



JOURNAL OF LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

Volume 1, Number 1 (June, 2025)

ISSN: 1595-9457 (online); 3093-0618 (print)

Website: <https://jppssuniuyo.com/jld> Email: jppssuniuyo@gmail.com

Received: June 11, 2025 Accepted: July 11, 2025 Published: July 21, 2025

Citation: Wokocha, David A.; Asemota, Roberts O. & Amena, Tyover B. (2025). "State Response, Ethnic Nationalism and the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in South East, Nigeria." *Journal of Leadership and Development*, 1 (1): 162-170.

Article

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STATE RESPONSE, ETHNIC NATIONALISM AND THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

David Amadike Wokocha ¹

Roberts Osatohanmwun Asemota ²

Tyover Benjamin Amena ³

Peace and Conflict Unit, School of General Studies, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,
Umudike, Nigeria ^{1, 2 & 3}

Corresponding Email: da.wokocha@mouau.ed.ng ¹

Abstract

Tensions resulting from ethnic nationalist agitations in the South East region of Nigeria in recent years show that the geopolitical zone has been militarized through the proliferation of arms. Till date little effort has been made by the Federal government of Nigeria to understand the dynamics of the current flow of small arms and light weaponry (SALWs) so as to reduce the presence of arms within the region. The Federal government of Nigeria however, has used tensions in the region to justify internal military operations – sometimes with serious consequences for the civilian population in the region – in its efforts to restore normalcy. In response the ethnic nationalist militia are manipulating the crisis in the region to establish a war-time economy for themselves as they perpetuate illegitimate activities to sustain their agitation. With the absence of any peace agreement or political negotiations the conflict continues hidden away from the international community, engulfing civilians and security personnel alike and in some cases affecting whole communities as it progresses. Armed groups continue to fragment and shift alliances as sub-conflicts between different political groups within the region are increasingly common. This paper argues in favour of engaging in complex negotiations and forging of allegiances in order to establish a culture of peace between the south east, other geopolitical regions and the Federal government. This paper relies on primary qualitative data collected from in depth interviews and also secondary data extracted from materials such as publications and text books. Data collected were content analysed.

Keywords: Ethnic Nationalism, Conflict, Security, Small Arms, State

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Introduction

Across the globe the illegal trade in small arms is such that from Afghanistan to Angola, Somalia to El Salvador, lethal small arms and light weapons (SALWs) could be bought for a little more than US\$20 a piece in street markets while, in African and Asian cities automatic weapons could be hired on an hourly basis. Rupesinghe and Anderlini (1998) argue that the legal trade in light weapons is worth an estimated US\$5 billion annually while the illegal trade is estimated to be between US\$2-10 billion. The financial reward from illegal trade in SALWs is humongous, thus making a multi-billion-dollar enterprise out of what was once a centralized monopoly of the military might of the state. Monopoly of the state as an institution over arms is rapidly being eroded and challenged by smaller, asymmetrical groups vying for economic and military control, since the state no longer has the capacity to solely fight insurgency movements they rely on international coalitions, regional blocs, mercenary groups and private security firms. Consequently, ex-Serbian soldiers have fought in Central Africa, South African mercenaries in Sierra Leone and Papua New Guinea. Their key roles are to operationally support national forces by fighting insurgent groups, and to train and equip conscript soldiers. Much closer home, the South African mercenary outfit called Executive Outcomes had been hired in the past to fight the Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria, likewise a private security company owned by Alhaji Asari Dokubo, an ex-Niger Delta militant, in Rivers State, Nigeria was hired to fight ethnic nationalist militants in South East Nigeria.

Therefore, the global proliferation of arms has led to the emergence of both private security companies who assist State security machinery and a high growth in terrorist organisations and other armed insurgent groups who challenge the State in an attempt to wrestle away the monopoly of violence from government as an institution. These clandestine organisations have one seemingly genuine grievance or the other against the various governments and States with which they are up against in arms. Globally, these conflicts cover a wide range and normally include ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts, separatists, ideological, secessionist, and resource-based conflicts. These conflicts comprise of spontaneous, unplanned acts of violence against targeted civilian and military objectives. Thus, in other parts of Nigeria churches get bombed in Maiduguri, Abuja, and in Owo where church members were machine-gunned down during Sunday service. Likewise, Mosques get attacked, destroyed and worshippers are slaughtered in Yobe, Kano and Kaduna by assailants who showed no premonition or preparedness for such level of violence. This is directly attributed to the deadly characteristics of the type of weapons used in these attacks. Small arms and light weapons such as AK 47s, Kalashnikovs, 9mm automatic pistols, hand grenades all have the ability to be effectively concealed and transported to their place of use without any form of stress or hullabaloo. Also, military patrol vehicles and convoys have been attacked, unprovoked, resulting to high casualties in the process. The attackers had the element of surprise and the concealment of automatic weapons going in their favour. Contrary to common opinions on why the conflict broke out in the South East, we strongly believe that these secessionist crises can be traced and linked to the failure of governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual Analysis

