ASSESSING THE ROLE OF THE NIGERIAN NAVY IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATIONS

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v10i6.01

Keywords

Nigerian Navy, Insurgency, Counter-Insurgency, Security Governance Theory, Lake Chad Basin, Maritime Security

Abstract

Research Problem: *The intractable wave of insurgency in Nigeria has become a serious threat to national security and has necessitated the expansion of naval role beyond its conventional mandate to defence the maritime space. Because much attention has not been given to the efforts of the navy in counterinsurgency that this paper assesses the role of the Nigerian Navy in counter-insurgency (COIN) operations in Nigeria.*
Methods/Theory: *The paper adopted a qualitative approach through the use of secondary data and personal experience/observation in counterinsurgency.The Security Governance Theory, explains contemporary security management as a multi-actor process involving military institutions, state agencies, and regional partners to counterinsurgency.*
Results: *The dynamic nature of insurgents' activities and their exploitation of difficult terrains and waterways to unleash their nefarious activities has made the navy a relevant security institution to counterinsurgencythrough maritime surveillance, territorial patrols, amphibious operations, interdiction of insurgent supply routes, and participation in joint operations.*
Conclusion: *The paper concludes that while the Nigerian Navy has advanced into a dynamic component of Nigeria's COIN strategy, sustained efforts in intelligence integration, capacity building, regional cooperation, and technological modernization are required to improve efficiency and long-term stability in insurgency-affected regions.*
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *This paper has brought to limelight that the Navy has now become a critical stakeholder in the counter insurgency operations.*
Recommendations: *The paper recommended improved funding for the Nigerian navy, strengthened intelligence management system of the entire military formations, increased deployment of cutting-edge technologiesand improved regional security cooperation.*

Introduction

The present global era is characterized by uncertain and insecurity that has challenges human existence and survival. Human beings have had to face natural and human security challenges such as pandemics and health threats, economic volatility, arms conflicts and other forms of human instigated threats. Amidst these challenges, Africa has found itself at a crossroads as terrorism and insurgency has become one of the most prevalence form of threat to human existence within the continent. Evidences of these threats are caused by destruction of lives and properties, mayhems, criminality, killings, fear, psychological trauma and incompetence leadership. These are also as a result of the fragile nature of the African state.

Nigeria as the perceived "Giant of Africa" has also been facing serious security challenges, mostly as a result of insurgency over the past two decades, particularly following the emergence of the dreaded Boko Haram insurgency since 2002 (Abdulsalam, 2023). The sect became violent in 2009 launching series of attacks on citizens and national infrastructures and causing a threat of national stability, territorial integrity, economic development, and human security. The group's activities, together with those of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have caused in thousands of deaths, the displacement of millions of people largely living in the northeast Nigeria, and the destruction of critical infrastructure across northeastern Nigeria and parts of the Lake Chad Basin. The complex and increasing nature of the insurgency necessitated the adoption of all-inclusive counterinsurgency measures involving all branches of the Nigerian Armed Forces (The army, air force and navy).

Globally, navies or maritime forces have been recognised as an essential component of national security framework but largely tasked with protecting a nation's territorial waters, safeguarding maritime resources, and defending national sovereignty(Ilori, 2017). However, the evolving nature of current security threats and the urgency it requires to tackle it, has extended naval responsibilities beyond conventional warfare to include counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (CT-COIN), joint military operations, operations at sea such as blockades and patrols, intelligence gathering and deterrence against escalation or involvement by external powers. In addition, naval forces contribute significantly through strategic sealift of Forces to and within theatre, provision of logistics support and facilitating the conduct of amphibious landings and strike operations are platforms through which Naval Forces strengthen COIN Operations (Cass, 2016).

Nigeria's counterinsurgency campaign has progressed through several operational phases. Firstly launched in 2011 as Operation RESTORE ORDER under a Joint Task Force framework, the operation was laterreorganized and renamed Operation ZAMAN LAFIYA in 2013, Operation LAFIYA DOLE in 2015, and subsequently, Operation HADIN KAI in April 2021. These operations have been steered by key national security frameworks, including the National Security Strategy (NSS) 2014, the reviewed NSS 2019, and the National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) 2016, which collectively providesthe FGN with alternate approaches of dealing with insurgency.In addition, acknowledging the transnational dimensions of the threat, the FGN co-established a Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2014, which comprise of the defence forces from Chad, Niger and Nigeria (Odomovo, 2016). The MNJTF Operations involved a Naval component as an essential COIN mechanism in the Lake Chad region (Willie, 2018).

