



## SECURITY LAPSES AND THE IPOB SIT-AT-HOME ORDER IN THE SOUTHEAST NIGERIA: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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**ABSTRACT:** *IPOB's incessant restriction of movement in Igbo land has no doubt put fear on the security agencies such as the Police, Civil Defense, Army, etc as well as the citizens of the Southeast who are presently afraid of pursuing legitimate handiwork due to the inability of the security agencies to provide any form of security for lives of any citizen who dares to pursue legitimate work or adventure. On sit-at-home days, the roads and highways are deserted by the security agencies that should ordinarily be seen to be emboldening and fulfilling their statutory responsibility, which is to provide security on sit-at-home days with a view to encouraging citizens to go about their normal businesses. These security lapses have bolstered the members of IPOB as well as other men of the underworld to flourish and threaten all legitimate efforts for both collective and personal survival. The persistent order which has gone from a Monday's sit-at-home order to, presently, weeks of sitting at home order, have not only affected the economy of the region and by extension the nation negatively, it has also dampened the morale and determination of both old and young people of the Igbo extraction from attempting to pursue legitimate livelihood so long as the order is in place. Legitimate meetings of government and private sector driven businesses and organizations, schools and missionary programs are all called off, abandoned or canceled for the purpose of adhering strictly to the sit-at-home order since security agencies will not dare provide any security. This study posited that there is a deliberate security lapse on the part of government security agencies and the negative effect of this action is that it has emboldened and made the sit-at-home order unmitigated. The paper adopted insights from both primary sources and secondary reports whilst relying on qualitative content analysis to achieve the objectives of this study. The findings revealed that there is a premeditated lapse on government security in the region as we cannot find any cogent reason why agencies with arms and munitions to counter illegitimate operations are scared to come out and contend with negative forces militating against the social economic development of the entire Igboland.*

**KEYWORDS:** Insecurity, Deliberate, IPOB, Sit-at-home order, Police, Southeast.



## INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The part of Nigeria referred to as Southeast Nigeria (or Igboland) lies between latitude 4\*15\* and 7\*5\* North, and longitude 6\*0 and 8\*30\* East. The total surface area is approximately 41,000 square kilometres.<sup>1</sup> The Southeast constitutes one of the single largest ethnic groups in Africa. In the 1930's, G.T. Basden had observed that:

The Southeast (Igbo Nation) ranks as one of the largest in the whole of Africa. Its numbers have been estimated as high as four, and never below three million. These people occupy a very considerable area of the Southeastern corner of Nigeria...<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Southeastern people present an interesting needlepoint—a populace persuasively integrated into Nigeria by the British, initially as a chunk of the protectorate of Southern Nigeria after a series of political changes including being an integral part of the Oil Rivers Protectorate as from 1891, and later the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893, and then as formidably a part of Nigeria following the amalgamation of 1914 that fused together the Northern and Southern Protectorates. For many years, Southeast Nigeria was considered the safest geo-political zone in the country. For instance, the five states of Southeastern Nigeria, namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo recorded the least spate of violent attacks in comparison with other parts of the country. In a case point, according to Vivian Chime, an online news reporter, the Southeast recorded the least number of killings in 2019 with 94 deaths while Southwest recorded 157 deaths followed by South-South with 341 deaths. The North Central recorded 469 deaths and the Northeast had 1009 deaths while the Northwest had the highest with 1,118 deaths.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, with renewed secessionist agitations from the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which have turned radical and violent, but particularly the apprehensive government counter measures, security in the region has deteriorated and this security lapses has led to palpable fear and insecurity in the Southeast that has affected negatively the morale and determination of the people of the region to voluntarily without fear or molestation live their homes for legitimate functions and activities. It is believed that any effort to leave your house in the Southeast for a legitimate work or assignment may be the end of such a person, with several cases of attacks, kidnapping, killings, molestations and gun running flourishing on the bases of these lapses.

