The Military, Corruption, And The Fight Against Insurgency And Banditry In Northern Nigeria, 2009-2023

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Abstract
This study investigates the military's role in combating insurgency and banditry in Northern Nigeria from 2009 to 2023, with a focus on the interplay between military operations, corruption, and governance challenges. Using a qualitative methodology that relies on secondary data such as journal articles, reports, and expert analyses, the research examines the factors hindering military effectiveness and the socio-political impacts of prolonged interventions. Major findings include the detrimental role of corruption, inadequate funding, and human rights abuses in undermining military efforts. The study concludes that while the military has achieved some success in reclaiming territories, a holistic approach involving governance reforms and community engagement is essential for sustainable security.
Keywords: Insurgency, Banditry, Military interventions, Corruption, Northern Nigeria

Introduction
Since 2009, Northern Nigeria has been plagued by insurgency and banditry, presenting some of the most formidable security challenges in the country's history. The Boko Haram insurgency, initially rooted in religious extremism, evolved into a full-blown conflict after its violent uprising in Maiduguri, Borno State, leading to significant loss of life and displacement of millions. By 2015, the crisis had expanded into neighboring countries, resulting in regional instability. Simultaneously, banditry involving mass abductions, extortion, and attacks on rural communities emerged as another pressing issue in states such as Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto. Combined, these crises have perpetuated a climate of fear and underdevelopment in Northern Nigeria. As John Campbell aptly notes, "the entrenchment of insurgency and insecurity in Northern Nigeria reflects not just military weaknesses but systemic governance failures".[1]

The Nigerian military has undertaken various operations to combat these security threats, including Operation Lafiya Dole to tackle Boko Haram and Operation Puff Adder to address banditry. These campaigns have recorded mixed outcomes. While some territories were reclaimed from Boko Haram, banditry and terrorism continue to thrive. Notable efforts, such as the formation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in collaboration with neighboring countries, underscore the regional dimensions of these threats. Despite these strategies, security challenges persist, partly due to insufficient military resources, poor intelligence, and corruption. General Martin Luther Agwai, a former Nigerian Chief of Defense Staff, observes, "Nigeria's security problems are exacerbated by leadership gaps and the inability to sustain reforms in military operations."[2]

A significant impediment to addressing these security challenges is corruption, particularly within the defense sector. Funds earmarked for military operations have often been diverted, leaving soldiers ill-equipped and demoralized. For instance, the 2015 $2 billion arms procurement scandal highlighted systemic corruption, where senior officials were accused of misappropriating funds meant for arms purchases.[3] This scandal, widely criticized, revealed how corruption undermines the military's capacity to combat insurgents effectively. According to Chinua Achebe:

> The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to
> the responsibility of personal example and accountability.[4]

This governance deficit has left the military struggling to address insecurity effectively.

Compounding the problem is the socio-economic context of Northern Nigeria, characterized by poverty, unemployment, and weak governance structures. These factors create fertile ground for insurgent recruitment and banditry. In rural areas, where basic social services such as education and healthcare are inadequate, extremist groups like Boko Haram manipulate grievances to gain followers. Banditry thrives in regions where law enforcement is weak, and the rural-urban divide exacerbates marginalization. According to Francis Fukuyama "When the state is weak, non-state actors fill the vacuum, often with dire consequences for security and development."[5] Northern Nigeria's challenges illustrate this dynamic vividly.

This paper explores the interplay between the military, corruption, and the fight against insurgency and banditry in Northern Nigeria from 2009 to 2023. It examines how systemic corruption undermines military efficiency, the socio-economic conditions that sustain insecurity, and the effectiveness of governmental strategies.

Overview of insurgency and banditry in Northern Nigeria (2009–2023)
Northern Nigeria has been a focal point of security challenges, dominated by insurgency and banditry since 2009. The Boko Haram insurgency emerged as a violent reaction to perceived governmental neglect, targeting civilians, military personnel, and infrastructure in its quest to establish an Islamic state. By 2014, the crisis had reached a peak with the abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls, drawing international attention. Despite military interventions, Boko Haram split into factions such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), further complicating efforts to curb its activities. Banditry, which involves armed groups attacking rural communities, kidnapping for ransom, and cattle rustling, has also escalated, particularly in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna states. These twin crises have not only caused widespread human suffering but have also crippled economic activities in the region.

