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THE UNITED STATES' ROLE IN COUNTERINSURGENCY EFFORTS IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper critically analyzes U.S. support for Nigeria's counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies. It examines the forms of support provided, including surveillance equipment, training, financial aid, and development cooperation. Using the qualitative methodology. The study applies a constructivist approach to explore how norms, identities, and strategic interests have shaped U.S.-Nigeria cooperation on counterterrorism. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the relationship between the two countries has been influenced by issues related to governance, human rights, and security, making it delicate.The U.S. has supported Nigeria through military aid, including equipment such as the A-29 Super Tucano, and special operations training, enhancing Nigeria's counterterrorism capabilities. Financial aid, such as the Financial Military Financing, has also played a role in strengthening Nigeria's defense framework. U.S. development aid addresses the root causes of insurgency by funding education, food aid, and markets in insurgency-affected regions. Despite these efforts, challenges such as corruption, inefficiency, and socio-

Keywords: U.S. support, counter-insurgency, Boko Haram, ISWAP, Smart Power

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economic inequality hinder the full potential of U.S. assistance. The paper argues that U.S.-Nigeria cooperation is shaped by a complex web of identities and interests, with the constructivist approach providing valuable insights but also revealing shortcomings. It concludes with a call for a "Smart Power" strategy, combining counterinsurgency measures with long-term development programs to address the structural causes of insurgency in Nigeria..

Introduction

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, is a nation characterized by its vast cultural diversity, abundant natural resources, and significant economic potential, however, in recent years, it has been grappling with a range of security challenges, foremost among them being the issue of insurgency (Omobuwajo, 2021). The rise of extremist groups, particularly Boko Haram and its offshoot ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province), has not only destabilized northeastern Nigeria but has also posed a threat to national and regional security (Goyei, 2018).

These groups exploit existing socio-economic grievances, religious tensions, and governance failures to perpetuate violence, leading to widespread human suffering, displacement, and a humanitarian crisis affecting millions to which the repercussions of these insurgent activities extend beyond Nigeria's borders, impacting neighboring countries and international security dynamics (Abubakar & Wapmuk, 2019; Adeyeye et al., 2023). The United States has long recognized the importance of curbing terrorism, viewing it as critical to global stability and security and so terrorism, particularly in the context of the post-9/11 era, has been a key driver of U.S. foreign policy, leading to extensive engagement in various regions where extremist ideologies take root (Putri et al., 2024). Nigeria, given its strategic position in West Africa, significant oil reserves, and emerging role as a regional power, has attracted U.S. interest (Manu, 2021). The U.S. has sought to partner with Nigeria to combat terrorism, recognizing that a stable and secure Nigeria is essential for peace and prosperity in the broader West African region and this relationship has

evolved over decades, grounded in shared interests in economic cooperation, democratic governance, and security collaboration (Okolie & Nnamani, 2016)
This study critically examines the role of the United States in counterinsurgency efforts in Nigeria, analyzing the strategies employed, the outcomes achieved, and the challenges faced. It explores the historical context of the U.S.-Nigeria relationship, the dynamics of the insurgency in Nigeria, and the implications of U.S. involvement in counterterrorism efforts, by assessing both the successes and shortcomings of these initiatives, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding counterinsurgency in Nigeria and the international response to terrorism (Owojori et al., 2022). This analysis is relevant not only for policymakers and scholars but also for practitioners in the field of security and international relations, as it highlights the need for comprehensive approaches that address the root causes of insurgency while fostering stability and resilience in affected regions.

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative methodology, collecting data from secondary books, journals, newspapers, and documents. This was relevant to understanding the historical, political, and social context of U.S.-Nigeria counterterrorism cooperation. It also enabled the exploration of existing theories, frameworks, and previous research on counter-insurgency strategies. Furthermore, using qualitative secondary data aided in identifying key themes, patterns, and insights from various sources, enhancing the depth and comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Conceptual Clarification

- Insurgency

  Insurgency means a coordinated non-conventional violent strategy resistant to change or displacement of a regime where a brutal force usually resorts to terrorism, guerrilla and other subversive activities to

accomplish set goals (Ewa, 2018; Sule et al., 2019). Rather than be a war between organized state armies where both parties fight in a civil and straightforward manner, insurgency entails the use of tactics that harness the vulnerabilities of conventional forces of the state, the insurgents could be advancing a different political, ideological or social cause, it may occur with reasons such as perceived oppression or neglect and economic marginalization (Omobuwajo, 2021).

