

**POLITICAL OFFICE HOLDERS AND SECURITY AGENCIES'
UNFINISHED TASK IN ADDRESSING RELIGIOUS
CONFLICT AND INSECURITY IN 21ST CENTURY
NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Violent religious conflict causes and aggravates insecurity. This paper rises to question the role played by 21st century North-Central Nigerian political office holders and security agencies in the task of addressing religious conflict and insecurity. The analysis of data drawn from observation and secondary sources reveals that these two sets of state agents do not only fail in carrying out the task, but also incite, sponsor and manipulate members of their religious groups against members of other groups. For the sake of their socio-political and economic motives, they use religion to cause trouble among the people by emphasising ethnic and political differences on religious lane. The paper concludes that once these state actors duly rise to the task of addressing violent religious conflict causing insecurity, issues of insecurity arising from it would cease to occur. It urges political office holders and security agencies to drop quietude and their underground role behind violent intergroup conflict causing and heightening the insecurity confronting 21st century North-Central Nigeria.

Keywords: Political office holders, Security agencies, unfinished Task, Addressing, North-Central

Introduction

It is quite worrisome that religion, a sacred institution of peace is being continuously politicised and made a source of insecurity in the 21st century, as in North-Central Nigeria. Scholars (e.g. Tukura, 2021; Alozieuwa, 2016) as well as concerned authorities and individuals have continuously expressed concern about the increasing spate of insecurity in 21st century Nasarawa and other states in North-Central Nigeria, as in other parts of Nigeria as a whole. North-Central comprises Nasarawa, Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Niger, Kogi, Kwara and the Federal Capital

Territory (FCT). Alozieuwa (2016) is of the opinion that the claimed peaceful and harmonious co-existence among the ethno-linguistic groups in Nasarawa State has recently become characterised by perennial communal and sectarian strife, fostered by hegemonic and resistance politics. As categorically pointed out by Reychler (2002) and Alubo (2006), the three geo-political zones of Northern Nigeria are characterised by the incessant outbreak of ethno-religious conflicts and disputes relating to land rights and community squabbles between 'indigenes' and 'settlers'. Here, the focus is on ethno-religious conflicts as security threats that political office holders and security agencies have allowed to thrive unchecked because there are political motives and ethno-religious sentiments that ground the 21st century ethno-religious politics of inciting one religious or ethnic group against another. Given the fact that political office holders and security agencies are capable of quelling the various forms of insecurity in society, it is questionable that they have not been able to duly address religious conflict and insecurity along with other security challenges in the 21st century North-Central Nigeria. Against the foregoing backdrop, this study rises to interrogate the role of political office holders and security agencies in addressing religious issues causing the insecurity confronting North-Central Nigeria. It seeks to show that political office holders and security agencies have failed in their corporate social responsibility of defending and protecting lives and property in the society. Rather, they compromise their responsibility, service delivery, standards, values, morality and the welfare of the citizenry for their selfish interests.

Perspectives on Conflict, Religious Conflict and Causes

Conflict has been defined as an overt behaviour arising from a process in which one party seeks the advancement of its own interest in its relationship with others (Lammers 1959, p. 559). It follows that clash of interest gives rise to conflict, because the parties involved struggle over the clashing interests. This point is also expressed by Abdulrahman (2007, p. 27), who notes that 'social conflict is an expressed struggle between two or more interdependent parties, who perceive scarce resources, incompatible goals and interference.' Similarly, Adejo (2004, p. 3) says that conflict involves collision or clash between two parties over two or more contesting things. This point tells volume of why this paper considers religious conflict as a phase of insecurity. Violence is involved. The contestation is usually violent. In Nigeria as a whole, Islam and Christianity are two religions under which the faithful engage each other in violent conflict, causing insecurity.

Religious conflicts are sources of insecurity because they threaten peace and security, claim lives and property, and cause chaos, commotion and all that other violent conflicts cause. As such, religious conflict arises when and where the faithful

of two contesting religions each 'perceive the other's values, behaviour, attitude, goals and interests as threats to theirs (Alachi, 2002, p. 3), as in the case between Muslims and Christians. Since after the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War, Nigeria has continued to battle with different forms of violent conflicts, which border on religion, ethnicity, linguistic difference, political hegemony, power and chieftaincy tussles, electoral violence, communal and boundary disputes, resource allocation and sharing parameters, the Niger Delta militancy, the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, and, most recently, kidnapping, banditry and Fulani raids on farmers and their communities. This assertion is affirmed by different scholars (e.g. Albert, 1999; Reychler, 2002; Alubo, 2006; Alozieuwa, 2016; Robert and Besong, 2017).

