

LEAHY LAW AND COUNTER INSURGENCY IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examines the operational implications of the United States' Leahy Law on Nigeria's counterinsurgency campaign in the north-east. While policy debates have long asserted that human-rights-based conditionality constrained Nigeria's access to critical military equipment, empirical evidence has remained limited. This research addresses that gap by assessing how restrictions on hardware availability influenced personnel motivation, operational effectiveness, and risk-avoidance behaviour among security forces deployed between 2014 and 2018. A correlational explanatory cross-sectional design was used, and data were collected from 430 personnel through a structured Google Forms questionnaire adapted from validated military readiness and psychology scales. Descriptive analysis showed consistently low levels of hardware availability. Pearson correlations and simple linear regression revealed that hardware availability strongly predicted both personnel motivation and operational effectiveness, while being moderately and negatively associated with operational caution. Higher equipment access corresponded with higher morale, improved combat readiness, and reduced risk-avoidant behaviour. These findings provide empirical support for claims that Leahy-related restrictions significantly influenced Nigeria's counterinsurgency capacity. The study contributes to ongoing debates on balancing human rights conditionality with the operational requirements of states confronting high-intensity insurgencies.

Keywords: Counterinsurgency; Human Rights Conditionality; Leahy Law; Operational Effectiveness; Personnel Motivation.

Introduction

The post–Cold War international system has been shaped by deepening global interdependence, which has transformed the meaning and practice of state sovereignty. With the collapse of ideological bipolarity, the twenty-first century witnessed accelerated economic liberalisation, rapid technological advancement, and the strengthening of multilateral governance, all of which enhanced the integration of political, economic, and security systems across the world (Held & McGrew, 2007). Global markets expanded, information technology reshaped communication, and international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation assumed greater influence in shaping state behaviour. As domestic decisions increasingly produced cross-border consequences, issues relating to trade, environment, and security became internationalised, thereby limiting the autonomy of developing states and compelling them to operate within externally influenced policy environments (Baylis, Smith, & Owens, 2019; Keohane & Nye, 2000).

This interdependence has also intensified the diffusion of normative and institutional power. Rather than relying solely on coercion, influential states increasingly promote their preferences through norms embedded in institutions and regulatory frameworks (Strange, 1996; Nye, 2011). This has enabled powerful states, particularly the United States, to extend elements of their domestic legal and ethical systems into the political and security sectors of less powerful states. As a result, sovereignty in many parts of the developing world has become closely tied to compliance with external standards, especially those related to human rights, security governance, and military accountability (Waltz, 2001). The Leahy Law reflects this broader trend. As a U.S. statute that conditions military assistance on human rights performance, it prohibits the provision of equipment, training, or funding to foreign security units implicated in gross human rights violations (Risse & Sikkink, 1999). Through this mechanism, the United States internationalises its domestic human rights norms and embeds them within the defence systems of partner states.

Nigeria’s confrontation with Boko Haram since 2009 illustrates the tension between human-rights-based conditionality and urgent national security needs. The insurgency has resulted in more than 40,000 deaths, the displacement of over 2.2 million people, and widespread destruction across the north-east (Barkindo, 2020; ACLED, 2024). Infrastructure valued at over \$9 billion has been destroyed (Bloomberg, 2017), and the education sector has suffered extensive losses, with more than 910 schools destroyed and 1,500 closed between 2009 and 2015 (Segun & Dele-Adedeji, 2016). This has contributed to Nigeria’s position as the country with the highest number of out-of-school children globally, estimated at 10.5 million (UNICEF, n.d.). Humanitarian needs remain severe in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, where displaced populations continue to require sustained assistance (UNHCR, n.d.). Given the transnational scope of the insurgency, Nigeria’s counterterrorism strategy has relied heavily on international partnerships, intelligence collaboration, and access to foreign military hardware (Omotuyi & Okwechime, 2021).

