Combating Boko Haram Insurgency: The Role of Nigerian Military

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on evaluating Nigeria's counterinsurgency strategies against the Boko Haram insurgency. It employed a historical research design and used content analysis to interpret the data. The study involved a thorough review of existing literature and documents to extract relevant information. The data were analyzed using trend analysis methods. Findings showed that Nigeria's military response to Boko Haram has been dynamic and multi-pronged, involving a combination of direct military engagements, institutional reforms, regional partnerships, and community-based strategies. Since the insurgency's onset in 2009, the government has adopted a comprehensive approach, integrating military, legal, socio-economic, and diplomatic tools to address the crisis, recognizing that lasting solutions require more than just force. However, ongoing obstacles such as poor logistics and outdated military hardware have impeded progress. Intelligence lapses have also worsened the security situation, particularly in areas heavily affected by the insurgency. The study concluded that overcoming Boko Haram necessitates strong political commitment, operational transparency, increased regional cooperation, and a citizen-focused strategy that emphasizes security, justice, and inclusive development. Achieving sustainable peace will require a holistic, long-term effort. Among its recommendations, the study urged the Nigerian government to invest in modern military assets, such as surveillance systems, armored vehicles, and communication devices, and to establish efficient logistics and supply chains to better support troops on the front lines.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, security is viewed as the government's capacity to safeguard its territory from internal uprisings and external threats by ensuring the military is adequately equipped for intelligence gathering, confidentiality, and protecting vital resources and rights essential to the state's survival (Hassan, 2014). In this regard, Modu et al. (2018) emphasized that good governance is foundational to national security, given that it is participatory, consensus-driven, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, fair, and inclusive. These qualities are crucial in supporting the military's efforts to uphold national security. The degree of a country's political and economic stability largely influences the effectiveness of its national security framework (Ayuk, 2013; Ike, 2018).

In Nigeria, security challenges, stemming from religious extremism (notably Boko Haram), the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), and widespread economic instability, have eroded public welfare. Weak institutions, which should respond swiftly to socio-economic and political crises, often fail to do so (Duke, 2019). This indicates a systemic breakdown that undermines the military's ability to maintain national security effectively. Since the 1970s, following the aftermath of the civil war, Nigeria has seen a rise in violent crimes and killings. While the country has previously faced notorious criminals like Oyenusi, Anini, and Shina Rambo, the current wave of crime is marked by greater intensity, boldness, and sophistication due to a blend of political, economic, and social pressures (Orhero & Okolie, 2023).

The military remains the primary guardian of national security and a symbol of unity. Recognizing its importance, Nigeria's constitutions, spanning from 1960 to 1999, have mandated the establishment of the Armed Forces. Their duties include defending against external threats, maintaining territorial integrity, and supporting civil authorities, when necessary, as defined by Section 217. Furthermore, Article 3, which outlines Military Assistance to Civil Authority (MACA), provides the legal basis for military involvement in internal security operations (ISOPs) in response to Nigeria's evolving security challenges (Okoli & Orinya, 2013).

In recent years, Nigeria has experienced a surge in insecurity, which has become a pressing national concern. This has led the Senate to advocate for increased funding for the defense and security sectors to combat insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and other crimes. The government has taken several steps to address these issues, including the enactment of the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2011, the installation of CCTV systems in strategic locations, and increased surveillance, especially in the Northeast and along key routes such as the Abuja–Kaduna Road (Angbulu, 2021). Efforts also include equipping security agencies with more effective tools and utilizing the media to disseminate security tips aimed at deterring criminal activities. Nevertheless, insecurity remains a major problem. While President Buhari once claimed that Boko Haram had been "technically" defeated, he later acknowledged the government's inability to completely end the insurgency.

This persistent insecurity is largely attributed to the nation's leadership. Despite government officials becoming targets and frequent kidnappings by desperate youths, decisive actions are lacking. Lives and properties continue to be lost. Churches, mosques, schools, and offices are not exempt from attacks. Although Nigerian governments have consistently increased defense spending to address this, insecurity persists (Ajike, 2015; Muhammad & Salleh, 2024). Notably, the defense budget rose from ₦921.91 billion in 2012 to ₦1.055 trillion in 2013 (Ewa, 2018). Analysts suggest these large allocations aim to reassure the global community of Nigeria's commitment to peace and economic stability. Given the rising violence, from Boko Haram to armed robbery, kidnapping, ritual killings, and ethnic conflicts, this study examines the Nigerian military's role in combating the Boko Haram insurgency.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Since 2003, Nigeria has faced persistent security challenges, notably the insurgency by Boko Haram and violent attacks by armed herdsmen, particularly in the North-East and across the country (Agbu et al., 2020). These groups have operated with impunity, leaving a trail of death, destruction, and societal trauma. Their actions have caused significant social, political, and economic disruptions not only for their immediate victims but also for the broader Northern region and Nigeria as a whole.

