

A Fitful Path: Nigeria's Faltering Counterterrorism Operation against the Boko Haram in the Northeast

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Abstract

Nigeria's security environment continues to be tense, tenuous and fluid. From all indications and yardsticks of policy planning and implementation, the country's security architecture seems to be unraveling. As the nation's security establishments confront multiple security crises especially in Northern Nigeria, their policy and operational reactions continue to be reactive. While the Boko Haram insurgency rages, a decade after the commencement of military operations against the group, military successes in the Northeast are at best modest. Following a decade of commitment of military resources including billions of dollars deployed to the procurement of armament and military hardware, expansion of forces' strength and creation of special operation formations, one can ask why have the military operations continued to falter and security architecture unravel? The study was anchored on the qualitative research approach and sourced data from published and openly available official documents, scientific publications and newspapers articles, reports, opinion pieces and commentaries. Making use of this open-sourced information, this study explains faltering military operations and Nigeria's worsening security environment to the failure of security planning, poor civil-military relations including lack of depth in intelligence agencies penetration of local communities across Northern Nigeria, rivalry among the three arms of the Nigerian Armed Forces, persistency of the poor culture of intelligence information sharing and lack of synergy and poor coordination among Nigeria's security establishments. This study recommends that more attention need to be paid to intelligence gathering, synergy and coordination among the security establishments in the bids to enhance the prospects of Nigeria's counter-terrorism operation and other military engagements across the country.

Keywords:

Counterterrorism Operation; Security Strategy; Intelligence Gathering; Boko Haram; Nigeria.

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Nigeria is facing numerous security challenges and these crises seem to be defying solutions directed at addressing them, at least at present. Given that no geo-political zone of the country is exempted from the incidences of insecurity and rising criminality, these crises can be seen as highly existential for the corporate existence of Nigeria. As for Nigerians that are daily getting caught up in the crossfire between personnel of the Nigerian security institutions and the merchants of death that terror groups, bandits and kidnapers have become, the experience has been harrowing to say the least. Given the horrendous human and material costs of the security crises facing Nigeria, it will not be out of place to argue as [Saliu \(2020\)](#) asserted that the “country is in the throes of fighting a war essentially with itself”. Indeed, the position that Northern Nigeria in particular is “hollowing itself out from the inside” aptly captured the existential nature of the current security crises that the Nigerian state and its security establishments are confronted with and battling to bring under control in Northeast and Northwest Nigeria.

To argue that Nigeria’s security environment continues to be tensed, tenuous and fluid is stating the obvious. As the security challenges facing Nigeria continue to morph and change in dynamics, the security institutions notably the Nigerian Armed Forces and to some extent the Nigerian Police Force seem to be playing catch-up. Indeed, from all indications and yardsticks of policy planning and implementation, the country’s security architecture seems to be unraveling. As the nation’s security establishments confront multiple security crises especially in Northern Nigeria, their policy and operational reactions continue to be reactive rather than proactive, at least that seems to be the perception of many Nigerians. The security challenges that Nigeria currently face are not only dynamic and evolving in nature but some are actually geo-political zones/regional specifics and particularly Northern Nigeria in manifestation.

In Northeast Nigeria, the Boko Haram terrorist, its breakaway groups the Islamic State in West Africa Province ISWAP and the Ansaru terror groups continued to carry out targeted attacks largely against communities, schools, IDP camps and against military installations especially in Borno and Yobe states ([Saliu and Saka 2019](#)). While the Boko Haram insurgency rages, a decade after the commencement of military operations against the group, military successes in the Northeast are at best modest. Without doubt, the liberation of communities hitherto overrun and held by the Boko Haram in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states and the phased returning of displaced Nigerians back to their communities represented the height of successes in Nigeria’s ‘war on terror’ under the regime of President Muhammadu Buhari ([Onapajo 2017](#)). However, the military campaign against the Boko Haram and its splinter terrorist groups continues to face challenges.

As the military campaign in the Northeast ebbs and the policy and operational strategies falter, fighters routed in this theater of operation seem to be linking up with bandits, cattle rustlers, kidnapers and sundry criminals in the Northwest. Indeed, more worrisome is the opening of new theater of conflict in the Northwest and part

of Northcentral as bandits, rustlers, kidnappers and everyday criminals combined to wage war of attrition against the Nigerian state and its military establishment. As bandits lay communities to waste in the Northwest, kidnappers abduct school children, students and ordinary Nigerians at will across Northwest states of Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara and Niger state in Northcentral Nigeria. No incidence shown more glaring the audacious nature of the criminals that had laid siege on the Northwest than the coordinated attacks and kidnapping of school students for ransoms in Kankara, Jengbebe, Greenfield and Tegin in Katsina, Zamfara, Kaduna and Niger states respectively (ICG 2020, 2018; Lar 2018). The current reality of the security environment in Northern Nigeria is pointing to the fact that banditry, cattle rustling and kidnapping have largely evolved into a criminally syndicated networks across the region.