Although the Nigerian Army remain the major force in countering insurgency because of their capacity and relevance on land security, the Nigerian Navy has also become a significant partner due to the peculiar geography of the conflict environment. The insurgency has stretched beyond conventional land-based operations into riverine and maritime spaces, particularly within the Lake Chad Basin, where several islands, waterways, and swamplands have provided insurgents with opportunities for movement, logistics, concealment and cross-border operations. Therefore, to effectively counterinsurgency in these areas, specialized maritime capabilities that only naval forces can provide is required.

Thus, the role of the NN is further strengthened by the Total Spectrum Maritime Strategy (TSMS) which was established in 2011 (Ajani, 2016). The TSMS which cuts across five spectrums guides all NN operational engagements. Specifically, Spectrum 5 involves NN Internal Security, COIN and Counter Terrorism operations (Ibas, 2019). Accordingly, the NN has been quite effective in this spectrum with the creation of a Naval Outpost (NOP) in the Lake Chad region and deployment of a detachment of the Nigerian Navy Special Boat Services (NNSBS) as a component of the Armed Forces Special Forces Battalion (AFSFBn) in the NE zone of Nigeria (Okoro, 2016). The Naval Base has also contributed meaningfully to the interruption of insurgent logistics networks and the regaining of territories formerly occupied by Boko Haram and ISWAP elements.

Despite these efforts and successes, the activities of the insurgents have continued unabated, especially, in the northeast Nigeria due to difficult terrain, insufficient surveillance abilities, logistical constraints, and the evolving guerilla tactics of the insurgents. These challenges highlight the need for a reassessment of the Navy's contributions to counterinsurgency operations and the factors affecting its operational effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

The emergence of Boko Haram insurgency since 2009 and their dastardly acts has caused a devastating effect on the country's security architecture and has further reproduced other security threats including banditry which is also threatening the very fabrics of the country's security. Despite the efforts put in by the government and military apparatus, the threaded impact of insurgency continues to post a serious challenge as they have exploited the difficult terrain, waterways, islands, and transboundary spaces of the Lake Chad Basin to sustain their operations, maintain logistical networks, and evade security forces. This has further complicated the counterinsurgency efforts of the military and reinforced the need for a multidimensional approach in dealing with the menace.

Existing studies on counterinsurgency, military strategy and operations have predominantly focused on the Nigerian Army as the principal actor in combating insurgency. This is so, because of the attention devoted to land operations, air power, broader activities of joint military formations and intelligence gathering. Limited scholarly attention has been given to specific and meaningful areas the Nigerian Navy has been involved in, in the fight against insurgency, particularly within the riverine and amphibious environments of the Lake Chad Basin. To further buttress the relevance of the NN which has not been duly acknowledged, is the launch of Naval Base Lake Chad, the deployment of the Special Boat Service, and the incorporation of the NN into Operation HADIN KAI and the Multinational Joint Task Force that have expanded the Navy's operational

responsibilities; which is why the challenges facing the navy in these unconventional warfare environments has not also been duly extrapolated.

It is against this background that this paper assesses the role of the Nigerian Navy in counter-insurgency operations within the Lake Chad Basin and the North East theatre.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to assess the role of the Nigerian Navy in counterinsurgency operations. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the role of the Navy in national defence.
2. Examine the relevance of the Navy in the counterinsurgency efforts of the military.
3. Evaluate the challenges of the Navy involvement in the counterinsurgency operations.

Conceptual Clarification

The paper examines some key concepts such insurgency, counterinsurgency and naval operations.

Insurgency

Insurgency as a concept refers to an organized and prolonged political-military struggle intended at challenging, weakening, or possibly conquering an established authority through the use of subversion, armed conflict, and other unconventional methods. The United States Department of Defense (DoD, 2005) defines insurgency as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict". The definition suggests that insurgents employ unlawful means to achieve their aim which could be political, religious, social or even ideological. Similarly, the United States Department of the Army Field Manual (2014) describes it as a prolonged politico-military struggle intended to weaken the legitimacy and control of an established government while expanding insurgent influence and control. This definition suggest that the underlining aim of insurgents is to overwhelm a government and assert their influence on a given territory.

