THE ARMED FORCES OF NIGERIA AND JOINT TASK FORCE OPERATIONS ACROSSNORTHERN GEO- POLITICAL ZONESIN NIGERIA, 2011-2024: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

Nigeria's Northern geo-political zones have experienced persistent security challenges since 2009, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and ethno-religious conflicts. These threats necessitated the establishment of Joint Task Force (JTF) operations led by the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) across the North-East, North-West, and North-Central zones. This study appraises the effectiveness of JTF operations HADIN KAI, SAFE HAVEN, WHIRL STROKE, and FASAN YAMMA from 2011 to 2024, examining their socio-economic impacts on affected communities. Employing qualitative analytical methods with primary and secondary sources, the study utilises thematic analysis grounded in Structural Functionalism theory. Findings reveal that JTF operations significantly degraded terrorist networks, reclaimed territories, and disrupted bandit activities, with Operation HADIN KAI liberating approximately 20 of 26 local government areas in Borno State and facilitating the surrender of over 121,000 insurgents. However, challenges persist, including substantial casualties among security personnel, with at least 454 soldiers killed between 2019 and 2025. While operations enhanced civilian protection, humanitarian relief, and economic revitalisation through stabilisation efforts and Quick Impact Projects, the overarching goal of establishing comprehensive security remains elusive. The study concludes that JTF operations are indispensable for national security but cautions that over-reliance on the AFN for Internal Security Operations poses long-term risks to their constitutional defence mandate, necessitating comprehensive reforms integrating military, socio-economic, and governance interventions for sustainable peace.

Introduction

Joint Task Force (JTF) operations represent a collaborative security framework that integrates multiple military branches and security agencies to address complex threats that transcend traditional operational boundaries. According to Gray, joint operations emerge from the recognition that modern security challenges require synchronized efforts across different domains of warfare, leveraging the comparative advantages of diverse forces to achieve unified objectives.[1] The theoretical foundation of JTF operations rests on the principle of force multiplication, where the combined capabilities of air, land, maritime, special operations, and intelligence units create synergistic effects that exceed the sum of individual contributions. Avant notes that the effectiveness of JTF operations depends significantly on command unity, interoperability, resource integration, and clearly defined rules of engagement that facilitate seamless coordination among participating agencies.[2]

Globally, JTF operations have become the preferred organisational model for addressing transnational security threats, humanitarian crises, and complex emergencies that require rapid, coordinated responses. The United States Department of Defense defines JTFs as adaptable formations established on geographical or functional bases, capable of conducting operations across the full spectrum of military activities including counterterrorism, peacekeeping, disaster response, and counterinsurgency.[3]A notable example was Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, where coalition forces operated under unified command structures to combat terrorism, and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which coordinated North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and partner nations in stabilization efforts.

Within the African continent, JTF operations have proliferated in response to diverse security threats including terrorism, insurgency, ethno-religious conflicts, resource-based violence, and transnational organized crime. The African Union's continental architecture for peace and security has increasingly relied on multinational joint forces such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) established by the Lake Chad Basin Commission countries Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon to combat Boko Haram insurgency across borders.[4] Similarly, the G5 Sahel Joint Force, comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, was created to address the expanding terrorist threats and intercommunal violence in the Sahel region, though operational challenges related to funding, equipment shortages, and political instability have limited its effectiveness.

According to Williams, African JTF operations often face unique constraints including insufficient logistics infrastructure, competing national interests among participating states, limited intelligence-sharing capabilities, and the absence of robust

[1] C.S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 127.
[2] D. Avant, "The Privatization of Security and Change in the Control of Force," *International Studies Perspectives* 5, no. 2 (2004): 153-157.
[3] United States Department of Defense, *Domestic JTF Commander Training Course Handbook*, https://info.publicintelligence.net/NG-DomesticJCTC.pdf accessed on 4 November 2025.
[4] A. Bamidele, "The Multinational Joint Task Force and the War Against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin," *African Security Review* 30, no. 1 (2021),77.

legal frameworks governing cross-border operations.[5]These operations frequently occur in fragile state contexts where weak governance, poverty, and social fragmentation complicate military efforts and necessitate comprehensive approaches that integrate security interventions with development initiatives, humanitarian assistance, and political reconciliation processes to achieve sustainable peace and stability.

In Nigeria, the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) has established multiple JTF operations across the six geo-political zones to address the country's complex and evolving security landscape characterised by terrorism, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, militancy, secessionist agitations, and other forms of violent extremism. In the North-East, Operation HADIN KAI (meaning "Coming Together" in Hausa) represents the primary counter-insurgency effort against Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), with the Theatre Command coordinating land, maritime, and air components alongside subsidiary operations numbering at least eighteen within recent operational periods.[6]

In the North-Central zone, Operation SAFE HAVEN was established to maintain peace in Plateau and Bauchi states, as well as southern parts of Kaduna state, while Operation WHIRL STROKE combats armed militias, cattle rustlers, and bandits across Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba states. Similarly, Operation FASAN YAMMA was established to tackle banditry and kidnapping in the North-West zone. According to Irabor, the AFN continually re-strategizes and adapts operational methods as threats evolve, incorporating lessons learned from field experiences, technological advancements, and international best practices.[7] The establishment of unified theatre commands reflects efforts to achieve the command unity essential for effective joint operations, while enhanced civil-military cooperation initiatives seek to build community trust, gather actionable intelligence, and facilitate humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected areas.

While existing literature acknowledges the AFN's extensive involvement in JTF operations across Nigeria's geo-political zones, significant gaps remain regarding the comprehensive socio-economic impacts of these military interventions on affected populations and regional development trajectories.

