

Reconfiguring Security Architectures In West Africa: Nigeria's Strategic Dilemmas In An Era Of Evolving Threats

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Abstract

The situation in today's world is inseparable from the changing nature of international relations. New geopolitical trends have undermined the traditional understanding of security, as the sources of threat have become multiple and complex. Such challenges are particularly acute in the geopolitical space of western Africa, where Nigeria plays a leading role. Therefore, in the present paper, the focus is on Nigeria's geopolitical space to highlight some of its prominent security concerns. The current security situation in Nigeria will be analysed through three thematic areas: the implications of regional security arrangements, political crisis management, and the response to new international threats. Particular attention will be paid to the way the Nigerian government addresses such challenges. It will be argued that the country's current strategy is inefficient and must be adjusted. The new approach should consider the importance of an integrated security system based on the principles of intelligence and diplomacy.

Keywords: Nigeria, West Africa, ECOWAS, Security Architecture, Hybrid Threats, Crisis Management, Human Security

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Security cannot be understood in terms of territorial defense or military power in the twenty-first century. The changing nature of threats has meant that security issues for states are now more complex than in the past. There is an increased role for non-state actors and transnational organizations and the impact of climate change is also a factor. Political instability, economic challenges and technologically advanced weapons of all kinds present new security issues for states in the twenty-first century (Baldwin, 2020; Kaldor, 2021).

In many developing countries in the South, these global pressures vie with deep-seated weaknesses in governance, uneven development, and social inequity. They are manifested in West Africa with a special vividness. Despite significant democratic and economic progress in the region since the early 2000s, West Africa remains a continent of recurrent instability, episodic insurgencies, political turmoil, and communal clashes (Aning et al., 2023; International Crisis Group, 2023). These overlapping pressures have placed considerable strain on regional security arrangements, raising legitimate concerns about their capacity to respond effectively to emerging challenges.

Within this geopolitical context, Nigeria is a regionally important player. It is both a stabilizing force for the region and a destabilizing one, paradoxically, at the same time. The country has been a pillar of peace and stability in West Africa, possessing both manpower and resources, and has played a leading role in maintaining regional security, as well as in peacekeeping missions and other international endeavors of a diplomatic nature (Adebajo, 2002; Williams, 2020). On the other hand, the country continues to confront a complex array of internal security challenges that undermine its domestic cohesion and weaken its external influence (Suberu, 2020; ACLED, 2024).

According to the ACLED 2024 report, Nigeria is in the “extreme” category, states affected by insecurity, 5th in political violence with more than 4,000 events and 9,355 fatalities recorded between December 2023 and November 2024. The most notable trends are the increased cases of banditry in the Northwest and Middle Belt and the high number of civilian casualties from militias, Boko Haram, and ISWAP attacks.

The insurgency has been persistent and threatening and the level of insecurity has escalated to difficult to ignore levels. The initially local phenomenon that started in Nigeria’s North-East has turned into a regional security dilemma, with insurgent groups adapting their tactics and strategies almost constantly (Thurston, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2023). In the North-West, there has been an increase in armed banditry that has caused significant impact on the local economy as well as resulted in the displacement of many people (SBM Intelligence 2022). In the Middle Belt, communal clashes have been frequently reported due to land and environmental issues among others (Okpara et al., 2021). Finally, there are also security challenges in the southern parts of Nigeria arising from maritime and separatist activities (UNODC, 2023).

Taken together, these observations suggest that Nigeria’s situation is not an isolated set of events but rather a closely related pattern of occurrences. The lack of results from intensive and sustained investment in military operations by the government has created room for the resurgence of insurgency, adaptation by other criminal networks, and the rise of new security challenges in other regions (Baldwin, 2020; Kaldor, 2021).

A critical look at Nigeria’s security situation shows that the situation is far from being satisfactory as there are various institutional and governance shortcomings that derail the process. Institutional fragmentation has characterized Nigeria’s security system, with agencies not operating on a single platform, which lowers the efficiency and responsiveness of security management in the nation (Osho, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2023). Governance failures have also compromised security as the nation has had weaknesses in both federal and sub-national governance frameworks, leaving several spaces for exploitation (International Crisis Group, 2023).

At the socio-economic level, some factors can be considered security challenges as they facilitate the proliferation of insurgency and sabotage in the nation. Nigeria’s relative poor social indicators have created a climate where militancy and terrorism can flourish (Collier, 2020; World Bank, 2021). There is a high unemployment rate among young people who feel alienated from the system, giving them reason and motivation to join insurgent groups and participate in violence. Insecurity has become a major concern in many parts of the country as the presence of state agencies is minimal.

