

Chinedu Simplicius Udeh

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NIGERIJSKE OBOROŽENE SILE IN PROTIGVERILSKE OPERACIJE V SEVEROVZHODNI NIGERII: OCENA STANJA

NIGERIAN MILITARY AND COUNTER- INSURGENCY OPERATIONS IN NORTH- EAST NIGERIA: AN ASSESSMENT

Povzetek Prispevek analizira dolgotrajne operacije nigerijskih oboroženih sil proti terorističnim in uporniškim skupinam, kot sta Boko Haram in Zahodnoafriška provinca Islamske države. Nigerijske oborožene (AFN) sile so v boju proti tem grožnjam uporabljale tako kinetične kot nekinetične ukrepe, vendar kljub njihovim prizadevanjem in uspehom negotovost še naprej ogroža vzpostavitev miru v državi. V tem prispevku, ki temelji na pregledu dokumentov in terenski raziskavi, so analizirani izzivi, s katerimi se spoprijemajo AFN, med drugim neustrezno orožje in oprema, vprašanja človekovih pravic, postravmatske stresne motnje in slaba sinergija med agencijami. Za reševanje nastale situacije je v članku predstavljenih nekaj predlogov, kako bi se tem izzivom lahko izognili.

Ključne besede *Nigerijske oborožene sile, gverila, varnostna negotovost, protigverila.*

Abstract This paper analyses the Nigerian military's protracted counter-insurgency operations against terrorist and insurgent groups such as Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province. To counter these threats the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) have been deploying both kinetic and non-kinetic measures to curb the insecurity, but despite their efforts and successes insecurity continues to undermine peace development in the country. This paper, based on desk research and a field survey, analyses the challenges faced by the AFN, which include inadequate weaponry and equipment, human rights concerns, post-traumatic stress disorder, and poor interagency synergy, among other things. To this end, the paper provides some insights into what could be done to obviate these challenges.

Key words *Nigerian military, insurgency, insecurity, counter insurgency.*

Introduction

“About 1.1 million lives could be lost by 2030, if the insurgency ravaging Nigeria’s North-East region continues” (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021a); “The humanitarian crisis in North-East Nigeria remained one of the most complex humanitarian crises in the world” (United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UN-OCHA]; 2021b).

These statements by the UNDP and the UN-OCHA capture the human security implications of the insurgency and insecurity in the North-East region of Nigeria, and the urgent need to push back and defeat it. Security is a first order priority and a necessary condition for the well-being of the people and the development of a country. As aptly noted by McNamara (1968), security is not military hardware, although it may include it; security is not military force, although it may involve it; and security is not traditional military activity; though it may encompass it. Security is development, and without development, there can be no security. The legitimacy of any government is predicated on the degree to which the security of the citizens is guaranteed. Simply put, security is freedom from danger, attacks and harmful threats to the individual or the nation.

Nigeria’s 1999 Constitution, as amended in Section 14 (2) (b), states that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government” (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 1999). This ultimately saddles the Nigerian government at all levels with the responsibility of safeguarding the lives, property and welfare of Nigerians against internal and external threats. Paradoxically, Nigeria is confronted and challenged by a seemingly intractable epidemic of insecurity such as insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, militancy, separatist agitations, ritual killings and other forms of criminality from north to south and east to west. These security challenges have dire consequences for Nigeria’s territorial integrity, security and national development.

One geo-political zone which has witnessed protracted insurgency, terrorism, banditry and other forms of criminality is the North-East, comprising the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. These states have unique, cross-cutting security challenges, but are particularly plagued by terrorism and insurgency waged by Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). It is believed that the insecurity emanating from the North-East zone has criminal domino effects across other geo-political zones in the north, particularly the North-West and North Central regions where banditry and kidnapping have become rampant, as well as in the southern belt of the country, where kidnapping, violent agitation and militancy challenge the capacity of the state to maintain law and order. Broadly speaking, Nigeria’s security challenges are driven by multiple causes and some commonalities such as ideological grievances, corruption and bad governance, weak security sector capacity, and socio-economic and political deprivation, as well as the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs), among others.

The activities of the insurgent groups in the North-East region have caused the worst humanitarian crisis in the history of Nigeria. As reported by the UNDP, Boko Haram and its splinter group ISWAP have sustained a conflict against the Nigerian state that has now lasted over a decade, causing over 35,000 deaths (350,000 when second-order effects are counted) and left over 2 million internally displaced people (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021a). Similarly, the North-East Development Commission [NEDC] (2023) reports that 14.8 million people have been displaced in the North-East due to the insurgency. The insurgency and criminality in the North-East have adversely impacted infrastructure, education, the healthcare system, the economy and the livelihoods of the people. For instance, the over 10 years of violence in the region has left 45% of all health facilities and an estimated 75% of all water and sanitation infrastructure destroyed. More than 2.9 million children have been denied access to education (Brechenmacher, 2019). The 2016 Report on the North-East Nigeria Recovery and Peace Building Assessment (RPBA) on the crisis in the North-East Region, produced by the FGN, the World Bank, the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), shows that property worth US\$9 billion has been destroyed due to the insecurity and insurgency in the region (Vanguard, 2016a). There are several other socio-economic, political, psychological, environmental and human security consequences of the insecurity in the North-East of Nigeria.