The sources for these insurgencies lie much deeper within a society and for that reason can be attributed to ethnic or religious differences as well as historical injustice or poor governance (Ewa, 2018). Such insurgent groups can be of different ethnic origins, political dissentients, or ideologically-inspired movement enthusiasts; such movements when they have public support based on the belief that the movement is fighting for the right of the public or acting in the general interest of the community (Dauda, 2021). The effects of insurgency are enormous, loss of lives, economic losses and political instabilities, insurgencies can also extend their effects to neighboring areas thereby subjecting entire countries or regions to terrible insecurity, which makes them a central interest of national and international security (Falode, 2019).

- Counterinsurgency

  Counterinsurgency (COIN) relates to the processes by which governments or state agencies use force and non-force to fight and vanquish insurgencies and re-establish order However, COIN transcends a military definition and encompasses a broad range of political, economic and social processes addressed to the insurgent movements' root causes (Adeyeye et al., 2023). Counterinsurgency operations are much effective when there is a right understanding of the insurgency and socio-political factors that surround the population and the insurgent.

A counter insurgency normally has tactical and civil components which normally consists of the military activities with focus on protection of civilians, provision of basic amenities, economic development and political engagement (Olu-Adeyemi, 2020). However, counter insurgency aims at the establishment of a potent opposition to the insurgency movement, and the consolidation of authority of the state (Obidimma & Ilem, 2023). The need for counter insurgency is all the more due to the fact that it involves multiple agencies and multiple countries and communities, and hence requires a multi-faceted and multi- year effort to achieve the desired objectives (Obidimma & Jahnomso, 2023).

- Foreign policy

  Foreign policy was defined as the ways and the policies that a state administers with other states and intergovernmental organizations which encompasses a broad spectrum of activity, irrespective of nature or scope, including diplomacy, trade, and negotiations, use of force and peace-making and humanitarian assistance and it is not unique to the political leadership of a nation but rather involves many factors such as national self-interest, conflict, economic and political, and religious and philosophical undertones. The formation of the foreign policy is influenced by the domestic factor which includes the attitude of the public and pressure from pressure group as well as International relations which includes the behavior of other states and the trend in the international system (Akinrinde, 2023).

- National Security

  National security is a concept that refers to the measures, strategies and policies chosen by a state in an effort to protect itself from threats that negate sovereignty, territorial boundaries and popular welfare, and which is more than just military security having extended to include aspects such as economic security, ecological security, health security and cyber security (Ewa, 2018; Habib, 2023). National security

endeavours to make it easier for a state to thrive in a hostile and uncertain world with a concept that involves threat recognition, risk analysis, and the development of measures to address those threats (Okolo & Akubo, 2019). This can involve mobilizations, security intelligence as well as diplomatic undertakings and collaboration with partners in the intercontinental theatre (Habib, 2023). National security is not just service's domain – it is the responsibility of all the governmental structures, police, intelligence, and even public health, to provide the nation with a full-spectrum security system (de Simone & Iocchi, 2022).

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism

The theoretical foundation for this research is Constructivism, an important theory in international relations that posits that ideas and other social constructs define international actors and their interaction (Kratochwil & Petonen, 2022). In contrast to sensualism that has labelled the international system as a struggle for power for the sake of interest, constructivism popularised the opinion that the international system is more a result of social construction of relations between the international actors and non-actors (Laurence & Rhoads, 2020). As this dissertation uses the framework of Shared Values, Perceptions, and Identity Theory to analyse the U.S.-Nigeria counterterrorism cooperation, this theory posits that the degree of shared values and perception between two nations impacts their foreign policy and diplomatic relationships (Burhanuddin et al., 2021).

Basic tenets of the theory

- ***Social Constructivism:*** This tenet posits that international realities are not predetermined but are shaped by social interactions and collective understandings. State behavior is influenced by the identities and interests that emerge from these interactions, meaning that concepts such as security, sovereignty, and cooperation are defined by social contexts rather than fixed attributes (Kratochwi & Peltonen, 2022).

- ***Importance of Ideas and Norms*:** Constructivism highlights the significance of ideas and norms in international relations. Shared beliefs about appropriate behavior, human rights, democracy, and governance shape how states formulate their policies and engage with each other (Muhajirah, 2020). For instance, the U.S. commitment to promoting democratic values can influence its counterterrorism strategies and partnerships, including its cooperation with Nigeria.
- ***Identity Formation*:** Constructivism emphasizes that national identities and the perceptions of self and others play a crucial role in international interactions. The identities of states are not static but are continuously constructed and reconstructed through political discourse, historical narratives, and cultural exchanges (Laurence & Rhoads, 2020). In the context of U.S.-Nigeria relations, the evolving perceptions of both countries regarding each other influence their cooperation in counterterrorism.
- ***Mutual Constitution*:** Constructivism posits a mutual constitution of structures and agents, where the actions of states shape the international system while the system simultaneously influences state behavior (McCourt, 2022). This interplay suggests that U.S. counterterrorism strategies in Nigeria are shaped not only by the U.S. national interests but also by Nigeria's responses, expectations, and identity as a partner in the fight against terrorism.

