



## **Cross-examining the Role of the Directorate of Islamic Affairs, Nigerian Army in Eradicating Terrorism in the Northeast through the Counter-Narrative Programme**

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### **Abstract**

Globally, kinetic approaches (military force) have been the primary tool in combating terrorism. Since the rise of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), *Jamā'at Ahl al-Sunnah li-I-Da'awah wa al-Jihād* "Association of the People of the Sunnah for Preaching and Jihād" popularly known as Boko-Haram in 2009, the Nigerian military has heavily invested in weaponry. Still, it continues to suffer

significant casualties despite some successes. This has led to the adoption of a non-kinetic approach known as Counter-Narrative Programme under the control of the Directorate of Islamic Affairs (DOIA), which has been battling the activities of these terrorists' group. This might be the reason why the non-kinetic approach, termed the counter-narrative approach, was introduced. What is the counter-narrative program? What military operations are taking place in the country? Which directorate of the Nigerian Army is saddled with the program? What is the role of the Directorate of Islamic Affairs (DOIA)? How efficient is the counter-narrative program? What led to the abandonment of the programme? And what is the way forward for the government to avert the subsequent explosion of new terrorist groups like the recent Lakurawa in order not to turn to another gorilla war? This paper is both qualitative and historical in approach, in interrogating the aforementioned issues. The paper concluded by dichotomizing the significance of the programme from an Islamic perspective, discussing the shortcomings of the programme, and ends with achievable recommendations.

**Keywords:** *efficacy, counter narrative programme, directorate of islamic affairs, nigerian army, extremism, terrorism*

### **Abstrak**

Secara global, pendekatan kinetik (kekuatan militer) telah menjadi alat utama dalam memerangi terorisme. Sejak munculnya Negara Islam Provinsi Afrika Barat (ISWAP), Jamā'at Ahl al-Sunnah li-I-Da'awah wa al-Jihād "Asosiasi Orang-orang Sunnah untuk Berdakwah dan Berjihad" yang populer dikenal sebagai Boko-Haram pada tahun 2009, militer Nigeria telah banyak berinvestasi dalam persenjataan. Namun, militer terus menderita banyak korban jiwa meskipun ada beberapa keberhasilan. Hal ini telah menyebabkan adopsi pendekatan non-kinetik yang dikenal sebagai Program Kontra-Narasi di bawah kendali Direktorat Urusan Islam (DOIA), yang telah memerangi aktivitas kelompok teroris ini. Ini mungkin menjadi alasan mengapa pendekatan non-kinetik, yang disebut pendekatan kontra-narasi, diperkenalkan. Apa itu program kontra-narasi? Operasi militer apa yang sedang berlangsung di negara ini? Direktorat mana dari Angkatan Darat Nigeria yang bertanggung jawab atas program ini? Apa peran Direktorat Urusan Islam (DOIA)? Seberapa efisien program kontra-narasi? Apa yang menyebabkan penghentian program tersebut? Dan apa langkah selanjutnya bagi pemerintah untuk mencegah munculnya kelompok teroris baru seperti Lakurawa

baru-baru ini agar tidak berujung pada perang gerilya lagi? Makalah ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan historis dalam mengkaji isu-isu tersebut. Makalah ini diakhiri dengan mendikotomikan signifikansi program tersebut dari perspektif Islam, membahas kekurangan program tersebut, dan diakhiri dengan rekomendasi yang dapat dicapai.

**Kata kunci:** *efektivitas, program kontra-narasi, direktorat urusan islam, tentara nigeria, ekstremisme, terorisme*

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, the military is considered a public service occupation, distinguished by its focus on life and death matters. Unlike other public service fields, military organizations operate under unique rules and structures, setting them apart from any other state entity. Their personnel, equipment, attire, and living conditions make them stand out conspicuously from the rest of society. This distinction has led to a singular way of conducting their activities. Nigerian Army Education Corps (2000)

The Military *vis-a-vis* the Nigerian Army, engages in almost every sphere of human endeavor. They do it in their unique way, usually referred to as “the Army Way, Nigerian Army Education Corps (2000). The “Army Way” is not visibly reflected in the way the Nigerian Army enforces law and order. Within its rank, to maintain discipline, which is a *sine qua non* for military force efficiency, maintenance of discipline in the military is an onerous task, which entails laws, regulations, customs, traditional ethics, and morale to fight the enemy. For all members of the Nigerian Army, more especially as a democratic state, the need to balance the requirement for military efficiency predicated on discipline and the need to conform to the rule of law and due process, especially in a complex situation like the fight against insurgency. Nigerian Army Education Corps (2000).

