

**CHALLENGES OF MILITARY OPERATION IN NIGERIA'S NORTH EAST GEO  
POLITICAL ZONE: TOWARD EVOLVING ALTERNATIVE COUNTER  
INSURGENCY FRAMEWORK**

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**Abstract**

*This research work examines the challenges of Military Operations in the Nigeria's North East geopolitical zone from 2009 to 2023. Agency theory serves as the theoretical framework, predominantly employing a secondary method of data collection. The study explores various strategies employed by the military over time, such as the "stick and carrot" approach, enemy-centric approach, population-centric approach, and "weed and seed" strategy, yielding moderate success the study reveals that the challenges afflicting the military operations in the north-east region are manifold. Chief among them are the nature of military training and orientation, the political economy of the conflict, the lack of modern technology, and international politics, among others. The paper recommends a re-orientation of soldiers engaged in internal security operations, as well as a similar re-orientation of the general populace. The military should undergo specialized training for internal operations prior to engagement, and ongoing re-training to effectively address the sophisticated global threats of today. This necessitates concrete domestic legislation to govern the military's internal operations. The military should be granted legal status and cease to function solely as a set of guidelines. This status must empower the military to employ maximum force against individuals who pose a threat to national security, while adhering to established legal and ethical norms.*

**Key Words:** Insurgency, Military, Military Operation, Orientations, North-East

## **Introduction**

While the primary function of the military is to safeguard the nation against external aggression or threats, there are instances when the military may be required to assist civil authorities in addressing internal violence and quelling internal tensions. For instance, the military may be called upon to support the police in reestablishing law and order within any region of the country. Section 217 (c) of the 1999 constitution forms the foundation for the military's involvement in internal security operations in Nigeria. It states the following concerning the military's roles in Nigeria: "suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President, subject to conditions prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly."

Section 8(1) of the Armed Forces Act stipulates that the President shall determine the operational utilization of the Armed Forces. This operational use is further defined as follows: "In this section, 'operational use of the armed forces' includes their deployment within Nigeria for the purpose of maintaining and securing public safety and public order."

However, the rise of unprecedented security challenges in the northeast has necessitated increased military intervention in the form of internal security operations. It has been observed that the military is increasingly involved in these operations (Okoli & Orinya, 2013). In response to this situation, the military has often been called upon to suppress riots, demonstrations, and acts of terrorism, aiming to restore peace and law and order.

While the primary responsibility for restoring law and order within the country lies with the civil authorities, specifically the Nigerian Police, Section 217 of the 1999 Constitution comes into play. This section allows for the military to be summoned to assist civil authorities in restoring public

order in any part of the country. In line with this constitutional provision, the military consistently engages in internal security operations, such as counterinsurgency efforts in the North-East.

The inevitability of military involvement in internal security operations becomes evident as the need for a higher level of aggression persists. Although this has been the case since the inception of Nigeria and continued through the colonial period, the recent wave of terrorism in the country has further underscored the justification for military participation in internal security operations. However, this approach is not without its challenges, as the military, not inherently trained for internal security operations, at times engages in behavior that lacks civility (Azinge, 2013).

Based on the aforementioned assertion, this paper aims to examine the challenges faced by military operations in the North-East. Additionally, it seeks to propose an alternative framework for the military to effectively address the inherent challenges present in contemporary Nigeria.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- i. To examine the challenges of counter insurgency in the north east geopolitical zone
- ii. To find an evolving alternative counter insurgency framework north east geo-political zone

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted qualitative approach with descriptive research design to uncover the truth in understanding the phenomena under investigation. Data was collected through secondary sources. The data was source largely from document produced by various national and international bodies dealing with counter insurgency and its management documents such a journal, report, periodical, statistics from NBS, text books and other relevant documents. These documents collected provides some important sources of information to the study Analysis of data was done qualitatively.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Military**

The concept military is a multifaceted and essential aspect of a nation's structure, embodying both its defense capabilities and its role in maintaining internal order. The military represents a specialized and organized force that is equipped, trained, and entrusted with safeguarding a country's sovereignty, interests, and citizens. Its significance transcends mere physical power, encompassing strategic planning, discipline, and adherence to a defined chain of command.

However, in relation to this paper military encompasses a wide range of functions, from defending a nation's borders to upholding internal order and participating in global efforts to maintain peace and security. Its role is shaped by historical context, evolving challenges, and the need for a delicate balance between national defense, civil society, and international cooperation.