The underlying causes of the insecurity in the North-East have revolved around history, climate and environmental issues, poverty, illiteracy, religious extremism, prolonged socio-economic neglect, poor governance and corruption (Udeh, 2022). There is also an external dimension to the problem, given the fact that some of the states in the region share international borders with Cameroon, Chad and Niger. These are countries plagued by their own internal contradictions and security challenges. Indeed, the creation of insecurity in Nigeria's North-East is a product of cross-cutting sociopolitical, socioeconomic and sociocultural factors. Some of the factors that explain the protracted nature of the insecurity in the North-East include the absence of the state, poverty, illiteracy, poor management of the forest, and overstretched security forces (Udeh, 2022). Any result-oriented response to insecurity must incorporate all the causative factors.

Strategic analysis of the remote and immediate causes of insecurity in the North-East of Nigeria has largely inspired the responses of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) through its civil and military authorities, as well as the international community. The responses have been a hybrid of kinetic and non-kinetic measures such as military/security operations, efforts at deradicalization, and the socioeconomic rejuvenation of the region.

The Nigerian government's military-oriented and non-kinetic responses have achieved limited success in stemming insecurity and criminality in the North-East. While the Nigerian military has substantially succeeded in decimating Boko Haram/ISWAP's leadership and its rank and file, the group has proven to be adaptive and

resilient as they continue to attack soft targets. Mitigating insecurity will require a deep understanding of its drivers and the dynamics, together with the motivations and capabilities of various strategic actors. It is also pertinent to underline and understand the regional dimension of the crisis in the North-East, which adds additional complexity to its insecurity.

The Armed Forces of Nigeria, comprising the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy and Nigerian Air Force, have been deployed to North-East Nigeria to counter insurgency and other violent extremist activities in the area. There have been some successes, and also certain challenges confronting the Nigerian military in defeating Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgents.

This paper is primarily based on desk research and a field survey to some of the states in the North-East, including Adamawa, Borno, Yobe, Bauchi and Gombe. It adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing key informant interviews conducted with sources including security operatives, academia, civil society organizations and focus group engagements with selected individuals. The paper covers the operational definition of key terms, the geo-strategic importance of North-East Nigeria, and the roots of the insurgency and insecurity there. Thereafter, the paper discusses the national and international efforts towards countering insurgency and insecurity in North-East Nigeria, the key challenges facing the Nigerian military, future trends of insecurity in Nigeria, and strategies to boost the role of the Nigerian military in counter-insurgency.

1 OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.1 Security

Security in its simplest form means freedom from or resilience against real or potential harm or threats from internal or external environments. It is the feeling of being safe and protected, as well as the feeling of freedom from danger, fear, anxiety, aggression and violation. It is about safeguarding individuals and a country from harmful threats. As noted by Meerts (2018, p 1) the concept of security entails a state of being free from danger or threats, including war, unemployment, illness or accidents.

1.2 Insecurity

The term insecurity denotes an atmosphere or state of mind characterized by self-doubt and vulnerability. According to the American Psychological Association (2018), insecurity is a feeling of inadequacy, a lack of self-confidence, and an inability to cope, accompanied by general uncertainty and anxiety about one's goals, abilities or relationships with others. For the purpose of this paper, insecurity is defined as any situation that encourages instability, crime, underdevelopment and deterioration in the well-being and quality of life of a people, or implies a threat to a nation's integrity and sovereignty.

1.3 National Security

A broad definition of national security entails the totality of all efforts taken to protect the territorial integrity and cherished values of a nation, improve the living standards of its people, provide security and the freedom of its citizens from all forms of anxiety and threats to life and property, and ensure their safety from natural or manmade disasters. It comprises the ability of a country to neutralize or degrade acts that could threaten the safety and well-being of the people or even undermine its capacity to maintain law and order (Peters, 2003).

1.4 Human Security

Human security is a people-centric and multifaceted understanding of the notion of security. The traditional concept of national security has been challenged by scholars arguing that the proper referent object for security should be at the human rather than national level. Hence, human security denotes the protection of the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and fulfilment. It means protecting people from economic, food, health, political, personal, environmental, community, spiritual and emotional threats which degrade their quality of life and well-being (UNDP, 1994).

