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EFFECTS OF MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST BIAFRAN AGITATORS ON MARKET TRADERS IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The resurgence of Biafra separatist militancy in South-eastern Nigeria, driven by perceived economic exclusion, ethnic marginalisation, and material deprivation among the Igbo, has heightened insecurity across various sectors, including commercial activities in Enugu State. Despite military efforts to contain the crisis, the effects of military operations on market traders remain inadequately studied. This study examined the effects of military operations against Biafran agitators on market traders in Enugu State. Specifically, it explored the effects of separatist violence on traders, assessed the impact of military operations, and examined the military's operational challenges in securing markets. A mixed-methods research design combining surveys and key informant interviews (KIIs) was adopted. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed. Of the 500 questionnaires administered, 488 were returned and analysed. Additionally, 12 KIIs were conducted and analysed using content analysis. Pearson's Chi-square test was used to test significance, while test-retest and inter-instrument consistency yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.8. Findings revealed that separatist attacks caused loss of lives, destruction of marketable goods, customer attrition, traders' relocation, and psychological distress among traders and customers. Military operations produced both positive and negative effects. Positively, they reduced militant activities in markets, improved security, protected critical facilities, and strengthened traders' participation in intelligence gathering. Negatively, alleged harsh responses against traders suspected of supporting militants and the over-militarisation of markets heightened fear and tension. Major operational challenges included weak combatant motivation, limited knowledge of local terrain, and inadequate public confidence and support. The study concludes that military operations have mixed consequences for market traders. It recommends financial assistance through loans and grants for affected traders and sustained, rights-compliant military operations against separatist violence in Enugu State.

Keywords: Military Operations; Biafran Agitation; Market Traders; Human Security

Introduction

Since the end of colonialism, which forcefully amalgamated and administered diverse ethno-religious populations that had previously existed as separate entities, many countries have been grappling with tension and internal security breaches manifested in different forms, including civil war, insurgency, religious crisis and violent secessionist agitation, otherwise known as separatist militancy (Adner, 2021). In particular, secessionist

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agitations, which are largely anchored on the perception and allegation of injustice and marginalization by aggrieved ethnic entities, have led to violent confrontation with state authorities by such aggrieved groups in many countries across the world, with negative impacts on corporate existence among the citizenry and national security.

In Nigeria, the unheeded calls for constitutional amendment and political restructuring that would give different geo-political zone the constitutional power to control their natural resources and shield them from the maladies of perceived marginalization and political alienation, have led to secessionist agitations with attendant negative implications for national security (Timothy, 2023).Some of the secessionist agitations groups in Nigeria include the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Nigeria's Indigenous Nationalistic Alliance for Self-Determination (NINAS), O'odua People's Congress (OPC) ,and Niger Delta Greenland Mandate (NDGM) among others (Prince, 2019). Most of these groups over time, had staged violent protests in furthering their agitation to secede from Nigeria (Refworld Report, 2021). Their activities during physical protests between 2015 and September, 2021 led to clashes with security forces with over 5,000 live lost and destruction of property worth over US$2.5billion (Refworld Report, 2021).

In response to the rising incidents of secessionist agitations, the Nigeria Military has employed a kinetic approach to counter violent agitation for succession in the country under different operations, including, Operations Python Dance in the South-East and South-South regions. The deployment of kinetic approach by the Nigerian military in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria in particular have assisted in the decimation of secessionist agitation groups and violent protest leading to arrest of secessionist leaders such as Nnamdi Kanu and Simeon Ekpa who were standing trials in different courts, sometimes in their absence (Adner, 2021). Nevertheless, conversely too, the clamp-down of secessionist agitation by the military is also presumed to have amplified the recalcitrant disposition of the agitators to sustain their destructive activities in South-eastern Nigeria with negative implications for market traders. In specific instances, much of this violent agitation for succession in the Eastern part of Nigeria have undermined market security as violent agitators, especially the activities of IPOB which continue to destabilize socio-economic activities in the region (Aroge, 2023). Since the Nnewi Telecommunication market witnessed multiple attacks within three weeks in May 2022, there have been 16 other market attacks inthe South-eastern Nigeria between 2022 and 2023 while many market stakeholders, especially the traders have not been able to recover from decreasing business activities after such attacks. First, the business activities of corporate business entities, including telecommunication operators such as MTN, and retailing outlets, have largely been disrupted as well (Aroge, 2023).For instance, some telecom masts belonging to MTN and other major mobile telephone operators were destroyed by IPOB.

Apart from the ICT sub-economic sector, the second category of IPOB-affected market traders in South-eastern Nigeria are made up of the small, medium and peasant traders whose livelihoods have been devastated by the activities of the agitators with their compulsory "sit-at-home" order, every Monday of the week. Aside the IPOB, some of the identified groups who have been involved in the agitations for the resurrection of the Republic of Biafra include the Igbo Concerned Citizens, Igbo Elders' Forum, and Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra. Other indigenous Igbo organizations in the forefront agitation for the republic of Biafra include the Biafra Zion Movement and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (Lederach, 2018). The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which is currently in the forefront of agitating for the republic of Biafra has carried out deadly attack in the South-eastern region, leading to loss of lives and properties, and disruption of socio-economic activities, including market trading, especially after the incarceration of the IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu by the Federal Government. Although the crisis has largely been degraded in many markets as mega closure of market is hardly noticeable in major markets in Enugu State except on Mondays, the seeming environment of sustainable peace in many markets in the State can best be described as enforced peace, which is largely sustained by rampant deployment of security personnel at short intervals to regularly conduct " stop and search" operations in order to pre-empt any violent action by IPOB (operation UDOKA II by the military), especially on Mondays and the

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days immediately preceding for Nnamdi Kanu's appearances in court. The current environment of heavily enforced market peace and fragile market security is a threat to the socio-economic survival of many traders in Enugu State, which requires concerted efforts of scholars to research into what has been done to improve market security in Enugu State, which harvests customer patronage within Nigeria and beyond This study examines the efforts of the Nigeria military at countering violent agitation in Enugu State of Nigeria and its implications for market traders in the state.

The resurgence of Biafra separatist militants in South-eastern Nigeria over perceived economic exclusion, ethno-national marginalization and material deprivation of the Igbo extraction has enthrone security breaches in diverse areas of human endeavours in Enugu State, including commercial and trading activities. The most visible existential threats to lives and livelihoods of the market traders in Enugu State are the coordinated attacks on the markets and other business entities, especially on Mondays and any other day so declare as "work free" day by the agitators in the state. Many of the market has witnessed frequent attacks and those mostly affected include the Afor-Garriki market, New market on Works Road, Ogige market, Ogbete market, Old Artisan and New Artisan markets, Kenyatta market and Coal Camp Market.

