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# **RETHINKING MILITARY RESPONSES TO TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA**

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# RETHINKING MILITARY RESPONSES TO TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA

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*Since 2003, terrorist insurgency in Nigeria has occasioned complex security and humanitarian crises, especially in the northeast region of the country. Boko Haram, a radical Islamist group from the region, has killed over 30,000 people and caused the displacement of more than 3 million others within the Lake Chad Basin region. Military responses by the Nigerian state and in collaboration with multilateral security agencies have achieved limited success. This paper not only questions the adequacy of military responses to terrorism, as a standalone approach, but it also advances the argument in the extant literature on the obsolescence of excessive militarization of counterterrorism operations as a security management strategy. It suggests the adoption of a more comprehensive and broad-based strategic approach. This is predicated on the limitations of purely military operations in counterterrorism, noting that military responses alone are structurally not designed to deal with the fundamental root causes of terrorism. In this regard, the paper advocates for a combination of military and other non-military counterterrorism approaches that seek to address the fundamental factors that give rise to terrorism.*

**Key Words: Terrorism, Insurgency, Nigeria, Counterterrorism Operations, Economic Inequality, Political Exclusionism**

## INTRODUCTION

Since the late twentieth century, the protective function, sovereignty, and territorial authority of nation-states have been under threat, occasioned by an upsurge in global terrorism, propelled by the emergence and rise of what Williams described as “Violent Non-State Actors” (VNSAs).<sup>1</sup> These actors have taken advantage of the instruments and process of globalization to carry out audacious and ferocious attacks on citizens, institutions, and critical infrastructure of the state.<sup>2</sup> Although terrorism, with its attendant negative consequences, dates

back to the pre-historic period, otherwise called “antiquity,”<sup>3</sup> its prevalence has been accentuated and escalated in the twentieth century, especially since the September 11, 2001, bombing of the World Trade Centre (WTC) in the United States by the Al-Qaeda terrorist network. The 9/11 attack has been followed by several other terrorist actions across the world.

Africa has experienced significant increases in planned and actual attacks by terrorist networks. With more than 27 different and affiliated “active militant Islamist groups” and terrorist networks operating across the continent, evidence points to the Horn and North of Africa, the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions, as well as the southern part of Africa as the continent’s “new terrorist hotspot” and “arch of instability.”<sup>4</sup> The consequence of the preponderance of terrorist groups and networks, as Beary has observed,<sup>5</sup> is that parts of the African continent have become battlefields for terrorists, jihadists, and other violent extremist groups.

In North Africa, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), has reportedly gained significant footholds in parts of Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. In Algeria, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which operates across North Africa, has been fighting to overthrow the democratically elected government and institute an Islamic state in the country.

In the Southern African region, there exists some potential for the escalation of terrorism and violent extremism. As Dube and Beri note,<sup>6</sup> using both the internet and the networks of radical clerics, the Islamic State has recruited over 140 youths from the Southern African region to fight its wars in Syria and Libya. Given the modus operandi of the group, radicalized members and recruits could be asked to return to their countries of origin for the expansion and sustenance of jihadist movements. For example, in July 2016, security operatives in South Africa arrested Brandon-lee and Tony-lee Thulsie in Johannesburg on suspicion of “plotting terrorist attacks on various Jewish institutions in South Africa and individuals; as well as attempting to join the ISIS.”<sup>7</sup> In February 2018, South African security operatives also traced the kidnapping of a British-South African couple—Rodney and Rachel Saunders, living in Cape Town and holidaying in KwaZulu-Natal—by Sayfydeen Aslam Del Vecchio and Fatima Patel, members of a terrorist cell with ties to ISIS.<sup>8</sup> The rising terrorist insurgency in northern Mozambique increased with the ISIS threat to attack South Africa.<sup>9</sup>

In Somalia, al-Shabab, an affiliate of al-Qaeda, has crippled governmental operations and state functions and launched audacious attacks in the neighboring countries of Kenya and Uganda. For instance, al-Shabaab orchestrated the

September 2013 Westgate Premier Shopping Mall attack in Nairobi, in which 67 civilians were killed, including six security officers, and the April 2015 attack on Garissa University College in northern Kenya, in which 147 deaths were attributed to the transnational jihadist group.<sup>10</sup>

Since 2011, Mali has been mired in complex and overlapping political, security, and humanitarian crises rooted in domestic and external factors. Armed ethnic Tuareg groups under the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) revived a dormant rebellion against the Malian state with the aim of creating an independent Tuareg state, Azawad, in the northern regions of Mali, comprising Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu. In a twist of events, the MNLA lost control of the region to Islamist terrorist groups led by *Ansar Dine* (“Defenders of the Faith”) and AQIM.<sup>11</sup>

Experts believe that the “ungoverned spaces” between Burkina Faso and Mali harbor AQIM, which controls five affiliate terrorist groups: *Jamah Ansar al-Dine* (Group of the Defenders of the Faith) and its *Katiba Khalid Ibn al-Walid* (also known as Ansar al-Dine “South”); *Al-Mowaqqioun bil-Dam* (Those who Sign with their Blood) and its most famous *Katiba*, Al-Moulathimoun (The Masked Man); Al-Mourabitoun (The Almoravids) and the temporary *Al-Qaeda al-Gharb al-Afriqiya* (Al-Qaeda in West Africa, AQW); Macina Liberation Front (MLF); and Sahara Emirate of AQIM. The Sahara Emirate of AQIM is distinct from other violent extremist groups such as *Haraka al-Tawhid wal-Jihad fil-Gharb al-Afriqiya* (Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, MOJWA), Ansaroul Islam, and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).<sup>12</sup>

Boko Haram, Ansaru, and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) operate in Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria. In the northeastern part of Nigeria, for instance, the groups have killed over 30,000 people, including civilians and security personnel, and kidnapped hundreds of schoolchildren, resulting in a monumental humanitarian crisis across the Lake Chad region. As of March 31, 2020, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that an estimated 9.8 million people in the region required humanitarian assistance and there were estimated 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Adamawa state, Borno state, and Yobe state.<sup>13</sup> The report also indicated that there are 111,058 IDPs in Niger’s Diffa Region, 297,380 IDPs in Cameroon’s northern region, 169,003 IDPs in Chad’s Lac Region, and 239,370 Nigerian refugees in the Lake Chad Basin areas of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

Terrorist groups take advantage of existing vulnerabilities in Africa—namely leadership deficit and governance failure, weak democratic institutions and the absence of democratic culture, and weak domestic security architecture—to engage in cross-border recruitment in search of operational bases and human resources. Other vulnerabilities include political exclusion and instability, the outbreak of violent social conflicts, mass poverty and inequality, the porosity of national borders and underdevelopment of border communities, religious extremism, youth unemployment and radicalization, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs). These factors have enabled such groups to carry out coordinated ferocious attacks on citizens, institutions, and critical infrastructure. The operations of terrorist groups threaten the sovereignty, territoriality, and stability of governments in Africa. They have also contributed to the escalation of insecurity in the continent.<sup>14</sup>