In the words of Alozieuwa (2016), 'relations among the ethno-linguistic groups in the North Central region have recently been characterised by perennial communal and sectarian strife, especially the Plateau-Nasarawa-Benue-Kogi axis– fostered both by hegemonic and resistance politics.' Some scholars argue that the common tendency is to disguise every violent conflict as a religious or ethnic conflict, or a result of protracted historical animosities (Omeje, 2012, Oyewole, 2013). For Omeje (2012), violent conflict in Nigeria is caused by state failure and poverty. It follows that apart from inciting, supporting and sponsoring members of their religious and ethnic groups to cause mayhem, they also fail in their corporate social responsibility of addressing crucial issues like religious intolerance and conflicts and other threats to insecurity.

The state failure also accounts for the poverty that ravages the citizens, and the vulnerable towards crimes, conflicts, insecurity, electoral violence (Albert, 1994; Tanuche, 2009; Besong, 2018). The elites are noted to use religion to cause mayhem (Bolarinwa, 2010, p. 64). They incite their religious fellows against the faithful of other religions and cause religious tension and violent crisis (Robert & Besong, 2017; Abilor, 2006; Agi, 1996). In the words of Obilor (2006, p. 161), 'among the many identifiable ailments ravaging Nigeria are religious matters; at the heart of the many identifiable solutions to the ailments are religious solutions.' He emphasises that despite having many religions, all the religious believe in God. So, there are many religions, but 'one God, who is the Father of all, the creator God and the Merciful God' (Obilor, 2006, p. 161).

Diverse Phases and Causes of Insecurity in 21 Century Nigeria

The insecurity ravaging North-Central Nigeria is of diverse phases. The diverse phases of insecurity in the Nigerian state include kidnapping, armed banditry, political thugery, hired assassination, Fulani herders' attacks on farmers and communities, hate speeches, elitist incitement, religious fundamentalism and crisis, ethnic hate, indigene versus non-indigene palaver, communal clashes, boundary disputes, chieftaincy tussle, unemployment, poverty, hunger and starvation, rape and

gender violence against women (Alubo, 2006; Lewis, 2011; Ayoade, 2014; Odekunle, 2010; Alozieuwa, 2016; Robert, 2017; Odekunle 2018; Dibie, Gotau and Robert, 2016; Besong & Robert, 2019; Robert, 2020; Ahmed, 2021; Tukura, 2021). Any other ones not mentioned among the above are imbedded in those above. That is, such ones are the off-shoots of the aforementioned ones. Although insecurity portends and concerns violence or war, it also extends to socio-economic and political wrongs and ills that threaten the safety, peace and tranquility of any society (Oyededeji, 2018, p. 3). It is in view of this expressed fact that this paper considers the insecurity ravaging Nasarawa and other states in North-Central Nigeria as being of diverse phases. The major phases have been mentioned. The emphasis is on the religious phases of the insecurity confronting North-Central states.

There are various causes of insecurity. In the first place, insecurity arises from conflicts over clash of interests or opposing capacities in relation to perceived or anticipated benefits or outcomes between the two or more parties involved. Conflict originates from differences in timing, objectives, interests, efforts, approaches, and attitudes of people to issues (Lammers 1959, p. 559). Socio-economic and political wrongs are the bane of social issues culminating to insecurity. Examples include unemployment, poverty, hunger and starvation, rape and gender violence against women. Stating categorically for illustrative example, it is important to note that employed youths would seldom have the time to engage in evil acts that unleash insecurity on society. So, unemployment is a factor behind civil unrest and social vices unleashed on Nasarawa and other societies in general (Besong, 2019; Robert, 2020). Elitist deliberate impoverishment of youths and the masses is another factor behind insecurity (Amozua, 2016; Besong, 2019; Robert, 2020). It is said, 'An idle man is a devil's workshop.' Also, a saying reads, 'A hungry man is an angry man.'