Boko Haram's violent campaign first gained public attention in December 2003 in Yobe State. Around that time, violent herdsmen attacks also began escalating across Nigeria. Boko Haram, initially known as the 'Nigerian Taliban', established camps in Kanama and near Gaidam (Enor et al., 2019). Their confrontations with local communities and security personnel intensified, especially after the arrest of two members, leading to violent reprisals. Between December 21, 2003, and January 1, 2004, the group attacked police stations, government

buildings, and communities in several local government areas of Yobe State. Thousands have died, and millions have been displaced, particularly in the North-East. Despite efforts, the government has failed to contain the group, which now controls parts of some states and even flies its flag (Ayitogo, 2021). Boko Haram poses a grave threat to lives and property in the northeast, evolving into a nightmare not only for Nigerians but also for the international community. The group's repeated attacks undermine the government's constitutional duty to protect citizens. In 2009, Nigeria was ranked among the world's 15 most vulnerable nations. In response, the government established a Joint Task Force (JTF) comprising personnel from the armed forces and the police. Still, despite support from the Multinational Joint Task Force, including troops from Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, success has been limited (Gudaku & Twaki, 2019).

The conflict's roots lie in long-standing grievances fueled by poor governance, elite negligence, and extreme economic inequality. Boko Haram is a product of deep-seated extremist ideologies and the collapse of both formal and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. The insurgency is sustained by jobless youths, widespread fear and mistrust among northern communities, and the state's inability to assert control in the region. The failure to coordinate effectively with neighboring countries has allowed Boko Haram to cross borders freely, finding refuge and recruiting in parts of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Growing insecurity and increasing attacks in the southern parts of the country, including high-profile kidnappings, have weakened support for President Buhari, even among his traditional supporters, and cast doubt on the government's capacity to maintain national unity (Gudaku & Twaki, 2019).

Since the 1970s, especially after the end of military rule, Nigeria has grappled with rising insecurity from crimes such as armed robbery, assassination, ethno-religious violence, kidnapping, and terrorism. According to Adebayo (2011), these problems have made Nigeria one of the least safe countries to visit or invest in, placing it alongside war-torn nations like Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq. Recent threats such as Boko Haram, Niger Delta militants, and IPOB (referred to by some as the Neo-Biafrans) have intensified the national security crisis (Duke, 2019). Ajike (2015) highlighted three major crises since 1970: persistent religious violence in the North, militancy in the Niger Delta, and the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East. These three crises form the core of this study. Security is the fundamental duty of any government; failure to provide it implies a loss of legitimacy. Boko Haram's toll on lives and property has been staggering. In 2011 alone, Nigeria ranked second in Africa and fifth globally for terrorist-related deaths (Zenn, 2014). By 2012, Boko Haram had launched 136 attacks targeting police, churches, and mosques. Their operations escalated further in 2013, culminating in the 2014 abduction of over 200 schoolgirls in Chibok and an assassination attempt on General Muhammadu Buhari. Terrorism, militancy, and crime threaten Nigeria's security, democracy, and development. These activities destroy infrastructure, displace communities, and deepen poverty. Easy access to arms has worsened the crisis, denying citizens a peaceful environment for personal and national growth (Falode, 2016; Adagbabiri & Okolie, 2020).

Security threats are not unique to Nigeria and have existed globally for centuries. Despite the constitutional role of the armed forces in supporting internal security, violence continues

to rise. The seeming inability of the military to quell these threats raises questions about its capacity, structure, and strategic direction (Ewa, 2018). Since independence, various challenges have tested the safety of Nigerian lives and the nation's political stability. Among them, the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70) stands out as a major security crisis. Efforts to counter insurgency using laws and military intervention have met with limited success due to poor understanding of the conflict, environmental constraints, political and military corruption, and inadequate funding. This study investigates the effectiveness of the Nigerian military's counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram in the North-East.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to assess the Nigerian military's counterinsurgency efforts against the Boko Haram insurgency. The specific objectives were to:

a. Examine the Nigerian military's role in curbing Boko Haram insurgency.
b. Interrogate the Nigerian government's approach to curbing Boko Haram insurgency.
c. Explore factors militating against strategies adopted by the Nigerian armed forces in curbing Boko Haram insurgency.
d. Examine the military intelligence failure and Nigeria's security challenges.

1.3. Research Questions

The research questions below are guided by this study:

a. What role does the Nigerian military play in curbing Boko Haram insurgency?
b. What approach did the Nigerian government adopt in curbing Boko Haram insurgency?
c. What factors militate against strategies adopted by Nigerian armed forces in curbing Boko Haram insurgency?
d. Does the military intelligence failure increase the security threat to Nigerians?

