
Olumuyiwa Babatunde Amao and Benjamin Maiangwa

University of Otago and University of Manitoba

ABSTRACT
This article undertakes a retrospective appraisal of Nigeria’s widely acclaimed, yet contentious, success in its interventionist role in Liberia and its seeming inability to contain the threats posed by members of the dreaded Islamist militant: Jamaat’u Ahsan Sunna Lidda’awati Wal Jihad/al-Wilayat al-Islamiyya Gharb Afriqiyyah, also known as Boko Haram. Drawing references from scholarly articles, electronic channels, and other commissioned reports, the article explains why Nigeria appears to be losing the war against Boko Haram, in contrast to its modest strides in Liberia between 1990 and 1997. We argue that Nigeria’s inability to contain the Boko Haram insurgency can be located within the context of its home-grown systemic challenges; particularly, its ineffectual political leadership and the politicisation of its national security under the Goodluck Jonathan Presidency.

Since its attainment of formal independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed a plethora of violent conflicts, reflected in deep seated regional divisions, pervasive political instability, and recurring ethno-religious conflicts (Lewis 2011). Aside from the Niger Delta crisis in the south, inter-confessional and ethnic violence, which invariably has to do with issues regarding land ownership, political power, and the uniquely Nigerian concept of settler and indigeneity (farmer-herder conflict), has become commonplace in northern Nigeria. The radical evolution of the Boko Haram insurgency since July 2009 can thus be ‘yet another phase in the recurring pattern that violent uprisings, riots and disturbances have become in Nigeria’ (Adesoji 2010: 96). What made the Boko Haram insurgency even more disturbing to many is the seeming inability of the Nigerian military to contain the recurring violence perpetrated by the group.

Arguably celebrated for its significant military interventions, especially during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone from the late 1980s through the 1990s, Nigeria’s military has recently come under severe disparagement for its inability to check the Boko Haram insurgency, a development that raises questions about Nigeria’s military response to managing violence at the home front and abroad. In the 1970s through the 1990s, Nigeria was regarded as the leading light in Africa, and one of the major powers on the continent, particularly in the context of peacekeeping and conflict management. That
period was the time when Nigeria’s leadership role on the continent was motivated by a doctrine of *Pax Nigeriana*, which was coined in 1970 by Bolaji Akinyemi (Nigeria’s former minister of foreign affairs between 1985 and 1987) to describe Nigeria’s leadership role in the founding of the African Union (AU), known then as Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Adebajo 2008a). The designation became an expression of Nigeria’s leadership commitment and responsibility to the African continent. The *Pax Nigeriana* philosophy articulates how Nigeria’s demographic preponderance, its economic and natural endowments, and its staggering human resources have been and can be put into use in providing leadership for Africa (Fawole 1993).

More than anything else, this doctrine is believed to have informed Nigeria’s commanding role in its various mediatory initiatives in West Africa – through the instrumentality of the sub-regional organisation, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and its peacekeeping unit, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) – and as a launch pad for Nigeria’s emergence as a respected actor on the wider continental scene. Nigeria has demonstrated this sphere of importance and influence on a number of occasions. As evident in the country’s military intervention in Chad between 1979 and 1982, its deployment of over 200,000 soldiers to several peace support missions around the globe, and its contribution of troops to at least 40 major UN and regional peacekeeping missions in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (Adebajo 2008a).

Given the preceding background, and taking cognisance of the seemingly dwindling capacity of the Nigeria military as evidenced by its dealings with Boko Haram during the Goodluck Jonathan Presidency, this article attempts a comparative analysis of Nigeria’s widely referenced commanding role in Liberia and its responses to the Boko Haram insurgency from July 2009, when the group’s activities assumed a catastrophic dimension, to the end of Goodluck Jonathan administration in May 2015. It is imperative to mention, at the outset, that this comparison has become necessary given the widely referenced feats alluded to the Nigerian state, particularly, its army in the various interventionist roles it played both in the West African sub-region, and on the entire African continent. Added to this acclaim is the general belief that Nigeria, owing to its socio-political and economic resources on the continent, should possess the wherewithal to resist and adequately confront any threat to its territorial sovereignty. More importantly, there is the need to examine why a country, once a reference point in the discourse on peacekeeping and conflict resolution in Africa (as it was seen, for example, in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau) appears to be struggling to contain a home-grown insurgency.

With references to Nigerian military’s contentious, but also decisive role in Liberia between 1990 and 1997, this article seeks to specifically answer the following questions: Why is the Nigerian army unable to contain the home-grown Boko Haram insurgency despite its leading interventionist role in West Africa and on the continent? Are there differences in the approaches deployed by the Nigeria military in Liberia and its approach in the campaign against Boko Haram under the administration of former president, Goodluck Jonathan? If so, how do these differences affect the war against the Boko Haram insurgency? Could Nigeria’s seeming inability to contain this insurgency be a function of a decline in its leadership and military capacity to respond to such threats or a consequence of other extraneous factors? And lastly, in what ways can Nigeria effectively overcome the Boko Haram insurgency?
To answer the foregoing questions, the article is divided into five sections, with the first serving as introduction. The second section assesses the underlying factors and explanations for Nigeria’s intervention in Liberia, as well as the approaches used by the Nigeria military in the intervention. The third section undertakes a retrospective appraisal of the Boko Haram insurgency, including the probable factors responsible for its continuing germination. The fourth section compares the response of the Nigerian military in Liberia and its role in the campaign against Boko Haram, and with insights from the experience of the Nigerian military in Liberia explains why the military appears to be losing the war against Boko Haram. The fifth and concluding section proffers some possible solutions on how the Nigerian military and government can effectively overcome the Boko Haram quagmire.

Nigeria and ECOMOG in the Liberian Civil War: Contending explanations

Nigeria’s involvement in Liberia as Margaret Vogt (1992) argues, has ignited a debate among African scholars, particularly, with respect to the role and mandate of the ECOMOG interventionist force. This debate has been argued as hinging on two main questions: Was the Nigeria-led ECOMOG intervention fuelled by its perceived hegemonic aspirations in West Africa? Or was the intervention intended to offer strong lessons in regional conflict management in a world where the West is becoming increasingly disengaged from Africa (Vogt 1992)? Providing an adequate response to these questions requires an in-depth analysis from two different perspectives: the National Interest and Economic Diplomacy; and the Personal Interest schools of thought.

The National Interest and Economic Diplomacy schools of thought

Proponents of the National Interest perspective have adduced the hostage-taking of about 3,000 people (mostly Nigerian embassy staff and lecturers at the University of Monrovia) by forces belonging to the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), as well as the need to secure their release, as overtly responsible for the aggressiveness with which Nigeria pursued its military intervention in Liberia. The proponents of this school argue that if Nigeria had failed to act, it would have amounted to a negation of the country’s commitment to the essentials of its national interest principles, which recognise the protection of the lives of its citizens as a fundamental objective (see for example Fawole 1993; Adebajo 2008a). Thus, intervening in Liberia was seen by the Ibrahim Babangida regime (1985–1993) as a continuation of its commitment to protecting its national interest, which, in this case, was the endangered lives of its citizens in a foreign land.

