Terrorism And Diplomacy: An Assessment Of Insecurity And Its Implications For Nigeria's External Relations Under President Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023)

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Abstract

Since Boko Haram appeared in the early 2000s, terrorism has remained a stubborn challenge for Nigeria, decisively influencing the state's foreign policy and international diplomacy. This thesis investigates how escalating insecurity shaped Nigeria's external engagements during President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, spanning 2015 to 2023. The guiding questions are: (1) how insecurity altered Nigeria's foreign policy priorities; (2)

what effects this had on both bilateral and multilateral interactions; and (3) how Nigeria's diplomatic maneuvers are explained from both Realist and Liberalist perspectives. Employing a qualitative, descriptive-analytical design anchored in secondary literature, the analysis demonstrates that insecurity undermined Nigeria's posture of regional leadership, created friction with Western partners wary of human rights lapses, and encouraged a pragmatic, interest-driven turn toward China. The research finds that terrorism ultimately refocused Nigeria's diplomatic energy on security imperatives, often overshadowing comprehensive developmental and humanitarian agendas. The study recommends fortifying domestic governance, overhauling the security architecture, and pursuing a more balanced diplomatic posture to restore Nigeria's standing in the international arena.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Counterterrorism, Diplomacy, Insecurity, Terrorism.

Introduction

Terrorism is defined as the methodical employment of violence by non-sovereign entities to advance political, ideological, or religious objectives through the mechanism of intimidation (Ganor, 2002). In contrast, diplomacy is the codified approach to managing states' interactions via negotiation and discourse (Berridge, 2022). All of these events are parts of modern governance. Nigeria faced enormous security issues under Muhammadu Buhari's administration which caused the country to reevaluate its foreign policy. The rise of more capable Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Zenn, 2020) added to the ongoing conflicts with Boko Haram, and the rise in armed banditry and mass kidnappings further complicated the security situation (International Crisis Group, 2021). All of these dangers combined to cause severe humanitarian effects, such as the UNHCR's (2022) report of over 2.5 million internally displaced people, which forced Nigeria to reevaluate its foreign policy priorities.

This study examines the effects of increased insecurity and terrorist activity on Nigeria's international relations during the Buhari's administration (2015-2023). It looks at how Nigeria's interactions with important foreign allies like the US and China as well as how they impacted its reputation in regional organizations like the African Union and ECOWAS. By concentrating on this time frame, the study seeks to comprehend how Nigeria's foreign policy choices and position on the African and international scene were influenced by the escalating threat of terrorism.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the effects of terrorism and internal insecurity on Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomatic engagements during the Buhari administration (2015–2023).

2. To assess the impact of insecurity on Nigeria's bilateral and multilateral relations.
3. To evaluate the implications of human rights abuses on Nigeria's international partnerships and foreign military cooperation.

Literature Review

Conceptual clarification

Terrorism

Terrorism continues to captivate both scholars and policymakers, not simply because of its sharpened destructiveness but also because its roots knot together political, psychological, and economic strands that refuse to stay neatly compartmentalized. The term can no longer comfortably fit the hierarchical, ideological, and single-state profiles of earlier decades; it has dispersed across non-state, transnational, and even intra-state stages. Schmid (2016) captured its substance in the phrase "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in pursuit of political change," a definition that still resonates yet demands revision. Jackson and Pisoiu (2018) expand this conceptual aperture, proposing that violence labeled as terrorism chiefly functions as a medium of communicative intent, its true audience always exceeding the immediate target of destruction to engage, provoke, and instruct entire populations or, ultimately, the globe.

Fresh evaluations highlight that contemporary terrorists no longer gather in remote camps or shadowy courtyards; instead, they inhabit the shared digital space, leveraging social platforms for recruitment, cryptocurrency for funding, and polished video content for recruitment and recruitment (Neumann, 2017; Conway et al., 2019). Rapoport (2020) and Weinberg & Eubank (2022) delineate a terrain in which religious zeal collides with organized crime, nationalist passion, and ideological fanaticism, generating a composite hazard that eludes the toolkit of any single analyst. The literature thus converges on the conception of terrorism as a living, adaptive danger sculpted by the same forces that globalize commerce and imagery; accordingly, existing definitions cannot be anchored in agreement texts, but must remain porous to the political, psychological, and cultural undercurrents that carry extremism into the popular consciousness.

Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the practice of dealing with conflict management, negotiations, and

dialogue between states, societies, or institutions with the intent of enabling peaceful interactions and mutual benefits (Berridge, 2015). In the context of Nigeria's counterinsurgency strategy, diplomatic initiatives have developed in both external and internal dimensions. Externally, Nigeria has strengthened and assumed leadership of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which includes troop contributing countries Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin with support from the African Union, European Union, and United Nations. This collaboration is focused on intelligence and information gathering, military strategy, and border control management on a regional level (United Nations Development Programme, 2017). One of the important achievements has been the creation of the Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit (RIFU), which facilitates the systematic sharing of sensitive information across the member states. These efforts, in their entirety, demonstrate cooperative diplomacy in the resolution and management of transnational security issues.

The regional cooperation against counterinsurgency suffered greatly with the death of Chad's President Idriss Déby in April 2021. Déby had been the linchpin of multilateral strikes against Boko Haram, and his abrupt exit revealed the fragility of an alliance built on the whims of a singular leader and not on resilient foundational frameworks (Africa Defense Forum, 2024). After his departure, the military commands sharpened and regional deliberations dulled. Within Nigeria, the failures of civic diplomacy were elevated to shocking new extremes. Civic engagement with communities that are at risk of extremism had been an ambitious goal, and in areas tortured by years of violence, the military often played the role of predator instead of the anticipated protector. Amnesty International (2021) reported a shocking catalog of violations: nighttime raids led to arbitrary detainment, hidden detention spaces were nourished by torment, and an astonishing number of funerals were shrouded with gunfire instead of the customary burial garments. With each violation, the fragile public trust was sent plummeting. Instead of fading, the anger that insurgents had been trying to stifle with military disguise was magnified and whims to avenge the violence they had incited.

Also, the Nigerian government has not taken any form of proactive diplomacy to the increasing violence, especially the farmer-herder conflicts and rural banditry. For a long time, these incidents have been dismissed as isolated cases of crime. There is a socio-political narrative to these incidents which requires conversation, ongoing engagement, and conflict resolution (Okoli & Uroko, 2020). Efforts to negotiate agreements

with the bandit groups in the northwest were too irregular and secretive, and too many conflicts were omitted from the process, resulting in many conflicts not being addressed which caused a continuous spiral of violence.

Empirical Review

Dauda and Morenikeji (2024) in their study traced the contours of Nigeria's West African foreign policy under Buhari, arguing that the conjoined pressures of geographic proximity, economic imperatives, and inherited diplomatic frameworks inclined the presidency toward prioritizing security cooperation and trade pacts. Nevertheless, chronic fiscal constraints and an insufficiently inclusive policy elite diluted the policy's potency. The authors therefore recommended strengthening the diplomatic service through targeted professional training, augmenting budgetary support, and integrating foreign policy analysis throughout the national education curriculum.

Ndagi (2023) evaluated the Buffer administration's diplomatic choices, asking how these choices served the national interest. The study identified execution obstacles including weak institutional capacity, the unrelenting menace of terrorism, and deep-rooted corruption. It further noted that the foreign policy process lacks systematic stakeholder consultation and is weakened by inadequate oversight. To enhance effectiveness, Ndagi urged comprehensive institutional reforms that mandate civic involvement in policy design and establish independent mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of international commitments.

Imam (2024) used the Two-Level Game theory to identify the internal forces that influenced Buhari's diplomatic choices between 2019 and 2023. The result showed that Nigeria's exterior stance was regularly rearranged by growing internal security issues and economic limitations, with measure like selective border closures supporting both regional and domestic recalibrations. The author came to the conclusion that in order to attain strategic coherence and durability, future policy should be more closely tied to domestic imperatives.

Chukwudinma (2019) looked at how Boko Haram affected Nigeria's foreign policy under Buhari and came to the conclusion that while insurgency weakened some bilateral ties, it also sparked closer sub regional cooperation. Long term stability was undermined as extremist organization adjust through secure funding and flexible tactic, despite Abuja's efforts to win new counter-terror deals. The study recommended that the government should have a separate

financial network with other West African and fortify intelligence-driven with multilateral structures.

Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework used in this analysis are liberalism and realism, which looks at how internal unrest and terrorism under the Buhari's administration (2015-2023) affected Nigeria's foreign policy development and diplomatic interactions. These theories, which are fundamental to the study of international relations offer varying justifications for how state behave in dangerous situations and how diplomatic contacts are carried out.

