



The Challenges of Military Operations in Plateau State, North-Central Nigeria, 1999 To 2022.

Author

**Adams
Ahmed
Okene**

Affiliation:

Provost
National
Defense
College,
Abuja



Abstract

Plateau State has been engulfed in lots of security challenges for about two decades now which made the erstwhile peaceful state a theatre for ethno-religious tensions. The constant resurgence of this security challenge in the state necessitated the deployment of the military to Plateau State to provide security and ensure peace in the state. The paper deployed the historical tools of research which include primary and secondary materials such as oral interviews, reports, journals amongst others. However, the military operations in the State have suffered several challenges and chief amongst these challenges is the bias and perception held by the people of Plateau on the non-neutrality of the military in its operations on the Plateau. This paper therefore examines this alleged bias of the military in its operations. The paper argues that the seemingly bias of military operations in the state is not an institutional objective of the military but stems from its challenges on securing the Plateau because the military is a disciplined institution where the spirit of camaraderie is very high. Thus, the issue of the military being partisan along ethno-religious lines in the Plateau security challenges is unfounded. The paper further argues that this trust deficiency between the military and the people could mar the success of confronting the security challenges in Plateau state and recommends trust building, open communication amongst others.

Keywords; insecurity, military operations, north central and Plateau State

Co-Author: Itodo Felicia

Department of History, Research and Archive National Defense College, Abuja



Introduction

Plateau State geographically nestled in the heart of Nigeria. The state with the maxim of 'State of Tourism' has been marred by persistent security challenges over the past two decades. It has witnessed communal conflicts, farmers-herders' crises, ethno-religious tensions, and insurgent activities such as kidnapping and banditry. These security challenges which have defied police actions have plagued the state, impacted the lives of its residents and shaped the socio-political landscape. Plateau state has been a hotspot of insecurity and violence since 1999, posing significant challenges to military operations in the state. The state complex security landscape has been characterized by several security challenges, resulting in loss of lives, displacement and destruction of properties. This has led to the deployment of military operations with different insignia and operational code names led by the Nigerian Army to secure the Plateau. Despite these military operations, the security challenges on the Plateau continued. This paper therefore examines the multifaceted nature of security challenges on the Plateau from 1999 when the Fourth Republic began in Nigeria to 2022 when another major crisis broke out on the Plateau. The paper attempts to unravel the perceptions and biases that have emerged, particularly with regard to the role of the military and their various operations in the area.

Scholars have written extensively on security challenges and its implications on Plateau State but the aspect of military operations and its challenges have not received adequate attention from researchers. The paper sets out to fill this obvious gap in research.

Geography, History and People and Security Challenges on the Plateau

Plateau State lies on coordinates latitude 80° 24'N and longitude 80° 32'E of the Greenwich meridian.¹ The state is one of the most diverse federal states, with more than 58 ethnic groups. The main ethnic groups in Plateau state are the Berom, the Anaguta, and the Afizere.² Although, not originally one of the autochthonous groups in the state but owing to their long residence in Jos, many Hausa and Fulani in the city refer to themselves as *Jasawa* which means people of Jos. The

¹ Plateau State coordinates retrieved from Plateau State official website, plateaustate.gov.ng 12th May, 2024

² Shedrack Gaya Best, *Conflict and Peace Building in Plateau State, Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2007) 4.



term *Jasawa* is also used for political representation of the Hausa in Jos which also distinguish them from the Hausa–and Fulani population in the states farther to the north.³ The Fulanis in Plateau have mostly remained cattle herders and their grazing routes often take them beyond Plateau State. The majority of the population in Plateau State is Christian, although accurate religious breakdowns are lacking. However, within the center of metropolitan Jos, Muslim Hausa and Fulani constitute the majority.⁴ This theme is not an attempt to whip up the ethno-religious divide but tries to underscore the nexus between the geography, history and the people of the study area and the security challenges therein. This is because the historical, regional, and religious dimensions of the Plateau crisis are crucial to understanding the protracted nature of the conflict situation.