In what lends credence to the above, Okoye (2006, p. 6) rightly observes that 'extreme poverty, as obtained in many Third World countries, causes people to commit suicide. Frustration is a strong contributory factor to suicide.' She goes on to observe that there are many more factors that cause individual and societal stress and tension in Africa and many other developing nations of the world (Okoye, 2006, p. 6). Okoye (2006, p. 6) notes that the most prominent of the factors are devastating poverty, loss of hope and not knowing where your next meal is coming from; while others are constant civil unrests, tribal clashes, religious rivalries, strikes, political killings, rape, destruction of public properties, unemployment, etc. In the same vein, Awolowo (1970) has observed that the aggressors against peace and stability in Nigeria are abject poverty, hunger, disease, squalor and ignorance, which are more devastating in their ravages, more insidious, more thorough and more resistant in their operations, than armed rebellion. His observation tells us that it is not only armed rebellion that poses serious threat to the security of a nation. Several other factors also cause insecurity and threaten a society's peace and stability.

In fact, it is important to emphasise the other aggressors against peace and stability in North-Central states, which are abject poverty, hunger, disease, squalor and ignorance. Awolowo (1970) stressed that these non-human enemies or aggressors ought to be crushed ruthlessly with immediate alacrity. Of course, as we all know, political office holders and security agencies are those who have the unreserved capacity to ruthlessly crush the alarming insecurity in the study area. In the case of crushing the aforementioned non-human enemies or aggressors, political office holders are the number one state actors with such capacity. Similarly, Lula da Silva, former President of Brazil, is quoted to have once said, “When I became President of this country, half of the population couldn't sleep because of hunger, while the other half could not sleep because of the fear of the hungry half” (Adamu, 2015, p. 24). Adamu (2015, p. 24) observes that 'about 54.6 million people go to bed every night hungry in Nigeria.' For Yagboyaju (2019, p. 50), 'one third of the country's entire population goes to bed hungry every day.' Hungry persons are angry and aggressive as a result of their plight (condition) and frustration. Thus, they are sources of threats to Nigeria and their fellows, especially those who are not hungry as they are.

Reacting to the above observation by Awolowo, Yagboyaju (2019, p. 34) says that Awolowo's assertion is apt because even after five decades of his observation, the issues he identified still manifest in Nigeria, as most of the issues are the remote factors behind most of the cases of insecurity in present-day Nigeria. It implies that those issues he identified are largely responsible for the contemporary security threats to North-Central Nigeria, such as kidnapping, hired assassination, ritual money menace, rape and killings, resource control contestation, communal clashes, ethno-religious conflicts, Fulani herders' raiding of farmers and other members of agrarian communities, chieftaincy tussle, cattle rustling and banditry, prostitution, armed-robbery, theft, etc. (Lewis, 2011; Ayoade 2014; Odekunle, 2010; Odekunle 2018; Dibie, Gotau and Robert, 2016; Besong & Robert, 2019; Robert, 2020).

Religious conflict is the peak of these conflicts. It is quite regrettable that Nigerian elites, inclusive of those in Nasarawa State and other states of North-Central Nigeria, are often behind the insecurity ravaging the Nigerian nation at large and North-Central Nigeria in particular. Instead of uniting to properly develop and transform the nation as well as groom the youths and children, the future leaders and elites of the nation, they rather disunite and mobilise their tribal forces under sub-national organisations to threaten national survival (Robert, 2020, pp. 90-95; Besong, 2019, pp. 11-14; Kia and Vurasi, 2013, p. 165; Amozua, 2016). They follow the same trends in causing religious conflicts among the faithful of the plural religions in Nigeria.

In appraising the role of traditional political office holders in conflict resolution in Awe, Galadima (2016, p. 48) argues that most of the traditional rulers of these days join forces with the secular politicians to unleash mayhem on the society, as such

traditional rulers and politicians politick with the lives and belongings, peace and tranquility and development of their people and places for political gains. He emphasises that some of these traditional rulers either incite such conflicts for their own interests or their superior politician bosses' (Galadima, 2016, p. 48). And, where/when they do not incite or cause conflicts, such traditional and secular political office holders fuel the conflicts/crises through financial support and donation of war weapons to either party at war, towards attaining genocide (Galadima, 2016). The misdeeds of most of our political office holders continue to cause or rather intensify the insecurity ravaging our society. As Amozua (2016) argues, criminals and all kinds of other enemies of the state and its citizenry are the collateral products of the heartless elites, who continuously gather the same youths they have frustrated and incapacitated, to unleash untold mayhem, woes, pains, atrocities and insecurity on the society and its people, all for their selfish political and economic gains.

