

Paradox of Counterterrorism: The Nigerian Military as Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS Partnership's Most Hunted 'Hard Targets'

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Abstract

This study examines Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS' affiliation and the travails of the Nigerian military in the counterterrorism campaign between 2011 and 2021. It relies on qualitative and documentary methods of data collection as well as content analysis. The study develops the concepts of 'convergence of security threat' and 'less convergence of security support' to explain how Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS partnership is implicated in scaling up ISWAP's tactical capability in carrying out more successful deadly attacks against the hardest targets – Nigerian military forces, army bases and facilities, killing scores of military personnel and carting away important fighting equipment with less push back. It further argues that while Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS strategic cooperation depicts considerable inflows of financial, tactical and force training supports, leading to a more formidable and battle-ready ISWAP; the Nigerian military has had marginal and stunted regional and international counterterrorism supports with less strategic capability to withstand or repel the costly terrorist offensives. This spells the need for the Nigerian military to invest heavily in rallying/building/leveraging cooperative regional and international counterterrorism supports in the fight against terror.

Keywords: Boko Haram, ISIS, ISWAP, Nigerian military, Counter-insurgency, Counterterrorism support.

Introduction

Boko Haram has always violently pushed its terror-prone ideological campaigns for the abolishment of Western education and establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria. Founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf as *Jamatu Ahli Al-Sunna lil Da'wa Wal Jihad* (JAS) (People committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teaching and Jihad), the terror group's predetermined goal of spreading radical Islam and forceful establishment of Islamic caliphate in the Northern Nigeria (Kassim & Nwankpa, 2018; Walker, 2016; Loimeier 2012) have been strongly matched with the tactical ability to carry out terrorist attacks that produce mass

casualties. For example, deaths attributed to Boko Haram activities rose by 317 % in 2014 to 6,644 in 2015 compared to ISIL's 6,073 deaths. Hence, in 2015, barely few years of its formation, Boko Haram overtook the ISIL as the world's deadliest terrorist group (Searcey & Santora, 2015). Nigeria has consistently been ranked third most terrorist nation over a 5-year period since 2015. It is noteworthy that the Nigerian military had relatively maintained a tactical advantage over the Boko Haram insurgent group in the early stages of its formation (Omenma & Hendricks, 2018), especially in capturing and scaling down its foot soldiers, reclaiming lost territories, and freeing captives (Onuoha, Nwangwu & Ugwueze, 2020; Mahmood & Ndubuisi, 2018). With exception to Boko Haram's ambush of September-October, 2013 which claimed the lives of several Nigerian soldiers, the Boko Haram sect had hardly forged any frontal attacks on the Nigerian Army (Cocks, 2014). This is why Boko Haram repeatedly evaded the Nigerian Army by retreating into hills around the borders with Cameroon whose soldiers were then unwilling to confront the terrorist group (Anugwom, 2019; Cocks, 2014). Pérouse de Montclos (2014) notes that in its formative stages, Boko Haram was never significant or cohesive enough an organization to truly threaten national stability. Although 2015 was quite an eventful year in the combat between Boko Haram and the Nigerian military as both parties gained, lost and regained territories, the morale of the Nigerian Army remained high to the extent that the soldiers were able to expel the militants from Baga on 21st February, after retaking Monguno (Ezeobi, 2020; Muscati, 2015). It was on the strength of this momentary 'success' that both Lai Mohammed, the Minister of Information and President Muhammadu Buhari boasted with some air of accomplishment that Boko Haram has been "technically defeated" (Iwuoha, 2020a; *BBC*, 2015).

Nonetheless, the ever-expanding deadly activities of the dreaded Boko Haram terrorist group have become a terribly traumatic nightmare to the Nigerian military. Although the unpredictable dangerous strikes of Boko Haram thickly dot the fringes of Nigeria's Northeast states including Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe; it is hard to deny that the porous borderlands across the un(der)governed spaces in the Lake Chad region (Iwuoha, 2020b), significantly complement the audacious terrorist attacks and their invincibility in the face of the seemingly disadvantaged Nigerian-side military fighters. Yet, about six swathes of timely scholarly accounts that establish and interpret the loci behind the fast diminishing strength of the Nigerian military campaigns against Boko Haram can never be taken for granted.

First is poor military strategy (Omenma & Hendricks, 2018); second, military corruption and politically-motivated diversion of counterterrorism funding (Onuoha, Nwangwu & Ugwueze, 2020; Omonobi, 2015); third, lack of effective preparedness and weapons supply (Oriola, 2021; Agbiboa, 2018); fourth, military's poor international counterterrorism supports (Iwuoha, 2019a; Iwuoha, 2019b); fifth, Boko Haram's tactical gains and maneuvering including the use of women (Botha & Abdile; Zenn, 2018a), and sixth, Boko Haram's strategic linkages with other extremist groups (Okoli & Nwangwu, 2022; Zenn, 2018b). These important scholarly offerings generally suggest why Boko Haram's creative sense of terrorism in Nigeria and its neighbouring countries defeat existing counterterrorism frameworks and stubbornly reinforce more complex threat scenarios against vulnerable populations.

Nevertheless, there is an untold version lacking in these compelling intellectual productions on Boko Haram narrative – the strategic significance of the Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS affiliation on the ongoing counterterrorism war in Nigeria. Three important questions lead this study: What are the gamut and context of the Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS tripartite connection? What is the contribution of the ideological and tactical changes initiated by the Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS affiliation to the 'failing' counterterrorism campaign in Nigeria? How is the Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS strategic alliance implicated in the terrorists' increasing deadly 'big hits' on Nigerian military formations? This paper fills these vacuums by attempting to understand the new tactical posturing as well as ideological and strategic redefinition/redirection of targets by the Boko Haram and ISWAP after their defining linkup with ISIS terrorist organization. For one thing, there has been less attention on the sudden shift of Boko Haram-ISWAP's attacks from soft targets to hard target, particularly, the Nigerian Army, which has tremendously increased. Thousands of the Nigerian military personnel have been killed by the insurgent group, and the military has lost facilities, equipment and ammunition worth millions of naira.

A flashback to major structural reorganizations which occurred in the life of the burgeoning Islamist group following its formal alliance with the ISIS of Caliph Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi on 7th March, 2015 would particularly suggest a fundamental watershed in Boko Haram's ideological and tactical posturing. A deep-set ideologically rift had caused a major split in Boko Haram's leadership resulting to two notable factions in August 2016, namely: Boko Haram, led by Shekau until his reported death on 19 May 2021, and Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), initially led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi and later replaced by Ba Idrisa (Zenn, 2020; Onuoha, 2016).