Relevance of the theory to the study

There are several reasons why the constructivist framework will be appropriate for the analysis of US –Nigeria counterterrorism cooperation for this research. First, it enables the investigation of how commonalities or differences of the countries in the issue of counterterrorism are expressed such as the U.S counter terrorism policies and the rights of human and democratic governance that promote terrorism cooperation with Nigeria for support where such value is uphold or under dispute(Laurence & Rhoads,

2020). Besides, the theory helps to explain how identity influences cooperation because, for the U.S. it is a hegemonic power in the international security system, while for Nigeria, it is a regional actor that wants to be recognized as capable of preventing the situations that lead to terrorism and this understanding of roles can either facilitate or undermine cooperation depending on attitudes towards each other in the fight against terrorism (Laurence & Rhoads, 2020)

Critique of the theory

There is considerable doubt that constructivism does not have explanatory and predictive abilities and is too hermeneutic to yield definite findings concerning the states' actions. Moreover, other critics argue that, according to constructivism, the role of materials, which must also be essential in international relations, such as capacities for defence and economy, could also be understated (McCourt, 2022).

Nevertheless, these critiques should not be regarded as negation of the relevance of constructivism for this study as the focus on the ideas, norms, and identities helps exploring the ways these social contexts frame the cooperation in countering terrorism between Nigeria and the U.S. (Efgivia et al., 20210. Even though material factors cannot be irrelevant, constructivism ensures that bystanders get a comprehensive account of the societal-political entrenched process with various layers of influences to the counterterrorism cooperation between the U.S. and Nigeria so that adding perceptions, identities, and norms adds depth to the comprehension in that, counterterrorism cooperation (Laurence & Rhoads, 2020; Mousavi, 2020).

Discussion

Relationship between Nigeria and United States

Since Nigeria's independence from British colonial rule in 1960, its relationship with the United States has evolved through periods of strong collaboration and occasional strain, reflecting broader geopolitical and domestic shifts

(Owojori et al., 2022). This relationship has been shaped by shared interests in economic development, regional stability, and security cooperation, as well as by Nigeria's role as a key partner in Africa (Akinrinde, 2023). The United States has viewed Nigeria as a valuable ally in promoting democracy, countering terrorism, and facilitating regional economic integration, while Nigeria has sought U.S. support for development initiatives, security assistance, and diplomatic backing (Putri et al., 2024). Over the decades, the bilateral relationship has been marked by several high-level diplomatic visits, trade agreements, and security partnerships, although challenges have occasionally surfaced, ranging from human rights concerns to differences in foreign policy priorities (Alexander, 2020).

In the early years after Nigeria's independence, the U.S. was eager to establish strong ties with the newly independent African nation, given Nigeria's significant size, abundant resources, and potential influence on the continent (Manu, 2021). The U.S. provided developmental aid to support Nigeria's economic growth and assist in building institutional capacities, during this period, U.S.-Nigeria relations were generally amicable, although there were points of tension (Akinrinde, 2023). For example, the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) strained relations, as the U.S. adopted a non-interventionist stance and refrained from supporting the Nigerian government's efforts to quell the Biafran secession and Nigeria perceived the lack of U.S. support as ambivalence toward the unity of the country, despite this, diplomatic relations resumed on positive terms following the war, with U.S. aid resuming and investment increasing (Owojori et al., 2022).

With the discovery of vast oil reserves, Nigeria quickly became a significant oil supplier to the United States, solidifying economic ties between the two countries and by the 1980s, oil accounted for the majority of Nigeria's exports to the U.S., making Nigeria one of the primary sources of crude oil for American markets (Tar et al., 2022). This economic interdependence was mutually beneficial but did not come without challenges; during Nigeria's military rule, particularly under General Sani Abacha's regime (1993–1998),

diplomatic relations suffered due to U.S. concerns about human rights abuses, corruption, and the absence of democratic governance in Nigeria (Akinrinde et al., 2023). The U.S. responded by implementing sanctions, suspending certain forms of assistance, and placing Nigeria on diplomatic notice over its internal governance issues but these actions created friction, as the Nigerian government viewed them as interference in its domestic affairs, while the U.S. justified the sanctions as necessary to uphold democratic values and human rights (Kinsey & Krieg, 2021; Gana et al., 2018).

Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999 marked a significant turning point in its relationship with the United States as the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military leader who transitioned to democratic governance, was welcomed by the U.S., which saw this shift as an opportunity to deepen bilateral ties and support Nigeria's democratization process (Iwouha, 2019). Obasanjo visited the U.S. multiple times, receiving support for initiatives aimed at poverty reduction, governance reforms, and anti-corruption efforts with the U.S. providing substantial aid through programs like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which helped Nigerian businesses access American markets and incentivized trade and investment (Okolie & Nnamani, 2016).

