

Mass Surrendering of Boko Haram Terrorists in North Eastern States of Nigeria: 2020-2023

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ABSTRACT

The heinous activities of Boko Haram have posed unmitigated and tremendous clogs in the economic, political, social and the security framework of the east-northern of Nigeria in particular and the entire country in general. The severity of their activities has inevitably drawn the attention of the Nigerian military to engage the insurgents. Given the above situation, this study investigated the military strategies employed by the Nigerian military, prompting Boko Haram insurgents' massive surrender as well as the effect of their mass surrendering in the on the fight against the insurgents on one hand and on the socio-economic lives of the people of North-Eastern Nigeria on the other hand. The study utilizes qualitative method, which is descriptive in nature. Secondary data were thus sourced from textbooks, Journals, the internet, Newspapers, among others. The study found that, the mass surrendering of insurgents in recent times can be attributed to the potency of the kinetic and non-kinetic military strategies adopted in the fight against the terrorists. Thus, the study recommends among others that, the Nigerian government should intensify efforts to address the root causes of the Boko Haram insurgency, especially such problems as poverty, illiteracy, political exclusion and inequality in the north-eastern part of Nigeria and indeed in the entire Nigerian state.

Key words: Terrorism, Fight, Insurgency, Boko Haram, Surrender, North-East, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

The surrendering process by Boko Haram Terrorists in Operation HADIN KAI Theatre commenced on 7 July 2021 with 11 family members from the JAS faction who surrendered to troops of 152Bn at Banki Junction. The commencement of the surrendering process by terrorists marked a turning point for OPHK and

further created the condition for the rescue of hundreds of abducted persons including 13 of the abducted Chibok girls Ishaq (2022). The surrendering process continues unhindered and progressively since it commenced in 2021. More terrorists and their families continue to embrace peace as evident in the number of terrorists that are so far in the Hajj Camp where they are temporarily accommodated Ishaq (2022). Initially, bulk of the terrorists and their families surrendered from locations in central and Southern Borno particularly Konduga, Bama and Banki. Other notable areas include Dikwa, Gwoza, Pulka, Damboa amongst other smaller adjoining settlements. The heightened surrender from those locations could not be unconnected with the proximity to Sambisa forest and Mandara Mountains which remains the terrorists' major enclaves. Similarly, troop's presence in the aforementioned locations affords the repentant terrorists the much needed avenue to give up their arms. The surrendering recorded in Northern Borno could be attributed to certain factors which include troops' sustained onslaughts, incessant intra rivalry clashes among the terrorists as well as non - kinetic efforts adopted across the Theatre (Ishaq, 2022).

The surrendered terrorists are usually profiled by intelligence personnel in conjunction with the staff of the Department of States Services (DSS) and thereafter handed over to Borno State Government officials for relocation and accommodation (Azukpe, 2022). The bulk of the ex-combatants and their families are kept at 3 State owned facilities namely the Hajj Camp, Shokari and Bulumkutu Camps all in Maiduguri. Additionally, the heightened and sustained surrender of terrorists has been a significant enabler of intelligence efforts across the Theatre. The terrorists who are always searched and profiled at the various points of reception come with series of

information required for tactical and operational intelligence purposes. In the same vein, selected terrorist commanders, and influencers were often debriefed in several meetings with the Joint Intelligence Fusion Centre (JIFC) and Military Intelligence Brigade (MIB) across the Sectors. Thus far, over 100,000 terrorists and their families have surrendered to troops of OPHK. Considering that the surrendering of BHT fighters and their families remains a positive development to the troops effort, there is need for the Nigerian Military to remain mindful of various approaches aimed at encouraging more terrorists to surrender while maintaining the trusted measures already in place.

