

Disinformation in the Military's Eternal Conflict Political Economy

In the fifteen years of the endlessly endless battles against terrorists, insurgents, bandits and kidnappers, the military authorities have not successfully managed the intersection of operations, disinformation and the democratisation of technology. This is in spite of the humongous resources they committed into influencing media reportage in all of its spheres. Occasionally, there have been leaks that have exposed their dishonesty and lies in what played out in the different theatres of operations and in what they reported and/or released to the general public.

Nigeria's military particularly the army has been actively battling myriads of criminals, for the last fifteen years, in a war that is assuming a permanent affair. These crimes and criminals have been described as insurgents/insurgencies, terrorist/terrorism, bandits/banditry, and kidnapping/kidnappers.

The insurgency, terrorism, banditry and kidnapping did not begin in one day. They came in phases and strategically metamorphosed in their evolutions. This is in tandem with the military particularly the army's attempt to regain the political economic initiatives of positioning themselves in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. This was after they endured the austere years of the founding president of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo.

Chief Obasanjo, a retired four star general and one time military head of state, attempted a model of what should be the relationship of the military with the civil authority in the eight years of his presidency. The military was confined to its roles of defence on land, sea and air and aiding civil authority when the need arose and when invited to do so.

In 2007, Chief Obasanjo handed over power to Alhaji Umaru Yar'adua in what was arguably the first transition of power from one civilian to another civilian in any democratic experiment in Nigeria's statehood. The significance of the development was not discernible at the time it occurred. Years down the road and with the evolving role of the military in the country's affairs particularly in the area they labelled "security" thus far, the Obasanjo years were defining and restraining on the military's their individual and collective ambitions.

It was under the presidency of Yar'adua that the "security" problematique began. In 2009, the group called Boko Haram which the military classified as Boko Haram Terrorist (BHT) came into the limelight. Perhaps due to the laissez faire disposition of the political leadership then, their naiveté and/or their belief in the professional expertise of the military, tackling the challenge was left in the hands of the military.

Nigeria's military had once occupied the frontline position in the political development in Nigeria. They had and managed power; they had and exercised influence and; they enjoyed fame and fortune. In the course of their years in power, they not only socialised Nigerians into their ways thus creating civil population oriented to their ways. They developed sophisticated and vast infrastructure of governance including generations of personnel that joined the services for motivations other than defending the country.

After eight years down the road of civil rule, the military felt emasculated and threatened existentially in the scheme of affairs in Nigeria's evolving civil rule system. The transition within transition which transferred power to non-military persons socialised in the military governance enabling environment gave the military the opening it had strategically positioned itself and waited to take advantage of. The Boko Haram emergence became the launching pad for its current political reckoning.

The military's newly found strategic role is centred on "security". The 1999 Constitution is the military's own vision of how Nigeria should be governed post military rule. The Constitution canonised "security" as the new all-encompassing name and work of the military. They retired defence. Defence under civil rule framework was not only limited. Defence did not carry the weight of security. The birth of this "security" in the 1999 Constitution as the military's new name and work is enshrined in Section 5 subsection 5 and Section 14 subsection 2B. In the scheme of governance under civil rule system, "national security" and "security" come first before any other matter. The implication of this is clear: the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE), in name and work, and in this priority order as arranged, come first before anyone and any issue.

When Boko Haram was born and the late president ordered the crackdown on the group, the military, led by the army, pushed the affair further and farther than its original intention. The military, as the professional managers of the type of violence unleashed by the group, found and provided relevant justifications for the group's activities. In this, development beyond the shores of Nigeria aided the military's strategic thinking. The Boko Haram metamorphosed into terrorism and insurgency and Nigeria enlisted into the international fight against terrorism.

The 1999 Constitution's Section 5 subsections 5 and Section 14 subsections 2B covered the external and internal dimensions of the phenomenon. In record time, the post Obasanjo political class, long under the psycho-social influence of the military, bought into the political economy of this "security". They and not the military, at the subnational levels,

became the mouthpiece of the campaign prioritising the attainment of “security” and at the national level the attainment of “national security” as the prerequisite for governance to take place.

The battle against Boko Haram terrorists continued and metamorphosed into the phase of insurgency. Thus when one combined terrorism and insurgency, “security” and “national security” became the dominant if not the only item of governance or the use of human and material resources in Nigeria. Even as there are lull in the international wings of the battle against terrorism, the Nigerian phase remained unabated as the whole new economy centered on security and/or national security in the North East sustained its continuation.

The presidency of Yar’adua and Jonathan was the golden era of the military’s resurgence into Nigeria’s civil rule politics. In this, the Office of the National Security Adviser, under the leadership of retired military officers of the army genre, managed the economy associated with Boko Haram, for the government. The Office also played and managed the politics associated with the battle against Boko Haram. The death of President Yar’adua and the emergence of President Jonathan did anger the North to the degree that terrorism/insurgency led by the Boko Haram group became the instrumentality for the return of political power to the North in 2015.