1.5 Insurgency

Insurgency is an organized resistance movement that uses subversion, sabotage and armed conflict to achieve its aims. According to Nigeria's National Counter Terrorism Strategy (2016 Revised, p 1) insurgency means "an organized armed struggle by a group aimed at weakening the authority of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in order to force a political change through the propagation of extremist ideology, under the guise of politico-economic marginalization".

1.6 Counter-Insurgency

Counter-insurgency is the use of all elements of national power, including military, psychological, diplomatic, information, economic, political and intelligence operations, to defeat an insurgency. A successful counter-insurgency operation requires a synchronization of multiple lines of effort, including diplomatic, information, military and economic, through a whole nation or society approach. Counter-insurgency is "the range of military, political and socio-economic measures adopted by a State in response to the outbreak of insurgency" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, NACTEST, 2016, p 1). It is important to note that the acquisition of real-time and actionable intelligence is necessary and core to successful counter-insurgency and insecurity in Nigeria in general, and the States in the North-East zone in particular, in order to uproot the causes of the conflict and threats.

2 THE ROOTS OF INSURGENCY AND INSECURITY IN THE NORTH-EAST

The roots of the problem which has caused and sustained the activities of BH/ISWAP terrorists in Nigeria will be considered in the light of the stance of the government regarding implementing of the Sharia Law, establishing an Islamic State and abolishing Western education. These will be discussed subsequently.

2.1 Non-Implementation of Sharia Law

The evolution of BH/ISWAP was rooted in the partial implementation and adoption of the contested Sharia law in 12 Northern states in the country, beginning in 2000 (Agbibo, 2015). There have been attempts to enforce its full implementation since the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s (Okoro, 2014). To BH/ISWAP insurgents, this has been their cry to the government; to declare the full implementation of Sharia Law (Boas, 2012). Accordingly, BH/ISWAP's origin and activities are a clear display and means of venting their anger with regard to the non-implementation of Sharia Law in the 12 Northern states of Nigeria (Buah and Adelakun, 2009). The non-implementation of Sharia Law is considered one of the roots of the problem which has caused and sustained the activities of BH/ISWAP terrorists in Nigeria.

2.2 Ungoverned Spaces

Ungoverned spaces are territories within a state where the government's presence is not felt by the people. Large portions of the states in the North-East region are forested with little or no government presence, thereby becoming a safe haven for insurgency. In particular, the extensive Sambisa and Alagarno forests have become major hideouts for terrorists. According to the 2019 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), which rates countries with regard to security, rule of law, and human and economic development, Nigeria was ranked 45th of 54 countries which were below the African average of 48 points (MO Ibrahim Foundation, 2020). This implies a threat to national security in the country. Hence, ungoverned spaces pose a serious challenge to the efforts to curb terrorism in the North-East region and towards enhanced national security in Nigeria.

2.3 Religious Indoctrination

The BH/ISWAP terrorists hold extreme religious ideologies, which they use as the basis for committing their heinous crimes. The terrorists erroneously view Western education as the cause of weak governance, poverty, unemployment, corruption and rejection in North-East Nigeria (Thurston, 2016). Instead, they believe that the practice of Sharia Law would engender the much-desired socioeconomic development. Accordingly, the rise of BH/ISWAP is embedded in Islamic fundamentalism, which they use to justify their actions; the group aims to promote Sharia law and create an Islamic state in Northern Nigeria (Akinola, 2015). As a result, it has waged war on any group or western idea which they believe is against Islam (Adelaja, Labo and Penar, 2018). It has been advocated that the misinterpretation of religious teaching is the

leading factor influencing the adoption of extreme religious views, especially among youths in northern Nigeria (Onuoha, 2014). Njoku (2020) asserted that there was no threat of punishment for BH/ISWAP fighters because they had been brainwashed to believe that death is a reward, so they looked forward to it. Thus, BH/ISWAP have been completely misguided into holding a perverted view of religious ideology which impacts negatively on national security.

2.4 Socioeconomic Problems

In North-East Nigeria there is a common perception that violent extremism is a direct consequence of the poor socioeconomic condition of the country. In this regard, Usman (2015) argued that poverty, low literacy level and unemployment are the driving forces behind the insurgency and insecurity in Nigeria. The current unemployment rate of 33.3% leaves a large number of youths disengaged and without the skills to engage in any meaningful economic endeavour. This has made it easy for them to be manipulated and recruited by BH/ISWAP terrorists. Thus, the vicious cycle of poverty and unemployment makes it easy for people to be recruited into BH/ISWAP.