The failure of governance and weak state presence are central to the rise of insurgency and banditry in Northern Nigeria. The region is plagued by chronic poverty, unemployment, and limited access to basic services, leaving millions vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups and criminal networks. Francis Fukuyama's assertion that "a weak state lacks the monopoly on legitimate violence, allowing non-state actors to fill the void"[6] aptly explains the conditions in the northern part of Nigeria. In many rural areas, residents rely on vigilantes for protection, as the state's security apparatus remains overstretched or absent. Boko Haram exploits grievances linked to governance failures, while bandits operate with near impunity in poorly policed territories.

Military operations have formed the backbone of Nigeria's response to insurgency and banditry, but these efforts have been riddled with challenges. Notable campaigns, such as Operation Lafiya Dole against Boko Haram and Operation Puff Adder targeting bandits, have achieved limited success. While some areas have been reclaimed from insurgents, others remain under threat due to the military's overstretch and lack of resources. Corruption in the defense sector further exacerbates the problem. As earlier noted, the infamous $2 billion arms procurement scandal exposed how funds meant for military operations were diverted, leaving soldiers poorly equipped. John Campbell observes, "Corruption undermines Nigeria's military effectiveness, enabling insurgents to thrive in the vacuum."[7]

Boko Haram's violent activities which has intensified in recent times has largely undermined human security. According to Gilbert (2014), since the insurgency began, there has been over 12,000 deaths and 8000 persons maimed.[8] Banditry has also forced thousands to flee their homes, creating a crisis of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in states like Zamfara and Kaduna. The economic consequences are equally dire, with farming and trading disrupted, contributing to food insecurity in the region. According to Richard Joseph:

> Being the most populous African nation and a major petroleum exporter were no longer doing Nigeria much good, as it was becoming increasingly "irrelevant" in continental and international affairs.[9]

Addressing these crises requires more than military action - it demands leadership and socio-economic investments.

Insurgency and banditry in Northern Nigeria also have international implications, particularly in terms of regional instability. Boko Haram's activities have spilled over into Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, prompting the creation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). While this regional collaboration has achieved some success in countering cross-border insurgency, banditry remains largely a domestic problem requiring localized solutions. The persistence of these crises underscores the urgent need for a holistic approach that combines military, economic, and governance strategies. For example, the insurgence of banditry in Nigeria has negatively affect the relationship between Nigeria and other Nation of the world because of bombing couple with kidnapping and hostage taking with or without demand for ransom; particularly of alien which have resulted to death of some of them and have greatly been an object of disturb not only to Nigeria but including the international community.[10]

The military's role in combating insurgency and banditry
The Nigerian military has been at the forefront of efforts to combat insurgency and banditry, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Since 2009, the military has been primarily engaged in counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram and its splinter group, ISWAP. Campaigns like Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Hadin Kai have reclaimed significant territory previously controlled by insurgents. Similarly, the military launched Operation Puff Adder and Operation Sahel Sanity to address the menace of banditry in states like Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna. These operations underscore the military's pivotal role in securing Nigeria's territorial integrity and restoring normalcy to affected regions. However, despite these efforts, the persistence of these security challenges highlights the limitations and complexities of military engagement.

The military's successes have often been hampered by a lack of adequate resources and corruption. Soldiers deployed to the frontlines frequently report insufficient equipment, delayed salaries, and poor welfare. Corruption within the Nigerian defense sector not only weakens military effectiveness but emboldens insurgents and bandits who thrive in the security vacuum. Issues such as corruption have led to operational inefficiencies, allowing insurgents and bandits to regroup and prolong the conflict. Addressing these institutional flaws is crucial for the military to achieve lasting success in its campaigns.

Moreover, the military's approach to counter-insurgency has been criticized for its over-reliance on brute force, which often alienates local communities. Indiscriminate bombings, arrests, and human rights abuses have created distrust between the military and civilians, making intelligence gathering more challenging. Amnesty International reports that "the military's heavy-handed tactics have exacerbated the grievances of local populations, fueling recruitment by insurgent groups."[11] In Zamfara and Katsina, similar criticisms have been leveled against the military for failing to address the root causes of banditry, such as poverty and the proliferation of small arms. To build trust and enhance effectiveness, the military must adopt a more community-centric approach that emphasizes protection over repression.

