

Intelligence Gathering and Security Operations in Nigeria: A Study of Selected Joint Task Force Operations

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Abstract

Gathering intelligence is crucial to successful security operations, particularly in complex and rapidly evolving environments like Nigeria, where a range of security threats are prevalent. This paper investigates how intelligence gathering enhances the effectiveness of Joint Task Force (JTF) operations, focusing on two specific case studies: Operation Delta Safe in the Niger Delta and the JTF on Cattle Rustling in Niger State. Utilizing secondary sources such as government documents, policy briefs, scholarly works, and reputable media reports, the paper delves into how actionable intelligence guides operational planning, resource allocation, and collaboration among agencies. Operation Delta Safe, which aims to combat oil theft, piracy, and militancy, illustrates how prompt intelligence can dismantle criminal networks and safeguard vital infrastructure. On the other hand, the JTF on Cattle Rustling in Niger State highlights the significance of intelligence in tackling rural banditry, improving civilian-military relations, and reestablishing local security. The paper highlights that while intelligence has greatly contributed to operational achievements in both scenarios, challenges remain. The paper concludes by proposing the necessity for better intelligence coordination, investment in advanced surveillance technology, and enhanced community involvement to ensure more effective security measures.

Introduction

Arising from the myriad of conflicts on the world stage, security issues and challenges have increased significantly. These conflicts, ranging from international terrorism to territorial disputes and geopolitical tensions, vary in intensity and impact, affecting millions of lives and often having far-reaching consequences beyond their immediate regions, leading to a complex

and multifaceted security landscape. This escalation in security concerns demands comprehensive strategies to address the evolving nature of these threats effectively. Accordingly, nations are now embarking on a serious search for nationalized actionable intelligence and effective security management strategies. This involves developing and implementing comprehensive measures to gather, analyze, and utilize intelligence to preempt and counter security threats (Lowenthal, 2000). Aminu (2023) emphasizes that intelligence, beyond being a crucial instrument of statecraft, serves as an essential mechanism for alerting policymakers about impending threats. This early warning system is vital for safeguarding a nation against unexpected armed assaults. This information enables informed decisions and strategic actions to be taken, thereby enhancing the security and stability of the state. In essence, intelligence functions not only as a tool for threat assessment but also as a proactive measure for national defence, ensuring that policymakers are forewarned and prepared to counteract potential dangers effectively.

Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has been replete with numerous security challenges, including ethnic and religious conflicts, militancy, banditry, terrorism, and insurgency (Adegoke, 2020). These issues have significantly impacted its development and stability. The Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast has caused widespread devastation, displacing millions of people. The Niger Delta region continues to experience long-standing militancy due to grievances over resource control and environmental degradation. Communal clashes and farmer-herder conflicts have exacerbated the security situation, particularly in the North Central region. In response to these threats confronting the Nigerian state, the federal government has initiated joint security operations. However, as Nte (2013) observed, Nigeria's efforts to address these internal security threats have presented significant challenges for the nation's intelligence community. The pervasive insecurity necessitates a comprehensive and

adaptive response from intelligence agencies, requiring the development of innovative strategies and improvement of operational capabilities. This paper is an attempt to engage intelligence in the broad spectrum of joint task force operations in Nigeria.

Conceptual Engagement

This section will discuss the basic concepts that scaffold this paper: Intelligence Gathering, Security Operations, and Joint Task Forces. Understanding these concepts is essential for developing a comprehensive approach to addressing security challenges in Nigeria.

Intelligence Gathering

Like most concepts in behavioural sciences, the concept of intelligence lacks universal acceptability. Still, in most contemporary analyses, intelligence is interpreted as the method of obtaining, processing and using information (Scott & Jackson, 2004). As a tool of state policy, the strategic essence of intelligence in national security has improved in importance. The Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz avers that intelligence includes information of every kind about the enemy and his country. A good piece of intelligence provides the early warning necessary to stop a stealthy, fast, and deadly enemy. Scott and Jackson (2004), posits that ‘intelligence is not a form of power, but a means to guide its use, whether as a combat multiplier, or by helping one to understand one’s environment and options, and thus how to apply force or leverage, and against whom.’

