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Military Force and Evolution of Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria, 2009-2025: A Historical Assessment of Successes, Challenges and Lessons

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the evolution of Nigeria's military counter-terrorism campaign between 2009 and 2025, with particular attention to the emergence of Boko Haram, the adaptation of military strategies, and the outcomes of successive counter-insurgency operations. Adopting a historical approach, the study evaluates the successes, persistent challenges, and key lessons arising from Nigeria's response to terrorism. It argues that while the Armed Forces of Nigeria achieved notable successes through major offensives, the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), improved intelligence coordination, and the recovery of territories once occupied by insurgents, terrorism has persisted because of evolving militant tactics, weak governance, inadequate logistics, porous borders, and socio-economic grievances. The scope of the study covers the period from the 2009 Boko Haram uprising to 2025, focusing primarily on North-Eastern Nigeria while considering regional security cooperation within the Lake Chad Basin. The methodology is qualitative and historical, relying on documentary sources, including government reports, scholarly publications, policy documents, and credible international security reports. The study concludes that effective counter-terrorism in Nigeria requires sustained military professionalism, intelligence-driven operations, regional collaboration, community engagement, and comprehensive socio-economic reforms to achieve enduring national security and stability.

KEYWORDS: Military Force, Counter-Terrorism, Boko Haram, Counter-Insurgency, National Security, Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of terrorism as one of the most serious security challenges confronting Nigeria in the twenty-first century has profoundly altered the country's political, economic, and social landscape. Since the outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2009, the Nigerian state has relied heavily on military force as the principal instrument of counter-terrorism. The insurgency has resulted in thousands of deaths, widespread displacement of civilians, destruction of infrastructure, and severe disruptions to livelihoods, particularly in the North-East. According to the

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023), violent extremism continues to undermine governance and sustainable development across the Lake Chad Basin. As Hoffman (2006) observed, "terrorism is the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change" (p. 40). This definition highlights the strategic nature of terrorism and underscores the necessity of coordinated state responses.

Military force has remained central to Nigeria's response because governments have viewed terrorism primarily as a threat to national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The deployment of the Nigerian Armed Forces through operations such as Operation Lafiya Dole and its successor, Operation Hadin Kai, demonstrates the state's commitment to defeating insurgent groups. Galula (1964) argued that "the aim of the war is to gain the support of the population rather than merely destroy the enemy" (p. 4), suggesting that successful counter-insurgency requires both military effectiveness and civilian cooperation. Consequently, while military operations have achieved important tactical victories, they have also exposed the limitations of force when employed without complementary political, economic, and social interventions.

Between 2009 and 2025, Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy evolved significantly in response to changing patterns of insurgent violence. Initial conventional military operations gradually gave way to intelligence-driven operations, regional cooperation through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and greater collaboration with international partners. These efforts led to the recapture of territories previously controlled by Boko Haram, the elimination of several insurgent commanders, and the rescue of kidnapped civilians. Nevertheless, terrorist groups adapted by employing asymmetric warfare, suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and cross-border attacks. As Cronin (2009) noted, "terrorist campaigns rarely end quickly; they evolve in response to state actions and changing political environments" (p. 8). This dynamic nature of terrorism has complicated Nigeria's military campaign.

Despite notable achievements, the military has faced numerous operational and institutional challenges that have constrained the effectiveness of counter-terrorism efforts. These include inadequate intelligence, insufficient equipment, corruption, logistical deficiencies, difficult terrain, porous borders, and allegations of human rights violations. Such challenges have often undermined public confidence and affected cooperation between local communities and security agencies. According to the African Union (2020), effective counter-terrorism requires not only military capability but also respect for human rights, good governance, and community participation. These realities demonstrate that military force alone cannot permanently eliminate

terrorism without addressing the structural conditions that enable violent extremism.