Realism

The theory was firstly proposed by Hans Morgenthau in 1948 and later improved on by Kenneth Waltz in his 1979 in his Theory of international Politics, realism is one of the most enduring theories of international relations. According to this view points, there is no overarching authority that can control state behavior and the international environment is anarchic. According to this perspectives, state are logical being whose survival is their top goal forcing them to use self-help techniques to protect their security (Waltz, 2010).

Realist believes that most reliable guarantor of a nations' security is power and prowess in particular. Thus idea sheds lights on Nigeria's militarized counterterrorism efforts under President Buhari which included the nation's leadership of the Multinational Joint Task Force and initiatives of "Operation Lafiya Dole". It is also possible to see Nigeria's tenacious diplomatic efforts to obtain military assistance and cutting-edge weapons from the US, China and France as a realist calculation that reflects a strong commitment to maintaining territorial integrity. Nigeria prioritized rigorous security imperatives over liberal international standards, putting the urgent needs of the state survival ahead of international condemnation for human rights violations. This supports the realist theory that states tends to downplay external factors when confronted with the prospects of survival (Amnesty International, 2021).

There are undoubtedly blind spots in realism. It ignores how domestic, non-state organizations, and international norms truly influence state actions by concentrating almost entirely on state centric power battles. The theory also downplays the ability of adversaries to unite in the face of shared threats, such as terrorism. These voids are filled by liberalism, which provides an alternative but complementary perspectives on the same problems.

Liberalism

The theory even though acknowledges the anarchical nature of the global order, liberalism which has its roots in Enlightenment principles and was brought back by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye in the 1970's and again in 2012-argued that government could still achieve win-win outcomes through institutions, trade, and common standards (Keohane & Nye, 2012). The perspective holds that democratic governance, communication, and diplomacy are necessary reduction. From a liberal standpoints, Nigeria's dedication to collective security is exemplified in its involvement with the UN, UNHCR, ECOWAS, and the African Union. Even though the Buhari administration often used the military actions, it also took part in international conferences on development and counter terrorism, showing that it understood the need of multilateral diplomacy and that military power alone would not be enough to eradicate terrorism.

Liberalism, however is criticized for having an idealism that breaks down when state interests sharply conflicts. It asserts that collaborations is always possible but it downplays how obstinate unequal power dynamics and conflicting national goals may be (Lyon, 2024). In Nigeria's case, the government overt efforts to form international partnership were thwarted by an unresolved history of human rights violations ethnic clientelism and governance deterioration which damaged the country's reputation and reduced the effectiveness of liberal diplomatic tools. The theory's applicability is best demonstrated by its ability of the federal government mixed overt military operations with international discussion and humanitarian assistance in an attempt to stabilize the internal and external environments.

Therefore, in the face of widespread national insecurity, both liberalism and realism offer a combination of lenses through which to view Nigeria's foreign policy calculations. Liberalism, on the other hand, reveals the layering of international cooperation, institutional discourse, and normative posturing meant for frame conflicts within rules, albeit inconsistently. Realist insight emphasis the reliance on force, strategic alliances and deterrence committed to the primacy of state survival. The Buhari administration's diplomatic approach which was shaped by pressing security concerns and moderated by a narrow but complex normative horizon is mapped out by the overlap and conflict of these paradigms.

Research Methodology

This study only adopted the qualitative sources and a qualitative descriptive-analytical methodology. Scholarly publications, official government

documents, policy reports and international organizations like UN, AU and Amnesty International were the sourced of the data. In order to understand how terrorism and insecurity influenced Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomatic interactions under the Buhari administration (2015-2023), the analysis was informed by the theoretical frameworks of liberalism and realism. Patterns in Nigeria's bilateral, multilaterals and regional diplomatic behavior were found using thematic content analysis.

The effects of terrorism and internal insecurity on Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomatic engagements

Between 2015 and 2023, Nigeria experienced a significant increase in terrorism and internal insecurity, disrupting the country's foreign policy framework. During President Muhammadu Buhari's tenure, Nigeria faced complex and interconnected threats such as the resurgence of Boko Haram, the development of Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), the proliferation of herder-farmers conflict and the widespread of armed banditry and mass kidnapping. These internal security concerns put heavy pressure on the Buhari administration to rebalance Nigeria's foreign policy away from multilateral leadership and economic diplomacy and towards militarized and security focused engagements ((U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2020).

