

How communication failure caused deadly attack on troops in Zamfara

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The attack on a forward operation base of troops deployed for anti-banditry operation in Zamfara State Saturday morning was aided by the failure of communication among the fighting forces, Daily Trust can report.

Gunmen had killed 12 security personnel comprising nine naval ratings, two policemen and a soldier during the raid on the base in Marumji, near the bandit-ravaged town of Dunsadun. Citing security sources, AFP news agency reported that the attackers stole weapons and also set houses on fire.

"The attackers stormed the base around 10:30am and engaged the troops in a fierce gun battle," one security source said.

"They subdued the troops and killed 12 of them. They include nine naval personnel, a soldier and two policemen."

A second security source confirmed the casualties.

The base in Marumji is described as a key site for logistics and reconnaissance in the army's fight against bandits in the area.

No communication among troops

A credible security source told Daily Trust that bandits took advantage of the lack of security communication gadgets and laid siege on troops at the Marumji.

"While the jamming of GSM in Zamfara has gone a long way in taming the bandits, it also has a negative effect on troops because communication among them was also extremely restricted," the source said.

"Most of the foot soldiers relied on normal phone networks instead of any of the specialised communication gadgets that should be deployed during operations such as the one going on in the North West."

"Only the top commanders have military radio or walkie-talkie, meaning those in the frontlines

would only use their personal mobile phones which are no longer accessible.

"The bandits took advantage of this and attacked them at their forward operation base. As you can see, the attack was launched on Saturday but it only came to the fore days after," he said. Another source said there was the need to deploy specialised communication gadgets for the troops.

"The ban on communication in Zamfara and parts of Katsina is not bad in its entirety but the military high command should have taken note of the adverse effect on troops."

Telecom suspension costly, has no NSA clearance - Source

A security source told Daily Trust that the shutdown of the telecom channels was not well-thought-out and bypassed the due process of getting clearance from the National Security Adviser (NSA), Babagana Monguno, who oversees cyber security.

"What really happened was that Minawale made a request to (Communications and Digital Economy minister) Pantami who went directly to the president who approved without input from the office of NSA."

"That decision has a national security implication. No country will disconnect the network without analysing national security implications. By that action, several national security surveillance capabilities that rely on the network were shut out. Before now it will be inconceivable for NCC to do this without approvals from ONSA."

The security personnel said he could not ascertain "if Pantami acted without advice or purposely disregarded the NSA."

But an aide of Pantami said the directive to shut down telecommunications in Zamfara State was issued by President Muhammad Buhari to top officials involved in the security issue.

A media aide to Pantami, Yusuf Abubakar, told Daily Trust that the minister couldn't have bypassed the National Security Adviser (NSA) to obtain a directive from the president as he isn't the official



■ A screenshot taken yesterday shows security operatives at the Medium Security Custodial Centre (MSCC) in Kabba, Kogi State

Photo: Channels TV

involved directly on the Zamfara security issue.

Abubakar said: "The directive (to shut down telecom sites) came from the president and both (the minister and NSA) are working for the president. I don't think there is any need for the minister to comment on it. More so, this is a security issue and everybody shouldn't be commenting on it. The minister is not the chief security officer of Zamfara and he has no (direct security) role to play in the security situation there."

How bandits bypass communication ban

Daily Trust gathered yesterday that the bandits whose activities were adversely affected by the jamming of communication networks were devising means to bypass the blockade.

One of them who spoke to Daily Trust said some of them were using Thuraya satellite phones, while others use Airtel and Glo, the two networks whose services were still available in some parts of the state.

"There are places where you can make calls if you have Airtel or Glo line," said Shehu Rekeb, a renowned bandit by phone yesterday. He boasted that they still could afford items they needed despite the ban on weekly markets and phone networks.

But a source familiar with

happenings in Zamfara said most bandits have fled to places like Kebbe and Tureta in Sokoto State and Birnin-Gwari in Kaduna to escape the blockade in Zamfara. Rekeb, who confirmed relocation of some of the bandits to Lamber Tureta, in Sokoto, said he and other kingpins remain within their "known location in Zamfara".

We are on top of the situation - Military source

A military source said they are on top of the situation, saying the bandits are seriously being dealt with by the combined security team.

"I cannot confirm to you the veracity of that isolated case but what I can tell you is that we are all out against the bandits. They are at receiving end and enormous clearance operations are ongoing," he said pleading not to be named.

He said they have been directed not to talk to the media on the operations.

"This is not a media war. It is a serious operation and we have been directed not to talk to the media until the bandits are cleared," he said last night.

Operation successful - Sen Dunsadun

Senator Saichu Dunsadun yesterday described the military operations in Zamfara State as

successful, saying the people of the state are solidly behind it.

Dunsadun, who represented Zamfara Central Senatorial District between 1999 and 2007, said: "I left Zamfara on Saturday, honestly speaking, the ongoing operation is successful because a lot of things are changing, the bandits, majority of them are on the run."

"By the grace of God, we are seeing a new beginning in the fight against the bandits. Majority of the people are not complaining because this is the problem that we have been suffering from in the last 10 years and now the government is tackling it."

Army chief to commanders: I won't take any excuse from you again

The Chief Army of Staff (COAS), Lt-Gen. Farouk Yahaya, yesterday resolved that he would no longer tolerate any excuse from the army commanders who are leading the fight against terrorism and all other forms of security challenges in various theatres of operation across the country.

Yahaya, who stated this during the opening ceremony of the combined second and third quarters Chief of Army Staff conference in Abuja, maintained that the Nigerian Army under his watch would remain resolute and continue to chart progressive paths towards tackling all challenges bedeviling the country.

The General's resolution came a few hours after bandits attacked a military base in Zamfara State where a dozen of the army personnel paid supreme price.

"Commanders must seize the initiative and commanders must take initiative; they must take decisive actions to defeat the threats in their respective area of responsibilities. I will not again take or accept any excuses. Gentlemen, failure is failure irrespective of the circumstances!"

The army chief also charged the troops to sustain the tempo in various theatres of operations in order to rid the nation of all security threats.