



# Winning the War and Losing the Peace: An Analysis of Counter Boko Haram Terrorism in Northeast Nigeria<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract:

This paper examines the multifaceted challenges and complexities surrounding the Nigerian government's counter-terrorism efforts. The study delves into the paradoxical situation of "winning the war but losing the peace," wherein the Nigerian military has achieved significant successes in degrading the operational capacity of Boko Haram, yet has struggled to establish a sustainable peace. It draws on various primary and secondary sources to analyse the historical context, socio-political dynamics, and strategic aspects of the counter-terrorism campaign. It evaluates both the military's kinetic operations and non-kinetic initiatives implemented to address the root causes of Boko Haram's rise, focusing on their effectiveness and limitations. It highlights the unintended consequences of military-centric strategies, including alleged human rights issues, displacement of populations, and exacerbation of grievances. It underscores the importance of a holistic approach that integrates military efforts with long-term socio-economic development, community engagement, and judiciary and security sector reforms to prevent the resurgence of extremism. In analysing the complex interplay between security, development, and governance, the study contributes to the understanding of the intricate challenges that emerge when addressing terrorism issues in a fragile state context. It emphasizes the need for a nuanced, context-specific approach that goes beyond short-term military gains to ensure sustainable peace and stability. The findings of this study hold implications not only for Nigeria but also for other nations facing similar challenges, providing insights into the delicate balance between winning the war against terrorism and securing a lasting peace.

## Keywords:

Terrorism;  
Counterterrorism;  
Sustainable Peace;  
Kinetic Operations;  
Human Rights Abuse;  
Displacement.

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## *Introduction*

Contemporary conflicts have proven to be more complex and complicated due to the multiplicity of actors and divergent interests that tend to prolong the conflict thereby increasing human casualty and fatality. Terrorism is increasingly becoming a common tactic employed by irregular forces and this makes conflict more difficult to manage. The fight against terrorism has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges, which requires concerted efforts by state actors as well as regional and international organizations to address such challenges (Aning, 2015). Nigeria's experience in countering Boko Haram terrorism stands out within the broader context of counter-terrorism endeavour. Here there are some records of military successes amidst very poor socio-political and economic conditions, leading to what could be best described as 'battlefield victory without peace' (Higate & Kamungi (Eds.). 2018). This succinctly captures the paradoxical nature of Nigeria's struggle against Boko Haram, encapsulating the nation's seeming triumphs on the battlefield and its subsequent struggles to establish lasting peace and stability. This study delves into the multifaceted dimensions of Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts, shedding light on the intricate interplay between military operations, political dynamics, socio-economic conditions, and involvement of international partners.

The Boko Haram activities, which began as a pacifist movement, later metamorphosed into a trans-national violent terrorist group following the inability of the government to root it out from inception, particularly, its inability to separate political imperative from the nation's strategic interest (Onuoha, 2013). The group began to gain international prominence and posed an existential threat to Nigeria's territorial integrity, and national security. With its violent approach towards driving its message, Boko Haram has sought to establish a caliphate based on its extremist interpretation of Islamic law. The Nigerian government, in response to the crisis, adopted strategies involving military deployment to counter terrorism, and regional and international collaborations (Kolawole, 2018). These efforts are perceived to be heavily kinetic, amidst asymmetric opponents within a civil domain. This, at times, yielded noticeable military successes, such as the recapture of key parts of Nigeria's homeland hitherto held by the terrorists, as well as the weakening of Boko Haram's operational capabilities. Yet, what follows military victories is often a demonstration of disillusionment as Nigeria grapples with the challenges of reconstruction, reintegration, and reconciliation (RRR).

The phenomenon of "losing the peace" is exemplified by the difficulties Nigeria has encountered in addressing the root causes of the crisis and in transitioning conflict-torn regions into stable, inclusive societies. The aftermath of military operations has frequently exposed the underlying socio-economic grievances that initially fueled Boko Haram's rise, including poverty, unemployment, corruption, and unequal access to resources (Ukiwo, 2015). This is encapsulated in what is termed a governance deficit. Moreover, the asymmetrical nature of the conflict has rendered civilian populations vulnerable to both Boko Haram's violence and, at times, heavy-handed military



responses. These complexities highlight the intricate balance that must be struck between security imperatives and safeguarding the rights and well-being of the civilian populace.

In recent times, the Nigerian government has been preoccupied with the struggle to consolidate military gains with comprehensive peacebuilding efforts. However, these efforts have continued to suffer setbacks due to overwhelming divergent political considerations. Governance challenges, ethnic tensions, and religious divides have further complicated the trajectory towards sustainable peace. The intricate place of politics in Nigeria's socio-political life has implications on security governance and frequently influences the efficacy of counter-terrorism strategies, the responsiveness of institutions, and the degree of regional cooperation. Moreover, the perception of state legitimacy, both domestically and internationally, hinges on Nigeria's ability to navigate the complex post-conflict landscape.