However, the enforcement of the Leahy Law has significantly shaped Nigeria’s operational capacity. In 2014, the United States reportedly blocked Israel from transferring U.S.-made helicopters to Nigeria due to human rights concerns (Times of Israel, 2015). Further restrictions

emerged in 2021 when U.S. lawmakers placed a hold on a proposed \$875 million arms sale that included 12 AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters (DePetris & Gramer, 2021). These actions prompted strong reactions from Nigerian authorities. Former President Muhammadu Buhari argued that the blanket application of the law “aided and abetted” Boko Haram by preventing Nigeria from acquiring needed weaponry during peak insurgent activity (Atlantic Council, 2015). Military officials later criticised what they described as Western double standards, stating that Nigeria struggled to acquire necessary equipment despite having the financial capacity to do so (Associated Press, 2024). Civil society groups also protested the delays, arguing that restricting Nigeria’s access to critical hardware undermined citizens’ right to security (Gazette Nigeria, 2021).

Although these developments highlight the significant influence of the Leahy Law on Nigeria’s counterinsurgency environment, the existing discourse remains largely descriptive and shaped by policy statements, media commentary, and diplomatic exchanges. Much of what is known centres on reported equipment delays, denied transfers, and the political tensions arising from U.S. human rights conditionality, yet little is understood about how these constraints have affected conditions on the ground for personnel engaged in counterinsurgency operations. Key operational issues such as hardware availability, troop motivation, mission performance, and risk-related behaviour have received minimal empirical attention, despite their centrality to effective counterinsurgency. As a result, there is a need for a systematic and evidence-based analysis that moves beyond political debate to examine how the enforcement of the Leahy Law has shaped practical operational realities in north-east Nigeria.

Problem Statement

Effective counterinsurgency operations depend on consistent access to functional military hardware, the motivation of deployed personnel, and the ability to conduct missions without excessive risk-avoidant behaviour (Felter, 2017; Oriola, 2021; Jeppesen, 2021). In Nigeria, however, the enforcement of the Leahy Law has raised concerns about how human-rights-based conditionality may be affecting these operational pillars. Reports of blocked arms transfers, suspended training programmes, and prolonged delays in accessing essential equipment have intensified debate about whether the law has unintentionally weakened Nigeria’s ability to confront Boko Haram and ISWAP (Atlantic Council, 2015; Reuters, 2022; CIVIC, 2024). Much of this debate remains anecdotal, shaped by political and policy commentary rather than grounded in empirical evidence from personnel who operated in environments characterised by equipment shortages. A clearer understanding of whether, and to what extent, hardware availability was affected is essential to evaluating the practical implications of the law.

Research in military psychology consistently shows that access to adequate equipment is a critical determinant of troop morale, confidence, and willingness to undertake high-risk missions (Felter, 2017; Oriola, 2021; Jeppesen, 2021). Despite this, no empirical study has examined whether reduced hardware availability in Nigeria’s counterinsurgency theatre resulted in measurable declines in personnel motivation, even though senior officials frequently claim that morale was affected. Similarly, although analysts have argued that equipment delays weakened tactical capability, no field-based study has assessed the extent to which hardware shortages influenced operational effectiveness, including mission performance, combat readiness, and the ability to

maintain operational tempo. In the same vein, personnel who lack adequate weapons, protective gear, or mobility assets may adopt more risk-avoidant behaviour, including delaying offensive operations or avoiding high-threat zones altogether. Such behaviour can prolong conflict, reduce pressure on insurgent groups, and diminish the overall effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations.

Therefore, this study examines how the Leahy Law's enforcement has shaped Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations in the north-east. The study investigates the extent to which the law affected the availability of essential military hardware, explores how hardware constraints influenced personnel motivation, analyses the relationship between hardware availability and operational effectiveness, and assesses whether hardware shortages contributed to increased operational caution and risk-avoidant behaviour among frontline personnel.

