Contextualizing Military Information Support Operations (MISO) in Nigeria's Counterinsurgency Operation: Toward Enhancing Operational Effectiveness[1]

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Abstract:

Military Information Support Operations (MISO) plays a crucial role in counterinsurgency by influencing perceptions, behaviours, and decision-making, which helps to enhance operational effectiveness. However, in Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations, MISO is hardly visible, as it is poorly employed, resulting in severe alienation of the local population, loss of institutional credibility and a rise in misinformation, which are at the core of strengthening insurgent movements and weakening operational effectiveness. Using a qualitative research method, dwelling largely on documented evidence and a thematic review of extant literature, the paper examines MISO within Nigeria's ongoing COIN efforts against insurgency in the northern region. It found that despite its recognition in Nigeria's National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), its application in COIN operations has been poor, limited and secondary, detaching it from the overall counterinsurgency strategy, with severe implications on operational effectiveness. The study, therefore, advances full integration of MISO as a major part of the CTCOIN strategy with clear objectives that align with mission objectives to enhance operational effectiveness. The theoretical frame of analysis adopted by this study is the soft power theory developed by Joseph Nye.

Keywords:
Military Information Support Operations; Psychological Operations; Counterinsurgency; Operational Effectiveness; Counterterrorism.

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Introduction

Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack in the United States of America (USA) by the Al Qaeda Network, the global security environment has witnessed a significant increase in unconventional/asymmetric warfare by irregular forces like terrorists and Islamic fundamentalist insurgency groups across the globe. These forces exploit vulnerabilities in the social system, such as religious sentiments, youth unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, poor governance, and a weak security system, to integrate themselves into the populace and even recruit members of the communities into their fold to gain support and credibility among the people (Richards, 2025). This strategy creates a safe haven for their criminal empires within the communities, making it difficult for the government to identify and dislodge. This is becoming increasingly common across the African continent, particularly in Sub-Saharan African countries, including the Sahel region and the Lake Chad Basin, where economic and human development indices are at the lowest level (UNDP HDI Report, 2023). This, however, reinforces the criticality of Military Information Support Operations (MISO), known as Psychological Operations (Psyops), in hybrid military operations, such as counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (CT-COIN).

Modern military campaigns in irregular warfare, such as counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, have shown that effective integration of MISO into operational strategies is critical to achieving mission objectives (Gurney, 2016). For it to be effective, particularly in longer conflicts with high-level strategic implications, it must include in-depth communication strategies, including long-term messaging plans to multiple target audiences (Gurney, 2016:1). For instance, the United States' efforts in Vietnam and the Soviet attempts in Afghanistan revealed that, despite military technological superiority, there is no substitute for strategic communication and for influencing the local population in counterinsurgency operations. This exposes the limitations of military offensives and the strategic importance of MISO towards successful counterinsurgency operations. Additionally, modern information and communication technology has provided opportunities and access for effective MISO in modern Irregular Warfare (IW) operations. However, not much attention has been paid to this in modern military campaigns against irregular forces in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria in particular, where the activities of irregular forces have dominated security challenges for more than two decades. This study adds to existing literature and thinking by foregrounding MISO as a critical component of COIN strategy required for effective COIN operations in Nigeria. The paper posits that MISO, as a critical element of Nigeria's COIN strategy, should be fully integrated with other operational strategies, from the tactical to the strategic level, to fight irregular forces successfully. The remainder of the paper is broadly structured under a number of select themes, namely: conceptual clarifications; the role of MISO in modern irregular warfare; theoretical framework; challenges and limitations of MISO in modern irregular warfare campaigns; conclusion and recommendations.

Methodology

The paper adopts a qualitative and non-empirical approach rooted in interpretive analysis. Data sources include policy documents, research publications (journal articles and textbooks), newspaper reports, verifiable social media reports, and government counterterrorism/counterinsurgency reports from 2016 to 2025. These were analysed using a content analysis technique, which helped to identify recurring themes related to the application of MISO in countering irregular forces in Nigeria. This approach enabled a critical engagement with diverse perspectives and supports the development of a nuanced conceptual framework.

