

# Fubara, Wike and the Niger Delta threat

Days before a Federal High Court in Abuja ordered Rivers State's monthly allocations to be withheld, a militant group, the Niger Delta Development Force (NDDF), had threatened to shut down oil installations in the region if the federal government did nothing to stop Federal Capital Territory (FCT) minister Nyesom Wike from undermining Governor Siminalayi Fubara's administration. The threat came before the court order. Halting the release of any state's monthly allocations in an economy still tied to Abuja's apron strings can be excruciating, indeed more punishing than any other measure designed to give a governor nightmares. So, what will Rivers do now, blow up everybody?

In the NDDF statement last Sunday, spokesman Justin Alabraba warned: "Our members will not hesitate to shut down oil installations if any judge in Abuja issues a pronouncement that financially incapacitates local governments in Rivers State, preventing them from fulfilling their duty to the people. We will act immediately. It will be a swift response, and we will shut down major oil installations in the Niger Delta. If President Bola Tinubu allows Wike to disrupt governance in the local governments of Rivers State, we will also disrupt governance at all levels... Wike must leave Fubara alone. For months now, Wike has continued to insult and intimidate Governor Fubara, wielding his federal influence. We won't tolerate that anymore. Any further move against Fubara by Wike will be met with the destruction of oil installations. Since Tinubu seems intent on turning a blind eye, let us all face the consequences together. Rivers State does not belong to Wike..." The court order followed the suit brought by 27 Rivers State House of Assembly lawmakers who accused Mr Fubara of flouting a court order ordering him to represent his 2024 Budget to the legislature and thumbing his nose at the constitution which prescribes the legislative quorum needed to legitimize the appropriations bill. Mr Fubara had presented his budget before a factional assembly of four lawmakers, arguing that he as governor – not the courts – did not recognize the 27 lawmakers whom he insisted had defected to the All Progressives Congress (APC). In a number of convoluted cases, the courts had unanimously, at least so far, ruled that the defections by the 27 had not been done or consummated according to the law and the constitution. It was a tight elbow room seized upon by the 27, but in the eyes of the law, until an appeal upturns the ruling, they remain the legitimate legislature. When the eyes of the law meet the opinion of the public, the former always wins, regardless of the emotions surrounding the issue in dispute. Rather than put its house in order, present a sound and incontrovertible case before the courts, Mr Fubara's administration has whipped up emotions, attempted to shame Mr Wike, name-call him for amorally disallowing the governor



from governing, and threatening to bring the whole democratic edifice down.

Obviously, as adumbrated by the NDDF and the Fubara administration, there are many in Rivers, perhaps a significant percentage, convinced that Mr Wike is the one troubling the state. Hence the twin threats of stifling oil production and scuttling the country's democracy. But both threats, not to mention the arguments underpinning them, are an indication of incompetent logic and disturbing lack of leadership capacity. Admitting but not conceding that Mr Wike is the sole troubler of Rivers, does it absolve the state and Mr Fubara of running an administration that undermines the rule of law and incompetently prosecutes its cases in the courts? They seem to give the impression that Mr Wike is a magician, running rings round them; and that they are too dimwitted to respond with anything but emotion and anger. Mr Wike is probably more

politically fleet-footed than all of them put together in Rivers, but it is not an excuse to subvert the rule of law and not find a few brains to help strategise Mr Fubara out of the needless stalemate he has constrained himself and the state. As it is evident, the highly emotive and entitled Mr Wike can be beaten at his own game. If Mr Fubara is unable to find the right strategy to undo his opponent, the fault is entirely his.

Indeed, the Rivers governor has tried to make light of the current judicial impasse involving the federal monthly allocations. It is unwise. It is a serious blunder.

Unable to convince the Appeal Court last month that the Speaker Martin Amaewhule-led House of Assembly is illegitimate, and the governor's four-man assembly the legitimate legislature, Mr Fubara has embarked on a series of legislative and judicial self-help measures at which many Nigerians wince. The problem is, however, not irredeemable; but the resolution cannot be procured by force, intimidation or blackmail. The governor cannot propel the state to defy the constitution, and his team of supporters to deride the courts – except of course he is thinking of secession. Given the heat of indignation he has worked himself into, not to talk of his defiant speeches at political gatherings, cocktails and churches, it is not certain that a few subversive ideas might not have crossed his feverous mind. If he is not to soon discover that his state and supporters as well as the rest of Nigeria would find him dispensable, he had better change tack. He presumes his opponents don't have supporters in the state, or that the rest of the country would be willing to abort democracy to help him win his argument against Mr Wike. These are misplaced presumptions. What indeed would it take to convince him that he could outfox his predecessor if he dug deep?