COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATIONS OF THE NIGERIAN MILITARY: WHY SO LONG?

Joel Ikechukwu Ojiakor[1] & Modupe Oluremi Albert

Abstract

This paper examines the origin and operations of insurgency groups especially Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria and the counter-insurgency operations of the Nigerian Military towards quelling the insurgency, their achievements, failures and why it has lasted so long without bringing it under control, rather, the insurgency is spreading to other parts of the country with social, security and economic implications, especially in Northern Nigeria. The conceptual and theoretical framework explored insurgency, counter-insurgency and social contract theory propounded by John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. Some of the findings include lack of political will, inadequate and outdated weapons, wrong approaches on; IPOB in Southeast, Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) and Boko Haram. Part of the recommendations include a change of tactics by the Nigerian Army by adopting non-kinetic measures, strong political will by our leaders to end the insurgency, elimination of corruption, etc.

Keywords: Insurgency, Boko Haram, Counter Insurgency, Operations, Nigerian Military.

Introduction

The activities of terrorists and insurgents have left the entire global landscape on tenterhooks. This corroborates a popular African adage which asserts that when the stone climbs up, the earthen pot becomes afraid. The nefarious activities of the insurgent groups have been a worrisome trend affecting world peace thereby making many places

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unsafe for peaceful co-existence, development, and good neighbourliness (Oji and Afolabi, 2022). The insurgent and terrorist groups include the Al-Shabab operating in Somalia, Kenya, and other East African States, Al-Qaeda in the Middle East and some European countries, Islamic State In Syria in the Middle East, Houthi rebels in Yemen, Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province spreading death and evil in Northern Nigeria and Lake Chad basin for two decades now.

For several decades, the African continent has largely remained violent-ridden on the political map. Indeed, to the outside world, civil disturbances, insurgence, guerrilla warfare, domestic rebellion and lately terrorism are the core features of the continent. No single internal factor has contributed more to the suffering of the civilian population among African states other than the scourge of civil conflicts within and between states (Ogundiya, 2010). The insecurity ravaging the African continent heightened as a result of the aftermath of the "Arab Spring", which culminated in the ousting and some cases, the death of former leaders.

The bloody exit of Col. Muammar Ghaddafi in 2011 gave rise to insurgency in Libya with the North African nation not having a stable or central government for over a decade now. Warlords like General Khalifa Haftar now hold sway in the beleaguered State despite efforts by the international community to bring negotiated peace without success. The UN-backed government forces under Prime Minister Fayez al-Serra have been battling these insurgent forces (The Nation, 2019). The instability, sorrows, tears, and bloodletting caused by these insurgents operating across West Africa especially Mali, Guinea, Burkina-Faso, etc seeking to expand their area of influence from the Sahel also gave room for Soldiers in Mali and Guinea to oust democratically elected governments in their respective countries in 2021 and 2022. One of the reasons is that Jihadists took the Malian Army unaware by slaying 10 soldiers on Easter day, April 21, 2019 (The Guardian, 2019).

Boko Haram was birthed in the North-Eastern Nigerian State of Borno in 2002 following a political disagreement between then Borno

State governor Ali Modu Sherrif, his former commissioner for Religious Affairs and spiritual adviser, Alhaji Buji Foi, and Boko Haram founder Mohammed Yusuf, who was later arrested by security agents and murdered in questionable circumstances (Iyekekpolo, 2016). Mohammed Yusuf's extra-judicial killing further radicalised the group which migrated to the border area of the State with Chad and Cameroon from where they launched their full-scale insurgency with Abubakar Shekau as the leader which has now spread to other parts of North East States, like Yobe, Bauchi and later North West States of Zamfara, Sokoto, Niger and most recently Kaduna State with the entrance of bandits, cattle rustlers and other terrorist groups who have now wreaked havoc on the country.

A splinter group emerged within the Boko Haram hierarchy following 'the ouster' of Abubakar Shekau faction by the Al-Banawi (son of Mohammed Yusuf) faction. This division gave birth to the entrance of ISWAP cum ISIL which further radicalised this terrorist group thereby bringing untold hardship to the citizenry with internally displaced people littered in the Northeast and other neighbouring States.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to underscore the reason behind the poor showing of the Nigerian Army in quelling the insurgency ignited by Boko Haram in 2002 which is now spreading like wildfire. Recall the exploits of the Nigerian military in ousting coupists and warlords in Liberia and Sierra Leone and also in bringing peace and tranquillity during international peace missions in Congo. Why is it taking too long to bring lasting peace to Northern Nigeria after over thirteen years since Nigerian military counter-insurgency operations commenced in that region?

Nevertheless, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the quest for a quick return of peace to the North East. Specifically, the study will look to achieve the following objectives:

i. To identify gaps in the Nigerian Army counter-insurgency strategies leading to a prolonged battle with insurgents.
ii. To examine ways through which Nigeria can engage its neighbouring countries towards a speedy resolution of the Boko Haram quagmire and enhance its national security.
iii. To explore efficient and effective means of handling radicalised individuals and groups.