Similarly, the transnational nature of the Boko Haram crisis requires international collaboration and support if it must be comprehensively addressed. Accordingly, Nigeria, especially under President Buhari (2015-2023) made overtures to neighbouring Lake Chad countries to strengthen the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Such cooperation proved to be effective, particularly in rooting Boko Haram out from the border areas (Ibrahim, March 2023, personal communication).

Accordingly, having made significant progress, particularly, on the battlefield, while still dealing with the challenges of post-conflict peacebuilding, it is imperative to reflect on the after-action review, the pitfalls to avoid, and the potential pathways to follow in navigating the country out of the conflict. This study periscopes the counter-Boko Haram terrorism campaign through a holistic lens. By probing the connections between the kinetic approach to conflict management, socio-political dynamics, and international engagements, this study seeks to offer insights that not only deepen understanding of Nigeria's struggle but also inform broader counter-terrorism efforts in an increasingly complex world.

### *Methodology*

The study adopts a qualitative research methodology, utilizing both secondary and primary sources of data including academic articles, policy documents, and news reports, among others. It also incorporates interviews with subject matter experts and key stakeholders including security experts, academics, and government officials for primary data. It employed thematic content analysis to assess counter-terrorism strategies' effectiveness, impacts, and broader implications. The interview transcripts were analysed qualitatively to identify recurring themes related to the challenges faced in transitioning from conflict to peace, as well as potential improvements.

### *Theoretical Framework: Governance and State Capacity Theory*

The analysis in this study is anchored on governance and state capacity theory. The theory is multidisciplinary with proponents that cut across different scholarships and practitioners who have contributed to its development. Fukuyama (2014) for instance

argues that strong state institutions are crucial for political stability and economic development. The role of inclusive and extractive institutions in shaping state capacity and prosperity is explored by Acemoglu & Robinson, (2013). Woolcock (1998), explores the importance of local institutions, social networks, and informal norms in shaping governance. Collier (2007), highlights the challenges that weak states face and the importance of building state capacity to promote development and peace.

In this study, the theory focuses on the capacity of the Nigerian state to provide security, development, and good governance in the country, particularly, in the Northeast part of the country. It looks at the impact of governance deficit on the region and how it helps to exacerbate terrorism. Hence, for there to be effective and holistic counter-terrorism programmes, the government must ensure that while it tries to ensure a safe and secure environment through the use of force, it must also provide local governance and address all those conditions that hitherto breed discord and discontent in society. While this is the case, the effectiveness of non-military strategies, such as deradicalization programmes such as Operation Safe Corridor, community engagement, and intelligence-sharing, in countering Boko Haram needs to be re-examined.

The theory provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of Boko Haram terrorism, counter-terrorism efforts of the government, and post-conflict stability in Nigeria. It looks at how issues of governance such as trust in official dealings, lack of accountability, and weak institutions, have contributed to the rise of Boko Haram and analyzes how these governance issues have eroded the state's capacity to address root causes of terrorism. There is therefore the need to examine not just the successes recorded so far by the military operation in the affected areas but also the long-term fall-out of the counter-terrorism efforts of the government.

### *Conceptualizing Counter-Terrorism Operations in Nigerian Context*

In this study, counter-terrorism operation incorporates the practices, tactics, techniques, and strategies that governments, through their institutions and agencies adopt to tackle terrorist threats and/or acts, both real and imputed (Lynn, 2004). Lynn notes further that counter-terrorism refers to offensive operations intended to prevent, deter, pre-empt, and respond to terrorism.

The counter-terrorism operation, in the context of Boko Haram, refers to a series of military and security efforts aimed at combating and neutralizing its threat (Ibrahim, 2018). Boko Haram is a terrorist organization that began in north-eastern Nigeria but has over the years spread beyond the region and across the nation, with an impact in neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The group is known for its violent tactics, including suicide bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians and security forces.

Counter-terrorism operations involve the coordinated efforts of various national and international actors, including the affected countries' armed forces, intelligence agencies, and sometimes foreign military assistance (Ibrahim, 2018). The primary goal of the operations is to degrade the capabilities of Boko Haram and eventually eliminate it, as

well as to restore peace, stability, and security in the affected regions. Key components of a counter-Boko Haram operation include:

### *Military Operations*

Involving the deployment of armed forces to engage Boko Haram terrorists, disrupt their activities, and dismantle their infrastructure.

### *Intelligence Gathering and Sharing*

Effective counter-terrorism operations heavily depend on accurate and timely intelligence. Intelligence agencies work to gather information about Boko Haram's activities, leadership, and operational bases, and this information is shared among the agencies involved, to coordinate counter-operation efforts.

### *Border Security and Regional Cooperation*

Boko Haram often operates within and across neighbouring countries through existing poorly secured borders. It becomes imperative for affected countries to collaborate on border security measures to monitor and prevent the spread of terrorism, as well as the circulation of small arms and light weapons across border routes. Regional organizations and neighbouring countries could assist in joint operations and intelligence sharing.

**Protection of Civilian Population and Rehabilitation:** Protecting civilians caught in the conflict and addressing their needs is a critical aspect of counter-terrorist operations in every context. Displaced populations and victims of Boko Haram's violence need assistance, protection, and opportunities for rehabilitation. Addressing the needs of victims of terrorism forms a critical component of every long-term counter-terrorism operation.