Intelligence gathering is deployed to investigate and solve cases. In overpowering a network, a state requires a system of networks. For states to keep and be ahead of criminals and terrorists within the physical and social environment, it must continuously engage and employ several systematic ways. Data about knowledge comes in a stream of unrelated, sometimes incomprehensible details. Fragments of phone calls, paper scraps, e-mails, odd reports, or rumours can be involved. In deciding what is authentic, meaningful, appropriate and, most

importantly, dangerous, this information must be filtered and analyzed (Peterson, 2016). It is not an easy task, but it is the challenge that faces the world today, that is, turning bits and pieces of information into data that can be applied in short time frames and disseminated to the people who need it. The strategic importance of intelligence gathering depends on how it helps the government make informed decisions. No doubt, every government needs intelligence to make an informed decision; thus, intelligence gathering produces policy outcomes.

Nte (2013), conceptualizes intelligence as ‘the process by which specific types of information relevant to national security are collected, analyzed and provided to policymakers.’ Intelligence is not merely gathering information but also analyzing such information and disseminating it to the appropriate authority for implementation (Waddington, 2013). The structure of a country’s intelligence network varies from country to country but usually consists of domestic and foreign intelligence. In the United States of America, for instance, the Federal Bureau of Intelligence (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as well as the State Security Service (SSS) oversees intelligence gathering. In Nigeria, the organizations responsible for both local and foreign intelligence gathering include the State Security Service, also referred to as the Department of State Services (DSS), and the National Intelligence Agency (NIA). Also, the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) serves as the military component involved in intelligence activities. These agencies collectively ensure the security and integrity of the nation’s intelligence operations, coordinating their efforts to address various internal and external threats. The DSS focuses primarily on domestic intelligence, the NIA handles foreign intelligence, and the DIA integrates military intelligence to support national defence objectives. For this study, intelligence gathering is the process of collecting, processing, and analyzing information related to the domestic environment or areas of operations. This comprehensive input, which includes the safeguarding of both the product and the process, is provided to

security policymakers to guide their decisions and actions in operational planning. Intelligence gathering supports informed decision-making and effective security operations.

Security Operations

All over the globe, security threats are becoming increasingly complex and sophisticated. Thus, addressing the magnitude and severity of such threats will entail not only investing in preventive measures but also developing sophisticated and integrated monitoring capabilities embedded in the incident response programme.

According to Nte (2013), ‘security operations are procedures and actions taken by security agencies to safeguard life and property, and to ensure that there is no threat to corporate existence within society.’ In Nigeria, the security situation in the six (6) geopolitical zones has been affected by the following enduring conflicts: the Boko Haram conflict in the North East; the conflict between herders and farmers in the North Central, cattle rustling and armed banditry in the North West; the Biafran secession in the South-East; militancy and cult-related conflict in the South-South; and kidnapping as well as armed robbery in the South West. All of these security challenges have made the distinctiveness of the environment to influence the demeanour of security operations; therefore, security operations could be non-combative or combative. When it is non-combative, it necessarily involves the use of intelligence to prevent any threat to human and state security. Such threats may take the form of sabotage, subversion, terrorism (radicalization, propaganda) and any other disruptive acts that could compromise national security. On the other hand, combative security operations involve the use of officers of security agencies such as the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, SSS and other devices to contain threats and conflicts that are already on the ground. Also, Nte sees security operations as those ‘deliberate operations such as intelligence gathering, cordoning, and search operations

designed to detect and combat all types of threats capable of creating insecurity within a section or sections of a country so that a secure atmosphere conducive to good governance can exist.’

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (1971) at the first session of the conference of Government, lists certain factors responsible for security operations in a country.

These include:

Internal Disturbances: These are circumstances characterized by situations in which there is no formal, non-international military conflict but where internal unrest or violence is present. These disturbances are marked by a significant level of intensity or duration and are often manifested through acts of violence or rebellion. Unlike formal conflicts, internal disturbances can take various forms, ranging from spontaneous acts of dissent or insurrection to organized confrontations between groups and the existing governmental authorities. These disturbances do not necessarily escalate into full-scale conflicts but still pose substantial challenges to internal stability. In response to such situations, the national government may be compelled to seek assistance from federal law enforcement agencies or, in more severe cases, the armed forces, with the primary objective of restoring public order and addressing the underlying causes of the unrest.

Internal Tensions: This refers to situations characterized by extreme and pervasive strains across various dimensions, including political, religious, ethnic, social, or economic spheres. These tensions can also emerge as a consequence of armed conflict or internal disturbances. Such situations often manifest in severe and systemic impacts on the population, which may include mass arrests, large-scale detentions for security reasons, and prolonged administrative detention. In some instances, these tensions can lead to allegations of ill-treatment, torture, or both physical and psychological abuse of detainees. The effects of internal tensions can be

profound, leading to a breakdown of social cohesion, exacerbation of existing conflicts, and a significant erosion of human rights.