2.5 Porous Borders and Uncontrolled Migration

The North-East region accounts for one-third of Nigeria's 1,497km international land border with Chad, the Republic of the Niger and Cameroon. This large expanse of land is loosely regulated, as communities along the border share cultural, religious and historical ties, among others. In addition, there are about 1400 illegal land border crossings in Nigeria, with only 84 approved land border posts (Ajaja, 2021). Thus, the poorly manned Nigerian borders provide unhindered access to SALW and criminal groups from the Sahel Region into Nigeria. In 2016, the United Nations (UN) Centre for Peace and Disarmament revealed that there were about 500 million assorted firearms in West Africa. It further stated that about 350 million of these arms, amounting to 70%, had been smuggled through Nigeria's porous borders (Vanguard, 2016b). The large number of firearms has continued to pose threats to national security. Furthermore, according to the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CSLAC), the influx of foreign fighters into Nigeria through its porous borders significantly contributes to insecurity (Nzeshi, 2021). In addition, about 500 villages and 13,000 hectares of land have been devastated, while about 2,835 people were killed between 2011 and 2020 as a result of terrorism, kidnapping and other crimes orchestrated through the porous borders (Ojewale, 2021). Thus, border porosity, which is a direct consequence of ineffective border control, is inimical to the efforts towards curbing insecurity in the North-East and, by extension, in Nigeria.

2.6 Demographic Pressures and Climatic Change

The shrinking of Lake Chad from 22,000 km² in 1960 to about 3000 km² in 2000 resulted in the loss of livelihood for farmers, fishermen and others who depended on the lake for survival (Gao et al., 2011). Leke and Leke (2019) indicated that deforestation and desertification have continued to degrade the soil, with about

40% of arable land lost, particularly in North-East Nigeria. Furthermore, Nigeria's population increased from 186 million to 201 million between 2016 and 2019, indicating an increase of 15 million, of which northern Nigeria accounted for 10 million (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). There has therefore been a significant decline in the natural agricultural resources in the North-East to cater for the increasing population, which is largely youthful. Thus, demographic pressure and climate change form part of the roots of insurgency in the North-East.

2.7 Geography and Regional Dynamics

The geographical location of the North-East region of Nigeria, and the proximity of Nigeria to fragile neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger, have also exposed Nigeria to regional insecurity. For instance, Niger is bounded on the north-west by Algeria, on the north-east by Libya, on the east by Chad and on the west by Burkina Faso and Mali. Most of these countries are enmeshed in conflict and insurgency, with dire consequences for Niger and her Nigerian neighbour. Foreign fighters from Libya and Mali flow freely into Niger and by extension into the North-East of Nigeria, carrying SALWs and violent extremist ideologies. Chad shares borders with Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya and Sudan, and these countries are also embroiled in conflicts and insecurity with spillover effects.

Having underlined some of the root causes of insecurity in the North-East region, it is important to examine some of the national and international responses to the menace.

3 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS IN COUNTERING INSURGENCY AND INSECURITY IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

The national and international efforts in mitigating insecurity in the North-East have been both kinetic and non-kinetic. These are discussed below, beginning with the kinetic efforts.

3.1 Kinetic Efforts

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has launched several military operations such as ZAMAN LAFIYA, LAFIYA DOLE and HADIN KAI. In addition, the Nigerian Army (NA) established the 7th Division in Maiduguri and several super-camps across the North-East to address the situation. The Nigerian Navy (NN) deployed its Special Boat Services to the Lake Chad region, while the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) deployed platforms in support of the surface forces. The efforts of the military are supported by other security agencies deployed in the North-East to address the situation, and the Nigerian forces collaborate with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) operating on the fringes of Lake Chad to restore peace and security to the region (Abdullahi, 2023). These kinetic efforts, although helpful in normalizing the security situation in the North-East Nigeria, do not address the

root causes of the conflict, and are therefore not sufficient to address terrorism and insurgency.

According to the International Crisis Group [ICG] (2021), the Nigerian military has essentially adopted a better defensive posture, regrouping its troops in “super-camps” in various northern Borno localities. This move has reduced military losses, but also allowed ISWAP to tighten its grip on other portions of rural Borno. The Nigerian authorities have stepped up military operations against ISWAP. The offensive, along with improvements in intelligence, surveillance and airborne reconnaissance capacity, and better coordination between air and ground forces, has escalated pressure on ISWAP and prevented large-scale jihadist attacks on garrison towns. In the past few months, Super Tucano, F-17 and other aircraft have repeatedly hit ISWAP fighters as they gathered to launch raids or struck them as they returned.

Due to the increased military pressure, ISWAP has adapted its tactics accordingly, dropping its large-scale attacks to evade the air raids and focusing on mounting roadblocks to kidnap and kill state officials, hitting military convoys with ambushes and improvised explosive devices, and using artillery fire against garrisons (International Crisis Group, 2021). Despite the successes of the kinetic efforts, the FGN and other well-meaning stakeholders acknowledge that military operations are not enough to defeat ISWAP, and have introduced other measures to defeat insurgency and insecurity in the north-eastern flank of the country. It is important to underline the need for deepened non-kinetic approaches by both military and civil organizations in order to unlock the adversaries’ Centre of Gravity (COG).