The regional and international dimensions of insurgency and banditry have also necessitated military collaboration beyond Nigeria's borders. The establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has been instrumental in countering Boko Haram's cross-border activities in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. This coalition, backed by international partners like the United States and the United Nations, has disrupted insurgent supply chains and limited their operational space. However, this success has not been replicated in the fight against banditry, which remains largely a domestic issue requiring localized solutions. According to Olaide, It is my observation that neglect, and the inability of the Nigerian government to consciously manage public resources entrusted on them for people interest have contribute greatly to insurgence of militancy in Nigeria; Boko Haram inclusive. If these entrusted resources have been use for the benefit of the whole Nigerians, youth would not be available for easy inducement for militancy and other social vices.[12] highlighting the need for good governance to complement regional military cooperation.

Despite its challenges, the military remains a cornerstone of Nigeria's efforts to combat insecurity. Reforms aimed at improving funding, accountability, and strategic operations could significantly enhance its capacity to deal with insurgency and banditry. For instance, implementing technology-driven solutions such as surveillance drones and enhancing military-civilian cooperation could improve operational outcomes. Furthermore, the military must align its strategies with broader governance reforms to address the socio-economic drivers of insecurity. As Chinua Achebe notes, "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership,"[13] emphasizing the interconnectedness of military and political solutions in addressing security challenges.

Corruption as a hindrance to military operations
Corruption remains one of the most significant challenges undermining military operations in Nigeria, particularly in the fight against insurgency and banditry. The diversion of resources intended for military equipment, training, and welfare has weakened the operational capacity of the armed forces. According to F. Onuoha and T. George:

> Systemic corruption in Nigeria's defense sector has not only undermined the effectiveness of military operations but has emboldened insurgents and bandits, who exploit these institutional weaknesses.[14]

This diversion of funds leaves frontline soldiers ill-equipped to face well-armed insurgents and bandits, prolonging the security crisis in the country.

One of the major effects of corruption in the military is the lack of adequate equipment and logistics for troops on the battlefield. Reports from soldiers fighting in the Northeast reveal that many are sent to confront insurgents with outdated weapons and insufficient ammunition. Amnesty International documented instances where soldiers abandoned their posts due to the lack of support and basic supplies, such as food and water.[15] This lack of preparedness has led to devastating defeats, including high-profile attacks on military bases by Boko Haram and ISWAP. Such incidents demoralize troops and weaken public confidence in the military's ability to protect the nation. The issues of "ghost soldiers," where salaries are paid to non-existent personnel, further compounds the problem, as funds meant for actual combat readiness are siphoned off by corrupt officials.

Corruption also hampers intelligence gathering and operational planning. Successful military operations depend on accurate and timely intelligence, but corruption within the ranks has often compromised this critical component. According to A. Adebayo "Corrupt practices, such as the selling of military intelligence to insurgents, undermine the strategic advantage of the armed forces and put lives at risk."[16] For example, leaked information has been blamed for the ambush of military convoys and the loss of strategic positions in conflict zones. Such

betrayals create mistrust within the military hierarchy, making coordinated efforts more difficult. Additionally, corruption in procurement processes often results in substandard equipment being supplied; further endangering soldiers on the frontlines.

The broader implications of corruption extend beyond the military to Nigeria's overall governance structure. Insurgency and banditry thrive in environments where state institutions are weak and corrupt. As Chinua Achebe famously observed, "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership."[17] This failure is evident in the mismanagement of resources that could otherwise be channeled toward addressing the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. The military, as a reflection of the larger Nigerian state, cannot succeed in its mission without systemic reforms that prioritize transparency and accountability. Addressing corruption is, therefore, essential not just for military effectiveness but for national stability as a whole.

To combat corruption in the military, there is a need for institutional reforms and the strict enforcement of accountability measures. The establishment of independent audit systems to monitor defense spending and the prosecution of corrupt officials could deter further embezzlement. Furthermore, engaging civil society organizations and international partners to oversee defense procurement processes can enhance transparency. Scholars like J. Campbell have argued that "the international community must take an active role in supporting Nigeria's fight against corruption, as it is intricately linked to global security."[18] Only by addressing corruption at its root can the Nigerian military regain its effectiveness and restore the trust of both its personnel and the general public.