Themain characteristic of insurgency is its asymmetric nature; because of its illegal and unconstitutional aims, insurgent groups are typically unable to confront state security forces through conventional warfare and therefore rely on guerrilla tactics, violence, propaganda, sabotage, and psychological operations to achieve their objectives. Metz and Millen (2004) argue that insurgency is often adopted by groups that lack the ability to achieve their objectives through conventional military means. Thus, insurgents exploit difficult terrains, civilian populations, and protracted warfare to offset the state's military superiority.

In the Nigerian constitutional context, an insurgency is well-defined within the framework and physical activities of the following; an attack on defenceless civilians resulting in the massive loss of lives and properties; prevention of the thriving domestic and foreign investments, linkages to murder, genocide and indeed, treasonable felony. The extreme extension and aggravation of insurgency and threat to security leads to terrorism which is a systematic use of violence, destructive acts, and coercive methods to intimidate individuals, populations, and constituted government (Okene and Olawale, 2013).

Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency (COIN) refers to the measures or actions adopted by a legitimate or constituted government to prevent, combat, and defeat an insurgency while restoring and maintaining state authority. It is generally regarded as the opposite of insurgency, as it seeks to preserve existing political structures and weaken the influence and abilities of insurgent groups (Liolio, 2013). The definition suggest that counterinsurgency requires all the gamut of the state machineries such as military, paramilitary, finances and political decisions.

Scott (2017) describes counterinsurgency as an combined set of actions intended to create and sustain stable political, economic, and social structures while addressing the underlying causes of insurgency. Similarly, NATO doctrine emphasizes the coordination of military and civilian efforts to address grievances, strengthen governance, and restore public confidence in state institutions.Counterinsurgency extends beyond kinetic approach. It includes a comprehensive blend of both the kinetic and the non-kinetic approach to preventing its recurrence.

Davidson (2016) buttresses that the success to counterinsurgencylargely depends on the government's ability to provide effective governance, security, and essential services. In this regard, military action alone is not the ultimate solution; long-term success encompasses the integration of all instruments of national power, including diplomatic, informational, military, and economic measures.

In Nigeria, counterinsurgency efforts have mostly focused on combating the Boko Haram activities and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the northeastern region. These efforts combine military operations, strategic communication, intelligence gathering, inter-agency collaboration, humanitarian interventions, and regional collaboration under frameworks such as Operation HADIN KAI and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

Nigerian Navy

According to the 1999 constitution section 217 subsection 1, there shall be an armed forces for the Federation which shall consist of an Army, a Navy, an Air Force and such other branches of the armed forces of the Federation as may be established by an Act of the National Assembly.

The Nigerian Navy (NN) is one of the branches of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, mandated to safeguard Nigeria's territorial waters, offshore resources, and contribute to national security objectives. While its primary responsibility is maritime defence, its operational scope has expanded to include internal security, counterterrorism, anti-smuggling operations, and counterinsurgency missions.

The Nigerian Navy that emerged in 1956 emerged from the ideas of some Nigerian nationalists who were fighting for Nigeria's independence. Maitama Sule, for instance said, he would like Nigeria to have "a Navy which can be justifiably proud and which is worthy of this great country" (Duyile, 2024). In its early form, the Navy functioned mainly as a coastal and constabulary force responsible for sea-lane delineation, hydrographic surveying and customs enforcement.

Contemporary naval operations are structured under the Total Spectrum Maritime Strategy (TSMS), introduced in 2011 to provide a layered and proactive response to maritime and security threats. According to Bala (2017), the TSMS is based on a proactive layered response to conflict

spectrum, which are phased and separated by distance to and from the coast. He avers that the requirement for effective policing of Nigeria's maritime environment as contained in the TSMS is based on the Maritime Trinity of action, comprising of surveillance capabilities, response initiatives and enforcement. The author concludes that the TSMS serves as an operational framework for the NN's strategic contributions to the COIN efforts of Operation LAFIYA DOLE in the NE zone of Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical underpinnings are a hallmark of discussing societal realities in the field of social sciences. Therefore, adopting a theory to assess the role of the Nigerian Navy in the counterinsurgency operations cannot be underestimated.

This paper is anchored on Security Governance Theory, which explains security management as a collaborative and multi-actor process involving the state, security institutions, non-state actors, and regional or international partners. It suggested as an alternative theoretical paradigm for looking at national, regional, and global security practices. It is a reaction to the increasingly dynamic nature of security threat in the global scene, particularly, terrorism, insurgency, piracy, and transnational crimes which has become a serious challenge for individual states to manage or combat effectively. The threat of violent state actors has necessitated the need for states to collaborate at any given front.