Conceptual Clarification and Theoretical Exploration

Military Information Support Operations

According to the United States Joint Publication 3-13 (2014), "Military Information Support Operations (MISO) is the integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities to influence or inform audiences to achieve mission objectives". Its core capabilities cut across military deception, psychological operations, public affairs, and, more recently, cyber operations (Troublefield, 2025). It is a critical component of the United States military for countering threats of terrorism and insurgency by undermining legitimacy of adversaries and building support for military actions through strategic communication. The primary goal of MISO is to employ information devices to alter the perceptions and behaviour of foreign authorities and individuals, who play a central role in reducing aggression levels and promoting peaceful solutions to conflicts (JP 2010; JP 3-3 2014). The Joint Publication Manual 3-13 (2014) identifies MISO not as a stand-alone strategy, but one that works with other strategies, like military offensives, to achieve strategic goals, and it is most impactful at the tactical level of operation. In Nigeria, MISO is embedded in the non-kinetic strategies of the CT-COIN operations, defined as "psychological Operations (Psyops)" to complement active combat operations against adversaries. In this study, it is used interchangeably with Psyops.

Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency strategy, often referred to by the acronym "COIN", is a broad, long-term, population-centric approach that addresses root causes, governance, and security to win local support. According to Valeriano (1962), the imperative of an insurgency movement is to gain active support or at least passive toleration from a majority of the people; therefore, counterinsurgency must look beyond pure military theory to focus heavily on population dynamics, rigorous field intelligence, and the interaction between the government and the people. Valeriano's expert opinion emphasises winning the support of the local population as the core of counterinsurgency. This view is upheld by Galula (2006), who argues that the primary objective of counterinsurgency is to win the hearts and minds of the population and gain their support rather than control of territory. He further notes that military science is one of the key operational approaches to addressing irregular warfare, such as insurgency, terrorism and guerrilla warfare, and its success is heavily influenced by factors beyond military might (Galula, 1964). Some

of these factors are highlighted in the operational definition of counterinsurgency strategy provided by the United States Government Counterinsurgency Guide (2009), which defines counterinsurgency as the "use of military, political, economic, psychological, and social measures to defeat an insurgency by gaining the support of the local population, addressing the root causes of the conflict, and neutralizing insurgent forces". The US Counterinsurgency Guide also identifies key components such as military operations to secure the population, civic actions to build legitimacy, and psychological operations to undermine support for insurgency. Although this definition has served and continues to serve counterinsurgency efforts globally, nations are at liberty to review their strategies to achieve the same goal: to create a stable environment and to ensure that legitimate authorities maintain control of the state (US JP 3-26, 2014). In Nigeria, the COIN Strategy is embedded in the National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), which serves as the blueprint for Nigeria's CT-COIN operations.

Operational Effectiveness

Operational effectiveness refers to the attainment of the desired results from activities initiated to reach predetermined goals. It includes actions and procedures taken to maximise available resources to achieve set goals or objectives prudently and effectively. According to Brathwaite (2018), it is a unit's ability to achieve strategic, operational, or tactical objectives, often defined by the intersection of military skill, morale, and the efficient application of force (Brathwaite, 2018). He further states that it bridges the gap between tactical combat actions and the achievement of broader political goals. The United States Department of Defence (DOD) (2020) defines it as a "measure of the overall ability of a system to accomplish a mission when used by representative personnel in the environment planned or expected for operational employment of the system, considering organization, doctrine, tactics, supportability, survivability, vulnerability, and threats". This implies that operational effectiveness tends to explain the overall capability to accomplish a mission's set goals and objectives. In this regard, full integration of MISO in Nigeria's COIN will enhance the operational effectiveness of the forces.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of this study is anchored on the soft power theory developed by Joseph Nye in his 1990 book, titled "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power". The theory emphasises that a country's power lies not only in coercion (hard power) but in its ability to influence others through persuasion and attraction (soft power). This influence is built on the appeal of the country's culture, political values, and foreign policies, which can lead other nations to desire what it wants and voluntarily adopt its goals (Nye, 2004). He argued that "attraction" is a powerful and often more effective tool than military or economic force (Hard power) (Nye, 2006). Okoli and Ugwu (2019) noted that by leveraging the principles of soft power, such as cultural appeal and cooperative foreign policies, the Nigerian military can enhance its influence and legitimacy among locals affected by insurgency. They further noted that the Nigerian military can enhance its operational effectiveness by building goodwill, trust, and