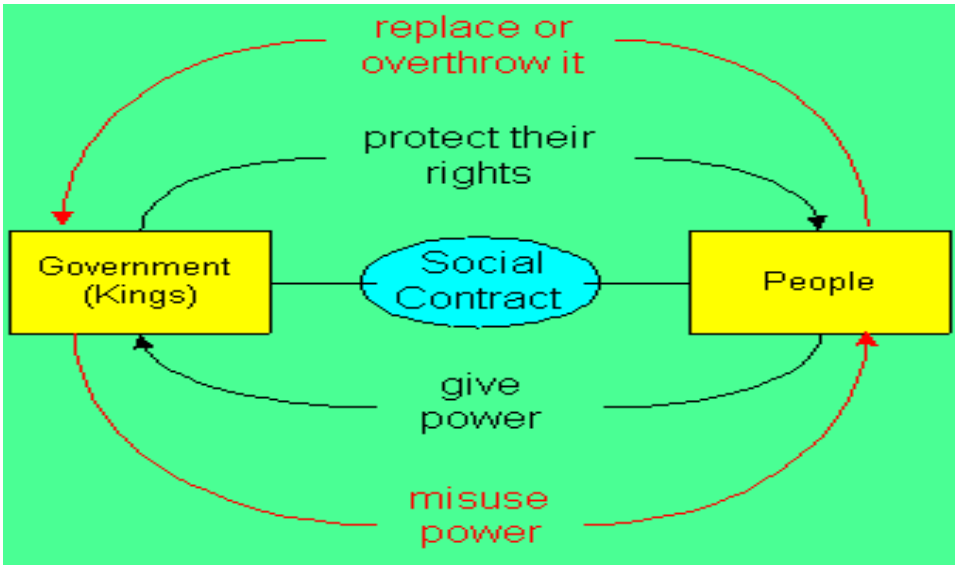
Research Question

i. What gaps in our counter-insurgency operations warranted the prolonged debacle?
ii. How will the State relate to and handle issues with radicalised elements and groups towards ensuring a peaceful, safe, and secure country?
iii. What strategy is required to ensure effective, efficient, and timely implementation of identified lapses?

Theoretical Framework

Social Contract Theory

Social Contract Theory is nearly as old as philosophy itself; it is of the view that a person's moral or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live. Also, the Social Contract theory states that the society or the state came into being by a contract that was made between the individual and the society or the contract that was made amongst the individual people to live together in peace according to the dictates of the laws guiding them (Sasan, 2016). The Social Contract according to John Locke in line with the above definition.



Source: blog.supplysideliberal.com

Social Contract Theory is important to justify the power that law enforcement can exert over the population as a whole (Evans and MacMillan, 2014). The power imbalance, held by law enforcement, is part of the social contract that society has agreed upon in exchange for security and order. Social Contract Theories as postulated by philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke are explained below.



Social Contract

Thomas Hobbes	John Locke
•Humans are naturally cruel, greedy and selfish. •To escape this "brutish" life people entered into a social contract. •Only a powerful government could ensure an orderly society. •Believed only an absolute monarchy could keep a society completely orderly.	•Humans are naturally reasonable, moral and good •Humans have natural rights: life liberty and property •People form governments to protect natural rights •Best government was one with limited power •If a government violates people's natural rights, people have the right to overthrow government

Salient features of the social contract … guora.com

Citizens of a state are in contract to be governed or ruled by some agreements (called law or Constitution) which are made for the smooth running of the state. Hence, the state performs her side of the agreement which includes the outsourcing and relinquishing of individual power in exchange for protection and provision for basic amenities like health care, education, security, etc, while in return the citizens abide and diligently obey the rules governing the state towards a peaceful, secured, and happy environment (Olssen, 2021). Perhaps the government cannot sincerely provide these amenities and keep their part of the bargain that gave rise to the Boko Haram insurgency and is also fuelling and helping the insurgents to enlist more members to their ranks despite the counter-insurgency operations of the Nigerian Army in the last few 13years.

Review of Related Literature

The study will begin the review of related literature by conceptualising key themes. These themes are as follows:

Insurgency

According to Osakwe and Umoh, (2013), an insurgency is:

> ….. a protracted violent conflict in which one or more groups seek to overthrow or fundamentally change the political or social order in a state or region through the use of sustained violence, subversion, social disruption and political action.

While Okene and Olawale (2013) explained insurgency as:

> Insurgency is a condition of violent revolt against constituted authority or established leadership, through sabotage and harassment to undermine its authority. They also went further to opine:
>
> In other words, insurgency becomes latent when a group of persons uses violent methods to resist the enforcement of the law, or the group opposes the running of organised governance through bloody violence and insurrection.

The Marine Corps Warfighting Publication Field Manual (quoted in Imam, 2017) defined insurgency as *An organised use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify or challenge political control of a region.*

Counter Insurgency

Imam (2017) quoting the Marine Corps Warfighting Field Manual, defined counterinsurgency as: … *a comprehensive civilian and military effort designed to defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes simultaneously.*

While Osakwe and Umoh (2013) explained counterinsurgency as:

> Theoretically, counterinsurgency is a term used to explain the various techniques and theories that relate to the prevention and suppression of armed insurgencies. As such, it is a response to the insurgency.