Security governance theory challenges the realist school of thought which see the state as the unitary actor in the international system that is responsible for protection of its citizens against any form of internal or external threat. The large scale of insecurity and violence perpetuated by violent non-state actors has proven that, security is no longer the exclusive monopoly of the state; therefore, there is a need for cooperation, institutional interdependence, and shared responsibility in the management of security threats. Specifically, *Krahmann*(2003) who is one of the leading proponents of the theory argued that, international security has shifted from state-centric "government" to complex, decentralized "governance". Easton, Den Boer, Janssens, Moelker, and Vanderbeken (2010) describe this arrangement as a "plural security" framework in which several actors, such as the military, police, other paramilitary agencies, judicial institutions, civil authorities, and local communities collectively contribute to public safety and national security. Similarly, Abrahamsen and Williams (2009) maintain that contemporary security governance operates through dispersed security networks including state agencies, regional organizations, and non-state actors working together to maintain security.

Within the context of counterinsurgency in Nigeria, the proponents' postulation is relevant considering the intractable nature of insurgency in the northeast and the necessity to bring every element of the state to bear to combat the menace. Successful counterinsurgency operations cannot rely on only the Army who have the troops on the ground. Other branches (Navy and the Air Force) of the military must also synergise with the Army to ensure total defeat of the insurgents. The kinetic military approach should holistically reflect a joint force of the military formation while the non-kinectic approach must also be incorporated through intelligence sharing, socioeconomic development, inter-agency collaboration, humanitarian interventions, and restoration of strong governmental structures. Therefore, counterinsurgency becomes a synchronized

effort involving security agencies, government institutions, regional partners and local communities.

The significance of security governance theory to this paper lies in its explanation of the collective role of the Nigerian Navy within Nigeria's broader counterinsurgency framework. The Nigerian Navy operates together with the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Air Force, Nigeria Police Force, intelligence agencies, and regional actors under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and Operation HADIN KAI. This inter-agency arrangement reflects the central assumption of the theory that security outcomes are best attained through coordinated institutional networks rather than isolated operational efforts.

The establishment of Naval Base Lake Chad and the deployment of specialized units such as the Special Boat Service (SBS) demonstrates the practical application of security governance principles in Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations. Through amphibious operations, maritime patrols, intelligence gathering, logistics support, and prohibition of insurgent movements and supply routes, the NN complements land and air operations in the Lake Chad Basin. These operations demonstrate the significance of the interconnectedness and interdependence of security actors in combating insurgency within difficult transboundary and riverine environments.

Historical Background of Counterinsurgency in Nigeria

Counterinsurgency is as old as the Nigerian state; as the country have had to deal with emerging insurgency and other form of insurrection from inception. More so, Ubah (1998) traced the history of counterinsurgency to colonialism, which established a precedent for the military's involvement in domestic security. According to Ukpabi (1986) and Hassan (2018), organizations like the Lagos Constabulary and the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) were machineries of the British to combat any form of antagonism, conduct punitive expeditions and protect trade routes against local resistance. And upon independence, Ukeje (2011) in 1960, the Nigerian military inherited these coercive institutional models, which historically prioritized state security over civilian protection.

In the early post-independence era, the military's role were mainly internal, characterized as a constabulary force assisting civil authorities (Peters 1997, Hassan 2018). Though the military were co-opted from 1960 to perform peacekeeping in Congo and other conflict-ridden areas outside the country, the first major domestic military deployments to suppress civil disturbances according to Falola and Oyebade (2010) was during the Tiv riots of 1960 and 1964 because of the escalation that led to armed guerrilla warfare. This period according to Hassan (2018) underscored a lack of distinct doctrine to guide unconventional roles, as the military was often used to suppress student crises, ethno-religious violence, and riots.

The thirty months Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) influenced Nigeria's strategic culture, as the decisive federal victory reinforced an offensive ideology and a reliance on conventional military establishments (Atofarati 1992, Omeni 2015). This achievement, however, led to a "tragedy of victory" that reinvigorated institutional inertia, causing the military to deprioritize specific COIN training in favour of conventional warfighting capabilities (Alabi-Isama 2013, Omeni 2015). Throughout the 1970s, the military perceived security threats as mainly external, which further stifled the

recognition that counterinsurgency required specialized development (Omeni 2015).