### **Military Operation**

The concept of military operations encapsulates the strategic, tactical, and operational activities undertaken by armed forces to achieve specific objectives. These operations are meticulously planned, organized, and executed to address various challenges, ranging from defending national sovereignty and countering threats to maintaining internal security and supporting international peacekeeping efforts. Military operations are characterized by their complexity, coordination, and the utilization of diverse resources and capabilities. In essence, military operations represent the application of military power in pursuit of specific goals, guided by strategic planning, tactical execution, and a commitment to achieving desired outcomes while upholding values and international norms. The concept of military operations underscores the complexity and importance of military endeavors in maintaining global stability and security.

### **Insurgency**

According to Powell and Abraham (2006), Insurgency refers to a violent move by a person or group of persons to resist or oppose the enforcement of law or running of government or revolt against constituted authority of the state or of taking part in insurrection. Insurgency as defined above becomes volatile of the constitution's criminal law and the international treaty obligations of a nation in the following circumstance:

When it constitutes an attack on defenseless citizens and other property resulting into injuries, loss of lives and properties as well as forced or massive internal displacement of people out of their habitual places of residence. When it drives business/investors away from an insecure area and also when it constitutes domestic and international crimes punishable by law such as treasonable felony, terrorism, murder, crimes against humanity and genocide (Powell and Abraham, 2006:21).

The concept of insurgency revolves around the challenging and complex phenomenon of armed conflict that occurs within a sovereign state, often involving non-state actors seeking to overthrow or challenge the established government or authority. Insurgency is characterized by asymmetrical warfare, where a weaker group employs unconventional tactics and strategies against a stronger opponent. This concept encompasses a wide range of political, social, and military dynamics that shape the course of such conflicts.

It is an intricate interplay of political, social, and military factors that characterize conflicts involving non-state actors challenging established authorities. Understanding insurgency is essential for policymakers, military strategists, and scholars aiming to address these complex and often protracted conflicts while striving to achieve stability, peace, and effective governance.

### **Theoretical framework (Agency Theory)**

Agency theory was propounded by (Stoll, Foot and Edward, 2012). The driving concepts in this theory are; control and connectedness. Control is about influence essential for orderly moderation of the actions and behaviours of individuals or groups in the performance of their duty. It connotes discipline and the ability to abide within the boundaries set by the law. To strengthen and ensure better intra and inter organizational coordination and synergy in a network relationship entails adopting appropriate control measures especially where information sharing and cooperation is needed to foster strong bonds of interdependence between allied organizations

Network relationship can only be strengthening by creating information ecosystem that allows different agencies working on similar task to coordinate and share information. Aside from the above, control engenders harmony and compliance to constituted authority and these are key dynamic property of connectedness which promote sustainable (Sriram, Ganesh, and Madhumathi, 2013).

Connectedness refers to the internal relationships of actors and components dependencies between stakeholders, units within and outside the organization, local networks of trust, formal and informal associations, social networks, knowledge spillovers, patterns of mobility within and from outside the network (Sriram, Ganesh, and Madhumathi, 2013). Its absence in interagency or allied agencies has consequences for low motivation, distrust, poor communication, institutional flaws (ICG, 2014) conflicting personal or group interest that in the end hampers the achievement desired of goals

The theory sees the relationship between the principal and the agent as contractual one which involves delegation of some decision making authority to the agent by the principal. The relationship between the state and the agent is one of the oldest and commonest codified modes of social interactions (Ross, 1973), Luhman and Cunliffe, 2012 and Law, 2006:21).

To appropriately uphold order and deliver social stability, funding must align with, and strengthen organizational capacity of those state agencies to perform their responsibility rightly. In essence, the state must not only provide, protect and ensure that such funds are judiciously used, but must enforce its accountability so as facilitate connectedness within and among the agencies involved in restoring social order. Real connectedness induces the concord of interest and functionality (Hallett, 2004).

It also demands that funding should align with assigned responsibility, ensuring its proper use and accountability; this is necessary, and in part, forms the basic dimension of an agency relationship. This is indispensable considering that different actors are involved and that they have different interests that are likely to be expressed in conflicting preferences (Scott and Marshall, 2005), if it is not properly controlled it is detrimental to the attainment of the goal being pursued. The failure to build-on and entrench the ideals of connectedness has allowed these differences to deepened as each agency wants to illegally have a share of the funds appropriated for curbing insurgency despite the consequence that such opportunistic behaviors may have on the society (Law, 2006).

Analysis from the above portrayed the main problem that has undermined Nigeria's capacity to effectively stamp out insurgency thereby necessitating the government to seek for external assistance. However, inter-agency squabble is more prominent amongst the security agencies (Odoma, 2014). These are agencies saddled with the maintenance of peace and security, as well as the protection of life and property in every political community.