2. Method

This study employed a historical research design as its methodological approach. Historical research involves describing and analyzing past events to gain a deeper understanding of current conditions and anticipate potential future implications. The primary aim of this design is to collect, verify, and interpret historical data to establish facts that either support or refute a hypothesis. It utilizes a combination of primary sources, including diaries, government documents, archival records, maps, photographs, and audiovisual materials, as well as credible secondary sources. Ensuring the accuracy and reliability of these sources is crucial to minimizing limitations (Sanibi, 2011). Being largely theoretical, the study primarily relied on secondary data obtained from academic journals, books, and reputable websites. These materials were critically reviewed and assessed in alignment with the study's objectives. This method was chosen to satisfy the researcher's interest in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The study focused on the Nigerian Armed Forces, comprising the Army, Navy, and Air Force. It relied on secondary data collection, drawing relevant information from journals, conference proceedings, government publications, textbooks, and magazines. This approach enabled the researchers to evaluate how the Nigerian military and government have responded to the Boko Haram insurgency. The study also employed descriptive and content analysis techniques to assess the military's counterinsurgency strategies against Boko Haram.

3. Results from Literature

3.1. What Role does the Nigerian Military Play in curbing Boko Haram insurgency?

Since the emergence of Boko Haram in 2009, the Nigerian military has played a central role in confronting the insurgency. This complex conflict, mainly concentrated in Nigeria's northeast, has led to over 35,000 deaths and displaced more than 2 million individuals. The military's response has involved a combination of combat operations, organizational reforms, regional alliances, and civil engagement efforts, all of which continue to adapt in response to the insurgency's changing nature.

3.1.1. Strategic Military Operations

The Nigerian military has ramped up its counterinsurgency campaigns. For instance, during operations carried out in Borno State from January 7 to 13, 2025, troops killed 76 insurgents, arrested 72 suspects, and rescued eight hostages (AP News, 2025). These missions typically feature joint air and ground assaults guided by real-time intelligence, drone monitoring, and the deployment of special forces. A notable innovation was the creation of "super camps", fortified mobile bases designed to reduce troop vulnerability, streamline logistics, and enhance the speed of both offensive and defensive actions. This model has strengthened territorial control and enabled more efficient responses to insurgent activities.

3.1.2. Structural Reforms and Tactical Advances

To better address the changing threat environment, the Nigerian military has implemented various internal reforms. The formation of the Theatre Command and 8 Task Division has centralized command and enhanced coordination among military units. In addition, Mobile Strike Teams have been introduced for rapid, high-impact missions in unstable regions. The military also opened a new Theatre Training School in Maiduguri in August 2024 and improved existing training facilities (Vanguard, 2024). These institutions focus on specialized instruction in asymmetric warfare, human rights practices, and community engagement. Troops are trained in adaptability, tech utilization, and disciplined operations to meet the demands of modern counterinsurgency.

3.1.3. Regional and International Cooperation

Understanding the cross-border nature of Boko Haram's activities, Nigeria has remained active in the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), working with troops from Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. This regional coalition has helped reclaim territories and disrupt supply routes. However, Niger's withdrawal from the MNJTF in April 2025, due to a military coup, raised concerns about regional cohesion (The Guardian, 2025). Still, a bilateral security agreement signed between Nigeria and Niger in August 2024 ensures continued joint operations and intelligence exchange (Daily Post Nigeria, 2024). Nigeria also benefits from international support, with countries such as the U.S., U.K., and France providing training, intelligence, and logistics. The U.S., in particular, supplied Super Tucano aircraft, enhancing Nigeria's aerial combat and surveillance capabilities.

3.1.4. Community Engagement and Civil-Military Relations

Successful counterinsurgency relies heavily on public cooperation and trust. Acknowledging this, the Nigerian military has strengthened its relationship with local communities by incorporating the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) into its operations. These community groups provide valuable intelligence and support local defense. The military also launched humanitarian projects, including medical outreach, the reconstruction of schools and markets, and infrastructure development in affected areas. These initiatives aim to win local support and reduce the influence of insurgent propaganda. Between July and December 2024, around 129,417 Boko Haram fighters and their families surrendered, an outcome attributed to military pressure and reintegration efforts (Sahara Reporters, 2024; Daily Post Nigeria, 2024).

Despite progress, the military's approach has faced criticism. A heavy dependence on combat tactics has sometimes overshadowed non-military solutions, such as economic empowerment and psychological operations. Accusations of human rights violations, such as arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings, have damaged the military's public image and provided fodder for insurgent narratives. Furthermore, internal problems, including corruption, poor logistics, and alleged collusion with insurgents, have undermined effectiveness. Reports of misappropriated arms and embezzled military funds continue to raise doubts about the military's credibility (Adesote & Akande, 2023).

3.2. What Approach Did the Nigerian Government Adopt in Curbing Boko Haram Insurgency?

The Nigerian government has implemented a broad and integrated strategy to tackle the Boko Haram insurgency, a violent extremist group that has significantly threatened national security and regional peace for over a decade. This strategy combines military action with legal instruments, socio-economic reforms, and regional cooperation. Its objective is not only to eliminate the immediate danger posed by Boko Haram but also to confront the deeper causes of radicalization and extremist recruitment. The strategy includes the following components:

3.2.1. Military and Security Measures

Military operations form a core part of Nigeria's approach to countering Boko Haram.

a. **Joint Task Force (JTF):** Created in 2003 to counter growing violence in the northeast, this force, comprising the military, police, and intelligence units, has been central to operations like search-and-seizure missions and confrontations with insurgents in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa.
b. **Super Camp Strategy:** Introduced in 2019, this model involved consolidating troops into well-defended, centrally located bases capable of rapid deployment. It was designed to improve mobility and reduce susceptibility to ambushes (Bodunde & Balogun, 2019).
c. **Use of Private Military Companies (PMCs):** To enhance its operational capacity, Nigeria hired foreign military contractors such as STTEP, a South African firm, which provided advanced training and tactical support to Nigerian forces (Bodunde & Balogun, 2019).
d. **Recent Progress:** Between July and December 2024, coordinated military campaigns led to significant victories, including the surrender of more than 129,000 insurgents and their family members, marking a crucial step in dismantling Boko Haram's structure (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025).