cooperation with those affected by insurgency through psychological operations that emphasise community engagement and support. Supporting this view, Agbiboa (2021) noted that winning the support of the people can be achieved by promoting Nigerian cultural values and democratic principles in military operations, indicating that the military can change the attitudes of target audiences, bolster its soft power and undermine the appeal of insurgent groups. This aligns with Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which emphasises the persuasive use of non-coercive strategies in achieving security objectives.

The Role of MISO in Counterinsurgency

In modern irregular warfare, such as counterinsurgency operations, a military offensive alone is inadequate to achieve a force's mission objectives, leading to the integration of non-military approaches. At the core of the non-military approaches is Military Information Support Operations. MISO is a key component of broader military strategic communication that integrates tailored messaging into broader operations to achieve deterrence, crisis response, and security operations (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013). Its role in COIN cannot be overemphasised because of its ability to render insurgents ineffective and non-influential by securing relations and support of the local population in an operational environment. The key roles of MISO in COIN are discussed as follows:

Understanding the Culture of the People

The first step towards an effective counterinsurgency operation is understanding the local population's culture within the operational environment, so that the force can understand the culture of the people where the insurgents operate. This would enable them to establish relations and secure the trust of the people. The adoption of MISO as a core component of COIN would ensure that a comprehensive cultural picture of the local population is developed and understood. This is achieved through the use of experts from the media, finance and business, psychologists, organisational network analysts, and scholars from a wide range of disciplines to understand why the local population is drawn into the insurgents' ideology, and to know the aspects that are appealing to them and how the insurgents drew their support (Gwakchang, 2009). The emphasis is to create a functional baseline to understand the values, attitudes, and perceptions of the people, design information and communication strategies to establish a relationship and to degrade the will and capability of the insurgents.

Building Trust and Changing the Narratives

Changing the narratives in counterinsurgency involves utilising information and media instruments, including mainstream and social media, to shape the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour of relevant audiences, including adversaries, local populations, and international stakeholders (Kvernbekk & Boe-Hansen, 2017). It helps align the cognitive domain of people within the operational environment with the mission's operational goals and build trust with local communities. Some of the identifiable methods include using social media handles (such as tweeter or X, Facebooks, Tik-Tok, Instagram, etc.) to quickly frame the context of a battle, presenting own forces as legitimate and moral

actors while painting the insurgents a evil traitors with the aim of destroying the livelihood of the people; integrating the narrative into strategy to provide purpose to military actions that links tactical actions with long-term political objectives (Blas, 2023); employing counter-narrative by actively countering the insurgents disinformation and misinformation through representative actions, media reportage, and diplomacy to dismantle their legitimacy; and leveraging cultural and psychological insights to create messages that promote trust in friendly forces, highlighting the benefits of cooperation or demonstrating the negative consequences of supporting the insurgents, and encouraging the local population to support military counterinsurgency efforts (Kvernbekk & Boe-Hansen, 2017). For instance, the integration of Strategic Communication in MNJTF COIN operations, using local radio stations like Radio Dandal Kura, Radiou Bouclier, and Radio Ndarason International, facilitated dialogue and cooperation with affected communities, countered misinformation and established trust that led to the weakening of the insurgents' local base and the subsequent degradation of the group between 2022 and 2023 (Saleh & Ukaeje, 2024). Additionally, strategic communication encouraged insurgents to surrender and embrace reintegration programmes across the Lake Chad countries. Over 100,000 members of Boko Haram, including combatants, surrendered to the MNJTF (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023). This indicates the effective role of MISO in changing the narrative and shaping people's perceptions in COIN operations.

