

# **FRIENDS OR FRENEMIES? ASSESSING THE UNITED STATES RESPONSES TO NIGERIA'S QUEST FOR ANTI-TERRORISM SUPPORT**

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## **Abstract**

Notwithstanding decades-long strains and stresses in their relations, Nigeria is one of the foremost African partners of the United States and a major recipient of American aid in Africa. Both countries have traditionally maintained very robust bilateral relations since the former's political independence in 1960, especially given their economic ties. Until recently, their economic ties have been very robust, thanks to Nigeria's sweet crude that the United States largely needed for decades. However, this study examines how the generally cordial bilateral relations between the two countries have not necessarily translated to effective security and anti-terrorism cooperation. Nigeria has consistently focused on the United States for anti-terrorism support, albeit with limited responses from the latter. In this regard, the study utilised both primary and secondary sources to investigate the puzzling inconsistencies in the anti-terrorism cooperation between these supposed allies. Thus, the study revealed that since both countries have a common interest in combating terrorism, a conventional realist approach can help us put in the proper perspective some understandable strategic reasons for their somewhat difficult anti-terrorism cooperation. The study concludes that as much as Nigeria desires American support, the dynamics of their anti-terrorism cooperation will not likely change for as long as the United States does not consider combating terrorism in Nigeria to be strategic to its Homeland Security.

**Keywords:** Anti-terrorism, Bilateral Cooperation; Nigeria; terrorism; United States.

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## Introduction

Nigerian history had been punctuated with myriads of political violence, civil war, ethnoreligious conflicts, military dictatorships, and terrorism. While terrorism only became a monumental national security concern in 2009, it is important to note that different political actors, including the state itself, have used violence to pursue their goals in the past. For instance, the military rule largely involved brute force and violence, such as the 1995 extrajudicial killings of the Niger-Delta environmentalists. Thus, for a complex mix of reasons, including governance deficits, corruption, and predatory elite rule, several non-state actors have sprung up with violent activities, including Boko Haram terrorism. Boko Haram had reportedly caused over 40,000 deaths between May 29, 2011, and April 12, 2021 (Campbell, 2021a). Terrorism has caused unprecedented 2.5 million internal displacements and led 7 million citizens into existential threats and humanitarian crises (Humanitarian Country Team, 2018). The deadliness of Boko Haram has since made it the world's most dangerous terror group and made Nigeria the third most terrorised country globally for many years (Institute for Peace & Economics, 2019; Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020, pp. 18-28).

Given that Nigerian defence and security forces were originally configured for conventional national security challenges (Nigerian Army Colonel, personal communication, October 22, 2019), there has been poor handling of terrorism. However, the country had developed series of legal and operational frameworks for its anti-terrorism efforts, such as the Terrorism Prevention Act (2013), National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2016), and Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in 2017, in addition to several military operations from 2009 to date. In late 2015, the Nigerian authorities claimed to have 'technically defeated' the terror group. In contrast, the terrorism trajectory had continued to grow in terms of the terror groups' operational prowess, organisational basing, political ties, and armed hostilities (Owojori et al., 2020, pp.6-10).

However, Nigeria's focus on the United States (U.S.) in seeking foreign assistance is what this study investigates. Thus, the study uses both primary sources (semi-structured interviews) and secondary sources to explain the dynamics of this cooperation. Theoretically, the realist approach is adopted to analyse why the expected cooperation between the two states has not materialized, arising from state interests, strategic and military interests, power politics, and self-interest. Otherwise, how could we understand the policy of a country known globally as the 'Czar' of the global war on terrorism not to put the full weight of its anti-terrorism prowess behind Nigeria?

The rest of this article is divided into five sections. The first section discusses Nigeria's anti-terrorism efforts, while the second section evaluates the methodology of Nigeria's quest for foreign assistance that has largely focused on the U.S. The third section examines the dynamics and trajectories of American responses to Nigeria's request for anti-terrorism cooperation, while the fourth section evaluates the realist-influenced American anti-terrorism support for Nigeria. Lastly, the fifth section evaluates the implications of Nigeria-US anti-terrorism relations.