Joint Task Force

A force is defined as a collective assembly of armed capabilities, including personnel, equipment, and organized units, designed for the execution of military or strategic objectives, while a task force is a specialized form of a force that is assembled with the explicit purpose of carrying out a particular mission or task (NATO, n.d.). As noted by Grigsby (2008), task forces are small groups of people and resources brought together to accomplish a specific objective, with the expectation that the group will disband when the objective has been completed. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (n.d.) posits that a task force as a grouping organized to carry out a specific mission or task, which is then disbanded when the task has been accomplished. This definition stresses the task force's temporary and mission-oriented nature, distinguishing it from more permanent military formations. Once the designated mission is completed, the task force is typically dissolved, and its components are either reassigned or returned to their previous operational roles. A Joint Task Force is defined as a collaborative operational unit composed of two or more military or paramilitary services, which may include branches such as the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, and the State Security Service (SSS), among others (NATO, n.d.). This integrated approach enables diverse capabilities and resources to be combined for the accomplishment of specific missions or objectives. The Joint Task Forces (JTF) concept provides flexible and efficient means to enable an alliance to generate forces in the short term, providing rapid deployment, multinational, multi-service task forces with appropriate command and control arrangements. The JTF is a deployable multinational, multi-service task force created and tailored primarily, but not exclusively, to military operations.

The Joint Task Force (JTF) is one of several command and control (C2) options for joint operations. A JTF is set up where the scope, complexity or other factors of the operation require the capabilities of the services of at least two or more institutions operating under a single Joint Force Commander (JFC). The size, composition, capabilities and other attributes vary significantly between mission-based JTFs and various operational environments (OE) factors, such as the threat, the geography of the Joint Operations Area (JOA), the nature of the crisis, and the time available to complete the mission. Typically, JTFs operate at the operational level and employ their capabilities throughout the JOA. Baginski (2007), opines that the rise of Joint Task Forces, Intelligence Operations Centres and Merger Centres has brought together experts from across the law enforcement, military, and intelligence communities, providing them with a distinctive opportunity to share tools and techniques for the prevention and elimination of any threat to national security.

Nexus Between Intelligence Gathering and Security Operations

The intelligence community holds a consensus that security is not defined by the absence of threats or challenges but by the presence of a robust, efficient, and effective system capable of proactively responding to these challenges with expediency, expertise, and real-time action (Gill, 2012). Intelligence keeps security agencies informed about events within their areas of responsibility (AOR) and determines when, where, and with what strength adversaries will stage and conduct operations that could threaten national security. Conversely, inadequate or absent intelligence undermines the ability of joint security operations to fully understand the extent of threats, preventing the development of holistic solutions and proactive engagement. Properly utilized, intelligence becomes the first line of defense. Strategic use of intelligence is crucial for the success of any joint security operation (Zamba, 2016). Intelligence support involves extensive collection, processing, and analytical capabilities pooled throughout the

intelligence process to ensure precise and timely dissemination of information. The gathering of information for joint security operations is interdependent, and the objective is achieved when supervised efficiently and effectively. Increased intelligence leads to successful security operations, while inadequate or incorrect information results in inefficient operations with adverse effects.

As Baginski (2007) asserts, the nature of contemporary threats has increasingly blurred the lines between traditional diplomatic, military, and law enforcement domains. This evolving threat landscape necessitates that all agencies of national power operate as a cohesive and integrated network to effectively address and overcome adversaries. The rise of Joint Task Forces, Intelligence Operations Centers, and Merger Centers exemplifies this approach by uniting experts from diverse fields, including police, military, paramilitary, and intelligence communities. These collaborative entities provide a unique opportunity for the sharing of tools, techniques, and intelligence necessary for national defense. According to Zamba (2016), in certain ungoverned or failed states where there is a complete absence of effective governance structures, armed bandits, drug traffickers, and terrorists exploit these environments as safe havens for their illicit activities. In these lawless regions, they exercise unchecked authority, engaging in violence, kidnapping, and other forms of criminality against innocent civilians.

