Counterinsurgency Strategies and Operational Effectiveness: A Conceptual Assessment of Strengths, Weaknesses, and Contemporary Constraints

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Abstract
Counterinsurgency (COIN) remains one of the most complex dimensions of contemporary security governance because of the evolving character of insurgent threats, asymmetric warfare, and the interplay of military, political, socioeconomic, and technological factors. Although conventional military operations are essential for disrupting insurgent capabilities, experience across different conflict environments indicates that operational effectiveness also depends on intelligence coordination, community engagement, accountable governance, regional cooperation, and sustainable recovery. This conceptual paper critically examines the operational strengths, weaknesses, and contemporary constraints associated with counterinsurgency strategies, using Nigeria's experience with Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) as an illustrative context. Drawing on population-centric counterinsurgency perspectives and Human Security Theory, the paper analyses military operations, intelligence and inter-agency coordination, civil-military relations, stabilisation, civilian protection, and regional security cooperation. It identifies key strengths in joint operations, intelligence-led planning, operational adaptation, and coordinated security responses. It also discusses persistent weaknesses, including intelligence gaps, logistical deficiencies, institutional fragmentation, accountability concerns, and declining public trust. Contemporary constraints include cross-border insurgent networks, changing technologies and information environments, weak governance, humanitarian emergencies, and resource limitations. The paper argues that military outputs alone provide an incomplete measure of success. It proposes an Integrated Counterinsurgency Effectiveness Framework comprising six interconnected dimensions: military capability and adaptability; intelligence and institutional coordination; community legitimacy; human security and civilian protection; governance and stabilisation; and regional cooperation. The framework offers a conceptual basis for evaluating whether counterinsurgency operations contribute to durable security and the restoration of legitimate public authority.

Keywords: *Counterinsurgency; Operational Effectiveness; Insurgency; Human Security; Civil-Military Relations; Intelligence; Security Governance; Regional Cooperation; Asymmetric Warfare.*

1.0 Introduction

Counterinsurgency (COIN) is among the most demanding forms of contemporary security intervention because it involves more than defeating an armed opponent. Insurgent organisations often operate within civilian environments, adapt to pressure, exploit governance weaknesses, and seek to influence the political and social conditions in which conflict occurs. Consequently, counterinsurgency requires the coordination of military, intelligence, political, administrative, informational, and community-oriented measures. Military force remains necessary when armed groups threaten lives and public institutions, but it cannot independently guarantee lasting security (Galula, 1964; Kilcullen, 2006; U.S. Department of the Army, 2014). (Agbiboa, 2020; Lenshie et al., 2024). The debate over counterinsurgency effectiveness centres partly on how success is defined. Operational indicators such as territory recovered, insurgents neutralised, weapons seized, or attacks disrupted can provide useful information about immediate performance. However, these indicators do not necessarily establish that the threat has been durably reduced or that civilians are safer. A more comprehensive assessment considers whether operations protect populations, strengthen public confidence, enable legitimate governance, and create conditions in which communities can recover from violence. Kitzen (2017) identifies legitimacy as a central mechanism in population-centric counterinsurgency, reinforcing the importance of the relationship between security institutions and the communities in which they operate. (Lawal & Saliman, 2026). Contemporary insurgencies also operate in environments shaped by cross-border mobility, changing communication technologies, propaganda, local grievances, humanitarian emergencies, and the uneven capacity of public institutions. These conditions complicate intelligence collection, coordination among agencies, and the transition from military operations to stabilisation. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023), in its study of pathways into and out of violent extremist groups across eight African countries, highlights the importance of understanding recruitment and disengagement through context-sensitive evidence rather than assuming a single pathway into extremism.

Nigeria offers an important context for examining these issues. The continuing threat posed by Boko Haram and ISWAP, alongside the wider security challenges affecting northern Nigeria, demonstrates the complexity of sustaining security despite prolonged military operations and regional cooperation. The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2026) describes Nigeria's security environment as involving multiple, overlapping challenges, including Islamist insurgency, banditry, and serious effects on civilian populations. Regional arrangements such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) further demonstrate the need for cooperation across national boundaries, while also revealing the institutional and logistical requirements of joint operations (Dauda & Ukaeje, 2024). (African Union Peace and Security Council, 2024; United Nations Security Council, 2017).