Degrading Adversary Morale

One of the major roles of MISO is targeting an adversary's leadership, command and control to create internal dissent and sow distrust using strategic communication channels (such as online messages, storytelling, media reportage, among others) to exploit existing tensions to weaken the group's cohesion and make adversaries question the legitimacy and decisions of their leaders. For instance, the MNJTF, after the split in Boko Haram in 2016, after ISIS appointed Abu Musab al-Barnawi as leader of ISWAP, side-lining Abubakar Shekau, which resulted in a serious conflict for fighters, territory, and legitimacy between the factions. The MNJTF leveraged its strategic communication channels to put pressure on both, using the split as a force multiplier to boost counterinsurgency operations (UNDP Conflict Assessment, 2022). The strategy was to keep pressure on both, to continue fighting each other while the force exploited the exhaustion and defections. Fortunately, it yielded the expected result by resulting in the death of Abubakar Shekau and Abu Musa al-Barnawi in May 2021 and September 2021, respectively (Ukaeje, 2026). The death of Shekau led to disarray in the Boko Haram camp and the subsequent surrender of its members to MNJTF and Nigeria's Operation HADI KAI (OPHK). It is important to note that the mass surrender of members of Boko Haram after the death of Shekau was facilitated through MNJTF's strategic communication. MISO played a vital role in creating disunity among the insurgents, which led to the degradation of their capacities and the subsequent recapture of the seized territories.

Building International Partnership and Cooperation

Counterinsurgency operations require support from international partners within and outside the region to build legitimacy of the operation, enhance its effectiveness and gather the support of the international community. It also requires the support of foreign partners in areas such as military assistance, including military training, military hardware support, arms and ammunition supply, and other supporting areas like tracking the financing of terrorism through global and regional financial institutions. Incidentally, one of the major strategies to achieve this support is through MISO. It plays a critical role in building foreign partnerships and enhancing security cooperation by influencing partner forces' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, enhancing their effectiveness in support of the operation; shaping narratives that promote shared interests and goals; fostering cooperation and collaboration between partner forces; building trust between partner forces; and facilitating cooperation and information sharing. Sadly, this has been missing in counterinsurgency operations in Nigeria. For instance, the major challenges of the MNJTF operations in the Lake Chad were identified by many studies to include lack of intelligence sharing, interoperability challenges (among the different country forces), inconsistency of funding, and support from the international partners (Saleh & Ukaeje, 2024). This shows that much has not been done by the MNJTF and Nigeria's OPHK in encouraging honest commitment and support from other member states, including the international partners in their support for the operation. The MJNTF/OPHK, therefore, needs to review their strategies, ensuring the full integration of MISO to enhance COIN operations.

Challenges of MISO in Counterinsurgency

Unlike conventional warfare, unconventional warfare such as counterinsurgency is not only won through military offensives but through a combination of military offensives (kinetic) and non-military approaches (non-kinetic). Underpinning both strategies is MISO, which is aimed at countering disinformation and misinformation by insurgents and winning the hearts and minds of the population. However, MISO faces some major challenges towards achieving its goal. These are as follows:

Public Trust Issues

At the core of MISO challenges in counterinsurgency operations lies trust among the affected population. Public trust issues cripple MISO by enabling propaganda, misinformation, lowering intelligence cooperation, and undermining the mission's credibility, as seen in Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts (Tiwa, 2024). As noted by the Former spokesman of the Nigerian Army, Brigadier General Sani Usman (rtd), "one of the most difficult phases of Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations was not only the physical combat in the North-East but the fierce propaganda war waged by Boko Haram to undermine public trust in government institutions." He further noted that the military had to rethink its entire communication strategy to stop the insurgents from shaping public perception at the height of the conflict, noting that the military is in the middle of an information war that is testing credibility, speed, and strategic communication under pressure (Punch, 2025). For instance, despite the government's appeal for

communities not to negotiate with bandits, several communities in Sokoto, Zamfara, and Benue states negotiate and even pay levies to bandits to allow them to harvest their farm produce (The Punch Editorial, 2024; The Guardian Nigeria, 2025; Vanguard, 2025). This indicates that the people in the affected communities have lost trust in the government to protect them, establishing the criticality of MISO in Nigeria's COIN operations.