### **Nigeria's Domestic Anti-Terrorism Situation: Issues and Challenges**

Nigeria has struggled for over a decade to combat violent extremism and terrorism orchestrated by the dreaded Boko Haram group and its break-away faction that has come to be known as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Nigeria's anti-terrorism activities had largely involved military operations and, to a limited extent, some soft approaches such as the de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes, the high point of Operation Safe Corridor. However, by default, Nigeria's CT frameworks and programmes have been complicated and mostly ineffective because of poor organisational and operational structure (Onapajo, 2017). Since 2009, when Boko Haram resurfaced with fiercer deadliness, Nigeria has launched five large-scale military operations against

the terrorists: Operation Flush (2009), Operations Restore Order (2011), Operation BOYONA (May 2013), Operation Zamani Lafiya (August 2013), and Operation Lafiya Dole (2015) (Owojori et al., 2020, pp.3-6).

The militaristic anti-terrorism operations in Nigeria have equally involved two unconventional practices. First is the enlistment of local volunteers, the famous Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), into the anti-terrorism operations. Second is the engagement of the South African private defence forces- Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment, and Protection (STTEP). The CJTF was reputed for deterring terrorist attacks in the Northeast, given their internal communal mechanism (Dulin & Patino, 2019, p. 4) and serving as de-facto intelligence apparatus in the operations (Kazir, 2017, p. 2). Also, the STTEP reportedly facilitated the dislodgement of the terrorists from the large swaths of territories in the North-East in early 2015, which was the only significant and undeniable strategic anti-terrorism achievement of Nigeria (M. Page, personal communication, October 29, 2019). Nigeria has also formed an alliance with its West and Central African neighbours of Benin, Chad, Niger, Cameroon under the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). As Brechenmacher (2019) noted, notwithstanding the lingering challenges with the MNJTF arrangement, its operations have recorded gains and security improvement in parts of north-eastern Nigeria.

Nigeria's soft approach had included dialogue and transitional justice efforts, which began in August 2011 when the government inaugurated a Presidential Committee, while another Dialogue Committee was inaugurated on April 24, 2013 (Agwu, 2016, p. 309). Also, the transitional justice efforts had manifested in the country's de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes meant for civilising repentant Boko Haram terrorists. The most significant of these programmes is the Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC), an integral part of Operation Lafiya Dole. Effectively, hundreds of former combatants have passed through the programmes, and roughly 2000 are currently undergoing courses

(Lawal & Adam, 2020). Unfortunately, many Nigerians see OPSC as a safe landing for the terrorists and would rather want justice done before forgiving the terrorists (Adibe, 2020). Nigeria had also attempted to address the underlying socio-economic problems in the northeast region, leading to the North-East Development Commission (NEDC) in 2017 (Keigbe, 2018). NEDC, however, is a culmination of many other previous programmes such as the 2015 Presidential Initiative, the 2016 Presidential Committee on the North-East Initiative (PCNI), the Victims Support Fund (VSF), all of which championed humanitarian programmes in the terrorism affected communities of Nigeria (Gado & Sanusi, 2019; Tukur, 2019; Victims Support Fund, 2019).

However, the underlining anti-terrorism pitfalls in Nigeria include the country's poorly modernised military, corruption, sabotage within the military, the politicisation of terrorism issues, and lack of national unity (Agwu, 2016, pp. 489,501, 930; Owojori et al., 2020b). The poor standing of the Nigerian military is such that "the country began counter-Boko Haram military operations by deploying the same materiel it used during the peacekeeping operations in Liberia" (Nigerian Army Colonel, personal communication, October 20, 2019). The poor force configuration could similarly be seen in the early 2020 lamentation of Major-General Segun Adeniyi, former Theatre Commander of Operation Lafiya Dole, who announced to the nation that there were shortfalls in Nigeria's military capacity as against the superior firepower of the terrorists (Haruna, 2020). The incapacitation was so much that as Nigerian forces continued to lack critically needed materiel, the terrorists owned mortar bombs, RPGs, Gun Trucks, etc. (Ibid). These are obvious indications that Nigerian anti-terrorism efforts have been unsuccessful in approaches and outcomes, explaining the country's obsession with foreign assistance-seeking.