Geographically, Plateau lies in the center of Nigeria, between the predominantly Muslim north and the mostly Christian south. The city of Plateau was established around tin mining activities during colonial times. It attracted migrants from all parts of Nigeria to work in the mines and with the colonial administration. The colonial legacy of indirect rule initially relied on northern emirate structures. Later, political power was transferred to the 'native' ethnic groups of the people of Plateau. Among these, the Berom were one of the largest ethnic groups and they most vocally defend 'indigene' rights in the state. But Hausa migrants from the north constituted by far the most numerous groups in Jos.⁵ Since 20..., the ownership of Jos and claims to 'indigene' status are fiercely contested between those who call themselves the native ethnic groups and the Hausa.

The struggle for indigeneship status is because it ensures access to political representation and positions within the civil service. Only local governments issue these certificates and therefore decide on indigene status.⁶ This arrangement opened the floodgates for the politics of labeling and the selective reciting of historical accounts that foster group boundaries to secure political control over local government areas. Within a socio-political environment characterized by strong patronage networks, exclusion of one fraction of the

³ Roger Blench, 'Recent Research on the Plateau Languages of Central Nigeria.' *Proceedings of the Hamburg meeting to mark the retirement of Professor Ludwig Gerhardt*, March 2004. 2009, 2.

⁴ Human Rights Watch. 2001. 'Jos: A City Torn Apart', *HRW Bulletin Vol. 13, No. 9* December 2001, 5.

⁵ Jana Krause, *A DEADLY CYCLE: ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN JOS, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA* (Geneva: Declaration Secretariat, 2011) 19.

⁶ Andrew Bulus, 52 years, Political Analyst, Jos, 15th December, 2023



political elite is widely felt as socio-economic decline among its constituency.⁷

Brief Overview of Security Challenges in Plateau State, 1999 - 2022

Since the return of Nigeria to civil rule in 1999, Plateau state has been engulfed and enmeshed in several security challenges. The enormity of this complex interplay of security challenges led to a declaration of State of Emergency in 2004 by the Federal Government led by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Available evidence tends to suggest that most communal clashes in the state are often rooted in historical grievances of ethno-religious colouration. These conflicts have resulted in loss of lives, displacement of communities, and destruction of property. According to Bala Muhammed, these ethno-religious tensions were exacerbated by factors such as resource competition and political maneuvering, religion fundamentalism and extremism.⁸

In the year 2001, the first major security challenge on the plateau erupted and approximations of over 1,000 people were killed and several properties worth millions were destroyed. The 2001 crisis began as a conflict over the appointment of a *Jasawa* to public office. The Federal Government under the leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo appointed a State Coordinator of the National Poverty Eradication Agency which is an agency of the Federal Government. The indigenes saw this appointment as their right and a share of the national cake and a settler should not be so appointed. Thus, the indigenes strongly protested the appointment. Human Rights Watch reported that the Berom youths and the *Jasawa* youth associations had sent clearly threatening memos and written exchanges to the governor of Plateau State, Mr. Jonah Jang before the violence erupted.⁹

Despite clear indicators and warnings from several stakeholders, the government did not undertake any significant preventive measures.¹⁰ Fighting broke out in Congo-Russia, a central poor area surrounded by Muslim dominated neighborhoods. This was as a result of a major road barricaded during the Muslim Friday prayers. It is instructive to note that tensions over the blocking of the street during Friday prayers had

⁷ Krause, A *DEADLY CYCLE: ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN JOS, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA*, 28.

⁸ Bala Muhammed, 47 years, Political Analyst/Civil Servant, Kaduna, 9th November, 2023.

⁹ Human Rights Watch. 2001. 'Jos: A City Torn Apart', *HRW Bulletin Vol. 13, No. 9* December 2001, 6.