The complex and challenging nature of such environments complicates joint security operations, making intelligence a critical strategic tool for combating, mitigating, and alleviating these multifaceted threats. For example, if crucial information regarding the opponent's position, strength, and capabilities is either unknown or inadequately provided, the success of the operation may come at a significantly higher cost in terms of both human lives and equipment. A pertinent illustration of this scenario is the experience of Major General Olusegun Adeniyi, the redeployed Theater Commander of Operation Lafia Dole in the North

East region of Nigeria. Major General Adeniyi publicly lamented that his efforts to neutralize terrorist threats were severely compromised due to the inadequate intelligence he received, which led to his forces being subjected to intensified and unexpected attacks. This example highlights the critical importance of accurate and comprehensive intelligence in joint operations. Consequently, there exists a reciprocal relationship between intelligence gathering, and the effectiveness of security operations. The success of security operations is deeply intertwined with the quality of intelligence available, which, in turn, shapes strategic decision-making and operational effectiveness. Effective intelligence gathering thus serves as the foundation upon which security operations build their success.

The foundation of effective intelligence gathering requires a profound and nuanced understanding of the strategic environment in which it operates. To develop and sustain intelligence capabilities, it is essential to grasp the complexities of this environment, which encompasses a wide range of factors including geopolitical dynamics, security threats, and the socio-political context. The primary objective of gathering intelligence is to accomplish missions that ultimately ensure security, defined as the absence of fear and want. Intelligence serves to provide government services with the necessary information to anticipate and prepare for various scenarios before deployment. Although the information collected may initially be raw or unprocessed, it must undergo a rigorous process of identification, analysis, and dissemination to establish basic factual understanding. This analytical process transforms raw data into actionable intelligence that can guide decision-making. Intelligence gathering and sharing are thus critical for enabling security services and policymakers to assess adversaries' goals and capabilities, detect and prevent criminal activities, defend national sovereignty, and support informed and decisive policy decisions.

The Role and Impact of Intelligence Gathering in Security Operations in Nigeria

Several security operations have been launched and are currently ongoing by Nigerian security forces to address various regional threats. Notable examples of these joint security operations include the Joint Task Force (JTF) Operation Hadin Kai (formerly Operation Lafia Dole) in the North East, aimed at combating the Boko Haram insurgency; Operation Hadarin Daji in the North West, designed to tackle banditry and criminal activities; Operation Delta Safe in the Niger Delta, which focuses on addressing militant unrest and oil theft; Operation Safe Haven in the North Central which seeks to maintain peace and security in Plateau State; Operation Flushout III in Rivers State, targeting criminal gangs and violent crime; and Operation Python Dance I and II in the South East, aimed at curbing secessionist movements and violent extremism; to mention a few, which seeks to resolve disputes and maintain peace in the region. These diverse operations reflect the Nigerian government's commitment to tackling regional security challenges through coordinated, multi-agency efforts.

Case Study One: Joint Task Force Operation Delta Safe

Operation Delta Safe was launched in the Niger Delta on the 24th of June 2016, replacing Operation Pulo Shield. Its objective is to improve security in the region, secure oil facilities, and crush militancy and pipeline vandalism. The Force's Joint Operations Area (JOA) includes the Niger Delta states of Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers, as well as the southern portions of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Imo, and Ondo. It is a joint operation that involves mainly men and officers from the Nigerian Armed Forces and other security agencies such as the Department of State Security, the Nigerian Police and the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps. The Joint Task Force carries out its operation using accessible theatre platforms, including vehicles, boats and aircraft (Agim, 2018). Since its establishment, the Joint Task Force, specifically through Operation Delta Safe, has made significant coordinated efforts utilizing intelligence

gathering to address the security threats posed by militant camps in the Niger Delta region. This joint security operation was launched to tackle the complex and multifaceted security challenges in the area, and it has made several modest yet notable strides toward fulfilling its mandate.

As Agim (2018) notes, Operation Delta Safe has achieved a range of significant outcomes that reflect its effectiveness in addressing security concerns in the Niger Delta region. Among its accomplishments is the enhancement of the safety of lives in the Niger Delta, leading to a substantial reduction in violence and criminal activities that previously plagued the region. The operation has also facilitated a rise in crude oil production by addressing the threats posed by illegal oil activities and ensuring the protection of critical oil infrastructure. This improvement in oil production has been a direct result of the operation's efforts to dismantle illegal refineries and their associated equipment, thereby curbing the illegal oil trade and its detrimental impacts on the Nigerian economy and environment of the Niger Delta. The operation has also achieved success in the recovery of arms and ammunition from illegal holders, which has contributed to reducing the availability of weapons for criminal enterprises.

