

Military In Sombre Mood As Terrorists Ambush, Kill Over 50 Soldiers, Officers In Eight Months

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THE past eight months came with manifest grieving for the Nigerian military as over 50 officers and soldiers were ambushed and killed by bandits and other hardened criminals in the country. The quoted figure represents reported cases, as the military, for strategic reasons, seldom announces the death of colleagues who pay the supreme price while fortifying the territory integrity of the country.

Spokesman of the Defence Media Operations (DMO), Major General Edward Bubba, while reacting to the incessant ambush and killing of military personnel, told *The Guardian* that, "surely, it would be over 50 personnel that would have been killed in eight months."

The latest of such killings was the tragic murder of a senior Army commander in a recent ambush in Katsina State. The incident occurred in Malali village, Kankara Local Council of the state, where the victim, who was a Major in the Nigerian Army, was responding to a distress call.

According to sources, the late army officer was en route to support local forces repelling an attack when his vehicle was intercepted by bandits. His assailants ambushed him and fatally shot him in the head, reports said.

On March 14, this year, 17 Nigerian soldiers, including three officers, were killed on a mission to halt clashes between two communities in Delta State. Their remains were laid to rest in a state burial at the military cemetery in Abuja. Both the Federal and Delta State governments had condemned the killing, promising that the perpetrators would face the wrath of the law.

The Nigerian Army had also vowed that it would avenge the killing of two officers and four soldiers by terrorists in Niger State recently. The operatives were killed in an ambush by terrorists. The soldiers were reported to have been killed when they engaged bandits in a gun duel in Roro, Karaga and Rumace communities, Bassa Ward, Shiroro Local Council of the state. Sources had said their bodies were found the next day with bullet wounds. According to the source, the soldiers lost their way while on a mission to combat the

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bandits occupying the forest when they were ambushed by Boko Haram terrorists. Also, the Defence Headquarters (DHO) eight months ago confirmed that 36 officers were killed in the same Niger State.

Director of Defence Media Operations, Bubba, made the disclosure when he gave a breakdown of casualties in the ambush of troops in Niger State and an evacuation helicopter that crashed on August 14, 2023.

The list goes on and on, leaving the military and the families of those who paid the supreme price to keep the country united to mourn their deceased loved ones.

Incidentally, the military is not the only institution paying the price for insecurity in the country.

Penultimate weekend, 23 members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) providing troops with information and local intelligence were killed in separate attacks by bandits and an armed kidnapping gang in the North East.

According to two officials from the force, the terrorists used an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) to blow up a vehicle carrying the CJTF team.

Reacting to the continued death of Nigeria's military personnel in the hands of terrorists in their country, a security expert, Frank Oshanugor, described the development as disheartening. Oshanugor regretted that soldiers trained with hard earned resources of the country over the years were losing their lives to terrorists and other non-state actors.

He said: "Training a single soldier does not come easy in terms of resources and physical commitment. Therefore, I personally feel bad when we lose such trained personnel, not just the military alone but all security forces."

"It is certainly not easy to train a policeman, Customs or Immigration officer. So, losing them carelessly to terrorists and other gunmen can be quite painful."

"The solution to this new guerrilla warfare largely hinges on the political will of our leaders not to see the life of the average Nigerian as a cheap commodity. We are talking of lives of the military here; but what of lives of other Nigerians that are daily sacrificed to the madness of the criminal elements in our midst?"

"Every day we wake up from sleep to hear of herdsmen killing 100 people in Plateau State or elsewhere. The political leaders would only make political statements in the media. Security agencies would occasionally make arrests but within a few days, the story ends there. Nobody is punished for the killing and in a short while, another round of killing takes place. Our leaders, as usual, will make statements that do not come with consequences."

He emphasised that Nigeria would only find solution to the spate of the killing of its military personnel and other citizens when culprits arrested for committing such crime are diligently and speedily prosecuted, convicted and punished accordingly.

"The life of the average citizen must be valued. Let us emulate the Americans who are ready to go to war for the sake of one American citizen or soldier whose life is violated," Oshanugor stressed.

Another security expert, Chukwuka Oji, also stated that losing over 50 officers and soldiers within eight months to attacks by bandits and criminal elements in society is heartbreaking.

He noted that even though the military is always economical with the truth for security

reasons, as the number of casualties might be higher than what has been disclosed, losing over 50 military personnel to bandits and terrorists could best be described as colossal.

