

Civil-Military Relationship and the Fight Against Security Challenges in Nigeria

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Abstract

Civil-military relationships in a democratic state like Nigeria describe a situation where the military establishment is obedient to the civil establishment and cooperates. The military is seen as one of the cornerstones of democracy in the sense that a well-disciplined, trained, and equipped military will not only defend the country against external aggression but will also help protect and uphold internal democratic norms while still differing from elected or appointed civilian authority whose fundamental function is the protection of lives and properties of the people as contained in the social contract. Unfortunately, this was not the case six years after Nigeria became independent or, better put, three years after she became a republic when the military truncated a civilian government and, as it turned out, obstructed the consolidation of democratic governance. Thirty years later and more, different military generals and junior officers continue to take over- power from either a military head or a civilian head of state. This has since given the military a strong influence on the emergence of political leadership, even though Nigeria is proud of experiencing twenty-four years of uninterrupted civilian leadership. This Paper examines the synergy between the Nigerian civilian administration and the military establishment in their attempt to address the rising security challenges caused by the wanton killing of people and destruction of properties all over the country, which is being allowed to fester with no end in sight. The study is exploratory and documentary, with a qualitative descriptive method used in analyzing textual data. Anchoring our discourse on the Agency theory of civil-military relations, findings revealed that the military's inability to address the rising insecurity in Nigeria results from the poor relationship between the military and the civilian leadership. The duo has been enmeshed in corruption, nepotism, ethnic politics, and religious fundamentalism. The Paper recommends the emergence of a robust civil-political leadership that is transparent and accountable to the Nigerian people and dares to direct the military on the most appropriate measures to address Nigeria's rising security challenges.

Background to the Study

The military is geared towards defending the state against internal and external threats. The necessity for maintaining harmony in society has led to the creation of a military institution (Gerassimos, 1998). Also, it is seen as one of the cornerstones of democracy in the sense that a well-disciplined, trained, and equipped military will not only defend the country against external aggression but will also help protect and uphold internal democratic norms while still differing from elected or appointed civilian authority whose fundamental function as an agent of the state is the protection of lives and properties of the people as contained in the social contract. Globally, military power has significantly declined, with the military increasingly taking a secondary position to civilian control or governance. However, it's important to note that this decrease in military influence is mainly evident in model democratic societies where democratic ideals are firmly established. (Ayeni, Uzoigwe, Sani & Dubu, 2019). Civil-military relationships are crucial for cultivating mutual respect, trust, and better communication among the people, not only during times of war but also in periods of peace, thereby strengthening their democratic rights. To achieve these, it is necessary to undo the advantages previously enjoyed by the military during military or autocratic rule (Adhima, 2016). However, stripping the military of its former privileges and asserting and executing control over the armed forces pose a formidable challenge for budding democracies. Civil-military relationships in a democratic state like Nigeria describe a situation where the military establishment is obedient by accepting subordination to elected civilian authorities. But shortly after independence, Nigeria's civilian government was truncated by the military, and as it turned out, obstructed the consolidation of democratic governance and has since maintained a strong influence on the emergence of political leadership even after the country has transited into a civilian democracy. Since the return to civilian government in 1999, the security conditions in the country have deteriorated significantly. Barely a day goes by without the media covering one crisis or another. These crises range from terrorist incidents, conflicts between local farmers and cattle herders, youth militancy, kidnappings, armed banditry, and cattle rustling to the slaying of innocent Nigerians in herders' attacks. The constant ethno-religious conflicts have also added to the severe menaces to the stability and peace of Nigeria.

Regrettably, the frequent engagement of the armed forces in most internal civilian security crises has gradually become a standard practice in Nigeria. The presence of soldiers has grown to be a regular facet of the day-to-day lives of Nigerian citizens. This climate of fear further exacerbates tensions and intensifies mistrust between civilians and the military. It also poses significant challenges for security personnel in the region and throughout Nigeria (Olofin, 2019).