The seizure and impoundment of illegal refineries and related equipment have been significant achievements in dismantling the illegal oil trade infrastructure. Between the 4th of May and the 17th of May, 2024, the Joint Task Force, utilizing comprehensive intelligence reports, undertook a series of coordinated operations that resulted in the destruction of 38 illegal oil refining sites and the apprehension of 29 suspected individuals involved in oil theft activities. These significant achievements, as reported by the News Agency of Nigeria (2024), highlight the effectiveness of intelligence-driven strategies in combating illegal oil operations and reinforcing national security efforts in the Niger Delta region. Additionally, on June 2nd and June 3th, 2023, the air component of the Joint Task Force acting on actionable intelligence as

reported by the News Agency of Nigeria (2023) conducted a series of strategic air reconnaissance and air interdiction operations across the Niger Delta region. During these targeted operations, the air component identified and bombarded multiple illegal oil refining sites. The successful execution of these air strikes led to the complete destruction of the illegal refineries, and the resulting explosions caused the illegally refined oil products and associated equipment to be consumed by flames. These operations not only dismantled significant components of the illegal oil trade infrastructure but also underscored the vital role of air power in addressing and mitigating illegal refining activities. In 2024, the Joint Task Force Operation Delta Safe (OPDS) undertook a major operation that resulted in the destruction of more than 40 illegal oil refining sites situated in the Ukwa Forest of the Ukwa West Local Government Area in Abia State. This successful operation was a part of the broader mandate of OPDS to combat illegal oil activities in the Niger Delta region. The destruction of these illegal refineries was a strategic effort to dismantle the infrastructure supporting illicit oil extraction and to curb environmental degradation caused by illegal refining practices (News Agency of Nigeria, 2024).

Case Study Two: Joint Task Force (JTF) on Cattle Rustling in Niger State

On the 9th of July 2015, the Joint Task Force, consisting of officers and personnel from the Nigerian Army, police and SSS operatives, as well as the state vigilante group, was launched to address the threats of armed banditry and cattle rustling along its borders with neighbouring states. The operation recorded so many successes, some of which led to the arrest and killing of high ranking members of the criminal cartel. The Joint Security Operation, with the help of human intelligence, was able to arrest many suspected cattle rustlers and recovered several arms and ammunition as well as hundreds of cattle.

The operation confronted several challenges some of which includes the difficult terrain of the vastness of the forest; tension among the locals of the affected local governments who were frightened over the activities of the bandits trying to resettle close to their localities arising from the intense heat they received from the security forces. Furthermore, the residents were scared that some residents have been compromised and recruited by the armed bandits and cattle rustlers to act as spy and informant for them.

Also is the porous nature of the border community, which was unmanned, thus leading to the proliferation of arms and giving the bandits entry from several directions. Strategic intelligence gathering to uncover the types of weapons, routes and locations used as hideouts by the criminal gangs in the forest were carried out and then passed to the commander of the operation who executed it. In a nutshell, intelligence gathering through surveillance, monitoring, patrols, and effective liaison with the local community and the State Government made the joint operation a success.

A reflection on the operations in both case studies highlights a couple of issues. Government for all intent and purposes is and has always been desirous of managing internal security operations with its thrust on a joint operation in managing challenges. These reasons would appear obvious. First, this would go a long way in minimizing the use of resources and cost. Secondly, it would effectively bring the capacity of each participating agency to bear on operations. A cursory look at the two case studies will show that the ideals of government may not have yielded enough success as to minimize security challenges. It does bring to question and the need to which this study has also attempted on the true jointness of the operations and the extent to which intelligence has been used or employed in leading the operations. It is clear that intelligence generation and use in a joint operation is an absolute necessity.

Conclusion

Intelligence is a significant component in the success of all human endeavours, whether in occupational, administration or joint operation. Intelligence is vital for guiding operations in a complex military operation and dominating ungoverned spaces. If the intelligence is accurate and apt; the chances are that the operation will succeed. Across the globe, intelligence and security agencies have been caught up in non-collaboration and even competition, thus weakening national security and policy formulation. In Nigeria, this problem exists in virtually all joint security operations. This evident aberration is responsible for the massive intelligence failure and the triumph of terrorist attacks. The study's specific goal was to assess critically intelligence gathering and how it could support security operations in Nigeria. The study concluded that all joint security operations, no matter the scale and time frame, require adequate intelligence for proper execution

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