MILITARY-LED PEACE BUILDING AND CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA, 2015-2025

Ugwu Onyema Eze
Department of Political Science, Evangel University, Akaeze
onyema.ugwu@evangeluniversity.edu.ng

Abstract

The participation of the military in internal security operations has been key in Nigeria's effort to combat insecurity in South-East Nigeria starting from 2015. Despite the positive contribution of military-led peacebuilding towards containing violence and safeguarding strategic infrastructure, its effect on civil-military relations, public trust, and sustainable peace is still debatable. Studies conducted in the past have focused on counter-insurgency operations and the resultant security gains, but there has been limited research into how military-led peacebuilding impacts civil-military relations. This study thus aims to investigate the link between military-led peacebuilding and civil-military relations in South-East Nigeria from 2015 to 2025. Applying Civil-Military Peacebuilding Theory and Hybrid Peace Theory, a qualitative documentary research design is employed whereby primary data sources include government publications, military reports, human rights reports, documents from international organisations, policy papers, news reports, and scholarly literature. Thematic content analysis was used in analysing documentary evidence collected. It was found that the results of military-led peacebuilding on civil-military relations have been contradictory. Whereas military actions helped increase territorial security and protect strategic infrastructure, issues related to excessive use of force, human rights violations, and lack of community engagement have negatively affected civil-military relations. However, civil-military co-operation (CIMIC) initiatives, humanitarian aid, and interaction with traditional and community leaders enhanced public trust and intelligence-gathering. The study's position is that the effectiveness of the peace-building efforts of the military largely depends on the nature of civil-military relations, accountability, respect for human rights and good governance. This paper makes an important contribution to the post-colonial civil-military relations literature in that it shows that stabilisation by the military alone is not enough for sustaining peace.

Keywords*: Military-led peacebuilding; Civil-military relations; Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC); Community engagement; South-East Nigeria; Sustainable peace*

Introduction

The South-Eastern part of Nigeria has long been portrayed as having experienced many difficulties, including inter-ethnic conflicts, insurgencies, and political instabilities. These have

often placed the peace and security of this region under threat. The point of origin of these difficulties has been precisely the unresolved legacy of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970, which has been further complicated by local, national, and international dynamics. The Nigerian Military has been important for this region because it has been repeatedly called upon to intervene in attempts to restore peace and security (Olonisakin, 2015; Nnoli, 2003).

Military-engaged peace-building, which is the use of the military to maintain or restore peace in regions that have experienced violence have been a significant aspect of the security agenda of

Nigeria, particularly in the South-East regions of the nation. Some others believe that this might increase the feelings of resentment among people who are already distressed and heighten tension. Others see this as an unavoidable necessity when other means aside from military action have failed to contain violence or instability. In the South-East of Nigeria, the military has engaged in peace-building through counterinsurgency operations, civilian protection programs, and support to governance and development programs. The military involvement in peace-building in South-East Nigeria has a historical root dating back to the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), a devastating conflict that vehemently hurt the entire socio-political landscape of the region.

During the civil war, the Nigerian military directly fought against the Biafran state that wanted to break away. At the end of the war, the start of a painful process of reintegration and reconstruction ensued in light of the existing tensions among different ethnic groups and regions (Nnoli, 2003). In light of the civil war in Nigeria, the Nigerian government initiated the policy of 'no victor, no vanquished' as a means of reconciling the country. However, the peace agreement was unable to help in restoring the developmental progress that the South-East needed due to the civil war.

Despite the rise of ethnic and political polarisation in the South-East region since the 1990s and early 2000s, the army became involved again in peace-building because of insurgencies and civil unrest (Uwechue, 2018). The military intervention and response to the secessionist movement initiated by the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which sought to revive the state of Biafra, is one of the most noteworthy examples known until now regarding military-initiated peace-building efforts in this region (Salihu & Mshelia, 2018).

The military conducted various missions, such as Operation Restore Order and Operation.

Python Dance to suppress these secessionist groups and re-establish federal control over this region (Uwechue, 2018). There are arguments suggesting these military peace-building efforts utilise forceful tactics, such that these efforts created more complexities and issues rather than aiding efforts between the military and the local folks to build mutual trust (Olonisakin, 2015).

The military-led peace-building efforts in South-East Nigeria involve a combination of military operations, security raids, and assistance with humanitarian and developmental challenges. While the efforts may have contributed to stabilising the environment, there is ongoing debate about the effectiveness of the efforts in the long term and how well they can ensure long-term peace (Uwechue, 2018; Onuoha, 2017). Persons generally perceive efforts made for the

promotion of peace as stop-gap measures and non-strategic long-term solutions to the conflict.

Military operations, for instance, such as Operation Python Dance, were largely aimed at combating insurgents, but they failed to address the root causes of the conflict, which may include issues such as poverty, feeling ignored, and lacking a voice in the South-East region (Onuoha, 2017). The problem with having a military-led peace-building is that it has two aspects to it, because it can address security concerns and usher in peace, but it may even exacerbate societal divides or retain a cycle of violence and undermine reconciliation, because having too much reliance on it, given that it is a region that has been affected by Civil War, may even worsen ethnic and political tensions (Nnoli, 2003; Olonisakin, 2015).