Scholars such as Udounwa and Onumajuru provide valuable insights into operational structures, tactical innovations, and military achievements in theatres like Operation HADIN KAI, yet their analyses remain predominantly focused on security metrics such as territories recaptured, insurgents neutralized, and weapons recovered without adequately examining how prolonged military operations affect local economies, agricultural productivity, educational access, healthcare delivery, and social cohesion in operational zones.[8] This research gap is particularly

[5] P.D. Williams, *War and Conflict in Africa* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 189-212.

[6] E.V. Onumajuru (ed.), *Lt Gen Faruk Yahaya: Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency Theory Meets Practice* (Abuja: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2023), 210.

[7] L.E.O. Irabor, *Contemporary Security Environment and National Development: Efforts of the Armed Forces of Nigeria* (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 2022), 16.

[8] S.E. Udounwa, *Compendium of Nigerian Army Transformation: The Buratai Years 2015-2020* (Abuja: Headquarters Nigerian Army, 2020), 22; Onumajuru, *Lt Gen Faruk Yahaya*, 210.

problematic given that the North-East zone has experienced over a decade of sustained military operations, the North-Central region faces ongoing communal conflicts despite JTF presence, and the North-West continues to witness escalating banditry and kidnapping despite military interventions, raising fundamental questions about operational effectiveness beyond tactical successes.

Furthermore, the displacement of millions of citizens into internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, the disruption of economic activities, the destruction of infrastructure, and the psychological trauma affecting entire generations demand systematic investigation to inform evidence-based policy recommendations for more holistic security approaches. This study therefore undertakes a critical appraisal of JTF operations in Nigeria's Northern geo-political zones specifically Operations HADIN KAI, SAFE HAVEN, WHIRL STROKE, and FASAN YAMMA examining not only their security achievements but also their broader socio-economic impacts.

Research Problem

Despite the significant role of JTF operations in addressing insecurity across Nigeria, particularly in the Northern geopolitical zones, there remains limited knowledge of their comprehensive impact. While the AFN have led major JTF operations such as HADIN KAI, SAFE HAVEN, WHIRL STROKE, and FASAN YAMMA, existing studies largely focus on operational strategies and military successes, with minimal attention to the socio-economic consequences of these operations.

This gap in knowledge raises questions about the overall effectiveness, sustainability, and broader impact of JTF operations in enhancing national security and development in the Northern geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Against this backdrop, this article seeks to examine the socio- economic impact of JTF operation across the three geo-political zones in Northern Nigeria, namely, North-East, North-West, and North-Central zones from 2011 to 2024.The North-East geopolitical zone consists of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe states. The North-West geopolitical zone on the other hand consists of Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara states, while the North Central geo-political zone comprises Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

Research Objective

The study aims to appraise the effectiveness of Joint Task Force (JTF) operations in the Northern geopolitical zones of Nigeria, from 2011 to 2024, with the following objectives: to analyse the approaches of Operations HADIN KAI, SAFE HAVEN, WHIRL STROKE, and FASAN YAMMA, as well as to assess their impact on the socio-economic conditions of affected communities in the area.

Theoretical framework

This study anchors its analysis in Structural Functionalism, as developed by Talcott Parsons (1951) and refined by Robert K. Merton (1968)[9] to interpret Joint Task Force (JTF) operations in Northern Nigeria as critical mechanisms for restoring and maintaining societal equilibrium. The theory conceptualises Nigerian society as a complex system of interdependent institutions, political, economic, security, legal, religious, and cultural, each performing specialised functions to ensure stability. Persistent insurgency, banditry, and communal clashes represent severe dysfunctions that overwhelm civilian security institutions (especially the police), creating a functional vacuum in the Integration

[9]Turner & S. Bryan, *Talcott Parsons: The Social System (*Cambridge: Routledge: 1951)

(I) and Goal Attainment (G) subsystems of Parsons' AGIL paradigm.[10]

JTF operations (HADIN KAI, WHIRL STROKE, SAFE HAVEN, FASAN YAMMA) therefore emerge as compensatory mechanisms, temporarily reallocating the military to perform internal security roles, thereby restoring order, reopening economic corridors, enabling displaced populations to return, and reactivating social institutions. Earlier studies largely applied the theory to explain state stability, military cohesion, or macro-level governance dynamics. In contrast, this paper employs the theory to examine the multi-dimensional impacts of JTF operations; military, socio-economic, humanitarian, and institutional. Using Robert K. Merton's manifest and latent functions, the intended (manifest) outcomes include degradation of terrorist and bandit networks, while unintended (latent) positive functions encompass enhanced community confidence and humanitarian access; however, latent dysfunctions such as military overstretch, erosion of police capacity, civil–military frictions, and prolonged militarisation of civic space simultaneously strain the broader system.

Although Structural Functionalism has been criticised for its conservative bias, overemphasis on stability at the expense of change, and inability to adequately explain power imbalances or structural inequalities that fuel violence in the first instance, its adoption remains strongly justified in this study. The theory's strength lies in its systematic explanation of how JTF interventions serve as adaptive responses that prevent total societal collapse across Northern Nigeria, illuminating both the multi-dimensional contributions (security, economic revival, social reintegration) and the institutional strains revealed by prolonged military engagement in domestic policing. By combining Parsons' AGIL scheme with Merton's nuanced concepts of manifest/latent functions and dysfunctions, the framework offers a balanced, empirically grounded lens that not only accounts for operational successes but also diagnoses systemic weaknesses in Nigeria's security governance architecture, making it the most appropriate theory for analysing the stabilising yet transformative role of Joint Task Forces within the broader social system.