Indeed, the Nigerian Army is considered one of the most formidable forces in the Sub-Saharan African region. Their duties as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are “*to win all land battles, defend the territorial integrity of Nigeria, protect and advance her national interests, and accomplish other tasks as may be assigned in aid of civil authority*” Nigerian Army Education

Corps, 2000). The mission already thrives on tested core values, which form the customs, ethics, and traditions of the Nigerian Army that entrench comradeship within the ranks.

Achieving this mission implied previous leadership with clear visions and strategic guidance to all troops. The leadership foresight as outlined over the years through transparent command philosophy and strategy in line with standard best world practice to reposition the Nigerian Army to attain readiness, professional standing as the duty to the country's capacity to defeat adversaries, and capability in a joint operation.

The Nigerian Army is the pride of the Nation and is tasked with the strategic defense of the country. The Nigerian Army has been a veritable tool in quelling several ethnoreligious and resource-based crises that threatened Nigeria's corporate existence. Ever since the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> republic in 1999, Nigeria faced a myriad of complex security challenges, including insurgency, insecurity, Militancy in the Niger-Delta oil-producing communities, kidnapping, political assassinations, extrajudicial killings, religious crisis, intercommunal conflicts, terrorism, and banditry, to mention a few. The military is often invited to participate in Internal Security Operations (ISOPs) due to innumerable reasons, including the proliferation of small arms, inadequate personnel of law enforcement agencies like the Nigeria Police, Nigeria Civil Defence Corps, Immigration, and Customs.

Sidiq (2019) interrogated the involvement of the Nigerian Army in the Odi crisis, which led to the wanton destruction of lives and properties in Bayelsa state. Similarly, there was Ghilah (Murder by deception) according to Sidiq (2023) in 2001 in Zaki-Biam of Benue state. The murder was alleged to have been caused by the involvement of the Nigerian military in ISOPs.

According to Pius and Waziri (2017), Terrorism and allied forms of violent extremism are relatively new variants of internal security threats in Nigeria. Onuoha (2011) also identified at least 187 ethno-religious orchestrated conflicts in Nigeria in which Nigeria Army was involved in the ISOPs between May 1999 and April 2009. The unlawful use of force or violence against anyone or property to

intimidate or coerce any government, civilian population, best defines terrorism and also highlights the activities of the extremist Boko Haram terrorist group in the northeast.

Nigeria, as a country, has been grappling with state-sponsored terrorism and that of non-state actor that often employ violence in perpetuating their extremist ideology. While the then Niger-Delta Militant groups was seen as a resource-based non-state violent group, Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria was fueled by a complex fusion of factors, including poverty, lack of education, extremism, rigid conservative creed, corruption, and a sense of marginalization by the Nigerian government; hence, religion is used as a platform to perpetrate their heinous crime that are antithetical to Islam and her principles. The people of the Northeast are a predominantly Muslim population who felt alienated from the secular government in the south, leading to grievances that Boko Haram exploited. All these led to the gorilla war in the region since 2009 till now, even though it is imperative to note that the terrorists have been decimated to a larger

Paradoxically, Boko Haram emerged with extreme ideology right from the mosque and Yusuf Muhammad's *Halqa*, before eventually metamorphosing into a full-fledged terrorist group that has destroyed not only the image of Nigeria but also that of Islam. Among the *modus-operandi* of the group are: suicide bombing, wanton destruction of lives and properties, rape of kidnapped victims, hostage taking, and attack on military and police formations to cause fear and commotion. Similarly, other arguments put forward to explain the emergence of terrorism in Nigeria, is that it was orchestrated by youth bulge, Udama (2013), inequality, David (2013), Evans, O, and Ikechukwu K. (2019) argued it was mainly poverty, Agbiboa (2013) posited it is religion while Ajala (2018) argued Boko Haram is more of political motivated.

Several scholars have written extensively on this non-state extremist group, their activities, evolution, divisions, and factors responsible for the incessant attack on several military formations, and effects of their destruction, without really highlighting the efficacy or otherwise of several military operations adopted in eliminating the religious extremist terrorist group. Pius and Waziri (2017), Bola (2017),

Don John (2017), and Olubunmi (2017) all focused on counter-terrorism without any mention of the counter-narrative programme, under the supervision of DOIA. There are counterarguments by scholars on whether kinetic or gorilla war is sufficient to eliminate the Boko Haram terrorist group.

Despite the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to eliminate the radical extremist group by the Nigerian government and other sub-Saharan nations like Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, the insurgency persists. From 2010-2015, the then civilian administration, to crush the terrorist group, created the Special Joint Military Task Force, which brought together the Armed Forces, police, and intelligence services, acting as the institutional kinetic response to counter the terrorist group. There were the goods, the bad, and the ugly about the programme. For instance, some international organizations like the Red Cross and Amnesty often alleged the military of extrajudicial killings and flagrant abuse of the rights of citizens. According to Mac-Ikemenjima (2016), as cited by Don John (2017), the military fight against the terrorist group remains unsuccessful largely because of the nature of repressive action taken, which often allows the terrorist group to cast themselves as freedom fighters.