### **The Foreign Anti-Terrorism Assistance Requests: Why Has Nigeria Focused on the United States?**

Arising from anti-terrorism pitfalls exemplified by the continued

growth in terrorism trajectories in Nigeria since 2009, Nigeria has consistently looked outward and sought foreign supports, particularly from the U.S. The question is: Why has Nigeria particularly focused on the U.S. for its foreign anti-terrorism cooperation quest? Perhaps the answer lies in their generally cordial relationship. Foremost in their bilateral relations is the robustness of their economic relations, in which Nigeria has been a country with which the U.S. has maintained the most significant ties in Africa, the largest African trading partner, and third-largest recipient of American foreign direct investment in Africa (Blanchard, 2014, p. 16). Similarly, Nigeria enjoys a preferential trade benefit under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of the U.S. (U.S. Department of State, 2018). And thanks to its crude oil supplies to the U.S., Nigeria has mostly had a favourable balance of payment in its trade relations with the U.S. In 2018, the U.S. goods and services trade with Nigeria was estimated at USD 11.3 billion, with exports of USD 5.1 billion and imports of USD 6.1 billion. The U.S. goods and services trade deficit with Nigeria stood at USD 1.0 billion (U.S. Trade Representative, 2018). However, their trade relations, especially crude oil supplies, had declined since 2012, following the U.S. local crude oil production occasioned by the Shale oil production. (Blanchard & Husted, 2019, p. 18).

The robustness of Nigeria-US bilateral relations has sometimes made the Americans consider Nigeria as their congenial African partner and a diplomatic and security ally to be relied upon for furtherance of the U.S. policy on African regional challenges where the U.S. would not or could not take responsibility (Burchard & Burgess, 2019, pp. 13-16). The high point of Nigeria-US relations was demonstrated in 2010 when both countries signed a Bi-National Commission Agreement for addressing issues of mutual concerns, including security matters. While the above points signify the nature and character of Nigeria-US relations, they provide an understanding of how Nigeria has excessively focused on the latter in its search for assistance and, at the same time, raise a puzzle about their bilateral anti-terrorism relations. After all, the U.S. is not the only world power with which Nigeria has relations.

Nigeria's quest for anti-terrorism cooperation with the U.S. emanated from the recommendations of a 2012 Presidential Committee that Nigeria sought intelligence gathering, equipment supplies from the latter (Agwu, 2013, p. 423). Thus, when former President Jonathan met former U.S. President Obama in September 2013 and played host to former U.S. Secretary of State Clinton, they essentially deliberated on how the U.S. could help Nigeria combat the scourge of terrorism (Owojori, 2021, p. 194). Also, President Jonathan reportedly wrote letters to President Obama and many other world leaders seeking assistance (Jonathan, 2018, p. 35). Moreover, since 2015, President Buhari has met two U.S. Presidents (Obama and Trump). His administration has played host to two former U.S. Secretaries of State (Kerry and Tillerson), and such meetings largely centred on Nigeria's anti-terrorism needs. Also, requesting anti-terrorism assistance from the U.S. is generally acceptable to Nigeria's military hierarchy.

