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## JTF Intensifies Raids on Militants' Camps

Written by This Day  
Saturday, 20 November 2010

The Joint Military Task Force on the Niger Delta yesterday continued its onslaught on **militants** by burning two **camps** located in the deep swampy area of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

The Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ishaq Ibrahim has also relocated to Warri to take charge of the naval aspect of the military operation.

The sustained attacks on the **camps** coincided with a statement yesterday by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta vowing to launch new raids on oil installations and take more hostages, just as the group confirmed that it ambushed a convoy of Nigerian Army gunboats heading towards one of its **camps** in Ayakoromo, Delta State early on Thursday.

Although there was no word on casualty figures from yesterday's raids by the **JTF**, the military was quick to point out that there were no air raids in all the operations embarked upon so far "even though the people have made such allegations." Also, the **JTF** did not give the names of the **camps** and the **militants** operating them.

The media co-ordinator of the **JTF**, Lt. Col. Timothy Antigha who made this clarification in a statement also assured law-abiding people in the area to go about their duties as their safety would be guaranteed.

"The attention of the **JTF** has been drawn to information circulating in the media that the **JTF** is set to commence an aerial bombardment of communities in the Niger Delta. This is false and not in the contemplation of the **JTF** now or in the new future. "This falsehood is being sponsored by renegade **militants** and their sympathisers and should be disregarded.

"The target of the ongoing operation is the elimination of criminal gangs, their arms cache and other assets identified and confirmed as centre of gravity.

"Traditional rulers and their subjects are advised to pursue their legitimate endeavours. Communities where these criminals are hiding are encouraged to call local **JTF** commanders and turn them in immediately." According to Antigha, a good number of ammunition was discovered during the raid, which led to the surrender of some **militants**.

However, MEND claimed that during ambush of the **JTF** on Thursday, ten soldiers were killed in the process. The **JTF**, which launched a full-scale **attack** on the **militants** last week confirmed the **attack** but said none of its men was killed. Only four soldiers were injured in the **attack**, said the **JTF**.

But MEND in an e-mail to the media said, "We have decimated a convoy of the task force heading for one of our **camps** in Delta State. At about 0300hrs, on Thursday, Nov 18, 2010, our units in Delta State received intelligence reports of the movement. Our units ambushed the convoy at Ayakoromo. This convoy was literally decimated.

"Reports reaching us from the General Hospital Warri showed that ten soldiers were brought in dead and 18 seriously injured. A large number of soldiers were reported by our fighters to have drowned."

However, Antigha told THISDAY that MEND's claim was false. "This people have started their media propaganda again. They did not kill any of our soldiers. Only a couple were wounded," he said. When pressed to give a figure, Col. Antigha said only four soldiers were wounded.

MEND claimed that a large number of weapons including machine guns, gun launchers, assault rifles and ammunitions were retrieved from the soldiers. The **militants** also acknowledged the take over of their camp in Bokoama, Rivers State by the **JTF** and said it has directed its fighters to continue with the sabotage of oil installations in the Niger Delta.

MEND said the Bokoama raid was facilitated by "certain persons from the community who tipped off the military authorities." The militant group said the freed hostages were kept in a community to ensure their safety "as a result of the bombings by the

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Nigerian military of **camps** and communities in the area."

It added: "The hostages were guarded by only a few of our fighters who retreated in order to prevent an exchange of fire that would have endangered the lives of these hostages." Despite the early Thursday morning ambush, the **JTF** yesterday reiterated its pledge to flush all armed gangs out of the creeks of the Niger Delta.

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The security forces had rescued 19 hostages -- two Americans, two Frenchmen, two Indonesians, one Canadian and 12 Nigerians -- from a camp in the mangrove creeks late on Wednesday in what the government heralded as a major victory. The **JTF**, responsible for policing the region, said it had taken over several militant **camps** and that an operation to secure others was "ongoing."

"This operation will continue for as long as it takes to uproot the **militants** from the Niger Delta," Major General Charles Omoregie, the commander of the taskforce said yesterday. But MEND vowed to carry out more kidnappings from oil facilities. "Our fighters have been instructed to carry out more raids on oil installations from where fresh hostages will be taken," the group said in a statement emailed to media houses yesterday.

Many fear the resurgence of unrest in the Niger Delta could undermine the credibility of President Goodluck Jonathan in the run-up to the general election next April. Jonathan is the first head of state from the Niger Delta.

MEND's main field commanders accepted the amnesty offered by late President Umaru Yar'Adua last year, and at least two of them, Farah Dagogo and Boyloaf, were instrumental to the freedom of the 19 hostages.

But the **militants** were always factionalised and new leaders have started to emerge. The freed hostages were held by a new field commander called Obese, a former Dagogo gang member, and the military wants to ensure such figures cannot gain a foothold.

"There is a need to take over all these **camps**. If not they could be reactivated," Omoregie said. In a related development, the people of Ogodobiri in Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State, the community where fleeing militant, John Togo hails from have outlawed militancy and warned intending militant groups to steer clear of their community.

The chairman of the community, Mr. Terry Youdowei in a statement disowned the notorious militant saying, "John Togo is not from Ogodobiri community; it's his mother that is from our community.

"He is from Ayakuromoh community in Burutu Local Government Area, about 100 kilometres away, but because of him, soldiers came to destroy our community in 2004.

"We don't want that to happen again. We heard that the **JTF** is preparing to **attack** communities again because of John Togo. It is true he used to have a camp here, but he had since gone to open a new camp in Burutu. We don't know him in Ogodobiri, he is not from our community, he is an outlaw as far as

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