Ajala (2021) acknowledged the failure of the MNJTF to combat the threats of terrorism in the northeast and highlighted five fundamental reasons for unsuccessful military operations in counter-terrorism. These reasons include the inability of the MNJTF to adapt to new threats, the unclear role of vigilantes in the MNJTF structure, the lack of a clear mandate for the MNJTF, the lack of understanding of the neo-patrimonial aspects of politics in the fight against terrorism, and the underestimation of the threats posed by the terrorist group and its affiliates. Ajala's (2025) article explored the public's perception of vigilantes and the extent to which they've been deployed in Nigeria. He further posited that the vigilante group should have a role within counterterrorism initiatives, especially in alternatively governed spaces

The insecurity of lives and properties orchestrated by the terrorist group also influenced the outcome of the 2015 general election in

Nigeria. The then incumbent civilian administration of President Goodluck Jonathan of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) lost to President Muhammadu Buhari (a retired Military general). The latter as part of his campaign as the presidential candidate of the All-Progressive Party (APC) use his military background as a strong sentiment to discourse and promise to find a long-lasting solution beyond the kinetic approach. The Counter-Narrative programme was thus introduced during his tenure (May 29, 2015 – May 29, 2023). There was a significant success on the war against the terrorists from all angles at this period, this can be unconnected with the assistance offered to the Nigerian Government by the United State of America Government, transfer of the Command Headquarters to the war zone in Maiduguri, Counter-narrative non-kinetic approach which included the DOIA active participation, deployment of more troops under (MNJTF) and change of military commanders.

An attempt shall be made in this paper to dissect the efficacy of the counter-narrative program of the Nigerian Army, which was under the DOIA. Unfortunately, the programme has been altered by the new civilian administration, which started on May 29, 2023. This will begin with a holistic perception of Nigerian Army,

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Nigerian Army: A Holistic Perception**

The general expectation of the Army is to counter the current and emerging security threats by undertaking operations to seize and retain initiatives. These expectations can be achieved through mission-specific orders. This is achieved through synchronized operations, effective counter-narrative initiatives, effective counter-initiatives, and freedom of action at all levels. Nigerian Army (2021) appropriated standard operating procedures, as well as freedom of action at all levels.

The Army High Command and its leadership, through the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), devised and crafted special and effective strategies to combat terrorism and insurgency. They must be open to counter the threat of banditry and herders/farmers' clash. Through their visions, the High Echelon of the Military devised strategies that

would ensure the achievement of the vision of the COAS. The Nigerian Army has been a veritable tool in quelling several ethnoreligious-based crises that threatened Nigeria's corporate existence.

The Nigerian Army strategy in the Northeast, in a holistic approach, is a coordinated plan of action through kinetic and non-kinetic approaches. It covers operational, logistic, and counter-insurgency operations, of which counter-narrative is part. The Nigerian Army's holistic strategy, generally referred to as ways, means, and ends, translates to achieving the goal, aim, target, or objective, among others. Without a holistic strategy, no Military campaign can succeed. Nigerian Army (2021).

Strategic approaches and witty styles of leadership led to success in any Military campaign. The evolution of strategic leaders dates back to about 2450 CE years ago. With Sun Tzu as the progenitor, other notable strategic leaders in history include but are not limited to Winston Churchill, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, and many others. Most of the Nigerian Army operations are to subdue the enemy and reduce them to the barest minimum with little or no collateral damage. It is, based on the following operational strategies, both in the Northeast and other theatres of operations, that is to "decimate, dominate, and occupy" (DDO), which concisely is the overriding strategy and a holistic approach of the Nigerian Army and its selected operations in recent times in fighting internal aggression before dabbling in its programme on counter terrorism. There is also a historical appraisal of the DOIA and then the cross-examination of the counter-narrative programme and its essentials.

### **Nigerian Army Operations**

In aid of civil authority and its fight against insurgency and other violent crimes in the northeast, the Nigerian Army joined hands with other security agencies to fight insurgency, civil strife, banditry, and other violent agitations across the country Nigerian Army (2021). A better perspective of the result of Nigerian Army operations is in joint operations. Success achieved over the years, because of joint operations with other Armed forces. The Nigerian Military, as an



instrument of National power, has been described as the pivot of other elements of National power. The end of the Cold War ushered in the euphoria of well-being, leading to the postulation in some quarters that global security would be enhanced, while harmony and peace would prevail in all corners of the world.