Following a decade of commitment of military resources including billions of dollars deployed to the procurement of armament and military hardware, expansion of forces strength inclusive of the creation of the 7th Brigade headquarter in Maiduguri and specifically for the ‘war on terror’ campaign and creation of special operation units and formations, creation of the office of Chief of Intelligence among others one can ask why has the military operation continued to falter and security architecture unravel especially as it relates to the operations in Northern Nigeria? Why has Nigeria failed to win in a convincing manner the ‘war against Boko Haram? What explains the unraveling of the country’s security architecture in Northwest Nigeria and why are bandits, rustlers and kidnappers having free reign plundering communities and kidnapping Nigerians in their communities, along major highways and sadly in school compounds at will? With all the resources invested in the security sector and the security policies that have been crafted to address the security crisis in Northern Nigeria, why has success eluded Nigeria? What and how can one explain the worsening security environment particularly Northwest Nigeria?

To answer these questions, this article relied on the qualitative research approach and gathered data from published and openly available official documents, scientific publications and newspapers articles, reports, opinion pieces and commentaries. Utilizing these open-sourced information, this study anchored the faltering military operations and Nigeria’s worsening security environment on a number of issues. Prominent among these are: the failure of security planning, poor civil-military relations including lack of depth in intelligence agencies penetration of local communities across Northern Nigeria, rivalry among the three arms of the Nigerian Armed Forces, persistency of the poor culture of intelligence information sharing and lack of synergy and poor coordination among Nigeria’s security establishments. Other non-security explanation variables includes: the crisis of corruption especially in military budget, procurement and expenditure, partisanship, poor communication between the government and the security institutions to the people, one sided security reports and its implications for people’s support for the

security operations especially in Southern Nigeria, the misguided statement for self-defense by then Minister of Defense and the attendant rise of the call for self-help in Southern Nigeria and the slippery argument of trying to avoid mounting civilian casualties by avoiding direct exchange of fire with bandits and kidnappers being made by the Nigerian Armed Forces among others. This study recommends that more attention need to be paid to intelligence gathering, synergy and coordination among the security establishments in the bids to enhance the prospects of Nigeria's counter-terrorism operation and other military engagements across the country.

The Nigeria State and the Management of Insecurity in Northern Nigeria

The Nigeria state and its security apparatus have sought to manage the nation's unending security challenges mainly through the deployment of the country's security asset. At the onset of the Nigeria state campaign against what was to become Boko Haram terror group, a joint security team code-named 'Operation Flush' comprising Nigerian Armed Forces, mainly Nigerian Army and Nigerian Police Force personnel, were deployed to dislodge members of the group known as the Nigerian Taliban from Kanama in Yobe State in 2003. In July 2009 elements drawn from the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Police Force raided the compound of Muhammad Yusuf, the then leader of the Boko Haram sect in Maiduguri. Following rising insecurity arising from the activities of the Boko Haram group now under the command of Abubakar Shekau, the Nigerian government under President Goodluck Jonathan established the first full fledged military task force, specifically deployed to address the Boko Haram terror insurgency that had assumed frightening dimensions. Following a directive from the Commander-in-Chief, President Jonathan on 12th June 2011, the Joint Military Task Force, JTF code-named 'Operation Restore Order' headquartered in Maiduguri was established. Personnel for the JTF were drawn largely from the Nigeria Army, Air Force and Navy, the Department of State Security, the Nigerian Police Force (Saliu and Saka 2019, 8; Onapajo 2017; Onuoha 2014; Solomon 2012). The JTF had a two-battalion force strength from the Nigeria Army, 750 Naval personnel, 650 personnel from the Air Force, 1,500 from the Police and 500 personnel from the Department of State Security (Oyewole 2021, 9).

Following continued military attacks from the Boko Haram terror groups and the group's successes at grabbing and holding territories, and to give legislative effects to the war on terror, the Federal Government signed the 'Anti-Terror Bill' into law and declared a 'State of Emergency' on Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States on the 15th May 2013. The Federal Government also raised the troops level to 8,000 in 2013, 20,000 in 2014, 25,000 in 2015 and the force level stands at around 50,000 troops at present. This is aside the tens of thousands of local vigilantes constituted

into the Civilian Joint Task Force that has largely become invaluable to Nigeria's counter-terrorism war in the Northeast ([Oyewole 2021, 9](#)). Following the electoral victory of retired General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress in the 2015 general elections and his inauguration, the first order of business for the President Muhammadu Buhari was the announcement of the relocation of military headquarters coordinating the counter-terrorism war in the Northeast from Abuja to Maiduguri, the centre of the military operations. Ramping up troops level, President Buhari also announced the formation of the Seventh Battalion of the Nigeria Armed with Headquarters at Maimalari Barrack, Maiduguri and appointed a Chief of Security Intelligence, an equivalent to the three Arms Service Chiefs to lead the coordination of intelligence operations as a strategic element of the war on terror ([Saliu and Saka 2019, 9](#)).

At the multilateral level, the Nigerian government had strengthened its military and intelligence cooperation with its immediate neighbours and the most important affirmation of the renewed cooperation was the reinvigorated commitment to the Chad Basin Commission, Multilateral Joint Task Force MJTF based at Ndjamena by troops contributing countries including; Benin Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Niger Republic with Nigeria as the major partner. At the bilateral level, the Federal Government under President Muhammadu Buhari was able to shore up Western Powers confidence in Nigeria and by so doing get more favourable responses especially on foreign military assistance for the prosecution of Nigeria's 'war on terror', security related intelligence information sharing and more importantly, acquisition and sales of military equipment to Nigeria. The most significant was the decision to sell twelve (12) A-29 Super Tucano fighter planes to Nigeria by the United States government under former President Donald Trump. Of the twelve, Nigeria has recently taken delivery of six of the fighter planes, while Nigeria fighter pilots, engineers and other operation support component personnel from the Nigeria Air Force have undergone intensive capacity training in the United States. The sales order for the fighter planes, their accessories and servicing agreement came at a cost of \$593 million ([Egobiambu 2021](#); [Reuters 2012](#); [Oyeleke 2021](#)).