3.2.2. Legal and Policy Instruments

Acknowledging that force alone cannot end terrorism, Nigeria has also pursued legal reforms to support its anti-insurgency efforts.

a. **Terrorism Prevention Act (2013):** This act legally defines terrorism, establishes procedures for prosecution, and empowers authorities to freeze assets, monitor communications, and detain suspects within legal parameters (Adesote & Akande, 2023).

b. **National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAPPCVE):** This framework promotes non-violent methods, including deradicalization programs, media outreach, and community-level engagement to prevent extremism and reintegrate ex-combatants (Bodunde & Balogun, 2019; Okolie et al., 2019).

3.2.3. Socio-Economic Programs

To address the socio-economic conditions that drive insurgency, especially poverty and youth unemployment in the Northeast, the government has initiated several development schemes (Duke, 2019):

a. **Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT):** Direct financial support to vulnerable households, tied to conditions like school attendance and health services.

b. **Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP):** Provides microloans to small business owners, particularly women and young people, to foster self-sufficiency.

c. **Home-Grown School Feeding Programme:** Focuses on improving children's nutrition and encouraging school attendance, particularly in impoverished and displaced communities (Adesote & Akande, 2023).

d. **Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF):** A local vigilante group made up of volunteers who assist security agencies with intelligence gathering and surveillance. Their deep knowledge of the terrain has significantly enhanced military effectiveness (Bodunde & Balogun, 2019).

3.2.4. Regional and International Partnerships

Given Boko Haram's transnational operations, Nigeria has prioritized cross-border and global cooperation.

a. **Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF):** Comprising forces from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, the MNJTF has been instrumental in joint operations and border security enforcement (Imoh-Itah et al., 2016). The recent exit of Niger from the coalition in April 2025, however, has sparked concerns about the force's cohesion.

b. **Global Support:** International allies such as the United States, United Kingdom, and France have aided Nigeria with military training, intelligence, surveillance tools, and logistics. These partnerships have significantly boosted Nigeria's ability to conduct targeted operations and monitor insurgent activity (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025).

3.3. What Factors Militate against Strategies Adopted by Nigerian Armed Forces in Boko Haram Insurgency?

Although the Nigerian government has adopted a multifaceted strategy, encompassing military, legal, socio-economic, and regional dimensions, to tackle the Boko Haram insurgency, the overall effectiveness of these efforts has been greatly diminished by persistent and deep-rooted challenges. These obstacles range from internal systemic issues to broader

socio-political factors that limit the effectiveness and public trust in the Nigerian Armed Forces. Key challenges include:

3.3.1. Insufficient Logistics and Equipment

A major barrier to military success against Boko Haram is the lack of modern and sufficient logistical support. Despite initiatives like the Joint Task Force (JTF) and the Super Camp strategy, frontline personnel often operate without adequate weaponry, protective equipment, vehicles, and communication tools. These shortages hinder rapid and effective responses, especially in the difficult terrain of northeastern Nigeria. The absence of advanced weaponry and dependable intelligence systems reduces the operational readiness of Nigerian forces (Onuoha, 2014).

3.3.2. Corruption and Financial Mismanagement

Corruption within the defense sector and procurement agencies has seriously compromised the fight against insurgency. Misuse of military funds, inflated procurement contracts, and diversion of operational resources have led to under-equipped and demotivated troops. This corruption undermines internal cohesion and erodes public confidence in the military's capacity to secure the country. The corrupt practices weaken the institutions responsible for national defense and sabotage effective counterterrorism efforts (Adekeye, 2015).

3.3.3. Strained Civil-Military Relations

Successful counterinsurgency depends on strong cooperation between the military and civilian populations. In Nigeria, this relationship has been damaged by reports of human rights violations, indiscriminate arrests, and excessive force by military personnel. Such actions alienate communities, making them less inclined to cooperate or provide intelligence (Adesote & Akande, 2023). Aghedo & Osumah (2014) emphasize that this mistrust hampers intelligence gathering, thereby granting insurgents greater freedom to operate.

3.3.4. Weak Intelligence and Surveillance Capabilities

The Nigerian military struggles with limited intelligence and surveillance capacity. The absence of real-time data from satellites, drones, and well-trained intelligence agents restricts the military's ability to anticipate and counter insurgent activities. This often allows Boko Haram to execute attacks unnoticed and retreat before any response can be mounted (Adesote & Akande, 2023).

