



## **Nigerian Military, Guerrilla Warfare and Cost of Fighting Terrorism: An Assessment of the Fight against North-East Insurgency 2012-2019**

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses the general performance of the Nigerian military in their war against the insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria. Apart from the methodology applied which was both primary and secondary source, background of the Nigerian military was discussed as to their participation in the previous operations. The central argument here is how fighting guerilla war has become so difficult for them because of either the first experience or lack of technical know-how to approach it. The fighting took Nigerian Soldiers more than one decade as such this research discovered some of the problems associated to this prolong and devastated war. Among them include the problem of corruption which the military institution is being accused. Funds meant for the operation were diverted and several examples of this have been revealed in the paper. General operation of the war and the assessment of Nigerian soldiers' performance are critically examined. In this regard, the counter-insurgency was faced with serious resistance from the insurgents who appeared very top to the Nigerian security. In this work, some war techniques that were demonstrated by the Boko Haram militants have been substantiated which were entirely new to the knowledge of the Nigerian military. The research at the end discusses way out to handle such problems in future by suggesting the total review of the military institution in terms of training, operation, discipline, professionalism, improvement in intelligence gathering and possession of modern warfare technology.

**Keynotes:** Military, Operation, War, Terrorism, Insurgency, Boko Haram.

### **1. Introduction**

In 2009, an Islamic militants called Yusufiyya movement clashed with Nigerian security personnel known as operation flush. The situation led to the outbreak of an endless insurgency called Boko Haram fight. Out of the desire to contain the lawlessness and rampant killings of innocent citizens, a Joint Task Force under the leadership of Nigerian military was established in 2013. What seemed to be a mere civilian or religious crisis, turned out to become a full scale war. Within the eight years of this operation, attacks and counter-attacks, Bomb and suicide bombing at maximum level have been witnessed. Never in the history of the country or Nigerian armed forces such fight was been fought. Generally war is an armed conflict between two or more sides (nations or groups) in which both combatants try to inflict damage on another. The aim is to compel the weak to succumb to the supremacy of the stronger opponent. War can also happen within a country if a group of some disenchanted elements picks up arms against the existing authority, like that of the Boko Haram war. Such and its type are classified as internal conflicts, insurgency or civil wars.

War is an organized and often prolonged armed conflict that is carried out by states and/or non-state actors – is characterized by extreme violence, social disruption, and economic destruction. However, this paper intends to examine one of the devastated operation that consumed Nigeria army in its history. Although most of the war fought were conventional, but the one under discussion which is Boko Haram war has been one of the exceptional war because of its nature and dimension. The modus operandi of the Boko Haram war and the unconventional method of

attack has compelled the Nigerian army and the government in general to review the whole approach to the fight. Military budget was therefore reviewed to the highest level with the aim to combat the crisis. The major questions to ask are: to what extent was the financial commitments achieved its aim? What was the outcome of the huge expenses incurred by government in the fight against Boko Haram? While this study intends to establish a ground with regard to success or otherwise of this political and economic war. Answers shall be given however little to the questions that were posed. Experts have it that, Nigeria army have been engaged in a war with faceless enemy who choose to apply Guerilla warfare in its entirety. This type of war is basically unknown to many men of the Nigeria army because it is a war that demand an exceptional training and expertise to face the enemy. What appeared to have been very irritating was the style of attack carried by the Boko Haram militants which is believed, were given a special training by war experts.

This work therefore shall also look into the major challenges faced by the Nigerian Military in the course of their operation in the North-East with emphasis on the attack and counter attacks which had exposed the weaknesses and strength of the soldiers and, where necessary identify some of the major areas that the institutions needs to be reviewed in the process of their future operations. The research shall also bring out some of the techniques applied by the enemy which was successful on the N. A. and analyzed to see whether it was a new war tactics unknown to the N. A. or it was just a negligence.