Apart from the foregoing, all political office holders are parents. Most security personnel are also parents. Parents, who fail in their ideal parental responsibilities, produce miscreants, terrorists and all sets of enemies of the state, who threaten the society in various regards. Some of such children have even killed their parents directly or indirectly. Pampering and lavishing money on children, without discipline and inculcating moral values unto them, does not imply good parenting. But that is what most elite parents of these days do. It is quite unfortunate that most contemporary parents misunderstand what good parenting entails. They teach children bad ways of life and leave them to their ruin in the nearest future. Failed parenting is one of the underground factors behind insecurity in society. All kinds of criminals have (had) parents and, of course, they do live with us. Failed parenting, which includes parents' bad examples, indecent and immoral lifestyles and indiscipline, leads to producing terrorists, kidnappers, political thugs, hired assassins, militants, armed-robbers, cultists, drug abusers and addicts, prostitutes, etc. Loose parenting causes a lot for parents and the society at large. Also, some elites in our state and beyond even feel that the more wealth you amass, the more wives and children you should have. They do not consider the implications, which include the problems of overpopulation and the inability to duly control your home because of its large population.

Consequent upon parental misdeeds, various spheres of life in society, like ours, get infected with various ills that would not have been in place if all parents were up and doing in their parental responsibilities. In what lends credence to the foregoing, Oladiran and Adadevoh (2008, p. 103) observe that the Nigerian social, political and economic spheres have been characterised by the following social symbolic features due to ethnic politics:

- (a) Lack of even distribution of wealth and income due to ethnic bias;
- (b) Mono-cultural and enclave economy;
- (c) Insecurity of jobs, lives and property;
- (d) High and increasing illiteracy rates;
- (e) Un-conducive atmosphere for healthy political bargaining and compromise;
- (f) Structural imbalances, corruption and increased per capita poverty.

Effects of Insecurity on North-Central States

Insecurity leaves untold effects on the society. It has political, social, economic, educational, cultural, developmental and other implications. As agrarian states of the Nigerian Federation, North-Central Nigeria suffers insecurity-induced effects on its agricultural (as well as economic, socio-political, educational, developmental, mineral and industrial) activities. It adversely affects the peace and tranquility of the state and infuses tension in the minds of individuals. This has lots of health and psychological implications for individuals. Intergroup and interpersonal relations are injured. Distrust, fear, disunity or disintegration and even lack of charity become the order of the day. This is so because everyone is scared of or skeptical about every other person around him/her.

As Tukura (2021) rightly observes, the rising insecurity in Nasarawa State is the highest challenge to agriculture, as it causes low productivity in the agricultural sector in contemporary Nasarawa State. This observation aptly applies to other states of the North-Central. The implications include hunger, poverty, rural-urban migration, loss of lives and property, etc. (Tukura, 2021, p. 13). Agricultural activities are often shattered by insecurity, as farmers and other citizens alike run for their lives and abandon agriculture (Tukura, 2021). Lamenting the spate of insecurity in Eloyi land and its attendant effects on agriculture, Tukura (2021, p. 14) observes that 'Fulani herders, armed bandits and kidnappers remain at the peak of the insecurity challenging agriculture in Eloyi land in particular and most other parts of Nigeria at large.' All parts of the North-Central currently suffer these problems highlighted by Tukura (2021).

More so, to state summarily, the increasing insecurity in the studied region spoils its hard earned reputation of agricultural prowess and scares away investors, who would have been contributing meaningfully to its development and wellbeing. Entrepreneurial ventures get shattered by the insecurity. The economy is adversely affected, as economic activities get paralysed. It introduces the culture of criminality, conflict and violence. Insecurity compounds existing socio-economic, political, educational, and developmental issues. It causes loss of lives and property. Vandalism is brought to place by insecurity. It heightens rural drift, poverty, rural

underdevelopment, vulnerability, poverty, youth restiveness, harsh economic situations (economic hardship), dependency ratio, issues of food crisis and environmental degradation, among others.

