

Military Culture and Counterinsurgency in the Twenty-First Century: Defeating Boko Haram in Nigeria

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Abstract

From the advent of conventional military forces, engaging in 'set piece' battles against themselves, large armies have generally abhorred unconventional fights. Following WWII, the dismal performance of powerful military forces against relatively inferior irregular foes has been a subject of debate among military theorists. The objective of this paper is to show how military cultures have influenced the performance of conventional forces in irregular warfare. It exploits how conventional militaries can best adapt to the changing nature of warfare in the twenty-first century, by applying lessons learnt from centuries of irregular warfare.

With recent upsurge in activities of terrorists' organizations such as Al-Qaida, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram in sub-Saharan Africa, there is increasing focus on this region. Particularly, Nigeria is of vital interest to the United States, being a regional power in the continent as well as one of the largest suppliers of petroleum to the United States. This paper utilizes the historical development of conventional forces to explain their predisposition to conventional fights. Furthermore, it exploits the fundamental differences between conventional and irregular warfare, as well as the nature of modern international terrorism. The paper concludes by recommending strategy for combating Boko Haram in Nigeria, while considering terrorism in the region is intrinsically linked with socio-economic challenges in the region.

Introduction

I've told the American people before that this will not be another Vietnam, and I repeat this here tonight. Our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world, and they will not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back. I'm hopeful that this fighting will not go on for long and that casualties will be held to an absolute minimum.¹

- President George H. W. Bush Address to the nation January 16, 1991

During Operation “Desert Storm”, air and ground combat operations lasted for only 52 days. Although Iraq possessed a credible military force, the Coalition victory was remarkable. The Coalition lost about 200 casualties to hostile fire, against Iraqi estimated casualties of 25,000 to 65,000 troops. The Coalition achieved its desired victory, by fighting its own kind of war. Operation “Desert Storm” was not like the Vietnam War in many regards. From the strategic perspective, the policy objectives of Desert Storm were clear. They included the withdrawal of Iraqi forces and restoration of Kuwait’s government as well as security and protection of allies and American citizens in the region.

The Coalition could easily derive its military objectives from these policy objectives. However, the policy objectives of the United States in Vietnam are still subject to debate, and it presented a challenge to military commanders during the war. Notwithstanding the poor strategic direction in Vietnam, the tactics employed by United States military were fundamentally flawed because it employed conventional tactics against a mostly guerrilla foe.

Several reasons have been offered for United States’ conventional warfare approach to the war in Vietnam. Some have proposed that the United States’ military was inexperienced and

unprepared for irregular warfare. However, the United States prior to Vietnam, had been involved in several irregular wars, such as the Philippine Insurrection, the Nicaraguan Intervention and the Korean War. Similarly, it had been less than a decade since the French experience in Indochina. Some of these experiences informed the publication of the Marine Corps Small War Manual, which stipulates that small wars were the Marines' routine foreign active duty.² Consequently the United States had sufficient experience to draw from having participated in more small wars than conventional ones. Despite the prevalence of asymmetric warfare throughout history, there is a cultural aversion to irregular wars and most combatants prefer quick, cheap and overwhelming victories to long gruesome struggles.³ This paper argues that cultural adaptation of large military forces is a critical requirement for winning irregular wars.

During Vietnam War, the United States possessed one of the most credible military capabilities in the world. Nevertheless, the United States failed to appreciate the war it was fighting. This error is common to most conventional forces because colonial powers such as Britain and France, with a wealth of experience in small wars, have often resorted to conventional strategy in irregular wars. For example, French troops in Indochina numbered about 145,000 by 1950, but numerically inferior Viet Minh regulars were able to adopt a strategy to outnumber French troops at places of their choice.⁴ Thus, by consistently avoiding battle with the main French force, the Viet Minh wore out the French forces and eventually defeated them at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

War is complex and chaotic because of its unpredictability.⁵ However, irregular wars pose a greater challenge in that the enemy is often a smaller force that is difficult to identify or predict. This is usually the case when fighting guerrillas.⁶ Also, much of the study of war has been

devoted to the “big wars”; wars between nations, such as the world wars. Although, these wars merit extensive study, due to their scope and impact; however, the variables considered, such as industrial capacity, size and organization of forces are relatively easy to measure.⁷ The study of irregular wars on the other hand is challenging because psychological factors are some of the most significant variables.⁸ The difficulties in measuring these variables and the limited geographical scope of irregular wars have limited the focus of most military forces on irregular wars.

Should powerful states avoid irregular wars altogether? As some have proposed. Yes, they should, if it were possible to choose wars. However, wars, being unpredictable tend to oscillate from one form to another. For example, during the Vietnam War, the North Vietnamese Army mostly adopted conventional tactics, while the Viet Cong used guerrilla tactics. Therefore, the United States found itself fighting a guerrilla war in the midst of a conventional one. Also, one could argue that Desert Storm asserted the United States dominance in conventional warfare; consequently, no right-thinking adversary would challenge it force-on-force.

According to Robert Cassidy, “the terrorists and global guerrillas of the twenty-first century are incubating in Asia, Africa, South America, and the periphery of Europe.”⁹ Hence, the United States has its focus on states like Nigeria. With a population of 170 million people, Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa.¹⁰ The failure of the Nigerian state could lead to enormous humanitarian and socioeconomic problems with grave consequences for the West African sub region. In addition, Nigeria is the eleventh largest producer of crude oil in the world, and accounted for nine percent of United States oil imports in 2011, making it the fourth largest foreign oil supplier to the United States.¹¹ Therefore, the peace and stability of Nigeria is of interest to the United States.

Since 2009, a terrorist group known as “Boko Haram” has executed various forms of attacks against the government and citizens of Nigeria. On 26 August 2011, the group attacked the UN building at the nation’s capital, Abuja killing 23 people and wounding several others.¹² The activities of Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) threaten the security in sub-Saharan African region. Consequently, an escalation in the activities of Boko Haram could lead to possible intervention by the International community, which could result in a counterinsurgency operation. Therefore, in discussing military culture and counterinsurgency, this paper will consider the formation of military cultures, counterinsurgency warfare and combating modern international terrorism by considering strategies for defeating Boko Haram in Nigeria. The terms irregular warfare or asymmetric warfare could apply to conventional forces or non-state actors or groups employing guerrilla tactics. However, this paper will limit this term to non-state actors whom would be referred to as insurgents and terrorists.

Historical influences of the American society on United States Army Culture

*The culture of a group can now be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.*¹³

The culture of military forces is essential to their success in irregular wars because they require a different approach from conventional warfare. As Schein suggests, the culture of a group is influenced by its history and environment. As such, the basic assumptions of the group must change for it to thrive in a new environment. Although, the military is an ancient institution that dates far back as recorded history, the security environment is ever-changing as new threats emerge globally. Practically all civilizations in history have engaged in armed struggles at some time. An analysis of these civilizations will reveal unique cultures of their militaries.