Conceptual Clarification

Civil-Military Relations

As with any concept in social science, the definition of civil-military relations is subject to interpretation by different scholars. It's about interactions between civilian leaders and high-ranking military officials and includes the general population. A sound civil-

military relationship is crucial for the stability of democratic systems. In contrast, a strained relationship can lead to either a weakened military or one that poses a threat to the very citizens it's meant to protect (Tapia, 2016; Abdullahi & Olofin, 2019). Civil-military relations now extend beyond just warfare to encompass nation-building. Wogu and Ibietan (2014) asserted that civil-military relations connote the rapport involving the entirety of civil society and the military establishments instituted for its protection. Civil-military relations cover many connections that inculcate different state security participants and non-state actors within society. According to the National Defence Policy (2006), Civil-military relations refer to the power dynamics involving the military, NASS, and the Executives with the principles of civilian supremacy in the military. The NDP emphasizes civilian control over the military in a democratic society. According to Fayemi (2006:1), 'civil-military relations could be regarded as a multifaceted political process that goes beyond the mere removal of the military from political power and addressing the underlying causes of militarism in society' (Abdullahi & Olofin, 2019).

The theory of civil-military relations emphasizes the significance of professionalism within the military, a concept supported by researchers including Huntington, Janowitz, and Feaver (Arjana, 2002; Feaver, 1996). According to Huntington (1957), professionalism distinguishes modern military officers from warriors of the past (Arjana, 2002). The principles that underpin these connections involving civil military in our nation, Nigeria, as stated in the NDP and referenced by Abdullahi and Olofin (2019), encompass the following:

- i. The Constitution's Supremacy
- ii. The Imperativeness of Democracy
- iii. Military's Civil control
- iv. The professionalism of the Military

Insecurity

Robert-Okah (2014), posits that insecurity is characterized by the existence or fear of harm to life and property and an unfavorable environment for people to follow their genuine interests. It encapsulates the presence or fear of threats to or direct disruption of security. This encompasses threats to an individual's safety, state, and environmental security. Beland (2005) describes insecurity as fear resulting from an actual or perceived absence of protection, that is, an absence or insufficiency of safety from harm. These definitions portray physical insecurity, mostly the apparent form of insecurity, and contribute to other types, such as social and economic insecurities. Despite the grave and pressing internal security challenges, it is disheartening that Nigeria has yet to formulate a reliable security policy. Onoja (2014) suggests that insecurity is the relative sensation of the presence of economic, political, social, cultural, and psychological fear. Adagbabiri and Okolie (2018) list several common descriptors of insecurity, including uncertainty, lack of confidence, insecurity, risk, lack of adequate protection, instability, danger, distress, absence of security, safety, and unsafety. Different individuals have used various methods to define the concept of insecurity. However, despite the differences in terminology, they all share a common understanding that insecurity refers to a state of being exposed to potential harm, including the risk of loss of life, property, or livelihood.

Civil-Military Relations in a Democracy

Democracies operate through systematic processes of assignment, representation, and accountability. The general populace assigns a certain level of decision-making power to their elected officials and holds these representatives accountable in future elections. Therefore, the public acts as the principal, selecting representatives as their agents in delivering effective governance. These elected officials, in turn, assign a portion of their authority to other groups to carry out specific tasks. For instance, the military is the group responsible for ensuring national security. In this secondary delegation level, the elected government acts as the principal, while the military serves as the agent. This two-tiered delegation among the public, the elected government, and the military sets boundaries of actions and accountability for each entity. The elected government, which is accountable to the public through voting, has the responsibility to devise policy and make decisions regarding the application of force in the nation's interest (Donnithorne, 2013). Answerable to their civilian overseers, the military must provide reliable military counsel, evaluate risks, and implement policy, including using force and risking lives when instructed. The differentiation between these roles and obligations carries ethical implications. As Feaver, cited in Donnithorne (2013), suggests, "the military can delineate the threat posed by a specific enemy in considerable detail, but only the civilian can decide whether to feel threatened and, if so, how or even whether to react. The military gauges the risk; the civilian evaluate it." Indeed, the military might strongly disagree with a chosen strategy, potentially offering sound political insight into its opposing advice (Donnithorne, 2013).