¹⁰ Samson Bako, 58 years, Political Analyst/Journalist, Abuja 4th October 2023



existed for several years.¹¹ According to Best, the brawl broke out when a Christian woman tried to pass through the congregation on that fateful Friday.¹² The Human Rights Watch reported that shortly after the brawl, Christian and Muslim youths faced each other with homemade weapons. These weapons included arrows, sticks, machetes, and guns. Fighting took place along improvised front lines.¹³ A strong religious dimension underlined the violent clashes from the first day: 'Church bells were ringing and there were Muslim calls to prayer throughout the night'. The 2001 crisis resulted in a heavily religious segregation within the city center of Jos, with the strongholds identified as the 'sharia line' and the 'new Jerusalem'.¹⁴

After the 2001 Jos crisis, violence spilled over into rural areas. Numerous clashes erupted between herders and farmers spurred or influenced by the ethno-religious division in Jos. The southern lowlands of Plateau State bore the brunt of violence. Worst hit was Shendam, Wase, and Langtang North and South Local Government Areas. Other areas such as Kanam, Kanke, Mikang, and Pankshin LGAs experienced fewer clashes. Rural fighting killed between 1,000 and 2,000 people between the years 2002 and 2004.¹⁵ By 2004, more than 100 villages had been attacked, damaged, or destroyed by well-armed militia groups. The main types of weapons used included AK-47s, machine guns and sub-machine guns, G3 rifles, Mark 4 rifles, single- and double-barrel shotguns, pistols, and locally made guns. It was at this period that the Federal Government having reviewed the wanton destruction of properties, loss of lives, insecurity and breakdown of law and order that it announced a state of emergency on the Plateau in 2004.¹⁶

In 2008, the city of Jos was again thrown into another tumult. This crisis was political in nature but assumed ethno-religious dimension. The chairman of Jos North Local Government Area, who was elected in 1999 left office in 2002. And since then, no local government elections took place until November 2008. The Plateau State government suspended local government elections in the crisis hit areas due to security concerns. This action of the state government sparked

¹¹ Best, *Conflict and Peace Building in Plateau State, Nigeria*. 66.

¹² Best, *Conflict and Peace Building in Plateau State, Nigeria*. 67.

¹³ Human Rights Watch. 2001. 'Jos: A City Torn Apart', *HRW Bulletin* Vol. 13, No. 9 December 2001, 6.

¹⁴ A. Danfulani and Sati U. Fwatshak, 'Briefing: The September 2001 Events in Jos, Nigeria.' *African Affairs*, Vol. 101, No. 403. April 2002, 253.

¹⁵ Jana Krause, 'Plateau State Violent Incidents: A Newspaper-based Database.' Unpublished doctoral thesis manuscript. Geneva: Graduate Institute of International Studies, Jana. 2011. 37.

¹⁶ Krause, 'Plateau State Violent Incidents: A Newspaper-based Database.' 39.



protests by the Jasawa community.¹⁷ The Jasawa elites had been in negotiations about broader political inclusion and offices for their community with Governor Jonah Jang over several years which did not receive the attention of Jang. During the preparation for the Local Government elections, the 'indigenes' secured the support of churches for their political campaign on the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) ticket while the Jasawa allied with the the All-Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) platform.¹⁸ Both churches and mosques strongly called on their congregations to vote only for a Christian or a Muslim candidate, respectively.¹⁹

Although the election process itself went smoothly and peacefully, both parties had youth groups following the stages of vote collection and the transportation of ballot boxes to the collation centers to 'guard' their votes. However, the Jos North LGA collation center had been relocated and neither side had been properly informed about it. This fuelled suspicions among the Jasawa that their votes would be lost. Tensions rose when both youth groups waited at the new collation center for the announcement of the results. Eventually, they were forcibly dispersed by the police. Before long, youth gangs went on the rampage through the city, killing, burning, and looting in the central neighborhoods.²⁰