Security cooperation also intensified during this period, particularly in the wake of the 9/11 attacks as the U.S. began to focus on counterterrorism efforts in Africa, and Nigeria's strategic location in West Africa made it a valuable partner and both countries engaged in security training programs, military assistance, and intelligence sharing (Owojori et al., 2022). For instance, the U.S. supported Nigeria's peacekeeping efforts in the West African region through training and logistical aid, however, some challenges remained with Nigeria's ongoing issues regarding corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inadequate infrastructure which limited the full impact of U.S. aid, often resulting in uneven outcomes (Manu, 2021).

The rise of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria and the group's alignment with global jihadist movements, such as ISIS, presented a new dimension to

U.S.-Nigeria relations as recognizing the threat Boko Haram posed not only to Nigeria but to regional stability, the U.S. increased its counterterrorism support through military training, intelligence sharing, and provision of equipment to the Nigerian Armed Forces (Alexander, 2020). Notably, under the Obama administration, the U.S. expanded security assistance to Nigeria, including the establishment of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) to oversee security efforts in Africa and increase counterterrorism initiatives in the region and also diplomatic visits, such as that of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in 2016, reinforced the importance of U.S.-Nigeria counterterrorism cooperation (Adeyeye et al., 2023).

Despite these cooperative efforts, significant challenges arose; the U.S. placed restrictions on certain military assistance due to concerns about human rights abuses committed by Nigerian forces such as the incident in 2014, where the U.S. withheld the sale of Cobra attack helicopters to Nigeria, citing reports of extrajudicial killings and abuses by Nigerian security forces (Manu, 2021). This decision strained relations, as the Nigerian government felt these restrictions limited its ability to effectively combat Boko Haram, however, the Leahy Law, a U.S. legal statute prohibiting assistance to foreign military units implicated in human rights abuses, underscored the American stance on human rights, creating a recurring obstacle in military cooperation (Dauda, 2021).

Additionally, economic and diplomatic issues sometimes caused tensions with the U.S. criticism of Nigeria's handling of economic policies, such as exchange rate controls and import restrictions creating friction, as Nigeria viewed these policies as essential for managing domestic economic challenges (Tankel, 2020). Similarly, trade relations faced setbacks due to Nigeria's regulatory policies, which affected American companies operating within the country (Obidimma & Ilem, 2023).

In recent years, U.S.-Nigeria relations have continued to be shaped by a mix of cooperation and tension with issues such as public health (particularly the COVID-19 pandemic), economic challenges, and shifting security dynamics

influencing the relationship (Manu, 2021). The U.S. provided substantial COVID-19 assistance to Nigeria, including medical supplies and vaccines, reaffirming the health dimension of the partnership (Tankel, 2020). Diplomatic visits, such as Vice President Kamala Harris's 2023 African tour, emphasized the U.S. commitment to enhancing trade, investment, and economic reform in Africa, with Nigeria as a key focus (Lenshie et al., 2024).

United States role in Counterinsurgency in Nigeria

The United States has played a significant role in supporting Nigeria's efforts to counter insurgency, particularly in the fight against Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province) (Adeyey et al., 2023). This role has encompassed various forms of assistance, including military aid, intelligence sharing, financial support, and development aid, through these multi-dimensional interventions, the U.S. aims to enhance Nigeria's counterterrorism capabilities and address some of the structural issues that fuel extremism (Olu-Adeyemi, 2020). However, the effectiveness of U.S. involvement has been shaped by complex challenges, including Nigeria's internal governance issues, regional security dynamics, and the resilience of insurgent groups.

Military Aid and Training: One of the primary avenues through which the U.S. supports Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts is through military aid and training which is why since 2014, when Boko Haram's activities intensified, the U.S. has increased its military support, providing Nigeria with equipment, training, and advisory assistance (Falode, 2019). Key military equipment supplied includes armoured vehicles, surveillance drones, and counter-IED (improvised explosive device) technology and in 2017, the U.S. approved the sale of 12 A-29 Super Tucano aircraft to Nigeria, which are light-attack aircraft equipped with precision-guided munitions (Okpaleke et al., 2023). These aircraft are intended to enhance Nigeria's ability to conduct airstrikes and improve the precision of its counterterrorism operations, but by mid-2021, the Nigerian Air Force had begun using these aircraft in operations against

insurgents in the northeast, marking a significant boost in Nigeria's aerial capabilities (Kfir, 2018).