They further explained that on the operational or practical plane, counterinsurgency is:

> …an integrated set of political, economic, social, and security measures intended to end and prevent the recurrence of armed violence, create, and maintain stable political, economic, and social structures and resolve the underlying causes of an insurgency to establish and sustain the conditions necessary for lasting stability.

Osakwe and Umoh also asserted that:

> Counterinsurgency only exists as a form of warfare because of its reciprocal.
> relationship with the insurgency. Counterinsurgency is therefore a war waged.
> within a state by a government using the instruments of state power in a combination of military, political, economic, civil, legal, and psychological means.

The two authors (2013) also observed while paraphrasing Bowman that:

> A political solution to insurgency requires that attention be given to the people in the locale in which the insurgency is rooted and carried out … Counterinsurgency should not be seen as a blunt military effort that focuses.
> solely on capturing and killing high-value targets. It is not primarily about defeating an armed enemy; rather, its main objective is centred on establishing lasting stability in a state or region. This requires that violence and subversion should be brought to a level manageable by local security forces and at the same time, political, economic, and social institutions should be built to address the structural problems fomenting instability.

The duo concluded that:

> An important part of counterinsurgency in Nigeria demands a greater reliance on non-military force. The exercise of military power should rather be used to create the space for political progress. While tackling armed insurgents, increasing efforts should be channelled into economic, social, and infrastructural development in a bid to win the hearts and minds of the people (Osakwe and Umoh, 2013).

It is important to state that according to various kinds of literature, the same factors that attracted young men and women to Marwa (Maitasine) during the infamous Maitasine riots in the 1980s in Bulumkutu, Borno, Kaduna, Yola, etc still attract them to Boko Haram and ISWAP today. Thus Boyle (quoted in Akpuru-Aja, 2013) noted:

> Boko Haram's members are largely drawn from dissatisfied youth, university students, and jobless graduates among them. It was also a major factor in the making of the Maitasine Sect.

Danjibo (quoted in ibid) concurs while stating:

> It is very obvious that Marwa exploited the dwindling economic situation and the Almajiri system and was able to attract large followers amongst the commoners, who were unable to afford the necessities of life and became die-hard patriots of the sect and Marwa himself.

Sir Frank Kitson, a British General (quoted in Osakwe and Umoh, 2013: 395) supports Osakwe and Umoh and Imam's positions as follows:

> … the first thing that must be apparent when contemplating the sort of action which a government facing insurgency should take is that there can be no such thing as a purely military solution because the insurgency is not primarily a military activity.

The truth is that no counter-insurgency operation can eliminate insurgents without adopting a mixture of solutions that will involve both political and military solutions or else the end of one insurgent will give birth to another more violent insurgent.

Galula (1964) summarised this discussion by stating that counterinsurgency requires an approach that has 80% political content and only 20% military. No wonder, the Bush administration in Iraq prepared a Marshall Plan that provided infrastructure, roads, clean water, communication facilities, electricity, etc. To win the hearts and minds of the people (Osakwe and Umoh, 2013:).

Origin of Boko Haram in 2002

So much work has been done on the origin of the group Boko Haram and how it metamorphosed into a terror machine terrorizing Northern Nigeria since the turn of this millennium. The work that perfectly captured its origin is that of Andrew Walker (2012) below:

> "Boko Haram's origins lie in a group of radical Islamist youth who worshipped at the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri a decade ago. In 2002, an offshoot of this youth group (not yet known as Boko Haram) declared the city and the Islamic establishment

> to be intolerably corrupt and irredeemable. The group declared it was embarking on hijra (a withdrawal along the lines of the Prophet Muhammad's withdrawal from Mecca to Medina). It moved from Maiduguri to a village called Kanama, Yobe state, near the border with Niger, to set up a separatist community run on hard-line Islamic principles. Its leader, Mohammed Ali, espoused antistate ideology and called on other Muslims to join the group and return to life under "true" Islamic law, to make a more perfect society away from the corrupt establishment. In December 2003, following a community dispute regarding fishing rights in a local pond, the group got into a conflict with the police. Group members overpowered a squad of officers and took their weapons. This confrontation led to a siege of its mosque by the army that lasted into the New Year. The siege ended in a shootout in which most of the group's seventy members were killed, including Mohammed Ali".

He further opined as follows:

> "Boko Haram is an Islamic sect that believes northern politics has been seized by a group of corrupt, false Muslims. It wants to wage a war against them, and the Federal Republic of Nigeria generally, to create a "pure" Islamic state ruled by sharia law. Since 2009 it has been driven by a desire for vengeance against politicians, police, and Islamic authorities for their role in the brutal suppression of the group that year. But the group has proved itself to be very adaptable, evolving its tactics swiftly and changing its targets at the behest of charismatic leadership. The group leapt onto the world's agenda in August 2011, when it bombed the United Nations compound in Abuja, killing twenty-three people. Some observers say Boko Haram has reached out to find allies in other global jihadist movements in the Sahel. The

> speed at which the group developed the capability to produce large and effective improvised explosive devices and enlist suicide bombers to deliver them suggests outside help. But thus far there remains no evidence to say the group intends to confront and attack Western interests inside or outside Nigeria."