On the 17th of January 2010, another crisis erupted in the City of Jos. The context of the outbreak of this violence remains disputed. The Muslims claim that a Muslim was attacked while reconstructing his house, which had been burnt down during the 2008 crisis in Dutse Uku, within the city centre. While the Christians argue that the reconstruction project was just a pretext to stir up trouble in the area. They maintain that the owner of the house brought hundreds of armed men to work on his construction site, insulting Christian passers-by and attacking them.²¹ The Muslim owner of the house contends that Christians tried to prevent him from finishing the roof of the house and threatened to burn down his house again. According to Higazi's

¹⁷ Ademola Johnson, 48 years, Political Scientist and Peace advocate, Abuja, 12th November, 2023

¹⁸ Philip Ostien, 'Jonah Jang and the Jasawa: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Nigeria.' *Muslim-Christian Relations in Africa*, August. 30 2009, 29.

¹⁹ Ostien, 'Jonah Jang and the Jasawa: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Nigeria, 30.

²⁰ Ostien, 'Jonah Jang and the Jasawa: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Nigeria, 32.

²¹ Citizens' Monitoring Group, 'Plateau under Attack! Jos Crisis 2010: Eyewitness and Survivor Accounts', February 2010, 65



interview with the Muslim house owner, 'Christians mobilised, blowing a whistle and asking people to "come out and fight for Jesus"'²²

Attempts to solve the dispute through the ward head or to call in soldiers to prevent an escalation failed. The situation led to a brawl. Shortly afterwards, a nearby church was attacked and destroyed. Again, the crisis spilled out beyond the city center. Neighborhoods that had remained peaceful until 2008, such as Anglo Jos, became sites of violent battles, looting, and destruction. Bukuru to the south of Jos city was also heavily affected by violence and destruction. The fighting was quelled by a heavy military deployment in Jos and Bukuru. At least 400 people are estimated to have died in January 2010 and more than 18,000 were displaced.²³ Following the Jos incident, several massacres took place on the outskirts of the city. On 19 January 2010, it was said that at least 150 Muslims were killed in Kuru Karama. In a reprisal attack, at least 200 Christians were killed in Dogo Nahauwa on 7 March 2010.²⁴ In both places' women, children, and the elderly who did not manage to hide or escape were killed. The trauma of both massacres weighed heavily on the population of Jos. Both sides often refer to Kuru Karama or Dogo Nahauwa to point out the extreme cruelty of the killers. Since then, the situation in Plateau State has spiraled almost out of control.²⁵

Small-scale violent incidents and target killings continued into 2011. Reported cases of public buses being stopped and passengers being selected and killed according to religious identity, simple market transactions sparking violent clashes, and private vehicles being attacked after taking a wrong turn into settlements dominated by the other religious groups.²⁶ This led to a more deepened mistrust between both parties divided along ethno-religious dimension. Each regularly accuses the other of collecting weapons and making preparations for fresh attacks. The proliferation of arms in the whole region and their acquisition by community groups has been reported over the past years. Only the presence and rapid deployment of the joint military and riot police Special Task Force (STF) prevents small-scale clashes

²² Adam Higazi, *The Jos Crisis: A Recurrent Nigerian Tragedy*, Discussion Paper No. 2. (Abuja: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011), 24

²³ Institute of Research in Nigeria, 'Our Lives Will Never Be the Same Again.' IRIN Quarterly Bulletin, 22nd January, 2010, 44

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, 'Nigeria: Investigate Massacre, Step Up Patrols.' 8th March, 2010

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, 'Nigeria: Investigate Massacre, Step Up Patrols.' 8th March, 2010

²⁶ Krause, *WORKING PAPER A DEADLY CYCLE: ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN JOS*, 38



from escalating. But the STF is unable to prevent small deadly clashes, silent killings, or bomb attacks completely.²⁷

Since 2015, there had been relative calm in Plateau. High scale conflict seems to simmer down in Jos except for seasonal raids by armed bandits, herder-farmer conflicts and other criminals in the smaller towns in Plateau state. The Farmer-Herder conflict posed a second major security challenge to the people of the Plateau following the indigene-settler contestation and struggle for political power using ethno-religious affiliation. It is instructive to state here that these tensions and conflicts on the Plateau between these ethno-religious groups is deeply rooted in the struggle for scarce resources, electoral competition, fears of religious domination, and contested land rights. This has led to the presence of well-organized armed groups in rural areas, the proliferation of weapons, and the sharp rise in gun fatalities within Jos City and the surrounding towns.