The persistence of insurgency has generated important lessons for Nigeria and other African states confronting similar security threats. Experience has shown that successful counter-terrorism depends on integrating military operations with intelligence gathering, regional cooperation, community engagement, deradicalization programmes, economic development, and institutional reforms. Kilcullen (2010) emphasized that "counterinsurgency is fundamentally about protecting populations rather than simply killing insurgents" (p. 35). This perspective reinforces the importance of adopting a comprehensive security strategy that balances hard military power with soft approaches aimed at winning public trust and addressing the root causes of conflict. Against this background, this study provides a historical assessment of the evolution of military force in Nigeria's counter-terrorism campaign between 2009 and 2025. It examines the changing nature of military operations, evaluates their successes and shortcomings, and identifies the principal lessons emerging from more than fifteen years of counter-insurgency. By adopting a historical methodology, the study contributes to existing scholarship on security studies, military history, and Nigerian political development while offering insights that may inform future counter-terrorism policies. Ultimately, the study argues that although military force remains indispensable in combating terrorism, lasting peace can only be achieved through an integrated strategy that combines security operations with effective governance, socio-economic development, and regional cooperation.

Conceptual Clarification of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

Insurgency refers to an organized political and military struggle undertaken by non-state actors against an established government or occupying authority with the objective of challenging, weakening, or overthrowing existing political structures. Unlike conventional warfare, insurgency relies on irregular tactics such as guerrilla warfare, sabotage, ambushes, terrorism, and propaganda to compensate for military inferiority. As Galula (1964) observed, "an insurgency is a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order" (p. 4). Thus, insurgencies are often long-term conflicts that seek to

erode the legitimacy and authority of the state while gaining the support or acquiescence of the civilian population.

Insurgency is fundamentally political rather than purely military. Although insurgent groups employ armed violence, their principal aim is to influence governance, public opinion, and political authority. Mao Zedong (1961) emphasized that "the guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swim in the sea" (p. 93), underscoring the dependence of insurgents on civilian support for recruitment, logistics, intelligence, and concealment. Consequently, insurgent movements often combine military operations with ideological campaigns and social mobilization to sustain their struggle.

Scholars have identified several characteristics that distinguish insurgencies from conventional warfare. These include decentralized command structures, irregular military operations, exploitation of difficult terrain, reliance on local populations, and the use of psychological warfare. According to Kilcullen (2010), "countering insurgency requires understanding that the conflict is fundamentally about people rather than territory" (p. 38). Modern insurgencies frequently exploit ethnic, religious, political, or economic grievances to gain legitimacy and attract followers, making them particularly difficult to defeat through military force alone.

Counterinsurgency (COIN), by contrast, refers to the comprehensive political, military, economic, intelligence, and psychological measures employed by governments to defeat insurgencies and restore legitimate authority. Counterinsurgency extends beyond battlefield engagements by addressing the underlying causes of rebellion while simultaneously protecting civilians. The U.S. Department of the Army (2006) defines counterinsurgency as "military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency" (p. 1-1). This definition highlights the multidimensional character of successful COIN operations.

A central principle of counterinsurgency is winning the "hearts and minds" of the population. Governments seek to convince citizens that supporting legitimate authorities offers greater security, justice, and economic opportunity than supporting insurgent groups. Galula (1964) argued that "the population is the prize" (p. 52), emphasizing that public loyalty ultimately determines the success or failure of both insurgents and counterinsurgents.

Accordingly, effective COIN combines security operations with development projects, humanitarian assistance, and institutional reforms.

Modern counterinsurgency strategies therefore emphasize civil-military cooperation, intelligence gathering, community policing, and the provision of essential public services. Governments often establish schools, healthcare facilities, infrastructure projects, and employment programmes in conflict-affected communities to reduce the appeal of insurgent movements. Petraeus and Amos (2006) maintained that "some of the best weapons for counterinsurgents do not shoot" (p. 1-27), referring to governance, education, economic development, and public trust as vital instruments in defeating insurgency.

The distinction between insurgency and terrorism is also significant. While insurgencies may employ terrorist tactics, not all terrorist organizations qualify as insurgencies. Terrorism generally seeks to instill fear through violence against civilians for political or ideological purposes, whereas insurgency involves sustained efforts to challenge governmental authority and establish alternative political control. According to Hoffman (2006), "terrorism is the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in pursuit of political change" (p. 40). Many insurgent organizations therefore combine guerrilla warfare with acts of terrorism, but their broader objective remains political transformation.