Unfinished Task of Addressing Religious Conflict and Insecurity

The task of combating insecurity is supposed to be endless, because once the state fighters relent, the non-state actors are bound to take advantage of their relenting efforts against them. That is why this paper talks about the 'unfinished task of addressing insecurity' in North-Central Nigeria. The paper urges political office holders and security agencies of this region to be proactive and always ready to unceasingly fight against the non-state actors, who are making the public to be dissatisfied with their significant efforts, diligence and service delivery. The failure to adequately combat the diverse phases of insecurity, inclusive of terrorism, militancy, kidnapping, unemployment and other forms of threats to peace and safety of a nation and its people, undoubtedly leads to violent nationhood war (Oyedeji, 2018, p. 3). To avert such war is why this paper rouses the attention of North-Central Nigeria's stakeholders, particularly political office holders and security agencies to the rising insecurity in the region. It charges them to do more by intensifying efforts and re-strategising security measures that would be efficacious in addressing religious conflicts and violence along with other phases of insecurity. This paper argues that once these state actors duly rise against the enemies of the state, the non-state actors causing the insecurity posing serious challenges to the wellbeing of the state and its citizens, the alarming insecurity in the state would be brought to the barest minimum, if not completely eradicated.

The base of the above articulated argument is that there is no way the non-state actors can overpower the state actors who have all what it takes to wipe out the former within one day. The state actors have more resources, logistics, manpower, technical-know-how and what have you than the non-state actors. So, it would be a slap on their face and a self-destruction of one's own good handiwork if North-Central security agencies and political office holders do not act fast against the agents of insecurity threatening the state and trying to shatter their handiwork and hard-earned reputation. So, the problem is the poor attention paid to them; or simply put, the major problem lies in the attitude of negligence or naivety to the problems at stake, causing insecurity, and the break in functionality by North-Central security agencies and political office holders in their task of combating insecurity in the region. For example, many kidnapped persons are not rescued by the state's security agencies. They allow the individuals to scout for money and pay the ransom before being released. There is no way these agencies would claim that they are all unaware of such cases of kidnapping and kidnappers' hideouts. Bandits do not live and operate in the air. Security agencies and political office holders can track, trail and arrest them, if they are willing to.

It is imperative to note that there are some cogent measures that have not been evolved, employed and sustained by North-Central security agencies and political office holders, and so the insecurity continues to thrive. The public, being aware of the ideal might, capability, resources, logistics and technicalities of these two sets of state actors, is left with the temptation to conclude from inference that security agencies and political office holders are behind the diverse phases of insecurity, which is why they willingly blind their eyes to the spate of insecurity in the state and allow it to continuously thrive. While applauding North-Central security agencies and political office holders for their efforts so far in combating insecurity in the state, this paper goes on to blame them for not being proactive and efficient enough. This is because they can valiantly fight the non-state actors on all fronts and emerge flawlessly victorious. All that is needed is simply for them to become willing to and act fast and efficiently against the non-actors unleashing insecurity on the state. They ought to rise to taking up the task of 'operation wipe out criminals causing religious and other forms of insecurity' in North-Central Nigeria.

Thus, their indifference and failure to duly address these looming issues imply that they are playing an influential underground role in the issues. To that end, this study shall advance the extant view that politicians, other elites and security agencies are responsible for the rising spate of insecurity in Nigeria, as in North-Central Nigerian states. The paper argues that as religion gets politicised, manipulated, misused and abused, it becomes a source of threat to internal security. The paper blames political office holders and security agencies for the spate of insecurity in this region as well as beyond. The reason is that these two mighty agents of the society are capable of combating insecurity as a whole and religious uprising and violence, causing and intensifying insecurity in particular, but yet they do little or nothing in this regard. It is hoped that this paper would reawaken the consciousness of political office holders and security agencies to the imperative of taking up their unfinished task of combating security challenges, in 21st century North-Central Nigeria. Their consciousness is hoped to be roused by the exposition made by this work.