The general impact of the various security challenges in Plateaus State since 2001 has been enormous. The human cost is most devastating as the number of deaths and injured whose figures are not very certain as the figures are influenced by ethno-religious and political exigencies. The internally displaced persons since 2001 peaked in 2004, with up to 220,000 people displaced.²⁸ After the 2008 riot, more than 10,000 were displaced, while violence in 2010 resulted in about 18,000 people being displaced.²⁹ Numerous houses in Jos have been burned and blackened remnants litter the streets in many parts of the city. All sides suffer a massive loss due to livelihoods destroyed. Violence and displacement have reshaped Jos and many rural settlements. As neighborhoods become religiously segregated, 'no-go areas' alter patterns of residency, business, transportation, and trade.³⁰ It is as a result of this wanton destruction of lives and properties and in an attempt to ensure the corporate existence of the country as one indivisible entity that the Military was called upon to restore peace, order and normalcy to the state.

²⁷ Krause, *WORKING PAPER A DEADLY CYCLE: ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN JOS*, 39

²⁸ David. Nwogbaga, S.I. Odoh, Doris O. Onwa, Fidelis C. Nnaji, 'ANALYSIS OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN NIGERIA: THE JOS (PLATEAU STATE) EXPERIENCES, 2001-2011', *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, Vol. 8, 1, March, 2015, 44

²⁹ Nwogbaga, S.I. Odoh, Doris O. Onwa, Fidelis C. Nnaji, 'ANALYSIS OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN NIGERIA: THE JOS', 45

³⁰ Irene Madaki, 46 years, Independent researcher, Jos, 21st December, 2023



Military Operations in Plateau State, 1999 - 2022

The security challenges in Plateau State or what is known as Jos Crises have in most times defied police action and the military has always been called in to provide security and prevent another breakdown of law and order. Nevertheless, the crises have always been a recurring decimal even with the presence of the military on the Plateau. The longest and most enduring military operations on the Plateau to confront the hydra headed security challenges is the military led Joint Task Force code named 'Operation Safe Haven' launched in 2010 . Before the establishment of Operation Safe Haven there were other operations in Plateau State that were put in place to curtail the security challenges in the State. Some of these operations include; Operation Mesa (2001-2007) and Operation Rainbow (2007-2011). They were established for the sole purpose of forestalling insecurity in the State. Operation Safe Haven which was more robust in terms of personnel and logistics was established in 2010 with its operational command in Jos. The multi task force is in charge of security of lives and properties in Plateau, Bauchi and parts of southern Kaduna. The Joint Task Force comprises of the Nigerian Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) and Department of State Security (DSS). The Police components of the Joint Task Force consist of the Mobile Police Unit and the Special Investigation Bureau (SIB).³¹

The Military operations in Plateau States by officers and men of the Operation Safe Haven had deployed both kinetic and non-kinetic approach to solving the security challenges of Plateau state. They respond to distress calls of crises, forcefully dislodging the perpetrators of these conflicts with the use of arms. With all these shows of force, the security situation in Jos remain unabated. It is in this vein that the Military under the Operation Safe Haven alongside kinetic approach devolved the non-kinetic approach to combating security on the Plateau. The perpetrators of these crises are people resident within the community and most times known by the community. In this vein, the military had to involve some stakeholders from the community in combating the security menace for an enduring peace.³² The military in this effort engaged the clergy from religions, community leaders, traditional rulers, youth leaders amongst others on the need for peace and harmonious coexistence.

