

## Sovereignty in Crisis: The Politics of Private Military Outsourcing and Hybrid Security Governance in Nigeria.

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**ABSTRACT :** This article examines Nigeria’s engagement with Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs), focusing on the 2015 deployment of Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP) during Boko Haram’s peak territorial expansion. Anchored in Weberian conceptions of sovereignty and contemporary security governance theory, the study investigates whether outsourcing coercive force represents an erosion of the state’s monopoly of legitimate violence or an adaptive reconfiguration under conditions of acute insecurity. Methodologically, the research employs a qualitative case study design, drawing on documentary analysis of policy reports, parliamentary debates, media coverage, civil society commentary, and secondary scholarly sources, complemented by comparative analysis of Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Mali. The findings show that while STTEP contributed to short-term tactical gains, accelerating territorial recovery and improving operational coordination, it did not address deeper structural deficiencies, including procurement irregularities, intelligence fragmentation, accountability gaps, and fragile civil–military relations. By integrating post-2015 Security Sector Reform (SSR) developments, the study argues that the consequences of outsourcing force depend on mandate design, oversight mechanisms, and reform integration. Essentially, sovereignty emerges as a negotiated and socially mediated authority grounded in legitimacy, accountability, and institutional capacity rather than coercive monopoly alone.

**KEYWORDS:** Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs); Sovereignty; Hybrid Security Governance; Security Sector Reform (SSR); Counterinsurgency; Nigeria

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Escalating levels of insecurity and terrorism continue to generate profound human and material costs worldwide. The Global Terrorism Index published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP, 2023) reports that terrorism was responsible for approximately 6,701 deaths globally in 2022, representing a 26 percent increase in lethality compared to the previous year. Nigeria remains among the countries most affected by these trends. The Boko Haram insurgency, an extremist movement rejecting Western-oriented governance and education has resulted in extensive loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, and large-scale displacement. Current estimates suggest that more than two million individuals have been displaced in northeastern Nigeria as a result of sustained insurgent violence and counterinsurgency operations (Ike et al., 2022; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2023). These developments have intensified scrutiny of Nigeria’s counterterrorism strategies and rekindled debates about the appropriateness and effectiveness of employing Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) in complex conflict environments.

A central issue in this debate concerns the political sensitivity surrounding state engagement with private military actors. In Nigeria, government officials have often appeared hesitant to publicly acknowledge the use of private contractors, partly due to anticipated public backlash and enduring normative resistance to what is frequently labeled “mercenary” involvement (Varin, 2018). Much of the existing literature on PMSCs concentrates on high-level decision-making processes, legal regimes, and international regulatory frameworks (Casiraghi & Cusumano, 2023; Pattison, 2014; Sørensen, 2017). Consequently, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to everyday narratives, how ordinary citizens, local communities, and even private security personnel themselves understand the state’s counterterrorism response, the credibility of national security institutions, and the broader implications of delegating coercive authority to private actors. This gap is particularly significant in contexts where public confidence in state institutions is already tenuous. Normative

objections to PMSCs are frequently grounded in classical conceptions of sovereignty. Liu (2010) contends that the privatization of force challenges the Westphalian model of the state, which presumes centralized and exclusive authority over coercion. Similarly, Weber (1964) traced the historical consolidation of legitimate violence within state institutions to the evolution of the modern state system, emphasizing the relatively recent emergence of the state's monopoly over force. From this perspective, outsourcing military functions appears to erode a foundational attribute of sovereign authority. Ethical concerns surrounding PMSCs are further reinforced by their perceived association with mercenarism. Singer (2004) observes that contemporary skepticism toward private military actors is shaped by historical experiences during the 1950s and 1960s, when mercenaries such as Bob Denard and Mike Hoare were implicated in destabilizing newly independent African states during the decolonization period. The involvement of foreign fighters in conflicts connected to apartheid-era South Africa deepened negative perceptions of private armed actors. Musah's characterization of private military companies as "old poison in new bottles" (as cited in Singer, 2004, p. 44) captures the enduring moral unease associated with the commercialization of warfare. In contrast, other scholars interpret the growth of private security through the lens of broader political and economic transformations. Clapham (1996) argues that the weakening of effective sovereignty in parts of Africa reflects structural limitations embedded in postcolonial state formation. Harvey (2007) situates the expansion of privatized security within neoliberal governance reforms that promote market-oriented solutions and the outsourcing of traditionally public functions. Leander (2005) similarly contends that globalization has contributed to the commodification of security, transforming coercive capacity into a tradable service within a globalized "market for force."

Both supply- and demand-side dynamics have facilitated the expansion of PMSCs. On the supply side, the end of the Cold War led to large-scale demobilization and downsizing of military forces, producing a surplus of trained personnel and weaponry, particularly in Eastern Europe and Southern Africa. This surplus created favorable conditions for the emergence of private military enterprises (Singer, 2008). On the demand side, fragile state institutions, incomplete nation-building processes, socio-economic inequalities, and identity-based conflicts have generated security gaps that governments may seek to fill through alternative providers (Van Creveld, 1991; Kaldor, 1999). Moreover, the perceived failures of international peacekeeping missions in Somalia and Rwanda contributed to Western reluctance to intervene directly in African conflicts, thereby creating additional space for private military actors (Adamo, 2021).