Suffice it to say that the growing insecurity and secessionist agitations in the Southeast is occasioned by several factors amongst which is the violence of the newly introduced unknown gunmen, as clearly described by the Nigerian Police. Indeed “unknown gunmen” is a new lexicon in the security architecture of Nigeria. Other factors include kidnappings and banditry but particularly the negative activities of the rogue Fulani herders including the faulted Eastern Security Network (ESN) which is alleged to be involved with security breaches and some other criminal activities as against the position of the IPOB who through their spokesman, Emma Powerful, insisted that the essence of the Eastern Security Network (ESN), which they launched on December 13, 2020, was to protect the Southeast from criminal activities, adding that ESN was a replica of AMOTEKUN in the Southwest established and funded by the governors of the Southwest zone.<sup>4</sup>



## Aims and Objectives

The goals of this paper are to show how the statutory security apparatuses of the government has been frightened and prohibited from fulfilling their responsibilities to the people of the region, which is to secure lives and properties of the people of the Southeast zone on the basis of an illegitimate sit-at-home order threatened by the Independent People of Biafra's (IPOB), and to x-ray the disastrous effect of government security agencies culpability or even incompetence in the Southeastern region.

## History of Sit-at-Home Order in the Southeast

The sit-at-home order, which began on August 9<sup>th</sup> 2021 to demand the release of IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu from prison, had crippled socio-economic activities in the Southeast region of Nigeria. According to the group, the sit-at-home protest would be observed weekly to demand the freedom of its incarcerated leader, Nnamdi Kanu, who had been in the custody of the Department of State Services (DSS) for a month.<sup>5</sup> "From that day, Biafra land will be on lockdown every Monday from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm until our leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, who was unlawfully abducted in Kenya and illegally detained by the Federal Government of Nigeria, is released." The statement further highlighted that, "We wish to state full details of this coming ghost Mondays every week; our people must understand that it was designed to show the world how serious we are towards this fight for Biafra freedom and independence. Everybody must adhere to this clarion call put in place by the leadership of IPOB and it would be good for everyone to know that IPOB will not relent until Biafra is fully achieved<sup>6</sup>." What did the security agencies, the military and police do to counter the sit-at-home order which has badly affected the economy of the Southeastern region since then?

The police, whose duty should be to counter-enforce free movement of persons and properties whenever an illegitimate sit-at-home order is given, clearly stay out of the highways and linking roads throughout the Southeast, thereby endangering the masses and citizens who are forced to undergo any legitimate movement no matter how urgent, important and necessary at their own risk. Is this not against the extant laws establishing the security agencies of the government whose duty is to protect lives and property? To lend credibility to the failures of the security agencies in handling security issues and particularly preventing the illegal sit at home orders, the Southeastern Governors Forum confirmed in a statement that:

"We are aware that the insecurity in Southeast has gone beyond IPOB. Cultists, armed robbers and kidnappers have recruited themselves and are using the name of IPOB to be killing innocent citizens. We would not allow this to continue."<sup>7</sup>

Should IPOB be attributed completely for the security lapses inherent in the region given that the burden lies on security agencies to guarantee that lives and properties are secured? The duties of the police are to protect the citizens and ensure that there is law and order; the army has a similar responsibility which is to protect the territorial integrity of the nation at large and to serve as a buffer in ensuring that the nation is secured internally. Against all this background, the government is accused of being complicit with the order and till date, they are yet to satisfactorily clear themselves of the allegations. Citizens of the region believe that the government security agencies are working with the IPOB and are aiding the unwanted forces operating in the Southeast. For example, an eye witness account queries thus, "Where was the Nigerian government that felt IPOB sit-at-home continuation was a weapon to deal with the



Southeast and should not be stopped? Both the immediate past and present Nigerian governments wanted the IPOB sit-at-home order to continue because they believed it was against the Igbo economy and therefore should not stop, and they actually did nothing to stop it, including giving orders to the military and police to give protection to people who dared to come out on the road and streets.<sup>8</sup> As an eye witness myself, the motivation for making this paper is anchored on the fact that till date, I could not find one police, civil defense or army checkpoint on my way when going about my activities and particularly going to work in Abia State University located in Uturu from my base in Umuahia on Mondays and on any other day for that matter. The roads were deserted like a graveyard and people hardly came out of their homes.