In all its ramifications, state response to the Boko Haram insurgency, starting from 2003 when Police operations were conducted in Geidam and Kanamma and 2009 against Muhammad Yusuf in Maiduguri has largely been militarized ([Aghedo and Osumah 2012](#)). The military approach was escalated following the institution of full-scale military task forces in the Northeast signaling the commencement of Nigeria's counterterrorism operation against the group. The Joint Military Task Force against Boko Haram in the Northeast transited through at least three stages. Starting with Operation Restore Order, 2011-2013; Operation Zaman Lafiya (We will live in Peace), 2013-2015 and the latest being 'Operation Lafiya Dole (Peace by all Means) ([Oyewole 2021](#); [Ibrahim and Bala 2018](#)).

Faltering counterterrorism operation against Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria: An assessment

There are a number of studies that have addressed the military approach at managing the Boko Haram terrorist insurgency. These studies appraised the successes of Nigeria's counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations especially as it relates to the military offensive in the Northeast. Other than this, they also assess the challenges confronting Nigeria state and its security establishment as it relates to the counter-insurgency/counter-terrorism operations especially in the Northeast. For example, [Bappah \(2016\)](#) averred that the failure of the military action against Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria can be situated around three main issues. These are: the erosion of military professionalism under successive civilian administrations since 1999; the poor and unprofessional handling of the war on terror by the leadership of the Nigerian Armed Forces and lastly the lack of political decisiveness and non-demonstration of will by the leadership of former President Goodluck Jonathan and the top brass of the Nigerian military to end the insurgency. While these three issues are germane, however, they did not capture all the factors that accounted for the poor handling of Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts against the Boko Haram under former President Jonathan.

Following the euphoria that greeted President Muhammadu Buhari's declaration that Nigeria has technically defeated the Boko Haram, [Onapajo \(2017\)](#) rhetorically asked whether Nigeria has actually defeated the group and recorded a decisive battle victory against terrorist insurgency in the Northeast. As it relates to the successes of the counter-terrorism efforts under former President Jonathan, [Onapajo \(2017\)](#) was emphatic in affirming that the military approach was ineffective much as the complimentary political approach at managing and addressing the Boko Haram terror insurgency under President Jonathan. Among the factors that can be attributed to explaining the ineffectiveness of Nigeria's counter-terrorism war, [Onapajo \(2017, 67\)](#) highlighted the large scale corruption that was the hallmark of military procurement and defense expenditure under the President Jonathan administration, the charges of human rights abuse in the prosecution of the counter-terrorism operations and the loss of confidence and goodwill of the international community in the regime efforts that emanated therefrom. As it relates to the pronouncement of technical defeat of the Boko Haram group under President Buhari, [Onapajo \(2017\)](#) agreed that one cannot dispute the fact that the regime had achieved tremendous progress in its fight against the group given some important milestones that had been recorded. However, [Onapajo \(2017, 69\)](#), argued that while the group might have been technically degraded, the military achievement should be seen as temporal, given that there are many signs suggesting that the threats of Boko Haram is still potent. Given, the resurgence of Boko Haram attacks against military and civilian targets starting from 2020 till present, it seems that [Onapajo's \(2017\)](#) worse nightmare and fear of a resurgent Boko Haram was actually not misplaced

after all. This, however, is not to deny the series of battle successes and military strides recorded by the Nigerian Armed Forces and other security institutions in the fore-front of the counter-insurgency operation against the Boko Haram in the Northeast and bandits, cattle rustlers and kidnappers in the Northwest in recent time ([Ogbaje 2021](#)).

Writing on the challenges confronting the Nigeria state in its counter-insurgency operations in the Northeast, [Saliu and Saka \(2019\)](#) identified poor interagency cooperation and coordination among Nigeria's security establishment, poor culture of interagency intelligence information management, poor civil-military relations and lack of respect for human rights which alienates the local population in the Northeast and corruption in defense budgeting and arms procurement as critical issues. While the issues raised by [Saliu and Saka \(2019\)](#) are of central importance, they largely dwell within the realm of security agencies operational challenges. Thus, the issues addressed by [Saliu and Saka \(2019\)](#) did not take more cognizance of importance issues that dwell within the realm of civil-military relations, political and social issues that do have serious implications on the success or otherwise of military operations in the Northeast and more recently in the Northwest. While the issues that regarded more the operational challenges confronting the security institutions will be addressed, attention will also be directed at discussion non-security related issues such as the crisis of corruption especially in security budgeting, military procurement and expenditure, poor communication between the government and the security institutions to the people, one sided security reports and its implications for people's support for the security operations especially in Southern Nigeria, the misguided statement for self-defense by the Minister of Defense and the attendant rise of the call for self-help in Southern Nigeria and the slippery argument of trying to avoid mounting civilian casualties by avoiding direct exchange of fire with bandits and kidnappers been made by the Nigerian Armed Force among others. These security and civil related challenges and issues undermining Nigeria's security strategy and military tactics are given attention in the remaining part of this section.