Conversely, there has being counter security measures put in place by the Nigeria military to secure the markets in Enugu State from the clutches of violent agitators and improve commercial activities in the state but the output and impact of this security measures have not been adequately studied by scholars. Although the reinvention of Biafra separatism has received substantial scholarly attention, available studies have neglected how the persistence of counter violent measures by the Nigeria military has affected the traders in Enugu State, especially those who are selling in the markets. While some scholars (David, 2018, Ike, 2018, Thomas, 2021) argue that the effort of the Nigerian military at countering violent agitation in Enugu State has curtailed security breaches in the markets, other scholars (Charles, 2017, Caleb, 2019, Waris, 2021) contend that the brutal military response of the Nigerian state against the neo -Biafra separatist uprisings has continued to harden the agitators towards violent attack on the markets and assumed that the sustained deployment of the military with kinetic approach, involving the proscription and arrests of pro-Biafra agitators has undermined market security rather than fortified it in Enugu State. This study examines the efforts of the Nigeria military at countering violent agitation in Enugu State and its implications for market traders.

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of military operation against violent agitators for Biafra Republic on market traders in Enugu State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study are to explore the effects of violent agitation for Biafra Republic on traders in Enugu State; assess the impact of military operation against violent agitators for Biafra Republic on market traders in Enugu State, and examine the challenges of the military at securing the markets against violent attacks by Biafra agitators in Enugu State. This study is significant as it avails relevant stakeholders the contributions and challenges of the Nigerian military at countering violent agitation in South-eastern Nigeria. It will specifically unveil the extent to which violent agitation has affected the rate of availability, accessibility, affordability and sustainability of products in markets in Enugu State and expose the extent to which such violent agitation has affected the security situation in the market the extent to which the military has countered it. The outcome of the research would be beneficial to the security agencies, both the state and federal governments and the traders. It will help governments to have an in-depth understanding of the challenges and concerns of the People of Enugu State towards addressing the problem of market insecurity. The knowledge garnered here will help political leaders and policy makers in making policies geared towards proper security for commercial activities in Enugu State and add to the existing literature on the subject matter of violent agitation, insecurity and counter violent operation by the military. Consequently, this study will fill identified research gaps and also contribute to the body of knowledge on peace, conflict and security studies.

Conceptual Discourse and Review of Relevant Literature

Secessionist Agitation

Frank (2017) views secessionist agitations as advocacy for departure or separation by a group of people from the larger political unit

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existing in a state it belongs to, so as to form a new nation of its own. In Frank's submission, secession encompasses all the key elements of secessionist agitations which are to mainly separate and form a new state. Secession is the official separation of a group of people from a political entity. This development commences once a group declares an act of separation, such as a declaration of independence. According to Charles (2018), secession attempts might be peaceful or violent; nonetheless the mission is the creation of a new independent state or territory from which it has seceded. The primary essence of secessions is to attain partial goals that are favourable to the agitators.

In his study, Adigun (2018) asserts that a principal character of secession revolves around ethno-national mobilisation, whereby ethnic minorities are mobilized to own a state of their own; The author posits further that secessionist tendency revolves around relative strength of the seceding group while powerful secessionist actions are more likely to achieve statehood with negotiated consent of the home states and the global community to agree to secessionist requests. Succession as adopted in this study means agitation for departure or separation of the South-eastern states from Nigeria as an independent nation of its own.

Historical Overview of Secessionist Agitations in Nigeria

In his study,Tekena (2018) found that the declaration of Republic of Biafra by late Col ChukwuemekaOjukwu in 1967 popped up agitations for secession from Nigerian state by the South east region. This came after the first coup detat of 1966 that led to killing of over 3,500 Igbo in Northern Nigeria and destruction of property worth over US$14.5 million. The declaration of Republic of Biafra led to 30-months of civil war in Nigeria between 6th July 1967 – 15th January 1970, with associated casualties of over100, 000 military, and death of about 2 million civilians which impinges on national security (Hussein, 2018). Hussain (2018) equally gave an account that in 1970 after the end of civil war, the Federal Government embarked on national integration programme towards regional equity, unity and peace to tone down agitation for succession and enhance national security. However, the implementation of the national re-integration programme was lopsided leading to increased perceptions of marginalization, neglect and alienation by the Igbos of the Southeast who cited sustained marginalization from political participation, infrastructural development neglect and seizure of abandoned properties by the Ibos by the Federal Government. Claim of marginalization by other regions also led to agitation for separation by other regions in Nigeria with attendant negative implications for national security. For instance, the annulment of 12 June, 1993 General Election by General Ibrahim Babangida which was won by late MoshoodKashimawoOlawaleAbiola contributed to the demand by the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) to secede from Nigeria based on perceived political alienation of the South-western region of the country (Gabriel, 2019).

Other incidences of secessionist agitation in Nigeria as noted by Charles (2020) include demands for resource control, economic equity and environmental security by Niger Delta militant groups. The agitation for secession and resource control posed worrisome security challenges that impinged on national security in Nigeria (Charles, 2020). Ibrahim (2021) found in his study that the Federal Government of Nigeria have been making concerted efforts to dissuade agitation for secession, including the establishment of the Federal Character principle (FCP) in 1996 with the primary objectives to reawakening national consciousness and promoting uniqueness of identity and decimate separatist agitation, among other objectives. However, the author notes that the attainment of national re-integration with less agitation for separation has not been adequately achieved due to faulty implementation of the Federal Character Principle. This has further led to regeneration of secessionist agitation groups such as MASSOB, IPOB, Niger Delta Avengers, and OPC among others with attendant negative implications for national security.

According to David (2021), the frustrating socio-economic conditions of many Nigerians along environmental insecurity also remain one of the contributory factors for increased agitation for secession as many often agitate for separation to enable them control the resources within their geographical entity to better their lots rather than use such resources to develop elsewhere. According to the author, the security challenges arising from secessionist agitation in the Niger Delta

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area of Nigeria is linked to the failure of Nigerian government to address the scourge of environmental degradation from gully erosion, oil spill and poor infrastructure, among other factors. In fact, Okons (2021) corroborated this assertion that the poor socio-economic condition of people has increased allegation of marginalization by different regional ethnic groups levelled against the Federal government of Nigeria, leading to increased agitations for secession with negative effects on national security.

Background and Trajectory of the Neo-Biafra Separatist Movement in Nigeria

According to Ibrahim (2020), the sustenance of the Biafra separatist movement since 1999 is an indictment of the Nigerian state over poor implementation of the post-civil war peace-building initiatives. Hence, it is not surprising that the grievances that led to the outbreak of the war, those that emanated from how the war was fought and how post-war resettlement was implemented have not only created a sense of collective suffering and victimhood amongst the Igbo (Ibeanu et al., 2016) but also combined to incubate and fertilise the founding and funding of the current neo-Biafra separatist movements in Nigeria.

