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## Fifteen Years of Boko Haram Insurgency and Endless Violence: Should Nigeria Hire Private Military Contractors?

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### Abstract

Following the unexplained death of its leader while in police detention, the violently ideological Islamic extremist group Boko Haram took up arms in the northeastern Nigerian states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa in 2009. Widespread deaths, property destruction, and civilian displacement have marked the 15-year battle. Kidnappings, armed herdsmen, Niger Delta militants, renegade bandits, and armed separatists all commit acts of terror that exacerbate this. The insurgency and other violent acts have not been put an end to by the Nigerian military or its affiliated militia, the Civilian Joint Task Force. Due to the ineffectiveness of the security agencies, rebels, and terrorists killed roughly 5,801 Nigerians in the first seven months of 2024 and kidnapped 4,348 more across the country. As is the case in other nations, this has led to calls for the involvement of private military contractors to assist put a stop to the violence. The military has rejected the notion of foreign contractors getting involved, insisting that the armed forces can complete the task if provided with the necessary equipment. The lengthy cycle of violence, the ineffectiveness of Nigerian

security personnel, and the controversy surrounding the use of foreign contractors are all examined in this essay. The study uncovers a weakness in the state security agencies brought on by dishonesty and a lack of responsibility. It advises Nigeria to accept foreign aid to improve the military's capabilities, particularly concerning the application of advanced machinery and technology. It is also suggested that the administration negotiate with the main players to end the violence.

Keywords: Boko Haram, insurgency, violence, Nigeria, private military contractors,

## Introduction

Boko Haram, also known as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad*, is a violent guerrilla terrorist organization that the Nigerian government has been fighting. Boko Haram, which operates in northeastern Nigeria and is well-represented in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, translates to "Western education is forbidden." The organization expanded its campaign of terror to northern Cameroon, southern Niger, and Chad. They have also launched attacks in Abuja, Kaduna, Bauchi, Kano, Plateau, and numerous northern states (Foyou et al, 2018). Mohammed Yusuf started the Islamist movement in 2002 to establish an Islamic government in Borno State. Because of the violence his members were planning, the authorities detained its leader, Mohammed Yusuf. He passed away under dubious circumstances while in police detention (Amnesty International, 2014:5). In several northern Nigerian states, Boko Haram has been engaged in a campaign of violence, murders, mutilations, and kidnappings since launching retaliatory attacks in July 2009.

The insurgency is Africa's longest militancy battle, having continued for 15 years with an unending cycle of violence (Umar, 2024). More than 2.5 million people have been displaced, and more than 40,000 individuals have died. The nation's peaceful basis and mutual coexistence have been severely weakened by the violence, kidnappings, and other acts of terror committed by Boko Haram (Tafida et al, 2023). The horror and chaos caused by armed herders, terrorists, renegade bandits, separatists, armed robbers, and kidnappers further exacerbate this. The tenacious guerrilla force has not yet been crushed or had any lasting effect by deploying military tanks, bombers, and other heavy weapons.

Boko Haram is still very much alive and well in northeastern Nigeria, particularly in Borno State, despite the government's frequent claims to have destroyed or damaged the organization. In Borno State and other areas in northeast Nigeria, thousands of Boko Haram fighters continue to engage in combat and murder both military troops and civilians. The group also collaborates with bandits to cause chaos in the northwest and some areas of northcentral. According to reports, Boko Haram carried out a new attack in Ngoshe, Gwoza Local Government Area, Borno State, in late September 2024, killing six farmers and kidnapping five more, including women. The local Civilian JTF commander was also slain by the attackers (Terzungwe, 2024). While the farmers were engaged in their farming operations, the terrorists ambushed them. Only a few weeks before this attack, several terrorists were claimed to have killed numerous citizens in a bombing and injured hundreds more (Terzungwe, 2024).