The Nigerian Army's joint operations with other military forces, more especially in the contemporary operating environment, as typified in the Northeast, are very complex and to some extent fluid. The issues involved are interconnected: insurgency, Boko Haram, and Banditry. There is no single factor that could be used to explain any conflict, violence, extremism, or communal crisis. The Boko Haram issue at the strategic level is influenced by political, economic, social, legal, and technological factors, amongst many others. This is why the relationship between Nigeria and its neighbors is vital, Sidiq (2019). This explains why it took President Buhari's diplomatic travels in 2015 to Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and the Benin Republic. This brings about commitment from these countries to countering the Boko Haram security breach, in the form of joint operations in the Lake Chad Basin with the formation of a Multi-National Joint Task Force.

At the operational level, there are factors and guidelines from the government's responsibilities and the interests of the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN). These involved expectations at the theatre of operations. The Military is expected to bring synergy in the execution of all planned operations against terrorist groups. In the global scene, countries evolved joint operations to win in all major operations; it is in line with this that Nigeria Government sought the cooperation of its neighbours in the fight against insurgency and the menace of Boko Haram. It is, therefore, a reality that no single nation can independently deal with security challenges within its territory. Nevertheless, in the modern context of crisis management spelled out in Military joint operations, no single service or agency can surmount the security crisis facing the nation without the assistance, cooperation, and collaboration of other agencies, Yusuf (2020) posited.

It was alleged that the Nigerian Ministry of Defense took a comprehensive approach, which was developed by the Canadian

Government and captured in the Canadian Forces Joint Publication Operation CFJP (2010). The comprehensive approach was based on the application of commonly understood principles and collaborative processes that enhance favorable and enduring outcomes in a particular situation.

According to Wahab & Ogbogbo (2020), the Nigerian Ministry of Defense, over the years, has evolved joint operations to talk myriad security challenges. The Nigerian Army is always the leader in all these joint operations, starting with Operation Harmony in 1997–2002 in the Bakassi peninsula, involving the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy, the Nigerian Air Force, Nigerian Correctional Services, and Nigerian Police. It was followed by Operation Delta Safe in the Niger Delta from 2004 to date. Also, involving the Nigerian Armed Forces as a contributor is Operation Safe Heaven 2001–date, set up by the Defense Ministry, to bring lasting peace to the Plateau and extend to parts of Nasarawa and Kaduna states in the Northwest. The Nigerian Army also established Operation Zama Lafiya in the North in 2007; it is now renamed Operation *Hadin Kai*.

The country's Ministry of Defense, through the Department, had Administrative and Support input towards the smooth and successful conduct of the following famous exercises/Operations in countering insecurity in the country:

**Operation Lafiya Dole in the North East:** launched in 2015 to bring peace by all means in the **northeast** and other parts of Nigeria ravaged by insecurity.

**Operation Safe Haven in Plateau State (OPSH):** This was established by the Nigerian federal government in January 2010 as a joint task force to combat persistent ethno-religious violence, particularly in Jos, Plateau State. It was later rebranded/replaced by "Operation Enduring Peace" in August 2025 in order to enhance security operations.

**Operation Delta Safe in the Niger Delta:** Officially activated on June 24, 2016, by the Nigerian Defense Headquarters, to replace "Operation Pulo Shield". Its primary mandate is to protect oil and gas infrastructure and deter militancy, crude oil theft, and sea robbery in the Niger Delta region.

**Operation Harbin Kunama in Zamfara State:** Operation Harbin Kunama I was launched on **July 8, 2016**, by President Muhammadu Buhari in Dansadau, Zamfara State, to combat banditry. Subsequent iterations, including Operation Harbin Kunama II, launched in April 2017 in Southern Kaduna, and Operation Harbin Kunama III, which was also launched on April 1, 2019. **Operation Harbin Kunama I (2016):** Launched in July 2016 in Zamfara State to tackle armed bandits. **Operation Harbin Kunama II (2017):** Launched on April 20, 2017, in Southern Kaduna, covering Zamfara and surrounding areas. **Operation Harbin Kunama III (2019):** Launched on April 1, 2019, in Gusau, Zamfara State, to combat banditry, cattle rustling, and kidnapping. These operations were designed to destroy bandit camps and restore security in the North-West and North-Central regions of Nigeria.

**Operation Sharan Daji in Bauchi and Zamfara States:** launched in **August 2015** to tackle armed banditry and cattle rustling in the Northwest, particularly in Zamfara State, and was revamped in July 2018. Major operations, clearance missions, and media updates regarding successes in Zamfara were heavily reported between 2016 and 2019. Similarly, there was **Operations in Bauchi (2022).**

**Operation Python Dance in the Southeast:** Launched in 2018 to crush the insecurity in the Southeast. Ministry of Defense (2025).