3.3.5. Uncontrolled Border Movements

Boko Haram exploits Nigeria's porous borders with Chad, Niger, and Cameroon to escape military pressure and regroup. While the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) aims to improve regional security cooperation, conflicting national agendas and periodic diplomatic tensions among member states have obstructed smooth cross-border collaboration (Duke, 2019). Imoh-Itah et al. (2016) note that the insurgents' ability to move across borders has consistently disrupted Nigerian military operations, underscoring the need for stronger regional integration.

3.3.6. Deep-Rooted Ideological Indoctrination

Boko Haram's persistence is also linked to strong ideological and religious indoctrination. Many of its fighters are deeply radicalized and committed to extremist beliefs that glorify violence and martyrdom. This ideological conviction makes the group resistant to military defeat and complicates the reintegration of defectors (Adesote & Akande, 2023). Umar (2013) stresses the importance of countering these extremist narratives, arguing that military force alone cannot eliminate the ideological appeal that sustains the insurgency.

3.3.7. Internal Disunity and Low Troop Morale

Internal divisions, poor welfare conditions, and low morale have further weakened the Nigerian military's performance. Delays in salary payments, lack of medical care, and inadequate support for wounded personnel contribute to widespread dissatisfaction among soldiers. These issues are made worse by inconsistent deployment policies and weak leadership, affecting troops' motivation and mental health (Muhammad & Salleh, 2024). Poor morale contributes to desertions, weakens discipline, and reduces overall operational effectiveness.

3.4. Does the Military Intelligence Failure Increase Security Threat to Nigerians?

Military intelligence plays a vital role in national defense, especially in combating asymmetrical threats such as the insurgency posed by Boko Haram and other extremist groups in Nigeria. When intelligence operations fail, it severely weakens the military's ability to detect threats, prevent attacks, and respond efficiently to emergencies. In Nigeria, repeated intelligence failures have significantly contributed to ongoing insecurity, particularly in the North-East. The following points highlight how these failures have impacted national security:

3.4.1. Delayed Reaction to Insurgent Attacks

One major effect of poor intelligence is the military's inability to anticipate or quickly counter insurgent attacks. Accurate and timely intelligence is crucial for early threat detection, strategic troop deployment, and the protection of civilians. However, Boko Haram has frequently executed deadly, coordinated assaults that have caught the military off guard due to outdated or inadequate intelligence. The 2015 Baga massacre, which led to the deaths of hundreds, illustrates how delayed responses can result in devastating consequences (Muhammad & Salleh, 2024). This shortfall is largely due to limited situational awareness and inefficient information processing within military intelligence systems. Aghedo & Osumah (2014) argue that such failures have allowed insurgents to outsmart security forces, causing high casualties and mass displacement.

3.4.2. Greater Civilian Exposure to Danger

The absence of effective intelligence networks has left many communities open to insurgent violence. Without robust systems to detect threats and share information between security agencies and locals, extremists can easily infiltrate villages, abduct residents, and destroy property. This exposure not only endangers lives but also erodes public confidence in government protection (Muhammad & Salleh, 2024). Aghedo & Osumah (2014) note that the military's weak intelligence capacity has left communities unprotected, leading to repeated

attacks and diminishing trust in the state. As a result, many civilians turn to local militias or vigilante groups for protection, which can introduce new security complications.

3.4.3. Compromise of Security Institutions

Another dangerous outcome of intelligence weakness is the infiltration of government and security structures by insurgents or their sympathizers. A lack of strong counterintelligence systems enables Boko Haram to gather sensitive information, interfere with operations, and breach military security. This severely limits the military's ability to conduct secret missions or maintain operational integrity. Insufficient vetting and surveillance have allowed extremists to embed themselves within security agencies, undermining efforts to combat terrorism and demoralizing troops.

3.4.4. Disjointed Intelligence Efforts Across Agencies

Military intelligence lapses are exacerbated by poor coordination among various security agencies. Rivalries and a lack of communication between the military, police, DSS, and other agencies often result in duplication of effort or a failure to share vital information. These gaps weaken Nigeria's overall counterinsurgency response. According to Chukwuma (2017), the absence of a unified intelligence-sharing system creates vulnerabilities that insurgents exploit by targeting areas with minimal security presence. Coordinated, cross-agency efforts are essential in counterterrorism, especially against elusive groups like Boko Haram.

3.4.5. Weakness in Counter-Radicalization Efforts

In addition to battlefield challenges, intelligence failures hinder Nigeria's broader efforts to prevent extremism and radicalization. Intelligence agencies must be equipped to identify areas at risk of radicalization, monitor extremist messages, and dismantle recruitment networks. However, these goals remain out of reach due to a shortage of personnel, inadequate human intelligence, and poor surveillance, especially in remote areas (Ike, 2018). Umar (2013) warns that failure to understand and respond to Boko Haram's ideological appeal allows the group to continue recruiting and maintaining influence over radicalized individuals. Effective intelligence is essential for detecting early signs of extremism and supporting deradicalization initiatives.