Poor Knowledge of the Environment

For effective integration of MISO in COIN strategy, the force must have a good knowledge of the culture of the people, the modus operandi of the insurgents, and their relationship with the local population. Poor understanding of the environment makes it difficult to design and deliver an appropriate message that drives strategic communication for MISO. In conflict environments like Northeast and Northwest Nigeria, the activities of the insurgents and bandits are intertwined with the socio-political, socioeconomic, and sociocultural life of the people. Therefore, without adequate knowledge of the environment and culture of the people, it becomes difficult for the forces to come up with appropriate designs to drive MISO. As noted by Mafela (2012), "a lack of knowledge of the culture of other societies could result in great miscommunication between language groups". It can even trigger disenchantment by the local population against the force, push the locals to embrace the insurgents, and undermine the whole process of MISO. The COIN operations against insurgents and their allied terrorist groups in the northeast have frequently been undermined by cultural, religious, and linguistic gaps (Dan-Azumi, 2025; Ukaeje, 2026). These gaps have also been identified as factors contributing to the complexity and protractedness of the conflict, underscoring the critical role of Military Information Support Operations in COIN.

Information Overload

The modern information environment is highly complex and dynamic, with unmonitored and uncensored information coming through various social media networks, such as Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, TikTok, and many others, resulting in an overwhelming volume of data. Unfortunately, this overwhelming volume of data is combined with high levels of uncertainty and diverse formats, which severely hampers both the effectiveness and efficiency of security forces, making it difficult to distinguish between reliable content and inaccuracies. Incidentally, the insurgents and other irregular elements are exploiting this gap to disseminate disinformation and misinformation, making it difficult for the security forces and even the populace to distinguish between reliable information and insurgents' propaganda and misinformation. A striking example of information overload is the ambush of a military convoy of the 25 Task Force Brigade on a rescue mission in Borno on 14 November 2025 that resulted in the abduction and killing of the Brigade Commander, Brigadier General M. Uba and three of his men by ISWAP (Sahara Reporters, 2025). While the attack was ongoing, information came through social media that Brigadier General Uba escaped the attack and was safe. At the same time, conflicting information came up,

revealing that the General was captured by the insurgents, making it difficult for even the Defence Headquarters to decipher reliable information from both, leading to the abduction and subsequent open execution of the General by his abductors. This shows the destructive impact of information overload that the use of MISO must consider in counterinsurgency operations.

Inter-agency Rivalry and Lack of Collaboration

Counterinsurgency operations involve a combination of different services and other security agencies working together to achieve the mission's goals. Therefore, to achieve the mission's goals, effective and efficient coordination of the various forces must not be compromised as it creates operational lapses, which in most instances lead to inter-agency rivalry and lack of collaboration among security forces. Unhealthy rivalries and a lack of collaboration among security forces in an operational environment like counterinsurgency create a lack of trust and a reluctance to share critical information, which is the foundation of effective MISO and other COIN efforts. In most instances, it leads to contradictory messages, duplication of efforts, waste of resources, working at cross-purposes, and conflicting intelligence, which often undermines MISO and the overall efforts of the mission. In August 2019, for instance, one of the most high-profile clashes occurred when soldiers of the 93 Battalion opened fire on a police Intelligence Response Team (IRT) conveying a high-profile kidnap suspect, Hamisu Bala (known as Wadume). The soldiers killed three police officers and a civilian, subsequently releasing the suspect. While the army claimed they acted "in error" because the police vehicle did not stop at a checkpoint, the police maintained they had properly identified themselves, leading to a major public dispute between the two agencies (Business Day Editorial, 2022). Also, in late 2025, security agencies provided contradictory accounts following a bandit ambush in Zamfara State. Initial reports from one security source declared a driver had been killed, while subsequent updates from other tactical units listed him as only injured. Such discrepancies in casualty figures and operational outcomes are common in the Northwest, often adding "chaos to tragedy" and complicating the public's understanding of the security situation (Ogalah, 2025).