As instability intensified, Nigeria diplomatic posture became increasingly influenced by its need to gain military assistance and intelligence cooperation. This transformation was reflected in the administration's extensive involvement with regional and international partnership. Nigeria led the revitalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which was made up of Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Benin Republic aimed to coordinate regional actions against terrorism in the lake Chad Basin. Although Nigeria took on a central leadership role in the MNJTF, the alliance was constrained by inadequate funds, late deployments and an excessive dependence on Nigeria's overburdened military forces.

Furthermore, the Buhari administration's engagement with international players like China, United States and France highlighted how internal insecurity had grown to be an important factor in determining foreign policy. The main goal of Nigeria's involvement in G7 summits and security forums was to request aid for border control plans, military hardware and surveillance technologies. Although some cooperation was encouraged by this externalization of domestic issues,

it also gave the impression that Nigeria's diplomacy was primarily reactive and narrow focused on counterterrorism rather than no regional integration or comprehensive bilateral development.

Nigeria's soft power suffered as a result of Buhari's foreign policy's concentration on security. Historically significant to Nigeria's position as an African leader, efforts in public diplomacy, humanitarian diplomacy and culture were overlooked. Its influence in organizations like African Union, and ECOWAS declined as well as her reputation as a regional stabilizer.

Impact of Insecurity on Nigeria's Bilateral and Multilateral Relations

Nigeria's bilateral and multilateral diplomatic interactions were significantly and extensively impacted by the insecurity that prevailed during President Buhari's government (2015-2023). Nigeria's standing as a reliable partner was damaged by the ongoing threats from Boko Haram, ISWAP, and widespread banditry. These factors also changed how international government and multilateral organizations interact with Nigeria (Nigerian Ministry of Finance, 2023).

Growing worries about military misbehavior and persistent human rights abuses by Nigerian security forces caused tension with the United States, a long time security and development partner ((Klobucista, 2018). The Leahy Law which prohibits US military aid to foreign troops suspected of violating human rights was spurred by these worries. Nigeria was able to buy A-29 Super Tucano aircraft in 2017, however the deal was contingent on rigorous adherence to human rights (Amnesty International, 2021).

The situation further worsened in 2020 when Nigeria was put on the list United States with counties with visa ban, alleging inadequacies in sharing security information, the situation worsened more signifying a decline in confidence in Nigeria's security and governance systems. The United Kingdom and other European Union members reacted more cautiously than other European nations. Frequent travel advisories brought on by rising insecurity discouraged international investment, travel and student exchange. Traditionally centered on infrastructure and capacity building, European development assistance has become more conditional, with a focus on police accountability, civilian protection and governance reform (UK FCDO, 2021). The Nigerian government harsh response to the 2020 #EndSARS protest further frightened European allies and diplomatic expression of concern. As

a result, there was less cooperation on peacekeeping coordination and migration policy, two areas where there had previously been significant engagement ((European External Action Service, 2020).

Nigeria's internal insecurity on the other hand had little impacts on its bilateral ties with China. China was able to sustain and even increase its economic involvement, especially through the Belt and Road initiatives, because to its non-interference policy. Despites occasional attacks on Chinese labour, China continues to invest in energy, industrial zones and transportation infrastructure. China demonstrated a pragmatic rather than value based approach by using adaptive solutions, such as hiring private security contractors in place of disengagement. Nigeria's foreign policy preferences underwent a little but significant realignment as a result of this contrast between Western conditionality and Chinese pragmatism (Sun, 2019).

Nigeria's long standing leadership in ECOWAS and African Union has clearly waned the multilateral stage. Growing internal security issues took resources and focus on away from regional diplomacy. Other West African nations, like Ghana Ivory Coast consequently assumed more significant roles in ECOWAS peace operations. Nigeria's multilateral standing has been steadily declining as evidenced by its declining financial contributions and limited participation in recent regional interventions, such as those in Mali and The Gambia (ECOWAS Commission, 2021).

Implications of Human Rights Abuses on Nigeria's International Partnerships and Foreign Military Cooperation

International watchdog like Amnesty International and Human Right Watch have repeatedly documented extrajudicial killings, forced disappearance, torture and unlawful detentions, particularly in Nigeria's north east and central regions where fights against terrorism were at their highest. These documented abused had significant diplomatic and strategic implications weakening Nigeria's legitimacy in international area and changing the tone of its foreign engagements. During the Buhari's tenure, allegations of human rights abuses by the men of Nigerian Armed Forces emerged as one of the most urgent obstacles to the nation's defence diplomacy and international partnerships.