**Operation Crocodile Smile IV in the South East:** launched in November 2020 to replace Python Dance Python Dance' in the south-east, to fight the multitude of reported cases of human rights abuses against the residents and the nefarious activities of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the unknown gunmen. Chinedu Asadu (2020)

The various joint operations engaged by the Nigerian Army with other security partners, both Military and paramilitary, have been preoccupied with the conduct of operations to defeat Boko-Haram terrorists and their allies, the Islamic State in West Africa Province

(ISWAP). The joint operations of the Nigerian Army have also been intensified to tackle other threats such as banditry, kidnapping, religious and tribal conflicts, herders/farmers clashes, and oil theft, as part of sustained counter-insurgency (COIN) operations, Nigerian Army (2020). An underlying principle for defeating insurgents and bandits is the concept of joint operations, a concept designed to identify, isolate, block, choke, neutralize, and eventually defeat all violent crimes and extreme violence, by combining land components, Naval components, in the Lake Chad Basin and Niger Delta, while airpower decimates the non – state actors from the Air.

### **Nigerian Army Programme on Counter Terrorism**

The desire to end wars and conflicts in search of peace has remained a daunting challenge in the global system. Conflicts like the Boko Haram imbroglio have seriously challenged the will of Governments that strive to ensure peace within their borders by employing their National Defense and security forces, or in some cases, through joint collaborative efforts within external forces to check spillover effects, thereby securing sub-regional or regional peace and security. In recent times, where volatile internal crisis threatens the sovereignty of states, such efforts have been directed mostly towards countering terrorism and insurgency, which have emerged as the prevalent threats to peace and security worldwide. These threats are being orchestrated by groups such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, *Ansaru*, and other groups involved in violent extremism and security breaches, Nigerian Army (2020).

In retrospect, the Boko Haram (BH) insurgency emerged in Nigeria in 2009. It was initially perceived as a local group of armed men waging war against the Nigerian state, but later became more violent and spread into the neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and the Benin Republic. At its peak in 2014, Boko Haram was termed the world's deadliest terror group, following the rise in violence by Boko Haram across the Lake Chad Basin. Katie Pisa & Tim Hume (2015)

Tackling terrorism requires a counterterrorism strategy; conversely, insurgency requires a counterinsurgency strategy. The

line separating terrorism and insurgency requires a counterinsurgency strategy and counterterrorism initiative. Therefore, the line distinguishing the two is thin since both use violence as a means to achieve their aim. Subsequently, while one was considered as out to cause fear and discredit constituted authority, the other was a quasi-related grievance recognized locally and internationally, Nigeria Army (2020).

The Nigerian Army counterterrorism program described Boko Haram as terrorists and insurgents all rolled into one. The current security environment in Nigeria and its multifaceted nature and dimensions constitute a serious threat to National security. The Nigerian Army has a robust counterterrorism program with proactive measures and a higher level of alertness. The program has five essential cardinal principles, namely. Mode, commitment, resilience, competence, and intelligence, Nigerian Army (2020)

The question is, how did the Nigerian Army approach countering the Boko Haram terrorists with its five cardinal principles to achieve the desired result? Counterinsurgency operations (COIN) are often long and are not like conventional warfare; the Army high command evolved a strategic leadership model to educate both the personnel and civilians alike on the need for synergy and cooperation to achieve success, according to the Nigerian Army (2020)

### **A cursory Glance at the History of the Directorate of Islamic Affairs (DOIA) Nigerian Army (NA).**

The Directorate of Islamic Affairs (DOIA) is as old as the Nigerian Army (NA). The origin of the Directorate could be traced back to the first set of troops recruited by Lieutenant (LT) Glover, also known as Glover Hausa, in 1860. Directorate of Islamic Affairs (2020) Undoubtedly, the majority of the Glover Hausas were Muslims. The British colonial authority was known for its non-interference with the religious and cultural values of its colonies, hence the Glover Hausas were later called "Hausa worship unhindered.

The first mosque to be built by the constabulary was in Obalende Barracks, Lagos, in 1863. The tradition continued for some time until the creation of United Colonial Nigeria, where mosques were built in

all Barracks of the colonial Regiments across the nation. It was placed under the leadership of an employed civilian Imam. Regimental and Battalion employment of Imam for unit religious requirements continued through independence in 1960, Directorate of Islamic Affairs (2020)

Employed *Imāms* were later commissioned into the Nigerian Armed Forces based on their level of education. Some were commissioned as Officers while others were commissioned as warrant officers. This continued with the formation of the Imam Department in 1963. The first commissioned Imam who headed the department was Imām Capt. Ilyasu Kastina: Chief Imam of the forces (CIF).

The Imam Department was situated at no. 7 Marina Street, Lagos in the Army Headquarters (AHQ) until it was relocated to an independent office at No 114 Kakawa Street before finally moving to the present location, Bonny Camp in 1980. The Imam department that was formed in 1963 eventually metamorphosed into what is known today as the Directorate of Islamic Affairs (DDIA).