In addition to the above reasoning, there is the belief that Nigeria’s involvement in Liberia corresponds largely to the country’s foreign policy posture of ensuring peace and tranquillity in neighbouring states. After the Cold War, Nigeria’s role in Africa was enhanced as neither of the two main ideological blocs (East and West) showed renewed interest in the security affairs of the continent. Consequently, it became practicable for Nigeria to command and exert its authority in West Africa: a phenomenon that has been popularly associated with its idea of Pax Nigeriana (Adebajo 2008b: 87). Nigeria’s posture of ensuring peace and stability in West Africa also partly emerged from its
experience during the Civil War (1967–1970), particularly given the ‘negative’ involvement of some West African countries during that War. According to David Francis:

the role played by neighbouring countries, in particular, how they were used by extra-regional and foreign powers as a staging post for support to the secessionist mission of Biafra, prompted a shift in Nigeria’s post-independence foreign and security policy from isolationism to intervention in regional security issues. (2009: 104)

Similarly, Nigeria’s involvement in the Liberian crisis, as Alaba Ogunsanwo (1985) argues, can be viewed from the lenses of Nigeria’s ‘sincere’ desire to facilitate the defence of the territorial integrity of all African states, particularly the West African sub-region, from the influx of refugees and clandestine groups.

The principle behind Nigeria’s decision to intervene in Liberia was further echoed by the Nigerian government at a press conference delivered by the country’s then vice president, Augustus Aikhomu who noted:

unless arrested, the carnage in Liberia could spill over to neighbouring countries, leading to the possibility of an external non-African intervention, hence the need for the deployment of troops to help stop the carnage. (1990: 1)

When further interpreted, it could be argued that Nigeria’s intervention in Liberia was seen as an opportunity to show to the rest of the world that Nigeria had the resources and the ability to secure its sub-region without foreign involvement.

One popular view held that Nigeria’s intervention in Liberia derived from its larger economic diplomatic mission and responsibility to Africa. Proponents of this line of thought argue that Nigeria, by virtue of being a major political and economic force in Africa, has the responsibility to lead Africa in the promotion of peace, and in the championing of the continent’s socioeconomic and political development. As SI Ebohon and Neville Obakhedo argue, it is believed:

Playing such a noble role in the economic construction and reconstruction of the region presents Nigeria with an opportunity to assert her dominant position in the region as a matter of prestige. Analysts argue that if Nigeria fails to do so, other credible and contending regional challengers such as Ghana, Egypt, Cote d’Ivoire and South Africa would take on such responsibilities. (2012: 163)

In line with Ebohon and Obakhedo’s (2012) observation, Nigeria’s leadership roles in the politico-economic and military activities of both ECOWAS and the AU have often been premised on a commitment to its age-long foreign policy principle of Afro-centrism, and its ideological assumption of an ‘altruistic big brother role’ in West Africa and on the African continent generally.

**The Personal Interest school of thought**

Advocates of the Personal Interest school of thought have situated Nigeria’s intervention in Liberia within the confines of the inter-personal relationship between Nigeria’s Ibrahim Babangida and the late Liberian leader and warlord, Samuel Doe. The relationship between the two leaders, they noted, is responsible for the significant investments the Babangida regime made in Liberia during this period. These investments include the regime’s contribution of about US$1-million towards the establishment of the Ibrahim Babangida Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Liberia, the
large cache of military supplies Babangida made available to Doe to quell the Charles Taylor-led NPFL rebellion, and the Nigerian government’s payment of the Liberian section of the Trans-African highway which the Liberian government named after Babangida, Nigeria’s settlement of the debt (US$25-million) that Liberia owed the African Development Bank (AFDB), and a further investment of another US$25-million in the joint Liberia-Guinea Mifergui iron project (see, for instance, Aning 1994; Sesay 1996; Dunn 1998; Tarr 1998; Walraven 1999; and Ellis 1999).

Another possible explanation for Nigeria’s interventionist role in Liberia within this school of thought was General Babangida’s leadership ambition and desire to create an image of himself as ‘a fearless, brave and great leader’ whose memory, he had hoped, would remain indelible not only in Nigeria but also in the contemporary history of the West African region (Adebajo 2008b: 87). Regarding Babangida’s role in the intervention in Liberia, it could be inferred that his involvement in the Liberian Civil War anchored on the desire to prove that under his leadership Nigeria possessed everything it required to be a peacemaker abroad. This inference suggests that leadership aspirations were a centrifugal determinant of Nigeria’s foreign policy. General Babangida saw Liberia as the most suitable platform to showcase his charismatic traits and morale and to boost his ego. A graphic illustration of Babangida’s drive for power and recognition as a statesman was made by Wole Soyinka (1996):

Babangida’s love for power was visualized in actual terms to mean: power over Nigeria, over the nation’s impressive size, its potential, over the nation’s powerful status and within the comity of nations. The potency of Nigeria was an augmentation of his own sense of power.

(1996: 14)

Alluding to the power and influence wielded by Babangida between 1985 and 1993, Shehu Othman (1989:142–3) observed that ‘no other Nigerian leader had established such a firmer grip over the military hierarchy and on the country than the way Babangida did’. Babangida, Othman (1989) claims, relished his personal contribution to Nigeria’s contemporary history, together with the way he exerted his influence and personal authority on matters of state and those concerning Nigeria’s relationship with Liberia. Adebajo further argues:

Babangida’s desire to demonstrate his leadership potential to West Africa and to the world at large, led to the use of Liberia as a centrepiece of his administration’s foreign policy focus; a development which further exacerbated the already strained relationship between Nigeria and Liberia. (2008b: 188)

Following the resolutions reached at the 13th session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government held on 28 to 30 May 1990 in The Gambia, President Babangida of Nigeria, canvassed for a community Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) to intervene in Liberia, with Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Guinea as members (Ajayi 1998: 183–4). In the words of Babangida, ‘Nigeria cannot fold its arms and stand back, while the Liberian crisis continued to claim more lives and also increasingly turned into an excuse for foreign intervention in African affairs’ (Akporor & Nwolise 1990: 104). As the SMC was unable to make progress on the diplomatic front, it resorted to creating ECOMOG, which was deployed on 7 August 1990 to ‘keep the peace’ in Liberia (Tuck 2000: 2).
ECOMOG drew its military contingent from the member countries of the mediation committee (Ajayi 1998).