3.2 Non-Kinetic Efforts

The FGN has introduced non-kinetic measures to curb insecurity in the North-East region. These include the enactment of legal, policy and institutional frameworks such as the National Defence Policy 2017, the Terrorism Prevention Act, the National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), the National Security Strategy (NSS) 2019, the National Cyber Security Policy and Strategy, the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, and the National Development Plan 2021-2025, and the establishment of the North-East Development Commission (NEDC), among others. The NEDC is the focal organization charged with the responsibility of assessing, coordinating, harmonizing and reporting on all intervention programmes and initiatives by the FGN or any of its MDAs, States and other Development Partners. It is mandated with the responsibility of receiving and managing funds allocated by the FGN and international donors for the resettlement, rehabilitation, integration and construction of roads, houses and business premises of victims of insurgency and terrorism, as well as for tackling the menace of poverty, illiteracy, ecological problems and any other related environmental or developmental challenges in the North-East states (NEDC; n.d.). The NEDC has intervened in health and humanitarian areas, agriculture, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and housing, among others. For instance, the NEDC has established ICT Resource Centres in each of the six states of the North-East in order to improve access to information technology in

the region. Despite the modest achievements of the NEDC since its establishment, the challenge of developing an integrated and sustainable master plan and funding remains existential for the Commission. It is also important to ensure the transparent, accountable and judicious use of the received funds to ensure durable peace and security in the North-East.

The FGN employed the services of the Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) to stifle the financial sources of the insurgents (GIABA, n.d.). Terrorist financing had enabled BH/ISWAP to perpetrate over 281 attacks, kill over 21,345 people, destroy property worth over US\$5.9 billion, and displace more than 2 million people between 2015 and 2019 (de Montclos, 2019). In addition, BH/ISWAP carried out about 81 Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks and killed about 145 people during the first quarter of 2022 (Haruna, 2022; Akpan, 2022). In June 2024, Boko Haram carried out some deadly suicide bombings in Borno State, targeting wedding and funeral ceremonies. A Nigerian Army spokesperson, Major General Edward Buba, said the attacks were cowardly and meant to project an image of strength to cover their (Boko Haram's) weakness and decline (Reuters, July 2, 2024). The insurgent groups left Nigeria ranked 8th of 92 countries in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2022, indicating the high rate of terrorist activities in Nigeria (GTI, 2022). There have been continued activities of BH/ISWAP in Nigeria, particularly in the North-East, due to the inadequate government presence and a large pool of disengaged youths. The resulting insecurity and loss of life and property impinges on national security. Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) is a small-scale defector programme established in 2016 for repentant Boko Haram fighters to reintegrate into civilian life. The OSC is a home-grown programme designed by the Nigerian government. The programme has achieved some degree of success by reintegrating several repentant BH members, although it has faced resistance from some quarters who believe that instead of rewarding the repentant BH fighters, they should be made to face the law and sanctioned appropriately. The OSC still needs a great deal of support from both the government and other stakeholders for it to serve its purpose and help mitigate insecurity in the North-East region.

At the end of 2019 there were 74 identified organizations working in the North-East, including 6 UN agencies plus OCHA and IOM, 28 INGOs, and 33 Nigerian national and local NGOs. Of the six states in the North-East, the bulk of the operational aid presence is concentrated in the three states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (the BAY States), where the Nigerian government has declared a state of emergency (Abdullahi, Daniel 'personal communication', February 2024). These three states, and Borno in particular, are the epicentre of the conflict and contain the most people in need of aid. The other three north-eastern states of Bauchi, Gombe and Taraba also have needs, however, and there is evidence that the true scope of the conflict extends at least to Gombe and Bauchi. There are also several other non-kinetic lines of effort, including political, environmental, informational and economic endeavours, among

others, designed to mitigate insecurity and promote peace building in the North-East region.

4 KEY CHALLENGES TO THE NIGERIAN MILITARY IN CURBING INSURGENCY AND INSECURITY IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

Some of the identified key challenges which complicate the Nigerian military's war against insecurity in the North-East region include the uncoordinated response by both government and international actors, weak regional cooperation, poor border management, the proliferation of SALW, and poor governance. These are adumbrated further below.