Mohammed Ali Ndume, a former Senate Chief Whip and senator from Borno South has urged President Bola Ahmed Tinubu to temporarily enlist the help of private military contractors to eradicate the remaining Boko Haram terrorists in Borno State in response to the recent wave of attacks by the group (Ali, 2024). He claimed that the military and civilian JTF lacked the necessary tools to complete the mission of eradicating the state's surviving militants. However, in a quick response, General Christopher Musa, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Nigeria's top military official, is against the idea of using private military contractors to combat bandits in northwest Nigeria or Boko Haram insurgents in Borno State (Anigbogu, 2024). The CDS mentioned the shortcomings of PMCs in Mali and Afghanistan as the main reason for his objection. Ndume's proposal to enlist PMCs to support the Nigerian military has generated conflicting views from public critics (Mbah & Dauda, 2024).

The issue is the conundrum the embattled political and military leadership of Nigeria is currently confronting regarding how to put an end to the violence, banditry, and insurgency raging in northern Nigeria. To calm a frightened populace, the authorities seem to have run out of ideas and instead depend on bluster and unsubstantiated reports that the military has killed hundreds of terrorists. This essay looks at the terrorist organization's sustained campaign of violence, and tenacity, and how it has managed to elude disillusioned and inadequate security authorities for 15 years. It has also looked at how the insurgency has affected

civilians as the military has become weaker, leading to calls for the involvement of private military contractors. The Nigerian armed forces ought to acknowledge its shortcomings and welcome outside assistance.

### **The anti-establishment ideology of Boko Haram**

Extreme poverty in the north of Nigeria and bad governance have long existed. A sect known as Boko Haram opposes what it describes as corrupt politics in the country's north. It disapproves of a group of dishonest, crooked, and deceptive Muslims who have taken over the region's leadership. The cult wants a real Islamic state based on Sharia law to take the place of these elites. By enforcing strict adherence to Islamic law, or sharia, it seeks to establish justice for the impoverished and God's kingdom on earth (Campbell, 2014). Sharia was viewed as the sole means of reestablishing social justice through the fervent teachings of its radical preacher, Mohammed Yusuf, and its complete application necessitates a shift in the governmental structure (Montclos, 2014:8–9). Particularly among young people, the radical talks were popular and well-received. It embraced an anti-state philosophy to establish a legal system and an ideal society based on Islamic principles (Walker, 2012:3). Additionally, it vehemently opposes Western education or "Boko" and prohibits or "haram" that type of instruction, attributing the region's poverty and misery to it.

### **From ragtag fighters to a conventional force**

After establishing a foothold in Borno State's Sambisa Forest, the cult attacked three states in northeastern Nigeria. Boko Haram used hit-and-run strategies and intermittent attacks with suicide bombers and improvised explosives from the beginning of the insurgency. Using AK-47-wielding militants on motorcycles to conduct attacks was one of its characteristics. The police were its first targets, followed by politicians, religious leaders, and those who opposed them. With thousands of individuals armed, Boko Haram quickly gained the status of a conventional army and ultimately overpowered and outgunned the Nigerian security forces (Barna, 2014). Additionally, there were specialist bombing units. With rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank weapons, sub-machine guns, armoured tanks, and armored personnel carriers, it gained the capacity to conduct coordinated and prolonged military operations.

Boko Haram initiated attacks on state institutions. Hundreds of prisoners were released after attacks on prisons in several areas (Okpaga et al, 2012). Churches, mosques, schools, car parks, marketplaces, agricultural and communication facilities, jails, military barracks, police stations, government buildings, and other representations of state power were all targeted by the gang. Three individuals were killed in the June 2011 bombing of the Nigeria Police Force Headquarters (Amnesty International, 2012:257). On August 28, 2011, an attack on the United Nations building in Abuja killed 24 people and injured 80 more (Amnesty International, 2012:257).

Boko Haram developed several tactics to maintain its activities, such as abduction for ransom, which has been a consistent source of revenue for the group. The money raised helps them achieve their goals and buy weapons. Attacks on many schools led to the deaths of educators and students as well as the kidnapping of others. More than 276 girls were kidnapped by Boko Haram from a Government Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, on April 14, 2014. Global indignation at this action sparked the "Bring Back Our Girls" movement (Barna, 2014:16).