For instance, a former General Officer Commanding, Nigerian Army I Mechanised Division, agrees that Nigeria needs the Americans for timely information and intelligence on Sambisa Forest and inside Nigeria, to be aided by the U.S. drone operations from Niger Republic (Channels Television, 2016). In 2015, as a further push for the needed anti-terrorism support, President Buhari accused the U.S. of unwittingly aiding and abetting the terrorists for denying the country access to appropriate strategic material and equipment (Nossiter, 2015). Similarly, former President Jonathan re-emphasised the desired role of the U.S. in helping Nigeria reverse terrorism trajectory when he addressed a Sub-Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2017 and called on the Trump administration to help Nigeria (Premium Times, 2017). Therefore, the positions of the Nigerian leaders above suggest that notwithstanding Nigeria's close ties to other countries such as Russia and China, there is a favourable disposition toward the U.S.

## The United States' Responses to Challenges of Terrorism in Nigeria

After a period of reluctance, the U.S first counter-Boko Haram action was the 'foreign terrorist' designation of the group in 2012 (Agwu, 2013, p. 424). Subsequently, it began anti-terrorism assistance to Nigeria by training Nigerian troops and providing capacity-building efforts for the country's armed forces, security services, and other agencies. Assistance to Nigeria has been championed by both the Pentagon (Defence Department) and the State Department through American overseas regional and global cooperation arrangements such as the West Africa Regional Security Initiative (WARSI), Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA), the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), the Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI), and other platforms (U.S. Department of State; Blanchard, 2014, p. 12). Similarly, the Pentagon has provided funds and carried out some anti-terrorism support programmes for capacity building and training for Nigeria (Blanchard, 2014, p. 12).

According to a Nigerian Air Force commander in the northeast operations, Nigerian troops have been trained at tactical-level, field training, military formation courses up to staff courses, and strategic level course at Defence College and so on (NAF Commodore, personal communication, January 13, 2019). Essentially, Nigeria's defence and security forces have been to elite U.S. military institutions (U.S. States Department & Defence Department, 2018). All such training have aided policy formation, troops' combat readiness and is instrumental to the country's development of the legal and operational frameworks such as the TPA (2013), NACTEST (2016), and PCVE (2017) (O. Ismail, personal communication, March 7, 2019). After all, most of the troops deployed for anti-terrorism operations and Nigerians who drafted policy frameworks for the country were largely drawn from the pool of many personnel trained through the U.S. programmes (Ibid.).

Nigeria and the U.S. struck an intelligence-sharing agreement in May 2014, which has not produced any significant outcomes due to

their operational challenges and political disagreement (Blanchard, 2014, p. 13). However, an observer had hinted that the U.S. refusal to divulge intelligence to the Nigerian military hierarchy is not unconnected to the sabotage within Nigeria's defence and security forces (Agwu, 2016, pp. 930-933). Additionally, personnel from associated agencies involved in anti-terrorism for technical issues were also trained for capacity building by the U.S., such as the Nigerian Police, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) (F. Onuoha, personal communication, January 9, 2019). More so, the U.S. Department of Defence budgeted more than US\$16 million for Nigeria in the Fiscal Years 2018 and 2019 for Train-and-Equip programmes (Blanchard & Husted, 2019, p. 22), even though the direct U.S. assistance to Nigeria is the least provided to any Lake Chad Basin country. However, the most topical issues have been the U.S. decision to either filibuster or outrightly block the supplies from the American Corporations or by frustrating supplies through third-party arrangements such as the decision of Israel to help Nigeria with supplies of decommissioned Cobra Helicopters (Agwu, 2016, p. 906). The U.S. had chosen to block the Jonathan administration from accessing air platforms by invoking the American Human Rights Law known as Leahy Vetting Law that prohibits the U.S. from providing defence assistance to countries whose security services have committed egregious human rights violations (Burchard & Burgess, 2019, pp. 1-2).