Yet, another observer, Cosmos Maduka, is of the view that “The Nigerian military and her sister security forces are part of the insecurity and criminalities, banditry and burning of properties and homes in our territory just to demonize IPOB and ESN.” According to him, the Nigerian military are the arsonists we have in the South East. They burnt houses and properties in Oguta last year over the loss of their men; they killed many in Ebonyi State; they are burning again in Ehime Mbano also in Imo State for the same reason. So they should keep quiet and stop claiming that they have stopped the sit-at-home order in the Southeast.<sup>9</sup> Harmoniously, another source states that, “Over 75% of the violent crimes in the Southeast are perpetrated and directly sponsored by the Nigerian military, DSS, and police to blackmail and demonize IPOB, ESN, and Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, so they should seize forthwith their claim of stopping the weekly Monday sit-at-home.”<sup>10</sup> The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) described the Nigerian military’s claim of enhancing security situation and for stopping the Monday sit-at-home as laughable and a claim that does not hold water.<sup>11</sup> According to Chimobi Nwaiwu, where were the Nigerian military and police when the people of Southeast were molested, intimidated and killed by hoodlums enforcing IPOB cancelled Monday weekly sit-at-home? They were all hiding in their barracks on Mondays while the sit-at-home lasted until our leader’s instruction that it must stop forthwith in Igbo land.<sup>12</sup> Writing as an observer, victim and one affected by the sit-at-home order, one worries why the Nigerian government has failed to decisively end the sit-at-home; is it deliberate? Why has the government failed to clearly instruct the security agencies to carry out their functions of providing security to the people of the Southeast on the days of sit-at-home?

### **Southeast: The Epicenter of Insecurity**

According to the English learner’s dictionary, insecurity means a lack of confidence and the state of individuals or even society of no longer feeling safe or secure.<sup>13</sup> Insecurity could also be said to be a feeling of missing self-assurance and now no longer being positive about your skills or whether or not human beings like you. It is the first class of one no longer feeling secure or robust and missing self-assurance of oneself.<sup>14</sup> Thus, insecurity no doubt damages every aspect of human life, economy and endeavors, and the first leg duties of every responsible government is the security of lives and properties upon which all other responsibilities are carried out. In this research, insecurity severely affected the Southeast zone such that the self-confidence of the indigenes has been critically influenced depressingly.

Notwithstanding the presence of government security personnel as well as the touted Eastern Security Network whose primary duties are to secure the region, data released by Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) showed that killings in the Southeast rose by 555.7 percent between 2020 and 2021. In other words, deaths reported on violent attacks rose to as much as 636



between December 13, 2020 and December 12, 2021. Nothing was spared—churches, security facilities and schools—and civilians were killed in their numbers. For example, on April 5, 2021, Imo State Police Headquarters and correctional service was attacked, and the gunmen freed at least 1,844 inmates and also looted the armory. Similarly, police officers were not left out as it is reported that over 46 stations were attacked and over 103 police officers killed.<sup>15</sup> The security agencies seem to be fully away from the dangers of not adequately carrying out their mandate. According a Vanguard report, the security agencies alleged that, “The killings and destruction of what the outlawed group sees as a possible challenge to its sinister plot are meant to create fear and force security agencies to withdraw along the Cross River-Abia-Anambra-Imo-Enugu-Rivers corridors and create a seamless route for fighters from Cameroon to bring in arms and ammunition to help actualize Biafra secession.” Also, the report has it that “The killing of policemen and officers and the dismantling of police stations and prisons as well as INEC offices along the Cross River-River axis would not have happened if the illegal group had not perfected the nefarious plot to flood the area with illegal arms so as to actualize its treasonable ambition.”<sup>16</sup>

These insecurity encounters in the Southeastern region, which as we find have practically affected and overwhelmed the five states, have thrown up concerns as to who is responsible? Is it IPOB or politically-induced? According to a major newspaper report, “No fewer than 175 persons, including soldiers, police and civilians, lost their lives in the Southeast within the last six months of 2021 due to the insecurity that has engulfed the troubled region. “The killings took place in 72 attacks by hoodlums across the five states in the region, namely Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi and Abia.<sup>17</sup> We hear and see it ourselves how, aside the killings going on, government facilities such as police stations, churches, schools and offices belonging to the Independent National Electoral Commission are also attacked and some set ablaze across the Southeastern states.