Further, the use of force by the military can repel people from their communities, make people less trusting of government institutions, and make it more difficult to develop and implement peace within society. The research paper intends to critically assess the involvement of the military in peace-building efforts in South-Eastern Nigeria. The study investigates both the strengths and weaknesses of military-led peace initiatives and sheds light on the role played by the military in helping post-conflict reconstruction activities. This study will analyse the evolution of the role played by the military since the Nigerian Civil War and its effects in building up national unity and stability in this part of the world. This study will help in increasing knowledge and discourse on military initiatives and will develop ideas about effective measures to attain sustainable peace despite military interventions.

Notwithstanding the growing emphasis on military-led peacebuilding in South-East Nigeria, there is not much empirical analysis that has been done on how military peacebuilding affects civil-military relations. Studies done in the past have largely focused on military peacebuilding efficiency, outcomes of counter-insurgency efforts, and security problems without paying any attention to the effect of military peacebuilding on public trust and civilian cooperation. This study seeks to fill this research gap. To find innovative solutions to the conflicts in the region, it is crucial to have a good knowledge of the history and nature of military-led peace operations in South-East Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Civil-Military Peacebuilding Theory and Hybrid Peace Theory. The former theory describes the role of military-led stabilisation in the process of restoring security and setting up conditions for peacebuilding, whereas the latter theory asserts that peacebuilding requires collaboration between formal institutions of the state and legitimate institutions of local governance. The combination of both theories is useful for developing an analytical framework for military-led peacebuilding and civil-military relations in South-East Nigeria. Civil-Military Peacebuilding Theory is based on a wider body of Civil-Military Relations (CMR) theory.

The classical scholars Huntington (1957), Janowitz (1960), Feaver (2003), and Schiff (2009) mainly concentrated on the issues of civilian control of the military and civil-military relations within democratic countries. Their contributions laid the normative basis of the understanding of

military institutions within the framework of constitutional democracies, emphasising professionalism, accountability, supremacy of civilians, agency, and concordance between the military, political elites, and society. Although the traditional civil-military relations theories developed by Huntington (1957), Janowitz (1960), Feaver (2003), and Schiff (2009) were largely concerned with the issue of civilian control of the military in conventional inter-state warfare and democratic governance, today's security situation is markedly different.

Contemporary wars are more likely to involve terrorism, secessionism, organised crime, and other types of intra-state armed violence, necessitating military intervention in domestic stabilisation other than defence of the country's territory. The military thus has taken up roles involving civilian protection, humanitarian aid, conflict resolution, and institutional support. This constitutes a move from the traditional civil-military relations theory to the peacebuilding concept in which the effectiveness of the military is determined not only by its performance on the battlefield, but also through its contribution towards increasing public confidence, institutional legitimacy, and sustainable peace (de Coning, 2020; de Coning & Karlsrud, 2021).

Therefore, according to Civil-Military Peacebuilding Theory, the role played by the military helps to create an enabling environment for political reform and peacebuilding efforts, especially where civilian institutions are either incapacitated or incapable of managing violence effectively (Paris & Sisk, 2009; Chandler, 2019). Modern scholars also define peacebuilding as an adaptive process that entails continuous learning and adjustment to changing security threats, as well as flexible approaches to addressing them in each particular situation (de Coning, 2020; de Coning & Karlsrud, 2021). However, military stabilisation efforts cannot bring about lasting peace. Sustainable peace demands institutional reforms, good governance, reconciliation, and improved state legitimacy (Karlsrud, 2021; Karlsrud & Heine, 2021).

Hybrid Peace Theory offers solutions to the issues associated with military-led stabilisation by maintaining that peace will be achieved through cooperation between formal state structures and other local actors, not solely as a result of state-centred interventions (Mac Ginty, 2010; Donais, 2008; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2016; Richmond & Visoka, 2022). This theory highlights the roles that communities, traditional authorities, civil society organisations, religious organisations, and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms play in building legitimacy and trust. The two theoretical approaches complement each other instead of conflicting with one another.

While Civil-Military Peacebuilding Theory provides the basis for analysing the role played by the military in contributing to security restoration, protection of the citizens and creation of an environment that facilitates peacebuilding, the theory of Hybrid Peace illustrates how trust-building and collaboration between security agencies and local communities are essential for achieving sustainable peace. With these two theories, it becomes possible to develop a comprehensive framework for the examination of military-led peacebuilding in South-East Nigeria, where solving the problem of insecurity is contingent upon security measures initiated by the state and engagement with local structures, including traditional mechanisms, civil society groups and other local actors.

Conceptual Model

The theoretical relationship underpinning this study is illustrated below.



Source: Author's conceptualisation based on Paris and Sisk (2009), Chandler (2019), Mac Ginty (2010), Donais (2008), Mac Ginty and Richmond (2016), and Richmond and Visoka (2022).

