

NEWS

Task Force Kills 12 Suspected Militants In Rivers

FROM KELVIN EBIRI
(PORT HARCOURT)

NO fewer than 12 suspected militiamen were feared killed during a gun duel with the Joint Task Force (JTF) at Tombia in Degema Local Council Area of Rivers State.

The Federal Government has said it

would separate genuine agitators in the Niger Delta from criminals who are bent on causing mayhem and wanton destruction in the region.

Security sources told *The Guardian* that the JTF comprising the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police and the State Security Services (SSS)

on Thursday evening invaded the island, believed to be the haven of some of the militia groups.

It was learnt that as soon as the militiamen got wind of the JTF's presence in the area, where they had been in control for over three years, they put up fierce resistance.

The militiamen reportedly attacked the men of the JTF with explosives. In the ensuing gun duel, which allegedly continued till the early hours of yesterday, 12 of the militiamen were reportedly killed.

When contacted, the task force's spokesman in the state, Major Musa Sagir said the deploy-

ment of the military to Tombia was necessitated by the on-going onslaught against suspected criminal gangs, who triggered off the recent disturbances in Port Harcourt and its environs.

Sagir said: "We are bound by duty to move to the major areas in the state considered as flashpoints and Tombia falls within that category."

He, however, declined to confirm the number of casualties, saying the JTF was still awaiting formal briefing on the situation in Tombia. According to him, "naturally, if there is con-

frontation like the one between the militiamen and the JTF in an open ground, there maybe tendency for some kind of casualty. There has not been any formal briefing on the situation in Tombia."

He said the JTF was still in Tombia in a bid to flush out the militia from the island. "We are trying to maintain and sustain the momentum of what we have started," he said.

Meanwhile, Minister of the Interior, Gen. Godwin Abe has said that the Federal Government is resolved to separate genuine agitators in the Niger Delta

from criminals.

The minister, who was on his first official visit to Port Harcourt yesterday, urged youths in the region to embrace dialogue with a view to returning peace to the troubled region, as no development could take place in an atmosphere of chaos.

He said: "People have a right to agitate but the approach has to be right. We have to separate agitation from criminality. We are committed to ensuring peace not only in this region but in all parts of the country, as it is only under a peaceful atmosphere that development can take place."

Intrigues Behind Policy Reversal

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Dankwambo, set aside one of the major planks of the policy: the distribution of dol-

team to look into the CBN proposal did not any way mean interference with the autonomy of the apex bank. He said: "The autonomy of

enough reason to dump it.

He told *The Guardian* yesterday that considering that the Nigeria only last year spent huge

policy. There is too much glamourising. We should learn from this experience," he counselled.