## 2. Research Methodology

This paper had use two different cities Maiduguri and Damaturu as a case study for this research. There were three different methods applied in the course of collecting data for the work. The first method used as a primary source in this work, was the oral interview with relevant stakeholders within the security cycle including some men of the Nigeria army that retired in the course of the crisis. A total of 35 persons were interviewed and about 89% of the data collected were analyzed in this research paper. Second method was direct and indirect observation methods which was a very clear method of getting all the necessary information by first coming into contact with an informant who is a permanent resident of the area and who had direct contact with the event, and the later was an active participation of the researcher to empirically observe the situation and at the end compiled his data. And finally, is also the use of

written materials both published and unpublished relevant materials to the research topic.

## 3. Brief Historical Background of the Nigeria Army and their Various Operations both Domestic and Foreign

Nigerian Army (N.A.) which was formed date back to the era of West African Frontier Force established in 1900, had officially recognized and became a sovereign institution by 1960 with the attainment of political independence. By 2016 the strength of NA had reached about 200,000 soldiers. There were six different divisions but with advent of the Boko Haram insurgency, 7 division was created in order to bring sanity and to end the crisis in the region. Since then, this defensive body with the primary assignment to protect the territorial integrity of the nation have been engaged in both national and international operations with objective to maintain peace and political stability. However, according to ministry of Defence information unit, the function of the Nigerian military include maintaining the land sea and air of the country by the armed forces, to formulate and execute National Defence Policy and to contribute and keep peace in Africa and wider World through the guidelines of United Nations Organisation among others. One of the protracted domestic war they fought was the thirty months civil war which ended in 1970. Later they participated in several internal conflicts operations. But upon all, none of the domestic conflicts has been so top like that of the current insurgency in the country. Internationally, they were engaged in numerous operations at various times and under different regime or governments. Among the few examples include: Operations participated in Liberia (1990, 2003), Sierra Leone (1999), Mali (2013), Gambia, Darfur (2004), Yugoslavia (1998), DR Congo (2004), Rwanda (1993), and Somalia (2007).

Nigeria army institution is being govern by Nigeria Army Council (NAC) led by the Chief of Army Staff (CAS). From 1960 to date, there had been a total number of 30 different CAS including the current one. (J. Peter: 1997). The operation in the North-East started with of Joint Task Force to bring an end to the revolt. Soldiers were redeployed to Maiduguri and different formations were formed to counter-attack the Islamic militants who have gained firm root in Maiduguri, Borno state capital and later the whole North-East region of the country. The JTF was decentralized into various Sectors. Each sector was headed by a Colonel in Nigerian Army. Under the Sector were various sub-Sectors that were headed by a rank of Major and sometimes even Captain. The

Sectors more or less became the justice ground of suspected BokoHaram members. Unfortunately many innocent were wasted at the Sector level. The major concern of this paper is to review the performance of the NA in this operation, and to find out why so many attacks could not be repelled despite huge amount of money spent to purchase weapons capable of destroying the insurgents. It is believed a lot of financial commitments was involved in the war which had attracted criticism as to whether the arms were really purchased or not.

**4. Cost Implication and Causalities of the War**

According to Transparency International report (2018), the Nigerian Defence and Security had

reported that from 2012 the security votes total around \$670million annually. However with the increase in the terror activities in the country and looking at the type of weapons at the disposal of the insurgents, the Defense budget had gone higher. I was discovered that sophisticated weapons such as Ak 47 rifles, fusil Automatic le’ger, (FAL), Self-loading rifle, rocket launcher R.G.P., improvised explosive device (IED) and several Bombs has compelled the Nigeria Army to re-visit their level of arms. (Abraham L: 2015)

Thus, 2018 also, New Informate reported about \$1bn was approved to buy military equipment. Below is a clear example of the annual budget for the Ministry of Defence from 2008 to 2017 which cover the substantial period of Boko Haram fight.

