

Vanguard

The Army, El-Zakzaky's Shiite and the Zaria killings

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The 'failed attempt' on General Buratai's life

Sheik Ibraheem Zakzaky, 62, the ever turbaned, tough looking leader of the Shiite Islamic Movement in Nigeria, IMN, is an Islamic scholar and a tempestuous preacher. He speaks straight to the powers-that-be and has survived many jail terms in the hands of military governments in the '80s and '90s for sedition. Never hiding his hatred for Israel and the United States, he lost three sons and 35 followers after a pro-Palestinian protest with the military on July 25, 2014 in Zaria, Kaduna State turned bloody. And penultimate Saturday night, gunfire and occasional explosions kept residents of Gyelesu area of Zaria nervously awake in their homes.

An estate, which housed Zakzaky – a first class graduate of economics from the Ahmadu Bello University (1979) – had been condoned off by soldiers, and was the theatre of the gun battle.

Even in the gust of the cold, dusty harmattan, residents in high rise buildings around the area claimed that a peep through the window showed battle ready soldiers taking position with their weapons, spitting fire into the large compound where Zakzaky, his household and hundreds of followers were holed up.

It was not clear if the embattled Shiite Muslims were firing back at the troops, since both sides later gave contradicting accounts. But, residents, who spoke to *Sunday Vanguard*, claimed to have heard piercing screaming of women and children, with men barking out orders from the compound. The battle went on, right through the night and continued after day-break, until Sunday.

Zaria, an old Hausa city, with a blend of ancient homes and modern buildings, located on the south-most fringe of the Sahel in Kaduna State, had experienced a violent encounter between the Nigerian Army and the IMN the previous day (Saturday).

Video clips show a group of people, some of them wielding clubs, machetes and knives, refusing armed soldiers passage on a major road. An unidentified Brigadier General and his men emerge, vehemently pleading with the leaders of the group to leave the road, but to no avail. Objects are thrown at the soldiers as they try to navigate the unruly situation. Suddenly, the crowd, which also has some women, becomes riotous.

The clips then show scenes of burning tyres and cleared barricades on a street but, this time, deserted. The clips are the evidence of a resolvable issue that later became ugly, leading to the siege on the compound of Zakzaky that Sunday night.

That penultimate Saturday evening, the Nigeria Army and the Shiite Muslims had traded blames over the afternoon confrontation between soldiers and the sect.

COAS escaped assassination from Shiites – Army

A statement by Colonel Sani Kukasheka Usman, Acting Director, Army Public Relations, issued, in Abuja, read: “The Shiite sect, on the orders of their leader, Ibrahim El-Zak zaky, today afternoon, in Zaria. attacked the convoy of the Chief of the Army Staff, while on his way to pay homage to the Emir of Zazzau and attend the Passing Out Parade of 73 Regular Recruits Intake of Depot Nigerian Army, Zaria.



(<http://www.vanguardngr.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Shiites-e1450193335753.jpg>)

Shiite members protest killing of members by soldiers in parts of Kaduna on Tuesday, December 15, 2015

“The sect members, numbering hundreds and carrying dangerous weapons, barricaded the roads with bonfires, heavy stones and tyres. They refused all entreaties to disperse and then started firing and pelting the convoy with dangerous objects”, the statement said.. “The barricade was obviously a deliberate attempt to assassinate the Chief of the Army Staff and members of his entourage while on a legitimate official assignment as Special Guest of Honour at the Passing Out Parade which had earlier been widely publicized.

“The troops responsible for the safety and security of the Chief of the Army Staff, on hearing explosion and firing, were left with no choice than to defend him and the convoy at all costs as well as open up the barricaded road for law abiding citizens. This is in line with the Nigerian Army’s Rules of Engagement and Code of Conduct.

“This kind of behavior will not be tolerated from any individual or groups and should not be allowed to repeat itself.

“We wish to implore all Nigerians to continue to be law abiding and remain conscious of other people’s rights to life, freedom of movement and passage.

“The Chief of the Army escaped unhurt and continued with his duties”.

It’s a lie, COAS was never attacked – Shiite

However, the spokesman for IMN, Mallam Ibrahim Musa, told *Sunday Vanguard* on phone that the COAS was not attacked, and that it was three vehicles carrying armed soldiers that shot and killed seven of their members and injured 20 after the COAS had long passed.

He said: “It is true that the COAS was in Zaria to attend the Passing Out Parade ceremony at the Nigeria Military School, Zaria on Saturday. “And this coincided with the time that we hold our annual Maulud at Hussaimiyya in Zaria.

“At 12 o’clock, we had to control traffic for our members to pass. “The security details attached to the Chief of the Army

Staff came down from their vehicles and we discussed and they passed.

“Immediately the COAS left, some well armed soldiers in three trucks arrived “It was from there that they became very rude and brutal. Then they started firing. I can tell you that we lost seven members and 20 were severely injured”.

The next day (Sunday), far worse claims were made by the Shiite group.

Our top leaders killed – Shiite

A statement by Musa read: “Following alleged blockade of the route of the Chief of the Army Staff by the members of IMN, the Nigerian Army descended on armless members of the Movement with heavy military weapons, killing indiscriminately. “In the mean time, leading members of the Islamic Movement, and other members as well, have been killed by the soldiers including the leader of the Kano Center, Sheikh Muhammad Turi; Dr. Mustapha Sa’eed; Malam Ibrahim Usman and Sister Jummai Gilima. “Also killed were Sayyid Aliy, a son of the leader of the Movement, Sayyid Ibraheem Zakzaky (H); the wife of Sayyid Ibraheem Zakzaky (H), Malama Zeenat Ibraheem, and tens of other members as more are being killed at the time of this release. “The sporadic killings took place at three different locations that include the residence of the revered leader of the Movement at Gyallesu; the Husainiyya Bakiyatullah at the GRA; and the Darur Rahma, located along Zaria-Jos Road where many armless people were killed.