Culture creates a paradigm, with which individuals within the group process information and draw deductions from the environment.¹⁴ According to Lieutenant General Theodore G. Stroup, “The Army’s culture is its personality. It reflects the Army’s values, philosophy, norms, and unwritten rules. Our culture has a powerful effect because our common underlying assumptions guide behavior and the way the Army processes information as an organization.”¹⁵ In order to understand military culture, it is vital to examine the larger society as well as the experience of the military in its history. The military is a subset of the larger society – usually a state, because its individuals are drawn from the society. For example, the ancient Romans perceived the Barbarians as rough and violent people, and this culture was evident in the violent way they

conducted of wars.¹⁶ For the United States military, its cultural identity began with the war of independence.

The loose confederation of the United States during the War of Independence severely limited resources that were available to the Army. Consequently, General Washington's men were mostly militiamen, who were poorly trained and ill equipped. This Army of militia was no match for the disciplined and well-trained British troops. Thus, Washington's strategy was founded on the weakness of the army. In this regard, he stated, "That we should on all occasions avoid a general action, or put anything to the risqué, unless compelled by necessity, into which we ought never to be drawn."¹⁷ With this strategy, the Army avoided confrontations with the main British Army, when it could and attacked only enemy weaknesses. This strategy was so effective that General Frederick Haldimand, the British governor of Quebec during the war remarked, "The American's will be less dangerous if they had a regular army".¹⁸ Thus, the United States Army cut its teeth employing limited war strategy in the War of independence.

Following, the United States successes in employing guerrilla tactics in the War of Independence, George Washington, in his writings of May 1783, warned the nation against maintaining a large peacetime standing army. He espoused the concept of well-organized militia for national defense.¹⁹ The events of the Newburgh conspiracy, occurring at that time, could have influenced Washington's thoughts in this regard. Also, Washington was a proponent of the policy of noninterference. He emphasized this in his farewell speech to the nation, in 1789, in when he stated, "Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice?"²⁰ This principle of noninterference guided the United States foreign policies into the twentieth century.²¹ Consequently, the policy

of using armed militia for national defense and noninterference guided the development of the United States Army until the War of 1812.

When President James Madison declared war on Britain and its allies in June 1812 the United States Army had only twelve thousand regular troops; with a possibility of raising this number with drafts and the militia.²² On the other hand, the British could only muster about ten thousand troops in Canada. Consequently, the United States expected a swift victory in the land war. President Jefferson even boasted “the acquisition of Canada this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec will be a mere matter of matching.”²³ However, this was not to be; as the United States Army initially suffered a number of defeats as it fought a highly trained and disciplined British force. Although, the war eventually ended with the Treaty of Ghent, the war would have a significant impact on the postwar Army.²⁴

The United States’ experience in the War of 1812 led to professionalization of the Army. Although the Army would be involved in the Indian wars into the twentieth century, the war of 1812 brought to the fore; the need for a large, well trained and equipped army capable of defending the nation effectively against the British. Therefore, experiences from the Indian wars had little impact on the Army because military leaders simply perceived them as minor diversions from the main objective; preparing for a conventional fight.²⁵ One of the leading figures in the professionalization of the army was Winfield Scott, a hero of the war. He participated in the development of manuals for the army and in the process, toured Europe to observe French military training methods. He eventually translated several French military manuals to English. Then, the United States Army adopted Napoleonic military strategy of warfare and established a conventional warfare culture in the army. This culture would influence the Union’s quest for decisive battles with the Confederates at the onset of the civil war in 1861

as well as the United States into the twentieth century.²⁶ Furthermore, WW2 victory would seal the United States cultural paradigm for conventional warfare.

Comparing British and the United States military culture

*Military policy is based upon two main elements, the structure of a nation's armed force and the strategy of their use.*²⁷

The Second World War instituted the conventional warfare culture in the United States military because it helped it forget the lessons learnt - if any, from small wars. Unlike the United States, the British can be considered as masters of small wars. However, British success in small wars is not necessarily a result of superiority in the strength of their army, but from their cultural disposition to small wars. Before WW2, the United States had been involved in several small wars in the Philippines, Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua, lessons learnt were soon to be forgotten.²⁸ However, the United States Marines gained some lessons from these wars, which formed the basis for the Marine Corps Small Wars Manual, published in 1930. A revision was published in 1940, and according to Max Boot, the manual came at a wrong time; when all efforts were geared towards WW2.²⁹

The fundamental difference in the United States and the British culture was while the British believed it was their God-given responsibility to colonize the savage nations of the world³⁰ the United States was against imperialism. Having fought the British for independence, the American policy of nonintervention dominated its international policies. As such the United States intervention in the Philippine Insurrection and the Boxer Rebellion were considered as necessary nuisances in the defense of freedom. As Albert J. Beveridge, proposed that America

could not abandon these savage nations for imperialists like Germany, Japan and Russia to take over.³¹ Therefore, the United States could not commit itself fully, to a war that was contrary to its beliefs. This was the case in the Philippine War, where President McKinley's reluctance to fully commit the nation to the war would frustrate the military.³²

The lack of full commitment by the United States to wars of intervention would continue into the Cold War. While the motivation for the United States intervention was the desire to stop the encroachment of communism worldwide, it was difficult to justify these interventions to the American people. Unlike the United States, the British ideology of colonization led to a development of a whole of government approach to small wars. Being an island, British national defense depended on naval defense of Britain and Ireland by the Royal Navy.³³ Consequently, the British Army was responsible for the policing of its empires around the world. From its experience as far back as the Anglo-Saxon wars, the British had learned the challenges of invasion and conquest, and had developed a system of "divide and rule".³⁴ This system involved raising local military and police forces within the colonies, requiring little British military presence. As a result, Britain could afford to maintain a modest-sized army.

The strategic roles for the British and United States forces would influence their organization. The British's role for its army required a small force. Consequently, at the onset of WW1 the Britain had one of the smallest armies in Europe, but at the end of the war in 1918 it was one of the largest.³⁵ Nevertheless, without any perceiving any future threat after WW1, the army reverted back to its statutory role of "garrisoning the Empire and forming a small expeditionary force for colonial wars."³⁶ Whereas, the driving force for the modernization of the United States Army after the War of 1812 was the need for a large and professional army, capable of defeating conventional forces such as the British. Similarly, after WW2 the organization of the US Army

was against another potential enemy, the Soviet Union. Consequently, the Cold War era was characterized by arms race between the United States and the Soviets. This anticipation for another “big war” with the Soviets largely guided the development of the United States warfare doctrine.