**Table 1.** Military expenditure (2008-2017)

Serial No.	Year	Personnel N billion	Overhead N billion	Recurrent N billion	Capital N billion	Total N billion
1	2008	NA	NA	NA	NA	192
2	2009	132.3	43.9	176.2	46.8	223
3	2010	155..3	37.3	192.6	39.4	232
4	2011	NA	NA	309.8	38.2	348
5	2012	254.8	41.6	296.4	35.9	332
6	2013	300.4	NA	NA	64	364
7	2014	273.8	40.5	314.3	35.4	350
8	2015	289.3	49.5	338.8	36.7	376
9	2016	278.4	33.8	312.2	130.9	443
10	2017	285.5	40	325.5	140	465

Source: [www.budgetoffice.gov.ng](http://www.budgetoffice.gov.ng)

The implication of such terrorist activities in the country is how unfortunately it affects the smooth development of the society. Looking at the above budget except one or two years 2012 and 2014, almost all the subsequent years the budget kept going further because of the insecurity challenges. In reality, all the billions spent on the arms and other logistics, are amount that should be judiciously spend on the quality lives of the citizens such as Education, Health, Water, Technology, Power and other development aspects. What many experts believed caused the inability of the Nigerian Army to succeed over the Boko Haram militant in this over a decade war, was the corruption involved in the operation. For instance, in 2014, when Boko Haram was having an upper hand in the fight, killing innocent people including substantial number of the men of Nigerian army, the military was busy spending over N7 billion in tours. According to United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs(14/3/2021), not fewer than 30,000 innocent lives were killed, 4000 soldiers and about 3million people displaced. In Maimalari Barracks Cemetery this researcher identify a cenotaph with names of fallen Heroes of 1,307

etched from 2013 that is almost eight years ago. How many were killed from that period to 2020 has to be fidgety number. Also related to this clear intrigues of the NA in the fight against insurgency was an estimated 600 soldiers killed within six months by ISWAP fighters in 2018 when they overran the army’s forward operating base in JiJi, Gaidam area of Yobe State. No wonder, the latest data from Global Terrorism Index (2019) rank Nigeria as third worst nation prone to terrorism with no improvement since 2017. The NA thus, a terrible experience in the fight. Is corruption therefore a solid ground for the failure to overcome the enemies or bring an end to the crisis?

**5. Nigerian Army and Corruption in the fight against Boko Haram.**

Corruption is broadly defined as a deliberate violations, for gainful ends, of standard of conducts legally, professionally, or even ethically, established, in private and public affairs. These gains may be in cash, or kind, or, it may even bepsychological, or, political, but, they are made from the violation of

the integrity of an entity and involves the subversion of its quality and capacity. (Y. B. Usman: 1995)

One serious case study was arm deal by the former security adviser to the Jonathan administration Rtd Col Sambo Dasuki who up to the time of compiling this research is still languishing in detention on charges of corruption related to the money meant to acquire weapons to fight Boko Haram. Dasuki's case as perceived by many stand as a clear example of how country's defense sector leaves room for exploitation. In fact corruption in the defense sector, is a major threat to Nigeria's internal security and political stability. This paper further confirmed, Sambo was said to have been involved in \$2bn deal contract for a refurbished helicopters to a company owned by a friend and financier of former President Goodluck Jonathan (L J Tahir 2019).

The delivered helicopters were not suitable for combat and have never been deployed. Much of this money is said to have disappeared through kickbacks, payment to "ghost soldiers" who don't exist, or via no-bid contract resulting in inflated spending that benefited politically-connected contractors.