Training provided by the U.S. military has also been instrumental in enhancing the skills of Nigerian security forces as U.S. Special Operations Forces have conducted training exercises with Nigerian troops, focusing on counterterrorism tactics, hostage rescue, intelligence gathering, and reconnaissance skills (Zbytovsky & Prouza, 2024). The U.S. has also trained Nigeria's civilian security agencies, including the Nigeria Police Force, in crowd control, human rights practices, and community engagement strategies to improve civil-military relations. while the military aid and training provided by the U.S. have strengthened Nigeria's counterterrorism response, the effectiveness of these efforts is sometimes hindered by systemic issues within the Nigerian military, such as corruption, inadequate maintenance of equipment, and challenges in intelligence utilization (Messineo, 2010; Gana et al., 2018).

Intelligence Sharing: Intelligence sharing between the U.S. and Nigeria has been a cornerstone of their counterterrorism cooperation, playing a crucial role in identifying and disrupting terrorist plots (Tankel, 2020). The U.S. has provided Nigeria with satellite imagery, aerial surveillance, and data analysis to help track Boko Haram and ISWAP movements, as well as to monitor suspected terrorist camps and supply routes (Habib, 2023). The deployment of U.S. drones in Niger, which can conduct surveillance across the Sahel region, has been instrumental in gathering intelligence that is later shared with Nigerian authorities and also this real-time information is critical for anticipating insurgent attacks and reducing the likelihood of ambushes or large-scale attacks on civilian populations (Okpaleke et al., 2023).

An example of successful intelligence collaboration occurred in 2014, following the abduction of over 270 schoolgirls from Chibok by Boko Haram. The U.S. provided intelligence support, including the use of drones and satellite imagery, to help locate the girls and monitor Boko Haram's movements, while the outcome was limited, the incident underscored the

importance of intelligence cooperation between the two countries (Habib, 2023; Okpaleke et al., 2023). Additionally, through the establishment of the Fusion Cell in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, the U.S. has created a platform for sharing classified information between Nigerian and American security agencies, allowing for better coordination and response to terrorist threats, however, intelligence sharing has faced obstacles, including concerns over data security and the risk of sensitive information being compromised due to corruption or leaks within the Nigerian system (de Simne & Iocchi, 2022)

Financial Assistance: The U.S. has provided substantial financial assistance to Nigeria to support its counterterrorism initiatives, since 2010, the U.S. has allocated millions of dollars in security aid through the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program, the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund, and other channels aimed at bolstering Nigeria's military capacity and enhancing its counterterrorism infrastructure (Tankel, 2020). Financial assistance has been directed toward purchasing military hardware, funding joint training programs, and supporting the restructuring of Nigeria's defense sector as seen in 2015, the U.S. pledged $600 million to support Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram, with funds allocated to enhancing border security, building law enforcement capacity, and improving communication networks to prevent cross-border insurgency (Okolie and Nnamani, 2016).

This aid from the U.S. has also supported initiatives to improve Nigeria's criminal justice system, focusing on the prosecution of terrorism cases and the U.S. has provided funding to train Nigerian judges and legal professionals in handling terrorism-related cases, aiming to strengthen the rule of law and improve accountability in the counterterrorism framework (Manu, 2021). However, while this financial support has been beneficial, issues such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and misallocation of resources have limited the full impact of U.S. financial assistance (Owojori, 2022). Concerns have also been raised regarding the accountability mechanisms in place, as some funds intended for counterterrorism may be diverted or misused within Nigeria's security agencies (Iwuoha, 2019).

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Development Aid: Apart from military and financial support the USA has also offered operational development support to Nigeria to fight terrorism as well as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and economic emasculation as key causes of terrorism (Tankel, 2020). Since 2009, the United States has worked through the United States Agency for International Development, economically empowering, educations and improving health services and Democratic governance in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states in Nigeria affected by insurgency (Manu, 2021). All these aims to provide conditions that will make extremism less attractive and also to provide hope for the vulnerable groups (Akinrinde, 2023).

A recent type of the USAID development assistance in Nigeria could be the Education Crisis Response program – the program focused on meeting the educational needs of children and young people affected by Boko Haram insurgency in the North-eastern states of Nigeria, where Boko Haram had been destructing schools and hinder learning and teaching (Owojori et al., 2022). The benefits of this program were enormous : thousands of children got a proper education and many young victims of violence received psychosocial support which would not let them become involved by the recoupement of the group. Also, the U.S development assistance has aimed at building democracy and governance, fighting corruption, supporting civil society institutions with a focus on peace and security (Alexander, 2020). Such efforts are crucial in combating the social and economic injustice which makes people turn to insurgency groups and although development aid is long term approach it is an important part of counter insurgency since it aims at eradicating alka causes which create environment that facilitates terrorism (Kfir, 2018)..