Furthermore, a look at the regional dimension of the security challenges that Nigeria faces shows that the situation is not better in neighboring states. The region has experienced security deterioration as some states have suffered take-over by military junta, which has created security challenges in the wider sub-region (Aning et al., 2023). Additionally, many international players are vying for influence in the region, which has impacted Nigeria's foreign policy and complicated the situation further (Williams, 2020). The situation in the region has become very erratic and even more challenging for Nigeria, which has to deal with the instability in its own backyard.

With the situation as described above, Nigeria's security architecture could be considered inadequate, given the current and emerging threats it faces. This paper argues that the situation is not as it should be because the country has not put in place the most efficient security framework to handle the menace. The nation's approach to security issues has been through the military and poorly integrated systems, which have not yielded optimal results. Worst till is the integration of so called repentant terrorists into the military architecture of the country.

This paper will review the changes in Nigeria's national security strategy, the challenges of addressing crises in a politically unstable region, and the effects of the emerging international security challenges on Nigeria. A firm understanding of these aspects of national security will contribute to the overall comprehension of the challenges that Nigeria faces and the best way forward in addressing them.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Towards Hybrid Security Governance

The changing nature of contemporary security problems requires a holistic approach to the concept and practice of security. The most established theories and approaches are guided by the realist idea of protecting a state's sovereignty through military means (Baldwin, 2020; Kaldor, 2021). However, as the situation with the proliferation of hybrid and unconventional threats indicates, this approach is no longer relevant in the modern context.

One of the alternative approaches is the human security paradigm, which focuses on the needs of individuals rather than the interests of the state. According to this approach, the role of state national security is to ensure people's livelihood and protect them from being subjected to structural violence such as poverty and social injustice (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994; Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2020). The main problem with human insecurities in Nigeria is that they are often intertwined with various forms of hybrid threats (Collier, 2020; World Bank, 2021).

Another concept worth considering is the one of hybrid threats. The major premise of this theory is that there is an increasing number of hybrid political and security challenges facing both the state and its people. Examples of such threats include terrorism, cyber attacks, disinformation, and transnational organized crime (Kaldor, 2021; Hoffman, 2021). They have the potential to undermine the national security of states since tackling them requires a response that goes beyond a single domain or instrument of state security (Kaldor, 2021). In Nigeria, hybrid security challenges take the form of organized banditry, insurgency, and various economic crimes (International Crisis Group, 2023; SBM Intelligence, 2022).

The regional security complex theory applies to Nigeria because some of the most pressing security challenges are regional in nature. According to the theory, states are no longer isolated political and military entities; instead, they are now directly and indirectly interacting with each other and engaging in international relations (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Regional security issues emerge when states are unable to effectively control events occurring beyond their borders (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This phenomenon could explain the emergence and development of regional security challenges such as those emanating

from the Lake Chad Basin (Onuoha, 2014; Okpara et al., 2021). Such challenges are particularly relevant for Nigeria because they directly affect its territorial integrity and national security.

While most of the theoretical approaches and frameworks discussed above can be applied to understand the nature of the security dilemma facing Nigeria, they are only partially incorporated into the government's security policy. Given the observed prevalence of hybrid security threats, the Nigerian government is still committed to relying solely on the military for national security (Williams, 2020; Aning et al., 2023). Therefore, it is recommended that the Nigerian government consider hybrid security governance to ensure a holistic approach to its national security in the context of hybrid security challenges. While the hybrid security governance approach might resemble the realist theoretical framework, it is based on the assumption that hybrid security threats require not only military but also political, technological, and economic responses (Krahmann, 2017; Abrahamsen & Williams, 2019). Furthermore, hybrid security governance assumes that addressing hybrid security threats needs to involve the efforts of individual states, regional alliances, and international organizations (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2019). Therefore, it can be concluded that hybrid security governance can be instrumental in unifying the theoretical approaches to security studies discussed in this paper.

3.0 NIGERIA'S INTERNAL SECURITY DYNAMICS

3.1 Insurgency and the Limits of Military Containment

At the heart of Nigeria's current security challenges is the instability in the North-East. The main source of this is the insurgency that has plagued the region, and particularly the Boko Haram group as well as its splinters. Even though the Nigerian government, alongside other countries, has launched military operations to end this terrorism, it has proven to be quite persistent. It did not relent even when faced with combined forces such as the Multinational Joint Task Force and the United States of America's military intervention in December, 2025.

Part of the problem is that Boko Haram has evolved and changed its tactics over time. It has split into smaller groups, making it easier to avoid being targeted directly, as well as employing more sophisticated methods such as ambushes and guerrilla warfare. This is done against both military installations and ordinary civilians (Thurston, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2023).

The issue of national security in Nigeria is multifaceted and comes from several sources that may overlap. It is, therefore, paramount to consider each of these underlying causes and their ramifications in detail. Only then can one begin to understand the root reasons for Nigeria's security problems and what can be done to address them. It would be inaccurate to reduce all of these challenges to a single factor when it is obvious that there are several interconnected ones. Each of these causes has an effect, either direct or indirect, on Nigeria's security challenges.