This paper gives a definition of concepts related to this research to enable us understand the context under which they were used.

Ethnic Nationalism

Ethnic nationalism can best be understood by defining certain terms or concepts that surround it. These surrounding concepts include first and foremost *nationalism* which has been broadly

defined as a political ideology which insists that the State be controlled by the nation. Scholars like Anderson (2006) argues that print-languages laid the bases for national consciousness and by extension nationalism in Europe by positing that the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation¹. The second concept is the state. The *State* is a legal and political organisation with sovereignty over a designated territory and population. The State itself, exists simultaneously as an internationally recognised member of the community of states and as a compulsory organisation run along bureaucratic lines with control over the legislative, administrative, judicial, and coercive functions of society (Anderson, 1983). The third concept would be that of an *ethnic group*. Armstrong (1982) defines an ethnic group as that human collective with a common myth of descent, shared culture, an association with a specific territory and sense of solidarity. The fourth concept which needs defining is the nation². This conception is a politically mobilized ethnic group seeking to secure state power. Members of such a movement are expected to give their highest political loyalties to the nation in an attempt to establish a unified nation-state: where the apparatus of the state is firmly under the control of the nation³.

Therefore, ethnic nationalism is the concept or ideology behind the agitation of statehood by ethnic nationalist movements in South East Nigeria. The umbrella movement for ethnic nationalist movements in the South East is the Indigenous People of Biafra IPOB. These groups politically define the Igbo nation in terms of ethnicity. The central political tenet of IPOB's method of ethnic nationalism is that the Igbo ethnic group can be identified unambiguously, and that such an ethnic group is entitled to self-determination or statehood. The quest for statehood by these ethnic nationalist groups in the South East has pitched them against the sovereignty of the Nigerian state. The outcome of this conflict of right to self-determination may vary, from calls for self-regulated administrative bodies within an already-established society, to an autonomous entity separate from the host society to a sovereign state removed from its host society.

The challenge of the sovereignty and military might of the state in most cases across the globe has resulted in endemic armed conflict. Violent conflicts occur when States respond to ethnic nationalism by forcefully clamping down on them militarily. From a global and international perspective on ethnic nationalist movements, Brian *et al* (2008) argues that nearly two dozen ethnic nationalist movements are active worldwide with at least seven of them violent and reflect ethnic or religious differences with the mother country⁴. Some violent cases of ethnic nationalism include, the conflict between ethnic nationalist group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government of Sri Lanka was carried out as a war until mid-May 2009, when the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) defeated the Tamil Tigers militarily; armed conflict concerning the secession of Western Sahara between the Popular Front of the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO Front) and the Moroccan government; violent conflict over self-government between the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK/KONGRA-GEL) and the Turkish government; armed violence between the Irish Revolutionary Army (IRA) and the

¹ Anderson, B. 2006. *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.

² Armstrong, John. 1982. *Nations before nationalism*. Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina press.

³ Suzman, Mark. 1999. *Ethnic nationalism and state power: the rise of Irish nationalism, Afrikaner nationalism and Zionism*. London. Macmillan.

⁴ Brian, Beary. et al. 2008. Separatist movements, should nations have a right to self-determination? Global researcher. Exploring international perspectives. Vol 2. No.4. Date accessed 02 December 2017. <http://www.globalresearcher.com>.

Northern Irish government; secessionist conflict between Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) and the Spanish government⁵. This shows that ethnic nationalist movements span the globe and just like the conflict in south east Nigeria, these violent conflicts are fuelled and sustained by the proliferation and availability of SALWs.