3.4.6. Poor Monitoring of Reintegration Programs

Failures in intelligence also impact the monitoring of former fighters who have undergone deradicalization or surrendered. Many of these individuals are not adequately tracked afterward, allowing some to return to insurgent activities, assist terror networks, or influence others (Falode, 2016). The lack of effective post-program surveillance has led to cases of re-radicalization, further sustaining the cycle of violence. These issues highlight the need for intelligence involvement throughout the entire counterinsurgency process, including rehabilitation, reintegration, and community rebuilding, to prevent a resurgence of extremism.

3.5. Discussion

This study, which examined Nigeria's military counterinsurgency efforts against Boko Haram, provided valuable insights based on the analysis of its objectives and research questions. Regarding the first objective, experts generally agree that Nigeria's military

approach to combating Boko Haram has been multifaceted and constantly adapting. Since Boko Haram emerged in 2009, the military has employed various strategies, including direct combat operations, structural reforms, regional cooperation, and local engagement. However, despite these efforts, the insurgency continues due to persistent institutional inefficiencies and complex socio-political issues. The findings of this study align with reports from The Guardian Nigeria (2025), which highlighted intensified military operations in 2025, reflecting a renewed commitment to addressing the insurgency. A significant example is a successful operation in Borno State in January 2025, which resulted in the elimination of 76 insurgents and the capture of 72 others. This operation, supported by real-time intelligence, drone surveillance, and elite troops, showcased the military's ability to adapt to the unique challenges of asymmetric warfare. The "super camp" strategy further enhanced troop mobility, protection, and response times, thereby reducing vulnerability to ambushes.

Supporting this, Vanguard (2024) emphasized that organizational reforms have enhanced operational efficiency. The creation of the Theatre Command and the 8th Task Division helped centralize operations and improve coordination among military branches. The establishment of training centers, such as the Theatre Training School in Maiduguri, highlights the military's focus on preparing personnel for asymmetric warfare through specialized training. Regionally, Nigeria's participation in the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was crucial in addressing Boko Haram's transnational nature (The Guardian, 2025). Despite Niger's withdrawal from the MNJTF in April 2025, a bilateral agreement signed in August 2024 ensured continued cooperation in border operations and intelligence sharing (Daily Post Nigeria, 2024). International support from countries such as the U.S., U.K., and France has further bolstered Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts through training, intelligence sharing, and aerial assets, like the Super Tucano aircraft.

Falode (2016) emphasized that community engagement is an essential part of the military's broader strategy. The inclusion of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) has improved local intelligence networks and enhanced surveillance. Civil-military initiatives, such as healthcare services, school rebuilding, and market restoration, have strengthened ties between civilians and security forces, contributing to the surrender of over 129,000 Boko Haram combatants and their families between July and December 2024 (Sahara Reporters, 2024; Daily Post Nigeria, 2024). However, the military's approach still faces limitations, particularly the over-reliance on kinetic measures and the neglect of broader non-military strategies, such as socio-economic development and psychological operations. Additionally, persistent human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings and unlawful detentions, have undermined public trust, providing insurgents with valuable propaganda.

Internal institutional problems, such as corruption, resource mismanagement, and potential collusion with insurgents, continue to erode the military's credibility. These issues, including the diversion of military funds and poor logistical coordination, have hindered the success of counterinsurgency campaigns, highlighting the need for comprehensive institutional reform to enhance transparency and accountability (Duke, 2019). The study's second objective examined the Nigerian government's strategies for combating Boko Haram. The findings revealed that the government has implemented a comprehensive, multidimensional approach,

integrating military, legal, socio-economic, and diplomatic measures. This approach acknowledges that the insurgency cannot be solved solely through military force but requires long-term solutions to address both the symptoms and root causes of violent extremism.

This finding supports the work of Bodunde and Balogun (2019), who highlighted the importance of military and security operations in Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts. Since the creation of the Joint Task Force (JTF), which includes military, police, and intelligence agencies, the government has conducted aggressive operations in the northeast, targeting insurgent strongholds and improving surveillance. The introduction of the "Super Camp" strategy in 2019, which involved consolidating troops into fortified, mobile bases, significantly enhanced mobility and reduced vulnerability to ambushes. Additionally, private military companies like STTEP have provided tactical training and support, boosting Nigeria's military capabilities. Between July and December 2024, these intensified efforts led to the surrender of over 129,000 Boko Haram fighters and their families, marking a significant blow to the insurgent network (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025).

Furthermore, the Nigerian government has developed legal and policy frameworks to support its counterinsurgency strategy. The Anti-Terrorism Act of 2013 provides a legal foundation for prosecuting terrorist activities, empowering law enforcement to intercept communications, detain suspects, and disrupt financial networks. The National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAPPCVE) focuses on prevention and rehabilitation rather than punishment. Through deradicalization programs, media campaigns, and reintegration efforts, the NAPPCVE aims to reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies, particularly among vulnerable populations. Socio-economic development has become a critical component of Nigeria's counterinsurgency strategy. Recognizing that poverty, youth unemployment, and illiteracy contribute to radicalization, the government has launched several initiatives to uplift communities in the northeast. Programs such as Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT), the Government Enterprises and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), and the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme aim to enhance economic resilience, improve access to education, and foster long-term stability (Duke, 2019). Additionally, the CJTF, a locally organized vigilante group, has enhanced intelligence gathering and supported military operations by utilizing local knowledge and community trust (Bassey, 2011; Falode, 2016).