"What if the strength of the Nigerian Army is about 150,000 out of which there are those incapacitated by sickness and those about to retire?" he queried. "So, when you look at it, the number of soldiers fighting the insurgents is too infinitesimal. The Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces should declare a total war on insurgents and other enemies of the country. The Federal Government should stop paying lip service to the fight against insurgency or the number of soldiers will be seriously depleted, thereby exposing us to external aggression and internal embarrassment."

Oji said the war against insurgency should no longer be limited to infantry, stressing that it should involve the Nigerian Air Force, which should bombard the insurgents from every angle.

He added: "They should not be spared. If the Air Force faces the insurgents, and kills them in their numbers, I bet they will run away from Nigerian territory."

"The air strikes should be continuous and we shall have peace in the country. While the air components are at war, the infantry with other security agencies, para-military and civilian task force should be on guard to fire at any insurgent that wants to run to safety."

"The government should stop handling insurgents with kid gloves. They should be treated like enemies of this country, which they are. We are tired of hearing of repentant insurgents who had killed our soldiers being rehabilitated into the system."

They should not be pitied but be killed in the bushes before they think of repentance. We need total extermination of the enemies of our country."

However, Dr. Adoyi Onoja of the Department of History, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, told *The Guardian* that one of the biggest drawbacks of security in Nigeria is the lack of governance of security.

He stressed that the wanton killing of Nigerian military officers brings to the fore the need for a robust and fresh National Security Strategy (NSS).

Onoja said: "This is where the question of policy or policy legislation comes into the fray. Governance of security would ask the questions what is security, whose security and what is a security issue."

"Security governance, which is part strategy, represents the condition where Ministries, Departments and Agencies of the public sector and the private sector begin to implement the state's security policy in their programmes and projects. The governance of security questions have not been asked and answered under civil rule and governance frameworks. This informed my assertion that for now the security in vogue is in the image of the military and military rule."

"This type of security outlived its usefulness nearly a quarter of a century ago. Security is not yet in the image of civil rule and governance, even when we are almost a quarter century down the road of this rule type. "So, where did the NSS derive its policy or horse on security? And why has this security and the genre called national security failed and continues to fail each time it is invoked in the last 15 years of the emergency called security in Nigeria under civil rule and

governance?"

Onoja noted that, "If the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) and its NSS were ever conscious of the need for policy to drive strategy on the matter they called security, the ONSA took for granted the view, and thus the knowledge that most Nigerians derive from military rule-era socialisation that security was exclusively the name and work of the executive agencies of the Military, Intelligence and Law Enforcement (MILE)."

He stated that this is the worst case scenario, adding that the best case scenario was to assume the content of the 1999 Constitution to represent the policy albeit the state's policy on security.

He stated further: "In what follows, I underscored what I called matters to note in the existing NSS and matters arising for the scheduled 'review' of the NSS, assuming the exercise is not already underway or even concluded."

"In the former, they include the followings: One, the foundational 2014 NSS was compiled to satisfy the yawning official statement gap on security that regularly confronted Nigeria's officials at international bilateral and multilateral engagements on the subject of security. The NSS was compiled to save Nigeria's officials the persistent embarrassment of the lack of official statement on the vexing internationalised issue called security."

"Two, the NSS was singularly compiled by the ONSA with assistance from agencies of the military, intelligence and law enforcement. Contrary to the document's claim, other institutions were never consulted, and the strategies contained inside the NSS were the views of their compilers for these institutions."

"Three, the 2014 NSS was built on a policy started security platform that did not provide for governance of security in Nigeria under civil rule and governance frameworks. The nearest to a policy used for the NSS, if it was ever used, was the 1999 Constitution."

"The 1999 Constitution is Nigeria's number one crisis and conflict creating operating framework deliberately instituted by the departing military as their strategy to remain relevant in the civil rule system post military rule and that underpinned the military, intelligence and law enforcement security conception in place."

"Four, the 2019 'review' of the NSS was a 'reprint' of the 2014 NSS."

"The only innovation was the removal of the name of the former president and his National Security Adviser for the then sitting president and his national security adviser."

"Five, the NSS has never been used and is not being used by any public sector or private sector organisation to guide its service delivery."



Rivers State Governor, Sir Siminalayi Fubara (middle) taking a walk during the visit to the State House of Assembly Quarters in Port Harcourt on Thursday.