JTF Operations in Northern Geo-Political Zones Since 2009

The AFN in collaboration with the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies have been involved in series of ISOunder various Joint Task Forces (JTF) systems.The severity of internal crisis has overtime determined the approach adopted to prosecute the operation or form joint task force in which case all the services –the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Air Force- including Nigerian Police Force and other relevant paramilitary organisations. According to Petinrincited in Omeje, "only the most simple of operations can be single service but once the operation becomes complex, then you need to get all the services involved and that is why we have Joint Task Forces to tackle very serious issues, if they are simple things then we will use individual services for such operations."[11]This statement implies that

[10] S. McLeod, & O. Guy-Evans, *Manifest and Latent Functions in Sociology: Definition & Examples*, https://www.simplypsychology.org/manifest-latent-function.html accessed on 1 December 2025.

[11] C. Omeje, "Focus on Joint Task Forces: A Prologue" *Nigerian Defence Headquarters Magazine*, (2012), 22.

implies complex operations require a joint force, as one service could be limited in one way or the order.As with any other military operations, JTFs are usually established with clear-cut mandates, Rules of Engagement (ROE) and Areas of Responsibility (AOR). The mandate of a particular JTF might vary from one another, but all are set up with the goal of restoring law and order in the Nigerian society. Since 2011, JTF operations havebeen conducted in different theatre of operations across the three geo- political zones in Northern Nigeria. These operationsinclude, OperationHadin Kai, Operation Fasan Yamma, Operation Safe Haven as well as OperationWhirl Stroke.In this section, a brief overview of the various operations undertaken will be provided.

Operation Safe Haven

Operation Safe Haven was established as a Special Task Force (STF) by the military on 21 January 2010, to curtail the reoccurring crisis in Jos and its environs.Prior to the creation of the STF Operation SAFE Havenon 21 Jan 10, the round of crisis that broke out on 17 January 2010 in Jos and environs had reached a height that has never been witnessed before.[12] The killings, maiming and burnings/arson could just be imagined. Since the end of Military Rule in 1999, Plateau State has been a theatre for ethnic and sectarian violence of different degrees. It became glaring that the magnitude of the violence could not be fully curtailed by the Police, which occasioned the deployment of the military January 2010 to take full control of the security situation in the State. The STF was an inclusion of members of the Armed Forces and the NPF and later the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and the Department of State Services (DSS). The task force was given the mandate to restore law and order in Jos Metropolis, the whole of Plateau and parts of Bauchi States.

By September 2011, the Federal Government upgraded the STF to a Joint Task Force (JTF) to cover Plateau, Bauchi and parts of Kaduna States to address incessant ethno-religious and herder- farmers clashes. The JTF comprised of the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Navy, the Nigerian Air Force, Police, NSCDC and DSS, the Police component consists of the Mobile Police and the Special Investigation Bureau (SIB) and covers Plateau, Bauchi, and parts of southern Kaduna. The Area of Responsibility (AOR) of the operation wassubsequently expanded to cover the 3,409 Square Kilometres of Bogoro and Tafawa Balewa LGAs of Bauchi State on 12 April 2013, and the 8,880 Square Kilometres of Southern Kaduna covering Kaura, Kauru, ZangonKataf, Jema'a and Sanga LGAs on 16 June 2018. Operation Safe Haven thus covered a total landmass of 43,202 Square Kilometres, the size of Denmark which has a landmass of 42,434 Square Kilometres.[13]Operation hinged on ensuring aggressive and decisive posture of troops to conduct military operations and carry out extensive non-kinetic activities across the theatre to restore the troop's confidence to the host communities.[14]

[12]T. Isa "A Brief on the Activities of Special Task Force Operation Safe Haven" *Nigerian Defence Headquarters Magazine*, (2012),26.

[13]A.M. Bello, "Junior Leadership in Internal Security Operations: Farmers/Herdsmen Conflict in Perspective" (Presentation to Passing Out Cadets of 66 Regular Course Army/ Short Service Course 45 & 67 Regular Course Navy/Air Force
, at Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, 2019).

[14]A.M. Bello, "Junior Leadership in …

On 29 August 2025, Operation Safe Haven was renamed as Joint Task Force Operation Enduring Peace (JTF OPEP) by the then Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Christopher Gwabin Musa. This was aimed at strengthening the mandate of the military in the area. While Operation SAFE HAVEN had contributed significantly to stabilising communities affected by years of violent conflict, the new structure was designed to focus on achieving more sustainable security. According to General Musa, "security challenges require more than immediate interventions but sustainable solutions that integrate military, political, judicial and community efforts."[15] The Defence Headquarters stated that Operation Enduring Peace will prioritize inter-agency collaboration, intelligence-led strategies, and stronger community engagement in tackling security challenges across the Joint Operations Area.[16]

Operation Hadin Kai

Operation Hadin Kai is a successor to a number of operations in Nigeria's North East Geo-political zone, executed by the Nigerian Military and other security agencies to combat the terrorist activities of Boko Haram and later the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP) in some North East Geo- Political states, notably Borno and Yobe states, which has resulted in destruction of lives and property, as well as widespread displacement of the civilian populace from their local communities leading to a significant increase in the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the area. Initial operations to curtail the violent activities in the area commenced with the setting up of Operation Flush Out I in 1998 by the Borno State Government as an internal security operation against bandits that usually attacked traders, commuters and businessmen and businesswomen in the state.