Based on the data described, it is evident that the violence is a major contributor to the death toll and overall instability in the region. There had been a significant number of attacks, ranging from small-scale ones to large-scale deadly assaults, targeting both civilians and the military. For example, over 2100 instances of violence occurred, with the number of killings and kidnappings being particularly high (ACLED, 2024). Even though military actions have been successful in some cases in eliminating insurgent groups, these have proven to be only temporary victories. Part of the problem is that there are still areas where violence is ongoing, and therefore there are opportunities for terrorists to regain power and resources. Additionally, even after successful military operations, the aftermath is not always dealt with appropriately, leaving room for the insurgency to resurface (Onuoha, 2014; World Bank, 2021).

3.2 Banditry and the Political Economy of Violence

In addition to the insurgency, the North-West region has also faced a spurt of banditry. Unlike the insurgency, which is ideology-driven, banditry has been rampant in the region due to economic motivations. Bandit groups have engaged in various predatory activities, including kidnappings for ransom, rustling, and illegal mining, among others. These activities have sustained numerous well-armed bands, and in many instances, they have operated with relative impunity (SBM Intelligence, 2022). In other words, insecurity has become an industry as people have turned to banditry as a lucrative activity.

It is noteworthy that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has exacerbated the banditry problem, especially since the area is sparsely patrolled. Worse still, some communities have become active accomplices in the perpetration of these crimes, thus hindering any attempts at bringing the culprits to justice (UNODC, 2023). Thus, it is safe to argue that the banditry problem has complicated the insecurity situation in the North-West region. Indeed, it has become a serious economic activity as several bandits have entrenched themselves in host communities as permanent residents. As a result, attempts to tackle the problem through direct military action have yielded limited results, and the only lasting solution lies in addressing their economic motivations.

3.3 Climate-Induced Conflicts and Resource Competition

Environmental factors have also become an important aspect of Nigeria's national security issues in recent years. The desertification process, together with changing rainfall patterns, as well as a decrease in water resources, has led to changes in Nigeria's ecological balance. This has had a particularly strong impact on the agricultural production of local farmers, resulting in the competition for arable land and watering places between farmers and herders (Okpara et al., 2021; World Bank, 2021). This competition has often resulted in violent conflicts (Okpara et al., 2021; World Bank, 2021). Particularly acute are Nigeria's ethnic tensions, which are complicated by natural resource conflicts, in the Middle Belt region.

It is noteworthy, however, that while these confrontations may be interpreted through the prism of ethnic and religious oppositions, they are largely caused by specific ecological and governance issues. The lack of effective regulation and coordination mechanisms has led to local conflicts erupting into nationwide ones (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2023). In addition, the inability of the Nigerian government to perform its coordinating function has led to the emergence of mistrust and resentment between local ethnic groups (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2023).

3.4 Maritime Insecurity and Illicit Economies

Another significant security issue is the Nigerian maritime domain. The Gulf of Guinea is known to host and facilitate piracy and armed robbery (IMB, 2023). However, this activity has decreased due to recent naval security operations by Nigeria and regional partners (IMB, 2023). Nevertheless, other maritime-related crimes, including oil theft, illegal bunkering, and trafficking, have significantly impacted the country, with enormous economic losses and negative environmental consequences, especially in coastal states like the Niger Delta (UNODC, 2023).

Meanwhile, Nigerian authorities must intensify efforts to combat maritime-related crimes. The weakness and lack of transparency of institutions involved create a conducive environment for these illicit activities, often with economic and environmental consequences. Therefore, improved supervision, advanced technology, and effective enforcement are required for better security outcomes.

3.5 Governance Deficits and Structural Drivers of Insecurity

Underlying many of these problems are governance and developmental challenges, weak policy

implementation, and the consequent inability of the government to deliver on its mandate and provide essential services. The relative absence of the state in many instances has allowed non-state actors to exploit these governance vacuums (Collier, 2020; Suberu, 2020).

Youth unemployment in Nigeria is a major structural impediment that provides a ready recruitment ground for various insurgent groups and criminals as many unemployed youths view terrorism as a profitable activity (World Bank, 2021). Thus, it is safe to state that insecurity in Nigeria is multifaceted and goes beyond just security challenges. Development issues such as youth unemployment, poor governance, and environmental degradation are important underlying causes of insecurity in the country.

It is therefore evident that the security situation in Nigeria is a composite of several security and non-security challenges. As such, the problems require a multi-faceted approach that goes beyond providing security to include other aspects such as governance, development, and the environment amongst others. The Nigerian government must address the underlying causes of insecurity if it wishes to have long lasting and sustainable peace and security.