## **State by State Account of Insecurity**

### **Abia State**

Abia state has witnessed several attacks, kidnappings and deaths. It took the newly sworn-in Governor of Abia State, Dr. Alex Otti, to appeal to Aba residents and the security agencies to give peace a chance for the relative peace you find in Aba. In the Aba metropolis, for example, it is reported that two policemen were killed in Aba on Thursday, October 26, 2023. Reports say that policemen from Ezianya Division went to a hotel called 32 Rooms in Umuode area of Osioma and arrested a boy and as they were about leaving the hotel with the boy, they were blocked on their way by armed men who reportedly started exchanging bullets with them and in the process overpowered them. The boys were reported to have beheaded one of the policemen and shot the other.<sup>18</sup> Similar unwanted stories are received every day in Aba, Umuahia, Umunneochi and Isuikwuato and many civilians and security officials have been killed across the state. At the Uturu Isuikwuato axis of the state, a mother of four children, Mrs. Mathew, and other commuters in a bus were murdered along Uturu road in 2022; students of ABSU as well as indigenes of the Okigwe, Umunneochi and Isuikwuato Local Government Areas have been badly attacked as majority of them no longer go home to their villages for safety reasons. Citizens in this part of the state are brutalized, kidnapped and killed in uncountable numbers, some roads along Abia and Imo borders (IHUBE, OKIGWE) and environs, of what can best be referred as ungoverned areas, have been taken over by kidnappers



and the roads shut down. The Abia State University is regularly closed down with academic activities paralyzed because of the sit-at-home order and insecurity on the axis.<sup>19</sup>

### **Anambra State**

“In Anambra state, 76 security agents and civilians were killed within the period, while 15 buildings and 28 vehicles were set ablaze. It could be recalled also that in Anambra, top police sources confirmed that about 24 security agents, including police, navy, army, DSS, NSCDC and about 52 civilians were killed in 2021. Prominent among some of the attacks in the state were the murder of Dr Chike Akunyili, the widower of a former minister of information, Prof Dora Akunyili and eight other persons at Nkpor on September 29, 2021. The BluePrint newspaper also reported that about 19 persons were killed in Awkuzu in Oyi Local Government Area in May of 2021 after four naval officers were killed in the same Awkuzu.<sup>20</sup>

### **Ebonyi State**

“Ebonyi State however recorded 32 killings and three arson cases in five attacks.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Enugu State**

“In Enugu State, 23 persons were killed, with four INEC offices and two police stations burnt.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Imo State**

“In Imo State, 49 policemen and civilians have been killed and not less than 11 vehicles have been burnt in 37 attacks. Investigation reveals that in Imo state, among the several attacks, a law student, Kingsley Chiwueze, at the Imo State University was killed at Douglas Road on April 27, 2021 while a policeman was killed at the university’s back gate on May 19. On May 8, a female officer of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, Chinenye Nwokeocha, was killed. Similarly, on October 1, being the Independence day, a man was beheaded at Oru West and in separate attacks on the following day, the palace of the traditional ruler of Obor and property belonging to a former leader of Orlu legislative council were set ablaze in Orlu Local Government Area.”<sup>23</sup> On October 4, a Department of State Services official, identified as Nwachinamere Ozuzu, was also killed along Owerri-Onitsha Expressway.<sup>24</sup> He further narrated that three other persons were also beheaded in Orlu on August 2, four oil workers were killed on August 16, an Anglican priest was killed on September 14, a Germany-based Nigerian, Oguchi Unachukwu, was reportedly killed by security operatives at the toll gate of Imo Airport while a businessman, Noel Chigbu, was allegedly killed by soldiers in Owerri on May 30.