### *Counter-Radicalization and De-Radicalization Efforts*

Aside from military actions during counter-terrorism operations, resources, and assets are dedicated to neutralizing terrorists' radical narratives and preventing the recruitment of individuals into extremist groups. This involves community engagement, re-orientation, and addressing socio-economic factors that contribute to vulnerability. Strategic communication plays a key role in counter and de-radicalization efforts of every government.

### *Psychological Operations*

This includes the deployment of strategic communication to counter terrorist propaganda and recruitment efforts. Nigeria has not maximally utilized and applied strategic communication in its counter-terrorism efforts. The use of media and engagement of strategic agencies such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), in the Nigerian context, is key in strategic communication. This is an effective tool in counter-terrorism operations.

### *International Support and Collaboration*

Given the transnational nature of terrorism, especially, Boko Haram, international collaboration is often sought. Countries, especially those in the affected region, could seek assistance from international organizations, as well as friendly international partners such as foreign governments that provide resources, training, and intelligence towards actualizing the goal.

It is important to note that counter-terrorism operations are complex and have humanitarian, political, and social implications that require articulating lines of effort in these directions. While the ultimate goal is to neutralize the threat posed by terrorist groups, a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the crisis promotes stability, and safeguards human rights is imperative to achieve sustainable peace.

### *Overview of Terrorism and Counterterrorism across the World*

Atta (2019) opined that over time mankind has lived with conflict, both at the individual level, community, state, or even global. Most of these conflicts, especially at the national level have always been between two unequal opponents. This is reflected in the weaponry, tactics, and personnel. However, insurgency war occurs when a lesser force attempts to subvert state authority using mostly guerrilla and terrorist tactics. Wars involving organized armies and irregular forces have been a constant factor in the history of warfare, and fighting them seems tougher than ever.

Contemporary conflicts are intra-state, contrasting with the inter-state wars that characterized the Cold War period. Many groups and non-state actors have continued to spring up and challenge state authorities. These groups use violence to press home their demand. Thus the most common today is the use of terrorist strategies to compel states to do what otherwise they would not have done. Their main objective is to create panic among the populace and destabilize the government. This is achieved when the populace loses confidence in the ability of the government to carry out its core statutory functions and responsibilities effectively.

Obasi (2020), argues that the trend of global conflicts over time has shaped how the concept of terrorism is defined or perceived. It has shifted from being perceived as a political phenomenon for making use of political resources (such as propaganda, protest, demonstrations, and training), to more of security; because of the use of instruments of violence to accomplish their goals.

Ibrahim (2018) sees terrorism from a security perspective and he explains that it has probably been the most prevalent type of armed conflict since the creation of organized political communities. He corroborated Obasi (2020) by emphasizing the power disparity between terrorism and government regular forces in terms of weaponry and training, however, what differentiates the two opposing forces is their nature, character, training, weaponry, and rule of engagement. Terrorism is completely reliant upon the population, and the population is the objective for both the terrorists and the counter-forces. A key dissimilarity between the past and contemporary terrorism is the

decentralization of terrorist groups. More so, in the information age, terrorist groups need not have extensive funding to have their message heard; terrorist leaders could through technology send any information they want to the internet, in this information age.

Accordingly, due to the transnational nature of terrorism, particularly, in the era of globalization, allying with groups that share similar ideology has become their common practice. This makes counter-terrorism war more difficult, and protracted and lasts longer than imagined (United Nations, 2020). In this case, civilian casualty becomes prevalent. On the other hand, such agitation could bring about development since every war has its positive and negative sides. Terrorist agitation, at times, puts the government in check in terms of utilization of resources leading to economic, social, and political reforms and development.

Hence, the rise of global radical Islamic fundamentalism particularly in Nigeria has marked a turning point in the development and study of terrorism and its attendant consequences (Okpara & Onapajo, (2020). Boko Haram, no doubt has significantly made its presence felt since 2009 in northeast Nigeria. This affirms the view that since the end of the Cold War and the advancement in science and technology, there has been a change like conflict, with the weaker side recording more successes. Part of the reason for the change is the rising importance of public opinion and information warfare, as well as the increasing adoption and acceptability of human rights and humanitarian laws which sometimes stalls or delays justice, especially in developing nations.

In the Nigerian context, Yaqub (2018) opines that in countering terrorism, it is usually difficult to identify them from the community in which they operate. It is against this background that state parties use all legitimate means including “carrot and stick” in a counter-terrorism war to suppress such subversion and rebellion. In this case, state actors are sometimes alleged to be violators of human rights in counter operations because of the lack of a battlefield and difficulty in identifying belligerents. Obiako (2017) further clarification between insurgency, terrorism, and conventional war by upholding that:

“Insurgency is not terrorism or conventional war for example, though it shares with them some similarities such as the use of force or guerrilla tactics to achieve an end which is often political. The difference between insurgency and terrorism lies in the scope and magnitude of violence. While for instance, terrorism rarely brings about political change on its own, insurgency attempts to bring about change through force of arms. Similarly, terrorists often apply a wide range of damages when compared to insurgents. On the other hand, while conventional war involves adversaries more or less symmetric in equipment or training, insurgency involves adversaries that are asymmetric, weak, and almost always a sub-state group.” (C. Obiako, personal communication).

The Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria shares some of the elements presented by Obiako such as the use of violence, and lack of a battlefield, however, it has not shown much interest in bringing about serious political changes at a national scale except for its focus on the introduction of Islamic modelled administration in some localized areas. This makes many see it as a local group with religious ideology. However, its extensive operations that transcend national frontiers contradict this belief and question the rationale for perceiving the crisis as local.

### *Interrogating Military Success against Boko Haram Terrorism*

Contrary to the thinking of many, this study agrees that there have been significant military successes against Boko Haram terrorism over the years. Heightened intelligence operations, sustained military offensives, and regional and international collaboration and cooperation have resulted in significantly degrading of the operational capacity and capability of the terrorist group, as well as its claim of territorial control. Since 2009 when the Boko Haram operation began to adopt violent tactics, the group has remained a significant security threat to Nigeria and neighbouring countries. The success of military efforts against Boko Haram has varied over time. This paper highlighted some factors that contributed to military successes in fighting Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria:

### *Strengthening of Multinational Joint Force (MNJTF) Operations*

On assumption of office, President Muhammadu Buhari began to open up strategic communication and collaboration with Nigeria's immediate neighbours such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon among others. This led to the revitalization of the MNJTF as Joint military operations involving Nigerian armed forces and those of neighbouring countries, such as Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Benin in combating Boko Haram terrorism. The MNJTF which was established to coordinate efforts across borders, has been significant in fighting terrorism around border areas through pooling resources and intelligence to target Boko Haram terrorists.

### *Improved Intelligence and Surveillance*

Regional and international collaborations with countries such as the United States in combatting terrorism provided for improved intelligence gathering and sharing of information among the affected countries. For instance, the U.S. has been supporting Nigeria in harvesting intelligence as well as training personnel for internal security. The intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) live feed provided by the U.S to Nigerian military operation against Boko Haram, tremendously helped Nigerian forces in assessing the exact location of the enemies and reduced battlefield collateral damages (O.O. Obolo, personal communication, 13 April 2023). It also helped in tracking the movements and activities of Boko Haram fighters. This has allowed security forces to anticipate and counter their actions.



### *Community Engagement*

The inability of the military to engage with the affected communities contributed to the initial setback in counter-terrorist operations of the military. For there to be a successful counter-operation, an effort must be made to win the hearts and minds of the local populace. On realizing that it has effectively engaged communities, the military began to identify stakeholders in the affected communities, who often provided valuable information about the group's activities and hideouts (S.O Eyekosi, personal communication, 30 March 2023).

### *Deradicalization Programmes*

The process of disarmament, de-radicalization, and reintegration programmes form an integral part of the counter-terrorism operation of the Nigerian government. This is encapsulated in an operation code named 'Operation Safe Corridor'. The largely successful operation is aimed at rehabilitating former Boko Haram members and reintegrating them into society. It targets reducing the number of Boko Haram foot soldiers and preventing further recruitment.

### *Enactment of Anti-Terrorism Legislation*

The realization that the lack of adequate legislative framework posed a serious setback in initial efforts to combat Boko Haram terrorism resulted in the speedy passage of anti-terrorism legislation by the Nigerian Parliament in 2011 to support counter-terrorism efforts. The Terrorism (Prevention) Act, of 2011 was amended in 2013 to provide for extraterritorial application of the Act and strengthen efforts to cut off terrorism financing. The 2013 amended Act was subsequently repealed and replaced in 2022 with the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022. The legislation paved the way for improved funding of counter-terrorism operations, purchase of military equipment, improving infrastructure, and providing training for security forces. It provides an enhanced framework to prevent, prosecute, and punish acts of terrorism.

### *International Collaboration and Assistance*

Alluding to the belief that Boko Haram terrorism is a human security issue that requires international collaboration, Nigeria made an effort to garner international support and partnership from countries such as the U.S., the European Union, and regional organizations like the African Union. These partners provided technical assistance, training, and resources to help combat Boko Haram. However, the strength and prospect of this assistance remain a subject of further investigation.

### *The Peace Paradox*

Despite the successes recorded by the military in its effort to combat Boko Haram threats, the study reveals a struggle by the authorities to consolidate its successes and maintain sustainable peace. The counter-terrorism approach has not addressed the underlying factors that feed extremism, including poverty, illiteracy, and governance deficit, thereby leaving an opening for the resurgence of extremist ideologies. The complex struggle against Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria and neighbouring countries has unveiled a challenging dilemma. The peace paradox revolves around the intricate interplay between pursuing peace and countering terrorism, highlighting the difficulties inherent in addressing security threats while striving for long-term stability and drive for sustainable peace.