Strategies for Uninterrupted Surrendering

The strategy required for the continuous surrendering of terrorists need to be vigorously pursued if a sustainable peace is to be achieved. The place of synergy between the military, Borno State government, other security agencies and paramilitary institutions within the State in ensuring continuous surrendering of the ex-combatants need not to be over emphasized. The approaches to be considered include specific Kinetic and Non-Kinetic approaches in achieving an unbroken and sustained surrendering trajectory. There are highlighted subsequently:

Kinetic Approaches

The kinetic approaches include logistics strangulation, offensive operations, aerial/maritime operations, among others:

Logistics Strangulation: Logistic strangulation is aimed at dislocating the supply lines of the terrorists which includes arrest and neutralizing terrorists logistics couriers particularly with those arms and aggressive. The denial of flow of logistics such as petrol, food, vehicles, drugs and other critical enablers into the terrorist enclaves would further accelerate the surrendering process. More so, the situation could lead to a devastating state of hunger and destitution which would in turn force more terrorists to surrender. An uninterrupted logistics supply to terrorists is synonymous to regular flow of oxygen to the heart. (Shaibu, 2022). It is proven that the denial of logistics such as petrol, food, drugs, and vehicles, motorcycles, bicycles among others would force the terrorists to surrender in droves or die of starvation. It could also force the fighters to become rebellion against their leadership (Efebeh, 2022). This could be achieved through sustained arrests of terrorists' logistics suppliers and collaborators across the North Eastern flanks.

Sustained Offensive Operation: The heightening of offensive action against the terrorists by the ground troops in recent time accounted for a large number of terrorists and their families surrendering. In the same vein, intelligence assessments revealed that prior to the commencement of major offensives against the terrorists, usually lead to mass surrender across the Theatre. The military in the last couple of years have stepped up their offensive against the terrorist unlike in the past when troops will remain permanently in their locations thereby allowing the adversary to have the initiative to attack various locations within the Theatre of Operation. (Mahmuda, 2021). To ensure continuous surrendering of the terrorists, troops must step up their offensive operation on those terrorists who are unwilling to surrender.

Aerial/Unmanned Aerial Vehicle/Maritime Operations: The Air Component OPHK in conjunction with the, Nigerian Army Unarmed Aerial Vehicle (NAUAV) have contributed immensely to the surrendering of terrorists based on their surveillance activities and offensive operations across the theatre. This is more so as sustained air interdiction missions over time have driven several terrorists and their families out of their enclaves in a bid to seek safe havens. It became more precise and surprises being achieved with the introduction of armed drones to the Theatre of Operation. The synergy between the Air Component, Nigerian Army Unarmed Aerial Vehicle and the artillery has brought about precision interdictions of mass gathering of the terrorists with huge and excruciating impact on the terrorists. This has led to large surrendering of the terrorists due to the holistic and well-coordinated operation (Oyeshola, 2002; Efebeh, 2016; Efebeh,2023). Hence, the need to sustain this offensive

Hybrid/Decapitation Operations

The concept of Hybrid operations as it is being executed in the Theatre of OPHK has overtime yielded considerable operational gains since its adoption. This was evident in several decapitation operations which have led to the neutralization of key terrorist leaders including Abu Asiya amongst others. Leveraging more on this concept could lead to more terrorists surrendering. The component of the hybrid forces that are mostly indigenes of the state serves as an added advantage based on their knowledge of the environment in terms of terrain, intelligence and identifications often help in the tracking of the terrorist, (Abubakar, 2022). There is the need to maintain and upscale the hybrid/decapitation operation across the theatre.

Non Kinetic Approaches Adopted by OPHK.

The non - kinetic approaches include airdropping leaflets, jingles, skill acquisition, free, compulsory and quality education at all levels, need to address abject poverty among others:

Airdropping of leaflets

The routine airdropping of leaflets by the air component on major terrorists' enclaves within the Sambisa forest, Mandara Mountains, Timbuktu Triangle and Lake Chad Islands continue to account for the mass surrendering of terrorists and their families. This was further corroborated from several interrogations with some surrendered terrorists where they revealed that they were convinced to surrender having read some of the literatures. Most times, the leaflets were translated into various languages such Hausa, Kanuri and Arabic to enable those who does not understand English. This has helped tremendous the level of transition. There is the need for continuous dropping of leaflets in all the suspected terrorists enclaves, (Abubakar, (2022).