Beginning from late 2016, the Boko Haram, along with ISWAP, technically upped their game – forging more lethal attacks, killing and maiming scores of military personnel, and looting several military's armories and fighting equipment with little push back. The unpredictable tactics of mapping and targeting military formations depict a clear-cut shift from Boko Haram's initial principal targets such as government establishments, churches, mosques, markets, schools and other public places with occasional hits on military check points and suicide bombings (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2018). The rate of military casualties resulting from terrorist attacks in Northeast Nigeria has gone up by an average of 56% against civilian casualties since 2015 (International Crisis Group, ICG, 2019). Between 2016 and 2021, more than 200 soldiers were reportedly killed and several others seriously wounded (Egbas, 2020; *Vanguard*, 24th March, 2020). Even the launch of Operation Safe Corridor in May 2016 aimed at deradicalizing and degrading the terrorist group fell short of the required cataclysmic firepower to decimate the insurgent group and upturn the ugly narrative. Contrary to the expectations that the split of Boko Haram into two antagonistic factions would weaken the group and result in lesser attacks and eventual defeat/demobilization, both groups rather gained more tactical advantage over the military.

This research relied on qualitative and documentary methods of data collection. Secondary data was sourced from official sources, including the Islamic State's media outlets, which serves as the mouthpiece of ISWAP; the Nigerian Army operation media; updates from the twitter account of the Nigerian Military, Nigeria Watch database, Human Rights Watch, Council on Foreign Relations, among several others. Data analysis was based on content analysis. Textual and contextual analysis and interpretation of all generated information were conducted to arrive at logical induction and evidential facts that led to the conclusion.

Anatomy of a Breakup: Boko Haram Split and the Global Jihadist Alliance

Boko Haram's desire to extend hands of comradeship and fraternity with other foreign Jihadist groups did not just start with its pledge of allegiance and subsequent affiliation with ISIS in 2015. Between 2011 and 2012, a group led by Khalid Al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur, sent letters to the leaders of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), criticizing Shekau's leadership and extremist stances (Ahmed, 2019). The consequence of these letters and the deterioration of the relationship between Shekau and his commanders was the emergence of the first split in the Boko Haram, which led to the formation of "Jama'at Ansari Al-Muslimin fi Bilad Al-Sudan" (Ansaru). With AQIM's recognition of Ansaru and withdrawal of support

from Shekau's Boko Haram (JAS), the JAS drifted towards AQIM's archrival—the Islamic State (IS). After a while, these two groups (Ansaru and JAS) reunited under the leadership of Shekau.

While Shekau admired and drew inspiration from ISIS, and consequently sought to identify with the Jihadi group, he was, to say the least, not enthusiastically committed to paying the price of such high-powered alliance. He was quite unwilling to shed off some of the personal predilection and ideological preference that were obviously irreconcilable with those of ISIS. Although his request to have an alliance with ISIS was accepted by the then leader of ISIS, Caliph Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi on 7th March, 2015, and the group subsequently had its name changed to ISWAP to truly reflect the affiliation, Shekau's dictatorial character, ideological commitments, operational modality, and over all nonconformity to the dictates of ISIS led to his sudden removal and replacement with Abu Musab al-Barnawi, son of late Mohammed Yusuf in August 2016. Abubakar Shekau, again fostered the division in the sect by leaving with some members of the group who were loyal to him, to form a separate insurgent group with the former name — Boko Haram or JAS. This division occasioned the emergence of ISWAP as separate jihadist group outside the leadership and command of Shekau. ISWAP continues to present itself as the group that revolts against state corruption, while offering financial incentives, and as such, has greater chance of recruiting supporters in relation to JAS (Ahmed, 2019). The killing of Mamman Nur—co-leader or second in command after Al-Barnawi—by his own ISWAP combatants leaves many observers with the anticipation that another schism would soon occur within ISWAP (Ahmed, 2019). The imagined implosion or schism would eventually lead to the reunion of the two Boko Haram factions (JAS and ISWAP). The allusions to the reunion of JAS and ISWAP later become possible following the death of Shekau and serious depopulation of the JAS militants loyal to him.

Meanwhile, a watershed occurred in the life of the burgeoning Islamist group following its formal alliance with the ISIS of Caliph Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi on 7th March, 2015. A deep-set ideologically rift caused a major split in Boko haram in which the leadership of Abubakar Shekau was undermined by ISIS (militant Sunni Islamist group founded in 1999 by Abū Muṣ'ab al-Zarqāwī, a Jordanian-born Islamic militant who led several insurgent attacks in Iraq) (Roggio, 2014). This became all too obvious in August 2016, when ISIS installed Abu Musab al-Barnawi as the new leader of Boko Haram – a move which was outrightly rejected by Shekau, who insisted on heading the Boko Haram faction (Onuoha, 2016). The result was the

emergence of two notable factions. One faction that retained the name Boko Haram was led by Shekau until his death on 19th May 2021. The second faction, ISWAP, was initially led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi, but he was later replaced by Ba Idrisa (also addressed as Abu Abdullah Idris ibn Umar al-Barnawi) (Zenn, 2020).

Having accepted Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance, ISIS directed that the sect be christened the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) with Shekau as the "Waly" (leader) (Ahmed, 2019). Meanwhile, issues centering on Shekau's dictatorial character, ideological commitments, and operational modality led to the removal of Abubakar Shekau in August 2016, and his eventual replacement with Abu Musab al-Barnawi, son of late Yusuf and former spokesperson of the group. This led to the split of the group into two factions, namely: JAS and ISWAP. While Abubakar Shekau, until his death in May 2021, continued to lead the JAS faction which launches its lethal attacks from the Sambisa Forest and Mandara hills, Abu Musab al-Barnawi became the leader of the more dominant ISWAP (Onuoha, 2018), which focuses primarily on decimating the Nigerian Military in addition to filling governance gap in the Lake Chad region straddling Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon (Brechenmacher, 2019; Anyadike, 2018).

Conceptual Analysis on Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS' Strategic Partnership and the Military's Counterterrorism Approach

This research develops the concepts of 'convergence of security threat' and 'less convergence of security support' as analytical frameworks to explain the implication of Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS strategic partnership on Nigeria's counterterrorism war. These analytic tools are deployed to pursue the major arguments of this paper. First, the concept of 'convergence of security threat' is hinged on the argument that Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS strategic alliance resulted to the tactical expansion of the ideological and strategic resource base of the Boko Haram and ISAWP, thus, increasing its capacity to cause, escalate, intensify or pose threats to identified harder targets. Simply, the interlocking or pooling together of ideological and tactical capabilities by two or more partnering terrorist organizations is most likely to produce more assured 'collaborative terror' or 'converged security threats' and, consequently, increase the capacity of the partners to impact dangerous harm against identified soft and hard targets.