Historically, PMSCs have been active participants in Sub-Saharan African conflicts. Executive Outcomes' operations in Angola and Sierra Leone during the 1990s are frequently cited as early instances in which private military intervention significantly influenced conflict trajectories (Singer, 2008). More recently, the deployment of the Russian Wagner Group to Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province in 2019 illustrates the continued appeal of private security solutions. Wagner personnel were engaged to assist Mozambican forces in combating the insurgent group Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jammah (ASWJ) (Fabricius, 2019). However, reports indicate that unfamiliar terrain, coordination challenges, and operational setbacks limited the effectiveness of the intervention, resulting in casualties and renewed debate about the practical limitations of private military deployments (Bekoe & Burchard, 2020; International Crisis Group [ICG], 2021). The Mozambican experience thus highlights both the perceived advantages and inherent constraints of privatized military assistance. Within the broader African context, Adamo (2020) argues that the role of private security actors must be situated against the backdrop of weakened state control over core instruments of power. Persistent corruption within police and military institutions, alongside governance deficits, frequently undermines reform initiatives supported by international donors (Singh, 2019). Ultimately, the durability of state authority depends on the capacity to regulate and control the legitimate use of force. As Kaldor (1999) suggests in her analysis of "new wars," contemporary conflicts are characterized by the proliferation of non-state armed groups, asymmetric warfare, and blurred distinctions between combatants and civilians. In such settings, governments facing institutional fragility may view PMSCs as expedient mechanisms for restoring short-term stability. Despite the complexity of these structural, normative, and operational dynamics, public discourse on counterterrorism and private military engagement remains largely dominated by elite and policy-oriented perspectives. Expanding scholarly inquiry to include vernacular understandings, how citizens interpret the outsourcing of security, assess the legitimacy of state institutions, and morally evaluate privatized force would provide a more nuanced and socially grounded account of security governance. Such an approach would move beyond narrow legalistic or strategic analyses and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the political and societal implications of privatized security in fragile contexts. In an attempt to study the consequences of outsourcing private coercive power on the state sovereignty, this research examines Nigeria's engagement with Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs) focusing on the 2015 deployment of Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP) during Boko Haram's peak territorial expansion.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOVEREIGNTY AND SECURITY GOVERNANCE**

This study draws on two interconnected theoretical traditions: the Weberian understanding of sovereignty as rooted in the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force, and contemporary security governance theory, which highlights the growing diffusion of security functions across public and private actors. Taken together, these perspectives provide a structured way to assess whether the engagement of private military and security companies (PMSCs) reflects a decline in state authority or, alternatively, a transformation in how sovereignty is exercised in modern conflict environments. Max Weber's conception of the modern state remains central to debates about privatized security. Weber famously defined the state as the entity that successfully claims a monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force within a defined territory (Weber, 1919/1994). Crucially, this monopoly is not simply about possessing coercive power; it is about the recognized authority to exercise that power. Sovereignty, in Weber's formulation, is territorially bounded, institutionally centralized, and anchored in legitimacy.

The increasing reliance on PMSCs complicates this classical understanding. When governments outsource military training, intelligence gathering, logistics, or even combat support to private entities, coercive functions are no longer carried out exclusively by public institutions. Scholars argue that this development unsettles the Weberian ideal-type by dispersing the operational management of force beyond the formal structures of the state (Chesterman & Lehnardt, 2007; Carmola, 2010). Although states typically retain the authority to authorize and regulate the use of force, the actual execution of coercive tasks may be delegated to private actors. However, several scholars caution against interpreting Weber's concept as an accurate empirical description of how states have always functioned. Rather, Weber's monopoly of violence should be understood as an analytical benchmark (Leander, 2018). Historically, states have often shared coercive responsibilities with militias, private companies, and other non-state actors. From this perspective, the emergence of PMSCs may represent a reconfiguration of sovereignty rather than its erosion. Similarly, Abrahamsen and Williams (2010) argue that privatized security does not necessarily undermine sovereignty. Instead, it signals the evolution of governance arrangements in which authority is negotiated across public and private domains. Sovereignty, therefore, may persist, but its practical expression becomes more contractual, networked, and collaborative.

Security governance theory complements the Weberian framework by emphasizing the plurality of actors involved in contemporary security provision. Rather than viewing the state as the sole guarantor of order, this approach conceptualizes security as the outcome of interactions among state agencies, private firms, international organizations, and local actors (Webber, 2014; Abrahamsen & Leander, 2016). Within this framework, outsourcing military and security functions is not treated as exceptional but as part of a broader transformation in governance structures. Hönke (2013) illustrates how hybrid public-private security arrangements increasingly characterize both postcolonial and advanced industrial contexts. Likewise, Villa and Braga (2021) describe the development of "hybrid governance" systems in which authority over coercive resources is jointly exercised by state and non-state actors. Importantly, hybrid security governance does not necessarily dissolve sovereignty. Instead, it reshapes and redistributes it (Prinz & Schetter, 2017). Sovereignty becomes relational and negotiated rather than purely centralized and absolute. While the state may retain ultimate legal authority, it may delegate operational tasks to private actors through contractual arrangements. In this sense, the employment of PMSCs can be interpreted as a pragmatic response to capacity constraints rather than an abdication of sovereign power. Nevertheless, hybridization raises important questions about accountability and legitimacy. Deitelhoff and Geis (2009) argue that the privatization and internationalization of military functions may weaken democratic oversight and obscure responsibility. When coercive authority is exercised by market-based actors, lines of accountability can become blurred, complicating the distinction between public authority and private interest. Thus, although hybrid security governance may enhance flexibility and operational effectiveness, it also generates normative concerns regarding transparency and democratic control.

The relationship between Weberian sovereignty and hybrid security governance is best understood as a continuum rather than a binary opposition. At one end lies the classical model of centralized state control over legitimate force; at the other, a dispersed system in which multiple actors share responsibility for coercive functions. Most contemporary states operate somewhere between these poles. Chesterman and Lehnardt (2007) suggest that the rise of PMSCs reflects not the disappearance of sovereignty but its marketization. States continue to authorize and regulate the use of force, yet increasingly rely on contractual mechanisms to implement it. Carmola (2010) similarly contends that PMSCs typically operate within state-sanctioned legal frameworks, thereby reinforcing rather than replacing sovereign authority. The Nigerian case therefore presents a theoretically significant question: Does the engagement of PMSCs signal a weakening of the state's monopoly

over legitimate violence, or does it demonstrate the adaptive transformation of sovereignty within hybrid governance structures? By situating Nigeria's experience within this broader theoretical debate, the study moves beyond simplistic normative judgments and instead examines how sovereignty is exercised, negotiated, and legitimized under conditions of acute security crisis

### **III. THE RISE OF PMSCS IN NIGERIA**

The involvement of private military and security companies (PMSCs) in supporting state security forces is a longstanding feature of contemporary conflict management rather than a recent innovation. PMSCs operate as formally incorporated business entities that deliver military and security-related services to governments through legally recognized contractual arrangements. This institutional and contractual status distinguishes them from mercenaries, who typically function outside official legal frameworks and engage in combat or security activities on a freelance basis. The prominence of PMSCs grew substantially during the 2003 Iraq War, when states such as the United States relied heavily on private contractors to supplement military operations. Nevertheless, incidents involving firms like Blackwater especially allegations concerning excessive use of force and civilian deaths provoked intense international debate over issues of accountability, regulatory oversight, and human rights compliance (Scahill, 2007; Percy, 2007). In the African context, particularly in Nigeria, the resurgence of PMSCs has generated similarly divided opinions. Some analysts regard private military actors as pragmatic partners capable of reinforcing fragile state security structures, especially where domestic forces face operational limitations. Others, however, link their presence to Africa's historical experience with mercenary interventions and external manipulation. Events such as the employment of foreign fighters during the 2011 Libyan crisis have deepened suspicions about the political and sovereignty implications of allowing privately contracted armed actors to operate on the continent (Isenberg, 2009; Varin, 2018).