The responses to the insurgency and insecurity in the North-East have been encouraging, and they are helping to stem the tide of insecurity in the region. However, uncoordinated responses still exist between the FGN on the one hand, and international partners on the other, in the implementation of programmes such as the OSC and Safe School Initiatives (Okereke, 2023). This paper has also underlined the need to ramp up regional cooperation between Nigeria and its neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Poor border management has made the Nigerian borders porous for the free entry of people, goods and services. Keeping in mind the ECOWAS Protocol of Free Movement of Goods and Persons, Nigeria must scale up its border management to arrest insecurity in the North-East. The proliferation of SALWs poses a serious challenge to curbing insecurity; the wide circulation of SALWs in the region fuels insecurity and empowers criminal groups to continue to challenge the country's monopoly in the use of instruments of violence.

Poor governance over years in the North-East has created a large army of unemployed youth and promoted poverty, illiteracy and socioeconomic underdevelopment in the region. The North-East has the largest number of people living in poverty in Nigeria. Unemployment is rife in the states and infrastructural deficits stare the states in the face. Addressing bad governance will be a right step towards curbing insecurity, insurgency and banditry in the North-East region of Nigeria.

5 FUTURE TRENDS OF INSECURITY IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

To develop effective strategies to counter the insecurity in the region, it is crucial that planners and decision-makers not only understand the current state of the conflict but also have a sense of how the conflict is evolving. An examination of the current conflict trends and an analysis of how contemporary insurgencies and modern African internal conflicts end suggest several plausible scenarios for the evolution of the insecurity in the NE. Here we present three possible futures, from the most likely to the least likely. In preparing these scenarios, it has been assumed that the Nigerian government and military's current, predominantly kinetic, approach to combating insecurity in the NE will remain, for the most part, unchanged in the near term,

and that non-kinetic efforts dealing with the micro, meso and macro triggers of the insurgency will be increased.

5.1 A Transformation to Criminality or a New War

According to Mao Zedong (2010), guerilla warfare without a political front and strong links to the population is nothing but “roving banditry.” As Boko Haram enjoys so little grassroots or external support, because it has so far failed to provide an ideological catalyst to mobilize discontent and focus it on achievable objectives, and because it has also failed to develop a mechanism to administer territory, it is probable that over time the group will metamorphose into a criminal or terrorist organization without a territory or a home base. Banditry as we have it in the North-West is not unconnected to this evolution. Other factors that support this scenario include the fact that the insurgency is heavily outmatched by a strong Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) which, on multiple occasions, has shown the capacity to decimate the group and which enjoys strong international support, including from its neighbours, who wish to close their borders and eradicate Boko Haram sanctuaries in their territories. Once the insurgency has been severely weakened, it is also likely that the Nigerian government will fail to reconcile with surviving hardcore militants, opening up the possibility that they continue as a criminal or terrorist group.

5.2 Expansion and Secession

Because of its extreme tactics, in its current form Boko Haram/ISAWP enjoys little or no public support. It has not been able to mobilize large segments of the population, and instead recruits support from a single ethnic group and from young, unemployed men who are mainly interested in financial rewards. Nevertheless, the conditions in NE Nigeria are ripe for an expansion of the conflagration. The Muslim population’s frustration with the government overall and the continued poverty and economic disparity, together with disenchantment with mainstream Islamic leaders, has created an environment in which radical, fundamentalist movements are among the only groups left with some authority. If Boko Haram experiences a change in leadership or reforms its violent tactics, and if the government and northern elites fail to address the root causes and grievances in the NE, it is possible that the insurgency could attain significant grassroots support, as it did prior to 2009. If this happens, the conflict could spread outside the zone to the whole of Muslim-dominated Nigeria, thereby deepening religious and regional fault lines and threatening national unity and stability. If the Muslim majority in the north were mobilized in support of Boko Haram’s objectives, it is possible that the north could attempt to break away in a secessionist bid to create an Islamic state.

5.3 Fracture and Co-option

Without additional internal or external support, Boko Haram has little chance of achieving any sort of military victory in the short to mid-term. This is because the group itself is reportedly already highly fragmented and its leadership is divisive. Thus, it is possible that Boko Haram could break into more factions and some groups

could become susceptible to co-option by the state over time. Factions within the insurgency have already attempted to enter into negotiations with the Nigerian government. If the conflict evolves into a strategic stalemate, it could be possible to influence the belligerents against continued fighting. If the insurgency were to splinter, it is likely that the die-hard elements of Boko Haram would either devolve into a criminal or terrorist organization or would be decisively defeated by the AFN.

These plausible scenarios are expected to guide and inform military and non-military strategies to defeat Boko Haram and other splinter terrorist groups in North-East Nigeria, such as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) and ISWAP. It must be noted that JAS has gained ground in the intra-jihadist fighting in North-East Nigeria, halting the previous momentum of ISWAP. According to ICG (2024), in the course of 2023 JAS took most of the islands in Lake Chad which ISWAP had controlled. This development calls for a new strategy by the Nigerian military and the governments of Lake Chad Basin Region.