Ethical and Legal Constraints

In formulating and executing warfare strategies, feasible options may raise difficult legal and ethical questions. Formulating and executing psychological operations or MISO within a counterinsurgency requires a careful balance between achieving security objectives and adhering to legal and ethical standards, as these operations directly influence the attitudes and behaviours of both insurgent forces and local populations. According to the Geneva Convention on armed conflict and the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), a State is responsible for internationally wrongful acts, including violations of IHL, that are committed by its organs; by persons or entities it empowered to exercise elements of governmental authority; by persons or groups acting in fact on its instructions, or under its direction or control; or by private persons or groups that it acknowledges and adopts as its own conduct (Year Book of the International Law Commission, 2001). This means that when misinformation,

disinformation, or hate speech is spread in the context of an armed conflict, the authors, irrespective of their status (private individual, members of State armed forces or any other party to the armed conflict) have been considered directly bound by the rules of the convention and IHL. In counterinsurgency operations, formulating and executing MISO plans and policies must take into consideration the rules of IHL and the Geneva Convention on Armed Conflict to avoid issues that contravene the rights of unarmed citizens/civilian population. Incidentally, in COIN operations, these legal considerations often hamper effective execution of MISO. Another area of concern is the ethical consideration, which implies that the forces must balance the need for strategic communication with the risk of being seen as manipulative, which could erode legitimacy and trust, and become counterproductive. Such a consideration makes it difficult for MISO to achieve its goal. For instance, part of MISO strategies restrictive communication and surveillance of communications to monitor the communication network of insurgents, but most often when it is applied it creates confusion, particularly among the local population, such as the case of Zamfara in 2021, when the telecommunication system was shutdown to restrict and monitor communication networks of bandits in the State, it created fear among the residents as they could not reach their relation within and outside the State, fuelling misinformation and panic, and eroding pubic trust in the government and security forces (Ilesanmi, 2021; Cleen Foundation, 2024).

Inadequate Human Capacity

In Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts, the human resource gap has been part of broader challenges, and its impacts manifest in several areas, including Military Information Support Operations. While the Nigerian military has increased focus on non-kinetic operations and trained about 604 special forces in areas including psychological operations in early 2026, the adequacy of MISO experts remains a serious concern (NTA, 2026). Considering the number of human resources needed to support the numerous military operations across the country, estimated at 12,000 personnel biannually by the Minister of Defence in 2023 to enhance the capabilities of the military to meet the security challenges of the country (Premium Times, 2023), 604 special forces are insignificant to the requirement. The Minister of Defence had warned in 2023 that Nigeria's armed forces are broadly overstretched due to numerous security challenges confronting the country, which has affected specialized personnel, including MISO experts, who are constantly spread in other areas (Premium Times, 2023). For instance, the Nigerian Army Division, headquartered in Maiduguri, serves as a permanent building block for counterinsurgency. Therefore, every combat unit in the division deserves a corresponding MISO or Strategic Communication cell to manage community relations and counter-propaganda, but this is not the situation, making it difficult for MISO to achieve its expected outcomes.

Measures for Enhancing MISO for Operational Effectiveness in Nigeria's Counterinsurgency

Review of NACTEST 2016

Given the criticality of MISO in counterinsurgency operations, its effectiveness in Nigeria's counterinsurgency has been debated by experts and academics alike due to its partial integration as part of Nigeria's counterinsurgency strategy. To ensure effective implementation of MISO as a major component of Nigeria's COIN strategy, there is a critical need to review Nigeria's National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) to fully integrate and institutionalize MISO as a major pillar of the strategy. The objective is to reinvigorate the department in all military services and boost the commitment of the services and personnel towards achieving their objectives in operations, as well as improve COIN efforts at winning the minds and hearts of the population, which is central to defeating the insurgents. This will involve the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) under the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) to achieve the support required to ensure effective implementation when the integration is achieved. The plan would include the review of MISO delivery methods with emphasis on understanding the local conflict environment, such as the socio-political, socioeconomic, and sociocultural dynamics, to avoid issues that could be considered coercive or intrusive to the local population, and to gain the trust of the local population, which is the main thrust of MISO.