Development of Doctrine

“Despite the importance of formal, written doctrine, informal doctrines composed of custom, tradition, and accumulated experience” as already highlighted, “often play just as significant a role in shaping the conduct of military operations as do officially codified precepts.”³⁷ Nevertheless, doctrines play pivotal roles in the training and equipping of military forces because it provides a framework for the accepted, best way to do things based on historical evidence.³⁸ This historical evidence gleaned from past experience is arguably a function of the lessons drawn from the experience. For example, after the French defeat in Dien Bien Phu in 1954, rather than review its counterinsurgency strategy, it maintained a similar enemy centric approach in Algeria. Military doctrine serves several purposes to the military; however, a very important function of doctrine is that it provides the military strategist with a foundation from which to make informed decisions in solving military problems.³⁹

After WW2, two events stimulated the interests of military practitioners and theorists in limited conflicts; they were the victory of Mao’s Communist Party in China in 1950 and the defeat of the French in Indochina in 1954. The Army Combat Development Command (CDC) at Fort Leavenworth established in 1960 for doctrine development, was slow in developing counterinsurgency doctrine for the Army. Consequently, General Decker later, created the

Special Doctrine and Equipment Group (renamed Special Warfare Group). Its primary role was to ensure adequate incorporation of counterinsurgency lessons in the CDC doctrinal manuals.⁴⁰ The Army's Field Manual 31 – 15, Operations Against Irregular Forces was published in 1961 and the following year, the Joint Chiefs of Staff released the “Joint Counterinsurgency Concept and Doctrinal Guidance.” Hence, one can assert that the Army tried to incorporate counterinsurgency lessons in its doctrines.

However, the challenge for the Army was implementing these doctrinal changes in its daily operations. As Andrew Birtle suggests, the Army had hundreds of manuals at that time and the main focus of the United States was the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Army did not adequately implement these counterinsurgency doctrinal developments.⁴¹ This failure would impact Army operations earlier on in Vietnam; especially under General Westmoreland, who employed a mostly conventional strategy in engaging the Vietcong/NVA guerrillas. By the end of the Vietnam War, the Army had learnt several lessons as Sorley opined in his book “A Better War”. Under general Abrams, the Army was far more effective against the NVA and Vietminh guerrillas by employing effective counterinsurgency strategies such as ‘clear and hold’ and population protection.⁴² Yet, lessons learnt from Vietnam were misapplied because for military leaders, two challenges stood out in Vietnam - the failure to apply counterinsurgency strategy and the restraint on the military by civilians. However, the later was to have more impact on the United States military doctrine.

During Vietnam War, Collin Powell, who was later influential in the development of military doctrine, developed a dislike for civilian experts with little or no military experience. Ignoring the United States erroneous conventional approach, the military emphasized the political restraint on the military as the major problem in the war. This perception was further validated when

escalation of bombing operations by B-52 bombers during Operation Linebacker II, eventually brought the North Vietnamese to the bargaining table. Collin Powell's experience in Vietnam influenced his contribution to the Weinberger and later Powell Doctrine, which advocated for the use of overwhelming force in the pursuit of identified objectives. This doctrine was further validated during Desert Storm. Nonetheless, Walter Kretchik argues otherwise. He suggests that the Army has been far more adaptive and innovative than scholars have acknowledged."⁴³ This may hold true in certain regards, but technology has been the most influential factor in the development of doctrine. Also, since Vietnam, there has been little review of counterinsurgency operations before Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Understanding Counterinsurgency Warfare

*It is a fact that in Indochina, despite a marked superiority in materiel and in troops, we were beaten. From one campaign to another, our commanders tried to drive the Vietminh into a classic pitched battle, the only kind we knew how to fight, in the hope that our superiority in materiel would allow an easy victory.*⁴⁴

Small wars are fundamentally different from conventional warfare because they present different sets of challenges. The failure to appreciate these differences before engaging in irregular wars is usually the undoing of conventional military forces. This was the United States experience in Vietnam, the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and the British in Malaya. When thinking of war, conventional forces usually consider organized battle against the armed forces of another nation, the object of which is to destroy the enemy's forces.⁴⁵ In order to understand irregular warfare, one must first understand the nature of the adversary, the characteristics of the wars and conditions that precipitate them.

Sung Tzu advised, "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril."⁴⁶ Unlike conventional forces that can be observed, and with careful intelligence, one can fairly assess their capabilities and organization, insurgents are without form; they are usually without a defined order of battle. In fact, until insurgents reveal their intentions through subversive activities, they remain virtually unknown to the government.⁴⁷ Hence, it is difficult to assess their characteristics until hostilities begin. Even then, insurgents are prone to change their strategy or tactics, to adapt to changing circumstances. They are fluid because they lack substantial assets or responsibility. Similarly, insurgents are usually elusive in nature⁴⁸, because, most times their numerical or firepower inferiority prevents them from engaging in direct battles

with the counterinsurgent. This was the case for the Vietcong guerrillas in Vietnam. However, insurgents are not always an inferior force to the counterinsurgents. During the Second Boer, the British fielded more than 400,000 troops in order to subdue irregular Boer forces that never numbered more than 90,000.⁴⁹ The British experienced a near disaster at Talana hill, for underestimating the enemy, who had modern firearms, and artillery that outranged those of the besieged British forces. Consequently, the challenge for the counterinsurgent is, understanding the nature of the enemy.

According to General Petraeus, counterinsurgency operation “is a “graduate level” endeavor full of paradoxes and challenges... It is important, then, that leaders develop a solid appreciation of the nature of irregular warfare.”⁵⁰ Irregular wars tend to be quite challenging, when compared with conventional warfare. First, irregular wars are usually long; average ones usually last between nine to thirteen years.⁵¹ This is usually a result of the insurgents’ strategy of avoiding decisive battles. An example of this was the Sri Lankan counterinsurgency war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam’s (LTTE) which lasted over 25 years.⁵² Similarly, as a result of the duration of counterinsurgency operations, they tend to be extremely costly; that is financially and otherwise. According to the Washington Post, the cost of Iraqi war to the United States was about three trillion dollars in 2008.⁵³

In addition to its financial implication, counterinsurgency operations tend to be costly in term of lives. In the Vietnam War, between 1956 and 1975 the United States sustained casualties of about 52,000 dead.⁵⁴ While the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietcong forces sustained had casualties of over a million dead. Thus, one of the attributes of insurgents is their willingness to take casualties. As Gil Merom suggests in his book, “How Democracies Lose Small Wars”, the insurgents usually have more at stake, because it is a “do or die situation”. This is the case

especially when the counterinsurgents are operating in another country as is the case for the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq. The insurgents are willing to take more casualties and prolong the war, with the hope of exhausting the counterinsurgents. Furthermore, Merom suggests that democratic states fail in small wars because they find it difficult to escalate the level of violence required to overcome the insurgents.⁵⁵ He attributed this to restrictions such as international pressures and political dynamics within the states. This was the case during the French war in Algeria. The French military escalation of violence against the insurgents generated sharp criticism from French citizens in January 1955.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the real strength of the insurgents is their ideology.