Impact of US Involvement

Effectiveness in countering terrorism: One of the primary goals of U.S. involvement in Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts has been to reduce terrorist activity and improve overall security. U.S. military aid and training

have contributed to enhancing the operational capabilities of the Nigerian military and security forces through the introduction of the A-29 Super Tucano aircraft has improved aerial surveillance and precision strike capabilities against Boko Haram and ISWAP, leading to successful operations that have recaptured territory from these insurgent groups (Habib, 2023). Reports indicate that U.S. assistance has contributed to the Nigerian military's ability to conduct targeted operations, disrupting the operational capabilities of Boko Haram and reducing the frequency of high-profile attacks, such as the mass abduction of schoolgirls (Owojori et al., 2022).

Joint military operations, informed by U.S. intelligence sharing, have resulted in significant operational successes such as the intelligence provided by the U.S. facilitated the rescue of hostages and the dismantling of terrorist cells in northern Nigeria (Iwuoha, 2019). The Nigerian military has conducted several operations leading to the deaths of key Boko Haram leaders, which has been attributed in part to U.S. support (Okolie & Nnamani, 2016). Furthermore, in the regions most affected by terrorism, there have been reported improvements in security conditions due to U.S. involvement, however, challenges remain, as violence from insurgent groups persists, and the security situation in Nigeria continues to be fluid (Akinrinde, 2023). Despite some successes, the overall reduction in terrorist activity is uneven, with reports indicating that Boko Haram and ISWAP have adapted to countermeasures, including resorting to asymmetric tactics such as suicide bombings and attacks on soft targets (Manu, 2021).

Human rights implications: The U.S. support for counterterrorism in Nigeria has raised significant human rights concerns, particularly regarding the conduct of Nigerian security forces and the potential consequences of U.S. assistance (Manu, 2021). The U.S. has often conditioned military assistance on respect for human rights, incorporating measures aimed at ensuring compliance with international human rights standards, however, the effectiveness of these measures in influencing Nigerian practices remains a topic of debate (Manu, 2020).

The Nigerian military's operations against insurgent groups have at times resulted in civilian casualties, raising alarms about the adherence to international humanitarian law and the U.S. has expressed concerns regarding the impact of military operations on civilians, with reports indicating instances where military actions have inadvertently harmed innocent civilians (Habib, 2023). This poses ethical questions regarding the balance between effective counterterrorism and the protection of civilian life as reports of extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions by Nigerian security forces in their fight against terrorism have emerged, often justified as necessary for maintaining security (Omobuwajo, 2021). U.S. assistance, particularly military support, can create complicity in these human rights violations if the aid does not come with robust mechanisms for accountability and oversight (Kfir, 2018).

Influence on Nigerian security policy: U.S. involvement has significantly shaped Nigeria's counterterrorism strategies and priorities, impacting how the country approaches security challenges (Abdulsalam, 2023). U.S. military training and equipment have influenced Nigerian military tactics, emphasizing modern counterinsurgency strategies that integrate intelligence-driven operations, joint task forces, and community engagement (Dauda, 2021). This shift towards a more structured and tactical approach has altered Nigeria's counterterrorism landscape.

The integration of new technologies, such as drones for surveillance and reconnaissance, reflects U.S. influence on Nigeria's military capabilities and this modernization has led to the development of strategies that prioritize intelligence gathering and operational precision, aimed at minimizing collateral damage while maximizing the effectiveness of military actions (Habib, 2023; Okpaleke et al., 2023). U.S. involvement has also encouraged Nigeria to enhance regional cooperation in counterterrorism, particularly within the framework of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) (Olu-Adeyemi, 2020). The U.S. has supported initiatives aimed at fostering

collaboration among countries in the Lake Chad Basin, emphasizing a collective approach to combatting terrorism (Bala & Tar, 2021).

Public perception: Public perception of U.S. involvement in Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts is mixed, reflecting both trust and resentment among various segments of the population (Zango, 2024). Some segments of the Nigerian public view U.S. support positively, recognizing the role it has played in enhancing Nigeria's military capabilities and efforts to combat terrorism while many others see U.S. involvement as necessary in the face of persistent security challenges, particularly given the limitations of Nigeria's military resources and the need for international assistance (Iwuoha, 2019).

Conversely, there is also significant skepticism and resentment towards U.S. involvement with concerns about human rights abuses associated with U.S.-backed military operations, perceived negligence towards civilian casualties, and the historical context of U.S. foreign policy in Nigeria contribute to distrust among certain groups (Okolie & Nnamani, 2016). Activists and civil society organizations have voiced concerns that U.S. assistance could inadvertently support oppressive practices by the Nigerian military (Putri, 2024). Additionally, media narratives play a crucial role in shaping public perception, with coverage of human rights violations and military operations affecting how U.S. involvement is viewed (Alaxander, 2020). When incidents of civilian harm or allegations of extrajudicial killings arise, they tend to provoke public outcry, impacting the legitimacy of U.S. assistance and influencing popular sentiment towards the U.S. government (Owojori et al., 2022).