If the argument was that the transition within the transition enabled the military to regained political reckoning after Chief Obasanjo left power in 2007, what happened to the battle against insecurity in the years that another retired general was elected president of Nigeria? It was under the nose of President Muhammadu Buhari that the addition of banditry and kidnapping to the terrorism and insurgency of the President Yar’adua and President Jonathan years happened.

One should recall that President Buhari was elected on the strength of his credential as former military officer and his promise to change the narrative on terrorism and insurgency. This was captured in one of the president’s three point agenda – securing Nigeria. In the eight years of the Buhari presidency, not only did terrorism/terrorists and insurgency/insurgents proliferated and reached their peak as they found fertile grounds to unleash mayhem on Nigerians. President Buhari’s tenure witnessed the addition of banditry/bandits and kidnapping/kidnappers.

The Office of the National Security Adviser and the service chiefs had field days managing the economy around terrorism, insurgency, and banditry and kidnapping individually and collectively. The extent of the inability to cover their tracks particularly that of the National

Security Adviser was the subject of criticism from the International Institute of Strategic Studies where they noted that the Office spent the better part of its time managing the damaging information of the theft and looting that characterised its work rather than coordinating the fight against these elements.

One such insight to the lies and dishonesty that characterised the truth and what the military and this time around the army reported what contained in a signal widely shared in a Group Chat and in a soldier's counter narrative which was enabled by his filming and commentary on the operation. The operation was in the North East area involving 149 Battalion located Kareto village in Mobbar Local Government Area of Borno State.

According to the Situation Report or SITREP,

...at about 0930 hours 17th November 2024, large number of Boko Haram Terrorists/Islamic State in West Africa Province (BHT/ISWAP) attacked 149 Battalion Kareto village under Mobbar Local Government Area in Borno State. The SITREP announced regrettably that the terrorists invaded Kareto village from both Gubio/Damasak and the east axis of Kareto. The gallant troops fought and engaged the miscreant elements before they were repelled by the troops. However, the battle damage assessment indicated as follows: 5 troops killed in action, 10 troops missing in action, accessories damaged equipment 1 MRAP burnt, 1 gun truck burnt, 4 gun trucks catered away, 2 excavator burnt, 1 shark man lorry burnt, 1 yellow bucket truck burnt; Below attached with photographs. The SITREP added that general security situation area is unpredictable.

There were two parts to the video: the visual part showing burnt vehicles and dead soldiers on the ground and the voice part "na Kareto be dis...na for Kareto oo... na for Kareto we dey oo ... see dem don fire our soldiers... God thank you for saving us... alhamdulillah... God continue to protect us...."

A WhatsApp group discussion ensued over the Situation Report and the Video.

The first person: the content of the signal was the opposite of reality based on the assessment of the damage. How can the military sustain this blow yet repelled the enemy, he asked.

The second person: Even miscreants carted away 4 gun truck while being repelled! With 4 soldiers missing ...probably abducted!

The third person: we should leave this people as the more you look the less you see. Since they said they repelled, we should take it like that.

The fourth person did a comparison of the loss and chose to call a spade a spade by urging to quit celebrating "mediocrity". In his view, these guys in green collect huge budget, to the detriment of the police, on fighting insurgency. They should justify it. If a policeman lost just one single rifle, you know what will happen to him...see the colossal loss in equipment by the military...

The fifth person noted the political economy of the whole "security" enterprise in the fight against terrorism, insurgency, banditry and kidnapping particularly in the misrepresentation of facts as contained in the situation report and the accompanying admission by a soldier on the front using his phone in the visual and voice that he presented. When the "forbidden fruit" is tasted, it becomes very difficult to remove the seed from the mouth. Very soon, he predicted, the army will launch "operation no retreat no surrender" and huge amount would be budgeted and released, and the journey continues. God save Naija.

The sixth person furthered the views of the fifth person noting that just as operation Lafia Dole was winding up in the North East, they have created another justification for another operation in the North West. Obviously, he was referring to the unveiling of Lakurawa in the Sokoto area by the army and defence headquarters. Another noted that "this sitrep is actually saying that 149 Battalion Kareto was overrun by BHT".

In confirmation of the endlessness of the endless game called terrorism, insurgency, banditry and kidnapping, the seventh person while admitting to the truth urged that we should check out all the operations opened by the military throughout the country and understand that they have not been able to successfully conclude anyone rather they will do everything to make sure it never comes to an end as a means of cashing out and holding to internal security.

Perhaps, this last view captured the eternal disposition of the military in their collective immoral and bloodsucking campaigns against the rest of Nigerians. This is in their bid to justify their hold on this "security" enterprise and their presence in what he described as internal security.

To this end, they will lie, lie and lie even when they are unable to control the lying narratives as demonstrated in the contradictory facts inside the Situation Report and in the brief account from the soldier's Video.