In response to threats posed by insurgent extremist groups, the Nigerian state has adopted security measures that have assumed varied and multilateral dimensions, including laws such as the Terrorism Prevention Act (TPA) 2011, revised in 2013 to provide for extraterritorial application of the Act and the strengthening of terrorist financing offenses, including the freezing of international and local terrorist funds and assets. Similarly, the 2022 Money Laundering Act was enacted to provide a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for the prevention and prohibition of money laundering in Nigeria, especially terrorist financing. Nigeria also adopted the 2014 National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), which was revised in 2016, and the 2014 National Security Strategy, revised in 2019. Nigeria has ratified several regional protocols on countering terrorism, including the ECOWAS Counterterrorism and Implementation Strategy of 2013, among others. Beyond legal and policy frameworks, Nigeria's budgetary allocation to the security sector has been on the increase since 2010 (see Tables 2 and 3).

Countering terrorism has also included multilateral approaches such as the revival of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), a security framework that was initially established in 1964 with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger as member-states. This dovetailed into the formation of a sub-regional security operative, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF), involving Nigeria and the three neighboring states. However, these response measures have been largely military in nature. For instance, the Anti-Terrorism Legislation (ATL), in practical terms, seeks to strengthen the security sector and frustrate the various means of financing terrorism, while the increase in budgetary allocations to the security sector has been conducted with a view to shore up the effectiveness and efficiency of military responses to terrorism.

Despite these responses, terrorism remains a potent security threat in Nigeria. Thus, the adequacy, utility, and effectiveness of military responses to terrorism have been the subject of thorny debates in policy and scholarly discourses. This paper advocates for a methodology that investigates the roots of terrorism and how it is implicated in everyday experiences at the local and community levels and unpacks the social conditions that promote the spread of extremist ideologies and violence. In this regard, it argues that militarized counter-terrorism as a standalone approach has a limited impact, and makes a case for it to be combined with other non-military approaches based on grounded knowledge to have the desired impact.

## THE TERRORISM THREAT IN NIGERIA

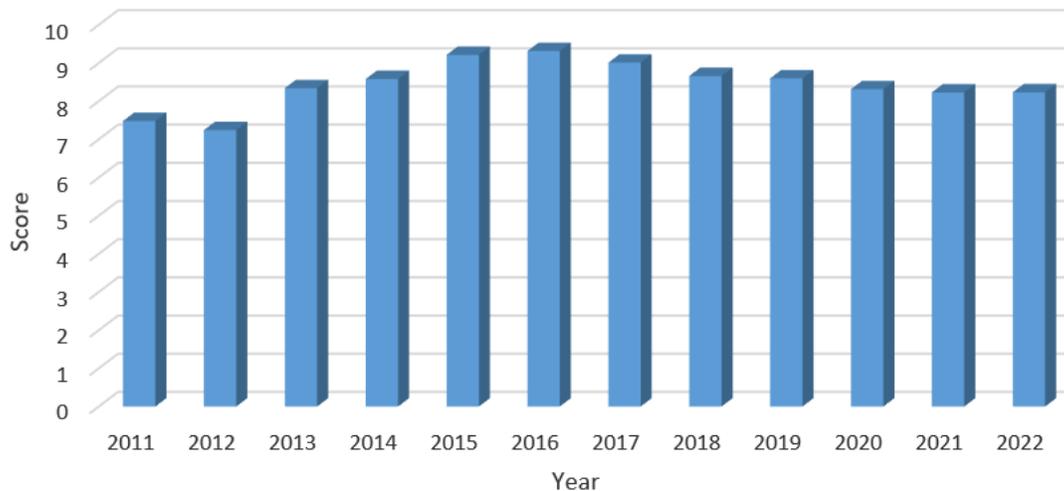
Since December 2003, terrorist insurgency has led to complex security and humanitarian crises, especially in Nigeria's northeast region. Boko Haram or *Jama'atu Ahlis Suna Lidda'awati Wal Jihad* (the People Committed to the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad), a radical Islamist terrorist group operating in north-eastern Nigeria and neighboring countries, first took up arms against state security forces with attacks on police stations and public buildings in Geidam and Kannamma towns of Yobe State. With known preferences in radical religious belief and social practices, the group has spread to other parts of the country, with bombing attacks and killings that have left several security operatives and civilians dead, including women and children.

Between 2009 and December 2015, it is estimated that the activities of the group led to the death of over 30,000 people and the displacement of about 1.6 million others and 17,738 refugees in Nigeria (IDMC, 2016). Cumulatively, it is estimated that, between 2003 and September 2018, Boko Haram killed more than 37,500 people, displaced more than 2.4 million others, and occasioned about 228,000 internal refugees (see CFR, 2018). The country has also continued to be ranked on the Global Terrorism Index as one of the states most impacted by terrorism (see Table 1 and Fig. 1).

**Table 1: Nigeria's Ranking in Global Terrorism Index: 2011–2022**

Year	Score	Rank	Remarks
2011	7.480	8/163	
2012	7.242	7/163	The number of fatalities in Nigeria has steadily increased over the last decade and has seen a dramatic increase in 2011 with 165 lives lost as opposed to 57 in 2010.
2013	8.340	5/163	The number of fatalities has continued to rise.
2014	8.58	4/163	82% killed in terrorist attacks were in just five countries, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria.
2015	9.213	3/162	Nigeria experienced the biggest yearly deterioration in terrorism on record. There were 5,662 more people killed from terrorism than in previous year, an increase of almost 300 percent.
2016	9.314	3/163	Third most impacted by terrorism behind Iraq and Afghanistan.
2017	9.009	3/163	Nigeria saw the biggest decrease in deaths from terrorism, which coincided with successful military actions against various terrorist groups coupled with a decline in domestic support for these groups due to their coercive approaches to recruitment and the pillaging of villages.
2018	8.660	3/163	Third most impacted by terrorism beside Afghanistan and Iraq.
2019	8.597	3/163	Deaths from terrorism in rose to 33 percent while terror-related incidents increased by 37 percent
2020	8.314	3/163	Nigeria is the third most impacted by terrorism behind Afghanistan and Iraq.
2021	8.230	6/163	The number of terrorist attacks increased by 49 percent between 2020 and 2021.
2022	8.233	6/163	Total deaths from terrorism in Nigeria fell to 448, the lowest level since 2011. Terror-related casualties dropped by almost half compared with the previous year.