Second, the concept of 'less convergence of security support' explains the lack of efficient regional and international counterterrorism support to the Nigerian military in its war against terrorism. The Nigerian military has in recent times faced serious setbacks in attracting or

maintaining viable, efficient and sustained counterterrorism support from its neighbouring countries and international security partners so as to boost its strategic capability in the ongoing counterterrorism war. Hence, while Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS partnership has tremendously widened Boko Haram/ISWAP tactical and operational capabilities, as well as increased their seeming monopoly of terror against identified hard targets, the Nigeria's military remains tactically limited and militarily constrained as it struggles with little or no visible success to counter ISWAP, adopting a more or less self-help approach. The Nigerian military is, therefore, entrapped or caged in its limited counterterrorism support/needs to maximize enhanced regional cooperation to advance its strategic capabilities. The convergence or rallying of regional and international security support can help to bolster Nigeria's effort and hand it a lasting and sustainable victory in its counterterrorism war.

The Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS cooperation expanded the labyrinths of ISIS foothold in Nigeria by burgeoning its ideological and strategic resource base, and consequently increasing its potential to expend more terrific harms on identified targets. The cooperation broadened its appeal level and aided more recruitment of people who were motivated to join ISIS but cannot go to Syria. The prevailing social, political, and economic conditions, including high unemployment rates, illiteracy as well as absence of basic amenities, in northern Nigeria particularly made it a fertile ground for jihadist radicalisation and recruitment for ISIS (Masi, 2015).

Cold-Ravnskilde and Plambech (2015) observe that Boko Haram is increasingly inspired by a number of global jihadist groups it is affiliated to, including Al Qaeda and Islamic State, as well as other radical African Muslim groups it has links with such as Al Shabaab, Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and AQIM. These ad hoc connections, therefore, make them a dangerous organisation that challenges the regional stability of West Africa. It is, however, disputed how significant the Boko Haram-ISWAP-ISIS relationship is to the tactical development of the group (Bodansky, 2015) and its capacity to organize more impactful terrorist threats. Although it may most of all serve the purpose of propaganda and attracting international media attention from the statements ISIS make – such as counting ISWAP's victories as their own, which could incentivise and inspire some followers, on the one hand, and converge into some form of 'imagined (psychological) threats' to identified targets, on the other hand.

ISWAP attracts specific attention having tactically established itself as the stronger faction and one of the most active ISIS affiliates globally. It distanced itself from the indiscriminate violence that characterized Boko Haram, renouncing the killing of Muslim civilians and vowing to focus attacks on Christians and state targets. ISWAP appears to be working hard to gain greater favour from its namesake organisation - ISIS, and has obtained some support already, notably in the form of training and funding (ICG, 2019). ISIS deployed limited, yet targeted, support such as ideological and operational guidance, as well as small amounts of money, to upgrade the capabilities of ISWAP as a distant jihadist group adopting its brand, and made it a far more potent insurgent force (Foucher, 2020). ISWAP also benefited from technical and material assistance from ISIS. After initial theological and military training completed remotely, ISIS provided ISWAP with significant financial support, while reportedly deploying trainers to the Sambisa Forest to personally train ISWAP commanders in strategy and tactics (Foucher, 2020). In fact, immediately after Shekau's oath of allegiance, a team of six to eight "Arabs" led by Abu Obeidah (an experienced Libyan jihadist) arrived in the Sambisa forest (Foucher, 2020). The team organized courses on strategy and tactics for ISWAP fighters. ISWAP fighters stated that: "They [ISIS fighters] taught us about anti-aircraft techniques, armour, and infantry. We benefited so much from them. They went to fight with us. They observed us, explaining that our way was so dangerous that it was like suicide" (ICG, 2019, p.2). The outcome of all these has been the injection of certain degree of professionalism into ISWAP and corresponding emergence of a more formidable, daring and impetuous ISWAP, fully dedicated to routing their only obstacle towards getting to the Nigerian State and perhaps overthrowing it. This perceived or actual obstacle has been the security forces, especially the Nigerian Army.

Zenn (2019) reveals how the Islamic State also provided some tactical advice to ISWAP by sending the group rocket-making photos in 2015, which closely resembled the rockets the Islamic State made in one of its own videos from "al-Fallujah Province" in Iraq. The "al-Fallujah Province" video was also found on the cell phone of an ISWAP member who was captured in Cameroon in 2015, suggesting ISWAP may have learned rocket-making in part from the video itself. Another form of tactical support that the Islamic State provided to ISWAP was up-armored suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosives devices (SVBIEDs) as reported by ISWAP insiders as early as 2017, though the SVBIEDs only appeared in an ISWAP video in 2018 and subsequent pictures released by the Nigerian Army in 2019.

By 2020, U.N. monitors assessed that ISWAP had ‘outstripped’ Boko Haram in size and capacity, and was operating “with a high degree of success [...] including by conducting raids on security forces, which have yielded significant war spoils in the form of materiel and other supplies” (Congressional Research Service, 2022). ISWAP has 4,000-5,000 fighters and therefore poses a more resilient threat to Nigerian security establishment (ICG, 2019). This explains why the group has caused real pains to the Nigerian military as it continues to attack military facilities, primarily targeting local military positions and overrunning dozens of army bases, killing hundreds of soldiers and looting materiel, and funds itself through raiding, kidnapping for ransom, and taxing local populations and commerce.

ISWAP’s focus on military targets has produced some practical benefits. After its split from Shekau, ISWAP suffered from weapons shortages, and frequent raids on military sites allowed it to replenish its supply. This adjustment appears to have won it both arms stockpiles and combat experience. Since June 2018, it used these advantages to attack larger military targets again, meeting with more success (ICG, 2019). ISWAP’s tactics seem to have contributed to a notable drop in civilian casualties in north-eastern Nigeria since 2016, and a rise in military casualties, especially its raid in July 2018 on a battalion-sized camp (killing approximately 700 soldiers) in Jilli, Yobe state – a clear indicator of ISWAP’s growing capabilities. Amid rising insecurity in other parts of northern Nigeria and in the Sahel region, to Nigeria’s north, great concern has thus mounted over a possible convergence of security threats (Congressional Research Service, 2022). U.N. investigators report that ISWAP has links to another ISIS faction, known as IS-Greater Sahara, active in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, though each group appears primarily focused on local aims (Congressional Research Service, 2022; Zenn, 2018b).