Courtesy of its hegemonic status, geographic location, economic strength and military capabilities, Nigeria naturally assumed command of the operation and also contributed most of the ECOMOG material in terms of logistics, manpower and finance, firstly under the Ibrahim Babangida regime and later under General Sani Abacha. According to Funmi Olonisakin (2008: 30), Nigeria contributed 70 per cent of the ECOMOG troops. It is also believed that Nigeria committed about US$4 billion between 1990 and 2003 in Liberia and had the largest number of troops in the 3,600 soldiers that were deployed for that mission (Adebajo 2008a). The ECOMOG force was also bolstered by the support of other African countries. In 1995, for instance, ECOMOG ‘consisted of 8,430 troops organised into ten battalions; of these troops 4,908 were Nigerian, 1,028 were from Ghana, 609 from Guinea, 747 from Tanzania, 760 from Uganda, 359 from Sierra Leone, and ten each were provided by Gambia and Mali’ (Tuck 2000: 2). Such outpouring of support by African countries to ECOWAS played a crucial role in the outcome of the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia.

But while Babangida is given some credit for initiating the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia, his role in the Civil War was by no means something associated with a universally positive narrative. Babangida’s involvement in Liberia has been criticised as dictatorial, both within Nigeria and outside, wherein critics saw the unilateral decision to support ECOMOG as clear evidence of the corruption of an authoritarian military regime. Many critics argued that it was a nepotistic move by Babangida to use his country’s resources in a time of economic decline to protect his Liberian friend Samuel Doe.

In addition to the National Interest and Economic Diplomacy and the Personal Interest explanations for the interventionist role played by Nigeria in Liberia, other explanations abound. One of these is the aspiration of the Nigerian army to prove to the West African sub-region, Africa, and indeed the rest of the world that it had the necessary resources and capabilities to maintain peace within its own constituency (West Africa) (Adebajo 2008b: 87). The Nigerian army was keen to demonstrate to the international community that it possessed the required professionalism, manpower, and resources to maintain peace even outside its own territory. This posturing was perhaps necessary to dispel insinuations that the Nigerian army was only proficient in staging coups, particularly given the historical antecedents of coup d’états in Nigeria (Kupolati 1990: 327).

Considering the fact that the army had been largely inactive after the completion of its mission in Chad between 1980 and 1984, the Liberian civil war provided a suitable environment and opportunity for the Nigerian military to demonstrate that it remained an effective peacekeeper that could maintain peace as well as exert its authority within a sub-region that it considered its primary constituency. This role was further informed by the successes recorded by the Nigerian military in its United Nations (UN) supervised international peacekeeping efforts in the Congo, the Balkans, Lebanon, Kuwait, Western Sahara, Somalia, Rwanda, and the Sudan.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that ‘the Nigerian military made use of the Liberian civil war as a testing ground for both its [[(in)effectiveness] and the viability of its arsenals and to also act as a deterrent to any hypothetical enemy’ (Omede 2012: 51). Through the use of the army and in terms of Nigeria’s need to maintain peace with its contiguous states and West Africa, the Babangida regime, as Adebajo (2008b: 189) notes,
assumed the responsibility of restoring peace to Liberia in spite of the huge cost implications. The regime estimated this cost at more than US$4 billion, although it is believed that it might have been as high as US$10 billion (Adebajo 2008b: 189).

By 1993, the Nigerian-led ECOMOG mission in Liberia had assumed a fully-fledged peacekeeping role, which necessitated the initial deployment of approximately 3,000 soldiers, 70 per cent of whom were drawn from the Nigerian army outside Monrovia (Adeyemi 1999). As Segun Adeyemi (1999) notes, the ECOMOG operation in Liberia was largely sustained by Nigeria’s willingness to bear the operational costs of the mission, which was by no means an easy one, particularly given the complexities associated with Liberia’s ethnic configuration. Although the UN played a substantial role in Liberia’s peace process, achieving peace in Liberia would have almost been impossible, save for Nigeria’s intervention through the instrumentality of ECOWAS. This intervention is even more significant because it happened at a time when the world was still uncertain about the pattern that the crisis in Liberia would follow, including the dimension(s), which the intervention should take. As a result of this intervention, Charles Taylor’s unconstitutional ascendancy to power was blocked. When elections were subsequently held in 1997 following a peace deal, Taylor emerged victorious and became president; he was sworn into office on 2 August 1997 (Tuck 2000; Adebajo & Ismail 2004).

Explicating Nigeria’s role in the Liberian conflict

Evolving from the foregoing, it suffices to argue that Nigeria’s goal of attaining peace in Liberia was achieved; though at a cost its leadership possibly never anticipated. Furthermore, if prestige was a part of her goal, it was also achieved as her participation further brought the nation into the limelight. Similarly, Nigeria’s interest in the protection of the lives of her citizens was also achieved, though some Nigerians reportedly lost their lives in the crisis. Yet despite all its modest achievements, Nigeria’s role and approach to ending the Civil War in Liberia was mired by allegations of human rights abuses and major tactical flaws. There existed considerable evidence of human rights abuses committed by the Nigerian-led ECOMOG troops during the 1992/1993 period when it switched from peacekeeping to enforcement operations (Tuck 2000). There was also the issue of the illegitimacy of the ECOMOG intervention, ab initio, considering that it was initially not approved by the UN Security Council until in 1992 ‘when it retrospectively approved ECOMOG’s actions under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter’ (Tuck 2000: 4).

Having been legitimised by the UN, ECOMOG increased its level of troops and extended its campaign from October 1992 to April 1993 (Olonisakin & Aning 1999: 22). During this period, ECOMOG employed a wide-range of tactics including air, ground and naval forces to bomb the Firestone rubber plantation because it suspected it to be a military target (Olonisakin & Aning 1999). The bombing resulted in a considerable number of civilian deaths. This development led to condemnation and allegations that ECOMOG did not comply with the ‘rule of proportionality’ in bombing these targets (Olonisakin & Aning 1999: 22). There were also reports that ‘ECOMOG launched air attacks (by Nigerian planes) on Liberia’s border with Cote d’Ivoire, where a clearly identified relief convoy was stationed, killing and injuring dozens of local people’ (Olonisakin & Aning 1999: 22–3).

It is important to underscore that the Nigerian leaders – General Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha – who spearheaded the operation of ECOMOG in Liberia, were military
dictators with credentials of gross human rights abuses at home, such as the suppression of opposition groups, harassment of civilians, civil societies, journalists, and individuals thought to be conspiring against their regimes (Olonisakin & Aning 1999). Thus, it is hardly surprising that they paid less attention to issues of human rights in the ECOMOG operation in Liberia and allowed the Nigerian troops to reproduce military behaviours that existed in their own country (Olonisakin & Aning 1999). There was also antipathy from ECOWAS member states towards Nigeria’s heavy-handedness and monopolistic approach in the logistical operations of ECOMOG. One example is the dispute with Ghana and Benin regarding Nigeria’s unilateral replacement of the ECOMOG force commander Arnold Quainoo (a Ghanaian) with a ‘more aggressive commander’ (Adibe 1997: 476), Nigerian General Joshua Dogonyaro.