Source: *Global Terrorism Index*

**Fig. 1: Nigeria's Ranking in Global Terrorism Index: 2011–2022**

*Source: Author's Computation with Data from Global Terrorism Index*

Some of the most notable terrorist attacks in Nigeria since 2009 include the October 1, 2010, Independence Day bombing at the Eagle Square in Abuja; the June 16, 2011, bombing of the Nigeria Police Force Headquarters in Abuja; and the August 26, 2011, bombing of the UN House in Abuja. The attack on the UN House was, according to Ogbonnaya, et al.,<sup>17</sup> a game-changer with far-reaching and imponderable reverberations that dramatically altered the scope, intensity, and focus of Boko Haram's violence and mission. Other notable attacks include the December 25, 2011, bombing of St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla, Niger State in which 27 people were killed,<sup>18</sup> the February 25, 2014, Buni Yadi killings, the April 14, 2014, Nyanya bomb attack in which more than 70 people died,<sup>19</sup> and the November 24, 2014, attack at the Central Mosque, Kano in which about 120 died and 126 others were injured.<sup>20</sup> In August 2014, the group declared some parts of Borno State as its sovereign Caliphate.

Terrorist attacks took a different dimension when, on April 15, 2014, Boko Haram abducted 276 female students at the Government Secondary School, (GSS) Chibok, Borno State. That abduction has been followed by many others, especially the February 19, 2018, abduction of 110 schoolgirls from Government Girls' Science and Technical College (GGSTC), Dapchi, Yunusari Local Government area of Yobe State, among others.

After what appeared to be a period of silence that lasted between 2016 and early 2018, during which the Federal Government claimed to have “technically defeated” the group, there has been a resurgence of Boko Haram attacks, concentrating on military formations. This has been the case since the factionalization of the group, which saw the emergence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), affiliated with the Islamic State (IS). For instance, the group attacked the Nigerian Army 157 Task Force Battalion in Metele, Borno State, on November 18, 2018. According to some estimates, the Nigerian Army lost over 118 soldiers, including the Battalion Commander, while 15 others remain unaccounted for.<sup>21</sup> The Metele attack was one in a series of successive attacks on military formations by the Boko Haram terrorist groups over a period of four months. This clearly points to a change of strategy and focus of attack by the group. Some analysts have located this change in strategy within the context of the operational objectives and methodology of the IS, a shift away from targeting the civilian population, aimed at reviving the support of the civilian population. Others have argued that the attack on military formations is an indication of Boko Haram’s return to its original focus at inception in 2009.<sup>22</sup> In a report, Salkida noted that ISWAP successfully attacked and overran 70 percent of the military formations in the areas of its dominance in 2018.<sup>23</sup> This means ISWAP sacked, by overrunning or forcing military shutdown, 14 of the 20 military bases in these territories in 2018 alone. The only time this ratio of attacks and takeovers came close to the 2018 numbers was in 2014.

Whatever the explanations for Boko Haram’s change of focus and target of attacks, it is undoubtedly evident, as Ogbonnaya noted,<sup>24</sup> that the activities of the terrorist group not only threaten human and national security, but they also challenge the territorial integrity and stability of the Nigerian state.

## **OVERVIEW OF MILITARY RESPONSES TO TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA<sup>25</sup>**

The use of the military to combat insurgency in Nigeria dates to the 1980s during the activities of the *Maitatsine* (one who cures), a domestic Islamic fundamentalist group that operated prominently in Kano in December 1980 before spreading to other northern cities, including Maiduguri in 1982, Kaduna in 1982, Yola in 1984, and Gombe in 1985. Under the leadership of Muhammadu Marwa, the *Maitatsine* on December 18, 1980, launched attacks on police formations, government establishments, churches, Christians, and moderate Muslims. The attacks led to the death of more than 10,000 people including four policemen, many civilian

injuries, and the burning of houses and public buildings.<sup>26</sup> In response, the federal government deployed contingents of the military and police to dislodge the group. Between 2003 and 2005, when Boko Haram attacked police stations and public buildings in several towns in Yobe State, the government also deployed the military against the members of the group.<sup>27</sup>

## **MILITARY RESPONSES TO TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY IN THE YAR'ADUA-JONATHAN ERA**

However, the use of the military to combat terrorism in Nigeria became most prevalent during the 2009 Boko Haram revolt in Borno State and its environs. A joint operation of the police and the military was deployed to quell the violent revolt. The response coordinated by the Borno State special security task force and led by Colonel Ben Ahanotu was codenamed *Operation FLUSH*. The team carried out a heavy bombardment of the residence and strongholds of Mohammed Yusuf, the then Boko Haram leader in Maiduguri. This led to the arrest and killing of several of the group's members before Yusuf was eventually apprehended on July 30, 2009, and handed over to the police for interrogation. He was killed in the process.<sup>28</sup> Although that military response provided relative stability, this was lost when Boko Haram regrouped about a year later to sustain its campaign of violence and attacks that included targeted killings and assassinations of security personnel up to 2011.<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, in June 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan authorized the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) to establish a military Joint Task Force (JTF) to conduct *Operation RESTORE ORDER*. The goal was to secure Maiduguri and check the frequency and intensity of attacks by the terrorist group.<sup>30</sup> The JTF, with headquarters in Maiduguri, comprised the Army, Navy, Air Force, the Nigeria Police, and the State Security Services. However, the presence of the JTF did not deter the group, as it escalated its acts of terror in other states beyond Borno, such as Adamawa, Bauchi, Kano, Yobe, and even the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), where it attacked the Nigeria Police Force Headquarters and the United Nations (UN) building. The expansion of the group's operations and growing threats beyond the northeast region compelled the military to reinforce and deploy more troops in other parts of the northern region. For instance, *Operation SAFE HAVEN* in Plateau State and *Operation MESA* in Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, and the Niger States, including the FCT, were reinforced by troops from other military formations and security agencies to contain the expanding terrorist insurgency.

Although *Operation RESTORE ORDER* recorded some successes in the form of the arrest and killing of some Boko Haram commanders and foot soldiers, attacks by the terrorist group continued. This was due largely to two fundamental reasons. First, Boko Haram at this point was an emerging terrorist and insurgent group whose operational tactics, logistics system power projection, and membership remained foggy to the security agencies. This lack of adequate knowledge of the group impeded the efficacy of most of the early military operations. Most fundamentally, the JTF carried out its operations without seeking recourse in the civilian populations of the affected communities. The consequence of this was that the people could not provide actionable intelligence that would have aided the operations of the military.<sup>31</sup>

Following sustained attacks by Boko Haram, President Jonathan on December 31, 2011, declared a state of emergency to be enforced by the military in 15 Local Government Areas (LGAs) across four states in the northeast and northcentral regions, namely Borno, Niger, Plateau, and Yobe, where the group had largely established its presence and maintained administrative structures. In May 2013, President Jonathan again declared a state of emergency in the three most affected states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. These measures were aimed at widening the scope of military operations against terrorism and the restoration of normalcy in the affected states. The declaration of a state of emergency empowered the military and other security agencies to take all necessary actions within their rules of engagement and Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) to contain terrorism in the affected states. These actions included the authority to arrest and detain suspects, possess and control any building or structure used for terrorist purposes, lock down any area of terrorist operation, conduct on-the-spot searches, and apprehend persons in illegal possession of weapons.<sup>32</sup> At the expiration of the first six months, as required by law, the emergency rule in the affected states was extended on December 31, 2013, to provide the military with ample time to record significant improvement in the security situation of the affected states.