To counter the notoriety of Boko Haram over the years, governments adopted a multi-faceted approach, combining military operations with socio-economic initiatives such as the creation of the Northeast Development Commission, and Victims Support Funds (VSF) among others. This is with the view to fostering development and addressing the root causes of extremism. This dual-track strategy forms the basis of the Peace Paradox. On one hand, pursuing military action against Boko Haram is necessary to create a safe and secure environment necessary for the injection of other elements of human security. However, this military response often results in occasional back-clashes common in conflict environments, especially, asymmetric war. This inadvertently exacerbates grievances that terrorists exploit to garner community sympathy and support. Excessive use of force can lead to civilian casualties, displacement, and human rights violations, creating a cycle of anger and resentment that terrorists exploit to recruit new members.

On the other hand, addressing the socio-economic drivers of extremism, such as poverty, lack of education, and governance deficit, is imperative for long-term peace. Investing in education, job creation, and other social services would address the underlying factors that make individuals vulnerable to radicalization. These efforts are usually for long-term measures and it takes time to yield results that may not provide immediate solutions to the pressing security concerns posed by Boko Haram. The paradox lies in the tension between these two approaches. Military actions can disrupt and degrade terrorist networks and reduce threats, but they risk re-introducing a cycle of violence and radicalization. While socio-economic initiatives are essential for long-term stability, they may not yield quick and immediate results needed for peace and stability.

To address the Peace Paradox, an integrated approach, encapsulated in what this study calls the 'whole of society approach', is required to strike a balance between these strategies. This involves integrated efforts to ensure that military actions are conducted with precision to minimize civilian harm and follow up with comprehensive post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Additionally, socio-economic initiatives must be designed and implemented in ways that are responsive to local needs, and put into consideration, the cultural sensitivity of the conflict environment. Additionally, it must be capable of delivering tangible improvements in people's lives. Addressing this paradox requires a



holistic and coordinated effort that acknowledges the complexity of the challenge and the necessity of multifaceted solutions.

### *Human Rights Question*

One aspect of Nigeria's counter-terrorism operations in the North East that negatively affected the overall peace process is the question of alleged human rights violations in the course of combating terrorism. (OO Obolo, personal communication, April 13, 2023) who corroborated E. Anebi (personal communication, July 3, 2023) do not agree that Government forces committed any form of human rights abuse in the theatre of operation:

“Sincerely from the point of military operations against an enemy of the state, I don't see anywhere the Nigerian government's efforts have in any way impinged on the human rights of the people because we are talking of groups that have taken up arms against the State, attacking security forces, killing innocent people, displacing civilian population, I will rather say that it is the activities of BH that is impinging on the rights of people to leave freely. The government forces must protect lives and property. The Nigerian government just tried to defend its territory and protect its citizens. As a professional soldier, I don't see us contravening the rights of the people as being propagated by some of the media outfits. As time goes on they will understand the side of the government.” (O.O. Obolo, personal communication, April 13, 2023).

However, the study agrees that asymmetric warfare could be complex, with the potential to cause violations. What is important is the ability of the national Armed Forces to display professionalism in the discharge of their duty. The allegations of human rights violations linked to counter Boko Haram terrorism operations in Nigeria attracted international condemnation, particularly, from the U.S. Government. Consequent upon this, the U.S., under its national laws, the Leahy Legislation, denied Nigeria every effort to acquire military equipment that originates or is licensed from the U.S., to prosecute the war.

Regarding terrorism, the U.S. has demonstrated leadership in mobilizing other nations globally to combat terrorism, particularly since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on its homeland. (Idahosa & Harrison, 2012; Olurounbi, 2020). The declaration of global war on terror was a swift response by the U.S. to deter any further terrorist incursion on its homeland. Bearing in mind its principles, particularly as it relates to human rights protection in any security operation, the U.S. has continued to impose sanctions on perceived violators of human rights during military operations. It is based on this that the U.S. insisted that Nigeria's counter-terrorism measures must recognize the sanctity of human rights if they must receive international support. Expectedly, this resulted in political disagreement that culminated in a sort of mutual suspicion between the two countries, particularly, in 2014/ 2015.

Consequent to this, the U.S. activated its domestic law (Leahy legislation) on Nigeria on the sale of arms (Kokim, 2015). For instance, the Leahy Law in the U.S., a human rights law, prohibits the U.S. Department of State and Department of Defence from providing military assistance to foreign security forces that have records of gross violations of human rights. The law prevented Nigeria from accessing certain categories of weapons from the U.S., and its allies as well as weapons that are licensed from the U.S. It is instructive to note that some other countries such as Bangladesh, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, and Pakistan were equally listed by the U.S. and sanctioned on ground of human rights violations in their respective military operations (Kokim, 2015). However, pundits believe the application of the Leahy law in the Nigerian context was more political since there were still states with more records of human rights cases such as torture in Yemen committed by Emirati security forces, violations by Iraqi forces in Mosul, and the extrajudicial killings by Police in the Philippine, yet the law was not invoked on them (Mohanty, 2017). Thus, in the Nigerian case, Amnesty reports indicate that those abuses persisted long after the law was partially lifted (Amnesty International, 2018; Reuters, 2020). The U.S. government began to lift the restrictions imposed on Nigeria, in 2015, thereby creating a window for Nigeria to purchase certain categories of offensive weapons from the U.S. beginning shortly after Nigeria had a political transition. This may have provoked suspicion as to the true intention of restricting Nigeria in a period when the country was in dire need of military assistance from its allies to combat Boko Haram terrorism.