Literature

Globalization, Human Rights, and Conditional Assistance

Globalization has redefined the principles of state sovereignty and reshaped how power is exercised in international relations. In that regard, domestic decisions yield transnational consequences, compelling states, particularly those in the developing world, to align their internal policies with external legal and ethical frameworks (Held & McGrew, 2007; Keohane & Nye, 2000). This diffusion of influence has manifested in the globalisation of human rights norms, where powerful nations embed moral imperatives within foreign policy and international assistance regimes (Forsythe, 2017). Sandholtz (2016) empirically shows that U.S. human rights conditionality in military aid reflects a liberal internationalist approach that seeks to promote compliance and accountability among recipient states, though its enforcement is often limited by strategic interests. Donnelly (2013) similarly argues that embedding human rights within foreign assistance represents an evolution of liberal internationalism, through which liberal democracies institutionalise moral norms to advance governance reforms and accountability abroad.

This normative transformation has found institutional expression in development aid, peacekeeping mandates, and foreign military assistance. According to Douch (2022), the conditional use of aid to enforce human rights compliance has become a standard mechanism of global governance, though its application remains uneven and politically selective. Aka (2002) argues that such conditionalities have become tools of indirect influence by advanced states over weaker ones, particularly in Africa, where dependence on foreign security assistance is high. Scholars such as Ștefanachi (2013) and Barone (2022) extend this argument by demonstrating how globalization has transformed the scope of international law, enabling domestic legislation in powerful states to shape international military conduct. Within this global order, moral legitimacy and compliance with human rights standards increasingly determine access to international assistance, embedding normative hierarchy in international security relations.

However, this linkage between human rights and security assistance is not without criticism. While it reinforces accountability and rule of law, it can also constrain the defensive autonomy of developing states facing existential security threats. Sandholtz (2016) cautions that the U.S.

approach to conditional military assistance, though normatively grounded, risks reproducing asymmetries of power by allowing domestic law to dictate international engagement. As such, the intersection of globalization, human rights, and conditionality creates a paradox: while it seeks to universalize moral governance, it simultaneously challenges the sovereignty and agency of aid-dependent states such as Nigeria.

The Leahy Law: Origins, Legal Foundations, and Global Application

Leahy Law is designed as an instrument of human rights by U.S. government. Originating in 1997 under the sponsorship of Senator Patrick Leahy, the law was intended to prevent U.S. complicity in human rights abuses by foreign military and police units (Leahy, 2017; Serafino, 2014). It stipulates that “no assistance shall be furnished” to any security force unit credibly implicated in gross violations of human rights, including torture, extrajudicial killings, or enforced disappearances (Congressional Research Service, 2022). Implementation occurs through a vetting process, commonly known as “Leahy vetting”, administered jointly by the Departments of State and Defense, which assess the human rights records of recipient units before approval of training or equipment (Tamariz, 2020).

Waggoner (2017) provides an empirical evaluation of the law, arguing that it has been instrumental in institutionalizing human rights accountability within U.S. foreign security engagements. RAND Corporation research (McNerney, 2017) also highlights its deterrent function, noting that the vetting system has improved compliance with humanitarian standards among partner militaries. Nonetheless, the Leahy Law’s enforcement has been criticized for inconsistencies and lack of transparency. Lumpe (2014) contend that its application is often selective, reflecting shifting U.S. strategic priorities rather than uniform human rights criteria.

The global impact of the Leahy Law extends far beyond the United States’ borders. Nwankwo (2019, 2020) argues that the Leahy Law has externalised U.S. human rights standards by conditioning security assistance on compliance, thereby compelling recipient states, especially in Africa, to reform their military institutions and operational protocols in line with American legal and ethical norms. Merrill (2019) similarly observes that the law’s implementation has internationalised U.S. moral frameworks, influencing how partner military’s structure training, vetting, and accountability mechanisms, effectively extending U.S. domestic values into global security governance. In Latin America and Southeast Asia, the law has been credited with promoting reform in militaries previously associated with abuses (Waggoner, 2017). But Sandholtz (2016) observes that in fragile or conflict-affected states, human rights conditionality embedded in U.S. military assistance often generates operational constraints by limiting access to essential training and equipment. He argues that while the intent is to promote accountability, such restrictions can inadvertently weaken local military capacity and complicate urgent security responses where institutional oversight is already limited. McNerney (2017) similarly finds that the implementation of the Leahy Law within the Department of Defense framework creates significant challenges for partner states engaged in counterinsurgency operations, as delays in vetting and conditionality enforcement hinder operational readiness and strain bilateral security cooperation