Such developments sustained the perception that ECOMOG was nothing but the ‘war machine’ of Nigeria (Kudjoe 1994: 290 cited in Tuck 2000: 5). General Dogonyaro’s campaign to rout out militias from the heartland of Liberia ‘inflicted so much collateral damage on Monrovia as to warrant frantic calls by many individuals and organisations, including Western diplomats sympathetic to ECOMOG, for General Dogonyaro’s replacement’ (Adibe 1997: 476). The rigidity with which Nigeria led the intervention in Liberia cost ECOWAS the support of many member states, particularly the Francophone countries (Adibe 1997: 483).

Meanwhile, despite Nigeria’s huge financial commitment to ECOMOG, the force was short of resources to deliver on its ‘ambitious peace-making programmes’ (Tuck 2000: 8). The financial shortfall experienced by ECOMOG led ‘to numerous alleged incidents of corruption, including the sale of fuel purchased by the US and intended for ECOMOG vehicles; hence the local joke that ECOMOG was an acronym for “Every Car or Moving Object Gone”’ (Tuck 2000: 9). According to Adibe (1997), ECOMOG also committed a blunder by installing an alternative government in Monrovia – the controversial Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU), led by Amos Sawyer: ‘The IGNU lacked any basis of local support, and became a uniting force for the leaders of disparate militia factions whose principal desire was to assume the presidency of Liberia’ (Adibe 1997: 481). The Nigerian military contingent involved in the ECOMOG operation also suffered some casualties during the disarming of NPFL rival militias in 1995. Adibe (1997: 481) describes how the Nigerian-led ECOMOG forces were ambushed by elements of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy – Johnson faction (ULIMO-J), which was followed by a heavy artillery bombardment of ECOMOG’s base in the provincial town of Tubmanburg in diamond-rich Bomi County. As a result, tension brewed and ‘security deteriorated rapidly, leading to the indefinite suspension of the ongoing disarmament operation in the Liberian hinterland’ (Adibe 1997: 481).

The perceived success of the Nigerian military in Liberia, therefore, is a highly contentious issue, particularly when its motivation and approaches are taken into consideration. In terms of its motivation, the intervention is viewed as a scheme by Nigerian rulers (Babangida and Abacha) to consolidate their despotic rule at home (Adibe 1997: 485). As already stated, ECOMOG forces were also accused of being partial and heavy-handed during the intervention in Liberia, and there was the issue of Nigeria’s reluctance to cede control and command of the ECOMOG mission to other member states. Moreover, although the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia is regarded as a pace setter and first experiment of regional-global partnership between ECOWAS and the UN (Olonisakin 2003: 112),
Abdel-Fatau Musah (2009: 18) argues that the UN showed little interest at the early stages of the Liberian Civil War and allowed ECOWAS to intervene without the initial mandate of the Security Council.

However, there are some positive lessons to take from the role of the Nigerian military in Liberia. Daniel Bach (2007: 307) argues that Nigeria’s diplomatic, financial, and military involvement shaped processes and outcomes in a decisive fashion from the decision of ECOWAS to intervene in the Liberian Civil War in 1990 up to the temporary solution of the conflict in 1997. As contended by Cyril Obi (2009: 121), the ECOWAS-led initiative under the leadership of Nigeria broadened the scope of ECOWAS’s functions and shifted its attention away from the historical culture of non-intervention to that of collective regional security. Continuing, Obi (2009) argues that the perseverance and commitment shown by the Nigerian military, despite losing about ‘one thousand troops’ (Obi 2009: 122) to the War, is also commendable. It bears mentioning that the effort of the Nigerian military in Liberia was bolstered by the short training provided by the United States to the Nigerian Battalions prior to the operations, as well as the provision of trucks, radios, and helicopters by the US and the UN (Olonisakin 2008: 27; Leatherwood 2001: 21).

Considering the positive impacts or otherwise of Nigeria’s military involvement in Liberia, what lessons, then, may be learned for its involvement in the fight against Boko Haram? To answer this question, it is apposite at this juncture to examine the context, history, and violent activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria.

**Boko Haram and the development of violent religious activism in northern Nigeria**

Northern Nigeria provides ample opportunity for the staging of sectarian and communal crises. The effects of a long history of neglect in terms of development and education, and disinvestment in industries and infrastructure in the region have birthed a pool of disillusioned youths ready to be used and manipulated by insurgents and religious extremists to fight and kill in the name of God. As noted by Abdelkérim Ousman:

> decades of military dictatorships, economic mismanagement, financial chaos, lawlessness, poverty, political repression, social tensions, corruption, are but major causes behind the rise of Islamism in [northern] Nigeria. (2004: 77)

Nigeria’s ethno-religious make-up also presents a peculiar problem for the stability of the country. There are over 250 ethnic groups and 450 spoken languages in Nigeria. The dominant ethnic identities are Hausa (north), Igbo (south-east), and Yoruba (south-west). There are two major religious groups in the country – Christianity and Islam – that are geographically polarised, with Muslims accounting for about 50 per cent of the population and mostly concentrated in the north, and Christians representing roughly 40 per cent of the population, and highly concentrated in the south. The other 10 per cent of the population are purportedly animists (Barna 2014: 15). Given the importance that many Nigerians attach to their ethno-religious identities, politicians and religious demagogues often exploit this ethno-religious attachment to their advantage to ignite violence as they clamour for political power and economic resources at the centre.
It is claimed that many Muslims in northern Nigeria look up to religion as an alternative ideology of governance because they have historically been dissatisfied with the leadership of the Nigerian state, especially its failure to provide adequate solutions to their socio-economic and political problems (Ousman 2004: 74). In addition, several past northern Muslim reformers such as Ahmadu Bello, the then premier of northern Nigeria, Aminu Kano, the leader of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and Abubakar Gumi, a Muslim religious scholar who inspired the foundation of the Yan Izala (Society of Removal of Innovation and Reestablishment of the Sunna) movement, have tried to develop programmes of reform that sought to Islamize modernity and purify the society (Loimeier 2012: 139).

The reforms advocated by Yan Izala and other likeminded groups were themselves challenged by some fringe groups within Islam who perceived such reforms as ‘either not radical enough in political terms or basically un-Islamic, equivalent to another form of Westernization’ (Loimeier 2012: 139). One such group was the Maitatsine (the one who curses) movement. The Maitatsine is a millenarian radical Islamist group led by a Cameroonian Muslim scholar, Mohammed Marwa (the Maitatsine). Marwa and his followers rejected all forms of non-Qur’anic innovations such as watches, western dress, bicycles, cars, and money. Given the group’s heretic proclamations, it was banished from the city of Kano (Loimeier 2012: 139).