Official COIN development in the Nigerian military environment commenced in 1978 when the British Military Assistance Training Team (BMATT) established the Special Warfare Wing (SWW) at the Nigerian Army School of Infantry (Omeni 2015). Notwithstanding the commencement, COIN institutionalization was mostly abandoned during the 1980s and 1990s as the military became progressively politicized and involved in state governmental affairs, giving rise to a "coup culture" (Siollun 2009, Omeni 2015). The military's internal function in this period was focused on suppressing local religious unrests, particularly, the Maitatsine insurgency of the 1980s, which was put down through high-intensity, kinetic operations (Elaigwu 2003, Hassan 2018).

By the late 1990s and 2000s, the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta compelled the military to shift its attention back to internal counterinsurgency (Omeni 2013, Hassan 2018). Military operations such as Operation Restore Hope (2003) marked the formalization of Joint Task Forces (JTFs) to combat resource-based insurgencies, even though the militants claimed to be fighting for resource control and the marginalisation suffered by the region (Ukeje 2011, Omeni 2015). The military struggled in this theatre because its order of battle (ORBAT) and equipment were more suitable for state-to-state warfare than for the asymmetric engagement in the riverine creeks (Howe 2001, Omeni 2015).

The emergence of Boko Haram insurgency has reawakened the vigour in the fight against insurgency. The violent approach of the insurgents since 2009 and its protracted nature became a major national priority. While the reactionary approach to counterinsurgency at the initial time were largely militarised, the sophisticated nature of the insurgents and their changing strategy force the military to continue to restrategise as the government also used other kinetic and non-kinetic approach. According to Ifezue and Kotun (2012) and Omeni (2015), the military has adopted a doctrinal shift from conventional Responsive Offensive Doctrine (ROD) to a Manoeuvrist Approach to Warfare (MAW) that emphasizes joint operations, intelligence gathering, and civil-military cooperation; while Bala (2017) specifically noted that, the Nigerian Navy has also been integrated into the framework through the Total Spectrum Maritime Strategy (TSMS) and the establishment of Naval Base Lake Chad to interdict insurgent supply lines.

The Role of the Nigerian Navy in Counterinsurgency Operations

The Nigerian Navy (NN) has become an important component of Nigeria's counterinsurgency (COIN) architecture, particularly in combating Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) within the North East and the Lake Chad Basin. Although the Navy's traditional mandate centres on the protection of Nigeria's maritime interests and offshore resources, its operational responsibilities have expanded to include internal security and counterinsurgency operations under the Total Spectrum Maritime Strategy (TSMS) introduced in 2011. The essence of the TSMS is to project naval capabilities across the spectrum of maritime threats, from the creeks to deep sea and beyond (including land operations). Bala (2017) explains that the TSMS is anchored on the "Maritime Trinity" of surveillance, response, and enforcement, with Spectrum Five specifically dedicated to internal security, counterterrorism, and counterinsurgency operations.

One of the major roles of the Nigerian Navy in counterinsurgency operations is maritime security and territorial surveillance. Indeed, as pointed out by Aina (2023), "the Nigerian Navy continues to be a formidable force among navies in Africa, especially when it comes to ensuring maritime security in Nigeria's coastline and in the Gulf of Guinea". The Navy has been effective in conducting patrols across waterways, riverine areas and coastal regions to prevent insurgents from using the maritime routes for smuggling arms, move logistics and infiltrate themselves into the country. The Navy monitors all forms of suspicious activities through surveillance systems and patrols and provide intelligence support to joint military commands. The installation of the Falcon Eye cameras along the coastline has enhance intelligence coordination and enhance the real-timemonitoring of insurgent advances in real time within the Lake Chad. In addition, the establishment of a JOD within the COIN architecture is imperative towards enhancing inter-service synergy and logistics support, as well as addressing the command-and-control issues affecting the effectiveness of the COIN efforts of NBLC in the NE zone of Nigeria.

Navies strengthen COIN Operations through operations intelligence gathering, information sharing and deterrence against escalation or involvement by external powers (Cass, 2016). The Navy gathers intelligence on insurgent activities, movement patterns and supply routes. Intelligence gotten by naval units contributes to operational planning and coordinated offensives against insurgent campsites. The efficiency of these operations is reinforced through information sharing with the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Air Force, intelligence agencies, and regional security partners operating under the auspices of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

Another significant role of the Navy is logistics and transportation support. The Navy also facilitate the movement of troops, food supplies, weapons, and military equipment within operational theatres, particularly in difficult terrains where road networks are either inaccessible or insecure. The Navy also supports in medical evacuation, emergency response operations, and strategic transportation of personnel and equipment during military engagements. These logistics capabilities enhance operational mobility and sustain joint military operations in riverine areas.