Villages were destroyed and soft targets were not spared. Markets, beer parlors, and taverns were all targeted by the rebels. Homes, stores, and automobiles were set on fire, and car bomb blasts claimed many lives (Amnesty International, 2012:257). Attacks were also made on places of worship. At least 25 individuals were killed when churches were targeted on Christmas Day in 2011 (Walker, 2012:6). Five worshippers, including the priest, were killed in an attack during a church service in Maiduguri. A car loaded with explosives was driven into the Harvest Field Church of Christ in Bauchi on June 3, 2012, by a suicide bomber (Walker, 2012:6). The gang targeted mosques, Muslim clerics, and traditional leaders in addition to Christians and churches.

### **Classification as a non-international armed conflict**

Boko Haram had a strong organizational structure and leadership at the start of the war. According to Montclos (2014), the group was renowned for its combination of sectarianism and terrorist tactics. It could plan its operations, assemble fighters, and launch persistent strikes. From machetes, clubs, small arms, and

homemade bombs, its operations progressed to more advanced weapons including tanks, armored personnel carriers, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank weapons, and sub-machine guns.

After the violence escalated in 2014, it was determined that the armed conflict had become a non-international armed conflict. By this time, the insurgency had met all the criteria needed to be classified as one, including having a command structure, being in control of territory, and being able to launch a continuous offensive (Ibanga & Archibong, 2018). An "Islamic Caliphate" was proclaimed by Boko Haram in the region it controlled. On August 23, 2014, its leader, Abubakar Shekau, raised a flag in Gwoza town and declared it the caliphate's headquarters. Additionally, Boko Haram created a robust administration based on Islamic law in the region it controls. According to reports, the gang controlled 13 LGAs in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states as of January 2015 (Barna, 2014:9).

The fact that it is classified as a non-international armed conflict suggests that the 1949 Geneva Conventions (Common Article 3) and the 1977 Additional Protocol II are applicable and be complied with. As a result, war crime perpetrators may face accountability before a suitable court or tribunal. In July 2012, former International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Fatou Bensouda traveled to Abuja to study the Nigerian conflict (Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC, 2013:8). The ICC returned in January 2015 and promised to bring charges for international crimes in the Nigerian conflict (Daily Sun, 2015). The ICC has failed or refused to fulfill its promise to hold war criminals and crimes against humanity accountable in the conflict and provide justice for victims, as it has done in numerous other conflicts (Archibong & Lloyd, 2021).

### **Designation as an international terrorist organization**

Regarded as one of the most deadly organizations in the world and known as the "Nigerian Taliban" (Walker, 2012), Boko Haram has received international designation as a terrorist organization (Okemi, 2013). It was classified by the United States (US) as a violent fundamentalist group with ties to al Qaeda (Barna, 2014:21). On November 14, 2013, Executive Order (E.O.) 13324 recognized it as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and a Specially recognized Global Terrorist (US Department of State, 2014).

Section 1(b) of the E.O. 13224 designated Abubakar Shekau, the commander of Boko Haram, Khalid al-Barnawi, and Abubakar Adam Kamar as Specially Designated Global Terrorists in June 2012 (US Department of State, 2014). In 2013, the UK declared the cult to be a terrorist organization, following the US's lead (Campbell, 2014:3). The group has been able to secure finance, an arms supply, and the continuation of the battle due to its loyalty and affiliation with worldwide terror organizations (Siegle, 2013:86-87). The United Nations Security Council imposed severe measures in May 2014 because the conflict's escalation was seen as a threat to global peace and security.

### **The government's reaction to the rebellion**

Launching a counterinsurgency operation against Boko Haram was the federal government's plan (Onapajo, 2013:54). To combat Boko Haram, it formed the Joint Task Force (JTF), a unique military task force in Maiduguri, in June 2011. When dealing with the insurgents, the JTF has been merciless. Hundreds of suspected Boko Haram members were executed in summary fashion by the Nigerian military (Ojo, 2010; Amnesty International, 2012:257). In April 2013, the JTF killed more than 200 people in Barga, Borno State, and injured more (Montclos, 2014:15). The rebels were engaged in intense combat by the Nigerian security forces, who were aided by local hunters and civilian volunteers known as "Civilian JTF."