4.0 REGIONAL RIVALRIES AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

4.1 ECOWAS and Institutional Constraints

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has served as the regional anchor for conflict management and collective security in West Africa. Since its transformation from an economic community to a security actor, ECOWAS has been involved in peacekeeping, peacemaking, and promoting democracy in the region. The interventions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia are cited as successful regional responses to conflict and political instability (Aning et al., 2023; Hartmann, 2020). However, the credibility and effectiveness of the ECOWAS have been questioned in the wake of military takeovers in several member states of the organization, including Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (Aning et al., 2023; International Crisis Group, 2022). This occurrence reveals the limitations of the organization in responding to challenges related to security and governance in West Africa.

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4.2 Fragmentation and External Influence

Although ECOWAS has consistently taken a stand against unconstitutional changes in government and imposed sanctions, the outcomes of these measures have been largely symbolic. In many cases, the military junta responded with even greater force and secured their position by portraying ECOWAS as an intervener (Ogbonna, 2023; Savadogo, 2022). This illustrates the failure of ECOWAS to reverse the unconstitutional change in government through sanctions and isolation. Furthermore, the credibility of ECOWAS as a regional organization was undermined due to the perceived unfair application of sanctions, which in turn affected its effectiveness as a regulator of state behavior (Hartmann, 2020; Aning & Edu-Afful, 2021).

At the same time, the growing interference of external actors in the affairs of member states has weakened

ECOWAS's ability to influence events in the region. The increasing presence of global and private security actors in West Africa has created additional security challenges in the region that do not always serve the strategic interests of ECOWAS (Williams, 2020; Le Roux, 2023). The involvement of external military, economic, and security actors in the affairs of member states and the promotion of their strategic interests by some states has affected the integrity and coherence of the regional security architecture (Aning et al., 2023; Thurston, 2020).

The strategic goals of external actors are multifaceted and range from securing access to resources to countering terrorism, pursuing geopolitical goals, and balancing the influence of rival states in the region. As a result, the involvement of external actors in regional security matters has created security challenges for multiple countries, which has hindered efforts to develop a coordinated and integrated approach to strengthening regional security (Le Roux, 2023; Williams, 2020).

Nigeria, which used to be the pillar of the ECOWAS economic and security capabilities, faces serious domestic security challenges that affect its ability to provide regional security and stability. Apart from the country's own security concerns, such as insurgencies, banditry, farmers-herdsmen clashes, and economic stagnation, it has borne an unfair share of the costs of maintaining peace in the region (International Crisis Group, 2023; Mustapha, 2021). This has had a detrimental effect on Nigeria's ability to promote its interests vis-a-vis ECOWAS, as well as the collective regional security and economic performance.

4.3 Crisis Response Deficits

In addition to leadership constraints, empirical analyses of ECOWAS interventions reveal recurring operational deficiencies that undermine the effectiveness of crisis response mechanisms. One of the most frequently cited challenges is delayed mobilisation. In rapidly evolving conflict situations, the ability to deploy forces or initiate mediation efforts in a timely manner is critical. However, bureaucratic processes, political disagreements among member states, and logistical constraints often result in slow responses, allowing conflicts to escalate before meaningful intervention occurs (Aning et al., 2023; Ebo, 2021).

Funding limitations represent another significant obstacle. Regional peace operations require substantial financial resources, yet ECOWAS continues to rely heavily on external funding partners to sustain its activities. This dependency not only affects the scale and duration of interventions but also raises concerns about autonomy and strategic independence (Ebo, 2021; Hartmann, 2020). Without a stable and predictable funding base, the organisation's ability to plan and execute long-term security initiatives remains constrained.

Coordination challenges further complicate crisis management efforts. Effective intervention requires seamless collaboration between military forces, political actors, and humanitarian agencies. In practice, however, coordination within ECOWAS operations is often fragmented, with overlapping mandates and unclear lines of authority (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2021; Ogbonna, 2023). This fragmentation can lead to inefficiencies, duplication of efforts, and, in some cases, operational failures. Moreover, the absence of robust intelligence sharing mechanisms limits situational awareness, thereby reducing the effectiveness of strategic planning and execution.

Taken together, these institutional, political, and operational challenges highlight a broader crisis of regional security governance in West Africa. ECOWAS remains an indispensable framework for collective action, but its current limitations underscore the need for comprehensive reform. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, enhancing financial autonomy, improving coordination structures, and adapting to the realities of external influence are essential steps towards restoring its effectiveness. For Nigeria, supporting such reforms is not merely a matter of regional responsibility but also a strategic necessity,

given the transnational nature of the threats it faces.