In the Nigerian context, the Boko Haram insurgency illustrates the complex relationship between insurgency and counterinsurgency. Since 2009, Boko Haram has employed guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, kidnappings, and terrorist attacks to undermine state authority in northeastern Nigeria. In response, the Nigerian government has implemented military offensives through the Armed Forces, intelligence operations, community engagement initiatives, and regional cooperation under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). These efforts have sought not only to eliminate insurgent strongholds but also to restore governance and public confidence in affected communities (Onuoha, 2014). Insurgency and counterinsurgency are interconnected concepts that represent opposing strategies in irregular warfare. While insurgents seek political change through prolonged armed struggle and popular mobilization, counterinsurgents aim to preserve state authority through a combination of

military action, good governance, socio-economic development, and public support. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that sustainable success in counterinsurgency depends less on military superiority alone than on addressing the political, economic, and social conditions that enable insurgencies to emerge and persist.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

For a historical study on Military Force and Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria (2009–2025), the most appropriate theoretical framework is to combine Counterinsurgency Theory (COIN) with Securitization Theory. These theories explain both the military response to terrorism and the political processes through which terrorism is treated as an existential security threat. Recent studies of Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy similarly emphasize securitization and institutional approaches in explaining military responses and their limitations.

Counterinsurgency Theory

Counterinsurgency Theory originated from the works of David Galula (1964), Robert Thompson (1966), and later the U.S. Army Field Manual FM 3-24 (2006). The theory argues that defeating insurgent or terrorist groups requires more than military superiority; it demands a combination of security operations, intelligence, effective governance, economic development, and popular support. Galula (1964) asserted that "the population is the prize," emphasizing that victory depends on winning the confidence of civilians rather than merely destroying insurgent forces. Counterinsurgency therefore integrates military action with political, economic, and psychological measures.

Applied to Nigeria, the theory explains why the Armed Forces launched major operations such as Operation Lafiya Dole, Operation Hadin Kai, and joint regional operations through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram and ISWAP. Although these operations weakened terrorist capabilities, scholars argue that military action alone has been insufficient because terrorism is also sustained by poverty, weak governance, unemployment, corruption, and ideological radicalization.

Counterinsurgency Theory is particularly relevant because it examines both the successes and shortcomings of Nigeria's military campaigns between 2009 and 2025. It helps explain how battlefield victories must be complemented by civilian protection, intelligence gathering,

reconstruction, community engagement, and deradicalization programmes to achieve lasting peace.

Securitization Theory

Securitization Theory was developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998) through the Copenhagen School. The theory argues that an issue becomes a security threat when political leaders successfully portray it as an existential danger requiring extraordinary measures beyond normal politics.

Following the Boko Haram uprising in 2009, successive Nigerian governments officially designated terrorism as a national security emergency. This justified increased military deployments, emergency rule in affected states, higher defence spending, new counter-terrorism legislation, intelligence reforms, and enhanced regional cooperation. Securitization Theory therefore explains why the Nigerian state relied heavily on military force as its principal counter-terrorism instrument while also creating institutions and legal mechanisms to combat terrorism. Recent analyses of Nigeria's security policy likewise identify securitization as a central analytical framework.

Relevance of the Theoretical Framework

The combination of Counterinsurgency Theory and Securitization Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing military force and counter-terrorism in Nigeria from 2009 to 2025. Counterinsurgency Theory explains how military operations, intelligence, civil-military relations, and community support contribute to defeating terrorist organizations. Securitization Theory explains how terrorism became framed as an existential threat that justified extraordinary security measures and extensive military intervention. Together, these theories enable a balanced historical assessment of the achievements, challenges, and lessons of Nigeria's counter-terrorism campaign.

Assessment of Successes of Military Force in Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Efforts (2009–2025)

The deployment of military force has been central to Nigeria's counter-terrorism campaign against Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) since 2009. One of the most significant achievements has been the recovery of territories that were once under insurgent control, particularly in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States. Through major military operations such as Operation Lafiya Dole,

Operation Hadin Kai, and joint regional offensives under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the Nigerian Armed Forces dismantled many insurgent camps and restored government authority in several communities. According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (2023), sustained military operations significantly weakened insurgent territorial ambitions. As Hoffman (2006) observed, "terrorism seeks to influence wider audiences beyond its immediate victims" (p. 40); consequently, reclaiming occupied territories represented not only military success but also a symbolic restoration of state sovereignty and public confidence.

