

# The Merchants of Terror: Neo-patrimonialism, Counter-Terrorism Economy and the Expansion of Terrorism in Nigeria

Njoku, Emeka Thaddues

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# MERCHANTS OF TERROR: Neo-Patrimonialism, Counterterrorism Economy and Expansion of Terrorism in Nigeria

**Emeka Thaddues Njoku**

**ABSTRACT:** *How can neo-patrimonialism aid our understanding of the materiality of counterterrorism and the expansion of terrorism? While previous works on the growth of terrorism have focused on issues such as the spread of radical religious ideology, US foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and poverty, recent works have examined factors such as the formation of linkages with other terrorist groups, fragmentation into cell-structures, forming of franchises, and exploitation of clannism and ethnicity. However, studies that interrogate the rentier nature of African and MENA region security institutions and its implications for the rise of terrorism are yet to be accounted for. This article draws from field research done in Nigeria between 2015 and 2019. It traced the expansion of terrorism in Nigeria to the neo-patrimonial systems inherent in security and political institutions, which are engaged in corrupt financial practices that breed a counterterrorism economy.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Boko Haram, terrorism, counterterrorism economy, neopatrimonialism, corruption*

## INTRODUCTION

The debate on the emergence and expansion of terrorism has been marked by a strong focus on external issues such as the spread of radical religious ideologies (Juergensmeyer 2001), the United States foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Mamdani 2004; Chomsky 1986), and material imbalances (Obi 2005). In recent times, scholars have narrowed their lenses on how the internal dynamics of various terrorist groups contributed to their growth and lethality. These include fragmentation into various cell-structures, formation of linkages among other terrorist groups, exploitation of porous borders, branching-out strategies or formation of franchises, and manipulation of clannism and ethnicity (Mendelsohn 2017; Hansen 2016; Weeraratne 2015; Hoffman 2013, 1995; Zenn 2013; Oftedal 2013).

However, terrorism scholars are yet to fully interrogate how state behavior in terrorism-affected countries has contributed to the growth and sustenance of terrorism. Specifically, there is a scarcity of in-depth analysis of how the neo-patrimonial nature of political institutions in Africa and the MENA region can explain the materiality of counterterrorism as well as the sustenance and expansion of terrorism. Drawing from field research done between 2015 and 2019 in Nigeria, this article advances extant debates on the expansion of terrorism. The study argues that the inherent neo-patrimonial systems that have come to define Nigerian governmental institutions, including the security sector, has led to the emergence of a counterterrorism economy. In other words, counterterrorism has become a platform for patronage and the enrichment of the political and military elite and their clients. The patronage system plays out through inflations of security budgets; corrupt procurement practices; the awarding of ghost contracts to clients, friends, and proxies; establishment of sub-contractors' businesses from among the circle of political or military elites; and the diversion of security votes for the economic and political benefit of politicians.

The implication of the aforementioned situations is that frontline troops in the Northeast are mostly under-resourced and their morale dampened. Consequently, this emboldens terrorist groups to carry out effective tactical strikes on military targets by engaging them in open confrontations. Furthermore, it increases the levels of support from the dwindling influence of mother organizations such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which are desperately trying to project their potency to the world. Moreover, the emergence of a counterterrorism economy creates room for subtle and intense sabotage of counterterrorism efforts; in other words, an end of terrorism would

mean an end to illicit funds and the misappropriation of public funds allocated for the fight against terrorism.

This article makes several significant contributions to current debates on the multi-causal factors behind the proliferation of terrorism in Nigeria despite increased national, regional, and international efforts. It also builds on the discourse of the neo-patrimonial nature of political institutions in Africa and the MENA region by unpacking the dynamics of neo-patrimonialism during conflict and post-conflict settings. Lastly, it advances extant perspectives on the war economy by exploring how terrorism and counterterrorism create conditions for corrupt economic activities by state officials and their collaborators. Moreover, the article argues that neo-patrimonialism has led to a counterterrorism economy and hampered the fight against terrorism in Nigeria.

Following this introduction and the description of the methods that inform this study, the article is split into five sections. The first examines current arguments on the expansion of terrorism. Second, the discourse is narrowed down to the emergence of terrorist groups in Nigeria. The third is a brief conceptualization of neo-patrimonialism and how it aids our understanding of the expansion of terrorism in the Nigerian context. The fourth underscores how the rentier nature of government institutions gives birth to a counterterrorism economy. The fifth section concludes the work and provides the implications of the counterterrorism economy to counterterrorism operations in Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is based on primary and secondary sources of data. Qualitative data were derived from eleven key informant interviews and a focus group discussion with respondents who were purposively selected. The snowballing approach was adopted due to the sensitive nature of this topic.<sup>1</sup> The key informant interviews include three executives of civil society organizations working with the government to curb terrorism, three serving and retired senior military and police officers that served in the Northeast, one commander of Civilian Joint Task Force, one investigative journalist operating in the Northeast, and three Boko Haram scholars. Moreover, a focus group discussion (FGD) of five civil society organizations' executives and program officers was conducted.<sup>2</sup> The data were collected between January and April 2019. Also, primary data was sourced from the dataset of previous fieldwork carried out between January and December 2015. The key informant interviews were conducted in a face-to-face manner and with the use of the telephone in

various locations of the respondents at the time of the interview, which are Abuja, Lagos, Oyo, and Rivers.