In 2009, following rapid increase in the spread of Boko Haram ideologies, which become more violent, the Borno State Government then initiated Operation Flush Out II to give more bit to the internal security architecture. The military component of the operation was expanded and the entire operation was placed under a military commander, Colonel BI Ahanotu.[17]On 27 July 2009, troops of Operation Flush Out II arrested Boko Haram leader, Mohammed Yusuf and handed him over to the Police, but was declared dead by the Police after a few days in custody. This further spurred more round of violent attacks from the group targeting citizens, and security forces in Borno. The continuous attacks from the group and the deteriorating situation in the area, compelled the Federal Government to disband Operation Flush Out II and launchJTF Operations Operation Restore Order I, on 12June 2011. Its main objective was to defeat Boko Haram terrorists and insurgents in all their strongholds, restore peace, and facilitate law and order in Borno and Yobe States.[18]Nigerian Armed Forces, Nigerian

[15]F. Oyinlola, " **CDS rebrands Operation Safe Haven as 'Enduring Peace" https://guardian.ng/news/cds-rebrands-operation-safe-haven-as-enduring-peace/ accessed on 3 November 2025.**

[16] C. Godfrey, "Operation Enduring Peace Launched: Military Unveils New Era of Security in Plateau

" https://newsdiaryonline.com/operation-enduring-peace-launched-military-unveils-new-era-of-security-in-plateau/ accessed on 3 November 2025.

[17]E.V. Onumajuru (ed.) *Lt Gen Faruk Yahaya: Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency Theory Meets Practice*, (Abuja: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2023,) 177.

[18]E.V. Onumajuru (ed.) *Lt Gen Faruk Yahaya: Counter Terrorism and Counter…* 179

Police Force (NPF), Department of State Security (DSS), Nigerian Custom Service (NCS), Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) and Defence Intelligence Agencies (DIA). The JTF Operation RestoreOrder I was organised into components which include, Land, Maritime and Air Components. The Continental General Staff System was applied in the Headquarters JTF. The HQ JTF had a Joint Intelligence and Interrogation Team made up of military intelligence, DSS and Criminal Investigation Department of NPF. [19]

Later in the year 2011, Operation Restore Order II and III were launched to provide security against Boko Haram in Bauchi and Yobe states respectively. [20] The rationale behind this decision hinged on the complexity of the crisis in Borno State, which compelled the government to enhance the operation to be more effective and have wider coverage up to Yobe State. Operation Restore Order was therefore scaled up to Operation Restore Order II to cover both Borno and Yobe States. However, it was soon observed that the situation in both states soon went out of control of Operation Restore Order II. Accordingly, Operation Restore Order III was established by merging both Operation Restore Order I and Operation Restore Order II as a more potent response to Boko Haram terrorism. [21]

Operation Restore order achieved relative successes, as Boko Haram tactics took the dimension of conducting raids, assaults, and ambushes against mostly poorly defended targets. These attacks were mostly directed towards civilians deemed collaborators or critics, security personnel, government and religious leaders, critical infrastructure, and banks and businesses for re-supply purposes. The JTF made attempts at restoring normalcy to an extent, as Maiduguri and its environs became untenable for the Boko Haram terrorists, who then sort refuge in the Sambisa Forest where they coordinated attacks, as the security in the area continued to deteriorate.[22]Despite the successes achieved, Operation Restore Order recorded a major setback with the attack on Bama on 7 May 2013. The terrorists attacked key points in the town, including the police barracks, and 202 Tank Battalion in Kur Mohammed Cantonment, Bama. [23] Consequently, the operation was reviewed and replaced with another operation, codenamed Operation Boyona.

Following escalation of violence and wanton destruction of lives and property in the NorthEastern part of the country by the Boko Haram insurgents, the then Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Ola Sa'ad Ibrahim, was directed by former President Goodluck Jonathan to restore law and order in the affected states. On May 14, 2013, the Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in the three worst-affected states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, and expanded the JTF operations into

[19]H.I. Mohammed "X-Raying the Activities of Operation Restore Order in Borno State" (*Nigerian Defence Magazine, 2012),*28.

[20]C.C.C. Osakwe, &B.J. Audu,"Nigeria's Military Operations in the Lake Chad Basin",*Journal of Defense Management*, Volume 7, Issue 1, (2017), 2.

[21]E.V. Onumajuru (ed.) *Lt Gen Faruk Yahaya: Counter Terrorism and Counter…* 180

[22]Nigerian Army TRADOC G-2 ACE, *Threat Tactics Report: Boko Haram*, (Minna: TRADOC, 2015),3.

[23]E.V. Onumajuru (ed.) *Lt Gen Faruk Yahaya: Counter Terrorism and Counter…* 181

Operation Boyona.[24] Operation BOYONA thus succeeded Operation Restore Order I, II, and III. The acronym BOYONA stood for Borno, Yobe, Nasarawa and Adamawa Operation. BOYONA was initially conceived to deal with the deteriorating security situation in these states, but was retained for the operation in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa State. The mandate of BOYONA was to destroy terrorist camps/bases, fish out perpetrators and bring them to justice, which was substantially achieved with the destruction of terrorists' strongholds and bases mostly located in the desert borders of Chad and Niger Republics.[25] In line with the directives, troops made up of men of the Armed Forces, the Police and other Security agencies were deployed under operation BOYONA to secure the nation's borders and assert the territorial integrity of the nation.

Troops of Operation BOYONA had serious and frontal encounters and confrontations with Boko Haram particularly in Monguno, Bama, Gwoza, Gubio, Damboa, Konduga and Marte. The intensity of the operation and the casualties suffered by Boko Haram insurgents led to their manoeuvring through the borders into neighbouring Niger Republic, Chad, and the Republic of Cameroon.[26]A review of Operation BOYONA necessitated the need to adjust the modus operandi. Premised on the aftermath of the review, Operation BOYONA was later renamed Operation Zaman Lafiya, culminating into the establishment of 7 Division Nigerian Army, with its Headquarters located in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno Stateon 19 August 2013. Zaman Lafiya is a Hausa phrase, which simply means live in peace or peaceful coexistence. The JTF Operation Zaman Lafiya was organised and structured in the form of close support Command.