In his study, Ibrahim (2018) argues that prior to the establishment of the IPOB which is the most current assemblage and manifestation of the neo-Biafra separatist movement in Nigeria by MaaziNnamdiKanu, the neo-Biafra secessionist struggle was pioneered by Chief Ralph Uwazuruike who founded the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) on 13 September 1999. MASSOB was established with the mandate of promoting the interest of the Igbo in Nigeria. According to Omeje (2015), MASSOB was able to secure the support of a vibrant global network of Igbo organisations such as the Biafra Foundation, Biafra Actualisation Forum, Igbo USA, and Biafra Nigeria World.

While writing on the inner working of the agitators and their movement groups, Ezea (2017) opines that a coalescence of state repression and internal leadership crises weakened many of the organisations, especially MASSOB and introduced deep cracks in the organisation. This created room for the operational gap for the emergence of other neo-Biafra movements, including the Biafra Zionist Movement, Biafra Zionist Front, Biafra Independent Movement, Biafra Youth Congress, Biafra Revolutionary Force, Biafra Liberation Council and the now proscribed IPOB. The IPOB appeals directly to the alienated underclass of mainly Igbo descent through its digital broadcasting outlets of which the internet-based Radio Biafra is the most popular.

As noted by Nwangwu (2021), similar to the earlier neo-Biafra separatist groups who were discredited by the IPOB for allegedly compromising the secessionist struggle, the IPOB is also founded on the avowed doctrine of non-violence. In relation to the conservative Igbo nationalists who favour dialogue and diplomacy in their pursuit of Igbo nationalism, however, the IPOB represents the militant wing of post-war Igbo nationalism which promotes the secessionist inclination that surged since the return of civil rule in 1999. IPOB's separatist campaigns have brought it on a collision course with federal security forces as well as Igbo political elite who purportedly aid and abet the state's repressive behaviour in the South-East.

While examining the operational structure of the IPOB, Thomas (2020) contends that the organisation has a quasi-decentralised command and control structure led by MaaziNnamdiKanu. The Germany-based 15-member Directorate of State (DOS) is the highest decision-making organ of the separatist movement. Below the DOS are the global headquarters (Asian, European, North American and African) representatives. In Nigeria, however, most states in the South-East and South-South have their state coordinators followed by zone and unit coordinators at the local government and community levels, respectively.

In tracing the origin of the military wing of the IPOB, Nwangwu (2021) informed that the IPOB created the Eastern Security Network (ESN) as its paramilitary wing on 12 December 2020 which led to a change of the group's separatist strategy from a non-violent mode to an armed struggle, especially after the military crackdown on the leadership of the organisation. As noted by the author, the dominant inclination within the IPOB, ESN and other radical separatists is that the crises of governance in Igboland derive from the oppressive Nigerian state and the collaborationist role of the conservative Igbo nationalists. As the paramilitary arm of the IPOB, the ESN is mandated to defend Biafra land by counteracting the military crackdown

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of the agitators.According to Emmanuel (2021), the ESN does not depend on external sources for its arms and ammunition as all its weapons are locally manufactured while the military outfit was created as a direct response to the perennial onslaught of state security forces against neo-Biafra separatist organisations.

Counter Violent Operation by Nigeria Military and Radicalisation of the Separatist Movements

According to Ojebode (2018), the predisposition of the IPOB to armed separatist struggle in Nigeria is a consequence of sustained deployment of military force against the activities of the neo-Biafra separatist movement. Although the separatist militants later changed their operational strategy to a confrontational approach rather than a conciliatory one, the separatist agitators, including the IPOB, generally come across as non-violent organisations by their initial design. As argued by Onuoha (2014), the separatists seek the realignment of the generational imbalance of power, and ultimately, an exit of the Igbo ethnic group into an alternative political and administrative arrangement that would be controlled by Igbo extractions for the benefit of the South-eastern region. Whilst the agitators agree on secession as the only solution to the perceived Igbo victimisation, they tend to differ on the operational strategies. Prior to the founding of the ESN by the IPOB in December 2020, neo-Biafra separatist groups were closely associated with such strategies as the threat of armed struggle, and boycott of major national events such as census, elections and national identity card scheme, as well as call for a referendum.

As noted by Ibrahim (2020), the military onslaughts against the Biafra agitators led to the re-thinking of their non-violent strategy in favour of violent agitation. The author informs that as far as September 2017 when the Nigerian military deployed the Operation Python Dance II, NnamdiKanu stated, amongst other things, that the IPOB leadership was reconsidering the viability or otherwise of continuing the separatist struggle in a non-violent manner. Kanu also emphasised the need for the agitators to begin the process of defending themselves in the face of relentless attacks from the Nigerian military. The author informs that the IPOB and other neo-Biafra separatist organisations claimed that they have suffered various gradations of state repression, including arrest and killing of Biafra “Remembrance Day” protesters, excessive military brutality and unprovoked shooting of unarmed protesters, illegal detention of neo-Biafra separatists, failed attempts to jam the transmission channels of Radio Biafra, invasion of the Afaraukwu home of MaaziKanu and proscription of the IPOB, as well as the extraordinary rendition of the IPOB leader from Kenya.

In his study, Charles (2023) explains that following the October 2015 arrest and incarceration of Kanu on charges of sedition, ethnic incitement, terrorism and treasonable felony, there were series of protests, marches and gatherings by IPOB members and supporters. Most of the protests and rallies were usually planned to coincide with Kanu’s court appearances. As argued by Nwangwu et al. (2020), most pro-Biafra rallies and peaceful demonstrations are often visited with various gradations of rights abuse by the Nigerian Military. However; Nwangu informed that the violation of the human right of the agitators reached an unprecedented height during the 2016 Biafra Remembrance Day which was also the 49th anniversary of the declaration of Biafra. As contended by the author, the security forces shot people during the Remembrance Day celebration in many locations, especially at Asaba, Nkpor and Onitsha (Nwangu 2020, Amnesty International, 2020). According to Amnesty International (2020), IPOB supporters and bystanders who clearly posed no threat to anyone were visited with outrageous use of unnecessary and excessive force which resulted in multiple deaths and injuries. Reports of harassment, torture, disappearances, abductions and extra-judicial killings of members of pro-Biafra movements by security agencies have also been documented by other rights organisations (Iroegbu, 2016; Sahara Reporters, 2016). Amnesty International (2018) also observes that the military was involved in arbitrary arrests, detentions and extra-judicial killings of IPOB members in the South-east between 2017 and 2018. According to Bewaji (2022), there is a history of extra-judicial killings of supporters of Biafra, which predate the government of President MuhammaduBuhari. In January 2013, for instance, fifty bodies believed to be Biafra supporters were found afloat in the Ezu River in AnambraState.The author contends that still, none of the past and present killings has been thoroughly investigated by successive Nigerian governments.