Another notable success has been the degradation of the operational capabilities of Boko Haram through the elimination and capture of key insurgent commanders. Military offensives, supported by improved intelligence gathering and air operations, disrupted terrorist command structures, weapons supply networks, and training camps. The death of Abubakar Shekau in 2021 marked a turning point in the insurgency, contributing to internal fragmentation within Boko Haram. According to Cronin (2009), "terrorist organizations decline when they lose leadership, resources, and public support" (p. 18). This development reduced the insurgents' capacity to coordinate large-scale conventional attacks and compelled many fighters to surrender under the Federal Government's de-radicalization initiatives.

The Nigerian military has also recorded success through enhanced regional and international cooperation in counter-terrorism operations. Collaboration with neighbouring countries—Cameroon, Chad, and Niger—under the Multinational Joint Task Force improved border security, intelligence sharing, and coordinated military offensives against cross-border terrorist networks. International support from partners such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and the African Union strengthened Nigeria's operational capabilities through training, intelligence assistance, logistics, and surveillance technologies. As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) emphasized, "effective counter-terrorism requires international cooperation and coordinated action" (p. 12). These partnerships contributed significantly to reducing the mobility and operational reach of terrorist groups across the Lake Chad Basin.

Furthermore, sustained military pressure facilitated the rescue of numerous civilians abducted by terrorist groups and encouraged the surrender of thousands of

insurgents. Military operations led to the liberation of many hostages, including women and children, while creating safer conditions for humanitarian agencies to deliver relief materials to internally displaced persons (IDPs). Programmes such as Operation Safe Corridor complemented military efforts by rehabilitating and reintegrating repentant insurgents into society. According to Forest (2012), "counter-terrorism involves not only defeating terrorists militarily but also preventing future radicalization" (p. 221). These initiatives reflected a gradual shift from purely kinetic operations toward a more comprehensive counter-insurgency strategy.

Finally, military operations have contributed to strengthening Nigeria's national security architecture and improving the professionalism of the armed forces. The counter-terrorism campaign accelerated investments in military modernization, intelligence systems, special operations training, and civil-military relations. Operational experience gained since 2009 has enhanced the capacity of the Nigerian Armed Forces to respond to asymmetric warfare and emerging security threats. While terrorism has not been completely eradicated, the military has prevented the collapse of state authority in the North-East and significantly reduced the insurgents' ability to seize and administer territory. As Galula (1964) aptly argued, "the aim of counterinsurgency is to restore the authority of the government" (p. 75), a goal that Nigeria has achieved in many previously insurgent-controlled areas despite continuing security challenges.

Challenges of Military Force in Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Efforts (2009–2025)

Despite notable military achievements, Nigeria's counter-terrorism campaign has been confronted by numerous operational and institutional challenges. One of the most persistent problems has been the adaptability and resilience of terrorist groups, particularly Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Following sustained military offensives, insurgents shifted from conventional warfare to guerrilla tactics, including ambushes, suicide bombings, kidnappings, and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). This strategic adaptation enabled them to continue inflicting casualties on both military personnel and civilians despite losing territorial control. As Hoffman (2006) observed, "terrorists are highly adaptable and will alter their tactics and methods to exploit vulnerabilities" (p. 247). Consequently, the

evolving nature of terrorism has continually challenged the effectiveness of conventional military operations in Nigeria.

Another major challenge has been inadequate logistics, insufficient military equipment, and limited intelligence capabilities, particularly during the early years of the insurgency. Reports of obsolete weapons, inadequate surveillance technology, poor welfare packages, and delayed salaries adversely affected troop morale and operational efficiency. Although successive governments increased defence spending and procured modern equipment, logistical constraints continued to limit rapid deployment and sustained operations in difficult terrains. According to the International Crisis Group (2021), deficiencies in equipment, logistics, and intelligence coordination weakened the effectiveness of Nigeria's military response in several phases of the conflict. These shortcomings prolonged military operations and created opportunities for insurgents to regroup after major offensives.

Human rights concerns have also posed significant challenges to Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts. Allegations of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, and prolonged detention by some security personnel generated criticism from both domestic and international human rights organizations. Such allegations undermined public trust and complicated intelligence gathering, as affected communities became reluctant to cooperate with security agencies. Wilkinson (2011) argued that "effective counter-terrorism depends upon maintaining public confidence and adherence to the rule of law" (p. 156). Consequently, balancing military necessity with respect for human rights has remained a critical challenge throughout Nigeria's counter-insurgency campaign.