Nigeria's Counterinsurgency and the Human Rights Dilemma

Since 2009, Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have waged a brutal insurgency responsible for over 40,000 deaths and the displacement of millions across the Lake Chad Basin (Barkindo, 2020; Zenn, 2020). Amnesty International (2015) and Human Rights Watch (2019) have documented extensive human rights violations committed by both insurgents and state security forces, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, and civilian targeting. These reports triggered the invocation of the Leahy Law, restricting U.S. military assistance to Nigeria due to credible allegations of abuse.

Omotuyi and Okwechime (2021) provide a comprehensive analysis of the intersection between Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts and the politics of the Leahy Law, noting that the conditionality has profoundly shaped the structure and conduct of Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations. They argue that while the law aims to improve accountability, its rigid enforcement has constrained Nigeria's capacity to acquire essential hardware, leading to delays in operations and prolonged exposure of civilian populations to insurgent violence. Similarly, Abdullahi and Chukwuma (2019) highlight how limited access to advanced equipment and inconsistent international support have lowered troop morale, exacerbated discipline problems and weakened institutional cohesion within the armed forces.

The response of Nigerian government to these constraints has been twofold; with official protest and strategic realignment. Nigerian leaders such as have accused the United States of "aiding Boko Haram" through restrictive application of the Leahy Law, arguing that the policy ignores Nigeria's security realities. In response, Nigeria has diversified its defence partnerships, purchasing arms from Russia, China, and Turkey (Adebajo, 2021). However, analysts warn that such partnerships may undermine transparency and accountability because of their human rights requirements (Ibeanu & Momoh, 2020). The resulting paradox illustrates a key dilemma of international human rights enforcement: efforts to promote ethical conduct in warfare may inadvertently erode institutional capacity and accountability in recipient states.

While policy analyses and journalistic reports have extensively debated the Leahy Law's role in Nigeria's counterinsurgency, the academic literature remains largely conceptual, lacking systematic empirical evaluation. Most studies rely on official statements, secondary data, or advocacy reports without field-based investigation into the law's operational impact. For example, Reuters (2022) revealed that approximately half of Nigeria's military units were ineligible for U.S. assistance due to Leahy vetting, yet there is little quantitative evidence assessing how such exclusions affected combat effectiveness, morale, or civilian protection outcomes. Similarly, CIVIC (2024) and the Congressional Research Service (2022) report that delays in weapons transfers hindered precision targeting, but their conclusions are based on policy analysis rather than direct measurement.

Globally, empirical research on human rights conditionality in conflict contexts reveals similar deficiencies. Sullivan (2023) and Blanken & Sullivan (2017) show that while conditional security assistance can reduce civilian harm in theory, it often produces unintended operational gaps when applied in fragile states with limited institutional capacity. In Nigeria's case, the absence of

systematic field data means that the debate over the Leahy Law's impact remains speculative. Omotuyi and Okwechime (2021) identify this empirical deficit, calling for studies that explore the psychological and institutional consequences of the law on Nigerian troops, particularly in terms of morale, discipline, and adherence to human rights norms.

This lack of empirical grounding constitutes a critical research gap. The existing scholarship has not adequately measured how human rights conditionality shapes the practical realities of counterinsurgency on the ground. No known studies have combined quantitative assessments of equipment availability, troop motivation, and rights compliance within the context of U.S. - Nigeria military relations. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this void by providing a data-driven analysis of how the Leahy Law affects Nigeria's counterinsurgency capacity in the northeast, offering evidence-based insights into the broader tension between global human rights governance and state security sovereignty.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational explanatory cross-sectional design to examine how the enforcement of the U.S. Leahy Law influenced key aspects of Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations in the north-east. The study population consisted of Nigerian security personnel who participated in counterinsurgency operations between 2014 and 2018, a period marked by heightened operational restrictions and diplomatic tension associated with the enforcement of the law. The population included members of the Nigerian Army, Air Force, and Navy deployed in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States. Since the exact number of personnel involved in counterinsurgency operations during this period is unknown, the sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970), which recommends a minimum of 384 respondents for populations above one million at a 95 percent confidence level. To further strengthen the confidence level and ensure adequate representation, the study exceeded this threshold, resulting in a total of 430 valid responses.