The extension was followed by the mobilization and deployment of JTF to those states and other states across the country. Following this development, JTF's *Operation RESTORE ORDER* was disbanded by the Nigerian Army and replaced with *Operation BOYONA* on May 15, 2013. *Operation BOYONA* was tasked with the curtailing the excesses of Boko Haram in the three most affected states. The renewed offensive against the group in the new operation was partly successful in the arrest and detention of Boko Haram members, the killing of some commanders, and the destruction of some armory and bomb-making factories.

Generally, the execution of the state of emergency was trailed by controversies and criticisms. Specifically, state governments in the affected areas as well as some leaders of the then-opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) viewed the state of emergency through a political prism for two reasons. First was the apprehension occasioned by the submissions of some political and security analysts that the declaration of a state of emergency entailed the replacement of State Governors with Military or Sole Administrators and the dismantling of existing democratic institutions in the affected states. There was also apprehension by the APC that the emergency rule was aimed at weakening its strong political bases, especially in the build-up to the 2015 general elections. Consequently, state governors, especially those of the then opposition APC, did not buy into the measure by the federal government. Secondly, there were allegations of the use of excessive force and violation of human rights in the enforcement of the emergency rule raised by international human rights watchers against the military.<sup>33</sup> The consequence of the allegations of human rights violation was the enforcement of the “Leahy laws” by the United States,<sup>34</sup> which frustrated attempts by the federal government to procure arms and mobilize international support to boost its military capacity to respond effectively to the Boko Haram challenge. In a testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on May 14, 2014, Sarah Sewall, US Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, admitted that “the provisions of law concerning security assistance and human rights known as the ‘Leahy laws’ affect our work to assist the Nigerian government to combat Boko Haram.”<sup>35</sup>

The failure of the emergency rule is depicted by the fact that terrorist attacks in the northeast region intensified with attendant increased fatalities. For instance, within the period of the state of emergency in 2014, over 7,711 deaths due to terrorist attacks were reported.<sup>36</sup> This was more than half of the Boko Haram-related deaths in Nigeria since 2011. The attacks were also extended to states outside the perimeter of the emergency rule as was witnessed in the Federal Capital Territory, Kano, and Plateau State. Secondly, the abduction of the Chibok girls on April 14, 2014, which marked the climax of the failure of the emergency rule, took place within the period of the state of emergency.

In May 2013, the failure of military operations and the devastating impact of the insurgency compelled a civilian group in Borno State to form a vigilante outfit, known as the “Civilian Joint Task Force” (CJTF) to hunt down Boko Haram members. The group was made up of local “youth with sticks” (*kato da gora*) and local hunters (*yan faratua*) working closely with the military to identify and capture members of Boko Haram in several communities and in the surrounding

bushes.<sup>37</sup> Despite its shortcomings in terms of the acquisition of military skills and possession of military hardware and sophisticated weapons of warfare, the CJTF as of June 2014, had assisted in the arrest of over 30 suspected members of Boko Haram, which were handed over to security agencies.<sup>38</sup> The successes of the CJTF notwithstanding, their illegal possession of arms raised a future security dilemma of what they would become in the future after the counterterrorism campaign, especially in the absence of institutional mechanisms to conduct what analysts have described as “a reasoned disarmament.”<sup>39</sup>

Boko Haram, however, continued its attacks on the local communities and civilian population, abducting, raping, and beheading victims, and often fleeing to neighboring Cameroon. The cross-border movement of its fighters further impeded the success of the military response. This informed the Jonathan administration’s increased diplomatic overtures that resulted in the revival of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), a security framework that was established in 1964 with Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger as members, and the resuscitation of a sub-regional security operative, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF), at the 14th Summit of the Lake Chad Basin Commission held in Ndjamena, Niger in April 2012.

Nigeria’s revival of the LCBC was another major military response with a diplomatic dimension. The revival of LCBC was in response to the spillover effects of the Boko Haram crisis in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, among other alarming effects on the international community. For instance, Ansaru, a splinter group from Boko Haram, kidnapped a French citizen (Francis Colump) working for Vergnet in Katsina State in December 2012 and kidnapped a French family of seven in the northern part of Cameroon that borders Bauchi State in February 2013.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, between 2013 and 2014 Cameroon had come under severe attacks by Boko Haram that resulted in high casualties. The attacks on Cameroon, Chad, and Niger constituted threats to French geo-strategic and economic interests in these former colonies that share borders with Nigeria. Thus, the Heads of State of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria attended a diplomatic meeting hosted in May 2014 by the then President of France, Francois Hollande, under the auspices of the Lake Chad Basin Commission with the United Kingdom and the United States as observers.

A major outcome of the summit was the creation of an intelligence-pooling unit based on the existing protocol of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the formation of a sub-regional security outfit, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF). The fusion center, which is being hosted by Nigeria, provides a platform

for intelligence sharing by security services of the Benin Republic, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria on terrorism and insurgency. Its output feeds the MJTF, which comprises Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. This intelligence fusion center improved cooperation on security intelligence in the sub-region and positively impacted the operations of the MJTF in terms of service delivery. The MJTF, formally established in September 1988 as a joint operation made up of soldiers from Chad, Niger, and Nigeria to ensure security within their common borders, actually started operation in July 1988 after a tripartite agreement was reached by the Heads of State of the three countries. However, it went almost moribund afterward. Thus, the resuscitated MJTF had its mandate expanded to include the fight against Boko Haram.<sup>41</sup>

The revival of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the resuscitation of MJTF could not effectively contain the escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and within the Lake Chad region, as the group's sustained cross-border activities into Cameroon, Chad, and Niger continued. For example, the confrontation between the MJTF and Boko Haram militants in Baga, Borno State in April 2013, left no fewer than 2,000 homes reportedly destroyed, over 185 people killed, and hundreds of others displaced.<sup>42</sup> This failure may be informed by the fact that the financial sustenance of the MJTF rested squarely upon Nigeria, as the limited contributions from other members put a constraint on the sustainability of the MJTF.