6 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE ROLE OF THE NIGERIAN MILITARY IN COUNTERING INSURGENCY AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Success in curbing the insurgency and insecurity in the North-East requires a grand strategy which defines the peace sought, intelligently combining diplomacy, the economy, military actions, and social and information operations. The FGN could adopt a comprehensive whole-nation grand strategy to guide lower-level activities. There is need for unwavering political will in support of violent COIN operations by the Nigerian military. The strategy needs to take into account the adversary and its mutating nature; in this case, it needs to be relevant to the nature of the Boko Haram insurgency. Broadly speaking, the following strategies could be adopted by the Nigerian military and government to deliver effective counter insurgency operation:

6.1 Adopt an Optimized Subordinate Military Strategy

This involves creating smaller fighting units, and devolving authority to independent battlefield commanders and employing specialized guerilla units alongside conventional infantry. To fight an insurgency, conventional armies must adopt some of the guerrilla strategies of their enemies, including small formations, deep penetration into hostile territory, and hit-and-run surprise attacks. The AFN could use small, highly trained, mobile groups to infiltrate the Boko Haram/ISWAP front lines. These could comprise 4-man teams to attack high-value targets, provide real-time intelligence, and disrupt Boko Haram/ISWAP's lines of resupply and communications. The military teams must be well-trained and authorized to call in precision air, artillery, and mortar attacks on Boko Haram/ISWAP locations and fighting teams.

6.2 Increase the Capacity of the Armed Forces of Nigeria

Increasing the AFN's budget by 35% for the next 10 years (2024-2034) would shore up their capability and equipment as they engage in internal security operations all over the nation. Professionalism cannot be achieved in the AFN if they are not well-funded and resourced. Nigeria's annual defence budget is rather a pittance compared to the enormous responsibility the military are meant to take on. The capacity of the AFN needs to be increased in terms of recruitment of personnel and training to fit the contemporary security challenges in the North-East and in Nigeria in general. The capacity issues of the AFN in terms of funding, training, equipment and welfare, among others, must be addressed for robust counter-insurgency operations. More personnel need to be added to the AFN Special Forces, together with deepening intelligence gathering and utilization as leveraging emerging technologies.

6.3 Diplomatic and Financial Isolation of the Insurgents

The government needs to erode one additional key pillar of Boko Haram's strength — their support overseas. Boko Haram/ISWAP/JAS have been effective at defining themselves as fighting for a just Islamic state in the eyes of the Muslim world, influencing the public narrative through media activities. The loss of foreign support and international legitimacy would play a pivotal role in Boko Haram's loss of legitimacy at home. It would also render fundraising more difficult. Increased counter-terrorist financing is urgent. In this regard, the Nigerian military could leverage its Defence Attache System all over the world to build a counter narrative against these insurgents, especially among the Islamic nations. The use of diplomatic and financial isolation would assist the Nigerian military in securing a sustainable victory over these insurgents and jihadists.

6.4 Ramp up International Cooperation with Strategic Countries

Nigeria needs to deepen her cooperation with countries such as the US, the UK, France, Canada, Russia, India and Pakistan. These countries are great powers with capable military forces. France is isolated here because of its influence over Nigeria's strategic neighbourhood. Nigeria needs to engage more with France in order to secure the cooperation of countries such as Cameroon and Chad in the fight against terrorism and insurgency. The FGN and the military need to effectively harness the defence attachés to win more international cooperation for the Nigerian military in the areas of modern equipment, intelligence collection and sharing, training and other tangible and intangible support.

6.5 A Closer Working Relationship with Nigeria's Contiguous/Strategic Neighbours

There is a need for Nigeria to deepen engagement with her strategic neighbours such as the Republic of Benin, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. These countries are pivotal to Nigeria's security. In addition, the Nigerian military needs to deepen its engagement with the armed forces of countries sharing borders with Nigeria, not just through

the MNJTF but also through other engagements such as sports, intelligence sharing, joint training and other social activities that could bring them together.

6.6 Addressing Poverty, Unemployment and Infrastructure Deficit

Addressing poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and the infrastructure deficit in the North-East is a necessary condition to boosting security in the region. In this regard, the NEDC, the states' governments, the organized private sector, civil society organizations and international partners need to deepen their collaboration to create an enabling environment to attract investment and industrialization into the North-East region of Nigeria. The military needs to find creative ways to support these non-kinetic efforts, because they could serve as force multipliers. The Nigerian military could be engaged in infrastructure construction, the provision of education through its well-established education corps, and assistance in healthcare delivery; these are areas where the Nigerian military has developed expertise and competencies.