Access to operational personnel is restricted, and deployment records are not publicly available; therefore, snowball sampling was employed. The survey link was initially shared with eligible personnel who had participated in counterinsurgency operations during the specified period. Each participant was encouraged to forward the link to colleagues who also met the eligibility criteria. A mandatory screening question at the beginning of the questionnaire required respondents to confirm that they served in counterinsurgency operations between 2014 and 2018. Any response indicating otherwise was automatically discarded.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The instrument comprised two sections. The first section captured demographic characteristics including age, gender, rank category, service branch, years of service, counterinsurgency experience, deployment location, operational role, and educational level. The second section consisted of Likert-type items measuring the four study variables. Hardware availability was assessed using items adapted from the material readiness frameworks presented by Wen et al. (2014), Taylor et al. (2025), and RAND readiness metrics. Personnel motivation was measured through items adapted from Britt and Dickinson's Military Morale Scale and the revised six-item

version validated by Kasemaa (2024). Operational effectiveness was assessed using items adapted from the Military Readiness Scale-15 developed by Taylor et al. (2025) and the Peace Support Operations Questionnaire by Bester and Stanz (2007). Operational caution was measured using items adapted from the EVAR-B scale, validated by Killgore et al. (2010), and the Military Operational Risk-Taking Scale, developed by Momen et al. (2010). These adaptations ensured strong construct alignment and maintained the psychometric foundations of the original scales while reflecting contextual realities in the Nigerian counterinsurgency environment.

The data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviations, and frequencies, were computed to summarise respondent characteristics and levels of hardware availability. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the associations between hardware availability and the three outcome variables. Simple linear regression was conducted to determine whether hardware availability significantly predicted personnel motivation, operational effectiveness, and operational caution. These techniques aligned with the study objectives and enabled the researcher to generate empirical evidence on how limited access to military hardware influenced operational performance and behaviour.

Results

Descriptive statistics were computed to assess the level of hardware availability among personnel engaged in counterinsurgency operations. As shown in table 1, scores across the four hardware availability items ranged from 1 to 5, with low mean values indicating limited access to essential equipment. Respondents reported a mean of 2.19 (SD = 1.17) for access to weapons and equipment (HA1), 2.25 (SD = 1.23) for adequacy of hardware during missions (HA2), 2.17 (SD = 1.15) for delays in receiving essential equipment (HA3), and 2.28 (SD = 1.17) for availability of modern aircraft, vehicles, and protective gear (HA4). These results collectively reflect a generally low level of hardware availability among the sample of 430 personnel.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Hardware Availability (N = 430)*

Item Code	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
HA1	430	1	5	2.19	1.17
HA2	430	1	5	2.25	1.23
HA3	430	1	5	2.17	1.15
HA4	430	1	5	2.28	1.17

To determine whether personnel motivation was associated with hardware availability, correlation and regression analyses were conducted. As shown in Table 2, hardware availability was found to be strongly and positively associated with personnel motivation, $r = .55, p < .001$. Regression analysis further indicated that hardware availability was a strong positive predictor of personnel motivation, $F(1, 428) = 180.75, p < .001, \beta = .55, t(428) = 13.44, p < .001$, with an unstandardized coefficient of $B = 0.69$ (SE = 0.05). These findings indicate that higher levels of hardware availability were linked to higher levels of personnel motivation among individuals engaged in counterinsurgency operations.

As also presented in Table 2, hardware availability was found to be strongly and positively associated with operational effectiveness. The correlation between the two variables was statistically significant, $r = .60, p < .001$. Regression analysis confirmed that hardware availability was a strong positive predictor of operational effectiveness, $F(1, 428) = 243.36, p < .001, \beta = .60, t(428) = 15.60, p < .001$, with an unstandardized coefficient of $B = 0.78$ ($SE = 0.05$). These results indicate that increased access to operational hardware corresponded with higher levels of operational effectiveness during counterinsurgency activities.