### **Nigeria's Military Operation in the North-East Nigeria**

The Nigerian military have combined different approach in the fight insurgency in the north east. These include among others: the carrot and the stick. The Enemy-Centric Approach, the Population Centric Approach, Weed and Seed and Clear-Hold-Build Strategies.

The stick model involves the use of coercion to manage terrorism and other forms of violence-based insecurity. Also known as the military model, this approach involves the arrest, trial, and sometimes execution of perpetrators of violence. This model underpins the US-led “War on Terror”, which targets the organizers of terrorism (Keen, 2008).

In contrast, the carrot approach involves conciliatory strategies, including dialogue and cooptation, to manage armed conflicts. Several reasons have been presented in support of the use of either the carrot or the stick strategy, including the availability of external support and the relative capability or strength of the state or the rebel group (Buhaug, 2006).

**The Enemy-Centric Approach:** This strategy involves identifying the insurgents, their hide out and physical combat with an organized Nigerian enemy. The over role goal is to defeat of the enemy as its primary objective, while viewing other instruments as secondary. In other words, the focus here is on the complete eradication of the insurgents or their guerrilla formations and cadres while minimising the significance of nation-building as well as measures to gain popular support. Overtime the military had adopted different variant of this approach in the North-east, including “soft” vs. “hard,” direct vs. indirect, violent vs. non-violent, and decapitation vs. marginalization strategies.”

This approach can be summarized as “first defeat the enemy, and all else will follow.” Research has shown this approach to be effective if applied to its fullest, it “might work against emergent insurgencies that are led or centrally controlled by a particularly powerful individual.

**Weed and Seed: Clear-Hold-Build** Weed and Seed as a military strategy was conceived in 1991, and gained prominence a year later as part of the federal response to widespread rioting after the acquittal of four Los Angeles cops who had been videotaped beating Black motorist. Since that



time, it has been implemented in so many countries as a counter insurgency strategy. The Weed and Seed strategy is based on a two pronged approach:

1. Law enforcement agencies and criminal justice officials cooperate with local residents to 'weed out' criminal activity in the designated area.
2. Social service providers and economic revitalization efforts are introduced to 'seed' the area, ensuring long-term positive change and a higher quality of life for residents."

In terms of strategy, Weed and Seed create a secure physical and psychological environment. Establish firm government control of the populace and area. Gain the populace's support. The main aim of this strategy is to clear, hold, remove and exclude of hostile elements. Building implies, literally, repairing infrastructure and, more metaphorically, gaining trust and winning support. However, this approach includes an element of force. With the use of this approach the military make use of civilian joint task force who have the knowledge of the terrain, their own people who are part and parcel of the insurgency and assist the military to secure the environment

The Population Centric Approach: This approach can be abridged as "first protect and support the population, and all else will follow. The population-centric approach focuses on protecting the population and maintaining or winning its support. Although direct military confrontation might be needed in defeating the insurgents, it is not seen here as the primary objective which is to win the supports of the population." There are more theorists supporting the population-centric approach than they are with the enemy-centric approach. however, the U.S. style of COIN embedded in the 2006 FM 3-24, and the Nigerian military approach in some areas where was captured by the insurgent, the military ensure the protection of the population first before any other things shall follows.

### **Challenges of Military Operation in North Eastern Geopolitical Zone**

The involvement of the military in civil operations informs the need for the military to adjust to the demands of the internal security operations. The military usually encounter problems when engaged in civil operations. Some areas where these problems stem from have been highlighted as follows:

(i) Orientation:

The Military orientation dictates that a potential threat is an enemy and as such should be eradicated by all means. Having this type of mindset during internal operations could be dangerous as defence against external aggression should be differentiated from the defence employed against 'enemies' within. Related to the above is the perception of the Military when called upon to engage in internal security, some soldiers are of the opinion that they have a more-noble role than this and even some think they have been called upon because of the incapacity and inefficiency of the police in maintaining law and order. The resultant effect is that the military usually take over operations from the police instead of aiding the civil authorities as provided for in sec. 217 of the 1999 constitution. Instead of lending support to the police or other civil authorities concerned the military end up taking leading roles. This can give rise to jealousy and distrust between the police force involved in the operations and the soldiers deployed for the operations. This is capable of causing unhealthy rivalry which can eventually undermine security efforts. This has caused the Nigerian Army to advocate for a centralized system to coordinate the activities of the Joint Task Force Operations in the country as such system would prevent order and counter order by various Heads of Security Agencies.

(ii) Training: By the nature of military training is to defend the country in times of war, military training is usually based on inflicting maximum damage and destruction to their opponents and defeating them in the shortest possible time within the rules and the laws of armed conflict.