Galula asserts, “The insurgent cannot seriously embark on an insurgency unless he has a well-grounded cause with which to attract supporters among the population.”⁵⁷ This is necessary because unlike in conventional war where the object is usually territory or some tangible object, the objective in counterinsurgency is the populace. The insurgent’s ideology or cause does not need to be real or justified, as long as the population can be made to perceive it. Common ideologies include religion as in Nigeria, racial as in South Africa, or nationalism. Sometimes, the insurgents use a combination of these ideologies to rally the population to their cause. Consequently, the challenge for the counterinsurgent is to defeat the insurgent’s ideology, and win the hearts and minds of citizens.

In his book, *Insurgency & Terrorism*, author Bard E. O'Neill asserts, “The first major criterion in evaluating an insurgency is the environment”⁵⁸ He further divides this into the physical environment such as terrain and climate as well as the human environment; which consists of the socioeconomic and political system of the area.⁵⁹ For example, the dense jungles of Vietnam and the mountain ranges of Afghanistan provided enormous advantages to the insurgents, while

posing a challenge to the counterinsurgents. Although, both physical and human environments are crucial in insurgencies, the later is relatively more important because of its inherent challenges. While the physical environment can be easily observed, the human environment is less obvious and only a thorough observation of the human subsystems would reveal the dynamics within the environment.

Historically, some conditions in the human environment have favored the rise of insurgency. Most importantly, they include economic underdevelopment, internal divisiveness, and political illegitimacy. Poor utilization of national wealth has been a source of conflicts in developing countries worldwide. For example, Nigeria had a steady increase in its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 2004 to 2011. Nevertheless, the percentage of its population living on less than one Dollar a day increased from 54.4 percent to 69 percent in the same period.⁶⁰ Similarly, Nigeria has eleven out of the forty wealthiest persons in Africa, but a large percentage of its population live in poverty. Furthermore, the large oil wealth in the nation has created expectations in the citizenry. Accordingly, this excessive disparity has been a source of tensions within the society. Another consequence is that it produces a large number of disenfranchised citizens that could be easily coerced by the insurgents.

The second human factor in the environment is internal divisiveness. This divide is commonly along racial, ethnic or religious lines and it usually leads to deep-seated grievances among one or more groups in society. Understanding the history of the environment is usually the first step to understanding the source of the conflict. For ethnically diverse countries in Africa such as Nigeria, ethnic conflicts have been major destabilizing factors. Some may wonder why similar ethnic diversity in the United States has not been destabilizing, but rather considered as strength. This is because the United States has developed a strong sense of national identity to which all

racial or ethnic groups can subscribe. Whereas, most African and Asian nations were created by colonial powers; and they have been unable to develop a strong national identity to mitigate this ethnic differences. Similarly, religious differences continue to be a source of tension amongst many societies such as in the Middle East.

Another common condition for insurgency is political illegitimacy. Political illegitimacy in this context does not simply imply undemocratic governance. Rather, it depends on the general level of acceptance of the government; irrespective of which form it may be. A government may be monarchical, as in the United Arab Emirates, and still enjoy popular support from its citizens. While, a democratically elected government may be unpopular, especially when citizens perceive the electoral process as corrupt. Consequently, after elections in some countries such as Nigeria, some aggrieved groups have resorted to violence. For instance, violent protests which erupted in a state in northern Nigeria after the 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria led to the death of about eight hundred people.⁶¹ Such incidents are common in developing nations and may indicate unfair electoral process or rejection of the results by factions within the society.

These afore mentioned conditions are important factors to be considered; they are key indicators employed by studies measuring the performance of states.⁶² Understanding the human environment is crucial in counterinsurgency operations, especially for the counterinsurgent operating in another state. The first impact of these factors is the insurgent's "cause". As earlier highlighted, the "cause" is crucial to the success of the insurgency because the insurgent's ability to coerce the citizens depends on it. Consequently, it is easier to coerce a populace that is impoverished and discontent with the government. This was the case in Cuba, where Fidel Castrol and Che Guevara were able to exploit Cubans' dissatisfaction with the Batista regime to lead one of the most successful insurgencies. On the other hand, Che was unable to get the

support of Bolivian citizenry. Barrientos, the president of Bolivia had carried out land reforms that appealed to the peasants, thus granting the government some legitimacy. Consequently, Che was a guerrilla without a “cause”. According to Gary Salmon in his book, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, “the guerrillas were in the wrong place at the wrong time.”⁶³

Another impact of the human environment is the dilemma for the counterinsurgent in deciding when to intervene in an insurgency occurring in another state. This is particularly challenging when the insurgents have a strong cause or the popular support of the populace, albeit coerced or voluntary. This posed a challenge to the United States in Vietnam because the Diem government was corrupt and did not enjoy the support of its citizens. Nevertheless, the United States was stuck with assisting an unpopular Roman Catholic president in a country of less than six percent of Christian population and about eighty percent Buddhists.⁶⁴ Furthermore, a regime change initiated by the intervening counterinsurgent can further exacerbate the challenges of the human environment, as was the case in Lebanon when the Israeli government attempted to install a Christian President. Consequently, in combating Boko Haram in Nigeria, it is necessary to understand the environment – both physical and human environment.

Defeating Boko Haram in Nigeria

Cultural knowledge is essential to waging a successful counterinsurgency.

American ideas of what is “normal” or “rational” are not universal. To the contrary, members of other societies often have different notions of rationality, appropriate behavior, level of religious devotion, and norms concerning gender.”⁶⁵

Knowledge of the history of Nigeria is essential to understanding its culture. It is common knowledge that the creation of most African states along indiscriminate ethnic lines constituted a major national identity crisis. This was asserted by Thomas Davis and Azubike Kalu-Nwivu, who opined, “The colonial legacy of patently artificial borders drawn for the convenience of European conference tables bequeathed to many newly independent African nations a motley mix of people, each with their own separate ethnic loyalties and traditions.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, it is worth briefly examining pre-independence as well as post-independence Nigeria in order to understand the background of present day conflicts. Thereafter this section will consider the history of religious conflicts in Nigeria and the present day conflicts. Furthermore, it will briefly discuss the Nigerian military counterinsurgency experience as well as the challenges and opportunities for United States’ intervention in ongoing crisis in the region.

Before Europeans arrived in West Africa, the region consisted mostly of some major empires and kingdoms with other smaller tribes and settlements. The Fulani Empire dating back to 12th century and the Oyo Empire from the 14th century were among the notable ones in present day Nigeria.⁶⁷ As asserted by Fredrick Schwarz, the pre-colonial history of Nigeria “... is not Nigerian history but rather the history of different tribes, or, occasionally, groupings of tribes.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, there was little interaction between these tribes during the colonial era.

Consequently, the amalgamation of Nigeria by the British in 1914 created a complex mix of nations with little affiliation for themselves. In addition, religious differences further complicate the challenge of integrating these ethnic factions.