However, the U.S. authorities shifted grounds after the 2015 regime change in Nigeria and provided the country with more than twenty Mine Resistant Armoured Personnel Carriers (MRAPs) in 2016 as part of excess defence articles drawdown (DefenceWeb, 2019). Also, in 2016, following the emergence of President Buhari, found to be more tolerated by the Obama administration, the U.S. activated the process for supplying Nigeria 12 Super Tucano A-29 air platforms with associated weaponry and ammunition. While a mistaken Air Force bombing of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in January 2017 stalled the process (Blanchard & Husted, 2019, p. 21), the Trump administration re-authorized the supplies

in December 2017 in a deal worth over half a billion USD (\$593 million) and slated for staggered delivery from 2021 to 2024 (Ibid., p. 19). Thus, to say that Nigeria-US anti-terrorism is disturbing is, perhaps, an understatement. For why would two countries, known to be partners and grossly affected by the scourge of terrorism, fail to cooperate toward addressing common threats?

### **The Realist Influenced Inconsistencies in the United States Anti-Terrorism Cooperation with Nigeria**

This study examines the puzzle in Nigeria-US anti-terrorism relations, which a realist perspective helps to understand. The realist framework informs us about states' positional character that makes them prefer relative gains in partnership to advantage partners. At the same time, their willingness to cooperate is often constrained by their concerns about relative gains (Grieco, 1988). This important systemic limitation of inter-state cooperation identified by the realist framework contributes to our understanding of Nigeria-US anti-terrorism cooperation because the U.S. has given security assistance to Nigeria strictly as its interests permitted. The U.S. commitment to human rights is fluid and based on its security needs and interests since the allegation of violations against Nigeria involves politics and vested interest. For instance, and as Burchard and Burgess (2019, pp. 16-24) observed, although Nigeria has had less than stellar human rights records, the U.S. chose to punish the country at a time that American interests (global war on terror) were also at stake, only because the U.S. had reliable alternative such as the Niger Republic.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S., former President George W. Bush announced the famous global war on terror with a doctrine of pre-emptive strike to neutralise terrorists in their hideouts worldwide aggressively. As a sign of the U.S. world leadership in combating terrorism, President Bush announced that "... America and our allies must not, and will not, allow it (terrorism) ...But some governments will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it: If they do not act, America will (Dowd, 2008). By 2002, President Bush sought approval from

the U.S. Congress to supply Nigeria defence articles and services and military education and training worth US\$4 million to address an unforeseen emergency (Thomas, 2018, p. 98). These developments were obvious efforts to coopt Nigeria into the U.S. network of allies in the global war on terror and a classical example of the U.S. realist disposition.

Similarly, the Bush administration in 2007/2008 established a new combatant command, Africa Command (AFRICOM). However, Nigeria championed other African countries' skepticism and suspicion about the U.S. intentions, forcing the U.S. to station AFRICOM in Stuttgart, Germany, eventually (Mboup & Mihalka, 2010). It is, thus, instructive to note that Nigeria's inaction and antagonism against AFRICOM could have been part of the reasons that the U.S. has chosen to pay back. However, Nigeria appears to be dancing to the American tune already, given the country's recent (April 2021) invitation to the U.S. to bring back AFRICOM, ostensibly to mitigate the security situations in Nigeria and West Africa that appear to be getting out of control (Campbell, 2021b).

As discussed in the prevision section, the U.S. has helped Nigeria somehow but has failed in arms supplies, and intelligence supports, which have negated all the training and capacity-building supports provided to Nigeria. It is, thus, puzzling that a famous Czar of global war had found it difficult to give Nigeria full support but instead chose to antagonise and abandon it. In other words, how the U.S. that as far away as 2001, chose to support Nigeria for terrorism prevention could turn against the country in the 2010s points to the fact that helping Nigeria is not necessarily a priority. After all, the U.S. is more interested in fighting jihadists in many theatres worldwide: in Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, the Philippines, and other places. It is less bothered about Nigeria for as long as the country's military can draw Boko Haram to a stalemate (J. Zenn, personal communication, July 23, 2020). After all, the northeast region of Nigeria, where terrorism is rife, is not strategic to American interests compared to Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta.