Strengthening Human Resource and Capacity Development

Adequate human resource and capacity development is critical to developing a robust MISO. Therefore, increasing the number of human resources in MISO and investing in their capacity development, with emphasis on cutting-edge technologies in cybersecurity and information technology, would address the challenges of the human capacity gap in Nigeria counterinsurgency operations. The objective of this strategy is to develop a robust pool of experts in MISO to ensure efficient and effective execution of MISO in COIN operations in Nigeria. Consequently, this will require a deliberate plan that will involve collaboration among all services (Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy and Nigerian Air Force) and the DHQ. The plan would include the involvement and collaboration of mainstream and social media experts, the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC), National Information Technology Development Authority (NITDA), and Federal Ministry of Information (FMoI) to drive a formidable information and communication strategy that would stiffen the disinformation and misinformation machinery of the insurgents across the country, while projecting the benefits of cooperation with military forces in operation. This strategy would boost operational effectiveness in Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations.

Strengthening Coordination among the Services and Security Agencies

Strengthening coordination among the services and other security agencies would improve collaboration among the services and other security agencies and enhance MISO in military counterinsurgency operations in Nigeria. This measure would enhance

information sharing, improve joint operations, eliminate rivalry, reduce duplication of efforts, waste of resources, working at cross-purposes, and conflicting intelligence, which undermine MISO. Institutions such as ONSA and NCTC have already provided platforms for collaboration, but implementation remains uneven. Enhanced coordination is vital in addressing interagency rivalry, as is often witnessed among the services and other security agencies in theatres of operations in Nigeria where terrorist groups operate across multiple jurisdictions. NCTC has emphasised that effective Military Information Support Operations and overall security require deep, formalized interagency collaboration (Raphael, 2025). This is one of the reasons the NCTC has in recent times, facilitated the review of Nigeria's counterterrorism and counterinsurgency Strategy.

Recommendations

The study recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria should:

1. Encourage NCTC to facilitate the review of NACTEST 2016 to ensure the integration of MISO as a major pillar of Nigeria's CT-COIN strategy.

2. Strengthen the capacity of the armed forces by combining budgetary support, human resources and training of personnel in MISO.

3. Ensure that the NCTC establish a robust inter-agency coordination mechanism by institutionalizing a permanent Inter-agency CT-COIN Task Force comprising representatives from all the major Stakeholders from the services, the Nigerian Police, DSS, NIIA, NIS, NCS and other relevant bodies. This task force should operate within a mandated quarterly meeting, a secure shared intelligence platform, and clear protocols to eliminate rivalries and improve information sharing.

Conclusion

The study has critically explored the cruciality of Military Information Support Operations in counterinsurgency, which is increasingly driven by information technology by equalizing power dynamics, extending the battlefield into the digital and cognitive realms. The study revealed that cognitive warfare through social media manipulation, deepfakes, and automated disinformation campaigns has given irregular forces, including insurgents and terrorists, the power to shape narratives, erode trust in institutions, and influence public opinion, helping to sustain their activities. This is exemplified in the manipulation of social media through misinformation and disinformation by insurgents in Nigeria. The study therefore noted that this development reinforces the cruciality of MISO to be institutionalized as a major component of a broader strategy in counterinsurgency, stressing that MISO provides the needed cognitive tool, especially in counterinsurgency operations, to counter the extremist narrative, disrupt terrorist operations, influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of target audiences and mobilize support for counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts, as well as promote cooperation and collaboration with the

local population. It, however, acknowledged that MISO can be impeded by a number of challenges, including public trust issues, poor knowledge of the environment, interagency rivalry, ethical and legal constraints, information overload, and inadequate human resources and capacity. These challenges need to be addressed to enhance MISO for overall operational effectiveness in Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations. It is on this note that the study identified review of NACTEST 2016, strengthening human resources and capacity development, and strengthening coordination among the services and other security agencies as measures to address these challenges.

Conflict of Interest

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

Notes on Contributor

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