Challenges and impacts of military interventions
Military interventions in Nigeria, whether during internal security operations or against insurgencies, face significant challenges that hinder their effectiveness and produce wide-ranging consequences. One major challenge is the lack of coordination among security agencies, which undermines the military's ability to effectively combat threats like Boko Haram, ISWAP, and banditry. According to A. C. Okoli and A. Ugwu:

> Inter-agency rivalry and the absence of a unified command structure often
> result in duplicated efforts, inefficiency, and failure to contain security
> threats.[19]

For instance, during the fight against Boko Haram, conflicts between the Nigerian Army and the police over jurisdictional authority have delayed critical operations. Such disorganization allows insurgents and bandits to regroup and carry out further attacks, perpetuating instability in affected regions.

Another pressing challenge is the inadequate funding of military operations. Despite Nigeria's substantial defense budget, much of the allocated funds are either mismanaged or embezzled, leaving troops under-resourced. According to Onuoha and George:

> The Nigerian military is often ill-equipped and poorly trained, especially
> when compared to the insurgents they are combating, many of whom possess
> advanced weaponry acquired through international smuggling networks.[20]

The lack of modern equipment and effective training leaves soldiers vulnerable on the battlefield, as seen in the repeated overrunning of military bases in the Northeast by insurgents. Additionally, delayed payment of salaries and poor welfare conditions have demoralized troops, leading to desertions and reduced combat readiness.

Human rights abuses by military personnel during interventions further complicate the situation, undermining trust between the military and local communities. Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture by Nigerian soldiers in counter-insurgency operations.[21] These abuses alienate the very communities that the military is meant to protect, creating a vacuum that insurgents and bandits exploit to recruit new members. For example, in Borno State, allegations of mass detentions and unlawful killings have led to widespread resentment against the military, complicating counter-terrorism efforts. According to Campbell "Winning the hearts and minds of the population is essential for effective counter-insurgency, but systemic abuse by security forces often achieves the opposite effect."[22]

The impacts of military interventions are far-reaching, affecting both national security and socio-economic development. On the positive side, military actions have successfully reclaimed territories once occupied by insurgents, allowing displaced persons to return to their homes. However, the prolonged nature of these interventions has diverted critical resources away from other sectors such as education and healthcare, exacerbating underdevelopment in affected regions. For instance, the military's extensive presence in the Northeast has drained state budgets while failing to provide long-term security solutions. Furthermore, the

militarization of conflict zones has disrupted local economies, as communities are caught between insurgent attacks and military operations. This double jeopardy perpetuates poverty and increases the likelihood of further conflict.

Politically, military interventions have also raised concerns about the erosion of civil liberties. In some cases, the Nigerian government has used the pretext of security operations to suppress dissent and silence opposition voices. The deployment of troops during protests, such as the #EndSARS movement in 2020, highlights how military interventions can be misused to undermine democratic principles. Okoye argues that "the over-reliance on the military for internal security operations reflects the failure of civilian-led governance structures to address underlying causes of unrest, such as unemployment and corruption."[23] As a result, military interventions often address the symptoms of insecurity rather than its root causes, leading to a cycle of violence and instability.

Conclusion

The study has examined the challenges and impacts of military interventions in addressing insurgency and banditry in northern Nigeria between 2009 and 2023, emphasizing the interplay between military operations, corruption, and socio-political dynamics. One key objective was to evaluate the military's role in combating insecurity and identify the factors hindering its success. It was found that poor coordination among security agencies, inadequate funding, and corruption significantly undermined military effectiveness. Additionally, the study highlighted how human rights abuses eroded public trust, thereby complicating counter-insurgency efforts. According to Okoli and Ugwu "Effective military operations require not only strategic resources but also the trust and cooperation of the communities they seek to protect,"[24] a sentiment that underscores the importance of civilian-military relations in achieving sustainable security outcomes.

Furthermore, the study revealed the socio-economic and political repercussions of prolonged military interventions. While reclaiming territories from insurgents was a notable achievement, the over-reliance on the military to address structural issues such as poverty and unemployment exposed the inadequacies of governance. This research supports the argument that sustainable security requires a multidimensional approach encompassing governance reforms, economic investment, and community engagement. As Adegbami and Uche observe, "The militarization of security challenges in Nigeria often treats the symptoms of insecurity rather than its root causes,"[25] a perspective that aligns with the study's recommendation for holistic conflict resolution strategies.

Endnote

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