Poor inter-agency coordination and cooperation

One of the most critical challenges confronting the Nigeria security establishment is the crisis of inter-agency cooperation and poor coordination of operations and missions in manner as to aid the achievement of expected mission's objectives. The lack of synergy and crisis of inter-agency rivalry inclusive of unhealthy rivalry between military chiefs has works in manner as to undermine the operations of the security establishment in general and constrain military formations coordination that is highly essential for achieving set objectives and ultimately the success of the nation's internal security interests. The inter-agency rivalry observable in the relationships among the three arms of the Nigerian Armed Forces on the one hand and between the military and other security institutions notably the Nigerian Police Force and the Department of State Security, DSS dated back into history. Following decades of military dictatorship and the vanguard roles that personnel from the

Nigeria Army played in providing officers/administrators inclusive of the positions of Head of State, Chief of Staff Defense Headquarters (second in command), Chief of Defense Staff among other key civil and military positions under different military regimes, the Nigeria Army has been thrust into occupying a vantage position.

This situation has largely conferred an all-inclusive privilege on the Army and its personnel over and above other arms of the Nigerian Armed Forces. This circumstance of history then means that the Army always finds itself taking the leading position and often at advantage especially in the context of resources mobilization and deployment, procurement of operational assets, equipment and munitions, leadership roles in joint operations and missions. This has especially been the case for super Military Joint Task Forces that has been the hallmark of Nigeria military operational strategy in the war against Boko Haram in the Northeast, the fight against bandits and kidnappers in the Northwest and part of Northcentral and such other task forces deployed in other parts of the country. The lack of synergy and inter-agency rivalry at the institutional level which in-turn find expression between formations undermines cooperation between formations. This in turn prevents the formations from pooling resources, sharing intelligence information and coordinating operational strategies, tactics and plans; this invariably ends up undermining the successes of operational engagements and missions, thus resulting in failure for the security institutions and undermining the nation's efforts at securing its territory and people.

The bad blood, animosity and rivalry between security agencies in Nigeria and more importantly between the branches of Armed Forces and the Nigerian Police Force has been disastrous and as such undermines institutional collaboration, coordination and cooperation between these important security establishments that are the foundation of the nation's security architecture. In most instances attempts at proving superiority and the feeling of animosity between personnel from the armed forces and the police had resulted in bloody and violent confrontations on the streets of Nigeria cities resulting in loss of lives and destruction of properties with police personnel and institution often at the receiving end. On average, there are usually two reported cases/incidences of clashes between personnel of the Armed Forces (most times the Army) and police personnel in Nigeria on a yearly basis ([Onyegbula 2019](#)). Between 2005 and 2019, there were reported incidences of reprisal attacks carried out against police personnel, their property and formations by personnel from the Nigeria Army and on few instances, the Nigeria Navy and Air Force across the country. Issues that often spark the violent reprisal attacks against the Police are often mundane bothering on charges of disrespect of senior military officers by police personnel on civil policing duties. Such attacks are usually followed by denials, blames and counter blames with each of the concerned parties pushing different narratives and trying to justify their action often without official attempt at thoroughly investigating such skirmishes and appropriately punishing offenders often from the military ([Onyegbula 2019](#)).

In the context of violent clashes of this nature, failure to punish offenders and continuing attempts at proving superiority by officers from the Armed Forces (often the Army) the foundation for rancor among troops drawn from the military, police and DSS into Joint Military Task Force had already been laid. It is therefore not a surprise when troops that are expected to blend, bond and work seamlessly in the context of their membership of joint task forces fail to give maximum cooperation, unable to trust one another talk less of being sure that the next officer beside them get their back in the heat of battle. Thus, it is not surprising that the feeling of comradeship that should exist between troops are non-existent. In the context of lack of trust, achieving synergy, collaboration, coordination and cooperation between troops, formations, and security institutions become a tall order. Unfortunately, these are essential ingredients for achieving success especially in the prosecution of a non-conventional war against Boko Haram, bandits, kidnappers and cattle rustlers in Northern Nigeria. Hinting to this defect, Auwal Musa Rafsanjani, the Executive Director, Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre, was quoted as stating that,

“the rivalry between the different security organizations must stop. This dispensation must strike the rhythm for effective coordination, collaboration and synergy as a diamond formation to victory” ([Agbedo 2021](#)).

What the position above implied was that an important missing link accounting for the current challenges facing the Nigeria security establishment as it relates to the prosecution of their numerous internal security operations is the absence of inter-agency harmony. This has practically made the security agencies start exhibiting the paradox of a house divided against itself, just like it can be said that Northern Nigeria is hollowing itself from within ([Onyegbula 2019](#)).