The Military Establishment/Organisation

The military is one of the state's institutions tasked with safeguarding the state's territorial integrity against external aggression. The development of the centralized nation-state offered a primary justification for maintaining a standing army. The structure of the military involves policies that define its mission, roles, and overall structure – decisions related to training, logistics, procurement of equipment, and managing and promoting military personnel (Croissant, Kuehn & Lorenz, 2012). Like other state institutions, the military serves as a tool through which states pursue their aims and objectives. The military, established by order or decree with the primary purpose of winning wars, has certain unique organizational features that set it apart. These characteristics include (1) discipline, (2) internal communication, (3) centralized command, (4) hierarchy, and (5) esprit de corps, which correspond to a certain level of isolation and self-sufficiency. The organization is vital to adequately performing military functions (Ojo, 2014). The military profession is dedicated to serving the state, and its structure is built on a hierarchy of obedience. Each tier within this hierarchy relies on immediate and unwavering obedience from the levels below it. Without this obedience, military professionalism cannot exist; it's the foundational virtue upon which all other military virtues are built (Huntington, 1957, p.73). A professional military officer is profoundly committed to national service (Huntington, 1957, p.35; Arjana, 2002). While it's essential for the military to maintain a certain level of autonomy to accomplish its mission, civilian control necessitates the ability of civilians to set its scope and limitations. In this context, the ultimate measure of

civilian control is the degree to which civilians can determine and uphold the boundaries of the military's self-regulation and who has the final say in disputes between civilians and officers (Croissant, Kuehn & Lorenz, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The Agency theory of Civil-Military Relations

The basis of our discussion depends on the Agency theory of civil-military relations, which was introduced in the 1970s by various scholars, including Mitnick (1973) and Jensen & Meckling (1976). Feaver (2003) adapted and refined the Agency theory in his book "Armed Servants," portraying civil-military connections as a fundamental agent of relationship, where civilian authorities oversee the activities of their military agents, the armed servants of the nation-state. The basic idea of the theory suggests that civil-military relations consist of a set of strategic interactions between civilian leaders, who act as the principals, and their military subordinates, who serve as the agents. The theory is based on several key assumptions.

1. The military will avoid their responsibilities as long as they are not subject to oversight by the civilian authorities (principal)
2. The military's performance improves when the military's objectives are in consonant with that of the civilian population.
3. The military can still function effectively even without constant monitoring if there is a strong expectation of punishment for misconduct or negligence. (Feaver, 2003).

The Relevance of Agency Theory to the Study

In every part of the world, a relationship inevitably exists that connects the military leadership - the body tasked with the nation's protection of civilians to civil leadership. These groups, as leaders and followers, are connected and interact in ways that fulfill societal needs. The establishment of the military is a response to the security needs of a community, society, nation, or country to defend against potential external threats, similar to the expected harmonious relationship between an organization's leaders or owners and its employees. The interaction between civilian authorities and the military should also be marked by understanding and cooperation to maintain societal peace. This is where the Armed-servant relationship comes to stay. In modern-day Nigeria, the military's expanded role has led to the civilian authorities offering various welfare packages as incentives for optimal performance. As a result, the military, now shouldering increased duties such as maintaining internal security in a democratic society like Nigeria, must foster a positive relationship with civilian superiors or principals, as applicable. The Agent theory helps to expose how the nature and character of the civil-military relationship is supposed to be. It defines the structure and boundaries of the relationship - the military as Armed servants of the civilian leaders. Regardless of the high-end role of the military, their subordination to civil rule must mark the relationship.

Civilian Control of the Military and Civil-Military Relations in Nigeria

The rationale behind advocating for the armed forces' subservience to civilian authority lies in recognizing the military as an integral part of the state and a crucial instrument of state procedure. Accordingly, the military should function as an instrument under the direction and control of political authorities vested with the constitutional power to decide its usage. Attaining civilian control over the military can be reached through several methods, such as keeping the military distinct from politics and ensuring it remains subordinate to civilian leaders who are directly answerable to the populace or a representative entity. Secondly, although the military should offer counsel and carry out defense policy, formulating such policy should be exclusively the responsibility of civilian authority. Thirdly, it is crucial to maintain strict political neutrality within the military to ensure loyalty to the government in power, regardless of the ruling political party.