Figure 1: The Conceptual Model for Military-Led Peacebuilding and Civil-Military Relations in South East Nigeria.

According to this model, effective military-led peacebuilding starts with security operations that aim at reducing violence and creating stability in the area. Stability in the area facilitates community involvement that builds confidence among civilians in the security institutions. Greater confidence improves the civil-military relationship, allowing the military, government institutions, traditional institutions, civil society, and the local population to cooperate. Cooperation leads to sustainable peace, which is the dependent variable in this study.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative documentary research method under the interpretivist paradigm in examining the connection between military peacebuilding and civil-military relationships in South-Eastern Nigeria from 2015 to 2025. The use of the documentary analysis technique in this study is appropriate since it offers an approach for analysing policy documents, institutional reports and literature on the issue of military intervention, community relations, and peacebuilding (Bowen, 2009). The secondary sources for this research were drawn from government policy documents, Defence Headquarters operations reports, Nigerian Army Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) literature, reports of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group (ICG), UNDP, OECD, scholarly articles, books and credible media.

The analysis of the document involved the use of a six-step thematic analysis approach by Braun & Clarke (2006, 2021). The theme of the analysis was guided by four issues which include:

military stabilisation operations; civil-military relations; community engagement and public trust; and sustainable peacebuilding outcomes. Both deductive and inductive coding techniques were used. In inductive coding, the themes emerged from the documents, while deductive coding was guided by the propositions of Civil-Military Peacebuilding Theory and Hybrid Peace Theory. This helped in the systematic analysis of the military intervention dynamics, civil-military relationships, perceptions within communities and sustainability of peacebuilding activities within the region.

The triangulation of documentary sources added to the reliability of the results obtained through the analysis of evidence from governmental documents, military records, international organisations, human rights reports, and academic literature. Also, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were the principles used in ensuring the quality of research as suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985). Credibility was assured through verification of multiple documentary sources; dependability was provided through systematic coding; confirmability, through the interpretations based on documentary sources; and transferability, through the contextualisation of the South-East Nigeria security environment. The ethics of the research have been ensured through accurate citation of all documentary sources, objective presentation of evidence, and interpretations of sensitive security information. Since the research has made use of the available documentary sources only, human participants have not been involved, and hence no ethical approval was needed.

Conflict in Military-Led Peace-Building in South-East Nigeria

The South-East part of Nigeria has often been politically unrest and ethnic conflict, which is mostly due to the war fought between 1967 and 1970. The war was caused by the desire of the secessionist Biafran government, mainly consisting of Igbo people, to fight against the Nigerian Federal Government, destabilising the social, economic and political structures of the region (Achebe, 2012; Alao, 1994). Despite being over fifty years old already, the effects of the war continue to influence today's politics, society, and development in the South-East (Nwankwo, 2018).

Over the past decades, this area has faced various cases of insurgency, violent clashes and political instability, which can be mostly explained by the feeling of being neglected by the central Nigerian government (Ukoha, 2020). Organisations such as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have emerged, calling for either the restoration of Biafra or greater autonomy. However, the Nigerian government has relied on military intervention, leading to a repetitive cycle of suppression and resistance, which perpetuates mistrust between civilians and security forces (Ezeibe, 2019; Ojukwu, 2014). The use of military forces in the area to ensure peacekeeping is viewed by the locals as being oppressive, despite its attempt to counter the activities of insurgents. Such an opinion is worsened by socio-economic frustrations arising from previous grievances, such as unequal resource distribution and marginalisation (Ake, 2001; Okeke, 2016). Ethnic division and historical enmity contribute to the challenge in ensuring peace, making it difficult for military interventions to solve the root cause of conflicts (Osaghae, 1998).

In an effort to achieve sustainable peace in the South-East, a holistic method must be applied when dealing with the structural issues causing the conflict. Apart from military and political negotiations, there should be considerations such as reparation and socio-economic development that would reduce marginalisation and inequality (Young, 2000; Adibe, 2017). Without the provision of integrative solutions, intervention measures will end up aggravating existing grievances rather than solving them. This will perpetuate instability and distrust. An understanding of the historical context of conflict as well as the socio-political environment of the area will be necessary in evaluating the effectiveness of military-driven peace initiatives.

Conceptualising Military-Led Peace-Building

Military-led peace-building is the involvement of the military in assisting the creation and maintenance of peace in war-stricken regions where, perhaps, non-military-led approaches may fail or may not be available. This comprises various plans as well as actions, which are designed to restore order, the political situation, and the necessary circumstances for the establishment of permanent peace (MacQueen, 2006). The concept of military-led peace-building is anchored in the reality that military forces may play a crucial role within the peace process due

to their well-organised structures and rapid response capabilities. The central goal of these activities is the return of peace, security, and good governance within society (Tschirgi, 2003).