Upon the appointment of Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai as Chief of Army Staff (coas) in July 2015, operation Zaman Lafiya gave way to Lafiya Dole, meaning 'Peace by Force'. This was aimed at signalling the commencement of a more offensive posture in the theatre of operations as well as sending a message to insurgents that they could not derail the wheel of peace in the region.[27]The Operation was also renamed Operation Lafiya Dole to engender more commitment and resolve to defeat the Boko Haram Terrorist. In addition, the Command-and-Control Centre was moved to Maiduguri.[28] The Operation Lafiya Dole engagements in the theatre of operation were facilitated and coordinated by the Theatre Command in Maiduguri to dominate the entire area of operations and to facilitate the effective flow of logistics support to formations or units.

Operation Lafiya Dole recorded significantly weakened Boko Haram's capacity to hold territories in the North East of Nigeria. These operations effectively weakened Boko Haram

[24]M. Abdullahi, "Army Renames Counter Insurgency Campaign" https://humanglemedia.com/nigerian-army-renames-counter-insurgency-campaign/ accessed on 20 June 2024.

[25]C.C.C. Osakwe, & B.J. Audu, "Nigeria's Military Operations …3

[26]E.V. Onumajuru (ed.) *Lt Gen Faruk* … 181

[27] S.E. Udounwa, *Compendium of Nigerian Army Transformation: The Buratai Years 2015- 2020*, (Abuja: Headquarters Nigerian Army, 2020,) 22.

[28] MWO. Angoe, "Giant Strides of Chief of Defence Staff Under Buhari" (*Nigerian Defence Magazine, 2018),*83.

through sustained airstrikes, artillery bombardments, and ground assaults targeting insurgent enclaves in Sambisa Forest, Lake Chad fringes, and other strategic locations. Consequently, the insurgents' territorial control was substantially reduced, and several Local Government Areas (LGAs) previously under their influence were liberated. Between January 2015 and May 2018, Nigerian forces neutralized approximately 4,609 Boko Haram fighters, arrested 4,876 others, and recovered over 2,000 weapons along with 116,714 rounds of ammunition.[29] These achievements, coupled with the restoration of relative stability in liberated areas, underscored the operational effectiveness of the Nigerian military.The operation was renamed OperationHadin Kai, in April 2021 by the then coas, Lieutenant General Ibrahim Attahiru. The rationale behind the renaming of the operation hinged on the belief of the COAS that the complete defeat of insurgency is a process that requires the participation of the entire nation using all elements of national power.

Operation Hadin Kai adopted a combination of focused kinetic and non-kinetic operations coupled with timely review of strategies to record significant achievements across the North East Theatre. Within the period under review, JTF Operation Hadin Kai conducted numerous clearance patrols, ambushes, offensive clearance operations as well as substantial air operations in support of ground troops which significantly degraded the capacity of Boko Haram terrorists / ISWAP insurgents and denied them freedom of action. The success story of these massive military operations resulted in the killing of many Boko Haram /ISWAP elements, arrest of suspects, rescue of victims and surrendering of insurgents and their families to gallant troops of AFN.[30]Despite the series of changes regarding the codename of the operation, its mandate remains the degradation of terrorists in the North-East geo-political zone.

Operation Whirl Stroke

Operation Whirl Stroke has its roots in Operation Ayem Akpatuma (Cat Race), which was launched by the Nigerian Army on February 7, 2018, with the mandate to quell farmer-herder violence, kidnappings, and other criminal activities across states in the Middle Belt region outside of Operation Safe Haven's scope. It was 44-day exercise from February 15 to March 31, 2018. The operation which covered Benue, Kaduna, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, and Taraba states, involved raids on communities, groups, and persons suspected of violence or criminal activity; cordon and search operations; and checkpoints.[31]By May 2018, Operation Whirl Stroke was launched by the Defence Headquarters as a replacement for Operation Ayem Akpatuma to counter armed herdsmen and militia groups operating inBenue, Nasarawa, and Taraba states. This became necessary following the loss of many lives and property, orchestrated by killer herdsmen in states across the country. A year after is establishment, the operation recovered 174 assorted weapons, over 3,000 rounds of ammunition, arrested over 167 suspects, while 139 bandits were killed during encounters with troops.[32] A breakdown of the recovered

[29]E.V. Onumajuru (ed.) *Lt Gen Faruk Yahaya: Counter Terrorism and Counter…* 202

[30] T.I. Gusau, & ET Iheoma "Defence Headquarters: The Journey So Far," *Nigerian Defence Magazine, (*2023*),*37.

[31] (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin,2018: 14)

[32] A. Yekini, "People who pay ransoms to kidnappers complicate our job" https://punchng.com/people-who-pay-ransoms-to-kidnappers-complicate-our-job-yekini-operation-whirl-stroke-

weapons revealed that 125 assorted weapons were recovered from Nasarawa State, in addition to about 2,235 ammunition from the state. Furthermore, no fewer than 52 people were arrested and 41 persons killed during our numerous operations in Nasarawa State. [33]This shows that the troops recovered more weapons in Nasarawa than Benue and Taraba combined.

At inception, the operation comprised of 6 sectors scattered all over Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba states. In 2023, five years after the launch of the operation, it was restructured into three sectors, namely Sector 1 in Benue State, Sector II in Nasarawa State, and Sector III in Taraba State. Since its establishment, Within the period under review, troops of Operation WHIRL STROKE conducted series of operations which interdicted and killed several criminal elements in Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States. The operation also led to the arrest of suspects and recovery of various types of firearms and ammunition.Operation Whirl Stroke has since then achieved series of positive results in Taraba, Benue and Nasarawa states. Operation Whirl Stroke has reportedly apprehended suspected armed attackers and destroyed an alleged criminal's camp close to Benue River.