Small arms and light weapons (SALW): Small arms and light weapons are conventional weapons, in that they are not weapons of mass destruction. These types of weapons have an additional set of characteristics that set them apart from major conventional weapons--characteristics that can play a part in developing the ways and means used to prevent their excessive accumulation because they are typically smaller, weigh less, cost less, and are more portable and less visible than major conventional weapons. However, these are the same set of characteristics that in recent years have transformed SALWs into deadly tools mass annihilation. Consequently, Annan (2000) as cited in Bourne (2007) argues that the death toll from small arms dwarfs that of all other weapons systems and in most years greatly exceeds the toll of the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In terms of the carnage they cause, small arms, indeed, could well be described as 'weapons of mass destruction'⁶. Historically, the transfer of SALWs to theatres of conflict began with the 1956 Suez crisis with the British, French and Soviet bloc's shipping weapons to both sides of the conflict since then this has been a tool of warfare and diplomacy used by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, particularly, the USA and Russia. In the earliest forms of military aid, weapons were shipped to Greece and Turkey to checkmate pro-Communist partisans with the onset of the Cold War. Hartung (2008) states that during the Cold War period, the Soviet Union made substantial arms exports, often in the form of military aid. The receiving parties are of interests to this paper because the Soviets armed and militarily supported ethnic nationalist liberation movements in South Africa, Angola and Namibia⁷.

In Africa, huge Soviet transfer of SALWs also benefited nationalist regimes like in Libya by the mid-1980s⁸. Importantly, these arms out-lived the various conflicts they were assigned to perpetuate because of their durability, and have found their way to fuel internal conflicts in Nigeria. Arms from Angola were used by a rebel faction from Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta. Henry Okah, a leader of an ethnic nationalist group named the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in Nigeria's South South region, was arrested in September 2007 by Angola's national police and charged with trafficking of arms and explosives. He has been described as a powerful arms dealer, who led a faction of the MEND whose armed attacks on oil production facilities in early 2006 shut down roughly a fifth of Nigerian output⁹.

In what was called the Niger Delta insurgency, 2003-2010, Nigeria's South South region witnessed the rise of several ethnic nationalist militia groups demanding resource autonomy from the Nigerian State. These groups visited unspeakable violence on security agencies, oil producing companies, their staff, local communities and government organisations. This resulted in the region being a washed with SALWs as the currency for perpetuating the conflict was in arms. Arms were also introduced into the Boko Haram insurgency via the Sahel, as the

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Bourne, Mike., 2007. *Arming conflict: the proliferation of small arms*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁷ Hartung, William D., 2008. *International arms trade*, in Williams, Paul. D. ed. *Security studies: an introduction*. New York. Taylor & Francis.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ Reuters news agency by Shirbon Estelle titled "Nigerian rebels say leader extradited from Angola". Feb 15, 2008. www.reuters.com. Date accessed 20th November 2023.

overrun armouries of the Libyan strongman (Col.) Gadhafi, who was deposed in an orchestrated NATO coalition operation. Arms from these store houses in Libya fuelled conflicts in Mali, Niger, Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon. For the secessionist militia in the South East, *The Cable* stated that the Attorney-General of the Federation, Abubakar Malami, in a press statement on 21th October, 2021 after receiving the report of a presidential committee setup as a result of secessionists' attacks, said that the separatist group had killed 175 security operatives comprising of 128 police men, 37 soldiers and 10 other security operatives. He further stated that 164 police stations and formations, including police headquarters, Owerri, Imo state, were attacked by secessionist militia while 396 firearms and 17,738 ammunition were carted away during the attacks and 628 vehicles destroyed.

The United Nations Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms defined small arms and light weapons (SALW) as follows¹⁰:

Small arms:

- i. Revolvers and self-loading pistols;
- ii. Rifles and carbines;
- iii. Submachine guns;
- iv. Assault rifles;
- v. Light machine guns.

Light weapons:

- i. Heavy machine guns;
- ii. Handheld under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers;
- iii. Portable antiaircraft guns;
- iv. Portable antitank guns, recoilless rifles;
- v. Portable launchers of antitank missile and rocket systems;
- vi. Portable launchers of antiaircraft missile systems;
- vii. Mortars of calibres up to less than 100-mm inclusive.

Ammunition and explosives:

- i. Cartridges (rounds) for small arms;
- ii. Shells and missiles for light weapons;
- iii. Mobile containers with missiles or shells for single-action antiaircraft and antitank systems;
- iv. Antipersonnel and antitank hand grenades;
- v. Land mines;
- vi. Explosives.