5.0 EMERGING GLOBAL THREATS

The character of insecurity in Nigeria is being reshaped by a new generation of risks that are transnational, technology-driven, and deeply interconnected. Unlike conventional threats, these emerging challenges do not respect territorial boundaries and are often difficult to attribute, regulate, or contain through traditional security mechanisms. Their impact is amplified by existing structural weaknesses, including institutional fragility, uneven development, and governance gaps. As Nigeria continues to integrate into the global economy and digital ecosystem, its exposure to these risks is increasing, making it imperative to adopt forward-looking and adaptive security strategies (Williams, 2020; UNDP, 2022).

5.1 Cyber-security Challenges

Nigeria's rapidly expanding digital economy has created new opportunities for innovation, financial inclusion, and economic growth. However, this digital transformation has also exposed individuals, businesses, and state institutions to a growing range of cyber threats. Cybercrime ranging from financial fraud and identity theft to ransomware attacks and online exploitation has become a significant concern, with both domestic and international implications (Interpol, 2023; Kshetri, 2021). The rise of digital banking, mobile payment platforms, and e-commerce systems has increased the volume of online transactions, thereby creating more entry points for malicious actors.

Empirical evidence suggests that cybercriminal networks operating within and outside Nigeria are becoming more sophisticated, leveraging advanced tools and exploiting regulatory gaps to carry out attacks (Levi & Smith, 2021; Interpol, 2023). Although Nigeria has made advances to strengthen its cyber-security framework in the enactment of cybercrime legislation and the establishment of regulatory agencies, implementation challenges persist. Limited technical capacity, inadequate funding, and weak inter-agency coordination continue to constrain enforcement efforts (Olayemi, 2022; Kshetri, N. 2021).

Furthermore, the transnational nature of cybercrime complicates jurisdictional enforcement. Many cyber offences involve actors, infrastructure, or victims located in multiple countries, making cooperation essential yet often difficult to achieve (Kshetri, 2021). In this context, strengthening international partnerships and investing in cyber resilience will be critical for mitigating risks. Without such measures, the benefits of Nigeria's digital economy may be undermined by growing vulnerabilities in cyberspace.

5.2 Climate and Migration Pressures

Climate change represents another significant and evolving threat to Nigeria's security landscape. Environmental degradation which manifests in rising temperatures, desert encroachment, flooding, and irregular rainfall, has already begun to disrupt livelihoods, particularly in agriculture-dependent communities (World Bank, 2021; IPCC, 2022). These disruptions are expected to intensify in the coming years, with far reaching implications for food security, economic stability, and social cohesion.

One of the most visible consequences of climate change is the increase in internal displacement and migration. As rural livelihoods become less sustainable, affected populations are increasingly moving towards urban centers in search of economic opportunities. This pattern of migration places additional pressure on urban infrastructure, including housing, healthcare, and sanitation systems, many of which are already overstretched (IOM, 2022; World Bank, 2021). The rapid expansion of informal settlements further complicates urban governance and increases the risk of social unrest.

In addition to internal migration, climate-induced pressures can exacerbate existing conflicts over land and resources. Competition for diminishing agricultural and water resources has already contributed to tensions

between communities, and these dynamics are likely to intensify as environmental conditions worsen (Okpara et al., 2021; IPCC, 2022). Addressing these challenges will require integrated policies that link climate adaptation, development planning, and conflict prevention. Failure to do so may result in a feedback loop where environmental stress fuels instability, which in turn undermines resilience.

5.3 Transnational Organised Crime

Nigeria occupies a strategic position within global networks of transnational organised crime. Its large population, extensive diaspora, and role as a regional economic hub make it both a source and transit point for various illicit activities, including human trafficking, drug smuggling, arms trafficking, and financial crimes (UNODC, 2023; Ellis & Shaw, 2021). These activities are driven not only by domestic vulnerabilities but also by sustained international demand, creating complex supply chains that are difficult to dismantle.

Organised criminal networks have demonstrated a high degree of adaptability, often exploiting weaknesses in border control, law enforcement, and governance systems. In many cases, these networks operate across multiple jurisdictions, using sophisticated methods to evade detection and prosecution (Shaw & Reitano, 2020; UNODC, 2023). The involvement of local actors, including corrupt officials, further complicates efforts to combat these activities, as it undermines institutional integrity and public trust.

The consequences of transnational organised crime extend beyond immediate economic losses. These networks can also contribute to broader insecurity by financing armed groups, facilitating the proliferation of weapons, and destabilising communities (Ellis & Shaw, 2021; Reitano et al., 2020). As such, addressing organised crime requires a comprehensive approach that combines domestic enforcement with international cooperation. Strengthening intelligence-sharing mechanisms, enhancing border security, and addressing corruption are essential components of an effective response.

5.4 Health Security

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a stark reminder of the profound security implications of public health crises. In Nigeria, the pandemic exposed significant weaknesses in healthcare infrastructure, including limited capacity, inadequate funding, and uneven access to services (WHO, 2022; Adepoju, 2020). Beyond its immediate health impact, the pandemic disrupted economic activity, strained public finances, and exacerbated existing inequalities, thereby highlighting the interconnected nature of health and security.