North African traders introduced Islam to the West African region in the 11th century.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, there was little Islamic influence (politically or militarily) in the region until Usman Dan Fodio, declared jihad in Gobir in 1804. Uthman Dan Fodio was born at Marata 1754 and he lived in the city-state of Gobir. He had traditional Islamic education in Gobir, however, several Medina-trained Islamic scholars strongly influenced his education.⁷⁰ By the late eighteenth century, he had begun teaching, writing and preaching some of his reform ideas. In 1802, motivated by these reformist ideas, he led his followers out of Gobir and declared a holy war against Hausa rulers in 1804.⁷¹ The Jihad ended in 1808 with the defeat of the Hausa states.

Following the defeat of the Hausa states Usman Dan Fodio established the Sokoto Caliphate in 1809 at Sokoto – in present-day Nigeria. Although, the Jihad was a religious war in certain respects, nevertheless, underlying socio-economic problems within the Hausa states precipitated the Jihad. As asserted by Abdul Islahi, “The social system was immoral; women were oppressed and neglected like animals. Christianity had gained ground, and cheating and fraud were rife.”⁷² The administration collected numerous taxes and levies, and confiscated peasant property. It also implemented forced labor, compulsory military service and enslavement of the people. Consequently, the Jihad had widespread support within the Hausa states because of the general disenfranchisement of the populace. Notwithstanding the impact of the Jihad on the West-African sub-region in the nineteenth century, its lasting legacy is its role in contemporary conflicts within the region.

Following independence in 1960, Nigeria has struggled to create a national identity from its smorgasbord of ethnicities. Also complicating this challenge are “religious conflicts”, that have continued to occur. Nigeria did not experience any significant religious crisis from its independence to late the 1970s. Guy Anorl in his book *Africa: A Modern History*, referred to this period as the “decades of hope.”⁷³ Although Nigeria experienced a thirty-month civil war from 1967 to 1971, religion played a minor role because the chief causes of the conflict were political and ethnic.⁷⁴ Being a new nation, Nigerians were full of expectation; they were free from the imperialist’s claws and hoped for a better life. The discovery of petroleum in commercial quantities further heightened these expectations. However, by the late 1970s, the socio-economic situation in the country had begun to frustrate Nigerians. As a result dissenting groups such as the Maitatsine movement began to emerge.

Mahamadu Marwa, a charismatic leader, established Maitatsine in the late 1970s. He leveraged “growing disparities, where most wealth was in hands of local elites cooperating with multinational corporations...”⁷⁵ His ideology appealed to the impoverished populace of rural communities of northern Nigeria, who believed the invasion of foreign Western culture, as evidenced in the growing cities, was the cause of their woes. His followership increased gradually as he gave inciting public lectures, preaching against the rich elite and the government.⁷⁶ Subsequently, he was arrested a couple of times by the government, but by then he already had disciples carrying on his preaching. Maitatsine commenced series violent riots at Kano in December 1980 and Marwa died in these first riots. The military eventually quelled the riots when the police was overwhelmed. Two years afterwards, Maitatsine riots reemerged in Maiduguri, Borno State (present stronghold of Boko Haram), and other modern states in Nigeria.

Nigerian security forces quelled the last of Maitasine riots in 1985.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, similar ethno-religious religious crises such as the Zango-Kataf crisis, continued to occur within Northern Nigeria. However, military governments from 1985 to 1999 were able to suppress these insurrections quickly. Consequently, at the beginning of Nigeria's fourth republic in 1999, the stage was set for a resurgence of extremist religious ideas.

*In a four-year period following Nigeria's 1999 transition, the democratically elected governments of 12 Muslim-majority states in northern Nigeria incorporated sharia into state criminal law and launched extensive Islamic social and economic reforms.*⁷⁸

Similarly, ethno-religious violence became more prevalent with the return to democracy in 1999. Although these ethno-religious tensions had existed for decades, they were forcefully suppressed by the military during military rule. Consequently, with the return to democracy there was an explosion of conflicts around the country and the new government and the security agencies were ill prepared to respond to these challenges. Between 1999 and 2012, there were over thirty cases that resulted in significant loss of lives. However, the religious extremist group, Boko Haram has been responsible for most of the most infamous religiously motivated killings in the past decade.⁷⁹

The Jama'atu Ahlu-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, meaning Group for the Followers of the Prophet for propagation and Holy Struggle (in Hausa language); commonly known as Boko Haram emerged in 2003.⁸⁰ The group is historically connected to the Maitatsine movements of the 1980s. However, its recent history began with the formation of the Nigerian Taliban by Abubakar Lawan in 1995. The group gained significant recognition in 2003, under the new leadership of a young cleric, Mohammed Yusuf.⁸¹ In December 2003, Yusuf and about two

hundred of his followers attacked several police stations in the Northern state of Yobe. Security forces quelled the riots and dispersed the militants. Nevertheless, Yusuf continued his preachings and recruitment of young men, mostly within the Northeastern states. In addition, the group continued its uprisings until security forces killed Yusuf in July 2009.⁸² Since then, the group has employed insurgency tactics against political leaders, government forces and the population.

*Counterinsurgents have to determine not only their opponents' motivation but also the approach being used to advance the insurgency. This information is essential to developing effective programs that attack the insurgency's root causes.*⁸³

Since its inception, Boko Haram has aimed at establishing an Islamic state and instituting Sharia Laws in Nigeria. In an interview with the media, one of its leaders asserted, "Allah, the almighty Lord, has authorized every Muslim to fight and establish an Islamic government over the world. One day it will happen in Nigeria and everywhere."⁸⁴ In line with this ideology, it has fought against everything perceived as "western" ideology and influence, mostly within Northern Nigeria. Similarly, the group has accused government forces of extrajudicial execution of their late leader, Mohammed Yusuf and has vowed to retaliate against Nigerian security forces; the Nigerian Police, because he died in their custody. These ideologies have remained the driving force for Boko Haram, but the group has evolved its tactics over the years despite government efforts to curtail its activities.

Initially, Boko Haram employed some basic guerrilla tactics. They conducted hit and run attacks on police stations and security check points.⁸⁵ In this process, they were able to acquire small arms and ammunition for further attacks. Similarly, they assassinated political figures and

members of the society they perceived as opposing their Jihadist's ideas. Thus, they created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity typical of most insurgencies. However, they routinely carried out large-scale conventional attacks that often resulted in the catastrophic loss of its fighters. For example, during the large scale uprising in Borno state in 2009, government crackdown, led to the death of hundreds of its members.⁸⁶ This resulted in a significant change in its modus operandi.