Theoretical Framework: Theory of the State

During the Enlightenment era, in 17th century, philosophies such as individualism, secularization and government based on a social contract were propagated by classical liberals such as Thomas Hobbes, who demanded a more representative government based on parliamentary rule to replace the state of nature. Andrain and Apter (1995) argue that Hobbes position on the modern political state was that the modern State was not a natural organisation ordained by Divine providence but rather a synthetic one established or invented by persons¹¹. Andrian and Apter (1995) posit that the social conditions of the state of nature contained violent conflict, physical insecurity, anarchy and the war of every man against every man.

¹⁰ Bourne (2007).

¹¹ Andrain, C.F. and D. Apter. 1995. Political protest and social change: analyzing politics. London: Macmillan.

Consequently, Hobbes argue that individuals were inspired by self-interest, prudence, desire and reason as they agreed to leave the state of nature wherein life was brutish and short, to establish what is known today as the modern political state. In contrast to the state of nature, a political state where a modern sovereign rules, individuals experience greater peace, better interpersonal cooperation, security, self-preservation and order. Hobbes argument was that in a competitive global society where conflicts among self – interested individuals over scarce resources are a part of life, the encumbrance rests on government or the state to guarantee security, productive lives and personal survival of its citizens.

Hobbes position on the responsibilities of the modern state towards its citizens tallies with that of Rotberg (2003)¹² though the latter takes the debate a notch higher. Rotberg (2003) posits that in our contemporary world, the modern state exists to provide a decentralized method of delivering political public goods to those living within its borders. These public goods are those tangible and hard to quantify entitlements that citizens make on states. Importantly, they give content to the social contract between rulers and the ruled which is at the core of regime/government and citizen relations. As such there is a hierarchy of political goods though there is none as essential and critical as the provision of security, particularly human security¹³. The pecking order for the provision of political goods are as follows – security (human & state), rule of Law, freedom and rights, health, educational, financial and physical infrastructure in this form. Thus, Rotberg (2003) argues that an individual or groups of individuals can come together to organize and procure goods and services that maximizes their sense of security in this manner providing private security, but this cannot in any way be substituted for the broad spectrum of public security as provided by the state. This is because the range and spectrum of provision of state security is too broad, wide and complex a scope for the private sector to handle¹⁴. Thus, only the resources of the megalomaniac state can adequately provide that political good of security.

Traditionally, some of the ways by which the state secures its citizens are by preventing, cross-border invasions and infiltrations, any loss or breakaway of territory, eliminating domestic threats or attacks on the national order and social structure, crime and any related dangers to human security and any recourse to taking up arms to resolve disputes or other forms of physical coercion (Rotberg, 2003). Importantly, this bundle of political goods, particularly security, establish a set of criteria which rank modern states and classifies them as either strong or weak. For South East Nigeria, the neglect of security and proliferation of small arms and light weapons within the region have become an indicator of weakness of the Nigerian state. However, ethnic nationalist violence in the South East alone does not condition or establish the weakness of the Nigeria state. It is necessary to examine the weakness of the Nigerian state through the profile of its component parts.

Consequently, other component parts of Nigeria have been engulfed in series of armed clashes between insurgent groups and the armed forces, thus effectively threatening state security. Pockets of armed non-state actors such as bandits, armed herdsmen, terrorists, ethnic militias and other armed groups, operate across Nigeria without interference and perpetuate murders, kidnappings and other terror related activities. Whether, these groups are united in purpose is beyond the scope of this paper but, these non-state actors are well armed and are in the process of wrestling the monopoly of violence from the State, which gives an insight to the

¹² Rotberg, I. Robert., 2003. Failed states, collapsed states, weak states: causes and indicators in ed. Robert. I. Rotberg. *State failure and state weakness in a time of terror*. Brookings institution press. Massachusetts.

¹³ Rotberg (2003)

¹⁴ *ibid*

intensity of proliferation of SALWs across most parts of Nigeria. This paper argues that for these groups to sustain their onslaught on Nigeria and her people there must be multiple caches of SALWs across the country and their much-needed supply routes and conduit pipes for weapons. This must be an important focus of the Nigerian authorities i.e. a robust and effective effort to impose restrictions on the production, circulation and transfer of arms and weapons to deny armed non-state actors any easy of operation. The Nigerian State's ability to stifle the flow of weapons to de-escalate the high level of insecurity, by imposing an effective arms control policy, categorizes it as a strong state.