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While tracing the mobilisation capacity of the agitators, Bolade (2022) informs that in 2017, the security forces were alarmed by the growing penetrative and mobilisation reach of IPOB, especially through 'community evangelism' and different forms of civil disobedience. The author informs that community evangelism was effectively used in the build-up to the November 2017 Anambra State governorship election and it entailed moving into villages to encourage people to boycott the electoral process. As a consequence of the growing popularity and influence of IPOB to incite people into civil disobedience, the Nigerian military was deployed in the South-East through Operation Python Dance I1 which is also known as Egwu Eke II in Igbo language. According to Ilozue (2017), Operation Python Dance II is the codename of the military operation that lasted from 15 September to 14 October 2017 in the South-East. The operation was deployed apparently to combat kidnapping, armed robbery, killing of priests and violent agitation but it later turned into a repressive tool against unarmed neo-Biafra agitators, especially members of the IPOB. As observed by Okafor (2017), the operation subjected unarmed and defenceless neo-Biafra youths to physical torture and other inhuman treatments such as ordering them to slap each other and forcing them to drink and eventually drown in muddy waters. Apart from invading the Afaraukwu home of MaaziKanu with about 10 Armoured Carrier Vehicles and seven Hilux vans. Ayo-Aderele and Ikokwu (2017) claimed that the Nigerian military of the Operation Python Dance II also invaded the Abia State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Umuahia, where they did not only destroy valuable assets such as laptops, iPads and phones but also assaulted some officials of the union. In his own submission, Thomas (2021) opines that the repressive tendencies of the Nigeria military of Operation Python Dance II in the South-East were quickly followed by the proscription of the IPOB and its designation as a terrorist organisation. The IPOB was first proscribed by the South-East governors, and shortly afterwards labelled a terrorist organisation by the Nigerian Army. Justifying the terrorism designation of IPOB, the military assumes that IPOB members used stones, Molotov cocktails, machetes and broken bottles, on a military patrol on 10 September 2017 which led to the prohibition of the organisation by the Federal Government on 20 September 2017. Notwithstanding the repressive response of the Nigerian state to Biafra separatism, the leadership of the IPOB continues to favour a confrontational approach to Igbo nationalism due largely to wider considerations for their material conditions.

In his historical account on the genesis of neo-Biafran agitation, David (2023) posits that on 30 December 2020, barely 2 weeks after the establishment of the ESN, the Nigerian military deployed combat helicopters, gun trucks and soldiers who invaded some forests in the South-East where the ESN members were believed to be camping. For seven days, Orlu communities in Imo State became the theatre of war between the Nigerian military and the ESN militia. According to Njoku and Elekwa (2021), many lives were lost during the clash. Similarly, a report of the European Asylum Support Office (2022) indicates that from 1 January to 30 April 2021, a total of 32 security incidents comprising 14 battles, 1 incident of remote violence/explosions, 13 cases of violence against civilians and 4 incidents of riots were recorded in Imo State, resulting in 59 deaths (European Asylum Support Office, 2021).

Njoku and Elekwa (2021) inform further that Imo State and other parts of Igbo land came under severe security threats after the end of the initial confrontations between the Nigerian military and ESN fighters in January 2021. On 5 April 2021, for instance, yet-to-be-identified gunmen, popularly referred to as 'unknown gunmen' launched a virulent attack on government facilities such as the Imo State Police Command and the Nigerian Correctional Centre, Owerri, freeing 1844 inmates of the Centre. The unknown gunmen also set the premises of the Centre, including many vehicles, on fire whilst soldiers were killed at Umuoji on the Owerri-Onitsha Expressway (Nkwo-Akpolu, 2021).

Beyond the attacks on INEC facilities, Mbah et al. (2022) show that violent Biafra separatist agitation and excessive military deployment accounted for low voter turnout during the 2017 governorship election in Anambra State. The author argues further that similar to the 2017 experience, the outcome of the November 2021 governorship election in the state also shows that the election recorded low voter turnout as a result of the IPOB's 'no referendum, no election' and 'vote and die' campaigns. Although the one-week sit-at-home leading to the Anambra election which

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was earlier ordered by the group was reversed, the state of fear and insecurity that was created by the politics of agitation for a separate state of Biafra accounted for the postponement of the governorship election in Ihiala LGA of the state (Israel, 2021; Ukpong, 2021). Apart from the negative impacts of the agitations on voter turnout, Israel (2021) opines that Anambra State and indeed the South-East have been turned into a killing field since December 2020 when the military ferociously responded to the Biafra separatist movement with draconian military crackdown. The author informs further that within Anambra State, for instance, Ihiala, Ozubulu, Ukpor, Ekwulobia, Orsumoghu, Lilu, Mbosi, Isseke and Ubuluisiuzor communities are amongst the most adversely affected by the spate of killings by the military. Major victims of the wave of insecurity in Anambra State include Dr.ChikeAkunyili and Chief Gabriel Ufoma who were gruesomely murdered by unidentified gunmen, and burning of the Nnewi house of Mr. Joe Igbokwe (a Lagos State-based politician), as well as the Anambra State complexes of the Department of State Services and the Federal Road Safety Commission, leading to the call for proclamation of a state of emergency in Anambra State as a containment measure against insecurity in the state during the build-up to the November 2021 governorship election (Malami, 2021).

Omonobi (2021) discusses two broad schools of thought on the identity of the unknown gunmen and why the South-east, which is one of the most peaceful regions in Nigeria before 2021 became one of the hotbeds of insecurity in the country. The first school is espoused by the Nigerian government and the relevant federal security agencies. This school argues that unknown gunmen are members of the IPOB/ESN whose simmering neo-Biafra separatist agitations are responsible for the ongoing sporadic and coordinated attacks on security agencies and other targets. It is within the purview of this school of thought that Nigeria's former Inspector General of Police (IGP), Mohammed Adamu, attributed the 5 April 2021 Easter Monday attacks on Imo State Police Command and the Nigerian Correctional Centre, Owerri, to the IPOB and ESN fighters. As noted by the author, just a few hours after the attacks, the former IGP noted that the attackers who came with sophisticated weapons such as General Purpose Machine Guns, Sub-Machine Guns, AK-49 rifles, Rocket Propelled Grenades and Improvised Explosive Devices are members of the proscribed IPOB/ESN. However, the IPOB and ESN have repeatedly denied any culpability in the 2021 Easter Monday attacks that lasted for about 3 hours at the Imo State Force headquarters (Okeoma, 2021). In line with Adamu's assertion above, another former IGP, Alkali Usman, during the launching of Operation Restore Peace at the Okpara Square, Enugu, directed policemen in the South-east to disregard the rules of engagement whilst dealing with Biafra secessionist groups (Eze et al., 2021).