These activities are normally both combat and non-combat activities. For example, in scenarios where states have become destabilised due to hostilities, military-led peace-building endeavours firstly include the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration of former combatants following humanitarian assistance aimed at addressing such pressing needs as food, shelter, and health care (Muggah, 2005). It may be possible to turn their attention to such issues as reconstructing infrastructure, ensuring that civilians are protected, and enabling democracy and the rule of law to function properly (Bellamy & Williams, 2010). Troops may be very essential during this process because, in fact, they are the only ones who can protect civilians in regions where there is no stability. Their activities, however, have to be part and parcel of a broader plan to usher peace into a region and include such aspects as development projects initiated by civilians and building political institutions (Schnabel & Carment, 2005).

The military has always been perceived as a force-projection instrument; however, its involvement in shaping peace indicates that it can function as a force for stability to achieve lasting

peace (Fetherston, 2004). It is always to be remembered that these projects, instead of taking help from civilians for this purpose, must work together with other civilians, along with international bodies, so that peace-creating processes are long-lasting.

The Concept of Civil–Military Relations

Civil-military relations (CMRs) involve relationships between the armed forces, civilian political authorities, and society. The term civil–military relations mainly covers the manner in which the military is governed, controlled and integrated into the political system while retaining its constitutional duty of defending the state. CMR also encompasses the degree to which the military stays accountable to civilian officials and conducts itself under democratic governance. The issue of civil–military relations has been defined by Samuel P. Huntington (1957) as the relation between civilian political authorities and military professionalism. Huntington proposes that for democratic stability, it is better to have objective civilian control where the military is politically neutral and militarily autonomous but subordinate to civilian leaders in politics. He further explains that military professionalism helps prevent political involvement of the military.

However, according to another scholar, Morris Janowitz (1960), there is a need for more integration between the military and society to have good civil-military relations. Janowitz argues that the modern military has to be a constabulary force in which the people serving the military share the same values as the rest of the society. From the standpoint of institutional theories, Peter D. Feaver (2003) uses the framework of the Principal-Agent Theory to define civil–military relations. According to him, civilian leaders (the principals) delegate the power to the military (agents) who must be monitored to align their actions with government policies. Civilian oversight in such a case is an important element for ensuring democratic control without compromising the efficiency of the military force.

Meanwhile, Rebecca L. Schiff (1995) proposes the theory of Concordance, in which she suggests that the existence of harmonious civil–military relations is not just based on civilian domination but also on the agreement between the military force, political elite, and citizenry in terms of military recruitment practices, political decision-making process, social composition of the officer corps, and military style. Taking this theory one step further, Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei (2008) suggest that three elements need to be considered when defining civil–military relations: democratic control, military effectiveness, and military efficiency. They suggest that effective democratic governance implies civilian oversight, but at the same time it must also be ensured that the armed forces have the capacity to fulfil their duties.

From an African perspective, according to Adebayo Adedeji (1998), sustainable democratic governance of Africa needs professional security structures with a respect for constitutionalism, the rule of law, and civilian supremacy. In the same vein, Funmi Olonisakin (2008) argues that democracy in civil-military relations in Africa rests on security sector reform, accountability, civilian oversight, and public trust in security institutions. He adds that in peacebuilding after conflicts, the military should work collaboratively with civilians without violating the rules of democracy and human rights.

On the other hand, civil-military relations may be defined as the relationship in institutional, constitutional, and social spheres between the government, military, and civilians to ensure professionalism, non-political nature, accountability, and subordination of the military to civilian governments. It has been argued by contemporary scholars that civil-military relations

do not only consist of civilian control but also entail transparency, trust, public participation, and interagency cooperation in addressing security problems like terrorism and insurgencies.

Military Operations and Peace-Building Efforts in South-East Nigeria

There has been insecurity in the South-East region of Nigeria due to separatist agitation, attacks on security personnel, and organised crimes. Separatist groups such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the militant wing known as Eastern Security Network (ESN) have largely been responsible for the insecurity through the implementation of sit-at-home directives, destruction of public properties, and violent clashes with security forces (International Crisis Group, 2024; Amnesty International, 2023). The above mentioned has hampered economic activities, eroded public trust in government structures and created insecurity in the region.

As a way of restoring law and order in the region, the Federal Government conducted various military operations in the region, including Operation Python Dance (Egwu Eke I-III) and Operation Udo Ka to dismantle the armed groups (Defence Headquarters, 2024). According to official records, the above military operations destroyed criminal hideouts, recovered advanced weapons and arrested suspects of militant organisations (Nigerian Army, 2024). Nevertheless, historical records show that military intervention created significant apprehensions regarding the nature of civil-military relations. According to Amnesty International (2016, 2023), Human Rights Watch (2023) and the International Crisis Group (2024), the use of excessive force, arbitrary arrest, detention without trial, destruction of property, and civilian deaths were common occurrences in security operations.

Such actions created distrust of security forces among local communities, and people did not want to share intelligence. As a result, the application of military peace-building measures created both successes and challenges. Whereas security interventions succeeded in the short run in ensuring reduced armed conflicts in local communities, they were associated with reduced community trust where they were seen as a violation of human rights. This finding implies that the success of military peace-building is influenced not only by the success of the mission but also by civil-military relations.