State Response and the Proliferation of SALWs in South East Nigeria

In the last three decades ethnic nationalism has proved it is far from being a declining force in the world today. Since the collapse of the old Ottoman Empire, the defunct USSR and the former Yugoslavia republic old ethnic nationalist movements have been invigorated as new ones have proliferated across Europe, Asia and Africa. Importantly, ethnic nationalist movements no matter where they exist or operate are faced with the challenge of confronting the formidable powers of the megalomaniac state. A State is a legal and political organisation with sovereignty over a designated territory and population. It exists simultaneously as an internationally recognized member of the community of states and, as a compulsory organisation run along bureaucratic lines with control over the legislative, administrative, judicial and coercive functions of society. In every case of movements regarding ethnic nationalism across the globe such movements must contend with the international and national status of the state.

Thus, governments worldwide depend on a range of measures, including political, economic, and military power, as well as diplomacy, to safeguard the security of the state which they govern and as such apply these range of measures to also respond to the issue of ethnic nationalism within their borders. Suzman (1999) argues that alterations to the prevailing political and economic environment create disequilibria within a state which in turn creates structural opportunities for ethnic nationalist groups to emerge¹⁵. They also help define the way ethnic nationalist movements shape their operational responses and general strategies. The rise of the current Biafra agitators is based on a sense of historical grievance against a state that they say does not represent them. Although States differ in their approach and response to ethnic nationalism, some begin by prioritizing non-military actions to tackle systemic drivers of insecurity, others rely on various forms of coercive power which predominate in most cases, particularly military capabilities, in responding to ethnic nationalism. The scope of these capabilities has advanced. Conventionally, military capabilities were mainly land or sea-based, and in smaller countries, they still are. Elsewhere, the response to ethnic nationalism now includes the air, cyberspace, and psychological operations.

This paper argues that the wide spread insecurity situation the South East has been experiencing since 2017 resulted to the escalation of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. This is directly linked to the Nigerian state's response to the emergence of ethnic nationalism in the region. The group, Indigenous People of Biafra IPOB, formed in 2012 by its leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, is the key driver for ethnic nationalist ideology in the region. This separatist group has over the years gathered a large following and membership which cuts across all strata of socio-political life in the region in their bid to actualise the establishment of the sovereign state of Biafra. Marginalisation, exclusion, inequality, and governance neglect

¹⁵ Suzman, Mark. 1999. *Ethnic nationalism and state power: the rise of Irish nationalism, Afrikaner nationalism and Zionism*. London. Macmillan.

were the major causes that led to the emergence of IPOB, which now seeks separation of the south east region from the Nigerian state. The ethnic nationalist movement IPOB initially adopted a nonviolent approach to its agitations for a sovereign state, thereby using rallies, peaceful marches, its radio station and the use of leaflets to create awareness and demand a state of its own.

In response, the Nigerian state took a kinetic approach as the use of the military and police forces were extensively applied to checkmate the rise of ethnic nationalist ideology and the group behind its spread, IPOB. Though there are several attacks on IPOB and her members by the security agencies, this paper focuses on the military aspect of the exercise code named Operation Python Dance. The Nigerian Army set up a military exercise cipher named Operation Python Dance II (Egwu Eke II) in the south eastern part of the country. The exercise, which officially covered all the five states in the south east zone lasted from November 28 to December 27, 2016, and according to the Vanguard newspaper, the Army public relations department issued an official statement that the exercise was to nip in the bud, criminal activities in the geo-political zone, particularly, kidnapping, armed robbery, as well as threat to security and peaceful coexistence in the country¹⁶. In practice the exercise which was supposed to be a confidence building one for the ordinary citizens, became characterized by fear for life by residents of the south east. The fear was fuelled by frightening messages trending on social media as purported laid down conditions for the people of the south east on how they should comport themselves during the one-month military operation. Besides, the unfolding events in Aba and Umuahia IPOBs acclaimed headquarters, both cities in Abia State resulted in people remaining in-doors.

The leader of IPOB Nnamdi Kanu having been arrested several times was released from detention on bail. He was granted bail on the April 25th, 2017 by Justice Binta Nyako of the Federal high court, Abuja.¹⁷ During his time in Abia state serving his bail, Kanu became very popular, inciting his followers and inflaming old secessionist sentiments. This led the Nigerian Army to re-launch the Operation Python Dance in September 2017. The Military raided Kanu's home in Afara-Ukwu, Umuahia in what was known as Operation Python Dance II on the 14th of September, 2017 and later declared IPOB a terrorist organisation. Kanu fled the country and a year later, footage of Kanu emerged in Israel, where he told reporters he was forced to escape Nigeria and that the Nigerian Army killed over 50 IPOB members in its attempt to arrest him at his home during the military operation¹⁸. Operation Python Dace II was a military exercise carried out in response to IPOBs ethnic nationalism.