Towards the end of 2010, the group began employing improvised explosive devices (IEDs) against Christian targets and security forces.⁸⁷ This significantly increased the casualties inflicted in each attack. Nevertheless, they escalated their violence further by suicide bombing tactics. They conducted the first suicide attack against the police headquarters in Abuja using a Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive device (SVBIED).⁸⁸ Presently, Boko Haram has continued with its spate of violence by employing hit and run tactics, mainly using small arms such as the AK-47 rifles and the General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMG).⁸⁹ It has also continued to employ IEDs, manufactured from locally made materials such as gas canisters, plastic and fuel explosives. Furthermore, they have concentrated their attacks against security forces, Churches, schools and other targets considered "Western" or anti-Islam.

The increase in the sophistication of their tactics and IEDs suggests that Boko Haram may have links with other terrorists groups such as Al Shabab in North Africa as well as AQIM. In 2009, one suspected member of Boko Haram, detained by the Nigerian Police, alleged to have had training in the manufacture of explosive devices in Afghanistan. Similarly, the group has asserted its support other terrorists groups as its present leader Abubakar Shekau stated in a video release, "We are with our mujahideen brothers in the Cause of Allah everywhere, in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Pakistan, Kashmir, Iraq, the Peninsula of Muhammad (Saudi Arabia)."⁹⁰

Despite this rhetoric, there is no evidence that Boko Haram receives financial or material support from any of these groups. Furthermore, the group has failed to gain widespread support among the populace because of its violent attacks and casualties inflicted on the population.

As earlier mentioned, a strong cause is critical to an insurgency. Looking at the historical trends of religious conflicts in Nigeria, it is apparent that some underlying causes have played key roles in rallying the people, despite the purported religious motivations. From the Jihad in the nineteenth century, to Boko Haram, underlying causes such as poverty and disenchantment with the government have been motivating factors for people to join these movements. Although, there are several schools of thought on what motivates Boko Haram, one can argue that the real question is, “what motivates the people to join their cause?” For Che Guevara, the same cause that was effective in Cuba was ineffective in Bolivia. As noted in the previous chapter, the political and socio-economic environment in both nations made the difference. Consequently, the political and socio-economic situations in Nigeria have contributed significantly to the persistence of religious crisis in the country. In addition, with a population of 160 million people and high rate of unemployment, ample manpower is available to further Boko haram’s cause, particularly in the Northern states. Thus, in combating Boko Haram, it is important for the Nigerian government to address the underlying socio-economic challenges that strengthen the cause of the insurgents.

*The primary objective of any COIN operation is to foster development of effective governance by a legitimate government. Counterinsurgents achieve this objective by the balanced application of both military and nonmilitary means.*⁹¹

The best approach for the Nigerian government, to defeat Boko Haram is to address the root cause of the problem. Nigeria is a secular state; hence, adopting Sharia nation-wide would be impossible. However, addressing the grievances of the populace by tackling the socio-economic challenges would reduce the “cause” of the insurgents. The first challenge is the high level of poverty. According to the Nigerian Punch Newspaper, “The North-West has the highest poverty rate with 70 per cent of its people living below \$1 per day. The North-East follows with 69 per cent.”⁹² Similarly, a 2009/2010 survey by the Nigerian Bureau of statistics shows the national average illiteracy rate at 51.4 percent, while those for the Northern states are in figure 1 below.

Serial	Northern State	Percentage of Population Illiterate
1.	Bauchi	77.3
2.	Borno	76.4
3.	Gombe	70.8
4.	Jigawa	82.7
5.	Kaduna	53.3
6.	Kano	72.2
7.	Katsina	83.3
8.	Kebbi	83.7
9.	Niger	65.0
10.	Sokoto	85.0
11.	Yobe	80.8
12.	Zamfara	85.1

Table showing percentage of illiterate persons above fifteen years in the Northern States⁹³

From the table above, it is obvious that the level of illiteracy in the North is far above the national average. This high level of illiteracy is responsible for the vulnerability of the populace to indoctrination by religious extremist. Another result of the level of illiteracy is the level of poverty as earlier highlighted. Consequently, improving education in Northern Nigeria would reduce the vulnerability of the population to activities of religious extremists because educated and enlightened citizens are less susceptible to coercion by religious extremist. Similarly, education would create better opportunities for employment and livelihood, thus reducing the grievances of dissatisfied Nigerians in the Northern region.

Although, Boko Haram has succeeded in recruiting several followers to its cause, it has been unable to generate widespread followership, most importantly within its areas of operations within Northeastern Nigeria. Opinion poll conducted by Gallup in 2010 suggests that majority of Nigerians do not embrace Boko Haram's anti-western rhetoric or Sharia as the only source of legislation.⁹⁴ The polls for Northeastern Nigeria showed of the number sampled, 0% supported Sharia as the only form of legislation, 64% supported Sharia as part of the legal system, but not the only one and 36% opposed Sharia as part of Nigerian legislation.⁹⁵ Similarly, another weakness of Boko Haram is its inability to create a shadow government like many insurgents with political objectives, as the Viet Cong employed its shadow government effectively in Vietnam.⁹⁶ One can attribute this to the scale of violence it has employed as well as its inability to provide any form of social services for the wellbeing of the populace. Consequently, the Nigerian government could effectively use sustainable socio-economic development to win the support of the people and adequately isolate the insurgents.

Another critical requirement for insurgents is external support and sanctuaries. According to Galula, outside support may range from moral, political, technical, financial and military

support.⁹⁷ As mentioned earlier, no facts have established Boko Haram links with external financial and technical supporters; however, evidence suggests that foreigners exist within the ranks of its fighters. The Joint Task Force (JTF) spokesman, commenting on Boko Haram, stated, “The terrorists have invited foreign mercenaries to assist them in the anticipated attacks,”⁹⁸ This presents significant challenge to security forces because the Nigerian government has not developed a system of identification for its citizens. Consequently, developing a system of national identification and database for citizens would enable security forces identify illegal foreigners. Similarly, the porosity of Nigerian borders have facilitated cross border activities by Boko Haram. For example, some members of Boko Haram were responsible for kidnapping French tourists in Cameroun in February 2013. Nigeria has 4,049 kilometers of border to protect,⁹⁹ and according to the Nigerian Immigration Service, there are over one thousand five hundred illegal routes across Nigerian borders.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, the Nigerian government could collaborate with its neighbors, especially; Cameroun, Niger and Chad to curb cross border activities of terrorists groups. Nevertheless, an essential requirement for any socio-economic development in the region is security.

In August 2012, Mr. Labaran Maku, the Nigerian Information Minister, referring to Northern Nigeria stated, “the region needs peace and stability more than any other region in the country, particularly because the region is clearly lagging behind in terms of infrastructure, education and other development indices.”¹⁰¹ The constitutional role of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is to maintain and secure public safety and public order.¹⁰² In line with this, the FM 3-24 stipulates that, “the primary frontline COIN force is often the police—not the military.”¹⁰³ This is because of the human intelligence (HUMINT) that a properly organized police force can provide in the region. However, the Nigerian Police has not been trained and equipped adequately to function

in this capacity. With about four hundred thousand officers, the NPF meets the United Nations (UN) recommended benchmark of one officer per 400 citizens. However, their poor training and equipment has been a major challenge.¹⁰⁴ For example, presently, the Nigerian Police has only a few helicopters mostly deployed within two major cities, Lagos and Abuja. Consequently, the Nigerian Police is unable to respond rapidly to criminal activities such as bank robberies prevalent in the country.