The international dimension of the Boko Haram insurgency called for a strategic review of the military operations in the northeast. Consequently, the federal government approved the creation of the 7th Division of the Nigerian Army to be inserted into the operation theater. The 7th Division became operational on August 22, 2013, and subsequently replaced *Operation BOYONA* with *Operation ZAMAN LAFIYA*. The objective of *Operation ZAMAN LAFIYA* was to deter Boko Haram in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, with a view to curtailing cross-border banditry in the northeast and safeguarding the territorial integrity of Nigeria. The operation began conducting counterinsurgency operations, focusing essentially on shelling Boko Haram bases in the Sambisa Forest, Baga, and several other enclaves in the savannah parts of Borno State. The operation initially reduced the frequency of attacks in major towns and cities in the north. It equally contributed to the decline in the use of suicide bombings and the reduction in armed attacks targeting fortified facilities such as police stations, military barracks, and detention centers toward the end of 2013.<sup>43</sup>

In reaction, Boko Haram shifted its focus mostly to soft civilian targets, launching attacks on vulnerable, isolated, and poorly secured towns, villages, schools, and places of worship. Beginning in January 2014, the group ramped up violent attacks on several rural communities in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States, despite the presence of the military. Challenges such as faulty force structure, weak application of technology, insufficient logistics support, and low morale of troops militated against the capacity of *Operation ZAMAN LAFIYA* to substantially degrade the operational capability of the insurgents. Within the first four months of 2014, for instance, over 2,596 people were killed in terror-related attacks in Nigeria. Of the total deaths, about 1,262 people were killed in Borno State, while more than 177 people were killed in Adamawa State.<sup>44</sup> On February 25, 2014, Boko Haram fighters attacked and burned 59 students at the Federal Government College, Buni Yadi. This attack was a significant warning incident that reinforced the gross failure of military preparedness to pre-empt attacks at soft targets. On March 14, 2014, Boko Haram carried out a jailbreak and freed some of its leaders and members held in a detention facility at the Giwa barracks in Maiduguri, Borno State. The attack was strategically targeted at weakening the military offensive against it. While claiming responsibility for the attack, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau warned that all Muslim female students receiving Western education would be treated as infidels.

Convinced of severe limitations in the capacity of the military to defeat the insurgents, countries such as the US, France, Britain, and China offered to support Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts, up to the point of the abduction of Chibok girls. Such assistance was in the deployment of Special Forces training units, limited sharing of intelligence from reconnaissance operations, and provision of military equipment. Meanwhile, the deterioration of security in the northeast forced President Jonathan to extend, for the third time, the state of emergency for another six months in May 2014 to provide the military with ample time to record significant improvement in the security situation in the affected states.

With Boko Haram evolving into a serious threat to the stability of the entire northeast, there were growing apprehensions over the group's ability to mount attacks capable of disrupting or derailing the planned February 2015 general elections. A week before the initial poll date of February 7, 2015, President Jonathan postponed the election for six weeks ostensibly to launch a new military offensive against Boko Haram. By the time the presidential elections were held on March 28, and shortly afterward, the offensive campaign had largely succeeded in degrading the group's control of approximately 27 LGAs in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States.<sup>45</sup>

## MILITARY RESPONSES TO TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY SINCE THE BUHARI ERA

In May 2015, Muhammadu Buhari assumed office as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In his inaugural speech, Buhari affirmed his commitment to intensify operations against Boko Haram. Shortly after his inauguration, he ordered the immediate relocation of the Military Command and Control Centre (MCCC) to Maiduguri, Borno State. The activation of the MCCC served as a forward command base for the military chiefs to monitor, coordinate, and control counterterrorism operations. President Buhari's administration equally worked to strengthen regional diplomatic relations. In May 2015, he visited Cameroon, Chad, and Niger to marshal a coalition of their armed forces to counter the Boko Haram threat more effectively and, in June 2015, he held meetings with the presidents of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger for the operationalization of the new 8,700-strong MNJTF earlier agreed in May 2015. He also ordered the release of the sum of US\$21 million, out of the US\$100 million pledged, for the operationalization of the sub-regional force.

In a bid to strengthen international support against Boko Haram, President Buhari met with the leaders of the G7 in June 2015, United States (US) President Barack Obama in Washington on July 20, 2015, and French President François Hollande in Paris on September 14, 2015. Buhari's renewed efforts to crack down on corruption rekindled the interest of the West in assisting Nigeria's efforts to deal with terrorism. It led to increased assistance from the US in the form of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) support, and the donation of over 24 mine-resistant armor-protected vehicles to the Nigerian army, among others.<sup>46</sup> Despite the warming up of relations with the Obama administration, the US Leahy Law that imposed an arms embargo frustrated Nigeria's effort to purchase attack aircrafts from Brazil and other US allies.

Meanwhile, President Buhari appointed new Service Chiefs and a national security adviser on July 13, 2015, to invigorate the ongoing military operations against Boko Haram. As part of the efforts to boost the morale of the troops, the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Major General Tukur Yusufu Buratai on July 19, 2016, launched *Operation LAFIYA DOLE* (literally meaning Peace by Force) as a new code name to tackle activities of Boko Haram.<sup>47</sup> The new operation replaced *Operation ZAMAN LAFIYA*. Technically, *Operation LAFIYA DOLE* was supported by allied partners from the UK and US. These partners provided intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) products, counter-Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) capacity building, and other specialized advice on the operations.<sup>48</sup>

The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) equally invigorated its air campaign in support of the operations. The air component of the operation included ISR, air interdiction, close air support, logistic re-supply, casualty/medical evacuation, and precision bombardment of Boko Haram camps, among others. The air assets deployed in the operation included the F-7NI supersonic fighter jet, Alpha Jet, C-130 AC, Augusta 109 LUH, Mi-35, Mi-24 gunships, Mi-17, and Supa Puma Helicopters, to carry out logistics support, reconnaissance, and combat operations. By February 2015, the NAF had conducted a total of 5,390 operational missions in the COIN theatre, including 2,648 for ground attacks, 1,479 for airlift, 1,443 for ISR, and 1,488 airstrikes.<sup>49</sup> Its operational sorties targeted “high-value terrorists,” hideouts, logistics support bases, and infrastructure in Boko Haram’s stronghold in the Sambisa Forest. Thus, with renewed regional and international support, the revitalized Nigerian military sustained efforts at recapturing territories held by the insurgents.

However, Boko Haram’s diminished territorial control informed the group’s tactical shift away from mass raids on villages in favor of suicide bombings directed at soft targets. In the first 120 days of President Buhari’s presidency, the insurgents killed more than 1,300 Nigerians.<sup>50</sup> Many of these killings took place in the group’s remote northeastern stronghold of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States. On October 2, 2015, however, Boko Haram again carried out coordinated suicide bombings in Kuje and Nyanya on the outskirts of the FCT, killing 18 people and injuring over 40 others. However, sustained military operations toward the end of 2015 led to significant degradation of Boko Haram ability, particularly the seizure of territories and large-scale attacks on population centers.