Jingles. The routine dissemination of jingles using both electronic and print media in different languages particularly kanuri, Hausa and Arabic remains an effective means of encouraging more terrorists to surrender. In this wise, the Theatre Radio also known as Radio Hadin Kai has a wide coverage across Borno, Yobe and environs. Program aimed at encouraging the terrorists to surrender to the DDR Camps, the kind of reward that awaits the surrendees particularly those surrendering with weapons, and the assurances that they would receive amnesty among others are often air. Major Zhakom, (2022). Similarly, some surrendered terrorists who are in contact with their former cohorts that are yet to surrender could be employed to send such messages encouraging them to embrace peace. There is the need for the military and government at all levels to explore the media avenues in reaching out to the terrorists in their enclaves, this would increase the figures of those surrendering currently in various camps.

Improvement of Living Conditions

The living condition of ex- terrorists is key to encourage others to also come out of the bush. A major setback bedeviling the surrendering process has been the poor living conditions within the holding facilities. This led to some protests and disgruntlement amongst the surrendered terrorists which in turn continues to discourage others from surrendering. The State government has emplaced measures to avert future occurrence and also measures were emplaced to ensure the speedy

upgrade of the standard and the unveiling of the road map towards the actualization of the state government plans. Zuwaira, (2022). It is therefore imperative that urgent measures are emplaced by Borno State Government as a matter of urgency to improve the living standards within the holding facilities.

Provision of Incentives

Incentive plays a key role in all military operations particularly the non-kinetic. Currently, the Borno State government gives money to surrendered terrorists with arms and ammunitions. The government practice Naira for weapon and monthly allowances were paid to all the ex-combatants Zuwaira, (2022). This practice could be further reviewed to include all terrorists who surrender with or without arms. Although the policy may require a lot of funding to be sustained, it remains a viable option to encourage more terrorists to surrender. The Federal Government of Nigeria could collaborate with the Borno state Government in escalating the DDR program.

Skill Acquisition

The Borno Model currently does not have a sophisticated and sustainable skill acquisition program for the ex-combatants unlike what is obtainable in the Operation Safe Corridor in Gombe where the earlier terrorists are being rehabilitated. The Borno Model though encouraging but the need to have varieties of skills acquisition program that would be learned for a given period to enable the ex-combatants to become self-reliant in future. Skills such as tailoring, sewing, mechanic and painting could be taught at the camp. The Borno State Government in conjunction with the Federal Government need to expedite action in this direction.

The Need for Free Compulsory and Quality Education.

The importance of education cannot be overemphasized particularly in the north where the number of out of school children was estimated to be around 10 million. NBS, (2022). Millions of children are out of school in the north east due to some factors; prominent among which are poverty, hunger and the ongoing conflict. These out of school children are fertile recruitment opportunity for terrorists and other sponsors of criminality, (Efebeh, 2016; Efebeh, 2021; Efebeh & Uwuseba, 2023). It is pertinent to state that the number of terrorists that have been neutralized by security agencies since the inception of this crisis would have completely been decimated. Sadly, the army of out of school children provides opportunity for

replacement of killed terrorists. There is therefore the need for the government as a matter of urgency declared free, compulsory and quality education across the country.

The Need to address abject poverty and endemic corruption in North East Nigeria. The poverty level in the north is multi-dimensional. This development is an incentive for criminality and violent extremism. Nigeria was declared the poverty capital of the world despite of huge natural and human resources, (Efebeh, 2017; NBS, 2022).

The Need for stringent Border control

Nigeria has over 1000 illegal international routes that are unmanned, Nigeria Boundary Commission (2020). Though ECOWAS protocols provides for free movement among member states but these has contributed immensely to the proliferation of illegal small arms and migrants into the country. These illegal weapons and migrants constitute huge security challenges for the country. To curtail this menace, there is the need for the government to ensure the fortification of Nigeria borders by deploying technology and also building a wall across the Nigerian border irrespective of the cost implication.

Need to Setup a Special Intervention Fund. Existing conditions within the holding facilities as well as the seeming incessant outcry by the surrendered terrorists suggests that the Borno State government could be overwhelmed. There is the need therefore, for the Federal Government of Nigeria to setup a special intervention fund which could augment the existing efforts of the State Government in the overall administration of the surrendered terrorists as well as the reintegration process. This could also be complemented by seeking private sector support and other relevant stakeholder holders as part of their corporate social responsibility.