Meanwhile, internal security operations only require restraint and the use of minimum force which is in contrast to what is usually required of soldiers in conventional warfare. The requirement for minimum force is because, they are now-maintaining law and order among their own people in their own country. By virtue of the training the military is train to fight conventional war not protracted conflict where in most cases the enemy is not known. The arbitrariness associated with the military while in internal security operations can be attributed to the kind of training undergone by the soldiers. There is therefore the need for the military to undergo proper training to deal with internal operations. This fact was also acknowledged by the former Chief of Army Staff, Lt-General Onyeab Ihejirika, when he contended that “the Nigerian Army must refocus its logistics training to carter for internal security operations in aid of civil authority”.

(iii) Equipment and International Politics: The soldiers involved in the north east operations are not properly equipped for the task. Soldiers engaged in the operations who are only equipped with guns will definitely use it if their lives are threatened by a hostile mob. Similarly, the Nigerian Army was quoted as saying the insurgents now use anti-aircraft guns mounted on trucks to fight the nation’s soldiers, likely outgunning the country’s overstretched forces (Vanguard Newspaper, 2013:7).

In addition to the above the during president Jonathan administration some countries notably America had refuse to sell weapons to the Nigerian government to fight the insurgents for the simple reasons that there was violation of human right in Nigeria as define by them. This makes the Nigerian military not only incapacitated but also allow the insurgents to wax stronger and captured most areas in the north east.

(iv) Strategy and Tactics: Military strategy and tactics are essential to the conduct of warfare. Strategy is planning, coordination, and general direction of military operations to meet overall

political and military objectives. Tactics implement strategy by short-term decision on the movement of troops and employment of weapons on the field of battle. Armies all over the world have strategies and tactics employed in times of war. Some of the most commonly cited principles are the objective, the offensive, surprise, security, unit of command economy of force, mass and maneuver.

In the case of north east the tactics were deficient as a result of inadequate technology which give adequate information about the insurgents as regard to there where bout, the nature of the equipment, the number of personnel and the strategies adopted. Worst still there are moll and traitors among the Nigerian military are said to be cog in the wheel of progress. There are insinuations that the internal wrangling among the rank and file has cripple and deteriorate all the tactics and strategies. Military expert such the like Huntington and Finer reminded us that what makes military to fight and win war to a large extent is not the weapons but spirit of esprit de cop.

(v) The political Economy of the war against Insurgency: There are other factors that have combined to undermine the military to eradicate insurgency but prominent among those factors is corruption. its manifestation has been expressed through malfeasance, misfeasance and nonfeasance. Malfeasance is more than stealing it is the performance by public officials of deeds that they are forbidden to perform by constitutional or statutory law or by commonly accepted moral standard. Misfeasance is the improper performance of lawful duties; it involves administrative activity that is within the lawful mission of an agency but violate constitutional standard or public interest. Nonfeasance is the failure of public official to perform required duties (Grover, 2008).

To begin with, evidence has shown that since the insurgency started, the Nigerian defence budget to combat insurgency had increased from 100 billion naira (\$625 million) in 2010 to 927 billion

naira (\$6billion) in 2011 and 1trillion (\$6.25billion) naira in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (ICG, 2014:30). According to the Leadership Newspaper 10th March, 2014 the federal government over a period of four years, has spent about N3.38 trillion to combat insurgency alone (Emeand and Anyandike, 2013).

A thorough investigation revealed that a large sum of monies budgeted by the government for combating insurgency were misappropriated by top government officials, military and other security agencies' officials in collaboration with politicians and contractors supplying military hardwires. This implies that military hardware contract has been a good arena for corruption, though often deliberately ignored. This is facilitated through the "offset" principle operated in defense procurement that is built into contractual conditionality.

Worse still, in Nigeria, there is almost no due diligence on potential improper check on beneficiaries from the offsets, no monitoring of performance on offset contracts, the corruption of politics in Nigeria reclines behind the government's inability to effectively battle the Boko-Haram.

### **The Alternative Framework for Military Operations**

Since 2009, with the outbreak book haram insurgency the role of the military on internal security operation is on the increase with mild degree of success. This is because the military are not that trained to manage interior operations like other civil authorities. However, the nature of the contemporary civil upheaval require that the military must be involved as stipulated in the 1999 constitution thus: Section 217 (c) 1999 constitution forms the basis of involvement of the military in internal security operations in Nigeria. It provides thus in relation to the functions of the military in Nigeria:

“suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President but subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an Act of National Assembly”.