Such allegations of human rights abuse, not only tarnish Nigeria's international reputation but also foster mistrust and resentment among local communities, inadvertently fuelling the cycle of radicalization. Nigeria's willingness to improve its human rights record opened the space for continued collaboration with the U.S. in areas of training, intelligence gathering, and sell of arms among others. The struggle against Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria and neighbouring countries underscores the complex intersection of security concerns, counter-terrorism efforts, and the imperative to uphold human rights and protect civilians. Accordingly, in response to the cruelty of Boko Haram terrorism, the Nigerian Government deployed various strategies to combat the threat, however, it is important to recognize that any effective and sustainable approach must be grounded in the principles of human rights and civilian protection.

In this light, there is a need to balance security imperative and human rights concerns in any operation irrespective of the operational environment. This is because poor management of human rights could jeopardize the operation and exacerbate the security situation. The fight against terrorism often presents governments with the challenge of striking a balance between ensuring security and safeguarding human rights. In the case of Boko Haram, it is imperative to recognize that observing and respecting human rights not only upholds the dignity of individuals but can also contribute to long-term stability. Disregarding human rights in an operational environment breeds resentment and distrust among communities, potentially fuelling radicalization and recruitment for extremist groups. On the question of the imperative for the protection

of civilians, this study notes that civilians, who are the most vulnerable in conflict situations, usually bear the brunt of Boko Haram's violence. Thus, ensuring their protection requires a multi-faceted approach. Furthermore, the provision of humanitarian aid to affected populations helps mitigate the humanitarian fallout of the conflict, ensuring that basic needs are met even amid violence.

### *Socio-economic Implications of Counter-terrorism Operations*

The fight against Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria has brought about a complex web of socio-economic consequences that have significantly impacted various aspects of the nation's life. These consequences have not only shaped the lives of individuals and communities in the immediate conflict environment but have also impacted the entire region. The Boko Haram crisis accounted for over 2.2 million internally displaced people and 20, 000 deaths since 2009 (Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2019). Again, Boko Haram's increasing soft targets such as schools, kidnapping of school children, and other inhuman acts disrupted the education system and social life of the people in the affected States. Its opposition to Western culture and norms has impacted negatively on the education system in the affected areas. This has disrupted the education of countless children and young adults. The long-term consequence is raising a generation with limited access to quality education.

S/N	Date	No. of Refugees	Countries	No. of IDPs	Source
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
1	11, Feb 2016			70,000 IDPs in Dikwa IDP camp	Punch, 11 Feb 2016
2	2013 - Jan 20, 2015	About 1 000 000 out of which 25,000 moved to Cameroon alone	Cameroon, Niger & Chad		Reuters of Jan 20, 2015
3	6 Oct 2015			19,000 IDPs	Punch 6, 2015
4	Jan 2015	About 13,000 flee from Baga in Borno state alone	Isolated island in the Lake Chad area		Reported by IOM
5	5 March 2015	16,000 flee to Cameroon bringing the total no. in Cameroon to 66,000	Cameroon		Punch, Mar 5, 2015
6	14 April 2015	About 800,000 children alone fled their homes while about 14,000 killed since the BH attacks started in 2009	Cameroon, Niger, and Chad, and within Nigeria		Vanguard 14 April 2015

7	Jul 7, 2015			Nigeria, 3 <sup>rd</sup> highest no.of IDPs	The leadership of 7 July 2015
8	19 Jun 2015	As of June 19, 2015, about 200,000 Nigerian refugees	Chad Cameroun and Niger	1.5 million IDPs in Nigeria	NCFRMI
9	1 July 2015			120,000 IDPs in 22 LGAs of Borno state	NAN, Daily Trust
10	May 2013 - Dec 2014	87,000 out of which 25,000 were children	Niger		News 23

Figure 1: Boko Haram-induced displacements in Nigeria from May 2014. Source: monitored and compiled by the Researcher.

This poses multifaceted challenges that require a holistic approach and calculated strategic intervention. For instance, the crisis disrupted the social and economic livelihood of the people, creating food insecurity and other humanitarian crises. The resultant humanitarian crisis demands robust efforts to provide adequate assistance, resettlement, and psychosocial support to the displaced individuals and families. The conflict has further weakened local economies by disrupting agricultural activities, trade routes, and markets. Additionally, businesses have been forced to close, and foreign investments have dwindled due to security concerns. The resulting economic instability has far-reaching implications, including unemployment, poverty, and reduced economic growth.

Addressing the psychological trauma associated with the experiences of many families in the affected States is crucial not only for the well-being of affected individuals but also for fostering social cohesion and stability. This came as a result of constant threats of violence and other brutal experiences. Again, there is increased tension among various ethnic and religious groups as a result of the activities of Boko Haram. For instance, non-indigenes and Christian communities affected by the crisis would easily ascribe religious and ethnic interpretations to the crisis, thereby inhibiting social cohesion. Rebuilding social cohesion and trust among diverse groups is essential for long-term peace and stability.