Significant shifts occurred in the battle against the group during *Operation LAFIYA DOLE*. The operation reinforced and aligned with other specialized operations like *Operation SAFE CORRIDOR*, launched in April 2016 for the de-radicalization and rehabilitation of repentant terrorists; *Operation CRACKDOWN*, initiated in May 2016 to clear the remnants of the Boko Haram in Sambisa Forest; and *Operation GAMA AIKI*, activated in June 2016 by the MNJTF to clear the insurgents operating in the northern part of Borno State.<sup>51</sup> Notwithstanding these multi-pronged military operations, there was a noticeable resurgence of terrorist attacks from October 2016, targeted on remote and unguarded communities, humanitarian convoys, IDP camps, and military formations in the northeast. The resurgence was occasioned by the split in Boko Haram, following the emergence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), whose targets of attacks were predominantly military and para-military formations.

On November 1, 2016, the military commenced *Operation RESCUE FINAL* aimed at rescuing kidnapping victims, including those held in the Boko Haram stronghold in Sambisa Forest. The operation involved about 4,200 troops, deployed to the forest through various fronts. The 151st Battalion of the Nigerian Army advanced into Sambisa through the Banki-Darul Jamal axis, the 27th Battalion advanced through Mafa, the 152nd Battalion advanced through Pulka, and the 222nd Battalion approached the forest through the Maiduguri axis. On December 24, 2016, President Muhammadu Buhari commended the Nigerian military for entering and crushing the remnants of the Boko Haram insurgents in their "Camp Zero," which is located deep inside the forest. However, the release of a 25-minute recorded video on December 29, 2016, by Abubakar Shekau claiming that his group has not been crushed served as a warning that the military still had much to accomplish. Although Boko Haram lost much of the territory it controlled because of military campaigns in the region, its raids on isolated military units and suicide bombings targeting population centers still caused widespread death and destruction in these four riparian countries of Lake Chad.

To ensure the effective and efficient execution of all military operations in the war against terrorism, budgetary allocations to the security sector has been on the increase since 2010 (see tables and figs. below).

**Table 2: Security Sector Budgetary Allocations: 2010–2017**

<b>MDAs</b>	<b>2010 (N' Bn)</b>	<b>2011 (N' Bn)</b>	<b>2012 (N' Bn)</b>	<b>2013 (N' Bn)</b>	<b>2014 (N' Bn)</b>	<b>2015 (N'B)</b>	<b>2016 (N' B)</b>	<b>2017 (N'B)</b>
Defense	291.719	348.037	359.736	397.756	340.332	358.466	443.077	469.838
Police Affairs	82.552	13.279	5.979	8.506	7.268	4.318	NA*	NA*
Police Formations & Command	245.095	295.666	308.474	311.148	292.252	329.669	308.919	313.515
Police Service Commission	3.865	2.611	2.238	2.229	1.796	0.784	0.947	1.465
Office of the National Security Adviser	107.148	109.855	123.488	116.459	110.725	84.13	88.875	123.490
<b>Total</b>	<b>730.379</b>	<b>769.448</b>	<b>799.915</b>	<b>836.098</b>	<b>752.373</b>	<b>777.367</b>	<b>841.818</b>	<b>908.308</b>

\*In the 2016 restructuring of MDAs, Police Affairs was brought under Police Formations and Command Headquarters

For instance, the federal government allocated over N6.7 trillion to the security sector between 2010 and 2017 to strengthen its capacity for counterterrorism operations. This amount did not include the US\$1 billion the FGN borrowed in 2013 by President Goodluck Jonathan to fund the anti-terrorism war and the US\$21 million that President Muhammadu Buhari approved for the Multinational Joint Task Force in June 2015.<sup>52</sup>

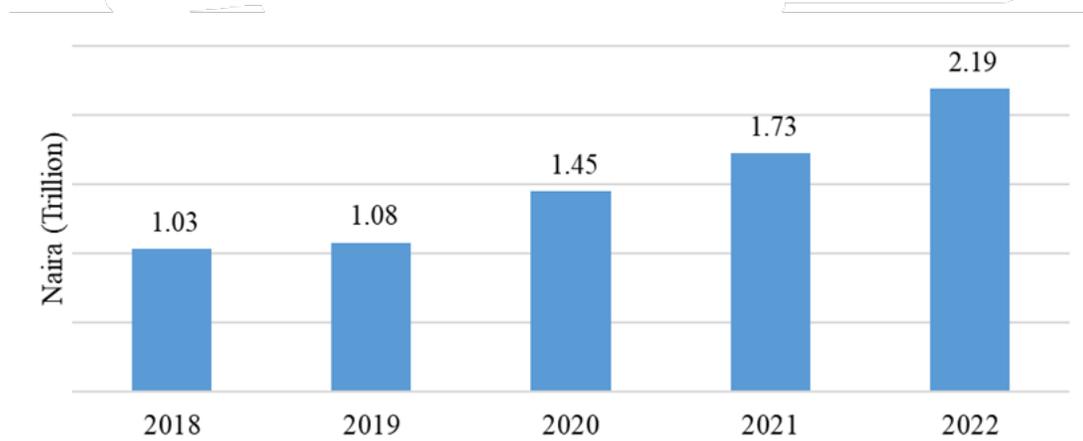
**Table 3: Budget for Security Sector Agencies: 2018–2022\***

Year	Description	Defense	Police Affairs	Police Formations & Command	Police Service Commission	ONSA
2018	Total	576.4B	<i>Subsumed in the Ministry of Interior</i>	324.2B	6.9B	122.7B
	Capital	157.7B		25.2B	758.9M	46.7B
	Recurrent	418.7B		299.0B	6.1B	76.0B
2019	Total	590.0B		366.1B	1.8B	120.7B
	Capital	159.1B		22.1B	968.0M	33.9B
	Recurrent	430.8B		344.1B	783.3M	86.8B
2020	Total	899.9B	2.8B	403.5B	1.4B	141.5B
	Capital	115.9B	450.0M	14.3B	377.5M	25.9B
	Recurrent	784.0B	2.4B	389.2B	992.1M	115.6B
2021	Total	994.1B	18.6B	500.2B	1.6B	219.2B
	Capital	147.3B	11.2B	36.6B	280.5M	85.0B
	Recurrent	846.8B	7.4B	463.6B	1.4B	134.2B
2022	Total	1.2T	4.8B	773.7B	1.2B	212.8B
	Capital	197.0B	2.0B	35.7B	232.2M	56.9B
	Recurrent	996.1B	2.8B	738.1B	926.5M	155.8B

Source: Budget Office of the Federation (BoF)