In view of this problem, the Nigerian Army embarked on expanding Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) programmes through the provision of medical services, education and other humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected areas (Nigerian Army, 2024). There is ample evidence indicating that the communities receiving continual humanitarian intervention were more inclined to cooperate with the security forces by sharing intelligence and participating in local peace efforts (OECD, 2020; United Nations, 2020). Thus, the evidence proves the existence of a direct link between military peacebuilding and civil-military relations. The military peace-building operations marked by coercion reduced trust and cooperation from the civilians, while operations supplemented with dialogue and humanitarian intervention improved the military legitimacy and boosted the success of peace-building operations.

Table 1: Evidence Linking Military -Led Peace-Building to Civil -Military Relations (2015 – 2025)

Period	Source	Documentary Evidence	Implication for Civil–Military Relations
2015–2017	Defence Headquarters (DHQ)	Deployment of troops in support of internal security activities in the South-East due to increased acts of separatism. Setting up of joint operations and intelligence operations.	A stronger military presence in civilian areas, raising doubts about militarisation.
2016–2020	Nigerian Army	Expanding the Civil–Military Cooperation (CIMIC) programme, including free medical outreach, education, rehabilitation of infrastructure, humanitarian assistance, and stakeholder engagements in affected areas.	Greater interaction between military and civilians, higher levels of public trust in some communities, and intelligence sharing.
2015–2021	Amnesty International	Cases of arrests without charge, extended periods of detention, torture, abuse of power in the use of force and extra-judicial killings in military actions against separatist groups.	Public distrust in security forces, allegations of human rights abuses, and strained civil-military relations persist despite continuing security activities.
2021–2023	Human Rights Watch	Continuing cases of violence linked to the activities of separatists, including sit-at-home directives, attacks on security operatives, destruction of infrastructure and allegations of abuses committed by armed groups and security forces.	Highlighting the complexity of the security situation and the necessity for a nuanced response to it by means of both force and respect for civilian rights.
2024	Defence Headquarters (DHQ)	Increased activities under the non-kinetic part of Operation Udo Ka, including intelligence operations, rescues, engagement activities and working with traditional and community leaders.	This points to an emerging strategy that combines military action with confidence-building and peace-building initiatives in communities.
2024	Nigerian Army	The increase in the activities of the CIMIC programme through health-related services, educational activities, the rehabilitation of infrastructure, and humanitarian assistance in areas under conflict.	Building closer links between the military and civilians, changing civilian perceptions about the military in some communities, and assisting peace-building initiatives at the community level.
2025	Headquarters of the Defence, Nigerian Army, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch	Military efforts aimed at stabilising the situation in light of insecurity and the need for accountability. It is reported by Amnesty International that a total number of 1,844 people were casualties due to conflict in the South East from January 2021 to June 2023.	As we can see from everything mentioned above, even though military peace-building initiatives have played an essential role in bringing stability in some regions, the issue of insecurity and accusations of human rights violations persists.

Source: Defence Headquarters (2024); Nigerian Army (2024); Amnesty International (2021, 2025); Human Rights Watch (2023, 2025).

From the document presented in the table above, it can be clearly seen that there is a clear indication that the peace-building efforts undertaken by the military in South-East Nigeria have shifted from the security approach to that of a civil-military approach. However, there is a limitation to the improvement of the military and community relationship because of the continued cases of human rights abuses, violence, and lack of trust. It is evident from the information provided by the Defence Headquarters of Nigeria between 2015 and 2017 that there was a deployment of the military to ensure internal security operations as a result of the increasing cases of separatist operations in the region. There were joint security operations conducted by the military forces and other security agencies, including the police, in an effort to curb the increasing cases of insecurity. The use of coercive measures to restore order in the region was adopted by the government of Nigeria.

The Nigerian Army implemented Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) activities through providing free medical care, education, reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure, humanitarian aid, and interaction with stakeholders in 2016-2020. In the above-mentioned context, CIMIC activities can be viewed as the transition to a non-kinetic way of peacebuilding that will foster relations between the military and civil society. The mentioned activities correspond to the current studies on peacebuilding, according to which sustainable peace can be achieved if humanitarian needs are met and cooperation between security agencies and local communities rather than military means is promoted.

Nonetheless, although the above activities might be seen as a shift towards peacebuilding, documentary sources provided by Amnesty International from 2015 to 2021 reveal a different situation. Specifically, Amnesty International has reported on such matters as arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, excessive use of force, and extrajudicial killings committed during military actions against separatists. These facts demonstrate that peacebuilding by coercive methods decreased the level of trust in security institutions. According to Civil-Military Relations Theory, the legitimacy of security institutions consists not only in the efficiency of actions performed by them but also in compliance with democratic norms. In addition, Human Rights Watch's reports for the period between 2021 and 2023 showed that despite the consistent military presence, insecurity was still prevalent. Human Rights Watch documented the violence perpetrated because of separatist insurgency, sit-at-home directives, and attacks on security agencies, destruction of infrastructure, and allegations of atrocities carried out by armed and security forces.