Eze et al.,(2021) conclude that as a consequence of ENS attacks on security formations and other soft targets by unknown gunmen (read as IPOB/ESN in Nigerian government and security circles), the Nigerian government has continued to unleash security agents on suspected members of the IPOB/ESN. Apart from Umutanze in the Orlu/Orsu axis where some suspected members of the IPOB/ESN were either killed or arrested, Nigerian soldiers and police personnel also invaded the House of Prayer International Covenant Church, OkporoOrlu, and arrested over 20 members of the church as suspected members of the IPOB/ESN (Onyejiuwa, 2021). The prevailing kinetic approach of the Nigerian security operatives against armed attacks in the South-east has further exacerbated the security challenges in the region as socio-economic activities have ebbed considerably.

According to Omonobi (2021), the second school of thought on the activities of the ESN on the other hand, is mainly associated with the opinion of Igbo (political) elite who contend that it is too hasty to attribute the ongoing carnage in Igbo land to members of the IPOB/ESN without a proper and thorough investigation. Leaning on the conspiracy theory of a false flag operation, the Igbo elite argue that the attacks are designed by external forces to subdue Igbo land and create the impression that the Igbo ethnic nationality is incapable of producing Nigeria's president in 2023. As noted by the author, a false flag operation is an act committed with the aim of concealing the actual source of responsibility and pinning the blame on another party. From the postulation of Omonobi (2021), it is quite evident that some Igbo elite tend to suggest that the dastardly activities of the unknown gunmen might be traceable to many early warnings and reports of mass movement of the insurgency groups to the southern parts of

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Nigeria. With particular reference to the 5 April Easter Monday attacks in Owerri. Uzoma (2021) argues that such attacks on the two strong Federal Government institutions remain strange to the Igbo. The author did not only exonerate the IPOB/ESN from the attacks but also attributed them to foreigners whose intention was to destroy the South-east (Uzoma, 2021). Thus, the widespread opinion in the South-east is that the attacks being carried out, in quick succession, on INEC facilities, security agencies and prominent Nigerians are designed to discredit people from the South-East and scuttle their quest for a Nigerian president of Igbo origin in 2023. In the light of a culture of hasty predisposition of the Nigerian military to blame the IPOB/ESN for insecurity in the South-East, Nwobodo(2023) contends that the time for a knee-jerk approach and fixated mindset in the investigation of criminal attacks by the security agencies has gone. It is not enough to be driven by a certain mindset, which has the tendency of foreclosing other probable leads and motives during investigations of very serious crimes like the ones being currently experienced in the Southeast.

The foregoing positions of scholars and opinion leaders suggest that there is no agreement over the actual identity of the unknown gunmen who are mainly responsible for the destruction of public utilities and bloodletting in the South-east. IPOB's repeated denial of culpability in these dastardly acts implies that the armed attacks in the zone might go beyond the separatist organisation and its militia, the ESN. This conclusion largely resonates with Charles (2022), who asserts that criminal groups, many of who are sponsored by political actors and institutions, could be responsible for violent attacks in the South-east. Irrespective of the actual identity of the unknown gunmen, however, everyone tends to admit that the loss of human lives and livelihood opportunities, as well as the destruction of state institutions, has increased exponentially in the Southeast. Thus, much of the reviewed authors primarily concluded that, military repression has not only failed to bring the IPOB's separatist activities under check but has accounted for the escalation of armed violence in the South-east.

What could be distilled from the reviewed literature is that there are plausible studies on security threats caused by violent agitation for the republic of Biafra, especially in South-eastern Nigeria and the countering efforts of the Nigeria military to secure the southeast region from the grip of violent agitators but the military repression has not only failed to bring the IPOB's separatist activities under check but has accounted for the escalation of armed violence in the South-east. In spite of this revelation from the reviewed literature none of the study was focused on the counter violent operation of the military against the agitators and its implications for market security in Enugu State, an academic lacuna this study intends to fill.

Theoretical Framework

This study used the theory of Counter Militancy Warfare as its explanatory weight

Theory of Counter Militancy Warfare

The theory of counter militancy warfare was propounded by Galula (2006); a French military officer who had war time experiences in China, Greece, Southeast Asia, and Algeria. The theory provided a winning "compass" for the counter militant combatants. This theoretical "compass" also comprises of the laws guiding counter militancy warfare, and corresponding strategy and tactics of winning the war. Essentially, the theory of counter militancy warfare is divided into two ideological orientations and approaches with two major ideological schools of thoughts. These include the population-centric and enemy centric ideological schools of thoughts. The Population-Centric Counter militancy approach as explained by Galula (2006) focuses on protecting the population, maintaining and winning its support against militancy as critical factors of wining militancy wars. According to the author, although direct military confrontation might be needed in defeating the militants, it is not often regarded within the Population-Centric Counter militancy approach as the primary objective of government and counter militancy force. The Population-Centric counter militancy approach can be summarized as "first protect and support the population to win their support and loyalty in order to defeat the militants. In the same vein, while the population-centric counter militancy approach is essentially and theoretically 'population-centric, with primary emphasis of using non-kinetic approach' it allows for offensive, defensive, and stability within the field of counter militancy operations (Petraeus& Amos, 2016).

Enemy-centric Theory of Counter Militancy Warfare

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The enemy-centric approach as postulated by Galula (2006) conceives counter militancy operation as a war contest between the regular security forces with an organized enemy of the state, and thus emphasizes the defeat of the enemy by force as the primary objective of counter militancy while considering other counter militancy mechanisms such as the use of non-kinetic approach as secondary. In other words, the focus here is on the complete annihilation of the militants or their guerrilla formations and cadres. There are also many variants of counter militancy models within the Enemy-Centric approach, including "soft" vs. "hard," direct vs. indirect, violent vs. non-violent, and decapitation vs. marginalization strategies." This approach can be summarized as first defeat the enemy before settling down to achieve the set aims and objectives of the militancy actions. As noted by the author, in modern times, the tactical approaches to win counter militancy war are often not discussed but applied in counter militancy operations.

According to Galula (2006), whether a counter militancy operation is being conducted within the confines of population-centric and enemy-centric theories, there are four operational conditions under which militancy could be won

The first condition is the need for the overwhelming support of the local population which is paramount and without which it is impossible to root out the militants because the local population know their hideout and have the clear knowledge of the geographical terrains of their local environment where the militants operate. The author opined further that attaining the support of the population should be compensated with adequate protection of such informant and their communities by the military otherwise such support would be lost to the militants if counter militancy actions are unfavourable to the population by exposing them to the danger of militancy attacks. Galula (2006) contends that counter militancy operation is often won based on sustained and intensity of effort and vastness of means of combating militancy by the military because counter militancy actions require a large concentration of operational effort, human and financial resources, and the required personnel to be won.