### **Cross-examining Role of the DOIA Nigerian Army in Eradicating Terrorism in Northeast through the Counter Narrative Program**

The Nigerian Army as a whole comprises several Directorates, of which the Directorate of Islamic Affairs (DOA) is not left out. The Directorate of Islamic Affairs is as old as the Nigerian Army itself, as it is the oldest religious component of the Nigerian Army. The Directorate of Islamic Affairs is as old as the Nigerian Army itself, as it is the oldest religious component of the Nigerian Army, with the mandate of providing the spiritual needs of the Muslim officers and soldiers in the Nigerian Army, Mustapha (2023)

What became known today as the Directorate of Islamic Affairs, as one of the directorates of the Nigerian Army, passed through certain stages right from its inception. Its origin could be traced back to the first set of troops recruited by Lieutenant (Lt) Glover, who was also called “Glover Hausa” in the 1860s. The majority of them are Muslims. Meanwhile, non-interference with the religious and cultural values of the colonies was one of the esteemed traditions of the

British colonial authority. As a result of this, the Glover Hausas who were later called ‘Hausa constabulary” were Muslims were inevitably allowed to perform their worship as contained in the religion of Islam, Mustapha (2023).

Following this allowance in 1863, the constabulary built their first Mosque at Obalende Barracks, Lagos in 1863. This tradition continued up to the creation of unified colonial Nigeria where mosques were built in all Barracks of the colonial regiments across the country, and placed under the leadership of employed civilian Imams. The practice was that regiments/battalions would employ their imams to administer regimental religious requirements of the unit and other non-regimental spiritual needs of the Muslim personnel. This tradition however continued through independence in 1960.

Upon independence and over time, the Imam Department was introduced. As a result of the fact that some of the civilian Imams were employed and commissioned into the Nigerian Armed Forces as officers, warrant officers, and so on, depending on their levels of education and capability, the department was headed by one of the commissioned Imams, Capt. Iliyasu Katsina as chief imam to the forces (CIF) in 1963. Mustapha, (2023)

At the inception, the department was initially situated in the Army headquarters Administration branch at No. 7, Marina Street, Lagos. However, it was later relocated to an independent office at No. 14, Kakawa Street, Lagos; before moving to its current location at Bonny camp since 1980. With a standard organizational structure and satisfactory service, the department was upgraded and got a new nomenclature to “Imam Directorate” with Lt. Col. A Ndwago as the first director in 1975.

However, in 1994, considering the expanded scope of duties and increased strength of the Imam Directorate, it was upgraded to the status of Directorate of Islamic Affairs (DOIA) as reflected in the NA Order of Battle (ORBAT) 1994 maintaining Brig Gen as the highest rank of its Directorship.

Thus, the command of the Directorate of Islamic Affairs which started with the Imam department, the Imam directorate is a continuous trend since its establishment in 1963. Presently, DOIA is

one of the directorates under the AHQ Department of Arm Administration (DOAA), and its current director is Brig Gen SG Mustapha (2017-2023). Over the years, the DOIA has undergone several changes and improvements some of which are; coordinating Hajj operations, creation of DOIA TS, redesignation of DOIA TS, production of religious pamphlets, deradicalization of the BHT ex-combatants, participating in peace, support/peace enforcement operations, the establishment of *Islamiyyah* schools all over the nation, fight against insurgency, among other contributions to the welfare of the Nigerian Armed forces and the entire citizen at large. Mustapha (2023)

The concept of counter-narrative covers resistance and opposition as told and framed by individuals and social groups. Counter-narratives are stories influencing social settings, economic policies, religion, and spirituality, mostly opposed to (perceived) dominant and powerful master narratives as elucidated by Alex (2014), Counter-narrative can also be defined as a system of stories that hang together to provide a coherent view of the world for the explicit purposes of combating violent extreme narratives and eliciting legal and non-violent activities in support of individuals, groups, or movements that support that world view. Nigerian Army (2020)

Counter-narrative also refers to the narratives that arise from the vantage point of those who have been historically adapted to certain ideas, even if they are detrimental. The idea counter-narrative implies a space of resistance against traditional norms. In essence, the counter-narrative program was geared towards engaging the repentant and surrendered insurgents in intellectual discourse, toward delegitimizing their activities as an anathema to the proper Islamic teachings. Sidiq (2023). Hence, the reasons why the Army High Command directed Islamic Affairs to develop an effective module of counter-narratives operation, to expose and debunk the wrong and baseless misinterpretation of Islamic teachings, Sidiq (2023).

The counter-narrative program aims to counter extremist ideologies and recruitment tactics employed by Boko Haram. The Nigerian Army's Islamic Affairs Directorate has implemented non-kinetic approaches, including spiritual discourse, to address the root

causes of the insurgency. This program seeks to reorient repentant members towards authentic Islamic teachings and counter the erroneous ideologies that fueled their extremism. Boko Haram's actions, such as the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls and the bombing of religious sites, directly contradict the core principles of Islam. These acts of violence and human rights violations are entirely incompatible with Islamic teachings. Mustapha (2023)

### **Essentials of Counter-narrative Program**

The Boko-Haram (BH) and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) members use Islamic teachings in a distorted manner to recruit and cajole members and sympathizers among the populace, who are Muslims, barely knowledgeable about the religion. They lack an understanding of the in-depth, authentic meaning of verses of the holy Qur'ān.