State institutions' legislative, executive, and judicial sectors supply the military with the required resources, policies, legislation, and supervision to maintain a proficient armed force. Conversely, the military is assigned to shield the state and its inhabitants from foreign and domestic threats. This bestows upon the military the exclusive privilege to apply force in defending the state and its citizenry. Although civil society functions autonomously, it frequently partners with domestic and global organizations to make sure that the military executes its responsibilities in a responsible, accountable, and professional way. Furthermore, civil society provides the military with information and assistance to attain national security goals. These interactions span all aspects of the polity (Onuoha & Okafor, 2019). Until 1999, the military in Nigeria was deeply involved in ethnic, institutional, and constitutional politics on a regional scale. Efforts have been initiated to professionalize the army and instill the importance of submission to civilian authority to enhance its efficiency and give it a non-partisan national identity (Babatunde, 2015). As per the Nigerian Constitution of 1999, section 217(2c) specifies that a primary duty of the Nigerian armed forces is "quelling insurrections and assisting civil authorities in reestablishing order when the president requests it, but subject to conditions prescribed by a National Assembly act." Section 218(1) emphasizes the President possesses supreme constitutional authority above the military, granting them the power to determine how the Nigerian Armed Forces are operationally deployed. Considering these constitutional powers, former president Olusegun Obasanjo took two significant measures to rectify the damage caused by previous military regimes: firstly, he mandated the retirement of all officers of the military who have held political appointments between 1984 and 1999; secondly, he initiated trials for several high-ranking military officers (Babatunde, 2015).

The decision to expel former military officers with political roles was based on the belief that those who had served under previous military regimes might not adapt well to a non-political military life, potentially undermining the re-professionalization efforts under civilian leadership. These measures may have been strong initial steps to establish civilian control and further professionalize the armed forces, but they aren't enough to

prevent future military-political interference. The most effective deterrent to military interventions in politics is believed to be transparent governance that is genuinely oriented towards the well-being of the people (Babatunde, 2015). The hierarchy within the military establishment in Nigeria is clearly outlined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Accordingly, Section 130(2) of Chapter VI, Part 1(a) of the Nigerian Constitution (1999) states that the President serves as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federation, Chief Executive of the Federation, and Head of State. This constitutional provision establishes the principle of civilian authority over the military (Ayeni et al., 2019). The President, or their representatives, assumes the role of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, indicating the superior authority of the civilian leadership over the military. The Constitution of Nigeria provides a strong backup on the duty of the military within a democratic system. As outlined in the 1999 Constitution, Nigeria is committed to maintaining a capable military that defends the nation against external threats, preserves territorial integrity, secures borders, suppresses insurrections, and assists civil authorities in restoring order as directed by the President, subject to the conditions set by the National Assembly (Onuoha & Okafor, 2019).

Various Security Challenges Faced in Nigeria

Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers Conflict

In the North Central region, specifically in Plateau State, there is a significant issue of insecurity. The conflict between the Hausa-Fulani and Birom communities has resulted in numerous casualties. Similarly, in Benue State, Governor Samuel Ortom has faced considerable challenges due to the ongoing conflict between Fulani herders and residents, leading to the loss of lives and the displacement of several villages. These devastating clashes, fueled by unresolved land disputes, climate change, religious and ethnic divisions, and a lack of understanding, have caused extensive damage to properties and livestock and have resulted in internal displacement, food insecurity, and widespread violence. These incidents can be characterized as large-scale civil unrest, riots, and mass killings driven by religious and ethnic differences.