Section 8(1) of the Armed Forces Act provides that the President shall determine the operational use of the Armed Forces which is defined thus:

“In this section, “operational use of the armed forces” includes the operational use of the armed forces in Nigeria for the purpose of maintaining and securing public safety and public order”. The security challenges witnessed in the country have called for more of military intervention in the form of internal security operations and it has been observed that the military is increasingly involved in internal security operations (Okoli & Orinya, 2013:21).

Given the above quote and the current socio -economic realities it is clear that the level of upheaval supersedes the capacity of the Nigeria policy, therefore alternative strategy is required thus:

- i. Rule of engagement: There is the need for domestic legislation to regulate the operations of the military operation internally. It should be given a legal status and cease to operate as a mere guideline. The status must empower the military to use maximum force against individual who in whatever guise threatening the sovereignty of the state under whatever code name.
- ii. War technology: It is pertinent to note that Nigeria with her vast economies status to remain with obsolete technology used in the sixties which were outmoded and out dated. Part of the problem is that most of the equipment used in the fight against insurgency were not only outdate but also cannot withstand the pressure of the modern weapons use by the insurgents. Nigerian military budget is on the increase therefore should procure modern equipment in order to withstand the challenges of modern threats.

iii. Re-orientation and Training: There should be re-orientation of the soldiers involved in internal security operations and the populace as well. The military has been tagged with the label of terror and an average Nigerian encountering soldiers on the road is likely to be subjected to unnecessary and unwarranted fear. Soldiers should be knowledgeable in internal conflict management. The military should be made to undergo trainings geared towards internal operation before engaging in same as well as re-training to meet with the recent challenges of today's sophisticated global threat.

The way and manner where all soldier will be train the same way makes them jack of all trade master of none. This implies that there should specialization and professionalism. Some section of the military should be train in guerilla warfare so that they can appear and disappear at the appropriate time.

iv. Political economy of the war. The bane of all challenges in the fight against insurgency in Nigeria is corruption. It has become a grand strategy and a conduit pipe through which most parties to the war survive. This include military officers, politicians, the locals, vigilante and some residents who have suffer most of the effect of the war. Until and unless corruption is dealt with decisively all the above strategy may not work. I therefore suggest life imprisonment as a good measure to curb menace of corruption

## **Conclusion**

This research work explores the Nigerian Military Insurgency Operations in North East Nigeria since 2009-2021. The study explore the various strategy used by the military over time with mild

success. However, Nigerian state engages in counter-insurgency operations to protect the civilian population from the activities of insurgents and armed groups on one hand; and to ensure the corporate existence of the Nigerian state. This endangers the popularity of the government among the civilians who are often left at some points to cater for their security while being subjected to various degrees of ill treatment. However, the Nigerian state has the responsibility to tackle the roots of insurgency rather than waiting for insurgency to manifest and to respond with brutal force. An alternative counterinsurgency framework must be rooted in addressing the root causes of insurgency, building community trust, and adopting a holistic approach that combines military operations with political, economic, and social strategies. Only through such a comprehensive strategy can the region hope to achieve sustainable peace and security.

### **Recommendations**

To address the challenges of insurgency in Nigeria's North East Geopolitical Zone, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This approach should encompass political, economic, social, and developmental initiatives aimed at addressing root causes and improving the livelihoods of local populations, thus reducing the appeal of insurgent groups.

Effective intelligence gathering and sharing are crucial components of countering insurgency. Strengthening intelligence capabilities and coordination among security agencies is essential to anticipate and counter insurgent activities, providing a proactive response. In this sense engaging with local communities is vital for building trust and obtaining valuable information. Establishing community-based intelligence networks can provide early warnings of impending attacks and help identify potential recruits for insurgent groups.



Robust counter-radicalization programs are needed to rehabilitate and reintegrate former insurgents into society. These programs should target the ideological and psychological factors that lead individuals to join extremist groups.

Enhancing border security is essential to prevent the movement of insurgents across international borders. Collaborating with neighboring countries is crucial for controlling the flow of arms and combatants. This can be done through pursuing political solutions and negotiations with non-hardline factions of insurgent groups can explore opportunities for ceasefires and reconciliation. Additionally, capacity building, humanitarian assistance, and international cooperation are key elements in achieving a sustainable and effective counterinsurgency strategy.

Transparency and accountability in military operations should be promoted to build trust among the population. Human rights abuses and civilian casualties should be thoroughly investigated and addressed. This can be achieved through the Development of a comprehensive information warfare strategy to counter extremist propaganda and shape the narrative in favor of the government. Engaging with local and international media is crucial. Establish a robust system for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of counterinsurgency efforts. Regular assessments should guide adjustments in strategy and tactics.

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