Challenges and Limitations

Coordination and cooperation: Effective coordination and cooperation between the U.S. and Nigeria in counterterrorism efforts are crucial for achieving meaningful results, however, several challenges impede this collaboration. Trust is fundamental in any bilateral relationship, especially when it involves sensitive issues such as counterterrorism but historical

tensions, misunderstandings, and differing approaches to security can hinder the establishment of a reliable partnership (Manu, 2021). For instance, Nigeria's military has at times been reluctant to fully share operational details or intelligence with U.S. counterparts due to concerns over sovereignty, fear of leaks, or skepticism about U.S. motives and such mistrust can limit the effectiveness of joint operations and the sharing of critical intelligence needed to combat insurgents (Owojori et al., 2022).

Information sharing is vital for coordinating counterterrorism efforts, however, challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, differing security protocols, and a lack of streamlined communication channels often create barriers such as instances of miscommunication that have led to missed opportunities for coordinated strikes against insurgent targets (Habib, 2023). Furthermore, the sensitivity surrounding operational intelligence can result in a reluctance to share information, even within the Nigerian military, leading to fragmented approaches and a lack of unified action against terrorist threats (Alexander, 2020). The U.S. and Nigeria may also have different priorities and strategies when it comes to counterterrorism; while the U.S. often emphasizes a human rights-based approach and the need to minimize civilian casualties, Nigerian security forces may prioritize immediate operational successes, which can lead to a divergence in tactics and objectives to which this misalignment can create friction in cooperation and undermine the overall effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations (Adeyeye et al., 2023).

Sustainability: The long-term sustainability of U.S. counterterrorism assistance is critical for building Nigeria's capacity to address security threats independently because while U.S. assistance has been valuable in enhancing Nigeria's counterterrorism capabilities, there is a risk of creating a dependency on external support (Zango, 2024). If Nigeria becomes reliant on U.S. military aid and training without simultaneously building its internal capacity, the long-term effectiveness of these initiatives may be compromised and this dependency can hinder the development of self-sustaining security

institutions and limit Nigeria's ability to respond to evolving security threats autonomously (Manu, 2021).

The sustainability of U.S. counterterrorism assistance is also subject to fluctuations in U.S. foreign policy and budget allocations as changes in U.S. administration, shifting priorities in foreign aid, and broader geopolitical considerations can affect the consistency of support for Nigeria (Akinrinde, 2023). In times of budget constraints, funding for foreign military assistance may be reduced, impacting ongoing programs and undermining the momentum of capacity-building efforts and for U.S. assistance to be sustainable, it must be effectively integrated into Nigeria's national security framework (Omotuyi, 2021). However, challenges related to governance, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiencies can impede the effective implementation of programs and without strong governance structures and accountability measures, U.S. assistance may not achieve its intended outcomes, limiting the long-term impact on Nigeria's security landscape (Falode, 2019).

Addressing root causes: Terrorism in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with socio-economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality; while U.S. development assistance has aimed to tackle these underlying factors, the scale and complexity of the challenges often limit the impact of these efforts (Kfir, 2018). Initiatives aimed at enhancing education and economic opportunities in northern Nigeria have struggled to reach large segments of the population due to infrastructural deficits, corruption, and political instability, so for U.S. assistance to effectively address the root causes of terrorism, it must also focus on engaging local communities (Tar et al., 2022). However, programs often fail to adequately incorporate local perspectives and needs so community-driven initiatives that empower local populations and build resilience against extremist ideologies are essential for fostering long-term stability and without this grassroots approach, U.S. efforts risk being viewed as top-down interventions that do not resonate with the

realities faced by communities affected by violence (Zbytovsky & Prouza, 2024; Salihu, 2021).

Political factors also play a critical role in fueling terrorism in Nigeria as corruption, weak governance, and a lack of political inclusivity contribute to grievances that can be exploited by extremist groups (Kinsey & Krieg, 2021). U.S. efforts to promote good governance and strengthen democratic institutions in Nigeria have often faced resistance from entrenched political elites who may be reluctant to relinquish power or address issues of accountability (Messineo, 2010).

Double Standards in the US Counterinsurgency in Nigeria/Africa

Concerns that surround U.S counterinsurgency strategy in Nigeria and more broadly for the African continent thus poses critical questions about the policy standards, and objectives that underpin America's conduct both in Nigeria and Africa in general. These double standards are evident in the unequal, different form, and measure with which nations are approached, supported, and held accountable in counterterrorism, give it a perception of partiality which is seen by states (Kfir, 2018).