Terrorism/Religious Extremism

Nigeria's North-Eastern region has experienced significant security challenges, primarily due to the presence of the notorious Boko Haram terrorist group. Among these national security issues, the insurgency in the North-East caused by Boko Haram is particularly alarming. The conflict began following the public execution of Boko Haram's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, by the police in Maiduguri. Since 2012, under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram has launched a violent campaign. Former Governor of Borno State Kashim Shettima has estimated that the conflict has led to the death of approximately 100,000 individuals and the displacement of two million people. Furthermore, the regional economy has suffered a devastating impact as a consequence of the conflict.

Ethno-Religious Crises

Severe inter-group conflicts in Nigeria have largely taken the form of ethno-religious clashes. These have primarily been concentrated in the Middle-Belt region and the

cultural frontiers of the Muslim north, where there have been confrontations between Muslim Hausa-Fulani groups and non-Muslim ethnic communities. The complexities of these clashes lie at the crossroads of religious and ethnic tensions, often blurring the lines between the two due to their profoundly interconnected nature (International IDEA, 2000; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). Some of the most significant instances of these violent ethno-religious confrontations in Nigeria encompass the conflicts in Tafawa Balewa in 1991, 1995, and 2000, the Zangon-Kataf riots in 1992, the Kafanchan-Kaduna crises in 1987 and 1999 and the Kaduna Sharia disturbances in 2000, and the Jos upheavals in 2001.

Niger Delta's Militancy

The Niger Delta region, despite being the source of Nigeria's wealth, unfortunately, suffers from a paradoxical situation of poverty amidst abundant resources. This has led to growing discontent and frustration among marginalized youths, ultimately giving rise to various militant groups that have resorted to acts such as kidnapping and bombing of oil installations. Nwagboso (2012) noted that the government, especially during the period of the military regime, failed to resolve the underlying issues of the protest in the Niger Delta region, which include environmental problems, poverty, unemployment, and lack of basic amenities. As a consequence, ethnic militias of Niger Delta origin emerged, resulting in the widespread militarization of the region. These developments have triggered security crises that the Federal government has been striving to bring under control.

Secessionist Movement

Following President Buhari's assumption of power, a significant surge in separatist movements has been observed, with particular attention given to the pro-Biafran movement spearheaded by the IPOB under the leadership of Nnamdi Kanu. The secessionist actions of IPOB pose a substantial threat to national unity. This time, the battle revolves around those supporting the idea of Biafran sovereignty. These agitations have resulted in security crises in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. The resurgence of these movements can be attributed to a perceived sense of marginalization and imbalanced development under President Buhari's administration.

Challenges of Civil-Military Leadership in Addressing the Security Challenges in Nigeria

Weak Parliamentary Oversight of the Military

The parliamentary lapse of the National Assembly has failed to monitor and enforce adherence to laws by governmental bodies, contributing to the principles of good governance (Aluko, 2015). The National Assembly (NASS) is instrumental in democratization and upholding civilian supremacy over the military. The 1999 constitution, in Section 218, empowers the National Assembly to exert substantial and active supervision over the military. The Constitution bestows extensive obligations and powers on them to oversee military matters. As highlighted in Part 1 of the second schedule, the NASS possesses legislative authority over defense, procurement of arms, ammunition, explosives, and the different military branches (Army, Navy, Air Force) and

related matters. As per Ukase (2014), this section essentially links the subsistence of the military to the NASS, as it can legislate on their very existence. Furthermore, the NASS can influence the military's capabilities by legislating resource allocation for defense (Adhima, 2016). The Assembly's duty in approving the national budget further emphasizes its authority and supervisory role over the armed forces.

The Nigerian parliament has struggled to establish effective and efficient influence over the military in the Fourth Republic despite the extensive powers granted to it by the Constitution. This can be partially ascribed to the legislature's initial condition from the onset of the Fourth Republic. As the country transitioned to civilian governance, the initial legislators were inadequately equipped to carry out their responsibilities in the first National Assembly. The prolonged military rule and the rushed nature of the transition process created significant institutional deficiencies in parliament (Lewis, 2009). Many elected legislators were inexperienced in politics, lacking the necessary skills and knowledge. The expedited timeline for party registration, candidate selection, and political recruitment limited the opportunity to attract qualified individuals and develop ample policy frameworks to help direct the legislative agenda. Additionally, the first National Assembly was bequeathed a difficult fiscal circumstance, with scarce resources to outfit and staff the legislature. Consequently, members functioned with a bare-bones support staff and had restricted access to documents, computers, and library assets (Lewis, 2009; Adhima, 2016).