Furthermore, the porous borders shared with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon have significantly complicated military operations. These borders have enabled insurgents to move fighters, weapons, and supplies across national boundaries with relative ease, thereby reducing the effectiveness of unilateral military actions. Although the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) improved regional cooperation, differences in national priorities, resource constraints, and operational coordination occasionally hindered sustained cross-border operations. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018), "terrorism increasingly exploits transnational networks that require coordinated regional responses"

(p. 15). This transnational dimension has continued to present strategic and operational difficulties for Nigerian security forces.

Finally, underlying socio-economic conditions have limited the long-term success of military force in addressing terrorism. High levels of poverty, unemployment, youth marginalization, illiteracy, weak governance, and corruption in parts of northern Nigeria have created conditions that facilitate radicalization and terrorist recruitment. Military operations can suppress insurgent activities, but they cannot independently resolve the structural factors driving violent extremism. As Galula (1964) stated, "a military victory is only one step toward achieving lasting political stability" (p. 89). Therefore, the persistence of socio-economic inequalities and governance deficits demonstrates that sustainable counter-terrorism requires integrating military force with comprehensive political, economic, and social development strategies.

Lessons from the Evolution of Military Force in Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria (2009–2025)

Nigeria's experience in combating terrorism between 2009 and 2025 demonstrates that military force, while indispensable, cannot by itself eliminate violent extremism. The campaign against Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) has shown that military victories are often temporary unless accompanied by effective governance, economic development, and social inclusion. Although military operations successfully reclaimed territories and weakened insurgent capabilities, the persistence of sporadic attacks underscores the limitations of relying solely on kinetic strategies. As Galula (1964) argued, "the military can defeat insurgent forces, but lasting success depends upon political legitimacy" (p. 63). This lesson highlights the necessity of integrating military action with broader political and developmental initiatives.

A second lesson is the critical importance of intelligence-driven operations in modern counter-terrorism. During the early years of the insurgency, inadequate intelligence gathering and poor coordination among security agencies allowed terrorist groups to expand their operations. Subsequent improvements in surveillance technology, intelligence sharing, and inter-agency collaboration enhanced the effectiveness of military campaigns. Hoffman (2006) observed that "good intelligence is the foundation of every successful counter-terrorism strategy" (p. 301). Nigeria's

experience therefore illustrates that timely, accurate, and actionable intelligence is essential for preventing attacks and dismantling terrorist networks.

Another important lesson is the value of regional and international cooperation in addressing transnational terrorism. Boko Haram and ISWAP have operated across the borders of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, making unilateral military action insufficient. The establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) strengthened intelligence sharing, joint military operations, and border security. Support from international partners through training, logistics, surveillance technology, and capacity building further improved Nigeria's counter-terrorism capabilities. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018), "international cooperation is essential for preventing and combating terrorism in all its forms" (p. 9). The Nigerian case demonstrates that regional collaboration significantly enhances national security efforts.

The counter-terrorism campaign also highlights the importance of respecting human rights and strengthening civil-military relations. Allegations of human rights abuses by security personnel occasionally undermined public confidence and reduced community willingness to cooperate with security agencies. Effective counter-terrorism requires building trust between the military and civilian populations because local communities often provide the intelligence needed to detect terrorist activities. Wilkinson (2011) maintained that "counter-terrorism measures are most effective when conducted within the framework of the rule of law" (p. 182). Consequently, professionalism, accountability, and adherence to human rights standards remain essential lessons for future military operations.

Nigeria's experience further demonstrates that addressing the root causes of terrorism is as important as defeating insurgents on the battlefield. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, corruption, political exclusion, and weak governance have continued to create conditions that facilitate extremist recruitment and radicalization. Military operations may suppress violence temporarily, but sustainable peace depends upon improving livelihoods, expanding educational opportunities, strengthening institutions, and promoting inclusive governance. As Forest (2012) noted, "lasting security requires addressing the social and political conditions that enable terrorism to flourish" (p. 214). This lesson underscores the need

for a comprehensive approach that combines security measures with socio-economic development.