Unfortunately, the obvious lack of efficient regional and international counterterrorism support to the Nigerian military undermines its war against terrorism. This is viewed from the concept of ‘less convergence of security support’ considering Nigeria military’s setbacks in attracting or maintaining viable, efficient and sustained counterterrorism support from its neighbouring countries and international security partners so as to boost its strategic capability in the ongoing counterterrorism war. For example, the United States being a major counterterrorism partner to the Nigerian government has provided different forms of counterterrorism support and other assistance to the Nigerian government. This has been consistently rolled out in the form of capacity-building assistance for security forces in the region, the provision of equipment to

regional militaries (e.g., through the Foreign Military Sales and Excess Defense Articles programs), and logistics and advisory support for the MNJTF. From 2015 to 2020, U.S. Africa Command maintained an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operation in northern Cameroon, involving up to 300 U.S. personnel; the Trump Administration ended that deployment. The State Department has managed some counterterrorism assistance for Lake Chad Basin militaries, and is supporting the development of a Nigerian Police Force unit to assume civilian law enforcement duties in the Northeast. From 2014 to 2020, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) administered a program in Nigeria to help counter extremist recruitment and reintegrate former extremists. Between 2014 and 2020, the State Department and USAID provided roughly \$2.3 billion in humanitarian assistance for the Lake Chad Basin region, most of it for Nigeria (Congressional Research Service, 2022).

However, the continued human rights abuse by Nigerian security forces have raised challenges for U.S. security assistance and military sales to Nigeria. This includes killed thousands of civilians in bombing raids, indiscriminate arrest and incarceration of innocent civilians, detainees being held in inhumane conditions while awaiting trials for many years, in which over 10,000 has died in military custody between 2011 and 2020 (Congressional Research Service, 2022). These concerns primarily hindered continued U.S. counterterrorism supports to Nigeria. In 2014, the Obama Administration blocked a planned transfer of U.S.-origin military helicopters from Israel to Nigeria, partly due to human rights concerns; in January 2017, it froze a planned sale of 12 A-29 Super Tucano aircraft to Nigeria after a Nigerian jet bombed a displacement camp. The Trump Administration revived the latter sale; Nigeria received the aircraft in 2021. In 2021, some Members of Congress reportedly placed an informal, pre-notification hold on a proposed sale of 12 AH-1 Cobra helicopters to Nigeria. Importantly, the U.S. “Leahy laws,” which prohibit most types of U.S. security assistance to foreign security force units implicated in gross human rights violations, have prohibited U.S. assistance for certain units in the Lake Chad Basin region. In 2021, the State Department designated Nigeria under the Child Soldiers Prevention Act (Title IV, P.L. 110-457) due to the use of child soldiers by state-backed militias battling Boko Haram and IS-WA, triggering restrictions on U.S. security assistance in 2022 (Congressional Research Service, 2022).

Meanwhile, regional military coordination has rarely improved even after the 2014 activation of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2014, comprising 8,700 troops from Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The MNJTF operations have been episodic with

unconvincing starts and sudden termination, and interoperability has been an enduring challenge. For example, MNJTF's operation Amni Fakhat (April-July 2018) and operation Yancin Takfi which began in March 2019 has been marred by poor commitment of forces. Again, sustained full-scale operations and intelligence coordination seem shaky as each MNJTF participating country faces other pressing security challenges, diverting attention and resources away from the campaign against Boko Haram and IS-WA (Congressional Research Service, 2022). Thus, Nigeria has struggled to consolidate the operational reliance that would come with genuine cooperation.

Importantly, the 'less convergence of security support' analysis provides understanding on why Nigeria's military has been less effective in facing ISWAP which appears to be a more formidable, battle-ready, and better trained force. Nigerian troops are poorly equipped and insufficiently supplied. Army bases are poorly fortified. Troop rotation is rare, medical evacuation capacity is feeble, coordination with air support (which has occasionally been essential to repelling attacks on ground troops) is weak, and senior leadership has been slow to grapple seriously with its problems (Oriola, 2021; Anyadike, 2018; Zacharias, Pieri & Zenn, 2018). More importantly, there is poor international counterterrorism supports. In recent years, therefore, Nigeria's military has merely concentrated its troop presence in semi-urban "super camps," ceding control over highways and rural areas and limiting humanitarian access and civilian protection beyond garrison towns. Aerial bombing raids and ground offensives periodically claim numerous militant fatalities, but Nigerian authorities often have proven unable to restore stability and state authority in cleared zones (Congressional Research Service, 2022).

Hence, for Nigeria to counter ISWAP militarily and win the counterterrorism war, it will likely need to invest more heavily in rallying and building cooperative regional and international counterterrorism supports. Unfortunately, these usually unsettled gray areas bordering on lack of effective counterterrorism cooperation are important dimensions of counterterrorism challenges that are less identified in popular international security discourses and thus have largely remained unsolved. This analysis substantially provides explanations why terrorist groups are intractable and undefeated in vulnerable states suffering 'less convergence of security support' despite possible long years of 'hopeful' international counterterrorism partnership/engagements and security cooperation, with even the most powerful nations in the world.

Boko Haram –ISWAP –ISIS Connection and the Security of the Nigerian Military

Contrary to the expectations that the split of Boko-Haram into two antagonistic factions would weaken the group and result in lesser attacks and eventual defeat/demobilization, the spate of Boko Haram attacks on the Nigerian Military fighting insurgency in Northeast, Nigeria remained on the increase between the last quarter of 2016 and 2021. Within this period, close to 2000 Nigerian soldiers were reportedly killed, several others seriously wounded, cash allowance for the soldiers and heavy guns and ammunitions either destroyed or carted away following Boko Haram attacks in Northeast, Nigeria (*Vanguard*, 24th March, 2020; *Premium Times*, 22nd January, 2020; Egbas, 2020). Ogundipe (2020a, p.9) rightly observes that the terrorist group was “largely successful in its rapid attacks on Nigerian troops, with soldiers being lost at a high rate in many firefights”. He goes further to lament, most pathetically, that “hundreds of soldiers have been killed since July 2018 and [that] the military lost more than 100 men in a single attack in November that year” (Ogundipe, 2020a, p.9). These increased attacks and killings of members of the armed forces led to a “disheartening” surge in application to quit the service, which in turn, led to the suspension of “approvals for voluntary retirement request from soldiers” by the Nigerian Army headquarters (Ogundipe, 2020b).