This paper critically examines the strengths, weaknesses, and contemporary constraints of counterinsurgency strategies. Its objectives are to clarify key concepts; discuss the theoretical foundations of population-centred and human-security approaches; assess the strengths and weaknesses of major counterinsurgency strategies; examine contemporary constraints; use Nigeria as an illustrative context; and propose an integrated framework for assessing effectiveness. The central argument is that sustainable counterinsurgency requires a coordinated

approach in which military capability is connected to intelligence, institutional accountability, community legitimacy, civilian protection, regional cooperation, and longer-term stabilisation.

2.0 Methodology

This paper adopts a conceptual research design based on a critical review of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and relevant reports from recognised international organisations. Literature was selected based on its relevance to counterinsurgency strategies, operational effectiveness, institutional coordination, civilian protection, and human security, with particular emphasis on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin. The selected literature was analysed thematically to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and contemporary constraints of counterinsurgency operations. Drawing on population-centric counterinsurgency perspectives and Human Security Theory, the analysis informed the development of an Integrated Counterinsurgency Effectiveness Framework. The paper relies on published sources rather than primary field data; therefore, its proposed framework remains conceptual and requires empirical validation in future research.

3.0 Conceptual Clarification

3.1 Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency refers to the combination of civilian and military measures undertaken to defeat an insurgency and address the conditions that enable it to persist. It can include military operations, intelligence gathering, political engagement, public administration, information activities, and measures to protect and support affected populations (U.S. Department of the Army, 2014). The precise mix of measures varies according to the character of the insurgency, the institutional capacity of the state, and the circumstances of affected communities. Counterinsurgency should therefore be understood as a coordinated strategic process rather than a synonym for military action alone.

3.2 Insurgency and Asymmetric Warfare

Insurgency is an organised challenge to established political authority that may employ violence, intimidation, propaganda, clandestine networks, and attempts to establish or contest control over populations and territory. Asymmetric warfare describes situations in which opposing actors possess different capabilities and use different methods to pursue their objectives. Insurgent groups may avoid direct confrontation with stronger state forces, instead using ambushes, improvised explosive devices, attacks on vulnerable targets, or coercion of local populations. These methods create demands for adaptable intelligence, careful operational planning, and protection of civilians.

3.3 Operational Effectiveness

Operational effectiveness concerns the extent to which an organisation or strategy achieves its intended objectives using available capabilities and resources. In counterinsurgency, effectiveness should be assessed at more than one level. Operational outputs include activities such as deployments, patrols, and engagements. Immediate outcomes concern changes in threats or the security of specific locations. Strategic outcomes concern whether improvements are durable and contribute to public safety, legitimate governance, and community recovery. Treating these levels as interchangeable can overstate the significance of short-term military gains.

3.4 Kinetic and Non-Kinetic Strategies

Kinetic strategies involve the use or threat of physical force, including military engagements, raids, and operations intended to disrupt armed groups. Non-kinetic strategies include intelligence analysis, communication, negotiation where appropriate, community engagement, governance support, and socioeconomic or humanitarian interventions. These categories are analytically distinct but often operate together. An integrated strategy does not remove the need for force where necessary; rather, it seeks to ensure that force is connected to broader political and security objectives and does not undermine the conditions required for lasting stability.

3.5 Security Governance and Human Security

Security governance concerns the institutions, rules, responsibilities, and relationships through which security is provided, overseen, and held accountable. It includes coordination among security agencies, civilian oversight, the rule of law, and engagement with communities. Human security, as articulated by the UNDP (1994), places people at the centre of security analysis and draws attention to economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. These concepts broaden counterinsurgency assessment beyond the defence of territory to include the safety and welfare of populations

4.0 Theoretical Framework

4.1 Population-Centric Counterinsurgency

Population-centric counterinsurgency places the protection and cooperation of the population at the centre of strategic thinking. It recognises that insurgency unfolds within social and political environments and that the behaviour of civilians can influence the availability of information, the legitimacy of state action, and the ability of insurgents to operate. Galula (1964) emphasises the importance of securing the population and establishing credible political authority, while Kilcullen (2006) argues for understanding insurgency through its local social dynamics. Kitzen (2017) further identifies legitimacy as a central mechanism in population-centric counterinsurgency. (Agbiboa, 2020; Aina, 2025).