> "Suffice it to note that scholars have traced the roots of Boko Haram to even 1995, but it was not until 2009 that the sect came to the national limelight when its leader Mohammed Yusuf died in Police custody. His death was the final straw that got the sect violently radicalised, as they went underground, obtained training abroad and, re-emerged as a war machine". OBC Nwolise (2019).

Consequently, it is clear at this juncture that the group Boko Haram (though not yet known as Boko Haram then) started in the mid-nineties in the North-eastern State of Borno State. The clashes the group had with government and security agencies in the State capital, Maiduguri forced them to Yobe State near the border with Niger. It was from here that things degenerated until they became radicalised and metamorphosed into a terror group to date.

Incubation Period

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the period from 2002 to 2009 during which the sect was driven underground from Maiduguri, Borno State, to Kanama, Yobe State, near the border with the Niger Republic was the incubation period. It was during this period that security forces in Kanama killed their then-leader, Mohammed Ali, and seventy members during communal clashes over a fishing pond and fishing rights that started with the killing of security agents in December 2003 and dragged on till early 2004. Sequel to their massacre in late 2003 in Kanama, Yobe State, the remnants of the sect returned to Maiduguri where they regrouped and reintegrated with the youths of the Imdimi mosque and settled back to life. It was from this point that Mohammed

Yusuf took the reins and commenced the process of building a new mosque for the group which they named Ibn Taimiyyah Masjid.

The land on which this new mosque was built belonged to Mohammed's father-in-law, Baba Fugu Mohammed. The group expanded from this point to other States like Bauchi, Niger, and Yobe. Their growth was phenomenal as they constructed a state within a state with its police, strict Islamic adherence, and large farm settlements. This attracted more members to their fold in leaps and bounds. They also attracted teeming members from across the border from war-torn Chad and refugees from the Niger Republic. According to Andrew Walker (2012; 4):

> "Much bloodier events soon followed. In July 2009 the group came into conflict with the authorities in a strikingly similar way to the events of six years before. Travelling en masse to the funeral of a fellow member, the group was stopped by police traffic officers, who were enforcing a tightened restriction on motorcycle helmets, and an argument ensued. The circumstances are unclear, but a member of the group is reported to have fired on the police, injuring several officers. The group then attacked police stations in Bauchi and Yobe, killing scores of police officers. Yusuf released several video sermons in which he explicitly threatened the state and the police with violence. They were circulated on DVD and gained a widespread audience. These events led the Bauchi government to crack down on the group, arresting more than seven hundred members.

In Maiduguri, the police surrounded the group's mosque, but members of the sect managed to break out and for three days they had the run of the town. They roamed the city acting independently, fighting police when they came across them and killing Muslim and Christian civilians indiscriminately. The police eventually regained control of Maiduguri and then embarked on a bloody purge of the group's members and anyone they suspected of being a Boko Haram supporter or

sympathizer. Dozens of people were rounded up and executed without trial, including Yusuf's father-in-law. Mohammed Yusuf was arrested by the army and handed over to the police, who killed him within hours (Onapajo and Ozden, 2023). Police officials denied that he had been executed, saying he had been shot while trying to escape. Videos clearly showing the execution of young boys and other alleged Boko Haram members by the police, including Buji Foi, a former commissioner for religious affairs in the state government, have been posted on YouTube. Those members of the group who were not killed or arrested fled, some say out of Nigeria. They entered another incarnation, that of famous Islamists on the run."

It is on record that this chain of events served as the incubation period that snowballed into the crises currently ravaging the entire North East of Nigeria and presently the North West States that are becoming too hot to handle by the Nigerian State. The UN Security Council says that Boko Haram members received training in a Tuareg rebel camp in Mali. It was after these that they launched a full-scale war against the Nigerian State and some neighbouring States that has lasted to date.