This study presumed that violent militant agitation has undermined both community and national security in South-eastern Nigeria which required the involvement of the military to curtail it. The study is thus convinced that the counter militancy warfare theory as adopted in this study have strong explanatory weight.

State Repression and the Persistence of Biafra Agitation

While the military response to the violent agitation in South-eastern Nigeria has largely been dominated by enemy-centric approach to ensure peace in the geo-political zone, scholars (Abbas & Jacob, 2023) have argued that the arrest and clampdown of many secessionist agitators, rather than end violent agitation, has enthroned and sustained coordinated attacks on state facilities by the agitators who considered such military expedition largely as state repression against the agitators, hence the adoption of theory of state repression for this study.

The earliest development of discourses around state repression is traceable to Dallin and Breslauer (1970), Lichbach (1987), Olson (1965), Tilly (1978), Walter (1972) and Ziegenhagen (1986). However, the latest advances in state repression research have been dominated by the works of Christian Davenport and Molly Inman (Temitope& Clement, 2024). According to Temitope& Clement (2024), state repression is the process whereby a government or its agents control a citizenry by force for political reasons. It also involves the restriction or prevention of the citizens' ability to take part in the political life of a society, especially through harassment, surveillance, spying, bans, proscription, arrests, torture and mass killing by government agents within their territorial jurisdictions.

As noted by the authors, state repression involves the use of instruments of violence or coercion, especially by the police, military and paramilitary forces, to reduce dissident actions, dissenting opinions and collective organisations. According to Inman (2012) state repression is often achieved through the use of intimidation and open violence while the instrument is also use to subjugate citizens and abolish their machinery of collective organisation. Hence, state repression is tantamount to a travesty of justice in which the rights of citizens and organisations (especially those who are considered anti-government) to freedom of speech and association are not only limited but citizens are also flagrantly arrested, tortured and killed within the territorial

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jurisdiction of the state Inman, 2012).

As Ake (1981) argues, the state is a specific modality of class domination. This is especially the case in postcolonial social formations in Africa where the relevant institutional mechanisms of repression are not adequately autonomised. The institutional mechanisms for deepening state repression can be exercised through coercion and or ideology. The coercive apparatuses of state repression according to Ake (1981) include the military, police, paramilitary formations and prisons whilst the ideological counterpart comprises the courts, legislature and state media. The former uses violence to protect the ruling class and ensure their domination over the masses, whilst the latter relies on non-violence to achieve the same objective (Ake, 1981; Althusser, 1970; Margulies, 2018). The state in both democratic and autocratic regimes use repression to deal with internal threats to its sovereignty (Davenport, 2000). Whilst there are usually sufficient safeguards against state repression in advanced democracies (Davenport, 2007), the use of force to silence dissenting voices and popular protests in Africa has become the norm (Coynash and Charron, 2019; Keels and Nichols, 2018). Thus, most African states, including Nigeria, are amongst the top countries with severe cases of human rights violations and the highest level of citizen distrust of government institutions (Anazonwu et al., 2021).

According to Ake (1981), the repressive character of the African state is inextricably tied to its colonial history. Colonial conquest of African territories was achieved by the constabularies and other paramilitary forces that were used to suppress, aggress, repress and oppress those opposed to the imposed authority of the colonial overlords. Hence, more than six decades after independence, the Nigerian state and its security architecture are assumed not to have decolonised as they are accused of still operating like an occupational force, especially in the South-eastern region where the Nigeria military is countering violent agitation for Biafra Republic. This has culminated in a state of permanent hostility between the Nigerian state and some groups in the South-east. In his study, Charles (2013) contends that although the official attempt to enforce the law necessarily carries with it certain coercive and punitive procedures which are, in the main, at variance with the guarantees stipulated in favour of the citizens by the constitution (Mbah and Nwangwu, 2014). As noted by Charles (2021), the penchant of the Nigerian state for brute and unbridled force, especially against non-combatant civilian populations, is quite alarming. The author argues that Nigerian state continues to rely on repression as its major response strategy to citizens' protests and mobilisation against poor governance. In this light, Ihonvbere (2013) surmises that the proneness of the state to repression makes it serve more as a weapon of rights violations and intimidation than as agents for the protection of the citizenry and facilitation of development. After Nigeria's independence in 1960, Ake contends that the postcolonial apparatuses of state repression retained their colonial character as agents of the state against civil society activists, especially trade unionists and students, as well as political opponents (Ake, 1981; Cole, 1999). The theory of state repression has a strong explanatory weight for this study as it supports the position of many civil society organisations that the Nigeria military has actually been used by the dominant ruling groups within the Centre as well as the South -east to suppress the agitation, grievances and revolt from the underclass of the Igbo ethnic stock within the IPOB.

Research Methodology

This study employed Key Informant Interview (KII) to gather the required data. The population revolves around relevant stake holders in the course of this study which includes the military involved in countering violent agitation, market traders, and other respondents, including separatist militant agitators and other relevant stakeholders that consist of traditional rulers and market leaders, market customers and community leaders. Other relevant stakeholders include Amalgamated Market Traders Association, Civil Society Organizations, and Nigeria Union of Road Transport workers.

Geographical Scope of the Study

This study focused on the effects of military operation against violent agitators for Biafra Republic on market traders in Enugu State of Nigeria between 2015 and 2023. The reason for the timeline is Notable markets in all the 17 local government areas of Enugu State were studied with emphasis on the markets with frequent attacks. The specific local

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government areas to be covered include, Aninri, Awgu, Enugu East, Enugu North, Enugu, South, Ezeagwu, Igbo-Etiti, Igboeze North, Igboeze South, Isi-Uzo, NkanuEast,Nkanu West, Nsukka, Oji River, Udenu, Udi, and Uzo-Uwani local government areas. The justification for covering all the 17 local government of Enugu State borders on the fact that though the magnitude might be different, there is no market in all the local government in Enugu State, including the remotest ones that is not directly or indirectly affected by the violent activities of the agitators for the Republic of Biafra, especially as it borders on the Monday "Sit-at-Home" policy. If the policy does not affect the local traders in the inner most local government areas, it often affects their customers who come from the city whose trade antennary is often restricted by "No Movement" policies, especially on Monday.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section presents and discusses findings from the study. The section is divided into two. The first part presents the demographic information and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents while section two presents the findings from each of the research objectives.