The Transparency International reported in 2016 further, corruption issue is largely unaddressed in the insurgency operation, and shall continue to weaken Nigerian counterterrorism capacity whilst strengthening Boko Haram. Among the terrible situation identified with corruption within the cycle of Nigerian military particularly related to Boko Haram fight, was the evidence discovered by the previous probes which was found in the office of the former Military Chiefs, using dozens of companies, stole as much as US \$15 Billion an amount many experts believe could have wipe out Boko Haram insurgency, had it been it was properly utilized. (Katherine, D: 2017)

Corruption thus, is said to have worsened the Boko Haram conflict, and it's a big driver of insecurity in the country at large. This has been a clear illustration how over the last 10 years, corrupt elites have been profiting from the conflict in the northeast and driven Nigeriato a crisis point.

Another open and empirical evidence of military corruption was the attack by some aggrieved soldiers on their senior officers on the ground that their allowances were not being paid for a very long time. All over the media it caught the daily caption: "SOLDIERS OPEN FIRE ON THEIR SENIOR OFFICERS". This was taken to be a topic of discussion of quite sometimes on the public and private media all over the country. (BBC news and

National Dailies 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2014) The newspaper said:

*"Major-general Ahmed Mohammed escaped unhurt after soldiers shot at his car at the Maimalari barracks. The soldiers blamed him for the killing of their colleagues by suspected Boko Haram insurgents."*

One more example of this mess in the army institution was the caption by B. Monguno, Security adviser to the President: NO MONEY! NO ARMS! According this source, funds running into Billions of Naira amounting to \$2.51 meant for the purchase of arms and ammunition under the past Service Chiefs were unaccounted for. In fact money budgeted for that purpose has been misappropriated. (Premium Times: 2020).

The pathetic side of this work is how Nigerian military authority reported that some soldiers were selling arms to Boko Haram. (L. Irabor: 2016). However series of examples of corruption in the military operation have been there to buttress as far as this research is concern. The last point was the case of Alex Badeh who was fired from his post as Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) for alleged to have stolen equivalent to \$24 million budgeted for soldiers salary. (VOA Africa: 2016).

Other corruption case similar to the above was the agitation civil society group demanding the investigation of properties worth \$1.5million in Dubai allegedly bought by former CAS Lt Gen Y. Burutai. Also among the cases of corruption within the military institution are repeated expenses which have been done deliberately in order to inflate the contracts. For instance M.M. Duruji, Idowu and Favour glaringly cited an example with the case of rehabilitation of National War Museum Umuahia, Abia State and that of Armed Forces Physical Health School and Games Village Esa-Oke, Osun State. For instance, the N.W.M. contract which was initially awarded at the cost of N24million by ministry of Defence in 2013 end to have consumed N172.7million in 2017.

This research pose the question: how can one single contract be awarded and re-awarded about five times?

However despite all the above analyses regarding cost and expenses incurred in the course of fighting the insurgents, there was huge casualties in terms of weapons destructions and loss of lives, including grievous injuries that rendered most of the soldiers disabled. The irony is how can such operation be

successful with such devious corruption allegation? The issue of discussion is how the militant had inflicted serious injuries through many series of attacks, which ration probably is unknown to the Nigeria army or an over sight or was a negligence? Below part of this research come up with two examples of Boko Haram war tactics which had succeeded in inflicting grave damage to the Nigeria soldiers.

## 6. General Operation

In most cases, especially in the midst of Boko Haram climax, Nigeria military usually carried out a general operation in search of Boko Haram militants. Once there is problem related to the Boko Haram attack, soldiers usually condoned the area in totality to carry out an operation or searching with no exception. The manner in which this operation is carried out is what many human right activists could not really understand. Almost all the people around would be brutally subjected to all inhuman treatment before arrested and taken to military Barracks or what they popularly called Guantanamo. (Military cell) this attitude had subjected many soldiers to court marshaled.