The strength of this perspective is that it directs attention to civilian safety, local knowledge, and the relationship between security operations and public confidence. It also cautions against assuming that tactical success necessarily produces strategic success. However, a population-centric approach can be difficult to implement where communities face coercion from multiple actors, where institutions lack capacity, or where the state cannot reliably protect those who cooperate. The approach should therefore be treated as a strategic orientation rather than a guarantee of success.

4.2 Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory broadens the concept of security from the protection of the state to the protection of individuals and communities from serious threats to their lives and welfare. The UNDP (1994) identifies several interrelated dimensions of human security, including economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. In counterinsurgency settings, this perspective directs attention to displacement, livelihood disruption, restricted access to services, civilian casualties, and the consequences of prolonged insecurity.

Human Security Theory is relevant because a population may remain insecure even after a military operation has recovered territory or reduced the immediate presence of armed groups. Its broad scope is also a limitation: not every social or economic problem can be addressed directly

through counterinsurgency, and the concept must be operationalised carefully. In this paper, human security is used to evaluate the civilian consequences and sustainability of security interventions, not to suggest that development programmes can substitute for protection against armed threats.

4.3 Integrating the Perspectives

The two perspectives are complementary. Population-centric counterinsurgency explains why protection, cooperation, and legitimacy matter to operational strategy, while Human Security Theory broadens evaluation to include the lived safety and welfare of affected populations. Together, they support a multidimensional framework built around four analytical concerns: operational capability, institutional coordination, community legitimacy, and human-security outcomes. The later sections expand this framework to include governance, stabilisation, and regional cooperation.

5.0 Major Counterinsurgency Strategies and Their Operational Strengths

5.1 Military Operations and Territorial Security

Military operations remain essential where insurgent organisations pose immediate threats to civilians, security personnel, and public institutions. They can disrupt armed activity, protect strategic locations, recover contested areas, and create opportunities for humanitarian access and public administration. Their contribution is strongest when objectives are clearly defined, operations are based on reliable intelligence, and sufficient logistical support is available (U.S. Department of the Army, 2014). Military action, however, should be assessed in relation to the security conditions it creates and whether those conditions can be sustained.

5.2 Intelligence-Led Operations

Intelligence supports the identification of threats, understanding of insurgent networks, operational planning, and allocation of scarce resources. Reliable information can improve the precision and timeliness of operations and reduce unnecessary exposure of civilians and security personnel to danger. Intelligence effectiveness depends not only on collection but also on verification, analysis, information sharing, and the ability to translate information into appropriate decisions.

5.3 Joint Operations and Inter-Agency Coordination

Joint operations can combine the capabilities of different security institutions and reduce duplication where mandates and responsibilities are clear. Coordination is especially important when insurgent activity crosses jurisdictions or when military operations depend on police, intelligence, border, and civilian authorities. Regional cooperation through the MNJTF illustrates the potential value of coordinated action in the Lake Chad Basin, although its effectiveness also depends on resources, interoperability, and institutional support (Dauda & Ukaeje, 2024). (African Union Peace and Security Council, 2024; United Nations Security Council, 2017).

5.4 Civil-Military Cooperation and Community Engagement

Community engagement can improve understanding of local conditions, support the identification of threats, and create channels for reporting concerns. Civil-military cooperation may also help coordinate humanitarian access and the restoration of essential services. These approaches are most credible when communities are treated as partners whose safety and rights

matter, rather than merely as sources of intelligence. Trust cannot be commanded; it is shaped by the consistency, fairness, and accountability of institutional conduct (Kitzen, 2017).

5.5 Governance, Stabilisation, and Socioeconomic Interventions

Stabilisation measures seek to connect immediate security gains with the restoration of public administration, basic services, livelihoods, and community functioning. David (2024) discusses the value of integrating development, diplomacy, and defence in Nigerian counterinsurgency and draws lessons from Uruzgan. Such integration can help connect security operations with wider political and developmental objectives. Nevertheless, interventions must be context-sensitive; poverty or unemployment should not be treated as automatic causes of insurgency, and development projects do not replace the need for effective protection.

5.6 Technology and Operational Adaptation

Communications systems, geospatial information, surveillance, and data analysis can support situational awareness and operational planning when used lawfully and responsibly. Their value depends on the quality of information, technical competence, institutional coordination, and appropriate safeguards. Technology does not remove the need for sound judgement, human intelligence, civilian protection, or accountability.