Poor culture of coordination in the gathering and management of intelligence information

Closely related to the problem of lack of coordination, cooperation and synergy between the arms of the Nigerian Armed Forces and other security institutions in Nigeria is the problem of poor management and coordination of intelligence information. While rivalry between security chiefs and head of security institutions can partly be blamed for poor coordination of intelligence information, however, the genesis of poor intelligence information management is deep rooted and institutional. At the heart of the problem is the differential operation background and the challenge of overlapping responsibility and authority as it relates to the generation, coordination, management and sharing of intelligence information in timely and secure manner between the difference agencies that have statutory operational responsibility on intelligence information management. By statutory rule, the Nigeria state maintain three main security intelligence agencies. These are the Department of State Security, DSS, Nigerian Intelligence Agency, NIA (foreign intelligence information and espionage) and the Defense Intelligence Agency, DIA. Of the three, the DSS is statutory responsible for the generational, management and sharing of internal intelligence information inclusive of preventing internal

subversive elements and her mandate is expressly internal intelligence security. The DIA is responsible for the generation, management and sharing of military related intelligence information and the deployment of such for the sole purpose of defending Nigeria's territorial integrity. However, with increasing security threats and the drafting of the military into internal security engagement, the line is becoming blur between the DIA and DSS as it relates to the gathering and deployment of internal intelligence information ([Saliu and Saka 2019](#), 12).

Aside these three, there is also the Directorate of Military Intelligence, DMI. The DMI was tasked with both military and domestic intelligence management roles under military dictatorship given the lack of trust on the intelligence unit of the Police and the DSS (then referred to as the SSS). Within the Nigerian Police Force, there is the existence of the Force Intelligence Bureau, FIB. Historically, the FIB as a special branch of the Nigerian Police Force has the mandate of gathering and management of internal intelligence information. Although the FIB lost out in the power politics of intelligence information management under successive military regimes and was largely marginalized and relegated, yet this important special branch of the Police still exists as a functional unit within the Police establishment. With these arrays of intelligence information management agencies and special branches, the issue of overlapping jurisdiction, authority and responsibilities will become problematic especially given the underlying context of inter-agency rivalry. Given the culture of inter-agency rivalry that continues to characterize working relationship among Nigeria's security agencies that have mandate on intelligence information gathering and management, the protection of turf and conflict of interest cannot but arise ([Saliu and Saka 2019](#)). Coupled with other challenges bedeviling the security institutions, these problems have largely contributed to the lack of cooperation, cohesion and oversight among the security and intelligence institution. The creation of the office of Chief of Intelligence in 2015 by President Muhammadu Buhari seems not to have contributed more to the effort at coordination, cohesion, synergy and the management of intelligence information especially as it relates to making intelligence information gathering and deployment the fulcrum of the Nigeria's counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations and missions in the Northeast, Northwest and across other zones in the country where task forces had been deployed ([Saliu and Saka 2019](#)).

Affirming the debilitating impacts of inter-agency rivalry, the Inspector General of Police, IGP Usman Baba was quoted as stating that, 'unhealthy inter-agency rivalry was a major factor limiting the capacity of the Nigeria's armed forces to effectively contain the insecurity bedeviling the nation'. Noting the destructive implications of inter-agency rivalry on the security establishment and the nation's security in general, IGP Baba, noted that,

“inter-agency friction constitutes a major threat to internal security and national cohesion. Secondly, it accounts for budgetary wastage, duplication of functions, mutual suspicion, and encroachment on each other's legal and operational

space by competing agencies. And thirdly, it exposes security agencies to public ridicule and possible loss of public confidence in the ability of such agencies to perform their statutory functions” (NDA-Isaiah *et al.* 2021).

Practically all of these issues raised by IGP Baba have manifested in the activities of Nigeria security establishment with regards to their ongoing operations across the country. The negative implications of inter-agency rivalry and lack of cooperation and cohesion as pointed out by the IGP Baba are applicable to the Nigeria situation.

Pervasive corruption in defense budgeting, expenditure and procurement process

One of the most important non-military related crises undermining the military operations in Northern Nigeria is the pervasive culture of corruption and governance crisis bedeviling the Nigerian security establishment. Without doubt, the crisis of corruption, culture of patronage and resource mismanagement runs deep within the Nigerian military in particular and the larger security institutions in general. Most aspect of resources management processes within the Nigerian security establishment, but more importantly arms, ammunition and weapon procurement process have largely been turned into avenue for resource leakage and corrupt enrichment. High ranking military and civilian leadership inclusive of individuals within the larger civil society that have had engagements with defense and military procurement exercise in the past have been accused of resources pilfering and corrupt enrichment from arms purchase deals. The processes of arms procurement in Nigeria are largely made susceptible to corruption given the opaqueness, lack of transparency and accountability that characterized the process. The utilization of private security firms/middlemen in arms procurement as against country-to-country bilateral sales agreements has tended to worsen arms procurement corruption.

While arms procurement process has been largely corrupt, this story is incomplete without a better grasp of the culture of secrecy, lack of transparency and non-accountability that have been the hallmarks of defense budgeting and expenditure processes in Nigeria. The secrecy as it relates to defense budgeting and expenditure was a carry-over trait from the decades of military rule and all attempt at reforming defense budgeting and expenditure processes since the return to civil rule has failed to achieve the desire results. This is largely because the reform processes were half-hearted, lack the necessary political will and commitment and are not backed by the desire to reform on the part of the military/security establishment leaderships and high ranking officers. Thus, most attempt at reforms had largely been still-born processes, ineffective and failed adventure. The failure of reforms can be attributed to the entrenched and deep-rooted nature of corruption in defense budgeting, expenditure and arms procurement processes with proceeds from this treasonable crime lining the pockets of high officers within the military, other security institutions, the civil leadership within the executive and legislative arms of government and of course bureaucratic officers especially those at the Ministry of Defense, directly involved in defense budgeting, general expenditure and arms procurement.