## 7. Boko Haram: Training, Skills and Weapons

Boko Haram members fought Nigerian security agents for almost ten years is a serious issue of concern to both scholars and security experts in the world. There were a lot of speculations that the Boko Haram fighters have been trained outside the country. Apart from evidence realized through the assistance give to them by foreign rebels mostly from Mali and Chad, which was seen in the dead bodies of their soldiers, there were different methods of war displayed in the course of their attacks.(L Tahir: 2019, S Garba 2020). The first point compounded by this research is the presence of foreign soldiers within the insurgents. In several occasions, when a fight took place, among the casualties found, were foreign fighters mostly of Malians or Chadians identifications. Beside this empirical evidence, in many instances, Al-Qaeda, the leading Islamic Militants organization in the world had recognized Boko Haram as its extension. Even though this issue is still a subject of scholarly debate among security

experts and scholars, many facts have proven that. According to 2015 Transparency International report, Osama Bin Laden had invested \$3 million in northern Nigeria with the view to promote this movement. It was also learnt that the group main spoke man Abu Qaqa publically said in January 2012 as reported by T. I., that Boko Haram is a “spiritual follower” of Al-Qaeda. He further added:

*“...Al-Qaeda are our brothers...our leader travelled to Saudi Arabia and met Al-Qaeda there. We enjoy financial and technical support from them. Anything we want from them, we ask”.*

Also in the same report:

*“In August 2013, Boko Haram leaders participated in a secret conference call that included 20 top Al-Qaeda operatives, including Ayman Al-Zawahiri.”*

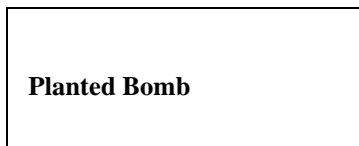
In 2013 U.S. State Department insisted on the issue of international connection of the movement. They raised alarm to the world that Nigerian Boko Haram has been dealing with international terrorist cells particularly Al-Qaeda and other Magreb States organizations such as Al-Shabab of Somalia. It is therefore relevant that this research has developed some “WAR STRATEGIES” vividly demonstrated by Boko Haram at different times against the Nigerian army in order to justify the above assertion.

### 7.1 Inbox Bomb Attack

This is a method of attack carried out by the Boko Haram against Nigerian Army several times before it was realized. In this context, a Bomb will be buried within a few meters of the target. When it is successfully buried, then a line will be drawn in form of a box to surround the main point where the bomb is buried. The bomber shall then sit few meters away from the area with remote controlling the timing of the Bomb explosion. The moment their target either a car or person entered the surrounding of that box being drawn, that person will press the remote and immediately before the target move outside the box, he will be destroyed by the explosion. Several military personnel and their vehicles were destroyed through this method until much later when it was realized. Both in the bush and within the metropolis a lot of such method were used which claimed hundreds of lives. Below is the example of the attack.

**ENEMY**(Watching the movement of the target to enter the box with bomb control)

(Main Road)  
 TARGET  
 (N.A.)



### 7.2 Disguised as a dead body to attack

This is a strategy applied by the Boko Haram fighters in Damaturu. Even if there is such kind of tactical bombing method militarily, most the people writing on the war and warfare especially dealing with terrorist insurgency have not seen such disaster. It was during one of their attacks in Damaturu when they succeeded in killing hundreds of people, including some senior army and police officers. It was the attack attention of the security personnel was drawn to evacuate the remains of those officers. Unknown to security personnel, the Boko Haram militants have disguised as part of the dead bodies with their gun aside pretending they were killed. Immediately with the arrival of the security personnel who were inspecting the level of the casualties, Boko Haram opened fire and clear almost all the people there including deputy commissioner of police. That tactics had devastated the minds of the security personnel as to how and where Boko Haram got all these training. More than 70 people killed including 15 soldiers and 10 sanitation workers (L J Tahir; 2019)

### 7.3 Attack using dead bodies

Another developed war tactics discovered by this research is how the insurgents used dead bodies to bomb their enemies after attack. For instance in the same Damaturu town in 2015, after inflicting casualties on both the civilian and security personnel, they attached bomb to several dead bodies. When security and environmental health workers came to clear the dead bodies, they detonated the bomb and further killed several innocent health workers and military personnel who came to take their wasted colleagues. This is also another war strategy not really known by either Nigerian military or any war experts, and if at all they are aware of it how did they get in that trapped?

