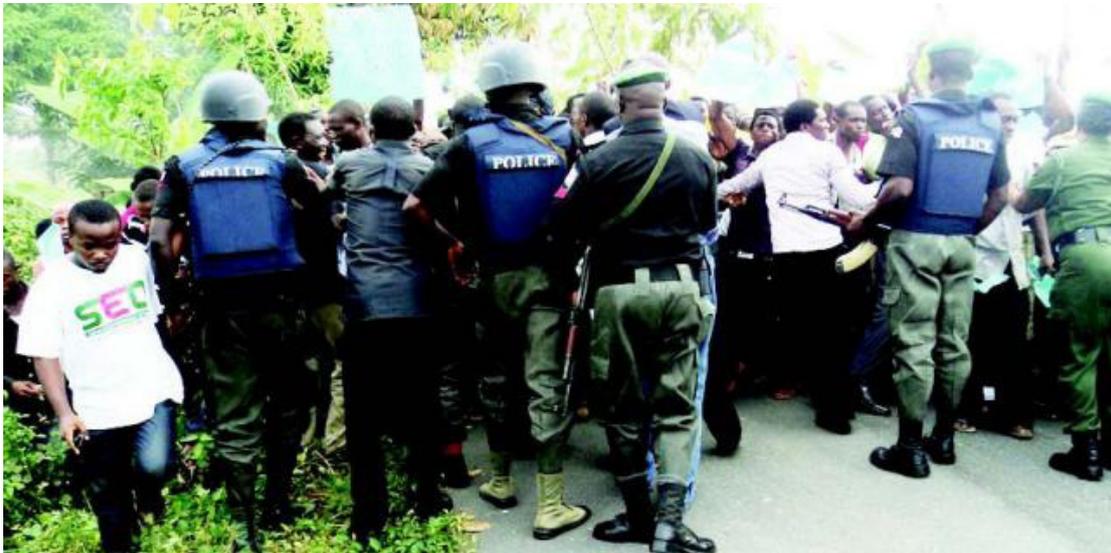
£60,000 on machine gun equipment (including heavy machine guns);
£320,000 on projectile launchers;
£340,000 on unmanned drones;

£12,394, 208 on armoured vehicles, tanks;
£492,298 on grenades, bombs, missiles, countermeasures;
£234,967 on explosive-related goods and technology;
£51,000 on warships¹⁶

On 27 July 2011, BIS approved small arms exports to Nigeria including sixty AK47s, forty 9mm pistols and £27,000 worth of ammunition. According to documents disclosed to Platform, these arms were used for "Government authorized security and training work".¹⁷ Despite multiple requests, BIS has refused to disclose the names of UK-based arms exporters.

However, a source from the security sector reports that:

*"It is common knowledge that soldiers and policemen sell arms to people who need them at give-away prices. There is no accountability at the Military and Police armouries. It has been established that the first set of arms Henry Okah, the convicted supporter of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) brought into the Niger Delta region was from the an armoury in Kaduna"*¹⁸



Nigeria is a major profit centre for UK-based private military and security companies (PMSCs). In Nigeria, these companies guard the oil industry and other sectors, free from any regulation by the UK government. Control Risks Group, Erinys, G4S, Saladin Security and Executive Outcomes are among the UK companies who have benefitted from contracts in the Niger Delta.¹⁹ A source in the security industry told Platform that the primary interest of these firms was “seeking their next contract in Nigeria”.²⁰ Rather than helping to resolve conflicts, these PMSCs are accused of hardening military security in the Delta.²¹

Under the Nigerian Private Guard Companies Act 1986, PMSCs operating in the country are prohibited from carrying arms. However, some have been implicated in the excessive use of force.²² PMSCs guarding oil companies are embedded within military and Mobile Police units who follow government orders.²³ This arrangement risks involving companies in human rights abuses.



Top image and above: Several protesters were reportedly killed at a demonstration against Shell in the Western Delta in November 2011.
Photos: National Mirror

The role of Shell

Oil multinationals operating in the Delta have reinforced militarisation by giving funding and logistical support to government forces for over a decade.²⁴ Shell and Chevron have been accused of complicity in systematic repression and have faced lawsuits in the US over their involvement in extra-judicial killings, torture and other abuses.²⁵ UK military aid runs parallel to these corporate practices, acting as an extension of company security policies.