The inquiries made from the respondents were based on the following: (1) the infighting and the breakaway of groups within Boko Haram, the factors influencing the disagreements and its consequences for counterterrorism operations; (2) the commercialization of counterterrorism operations; and (3) the state and nonstate actors who are beneficiaries of the commercialization of counterterrorism operations in the Northeast. Specific questions on the commercialization of counterterrorism were based on the following: 1) the defense budget and expenditure-provision of weapons, remuneration of officers and men in counterterrorism operations in the Northeast; 2) the politics of the security vote and its utilization by governors of the northeastern region in Nigeria; and 3) the diverse sociopolitical and economic consequences of the commercialization of security and the expansion of terrorism in the Northeast of Nigeria.

## EXPANSION OF TERRORISM: EXAMINING EXTANT DISCOURSES

The expansion of terrorism has been a source of interest to scholars and experts for many years; particularly after the 9/11 terrorist attack on the US. Earlier discourses on the emergence and rise of terrorism were traced to religion, the US Foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa, and poverty (Juergensmeyer 2001; Mamdani 2004; Obi 2005; Bah 2017). Recently, scholarship on the growth of terrorism has been traced to the internal workings of various terrorist groups based on the organizational and operational strategies of group leaders (Mendelsohn 2017; Hansen 2016; Weeraratne 2015). In this section, I examine the diverse factors behind the emergence and growth of terrorism, notably in Nigeria.

Scholars such as Beit-Hallmi (2004), Juergensmeyer (2001), and Enweremadu and Njoku (2017) have argued that religion played a significant role in the emergence and expansion of terrorism, particularly the Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Terrorist groups within various religious traditions believe that violence is sanctioned by God. This act is evident in the Christian crusades that led to the deaths of Muslims, Jews, and those termed Heretical Christians. It is also marked by the activities of the Hashish group that killed Christian leaders, Jewish Sicarians, and Roman collaborators.<sup>3</sup> It is this perspective that influenced Huntington's (1996) assertion that "the twentieth-century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxist-Leninism is

only fleeting and superficial historical phenomenon when compared to the continuing and deeply conflictual relations between Islam and Christianity” (p. 209).

In another vein, Noam Chomsky and Mahmood Mamdani attributed the growth of terrorism to the US foreign policy choices in Latin America and the MENA region. Chomsky (1986) stated that President Reagan’s choice of eradicating the rise of violent groups in Latin America and MENA had a blowback effect, as various groups were mobilized in resisting the US. Similarly, Mamdani (2004) argues that during the Cold War, the US sponsored the Mujahedeen to fight a proxy war in the Muslim countries, which were targeted at obstructing the dominance of the Soviet Union. However, this move raised militant groups in the region that turned around to resent the US following its support of Israel, its position on the Palestinian question, and the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan (Mamdani 2004).

Furthermore, socioeconomic inequality has also been cited as a major factor that spurs terrorism. Although many of the known terrorist groups emanate from the upper middleclass or are educated, many terrorist foot soldiers in Egypt, Nigeria, Kenya, Somalia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines are from poor social backgrounds. Political instability, corruption, and bad governance lead to socioeconomic disparity, which leads to crimes, and the incarceration of many young people in detention facilities. Terrorist leaders recruit many incarcerated people (Dagne 2002). In the case of Nigeria, the high level of poverty in the northern part of the country, lack of basic amenities, and unemployment created room for the rise of Boko Haram (Enweremadu and Njoku 2017; Obi 2005), which lured youth into their fold with the promise to provide money for business start-ups (Mercy Corps 2017).

Scholars have also addressed the internal dynamics of terrorist groups. Explicitly, they address questions of how terrorist group leaders manage their organizations in ways that enable them to expand or decline. One notable example is the establishment of franchises. For example, Mendelsohn (2017) argues that Al Qaeda leadership adopted a branching-out strategy that entails the establishment of various franchises in different parts of the world, such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Algeria, and Somalia. Al Qaeda leadership also established a franchise in the Indian sub-continent, known as Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), covering countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. Mendelsohn (2017) maintains that the franchising strategy gave birth to ISIS. However, Mendelsohn argues that Al Qaeda’s establishment of branches in different parts of the world did not signal

growth or strength but rather its decline and that the branching-out strategy was, in fact, a means of survival. The leadership of Al Qaeda has shown that it lacks the managerial skills to maintain an organization due to its poor choices, such as the decision to attack the US without ample strategic and institutional capability to withstand the backlash from the US and the coalition of states. This is aptly demonstrated by its incapacity to launch significant attacks like the 9/11 attacks on the US homeland (Mendelsohn 2017).

While Al Shabaab is seen as Al Qaeda's franchise in Africa, it has managed to sustain itself through various innovative economic approaches. The group also exploited the sociopolitical issues inherent in Somalia to recruit more followers and have made inroads in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. Specifically, Hansen (2016) asserts that the growth of Al Shabaab is, among other things, traced to its exploitation of the division among various clans and ethnic groups struggling for political ascendancy and dominance in Somalia. As a result, it was able to successfully recruit followers among clans competing for hegemonic control and launch unprecedented levels of attacks in the East African region (Hansen 2016).