Future pandemics or large-scale health emergencies remain a persistent risk, particularly in a globalised world where diseases can spread rapidly across borders. Nigeria's vulnerability is compounded by factors such as high population density in urban areas, gaps in surveillance systems, and challenges in emergency response coordination (WHO, 2022; Nkengasong & Mankoula, 2020). These conditions underscore the need for sustained investment in public health systems, including disease surveillance, healthcare workforce development, and infrastructure expansion.

Health security must therefore be understood as an integral component of national security. Strengthening resilience in this area requires not only domestic reforms but also active participation in global health governance frameworks. Collaborative efforts, including data sharing, research partnerships, and coordinated response strategies, will be essential in mitigating future risks (Kickbusch et al., 2021; WHO, 2022).

6.0 RECONFIGURING NIGERIA'S SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

There is an urgent need for deliberate and far reaching reconfiguration of its security architecture in Nigeria's evolving threat environment. The persistence of insurgency, the spread of organised crime, and

the rise of non-traditional threats have exposed the limitations of existing frameworks that rely heavily on fragmented institutional responses and reactive strategies. Contemporary security challenges are interconnected and adaptive, requiring responses that are equally integrated, anticipatory, and multidimensional. A reconfigured architecture must therefore move beyond conventional paradigms and embrace a more coordinated and forward-looking approach that aligns national capabilities with present-day realities.

A central priority in this transformation is the need to address institutional fragmentation. Nigeria's security landscape is characterised by multiple agencies operating with overlapping mandates, often without effective coordination. This lack of integration has resulted in delayed responses, duplication of efforts, and gaps in operational efficiency (Aning et al., 2023; Ebo, 2021). Strengthening inter-agency collaboration requires not only formal coordination mechanisms but also a cultural shift towards information sharing and joint operational planning. Integrated command structures, unified communication systems, and clearly defined roles can significantly improve responsiveness and reduce operational inefficiencies.

Evidence from comparative security systems suggests that coordinated frameworks are more effective in managing complex threats than isolated institutional efforts (Krahmann, 2017; OECD, 2021).

Closely linked to institutional reform is the need to prioritise intelligence-driven strategies. Traditional reliance on kinetic military operations, while necessary in certain contexts, has proven insufficient in addressing adaptive and decentralised threats. Intelligence-led approaches, supported by data analytics and real-time information sharing, offer a more proactive means of identifying and neutralising risks before they escalate (Gill & Phythian, 2020; UNODC, 2023).

In Nigeria, enhancing intelligence capacity involves investing in data infrastructure, improving analytical capabilities, and fostering collaboration between intelligence agencies and other security institutions. The integration of technology into intelligence processes, such as predictive analytics and geospatial mapping, can significantly improve situational awareness and decision-making (Kshetri, 2021; Levi, M., & Smith, R. 2021).

Preventive diplomacy also represents a critical component of a reconfigured security framework. Given Nigeria's strategic position within West Africa, its engagement in regional conflict prevention is both a responsibility and a necessity. Early diplomatic intervention in emerging disputes can help de-escalate tensions and prevent the outbreak of violence, thereby reducing the need for costly military interventions (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2022). Preventive diplomacy requires sustained engagement with regional actors, investment in mediation capacity, and the strengthening of institutions such as ECOWAS. By taking a proactive role in regional stability, Nigeria can reinforce its leadership position while contributing to a more secure neighbourhood, which in turn has direct implications for its own national security.

Equally important is the integration of human security considerations into national policy. Security cannot be sustained solely through coercive measures; it must also address the socio-economic conditions that give rise to conflict. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion create environments in which violence can thrive (UNDP, 2022; World Bank, 2021). In Nigeria, the link between economic marginalisation and recruitment into insurgent or criminal networks is well documented. Embedding human security into policy therefore requires a holistic approach that combines economic development, social protection, and inclusive governance. Investments in education, job creation, and community development are not merely social objectives but strategic interventions that contribute to long-term stability (Collier, 2020; Suberu, 2020).

Another indispensable element of security reform is technological adaptation. The increasing digitisation of economic and social activities has introduced new vulnerabilities, particularly in the domain of cyber-security. At the same time, technological tools offer significant opportunities for enhancing security capabilities. Surveillance systems, biometric identification, and digital communication platforms can improve monitoring, coordination, and response (Kshetri, 2021; Interpol, 2023). However, the effective use of such technologies requires substantial investment, as well as the development of regulatory frameworks that balance security needs with privacy and civil liberties. In Nigeria, bridging the technological gap will be critical for keeping pace with evolving threats, particularly those that operate within digital and transnational spaces (Olayemi, O. 2022; OECD, 2021).