Moreover, if the allegation of norm violations against Nigeria is put to critical analysis, it also depicts double standards and inconsistencies in the U.S. human rights crusade. Indeed, the U.S. has a history of courting regimes with poor democratic and human rights credentials during the Cold War, as well as its current support for Pakistan, Egypt, Jordan, and other countries (Owen IV & Poznansky, 2014, pp. 1073-1075; Lang et al., 2017). Furthermore, despite the allegations against Saudi Arabia for aiding and abetting war crimes in Yemen and being responsible for killing Jamal Khashoggi, the U.S. has continued to supply that country with defence equipment (Ward, 2021). Perhaps the most instructive example is how the U.S. has consistently cooperated with Malaysia on anti-terrorism matters despite their complicated relations and antagonistic worldviews, and wider foreign policy questions (Parameswaran, 2019). Yet, the U.S. has been inconsistent in cooperating with Nigeria, with which it maintains more cordial relations, which suggests interest and politics as argued by the realists.

Arising from the foregoing, therefore, the nature and character of Nigeria-US anti-terrorism remains a puzzle, but a realist theory helps our understanding of a situation in which both countries claim to be partners but yet their cordial relationships have not been leveraged for effective anti-terrorism cooperation and outcomes. But the important point to note is that the U.S. decision to deny Nigeria critical intelligence and arms supplies has only allowed the trajectory of terrorism to grow in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin. But having said that, it is imperative to give blow-by-blow implications of the anti-terrorism relations of the two countries.

### **The Outcomes and Implications of Nigeria-United States Anti-Terrorism Relations**

The intractability of terrorism in Nigeria has resulted from a mix of internal issues and external factors. While it is the responsibility of Nigeria to fix the terrorism challenges, bilateral and multilateral cooperation are also important because terrorism had proven to be unamenable to unilateral actions of any single country. But if

international cooperation is anything to go by, then the appropriate conclusion that can be drawn is that Nigeria-US anti-terrorism cooperation has been an utter failure in approach and outcomes. And since the success of any strategy to combat terrorism can only be measured by how the terrorist violence is curtailed, then what can be said of Nigeria is that terrorism has continually grown in trajectories, and the U.S. is largely implicated in all these. To draw this conclusion correctly, it is important to analyse how the U.S. actions and inactions have allowed terrorism to grow in trajectory using four yardsticks: terrorist group's operational capacity, territorial control, foreign links, and violent attacks.

### **Operational Capacity of Boko Haram and Its Break-away Factions**

By operational capacity, mention could be made of the Nigerian terror groups' means of funding, terror tactics, combat readiness, and possession of military equipment. Thus, there is a significant implication of the lukewarm U.S. counter-Boko Haram policy and strategy for how the terrorists have continued to enjoy unhindered funding that has served as oxygen for them. The poorly coordinated and inconsistent anti-terrorism ties between Nigeria and the U.S. have only been to the advantage of the terror groups who have succeeded in avoiding funding sources being detected. The same can be said of how the terrorists have continued to advance in their mastery and deployments of superior armament and operational tactics (Adesoji, 2019, pp. 10-11; Gilbert, 2014, pp. 150-156). The worst scenario of the terrorists' growth in trajectory in terms of capacity was proven by the former Nigerian Commander of Operation Lafiya Dole (General Adeniyi) in early 2020 about the group's possession of superior firepower (Haruna, 2020).

### **Terrorists' Territorial Control**

The availability of ungoverned spaces naturally provides a safe haven for the terrorists, which is why Bruce Hoffman, as the famous Doyen of terrorism studies scholarship, has called on the international