### **Contradictory Reports on Security Situation in the Southeast**

The spokesman of the IPOB, Emma Powerful, has come out to state that, “As much as the sit-at-home was an IPOB brain child and a powerful strategy of IPOB, the Nigerian securities especially military and the police aggravated the sit-at-home by their tacit support of the criminals enforcing the sit-at-home to blackmail IPOB and ESN.”<sup>25</sup> In the same way, the Department of State Security Services (DSS) established that the insecurity in the region is a deliberate criminal activity of non-state actors. Wilcox Idaminabo, a DSS director in Imo State, who made the following assertion at a one day stakeholders roundtable organized by Center



for Transparency Advocacy (CTA) ahead of the November 11, 2023 Imo Governorship election, came to a conclusion that criminals are carrying out attack on lives and properties in the Southeast, under the guise of Biafra agitation.<sup>26</sup> So these contradictory reports as to who is responsible for the insecurity in the Southeast ordinarily makes it authoritative for the security agencies to unearth and stop the activities of these men of the underworld with no clear identity.

For instance, The Biafra Nations League (BNL) alleged that the unknown gunmen attacking different locations in the South East are Fulanis being sponsored by some northern political leaders. According to the group, the aim of the sponsors are to terrorize the Southeast and make it ungovernable as the case is in the Northeast of Nigeria. The Deputy National Leader of BNL, Ebuta Akor Takon, in an interview, said that insecurity in the Southeast, mainly the activities of some of the unknown gunmen were suspicious, adding that the attacks on banks and stores in Anambra and Enugu were not part of the agenda of Biafra liberation.<sup>1</sup> He mentioned that, “There was a plot to blackmail pro Biafra groups,” insisting that the Biafra struggle is not about “armed robbery and looting of people’s property.” According to him, “Miyetti Allah who once threatened to deploy 5000 Fulani security operatives to the Eastern region have already done that before their announcement.<sup>27</sup> Also, it would be recalled that Governor Hope Uzodinma, who IPOB have so much axe to grind with, after initially blaming the group for the courageous attacks in Imo State at the police headquarters and Correctional Centre both in Owerri, quickly recanted that IPOB was not responsible for the incident but instead blamed politicians for the attacks.<sup>28</sup>

Aside the above positions taken so far, other Igbo leaders, including Governor David Umahi of Ebonyi State and the President General of the Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Professor George Obiozor, have at different times tried to exonerate IPOB from having a hand in the alarmingly growing security attacks in the region. For former Governor Umahi, “IPOB cannot be involved in the attacks as he sees it as alien to their objectives, which is protection and advancing Igbo interests, while late Professor Obiozor, the then President General of Ohanaeze Ndigbo, reasoned that the attacks were being orchestrated by enemies of the Southeast, who have invaded the region in order to deny it of the 2023 presidency.<sup>29</sup> As expected, Nigerians are still divided on the security situation in the Southeast and on what IPOB really stands for—a freedom fighting group for a Biafra nation or a terror group. Some, who are sympathetic to its course, believe that Nnamdi Kanu and his group are only being demonized while others feel differently, insisting that though it started as a self-determination group, recent activities linked to the group, put it in a different perspective, are also spreading fear and terror in the land. “People are only calling IPOB names because of their own selfish interests.<sup>30</sup> John Udogwu, an Onitsha established pharmacist is of the view that IPOB and her latest sit-at-home orders were aimed at releasing Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and has not done anything wrong to be branded a terror group; instead, they should be commended for defending and protecting Igbos against the atrocities of killer herdsmen who in other regions have similar outfits contending with insecurity. He queried why and how a group that is fighting for the emancipation of its people can be the same that will be terrorizing them. It does not make any sense to me. IPOB is about freedom for the Igbos while ESN is for the security and safety of the Igbo man in Igboland, which is what we all need at the moment because the government has failed to protect our people.<sup>31</sup>



## CONCLUSION

Alaigbo is on fire and no conscientious objector can afford to be silent in the face of the ongoing war of slow destruction of our region, as you can find that more and more communities are seeing that the government is not stepping in with its security forces and are forming their own vigilante groups. The only reason why the Nigerian state would declare a war against Ndigbo—which is what a former IGP Usman Baba’s mandate of May 18, 2021 to officers in the region amounts to, which ordered as follows: “Don’t mind the media shout; do the job I command you. If anyone accuses you of human rights violations, the report will come to my table, and you know what I will do. So, take the battle to them wherever they are and kill them all. Don’t wait for an order.”<sup>32</sup>—is because some people in government continue to view the old Eastern region from the prism of a conquered territory effectively under occupation since the end of the civil war in 1970.