5.7 Summary of Operational Strengths

The major strengths of counterinsurgency strategies lie in their capacity to combine direct protection, intelligence, coordination, community engagement, and stabilisation. No single strategy is sufficient in every setting. Their effectiveness depends on whether the components are aligned with clear objectives, supported by appropriate resources, and evaluated against both immediate results and sustainable security outcomes.

6.0 Operational Weaknesses of Counterinsurgency Strategies

6.1 Intelligence Gaps and Misidentification

Intelligence gaps can lead to delayed responses, poor prioritisation, ineffective deployments, and misidentification of threats. Inaccurate or insufficiently verified information may also expose civilians to harm and undermine confidence in security institutions. Improving intelligence effectiveness requires investment in analysis and verification as well as appropriate mechanisms for sharing information and learning from mistakes.

6.2 Weak Inter-Agency Collaboration

Security institutions may operate with different mandates, procedures, communication systems, and organisational cultures. When coordination is weak, agencies may duplicate efforts, withhold relevant information, or leave gaps in responsibility. Dauda and Ukaeje (2024) identify interoperability challenges among the constraints affecting the MNJTF, illustrating that joint mandates alone do not guarantee effective cooperation.

6.3 Logistical and Resource Deficiencies

Counterinsurgency operations can be weakened by inadequate transport, communications, equipment, maintenance, personnel support, and predictable funding. Resource shortages may limit mobility, delay responses, reduce operational continuity, and undermine joint initiatives. Effective resource management therefore requires transparent planning, prioritisation,

maintenance, and alignment between operational needs and available capabilities.

6.4 Civilian Harm, Accountability, and Legitimacy

Allegations of misconduct, avoidable civilian harm, arbitrary treatment, or inadequate accountability can damage the legitimacy of security institutions. Such consequences are not separate from operational effectiveness because they may reduce community cooperation and make intelligence collection more difficult. Counterinsurgency operations should comply with applicable legal obligations and include credible mechanisms for investigating allegations, addressing substantiated misconduct, and learning from incidents. (Osadare & Olagunju, 2025; Agbiboa, 2020).

6.5 Overreliance on Kinetic Operations

Military action is indispensable when armed groups threaten lives, but an approach dominated by kinetic operations may fail to address the institutional and social conditions that affect the sustainability of security. Territory recovered through force may remain vulnerable if public administration, policing, essential services, and local security arrangements are not restored. The point is not to replace military action with development, but to connect immediate protection with a feasible plan for sustaining security.

6.6 Weak Post-Operation Stabilisation

Where stabilisation is poorly planned or under-resourced, security gains may be temporary. Residents may remain displaced, livelihoods may not recover, and public institutions may be unable to provide reliable services. Stabilisation requires coordination among relevant authorities and partners, attention to local priorities, and realistic arrangements for maintaining services and security.

6.7 Summary of Operational Weaknesses

The operational weaknesses discussed above are interconnected. Intelligence deficiencies can worsen coordination; weak coordination can waste scarce resources; civilian harm can undermine trust; and inadequate stabilisation can reduce the durability of military gains. Effective counterinsurgency therefore requires systematic review of both operational performance and the institutional relationships that support it.

7.0 Contemporary Constraints on Counterinsurgency Effectiveness

7.1 Transnational Insurgent Networks and Cross-Border Insecurity

Cross-border movement, shared logistical routes, and regional networks complicate counterinsurgency because armed groups may exploit differences in national capacity, jurisdiction, and border management. These challenges make regional coordination important, but cooperation must be sustained through compatible procedures, information sharing, adequate resources, and clear responsibilities. The MNJTF experience demonstrates both the value and the institutional demands of regional action (Dauda & Ukaeje, 2024). (United Nations Security Council, 2017).

7.2 Technological Adaptation and Emerging Threats

Insurgent organisations can adapt their use of communication technologies and other tools as security practices change. Security institutions must assess emerging threats and maintain appropriate technical capacity, while ensuring that surveillance and information practices remain lawful, proportionate, and accountable. Technological solutions should complement, not replace, human judgement and reliable local understanding.

7.3 Misinformation, Disinformation, and Propaganda

Information environments can influence public perceptions of security operations, shape community expectations, and amplify fear or distrust. Misleading claims may circulate rapidly during crises, while official communication that lacks credibility can deepen suspicion. Responses should prioritise timely, accurate, transparent communication and independent verification rather than treating all criticism or disagreement as hostile propaganda.