community to properly address such in their anti-terrorism struggles (Hoffman, 2017). The trajectory of terrorism has, thus, grown in Nigeria because terrorists have consistently maintained territorial control, capturing a large swarth of land area in Northeast Nigeria and declaring an Islamic caliphate headquartered in Gwoza in 2014 (Ogbogu, 2015, p. 17). Even though Nigeria liberated these territories through the help of South African mercenaries in early 2015 (Campbell, 2015), things have begun to fall apart again since 2018, which is a pointer to the resilience of the terrorists' territorial control capacity. For instance, even though it is a controlled base of the regional MJTF forces, Nigeria's military facility in Baga was captured and temporarily by terrorists of ISWAP extraction in November and December 2018, leading to the deaths of scores of troops (Aljazeera, 2019). Core Boko Haram terrorists, however, still have Sambisa Forest as their sanctuary and have reconquered villages and towns where the military once sacked them (Mbah, 2018; Zenn, 2020, pp. 6-8).

### **Foreign Links of Boko Haram and Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP)**

One undeniable fact in the terrorism dynamics in Nigeria is how lack of cooperation from the international community, especially the U.S., denied the country necessary intelligence. This the terrorists have taken advantage of in establishing alliances with dreaded al-Qaeda and ISIS. As Nigeria was abandoned to its fate, terrorists in the country gained capacity-building support from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Zenn, 2018, pp. 89-122). A break-away faction later got affiliated to ISIS, which bred today's ISWAP (Ibid.). In this regard, a question that begs the answer is, what has the U.S. as a Czar of the global war on terror benefitted in allowing terrorists have the leeway to enjoy external connections that made them grow in capability? As rhetorical as the above question may sound, it is an important one because given the American interest to get rid of Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda elements, the U.S. worked with Pakistan using drones in thinning the Taliban and al-Qaeda elements in that country to the extent of fracturing their

external links (Mir, 2018, p. 70). But in the Nigerian experience, Boko Haram and ISWAP have been empowered by AQIM, ISIS, Al-Shabaab, and Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Azumah, 2015, p. 12), all of which got the group sophisticated.

## **Boko Haram and ISWAP's Violent Attacks**

From mere rioting in 2009, there have been terrorist violence in Nigeria that has made the country almost a shadow of itself. From drive-by shootings to bombings, mass kidnapping, and beheading, terrorists in Nigeria have continued to wreak havoc while Nigerian security forces appear incapable of reversing the trends. In all these, there is an implication of the U.S. arms embargo on Nigeria. As the most dangerous terror group in the world, according to the Global Terrorism Index, Boko Haram (together with ISWAP) has caused more deaths than Islamic State did in both Iraq and Syria (Bicknell, 2020). To this end, and even though he has been critical of his predecessor, President Buhari realised the link between the terrorists' attainment of superior firepower and the uncooperative U.S. policy and strategy on Nigeria, which made him criticised the U.S. (Nossiter, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

While international cooperation is an inevitable mechanism for addressing terrorism, it remains a puzzle that despite their generally friendly relations, cooperation between Nigeria and the U.S. has not necessarily reversed the trajectory of terrorism in Nigeria. And despite Nigeria being regarded as one of the major U.S. partners in Africa, the U.S. has failed to put its full military and technological might behind this West African country, which has inadvertently aided the terrorists. A situation whereby concerns for human rights informed such American counter-Boko Haram policies and strategies for so long points to challenges of inter-states cooperation that the realist school of thought makes clear. Or how could it be understood that terror groups (ISIS and al-Qaeda) worked with Boko Haram and ISWAP, but a state known as the Czar of the global war on terror has

been reluctant to cooperate meaningfully with a less endowed state? It, therefore, appears to be an irony that terror groups are cooperating than nation-states, which reveals that international cooperation could be marred by politicisation and vested interests, as the realists suggest. However, notwithstanding the challenges highlighted in Nigeria-US anti-terrorism relations, the way forward lies in Nigeria deploying its diplomatic mechanisms effectively. Moreover, the U.S. would have to revitalise its anti-terrorism policy and strategies to aid Nigeria and not the terrorists, especially in the light of the demise of former Chadian President Debby and given the concerns raised by Nigeria's President Buhari about the likelihood of West and Central Africa regions getting plunged into total instability.

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