Need to Setup a Special Dialogue Committee. There is the need for the Federal Government of Nigeria to setup a Special Dialogue Committee saddled with responsibility of further exploiting the reconciliation process between the victims and the ex-combatants in order to have a seamless reintegration into the society. The Committee could be composed of members of the intelligence communities, Federal and State Governments, key traditional and religious leaders, as well as other stakeholders in the North East Theatre. Additionally, the Committee could further look into the wellbeing and plight of the surrendered terrorists with a view to effectively addressing the key issues.

Need for Comprehensive Methodology

There is seemingly a lack of understanding of the surrendering process and subsequent reintegration by some agencies and organizations. This underscores the need for a comprehensive whole of society approach where all stakeholders, Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations and corporate bodies will have an understanding of the process to enable them play their roles effectively. Zuwaira, (2022).

Quranic Competition. The organization of Quranic competition among indigenes of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States in 2022 by Headquarters Theatre Command Operation Hadin Kai was one of the counter narrative strategies that resonated with the people of the North East'. The competition brought to the fore that the military despite that professional peculiarity are not idol worships as being propagated by the terrorists in order to weep sentiments and more converts. Six best participants including a female were selected among the competitors and were subsequently sponsored to perform Lesser Hajj Umrah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by Headquarters Operation HADIN KAI, (Amakiri, (2022). This development was highly appreciated across the North Eastern States and beyond. It also became an effective counter narrative against the sermon of the terrorists to the followers and sympathizers. The successful return of the competitors from Lesser Hajj tremendously increased the number of surrendees and also endears the security agencies more to the populace as evident in the volume of intelligence provided onwards. Major Yakubu, (2022).

Infrastructural Development. The Theatre Command Operation Hadin Kai has embarked on numerous developmental projects within the host communities where military operations are being conducted as part of the Civil Military Cooperation. Some of these projects embarked upon includes but not limited to the construction of Solar Bore Hole across the host communities of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States respectively. Also constructed were roads, bridges, sport complex and renovated class rooms, (Ukandu, (2022). These projects have immensely impacted on the indigenes of these communities thereby encouraging mass surrendering of the terrorists and granting of credible intelligence to the military authority in return.

The Impact of Mass Surrendering on the Strength and Fighting Capacity of Boko Haram

Terrorism has serious implications for the security of the nation and its socio-political

development. The Nigeria' State is already insecure owing to the activities of various groups such as armed robbers, kidnappers and cultist among others but the coming on stage of terror groups has heightened this. The activities of these groups in the country particularly the Boko Haram group have continued to generate concern within academic and intelligence circles. The presence of terrorist groups in the country portends danger for Nigeria because the country is not safe from transnational terrorism. With international terror networks such as the al-Qaeda within global reach and the changing security environment in West Africa occasioned by the emergence of terror groups such as Al Qaeda in the land of Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operating across the Sahara Desert in Mauritania, Morocco, Mali and Niger, there is growing fear among Western diplomats that Nigeria sleeper terrorist cell may be emerging, (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, Ojua & Okorie, 2019; Efebeh et al, 2021).

According to Abdullahi (2023), the surrender of the Boko Haram insurgents was a result of escalated kinetic and non-kinetic operations by the Joint Task Force (JTF) and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), coupled with a dwindling logistic supply in Boko Haram hideouts. A kinetic operation is a euphemism for military action involving active warfare, including lethal force. The phrase is used to contrast between conventional military (kinetic) action from "soft" force increasingly used against enemies, including diplomacy, sanctions and cyber warfare. Abdullahi, (2023). The kinetic approach pursues aggressive, offensive measures to eliminate or capture network members and their supporters and employs such things as bombs and bullets to pursue the campaign. It can be further subdivided it into two types: action directed by the U.S. military and action directed by the host-nation military, (Raab & Milward, (2023).