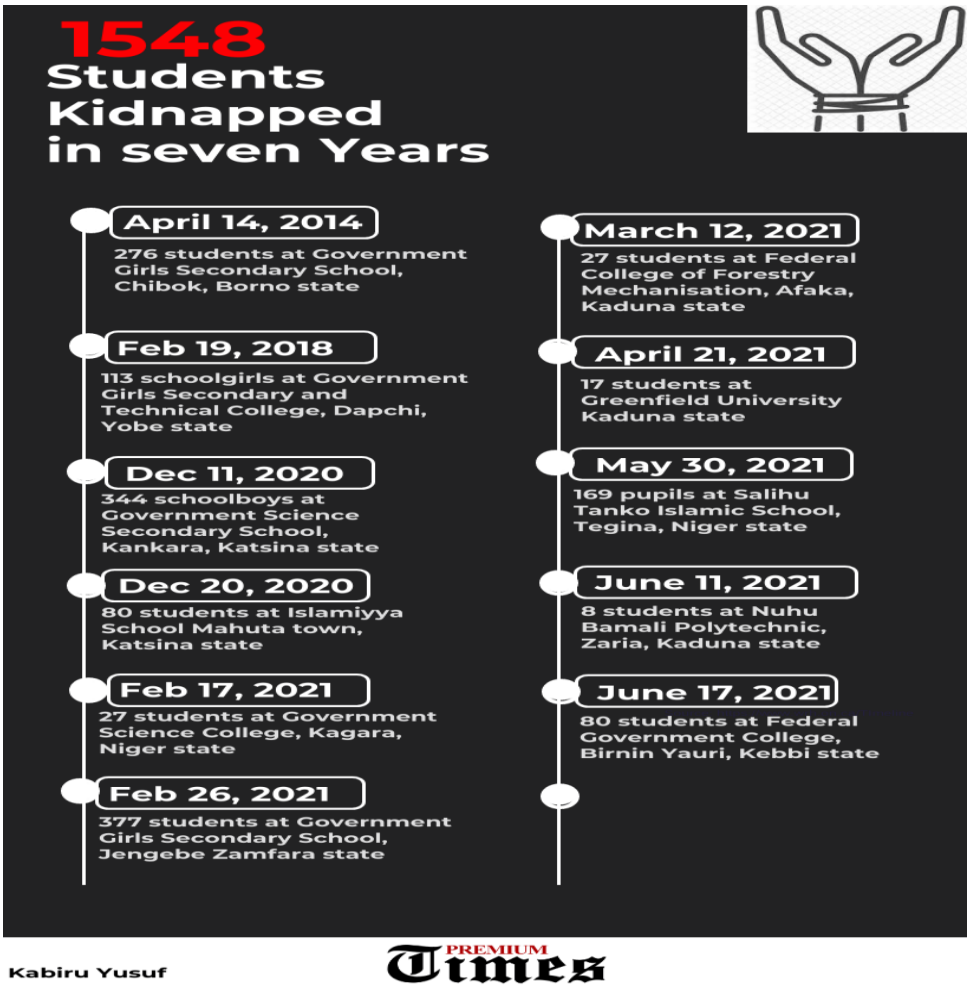
Impact of their Operations:

"The group Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, known the world over as Boko Haram, is an extremist Islamic sect in Nigeria that has created havoc across the north of the country and in the capital, Abuja. Its violent attacks on government offices, the United Nations, and churches threaten to destabilize the country." Andrew Walker (2012: 1)

To chronicle the impact of this insurgent group from 2009 to date is not only herculean but difficult. However, a good attempt will be made to identify them, especially those that made world headlines and attracted global attention. These include the kidnap of 276 Chibok school girls on April 14, 2014. The kidnapping of 113 schoolgirls at Government Girls Secondary & Technical College Dapchi, Yobe State, on February 19, 2018. Boko Haram insurgents also abducted 344 schoolgirls at Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina

State, on December 11, 2020. On February 26, 2021, they (Boko Haram) also kidnapped 377 students at Government Girls Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State.

According to Kabir Yusuf of Premium Times, on June 22, 2021, a total of 1,548 students were kidnapped in seven years from 2014 to 2021. According to the same report, security operatives in a shootout have since freed less than a quarter of the kidnapped students from the bandits. The report also put the blame squarely at the doorsteps of the inefficient Federal Government of Nigeria.



The Boko Haram insurgents have also committed many gross cases of abuse and violations of human rights in Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger (February 2015) Chad (June 2015), and Cameroon since December 2013. This is despite the signing and creation of the Multinational Joint Task Force to fight Boko Haram, involving troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. These were properly reported in a UN, General Assembly document dated December 9, 2015 (A/HCR/30/67).

According to a UNDP report published by Aljazeera on June 24, 2021, approximately 350,000 people were killed due to Boko Haram insurgents, the majority of these were children below the age of five. This insurgency has also led to food shortages, and agricultural production decline as farmers are unable to go to the farm thereby threatening many households that depend on agriculture for livelihood. The report also stated that over 3.2 million individuals are displaced in the Lake Chad region while 13.1 million people live in areas affected by the conflict in Northeast, Nigeria.

On August 26, 2011, the group conducted its first attack on Western interests via a vehicle bomb on UN headquarters in Abuja, killing at least 23 persons and injuring more than 80. Boko Haram claimed responsibility for this attack and threatened to conduct more attacks against Western and Nigerian governments' interests. The group went further to attack the media, Police Forces, Military formations, and Christians and even raided banks. All these had casualties and negative implications on the economy (Omenma et al, 2023). Perhaps this precipitated the US State Department to designate Boko Haram as a foreign terrorist organisation in November 2013. Late Chadian President, Idriss Deby, announced that 92 Chadian troops were killed in a Boko Haram attack that lasted several hours. He further said that 24 army vehicles were destroyed and captured military arms were taken away by Boko Haram insurgents. The Nigerian military has also suffered various casualties including that of 50 soldiers in an ambush near Goneri village, Yobe State, in March 2020.

It is obvious from all the above credible reports that the implications of Boko Haram operations since the beginning of its insurgency in 2009 are kidnapping, wanton destruction of lives and

properties, economic hardship and displacements. This is at variance with Boko Haram's claim of fighting against corrupt government officials.

Kidnappers torturing victims of Abuja-Kaduna train attack



Premium Times Editorial, August 8, 2022.