The need for a counter-narrative program is not far-fetched from the fact that the message of Islam is simple. It preaches love and peace and advocates for peaceful coexistence among different religious groups in many verses of the holy Qur'ān. Therefore, the *modus operandi* of the programme is clearly to engage the insurgents and enlighten them on the true teachings of Islam. More importantly, highlights the public's overt or covert sympathy with both Boko Haram/ISWAP.

The Nigerian Army, through the Director of Islamic Affairs, vetted refutable Islamic scholars to be part of the counter-narrative team. The responsibility of preparing, coordinating, and delivering a well-organized counter-narrative package in the Northeast Theater of Operations lies solely on the Director of Islamic Affairs of the Nigerian Army. Alex (2014). The method, as planned and conceived by the Directorate of Islamic Affairs of the Nigerian Army, consists of the following Planning the programme, Content creation, Running the program, Target audiences, and the Evaluation and Tool Box. Nigerian Army (2014)

The above planning method is the cardinal *modus operandi* of counter-narrative programs that focus on a message that offers a

positive alternative to extremist propaganda or aims to deconstruct or delegitimize extremist narratives.

- Focusing on what Islam truly preaches, thereby offering positive views about the religion, shared values, open-mindedness, freedom of expression, and choice without compulsion.
- Highlighting how violent extremism and extremism negatively affect the people, they claim they represent socially, economically, politically, and religiously.
- Demonstrating and exposing the hypocrisy of extremist groups and how their actions are often inconsistent with their own stated beliefs. Sidiq (2023)

The Army High Command, with its exemplary, inspiring leadership, approved the non-kinetic approach to the fight against insurgency in the Northeast. Accordingly, the kinetic and non-kinetic approaches to insurgency should be complementary to end the wanton destruction of lives and properties. This implies that the spiritual component of the warfare is as important as the physical component in protecting the territorial integrity of the Nigerian state

The role of the Directorate of Islamic Affairs of the Nigerian Army in the counter-narrative program is indeed in line with the following Qur'ānic statement and traditions of the noble Prophet Muhammad. It is an obligation placed on every Muslim to call to that which is right and dissuade people from all that is forbidden in Islam. The Qur'ān states in this regard: *"Let there arise from you a group calling to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. It is these who are successful"*. (Qur'ān 3:104).

Similarly, the Prophet was on record to have said: *"Whosoever among you sees an act of wrong should change it with his hands. If he is not able to do so, then he should change it with his tongue. If he is not able to do so, then with his heart, and this is the weakest of faith"*. (Hadith 34 of An-Nawawi, Related by Muslim)

The decision of the Army Command to engage in a counter-narrative program as a form of non-kinetic operation has greatly helped in curtailing uncountable insurgents' moves. The counter-narrative program within the Nigerian Army has provided crucial



insights despite the alarming number of youths falling prey to radicalization and violent extremism under the guise of Islam. During these sessions, many youths and repentant terrorists' express remorse and sadness, acknowledging the indoctrination and ignorance that led them down this path. When confronted with the true tenets of Islam, they often express regret for their past actions. Muhammad (2022), submitted.

This program has highlighted the limitations of a purely military approach, demonstrating that the insurgency stems from deeply ingrained extremist ideologies. While kinetic operations continue, it's vital to address the root causes by disrupting the flow of recruits to these extremist groups. Similarly, Insurgents were left with a clear and comprehensive package to disabuse their minds of all violent notions being indoctrinated into them. Therefore, from 2017 to date. The program recorded huge success with insurgents pledging total obedience to the Nigerian state and vowing not to return to the old ways.

This is the initiation and indoctrination of ignorant youths; the Army sees this as a religious duty, and hence, the Directorate of Islamic Affairs was saddled with this pivotal role. The pristine Islamic principles, who is a Muslim? What are the roles of Muslims in society, as well as the importance of peace in Islam, are major topics discussed during this program. Nigerian Army (2020)

The counter-narrative program is an approach that offers an alternative view to extremist ideas and how they recruit and spread propaganda. The effort comes in response to the menace of insurgency and violent extremism engaged by Boko Haram. The Nigerian Army, Islamic Affairs Directorate's initiative and contribution to, non-kinetic exercises to end the protracted insurgency and violent extremism. This is because Islam unequivocally condemns violence and abuse in all forms. It emphasizes peaceful coexistence and advocates for dialogue, patience, diplomacy, reconciliation, and forgiveness as the preferred means of resolving conflicts.