The Nigerian Navy further contributes through amphibious and special operations. Naval personnel, particularly the Special Boat Service (SBS), conduct amphibious landings, invasions, investigative missions, offensive strikes and rescue operations against insurgent strongholds in difficult terrains. The SBS which was established in on 27 December 2006, was aimed to tackle any form of unconventional security threats such as piracy, hostage-taking, insurgency, and terrorism. Bolarinwa (2019) and Aliyu (2019) note that the SBS has participated in operations such as Operation Pulo Shield, Operation Safe Haven, and Operation HADIN KAI. The amphibious capacity of the Navy have been proven effective in accessing riverine and marshy areas within the Lake Chad Basin that are hitherto difficult for conventional land forces to penetrate.

Worthy to note is the establishment of Naval Base Lake Chad (NBLC) in Baga, Borno State, in 2016. The establishment of the base provided the Navy with a permanent operational presence within the North East counterinsurgency theatre. Soriwei (2020) observes that Naval Base Lake Chad coordinates closely with land and air components to liberate occupied territories, prevent terrorist infiltration, and support stabilization operations in the region. The base

also serves as a strategic centre for maritime patrols, amphibious operations, and joint military coordination within the Lake Chad Basin.

Overall, the Nigerian Navy's counterinsurgency operations are largely conducted within a joint and collaborative framework. The Nigerian Navy has advanced from a conventional maritime defence branch of the Armed Forces into a critical force multiplier in the counterinsurgency efforts.

Successes of the Nigerian Navy in Counterinsurgency Efforts

There is no doubt that the Nigerian Navy (NN) has played a significant role in collaboration with other branches of the Armed Forces in combating the scourge of insurgency in Nigeria. From the conventional role of ensuring maritime defence and security, the force has expanded its scope to including counterinsurgency operations in the Niger Delta and Lake Chad Basin among other domestic security operations. The following reflects some of the achievements of the Navy in the counterinsurgency efforts.

Establishment of Specialized Elite Units: One of the major achievements of the Nigerian Navy was the establishment of the Special Boat Services (SBS) on December 27, 2006. This unit was designed to address emerging unconventional threats such as insurgency, terrorism, piracy, and hostage-taking. According to Bolarinwa (2019), the SBS has been instrumental in several internal theatres, including Operation Pulo Shield in the Niger Delta, Operation Safe Haven in Plateau State, and Operation Zaman Lafiya in the North East. Reiterating the successes of the navy in the counterinsurgency efforts through the SBS, the President and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, thus noted that:

Beyond the maritime domain, I also commend the Nigerian Navy for its contributions to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations across the country. The courage and professionalism demonstrated by the Special Boat Service in executing complex missions are truly commendable (Tinubu, 2026).

The increased deployment of SOFs which include the Army's SOFs, Air Force SOFs, and the Navy's SOF, known as the Special Boat Service (SBS) in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (CT-COIN) operations against the nefarious activities of Violent Non-State Actors (VNSAs) such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the Northeast region, has resulted in significant successes (Aina, 2023).

Strategic Presence in Conflict Theatres: As part of the efforts at strengthening the fight against terrorism, the Navy established the NOP Lake Chad now referred to as Naval Base Lake Chad (NBLC) in Baga, Borno State in 2016. According to Adeniyi (2019), the base was under the supervision of the Maritime Component Commander (MCC) Operation LAFIYA DOLE. This was followed with the immediate deployment of NN personnel in the Lake Chad Basin which equally formed the COIN maritime component of Operation LAFIYA DOLE (Adeniyi, 2019). The contributions of NBLC to the COIN efforts of Operation LAFIYA DOLE had successfully repelled several attacks initiated by insurgents and dislodged the insurgents from their camps within the Area of Operations (AOO) of Operation LAFIYA DOLE. Soriwei (2020), also noted that the base serves as a crucial hub for increasing COIN efforts under Operation Hadin

Kai, preventing terrorist infiltration and liberating territory from Boko Haram insurgents. The base coordinates with ground and aerial forces to conduct all-inclusive operations on the Nigerian side of the Lake Chad area.