The problems of the NPF date back to its inception; however, its capabilities further declined during the years of military rule in Nigeria. During these periods, successive military governments constantly employed the military to maintain public law and order. Consequently, the NPF could not sufficiently develop its capacity to undertake its constitutional roles. Therefore, one of the vital areas for improvement is the training and equipping of the Nigerian Police Force. Another critical requirement for developing a credible police force is attractive remuneration and benefits.¹⁰⁵ This would ensure policemen are highly motivated and less susceptible to corruption. As such, a credible police force would be able to maintain peace and security with region without constant employment of the Nigerian Military.

Employing the military for continuous internal security operations has not been without challenges because; it has distracted the military from concentrating on its primary role of defending the country from external aggression. Although, one may argue that Nigeria has not faced significant external threats in the last couple of decades, nevertheless, it is important to prepare the military to respond to both external and internal threats, when required. Like most national armies, the Nigerian Army is mostly trained and equipped for conventional warfare. However, its last conventional war was WWII, when Nigerian troops in British regiments, fought the Japanese in Burma. The Nigerian Army's subsequent engagements have been mainly hybrid

wars against powerful insurgents, with some conventional warfare capabilities. Some of these insurgents include the Biafran Army during the Nigerian Civil War, as well as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), during the Liberian Civil War.

Notwithstanding its conventional orientation, the Nigerian Army has had credible experience in irregular warfare in the last two decades. Following the outbreak of civil war in Liberia, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), deployed its military arm, the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to Liberia in 1990. The Nigerian Army constituted about seventy percent of these troops.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the Nigerian Army constituted ninety percent of ECOMOG troops deployed to Sierra Leone during its Civil War in 1998.¹⁰⁷ ECOMOG operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone were revelations for the Nigerian Army, because they exposed some of the deficiencies in its capabilities in irregular wars. Some of the tactical challenges faced include, lack of adequate intelligence on the enemy and the environment, as well as doctrine and training for COIN. Other challenges were lack of critical equipment for COIN operations, such as assault helicopters and interoperability between the Nigerian Army and Air Force.¹⁰⁸

Post ECOMOG operations provided opportunities for the Nigerian Military to draw lessons from its experience in Sierra Leone and Liberia. However, several other challenges faced the military at that time. The draw down in operations in Liberia in 1998, and in Sierra Leone in 2000 coincided with Nigeria's transition from military to civil government in 1999. As such, the focus was developing an apolitical military that would be subordinate to the civilian government as highlighted by Said Adejumobi:

During the decades of military rule the Nigerian military have lost nearly all semblance of professionalism and became thoroughly corrupted. Senior officers

*all became immensely rich through theft, while junior officers and enlisted men live in poverty. Today, there are no civil-military relations in the normal sense of the phrase. The military is incapable of self-reform and cannot lead democratization. Only a radical transformation of the military and the wholesale replacement of the officers' corps could open the way for democracy.*¹⁰⁹

Consequently, the military neglected some pertinent lessons from the ECOMOG experience, such as the need for counterinsurgency doctrine. Nevertheless, ECOMOG experiences had some impact on the military. For example, the need for assault helicopters led to the procurement of the Russian-made Mi-35 helicopter gunship for the Nigerian Air Force. Similarly, the United States Operation Focus Relief began training of over a thousand Nigerian troops in irregular warfare. Its aim was to train and equip soldiers from Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal to conduct peace-enforcement operations in Sierra Leone, against the Revolutionary United Front.¹¹⁰

Some of these changes in the Nigerian military had positive impact on its role in Niger-Delta Crises in Nigeria. Although, there had been persistent unrest in the Niger-Delta region over the impact of oil exploitation in the region and neglect by the government, the establishment of the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) resulted in renewed conflict in the region in 2005.¹¹¹ The Nigerian Military was again combating insurgents in the riverine south of Nigeria. The three arms of the Nigerian military, the Army, Navy and Air Force constituted the Joint Task Force (JTF) for Operations Restore Hope in the Niger Delta. Although the Nigerian Armed Forces possessed a joint structure at the strategic level, with a Chief of Defense Staff (CDS), analogous to the United States Chairman Joint Chief of Staff (CJCS), it lacked “jointness” at the tactical and operational levels. Therefore, the immediate challenge of the JTF was again interoperability of the three Services in a joint context.

Despite initial challenges in curbing the insurgency, the JTF was able to adapt counterinsurgency strategies in combating the insurgents. Particularly, under the pragmatic leadership of General SY Bello, the Commander of the JTF in 2008/2009, the JTF successfully employed counterinsurgency strategies such information operations and population-centric approaches to isolate the insurgents. Similarly, he integrated the planning and execution of operations, such that three Services worked synergistically as well as the joint training of Special Forces troops for the three Services.¹¹² Consequently, the JTF was more effective in combating the insurgents, who were more amenable to the government's amnesty program. Some lessons of the JTF in Operation Restore Hope have influenced ongoing operations against Boko Haram in the North; however, there is the need to incorporate these lessons into the development of the military.

Like most conventional militaries, the first step in changing the force begins with a cultural reorientation. That is, nations; especially in Sub-Saharan Africa must appreciate the uniqueness and prevalence of small wars within the region, and train and equip their armed forces to adequately respond to these conflicts. In doing this, the first step for the Nigerian military should be to establish a system of incorporating lessons learnt from counterinsurgency warfare into its doctrine. For example, the Nigerian Army should task the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), with developing counterinsurgency doctrines for the Army, rather than the army learning on the go in subsequent operations. The Nigerian Navy and Air Force could also benefit from this reorientation to develop its counterinsurgency warfare capability. In order to avoid trying to reinvent the wheel, counterinsurgency training should also be the focus of foreign military assistance.

For the United States, its military footprint, in Africa has been minimal in recent years. However, with the escalation of AQIM's activities in the region, there are renewed efforts to focus on Africa, as the stated by Jennifer Cooke, the director of the Africa program at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies. "I think the security threats emanating from Africa are being taken more seriously than they have been before, and they're more real,"¹¹³ Africa, presents enormous security challenges for several reasons. First, the continent is large. With an area of about thirty million square kilometers, Africa is more than thrice the size of the United States.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, some of the largest countries such as Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan have large portions of their territories ungoverned. For example, Mali has a territory of 1.24 million square kilometers and a population of about thirteen million people. Therefore, its seven and a half thousand strong military has been unable to police its territory effectively; especially its harsh terrain in the north. This makes it easy for cross boarder criminal activities to take place and provides safe havens for insurgents such as AQIM, presently operating in northern Mali.