7.4 Weak Governance and Political Constraints

Limited administrative capacity, corruption, inconsistent service delivery, and weak accountability can constrain the ability of public institutions to sustain security. These problems are not uniform across Nigeria or across conflict-affected communities, and their contribution should be assessed contextually. Nonetheless, counterinsurgency strategies may struggle to consolidate security where institutions cannot maintain public services, resolve disputes fairly, or respond credibly to community concerns.

7.5 Civilian Protection, Displacement, and Humanitarian Challenges

Prolonged insecurity can disrupt farming, trade, education, healthcare, and access to markets, while displacement places pressure on host communities and humanitarian systems. The EUAA (2026) documents the multifaceted character of Nigeria's security environment and its effects on civilians. These consequences matter to counterinsurgency because insecurity can persist in daily life even when particular military objectives have been achieved.

7.6 Socioeconomic Vulnerabilities and Community Resilience

Socioeconomic hardship may interact with insecurity, exclusion, local grievances, and perceptions of state legitimacy, but it should not be treated as a single or automatic cause of violent extremism. UNDP (2023) examines varied pathways into recruitment and disengagement across eight African countries, supporting context-sensitive analysis. Effective responses should therefore be based on evidence about local circumstances and combine protection with appropriate recovery and resilience measures.

7.7 Funding Limitations and Sustainability

Counterinsurgency requires sustained funding for personnel, equipment, maintenance, intelligence, civilian protection, and stabilisation. Short-term funding or poorly coordinated resource allocation may undermine operational continuity. Dauda and Ukaeje (2024) identify funding and equipment constraints among the challenges affecting the MNJTF. Long-term planning should therefore align resources with clear priorities and transparent evaluation.

7.8 Synthesis

Contemporary constraints often magnify existing operational weaknesses. Cross-border threats test coordination; technology changes the information environment; humanitarian emergencies complicate stabilisation; and resource limitations reduce institutional resilience. These constraints cannot always be eliminated, but their effects can be managed through adaptation, cooperation, accountability, and context-sensitive planning.

8.0 Counterinsurgency Effectiveness in Nigeria: A Contextual Assessment

8.1 The Evolution of Insurgency and State Responses

Nigeria provides an important context for examining the interaction between military action and wider security conditions. The activities of Boko Haram and ISWAP have contributed to a prolonged security crisis in the northeast, while other forms of insecurity affect additional parts of the country. The EUAA (2026) describes Nigeria's security situation as multifaceted, involving Islamist insurgency, banditry, and serious consequences for civilians. This environment requires strategies capable of adapting to different actors, locations, and patterns of violence. Nigeria's response has included military campaigns, intelligence operations, and regional cooperation. Yet continuing violence illustrates the distinction between disrupting an armed group's immediate activity and resolving the broader security challenge. A comprehensive assessment must recognise operational achievements without assuming that they automatically produce lasting stability.

8.2 Operations against Boko Haram and ISWAP

Military operations remain central to efforts to disrupt insurgent activities, protect military installations and civilian communities, and recover contested locations. The regional dimension of the conflict has encouraged cooperation through the MNJTF, authorised by the African Union Peace and Security Council and operating within the Lake Chad Basin security architecture. Dauda and Ukaeje (2024) report that the MNJTF has made progress in its military mandate and moved towards stabilisation, while facing constraints involving funding, equipment, interoperability, and policing capacity. (African Union Commission, 2024; African Union Peace and Security Council, 2024). These findings demonstrate that joint security initiatives can contribute to operational objectives but remain dependent on material and institutional support. The continuation of insurgent activity also indicates that military pressure does not automatically eliminate insurgent capabilities. Operational success should therefore be assessed against clearly defined objectives and the durability of resulting security improvements. (Lenshie et al., 2024; Okoko et al., 2024).

8.3 Operational Achievements and Persistent Challenges

Military operations can disrupt armed activity, secure strategic locations, and create opportunities for humanitarian access and the restoration of public administration. Regional cooperation can improve coordination against threats that cross-national boundaries. However, the persistence of violence, displacement, and civilian vulnerability shows why the assessment of effectiveness must extend beyond operational outputs. It is useful to distinguish three levels of performance. Operational outputs include deployments and engagements; immediate outcomes concern changes in threats and local security; and longer-term results concern the durability of those changes and the capacity of institutions to sustain protection. A recovered location may represent an important achievement, but it does not by itself establish that policing, services,

livelihoods, and legitimate administration have been restored.