Tension between the Military and Civil Society

While the military has achieved some progress in its efforts to counter insurgency, including the recapture of previously held territory and the liberation of hostages, its use of kinetic methods has raised significant concerns regarding the protection of civilians. This has led to tensions involving civil society and the military, particularly regarding matters related to civilian casualties and human rights abuses. Although the table below does not provide an exhaustive list, it presents examples of instances where issues have arisen between civil society and the military (Onuoha & Okafor, 2019).

Weak Communication between the Military and the Civil Populace

The persistent belief among the populace that the military operates beyond civilian control contributes to a misunderstanding between civilians and the military. This issue has its roots in the era of military rule, with the military still grappling with total submission to civilian authority (Ukase, 2014). A distinct lack of trust and collaboration, crucial for robust civil-military relations in Nigeria, is evident. Despite the military's respected status due to its rigorous training, discipline, and function in national defense, open dialogue between civilians and military personnel continues to be challenging (Olofin, 2019).

Civil-Military Relations Desks in the Military Remain Highly Centralized

Nigeria's security apparatus is predominantly concentrated in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, complicating effective civil-military interactions at the state level. The

necessity for orders from the central command and the absence of well-established civil-military units or desks for community interaction compounds this problem. The vertical organization of security institutions, including the military, hampers the efficacy of civil society initiatives in civil-military relationships, especially at the state level (Olofin, 2019).

Lack of Effective and Proactive Political Leadership

The lack of effective political leadership has been a significant contributing factor to the challenges faced by the military. Despite the constitutional provision that designates the President as the commander-in-chief, some Nigerian leaders in the current democratic era have not fully embraced this responsibility. Their limited understanding of military affairs and the failure to convene regular National Security Council (NSC) and the National Defence Council (NDC) meetings have deprived them of valuable advice and support. Additionally, as the federal parliament, the National Assembly has not effectively fulfilled its role in overseeing national security. In the early years of democratic rule, many legislators lacked awareness of their fundamental responsibilities in law-making, budget allocation, and oversight. Capacity-building efforts have been slow, resulting in limited effectiveness in holding the armed forces accountable. Following a court ruling, it was only in 2013 that parliament became aware of its constitutional obligation to scrutinize nominees for security chief positions (Adhima, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study underscores the value and irreplaceability of a subordinate civil-military relationship in Nigeria. A relationship that should not only be cordial but constitutional and professional. It's critical to underscore that the military is essential in sustaining democracy. As such, it should actively collaborate with civilian authorities while adhering to the rule of law, transparency, and accountability. The military's principal duty is to safeguard the populace and the state, and it must display the utmost level of professionalism in fulfilling this role. However, the current situation in Nigeria shows limited engagement involving civilians and the military, emphasizing the necessity for increased military accountability. The parliament's oversight of the military remains ambiguous, and the military's participation in business activities lacks transparency and comes with various complications.

Thus, the Paper recommends the emergence of a robust civil-military leadership where the military realizes its subordination to the civilian government that is transparent and accountable to the Nigerian people. A leadership that dares to direct the military on the most appropriate measures to take and the Armed servant role they must live out as they address the rising security matters bedeviling the nation. The lack of cooperation, inter-agency rivalry, and superiority have hindered the Nigerian security architecture from effectively gathering and sharing intelligence, which is crucial for preventing conflicts. The security challenges faced across different regions of the country demand a coordinated approach involving the cooperation and collaboration of civilian and military leadership. All parties need to work together to address these crises. While carrying out their duty, the military is encouraged to adhere strictly to the Constitution,

professionalism, and rules of engagement. Finally, the military must allow itself to be subordinated to effective civilian control in order to cure her of some of her excesses.

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