The decline of security cooperation with important Western partners, particularly the United States, was one of the most obvious effects. U.S law forbids military support for foreign security rights abuses under the Leahy Law. The Obama government stopped selling weapons

and providing security training, citing this law. The sale of A-29 Super Tucano aircraft was authorized by Trump administration in 2017, but there were strict monitoring requirements attached to the deal. This conditional involvement, which was motivated by worries about human rights responsibility, highlighted the persistence lack of confidence in the military relationship between the United States and Nigeria (The Migration Policy Institute (MPI, 2022).

The dilemma is made worse by Nigeria's low standing in international rankings such as its seventh-place finish in 2023 GTI. These rankings, which are frequently brought up in global discussions, influence international relations and deter travel and investment from companies. The greatest impacts has been felt by foreign direct investments. According to UNCTAD (2023), insecurity was a major cause in Nigeria's 36% fall in foreign direct investment. Global corporation redirected their investments to nations with greater stability such as Rwanda and Ghana (World Bank, 2022). An important turning points in Nigeria's international reputation was 2014 kidnapping of the Chibok girls which significantly increased investor's anxiety as a result of fear of human rights abuses (Madume and Owule, 2024).

Furthermore, Nigeria's credibility in multilateral discussion was undermined by domestic patterns of ethno-regional favoritism in federal appointments and opaque military. These problems raised concerns for African and international organizations that prioritize democratic norms and rule-based diplomacy. Overall, under Buhari, violations of human rights resulted in a decline in diplomatic capital, a postponement capital, a cooperation, and a weakening of international alliances.

Conclusion

The study's conclusions show that internal unrest and terrorism during President Buhari's rule (2015-2023) significantly altered Nigeria's foreign policy and diplomatic interactions. The country was forced to embrace a security-centric foreign policy that placed a higher priority on military alliances and counter terrorism cooperation than on humanitarian or developmental diplomacy due to the rise if Boko Haram, ISWAP, rampant banditry and communal violence. Nigeria's long standing leadership in regional organizations like the African Union and ECOWAS was undermined by this reactive strategy. Smaller regional powers like Ghana and Coted'Ivoire were able to take on increasingly significant roles in multilateral diplomacy as a result of Nigeria's declining financial stability and credibility, as well as its incapability to stabilize its domestic security

environment.

Furthermore, Nigeria's bilateral ties, especially with Western democracies, were negatively impacted by insecurity. Nigerian security forces were accused of violating human rights, which resulted in strained in relationships with the US and EU, conditionality in military aid, and a drop in trust. Nigeria's diplomatic image was further damaged by incidents like the #EndSARS protest, which led to worldwide censure and increased scrutiny of the country's security and governance procedures. On the other hand Nigeria remained close to China, whose non-interference stance and emphasis on economic investment offered a reliable substitute for conditional engagement with the West. Nigeria's global alignment changed as a result of this divergence, which reflected the growing conflicts between interest driven and values-based diplomacy.

Persistent human rights abuses also had wider ramifications than just foreign military cooperation, according to the study. Nigeria, one of the country's most affected by terrorism worldwide, saw a major decline in its reputation. Aspirations for increased international influence, such as its candidacy for a permanent membership on the UN Security Council, were hindered by its negative branding, which also reduced soft power and foreign direct investment. Nigeria's credibility was further damaged on the international front by domestic issues including institutional opaqueness and ethnic favouritism.

Recommendations

The government must start a comprehensive security sector reforms aimed at improving intelligence coordination and professionalizing the military while respecting international human rights norms if it is to improve Nigeria's standing internationally and its relations with other countries.

To combat unfavourable global narratives, a strong public diplomacy plan should be created that makes use of Nigeria's creative industries, worldwide media involvement and cultural diplomacy.

It is also imperative that multilateral alliances be strengthened; Nigeria should balance its partnerships with non-Western nations like China and Russia while aggressively supporting AU and ECOWAS peacekeeping deployments.

Fighting the funding of terrorism must also be top priority, necessitating cooperation with international security organizations, open defense budgets, and cross-border financial intelligence sharing.

Lastly, long-term conflict prevention

measures are the only way to achieve lasting peace. These must include funding for youth employment, education, and community-level discussions to address the underlying causes of insecurity and radicalization, especially in the Northeast where conflicts are prevalent.

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