Secondly, most African nations are ethnically and religiously diverse. This diversity has been a major source of conflict in the region. Although, one could contend that these diversities are not the cause of the problems experienced, but corrupt leaders in the region exploit these fault lines to further their selfish agendas. Similarly, another security challenge is the level of poverty, closely related with bad governance and corruption. According to the World Bank, forty seven percent of Africa's population lives below poverty line and this number constitute about forty percent of the world's population living below poverty line.¹¹⁵ These statics are disturbing when one considers that Africa accounts for only fifteen percent of the world's population.¹¹⁶ Similarly, level of literacy of Africa's population also poses a security threat. For instance, Chad,

Mali and Niger have literacy rates of 34.5, 31.1 and 28.7 percent, respectively.¹¹⁷ This combination of poverty, illiteracy and corruption creates an abundance of disgruntled citizens, whom, insurgent groups like Al-Qaeda can easily coerce and employ for their ends. Consequently, there is the need for the United States to focus on Africa in order to help stem the activities of Al Qaeda and the likes.

“A successful COIN effort establishes host nation (HN) institutions that can sustain government legitimacy.”¹¹⁸ Therefore, the first step in assisting Nigeria, in the fight against Boko Haram should be helping the government to build strong institutions. This would facilitate economic development, alleviate poverty and reduce the number of disgruntled citizens in the society, who have been potential recruits for the insurgents. Furthermore, as the United States considers its options for increased military activities in the region, it must contend with some limitations. Following drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as recent defense cutbacks, the first limitation for the United States is the availability of resources for any large-scale military operations in Africa. Any large-scale operation in the region would require enormous human and material resources.

Secondly, large-scale military intervention may have undesired impact in the region. This is because of the underlying mistrust of the “West”, as imperialist. A recent evidence of this perception was the reaction of several countries to the United States African Command (AFRICOM). Some “opponents of AFRICOM argue that the United States is moving toward a neo-colonialist stance with regard to the continent which reeks of militarism and imperialist ambition.”¹¹⁹ Consequently, deploying a large-scale force could be counterproductive to winning the hearts and minds of the population.

From the foregoing, it implies that the most viable option for the United States military in Africa is a “small footprint” force. This would be cost effective and host nation would not view it imperialist invasion by the United States. As the FM 3-24 stipulates, “developing effective HN security forces—including military, police, and paramilitary forces—is one of the highest priority COIN tasks.”¹²⁰ The United States achieves this through several options such as its International Military Education and Training (IMET) program or other programs for developing HN security forces.¹²¹ For Nigeria, the United States could employ Foreign Internal Defense (FID) because of its whole-of-government approach.

FID can allow civilian and military agencies of the United States government to assist the Nigerian government protect its society from lawlessness, insurgency and terrorism, such as Boko Haram and other militant groups within the region.¹²² Although, Boko Haram has not posed a serious international threat, its recent actions in abducting French nationals from Cameroon indicates its potential for wider influence within the West African region. Moreover, it is important to prevent Boko Haram, AQIM and Al-Shabab from networking effectively within Sub-Saharan Africa, because this could have far-reaching effect world-wide.

Some areas the United States military can focus on assisting the Nigerian military include training in information operations and intelligence gathering, as well as COIN training for conventional and Special Forces troops. Other areas include post conflict operations such Humanitarian Assistance (HA), Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and rehabilitation of former combatants. In addition, as Said Adejumobi stated, “the institutional culture of military vocation that includes esprit the corps, strict subordination and discipline, and organizational solidarity were all squandered during years of military rule.”¹²³ All the same, the Nigerian Armed Forces has made considerable progress in re-professionalization of its force, since the

return of Nigeria to civilian government. The United States military can help build on this progress by its interaction with Nigerian Military. Recent United States experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, as highlighted in the FM 3-24 would be very relevant for this interaction.



Conclusion

The cultural adaptation of military forces is critical to the successful conduct of irregular wars. Culture creates a paradigm, with which individuals within the group process information and draw deductions from the environment. Therefore, it affects how and what threats we perceive. In recent history, most conventional militaries have trained and equipped for conventional fights with other conventional forces. This cultural orientation is the major challenge conventional forces have faced in COIN operations. One reason for this is the perception of irregular wars as unusual, despite its prevalence since the end of WW2. Nevertheless, this conventional military culture can be attributed to various factors.

The military is a subset of the society; consequently, the values and culture of the society also affect that of the military. This will account for the difference between the United States and the British military cultures. Britain with its imperial history has been more disposed to irregular wars based on its experience in its empires world-wide, while the United States culture of non-intervention has created an aversion for irregular wars. Nonetheless, the United States has had ample experience in irregular wars following WW2. These experiences were easily forgotten because they were perceived as minor distractions. Other perceived threats such as the USSR during the Cold War, influenced military development.

Another reason for the aversion to irregular wars is the challenge it presents. As the FM 3-24 espouses, irregular wars are difficult. Owing to the nature of the enemy, they tend to be more unpredictable and usually require a whole-of-government approach that most militaries are not trained and equipped to undertake. Unlike conventional wars in which the objective is to destroy enemy forces or capture territory, the objective of COIN is to win the hearts and minds of the population. This cannot be accomplished by brute force but by isolating the insurgents from the

population. The insurgent's greatest weapon is its cause. Consequently counterinsurgents must focus on defeating the insurgent's cause.

To be successful, a counterinsurgent must understand the physical as well as human environment in the region. This would enable the counterinsurgent understand the underlying causes of such insurgencies. For Boko Haram, it employs religious rhetoric in its cause in Nigeria; however, its real strength is its ability to rally disgruntled citizens to its cause. Historically, from the Sokoto Jihad to modern-day conflicts in the region, socio-economic challenges play a major role. Therefore, addressing socio-economic problems in Northern Nigeria would undermine Boko Haram's activities in Nigeria.

A prerequisite for socio-economic development by the Nigerian government is security in the region. The NPF and the military must be adequately trained and equipped to fight COIN. Like most conventional military forces, the Nigerian military has been trained and equipped for conventional fights. These conventional approaches have been proven ineffective in irregular fights. Furthermore, if the recent trend in warfare is anything to go by; irregular wars will remain a dominant form of warfare, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Accordingly, a reorientation of the Nigerian military is essential.

The United States could also facilitate the reorientation and training of Nigerian Armed Forces through FID. FID provides a cheap and small footprint option for the United States as it faces the challenge of budget cutbacks. The Nigerian military has been able to adapt in combating present challenges, based on experience from previous conflicts such as during ECOMOG operations and the Niger Delta crisis, United States military to military interaction with Nigeria would further improve Nigeria's capacity to maintain security within its borders

and the region at large. Successful conduct of COIN operations begins with a mental shift from conventional warfare strategy to COIN strategy.



Notes

(All notes appear in shortened form. For full details, see the appropriate entry in the Bibliography)

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