The military establishment was confused and unsure of how to react due to the severity and persistence of Boko Haram's attacks (Oarhe, 2013:67). In May 2013, former President Goodluck Jonathan proclaimed a state of emergency in the states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. Additionally, the Nigerian security forces reacted forcefully, bombing Boko Haram targets with fighter jets (Montclos, 2014:15). The Nigerian House of Representatives wanted the Army Headquarters moved to Maiduguri after the Nigerian army suffered severe losses. In September 2013, the Nigerian Army's 7th Division took the place of the JTF due to its failure to subdue the terrorists.



## Politicization of the conflict

The All Progressives Congress (APC), the opposition party, and Muhammadu Buhari, its presidential candidate, politicized the dispute as the country approached the 2015 national elections. However, the APC and Buhari, who won the general election, failed to deliver on their pledge to end the insurgency within months of winning. Boko Haram persisted in its campaign of violence, murders, property damage, and civilian displacement. With the help of Niger troops, the Nigerian military continued its counteroffensives. The Buhari government said campaigns against Boko Haram technically ended in December 2015 (BBC 2015). Former president Buhari claimed that Boko Haram was only able to fight using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and that it was only active in Borno state, which is its home state (BBC, 2015). The jihadist group no longer controls major cities and has lost a large portion of its territory since 2015. The threat has not completely disappeared, either (Felbab-Brown, 2018).

Boko Haram continues to fight and cause significant damage to lives and property while being largely degraded. The government's assertions that Boko was vanquished were called into question in February 2018 after 110 schoolgirls from Dapchi were abducted. Former President Buhari called the insurgents' ruthless death of citizens in January 2020 "crazy and senseless terrorist killings" (Mwakideu, 2020). 76 rice farmers were slain by jihadists on motorcycles outside of Maiduguri in February 2020. The attackers said the assaults were carried out as payback for farmers who had aided the Nigerian military (DW, 2020).

## Forming coalitions and intensifying assaults

By 2022, Boko Haram had formed alliances with bandit groups, which were armed gangs that were active in several areas in northwest Nigeria. The partnership was announced by Nigeria's Information Minister, who called it "an unholy handshake" (Asadu, 2022). The alliance's outcome was the horrific attack in Abuja, where the rail track was blown up with explosives, killing eight passengers and kidnapping over 100 others (Asadu, 2022). In 2023, the Islamist rebels continued their deadly raids on villages, killing



dozens of people. In one instance, 20 mourners were slain by the militants as they were returning from the burial of jihadists who had attacked earlier. In Yobe State, the mourners lost their lives when their car ran over an explosive device that the terrorists had planted (Aradi, 2023).

In a previous raid on Guro Kayeya village, militants killed 17 people when the residents refused to pay a purported harvest tax. To finance their activities and maintain control over communities, the militants demand money from residents (Aradi, 2023). According to reports, Boko Haram carried out several devastating attacks in 2024, including the return of the notorious suicide bombs carried out by women and girls, which were a key element of its previous violent campaign (Adetayo & Ijani, 2024). Three coordinated suicide explosions have occurred in Gwoza, Borno State, since June 30, 2024. A well-attended wedding was the objective of the first. The third was set off at a hospital caring for the injured, and the second was set off during the funeral service for the attack victims. The attacks claimed the lives of at least 32 persons (Adetayo & Ijani, 2024). A hijab-wearing woman killed herself and ten others in July 2024 when she set off an explosive strapped to her back (Adetayo & Ijani, 2024). In September 2024, jihadists from Boko Haram attacked Yobe State, killing at least 80 people and leaving numerous more missing (Agence France-Presse, 2024). About 150 motorcycle-borne Boko Haram militants used rifles and RPGs to attack the Mafa ward, killing several people and setting numerous homes and businesses on fire (Agence France-Presse, 2024). Boko Haram militants killed at least 16 people and injured scores more in another attack at a teashop in Borno State's Konduga district. According to the authorities, an improvised explosive device was installed in the café by the attackers (Adebayo, 2024).