³¹ Rabiu Abdullahi, 41 years, Officer, Operation Safe Haven, Rayfield, Jos 15/01/2024

³² Rabiu Abdullahi, 41 years, Officer, Operation Safe Haven, Rayfield, Jos 15/01/2024



However, the people of the Plateau erroneously see the military as a brutal arm of government and the political elites who are on the Plateau not to combat insecurity but to execute an agenda. Thus, there was the need for the public to understand its *modus operandi* and a harbinger of peace and not of brutality. Arising from this, a one day sensitization seminar on Human Rights Abuses was held on 17 August 2017 for troops of Headquarters 3 Division and Operation Safe Haven and critical stakeholders such as at the clergy, traditional rulers, women groups, and youth bodies amongst others by the Army Headquarters Department of Civil - Military Affairs at Maxwell Khobe Cantonment.³³ The Nigerian army 3rd Armored Division established a community engagement programme, code-named 'operation Harmony', in plateau state, which led to significant reduction in violence and improved relationship between the military and the local communities. The military organized a football tournament, 'The Peace Cup', which brought together youths from different communities and helped to promote unity and peaceful coexistence.

Also, the Nigerian military partnered with the plateau state government to establish an agricultural development programme, which provided training and support to farmers and improved food security in the state. The military also launched 'Clear Message' which aimed to counter extremist propaganda and promote a message of peace and unity. They distributed leaflets and posters with messages encouraging communities to reject violence and embrace peace. The military also collaborated with non-governmental organization to provide humanitarian assistance to communities affected by crisis, they provided support to refugee camps and assistances to internally displaced persons in the state.

In May 2018, the Commandant of Operation Safe Haven Major General Atokagbe was recognised by the International Federation of Civil Rights and Liberty Organizations, conferring an award of excellence on him, for restoring relative peace in Plateau state, after years of ethno-religious conflicts that saw hundreds dead. The award was as a result of the efforts made by the military in combating security in Plateau State.³⁴ However, despite the efforts of the Military under the command of Operation Safe Haven in the fight against insecurity on the Plateau, there are various challenges faced by the military in its operations in Plateau State.

³³ Atabor Victor, 35 years, Soldier, 332 Artillery Regiment, Army Barracks Shendam LGA, Plateau State. 3rd December 2023

³⁴ Atabor Victor, 35 years, Soldier, 332 Artillery Regiment, Army Barracks Shendam LGA, Plateau State. 3rd December 2023



Challenges of Military Operations in the Fight against Insecurity Plateau State

The military has been in the theatre of the Jos crises for over two decades now since 2020sacrificing their comfort and the warmth of their families to be under the scorching sun, in the biting cold and the windy rains to provide the needed security in the Plateau. These sacrifices notwithstanding, the military has faced lots of challenges in their quest to combat insecurity in Plateau State. These challenges are multifaceted from operational constraints, partial success in their military campaign, Saboteurs within and outside the operations, ambush and surprise attacks but most importantly, the bias and perception of the community on the role of the military in the conflict.

Operational Constraints: The Military deployed to combat insecurity in Plateau state are faced with lots of challenges in their operations stemming from inadequate operational logistics. These operational logistics include insufficient arms and ammunitions, inadequate personnel, limited resources, the vast and unfamiliar terrain of the Plateau. With these teething challenges, the military under the operation code named Operation Safe Haven could not perform optimally. The Plateau cannot be adequately secured with the number of security personnel under the Operation Safe Haven whose exact figures cannot be assessed for security reasons. But one major complains from the field by Officers and men of the operation is that they are over stretched due to the vast and unfamiliar terrain they are to secure. An Officer in an interview said that the hoodlums from both sides take advantage of the low number of personnel of Operation Safe Haven to unleash coordinated mayhem swiftly in few locations and retreat before the military could get to the locations. This to some extent has kept the crises reoccurring despite the presence of the military.³⁵