US embassy cables from 2006 confirm that Shell was “providing direct funding to the JTF [Joint Task Force],” a combination of the Nigerian army, navy and police deployed to fight militants in the Delta. To assist the JTF, Shell planned on “buying several millions of dollar[s] worth of vessels and equipment”.²⁶ However, Shell did not want to bear these costs alone. Government documents reveal that Shell executives lobbied the UK and US to increase military aid in order to secure the company’s oil fields. In February 2006, Shell’s Malcolm Brinded met the Foreign Office in London. Meeting minutes state:

“Shell keen to see HMG [the UK government] looking for further opportunities to assist Nigeria with Niger Delta security and governance.”²⁷

Ann Pickard, who was then Shell’s Vice President for Africa, also told the US that:

“the GON [government of Nigeria] ... is constantly importuning for funds to improve their military and police capabilities. Pickard expressed hope the USG [US government] and HMG might eventually cooperate on programs for development of the Nigerian military and police.”²⁸

She urged the US to “focus on police and coast guard capacity building in the Niger Delta”.²⁹ Shell’s lobbying efforts appear to have paid off. The UK expanded its military assistance budget and offered more training to Nigeria over the next four years. This meant lower operating costs for Shell, but shifted risks onto the UK.

UK military aid and conflict

By summer 2008, the Delta conflict had cut Nigeria's oil production by over a quarter and pushed soaring oil prices to a record \$147 per barrel. Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown offered to increase UK military aid to Nigeria in a speech at the G8 summit in Japan, in order to "deal with lawlessness that exists in this area and to achieve the levels of production that Nigeria is capable of". Brown's announcement backfired and led to the collapse of a ceasefire in the Delta. The immediate response from the umbrella militant group, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), was unequivocal: "UK citizens and interests in Nigeria will suffer".³⁰

The UK's offer was followed by a resurgence in armed conflict. In September 2008, MEND launched 'Operation Hurricane Barbarossa'. The six-day 'oil war'

was one of the most coordinated and devastating series of attacks on the oil industry in Nigeria. Shell was one of the main targets.³¹

Having aggravated the conflict, the UK went on to establish a permanent naval facility in Lagos, known as the Joint Maritime Security Training Centre (JMSTC). Since late 2009, UK marines have used the JMSTC to train the Nigerian military to secure the Delta's oil fields.³² Ground combat, inshore boat patrol, maritime interdiction and advanced board and search techniques are among the methods taught at the facility. Photographs apparently from March 2010 show Nigerian troops armed with AK-47s posing on British-loaned boats with marines from the Royal Navy. This was later confirmed by a parliamentary answer.³³



UK Royal Marines training Nigerian military in Lagos, March 2010.

Unmonitored human rights impacts

As early as 2004, the FCO anticipated that UK involvement in “helping the Nigerians to patrol the riverine areas” and “training of police and army units” would be controversial. “These are tricky issues,” wrote Richard Gozney, then British High Commissioner to Nigeria.³⁴ Given the potential for things to go wrong, the policy should have been carefully risk assessed and monitored if it was going ahead at all. However, the FCO claims it did not make any risk assessment from the lead up to Brown’s 2008 announcement to 2012.³⁵

The MoD has stated that “All our military assistance programmes are subject to regular monitoring as to their effectiveness”.³⁶ However, a government official familiar with the programme disagreed:

“We don’t even track individuals in training courses. They come for a course and then we lose them. We’ll never know how effective it is.”³⁷

Currently the only form of monitoring is a ‘comment box’ added to the application forms in 2012. Platform asked about

how participants in the UK’s military training programme were selected and were told that:

“Nigerians select who they think is appropriate. Then we just make sure they are of a certain rank. We don’t select candidates. Once the numbers are put forward we check they are up to standard.”³⁸

The government official was unable to confirm whether or not the checks included screening for human rights abusers. This is at odds with what the former Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Bill Rammell, told Parliament in 2009. According to Rammell, the programme had a “strong theme throughout of respect for the rule of law and human rights.”³⁹

The UK appears to allow the Nigerian military to select soldiers for the programme, unscreened and with virtually no monitoring of the programme’s impact. The possible consequences for human rights and stability appear to have been overlooked or disregarded.