8.4 Intelligence, Coordination, and Community Relations

Effective counterinsurgency depends on reliable intelligence, competent analysis, and coordination among institutions. The interoperability constraints identified by Dauda and Ukaeje (2024) show the importance of procedures and resources that enable joint action. Community relations are also relevant because local residents may possess knowledge of changing security conditions, yet their willingness to share information may depend on their safety and confidence in security agencies. Community engagement should therefore be supported by credible complaint mechanisms, professional conduct, and appropriate protection for informants. Where residents fear retaliation or believe that security institutions are unresponsive, cooperation may be limited. Intelligence coordination and public trust should be treated as related components of operational effectiveness.

8.5 Civilian Protection and Human Security

The consequences of insecurity extend beyond direct armed confrontation to displacement, disrupted livelihoods, damage to infrastructure, and limited access to essential services. The EUAA (2026) documents the continuing complexity of Nigeria's security environment and the impact of violence on civilian populations. These conditions illustrate why military indicators alone cannot capture the lived experience of security.

Human Security Theory provides a useful lens for evaluating whether security interventions improve people's ability to live safely and access basic services (UNDP, 1994). Civilian protection should be incorporated into planning and evaluation, alongside measures to support humanitarian access, livelihood recovery, and accountable public administration. Such measures complement military protection rather than replace it.

8.6 Lessons for Nigeria

1. Connect military operations to clear strategic and stabilisation objectives so that immediate gains can be sustained.
2. Provide regional security initiatives with predictable funding, appropriate equipment, interoperability arrangements, and clearly defined responsibilities.
3. Strengthen intelligence verification, analysis, information sharing, and institutional learning from operational shortcomings.
4. Make civilian protection and accountability central to operational planning and evaluation.
5. Support safe community engagement and credible mechanisms for reporting threats and complaints.
6. Link improvements in immediate security with realistic plans for restoring public services, livelihoods, and local administration.
7. Evaluate effectiveness through a combination of operational indicators, civilian safety, institutional performance, public confidence, and durability of security improvements.

8.7 Synthesis

Nigeria's experience reinforces the central argument that military capability is indispensable but insufficient on its own to guarantee sustainable security. Regional cooperation, intelligence, institutional coordination, civilian protection, and the restoration of legitimate governance must be considered together. The case provides a contextual illustration of the paper's conceptual

argument; it is not an empirical validation of the framework proposed below.

9.0 Towards an Integrated Framework for Effective Counterinsurgency

9.1 Rationale for an Integrated Framework

A central limitation in conventional assessments of counterinsurgency is the tendency to equate operational activity with strategic success. The number of engagements, insurgents neutralised, or locations recovered may indicate performance, but these measures do not independently establish whether insecurity has been sustainably reduced. Population-centric perspectives and Human Security Theory support a broader assessment that considers the relationship between military action, legitimacy, civilian safety, and institutional capacity (Galula, 1964; Kilcullen, 2006; UNDP, 1994).

This paper proposes an Integrated Counterinsurgency Effectiveness Framework (ICEF) comprising six interconnected dimensions. The framework is conceptual and intended to organise analysis, identify weaknesses, and guide context-sensitive evaluation; it has not been empirically validated.

9.2 Dimension One: Military Capability and Operational Adaptability

Military capability includes trained personnel, appropriate equipment, operational planning, logistics, and the ability to respond to changing threats. Operations can disrupt insurgent activity and protect vulnerable populations, but their strategic value depends on the durability of the security they create. Evaluation should consider operational readiness, logistical reliability, responsiveness to changing tactics, civilian protection, and the maintenance of secured areas.

9.3 Dimension Two: Intelligence and Institutional Coordination

This dimension concerns the collection, verification, analysis, and appropriate sharing of information, together with coordination among institutions. Effective coordination requires clear mandates, communication channels, interoperable procedures, and mechanisms for reviewing failures. The relevant measure is not merely the volume of intelligence collected but its reliability and contribution to appropriate decisions.