In addition to these core areas, accountability and governance reforms must underpin any effort to reconfigure the security architecture. Public trust in security institutions is essential for effective cooperation between the state and its citizens. Allegations of human rights abuses, corruption, and lack of transparency have, in some instances, eroded this trust, thereby undermining the legitimacy of security operations (Amnesty International, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Strengthening oversight mechanisms, promoting professionalism within security agencies, and ensuring adherence to the rule of law are therefore critical components of sustainable reform. Without these measures, even well-designed strategies may fail to achieve their intended outcomes.

Ultimately, reconfiguring Nigeria's security architecture requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that aligns institutional structures, strategic priorities, and operational tools with the realities of a rapidly changing threat environment. It demands not only policy adjustments but also sustained political commitment and resource allocation. By prioritising coordination, intelligence, diplomacy, human security, and technological innovation, Nigeria can build a more resilient and adaptive security system capable of addressing both current and emerging challenges. Such a transformation is not optional but essential for ensuring national stability and regional leadership in an increasingly complex security landscape.

7.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

7.1 Policy Implications

Reconfiguring Nigeria's security architecture will have far reaching policy implications which will extend beyond operational adjustments to encompass institutional reform, legal innovation, and strategic realignment. Having regard to the multifaceted nature of contemporary threats facing the country, policy responses must be equally comprehensive, embedding security, governance, and development considerations into a coherent framework. This requires moving away from reactive and fragmented approaches towards policies that are preventive, coordinated, and grounded in long term sustainability.

A deliberate restructuring of the security sector, demands a deeper regional engagement, alignment between economic and security priorities, modernisation of legal instruments, and the establishment of sustainable funding mechanisms.

Nigeria's security institutions have historically struggled with issues of coordination, accountability, and capacity, which have limited their effectiveness in responding to evolving threats (Ebo, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2023). A central pillar of these policy implications is the need for comprehensive security sector reform (SSR). SSR must therefore go beyond incremental changes and address structural deficiencies within the system. This will include redefining institutional mandates, strengthening oversight mechanisms, and enhancing professionalism within the armed forces and law enforcement agencies.

Public trust for the Nigerian security architecture has been eroded; so, there is equally the need to rebuild public trust, which has been undermined by allegations of misconduct, bribery and corruption and lack of

transparency (Amnesty International, 2022; Suberu, 2020). Empirical studies indicate that public cooperation is significantly higher when security institutions are perceived as legitimate and accountable, making trust-building an essential component of effective security governance (OECD, 2021).

Strengthening regional engagement within ECOWAS is another critical policy dimension that must be put into consideration. Nigeria's security challenges are deeply interconnected with broader regional dynamics, particularly in West Africa, where porous borders and transnational networks facilitate the movement of armed groups, weapons, and illicit goods (Aning & Edu-Afful, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2022). As a leading member of ECOWAS, Nigeria has both the capacity and responsibility to drive reforms that enhance the organisation's effectiveness. This includes advocating for improved coordination mechanisms, supporting capacity-building initiatives, and contributing to the development of more robust enforcement frameworks. Strengthened regional engagement also requires sustained diplomatic efforts to promote political stability and democratic governance, thereby addressing some of the root causes of insecurity in the region (Hartmann, 2020; Aning et al., 2023).

Closely related to regional cooperation is the integration of economic and security policies. Insecurity in Nigeria is closely linked to economic deprivation, unemployment, and inequality. As such, policies that focus exclusively on military or law enforcement solutions may not likely produce lasting results. Integrating economic and security strategies involves aligning development initiatives with security objectives, particularly in conflict-affected areas. For example, targeted investments in infrastructure, education, and job creation can reduce the incentives for participation in criminal or insurgent activities (UNDP, 2022; Stewart, 2021). This approach recognises that economic stability and security are mutually reinforcing, and that sustainable peace depends on addressing both simultaneously.

In addition to institutional and economic reforms, there is a pressing need for the modernisation of legal frameworks to address emerging threats. Nigeria's existing legal system, while comprehensive in many respects, has struggled to keep pace with developments in areas such as cybercrime, terrorism financing, and transnational organised crime (Olayemi, 2022; UNODC, 2023). Updating these frameworks requires not only the enactment of new legislation but also the harmonisation of existing laws to eliminate inconsistencies and gaps. It should be emphasized that effective implementation is as important as legal reform itself.

Strengthening judicial capacity, improving investigative procedures, and ensuring inter-agency cooperation are essential for translating legal provisions into practical outcomes (Kshetri, 2021). Without such measures, even well-crafted laws may fail to achieve their intended impact.

Another point of consideration is the establishment of sustainable and transparent funding mechanisms for the security sector. One of the recurring challenges in Nigeria's security architecture is the inconsistency and lack of transparency in funding, which can hinder planning, reduce operational efficiency, and create opportunities for mismanagement. (Ebo, 2021; OECD, 2021).