Double standards are said when the same situations are addressed by using different standards, and this is seen as hypocrisy or partial intervention based on politic, economical or strategical reasons. With regards to counterinsurgency, asymmetry which amounts to double standards can however be noticed in the intensity of military support, diplomatic attention and verbal condemnation of Rights abuses in different countries especially the African continent (Iwouha, 2019).

Terrorism, through Boko Haram and other insurgent group, has been a significant concern in the Nigerian, and the U.S. has offered, and continues to offer considerable support to Nigerian militarily in its fight against these demons, yet this seems to be selective across the region (Bala & Tar, 2022). For example, where the US has provided military support to Nigeria, it has been shy of providing a similar degree of support to other African countries

with insurgencies, for example Cameroon or Chad and so this differential military support raises questions about the criteria used to decide which country gets what and why (Iwouha, 2019).

The US over the years has supported Nigeria's military fight against Boko Haram with support that has been marred by concerns over human rights violation by the Nigerian military such as extra-judicial killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, and sexual violence, yet assistance continues, there seems to be the question of double standards (Salihu, 2021). In other regions, for instance the Middle East, the U.S has been faster in applying sanctions or even halting military assistance the moment human rights abuses are reported as this suggests that U.S policy might not really be about human rights but on predictability grounds (Tar et al., 2022).

The communism approach to counterterrorism typical of the United States often focuses mostly on the military power disregarding the root socio-economic and political causes of terrorism (Akinrinde et al., 2023). Specifically, counter-terrorism aid offered by United States to Nigeria has often centred on the provision of security assets, and trainings, rather than on broader development assistance (Manu, 2021). However, since the U.S., the developed country under study, has been more aggressive in the promotion of development aid in other parts of the world particularly in east Africa the country has invested in programs to solve the root causes according to Owojori et al. (2022). It provided political solutions and foci that raise questions about the real intentions of such players regarding sustainable stability and development in Nigeria.

Several important issues that academic literature on double standards of the U.S in counter insurgency in Nigeria and Africa found are: Several issues are widely pointed out by the research because scholars maintain that the U.S foreign policy is primarily driven by geostrategic considerations rather than universal democratic values and adherence to human rights (Obidimma & Jahnomso, 2023). The idea that the US supports ogIlitarian governments or turns a blind eye to oppression at the countries vital for combating terrorism

lessens its authority and credibility in promoting human rights to an international stage (Putri et al., 2024).

Scholars also advocate for the U.S., and the Nigerian government to be made responsible regarding human rights abuses and this is done through citing for more information on the military's operations, observing and obeying to international humanitarian law and making sure that the aids given by the United States do not lead to abuse (Kfir, 2018; Salihu, 2021). This type of accountability is crucial in as far as rebuilding that trust and legitimation of the relations between Nigeria and the United States of America is concerned.

Conclusion

The support from the United States in counter insurgency in Nigeria has included major provides of military equipment, intelligence cooperation, training, financial dependencies for the fight against terrorism and stabilization, although this cooperation is not devoid of its diffculties and dynamics (Okolie & Nnamani, 2016). Double standards which are common in America's foreign policy have, in many cases, led to complications that cause inefficiency in counterterrorism and breed suspicion regarding the real motive of the US (Zango, 2024). Moreover, also, the U.S approach has often focused on technical military factors more than the socio-economic and/or political factors that cause insurgencies and this has made its solutions challenging for the meanings of the long-term stability, security, and sustainable peace (Alexander, 2020). As the US continues to work out relations with Nigeria it should be apparent to the fact that the US needs a multi pronged approach that would involve military support alongside developmental assistance, respect for human rights, support for the democracy and the development of the Nigerian institutions (Owojori et al., 2022).

Recommendations

Adopt a Comprehensive Counterterrorism Strategy: The U.S. should develop a more integrated counterterrorism strategy that combines military assistance

with extensive development programs aimed at addressing poverty, unemployment, and education deficits in Nigeria, and as such, an approach should prioritize initiatives that empower local communities and promote resilience against extremist ideologies (Okolie & Nnamani, 2016).

Enhance Human Rights Oversight: Establish robust mechanisms for monitoring human rights compliance in military operations funded by U.S. assistance which includes requiring Nigerian forces to adhere to international humanitarian law and ensuring that U.S. military aid does not contribute to human rights violations (Obidimma & Jahnomso, 2023).

Strengthen Diplomatic Engagement: Increase diplomatic efforts with Nigerian leadership to foster open dialogue about security strategies, human rights, and governance. Regular high-level visits and strategic dialogues can help build trust, align priorities, and ensure a unified approach to counterinsurgency efforts (Omotuyi, 2021).

Address Root Causes of Insurgency: U.S. development assistance should target the root causes of terrorism, such as socio-economic disparities and political marginalization with programs that promote education, healthcare, job creation, and good governance which are essential for fostering long-term stability and reducing the appeal of extremist groups (Kfir, 2018).

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