Operation Fasan Yamma

Operation Fansan Yammahas an AOR which covers the entire states in the North West Geo-Political zone and parts of the North Central Geo- Political zone. It was preceded by two major operations in the North West, Operations Hadarin Daji and Whirl Punch. Operation Hadarin Daji, which loosely translates to 'disruption' in the Hausa language, was launched on 10 May 2019, as a direct result of the military's quest to disrupt the threat of armed banditry in parts of Northwest Nigeria. Operation Hadarin Dajin was established to subsume other operations with similar objectives such as Operation Kunama III, Operation Diran Mikiya, Operation Kashe Mugu, and Operation Puff Adar, by the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Air Force, and the Nigerian Police Force, respectively.[34] Operation HadarinDaji was therefore established to bring other independent operations by various components of Nigeria's security services in the region, under a unified front. From its inception, Operation Hadarin Daji's AOR included Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi states, and is broadly divided into 12 sectors to ensure effective command and control.[35]The headquarters of the operationwas in Sokoto.

Operation Whirl Punch on the other hand was established in 2018 to combat armed banditry, cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery and other form of criminality along Kaduna - Birnin Gwari and its environs. Under Operation WHIRL PUNCH, 1 Division Nigerian Army was tasked to provide security and restore normalcy along Kaduna – Abuja

commander/ accessed on 4 November 2025.

[33] A. Yekini, "People who pay ransoms to kidnappers complicate our job" https://punchng.com/people-who-pay-ransoms-to-kidnappers-complicate-our-job-yekini-operation-whirl-stroke-commander/ accessed on 4 November 2025.

[34]F. Aina, J.S. Ojo, & Soyewale "Shock and awe: Military response to armed banditry and the prospects of internal security operations in Northwest Nigeria" https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10246029.2023.2246432?scroll=top&needAccess=true accessed on 4 November 2025.

[35]F. Aina, J.S. Ojo, & Soyewale "Shock and awe: Military…

Expressway and Birnin Gwari and its environs as well as Niger State, which were hitherto devastated by the activities of bandits, kidnappers, armed robbers and cattle rustlers.[36] Operation WHIRL PUNCH operating in Kaduna and Niger States axis conducted several raids/ offensive clearance operations and air operations in support of ground troops. So far, during the highly successful operation, several bandits were neutralized and others arrested. Civilians were also rescued.To complement the efforts of HADARIN DAJI, and WHIRL PUNCH, Operation THUNDER STRIKE was also established, as a result of the Kaduna-Abuja train attack on 28 March 2022 and increased activities of bandits and terrorists in parts of Kaduna and Niger states.

In September 2024, the then Chief of Defence Staff launched a new operation "Fasan Yamma," which literally means "Salvage the West" by collapsing previous operations, such as Operation 'Hadarin Daji' and Whirl Punch, in a single theatre to improve coordination and effectiveness in fighting organised criminal networks. The decision to harmonise the two JTF operations was driven by the observation that during the earlier operations Whirl Punch and Hadarin Daji, 1 Division and 8 Division of the Nigerian Army had been operating independently. That separation allowed criminal elements to evade pressure by crossing between the two theatres: when one side became active, the enemy simply slipped into the other and found sanctuary. According to Musa, whenever operations ceased in a theatre, they returned, therefore, it became necessary to harmonize the efforts of the Divisions and all other formations involved to achieve meaningful progress.[37]It, therefore, became necessary to synergize efforts and resources, leading to the merger of various operations in the zone and the establishment of Operation FANSAN YAMMA, like Operation HADIN KAI.

Impact of JTF Operations in Northern Geo- Political Zones

The impacts of the JTF Operations in geo-political zones in Northern Nigeria can be measured in social and economic dimensions of the area in question. In this section, highlight will be provided on the impact of the involvement of the AFN in JTF Operations across the areas.

Firstly, JTF Operations have been instrumental in addressing internal conflicts and insurgencies. For instance, JTF Operation HADIN KAI led to the reclamation of about 20 out of 26 local government areas in Borno State between 2015 and 2020, which were earlier occupied by terrorists in the North East Geo- Political Zone.[38]In 2024, kinetic operations in the area led to the neutralization of over 567 JAS/ISWAP terrorists, recovery of 492 assorted weapons and recovery of 10,714 assorted ammunition.Additionally, Operation Hadin KAI was also able to recover several vehicles from the Timbuktu Triangle and

[36]A.C. Godwin "Defence Headquarters gives update on 'Operation WHIRL PUNCH" https://dailypost.ng/2018/11/19/defence-headquarters-gives-update-operation-whirl-punch/ accessed on 4 November 2025.

[37]C.G. Musa, "Strengthening the Armed Forces of Nigeria for National Security and Development" (Presentation to Participants of National Defence College Course 33
, at National Defence College, Abuja, 28 January 2025).

[38] R.O. Bankole, "The Role of the Military In Internal Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding,"(Presentation to Participants of National Defence College Course 33, at National Defence College, Abuja, March 2025).