However, on 19 December 1980, Marwa and his group attacked a major Mosque in Kano, which triggered several days of confrontation between his followers and the Nigerian military. About 6,000 people were killed, including Muhammad Marwa himself. Despite this seeming defeat, the group smouldered with vengeance for a while, ‘rising in rebellion in 1982 (Maiduguri and Kaduna), 1984 (Yola), 1985 (Gombe), and 1993 (Funtua)’ (Loimeier 2012: 139). Other bouts of violent religious conflicts ensued after the eventual demise of Maitatsine, not least in Kaduna, Plateau, and Kano states. But it was not until the return to democratic rule in 1999 that another militant religious group (Boko Haram) emerged, posing a serious national security threat to Nigeria. Ben Okri (2014) situates the rise of Boko Haram within the context of Nigeria’s transition to democratic rule, arguing that the group rose in an attempt ‘to bring about, through terror, a return to the [political] hegemony of the north’. Similarly, Ousman (2004: 77) claims ‘the advent of democratic pluralism has brought into focus the Sharia as a new tool by which northern Muslim leaders may well mobilize the masses around the Islamist rhetoric to achieve political gains and keep the balance of power to their advantage’.

Whatever the merits of the foregoing claims, it is arguable that the Boko Haram phenomenon reflects certain characteristics of the historical processes of religious activism and politicization in northern Nigeria. More so, and as Eghosa Osaghae asserts:

Boko Haram represents a part of the resistance to the (sinful) colonial state and its Western rudiments; a reaction to widespread poverty and perceptions of relative deprivation held especially by marginalised youths who find the message of an alternative society quite appealing; and the contradictions of social and political relations in northern Nigeria that have produced foot soldiers and agents for political gladiators. (2014: 18)

Having situated Boko Haram within the systemic challenges and history of religious activism and politicisation in Nigeria, the next section provides a five-year summary of the group’s insurgency.

The Jama’atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda’awati Wal Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad) or al-Wilayat al-Islāmiyya Gharb Afriqiyyah (Islamic State West Africa Province), otherwise known as Boko Haram (Western Education is sinful), was originally a group of some 200 people, who migrated to the remote parts of the northeastern part of Yobe state near the country’s border with Niger Republic sometime around 2002. The group was basically pacifist in nature at its conception. Its initial ambition was simply to live a sedentary lifestyle away from what it perceives as the corrupt make-up of the northern states. The group’s initial leader, the late Mohammed Yusuf, admonished his followers to reject modern Islamic schools of the Yan Izala as well as Nigeria’s secular system of education. He also spurned Nigerian democracy and the constitution, and criticised the arbitrariness of Nigerian institutions (Loimeier 2012: 149).

Between 2002 and 2007 the group engaged in several altercations with local communities and the police in Yobe state, which led to its expulsion and eventual relocation to Borno state, where it rose to prominence. In June 2009, a confrontation between the group and the Nigerian police force (Operation Flush) in Borno state triggered an uprising in July 2009 in five northern states that left over 800 people – mostly group members – dead. During this uprising, the group’s mosque (Ibn Taymiyya Masjid) in Maiduguri was destroyed, and the Boko Haram leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was reportedly killed while still in police custody. According to JC Hill (2012: 2), the killing of Yusuf by the Nigerian police motivated the group to significantly expand and intensify its armed campaign. Hill (2012: 2) also claims the action of the Nigerian ‘security forces’ against the group outraged popular sentiments in the north to such an extent as to ensure that the group had a steady stream of volunteers and sympathisers. In recent times, however, the accentuation of Boko Haram’s violent activities and its audacious attacks against civilians have led to a considerable diminishing of its stream of volunteers and sympathisers in northern Nigeria (Barna 2014: 6).

After the 2009 uprising, Boko Haram appeared defeated and went into exile. It is claimed the group took refuge and trained with other Islamist militants in Mali, Niger, and Algeria while in exile (Oftedal 2013: 35). On its return to Nigeria in mid-2010, Boko Haram became vicious, using such sophisticated weapons as Vehicle Borne Improvised Devices and AK-47 to conduct attacks, including suicide bombings. When it returned from exile, the group became strongly resolved to exert its influence in northern Nigeria and establish an Islamic Caliphate akin to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Boko Haram eventually pledged allegiance to ISIL in March 2015. Since its return from exile in 2010, the group has expanded its list of enemies from security personnel and politicians to include foreigners, civilians, clerics, students, young girls, women, and those it considered to be engaging in un-Islamic practices (Hill 2012).

Boko Haram has conducted several high-profile attacks including the Christmas Day bombing on 25 December 2011 of St Theresa’s Catholic Church Madalla in Minna, Niger state, and the 20 January 2012 coordinated attacks at government establishments in Kano, where more than 185 persons were reportedly killed. Numerous attacks on security outfits and civilians by Boko Haram were also documented in 2013. These include attacks on secondary schools and tertiary institutions where several students were killed. Due to
the porosity of the West and Central African borders, and the issue of cross-border family, ethnic, and religious ties, Boko Haram’s violent activities have extended to neighbouring Cameroon, Chad, Niger and, to some extent, Mali (Loimeier 2012: 138; Barna 2014: 12). The group has kidnapped western targets including a French priest and seven-member French family in Cameroon in 2013, as well as the wife of the deputy prime minister of Cameroon. In April 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 schoolgirls from a secondary school in Chibok, Borno state. The French family members and the wife of the Cameroonian deputy prime minister have since been released, but the Chibok girls, save for the 50 who escaped and the 21 that were released in October 2016, are still in captivity. Judit Barna (2014: 8) claims that a ransom of US$3-million was paid for the release of the French nationals.

Perhaps the most deadly of Boko Haram’s attacks was the one which the group unleashed on Baga, and Doron Baga, in Borno state on 3 January 2015. Although, the exact number of human lives lost in the attack remains contested, the figure is said to hover between 200 and 2,500, and an estimated 3,700 houses were said to have been destroyed. In addition, 14,638 Nigerians reportedly fled to Chad, among which were at least 105 unaccompanied children who found their way to the Ngoubou camp located in Chad, while another estimated 5,000 people were said to have fled to Maiduguri, the Borno state capital. On the whole, Boko Haram attacks represent ‘more than 80% of all terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2013 for which a perpetrator group was identified in Nigeria’ (START 2014: 4). Barna (2014: 9) claims the death toll arising from Boko Haram’s activities between July 2009 and July 2014 is over 22,000.

The terror attacks have also led to an unprecedented internal displacement of civilians in the northeastern region of Nigeria. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports that there are nearly 650,000 internally displaced persons in northeastern Nigeria. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights put the estimate of all the internally displaced persons in Nigeria since 2010 due to violence at 3.3 million (one of the highest numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the world). As at 2014, Niger alone hosts about 40,000 Nigerian refugees who have fled their homes as a result of the attacks of Boko Haram (UN Human Rights 2014; Barna 2014: 12).