Entry of the Nigerian Military in 2009 and How the Military is Carrying Out Its Operations

Following the escalation in the activities of the Boko Haram sect and the failure of the Nigeria Police Force to contain them, the Federal Government drafted the Nigerian Military in 2009 to quell the insurgency. It is unfortunate to note that more than ten years after the involvement of the military in this counter-insurgency operation in the Northeast, Boko Haram and their ISWAP allies have extended their operations beyond the North East to North West and North Central

regions of Nigeria respectively (Okoli and Lenshie, 2022). Statistics show that casualties are mounting on all sides with the Army's poor handling of its counter-insurgency operations as the insurgents have dealt various mortal blows with numerous strategic attacks ranging from June 16, 2011, car bomb attack on Nigeria Police Headquarters in Abuja killing two persons including the suicide bomber with 33vehicles destroyed beyond repair according to Aljazeera News, another car bomb attack on UN Headquarters in Abuja on Friday, August 26, 2011 killed 18persons and injured over 60persons according to BBC report. Also, Chris Ewokor of the BBC reported that insurgents attacked an Abuja – Kaduna bound train on March 28, 2022, killing 9 persons and taking over 168persons hostage, 11 of the hostages were released on June 11 and a pregnant woman was earlier released by the insurgents on compassionate grounds. It is widely alleged in Nigeria that families of the hostages pay huge ransoms to secure the release of their loved ones. A few days before this train attack, insurgents also attacked the runway of the Kaduna airport killing one person. To crown it all, ISWAP claimed responsibility for the Kuje medium security prison attack on July 5, 2022, during which one prison warder was killed, many were injured, 69 Boko Haram inmates were released and over 400 inmates are still on the run (Ogu et al, 2022). This was a day after Boko Haram insurgents attacked President Buhari's advance convoy in Daura, Katsina State, killing two persons.

The point here is that the military has been unable to terminate the activities of the insurgents since their involvement over ten years ago as the insurgents have extended their terror from Northeast to Northwest, North Central and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This lethargy can also be observed in President Buhari's statement after his visit to the Kuje Correctional Centre sequel to the July 5, attack. The President was quoted to have said "How can terrorists organise, have weapons, attack a security installation and get away with it?" Buhari asked.

Boko Haram insurgents scored a bull's eye against the Nigerian Military on November 18 and 19, 2018, in Melete, Borno State, where over 118 soldiers were killed and 153 missing in the assault on 157 Task

Force Battalion according to Premium Times. President Buhari 'condemned the attack and vowed to ensure the end of the insurgency and as well care for the soldiers deployed in the volatile Northeast'. Also on March 24, 2020, Boko Haram fighters killed at least 50 Nigerian soldiers in an ambush near Goneri village in northern Yobe state.

The Military has also dealt some deadly blows on the insurgents before now. This was after a peak in Boko Haram activities between 2014 and 2015 which caused a shift in the date for the 2015 National elections. The Nigerian Army through its Director, Army Public Relations, Brigadier General Yerima Mohammed, on April 19, 2021, stated that scores of Boko Haram elements were killed by troops of Operation Lafiya Dole during Operation Takaibango at Dikwa and Gulumba Gana as the terrorists attempted to take control of Dikwa, headquarters of Dikwa Local Government Area of Borno State. Also, troops of Operation Hadin Kai of the Nigerian Army killed eight Boko Haram and ISWAP members at Wulgo, Borno State, on Monday, October 15, 2021. This was disclosed by Brigadier General Onyema Ugochukwu, Army Spokesman.

On the flip side, on 17 January 2017, a Nigerian Air Force jet mistakenly bombed an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp near the Cameroonian border in Rann, Borno State. They had believed it was a Boko Haram encampment. The bombing left at least 115 people dead, including six Red Cross aid workers, and left more than 100 injured. Similarly, in April 2021, some soldiers were killed by a fighter jet belonging to the Nigerian Air Force which bombed ground troops in Mainok, Borno State.

Sequel to the above, it can be argued that the counter-insurgency operations of the Nigerian military, which is now in its thirteenth year, have had little or no significant effect to neutralize Boko Haram and ISWAP. According to the January 21, 2022, report of the Statista Research Department, Boko Haram maintained its number two position as the most brutal terrorist group globally behind the Taliban in 2019. Taliban killed 7,531 while Boko Haram killed 1,954 with ISIL, Houthi extremists in Yemen and Al-Shabab came third, fourth and fifth respectively with 1,252, 983 and 864 killings in that order. A UNDP

report released on June 24, 2021, stated that the Boko Haram insurgency directly caused the death of 35,000 people in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States in 2009.



Premium Times Editorial on August 9, 2022, titled: Buhari's inept leadership and Nigeria's escalating insurgency.

Why so long?

We will attempt to identify and discuss the reasons behind the protracted battle for the Nigerian Military to defeat these insurgents after over 13 years of more casualties and the spread of insurgency to most parts of the North.

Lack of Political Will

A major stumbling block militating against the Army in achieving final victory over the insurgents since their military campaign commenced is the lack of political will on the part of our political leaders who have failed to be united in taking decisive action towards the elimination of this monstrous enemy called insurgency (Akinyetun, 2017). This prebendalism, political affiliation and ethnic affinity have contributed in no small way to reducing the efficiency of the Army chain of command. The confrontation and war of words between political gladiators from both the ruling party and opposition parties often

politicise the operations of the Army. The military high command and operations need to be isolated and immunised from politics and ethnic jingoism to enable the Nigerian State to achieve victory against the insurgents as our military had done well outside the shores of this country before now time without a number.