Conclusion

As explained above, the diverse phases of insecurity experienced these days in North-Central Nigeria are recent trends which are soiling the name of the state, while at the same time threatening lives and property. In fact, some lives and property are lost to insecurity on a daily basis. Some funds for the development of the state are channelled into combating insecurity. However, the fact that the deeds of North-Central security agencies and political office holders have not been able to quell the rising insecurity is a proof of their poor involvement in the fight against the non-state actors unleashing insecurity on the state and its citizenry. The activities of the miscreants could be brought to an abrupt end if security agencies and political office

holders duly rise to the challenge and fight tooth and nail. Lack of will and sharp practices by these state actors are what make the insecurity to thrive, which is why they are indicted for the insecurity ravaging the state.

The hidden agenda behind the insecurity is also why the rising insecurity thrives. There is no way the non-state actors can defeat these state actors in the war against criminals of all kinds in the state, because they have various comparative advantages over the former actors– the enemies of our state. To defeat them and maintain victory over them, the state actors (North-Central security agencies and political office holders) must sustain their task of combating insecurity by never relenting at any point in time and making it a daily routine. The paper concludes that until security agencies and political office holders of North-Central Nigeria become and remain proactive, decisive and gallant, and act well and fast against the causes of insecurity, the rising insecurity will soon get out of hand.

Recommendations

Following the foregoing discussed issues, this study recommends the following:

1. Religious bodies should duly sensitise their members on what all religions share in common, for which religious tolerance should be upheld and religious inclusiveness should be imbibed and promoted.
2. Strong legislations should be made against all forms of religious incitement, and mass awareness campaign on how to resist politicians' and other elites' religious incitement and cajoles.
3. All those found guilty of any kind of religious misdeeds and offences, including incitement, should be punished accordingly. There should be no sparing of any sacred cows.
4. Harsh and sustained legislations should be enacted and enforced against kidnappers, bandits, cultists, militants, armed-robbers, drug abusers, adducts and peddlers, and others. There should be no sparing of any sacred cows. Anyone guilty should be punished accordingly. States like Akwa-Ibom, Ebonyi, etc. that criminalised kidnapping with harsh, strong and sustained legislations (capital punishment and jail terms) come to be free from kidnapping when it rose and strived there then.
5. Security agencies should trace various places alleged to be camps and hideouts of kidnappers, bandits, cultists, militants, armed-robbers, drug abusers, adducts and peddlers, and others. Once willing political office holders make available the needed finance and logistics to fight against these non-state actors on all fronts, the goal will be achieved in no distant time. Consequently, the state will become free from the torments of the various criminals. That will imply gaining back the state's lost peace and security.

6. Strong operational legislations should be made against anyone who abets, supports, trains, mobilises, sponsors, incites, hides, houses and/or defends criminals of any kind of heinous crimes. Both security personnel and political officer holders found wanting should be severely dealt with according to what the law prescribes for offenders of security related crimes.
7. Good and ethical parenting should be emphasised by all agents of socialisation. Parents should exhibit exemplary parenting and carefully watch over their children and wards. Moral values should be inculcated into children right from early age, so as to 'catch them young'. True moral education by religious bodies would help a lot. This calls for partnering with these bodies in the fight against insecurity in North-Central Nigeria. All agents of socialisation should be made to directly and indirectly engage in the fight against criminality of all forms. Religious organisations and mass media should be charged and guided with conventionalised and legalised laws forbidding hate speeches, preaching against other religions, religious intolerance, ethnic hate/prejudices, gender stereotype, incitement and penchant media broadcast and reportage.
8. Traditional rulers should be returned the powers stripped of them by the 1976 Local Government Act, which limits their powers. When made more responsible to traditions and their subjects than politicians, their authority cannot be easily trampled on. The traditional rulers need some political independence rather than interference and orders of secular politicians at all times. When this is done, they would be able to adequately combat the insecurity right from the grassroots. On their part too, any traditional rulers found wanting should be deposed.
9. Special Joint Task Force should be created, well mobilised and properly armed. Rapid response security numbers should not just be there for fancy or to deceive the public. They should be made active and responsive all day long. Excuses should not be given or tolerated for failing to save people in distress, who made distress calls across to security personnel. Security agencies ought to build confidence in the public, so as to easily get security tips on how to catch criminals around volunteered civilian informants. The identity of such informants must be kept secret; else, others would be scared of reporting criminals around them. Vigilante group should be made good use of, and its personnel subjected to regular training and guidance against intimidating civilians.

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