Imoh-Itah et al. (2016) argue that Nigeria's participation in the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is essential to addressing the transnational nature of the Boko Haram threat. The MNJTF, which includes forces from Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Benin, has facilitated coordinated operations and intelligence sharing across the Lake Chad Basin. Despite challenges, such as Niger's withdrawal from the MNJTF in 2025, bilateral agreements like the security pact between Nigeria and Niger, signed in August 2024, demonstrate an ongoing commitment to regional cooperation (The Guardian Nigeria, 2025). International support from countries like the U.S., U.K., and France has further strengthened Nigeria's counterinsurgency capacity through military training, surveillance technology, and logistical support.

The study's third objective revealed that although the Nigerian Armed Forces have implemented various strategic interventions, several factors continue to undermine the effectiveness of these efforts. These challenges stem from internal institutional weaknesses and

broader regional and ideological issues that hinder military success. One of the most pressing concerns is inadequate logistics and equipment. Despite improvements such as the Super Camp strategy and coordinated JTF operations, many frontline units still lack modern weapons, armored vehicles, and advanced communication tools. This logistical gap limits the military's ability to respond swiftly and effectively, particularly in the challenging terrain of Nigeria's northeastern states. Onuoha (2014) highlights that without advanced resources, the military struggles to combat a highly mobile and adaptive insurgency. Corruption within the defense sector exacerbates this issue, as mismanagement and embezzlement of funds meant for military operations result in poorly equipped and demoralized troops. Adekeye (2015) further asserts that systemic corruption depletes essential resources for counterinsurgency programs, eroding public trust in the military's ability to secure the nation. These issues undermine institutional effectiveness and contribute to operational failures that insurgents can exploit.

Civil-military relations remain a significant obstacle to effective counterinsurgency. Allegations of arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial killings, and other human rights abuses have strained relations between the military and local communities. Aghedo & Osumah (2014) note that these abuses hinder civilian cooperation and impede intelligence sharing, which is critical for identifying insurgent movements. When civilians feel alienated, insurgents are more likely to find refuge and support among them. Additionally, limited intelligence gathering and surveillance capacity within Nigeria's security framework hinder the military's ability to anticipate and respond to attacks effectively. Ezeoha (2018) explains that intelligence failures, coupled with inter-agency rivalries and weak coordination, lead to delayed responses and operational setbacks.

As this study's findings indicate, the cross-border mobility of Boko Haram insurgents remains a significant challenge. Nigeria's porous borders with Cameroon, Niger, and Chad allow insurgents to evade military pressure and regroup across borders. The MNJTF was established to enhance regional cooperation, but issues like inconsistent political will, logistical constraints, and Niger's recent withdrawal in 2025 have reduced its effectiveness (Duke, 2019). These regional dynamics provide Boko Haram with operational sanctuaries outside Nigeria's reach (Aghedo, 2015). Umar (2013) further stresses that ideological and religious indoctrination is a core factor in Boko Haram's resilience. The group's narrative, centered on religious duty and martyrdom, makes it difficult to counter or rehabilitate adherents through conventional military means. He advocates for counter-narratives and theological engagement to address the ideological roots of extremism, as military suppression alone does not tackle the motivations driving recruitment and loyalty. Finally, internal divisions and low morale within the Nigerian military further impede operational success. Delays in payments, inadequate medical care, and a lack of support for injured soldiers contribute to low troop motivation and discipline. Low morale leads to desertion, reduced combat effectiveness, and a lack of cohesion among units, all of which undermine long-term counterinsurgency efforts.

The study's fourth objective revealed that military intelligence failures significantly amplify security risks in regions affected by insurgency. Intelligence is critical to effective counterinsurgency operations, and its failure compromises the military's ability to predict, prevent, and respond to threats, further exacerbating national insecurity. One immediate

consequence of intelligence failures is delayed responses to imminent threats. For instance, the Baga massacre in 2015 occurred due to the military's lack of real-time intelligence and slow dissemination of information. Such lapses reflect a lack of situational awareness and inadequate communication between military units. Aghedo & Osumah (2014) argue that intelligence failures consistently allow Boko Haram to surprise and outmaneuver security forces, leading to a heavy emphasis that, without a solid intelligence infrastructure, local communities often perceive the state as unable to ensure their safety, which can lead them to form self-defense militias (Modu et al., 2018; Orhero & Okolie, 2023). While these militias might offer temporary protection, they can also escalate violence and contribute to lawlessness. Intelligence failures also provide opportunities for insurgents to infiltrate security forces. Without effective counterintelligence systems, Boko Haram operatives can access sensitive information, sabotage operations, and compromise key missions.