Nigeria's recourse to PMSCs during President Goodluck Jonathan's tenure vividly illustrates the strategic and political dilemmas surrounding their use. By 2014–2015, Boko Haram had taken control of substantial areas in northeastern Nigeria, exposing serious institutional and operational weaknesses within the armed forces. Amid rising public dissatisfaction and the pressure of impending presidential elections, Jonathan committed to reclaiming occupied territories and reversing insurgent momentum. However, the military's response was hampered by systemic problems, including inadequate equipment, weak logistical systems, corruption, and insufficient counterinsurgency expertise (Omeni, 2018; Thurston, 2018). Longstanding governance shortcomings and limited investment in defense capacity had further eroded operational effectiveness, leaving the administration with constrained strategic alternatives (Deckard & Pieri, 2017). At the same time, Nigeria's counterinsurgency campaign was overshadowed by allegations of serious human rights violations. International monitoring organizations reported instances of arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings by security personnel (Amnesty International, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2012). These allegations complicated Nigeria's external security relationships. Under the United States' Leahy Law, assistance is restricted to foreign military units credibly implicated in gross human rights abuses. Consequently, the U.S. government demonstrated reluctance to provide direct military aid and reportedly withheld certain arms transfers during the Obama administration (Siegel, 2015; Abdullahi, 2021). The reduction in Western military support arguably narrowed Nigeria's options and increased the attractiveness of engaging private military contractors.

Against this backdrop, the Nigerian government contracted Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP), a private military firm headed by Eeben Barlow. From January to March 2015, STTEP supplied operational training, tactical advice, intelligence assistance, and limited air support to Nigerian forces (Varin, 2016; Freeman, 2015). Although initial public narratives framed the intervention as part of efforts to rescue the abducted Chibok schoolgirls, the mandate broadened into coordinated offensive operations designed to retake territories under Boko Haram control and improve security conditions ahead of national elections (Barlow, 2018; Adamo, 2020). Accounts suggest that STTEP's participation facilitated the relatively swift recovery of several towns previously dominated by insurgents (Varin, 2018). Despite these battlefield gains, public reactions remained mixed. Critics argued that employing foreign private contractors weakened perceptions of national sovereignty and signaled deficiencies within Nigeria's constitutionally mandated security institutions. Section 217 of the 1999 Constitution assigns the responsibility for defending territorial integrity and suppressing insurrection to the armed forces. For many citizens, outsourcing core defense functions appeared inconsistent with constitutional principles and patriotic expectations (Eghoikhunu & Kayode, 2023). Moreover, broader concerns about Jonathan's governance record and counterterrorism approach likely influenced how the PMSC engagement was perceived domestically. Subsequent administrations have continued to grapple with persistent insecurity. Under President Muhammadu Buhari, attempts to reinforce the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and implement deradicalization initiatives achieved uneven results. Ongoing incidents including

the abductions in Dapchi (2018), Jangebe (2021), and Kaduna (2021), as well as the 2022 attack on the Kaduna–Abuja train have sustained public frustration regarding the state’s capacity to ensure safety. The expansion of banditry and insurgent violence has reignited discussions about alternative security measures, including renewed proposals to engage mercenaries or PMSCs (Akinrefon, 2022). Similar anxieties persist under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, as insecurity remains a dominant national concern. Overall, Nigeria’s engagement with PMSCs reflects a multifaceted tension between urgent security demands and broader considerations of legitimacy, accountability, and institutional development. While private military actors may deliver short-term operational improvements, their deployment raises enduring concerns about sovereignty, democratic oversight, human rights protection, and the long-term consolidation of national security capacity.

#### **IV. NIGERIA’S SECURITY CRISIS AND THE TURN TO STTEP: BOKO HARAM’S TERRITORIAL EXPANSION AND STATE VULNERABILITY**

By mid-2014, Boko Haram had evolved beyond sporadic insurgent attacks into a force capable of holding and administering territory. The group captured key towns across Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States and, in August 2014, proclaimed a so-called “caliphate” with Gwoza as its symbolic center. This development represented a major escalation in the conflict and constituted Nigeria’s gravest internal security challenge since the civil war (Thurston, 2018). The seizure of territory was not merely symbolic; it directly challenged the Nigerian state’s sovereign authority and exposed significant weaknesses within the national security architecture. Analysts attribute the military’s difficulties during this period to deep-rooted structural challenges rather than isolated battlefield errors. Persistent underfunding, irregular procurement processes, corruption within the defense establishment, and poor logistical coordination undermined operational readiness (Omeni, 2018; Transparency International, 2019). Reports indicated that soldiers deployed to the frontlines often lacked sufficient weaponry and ammunition, faced delays in salary payments, and operated under harsh conditions that eroded morale. In some instances, these pressures contributed to disciplinary breakdowns, including mutiny (ICG, 2016). Such systemic deficiencies severely constrained Nigeria’s ability to confront an insurgent group that had adopted flexible guerrilla and hybrid warfare strategies.

In addition to operational setbacks, Nigeria’s counterinsurgency efforts were increasingly criticized for alleged human rights violations. Investigations by Amnesty International (2015) and Human Rights Watch (2012) documented claims of arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention, torture, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings in the northeast. These allegations had significant repercussions. Domestically, they strained civil–military relations and diminished public confidence in security institutions. Internationally, they complicated Nigeria’s defense partnerships and diplomatic engagements. The United States’ Leahy Law, which restricts military assistance to foreign security units credibly implicated in serious human rights abuses, became particularly consequential in this context. While not constituting a comprehensive embargo, the law’s vetting requirements slowed and limited the scope of U.S. military assistance during the Obama administration (Siegel, 2015; Abdullahi, 2021). As Nigeria sought to reclaim lost territory ahead of the 2015 general elections, restricted access to external military support narrowed the range of available policy options. Against this backdrop of battlefield reversals, reputational damage, and constrained foreign assistance, President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration pursued alternative strategies to rapidly enhance military effectiveness. The decision to engage Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP) should therefore be understood as a crisis-driven response shaped by institutional weaknesses and political urgency.