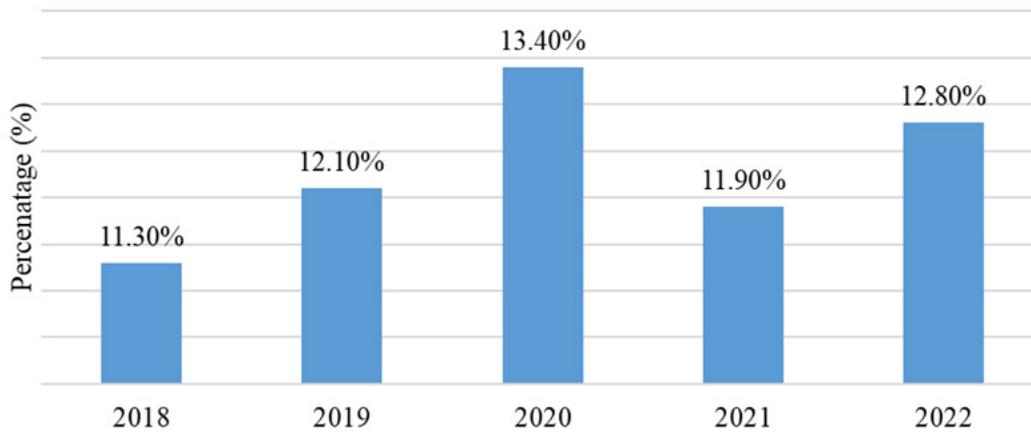
\*For simplification, M denotes 1 million naira, B denotes 1 billion naira, and T denotes 1 trillion

**Fig. 2: Total Allocation to Security Sector in Federal Government (2018–2022)**



Source: Author's Computation with Data from Budget Office of the Federation (BoF)

**Fig. 3: Share of Security Budget in Overall FGN Budget (%)**



Source: Author's Computation with Data from Budget Office of the Federation (BoF)

Increased budgetary allocations to the security sector precipitated an increase in military expenditure between 2010 and 2014 (see Table 3).

**Table 4: Nigeria's Military Expenditure (2010–2014)**

Year	Military Expenditure (LCU) in Billions of Naira	Military Expenditure (Current, USD) in Millions	Military Expenditure Per Capital (Current, USD)	Military Expenditure as Share of GDP	Military Expenditure as Percentage of Government Spending
2010	299.1	1,990.1	12.5	0.5	3.2
2011	369.0	2,384.9	14.5	0.6	3.4
2012	364.8	2,316.5	13.7	0.5	3.6
2013	380.5	2,418.0	13.9	0.5	3.5
2014	373.8	2,264.5	12.7	0.4	3.3

*Source: Global Firepower, Nigeria: Armed Conflicts, Military Spending, and the Economic Context, October 2015. (Available at <http://knoema.com/yfkakle/nigeria-armed-conflicts-military-spending-and-the-economic-context>).*

## **RETHINKING MILITARY RESPONSES TO TERRORISM AND INSURGENCY**

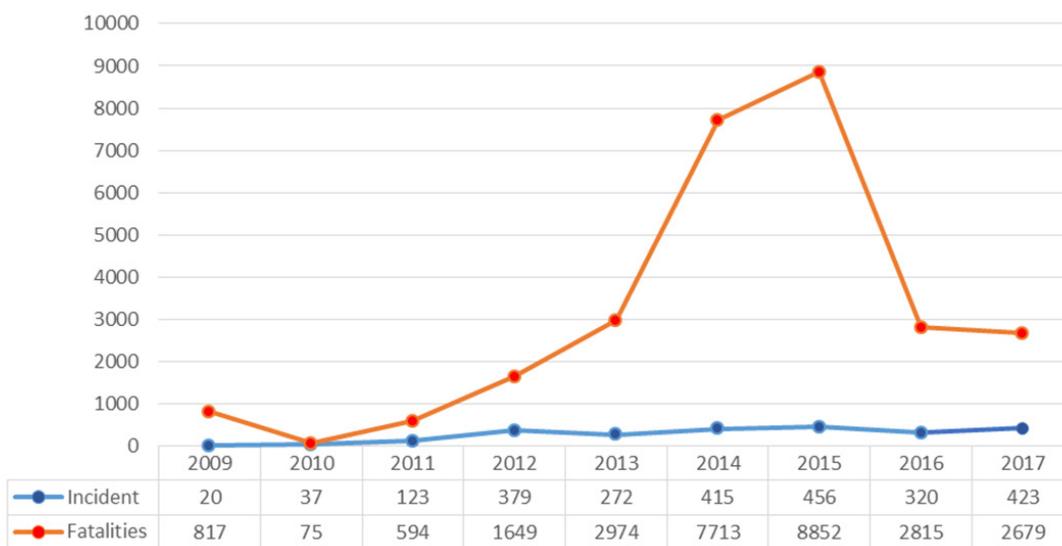
Clearly, the foregoing indicates that military responses to terrorism in Nigeria have been limited in achieving the expected outcome. Although it has succeeded in pushing Boko Haram out of major cities, as was evidenced by the drop in the frequency of attacks in many major cities, especially between 2015 and early 2018, Boko Haram has found operational bases within the larger civilian populations in rural and remote areas within and outside of Nigeria from where it has continued to successfully carry out attacks—suicide bombings, drive-by-shootings, targeted assassinations, kidnappings, and cross-border raids on poorly secured villages in Nigeria and neighboring Chad, Niger, and Cameroon.<sup>53</sup> Most fundamentally, terrorist activities have continued to pose a potent threat to the security of lives and property in Nigeria despite military responses.

In 2013, the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) listed Nigeria among the ten countries with the highest number of terrorist attacks. According to the Database, there were a total of 341 terrorist attacks in Nigeria in 2013 that resulted in 2,003 fatalities. Consequently, Boko Haram was listed as the 3rd Most Lethal Terrorist Organisation out of ten others sampled, coming behind only the Taliban and ISIS. In 2014, Global Terrorism Index (GTI) ranked Nigeria as the fourth most affected country with regard to incidences of terrorist attacks out of 162 countries surveyed. In 2015, the GTI reported that “terrorism

remains highly concentrated with most of the activities occurring in just five countries: Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria.” These countries accounted for 78 percent of the lives lost to terrorist attacks in 2015 and 82 percent of terrorism-related deaths in 2014. The report further indicated that Nigeria was the third most impacted country by terrorism out of 162 countries profiled. The country experienced the largest increase in terrorist activity with 7,512 deaths in 2015, an increase of over 300 percent since 2013.<sup>54</sup> Between 2016 and 2019, the GTI reports have changed significantly, as Nigeria has consistently ranked as one of the countries most affected by terrorism (see Table 1 and Fig.1).