Antonio, Gower, Young and Teague (2023) affirm that almost every conflict has a combination of both kinetic and non-kinetic operations, ranging from full-scale invasions, to helping a country rebuild their schools and homes. Non-kinetic operations can be defined as the employment of nonlethal strategies and tactics with weapons that are "sub lethal" or "weapons not intended to be lethal". By gaining the support of the population through non-kinetic activities, one increases the chances of providing sustained economic, social, and political stability. Non-kinetic operations provide aid, such as building new infrastructure or improving the school and school system, are extremely important in helping

the country get back on its feet and will eventually lead to a country that is able to maintain a strong and stable government. Raab & Milward, (2023).

Therefore, non-kinetic operations are preferred over kinetic ones, mainly because there are fewer casualties involved, non-kinetic effects will only work to a certain extent. Although non-kinetic affects are much more than mere soft power, the ability to get what you want through attraction using the instrumentalities of diplomacy rather than coercion or payments (Efebeh, 2020a; Antonio et al., 2023). The non-kinetic approach employs neither bombs nor bullets but instead uses non-coercive means to counter networks and impair a combatant's will to fight. It includes such activities as the reconstruction of war-torn areas, intelligence and psychological operations to win over the "hearts and minds" of local populations, and efforts at terrorist rehabilitation, (Efebeh & Okereka, 2020; Raab & Milward, 2023).

Abdullahi (2023) further argues that thousands of fighters from the Boko Haram Islamist insurgent group in northeast Nigeria have surrendered, the Nigerian armed forces, attributed the development to the military's counter-insurgency efforts. Also 350,000 people have died in the conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian army since it began 12 years ago according to a United Nations estimate and the fighting has spilled over to neighbouring states of Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

The mass surrendering has been seen as a significant blow to Boko Haram's capacity to carry out attacks. According to (Ishaq, 2022), the surrenderings militants have provided valuable intelligence that has helped security forces to carry out successful operations against the group. The surrender has also been seen as a sign that the group's ideology and tactics may be losing appeal among its members. However, some experts have cautioned that mass surrenderings alone may not be enough to end the Boko Haram insurgency. As noted by Zenn (2021) an expert on Boko Haram and African insurgencies, surrendering alone does not mean that these fighters will not be replaced by others, and it does not mean that the underlying grievances that drive the insurgency have been addressed. Efforts must therefore be made to address the root causes of the Boko Haram insurgency, especially poverty, inequality, and political exclusion. Additionally, steps must be taken to ensure that surrendered militants are effectively reintegrated into society and are not subjected to further violence or discrimination (Efebeh, 2021; Zenn, 2021, Efebeh, 2022). While mass surrenderings can have a significant impact on the Boko Haram insurgency,

it must be part of a broader strategy that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict and ensures the effective reintegration of surrendered militants into society.

II. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The mass surrendering of Boko Haram terrorists in the North East Nigeria can be attributed to the Kinetic and Non-kinetic strategy of the Nigeria Military. Some of the Kinetic approaches adopted includes but not limited to strangulation/decapitation operation , offensive operations, dropping of leaflets written in kanuri, Hausa, Arabic and other common languages . The non-kinetic operations includes skill acquisition, infrastructural development, free quality and compulsory education, eradication of poverty and unemployment ,provision of incentives, committee on reconciliation among others. It is pertinent that the efforts of the Nigerian military has contributed immensely in the degrading of the terrorists in the north east and therefore need to be encouraged in all ramifications.

It is however pathetic that the military does not enjoy equivalent inputs from the government. It must therefore be stated that the military need a complimentary involvements from other stakeholders particularly the states and the federal government towards ensuring that citizens are not bequeathed with peace of the grave yard. The government must stand tall in meeting its obligations in terms of social contract with its citizens. The more citizens of school age are provided with quality free and compulsory education up to the university level, the less out of school children would be available for criminality. Additionally, it is equally critical for the government to provide gainful employment for employable Nigerians in the labour market. This can be achieve if the profligacy in governance is reduced to the barest minimum and the endemic corruption is taken seriously by way of melting capital punishment for those indicted to serve as deterrence (Efebeh, 2020b). The combination of all these would transform Nigeria to a better society with minimal security challenges and surest way in achieving its full potentials as not giant of Africa but one of top most economy in the world.

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