### **The demand that private military contractors be involved**

The Nigerian armed forces have made constant claims of having killed hundreds of terrorists and significantly diminished their capacity (Asadu & Umar, 2024). But the truth is that they cannot put a stop to the insurgency, which has killed over 40,000 people so far (Agence France-Presse, 2024) and forced over two million to flee their homes (Asadu & Umar, 2024). There has been a request for foreign involvement to

put an end to the ongoing bloodshed in light of these attacks and the security services' seeming inability to halt them. This intervention may involve private military contractors, as is done elsewhere.

Everyone is living in a nightmare due to the jihadists' and bandits' frequent attacks on residents in Borno State and other areas of northeast, northwest, and north-central Nigeria, as well as the government security forces' incapacity to stop them. Mohammed Ali Ndume, a former Chief Whip of the Nigerian Senate and a federal lawmaker who represents Borno South has proposed that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu temporarily enlist the help of private military contractors (PMCs) to eradicate Boko Haram terrorists who are still active in Borno State (Ali, 2024). The PMCs can also target bandits and other criminal gangs in the northwest. The Chief of Defence Staff dismissed this proposal as a workable solution to the insurgency (Anigbogu, 2024).

The use of PMCs in the Boko Haram insurgency is not new. To stop insurgent attacks in the northeast and aid in the rescue of the Chibok Schoolgirls, Nigeria reportedly enlisted South African PMCs in 2014 (Klaassen, 2023). According to reports, hundreds of PMCs fought Boko Haram directly (Stein & Eckel, 2015). Goodluck Jonathan, the former president, refuted the reports, asserting that the foreign contractors were technicians hired for maintenance (Klaassen, 2023). However, Senator Ndume has confirmed the hiring of PMCs in 2014. According to him “Boko Haram reached its peak in 2014, during the last days of Jonathan, and somebody advised him to engage Private Military Consultants (PMC) from South Africa, and they entered into an agreement with them. They said they should give them two or three months to flush Boko Haram out, and they did” (Amodu, 2024). After public outcry and dissatisfaction, the contractors were removed from Nigeria in late 2015 (Klaassen, 2023). Ten years later, Senator Ndume has called for foreign contractors to return to fight the bandits and Boko Haram that are raging in northern Nigeria.

### **Private military contractors: Who are they?**

One of the many non-state organizations whose operations have called into question the long-standing notion of state sovereignty and the monopoly of violence is the private military contractor (PMC)

(Andreopoulos & Brandle, 2015). According to international law, PMCs are neither mercenaries nor outlaws. A sizable portion of the society recognizes, supports, and respects them as they operate in the open public market (Benicsak, 2012). Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multinational companies (MNCs), and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) all support and admire them. They are internationally recognized corporate associations that offer military skills and services associated with battle (Singer, 2003). PMCs are legally organized profit-making businesses that offer battle zone services, including intelligence, planning, operational support, training, technical skills, and combat tasks for hire.

PMCs did not acquire identifiable corporate forms until the middle of the 1980s. In military and security projects, their services became available to governments and other clients in the 1990s (Kinsey, 2006). To influence the battle in favour of their customers, PMCs made headlines in the 1990s for their military prowess in several African conflicts (Shearer, 1998). The nature and conduct of warfare have undergone a significant alteration due to the role of PMCs. Political, legal, and economic costs of war are decreased when PMCs are involved (Gaston, 2008). With the help of private contractors, former President George W. Bush conducted military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan without fear of public outrage (Kidwell, 2005).