Furthermore, Weeraratne (2015), alongside other scholars, has identified certain factors for the expansionism of terrorist groups. First, focusing on Boko Haram, Weeraratne argues that the group is fragmented into various cell-structures scattered throughout northeastern Nigeria. Second, the establishment of connections among terrorists enhances their lethality and growth (Hoffman 2013; Byman 2012; Marret 2008). For instance, Weeraratne asserts that Boko Haram's partnership with prominent terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb, Al Shabaab, and ISIS contributed to its growth. The partnership aids in providing psychological, financial, and logistical support to Boko Haram. Third, Boko Haram's exploitation of Nigeria's porous borders is another factor that aids its survival. In other words, the Nigerian government's lack of capacity to secure its borders with Chad, Cameroon, and Niger has contributed to the resilience of Boko Haram, as many of the terrorists infiltrated the border to carry out attacks on the Nigerian military and escape (Weeraratne 2015; Hussein 2012). In addition, Weeraratne argues that porous borders also makes it easy for terrorist groups such as Boko Haram to smuggle military-grade weapons from Libya (Weeraratne 2015; Zenn 2013; Oftedal 2013).

The arguments, as detailed above, take us further into understanding how terrorist groups emerge, sustain themselves, and grow. However, there is a need for further studies on the expansion of terrorist groups, as current explanations are not exhaustive. Specifically,

scholars are yet to account for how the behavior of states, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and MENA, contribute to the expansion of terrorism. A critical question is whether the neo-patrimonial nature of political institutions can explain the resilience and expansion of terrorism. Using the Nigerian case, this study advances existing theories on the factors behind the rise of terrorism. The article asserts that the rentier nature of political institutions in Nigeria influences the materiality of counterterrorism measures and produces a counterterrorism economy, which sustains terrorism. Explicitly, efforts to curb terrorism in north-eastern Nigeria has become a means for enrichment by political office holders and their clients through overestimated security budgets; ghost contracts and procurements; the creation of subcontractor businesses among the military elite, their friends, and proxies; and the misappropriation of security vote by governors in the North-east.

Although the concept of the war economy has been used to explain how political actors exploit civil war situations to amass wealth and ensure that war continues, civil wars and terrorism are not the same. Rubin (2000, 1789) asserts that “wars create conditions for economic activity, though often of a predatory nature and such economic returns to the use of violence may both provoke such wars and nourish interests that perpetuate them.” Even though civil war and terrorism are both forms of political violence used by aggrieved groups to challenge the state, they are not the same, as the goals and tactics differ (Boulden 2009; Martini and Njoku 2017).<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is crucial to advance the war economy literature by theorizing how economic activities thrive within the counterterrorism context. This is salient, considering the limited works on the commercialization of counterterrorism. In this article, I examine the commercialization of counterterrorism measures or what I term the counterterrorism economy, underscoring how it contributes to the expansion of terrorism in Nigeria.

## THE PROLIFERATION OF TERRORIST GROUPS IN NIGERIA

The history of the Nigerian state is one of intermittent politically motivated violence, which ranges from groups campaigning for secession, religious purity, to economic emancipation. However, this article focuses on extremist groups driven by religious ideology. The Maitatsine, a radical religious group under the leadership of Mohammed Marwa, emerged around the early 1960s and continued up to the 1980s. The group attacked government agencies and Christian communities. It also confronted the Sufi Brotherhood, which is comprised of the Qadriyya and

Tijanniyya sects, on the grounds that they were distorting the Islamic faith due to their pro-Western stance (Falola 1998; Haynes 1996). Although the Nigerian government deployed its military to suppress the Maitatsine, other radical groups who rejected the Westernization of the Islamic faith emerged in the early 2000s. This includes the Al-Sunna Wal Jamma, “Followers of the Prophet,” AKA the “Nigerian Taliban,” and the Jama’atul Ahul-Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad, also known as Boko Haram (Akanji 2015). Like the previous extremist groups, Boko Haram advocated for the literal interpretation of the sacred texts and the practice of true sharia to end the corruption among Muslim leaders of northern extraction (Adesoji 2010).

Since its emergence around 2003, Boko Haram has grown in size and strength, adapting to the new security infrastructures of the Nigerian government. They have succeeded in procuring sophisticated weapons, surviving harsh conditions, kidnapping women and girls whom they use as sex slaves, and engaging in suicide bombing. They have equally grown tactically, as they have successfully launched several attacks on military targets.

Boko Haram has also allied with other terrorist groups in Africa and the Middle East and received funding, training, and other forms of support from Al Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb (AQIM), Al Shabaab, and ISIS. In 2003, Osama bin Laden mentioned supporting the Jihadist movement of Boko Haram in Nigeria in a public statement for the first time. Furthermore, Zenn (2019) argues that Boko Haram commanders (notably, Mamman Nur, Abu Mus’ab al-Barnawi, Adam Kamar, and Khalid al-Barnawi) formed strong relations with AQIM, Al Shabaab, and ISIS. However, there has been infighting, as some commanders disagree with Shekau’s leadership style and *modus operandi*. In 2012, a Boko Haram faction, Ansaru, emerged, but this was short-lived, as Shekau was able to force this group back into the Boko Haram fold (Zenn 2019). Moreover in 2015, Shekau pledged loyalty to ISIS and changed its name to al-Dawla al-Islamiyya fi Wilayat Gharb IAfriqiyah, known as the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP). However, in 2016, with the backing of ISIS, some commanders and members successfully overthrew Shekau and Abu Mus’ab al-Barnawi became the leader of ISWAP. As a result, Shekau reverted to Jama’atul Ahul- Sunna Lidda’awati Wal-Jihad and has since continued to lead the group (Zenn 2019). Despite repeated rhetorical claims by the Nigerian government that it has defeated Boko Haram, the jihadist insurgency has grown as new groups emerge. In 2018, the Nigerian Army reported that it had uncovered a new terrorist group known as Jama’atu Nus’ratul-Islami Wal Muslima led by Abdul-Fadl LyadGali (Punch 2018, 1).