Alibi

“The killing was so brutal at Gyallesu that even those injured in the shooting were identified and killed in cold blood by soldiers. At the time of writing this press release, the victims run into hundreds, if not thousands.

“We state categorically that the claim by the Army that members of the Movement attempted to assassinate the Chief of the Army Staff is a blatant lie as the Army came back to launch their attack more than an hour after the COAS had passed.

“Clearly, the Nigerian government, through its military, is now on the rampage, in an all out war with the Islamic movement, its members and structures. The scale of this attack would suggest it was meticulously planned by the authorities and now being executed ruthlessly. The alleged attack on COAS Burutai was just an alibi. As the dust began to settle over Zaria on Monday, the Movement claimed that at least one thousand of its members have been killed by soldiers.

‘Zakzaky taken away with wife’

Another statement by Musa, that Monday, said the Army was not only selectively killing its members, but it had also instigated the public to join in the killings.

The IMN statement read, among others: “Following the brutal attack on the Islamic Movement in Nigeria by the Nigerian Army in Zaria, we wish to state as follows:

“A source has confirmed that the Army has taken the revered leader of the Movement, Sayyid Ibraheem Zakzaky (H), from his house this morning and is receiving treatment for injuries he sustained during the attack.

“About a thousand of members of the Movement have been massacred at the moment as counting continues, but the soldiers are now busy evacuating the dead bodies to an unknown destination.

“There are hundreds of others who have received various degrees of injuries that are in need of assistance but have currently been denied access by the soldiers on ground who are in a killing spree, shooting anyone identified as a member of the Movement. “We wish to state here that some of those earlier declared dead through various sources might not have been killed but might be severely injured and in need of assistance. “Members of the Movement should be allowed immediate access to Sayyid Ibraheem Zakzaky (H) as a means of taming the situation from aggravating. “Access to health facilities should immediately be allowed to those injured anywhere in Zaria”.

Zakzaky, wife in our custody – Army

Shortly after the Monday statement by the Shiite Muslim group, the General Officer Commanding, GOC, 1 Division of Nigerian Army, Major General Adeniyi Oyeade, said the Islamic leader was in the custody of the Army

He told journalists: “On December 12, 2015, myself and Kaduna State Commissioner of Police were with President Muhammadu Buhari who was in the state for an assignment when I received a distress call that the life of the Chief of the Army Staff, COAS, Lt. Gen. Tukur Buratai, was threatened by some hoodlums who blocked his way on Sokoto Road in Zaria city. “After much persuasions from senior officers on the entourage, the hoodlums, who were later identified as Shi’ites members, remained adamant and, in line with our Rules of Engagement, we had no option than to clear the road for the COAS and, in the course of doing that, the hoodlums started throwing missiles at the convoy; and our men responded which resulted in minimum casualties.

“From there, we received information that they had started mobilizing in one of their temples at Husainiyya, the residence of the leader at Gyellesu and Dambo Road. That was on Saturday night, this led to a long night of battle.

“We have nothing against the Shiites because they are Nigerians and our duty is also to protect them. But we cannot tolerate them forming a government within a government. I call on all Shiites members to be law abiding and go about their religious activities without tampering with the freedom of others. “I want to say that Zakzaky and his wife are with us and they are safe. We shall soon allow his family and members to meet him. “Please don’t ask me about the number of casualty. All I can say is that both sides had casualties and it is not our job to count how many of the Shiites were in the casualty”.

Corpses

But there were many accounts on the casualty figure. One claimed that the morgue at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, Zaria was filled with corpses of the Shiite Muslims, and that truck loads of more were still being dumped there. Another claimed seeing corpses in open drains, toilet soak-aways and under the rubbles of demolished buildings.

But one thing was sure: Scores were killed by soldiers in the university city..

Pandemonium

On Tuesday, hundreds of protesting members of the IMN, around 12 noon in Tudun Wada quarters of Kaduna metropolis, caused pandemonium that spread to many parts of the town. The Shiites, demonstrating against the Zaria incident and the detention of their leader, El-Zakzaky, were, however, blocked from continuing the protest by armed police men around Tudun Nupawa. Pedestrians in Tudun Wada and adjoining areas ran in different directions in fear, many not knowing the cause of the panic. Shops hurriedly shut while banks and other corporate businesses closed.

Vehicles, tricycles and motor-bikes sped in different directions, hooting as they fled to safe areas. Around 2pm, *Sunday Vanguard* put a call to Musa, the IMN spokesperson. He said: “Our members came out about two hours ago to protest the Zaria killings. They were also peacefully demonstrating against the detention of our leader and his wife. The Sheikh was shot four times on his legs. Our protesting members are saying that they cannot trust anyone to take care of the leader outside our members and members of his family. But, fully armed policemen came and halted the peaceful demonstration. They then started shooting at the protesters. As they ran, people also ran with them, because the police were firing into the procession. “I cannot tell you how many have been killed now. You know that when you escape with gun shots, anything can later happen”.

When contacted, Kaduna State police spokesman, DSP Abubakar Zubairu, said the police had merely gone there to restore law and order.

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