In quick response to this, the Nigerian Military began the withdrawal and evacuation of the soldiers, in December 2018, from their small units farther afield and concentrating them in few ‘super camps’ (Cook, 2019; Carsten, 2019). Ironically, this further emboldened the insurgents who interpreted the move to mean a retreat of the soldiers, and then subsequently took advantage of the absence of the military to make effective occupation of the abandoned units/zones. Following the intensification of attacks, the Nigerian soldiers took the defensive side while the Boko Haram (the expansionist ISWAP precisely) remained the offensive side upon whose advancement the soldiers often fled and got routed in the process (Dietrich, 2015; Onuoha, Nwangwu & Ugwueze, 2015). As a result of one of those attacks in March, 2020 that left dozens of soldiers dead, the then Theatre Commander of Operation Lafiya Dole in Borno State, Major General Olusegun Adeniyi, in a viral video, complained about Boko Haram insurgents having more ammunitions and thus attacking more frequently and deadlier than the soldiers. This, unfortunately cost him his position as he was immediately removed on 30th March 2020 (Ezeobi, 2020; Ogundipe, 2020c).

Table 1 shows the number of Nigerian soldiers reportedly killed by Boko Haram between 2009, when the group's rascality and radicalization intensified and 2015, when the group formally got affiliated with ISIS.

Table 1: Number of Nigerian Soldiers reportedly killed by Boko Haram (2009-2015)

Number of Soldiers Killed (at least)	Location of Attack	Date of Attack	Sources
7	Morgue Town in Maiduguri	Monday.22-23 December, 2011.	The Guardian. 23th December, 2011.
2	Okene, Kogi State.	August 8 th , 2012.	BBC, Wednesday, August 9 th , 2012.
1	Borno State	February 1, 2013	https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/nigeria-1960-present/
2	Bama, Borno State	May 7, 2013.	https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/print
2	Bama, Borno State	August 4-5, 2013	https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/print
40	Around Kasiya Forest of Borno State	September 12 th , 2013.	France24.com. Wednesday September 18th, 2013.
16	Kasiya Forest, Maiduguri, Borno State.	September 10-12 th , 2013.	France24.com. Wednesday September 18th, 2013.
23	Gwoza town in Damaturu	Tuesday. 29 th October, 2013.	TNH, 12 December, 2013
2	Boko Haram hideout, Kano State	November 9 th , 2013	TNH, 12 December, 2013
20	Military Barracks in Bama, Borno State	December, 20 th , 2013	https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/nigeria-1960-present/
15	Cameroon-Nigerian border, Borno Sate	December, 23 rd , 2013	https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/nigeria-1960-present/
9	Izag village in Gwoza of Damaturu.	Monday. February 15 th , 2014.	Aljazeera. February 17 th , 2014.
24	Buni Yadi village of Yobe State.	Tuesday. May 27 th , 2014.	Nigerian Tribune, 27.May.2014.
8	Baga Town of Borno State.	Saturday. March 21 st , 2015.	Guardian Post. Saturday, March 27 th , 2015. 15:43 EST.
46	Island in Lake Chad	April 25 th , 2015	https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/nigeria-1960-present/
7	Gonri village of Yobe State.	October 7 th , 2015.	N.A.

Source: Compiled and tabulated by authors

Table 1 reveals that no deaths were reported on the side of the Nigerian military in their fight against the Boko Haram insurgents between 2009 and 2011. However, at least two hundred and twenty-four (224) Nigerian soldiers were reportedly killed by the insurgent group (Boko Haram) between December 2011 and October 2015. In other words, prior to the group's affiliation in March 2015, the group succeeded only in reportedly killing at least 171 Nigerian soldiers in the totality of its 6 years-long warfare and attacks against the Nigerian military forces.

Since the affiliation, ISWAP has benefitted from the ISIS in a number of ways, especially in terms of funding, training and other material/ideological supplies like books. Particularly, ISIS provides training, funding, and ideological and operational guidance to ISIS provinces in sub-Saharan Africa in order to upgrade their capabilities as distant jihadist groups adopting the ISIS brand of ideology (Zenn, 2020). In November 2019 and March 2020, Crisis Group interviewed sixteen defectors from Boko Haram and ISWAP. Among the persons interviewed were several former fighters who had served as bodyguards for different senior commanders, as well as one of the men involved in running the electronic communication platforms used by Nigerian jihadists to consult with the ISIS caliphate in the Levant (Foucher, 2020). The defectors confirmed that ISIS began sending support to Nigeria in the form of ideological and operational guidance, but also some material assistance. The defectors firmly maintained that although ISIS did not send weapons, it (ISIS) sent money transfers that came at least every two weeks, ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 through associated individuals or companies in Nigeria and deliveries by courier to individuals visiting Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates (Foucher, 2020). ISWAP's leaders used ISIS donations to obtain hardware from fighters at agreed-upon prices. In facilitating these purchases, ISIS helped provide the fighters with an income. Defectors stated that fighters could earn up to 150,000 Naira, or \$350, from a successful raid while also helping the ISWAP command centralise key weaponry (Foucher, 2020). ISIS thus encouraged ISWAP to become financially self-sustaining, sharing lessons from its experience governing portions of Iraq and Syria, where it tried to maintain a functioning and taxable economy in areas under its control (Foucher, 2020).

Since 2016, ISWAP has launched more attacks and has caused far more casualties among the military than Shekau's JAS (Foucher, 2020). **Table 2** catalogues the number of Nigerian soldiers reportedly killed since Boko Haram-ISIS affiliation, including the locations and dates of attacks.