#### **V. STTEP’S OPERATIONAL ROLE (JANUARY–MARCH 2015)**

STTEP, led by former South African Defence Force officer Eben Barlow, was contracted in early 2015 to provide short-term support to Nigerian forces. The company’s mandate reportedly encompassed specialized counterinsurgency training, operational restructuring, intelligence assistance, and coordination of limited air capabilities (Varin, 2016; Nielsen, 2016). Although early public discourse linked the engagement to efforts to rescue the abducted Chibok schoolgirls, subsequent accounts suggest that the mission expanded to include broader offensive operations aimed at dismantling Boko Haram’s territorial control prior to the March 2015 elections (Barlow, 2018; Adamo, 2020). Operationally, STTEP concentrated on reorganizing selected Nigerian units into more agile and cohesive strike forces. Emphasis was placed on maneuver warfare, enhanced coordination between ground forces and air assets, and intelligence-led targeting. Observers note that this approach differed significantly from the Nigerian military’s earlier defensive posture, which had enabled insurgents to consolidate captured areas (Varin, 2016). By February and March 2015, Nigerian forces, working alongside regional partners within the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) recaptured several towns in Borno State previously under Boko Haram control. Commentators argue that STTEP’s involvement contributed to improved tactical coordination, increased operational tempo, and renewed troop confidence (Bamigboye,

2023). While it remains challenging to disentangle STTEP's direct impact from concurrent regional offensives conducted by Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, many analyses credit the intervention with accelerating Nigeria's counteroffensive momentum during a politically sensitive electoral period (ICG, 2016). However, the intervention was explicitly temporary. STTEP's contract reportedly spanned approximately three months and concluded shortly after the 2015 elections. This short timeframe raises important questions about long-term sustainability. Although the intervention appears to have strengthened short-term operational capacity, it did not fundamentally address underlying institutional challenges, including procurement inefficiencies, systemic corruption, insufficient training structures, and weak oversight mechanisms. Subsequent developments such as continued insurgent attacks, expanding banditry, and repeated mass abductions under later administrations indicate that the tactical successes of early 2015 did not translate into lasting strategic stabilization (Zenn, 2020; ICG, 2020). Accordingly, Nigeria's engagement with STTEP can be interpreted less as a comprehensive solution to insecurity and more as a temporary force-multiplying measure adopted amid profound institutional fragility.

## **VI. TACTICAL GAINS VERSUS STRUCTURAL REFORM**

The deployment of Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP) in early 2015 appears to have delivered notable short-term military improvements. Contemporary reports indicate that Nigerian forces, following adjustments in operational strategy and improved coordination, were able to retake several territories in Borno State previously controlled by Boko Haram within a relatively brief period (Varin, 2016; Barlow, 2018). Observers link these successes to STTEP's operational model, which emphasized mobile strike formations, intelligence-led operations, and coordinated air-ground maneuvers, an approach that differed markedly from the Nigerian military's earlier defensive and reactive posture (Nielsen, 2016). In this regard, STTEP acted as a force multiplier, temporarily strengthening combat effectiveness and boosting troop morale at a politically sensitive moment ahead of the 2015 general elections. Yet, while these battlefield gains were significant, they did not resolve the deeper structural weaknesses that had hampered Nigeria's counterinsurgency campaign from the outset. Persistent institutional challenges including irregularities in procurement processes, entrenched corruption within defense structures, gaps in training and professional development, weak logistical systems, fragile civil-military relations, and limited intelligence coordination remained largely unaddressed (Omeni, 2018; Transparency International, 2019). Subsequent analyses by the International Crisis Group (2020, 2022) suggest that although territorial control shifted at various points, the insurgency itself adapted rather than collapsed. Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), adjusted their tactics by relying more heavily on asymmetric operations, rural entrenchment, and targeted attacks against both civilian populations and security infrastructure.

The persistence and in some regions, expansion of insecurity under subsequent administrations further illustrates the limitations of short-term military outsourcing. During the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari and continuing under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Nigeria has experienced recurring mass kidnappings, intensified banditry in the northwest, communal violence in the Middle Belt, and attacks on transportation and energy infrastructure. High-profile incidents, including school abductions in Kaduna and Zamfara States and assaults on key transit routes, underscore that territorial recapture in 2015 did not translate into durable national stabilization (ICG, 2023; SBM Intelligence, 2024). These patterns indicate that while PMSCs may enhance operational performance in the short term, they do not inherently address governance deficits, institutional fragmentation, or accountability weaknesses that perpetuate insecurity. Distinguishing between tactical success and structural reform is therefore essential. Tactical success refers to immediate operational outcomes such as improved maneuverability, successful offensives, or the recovery of contested territory. Structural reform, by contrast, involves comprehensive institutional transformation: professionalizing the armed forces, ensuring transparent procurement systems, strengthening oversight and accountability mechanisms, integrating intelligence frameworks, and embedding respect for human rights within security operations. Without sustained reform of these foundational elements, battlefield victories are likely to prove temporary.

This dynamic reflects broader debates within the literature on privatized security. Solomon (2017) characterizes PMSCs as "stabilization enhancers," capable of delivering rapid operational support but not designed to construct enduring peace architectures. Their strengths lie in flexibility, speed, and specialized expertise rather than long-term institutional development. Similarly, Bamigboye (2023) notes that private military engagements in African conflicts frequently focus on achieving immediate operational objectives tied to contractual mandates, rather than fostering systemic governance reform. Because PMSCs operate within market-based frameworks, their interventions are typically shaped by defined timelines and deliverables rather than sustained institutional restructuring. Recent scholarship reinforces these concerns. Abrahamsen and Williams (2022) argue that reliance on private security actors can, in some instances, postpone necessary internal reforms by

Temporarily compensating for institutional weaknesses. The International Crisis Group (2023) likewise emphasizes that meaningful security sector reform (SSR) including civilian oversight, accountability measures, and professional standards is indispensable for long-term stability. In Nigeria, continuing allegations of corruption and human rights violations within the security apparatus suggest that such comprehensive reform remains incomplete. Affirmatively, Nigeria's experience highlights a broader theoretical insight: while privatized military assistance may temporarily rebalance the operational environment, it cannot replace sustained state-building efforts. Enduring security depends on institutional legitimacy, professional competence, transparent governance, and accountable leadership, qualities that cannot be permanently outsourced. In moments of acute crisis, tactical outsourcing may provide breathing space, but without parallel structural reform, it risks reinforcing cycles of dependency and leaving underlying vulnerabilities unresolved.