Sustainable funding requires a predictable and adequately resourced budget that aligns with strategic priorities. At the same time, transparency and accountability mechanisms must be strengthened to ensure that resources are used effectively and in accordance with established standards. International best practices emphasise the importance of financial oversight, audit systems, and public reporting in enhancing the credibility and performance of security institutions (World Bank, 2021; Transparency International, 2022).

Beyond these core areas, policy coherence remains a critical factor in the success of any reform agenda. Fragmented policies that operate in isolation are unlikely to produce meaningful outcomes in a context

where security challenges are interconnected. A unified governmental approach, supported by strong political will and institutional coordination, is therefore essential. This includes fostering collaboration between federal, state, and local authorities, as well as engaging non-state actors such as civil society organisations and the private sector. Inclusive policymaking processes can enhance legitimacy, improve implementation, and ensure that policies are responsive to local realities.

Essentially, the policy implications of reconfiguring Nigeria's security architecture point towards the need for a balanced and integrated approach. Security sector reform, regional cooperation, economic integration, legal modernisation, and sustainable funding are not isolated priorities but interdependent components of a broader strategy. Their effectiveness will depend on the extent to which they are implemented in a coordinated and consistent manner. For Nigeria, the challenge lies not only in identifying the right policy directions but also in sustaining the commitment required to translate them into tangible outcomes.

8.0 CONCLUSION

Nigeria's contemporary security landscape illustrates, in a particularly acute form, the pressures shaping the evolving global order. While many states contend with transnational threats such as terrorism, organised crime, cyber insecurity, and irregular migration, Nigeria's experience is compounded by entrenched domestic conditions—fragile institutional coordination, uneven development, governance deficits, and persistent socio-economic inequalities. The preceding analysis has shown that insecurity in Nigeria is neither accidental nor isolated; rather, it is the product of intersecting structural, political, and technological dynamics that reinforce one another over time.

A central theme emerging from this study is the inadequacy of conventional security responses that rely predominantly on kinetic, military-driven strategies. Although such measures may yield short-term gains, they have not addressed the underlying drivers of conflict, including poverty, youth unemployment, weak local governance, and community distrust of state institutions. The discussion across earlier sections demonstrates that without confronting these root causes, security interventions risk remaining cyclical—responding to symptoms while leaving foundational vulnerabilities intact. This explains the recurring pattern of containment without resolution that has characterised Nigeria's security efforts.

Equally significant is the fragmentation within Nigeria's security architecture. Overlapping mandates, limited inter-agency cooperation, and gaps in intelligence-sharing have undermined operational efficiency. As highlighted in the paper, modern security threats are fluid and networked, requiring responses that are equally coordinated and intelligence-led. The absence of a fully integrated framework has constrained the state's capacity to anticipate, prevent, and decisively respond to emerging risks. In this regard, institutional reform is not merely desirable but indispensable.

The analysis also underscores the growing importance of non-military dimensions of security. Developmental deficits—particularly in education, infrastructure, and social welfare—have created environments in which insecurity can thrive. Similarly, the role of technology has become increasingly pivotal, both as a tool for enhancing surveillance and intelligence capabilities, and as a domain of new vulnerabilities. The discussions in this paper have therefore stressed the need to balance technological adoption with regulatory safeguards, ensuring that innovation strengthens rather than undermines national security and civil liberties.

Furthermore, the regional and international context cannot be overlooked. Nigeria's security challenges are deeply interconnected with broader dynamics within West Africa, including porous borders, arms proliferation, and cross-border insurgencies. As the paper has argued, Nigeria's capacity to manage its internal security has direct implications for regional stability. This places a responsibility on the state to not

only reform domestically but also to engage more strategically in regional cooperation, intelligence-sharing, and collective security mechanisms.

In light of these findings, a compelling case emerges for a fundamental rethinking of Nigeria's security paradigm. A sustainable approach must move beyond reactive crisis management towards a proactive, preventive, and people-centred model. Such a framework should integrate military capability with effective governance, socio-economic development, diplomatic engagement, and data-driven decision-making. It must also prioritise accountability, transparency, and public trust—elements that are essential for long-term legitimacy and effectiveness.

Ultimately, Nigeria stands at a critical juncture. Continuing along the current trajectory risks perpetuating a cycle of instability, where responses are continually outpaced by evolving threats. However, the adoption of a comprehensive and forward-looking security framework offers a different path—one that not only addresses immediate risks but also strengthens the foundations of national resilience. By aligning its security strategy with broader developmental and institutional reforms, Nigeria has the potential to transition from a state preoccupied with internal crises to a more stable and influential actor within the West African sub-region and the wider international community.

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