At the national level, the crisis has depleted the national treasury. For instance, in January 2023, Former President Muhammadu Buhari mentioned that his government spent over \$1bn in weaponry to recover territories from Boko Haram (Aworinde, 2023). Aside from efforts at rebuilding damaged infrastructures and essential facilities destroyed by Boko Haram, overall processes of counter-terrorism and insurgency operations have proven to be very expensive. This posed a great challenge to the nation with existing economic challenges. Resources that would have been put in other critical sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure, are being reallocated to counter-

terrorism. Balancing the urgent need for security with broader socio-economic development remains a challenge.

Another critical implication, but sparingly discussed issue in the Boko Haram crisis is the weaponization of gender-based violence by Boko Haram. Its actions have disproportionately affected women and girls, who have been subjected to abduction, sexual violence, and forced marriages, thereby creating a web of mental insecurity in them. Addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equity through the application of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (SC/RES/1325) must be integral to the recovery process. Nigeria is a signatory to this landmark resolution and has been taking steps to domesticate it at the national level. Navigating the complex socio-economic consequences of countering Boko Haram terrorism requires a holistic approach that combines security measures with targeted interventions in education, healthcare, job creation, and community reconciliation. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can move closer to, not only defeating terrorism but also building a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous society.

### *Operation Safe Corridor in Retrospect*

The study reveals a lack of comprehensive deradicalization and reintegration programmes for former Boko Haram fighters, and limited support for victims' rehabilitation. This gap hinders the achievement of sustainable peace. Post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation require careful planning, collaboration, and dedication to restore stability, rebuild infrastructure, address social and economic disparities, and ultimately pave the way for lasting peace. One notable initiative of the government that seeks to address the issue of reconstruction and rehabilitation of the affected communities, is the "Operation Safe Corridor," which is a programme designed to facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants and displaced persons into society while promoting stability and development (D. Abdullahi, personal communication, May 31, 2023).

As of May 2023, about 2,167 ex-Boko haram members have passed through the Nigerian government's rehabilitation programme under the Operation Safe Corridor. Out of the 2,167 people that graduated from the programme, 2,140 were Nigerians and 27 foreigners from Cameroun, Chad and Niger, indicating that the crisis has grown beyond local terrorism. OPSC has the support of both national and international partners such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Swiss Embassy among others (Vanguard News Online (May 12, 2023).

Operation Safe Corridor as an initiative of the government, recognises that individuals who have participated in armed conflict, often against their will or due to coercive circumstances, must be reintegrated into society as part of the conflict resolution spectrum. The programme typically involves a multi-faceted approach that involves demobilization, disarmament, rehabilitation, vocational training, psychosocial support, and education (D. Abdullahi, personal communication, May 31, 2023). Its

main objective is to create a safe and conducive environment for participants to transition from a life of conflict to that of stability and development. Its key components include demobilization and disarmament of former combatants; rehabilitation and counselling of former combatants who have been exposed to trauma, violence, and psychological stress during their time in conflict; vocational training and education for participants with practical skills and offer them opportunities to develop employable skills, fostering self-reliance and reducing the likelihood of returning to conflict; civic education and social reintegration for participants to help them understand human rights, citizenship, and peaceful coexistence; community reconciliation to facilitate the acceptance of former combatants by their communities, and address grievances, promote understanding, and rebuild trust between participants and the broader community.

However, Abdullahi notes that despite the laudable objectives of the Operation, as well as similar initiatives set out to achieve as part of post-conflict recovery, it has faced several challenges. This includes: funding limitations, ensuring long-term sustainability, and addressing deeply ingrained societal divisions. Additionally, the success of these programmes depends on effective collaboration among all actors such as governments, international organizations, NGOs, and local communities (D. Abdullahi, personal communication, May 31, 2023). Unlike the Niger Delta amnesty programme that was largely successful, Operation Safe Corridor targets Boko Haram fighters and appears to ignore the leaders. Capturing the leaders of Boko Haram in the programme through mutually accepted terms and conditions, would, just like the case of the Niger Delta amnesty, bring the real fighters to naturally submit and accept any peace initiative provided their leaders have accepted same. Contrary to this, the Operation has led to the surrender of a large number of former Boko Haram members who accepted the peace initiative, yet the fight has persisted. This could mean that there may be some economic or greener pasture seekers among those who embraced the programme, whose role in the crisis may not be strong enough to make any significant impact on the peace effort.

### *Major Findings*

The study notes that while Nigeria's military campaign against Boko Haram has recorded considerable success, the peacebuilding process remains fraught with challenges. Key among these limitations are the issues of human rights concerns, socio-economic consequences of the conflict, and inadequate post-conflict initiatives. Accordingly, the following are major findings emanating from the study:

- i. The Nigerian government's counter-terrorism operations remain heavily kinetic. The Nigerian government's initial response focused heavily on a militarized approach to counter Boko Haram terrorism. While this approach yielded significant successes in degrading the group's capabilities and regaining territories it initially controlled, it failed to address the root causes that fueled the rise of





Boko Haram, such as socio-economic inequality, political corruption, and governance deficit.