Table 2 also indicates that hardware availability was moderately and negatively associated with operational caution. The correlation analysis showed a significant negative relationship, $r = -.45, p < .001$. Regression analysis further demonstrated that hardware availability was a significant negative predictor of operational caution, $F(1, 428) = 106.78, p < .001, \beta = -.45, t(428) = -10.33, p < .001$, with an unstandardized coefficient of $B = -0.58$ ($SE = 0.06$). These findings indicate that higher levels of hardware availability were associated with lower levels of risk-avoidant behaviour during counterinsurgency operations.

Table 2: Summary of Correlation and Regression Results Predicting Personnel Motivation, Operational Effectiveness, and Operational Caution ($N = 430$)

Predictor Variable	Correlation with Outcome (r)	Regression Coefficient (B)	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Hardware → Personnel Motivation	.55**	0.69	.55	13.44	.000	Strong positive predictor
Hardware → Operational Effectiveness	.60**	0.78	.60	15.60	.000	Strong positive predictor
Hardware → Operational Caution	-.45**	-0.58	-.45	-10.33	.000	Moderate negative predictor

Note. $p < .01$ for all correlations.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study offer empirical insight into how the operational limitations associated with the enforcement of the U.S. Leahy Law shaped counterinsurgency performance in north-east Nigeria. The descriptive results demonstrated that hardware availability was generally low across the sampled personnel, with consistently low mean scores on all measures of equipment access. This aligns with documented reports indicating that the enforcement of the Leahy Law significantly limited Nigeria’s access to advanced military hardware during the height of the Boko Haram insurgency. Reuters (2022), for example, reported that up to 50% of Nigerian military units were ineligible for U.S. assistance because of Leahy vetting restrictions. Similarly, the Atlantic Council (2015) and the Congressional Research Service (2022) noted that the delays and denials

caused by the law created equipment shortfalls at a time when operational demands were high. These conditions contributed to a supply environment where troops often relied on outdated or insufficient equipment, consistent with the low hardware availability observed in this study.

Hardware availability was found to be strongly and positively associated with personnel motivation. Personnel who perceived higher levels of equipment access also reported higher morale and operational enthusiasm. This result is consistent with empirical evidence from military psychology, which shows that access to adequate resources strongly predicts morale, confidence, and willingness to engage in high-risk missions (Britt & Dickinson, 2005; Kasemaa, 2024). In the Nigerian context, this aligns with concerns raised by senior military officials who argued that hardware restrictions negatively affected troop morale and the broader conduct of counterinsurgency operations (Associated Press, 2024; Atlantic Council, 2015). These findings therefore substantiate long-standing claims by Nigerian authorities that operational motivation was weakened by the constraints imposed under the Leahy framework.

The study also found that hardware availability was a strong positive predictor of operational effectiveness. Respondents who reported greater access to weapons, vehicles, protective gear, and mission-critical equipment simultaneously described higher levels of combat readiness, rapid response capability, and overall operational performance. This result is consistent with established findings on military readiness, which identify equipment serviceability and availability as core determinants of tactical and operational success (Taylor et al., 2025; Wen et al., 2014; RAND Corporation, 1991). Reports by CIVIC (2024) and the Congressional Research Service (2022) further explain that inadequate access to precision-guided systems and surveillance platforms limited the Nigerian military's capacity to minimise civilian harm and maintain operational tempo. Thus, the empirical relationship observed in this study reinforces the view that the Leahy-related hardware constraints directly affected Nigeria's ability to prosecute counterinsurgency operations effectively.