Table 2: Number of Nigerian Soldiers reportedly killed, mostly by ISWAP, January - August, 2021

Number of Soldiers Killed (at least)	Location of Attack	Date of Attack	Sources
13	Gazangana village, Gujba, Yobe State	Saturday, 9 th January, 2021	Africanews 11 th January, 2021
22 (6+5+9+2)	Damboa; Chibok; Dikwa Borno State	11 th , 14 th , 18 th , 29 th January, 2021	https://theowp.org/crisis_index/boko-haram-insurgency/ ; Punch. 31 January 2021
14 (4+3+7)	Diffa region; Kukawa; Marte; all in Borno State	1 st , 12 th , 18 th February, 2021	https://theowp.org/crisis_index/boko-haram-insurgency/
15	Gudumbali, Borno State.	3-11 th , March, 2021	France 24. 3/03/2021
30	Borno state	March 12, 2021	Christianity daily, March 12, 2021
27	Monguno and Kukawa, Borno state.	March 14, 2021	Reuters. March 14, 2021
19	Gudumbali, Borno State	March 14, 2021	Wion. March 14, 2021; AA. 14.03.2021
4	Gulwa and Musuri Villages in Gamboru Ngala LGA, Borno State	16 th March, 2021	AA. 16.03.2021
3	Kumuya military base, Yobe state.	April 17, 2021	Platinum post. April 17, 2021
31	Mainok, Kaga LGA, Borno State	11 00 GMT, April 25-26, 2021	News24. April 26, 2021; Africanews, 26/04/2021
40	Army Camp in Mainok, Borno State	Sunday 25 th -26 th April, 2021	The Cable April 26, 2021; https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/print
12	Ajiri, Borno State	May 2 nd , 2021	https://theowp.org/crisis_index/boko-haram-insurgency/
5	Ajiri town of Borno State	May 5, 2021	Defence post. May 5, 2021
7	Damboa, A Borno Community of Borno State	June 3, 2021	Premium times. June 3, 2021
3	Kwamdi village, Damboa LGA, Borno	June 15 th , 2021	Vanguard, June 16 th , 2021
12	Monguna, Borno State	05 th August, 2021	https://nigeria.liveuamap.com/ 05/08/2021

Source: Compiled and tabulated by authors.

Table 3 integrates and summarizes the information on **Tables 1** and **2**. It shows that ISWAP's identification and allegiance to ISIS contributed tremendously to the astronomical rise in the number and frequency of attacks as well as in the escalation of killing of the soldiers from 224 in pre-affiliation era to 1,841 in post affiliation era. This alliance factor offers explanation for this, at least in two senses, viz— (i) in explaining the relatively lower number of attacks and deaths of the Nigerian soldiers in 6 years (2009-2015) and (ii) in unpacking the incredibly heightened attacks and deaths of the soldiers in just barely 5 years (2016-2021).

Table 3: Summary of Tables 1 and 2

Year	Number of soldiers killed	Summation
2009	0	224
2010	0	
2011	7	
2012	2	
2013	121	
2014	33	
2015	61	
2016	204	1,617
2017	69	
2018	379	
2019	264	
2020	444	
2021	257	
Total		1,841

Source: Authors' compilation

ISWAP's Ideological Change and the Mapping of 'Nigerian Military' as Hard Targets

Prior to the Boko Haram-ISWAP affiliation with ISIS, serious internal crisis rooted in ideology and Abubakar Shekau's idiosyncratic leadership had rocked the Boko Haram insurgent group. One of the major areas in which this crisis continued to manifest had been over who/what constitutes the right target and the modalities of executing attacks. Whereas Shekau had greater preference for attacking soft targets (schools, churches, markets and other public places); non-compliant Muslims and, of course, the police and other security operatives as occasions may demand, the likes of Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur had penchant for attacks on hard targets, particularly the Nigerian Army and the MNJTF. In other words, while launching attack on the military was somewhat secondary and peripheral to Shekau, it was primary and central to Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur seen to be the hardcore and diehard elements within the group (and who reportedly wrote to ISIS seeking Abubakar Shekau's removal). Unlike Shekau, these elements did not think it worthwhile to kill Muslims who have not yet come to share in the group's extremist philosophy. Again, they frowned at the use of child suicide-bombers which had then come to be Shekau's frequent mode of launching attacks. With Shekau as the leader, an imperious one at that, his personal preferences always came first and as such limited the capacity and enthusiasm of the group to focus mainly on the hard target—the Nigerian Army, accounting therefore for the relatively lower number of attacks and deaths of the Nigerian soldiers (224) in the pre-affiliation years.

The second sense in which the affiliation factor contributes to the increase in the depth of attacks and concomitant deaths on the military side can be seen from the lines that follow: The affiliation and subsequent split offered the emergent splinter group (ISWAP) led by the hardcore/diehard elements—Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur—the freedom and

leeway to give effect to their long suppressed convictions under Shekau. The global jihadist affiliation offered them the opportunity to fine-tune their strategies and right-channel their attacks on their long-identified target (the Nigerian military), and this they did with unrestrained gusto and bewildering tempo. It should however be pointed out that the inter-group clashes between JAS and ISWAP that ensued resulted in a significant drop in attack and deaths of the soldiers between the last quarter of 2016 and the early part of 2017. Although the affiliation was effected in 2015, its impact in terms of increase in attacks and deaths of the soldiers was not significantly felt because of two reasons: First, 2015 was the year that the insurgents lost so much, both in terms of members and in terms of territory; the very reason Shekau had to succumb to the pressure from the likes of Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Mamman Nur to seek help from ISIS (Foucher, 2020). Second, 2015 was the gestation period during which the affiliation was undergoing perfection, both in terms of teaching and familiarization of tactics, etc.

Although the two groups had gone their separate ways, the media and government typically treated the two splinters as one group thereby making it difficult to appropriately apportion attacks or identify which of the groups is responsible for which particular attack. This soon led to claims and counter claims of attacks by the two splinters. However, most of the attacks on the military from the second half of 2017 onwards had been credited to al-Barnawi's ISWAP, including the 2017 ambush on an oil exploration team from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation as well as the reclaim of territory in Borno (Human Rights Watch, 2018; Mapping Militant Organizations, 2018). Again, the withdrawal of the Chadian troop from the MNJTF along the Lake Chad further heightened the vulnerability of the Nigerian soldiers to the rising attacks from the ISWAP (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, 2017).

Perhaps, the most disturbing aspect of the entire confrontation has been that the Nigerian Army is fighting two groups of insurgents whose operational and tactical dynamics are alien to the training and orientation of the Nigerian soldiers afield of war. Both historical evidence and the emerging realities of the contemporary time bear it out that fighting a two-pronged war (fighting from both ends) has never been easy for any military organization, from the most sophisticated to the very least. Herein lies the fate of the Nigerian soldiers in Northeast Nigeria, which in the first quarter of 2021 alone lost close to 300 soldiers to ISWAP.

Table 3 reveals that not less than two hundred and fifty-seven (257) Nigerian soldiers were killed by the insurgent operating in the Northeast Nigeria in what comes close to as the first

half of 2021. Again, this shows an upward trend in the quality and quantity of attacks on the Nigerian military by the insurgents in the Northeast alone. The figures on the **Tables 3** as humongous as they appear, are still a conservative understatement of the actual number of Nigerian soldiers lost to the insurgents in Northeast since 2009, at least in two senses. On the one hand, the incidents/attacks in which deaths were reported with such descriptive and qualifying words like “several”, “scores”, “dozens”, “unknown” etc by reporters and the Media to suggest undefined figures were deliberately not included in these tabulations for the purpose of measurability. On the other hand, many of those soldiers described as “missing”, “at large”, “wounded”, or “injured”, are sometimes later found dead and unreported. Many deaths have also gone unreported or underreported.