Partial Success of the Military Operations: Several respondents have questioned the relevance of the military operations in Plateaus State as the military is only 'reactionary' and not 'preventive' as it should be. An informant retorted that the Military operation in Plateau State is a failure because despite their presence, conflicts continued unabated. He recounted that several times, calls were put to the command at the onset of crises but their slow response have resulted to loss of lives and wanton destruction of properties.³⁶ Nevertheless, an international humanitarian Non-Governmental Organization working in Plateau State rebuffed the claims of the informant that despite the continued

³⁵ Anonymous, 38 years, Soldier, 1st March, 2024

³⁶ Chief Williams Magnut, 68 years, Community Leader, Jos, 19th January, 2024



reoccurrence of crises in Plateau, the presence of the Military has reduced the effect to the barest minimum. The NGO stated that the military has done their best in the given situation and that issues of conflict are more resolved using non-kinetic approach.³⁷ In essence, the continued reoccurrence of crises in Plateau has become a serious challenge to military operations in Plateau State

Saboteurs within the Operations and Intelligence Gathering: One of the major challenges of military operations all over the world is that of moles within the military formation sabotaging the efforts of the military. This they do by leaking sensitive information, exposing the strategies to a party to the conflict amongst others.³⁸ Operation Safe Haven in the Plateau is not insulated from such cases of sabotage. A soldier on anonymity said that they will receive information of an outbreak of a planned attack and design a strategy to checkmate the attackers but the information will leak out and the attackers will change the location of attack. While the personnel of the Operations move to the expected location of attack, another location will be attacked demoralizing the personnel and bringing their efforts to nullity.³⁹ Limited human intelligence and inadequate surveillance capabilities make it difficult to gather accurate information on enemy movements, which in turn affect the success of military operations in the state.

Political infiltration, manipulation and Interference: The military just like the leadership is a product of the society and are susceptible to the avarice of the society. In this vein, the military has not been completely insulated from political maneuvering and control by the political elites. The infiltration is in two folds, from the federal hierarchy and the state leadership of the political circle. There have been several cases where operations were aborted arising from 'orders from above'.⁴⁰ These infiltrations on the supposedly neutral agency of government by the political elites with their biases, perceptions and interests have posed a serious challenge to the military's fight against insecurity on the Plateau, as it influences military decisions, undermining operational effectiveness. In 2018, the military's attempt to launch an operation in the town of Riyom was delayed due to political infighting between the state and the federal which eventually led to the loss of lives and properties.

³⁷ Helping Hands, Non-Governmental Organization, Abuja, 7th February, 2024

³⁸ Anonymous, 38 years, Soldier, 1st March, 2024

³⁹ Anonymous, 34 years, Soldier, Jos, 8th February, 2024

⁴⁰ Anonymous, 45 years, Soldier, Jos, 9th February, 2024



Surprise Attack and Ambush and Terrain: The Military operations in Plateau State also faced a challenge of unsuspected attack and ambush by the ethno-religious militias that have been established by the ethno-religious groups over time which are possible due to their familiarization of the terrain. These attacks are most times not publicized so as not to reveal the weakness of the military. These attacks are most times devastating that the military lose some of its men. There had been such attacks in Buruku, Shendam, Pankshin amongst others.⁴¹

Public Perception on the Bias of the Military and Approach to Security Challenge

One striking aspect emerging from the oral interviews is the pervasive perception of bias in the military's approach to security challenges. As discussed earlier, the people have some suspicion and biases of the military operations in the Plateau. These biases stem from the operations of the military in tackling insecurity in Plateau State. These biases include the alleged brutality of the military in their operations on the civilian populace, assumed partisanship of the military in the crises and the failure of the military to respond on time to emergency cases of crises. Respondents consistently expressed suspicions about the impartiality of military interventions and operations, raising concerns about the potential impact on community-military relations.