Considering the modest success of the Nigerian military during the Liberia civil war, and its experience in other peace operations in Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Cote d’Ivoire, and Mali, it is perplexing for many Nigerians and external observers that the Nigerian military is failing to contain the insurgency of Boko Haram. Although questions have been asked on the strategies adopted by the Nigerian military to deal with the insurgency, relevant information in the literature and from the Nigerian military authorities is scarce, except for the state of emergency declared by the Goodluck Jonathan administration in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states in May 2013. This emergency declaration was extended in November 2013 for another six months in order to match the increasing intensity of Boko Haram’s attacks. Initially, this move was lauded as a robust approach that could eventually sound the death knell for Boko Haram.

Conversely, it was after this declaration that Boko Haram grew more sophisticated, intensified its attacks on the civilian population, and successfully raided a number of military bases including the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) base, located on the outskirts of Baga in northeastern Borno state. Perhaps, a noteworthy breakthrough for the Nigerian army in its campaign against the group, particularly between 14 February and 28 May 2015, is the procurement of arms from the black market, and the employment
of mercenaries’ from South Africa in the fight against Boko Haram, as well as the contribution of regional countries including Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. However, the fact that it took the Nigerian military almost five years to start making serious advances on Boko Haram questions their ‘rules of engagement’ and engenders the need for comparison with their perceived ‘successful’ involvement in Liberia.

Response to the Liberian Civil War and the Boko Haram insurgency compared

Zacharias Pieri and Rafael Serrano (2014: 4) argue that the failure of the Nigerian military to contain Boko Haram under the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan may partly be attributed to the ‘fundamental structural changes to the military and political systems in Nigeria’. Given the reform of the Nigerian military after the return to democracy in 1999, many top brass (so-called politicised military officers) were retired on 10 June 1999 by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration (Fayemi & Olonisakin 2009: 249). Subsequently, the retired and acting officers began making inroads into the political and economic activities in the country, thus setting the stage for the politicisation, and weakening of the military. As Jimi Peters (1997: xi) argues, the military’s influence has expanded into the economic sphere where officers, ‘retired and serving, head or serve on the boards of public corporations, and companies in the private sector or have establishments of their own’. Such meddling by the Nigerian military officers in politics, as well as in the economic sphere of the country, inexorably engenders corruption and ‘undermines their commitment to protect the country and its citizens’ (Ouédraogo 2014: 11).

Furthermore, although Nigeria spends ‘approximately 0.9% of its GDP on defence expenditures, (and these figures are expected to rise to 1.3% by 2016) the Nigerian military still ranks woefully behind those of other African countries’ (Pieri & Serrano 2014: 5). Similarly, in its current battle against Boko Haram, there are ‘allegations of corruption in the procurement of inferior equipment and diversion of supplies to Boko Haram have eroded trust in the Nigerian military and directly compromised’ its capacity to conduct regional operations and contain the Boko Haram insurgency (Quédraogo 2014: 23). Moreover, despite having spent US$76-million on barrack rehabilitation and construction, many military barracks in the country remain largely decrepit (Quédraogo 2014: 23).

As already mentioned, similar accusations of corruption tarnished the reputation of the Nigerian senior military officers in the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Bach argues:

senior army officers transformed Nigeria’s ECOMOG operations into a conduit for personal enrichment, thus leading to disinvestment in military equipment. In the year 2000, an American audit of the Nigerian armed forces reported that 75% of army equipment was damaged or completely out of commission. (2007: 311)

Given the scale of corruption within the military institution with the attendant poor equipment and low morale, it is hardly surprising that Boko Haram has continued to embarrass and outsmart the Nigerian army. And regardless of the claims of progress made by the military in the battle against Boko Haram during the Jonathan administration, ‘what appears to be a consistently disturbing scenario is the capacity of the insurgents to return to the area they had wreaked havoc to cause further damage’ (Adewumi 2014: 5).
There are other bases of comparison to make between the Nigerian military intervention and leadership in Liberia and in the Boko Haram crisis during the administration of Goodluck Jonathan. To begin with, the then Nigerian head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida, who initiated the intervention in Liberia, was decisively involved in the Liberian mission, although his decision to intervene was partly influenced by his friendship with the former Liberian president, Samuel Doe. Babangida made use of the Nigerian army to demonstrate to the rest of the world that he was a decisive leader who would not spare anything to stabilise and unite the West African sub-region. He also wanted to showcase the capacity of the Nigerian army as a force to contend with and to demonstrate to the international community that Nigeria’s record all over the world in the area of peacekeeping operations was no fluke.

Under Jonathan, the army appeared demoralised, and less-decisive, hence the varying degrees of tactical withdrawal and mutiny by the Nigerian army in the fight against Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria. The mutinied soldiers lamented their poor equipment, meagre salaries and corruption within the army. They then turned their guns against the army commander in charge of the Maiduguri barracks ‘after they heard about a bloody ambush in which a number of their colleagues lost their lives’. The BBC reports that some Nigerian soldiers claimed that sending them to engage the insurgents without adequate weapons was tantamount to sending them to die. In August 2014, wives of Nigerian soldiers staged a protest at the Maiduguri barracks decrying ‘the deployment of their husbands to the battle front on the grounds that they were not properly equipped’. The lack of morale and quality equipment for the troops fighting Boko Haram was evidenced by the nearly 400 Nigerian soldiers who crossed the border to Cameroon after an encounter with Boko Haram insurgents. The residents of Bama, which once fell under the control of Boko Haram, confirmed that ‘about 400 troops, some of them without weapons or boots, had fled after a military jet mistakenly bombarded the town’s barracks during intense fighting’. Developments such as this one leaves many Nigerians questioning what may have happened to their once powerful military force, which performed courageously in Liberia – where international actors were initially hesitant to act – and in several regional and international peacekeeping engagements, but now seemed scared and innately incapable of withstanding the firepower of Boko Haram.

As pointedly noted by Robert Rotberg (2014), the Nigerian army was formidable two decades ago as they helped to quell major civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and were the sturdy shield of ECOWAS peacekeeping operations and UN missions in Africa and the world over. But in the fight against Boko Haram, the Nigerian army, of about 67,000 men and women, appears deflated and demoralised. The Nigerian military failings to contain Boko Haram during the Jonathan administration have led to allegations in some quarters that Boko Haram is sponsored by certain elements within the military and the political cadre. In an interview with Sahara Reporters, Stephen Davis, the Australian negotiator between the Jonathan government and Boko Haram, alleged that ‘former Governor Ali Modu Sheriff of Borno state and a former Chief of Army staff, General Azubuike Ihejirika (rtd.) are among the top sponsors of Boko Haram’. If these allegations are true, it confirms the assertion made by President Goodluck Jonathan in 2012 that ‘some members of the dreaded Boko Haram group were in the executive, legislative and judiciary arms of government as well as the police and armed forces’ (Adetayo 2012).
Another noteworthy difference between the Nigeria’s military intervention in Liberia and in the Boko Haram crisis is the nature and temperament of the leaders in power. Ibrahim Babangida’s background as a military leader was instrumental to the effectiveness of the Nigerian army, as it had been with previous military heads of state. In the 1970s, General Yakubu Gowon of Nigeria played an influential role in the formation of ECOWAS. Similarly, in the 1990s, the key leadership role played by several West African leaders, in particular, General Babangida, led to the formation of ECOMOG, and its deployment to peace operations in the West African region (Francis 2009: 111). Even under the Obasanjo presidency (1999–2007), the Nigerian army still had some semblance of its old self and was relevant in several peace operations in the West African region. The argument therefore would be that a leader’s idiosyncrasy matters a lot when it comes to the strength of its defence forces. Former President Goodluck Jonathan was quite lackadaisical and lacklustre in his approach to defence related policies until the Chibok girls’ abduction. Writing for Business Day Live, Adekeye Adebajo (2014) assessed the Nigerian state handling of the Boko Haram crisis under the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan as follows:

The state is becoming a crippled Leviathan unable to exert a monopoly of the use of force over its own territory: perhaps the greatest indictment of a leadership that has often confused kleptocratic avarice with democratic governance ... This situation shone a harsh light on the Nigerian government, exposing the poverty of thought and action in Abuja. And with the eyes of the world glued on Nigeria, Jonathan’s administration did not cover itself in glory.

Moving further, the Nigerian government in Liberia enjoyed a wide range of support from ECOWAS-ECOMOG, and the US and UN, hence, its ability to effectively coordinate its responses. It should be recalled that the US provided the Nigerian battalions in Liberia with training prior to the operations (Olonisakin 2008: 27), and, working discretely through private contractors, the US also provided the Nigerian army with ‘trucks, radios, and helicopters’ (Leatherwood 2001: 21). However, western countries such as the US and the United Kingdom partly hindered Nigeria’s military operation against Boko Haram by their refusal to sell arms and helicopters to the Nigerian government because of allegations of human rights abuses by the Nigerian military. The US in particular feared that Nigeria did not know how to properly operate cobra attacks helicopters (O’Grady & Groll 2015).

Consequently, the Nigerian government cancelled a US military training program for the Nigerian army, and sought the services of special forces from South Africa to train and lead operations against Boko Haram, as well as provide helicopters and pilots (O’Grady & Groll 2015). The procurement of arms from the black market, and the use of mercenaries and collaboration with regional MNJTF enabled the Nigerian military to record some modest successes against Boko Haram toward the end of President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration. It is thus arguable that Nigeria’s contribution to the Liberian war was ‘successful’ partly as a result of the involvement of other countries and international actions, and the coordination between all the forces/agencies involved in the Liberian Civil War.

One possible factor that may explain the lack of an initial proactive regional or continental response to the Boko Haram crisis is the fact that Nigeria has always been regarded as the regional leader as far as security matters are concerned in the West African region.
There are no natural regional leaders in West Africa that can mobilise and galvanize a regional response under the auspices of ECOWAS to intervene in Nigeria. Besides, Nigeria may have felt too proud to seek assistance from its neighbours owing to its political status and past ‘glorious’ efforts at peacekeeping operations and economic assistance to several West African states, which are confronting numerous political, health, and economic challenges, and may not be capable of leading regional peace and security operations in the manner that Nigeria had done in the 1990s. Francis (2009: 100) notes among the factors that will determine the effectiveness of ECOWAS in peace and security in West Africa is ‘the political viability of the states and the willingness to lend themselves to the difficult and expensive activities of maintaining regional peace and security’.

Another difference between the Nigerian military intervention in Liberia and in the Boko Haram crisis has to do with the nature of both crises. In Liberia, the Nigerian military, which is better trained for conventional warfare, fought in direct combat with Taylor’s NPFL forces, although the confrontation was not always conventional. The tactics used by Boko Haram, however, like several other terrorist organisations known in recent years, are quite erratic. Terrorists employ a range of tactics to inflict as much damage as possible. Such tactics could include conventional and guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, targeted assassinations, kidnappings, hijacking, and roadside shootings. Besides hijacking, Boko Haram has employed all the aforementioned tactics against the Nigerian state and its people. Thus, it was always going to be a difficult mission for the Nigerian military, which is best suited for conventional military operations, to confront a rather fluid and erratic Boko Haram.

That said, there were times when Boko Haram brought the war to the doorsteps of the Nigerian military during the administration of Goodluck Jonathan. As Sanusi Abubakar (2014) observes, ‘the battle is more immediately conventional because Boko Haram seems to have busted out of Sambisa Forest, blown up some bridges and major link roads to block or slow down reinforcement as they carve out a portion of the northeast as their purported caliphate’. It was during one of these direct confrontations between Boko Haram and the Nigerian military that the latter fled for safety to Cameroon. Although ‘the Nigerian military and the government have repeatedly said that it is unpatriotic to allow the enemy hear that the armed forces are weak, the reality, however, is that the enemy fighting the armed forces in the field know exactly what is happening’ (Ibrahim 2014).

Finally, although the Nigerian military has been commended for its peacekeeping and enforcement activities in Liberia, and on the entire African continent, its alleged human rights abuses have also been noted and condemned. The Nigerian military has been heavily criticised by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International for the manner in which it has been handling the Boko Haram crisis. Alleged incidents of extrajudicial killings, torture, and unlawful arrest and detention of suspects have been blamed on the Nigerian military as it tries to contain the threat posed by Boko Haram. According to E Ouédraogo, ‘senior Nigerian military leaders have been at a loss to explain these actions despite being articulate in their understanding of the potential exacerbating effects that heavy-handed domestic security measures can cause among local populations’ (2014: 22).

At the time of writing this article, Nigeria has witnessed a change in leadership and government, with Muhammadu Buhari, a former military ruler, emerging as president. Expectations are therefore high with regard to the capability of his government to effectively...
deal with the Boko Haram menace, particularly, given his military experience and background, in contrast to what obtained under the Jonathan presidency. However, since the inauguration of Muhammadu Buhari as Nigeria’s president, Boko Haram has demonstrated its resolve to sustain its reign of terror in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, where it had launched a total of 12 major attacks and killed at least 109 persons in the process. Thus, it remains to be seen whether the Buhari administration can eventually nip the insurgency in the bud.

Concluding thoughts

In the course of writing this article, attempts have been made to contribute to the body of literature on the Nigerian army’s response to the Boko Haram crisis and its military intervention in Liberia. The article reveals that Nigeria’s seemingly decisive role in Liberia is intricately linked with the political and leadership orientation of the Babangida regime, and his desire to use the Liberian situation to advance his personal interests and demonstrate Nigeria’s capacity to provide leadership for its immediate sub-region through ECOMOG, and the continent at large. Arguably, we have established that the seeming inability of Nigeria to effectively put to rest the Boko Haram insurgency is a function of years of institutional decay in the military and what appears to be insufficient political zeal on the part of the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan to rally support across the Nigerian public and among its contiguous states and the comity of nations to rout out Boko Haram.