Corruption

The government of President Mohammadu Buhari won the 2015 and 2019 general elections against incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan on the popular mandate of anti-corruption, security, etc especially due to the arrest of two Nigerians and an Israeli by South African Police on September 5, 2014 at Lanseria International airport, northwest of Johannesburg, for trying to smuggle in the sum of $9.3m via a chartered flight from Abuja with which they claimed they wanted to use in buying military hardware to fight insurgency in Nigeria. Boko Haram as of early 2015 had 20 Local Governments (the size of Belgium) under their control and their daring attacks then forced the Federal Government to postpone the 2015 general elections by some months (Olaniyi, 2019). By March 16, 2015, the Army was able to retrieve 15 Local Governments from the remaining only three - Abadam, Kala-Balge and Gwoza Local Governments in the hands of Boko Haram.

Also, some retired military chiefs like Kenneth Minimah, former Chief of Army Staff and Alex Badeh, former Air Chief and later Chief of Defence Staff under former President Goodluck Jonathan, were charged to court by EFCC for misappropriating the sum of #13.798b meant for arms purchase while Alex Badeh was charged for money laundering. Other senior officers were also charged to various courts or are still under investigation for various offences concerning the diversion of public funds meant for arms purchase at various times. Also, a former Chief of Army Staff under current President Mohammadu Buhari, Tukur Yusuf Buratai is presently under investigation by ICPC for corruption offences. Also in July 2019, the army high command declared five army officers wanted to make away with the sum of #1b meant for arms purchase. It is therefore worrisome that these top military officers entrusted with our lives and the nation's

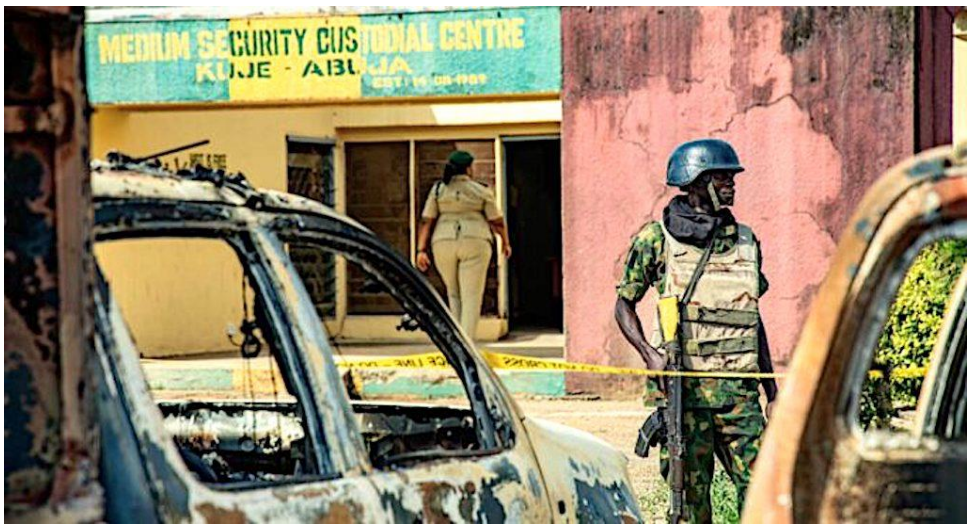
security can descend to this level of mind-boggling corruption, misappropriation and conversion of public funds while lives and properties are being lost almost daily.

Inadequate and Outdated Weapons

It is not surprising that with items number one and two above, the weapons available for the military rank and file to fight Boko Haram are inadequate and outdated weapons which cannot sustain or win the war. For example, in the aftermath of the recent Kuje prison attack by ISWAP to free its members, some Kuje prison officers confessed that the assailants came with superior weapons which their (prison) outdated weapons could not match hence giving ISWAP easy victory (Njoku, 2020). Cases also abound where military officers abandoned their duty post because Boko Haram's firepower was more than their own. Sequel to this, some military officers were court-martialed for AWOL and deserting their duty post by the military high command.

In 2019, one Major and 21 soldiers were declared wanted by the Nigerian Army for fleeing the scene of the Boko Haram attack in Gubio, Borno State, where 18 soldiers were killed during the attack on a military outpost. In September 2014, about 400 Nigerian soldiers sought refuge in Cameroon after fleeing a Boko Haram onslaught on Nigerian soil. More than a dozen allegations of desertion involving hundreds of soldiers were formally recorded by the military within the same period. Similarly, in March 2021, the military hierarchy declared that 12 officers and 89 soldiers wanted to desert the war front during Boko Haram attacks in Marte and Dikwa Local Government Areas in Borno State. The attack caused the death of at least 7 soldiers of the 15 Task Force Battalion. All these point to one fact, inadequate and outdated weapons which makes it difficult for the army to win the war against Boko Haram.

Scene from ISWAP attack on Medium Security Prison Kuje



Copied from Premium Times Editorial dated August 8, 2022.