This evidence shows that military action alone was not enough to mitigate the causes of insecurity, which were largely political, economic, and social in nature. The consistency of violence supports the theory proposed by Hybrid and Adaptive Peacebuilding, with the importance of the joint effort of government organisations, community, NGOs, and traditional institutions to build sustainable peace. The collected information regarding 2024 demonstrates many changes in the military tactics. According to the report issued by the Defence Headquarters, the employment of non-kinetic techniques was observed during Operation Udo Ka. Such techniques comprised intelligence, rescue efforts, community engagements, and cooperation with traditional rulers and community leaders. In addition, the Nigerian Army

intensified its CIMIC operations, which consisted of such activities as health care services, education, community rebuilding, and humanitarian support. There is evidence that suggests that military action coerced civilians, making them less willing to cooperate with security forces, hence affecting civil-military relations negatively. On the other hand, CIMIC activities increased cooperation and sharing of intelligence, indicating that peacebuilding has positively affected civil-military relations.

It is possible to notice that the realisation has taken place that the victory of the military campaign will not be accomplished at the front line but through establishing a relationship of mutual trust with the local population. Such examples can be regarded as relevant to the civil-military peacebuilding approach. Nevertheless, the documentary study for the year 2025 demonstrates that many difficulties persist. The information from the Defence Headquarters and the Nigerian Army demonstrates the processes of stabilisation. The reports of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch indicate that there are still security concerns, human rights abuses and a need for more transparency, accountability and community involvement in the peace-building process. The information provided by Amnesty International, such as 1,844 deaths linked to the conflict in South-East from January 2021 to June 2023 and involving state and non-state actors, proves that the conflict continues to remain intense and military measures are inadequate.

It can be clearly seen that there is a relationship between the independent and dependent variables of this research (military-led peacebuilding and civil-military relations). The military-led peacebuilding process began as a kinetic process, but slowly developed into a process which had a hybrid approach and had security measures and civil measures combined. From the results obtained from the research, it is clear that although CIMIC operations made dialogue and humanitarian efforts possible, the allegations of human rights violations, insecurity and lack

of accountability prevented the development of positive civil-military relations.

Challenges of Military-Led Peace-Building

The complications of military-led peacebuilding in South-East Nigeria are multi-faceted and complex; historical, political, and societal in origin. As welcome as military intervention is to the restoration of order, there are a lot of factors that make it difficult for military force to secure lasting peace in the region.

1. **Distrust of the Military:** Another major issue is a lack of sufficient trust in the military by the people within the South-East region. Military tyranny in the South-East, particularly during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), whereby military activities made such terrible things happen, has been evident since the onset of this war (Ojukwu, 1989). This historical burden has made such people less trusting of military-led peacebuilding efforts. Many people viewed the military as one avenue through which the state keeps its powers and not a neutral force for peace (Ajibola, 2018).
2. **Political and Ethnic Conflict:** Marginalisation by the Federal Government has been one of

the main reasons for keeping the Igbo people of South-East Nigeria in constant political and ethnic conflict (Onu, 2012). Political relations in the region are currently tense because there is pressure on the need for self-governance and recognition of unique identity in the region. These tensions could increase further in case of military interventions, as they might be perceived as attempts at the imposition of the federal government on the situation rather than resolution of the tensions (Isike, 2015).

3. **Failure to Resolve the Underlying Causes of the Conflict:** It would be possible to carry out peacebuilding through the military in terms of fighting the insurgents and establishing the rule of law, but it cannot resolve the underlying causes of the conflict such as corruption, political exclusion and socio-economic disparities (Obi, 2010). Peace-building through military action is just a temporary solution that will not lead to lasting peace if the underlying problems remain unresolved (Fagbohun, 2020).

4. **Human Rights Violations:** The security operatives in South-East Nigeria have committed various forms of human rights violations, ranging from extra-judicial killings, unlawful arrests, and torture (Human Rights Watch, 2016). These violent actions undermine the effectiveness of peacebuilding through the military because of its lack of legitimacy and alienation of the local populace (Okolie, 2019).

5. **Insurgency and Armed Groups:** There are many separatist armed groups, including Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), whose operations are primarily confined to the South-East region of the country. These armed groups are of the view that the separation of the region from other federating units is essential. Such groups are often involved in actions that create problems for the governance of Nigeria (Nwachukwu, 2020). Forceful measures undertaken by the military may lead to an increase in tension and hence loss of life and instability in the region (Smith, 2018).

6. **No Community Participation:** Community participation is one of the most important factors for a successful peace-building exercise. However, since military-based peace-building exercises do not favour community participation and interactions, they do not allow any form of participation in the peace-building process (Galtung, 2000). Therefore, it can be said that their contribution towards peace-building exercises is a top-down approach rather than bottom-up.