Operational Successes and Specific Missions: The Nigerian Navy has successfully executed several missions that have degraded the capabilities of insurgent groups:

The Ruwan Kada Mission: The mission was considered the maiden national assignment of the NN's landing ship transport as between the period of March and July 2017, the navy functioned as an effective blocking force in the Lake Chad Basin during this mission, indicating their efficacy in asymmetric warfare.

Clearance of Lake Chad Islands: The navy in collaboration with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), conducted clearance operations on the islands of Lake Chad, effectively dislodging Boko Haram insurgents and ISWAP from their strongholds.

Neutralizing Advances: Research by Zubairu (2023) shows that the Navy has been rated highly effective (64.6%) in neutralizing insurgent advances and facilitating the destruction of insurgent infrastructure (53.2%).

Technological and Local Development

The Navy has also made remarkable stride in domestic platform advancement to support COIN. In 2012, the Navy took delivery of the NNS Andoni (P-100), a 31-meter Nigerian Navy Seaward Defence Boat (SDB) constructed by the naval engineers at the naval dockyard in Lagos. It was the first locally-made manufactured by the NN, marking a significant milestone in indigenous maritime capability supporting domestic security. Also, the Navy has integrated surveillance systems like Falcon Eye to improve real-time monitoring of insurgent activities along waterways.

Challenges Facing the Nigerian Navy in Counterinsurgency Operations

Despite the significant contributions of the Nigerian Navy (NN) to combating insurgency in Nigeria, the Service continues to face challenges such as operational, administrative and logistics challenges which in many ways affect the overall wellbeing and capacity of the Navy. Some of these challenges are identified and discussed as follows.

Inadequate Logistics and Specialized Equipment: One of the major challenges facing the Nigerian Navy is lack of/or inadequate specialised material handling equipment for logistics supply required for effective counterinsurgency operations. The NBLC for instance, as aptly captured by Oguntade (2018) currently lacks specialised Material Handling Equipment (MHE). These MHEs are designed to haul, unload, stow and issue materials in warehouses (Oguntade, 2018). The lack of these equipment has negatively impacted on the operational capabilities of the ratings and officers of the NBLC, with implications for efficient conduct of COIN Operations in the AOO of Operation LAFIYA DOLE.

Administrative and Operational Challenges: The administrative and operational challenges bedevilling NBLC include insufficient funding of the NBLC's administration and operations, absence of a befitting accommodation facility in the base, absence of modern and appropriate boats for COIN operations, lack of personal kit and gears and lack of special operation equipment (Soriwei, 2019). In addition, the lack of equipment gadgets such as communication set,

night vision goggles, tested armour plate and helmet needed for operations are challenges facing the counterinsurgency efforts of the navy.

Intelligence and Inter-Agency Coordination Challenges: The assymetric nature of insurgency, demands accurate and timely intelligence gathering, information sharing and well coordinated command structure. While the NN has improved in the area of surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities through systems such as Falcon Eye, the lack of adequate synergy among security agencies occasionally affect operational coordination. Udeh (2024) argues that inadequate inter-agency synergy among the Navy, Army, Air Force, and other security agencies can weaken the unity of effort needed for successful joint operations. The transnational character of insurgency within the Lake Chad Basin also makes regional intelligence cooperation under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) more critical.

Difficult Operating Environment: The geographical and environmental conditions within counterinsurgency theatres present another major challenge to naval operations. Conducive operating environment enables troops to discharge their mandate effectively and efficiently. However, the extreme nature of the weather affects the performance of men and equipment, thereby, impacting negatively on the conduct of COIN activities by NBLC in the AOO of Operation LAFIYA DOLE. For instance, Ezeoba (2018) stated that the ecological shrinkage of the Lake Chad from over 25,000 km2 has significantly impacted on the human population, livestock, fishing and crop farming activities in the Lake Chad Region. Thus, the difficult operating environment of NBLC hinders the efficiency of troops' mobility and manoeuvrability during sea patrols and offensive movements.

Cross-Border and Regional Security Challenges: The transnational nature of insurgency within the Lake Chad region poses a serious constraint on the nation's security and the efforts of the military in the counterinsurgency efforts. Insurgent groups often take advantage of porous borders and waterways across Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon to evade security operations, sustain supply networks and move fighters. This circumstances compounds military operations of a state and places greater demands on regional collaboration, joint maritime surveillance, and coordinated operational planning among member states of the MNJTF.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the findings, the paper addresses the following issues:

The Role of the Navy in National Defence

Based on the findings, it is apt to note that the navy is a specialised arms of the armed forces of Nigeria with specific responsibilities to ensure maritime defence, sea control and denial, power projection of the nation through amphibious operation, perform search and rescue missions in an event of shipwreck, and other constabulary roles. The changing nature of conventional warfare in Nigeria has also expanded their traditional responsibilities; as they are also involved in counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts.

