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War in Borno : Boko Haram in fierce resistance — DHQTRS

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BY KINGSLEY OMONOBI

ABUJA—The military, yesterday, confirmed that it is currently engaged in a fierce battle with Boko Haram insurgents who have been unleashing terror in the North Eastern part of the country. The Defence Headquarters admitted that it lost soldiers in the encounters while some terrorists were also killed.

This was against the backdrop of revelations that the troops were finding it difficult to check activities of the terrorists because of the sophistication of the sect members among other factors.

In a statement issued, yesterday, by the Director of Defence Information, Major General Chris Olukolade, the Defence Headquarters said that civilians had been evacuated from the battle ground before commencing the operation.



(<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/03/war-borno-b-haram-fierce-resistance-dhqtrs/brono-attacks/>)

People look at the wreckage of a car, yesterday, after two explosions killed over 35

people in a crowded neighbourhood in Maiduguri, Borno State, weekend. Photo: AFP.

According to the statement, “the air operations to clear terrorists bases sited in Daggu and Yazza areas of Borno State during the weekend have registered the expected results in the ongoing campaign against terror. The mopping up operation by ground forces after air assault has confirmed the death of several terrorists located in the bases. Civilians had earlier been evacuated from the vicinity of the identified terrorist enclaves in line with operation orders before the air and land assaults. Extensive cordon and search of the entire locality is ongoing with a view to apprehending the wounded and other members of the terrorists group who might still be trying to flee.

Fierce encounter

“Also yesterday, troops in pursuit of those who carried out attack in Buni Yadi last week, had fierce encounter with the terrorists around Mainok and other locations between Apa and Abulum in Borno State. The air and land operations that ensued recorded the death of some terrorists. Soldiers also died in the encounters”.

The statement added that, “suspects who are believed to have been responsible for detonating the bomb that exploded at Bintu Sugar Ngamari area of Maiduguri yesterday (Saturday) killing many citizens and wounding several others have been arrested and are helping in the ongoing investigation on the incident. Patrols are continuing on land and air in the entire mission area in North East towards apprehending or eliminating the rampaging terrorists in the area”.

The Defence Headquarters dismissed as untrue the reports claiming that civilians were mistakenly killed in the air operations in some parts of the mission area, as the claim could not be confirmed after the mopping up aspect of the operation.

It reaffirmed its directive that necessary care should continue to be taken to ensure safety of innocent Nigerians in the operational areas notwithstanding the fierceness of the encounters.

Meanwhile, authoritative security sources disclosed to *Vanguard* at the weekend why Boko Haram members have been carrying out their killing campaign in the North East seemingly without molestation.

The source said that a combination of many things have made the activities of the sect difficult to check.

The source who is with one of the security agencies based in the North East told *Vanguard* that as things stand, the security agencies in the North East cannot cope with the sophistication and the battle hardiness of the sect members. “Have you asked yourself why these guys strike at night? The reason they attack at night is because they know that our soldiers cannot cope. For instance, the sect members wear night vision goggles and ride in a convoy of brand new Hilux vehicles. They see what our soldiers cannot see at night. With their sophisticated weaponry and their combat hardiness it is no wonder they operate freely at night. Do our soldiers have night combat gears? I do not think so.

Why Boko Haram is elusive

“Another reason I think these guys are out gunning our men is that they are battle hardened. Our investigation showed that they are not Nigerians. They are mostly from Chad and Niger republics. These men have decided to export terror to Nigeria. Have you not wondered why there was a lull in their activities late last year? This was when they exported their activities to the Central African Republic. After the war there, they came back to Nigeria. Have you not wondered why there is peace in Niger and Chad where there used to be change of government so often? These are men that used to cause trouble in their countries but now they have found a viable occupation in killing innocent people in Nigeria. One

way I think the government can get to the root of the matter is to find out the financiers of these terrorists. Where did they get the brand new hilux vehicles they are using? These things should be investigated. This is not just guerrilla warfare. It is more than that. You can't move in a convoy of 10 vehicles and operate for at least three hours unmolested and you say its guerrilla warfare", the source said.

Vanguard also gathered that fear of summary execution of the locals of communities in the area, was hampering the passing of information that would have boosted intelligence and security operations to check the terrorists.

According to *Vanguard's* investigation, once information goes out that the terrorists were in a community or that they planned to launch an attack from a location, and security agencies nipped the attack in the bud or succeeded in arresting the terrorists, other members of the group would go after the suspected informants, tie them up and summarily execute such persons.

A chilling account was also narrated to *Vanguard* of some informants, having their throats slit open with long daggers or swords in the presence of community members to serve as deterrent to those who may want to embark on such dangerous road, with the sect members shouting '*Allahu Akbar*' meaning God is great.

Aside the dangers of giving out information which has made people of communities in the area to suffer in silence; there is the pronounced problem of the military not having the kind of equipment like attack helicopters they need to prosecute the onslaught against the group.

Another reason discovered by *Vanguard*, is the frequency in the changes of Commanders, snowballing into frequent change of strategy and this in a way affects the morale of soldiers on the battle field.

For the army, there are issues of inadequate Armoured Personnel Carriers as well as vehicles like pick up vans which are not really the type needed for the prosecution of the battle in such terrain.

A source told *Vanguard* that if the government was able to equip the Nigerian Airforce with about 70 Mi-35 Helicopter gunships for instance, and they carry out daily patrols and are armed with the sorties to take out these terrorists any time they venture to come out, the terrorists will run out of the country.

However, the fear of officials of government at the federal level too, that arming the military heavily and giving them the free hands to carry out the operation will lead to collateral damages and result in innocent citizens being caught in the crossfire, thereby raising issues of human rights, is another area that the terrorist are capitalizing on.

Also, another challenge facing the prosecution of the war on terror is the fact that instances have occurred where it was discovered that movement of weaponry and troops as well as operational plans have leaked to the terrorists to the extent that some planned assault on them have backfired and troops ended up being ambushed and killed.

The problem of funding for the operation has also been mentioned and in this regard, the National Assembly has been seriously indicted as they have constantly found it extremely difficult to approve funds for procurement of modern equipment on the grounds that they were too expensive.

Unfortunately, the modern equipment needed like aircraft, APC's, tracking equipment and specialized military trucks needed for such operations, are all denominated in foreign currencies.

On the foreign side, *Vanguard* gathered that neighbouring countries like Cameroon, Niger, and Chad, because of their

socio-economic problems and fear of provoking the terrorists to turn against them, preferred to adopt a standby attitude and confront the terrorist any time they ran into their territory.

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