Is it not possible that IPOB may not be responsible for the insecurity in the Southeast and the culprits in these dastardly attacks against police in the Southeast and South-South? Former President Buhari had approved undisclosed new security measures for the Southeast and South-South regions as announced by the then acting Inspector General of Police, Usman Baba on May 11, 2021. One wonders why these unending attacks in a once peaceful and calm region. While I agree that IPOB may actually have derailed and lost sight of its original vision in a bid for vengeance, which has always been threatened, it is possible they allowed their quest to avenge whatever attack they claim against members of the group to derail them from their earlier set objectives. Certainly, if this is the case, this has made it difficult for many reasonable people who actually believe Igbos are being marginalized in Nigeria from supporting their agitations. Therefore, one may say that it is no longer agitations but pure criminality and crimes against humanity, if confirmed to be true.

Also, the establishment of state police as a way of contending with the insecurity in Nigeria and the Southeast in particular has remained on the front burner. The advocates of state police believe that Nigeria is too large to be governed by an ill-equipped central police force with a dysfunctional command structure where governors of the state, through the chief security officers of their respective states, cannot give directives to a commissioner of police posted to his/her state. In other words, a commissioner of police only takes orders from the Inspector General of Police (IGP), who is shielded in the seat of power in Abuja and even understands little of the security challenges facing the Southeastern localities. Meanwhile, the governor bears the blame anytime there is a breach of the peace in his state. Also, a former president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Olisa Agbakoba (SAN), in an interview with *The Guardian*, faulted the existing policing structure in the country, noting that it was impossible for one IGP to ensure security across Nigeria. In his words:

“There is no way one IGP can ensure security across Nigeria; it is not just possible. In the United States and many other federations, there are the county police (which are the local council police), the state police and then the federal police. The federal is the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). But the problem here is the fear that state police will be politicized and I see that danger. But it’s a matter of debating it very well.”<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, while it is clear that the rural communities have little or no security, there is obviously a widening sense of impunity across Nigeria which has driven people to arm themselves with kidnapping, banditry, terrorism and conflicts with nomadic herders and





farmers flourishing at an alarming rate. What are these factors promoting insecurity? There is an overwhelming unemployment rate in the country and this issue is driving our youths into criminal activities. It is capable of causing terror in our peculiar circumstance where you find that every tenth young citizen of the country is officially unemployed.<sup>34</sup> Another factor is corruption. In 2021, Transparency International placed Nigeria in the 146th position out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index, scoring 26 out of 100.<sup>35</sup> Corruption has already become a part of life in the country and it forms part of the economic problems in Nigeria today.<sup>1</sup> Imbalance is another issue, a situation where you find disparity in development or inequity and ethnicity driving different sectors of our country in the areas of appointment and nation building; it poses a huge security threat to our collective existence. High influx of arms is another factor promoting insecurity. Smugglers use the porous coastal borders of the country to sell arms and the corruption and weak judicial systems only help smugglers to sell even more guns. They provide pistols, shotguns, assault rifles, grenades, and explosives against the people and military forces.

Lastly, the weak judicial system is one of the biggest causes of insecurity in Nigeria. People feel insecure when corrupt leaders, criminals and terrorists go free. Many evil-minded people think that money can buy freedom in the country; unfortunately, the corrupt system proves this line of thought.<sup>36</sup> Let it be known that Nigeria is going from a largely governed country with a few ungoverned spaces to a place where there are a few governed spaces and in the rest of the country governance has retreated.

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