Despite the acclaimed “technical defeat” of Boko Haram by the military, the group has continued to carry out deadly attacks on military, humanitarian, and civilian targets. Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED) documented 2,445 offensive, defensive, or strategic incidents that involved Boko Haram, with 28,168 fatalities in Nigeria between 2009 and 2017 (see Fig. 4). Thus, as some analysts have submitted, terrorist attacks have become an almost daily occurrence in Nigeria, especially in the northeast region of the country.<sup>55</sup>

**Fig. 4: Trend In Boko Haram Incidents and Associated Fatalities (2009–2017)**



Source: Compiled with data from Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 1997-2018 (Available at <http://www.acleddata.com>).

There are several schools of thought on the limited impact of military responses to effectively contend with the escalation of terrorist insurgency in Nigeria. On the one hand, there are those who have argued that military responses have been reactionary rather than preventive. In other words, the responses only come into effect after terrorist acts have been perpetrated. Because there are no logistical provisions or military guidelines that are provided as to what could be done to prevent acts of terrorism, security and law enforcement agencies take no action of any kind to prevent acts of terrorism until they are committed. On the other hand, are those who believe that military responses to terrorism in Nigeria are largely devoid of security intelligence, which is a core component of counterterrorism operations. For instance, community policing, a fundamental aspect of military intelligence that is widely employed in counterterrorism operations across the world, has not been adequately employed in Nigeria.<sup>57</sup>

Most fundamentally, there is also the argument that military responses are merely superficial. They do not address the ecological, anthropological, socio-economic, and political factors such as religious extremism and radicalization, governance failure and deficit, alienation, inequality and political exclusionism, youth unemployment, and mass poverty, among others, which provide a fertile breeding ground for terrorist activities.<sup>58</sup>

The continued escalation of terrorist insurgency in Nigeria despite military responses not only challenges the adequacy and effectiveness of the responses, but also indicates, in policy terms, the failure of excessive militarization of counterterrorism operations. Bappah similarly alluded to the failure of military operations in response to the Boko Haram insurgency.<sup>59</sup> This failure results from the inherent operational and strategic weaknesses of military responses as counterterrorism measures. For instance, in contextual and practical terms, military responses are fundamentally not designed to address the root causes of terrorism. In military operations, attention is paid only to actions that constitute acts of terrorism rather than to the factors that give rise to and sustain them. Thus, there are no measures in military responses designed against environmental, socio-economic, and political factors that incentivize individuals or groups in society to resort to extreme violence and terrorism.

Since 2001, religious extremism has overtaken national separatism to become the main driver of terrorist attacks around the world. In specific terms, there was a 60 percent increase in deaths arising from incidences of terrorist attacks in 2014 around the world and the majority of the attacks were carried out by "groups with [a] religious agenda."<sup>60</sup> Governance failure has equally resulted in

expansive inequality, mass poverty, and defense budget mismanagement. This has occasioned the porosity of national borders and the underdevelopment of border communities, which in turn have created enabling environments for the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs), especially from destabilized countries in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.<sup>61</sup> As of 2011, it was estimated that over 600 million illicit SALWs were in circulation globally. Out of this number, 100 million were said to be in Sub-Saharan Africa and about 80 million in the West African sub-region. Most importantly, half of these illegal weapons are in the hands of violent non-state actors such as terrorist organizations, militant groups, and transnational criminal groups.<sup>62</sup> These have provided terrorists the ability to carry out audacious attacks against states.

On the other hand, political exclusionism and youth unemployment were fundamental causes of the Arab Spring in North Africa. According to the African Development Bank,<sup>63</sup> the political and economic origins of the Arab Spring were rooted in the deliberate refusal of the ruling class in the region, especially Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, to develop pluralistic and open political systems. It further noted that the governments failed at job creation, especially for the young, and state economic policies did not result in inclusive growth and development. Unfortunately, global terrorist networks such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, with ever-widening presence in Africa, have taken advantage of the fallout of the Arab Spring to advance their cause and further escalate the security and humanitarian crisis in the entire Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.<sup>64</sup>

Secondly, military operations as counterterrorism measures have the propensity to create many more terrorists than they kill, forge alliances among terrorist groups, and encourage the escalation of international terrorism. With reference to the Middle East, Freeman has noted that military responses to terrorism in the Middle East and other Islamic countries have energized reactionary religious dogmatism among Muslims,<sup>65</sup> which is shaping the socio-political and religious ideologies and economies of both Muslim and non-Muslim societies alike. The consequences of this have been the increasing alignments among terrorist networks and the escalation of security crises and sectarian strives around the world. Thus, whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Kenya, Nigeria, or Uganda, military options alone have neither been successful in checkmating the activities of terrorist organizations nor in reducing the escalation of terrorism.

Thus, the limitations of military responses to contend with the continued escalation of terrorism strongly suggest the compelling need for a combination of several policy and strategic responses. Together with military campaigns,

these responses must seek to combat terrorism from its root and address the factors that enable the emergence and sustenance of terrorism. This combination of responses should seek to prohibit the existence of those societal deficits and economic inequalities that make individuals and groups resort to extreme violence as a means of protest or seeking redress. To be relevant, state responses to terrorism in Nigeria must focus on addressing environmental, socio-economic, and political factors such as religious extremism and ethnoreligious intolerance; governance failure that manifests in inequality, injustice, and unequal access to economic opportunities; mass poverty; political corruption and profligacy; lack of transparency and accountability in governance; political exclusionism; and youth unemployment. These are factors that inform aggressive behaviors among the excluded and the less privileged, which in extreme cases have resulted in terrorism as is evident by the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria.<sup>67</sup>

## CONCLUSION

While terrorism remains a potent threat to human and national security in Nigeria, military responses aimed at eradicating it have not yielded the desired result. Thus, a combination of military and non-military approaches to counterterrorism and national security is needed to address the situation. These alternative approaches, while continuing military options, must include non-military solutions such as countering religious radicalization, addressing governance deficits, and empowering citizens through inclusive political institutions and processes that foster greater participation in decision-making. Other non-military options include community policing, social policies and people-centered processes for grassroots development, capacity development, skills acquisition programs for gainful youth employment, and the construction or rehabilitation of basic infrastructure to enable people in conflict-affected communities and regions to access basic services and regain their human dignity and security. These actions will not only help reduce high defense expenditures and save lives, but will go a long way in bridging socio-economic and structural inequalities that feed into social tensions and violence. In this regard, effective civic education, grassroots campaigns, and legislation on issues such as democratization and public accountability, respect for citizenship, and human rights will create a conducive environment for increased productivity, social harmony, and non-violent resolution of conflicts. Also, zero tolerance for impunity, alongside social justice, and adherence to the rule of law will go a long way toward consolidating political, human, and national security in Nigeria.

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