## **VII. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS, LEGITIMACY, AND THE POLITICS OF OUTSOURCING FORCE**

Although academic discussions of private military and security companies (PMSCs) tend to concentrate on high-level policymaking, legal regimes, and regulatory oversight, the dimension of public perception remains comparatively underexamined. In fragile governance contexts, legitimacy is not secured exclusively through constitutional mandates or military effectiveness; it is also constructed through how citizens interpret, debate, and narrate state behavior. In Nigeria, the 2015 engagement of Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP) unfolded within a politically charged climate characterized by insurgency fatigue, competitive electoral politics, and persistent anxieties about sovereignty. An analysis of media commentary, civil society reactions, parliamentary deliberations, digital discourse, and religious and regional perspectives reveals that outsourcing military functions was not merely an operational decision but a politically and socially contested act.

**A Media Framing and the Construction of Legitimacy:** The media significantly influenced how STTEP's involvement was understood by the public. Domestic and international outlets offered divergent portrayals. Some framed the intervention as a necessary and pragmatic response to stagnation within Nigeria's counterinsurgency campaign, highlighting the swift recovery of insurgent-held territories and improved operational coordination. Within this narrative, STTEP was presented as a technical solution deployed to address institutional shortcomings (Bamigboye, 2023; Varin, 2020). Conversely, other media narratives emphasized concerns about limited transparency, the opacity of contractual arrangements, and the political timing of the intervention in proximity to the 2015 general elections. The Jonathan administration's reluctance to disclose comprehensive details of the agreement fueled speculation regarding executive overreach and strategic political calculation. The frequent use of the term "mercenaries" in certain reports invoked historical memories of destabilizing private actors in postcolonial Africa, thereby reinforcing moral unease about the commercialization of force (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2022). Media representations thus served a dual purpose: they contributed to legitimizing STTEP's operational role while simultaneously amplifying apprehensions about sovereignty, accountability, and electoral motivations. This ambivalence underscores the powerful role of communicative framing in shaping the legitimacy of security governance.

**Civil Society Responses and Performance-Based Legitimacy:** Civil society actors including policy analysts, advocacy groups, and human rights organizations approached the outsourcing of force with measured skepticism. Key concerns centered on procurement transparency, oversight mechanisms, and the potential circumvention of democratic accountability. Research on hybrid security arrangements indicates that insufficient transparency can erode public confidence, even when operational achievements are evident (Casiraghi & Cusumano, 2023). At the same time, perceptions among communities most affected by Boko Haram's violence often reflected a more pragmatic orientation. In conflict-impacted areas, the restoration of territorial control and relative safety frequently outweighed normative objections to privatization. This dynamic reflects what scholars describe as performance-based legitimacy where state authority is evaluated primarily according to its capacity to deliver security outcomes rather than adherence to procedural standards (ICG, 2023; Nwankpa, 2021). However, performance-based legitimacy is inherently provisional. While tactical successes may generate short-term approval, they do not necessarily foster enduring institutional trust. In contexts where systemic reform is limited, public support may dissipate once immediate security improvements wane. Consequently, legitimacy in fragile states often remains transactional rather than deeply institutionalized.

**Parliamentary Scrutiny and Political Contestation:** Deliberations within Nigeria's National Assembly reflected broader tensions between executive discretion and constitutional oversight. Critics questioned whether engaging foreign private contractors aligned with Section 217 of the 1999 Constitution, which assigns

Responsibility for national defense to the armed forces. Concerns were raised regarding the adequacy of legislative scrutiny and the transparency of procurement processes. Proponents defended the engagement as an exceptional measure warranted by an acute security crisis. Nevertheless, the temporal proximity of the STTEP intervention to the 2015 elections infused the issue with political significance. Analysts suggest that the recapture of territories prior to the polls carried symbolic electoral implications alongside military relevance (Adamo, 2020; Zenn, 2020). Parliamentary debate thus extended beyond procedural questions to encompass partisan contestation over narrative framing, executive authority, and political credit. The outsourcing of force therefore became entangled with broader debates about democratic accountability and the permissible scope of executive action during national emergencies.

**Social Media and Popular Narratives:** Digital platforms amplified polarized interpretations of the intervention. On social media, some users characterized reliance on foreign contractors as evidence of institutional failure and diminished national pride. Others defended the decision as a necessary and pragmatic response to an urgent threat. In highly politicized online environments, assessments of military effectiveness were often filtered through partisan identities and electoral affiliations. Studies of digital political communication in Nigeria indicate that security discussions on social media frequently intersect with broader critiques of corruption, governance inefficiency, and elite impunity (SBM Intelligence, 2024). Within these spaces, debates about STTEP transcended technical military considerations and became symbolic reflections of sovereignty, competence, and national dignity. Unlike formal legislative discussions, online narratives were often emotive and identity-driven, reinforcing the perception that outsourcing force carried moral and symbolic weight.

**Religious and Regional Perspectives:** Nigeria's religious diversity and regional heterogeneity further shaped perceptions of legitimacy. In the predominantly Muslim northeast where communities bore the brunt of insurgent violence, immediate security restoration was often prioritized over abstract sovereignty concerns. For displaced populations and local authorities, reclaiming territory and restoring freedom of movement had immediate humanitarian implications (UNOCHA, 2023). In contrast, some southern constituencies, historically wary of foreign intervention and external influence, expressed stronger normative reservations about privatized military engagement. Historical experiences of mercenary activity in Africa continued to inform moral interpretations. Religious leaders articulated varied positions. Some framed the struggle against Boko Haram as a moral obligation that justified extraordinary measures. Others cautioned against normalizing privatized coercion and emphasized the ethical responsibility of the state to ensure accountability and transparency (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2022). These responses demonstrate that legitimacy was unevenly distributed and shaped by local histories, identities, and experiences of insecurity.

