Niger Delta Weekly: Mitigating Clashes Between the Police and Protesters in the Niger Delta

October 11-17, 2020

Description

This special edition of the weekly update highlights spiraling protests against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police over allegations of heavy-handedness including unlawful arrests, torture and extrajudicial killings across the country, with a focus on clashes between the police and protesters in the Niger Delta. The 'EndSARS' protests were reportedly triggered by the shooting of a young man by SARS operatives in Ughelli, the headquarters of Ughelli North LGA, Delta State. The protests which started as social media campaigns - #EndSARS - by young Nigerians calling on the government to disband the special tactical unit of the police, has turned violent with several reported incidents of shooting and killing across the country, including the Niger Delta. On October 8, 2020, for instance, a policeman was reportedly killed and another sustained gunshot injuries during a clash between security operatives and 'EndSARS' protesters in Otovwodo community in Ughelli North LGA, Delta State. A rifle belonging to one of the policemen was reportedly stolen and several vehicles destroyed during the incident.
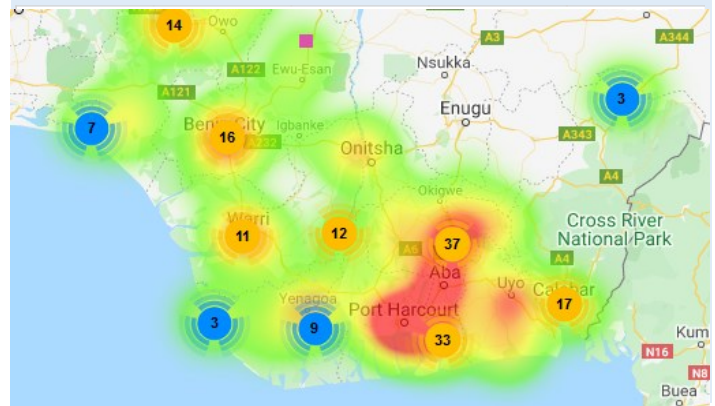
Why it Matters

The 'EndSARS' protests have continued to spread across the country including major cities in the Niger Delta, in spite the government's announcement of disbanding and replacing the controversial police unit with a Special Weapons and Tactical Team (SWAT). Emboldened by allegations of continued police brutality, protesters are further demanding the release of all arrested protesters and a holistic reform of the entire police. The spiraling situation could escalate into violent clashes with devastating social, economic and political consequences.

Social: Clashes between protesters and security forces could escalate into widespread unrest and public outrage with serious security and health implications for communities and residents. Violent protests and crackdowns could cause distress, injury, death and devastation. It could also result in the use of teargas and water cannons which could cause respiratory difficulties and traumatic brain injuries. This could further galvanize these protests and make them more devastating.

Economic: Clashes between protesters and security forces could result in the destruction of infrastructure and disruption of economic activities. Violent protests could also provide an avenue for hoodlums and criminals to rob residents, loot shops and vandalize properties.

Political: The ongoing 'EndSARS' protests have the potential to escalate in ways that could result in mass demonstrations and backlash movements against the government. These spiraling protests could also be hijacked by violent non-state actors and other subversive groups to undermine the government and cause political instability.

Incidents Heat Map of Abuses by Security Forces and Violent Protests in the Niger Delta

Heat Map shows the intensity of violent protests and abuses by security operatives in the Niger Delta from January 2016 - August 2020. Sources: All data sources formatted on the P4P Peace Map www.p4p-nigerdelta.org.

Prognosis

The protests are not only a reaction to police brutality, but also a rallying point for the citizenry to voice their displeasure over insecurity and harsh economic conditions. With tensions continuing to rise, any use of force by security forces could be counterproductive. Stakeholders should work with the relevant law enforcement agencies to create safe spaces for protesters, and enlighten protesters to be peaceful. The police should also be guided on the use of non-violent means including negotiation to de-escalate violent protests.

Contact Us

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Report Incidents: IPDU Early Warning System

Please report any verified incident of conflict to the IPDU SMS early warning system: Text report to **080 9936 2222**

Incident Details: Kindly include the State, LGA, Town, Date, and Brief Incident Description.