7. **International Scrutiny and Legitimacy:** International scrutiny can be observed in the peace-building processes of the military of South-Eastern Nigeria from other countries and human rights organisations. It seems reasonable to raise the question about the legitimacy of such actions made by the Nigerian military since there is data concerning human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2017). Such a fact may become a threat to the country's foreign policy and will make it hard to conduct the peace-building process. The peace-building processes in South-East Nigeria performed by the military seem to be a temporary way out of the security problem; however, it will become quite challenging to create sustainable peace in the future.

Civil-Military Relations and Community Engagement

Many factors of historical, societal, and political nature affect civil-military relations in Nigeria, especially in the South-East. The first distinguishing feature of the South-East region of Nigeria is the peculiarities of the history of state-society relations in Nigeria because of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), which affected the image of the state and the army greatly among the Igbo people and also the image of the country as such (Osaghae, 1998; Suberu, 2001). It is connected with distrust in the federal military forces and the feeling of marginality among the population of the South-East region in Nigeria. However, it is known that the South-East region of Nigeria is distinguished by good community relations and political awareness of its inhabitants.

Nevertheless, there are some issues concerning security in this region in the form of separatism, inter-community conflicts, and violence against state institutions by non-state actors (Onuoha, 2014). Nowadays, there are active separatist movements in the area, including the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), leading to instability and more contact between the military and civilians (Agbiboa, 2021). In 2017, the Federal Government of Nigeria recognised IPOB as a terrorist organisation and thus increased militarisation of the region (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2017). The Nigerian armed forces should be responsible for internal security and the protection of sovereignty; however, there is concern that the use of the military in civilian spaces could lead to possible abuse of human rights, disproportionate force, and civil-military relations (Akinwale, 2010).

The deployment of the military in the South-East region through such exercises as Python Dance and subsequent security operations has been seen as an oppression and encroachment on the people, resulting in the deteriorating relationship between the civil and the military (Amnesty International, 2021). Cases of human rights abuse, which involve such issues as extra-judicial killing, arbitrary arrests and destruction of properties, have eroded the trust that people had in the military. As a result, the civil-military relations in the South-East continue to be very complex. The deployment of the military in the restoration of law and order has been highly effective in the reduction of some violent actions and the creation of order; however, the military has exacerbated the claims of repression by the government, particularly among the youths who advocate for secessionism (Agbiboa, 2021; Reuters, 2023).

The problem outlined above indicates the limitation of peacekeeping through militarisation and emphasises the need for other forms of making peace that would involve dialogues, justice, and inclusive governance aimed at addressing the key causes of insecurity in the region. These activities aimed at ensuring peace in the region could result in mutual distrust between the military and civilians (Okpala, 2018). Peacekeeping is seen as too aggressive; there are tensions due to human rights issues; thus, there is some resistance (Akinola, 2020). Nevertheless, community involvement of the people has been an integral part of the military operations in the South-East region. Moreover, there is a trend of promoting cooperation between the military forces and the local communities. The approach entails dialogues resulting in cooperation in solving security problems, including crime, insurgency, and conflicts between groups.

The military is also increasingly participating in many projects that serve the community members. They are involved in the construction of school buildings, health facilities, and other development projects (Olomojobi, 2020). These projects seek to bring about a change in the perception of the community members regarding the military force from being oppressive agents to agents for the protection of the people (Agwu, 2021). However, if someone were to work effectively with any community, they must understand the culture and politics prevailing in the area. Generally, the South-East is made up of Igbo people with their own culture and memories of military rule during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. Only if such factors are taken into account in the civil-military engagement would it be successful in creating dialogue in the society's belief system. Hence, it is the capability to build trust in military operations that are respectful and developmental in their approach that will form a very important aspect of ensuring successful civil-military relations in South-East Nigeria. For sustainable peace to be achieved in the region, it is very essential for the use of techniques in military operations to be community-oriented. The change in civil-military relations from conflict to cooperation represents an important milestone in improving the region.

Policy Recommendations for Military-Led Peace-Building in South-East Nigeria

The following recommendations are made to ensure South-East Nigeria has a stable, peaceful future: The implications of this study for post-colonial civil-military studies lie in its evidence that military stabilisation alone is not sufficient to achieve sustainable peace in societies suffering from grievances, exclusions, and lack of state legitimacy. Whereas classical civil-military theories focused on the importance of professionalisation and civilian control of the military, the study suggests that military peacebuilding in post-colonial societies will be effective only if there is legitimacy, accountability, community participation, and trust in institutions. Thus, the theory of civil legitimacy has emerged from this study as a key mediating factor in the process of sustainable peace. Thus, the empirical data contribute to the existing theoretical base concerning civil-military relations in post-colonial states because it proves the idea that apart from the monopoly of using coercive force by a state, the successful performance of military peacebuilding interventions in post-colonial states is conditioned by the level of their legitimisation in terms of civilian institutions. Consequently, this research contradicts the conventional idea about the interdependence between security and legitimacy as two mutually supporting results of military interventions in post-colonial societies.