**Legitimacy, Symbolism, and Crisis Governance :** The Nigerian experience illustrates that legitimacy in outsourced security arrangements is multifaceted and socially constructed. It is influenced by constitutional principles, performance outcomes, media framing, partisan dynamics, historical memory, and lived experiences of violence. Three interrelated patterns emerge. First, visible operational gains generated conditional, performance-based approval. Second, perceived opacity in decision-making processes weakened institutional trust. Third, symbolic concerns about sovereignty particularly the conflation of PMSCs with mercenarism complicated normative acceptance. Recent scholarship on hybrid security governance emphasizes that while private actors may temporarily enhance state capacity, they simultaneously introduce accountability dilemmas that affect long-term legitimacy (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2022; ICG, 2023). Sovereignty, in this view, is not merely a formal legal status but a socially negotiated and continuously reaffirmed attribute. The politics of outsourcing force therefore extend beyond military effectiveness to encompass deeper questions of identity, authority, and democratic accountability.

## VIII. NIGERIA'S POST-2015 SECURITY SECTOR REFORM EFFORTS

The democratic transition of 2015 marked a significant political turning point in Nigeria and coincided with renewed commitments to strengthening national security institutions. Upon assuming office, President Muhammadu Buhari's administration acknowledged the structural deficiencies exposed during Boko Haram's peak territorial expansion and signaled an intention to recalibrate Nigeria's security architecture. Although Security Sector Reform (SSR) was not always articulated as a formally consolidated doctrine, it emerged as an implicit though inconsistently implemented, pillar of counterinsurgency and stabilization policy. Post-2015 reform initiatives spanned multiple domains, including anti-corruption efforts, military professionalization, human rights compliance, and intelligence coordination. Despite these efforts, reform implementation has largely been incremental, with uneven outcomes across sectors.

**Anti-Corruption and Defence Procurement Reform :** One of the earliest and most politically consequential reform initiatives involved investigations into defence procurement practices under the previous administration. The revelation of extensive misappropriation of funds intended for arms acquisition widely referred to as the “arms procurement scandal” exposed systemic governance failures within the Ministry of Defence and associated institutions. The establishment of investigative panels and the prosecution of high-profile figures were framed as steps toward restoring fiscal accountability and rebuilding public confidence in the defence sector. Assessments by Transparency International’s Government Defence Integrity Index (2019; 2022) indicate modest improvements in formal oversight structures and anti-corruption frameworks. Nevertheless, persistent structural vulnerabilities remain, particularly regarding procurement transparency and effective political oversight. Parliamentary access to detailed defence expenditures continues to be restricted due to the classified nature of security budgeting, and independent auditing mechanisms remain limited in capacity (Transparency International, 2022). Recent evaluations suggest that while anti-corruption initiatives addressed past irregularities, reform momentum has not consistently translated into systemic transformation of procurement governance (ICG, 2023). Critics contend that certain measures appeared reactive and selectively targeted rather than embedded within a comprehensive institutional restructuring strategy. Consequently, although the anti-corruption campaign symbolized an important normative shift, sustained accountability depends on deeper transparency reforms and strengthened legislative scrutiny.

**Military Professionalization and Capacity Building :** Beyond anti-corruption measures, post-2015 reforms prioritized military professionalization, doctrinal adjustments, and expanded international partnerships. Nigeria intensified defence cooperation with external partners, including the United States and the United Kingdom, facilitating counterinsurgency training, intelligence-sharing programs, and equipment modernization initiatives. These collaborations were designed to enhance operational capacity and improve strategic coordination. Simultaneously, Nigeria deepened its engagement within the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), strengthening regional collaboration with Chad, Niger, and Cameroon to address cross-border insurgent mobility (ICG, 2020). Given that Boko Haram and its splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), operate transnationally, enhanced regional integration reflected recognition of the need for cooperative security responses (Zenn, 2020). Despite these advances, structural challenges have continued to constrain professionalization efforts. Persistent welfare concerns including inadequate housing, delayed allowances, and logistical deficiencies have negatively affected troop morale and operational readiness (SBM Intelligence, 2024). Moreover, insurgent adaptation, particularly ISWAP’s strategic pivot toward targeted assaults on military installations and community infiltration tactics, has tested the resilience of reformed units (Zenn, 2020; ICG, 2023). Professionalization, therefore, extends beyond tactical retraining. Sustainable reform requires investment in troop welfare, leadership development, merit-based promotion systems, and institutional continuity. While improvements are evident in certain operational domains, broader institutional transformation remains incomplete.

**Civil–Military Relations and Human Rights Compliance :** The international scrutiny surrounding allegations of human rights abuses during earlier counterinsurgency operations prompted renewed attention to civilian protection and adherence to international humanitarian law. Post-2015 reform discourse emphasized enhanced training on rules of engagement, collaboration with civil society actors, and engagement with international human rights standards. However, recurring allegations of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and excessive use of force indicate that accountability mechanisms remain fragile (Amnesty International, 2023; ICG, 2023). Although internal investigations and court-martial proceedings have occurred, the absence of robust independent civilian oversight continues to raise concerns regarding transparency and impartiality. Scholarly analyses emphasize that meaningful SSR requires institutionalizing accountability mechanisms beyond executive control, including empowered parliamentary committees, independent complaint channels, and transparent investigative processes (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2022). Without these structural safeguards, reform efforts risk being perceived as symbolic gestures rather than substantive institutional change. Human rights compliance also carries strategic implications. Nigeria’s relationships with international partners particularly in light of frameworks such as the United States’ Leahy Law remain contingent on credible reform commitments. Thus, improvements in human rights governance are both normative imperatives and strategic necessities.

**Intelligence Coordination and Institutional Integration :** A further dimension of post-2015 reform efforts has focused on improving intelligence coordination among Nigeria’s various security agencies, including the Armed Forces, the Nigeria Police Force, and the Department of State Services (DSS). Fragmented intelligence sharing and bureaucratic rivalries were widely identified as contributing factors to earlier operational shortcomings. To address these challenges, authorities established inter-agency task forces and sought to enhance information-

Sharing mechanisms. Nonetheless, institutional competition, jurisdictional ambiguity, and overlapping mandates continue to impede cohesive coordination (ICG, 2023). The centralized structure of Nigeria's security system, combined with limited autonomy for local policing institutions, complicates integrated response strategies. Debates surrounding the potential establishment of state police forces further illustrate tensions between decentralization and centralized authority. Proponents argue that localized policing structures could improve responsiveness and intelligence gathering, whereas critics caution that decentralization may foster politicization and uneven security standards across regions (SBM Intelligence, 2024). Intelligence reform, therefore, intersects with broader constitutional debates concerning federalism, governance, and the distribution of sovereign authority.