Another significant lesson is the necessity of strengthening military professionalism through continuous training, modernization, and improved welfare. The evolution of the insurgency exposed deficiencies in logistics, equipment, communication systems, and troop welfare during the early stages of the conflict. Continuous investment in modern weaponry, intelligence technology, specialized counter-insurgency training, and the welfare of military personnel has improved operational effectiveness. According to the African Union (2020), professional, well-equipped, and motivated security forces are fundamental to successful counter-terrorism operations across Africa. Sustained institutional reforms therefore remain essential for responding effectively to future asymmetric security threats.

Finally, Nigeria's counter-terrorism experience demonstrates that sustainable peace requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Military force should be integrated with law enforcement, intelligence services, judicial reforms, community engagement, religious dialogue, strategic communication, rehabilitation of former insurgents, and post-conflict reconstruction. Programmes such as Operation Safe Corridor have illustrated the importance of combining military success with deradicalization and reintegration initiatives. As Cronin (2009) argued, "terrorist campaigns rarely end through military force alone but through a combination of political, security, and societal measures" (p. 8). Therefore, the principal lesson from Nigeria's experience between 2009 and 2025 is that effective counter-terrorism depends on a balanced strategy that addresses both immediate security threats and the long-term conditions that sustain violent extremism.

Conclusion

The evolution of military force in Nigeria's counter-terrorism campaign between 2009 and 2025 reflects both significant progress and enduring challenges in confronting violent extremism. Since the emergence of Boko Haram as a major security threat, the Nigerian Armed Forces have remained at the forefront of efforts to restore national security and protect the country's territorial integrity. Through sustained military operations, including Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Hadin Kai, supported by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the

military succeeded in reclaiming occupied territories, degrading insurgent capabilities, rescuing abducted civilians, and preventing the complete collapse of state authority in the North-East. These achievements demonstrate that military force remains an indispensable instrument of national security. As Galula (1964) observed, "the aim of counterinsurgency is to restore the authority of the government" (p. 75), a goal that Nigeria has substantially pursued despite persistent insecurity. Nevertheless, the historical assessment reveals that military force alone has been insufficient to achieve the complete eradication of terrorism. The adaptability of Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), porous international borders, intelligence gaps, logistical deficiencies, corruption, and allegations of human rights violations have constrained the effectiveness of military operations. These challenges illustrate the complexity of combating asymmetric warfare, where insurgent groups continuously modify their tactics in response to government actions. Hoffman (2006) argued that "terrorists are highly adaptable and innovative in exploiting weaknesses" (p. 247), a reality consistently reflected in Nigeria's counter-terrorism experience. The study further demonstrates that sustainable counter-terrorism requires a comprehensive approach that extends beyond military operations. Effective intelligence gathering, regional and international cooperation, community engagement, respect for human rights, and strong civil-military relations are essential components of successful counter-insurgency. Equally important is addressing the underlying socio-economic and political conditions—including poverty, unemployment, weak governance, and youth marginalization—that facilitate radicalization and recruitment into extremist organizations. According to Forest (2012), "lasting security requires addressing the social and political conditions that enable terrorism to flourish" (p. 214). Consequently, military force should function as one component of a broader national security strategy rather than as a stand-alone solution. The Nigerian experience also offers valuable lessons for other states confronting terrorism and insurgency. It underscores the importance of modernizing the armed forces, investing in intelligence capabilities, strengthening regional security partnerships, and integrating military success with post-conflict stabilization, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. Programmes such as Operation Safe Corridor

demonstrate that deradicalization and reintegration initiatives can complement military achievements by reducing the likelihood of renewed violence. As Cronin (2009) maintained, "terrorist campaigns rarely end through military force alone" (p. 8), emphasizing the need for coordinated political, economic, legal, and social responses to violent extremism.

The history of Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts from 2009 to 2025 demonstrates that while military force has achieved considerable success in weakening terrorist organizations and restoring state authority in many affected areas, long-term peace and security depend upon a balanced strategy that combines effective military operations with good governance, economic development, social justice, and the rule of law. The lessons derived from this historical assessment provide important guidance for policymakers, military planners, and scholars seeking to strengthen Nigeria's security architecture and build a resilient society capable of preventing the resurgence of terrorism in the future.

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