The continued proliferation of terrorist groups in Nigeria further raises the question of what factors could have accounted for the growth of terrorism despite both hard and soft counterterrorism measures by the government. This article takes on this question. Generally, the discourses on this question have focused on internal issues that are pertinent to the organization of terrorist groups, such as the fragmentation into various cell-structures, formation of linkages among other terrorist groups, and branching-out strategy. There are also issues that are internal to Nigeria, such as poverty, poor governance, and ethnic and religious cleavages. Other debates have revolved around conventional external issues outside the control of Nigeria, such as the spread of radical religious ideologies, and US foreign policy. However, there is a need to delve into other factors not captured in the literature, specifically how political and military actors use counterterrorism as a means for personal economic and political gain and how this undermines the fight against terrorism.

#### NEO-PATRIMONIALISM: COUNTERTERRORISM ECONOMY AND EXPANSION OF TERRORISM

This article discusses how the neo-patrimonial structure of government institutions contributed to the expansion of terrorism in Nigeria. One key issue that has defined African states, and precisely their sociopolitical and economic spaces, and institutions is neo-patrimonialism (Bratton and Van de Walle 1994). In other words, the concept of neo-patrimonialism is used as an explanatory variable in discussing institutional, governance, and developmental challenges on the continent. This article has diverged from the institutional discourse of state neo-patrimonialism during peacetime to examine neo-patrimonialism in a conflict environment. Specifically, it looks at how neo-patrimonialism can explain the materiality of counterterrorism as well as the sustenance and expansion of terrorism. The Weberian model of patrimonial relations that revolves around the political hierarchy of ruler, staff, and subjects (Weber 1978) provides the platform for understanding the materiality of counterterrorism and its subsequent expansion.

Regarding Weber, the concept of neo-patrimonialism is used in the literature on political institutions to explain “systems in which political relationships are mediated through and maintained by personal connections between leaders and subjects or patron-client” (Pitcher et al. 2009, 129). It explains inherent corruption in political institutions for personal interest (Pitcher et al. 2009).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, neo-patrimonialism is used to differentiate the “modern variant of Weber’s ideal type-one in which

the veneer of rational-legal authority has been imposed by colonialism, yet personalistic or patrimonial logic characterized by patrimonialism, clientelism, and corruption is said to prevail” (Pitcher et al. 2009, 129).

In Africa, authority is sustained through a patronage system rather than ideology and law. Neo-patrimonial logic is evident in states where public officials favor clients within state structures and through contracts, licenses, grants, and projects in return for support and loyalty (Ikpe 2009; Bratton and Van de Walle 1994). This is evident in various political institutions in Nigeria. Neo-patrimonialism and its subsets, such as prebendalism and clientelism, have been used to describe how support for the government or political office holders are influenced and sustained through the disbursements of rents (Ikpe 2009). Moreover, the patronage system within these political institutions, including the security sector, has further facilitated corrupt practices, poor governance, and incremental political decay (Joseph 2014; Bah 2012, 2020).

This study argues that the neo-patrimonialism in the security institutions in Nigeria, particularly those involved in counterterrorism operations in the Northeast, is an essential variable in understanding how the war on terrorist groups in Nigeria has become commercialized, leading to the emergence of the counterterrorism economy. The counterterrorism economy is facilitated by neo-patrimonial relationships between different types of political actors and their clients. Thus, this article advances prevailing theories on the emergence and persistence of terrorism. It contends that neo-patrimonialism explains the expansion of terrorism in Nigeria. To comprehend the dynamics of neo-patrimonialism and underscore its implications on the expansion of terrorism, the first point of call is the budgetary allocations to the defense sector and particularly those for counterterrorism operations.

There has been an increase in funds allocated to various security units in Nigeria, such as the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the interior, and Office of the National Security Adviser, due to the rise in security challenges in different parts of the country. This is evident in the approved 2014 to 2019 budgets, where allocation for the security sector rose from ₦932 billion in 2014 to ₦1.76 trillion in 2019 (BudgIT 2019). Also, the budgeted additional funds for military internal security operations grew from ₦24.12 billion in 2014 to ₦75 billion in 2018 (BudgIT 2019).<sup>6</sup> These extra allocations for internal security operations were aimed at tackling security challenges, particularly the rise of Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorist activities in the Northeast, under various operations. These operations include Lafiya Dole, Operation Safe Corridor, Operation Gama Aiki, and Operation Crackdown (BudgIT 2019). However, the increase in funds to tackle terrorism

has not translated into meaningful results. Despite the huge growth in security spending, Boko Haram terrorism continues to grow. Nigeria's counterterrorism effort has been plagued by the misuse of security funds through corrupt subcontracting practices, ghost and inflated contracts, and the misappropriation of security votes.

### Subcontractor Businesses: Ghost and Inflated Contracts

There have been reports of massive embezzlement and the misappropriation of funds allocated to the security sectors, including those allocated for counterterrorism operations in the Northeast. Furthermore, despite the increase in security budgets and additional funds for military internal security operations in the Northeast, there have been reports of poor remunerations of counterterrorism security officers in the Northeast, lack of provision of basic amenities, and inadequate weapons to combat Boko Haram. In 2015, the former National Security Adviser to the president, Sambo Dasuki, was suspected of embezzling two billion dollars through various phantom contracts for the purchase of military hardware (BBC 2015). Dasuki was arraigned on twenty-two count for allegedly misappropriating funds meant to tackle terrorism. He was detained by the federal government for four years and released on bail in 2019 (Sahara Reporters 2020). In 2016, twelve senior military officers, including serving military generals, were also arrested by the military and handed over to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on alleged misappropriation of funds meant to curb terrorism in the Northeast (BBC 2016). A presidential panel established by President Muhammadu Buhari discovered massive fraud in arms procurement within the military between 2007 and 2015 (Sahara Reporters 2016). However, the trials of Dasuki and the military generals are still ongoing (Sahara Reporters 2020, Nwabufo 2020).