A separate and broader compilation from the Council on Foreign Relations (2021) between 2011 and August 2021 puts the total number of security forces (this includes other security outfits other than the Nigerian Army) killed by the insurgents at 4,212. **Table 4** shows a periodic breakdown of the number of casualties involved.

Table 4: Periodic Breakdown of number of Security Forces killed by Insurgents in Northeast, Nigeria

Month/Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
January		65	21	11	49	12	16	14	148	66	52
February		54	18	15	58	34	44	9	46	10	19
March		23	18	17	26	8	11	15	44	185	60
April		10	34	19	72	7	18	13	111	61	44
May	10	19	45	75	12	2	12	10	94	21	189
June	15	34	2	27	7	40	13	9	91	39	3
July	14	14	3	62	12	4	30	125	83	98	50
August	11	20	27	33	8	4	2	17	26	5	0
September	6	12	68	37	2	61	1	0	69	65	-
October	9	24	35	81	24	30	27	27	38	26	-
November	8	23	12	20	6	25	8	140	16	16	-
December	50	42	15	53	7	4	20	80	26	25	-
Total	123	340	298	450	283	231	202	459	792	617	417

Source: Compiled from the *Council on Foreign Relations* (2021).

Among other important insights, **Table 4** shows that the interval before the affiliation (i.e., May 2011 to March 2015) witnessed the killing of about 1,344 security forces, while the interval following the affiliation (i.e., April 2015 to August 2021) recorded a total of 2868 deaths of the security forces.

ISWAP's Anti-Military Posture and Attacks on Military Bases & Equipment

One of the significant ways in which ISWAP-ISIS alliance has affected the operational dynamics of the former is on their choice of target. According to one of the defectors interviewed by Crisis Group, ISIS encouraged them to focus more on the security forces. In this regard, they encouraged ISWAP to maintain a standing army that will consistently engage the Nigerian security forces and the MNJTF. This same issue of the nature of subjects/objects of attacks remained one of the cardinal areas of difference between the JAS and the ISWAP. These two factions maintain divergent ideological views on whether Muslim civilians should also constitute a target (Mahmood & Ndubuisi, 2018). They further clarified that while JAS insists that anybody, including Muslims, who does not support the group is a government collaborator and thus an object of attack, the ISWAP holds a different view about Muslim civilians, insisting that only government forces and installations should constitute the objects of attack/violence. This ideological divide has sustained the difference in the choice of targets of attacks. While the JAS focuses on soft targets using children, especially female suicide bombers, the ISWAP prefers attacks on military/security structures. Whereas the JAS equally has a history of attacking the military occasionally, over 80 percent of the attacks on both the military personnel and their base/equipment/facilities since 2017 have been carried out by the ISWAP.

Table 5: Selected cases of ISWAP's Attacks on the Nigerian Military Bases/Equipment & Facilities, 2017-2020

Nature of Attack	Location of Attack	Date of Attack	Sources
7 gun trucks were destroyed in the attack.	Kangarawa Village of Borno State	Thursday. January 14 th , 2017.	Anadolu Agency. Thursday. January 14 th , 2017.
About 4 soldiers were killed and weapons and ammunition carted away	Along Dikwa road of Borno state.	Saturday. February 11 th , 2017.	International center for investigative reports. Saturday. February 11 th , 2017.
Undocumented number of four-wheel-drive vehicles were captured and "armor" burned,	Magumeri community, Borno State	25 th November, 2017	Premium times, 26 th November, 2017
14 soldiers were lost and four trucks fitted with machine guns were also stolen.	A market near Munag Garge Maiduguri.	Wednesday. January 17 th , 2018.	Reuters new. Thursday. January 17 th , 2018.
Military armored vehicle and 3 trucks destroyed.	Jilli Village, near Geidam Yobe State.	July 19 th , 2018.	Premium times. July 19 th , 2018.
8 military vehicles were destroyed and 4 seized with ammunition	Metele Village in Guzamala LGA.	Monday 6:05pm. November 22 nd , 2018.	Premium times. Monday. November 22 nd , 2018.
4 machine guns were destroyed	Near Jakana Village, 30km from the state capital.	Wednesday. July 17 th , 2019.	Aljazeera News. Thursday. July 18 th , 2019.

7 gun trucks were destroyed	Mogula Town near Cameroon.	Saturday. August 18 th , 2019	Defense post. Sunday. August 19 th , 2019.
Militants carted away 3 military vehicles and 1 van belonging to the CJTF	Towns of Gajigana and Gajiram, Borno State	September 12, 2019	Defense post. September 13, 2019
1 Armored vehicle, 2 other military vehicles, and “large quantity of weapons and ammunition” were captured	Gubio Town	Friday. September 17 th , 2019.	Al Arabiya Network. 17 th , 2019.
Gun trucks were decimated	Near Goneri village of Borno State	Monday. March 24 th , 2020.	Aljazeera News. Tuesday 20:01 GMT. March 25 th , 2020.
7 technical pickup trucks fitted with machine guns were destroyed	Damboa, 85 km south of Maiduguri	Saturday. June 27, 2020.	Premium times. June 27, 2020.
Military base was razed down as arms and ammunition were stolen by the insurgents	Komala village, Damboa, Borno state	June 28, 2020	Vanguard. June 28, 2020
The insurgents seized weapons and ammunition	Near the town of Marte in Borno state	01.10.2020	Anadolu Agency (AA). 01.10.2020
Various weapons and ammunition were destroyed	Fishing town of Baga, Borno State	27 th September, 2020	BBC news. 27 September 2020.
Many Anti-aircraft gun were destroyed	Malamfatori, Borno State	November 2 nd , 2020	https://theowp.org/crisis_index/boko-haram-insurgency/

Source: Compiled and tabulated by authors

Information on both **Table 5** above and **Table 6** are particularly very insightful. They are useful in understanding what keeps the insurgents perpetually in business. The jihadists thrive on captured sniper rifles, field artillery and armored vehicles belonging to the Nigerian military and the MNJTF, especially when entire battalions are overrun like the case of Jillli military base, Yobe in July 2018.