Duruji, Idowu, Dibia and Duruji-Moses (2018, 439-443) catalogued forms of corruption in defense expenditure and military spending to include: repetition of expenses, inappropriate expenditure items, duplication of expenditures using different headings and expenditure heads with unduly large funds among other forms of corrupt practices. Indeed, there are numerous instances of pervasion of budgetary process, corruption in military spending and arms procurements that have been reported in the Nigeria media. The most celebrated in recent time has being the corruption in procurement and large scale theft uncover by the Presidential Committee instituted by President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 to audit weapons and equipment procurement for the Nigeria's security institutions since 2007 (Premium Times 2015). The committee headed by Rtd Air Vice Marshal John Ode in its interim report, detailed irregularities in weapons procurement and management of defense fund traceable to the Office of the National Security Adviser (NSA) headed by Rtd Colonel Sambo Dasuki under the regime of President Goodluck Jonathan. The committee in its report noted that defense procurement contracts worth \$2.1billion in nearly 53 contracts for the delivery of four Alpha jets, twelve military helicopters, bombs and munitions were not delivered to the Nigeria security agencies as ordered for in the contracts. As a follow up on the report of the committee Rtd Colonel Dasuki was placed on custody by the Federal Government. Upon further investigation conducted by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission, EFCC, judicial proceedings were initiated against Col Dasuki, high ranking military officers, bureaucrats, political appointees and companies implicated in what had become known as #Dasukigate and/or 'Nigeria's Arm-gate scandal' in media and popular parlance in Nigeria (Saliu and Saka 2019, 15-17; World Peace Foundation 2019; Sahara Reporters 2018; Oluwagbemi 2017; Premium Times 2015; Vanguard 2015).

Commenting on the negative impacts of corruption in defense budgeting, military expenditure and arms procurement, Rtd Colonel Tony Nyiam was quoted to have stated that:

The military has a high impact of corruption on the allowances and welfare of fighting troops and on the quality of their arms. Besides, mid-career and junior officers, the rank and file (that is the non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and the other ranks) feel that the war in which most of their colleagues have lost their lives has become a source of embezzlement of public funds by some of their top senior officers (Vanguard 2020).

As it relates to the impact of corruption on morale of personnel in the security agencies but more importantly the officers and men of the three arms of the Nigerian Armed Forces, Rtd Colonel Nyiam was also quoted to have stated that:

it's this witnessing or perception that funds allocated for the right military equipment purchases, and funds allocated for the far North theatre of war operations are being embezzled, that is, one of the major causes of low morale (Vanguard 2020).

In a nutshell, morale and fighting spirit of officers and men of the Nigerian Armed Forces are negatively impacted by grafts, corruption, patronage and nepotism that have fast become an entrenched practice within the defense and security establishment. The problem of corruption and fraud in defense budgeting, expenditure and military procurement largely undermines the capability, capacity, morale and fighting spirit of men of the Nigeria Armed Forces deployed for missions in the Northeast and of recent the Northwest. Corruption, graft and the crisis of poor management of men and materials and pervasive governance crisis bedeviling the security establishment constitute serious impediments to Nigeria's counter-terrorism operations in the Northeast and the efforts at combating the scourge of banditry, cattle rustling and kidnapping in the Northwest (Saliu and Saka 2019).

Poor coordination of civil-military relations and lack of depth with communities for intelligence information gathering

Every instance of insecurity, conflict and war has their intrinsic characters that are peculiar. The intrinsic characters that drive a conflict also inform the dynamics of such conflict and insecurity. To that end, it has become a trite in defense planning, military strategy and tactics that a better grasp of the nature and dynamics of a conflict should inform the nature of military operational responses. While conventional warfare can be addressed through a strategy that lays emphasis more on troop strength, deft logistic planning and fire power, for unconventional operations especially counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations, military planning and strategy encompass more than the above. While intelligence information gathering and its deft deployment is squarely at the heart of every military operation, conventional or non-conventional, the place of intelligence information gathering, its management and judicious utilization is even more critical and highly central to the successes of counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations and missions. To this end, military planners and strategists often lay particular emphasis, devote more man-hour and spend enormous military resources to the gathering of adequate and up to date intelligence information. Military planners and strategists are also very careful in the way and manner they manage the intelligence information gathered with the purpose of guarding against leak, compromise with the objective of forestalling mission's failure and consequent loss of personnel. The recognition of the centrality of intelligence information to the success of military operations informed the significance that military planners and strategists across the world placed on Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, ISR as a very special issue in military strategic planning (Schwille *et al.* 2020; Silva and Ribeiro 2018).

While it can be adduced that the creation of the office of Chief of Intelligence by President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, the first in Nigeria's military history, signifies the appreciation of the role of intelligence gathering for the country's counter-terrorism war in the Northeast. However, the extent to which the creation of the office aided the immersion of military and security personnel in communities, infiltration of terrorist and insurgent cells and networks, sow disinformation and gathered updated intelligence

information that are deployed for the planning of military engagements in the theatres of conflicts is questionable. If anything, the resurgence of Boko Haram, the group's successes at ambushing military convoys, successful attacks on military and civilian targets pointed to the failure of intelligence gathering, management and deployment for mission successes. This failure is partly attributable to the failure of the Nigeria Armed Forces to win the hearts and minds of individuals and communities in the theatre of conflicts. The failure is a reflection of the failed nature of civil-military engagement by the Nigeria armed forces and poor appreciation of the centrality of people's support for the success of security missions/operations by other security institutions that make up the Nigerian security establishment (ICG 2018). [Oyewole \(2020\)](#) highlighted the tenuous nature of the relationship between Nigerians and the Nigeria armed forces by looking at conflict and cooperation that characterized the engagements between communities that host military installations and bases across Nigeria.