Some of my interviewees corroborated the above reports by revealing how various political actors within and outside the military diverted funds allocated to address terrorism for their own selfish interests. For instance, during one FGD, a retired colonel in the army explained that while defense procurement is not solely within the purview of the military, military personnel are culpable in various fraudulent acts that occur during the process of procuring military equipment. Once funds are allocated for the purchase of military hardware, political officers at the Ministry of Defense already have contractors that they impose on the military to supply the hardware. Refusal is not an option, as the military will be told that there is no money in the future if they fail to accept contractors provided by political actors. When asked whether

government officials collaborate with the military to illegally divert funds, the colonel stated:

Oh they do! If they say we are going to give you one billion dollars for acquisition of (military procurements). Then after it gets to him (officer(s) in charge of overseeing procurement), they will tell you this is the man that will supply it. And you cannot refuse because if you refuse the next time you send it (make request) they will say there is no money. So the corruption of this budget and financing is essentially in two ways, the civilian (lack of) oversight function part and the even the military themselves.<sup>7</sup>

In the context of the defense budget and procurements, there is a formed collaboration between the military elites and the political officers to defraud the state. A counterterrorism security officer, who recently returned from the Northeast, noted that even when contractors supply weapons, many of them are outdated and inferior to the terrorist groups' sophisticated weapons. They would overstate the cost of the outdated weapons and embezzle the funds. As the officer stated:

You could see that purchasing of hardware for the army and other organizations saddled with the responsibility of terrorist fights are not being given much priority. Even when they are given priority, they bring in outdated weapons that would make you not to achieve what you intend to achieve. And they will put much money on it and say that is the amount they bought them.<sup>8</sup>

There are reported cases of shortages of weapons to combat Boko Haram. During my 2015 fieldwork, counterterrorism personnel in the National Security and Civil Defence Corps stated that bullets were rationed among security officers, and when attacked by terrorists they were not allowed to return fire until they are given the order to do so. Hence, they have to dodge bullets coming from the terrorist groups.<sup>9</sup> A commandant of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) also highlighted the lack of weapons needed to combat terrorism in the Northeast. As a result, the military do fewer field operations to attack terrorist groups; and often seek the help of the militaries of neighbor countries. According to him:

There are no adequate weapons within Borno state and the local governments. Hence, they (soldiers) round themselves for self-defense. They are not going out for operations to look for Boko Haram. The government did not make any effort (to provide weapons). If we want to go

for operations in Sambisa forest, the Nigerian army invites Cameroon soldiers to come and join us (CJTF) to go for operations. Even the mine-sweeper that detects mines and other bombs that Boko haram plants is only Cameroon minesweeper that we are using. We don't have our own.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, while the military is said to be culpable in phantom defense procurement, an area where there have been reported cases of pronounced embezzlement and the diversion of public funds in the military is in the realm of logistics.<sup>11</sup> This problem is well-known among investigative reporters. One conflict and terrorism investigative journalist stated during an interview that “there is this sub-contractor business that has emerged as a result of the insurgency.” Contracts for the supply of fuel, culinary services, and the provision of toiletries are notorious for the misappropriation of funds. Contracts are awarded based on the personal interests of the military elites, particularly to their relatives, spouses, and friends.<sup>12</sup> However, supplies for fuel and other logistics are not sufficiently provided even though the government makes the payments. A major general, who served as commander in the Northeast, stated that they had challenges in the provision of food for frontline troops. As a result, they took part of each soldier's remuneration to provide food for them. As he explained:

Initially, they were given their feeding allowances, but along the line, the locals were vacating town, there was nothing to buy with the money. So personally, I resorted to moving the cooks to the war front so they can cook for them because that money was useless to them, and of course, if they had the money and are hungry, they will still not be able to fight. They will still have excuses to go and look for food. So I said, part of the money should go for the feeding while the other part remains with them when they come back.<sup>13</sup>

However, the practice of keeping back part of the soldiers' remuneration for food was flagged during the FGD as an example where the diversion of funds occurs within the military. Respondents decried how military commanders were given lots of liberty over the use of logistics expenditure so as to create room for embezzlement. When asked about the use of security funds, one colonel replied:

Badly utilized! Very badly utilized, interest in military expenditure is the question of accountability and hiding behind exigencies of security and allowing commanders a lot of liberty [with] the expenditure creates

room for looting and lots of corruption that cannot be mentioned... The political masters want it this way because they also benefit. They ask for returns.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, in response to the major general's rationale for slashing the feeding allowance for soldiers under his command in the Northeast, a respondent within the FGD stated: "If a commander is given 2,000 naira to feed a soldier, and at the end of the day he said yes I had fed you with 2,000 naira, how do you quantify the quality of the Garri (cassava flour) and vegetable, whether half chicken or fish (was provided)? So that is the question. So, inherent in that system is accountability that is lacking, so that is the truth of the matter."<sup>15</sup> Also, counterterrorism security personnel responded to the rationale given by the major general by stating that, "When it comes to the issue of entitlement that is meant for you, they mutilate it and destroy [it] for you. Your family are there dying of hunger. How can you tell me that I don't know what to buy with my money?"<sup>16</sup> Similarly, a program officer with a CSO working with the government on counterterrorism issues stated:

It was an issue like six, seven years ago and it's still an issue today (counterterrorism security personnel) getting their allowance on time or the exact amount they were supposed to be given. This goes back to explain that there [is] a lot of secrecy[,] you know a lot of corruption within the military.<sup>17</sup>

The responses of the respondents in this study points to a clear system of patronage and corruption by the political and military elite involved in the counterterrorism operations in the Northeast. Large amounts of funds were disbursed but did not translate into success in curbing terrorism. The military collaborates with political actors in awarding phantom defense contracts in procuring military equipment that are inadequate. There is no oversight to ensure that the right type and adequate number of military hardware are acquired. Rather, a good part of the funds are siphoned by political and military elites. Most of the corruption happens through a system of subcontracting tied to the relatives, friends, family, or proxies of the political and military elite. This system of corruption has led to the emergence of a "counterterrorism economy," which is enriching various actors in counterterrorism operations in the Northeast to the detriment of the troops on the ground and the safety of ordinary citizens.

The counterterrorism economy is akin to the idea of greed in civil wars, which benefit warlords. For instance, Reno (1995, 1998) identified

the emergence of a warlord economy during the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where the military, in collaboration with multinational corporations, exploited violence to control the resources for their gain. According to Murphy (2003, 70), “These resources, in turn, provide the patronage foundation of the social relations of dominance and dependency in the military organizations. A warlord economy is organized more with the aim of controlling the resources of territory than vanquishing the enemy on the battlefield.” While the warlord economy has often been associated with the exploitation of natural resources to fund civil wars, Nigeria’s counterterrorism economy is firmly rooted in the system of corruption and neo-patrimonialism.

### Security Votes and their Utilization

In Nigeria, a security vote refers to “the budgetary or extra-budgetary allocations ostensibly [earmarked] for security, received by the President, Governors and Local Government Chairmen” (Dada 2015, 26). A security vote is independent of the defense budget. It is used as an addendum to security funds allocated within each state and local government areas and is used, arguably, for purchasing security equipment and allowances of security personnel within respective states. The practice is a vestige of colonial rule, which was reinforced in the 1960s during military rule. Under military rule, a certain amount of money, termed a “security vote,” was allocated to military administrators for dousing the grievances of civilian elites over the military takeover of the government (Page 2018). The practice continued from the 1970s to 1999. On assumption of office in 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo continued the practice of issuing security votes, this time to state governors and local government chairmen (Egbo et al. 2012). In 2017, Transparency International and Civil Society Legislative Centre (CISLAC) stated that:

Economists from BudgetIT note that ₦1.12trn Naira is the 2017 defence and security budget (not including security votes), equating to 15.36% of government spending. Their estimates and ours are that, approximately, ₦210 billion is allocated to security votes at the state level and ₦180 billion at the federal level, making total defence and security around ₦1.51 trillion, equating to approximately 20 percent of total government spending in 2017.

The Daily Trust also reported that “presently only three States record security votes of less than N500 million monthly while six have votes in excess of N1 billion per month” (Enahoro 2019). The Northeast is one of the geopolitical zones

with a sizeable amount of security votes, with about a total of ₦32.875 billion in 2014.<sup>18</sup> The breakdown shows that Bauchi State received ₦1.417 billion monthly (₦17 billion annually), Borno State got ₦806.25 million monthly (₦9.675 billion annually), Taraba State received ₦200 million monthly (₦2.4 billion annually), and Yobe State got ₦316.667 million monthly (₦3.8 billion annually) (Leadership News 2014).

Security votes have been a controversial issue, and their disbursement and usage has been the subject of national debate. There are claims that security votes are unconstitutional (Enahoro 2019) and that political actors within the government at the federal and state levels have further abused the practice. Often, security votes are allocated and used for the personal interests of the elites (Transparency International 2017). Thus, it has become a source of patronage and rewarding loyalty. For instance, it was reported that General Muhammadu Buhari jailed a former governor of Kwara State on the allegation of the misappropriation of \$2.7 million (page 2018). Also, it is reported that General Sani Abacha embezzled \$1.1 billion through security votes for sixty different security operations in the country (BudgIT 2018). Furthermore, Matthew Page (2018, 4) asserts that, “following Nigeria’s 1999 return to civilian rule, soldiers turned civilian officials such as President Obasanjo and National Security Adviser Aliyu Mohammed Gusau allowed security votes to multiply and proliferate across government and the security sector. Nigeria’s 36 civilian governors also embraced this powerful source of political patronage, campaign finance, and personal enrichment.”