Sambisa Forest, which included 1 x MOWAG APC, 1 x Spartan APC, 1 x Camel MRAP, 1 x Proforce MRAP, 1 x Panhard VBL, 2 x Hilux vehicles, 1 x Lowbed, 3 x Canter trucks and 3 x Tractors among others.[39] The Theatre was also able to rescue 2,225 civilians from terrorists' enclaves.[40]In addition to this, by December 2024, efforts of troops of Operation HADIN KAI resulted in the mass surrender of over 121,000 terrorists and their families since the surrender process began in July 2021.[41]In the year 2024 alone, a total of over 20,000 fighters and their family members surrendered to troops.[42]JTF Operations SAFE HAVEN, WHIRL STROKE and FASAN YAMMA have also supported civil authorities in maintaining law and order in their theatres of operations. Their interventions have markedly reduced major attacks, kidnappings, and banditry, thereby improving overall security. In 2004, Operation Whirl Stroke conducted several offensive operations across Benue, Nasarawa and Taraba States, destroying 32 bandit camps, arresting 541 suspects-including 2 illegal arms manufacturers and 15 gunrunners and recovered 141 weapons and 3,3885 rounds of ammunition.[43]

In Benue State, operations in hotspots such as Katsina-Ala and Guma dismantled criminal hideouts, neutralized key bandit leaders, and disrupted established kidnapping networks, particularly along the Makurdi–Naka corridor.[44]Irrespective of these positives, armed herdsmen continue to sack various communities, especially in Benue State. The number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in IDP camps has also continually been on the increase in Benue state. Similarly, in Plateau State, Operation Safe Haven activities in Jos and Riyom, resulted in the recovery of illegal firearms and the arrest of individuals involved in violent clashes.[45]In Kaduna State, the activities of Operation Fasan Yamma led to the decrease of incidence of highway ambushes along the famous Abuja- Kaduna highway, making travel considerably safer for residents. Specific gains made by the Operation Fansan YAMMA include reduction in armed banditry and kidnapping, as well as domination of the Joint Operations Areas through the conduct of simultaneous dry season operations in the North- West Geo-Political Zone. This resulted in the elimination of over 7 key bandit leaders in the North-West

[39] W. Shaibu "Insurgency and National Security: An Appraisal of Operation Hadin Kai" (Presentation to Participants of National Defence College Course 33, at National Defence College, Abuja, March 2025).

[40] W. Shaibu, "Insurgency and National Security…"

[41] C.G. Musa, "Strengthening the Armed Forces of Nigeria for National Security and Development" (Presentation to Participants of National Defence College Course 33
, at National Defence College, Abuja, 28 January 2025).

[42] O.O. Oluyede, "Combatting Asymmetric Threats to National Security in Nigeria: The Nigerian Army in Perspective" (Presentation to Participants of National Defence College Course 33, at National Defence College, Abuja, 29 January 2025).

[43] Presentation by Operation Whirl Stroke 20 February 2025

[44] S. Agada, and C.N. Okereke (eds.) *Report of the Field Research on the Impact of ongoing Joint Task Forces Operations on the Socio- Economic Development of Geo-Political Zones in Nigeria*, (Abuja: National Defence College, 2025), 24.

[45] S. Agada, and C.N. Okereke (eds.) *Report of the…*

in January 2025 alone.[46]Collectively, these efforts have strengthened the security landscape in the North-East, North West and North Central Geo-political Zones.

Secondly, JTF Operations have also facilitated economic activities in operational theatres by supporting the return of displaced persons. For instance, in the North- East Geo- Political Zone, through the conduct of stabilization operations. Stabilization operations entail the painstaking scanning of displaced communities for IEDs and other unexploded ordnances, the construction of field defences and the provision of security for such communities to aid the return of displaced communities. In 2024, the successful conduct of stabilization operations at Kukawa and Mairari led to the return of over 5,000 displaced persons to their ancestral homes.[47]This provided an avenue for economic activities to pick up in these towns, thereby enhancing the standard of living of the locals and renewed source of livelihood.

Another impactof JTF operations is in execution of quick impact projects. In a bid to foster good relationships with host communities, JTF commanders embark on Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) within their respective Areas of Operation. For instance, 7 Division Nigerian Army provides free medical treatment and consultations to local communities in collaboration with relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the State Government. Additionally, the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Air Force have been providing medical outreach services in IDPs camps and communities liberated from Boko Haram and bandits in the North East and North West zones of the country.[48] Furthermore, the AFN refurbished the studio complex and installed a 40KVA generator to support the operations of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Maiduguri station. This was aimed at improving the reach of the station to air its programmes beyond the North-East zone.[49]

JTF Operations in the zones in question have also created safe zones for the delivery of humanitarian aids to IDPs. The military has provided security and logistical support for IDP camps, as well as food, medical care, and shelter. In the JTF theatres of operations, the AFN has also provided emergency relief during natural disasters such as flooding, by airlifting of flood victims, notably in Borno State in September 2024. Through the Nigerian Air Force's airlift operations, tons of relief materials were delivered to affected communities.[50]

It is worthy to not that JTF operations in Nigeria, especially in Northern Geo-political zones have come with a price, as the AFN and other security agencies have lost a lot of officers across various operational theatres. A report by premium times, stated that at least 454 Nigerian soldiers were killed in ambushes across the country between 2019 and 2025. According to the report, the worst-affected states cut across the North-east states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe and the North-

[46]C.G. Musa, "Strengthening the Armed Forces of Nigeria for National Security and Development" (Presentation to Participants of National Defence College Course 33
, at National Defence College, Abuja, 28 January 2025).
[47]W. Shaibu, "Insurgency and National Security…"

[48] L.E.O. Irabor, "The Military and National Security in the Contemporary Security Environment: The Armed Forces of Nigeria in Perspective," (Presentation to Participants of National Defence College Course 31, at National Defence College, Abuja, 23 February 2023).
[49]L.E.O. Irabor, "The Military and…
[50] R.O. Bankole, "The Role of the…

west states, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara, with additional incidents recorded in Benue, Kogi and Niger, and occasional cases reported in parts of the southern Nigeria such as Abia, Delta, Imo and Rivers. [51] While it is difficult to ascertain the exact figure of fatalities on the side of JTF Forces, it remains a fact that a significant number of personnels have lost their lives across various theatres, which has negatively affected the country's national security.