The genesis of the poor relations between Nigerians and personnel of the Nigeria armed forces on the one hand, and the people and the military establishment at the institutional level on the other hand was nurtured under decades of military dictatorship. Under military rules, the Nigeria armed forces routinely violate human rights, treat Nigerians with disdain and thus, are unable and unwilling to get people support and nurture trust of Nigerians. Similar poor relationship that was built on the culture of rights violation, harassment and use of violence existed between Nigerians and the Nigeria Police Force at individual and institutional levels. This poor relationship with the people by personnel of Nigeria's security establishment and their institutions has not abated since the return to civil rule (ICG 2018). The October 2020 #EndSARS protests across Nigeria's major cities also the poor relationship between personnel of the Nigerian police force and Nigerians and the violent attacks unleashed against police formations and personnel during the protests and afterward especially across Southeast Nigeria underscored the contempt that Nigerians hold police personnel and police institution in Nigeria.

Instances of high-handedness and extra-judicial killings abound in the Nigeria armed forces interface with the larger population in the Northeast and Northwest as well as the relationship between the people and the larger security establishment in Nigeria. The extra-judicial murder of Muhammad Yusuf, erstwhile leader of the Boko Haram in 2009 was a turning point in the group's militarized engagement with the Nigeria state. Amnesty International had detailed the appalling conditions of civilians detained by the Nigeria armed forces at Giwa barrack in Maiduguri. There has also been reported incidences of the Joint Task Force attacks communities as reprisals for Boko Haram attacks and ambush on the force. [Amnesty International \(2018a; 2018b\)](#) have detailed abuses and exploitation of civilians in the hands of personnel of the Military Joint Task Force in the Northeast theatre of operations. Indeed, more than any other right group, the Amnesty International have come to be perceived as enemy by military authority in Nigeria and the military institution has often had heated exchange and counter-communication.

The abuses that the armed forces have been accused of committing in the Northeast against civilian have contributed to the eroding of trust and support for the military in the area of operation. However, it is clear that the military cannot record overwhelming successes and exterminate the Boko Haram without unalloyed trust, support, understanding and assistance of the civil population in the Northeast. It is also becoming increasingly clear that the military institution is losing support of the communities in the Northwest as the people seem to see the efforts of the state not enough to address the insecurity, criminality and the climate of fear they have had to contend with as bandits, rustlers and kidnapers keep tormenting their communities without respite ([Babangida 2021](#)). However, winning the war against the Boko Haram and decimating criminals in the Northwest requires enormous goodwill, trust, understanding and ultimately cooperation and assistance from the civil population. Indeed, the successes of the Joint Task Forces, Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Hadarin Daji in the Northeast and Northwest is squarely premised on the people of the communities providing appropriate, up to date and reliable intelligence information on the activities of the terrorists, bandits, rustlers and kidnapers to the military authority to aid their operational planning, missions' strategies and tactics. The relentless efforts of the civilian population to aid the war on terror in the Northeast, in particular the exploits of the members of the Civilian Joint Task Force in aiding the Nigerian war efforts in the face of threats to their persons, families and communities has been well documented ([Agbibo 2021, 2018, 2015](#); [Gana 2020](#); [Maiangwa and Ikechi-Ekpendu 2020](#)).

[Maiangwa and Ikechi-Ekpendu \(2020, 331-333\)](#) painted the heroic roles of the CJTF as foot-soldiers to the Nigeria armed forces in combating Boko Haram by tagging along with the Joint Task Force in military operations. In specific terms, they mount check-points to identify and fish out collaborators and insurgents that they in-turn handed over to the military, gathering intelligence information on activities of Boko Haram and passing it across to the military for operational purposes, as community policing agents, providing security for Internally Displaced Persons camps and securitizing movement in and out of the camps, assist humanitarian groups aid agencies to control crowd in IDP camps and also provide security for aid agencies operation, clearing drainages, markets and public places, traffic control within Maiduguri and other major cities among other sundry support activities for the military efforts. While there have been instances of reported high-handedness and abuses, through training and re-organization into sectors for proper coordination, the Civilian JTF has been highly instrumental to the military efforts and seems to have become indispensable to local level security provision in Borno state, [Maiangwa and Ikechi-Ekpendu \(2020, 333\)](#) have argued. Of course, there is a caveat in that the Civilian Joint Task Force that has been reorganized as a state support militia can turn bad and become a new source of threat in post-Boko Haram Northeast Nigeria. Preventing the mutation of this state sponsored militia into a new form of threat is the responsibility of state authorities, national and local as well as the authority of

the Nigeria Armed Forces that worked and partnered with the group in prosecuting her war on terror in the Northeast.