**Overall Assessment of Post-2015 SSR Trajectory :** Taken together, Nigeria's post-2015 SSR initiatives reflect institutional recognition of vulnerabilities exposed during the height of Boko Haram's territorial dominance. Reforms targeting procurement accountability, military professionalization, human rights compliance, and intelligence integration represent substantive components of a reform agenda. Nevertheless, implementation has proceeded gradually and unevenly. Three persistent structural constraints are particularly evident: Institutional fragmentation, which hinders coherent inter-agency coordination; Governance deficiencies, including opaque procurement systems and limited legislative oversight; Accountability gaps, especially concerning civilian protection and human rights enforcement. The continued prevalence of insurgency, banditry, and communal violence under successive administrations underscores the incomplete nature of institutional recalibration (ICG, 2023; SBM Intelligence, 2024). While operational capabilities have improved in certain areas, structural transformation remains partial. From an SSR perspective, Nigeria's trajectory suggests incremental adaptation rather than comprehensive overhaul. The sustainability of reform will depend on consistent political commitment, strengthened transparency mechanisms, and empowered civilian oversight institutions. Absent these elements, improvements in tactical performance risk being undermined by enduring institutional fragility.

## **IX. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: NIGERIA VS MOZAMBIQUE VS SIERRA LEONE VS MALI**

A comparative perspective across Nigeria (STTEP), Mozambique (Wagner), Sierra Leone (Executive Outcomes), and Mali (Russian private military companies/Wagner) provides analytical leverage beyond a single-case study and strengthens broader claims about hybrid security governance, legitimacy, and the political economy of outsourced force. In each of these contexts, governments turned to external or private coercive capacity during moments of acute battlefield pressure, institutional fragility, and time-sensitive political imperatives. Yet the consequences of outsourcing varied significantly depending on mandate design, depth of integration with national forces, accountability structures, and whether contractor engagement was accompanied by meaningful security sector reform (SSR). Nigeria's 2015 engagement of STTEP is most accurately described as a short-duration, targeted force-multiplication strategy. The intervention was time-bound and designed to accelerate counteroffensive momentum against Boko Haram without embedding contractors into long-term governance structures. Rather than replacing state institutions, STTEP functioned as a temporary operational enhancer, focusing on tactical recalibration, mobility, and intelligence coordination (Varin, 2016; Bamigboye, 2023). This "surge" logic reflected crisis management rather than structural substitution. However, as subsequent insecurity demonstrated, the rapid territorial gains did not translate into deep institutional reform, underscoring the distinction between battlefield effectiveness and systemic resilience (ICG, 2023).

Mozambique's experience in Cabo Delgado illustrates a contrasting pattern. The Wagner Group's 2019 deployment occurred in an environment marked by weak coordination, limited interoperability, and insufficient local preparedness. Rather than functioning as a short-term trainer-and-enabler, Wagner operated closer to a substitute capacity model in which private actors assumed frontline operational roles amid fragile institutional structures. Reports from the International Crisis Group (2021) and subsequent analyses indicate that operational challenges including unfamiliar terrain, coordination failures, and local distrust undermined effectiveness. Mozambique ultimately pivoted toward state-led and regional interventions, notably through Rwanda and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which proved more sustainable stabilizing mechanisms than the earlier Wagner deployment (ICG, 2021; Fabricius, 2022). The Nigerian and Mozambican cases together suggest that outsourcing may temporarily compensate for institutional deficits, but poor integration and opaque accountability can exacerbate legitimacy erosion and prompt later reliance on regional or intergovernmental actors. A comparison between Nigeria and Sierra Leone further sharpens the analysis of performance-based legitimacy. Executive Outcomes' intervention in Sierra Leone during the 1990s is frequently cited as a paradigmatic example of private military effectiveness, given its rapid improvement of battlefield dynamics Against the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) (Singer, 2008). However, more recent scholarship urges caution

in accepting the “success narrative” at face value. Adamo (2020) and Abrahamsen and Williams (2022) emphasize that while tactical outcomes were notable, the intervention raised enduring questions regarding sovereignty, transparency, and democratic accountability. Similarly, Nigeria’s STTEP episode produced compressed-time territorial gains but generated political ambivalence regarding executive discretion and the symbolism of outsourcing force. In both contexts, military effectiveness did not eliminate contestation over legitimacy. These cases reinforce the proposition that performance-based legitimacy is conditional: it can generate short-term approval when security outcomes improve, but it remains reversible in the absence of institutional reform and transparent oversight. Mali presents a more cautionary trajectory. Following deteriorating relations with Western partners and the withdrawal of major international missions, Malian authorities deepened engagement with Russian private military actors, particularly Wagner and affiliated formations. Unlike Nigeria’s time-limited STTEP model, Mali’s partnership evolved into a more embedded arrangement intertwined with regime security priorities. Reports by the United Nations and human rights organizations have documented allegations of serious abuses involving Malian forces operating alongside Wagner personnel, intensifying debates over state responsibility and civilian protection (United Nations, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023). In this context, outsourcing appears less as technical capacity support and more as coercive governance by proxy. The blurring of accountability lines and the politicization of security partnerships have heightened legitimacy costs domestically and internationally. Mali thus illustrates how embedded PMC relationships can deepen governance fragility and complicate democratic oversight, particularly when private actors become central to regime survival narratives.