9.4 Dimension Three: Community Legitimacy and Population-Centred Security

Community legitimacy refers to the extent to which residents regard security institutions as credible, fair, accountable, and responsive. Engagement should provide safe channels for reporting threats and complaints, protect informants, and respond appropriately to community concerns. Indicators may include public confidence, perceived safety, responsiveness to complaints, and evidence of safe cooperation. Communities should not be treated collectively as threats because of location, identity, or social relationships.

9.5 Dimension Four: Human Security and Civilian Protection

This dimension considers the safety and welfare of people affected by insurgency and counterinsurgency. Indicators may include civilian harm, displacement, access to healthcare and education, access to markets and farmland, livelihood recovery, and the effectiveness of mechanisms for investigating civilian harm. Quantitative indicators should be interpreted carefully and complemented by qualitative evidence because underreporting and restricted access can distort apparent trends.

9.6 Dimension Five: Governance, Stabilisation, and Recovery

This dimension concerns the capacity of public institutions to sustain security after immediate threats have been reduced. It includes restoration of public services, functioning local administration, access to justice, livelihood recovery, and coordination of humanitarian and longer-term recovery interventions. Programmes should be based on assessed needs and should not assume that poverty alone causes insurgency. Their contribution should be evaluated through improvements in service access, institutional functioning, and the durability of security.

9.7 Dimension Six: Regional Cooperation and Response to Contemporary Threats

Regional cooperation is necessary where insurgent activity crosses national boundaries. It requires sustained support, clear responsibilities, appropriate information sharing, and interoperability among participating institutions. The MNJTF experience highlights both the potential contribution of joint operations and the importance of resources and institutional capacity (Dauda & Ukaeje, 2024). Evaluation should consider whether regional arrangements improve coordinated responses and contribute to durable security.

9.8 Integrating the Six Dimensions

The six dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Military operations may disrupt immediate threats, but their strategic contribution depends partly on intelligence quality, institutional coordination, and the ability to maintain security afterwards. Community legitimacy can support cooperation, while civilian protection and accountable governance may strengthen public confidence. Regional cooperation can improve responses to cross-border threats, but its effectiveness depends on interoperability and sustained commitment.

For practical purposes, the framework can be organised around four overlapping stages: (1) threat assessment and strategic planning; (2) coordinated security operations; (3) stabilisation and community recovery; and (4) evaluation, accountability, and adaptation. These stages are not rigid or strictly sequential. In practice, threat assessment, security operations, humanitarian assistance, stabilisation, and evaluation may occur simultaneously or recur as conditions change.

9.9 Proposed Indicators for Assessing Effectiveness

Framework dimension	Illustrative indicators	Evaluation question
Military capability and adaptability	Readiness, logistics, response to changing threats, durability of secured areas	Are operations reducing threats and contributing to sustained security?
Intelligence and coordination	Verified intelligence, information-sharing timeliness, clarity of responsibilities	Are institutions making informed and coordinated decisions?
Community legitimacy	Public confidence, responsiveness to complaints, safe community cooperation	Do communities regard security institutions as credible and safe to cooperate with?
Human security and civilian protection	Civilian harm, displacement, service access, livelihood recovery, safety perceptions	Are interventions improving the safety and welfare of affected populations?
Governance and stabilisation	Functioning services, local administration, access to justice, economic recovery	Can institutions sustain security and support recovery?
Regional cooperation	Interoperability, cross-border coordination, sustained operational support	Are regional arrangements improving responses to shared threats?

Source: Author's conceptual synthesis, drawing on Galula (1964), Kilcullen (2006), Kitzen (2017), UNDP

(1994, 2023), and Dauda and Ukaeje (2024).

9.10 Synthesis

The ICEF provides a structured way to examine why counterinsurgency strategies may produce operational gains without necessarily achieving sustainable security. It does not assume that all dimensions carry equal weight in every context, nor does it prescribe a universal numerical score. Its practical application requires context-specific definitions, reliable baseline information, multiple sources of evidence, and attention to unintended consequences. Its contribution is analytical: it links military performance with institutional coordination, community legitimacy, civilian protection, stabilisation, and regional cooperation.