Warships on standby

This is not the first time the UK has maintained a military presence in the Niger Delta. In the 19th century, the UK deployed gunboats to repress local merchants who threatened the interests of the Royal Niger Company, which was then trying to gain a monopoly over the export of palm oil. The Navy destroyed entire towns in punitive raids.⁴⁰ Today, the UK government has come dangerously close to direct intervention against rebels in Nigeria's creeks and seas in the interests of securing crude oil fields and corporate profits.

On 1 October 2010 Nigeria marked 50 years of independence. The same day, the UK's largest warship, HMS Ocean, arrived in Lagos on a four-day mission. Behind the official ceremonies, security

forces were on high alert after British intelligence received warning of a bomb attack by MEND, which killed at least 12 people in Abuja.⁴¹ Lynx helicopters from 847 Naval Air Squadron, previously deployed in Iraq, were "on standby for counter piracy operations".

*"For three days the aircrew, aircraft and maintainers were poised to conduct flying at short notice. Ultimately the necessity did not arise."*⁴²

Subsequently, HMS Dauntless, the largest destroyer in the UK Navy, and the French Navy frigate L'Herminier visited Lagos in June 2012 to conduct "joint training operations" with Nigerian forces aimed at combatting "piracy and sea criminality".⁴³



UK warship HMS Ocean and Lynx helicopters in Lagos in October 2010. Photo: Royal Navy.

Containing terrorism

Despite Nigeria's indiscriminate use of force against alleged Boko Haram insurgents in the northeast,⁴⁴ the UK and Nigerian military have continued to cooperate closely, with tragic consequences. In March 2012, UK special forces worked alongside the Nigerian military on a botched hostage rescue mission in the city of Sokoto. An Italian and a British national were killed, and the Italian government was angered at being kept uninformed until the operation was underway.⁴⁵

In January 2013, the UK Government provided 200 soldiers to train forces in Anglophone West African countries, including Nigeria and Sierra Leone.⁴⁶ This is the newest installment in on going military aid supposedly aimed at "containing terrorism". However, a March 2013 Memorandum of Understanding reveals that the threat of terror is seen as lying in "oil bunkering, illegal refineries, vandalism of pipelines".⁴⁷ This conflation of terrorism with conflicts over oil and gas resources and revenues, raises

questions about where the line will be drawn in UK troop involvement in oil conflict.



The mother of Gaddafi Soda holds up a photograph of her son who was allegedly shot and killed by police on the street in front of his house in the northern city of Kano on May 25, 2012.

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Conclusion

The UK and its allies have escalated the militarisation of Nigeria's oil fields in the interests of 'energy security' and 'counter-terrorism'. This assumes that military force can help to resolve the complex social and political problems of the Delta. Yet some of Nigeria's highest-ranking military officials have stated that government forces cannot resolve the Delta crisis.⁴⁸ The military are widely suspected to be involved in oil theft on an industrial scale.⁴⁹ Oil companies' over-reliance on the military has also led to "serious internal friction" in Shell.⁵⁰ Militarisation will not provide lasting security in the Delta.

As budget cuts put pressure on the armed forces, the UK cannot afford to risk engagement in the Nigeria's oil conflict. UK taxpayers are funding a

policy that supports repressive troops and subsidises the operating costs of oil giants like Shell. The UK government has promoted the interests of oil companies, arms traders and PMSCs at the expense of human rights and regional stability.

The UK could play a more positive role in the Delta by focusing more resources on the urgent issues of poverty, corruption and weak governance, helping to clean up decades of oil pollution and enabling local residents to hold companies and the Nigerian government accountable for violations of human rights.

For further recommendations to a range of stakeholders visit:
<http://bit.ly/ZEmF8n>

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