The lack of proper vetting and internal monitoring has enabled adversarial elements to infiltrate security agencies, thereby heightening the risk to both military personnel and civilians. This not only jeopardizes military operations but also erodes morale within the forces. A critical concern is the lack of coordination between Nigeria's security agencies. Rivalries and fragmentation among the military, police, DSS, and other intelligence agencies lead to poor information sharing and operational inefficiencies. Chukwuma (2017) concurs, identifying the lack of a centralized intelligence-sharing platform as a significant barrier to a unified security response. This fragmented approach allows insurgents to exploit intelligence gaps and strike vulnerable points in the national defense with minimal resistance.

The military intelligence failures undermine Nigeria's broader counter-radicalization and preventive strategies. Without adequate human intelligence and technological surveillance in high-risk areas, security forces cannot detect early signs of radicalization or disrupt extremist recruitment networks. Umar (2013) further emphasizes that intelligence agencies must comprehend the ideological appeal of groups like Boko Haram to counter their influence effectively. The current failure to do so enables these groups to maintain a steady stream of recruits and extend their ideological reach. These challenges also extend into post-conflict scenarios. Weaknesses in intelligence have hindered the monitoring of former combatants, some of whom have returned to extremist activities. The lack of proper tracking of these individuals has led to re-radicalization, perpetuating the cycle of violence. This underscores the need to integrate intelligence systems not only into military operations but also into deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs.

4. Conclusion

The Boko Haram insurgency has emerged as one of the most significant threats to Nigeria's internal security, national unity, and regional stability over the past decade. This study examines the complex and multifaceted strategies employed by the Nigerian government, particularly through military action, to address this persistent threat. While the military has played a central role in weakening Boko Haram's operational capacity, the findings indicate that relying solely on military operations is insufficient for achieving long-term peace and stability. A comprehensive approach that combines military action with effective intelligence,

strong institutions, socio-economic development, and regional collaboration is essential for success.

One key military initiative has been the formation of the Joint Task Force (JTF) and the adoption of innovative strategies such as the Super Camp model. These approaches were designed to enhance military efficiency, protect personnel, and improve rapid deployment capabilities. With the support of private military contractors and international allies, these efforts have led to some short-term successes, including the elimination of insurgents and the surrender of fighters. However, these gains have not been enough to fully dismantle the group's influence, due in part to deep-rooted socio-political and ideological factors driving the insurgency in the North-East.

A major finding of the study is that military intelligence failures have undermined Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts. Repeated lapses in intelligence have caused delays in responses, increased civilian casualties, and, in some cases, allowed insurgent sympathizers to infiltrate military and security agencies. The lack of coordination and information sharing among agencies, including the military, police, and the Department of State Services (DSS), has created significant gaps in Nigeria's security structure. These institutional weaknesses have allowed Boko Haram to remain adaptable, mobile, and capable of launching attacks despite continued military pressure. Another important insight is the impact of internal military challenges, such as inadequate logistics, corruption in defense procurement, poor troop welfare, and low morale among soldiers. These issues not only hinder operational effectiveness but also undermine confidence in the military's ability to protect the population. The lack of trust and cooperation between the military and local communities, fueled by past human rights abuses, has further limited intelligence gathering and the effectiveness of community-driven security efforts.

Socio-economic factors also play a critical role in sustaining the insurgency. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and inadequate infrastructure in the North-East have created an environment conducive to recruitment and radicalization. Although initiatives like Conditional Cash Transfers, microfinance programs under GEEP, and school feeding schemes have been introduced to address these challenges, their impact remains limited. More inclusive and sustainable development programs are needed to address the underlying issues that drive individuals, particularly youth, toward violent extremism. Regionally, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is a crucial mechanism for collaborative security efforts across the Lake Chad Basin countries. However, political and logistical challenges have hindered their effectiveness. The recent withdrawal of Niger from the MNJTF underscores the fragility of regional security alliances and highlights the need for stronger diplomatic and defense cooperation among West African nations.

In conclusion, while the Nigerian military has played a vital role in confronting Boko Haram, the complexity of the insurgency requires more than just military force. A coordinated, holistic effort is needed to strengthen institutional capacity, reform security and intelligence operations, promote human rights, engage local communities, and invest in education, youth empowerment, and infrastructure development in the North-East. The fight against Boko

Haram should be framed not only as a security challenge, but also as a priority for governance and development. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

    a. The Nigerian government should prioritize the procurement and maintenance of modern military equipment, including surveillance technology, armored vehicles, and communication tools, and ensure reliable supply chains and logistical support for frontline troops.

    b. Security agencies should establish a centralized intelligence-sharing framework to improve collaboration among the Nigerian Armed Forces, Police, DSS, and other relevant agencies, reducing intelligence gaps and preventing infiltration.

    c. The Nigerian government should implement integrated counterterrorism policies that include legal reforms, economic development, counter-narratives, and rehabilitation programs, focusing on addressing the root causes of radicalization, particularly in the North-East.

    d. The Ministry of Defence should improve training, welfare packages, and psychological support for military personnel, which will enhance troop morale and professionalism, thereby improving operational performance and strengthening public trust in the military.

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