



## Southern Nigeria in flux

1. Southern Nigeria is currently undergoing a period of some turmoil. The proximate causes are changes to the management of the Niger Delta amnesty programme and renewed demands by Biafran secessionists, although there are indications that broader national-level politics is being played out at a local level.

### The Niger Delta Amnesty

2. Violence in the Niger Delta declined significantly after the amnesty commenced in 2009 under then President Yar'adua. President Buhari renewed the amnesty just before it was due to end in December 2015. It's important to note that the amnesty was essentially a weapons amnesty – the militants of organisations like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) gave up their weapons in return for training and stipends. This took some of the weapons out of the area, but left the militant networks largely intact.<sup>1</sup> The current government decided to continue the amnesty but is determined to cut the patronage links between the ex-leaders of the militants and their old networks, and this is behind the threat to arrest a leading militant, Government Ekpemupolo (also known as Tompolo). In turn, this has led to the current attacks on pipelines and consequent environmental pollution – there have been five such attacks since the beginning of the year with the most recent involving the Italian multinational, Eni, in Bayelsa State.

---

<sup>1</sup> In effect, stipends were handed to militant leaders who distributed them to their networks.

## **The Biafra issue**

3. Separatist activists have been raising the issue of ‘Biafra’ since the war in the late 1960s but this has come to a head recently with the arrest of a British-Nigerian citizen, Nnamdi Kanu, who is a leader of a separatist organisation and director of a London-based radio station, Radio Biafra. His arrest has led to demonstrations and deaths in a number of south-eastern states of Nigeria. This has happened at a time of heightened tension, with state elections taking place recently in Bayelsa, Rivers and Akwa Ibom states.
4. Some Biafran separatist leaders have claimed that they have hijacked an oil tanker and that they will blow it and its crew up unless Nnamdi Kanu is freed. While kidnaps of crew are common, it is not thought that these or any other activists or militants in the area are holding any vessels at the moment.

## **Conclusion**

5. The Niger Delta militancy and Biafran separatism have not historically been related, and there is considerable room for doubt that such a link has been established. Delta militants are based upon Ijaw coastal communities, while the Biafran demands are an Igbo narrative. Biafra is a south-eastern issue, and there is no record of wider south/south (as it is known in Nigeria) sympathy for Igbo separatism.
6. While the Niger Delta militancy and Biafran separatism have been unconnected, it is worth keeping in mind the possibility that some southern politicians may be sponsoring moves to create tension and provoke violence against the ‘northern presidency’ (President Buhari is a northerner).<sup>2</sup> If this is so, it is possible that a marriage of convenience could be fashioned, for some time at least, between the Niger Delta militants and Biafran separatists.

---

<sup>2</sup> Analysts suspect that some northern politicians helped to sustain the Boko Haram insurgency against former president Goodluck Jonathan, a southerner, until he left office in March 2015.

7. The extent and duration of the current violence will depend in part on whether the federal government accedes to demands not to arrest 'Tompson' and to release Nnamdi Kanu. Currently, the federal government appears minded not to back down on either issue, but this could of course change. President Buhari's government will be very aware of political realities and sensitivities in southern Nigeria, and of the hazards of potentially facing two insurgencies – one in the North and one in the South – at the same time.

**Terra Firma Risk Management**  
**February 2016**



**PREVENTION | PREPAREDNESS | RESPONSE | RECOVERY**

**UK 24/7 +44 (0) 207 127 0001 US 24/7 +1-305-677-7574**  
**E [info@terrafirma-rm.com](mailto:info@terrafirma-rm.com)**  
**[www.terrafirma-rm.com](http://www.terrafirma-rm.com)**