Table 6: Selected Cases of ISWAP’s Attacks on the Nigerian Military Bases/Equipment & Facilities, January -August, 2021

Nature of attack	Location of attack	Date of attack	Source
A Hilux belonging to the Nigerian military was burnt in the attack	Geidam town in Yobe State	January 8, 2021	Premium times. January 8, 2021
Military vehicles in a convoy destroyed by fire rockets.	Gazagana village of Yobe State.	January 11, 2021	Barrons’s. January 11, 2021
7 gun trucks destroyed; seized weapons, ammunition and 6 four-wheel-drive vehicles, as well as burning down the army barracks.	town of Marte in Borno state.	16 January, 2021	Aljazeera. 16 January, 2021
Military vehicle detonated	Niger state.	16 January, 2021	AA. 16 January, 2021
Several military vehicles burnt	Niger state	19 January, 2021	AA. 19 January, 2021
Carted away one Hilux van and busted the tires of the other military vehicles.	Dikwa town, Borno State on Friday.	31 January 2021/2021	Punch. 31 January 2021
The jihadists seized weapons and two MRAPs and burnt the base in Mainok town.	Town of Mainok	26/04/2021	Africanews. 26/04/2021

The Jihadists seized a military armored vehicle and destroyed three trucks.	Yobe state	April 24, 2021	Voanews. April 24, 2021
Several technicals destroyed/captured with one NSV HMG	Monguno, Borno State	5/08/2021	https://nigeria.liveuama.com/5/08/2021
Military vehicle destroyed by insurgents.	Gudumbali in the Lake Chad region	March 14, 2021	Wion. March 14, 2021
Military vehicles destroyed by insurgents.	Between Monguno and Kukawa	March 14, 2021	Reuters. March 14, 2021
An Armored-plated vehicles belonging to the military were destroyed.	Damboa, a Borno community	June 3, 2021	Premium times. June 3, 2021
Heavy military equipment destroyed by insurgents	Kumuya military base in Yobe State	April 17, 2021.	Platinum post. April 17, 2021.
Jihadists seized weapons and two MRAPs belonging to the military and burning the base.	town of Mainok outside the regional capital Maiduguri.	April 26, 2021	Yahoo news. April 26, 2021
Carted away several ammunition	Gwoza local government area of Borno state	06.04.2021	AA. 06.04.2021
Carting away weapons, seized five trucks, and one fitted with machine guns	Ajiri town	May 5, 2021	Defense post. May 5, 2021
Three trucks were hit by fighter jets and another one was seized along with a dozen rifles	Banki in Borno State	Jun 28, 2021	AFP. Jun 28, 2021
Jihadists carted away with two Vickers MBT including weapons and pickups.	City of Bama in Borno state.	June 16, 2021.	Holistic overview. June 16, 2021.
Two vehicles belonging to the CJTF were razed.	Damboa town in Borno state.	Aug 09, 2021	Sahara reporters. Aug 09, 2021.

Source: Compiled and tabulated by authors

In point of fact, “between 2018 and the first quarter of 2021, the jihadists successfully raided about 38 military formations in the Northeast and in most cases carted away military hardware” (*Daily Trust*, 25th April, 2021). Again, about 70 per cent of the weapons and other military equipment procured by the federal government to fight the insurgents end up in the hands of the Boko Haram forces. This revelation was climaxed by the following pathetic lamentation:

When about 30 armoured vehicles procured from around the world arrived the battle-front, military high commands in Abuja thought that would soon turn the tide in the intractable insurgency in the north-east part of the country. Soon, a tally showed that 16 of those precious equipment were either destroyed or taken away by the insurgents (*Daily Trust*, 25th April, 2021, p.1).

Hence, each time the Nigerian troop launched any successful attack, it was usually a celebration of “recovered” weaponry previously lost to the Jihadi insurgents.

Conclusion

The ongoing carnage in Nigeria's Northeast geopolitical zone, where the insurgents' group (Boko Haram) and the Nigerian Military have continued to exchange fires, destroy, maim and kill civilians, militants and soldiers in their numbers seem to have acquired a more audacious intensity to itself. Since after the civil war (1967-1970), the Nigerian military has never lost as much members of its men and officer corps as they have continued to lose since 2015. These losses are not to sicknesses or sudden natural disaster, but to the insurgents operating in the Northeast of the country. In the beginning, Boko Haram conducted their attacks using simple weapons like clubs, sticks, stones, knives, and other simple weapons. Of course, they attacked softer targets with minimal training and combatant skills and later graduated to using guns and other SALWs to target markets, churches, mosques, and easy targets.

Following Boko Haram's tactical errors and subsequent loss of territories originally under its occupation and control to the Nigerian Military in early 2015, the group decided to pitch its tent with ISIS by way of allegiance and affiliation. The allegiance was an acknowledgement of ISIS' superiority and the need for sundry assistance, especially at a trying time like the period the oath of allegiance was taken by Abubakar Shekau, the then Boko Haram leader.

The oath was offered and accepted on 7th March, 2015 by the then leader of ISIS, Caliph Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi at whose behest Boko Haram subsequently adopted the name ISWAP to truly reflect the affiliation. The expected support and assistance from ISIS did actually come in manifold contexts, such as money and material transfers through associated individuals or companies in Nigeria; trainings, ideological and operational guidance as well as organizational reforms. ISIS thus encouraged ISWAP to become financially self-sustaining, as ISWAP's leaders used ISIS donations to obtain hardware/weaponry. ISIS trainings and sharing of lessons with ISWAP by its Arab teams with experience from governing portions of Iraq and Syria, where it tried to maintain a functioning and taxable economy in areas under its control, were very helpful to ISWAP, at least in two ways. First, it helped in upgrading the capacity of ISWAP to confront and deal with security forces, especially the Nigerian Military formation/establishments.

The outcome of all these has been the injection of certain degree of professionalism into ISWAP and corresponding emergence of a more formidable, daring and impetuous ISWAP, fully committed to routing their hardest target, the Nigerian Army. Since 2016, ISWAP has launched more attacks and caused far more casualties among the military than Shekau's JAS.

The informed position of this article, therefore, is that the sudden shift of ISWAP's attacks from soft targets to hard target, especially the Nigerian Army, is not unconnected to the ISWAP-ISIS affiliation. Since the affiliation, attacks on the military has more than tripled: thousands of the Nigerian military personnel have been killed by the insurgent group, and the military has lost facilities, equipment and ammunitions worth millions of naira. Also very frustrating is the fact that the Nigerian military have increasingly lost the confidence, support and cooperation of the civilian population in the fringes of the Northeast (Nigeria's theatre of war).

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