### 7.4 Suicide bomb attack

This is a very common method of war used by terrorists all over the world. A suicide bomber is someone who sacrifices his life and carried an attack on a specific target, living many innocent into pieces. Not fewer than 50 different suicide bomb attacked was carried out between Damaturu and Maiduguri

from 2013 to 2015 by Boko Haram fighters. (CJTF record:2018) But the new approach and method introduced by these terrible insurgents was the use of small girls or old women. Many at the beginning have no idea that a small girl shall be attached with an explosive device. A lot of people were attacked and killed by those small teenagers who usually dressed in Hijab. (Islamic code of dress) It was much later after serious casualties this method was surmounted by the security agents with the help of general public.

However, from the above four different war methods clarified, there were substantial evidence that Nigerian army had demonstrated ignorance of Guerilla warfare or had shown lack of war consciousness which caused grievous consequences on substantial number of their soldiers. Other weakness or shortcomings of the NA during their operation in the North-East include:

- Reckless womanizing and sometimes incessant rape of young girls, which had provoked the general public to see them as worse enemies than Boko Haram.
- Engaged in other social activities at the war front like playing football which caused them great loss in Gaidam Local government of Yobe state in 2018.
- Relating with young boys as their errands which turned out to be informants of Boko Haram and that had significantly gave their enemies chance to attack them.
- Open corruption along the high way which entangle them into suspicion and loss confidence from the commercial drivers and their passengers along the way.
- Rampant mingling and social interactions with civilian and other unknown faces, many of them were wasted by Boko Haram at the beginning of the fight.
- Inability to differentiate between enemies and their colleagues in so many combats.
- Ability to control their aggressiveness towards their relationship with civilian in the midst of the crisis.

From the above few points identified, it is pertinent for the Nigeria army to know that serious challenges are facing the institutions. Global nations are in competition or rat race to reach advance stage of

militarization in order to extent its external influence. A nation in such formidable situation to handle its domestic crisis is really having top time to articulate development vision no matter the attempts. All most all African countries have security challenges, particularly West African sub-region. But the level of commitments in tackling internal crisis is higher in other land compare to Nigeria. And the equally the level of mess within the military institution is higher compare to other countries. This work therefore concludes its research with the below findings.

- Corruption has eaten deeply into the fiber of army institution and it has to be aggressively tackled. Otherwise there will be serious damage in future more than the current one.
- There is blatant indiscipline at the war front and such attitude had caused a lot of setback in the war.
- There is serious need for advance and modern guerrilla warfare training to be given to men of the Nigerian army either nationally or internationally. This requires special unit in thousands to handle such insecurity in future.
- Politicization of military institution is the last hope of any nation. Provided Nigeria wants to restore the integrity and professionalism of Nigeria army, it has to be wash out of the national dirty politics.
- The level of intelligence gathering is still low and outdated.
- Arms and ammunitions in use were outdated, sub-standard and irrelevant as far terrorism and guerilla wars are concern.
- Allowances and other financial commitments of the soldiers on field must be improved and reviewed to enable them have the zeal to fight wholeheartedly.
- Intelligence report was inadequate as vital information has become difficult for the Military to obtain.

## 8. Conclusion

From the above analysis on the involvement of Nigerian military in North-Eastern Nigerian insurgency, it is very clear to grasp that there were so many lapses as to why the fight has been prolong for more than one decade. Looking at the nature of the fight and the unconventional approach by the militants, the inability of the NA to understand the Guerilla warfare at the beginning of the fight, corruption and other unprofessional attitude have all combined to contribute towards the failure to tackle the situation in time. The work has succeeded to

outline some of the clear examples of financial scandal within the institution and come up with suggested areas identified as some way out for the challenges ahead of the NA in the fight against insurgency in the country.

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