The perceived bias of the people of Plateau on the military is multifaceted, encompassing suspicions of favoritism towards specific ethnic or religious groups, as well as concerns about the disproportionate use of force in certain situations.⁴² A prevailing sentiment of distrust towards the military's role in maintaining security emerged, underscoring the need for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between the military and the community. Some community members expressed concerns about the perceived favoritism displayed by the military, particularly in instances where interventions appeared to align with the interests of specific ethnic or religious groups.⁴³ This perception, whether grounded in reality or shaped by historical narratives, has contributed to an environment of suspicion and apprehension which has the propensity of escalating security tension in Plateau State.

The military however is a disciplined organization with the spirit of camaraderie amongst officers and men. Although, being humans

⁴¹ Peter Saleh, 45 years, Soldier, Jos, 9th February, 2024

⁴² Solomon Jeremiah, 56 years, Civil Servant, Jos, 18th February, 2024

⁴³ Abdullahi Usman, 50 Years, Civil Servant, Wase, 19th February, 2024



and products of the society, they could be susceptible to emotions that could derail their neutrality especially in the theatre of war. Nevertheless, the military has not decayed to the extent of collectively taking sides publicly when combating a security breach. Thus, the biases or perceptions raised by the people of Plateau with regards to military operations may only have been the terms of engagement to combat insecurity. Meanwhile, as discussed previously in the challenges confronting military operations, the mention of infiltration from the political leadership or top hierarchy of command could portray non-neutrality of the military in the field of operations in such instance.

This perception or biases held by the people have a far-reaching effect on the security situation on the Plateau. It is instructive to note that in every military operation, information gathering and intelligence are key to the success of such operations. Such intelligence gathering is done by indigenes, locals or residents of the community and not the military. The military only analyse the information received for further action. Thus, if there is lack of trust or mutual cooperation between the military and the people, such key element in combating insecurity will be missing. More so, the people could thwart the efforts of the military with thunderous cries to the international community of human right abuses, ethnic cleansing and other issues that could put the image of the military in jeopardy even if such allegations are false. A hypothetical case was the discovery of corpses, buses and other incriminating items at the abandoned tin well in Plateau in the year 2020. Before the discovery was made, the people cried to the international community of the military's attempt to desecrate their ancestral culture just in a bid to dissuade the military from the getting to the well.⁴⁴

Due to these impacts and several other negative impacts that the loss of trust between the military and the people could result to, it is therefore expedient to devise measures to bringing these critical stakeholders in the fight against insecurity to a common ground. Thus, there is the need to emphasize the importance of rebuilding trust through community engagement, transparency, and inclusive policy-making. By addressing the perceived bias and fostering a collaborative approach between the military and the community, Plateau State can move towards a more secure and harmonious future.

⁴⁴ Misbau Bayero, 38 years, Historian, Abuja, 4th March 2024



Conclusion

This paper examines security challenges in Plateau State from 1999 to 2022, with a focus on the perceptions of bias held by the community towards the military. The multifaceted nature of security challenges, combined with historical and contextual factors, has contributed to a complex environment where suspicions abound. The presence of the Hausa and Fulani Muslims in Jos referred to as the *Jassawa* and the ethnic Berom people who share the Christian faith has already set a template for contestation and struggles especially in the ethno-religious nature of Nigerian politics. Little wonder, the Jos crises became hot at the onset of the Fourth Republic over political appointments, local government elections amongst others which boomeranged to the rest of the succeeding security challenges in the state.

Due to the wanton destruction of properties and loss of lives, the military was drafted to Plateau to contain the security challenges. The military under the code name Operations Safe Haven has been in charge of securing peace on the Plateau since 2010. The operation has been largely successful. However, it is also confronted with some challenges which include logistics amongst others especially the alleged bias and perception of the military's 'neutrality' in its operations on the Plateau. This paper submits that this bias has the propensity of escalating the security challenge in Plateau State if not checked. The paper therefore called on policymakers, military leaders, and community stakeholders to work collaboratively in shaping security strategies that not only address immediate challenges but also foster a resilient and trusting relationship between