The article’s comparative assessment of Nigeria’s military involvement in Liberia and its fight against Boko Haram similarly evince a number of sombre facts regarding the current state of the Nigerian military, the leadership of the country, and regional security in West Africa.

First, the comparison shows some grave deterioration in the Nigerian military structure under former President Goodluck Jonathan particularly in terms of discipline, morale, and inadequate equipment and training as compared to what obtained under the Babangida and Abacha regimes, particularly in the course of Nigeria’s intervention in Liberia.

Second, contrary to what obtained in Liberia, where the Nigerian army appeared relatively equipped to handle the conventional warfare tactic which defined the intervention, experiences from the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency suggests otherwise, as it appears the Nigerian military has not evolved alongside the changing dynamics of West Africa’s security challenges. Clearly, the Nigerian military lacks counterterrorism and counterinsurgency training as demonstrated by Boko Haram’s capacity to withstand its firepower and, in some cases, overpower it. Even when Boko Haram brought the war to the doorsteps of the military, lack of equipment, training, and low morale affected the army’s response. This situation gave Boko Haram the leeway and confidence to usurp territories, including the station post of the MNJTF in Baga, even if for a short time.

Third, the comparison mirrors the deterioration of regional security cooperation in West Africa as manifested by the initial lack of regional support to Nigeria in the first four years of the Boko Haram insurgency. International support for the Nigerian government has also not been forthcoming partly due to allegations of human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings carried out by the Nigerian military in the name of counterterrorism. In January 2015, the AU pledged to deploy a military force of about 8,700 to be contributed by
Nigeria, Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon to support the Nigerian government in the battle against Boko Haram. The AU’s decision to support Nigeria presents an opportunity for African states to unite against a common threat.

Finally, the comparison is a sombre reminder that the *Pax Nigeriana* project was feckless and less important during the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan. This indeed is in sharp contrast during Nigeria’s 33-year military era (1966–1999), when Nigeria’s active role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution issues within its shores and its immediate sub-region were pursued with pride, vigour and viewed as a matter of urgent national interest and security.

Given the foregoing challenges, we contend that if the Nigerian military is to be made more relevant to the country’s security crises, it must be subjected to aggressive and productive military training and be provided with modern equipment to face the changing dynamics of the country’s security threats. Solid efforts must, therefore, be made to comprehensively overhaul the training and logistics departments of Nigeria’s military institutions, particularly, in terms of counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency. This has become necessary, following reports that the training of the Nigerian troops by some ‘foreign mercenaries’ and the arrival of additional and more sophisticated equipment have enabled the Nigerian government to reclaim many of the towns and territories previously held by Boko Haram in the affected states (Ibeh). This development further reinforces the seemingly positive effects which the acquisition of new weapons and ammunition can have (or are reportedly having) on the ongoing counter-insurgency operations in Nigeria’s northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa.

Furthermore, it is argued that for Nigeria to effectively defeat this insurgency, adequate efforts must be made to boost the morale of the soldiers at the battlefront by ensuring that their allowances and entitlements are duly paid. And as Jibrin Ibrahim contends, those who have diminished the capacity of the armed forces by stealing the monies allocated for equipment and salaries for junior officers fighting Boko Haram must be court marshalled in order to reverse some of the mistakes that have brought the country to a distressing state. It is, however, imperative to note that ensuring military professionalism and effectiveness is not only a matter of equipment, but also demands a long-term investment in ‘developing individuals and units that are competent, compassionate, and respected’ (Quédraogo 2014: 34).

While the emphasis in this article has been on the (in)ability of the Nigerian military to respond to the Boko Haram crisis, it is important also to state that long-term peace within Nigeria and around its borders will be determined by the success or otherwise of the ongoing multi-national collaboration between Nigeria and its contiguous states (Niger, Chad, Benin, and Cameroon). The sustenance of such collaborative efforts will not only help shore up Nigeria’s porous borders, which Boko Haram uses to escape and prepare attacks and for transporting its small arms and light weapons (SALWs) and other trafficked/kidnapped fighters into Nigeria, but also ensure there are no safe havens for the sect in the region, thereby making it difficult for the group to change training camps on a transnational basis. Restoring the glory of the Nigeria army, and stabilising the internal security of the country in our view, will considerably depend on how the Muhammadu Buhari led administration (29 May 2015 to 29 May 2019) engages with some of these issues.
Notes

2. Ibid, 32.
9. The transition to democratic rule also introduced certain constitutional and democratic accountability constraints that influence troop deployments both in regional and national conflicts. Unlike during a military regime where deployment is done at the authorisation of the head of state, troop deployment to internal and regional crisis now has to be approved by the Nigerian house of representatives (Francis 2009: 107).
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
14. See note 5 above.
16. It bears mentioning that the downward spiral slide of the Nigerian army started during the presidency of Obasanjo, whom Adekeye Adebajo criticised for failing to ‘professionalise and re-equip the Nigerian army’. Business Day Live 2 June 2014.
17. It must be acknowledged also that the Anglophone/Francophone rivalry among the West African countries affected the intervention in Liberia. The Francophone countries in West Africa (particularly Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso) vehemently opposed the Nigeria-led intervention in Liberia, which they viewed as a tool for entrenching Anglophone (Nigeria) domination in the region (Draman & Carment 2001: 17). Such regional rivalry has continued to affect and influence ECOWAS’ response to security crises in the region. But as Francis (2009: 101–2) argues, despite the colonial rivalry and strategic interests of West African states, ‘the norm of sub-regional unity and co-operative ethos, provided the opportunity for ECOWAS countries to “do something” about the peace and security problems within the region, and to develop viable mechanisms for the pacific settlement of disputes and conflict management’.


Note on contributors

Olumuyiwa Babatunde Amao is a Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Politics, at the University of Otago, New Zealand. He holds a Master of Arts degree (cum laude) in Political Science from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. His research centres on the Foreign Policy of Emerging Middle Powers, Resource Governance discourses, Politics of Development and Underdevelopment in Africa, and Terrorism.

Benjamin Maiangwa is a PhD candidate at the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice, St Paul’s College, University of Manitoba. He holds a MSc degree in Sustainability, Development and Peace Studies from the United Nations University, Tokyo Japan and a MA in Conflict Transformation from the University of Kwazulu Natal, South Africa. His research and writing have focused on ethno-religious and jihadist terrorism in Africa, ECOWAS security architecture, and critical and emancipatory peacebuilding.

ORCID

Olumuyiwa Babatunde Amao http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5246-4646

References


Adebajo, A. 2008b. ‘Hegemony on a shoestring: Nigeria’s post-Cold War foreign policy’, in Adebajo & Mustapha (eds), Gulliver’s Troubles, Nigeria’s Foreign Policy after the Cold War.