10.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

10.1 Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the strengths, weaknesses, and contemporary constraints of counterinsurgency strategies, using Nigeria's experience with Boko Haram and ISWAP as an illustrative context. It has argued that counterinsurgency effectiveness cannot be determined exclusively by military achievements such as neutralising insurgents, recovering territory, or disrupting operations. Effectiveness must also be assessed in terms of civilian protection, institutional coordination, community legitimacy, and the sustainability of security outcomes.

The analysis identified important strengths in military operations, intelligence-led planning, joint security initiatives, community engagement, and stabilisation. It also identified operational weaknesses, including intelligence gaps, institutional fragmentation, logistical deficiencies, accountability concerns, and weak post-operation stabilisation. Contemporary constraints such as cross-border networks, technological adaptation, misinformation, governance limitations, humanitarian emergencies, and resource shortages complicate implementation and sustainability.

Nigeria's experience illustrates the difficulty of translating military activity into durable security. The continued threat posed by Boko Haram and ISWAP does not negate the contribution of security operations; rather, it shows the importance of assessing operational achievements alongside the institutional and social conditions required to maintain them. Population-centric counterinsurgency perspectives and Human Security Theory provide a basis for this broader assessment. The paper's principal conceptual contribution is the Integrated Counterinsurgency Effectiveness Framework, which brings together six dimensions: military capability and adaptability; intelligence and institutional coordination; community legitimacy; human security and civilian protection; governance and stabilisation; and regional cooperation. The framework offers a structured basis for examining why military gains may not automatically produce sustainable security. Its dimensions and proposed indicators require empirical assessment in specific conflict settings.

10.2 Recommendations

1. **Adopt an integrated strategy.** Connect military operations with intelligence, civilian protection, governance, stabilisation, and community engagement through clearly defined objectives and responsibilities.
2. **Strengthen intelligence and inter-agency coordination.** Improve information verification and sharing, operational communication, interoperability, and institutional learning from failures.
3. **Prioritise civilian protection and accountability.** Incorporate civilian-protection considerations into planning and evaluation and maintain credible procedures for investigating allegations of misconduct and addressing substantiated harm.

4. **Strengthen community engagement and trust.** Provide safe channels for reporting threats and complaints, protect informants, and respond professionally to community concerns.
5. **Improve regional security cooperation.** Sustain support for joint arrangements, clarify responsibilities, improve interoperability, and strengthen cooperation on cross-border threats.
6. **Connect operations with stabilisation and recovery.** Where security conditions permit, restore essential services, support livelihood recovery, and strengthen local administration based on assessed community needs.
7. **Improve logistics and resource management.** Align funding, equipment, transport, communications, maintenance, and personnel support with operational requirements and transparent priorities.
8. **Adapt to emerging threats.** Review strategies regularly, assess changing insurgent tactics, and communicate accurately and responsibly in contested information environments.
9. **Use multidimensional evaluation.** Assess military outputs alongside civilian safety, displacement, service access, institutional performance, public confidence, and the durability of security improvements.
10. **Promote research and institutional learning.** Support context-sensitive studies that examine operational performance and longer-term consequences for communities, governance, and legitimacy.

10.3 Contributions, Limitations, and Further Research

The paper contributes conceptually by bringing population-centric counterinsurgency perspectives into dialogue with Human Security Theory and by proposing a six-dimensional framework for evaluating effectiveness. It distinguishes immediate operational outputs from wider outcomes and longer-term impact, encouraging assessments that consider military performance together with civilian protection, institutional capacity, and community recovery.

The study is limited by its reliance on published sources rather than original fieldwork or a systematic statistical evaluation of counterinsurgency operations. The sources reviewed may differ in geographical coverage, methods, reporting periods, and definitions of effectiveness. The proposed framework has not been empirically validated, and the paper does not establish causal relationships among its dimensions. Future research could apply the framework in selected conflict-affected communities in northeastern Nigeria using case studies, interviews, community surveys, and institutional assessments. Comparative research could examine how variations in coordination, civilian protection, governance, and regional cooperation affect the durability of security outcomes. Research should also consider the different experiences of women, young people, displaced populations, and other vulnerable groups. In conclusion, counterinsurgency effectiveness is a multidimensional and context-dependent process. Military action remains necessary where armed threats persist, but sustainable security requires coordinated institutions, civilian protection, community legitimacy, regional cooperation, and the restoration of effective public authority. An integrated approach offers a more comprehensive basis for assessing performance and identifying pathways towards lasting security in Nigeria and comparable contexts.

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