Taken together, these cases support several broader analytical propositions. First, outsourcing is most likely under conditions of convergent constraint where battlefield urgency intersects with institutional weakness and limited external assistance. However, the form outsourcing assumes varies along a spectrum from short-term surge support (Nigeria) to attempted substitute capacity (Mozambique) to embedded regime-aligned partnership (Mali). Second, rapid tactical gains do not equate to durable stabilization. Both Nigeria and Sierra Leone demonstrate that improvements in operational tempo can coexist with unresolved governance deficits and contested legitimacy. Third, accountability trajectories diverge sharply depending on integration depth and oversight mechanisms. Mali’s experience underscores how embedded PMC partnerships can amplify human rights risks and generate profound legitimacy challenges when coercive authority becomes insulated from democratic control. Comparative analysis therefore reinforces a central insight of hybrid security governance scholarship: the privatization of force does not produce uniform outcomes. Instead, it reconfigures sovereignty, legitimacy, and accountability in context-specific ways shaped by political incentives, institutional capacity, and oversight architecture (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2022; ICG, 2023). By situating Nigeria alongside Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Mali, the broader pattern becomes clear: private military outsourcing can provide short-term operational relief, but its long-term implications depend on whether it complements or substitutes for meaningful institutional reform and accountable governance.

## **X. CONCLUSION**

This study examined Nigeria’s engagement with private military and security companies (PMSCs), focusing particularly on the 2015 deployment of Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP). By analyzing the case through the intersecting frameworks of sovereignty, hybrid security governance, legitimacy, and security sector reform (SSR), the research moved beyond simplified claims that privatized force either inevitably weakens state authority or automatically strengthens state capacity. Instead, it has shown that the consequences of outsourcing coercive power are context-dependent, politically mediated, and deeply embedded within broader governance structures. The findings indicate that Nigeria’s decision to contract STTEP was not an anomalous policy departure, but rather a crisis-driven response shaped by converging structural pressures. Boko Haram’s territorial expansion, institutional fragility within the armed forces, procurement irregularities, declining troop morale, and restricted external assistance due to human rights concerns collectively narrowed the government’s strategic options. Within this constrained environment, STTEP operated as a short-term force multiplier. Its emphasis on mobility, intelligence-led operations, and coordinated air-ground maneuver contributed to tangible battlefield gains and accelerated territorial recovery ahead of the 2015 elections. These outcomes illustrate that, under specific conditions, PMSCs can enhance operational effectiveness and temporarily rebalance coercive dynamics. Yet the analysis also demonstrates that battlefield improvement should not be conflated with institutional transformation. The STTEP intervention did not rectify systemic deficiencies in procurement oversight, intelligence coordination, civil–military accountability, or governance transparency. The persistence of insecurity in subsequent years including insurgent adaptation, recurrent mass abductions, and expanding banditry highlights the limitations of short-duration outsourcing when not integrated into comprehensive SSR processes.

Nigeria's experience thus reinforces a broader theoretical proposition: private military assistance may recalibrate immediate force relationships, but it cannot replace sustained institutional reform, professionalization, and democratic oversight. In engaging sovereignty debates, this study challenges binary interpretations. Drawing on Weberian understandings of the state's monopoly over legitimate violence alongside contemporary security governance theory, the Nigerian case suggests that contracting STTEP did not represent a straightforward erosion of sovereignty. Rather, it reflected an adaptive reconfiguration of sovereign authority within hybrid governance arrangements. Sovereignty in contemporary conflict settings appears less as an absolute and centralized monopoly, and more as a negotiated and relational construct. The Nigerian state retained formal authorization over the use of force while delegating operational functions through contractual mechanisms. Such delegation complicates the classical Weberian model but does not necessarily invalidate it; instead, it illustrates the evolving modalities through which sovereignty is exercised. Legitimacy emerged as a central analytical theme. Public perceptions shaped by media narratives, parliamentary debates, civil society engagement, digital discourse, and regional and religious identities played a crucial role in mediating the political consequences of outsourcing force. The Nigerian experience demonstrates that in fragile contexts, legitimacy often operates on a performance-based and transactional basis. Visible territorial gains generated pragmatic acceptance among some constituencies, particularly those directly affected by insurgent violence. However, this approval remained conditional and susceptible to concerns regarding transparency, executive discretion, and symbolic sovereignty. The historical association of PMSCs with mercenarism amplified moral ambivalence and underscored that outsourcing force operates not only at the level of operational effectiveness but also within symbolic narratives of authority, competence, and national dignity.

Incorporating post-2015 SSR efforts into the analysis reveals a trajectory characterized more by incremental adjustment than transformative overhaul. Anti-corruption investigations, professionalization initiatives, renewed attention to human rights compliance, and efforts at intelligence integration demonstrate institutional acknowledgment of structural weaknesses. Nevertheless, implementation has been uneven, constrained by governance fragmentation, limited oversight capacity, and recurring accountability challenges. The Nigerian case therefore suggests that the sustainability of hybrid security arrangements depends on whether they reinforce or postpone deeper institutional reform. Without consistent political commitment to SSR principles particularly transparency, civilian oversight, and merit-based professionalization outsourcing risks obscuring fragility rather than resolving it. The comparative analysis further clarifies these dynamics. Nigeria's time-bound surge model contrasts with Mozambique's attempted substitute-capacity approach, Sierra Leone's performance-legitimacy paradox, and Mali's more deeply embedded regime-aligned partnerships with Russian private military actors. Across these cases, three broader patterns emerge: outsourcing tends to occur under acute structural constraint; short-term tactical gains seldom translate into durable stabilization absent institutional reform; and deeper contractor integration without strong oversight mechanisms heightens legitimacy and accountability risks. These comparisons underscore that privatized security should be understood as a spectrum of governance arrangements rather than a uniform phenomenon

Essentially, this research advances a central claim: outsourcing coercive capacity in fragile states is neither inherently sovereignty-eroding nor inherently capacity-enhancing. Its effects are contingent upon institutional design, transparency, duration, integration with SSR processes, and the social legitimacy it commands. Nigeria's engagement with STTEP illustrates the dual nature of hybrid security governance simultaneously adaptive and precarious. While tactical outsourcing may provide temporary breathing space during acute crisis, sustainable security depends on institutional credibility, accountable governance, and long-term reform. Sovereignty, in this broader sense, is not merely the possession of coercive means, but the socially recognized and democratically regulated authority to exercise them. Future research would benefit from deeper empirical exploration of vernacular perceptions of security outsourcing, longitudinal assessments of SSR implementation, and analysis of how shifting geopolitical alignments influence African states' reliance on private military actors. Expanding methodological approaches to include field-based perception studies and detailed examinations of contractor-state contractual arrangements would further enrich scholarly understanding. By foregrounding legitimacy and institutional reform alongside operational outcomes, this study contributes to a more nuanced account of how states navigate insecurity in an era characterized by the marketization of coercive power.

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