To show the success of the war against insurgency and, by extension, the counter-narrative program of the Nigerian Army, after nearly a decade of living in refugee camps, a joint rebuilding initiative by the Borno State government, the United Nations, and the European Union provided 864 homes to 5,000 Ngarannam residents, allowing them to return to their village. Okeke-Korieocha (2023)

'Ngannaram: The Homecoming' is a documentary that chronicles the experiences of Amina, Falmata, and Hassan, three residents of Ngarannam. It follows their journey from the devastating 2015 insurgency attack that shattered their lives to their eventual return home, facilitated by the UNDP's intervention program in 2022

It is really important for us to tell the story of how we got here, where we came from, and where we are going," she said;

*This is important for many people to understand what is happening in the North. On the night we escaped I wondered if I would ever walk along the fields I played in as a child and if things would ever go back to the way they were,"* shared Amina Modu, 19 years old, one of the main characters of the film. *"After living in a camp for almost a decade, I hope our story inspires others not to give up on their dreams of returning home someday."* Ngarannam (2023) as cited in Okeke-Korieocha (2023),

Babagana Zulum, the Executive Governor of Borno state, while expressing gratitude for the general effects of the collaboration that has returned peace to the state, said, as cited by Ifeoma Okeke-Korieocha (2023),

Borno has experienced significant internal and external turmoil over the last decade. The only way to prevent the next generation from joining the extremists is to make sure that many villages are stabilized, allowing people to return and use their agricultural lands, which will allow them to earn a living

Similarly, Olatunji was on record as having documented the fact that the state is returning to its previous glory. He opined as follows:

Between 2014 and 2016, Boko Haram insurgents sacked Dikwa Night Market and the entire town several times, but there is a

gradual rebuilding of peace and security in the area, Daily Trust Saturday reports. One of the most gladdening features of the return of peace and security in Dikwa, a community in Borno State troubled by a violent conflict, is the steady resuscitation of business, reminiscent of the good old days. Olatunji (2024)

### **Recommendations**

The analysis and comprehensive counter-negative program discussed in this research face limitations due to the classified nature of the materials and the emphasis on restricted documents by the Army High Command. Nevertheless, the following recommendations are proposed for a successful counter-negative initiative: 1) It is recommended that the Nigerian Army High Command, as a matter of urgency, make all counter-narrative programs across the country more accessible to non-governmental organizations in the country. This inclusion would expand the program, allowing for a wider range of ideas and evaluations; 2) It is astonishing that the new Military chiefs under the current administration abandoned the Counter-Narrative programme in half-way. Governance should be continuous, and thus, rather than totally abolishing the programme, rejigging is better; 3) It is essential for the government to include all states and stakeholders critical to the counter-narrative program. Active involvement of the entire society and community is crucial; 4) Women play multiple roles in insurgency and violent extremism. To prevent this deadlock, they must be involved in and integrated into subsequent counter-narrative initiatives; 5) The eradication of poverty, social stratification, and early Islamic education will reduce to the barest minimum, if not total elimination, the threat of violent extremism and terrorism. Governments at all levels should monitor and, if necessary, regulate the activities of Muslim scholars and local *Madāris*. According to UNESCO, war begins in the minds of men and women, as do grievances that often lead to radicalization, rebellion, terrorism, and insurgency. Proper Islamic education is essential; 6) The research points out gaps in current counter-narrative programs and recommends further research on the radicalization of Muslim youths through social media platforms; and 7) Political leaders should avoid meddling with security issues. The military needs to be allowed

to do its work. The continuous negotiation with Bandit and Terrorist groups needs to stop. The military must be giving the marching orders to eliminate these terrorist groups who are hellbent in destroying the image of Islam. The captured innocent or coerced ones must be allowed to undergo rehabilitation under the DOIA.

## **CONCLUSION**

An attempt has been made in this paper to interrogate the historical foundation of the Directorate of Islamic Affairs (DOIA) of the Nigerian Army. The paper, among other things, elucidated the role of the Directorate in fighting insurgency in the northeast of Nigeria. The country is made of six geo-political zones, namely; south-south, South-East, South-West, North-Central, North-west and North-East. The last geopolitical zone is closer to other Sub-Saharan countries like Chad, Cameroon, and Mali. These are the battlegrounds for the insurgent groups. The terrorist group in this area started as a result of many factors, including corruption, misgovernance, and, most importantly, violent extremist ideology. Since 2009, the kinetic approach by the military has been successful to a certain extent, but the insecurities in the area persist. The role of the DIOA in the moribund Counter-narrative programme, which is now abandoned by the present administration, was the focus of this paper. The paper x-rayed the merits and demerits of the programme after dissecting some of the military operations introduced by the Civilian government that ruled between 2015 and 2023

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