6.7 Strengthening the Capacity of the Police

The need to strengthen the capacity of the NPF as the lead agency in internal security cannot be overstressed. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) needs new training, modern policing equipment and systems to build their capacity to face contemporary security challenges. The mindset of NPF personnel must be re-tuned to focus on a human and community security policing strategy. More recruitment of degree holders into the NPF is need in the next 5-10 years. In addition, the issue of the State Police needs to be revisited and constitutionally accommodated to empower communities to police themselves. Until the NPF's capacity to maintain law and order is ramped up, the Nigerian military will continue to be overstretched and operationally ineffective. To assist the NPF, the Nigerian military could support them with training, intelligence, and other necessary support which would help the police to function optimally.

6.8 Deepening Intelligence Gathering and Management

Deepening bilateral and multilateral intelligence gathering with countries such as Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria is a necessary requirement to prevent and defeat insurgency and insecurity in the North-East. In this regard, the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) need to recalibrate their intelligence operations with these countries. Furthermore, the fight against insurgency, banditry and insecurity needs to be seen as an intelligence-based operation. The NIA and DIA need to go the extra mile to ensure that Nigeria's neighbours on the north-eastern flank do not support terrorists and insurgents. Accordingly, there is need to strengthen regional and extra-regional intelligence cooperation.

Conclusion This paper analyses the role of the Nigerian military in countering insurgency and insecurity in Nigeria's North-East and considers the factors/triggers of insecurity in the region and the broader consequences of insecurity for both the well-being of the people and national development. The paper discusses the role of the Nigerian military in curbing insecurity in the North-East, largely from a kinetic point of view,

while also underlining the point that the Nigerian military is equally rendering non-kinetic support to the government in moving towards a sustainable defeat of insurgency in the region. We have established that the general security situation in the north-eastern states has been precarious and volatile since 2009, when Boko Haram launched an insurgent campaign against the Nigerian state. The insurgent groups which seek to establish an Islamic caliphate are not relenting, despite the efforts made by government to defeat them. The kinetic and non-kinetic endeavours so far have brought limited success, hence the need to recalibrate the efforts to defeat the insurgents and other violent non-state actors, bearing in mind that fighting insurgency is not an overnight thing; it takes time and resources, as well as demanding a whole-society effort, to defeat it.

It is believed that the rising spate of kidnapping and armed banditry in the North-West and North Central zones of Nigeria are being perpetuated by some of the insurgent fighters from the North-East and/or their collaborators. Based on the analysis presented in this paper, it could be concluded that the conflict in the North-East is most accurately viewed as a counter-insurgency problem, rather than a pure counter-terrorism problem. Boko Haram and ISWAP are major regional insurgent groups with local, national and regional political objectives, and this fact needs to be well appreciated in order to defeat their campaign against the Nigerian state. Insecurity in the North-East has been driven by a number of underlying contextual factors and proximate causes, including poor governance, elite's delinquency and extreme socioeconomic inequality, porous borders, resource grabbing and control, among others.

The combination of the three factors of adopting a strategic objective matched to the adversary, using a grand strategy that focuses the whole nation on this objective, and adopting an optimized, subordinate military strategy are some of the ways to curb insecurity in North-East Nigeria. For the Nigerian military to decisively overcome insurgency and violent extremism in the North-East it is imperative to mitigate its systemic challenges of poor equipment holding, inadequate manpower capacity, low level of technology augmentation, and budgetary constraints. Even when the capacity of the Nigerian military is sufficiently engineered, the need for good governance, poverty reduction and job creation cannot be harped on enough. This report offers some recommendations for mitigating the level of security in the North-East.

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email: chinudeh@yahoo.com

Dr. Chinedu Simplicius Udeh je diplomiral iz političnih ved na Univerzi v Kalabarju, magistriral iz političnih ved na Univerzi v Lagosu in doktoriral iz mednarodnih odnosov na Univerzi v Abuji, vse v Nigeriji. Zaposlen je kot vodilni uslužbenec in glavni raziskovalec na Nacionalnem obrambnem kolidžu v Nigeriji. Je gostujoči izredni profesor na Oddelku za politologijo in mednarodne odnose na Univerzi Nil v Nigeriji. Raziskovalno se ukvarja z obrambno ekonomijo, nacionalno in mednarodno varnostjo, nadzorom orožja in razorožitvijo ter uporništvom.

Chinedu Simplicius Udeh, PhD, holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science from University of Calabar, an MSc in Political Science from the University of Lagos, and a PhD in International Relations from University of Abuja, all in Nigeria. He works as a Directing Staff and Principal Research Fellow at the National Defence College, Nigeria. He is a visiting Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Nile University of Nigeria. His research interests are in the fields of defence economics, national and international security, arms control and disarmament, as well as insurgency.

e-mail: chinudeh@yahoo.com

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