A significant negative relationship was also found between hardware availability and operational caution. Personnel with lower access to essential equipment were more likely to exhibit risk-avoidant behaviour, including avoiding high-risk terrain, delaying offensive engagement, or limiting pursuit of insurgent elements. This finding aligns with the risk-propensity literature, which shows that inadequate resources heighten perceptions of danger and increase risk-avoidance during combat operations (Killgore et al., 2010; Momen et al., 2010; Ben-Shalom & Glicksohn, 2013). In the context of Nigeria's insurgency, this dynamic may have reduced the operational pressure applied to Boko Haram and ISWAP, thereby indirectly enabling insurgent mobility and resilience. Similar observations have been made in policy analyses that attribute tactical hesitation and operational delays partly to equipment deficiencies (Omotuyi & Okwechime, 2021; Barkindo, 2020). The present findings therefore provide empirical confirmation of this operational pattern.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the enforcement of the Leahy Law had substantive implications for Nigeria's counterinsurgency capabilities during the period under study. Limited access to essential military hardware was associated with reduced personnel motivation, diminished operational effectiveness, and heightened operational caution, all of which undermine sustained counterinsurgency performance. These results echo wider scholarly concerns about the unintended consequences of human-rights-based conditionality in conflict-affected states

(Sandholtz, 2016; Aka, 2002; Douch, 2022). Although the Leahy Law aims to prevent complicity in human rights abuses, its operational effects in fragile security environments such as Nigeria appear significant, raising critical questions about how to balance accountability goals with urgent security needs. The evidence presented here therefore contributes to ongoing debates on the implications of the Leahy framework for Nigeria–U.S. security cooperation and for global counterterrorism efforts more broadly.

Conclusion

This study confirms that limited hardware availability occasioned by Leahy Law enforcement significantly shaped Nigeria’s counterinsurgency operations. Personnel who perceived adequate access to weapons, vehicles, protective gear, and mission-support tools exhibited measurably higher morale and stronger operational performance. Conversely, when hardware was perceived as inadequate or delayed, motivation weakened, effectiveness declined, and risk-avoidant behaviour increased. Troops who were under-equipped were more cautious, slower to engage, and less capable of sustaining offensive momentum. In counterinsurgency environments, these conditions can prolong conflict and enable insurgent adaptability.

While the objective of preventing human-rights abuses is legitimate and necessary, the study demonstrates that a rigid enforcement of the Leahy Law may unintentionally degrade frontline operational capability. The Nigerian experience shows that restricting access to critical equipment during active conflict weakens morale, disrupts mission effectiveness, and alters tactical behaviour in ways that may inadvertently advantage insurgent groups. Human-rights-based conditionality that simultaneously constrains battlefield capacity risks producing contradictory outcomes, particularly when operational personnel are already confronting high-intensity threats with limited resources.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that United States government should revise its implementation of the Leahy Law by accelerating the vetting process, creating fast-track approval pathways for units with demonstrated compliance records, and ensuring that frontline units already vetted are not deprived of essential equipment during peak operational periods. These adjustments would preserve the human-rights safeguards intended by the law while preventing the operational stagnation that arises when equipment delays undermine mission readiness.

The Nigerian government on its part should strengthen its internal accountability system by improving the documentation of field operations, enhancing the capacity of investigative bodies, and institutionalising routine human-rights training across all security units. These measures will reduce violations that activate Leahy restrictions and will demonstrate Nigeria’s commitment to global accountability standards. Nigerian security institutions should also expand domestic procurement channels and improve maintenance systems, thereby reducing dependence on external suppliers. Greater investment in indigenous defence manufacturing would better ensure more reliable access to hardware and enhance long-term operational readiness.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Defence should introduce structured morale-support interventions for deployed personnel. These should include improved welfare schemes, clearer rotation policies, and expanded psychological support services to counteract the motivational decline associated

with inadequate equipment. Such measures will address the emotional and behavioural challenges identified in this study.

Finally, regional and international partners, particularly the African Union and ECOWAS, should strengthen multilateral security cooperation by expanding joint training initiatives, facilitating pooled procurement of military hardware, and improving shared oversight mechanisms. A more collective approach to security assistance would reduce Nigeria's vulnerability to unilateral conditionality regimes and create more stable channels for accessing mission-critical equipment during high-intensity counterinsurgency operations.

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