Discussion of Findings

Operational Effectiveness of JTF Operations

The analysis of Joint Task Force (JTF) operations, particularly Operation HADIN KAI, highlights significant achievements in counter-insurgency efforts within Nigeria's North-East geopolitical zone. Between 2015 and 2020, approximately 20 of 26 local government areas in Borno State were reclaimed from terrorist control, demonstrating the JTF's operational capability to regain and maintain territorial control. In 2024, kinetic operations led to the neutralization of over 567 JAS/ISWAP terrorists and the recovery of 492 assorted weapons and numerous armoured vehicles, significantly disrupting insurgent logistics. The voluntary surrender of over 121,000 terrorists and their families since July 2021 further indicates the effectiveness of psychological operations and strategic incentives for compliance. Operations in other zones, including SAFE HAVEN, WHIRL STROKE, and FASAN YAMMA, contributed to the reduction of kidnappings, armed banditry, and highway ambushes, thereby enhancing civilian security and stability. JTF have thus been effective in reclaiming territories, dismantling insurgent networks, and reducing violent crime, though effectiveness varies across regions.

Impact on Civilian Security and Humanitarian Relief

JTF operations have played a crucial role in protecting civilians and facilitating humanitarian assistance. Over 2,225 civilians were rescued from terrorist enclaves, while the establishment of secure zones enabled the provision of food, medical care, and shelter to internally displaced persons (IDPs). Additionally, emergency airlift operations during floods in Borno State in 2024 exemplify the JTF's capacity to provide rapid humanitarian response. Therefore, beyond military objectives, JTF operations have significantly enhanced civilian protection and the delivery of humanitarian aid, fostering safer and more stable living conditions.

Socio-Economic Impacts

The return of displaced persons and the implementation of Quick Impact Projects(QIPs) have facilitated socio-economic recovery in liberated communities. Stabilization operations in Kukawa and Mairari enabled over 5,000 displaced individuals to return home, supporting the resumption of agricultural and commercial activities. Community-focused initiatives, such as medical outreach programs and the refurbishment of local media facilities, further strengthened social infrastructure and public confidence. In essence, JTF operations have

[51] F. Ogunrinde, "Nigeria lost 454 soldiers to ambushes between 2019 and 2025" Premium Times https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/837042-nigeria-lost-454-soldiers-to-ambushes-between-2019-and-2025-report.html?fbclid=IwdGRzaAOMV55jbGNrA4xXgmV4dG4DYWVtAjExAHNydGMGYXBwX2lkDDM1MDY4NTUzMTcyOAABHpItZY21MAzCzf8zv56U-tAgPspTBN8dNOcjxzTWRphG6gmmrNrwwuheHsNB_aem_2xLs7xxDsGZmsVOWhBJgIQ&sfnsn=scwspwa accessed 21 November 2025.

contributed to economic revitalization and community stabilization, underscoring the multi-dimensional impact of military interventions.

Human Cost and Operational Challenges

Despite operational successes, JTF operations have incurred significant human and strategic costs. Reports indicate at least 454 Nigerian soldiers were killed in ambushes between 2019 and 2025, particularly in high-risk zones of the North-East and North-West. These losses not only impact operational capacity but also present challenges for long-term sustainability and morale. Additionally, insurgents' adaptive tactics continue to pose persistent threats, requiring continuous operational innovation. The substantial human cost and evolving security threats highlight vulnerabilities in sustaining long-term gains and necessitate improved force protection measures and strategic planning.

Overall, JTF operations have enhanced security, promoted humanitarian support, and fostered socio-economic recovery across Nigeria's North-East, North-West, and North-Central zones. However, sustaining these achievements requires addressing high operational costs, ongoing insurgent threats, and comprehensive reintegration strategies for surrendered fighters and affected communities. Summarily, JTF operations in Nigeria exemplify a multi-dimensional approach to national security, integrating military, humanitarian, and socio-economic interventions. Nonetheless, long-term stability depends on complementing kinetic operations with non-kinetic strategies, including community engagement, intelligence-led operations, and socio-economic development programs.

Conclusion

Joint Task Force operations have become indispensable to Nigeria's multifaceted approach in addressing the complex and evolving security challenges across the Northern geopolitical zones from 2011 to 2024. This appraisal of Operations HADIN KAI, SAFE HAVEN, WHIRL STROKE, and FASAN YAMMA demonstrates that multi-agency responses have achieved measurable successes in territorial reclamation, degradation of terrorist networks, reduction of armed banditry, and facilitation of humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected communities. Anchored on Structural Functionalism Theory, the study establishes that security institutions function as interdependent components within Nigeria's broader societal system, where effectiveness depends on synchronized performance of assigned roles by the Armed Forces of Nigeria, Nigerian Police Force, and other agencies. However, despite operational gains including the surrender of over 121,000 insurgents, rescue of thousands of civilians, and return of displaced persons to liberated communities, systemic challenges persist. The substantial human cost with at least 454 military personnel killed between 2019 and 2025 alongside continuous insurgent adaptation and the over-reliance on the military for internal security operations, raises critical sustainability concerns. Enhancing long-term impact requires continuous adaptation of military strategies, improved interagency coordination, adequate resource allocation, comprehensive reintegration programs for surrendered combatants, and deliberate integration of socio-economic development and peacebuilding initiatives that address root causes of insecurity beyond kinetic interventions.