Services provided by PMCs have been used by international organizations such as the UN and AU (Francioni, 2008). The engagement of private security providers and services in humanitarian operations is a constant phenomenon (Pavel, 2010; Stoddard et al, 2008). The UN has mainly depended on private to secure its personnel and equipment in conflict zones (Lynch, 2010). States are, however, their main clients (Rasila, 2013). After the Second Gulf War broke out in 2003, PMCs were awarded large contracts to provide security services in Iraq (Osakwe & Umoh, 2014). PMC services have proven extremely beneficial for weak states and those experiencing internal armed conflicts (McIntyre & Weiss, 2007). South African PMCs successfully participated in the intra-state conflicts in Angola and Sierra Leone (Schneider et al, 2013). In the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, military activities have been carried out by the Wagner Group, a Russian PMC with tens of thousands of fighters (Ray, 2024). Additionally, the Wagner Group has conducted business in Syria and other African nations (Luna et al, 2023).

However, there are concerns regarding PMC involvement in military situations. Private contractors frequently act with impunity and in ways that violate the laws of war (Perrin, 2006). Additionally, PMCs have been implicated in egregious human rights abuses and other war crimes (Moyakine, 2015). Intentional killings, indiscriminate attacks on civilians, damage to civilian property, torture, arbitrary detention, and sexual violence are among the crimes perpetrated by PMCs (Snell, 2011; Spiegel, 2005). PMCs function in a legal void and that has been a major source of concern (Kalidhass, 2014). Concerns regarding accountability, legal responsibility, and transparency are becoming more important given their growing use in crisis and conflict areas, as well as the prevalence of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and human rights abuses (Hedahl, 2015).

### **Does Nigeria need to hire outside contractors?**

According to some, the insurgency in northeastern Nigeria is Africa's longest militancy conflict (Umar, 2024). Militant organizations continue to be a serious menace, commanding thousands of fighters (Amnesty International, 2020). The number of casualties and destruction caused by insurgent attacks seems to have skyrocketed since the beginning of 2024. Jihadist organizations have become more prevalent outside of northeast Nigeria, especially in Niger State, by collaborating with criminal gangs and armed bandits (Agence France-Presse, 2024; Asadu, 2022).

Given that the war against terrorism has unquestionably security and capacity gaps, the idea of bringing in foreign PMCs has sparked discussions and outbursts from specialists, victims, military officials, and members of the public. Nasir El-Rufai, the former governor of Nigeria's unstable northwest Kaduna State, threatened to hire foreign contractors to combat the militants in April 2022 if the federal government did not address the issue (Abdullahi, 2022). In Kaduna, bandits and insurgents have been raging, indiscriminately attacking, murdering, abducting, and destroying civilian property without consequence. However, the federal government's security apparatus has failed to keep them in check.

Nigeria's public security forces are overburdened, which has highlighted how crucial it is to work with international contractors to put an end to the violence. Ndume asserts that globally governments

employ military contractors to conduct operations in certain locations. The contractors will arrive with their equipment and quickly remove those Boko Haram terrorists. They will collaborate with the Nigerian military and Civilian JTF, who are familiar with the region. Ndume remembered how, in 2014, during the height of Boko Haram's power under the Goodluck Jonathan administration, the use of South African private contractors in conjunction with the Nigerian military effectively drove militants out of Maiduguri (Terzungwe, 2024). In addition to Ndume's request, security sector stakeholders had urged the federal government to work with PMCs to address Nigeria's insecurity problem in 2020 (Odunsi, 2020). Citing PMCs' shortcomings in previous conflicts, Nigeria's Chief of Defence Staff is against the concept of interacting with them. He asserted that military gear for troops might be purchased with the money allotted for PMC activity.

Lack of equipment is not the reason for the military's display of incompetence and inefficiency. Over the last five years, Nigeria's defence expenditure has increased by 262 percent, surpassing the sum of its health and education budgets (Tayo, 2022). N3.85 trillion was set out for defence and security in 2024. Defence accounted for the greatest portion, 42.8 percent or N1.647 trillion, followed by the police force (25.22 percent or N970 billion), the interior (12.25 percent or N471.625 billion), and the National Security Advisor (7.5 percent or N288.750 billion) (Nwachukwu & Onjie, 2024).