Lack of Synergy Among the Military Arms

Lack of synergy among all the military arms (Army, Airforce, Police, etc) is another factor militating against a successful fight against Boko Haram since the military offensive against them started in 2009. Due to this rivalry which includes not sharing military intelligence, competition among service chiefs, etc grave errors of omission and commission have led to monumental losses on the battlefield. The incident that took place on 17 January 2017, where a Nigerian Air Force jet mistakenly bombed an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp near the Cameroonian border in Rann, Borno State is a case in point. This incident alone caused the death of 115 persons, including 6 Red Cross aid staff and more than 100 injured. Similarly, in April 2021, some soldiers were killed by a fighter jet belonging to the Nigerian Air Force which bombed ground troops in Mainok, Borno State erroneously.

All these ugly incidents would have been avoided if intelligence were shared between all the military arms knowing that they're fighting against a common determined enemy in Boko Haram.

Wrong Approach

Over the years, the Nigerian military applied almost the same strategy for every insurrection and insurgency and it keeps getting the same response. From the Maitatsine riot in 1980, and the 'Ali must go students' riot' in 1978 which is recorded as one of the most violent students riot in Nigeria, ongoing IPOB agitation and unknown gunmen menace in the South East, the current State suppression of Islamic Movement of Nigeria over the detention of their leader, Sheik El-Zakzakky and his wife Zainab and alleged killing of hundreds of its members, etc. The military applied one method, brutal suppression of dissent from the populace. It is advised that the military should always exhaust every means of negotiation and carrot approach before going for a full-scale military offensive.

Lack of Unity Among Politicians and Political Elites

Sequel to many reasons which include disunity, different political affiliations, ethnicity, internal rivalry and bitter struggle for power among the politicians, elites and political parties, these contending forces always try to undo each other for their aggrandizement and detriment of the Nigerian State. For instance, President Mohammadu Buhari was accused in 2013 of saying that the attack on Boko Haram was an attack on the North. The current APC Vice Presidential candidate, Alhaji Kashim Shettima, is also at the forefront of those canvassing for Boko Haram amnesty.

Conclusion

Having identified the gaps in our counter-insurgency operations that resulted in the prolonged debacle, which included a lack of political will on the part of the government, inadequate and outdated weapons and corruption. The study concludes with the:

i. The Federal Government should change their approach to the de-radicalization of former terror elements to ensure a peaceful and secure country.

ii. Peaceful means such as dialogue and promise of amnesty are necessary before a resort to full-scale military option as the citizenry needs a secure and peaceful country to thrive.
iii. Some of the strategies needed to ensure timely implementation and curbing of this insurgency include synergy among the military arms, purchase of modern and adequate military hardware, unity and strong will among politicians and elites irrespective of tribe, religion and party affiliation as this is a major obstacle in the fight against insurgency.
iv. Elimination of corruption in the military chain of command.

The implementation of the above should be effective, efficient and timely.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations which we believe if implemented will bring an end to the lingering Boko Haram conundrum.

Development of Political Will by Politicians in power to defeat Boko Haram insurgency.

Our political leaders must develop the will to say enough is enough of this lingering insurgency and support the Nigerian Military with all it takes to go all out and achieve the much-desired victory over this insurgency. This is most important as even President Muhammadu Buhari recently pointed out that the insurgency is being fuelled by foreign interference.

Elimination of Corruption in Military Chain of Command

Corruption has remained a recurring clog in Nigeria's wheel of progress for many decades and this must be eliminated in the military chain of command if we want to end the Boko Haram insurgency soon.

Special courts should be set up to try corrupt military officers and bring them to book immediately where necessary to serve as deterrents to other would-be offenders. A situation where cases of accused officers drag on for years is not the best for the country.

Immediate Purchase of Modern and Sophisticated Weapons

It will be trite to state that adequate modern and sophisticated weapons are needed to guarantee victory against Boko Haram. The Federal government must as a matter of urgency go out of its way to purchase adequate modern military weapons to ensure victory and reduce casualties on the battlefield and desertion of soldiers in the face of the Boko Haram onslaught.

Change of Tactics

The current approach by the Nigerian military to adopt only a full-scale military option is not the best, even America left Afghanistan after a full military option did not yield the necessary result. It is recommended that negotiation, consultation and civil engagements should be explored to find lasting solutions to this carnage. Full military action will only breed underground dissent and peace of the graveyard which will not guarantee lasting peace. A change of tactics is needed after over ten years of full-scale war.

Synergy among the Military Arms

A popular African saying that "united we stand, divided we fall". This saying is very apt as all the military arms must close ranks, share intelligence and fight this common enemy, Boko Haram, as a team to secure vital victory before this handshake will pass the elbow. Synergy among the military arms will surely reduce and eliminate avoidable deaths and casualties similar to those of Rann and Mainok to mention a few.

Unity and strong will among politicians and elites irrespective of tribe, religion and party

After almost two decades of insurgency against the Nigerian State by the Boko Haram group, coupled with thousands of deaths, kidnappings and millions of internally displaced persons, it is highly recommended that our politicians, religious leaders and elites come together with one goal, to eliminate the Boko Haram scourge, irrespective of party affiliations, tribe and religion. Time is running out!

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