The Relevance of the Navy in the Counterinsurgency Efforts of the Military

From the findings, the relevance of the NN in the counterinsurgency efforts lies in their successes and achievements. In the quest to combat insurgency, the navy established Special Boat Services (SBS) to address emerging unconventional threats such as insurgency, the

SBS has been involved in several internal theatres, including Operation Pulo Shield in the Niger Delta, Operation Safe Haven in Plateau State, and Operation Zaman Lafiya in the North East. The navy has also advanced the use of technology such as the integrated surveillance systems like Falcon Eye to improve real-time monitoring of insurgent activities along waterways. All these points to the relevance that the navy holds within the military force in ensuring national stability.

The Challenges of the Navy Involvement in the Counterinsurgency Operations.

From the findings, no doubt, the navy is not without challenges; and these challenges have in some majors hindered their effectiveness in the counterinsurgency efforts. Some of them include inadequate logistics and fundings, lack of synergy among various security agencies, difficult operating terrains, inadequate intelligence sharing and porous border around neighbouring countries.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Nigerian Navy, no doubt is an important aspect of the military because of the specific role they play in ensuring national defence and security. Maritime defence is the exclusive responsibility of the navy but over the time, the NN has advanced from a conventional maritime defence force into a critical component of Nigeria's counterinsurgency (COIN) architecture.

The navy has expanded its operational roles to include internal security and counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (CT-COIN) operations through the framework of the Total Spectrum Maritime Strategy (TSMS), particularly Spectrum Five. This is so because of the emerging security threats in the Nigerian political environment that demands the collaborative efforts of security operatives. The navy has contributed significantly in the fight against Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), especially within the Lake Chad Basin through maritime security operations, territorial surveillance, logistics support, amphibious missions, intelligence gathering, and joint military operations.

The establishment of NBLC in 2016 remains a major achievement in the Navy's efforts to countering insurgency. Also, the operational activities of the SBS have demonstrated the Navy's growing efficiency in amphibious combat, reconnaissance, and riverine operations within difficult terrains inaccessible to conventional land forces. Despite the successes made by the navy, the findings show that several challenges had also impeded their operational roles such as logistics and equipment limitations, difficult environmental conditions, intelligence and communication gaps, as well as the transnational nature of insurgency within the Lake Chad region. The complexity of asymmetric warfare also highlights the need for continuous modernization, inter-agency coordination, and institutional adaptation. Notwithstanding, in a nutshell, the Nigerian Navy remains an indispensable force multiplier in Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations against the previous perception that the army and the air force are the only indispensable military force in the counterinsurgency efforts.

In view of the findings, the paper recommends the following:

As a matter of national importance, the Federal Government should transparently improve the funding of the NN so as to strengthen the operational and logistical capacity of the institution. This approach will further

advance the acquisition of modern patrol boats, surveillance systems, amphibious platforms, communication infrastructure, and specialized counterinsurgency equipment.

The Ministry of Defence should strengthen the intelligence management system of the entire military formations. There should be adequate synergy and synchronization of data among the army, navy and air force to guarantee real-time information sharing, early warming mechanism and response. The ministry should also work with other sister agencies to facilitate harmonious working relationship for the defence and security of the nation.

The Nigerian Navy should increase the deployment of cutting-edge technologies such as drones, Falcon Eye surveillance systems, satellite monitoring systems, and early-warning devices to improve maritime domain awareness and real-time operational intelligence.

Regional security cooperation among member states of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), particularly Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, should be further enhanced to address the porosities around the borders that breeds the infiltration of insurgent movements across the Lake Chad region.

Counterinsurgency operations should not be strictly kinetic, rather continuous introduction of the non-kinetic approach that will accommodate the civilian population who can also help in information sharing. These can be possible through favourable civil-military relations, rebuilding trust among the people, stronger community engagements and humanitarian support to reduce the influence of insurgency in the areas.

Counterinsurgency is not an exclusive responsibility of the military. All hands must be on deck to finding lasting solutions to the menace. Therefore, the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces of Nigeria should strengthen policy development, institutional research, and strategic studies collaborations between military institutions and academic researchers to support evidence-based adaptation to the changing dynamics of insurgency and terrorism.

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