Aside the issues of poor civil-military relations and lack of synergy between the military and civilian population in area of operations, there is also the increasing perception that the major handlers of the regime are poor in communicating to the general population. The pattern, tone and language of communicating with Nigerians by important figures in the current regime whether civilian and military have not been appropriate. The language so far employed has not been that which instilled confidence in the civil populace; neither did their messages communicate empathy. To that end, rather than communicate in manner that shores up popular support for state efforts, the military institutions in the ongoing security operations and the troops at the frontline, messages from senior government figures and military leadership have been those which erode support and stir up ethno-national sentiments across the country. Nothing demonstrated the clear lack of understanding about the importance of communicating to garner support for the State than the statement credited to the Minister of Defence, Rtd Major General Bashir Magashi, to the effects that Nigerians should not be cowards and that the people should take up arms and defend themselves from bandits and criminals ([Omonobi 2021](#)). The Minister, Rtd General Magashi was quoted by the Vanguard newspaper as stating that:

It is the responsibility of everybody to keep alert and to find safety when necessary. But we shouldn't be cowards. At times, the bandits will only come with about three rounds of ammunition, when they fire shots, everybody runs. In our younger days, we stand to fight any aggression coming for us. I don't know why people are running from minor things like that. They should stand and let these people know that even the villagers have the competency and capabilities to defend themselves ([Omonobi 2021](#)).

Messages like this alienate the civil population and show a clear dereliction of duty on the part of the State. That message, as that coming from a retired General in the Nigeria Army and a sitting Federal Minister of Defence, was a clear demonstration of the lack of understanding of the significance of messaging for support by leading figures in the current regime. Similar messages that civilian population should take up arms and defend themselves were also uttered by Governor Bello Matawalle of Zamfara state, one of the state worse affected by rampaging bandits in the Northwest ([Sani 2021](#)). That a Governor elected to guarantee security will direct the people of its state to take to arm and confront well-armed bandits and dare-devil criminals is the height of poor communication and messaging from state officials to the population. The issue of poor communication and messaging undermines popular supports for the State and the military efforts in communities besieged by bandits and criminals in the Northwest. The flip side to messaging calling civilian to arms was that it can result to mass hysteria, emergence of vigilante group and the negative implications for long term peace and stability in the region.

Conclusion

Nigeria is perhaps going through its worse security crisis since the end of the nation's thirty months' civil war in 1970. In the nation's recorded post-independence political and security history at no time have Nigerians been besieged by terrorists, bandits, armed herdsmen, kidnappers and sundry everyday criminals as the case is especially since early 2020. In the same wise, there has not been a time following the end of the civil war that the Nigeria's security establishment has been under intense pressure as they have been since late 2019 and early 2020. Worsening the plight of the nation's security institutions particularly the Nigeria Armed Forces has been the need to combat insecurity and criminality on multiple fronts. The decade old military engagement and deployment Boko Haram splintered groups (JAS, ISWAP & Ansaru) in the Northeast has continue unabated, even though President Buhari claimed that the group has been technically defeated in 2017. The upsurge in terrorist attacks against military and civilian targets in recent time, in the midst of reported death of Abubakar Shekau, factional realignment and the battle for supremacy among different factions operating in the Northeast confound logic and is baffling. Indeed, as [Bukarti \(2021\)](#) highlighted, factional splits of terror groups led to more, rather than less violence from Nigeria's experience against Boko Haram in the Northeast.

As if the terror of Boko Haram is not enough, the Nigeria Armed Forces and other security institutions are now contending with growing insecurity and criminality across Northwest Nigeria. As bandits, kidnappers and cattle rustlers engaged in mindless violence against civilian in the region, kidnapping and decimating communities, the Ansaru, a splinter group from Boko Haram also seems to be gaining foothold. Banditry and ransom kidnapping has extended southward to Northcentral Nigeria opening new arena of criminality that the Nigeria security institutions has had to contend with. While there is no threat of jihadist terrorism extending to Southern Nigeria at least for now and the region can be said to enjoy relative peace, however, upsurge in arrays of criminality and criminal enterprises notably ransom kidnapping is becoming worrisome. Of course, there is the threat coming from the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB and the group violence against personnel and institution of the Nigeria Police Force in the Southeast. While oil induced violence and criminality has receded in the Niger Delta, piracy, kidnapping, oil bunkering and sundry criminalities continue unabated necessitating continued presence military operation in the region.

To effectively address worsening security environment, the Nigeria state and its security establishment need to enhance the fire power of all the task forces deployed for security missions across Northern Nigeria. But more than this, the security establishment, especially the armed forces need to prioritize and deploy needed resources to the generation of up to date intelligence information, its management and synergize information, strategies and tactics sharing among segments of the

security institutions engaged in security missions across the country. The Nigeria state and by extension the Armed Forces need to prioritize soft-power policy programmes directed at equipping communities with skills to counter violent extremist messages in Northeast and to identify individuals that are ring leaders of bandits in the Northwest and neutralize such threats before they magnify. To this end, the Nigeria security establishment need to prioritize and deploy resources to programmes and projects that benefit communities at the margin. The security institutions especially the Armed Forces, Police and the DSS need to engage in deep immersion in communities across Northern Nigeria with the objective of gathering information, countering violent narratives and enhancing capacity of communities for early warning and detection of security threats. The Nigeria state and the security institutions also need to be mindful of the language of their communication with Nigeria and understand the need for language that inspire confidence in people and stimulate their sense of patriotism.

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