The yearly budget increases mainly intended to purchase weapons, ammunition, and high-tech equipment have not produced the expected results (Akahome, 2024). Nigeria's security sector is criticized for lacking accountability, having little to no control over the use of funds, and lacking explicit performance metrics to assess whether security services are meeting their objectives (Nwachukwu & Onjie, 2024). The struggle against insurgency and banditry is hampered by corruption in security agencies because it depletes limited resources, lowers operational effectiveness, and erodes public confidence in the military and security services (*Punch*, 2021). Police officers and soldiers have been charged by Nuhu Ribadu, the National Security Adviser (NSA), of stealing and selling weapons and ammunition from their formation to terrorists, bandits, and other non-state actors (Isamotu, 2024; Odeniyi, 2024). The NSA described the security personnel engaged in the crime as "worse human beings" and claimed that a significant portion of the illegal

weapons being used to perpetrate crimes in the nation belonged to the government (Odeniyi, 2024). This is a glaring illustration of how corruption in Nigeria is fostering and extending banditry and insurgency.

### **Nigerian authorities' limited options**

The alternatives available to Nigerian military and political leaders in the conflict with bandits and insurgents are limited. One possibility is the creation of state police to supplement the existing federal police. However, there is resistance to state police because of concerns that state politicians may abuse them to target their rivals (Yusuf & Ademola, 2024). Vigilantes have been established in some communities to stop the frequent attacks. However, their ability to repel heavily armed attackers has been hampered by the law that forbids them from carrying firearms. Boko Haram militants also assassinated the commander of the local Civilian JTF during their September 2024 offensive in Gwoza, Borno State, which claimed numerous lives (Terzungwe, 2024).

The need for PMCs to cover the gaps in the country's security architecture stems from several issues, including corruption, a lack of accountability, ineptitude, ineffectiveness, and a decline in public faith in the security forces. In the first seven months of 2024, there were 4,348 kidnappings nationally and about 5,801 deaths by terrorists and insurgents in Nigeria, according to data from Beacon Security and Intelligence Limited (BSIL) (Nwachukwu & Onjie, 2024). The numbers are concerning and should not be allowed to rise. To stop the tide, a prompt and resolute answer is needed. The federal government ought to work with PMCs and establish attainable objectives, deadlines, and guidelines for their participation. In the absence of foreign fighters, and lack of capacity of regular security personnel to end the violence, the government can seek a political solution by negotiating with the non-state armed actors to put down their weapons. This formula halted years of violence that almost destroyed Nigeria's oil economy and worked in the country's problematic Niger Delta.

Clear performance standards should be established to evaluate whether security agencies are producing outcomes, and regulations and controls should be in place regarding monies. The government should address the issue of corruption in the security services by punishing offenders as a deterrent. The



government should ensure openness and accountability of funds allotted to the security sector are properly managed. The government should address the issue of unemployment, poverty, and out-of-school syndrome should also be addressed by the government. Due to the current economic downturn, there are now more jobless and desperate young men, which makes it simpler for criminal gangs and armed groups to recruit them into unlawful activity.

## Conclusion

Since 2009, Boko Haram has taken the country captive, humiliated the Nigerian military, and forced them to retreat from various local government districts. Extreme brutality and massive property and human destruction have been hallmarks of the conflict. As thousands have been purposefully targeted, kidnapped, tortured, disfigured, displaced, and killed, civilians have been left to bear the suffering and destruction of the conflict. Young ladies in particular have been enlisted as suicide bombers. The effects of their strikes have been felt in neighboring Cameroon and Niger, where the jihadists conducted raids that killed civilians and damaged property. The government's assurances that the gang will be defeated have not been fulfilled. With infiltration from violent Islamic groups that had previously operated in the Maghreb region, the group has become stronger rather than defeated. The Nigerian government should hire contractors with military experience and advanced technologies to put an immediate stop to the violence rapidly spreading throughout the country,

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