Findings from the study confirms that the effects of violent agitation for Biafra Republic on market traders in Enugu State were largely negative as separatist militant agitation for Biafra Republic has negatively affected the traders, their livelihoods, dependants, properties and psychology, including job and profit losses, destruction of lives, loss of valuable trading items, destruction of cash and business records, and mental breakdown. Some respondents, through the KII, did not only confirm the above variable findings on the effects of violent agitation for Republic of Biafra on market traders in Enugu State, they equally identified other effects of the attacks in interviews as follow:

According to a respondent:

> Over N12billion is lost in Enugu State each day there is IPOB Sit-at-home. You tell people to sit at home when you have nothing to manage the effects of hunger in the land and for those of us in the business sector, we lose an average of N9billion in Enugu metropolis alone and I believe we also lose much more when we add the lost from markets denial from other local government areas too and this is not good for our economy. **(KII/ Male/Trader/ Enugu/ Enugu State/August, 2024)**

In another KII an interviewee confirmed that:

> I trade in groceries in the market but we are seriously suffering from this Sit-at-home palaver that is destroying our business; some of us cannot survive without coming to this market because this is where we earn our daily livelihood but currently much of our trading items remain largely unsold due to frequent closure of market. I run into a loss of more than 130,000 in each of the sit-at-home episode. Unfortunately, I took cooperative loans to bankroll this business with intense difficulty of paying back due to denied trading activities by the IPOB. Businesses have virtually collapsed and those whose businesses have collapsed may pickup arms one day to fend for themselves, which will increase insecurity and crime rates. **(KII/ Male/Trader/ Emene/ Enugu State/August, 2024)**

Another respondent asserts that:

> My transportation business has been affected by the disruption of trading activities by IPOB because once the sit-at-home order is announced; we don't have the opportunity of transporting goods to the markets while we are sometimes stranded on the road for two days which makes perishable goods to get spoilt in the vehicle and a lot of traders don't get means of transportation to

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> their shops. In essence, Enugu State, which is known for trade and entrepreneurship, is being shutdown on the first business day of every week. The Sit-at-home order has crippled my earning capacity for several months. This week, we have Sit-at-home two times; Monday and Friday, losing the opportunity to earn offload my passenger goods in the markets. It has made it difficult for me to take care of my family and pay instalments of 20,000 Naira weekly for this shuttle on hire purchase. An average of 50,000 people travel to patronize markets in Enugu State at an average of 3000 Naira per traveller. Thus, any day Sit-at-home order is being observed, the transport sector lose hugely from delivering trading items to the markets. In many instances there were incidents where hoodlums attacked vehicles distributing trading items and set it ablaze by the agitators. In another instance, two tricycles were also torched by separatist militants in one of the markets before security operatives arrived at the scene to restore peace and order. **(KII/ Male/Trader/ Enugu/ Enugu State/August, 2024)**

From the above findings, there is no doubt that due to persistent violent attacks on the markets in Enugu State, there has been low supply of sellable goods as many foreign and local investors vacated many of the markets in Enugu State for fear of being killed or kidnapped to patronize other safer markets elsewhere. Many market traders can no longer continue with their businesses as they lost much of their trading items to separatist militants. Due to incessant attacks by violent agitators, many traders lost their source of income and business opportunities. The implication of this finding is that without ameliorating their sufferings, many market traders will still remain out of business or virtually helpless to contribute to the socio-economic development of Enugu State. The displacements and forced movements of many traders to safer haven also means drastic reduction of trading activities in many community markets in Enugu State and reduction in income generation and socio-economic activities, which continues to deprive many traders their utmost means of livelihood.

Impact of Military Operations against IPOB on Market Traders

Findings from the study confirmed that military operation against violent agitators has led to a drop in separatist militancy activities in the markets improved market security and protection of critical market facilities. The counter separatist militancy operation has equally increase consciousness of the traders on their roles of supplying critical intelligence about the negative activities of separatist militants and their collaborators among traders to the military, and contributedtoimproved customers patronage and sales in the markets. Some of the strategies adopted by the military to safeguard markets from separatist militancy attacks are the deployment of the military with other security agencies, including the Police, Civil Defence and the Department of State Services. There is also a collaborative effort between the military, private security outfits guiding the markets and the Market Traders Association by exchanging phone numbers for any emergency calls while also placing military informants at strategic locations. The counter-militancy strategies of securing the marketers in Enugu State included the funding of the establishment of additional market security posts, deployment of private security intelligence monitors, and establishment of Market Patrol Task Force (MPTF) consisting essentially of the military intelligence, police, civil defence among others.

While corroborating the above finding, a key informant asserts that:

> The military operations in Enugu State has led to tremendous drop in separatist militancy activities and their incessant attacks on the markets while such effort has amplified the confidence of many traders to open shop even on Mondays that have

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> hitherto been declared as work- free day by IPOB. I havenodoubt in my mindthatthe military operation has led to improved market security and protection of critical market facilities. The sensitization programme of the military has also increased consciousness among traders on their roles of giving critical intelligence and information about the negative activities of separatist militants and their collaborators among traders to the military. **(KII/ Male/ Leader, Market Traders Association/Nkanu/ Enugu State/ August, 2024**)

In his opinion on the impact of the countermilitancy effort of the military on market traders an interviewee posits that:

> The military operation against violent agitators in Enugu State has contributed to and improved customers patronage and sales in the markets with many customers having renewed confidence visiting the market with less fear of being attacked by IPOB.
>
> On positive note also, before separatist militant violent attacks on the markets started, there was relative peace and spatial presence of security agencies in virtually all the markets, and there was no need for the military to curtail access to markets, which allows criminally minded traders with contraband items to enter the market with minimal detection. The current improved presence of the military along other security outfits has reduced such contraband items in the markets. In addition, the military has also collaborated with other security agencies, including the police and State Security to enhance improved security in the markets against militancy threats; and some banks within the markets have fortified their premises with strong military security outfits. These efforts have relatively boomed marketing activities with improved customers' patronage, especially on Mondays. **(KII/ Male/ private security guard in the market /Enugu/ Enugu State/ August, 2024)**

While amplifying the negative impact of military operation against separatist militants, a KII asserts that:

> Military operation against we innocent traders sympathizing with peaceful agitators for Biafra Republic is filled with brutal responses because we are often suspected of aiding violent agitators while the over militarization of the market with the overwhelming presence of the military sometimes create fear and heightened tension among traders. Constant harassment of the marketers by the military on suspicion of being militants has continued to create fear and intimidation in the mind of the traders. In fact, some of us have abandoned the market, leading to reduction in market supply. I personally have abandoned the market when I learnt that soldiers were looking for me before I was finally arrested and detained here on the allegation of giving agitators sensitive information about the military which are all false. **(KII/ Male /Detained Market trader sympathetic to the actions of agitators/Enugu/ Enugu State/April, 2024)**

While also lamenting their plights in the hand of the military, a trader opined that:

> The military are fond of mounting many road blocks, especially on the eve of market days in many parts of Enugu State with stringent

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> checking, which delayed arrival of goods into the market on time while some of the goods got spoilt on the road. There were extortion of traders on the road by the military, the cost of which were passed to the consumer, thus increasing the prices of goods and services in the market. Though access to markets by buyers was limited by separatist agitators, especially on Mondays, some security officers have exploited the challenge to transform themselves into emergency market traders having taken over the functions of middlemen from the traders by bringing the goods directly from the hinterland or from the home of the traders at exorbitant prices directly to the home of the customer, thus making huge profit from the transaction. **(KII/ Female /Market trader/Ukehe/ Enugu State/April, 2024)**

Findings from the objective confirmed that military operation against violent agitators has led to a drop in separatist militancy activities in the markets improved market security and protection of critical market facilities.