These two events were instrumental to the proliferation of SALWs as IPOB which was initially non-violent now mutated from adopting non-violence to embracing acts of violence. Consequently, by December 2020, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, leader of IPOB announced the establishment of a paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), allegedly to protect the Igbo against the attacks of armed Fulani herdsmen and to protect IPOB rallies from attacks of the armed forces. Unfortunately, the introduction of IPOB's paramilitary wing has led to an escalation in indiscriminate use of firearms within the region resulting to low intensity armed conflict between ESN and government forces. One of the observed methods of acquiring arms and ammunition is by ambushing unsuspecting military or police personnel, killing them and dispossessing them of their service weapons. This has led to large scale attacks on security

¹⁶ Jimitota, E.M. et. al .2016. *South-East burns as Biafra day turns bloody*. Vanguard, 31 May

¹⁷ <https://www.channelstv.com/2017/04/25/breaking-nnamdi-kanu-granted-bail/>

¹⁸ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/291452-breaking-nnamdi-kanu-confirms-new-video-showing-him-in-jerusalem-lawyer-says.html?tztc=1>

personnel in the South East. Resultantly, killings, kidnapping for ransom, high profile assassinations, murder and all sorts of violent crime usurped the stability of the South East geo-political zone. Unfortunately, in the process of this conflict, members of the armed forces became legitimate targets for these militia attacks as they were killed, kidnapped and ambushed seamlessly across the South East and vice versa. The extent to which lives were effortlessly destroyed was made evident in the exposing of the Lokpa Nta cattle market mass killing site¹⁹, at Okigwe LGA along Enugu – Port Harcourt express way, where over eighty decomposing bodies of men, women and children were discovered, some of them headless.

Conclusion

In peace studies, the use of violence to checkmate violence has shown to be a conflict management style with a zero-sum outcome, hence a lose-lose situation. The Nigerian State must as a matter of urgency jettison the Cold War security mentality whereby states approach conflicts within their borders using hard power or military might to portray a powerful image of themselves. Since the collapse of the Iron Curtain and proliferation of armed non-state actors, these armed groups despite their small size have shown ability of destabilising whole regional blocs. Therefore, powerful modern states normally exhaust all diplomatic and peaceful means before engaging militarily. They put human security as their utmost priority, the safety of their citizens and even the offenders amongst them. Hence, Nigeria must see dialogue as a better option to achieving durable peace in the south east region despite the fact that violence has been introduced into the conflict. Peacefully disarming and dialoguing with these separatist groups remains the best option to sustainable peace. This is the position of this paper because unfortunately, the kinetic approach of the Nigerian State is yet to bring peace to the South East rather it has created multiple problems for the region, one major problem being the proliferation of small arms and light weapons which is also linked to widespread drug abuse of Crystal Meth, a banned substance abused by youths of the region.

To end conflict, one must understand its underlying causes, the weakness of the Nigerian State reflects in its lack of political will to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the crisis in the South East due to what scholars in the field term entrapment. Entrapment is one of the dynamics of protracted conflict, which can lead adversaries in a conflict, especially the leadership, into a course of action that involves intensifying the conflict with no chance of changing policy or backing away. Since the Civil War 1967 – 1970, the Nigerian state has sacrificed time, effort, resources and lives in its armed conflict against the ideology of ethnic nationalism in the South East region, yet it persists in the continuation of the conflict, probably, in an effort to save face or the state not admitting to have made a costly mistake in policy making. The end result of the Nigerian State being caught in the dynamics of entrapment is that there is greater difficulty in changing from what Zartman (1985) describes as a winning mentality to a negotiating mentality²⁰. Thus, the Nigerian government must re-think its response to ethnic nationalism in the South East region as armed conflict breeds arms proliferation therefore conflict becomes endemic and protracted in nature.

¹⁹ <https://punchng.com/70-corpses-skeletons-uncovered-near-abia-cattle-market-gov>.

²⁰ Zartman, I. William. 1985. *Ripe for Resolution: Conflict and Intervention in Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press.