Information from key informants in this study also points to a similar finding about the misappropriation of security votes by governors. The respondents revealed shady practices by military elites in creating and sustaining an atmosphere of violence as a way of ensuring the continued rationale for increased amounts of security votes to their military units in the North-east. For instance, a retired major general in the Army who served as commander in counterterrorism operations, and often interacts with state governors in the region, reiterated the claim that the governors are not using security votes for their intended objectives. When asked about the efforts governors are making address terrorism in the Northeast, he stated:

I have a problem there. These state governments represented by the executive believe that the war on terrorism is not political—is not their war. It is the military, and while I saw that, I continue telling them it is about you, not just me. While some of them play some good roles, others look elsewhere. They will tell you straight to your face, go to the federal government, and get what you want. Don’t ask us.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, during the FGD, a respondent stated that governors are not using the security votes to fully support the counterterrorism security agents in the Northeast. This is partly because the term “security votes” is ambiguous and can be conceived by the governors in ways that serve their interest. Specifically, the governors could interpret security votes as contingency money to promote well-being by tackling poverty, drug abuse, or other issues not directly linked to military security. He said thus:

Let me say security vote, that word is omnibus. Anything you can think of fits into [a] security vote. A governor that has a security vote can use a chunk of it to feed people; he can use a chunk of it to promote the empowerment of people. It is a contingency vote to meet exigencies that were never anticipated. That is why they (governors) have the liberty because it is a contingency fund to meet unforeseen circumstances. Let us be frank about it. It is not judiciously used. And the reason is that the (lack of) oversight function for it. (The fact that it is a) contingency fund does not mean it is not accountable. Contingency fund are accountable, it is unforeseen agreed, but once it is spent, you must account for it. But the people who are supposed to check the accountability of it are also accomplices.<sup>20</sup>

There have also been claims that in collaboration with the ruling party, governors use security votes to advance their political career and that of their loyalists during elections. They also use it to fund their foreign trips and health issues. The reason is that the money is shrouded in secrecy—it is often not accounted for nor returned to the state’s coffers. As one respondent in the FGD stated, “They are not using it judiciously; they have some diversions for personal interests, misappropriation and the likes.... They could use it to campaign (for elections) to stay in power.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, a security expert in the Northeast stated when asked about the misappropriation of security votes by governors:

Yes, [a] security vote is complicated. It has become synonymous with corruption. At the end of the day there is no accountability. A significant percentage of security vote[s] (have become) a governor’s slush fund and it is an important source of revenue for his (election) campaigns, for his ruling party’s campaign during election time.<sup>22</sup>

Security votes also create antagonistic relations in government, especially between the governors and military elites operating in the Northeast. It is believed that the security vote is supposed to be used to augment the

funds allocated to curb terrorism. Respondents in this study agree that the increased number of security votes by governors in the Northeast is due to terrorism. However, they see antagonism between governors and the military elites. Some military elites believe that the governors are not giving them their share of the misappropriated funds. According to one respondent:

I have seen very clear opportunities for political actors to amplify and push cases of terrorism for several reasons. One of them is to be able to destabilize the system and increase resources that cause some people to benefit. For instance, I had the opportunity to be in a military formation where three Generals were discussing, and some of the eavesdrops[sic] that got to me were that there is a need for them to create panic in the state so that the governor can release security vote[s]. So [a] security vote in itself has also increased the level at which terrorism has occurred in various locations.<sup>23</sup>

The pathology in the funding of counterterrorism has made “terrorist violence” and its sustenance as a channel to amass wealth.<sup>24</sup> As Egbo et al. (2012) assert, a security vote is a major avenue of corruption and misappropriation of public funds by political officeholders. Specifically, Egbo et al. (2012) argue that under the guise of national security imperatives, security votes have become institutionalized and a site of security misgovernance at federal, state, and local levels. They further attribute its sustenance to the well-entrenched neo-patrimonial approach to governance in Nigeria. Unfortunately, security votes, and the entire security budget, have led to a diabolical counterterrorism economy that is perpetuating terrorism through the inefficiency in combating Boko Haram. Arguably, the resilience of terrorist groups and expansion of terrorism in Nigeria is traced to the corrupt practices of political actors in counterterrorism operations in the Northeast. Terrorist violence has become an avenue of patronage and enrichment of political actors. The inherent lack of fiscal responsibility and mechanisms to check for transparency and accountability in the utilization of security funds expose the government’s complicity in the failure to defeat Boko Haram and ISWAP.

## CONCLUSION

This article addresses a critical question about **the failure to defeat Boko Haram and the prolongation of terrorism.** Prevailing debates have revolved around factors peculiar to terrorist groups, such as the fragmentation into various cell-structures, formation of linkages with other terrorist groups, exploitation of porous borders, branching-out strategy

and formation of franchises, and the manipulation of clannism and ethnicity. Others have focused more on other factors, such as the spread of radical religious ideologies, US foreign policy, and material imbalances within society. This study advances existing debates that explain the failure to defeat Boko Haram and the prolongation of terrorism by focusing on the neo-patrimonial nature of the Nigerian state. The article contends that corruption and neo-patrimonialism have produced a diabolical counterterrorism economy that is undermining the ability of the military to effectively fight the terrorists. Specifically, it examined corrupt practices in the allocation and use of security funds. This is reflected in the embezzlement of funds, which deprives soldiers of proper weapons and ammunition and undermines morale. In fact, there are reports of soldiers protesting and abandoning the fight. According to one report, 250 soldiers and 167 police officers deserted their posts in the Northeast (Tsokar2016, Ogundipe 2018). There are also confirmed cases of mutinies by personnel involved in counterterrorism operations in the Northeast (Iwuoha 2019). The rentier nature of security institutions has led to the emergence of a counterterrorism economy where political actors and the military elite misuse the growing security budgets for their personal gains. Through ghost contracts to proxies, friends, and families; inflated security contracts; and the diversion of security votes; large amounts of money budgeted to fight terrorism are embezzled.