Moreover, the research makes an empirical contribution through conducting a longitudinal analysis of military peace-building in South-East Nigeria during the 2015-2025 period based on evidence drawn from military actions, government documents, human rights violations data, and academic sources. It provides a deeper insight into the limitations of force-based stabilisation policies as compared to other studies focused on the security effects of military actions only. Thus, the results of this paper confirm recent theoretical propositions regarding post-colonial and hybrid peace-building literature that calls for the combination of security enforcement with governance and development, among others.

Recommendations

Strengthening Civil–Military Partnerships and Community Security

Promote structured collaboration between the military, civil society organisations, traditional and religious leaders, women, youth, and community groups. Institutionalise community-based security initiatives, strengthen early-warning systems, and encourage local participation in planning, implementation, and evaluation to improve trust, intelligence gathering, and the legitimacy of security interventions.

2. Facilitating inclusive governance, dialogue and reconciliation

Facilitate dialogue between the Federal Government, state governments, security agencies and civil society organisations on issues of political exclusion, socio-economic marginalisation, identity and imbalances in development. Advocate for good governance, civilian control, rule of law and reconciliation that restores the faith of citizens in their governments.

3. Highlighting demilitarisation, reintegration and human rights

Strive to ensure that the military deployments are temporary in nature while the power is gradually transferred to the civilian authorities and security agencies. Develop strong programs of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).

4. Socio-economic peace-building initiatives

Link the efforts aimed at providing security with those in development in terms of infrastructure development, education, healthcare, agricultural activities, business, etc. Development which involves everyone will address the structural roots of conflict and render the communities invulnerable to being used for violent purposes.

5. Developing Effective Cooperation with Regional and International Organisations for Sustainable Peace

Develop effective cooperation with regional and international organisations, including the UN, AU and ECOWAS, in peace-building, conflict prevention, capacity building, human rights and reconstruction following the conflict. Sustainable peace in south-eastern Nigeria will be achieved through a combination of accountable security actions and development, governance, human rights and community participation to develop post-colonial civil-military theory by demonstrating that military stabilisation can work if it is integrated into civilian institutions that tackle the structural causes of the conflict.

Conclusion

The experience of military peace-building in South-East Nigeria demonstrates that the participation of the military in post-conflict situations is always a double-edged sword. In light of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970, the use of military force has been crucial but also debatable because of today's counter-insurgency and counter-separatism initiatives. Military forces guarantee security, help reduce violence, ensure protection of critical infrastructure, and allow timely action. However, the employment of military forces is relatively ineffective in addressing the root causes of conflict: marginalisation, unemployment, poor governance, and historical grievances. As such, the adoption of a militaristic approach to resolving conflicts may unconsciously exacerbate issues of mistrust and marginalisation, thus causing human rights violations that may harm peacebuilding processes (Olonisakin, 2015; Nnoli, 2003; Onuoha, 2017).

The results show that although military involvement is inevitable in cases of acute insecurity, it cannot be an alternative to peace-building. Peace is sustainable only through an integrated process which involves not just security but also good governance, community involvement, socioeconomic change, and political dialogue. In accordance with contemporary peace-building literature, effective collaboration between civil authorities and military forces must support the local efforts of reconciliation without replacing them by giving traditional institutions, religious organisations, civil society organisations, women and youth groups opportunities to contribute to resolving conflicts and recovering from them (de Coning, 2020; Mac Ginty, 2010).

This hybrid strategy increases institutional legitimacy and builds public confidence in government institutions. Consequently, this research concludes that military involvement in South-Eastern Nigeria is necessary and, at the same time, inherently limited. The necessity lies in the fact that continuous insecurity compels the government to meet its constitutional obligation of securing lives and properties. Nevertheless, for its success, it has to be complemented by reforms which tackle the conditions that give rise to the conflict itself. Military activities must thus serve as a tool for enabling security in a peace-building strategy that entails political inclusiveness, equitable development, good governance, observance of human rights and access to judicial structures.

It should be noted that sustainable peace in South-East Nigeria will not come from the perpetuation of military actions but from the process of successfully structuring the conditions for reconciliation. This can be done through carrying out inclusive governance reforms that promote political participation, tackling social and economic injustices through development programs, instituting independent accountability and justice processes to resolve historical grievances and human rights abuses, and regular consultations between the government, security institutions, traditional rulers and other community actors. These complementary approaches would make military stabilisation not only a short-term reaction to insecurity but also the basis on which long-lasting peace, democracy, and strong state-society relationships can be built. For South-East Nigeria to move away from perpetual cycles of violence to achieving lasting peace and development, a peacebuilding approach is the only way forward. Thus, this study shows that

for sustainable peace in South-East Nigeria, there is a need to shift from just military stabilisation and move to a broader peacebuilding approach based on structural reconciliation. The process of structural reconciliation will entail political inclusion, socio-economic development, an independent mechanism of accountability, human rights, security sector reform and dialogue between state institutions, traditional rulers, CSOs, women, youth and community leaders. The use of military force should not be the goal of peacebuilding but should rather be the enabling tool for the peacebuilding process. This way, a combination of security and inclusive governance will be the best way out of the situation in South-East Nigeria.

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