However, in spite of the efforts by the military, the strategies have not totally eliminated the attacks from violent agitators due to many factors, including the shortfall in the number of military security personnel needed to adequately secure the markets in Enugu State, especially those in the villages. Conversely, the police were found not to be prompt in responding to the frequent attacks on market traders and distress calls by traders in the villages by complaining of logistic problems most of the time and lack of adequate manpower to avert the attack. On the other hand, the military approach takes adequate measures, assessment and analysis to evaluate the information for potential military actions or response to avoid collateral damages. Hence, the military operation led to brutal military responses against traders suspected of aiding violent agitators as well. Additionally, the operations have created fear and heightened tension among traders over military presence in the market.

The above findings are in line with David's (2018) earlier postulation that the military operation has impacted positively on the market traders but the clashes between separatist militants and the military sometimes weighed down seriously on commercial and trading activities in Enugu State leading to reduction in their business hours to guard against being attacked by the militants. More so, the military are also being accused of human right violation while carrying out its official assignments which conforms to state repression theory.

Challenges of the military at securing the markets against violent attacks by Biafra agitators in Enugu State

The main focus of this section was to examine the operational constraint of the Nigeria Military at countering separatist militancy to enhance market security in Enugu State. The qualitative findings from the field of study clearly confirmed that the operational constraints of Nigeria Military in the study area included weak combatant motivation, low knowledge of familiarity of the combatant force with local geographical terrain, low public confidence and support for counter militancy operation by traders, and insufficient equipment. There is no doubt from the above findings that though the military personnel have recorded immense achievements in countering violent agitation to enhance market security in Enugu State, they still carry out some of their operations under unfavourable work environment with negative consequence for some officers and men. This finding conforms to the contention of Thomas (2023) that Nigeria military confronts challenges on the field of operation in Enugu State. This finding also confirms Shiklam's (2016) earlier discovery that many markets in Enugu State are vulnerable to easy access from different directions with insufficient military personnel to secure the markets. The finding is equally in line with counter militancy theory of warefare that public spaces need not be exposed to easy attacks by criminals and the need for the motivation of counter militancy forces to perform optimally.

The finding was confirmed by a respondent who posited that:

> Though the Nigeria military has recorded immense

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> achievements in counter militancy operation to secure the markets in Enugu State, we still carry out some of our operations under unfavourable work environment with negative consequence for some officers and men because the counter militancy operation has caused the military operational casualty too as some of our officers and men have lost their lives. Many of our fighters are also weigh down by emotional and psychological torture from long absence from home, death from combat operation while some of our members are still missing-in-action. Sustenance of heavy Injury and negligence of families of our deceased personnel by concern authorities remains largely unaddressed also. **(KII/ Military personnel/ Akpugo/ Enugu State/ April, 2024)**

While confirming a clear case of psychological trauma among the counter militancy troops in Enugu State, a military psychiatrist officer asserts that:

> Some of the military personnel on counter militancy operation in Enugu State are in psychological trauma leading to behavioural disorganization of some officers and men as a fall out from direct exposure to combat fatigue, which often inform their recalcitrant behaviour a time towards the traders in the markets. Apart from combat fatigue, the counter militancy operation is still hit by low morale among the fighting troops due to low motivation and low morale covering a broad spectrum of issues, including wrong deployment for operation, poor feeding and accommodation, non-payment or irregular payment of allowances, suspension on the use of android phone by the military hierarchy, which regularly ex-communicate them from family members and loved once. **(KII/ Military personnel/Ozalla /Enugu State/ July, 2024)**

One soldier captures the danger inherent in their operating environment as he posits that:

> A major concern of many military personnel, especially we the soldiers on counter militancy operation in Enugu State, is lack of adequate safety on the road while on" a pass" because soldiers are not allowed to travel with their weapons, which sometimes leads to loss of lives of some soldiers due to ambush attacks by separatist militants and kidnappers on public vehicles traveling and captured. when they identify a soldier in such ambush they don't spare the soldier. **(KII/ Military personnel/Nsude / Enugu State/ October, 2024)**

One security personnel interviewed explains why it was relatively easy for the separatist militant to disguise and gain easy access into the market for their devilish acts in spite of the security measures put in place. The respondent noted that:

> There are incidences of separatist militants disguising as traders to spy on the market, and they are very difficult to detect since there is free entry to the market and out of the market in Enugu State. More so many of the soldiers were not provided with basic alert equipment, including body search equipment. More so, many of the markets are neither fenced nor gated. It is therefore impossible to lock gates after the close of many markets in the evening to adequately monitor who comes in and out of the market from these gates. Violent agitators sometimes visit the markets in the night to burn it. **(KII/ Male/ Military Personnel/Enugu/ Enugu**

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State/ July, 2024)

What was confirmed from the above findings was that there are operational constraints of Nigeria Military in the study area, including weak combatant motivation, low knowledge of familiarity of the combatant force with local geographical terrain, low public confidence and support for counter militancy operation by traders, and insufficient equipment.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of military operation against violent agitators for Biafra Republic on market traders in Enugu State, Nigeria and concluded that violent activities of separatist militants have negatively affected traders in Enugu State in diverse areas of trading endeavours, including low supply of sellable goods, lost of trading items to separatist militants, lost their source of income and business opportunities. The displacements and forced movements of many traders to safer haven also led to reduction of trading activities in many community markets in Enugu State and reduction in income generation and socio-economic activities, which continue to deprive many traders their utmost means of livelihood. The study equally concluded that the counter militancy operation by the military has impacted both positively and negatively on the traders, and also concluded that the military operation is also bedevilled by some challenges which include insufficient combat equipment, low funding of operation, low level of familiarity of personnel with local topography, and leaking of military operational strategies to separatist militants by internal moles.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended in this study that:

Traders who lost their goods should be supported by both government and non-governmental organisations with loan and grants to provide them with new start-up capital.

The military should sustain its tempo of countering violent separatist agitation in Enugu State and conduct their operations within the international standard on the rules of engagements.

The military should fortify its troops with sophisticated equipment and recruit more counter militant combatant force while participating troops should be motivated with prompt payment of salaries and allowances to enhance optimal performance.

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