There is vivid inefficiency and failure, since terrorism is growing despite the huge increase in the security budget. While we would expect that increased level of security funds would lead to the defeat of the terrorist groups, in reality we see an expansion of terrorism. This study provides an empirical justification of Nwankpa's (2015,35) argument that "the unregulated free flow of cash may have fueled corruption among military commanders who for selfish reasons divert funds meant for soldiers' salary and for the upgrade of weaponry." Furthermore, the Nigerian context speaks to other cases of corruption and neo-patrimonialism during times of war or conflict. The wars in Afghanistan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Angola are cases that illuminate the dynamics of neo-patrimonialism in conflict settings where political actors and their clients establish businesses so as to exploit and help sustain conflicts for personal enrichment (Murphy 2003; Malaquias 2001; Rubin 2000; Reno 1995, 1998).

The counterterrorism economy in Nigeria has several implications. One overriding consequence is the expansion of terrorism. Clearly, the misappropriation defense sector funds deprive the military of the assets needed to match Boko Haram's and ISWAP's

growing sophistication in modern weaponry. It further emboldens the terrorist groups to launch daring attacks not just on defenseless civilians, but also against military bases. Also, the resilience of the terrorist groups encourages Al Qaeda and ISIS to view Nigeria as fertile ground for the expansion of their jihadist goals and to project the successes of Boko Haram and ISWAP as victories in global jihadism. Mendelson (2017) asserts that Al Qaeda's decline influenced its adoption of a branching-out strategy, such as the establishment of franchises in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The resilience of the terrorist insurgency in Nigeria may validate Al Qaeda's strategy. Also, the increasing successes of Boko Haram and ISWAP may encourage newer terrorist groups to emerge. Besides, the insecurity breeds a fertile ground for criminal gangs engaged in various forms of violence and extortion.

## NOTES

1. The snowballing approach was used for the fieldwork carried out in 2019. The use of snowballing is based on the sensitive nature of the issue of security sector finances in Nigeria. In other words, the author had challenges finding security agents and civil society organization workers who were willing to be interviewed. To overcome this challenge, respondents had to establish confidence and trust in the author. As a result, the respondents that were initially interviewed provided contact information for others. The author sought the consent of the interviewees and confidentiality was also guaranteed.

2. This civil society organization has partnered with the federal government of Nigeria to implement the government's operation of safe-corridor programs. The programs are aimed at deradicalizing and reintegrating ex-Boko Haram and ISWAP members into society.

3. The Hashish group, also known as the assassins, were Islamic extremists under the leadership of Hassan in Al Sabbah. For more on Hashish, see Hoffman (2006, 84). According to Pedahzur and Perliger (2009), the sicarians were said to be the first sects that engaged in acts of terrorism. There are two schools of thought on the meaning of their name. One school believed that they got their name from the sicca-a dagger that they used to kill their targets, another school claimed that their name is derived from the word sicarius, which means killer-assassin. For more on the Sicarians, see Pedahzur and Perliger (2009, 6).

4. For more on the differences between civil war and terrorism, see Boulden (2009) and Martini and Njoku (2017).

5. This article subscribes to the conceptualization of corruption by Ogundiya (2009: 282): "Corruption is a multidimensional concept that has

legal, social, political, economic and ethical connotations. It comes in various forms and dimensions. It is simply conceived ... as misuse or improper use of power and influence, deliberately and consciously for personal aggrandizement or group advantage. In this sense, corruption connotes the abuse of public roles or resources, or the use of illegitimate forms of political power and influence, by public or private parties.”

6. Current data on the approved additional allocation for internal security operations was difficult to obtain at the time of writing this article.

7. FDG conducted with executive and program managers of CSOs focused on security issues (Abuja, March 13, 2019).

8. Interview, counterterrorism security personnel in the Nigerian Police (Lagos, April 11, 2019).

9. Interview, counterterrorism officer of the National Security and Civil Defence Corp (Oyo, February 19, 2015).

10. Interview, commander of Civilian Joint Task Force (Borno, February 7, 2019).

11. FGD conducted with executive and program managers of CSOs focused on security issues (Abuja, March 13, 2019).

12. Interview, conflict and terrorism investigative journalist (Abuja, March 12, 2019).

13. Interview, major general, (retired) commander of counterterrorism operations in the Northeast (Abuja, February 12, 2019).

14. FGD conducted with executive and program managers of CSOs focused on security issues (Abuja, March 13, 2019).

15. FGD conducted with executive and program managers of CSOs focused on security issues (Abuja, March 13, 2019).

16. Interview, counterterrorism security personnel in the Nigerian Police (Lagos, April 11, 2019).

17. Program manager of CSOs focused on security and development (Abuja, February 11, 2019).

18. Current data on the number of security votes disbursed to the Northeast states was difficult to obtain at the time of writing this article. This is because issues like security votes are shrouded in secrecy by the government.

19. Interview, major general (retired) commander of counterterrorism operations in the Northeast (Abuja, February 12, 2019).

20. FGD conducted with executive and program managers of CSOs focused on security issues (Abuja, March 13, 2019).

21. FGD conducted with executive and program managers of CSOs focused on security issues (Abuja, March 13, 2019).

22. Interview, Nigerian security expert (United States, March 14, 2019).

23. Interview, executive of an advocacy NGO (Abuja, February 27, 2019).

24. Interview, executive of an advocacy NGO (Abuja, February 27, 2019).

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**EMEKA THADDUES NJOKU** (emeka.njoku.thaddues@gmail.com) holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. His research focuses on the intersection of civil society organizations and security governance, particularly post-9/11 international and state-level counter-terrorism policies and practices. He is currently a 2019/2020 Post-doctoral Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies/African Humanities Program, New York, USA. Njoku’s work has appeared in *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, *Development in Practice*, *Development Policy Review* and a forthcoming edited book by Manchester University Press.