- ii. The military campaign against Boko Haram came with allegations of human rights abuses, both from the Boko Haram and the government security forces, leading to grievances among local populations. This has the prospect of undermining public trust in the government, which the terrorists could catch on to recruit new members.
- iii. Ineffective coordination among various security agencies and government bodies hindered the overall effectiveness of the counter-terrorism efforts. The lack of information sharing, coordination, and cooperation among agencies involved in the operation resulted in a disjointed approach that allowed Boko Haram to exploit gaps in security measures.
- iv. The conflict resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis, displacing millions of people internally and externally and causing widespread suffering among civilians. The lack of adequate humanitarian support further eroded trust in its ability to protect and care for its citizens.
- v. Boko Haram's tactics of targeting soft targets such as educational institutions resulted in the disruption of the education system for teeming school children, particularly girls in North East Nigeria. This has implications, particularly, in access to educational opportunities and increased vulnerability.
- vi. The establishment of “Operation Safe Corridor” and other peacebuilding initiatives of the government failed to address the deep-rooted socio-economic challenges that hitherto created an enabling environment for the crisis to grow. These programmes faced challenges in implementation and lacked long-term sustainability. Reintegration efforts often fell short of local acceptability due to insufficient job opportunities and social stigma.

### *Recommendations*

Based on these findings, the study recommends as follows:

1. The Nigerian government, through the Ministry of Defence and Defence Headquarters should work to ensure that counter-terrorism operations are conducted within the boundaries of domestic and international legal frameworks, particularly as it applies to the laws of Armed Conflict in the conduct of internal security operations. There is a need to integrate human rights, and civilian protection as part of pre-deployment training for the military.
2. The Nigerian government should pursue a programme aimed at comprehensive and inclusive socio-economic development of the affected region/ states/ local governments. This could be done by addressing the underlying issues such as

poverty, unemployment, lack of education, and basic infrastructure that hitherto created a gap.

3. Post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation endeavour of the government should prioritize community engagement to foster stronger connections between communities and local security forces. This approach can help build trust, gather valuable intelligence, and promote a sense of local ownership in the maintenance of peace and security.
4. As part of counter terrorism strategy, the Nigerian government, through the relevant agencies should develop and strengthen its strategic communication campaign to counter Boko Haram terrorist narratives and its social media dominance and online recruitment efforts.
5. The government's effort to install a comprehensive peacebuilding mechanism should prioritize the inclusion of women in every conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding endeavour. This is to close the gender gap and address women-specific challenges in conflict environments.
6. The Nigerian government should embark on a comprehensive judicial and security sector reform to pursue justice and accountability. This is crucial in ensuring that victims of Boko Haram's crisis receive timely redress

### *Conclusion*

The Nigerian government's counter-terrorism approach has been multifaceted, with recorded successes on the side of government forces against Boko Haram. This study highlighted the areas of success by government forces in the Boko Haram counter operations, though it is yet to secure a lasting peace. The Nigerian military deployed a joint task force at national and regional levels which was instrumental in degrading the operational capabilities of Boko Haram, but yet to achieve the desired peace. The post-conflict phase revealed the fragility of peacebuilding efforts, as challenges persisted in the form of governance gaps, corruption, and the inability to address underlying socio-economic disparities. Moreover, the lack of effective collaboration between government agencies, international actors, and local communities hindered the establishment of a comprehensive and inclusive peace framework.

It is important to recognize that while defeating terrorism is crucial to having peace and security, ensuring lasting peace requires a concerted and sustained commitment to addressing the underlying drivers of the conflict. A more holistic counter-terrorism approach that addresses underlying causes of extremism, respect for human rights, and a focus on post-conflict initiatives is crucial if the government must achieve sustainable peace.

### *Conflict of Interest*

The author hereby declare that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

### *Notes on Contributors*

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#### List of Persons Interviewed by the Researcher

S/N	Title/ Rank	Name	Organisation	Appointment	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)
1	Dr	Nna-Emeka OKEREKE	National Defence College Abuja	CRF/Research Coordinator	Abuja	24/03/23
2	Prof	Yusufu Zoaka Ali	University of Abuja	Prof of Policy Analysis	Abuja	27/03/23
3		Anonymous	Nigeria Air Forces		Abuja	30/03/23
4	Prof	Otoabasi Akpan	Akwa Ibom State University	Prof of History of Ideas/ Int'l Security	Abuja	5/04/23
5	Brig Gen	OO Obolo	Nigerian Army	Director Coordination	Abuja	13/04/23
6		Anonymous	National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC-ONSA)		Abuja	28/04/23
7	Air Cdre (Dr)	Dr Darlington ABDULLAHI	National Defence College	President, AANDC/ Former Director, Nat Military Strategy	Abuja	31/05/23
8	Air Vice Mars hal	Emmanuel ANEBI (Rtd)	Nigerian Air Force	Former Air Task Force Commander, Op Lafia Dole	Abuja	3/07/23