

**FORCES OF ORDER AND DISORDER: THE NIGERIAN MILITARY**

**EXAMPLE**

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**Abstract**

The Nigerian military over time has played significant roles since independence in stabilizing and ensuring that the ship of the Nigerian state does not disintegrate. They achieved these by constantly intervening and sacrificing their lives whenever they were called upon in serious internal and external threats to keep Nigeria as an indivisible entity. These were evidenced in the Western Regional electoral crisis of 1964, the Nigerian civil war, the Tiv Riots, the Maitatsine uprising, the militancy in the Niger Delta, and the Boko Haram insurgency that's currently ravaging the North East region of Nigeria. The military has also made Nigeria proud in various international missions due to their patriotism, commitment, and sense of purpose. This was witnessed in the peace mission to Congo, Yugoslavia, and the Darfur region of Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Over time, the military remained the rallying point for national integration and development. But some actions of Nigerian soldiers have portrayed the military in bad light thereby casting aspersion on the integrity of the military authorities and eroding civil-military relationship. These negative attributes of soldiers were exhibited in Odi in Bayelsa, Zaki-Biam in Benue State, and the North Eastern part of Nigeria. Thus, this paper argues with findings from written evidence that there is a need for military hierarchies to inculcate a culture of discipline in its members, and train and retrain them to comply with modern-day reality rules of engagement in the theatre of operations.

**Keywords: Disorder, Order, Military, Nigeria, Territorial Integrity**

**Introduction**

All over the world, respective militaries have on several occasions been called up by their governments to perform internal military operations in their different countries where internal security is threatened for the sole purpose of restoring peace, law, and order. Internal security operations are the primary responsibilities of the civil police. However, in some cases, civil police do not have

the operational capabilities to tackle threats emanating from civil disturbances. On such occasions, the military is called in to restore normalcy. Typical examples are the “ethnoreligious conflict involving the Irish Republican Army (IRA) who fought for Catholic Ireland”. The conflict became unbearable and threatened the internal security of the United Kingdom to the point that British armed Forces had to be brought in to contain IRA continuous bombings<sup>1</sup>. Ghana deployed its armed forces for internal security operations that involved the containment of “terrorism, piracy at the sea, illicit drug trade, human trafficking, and armed robbery”<sup>2</sup>.

Nigeria is not an exception in deploying the military to handle internal security challenges that over time threatened the national security of the country. The regular deployment of the military to internal security duties other than their normal duty of national defense against external aggression<sup>3</sup> over the years makes the military appear as the savior of the Nigerian Union. This new normal has given the military institution a wider acceptability in being part of the solution to matters of internal security. In that context, they have been seen as the symbol of Nigerian unity through their conduct and interventions both within and outside Nigeria. The military often acts as an agent of stabilization in matters of internal security threats as they are mindful of their primary responsibilities in containing external threats tailored towards Nigeria’s corporate existence. Nigeria has witnessed a series of crises since independence that have threatened its existence and subsequent balkanization, but not for the astute and impartial intervention of the military who constantly sauntered to ward off security threats that may have caused the nation to drift apart.

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<sup>1</sup> Obayomi Olanisakin, “The Armed Forces and the Challenges of Internal Security in Nigeria” in Basse Celestine and Maurice Ogbonnaya (eds.), *Internal Security Crisis and Community Policing in Nigeria: Policy Options and Strategies*, (Lagos: Concept Publication Ltd, 2019), P.252

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Buratai Yusuf Tukur, “The Nigerian Army and the Challenges of Internal Security and Community Policing in Nigeria” in Basse Celestine and Maurice Ogbonnaya (eds.), *Internal Security Crisis and Community Policing in Nigeria: Policy Options and Strategies*, (Lagos: Concept Publication Ltd, 2019), P.273

The Nigerian military has been deployed to almost all the 36 states of the country including Abuja for internal security operations arising from the push and pull of the “forces of globalization and socio-economic inequalities”<sup>4</sup>. A series of issues have erupted that threatened Nigeria’s existence but the military has always risen to the occasion to ensure that they are brought under control. Thus, Obayomi Olonisakin has observed that:

in Nigeria, a series of internal security challenges have emerged since independence in 1960. These include ethno-religious conflicts, sectarian crises, political violence, terrorism, and pastoralists-farmers conflict. Others are armed robbers, kidnappings, cultism, ritual killings, pipeline vandalism, illegal bunkering, and militancy<sup>5</sup>.

The military has also been deployed together with the police and other paramilitary outfits during elections to give security to voters and the Independent Electoral officials, to scare away people who would want to snatch ballot boxes and cause electoral violence. This deliberate effort is to end election violence and deepen democracy in the country. The sophistication of these forces in terms of arms capability acquisition makes the military the first responder. In trying to thwart and wipe out these threats to Nigeria’s internal security, the military ended up abusing the human rights of the citizens and the line of their duties, thus casting doubt on civil-military engagements. In all their good sides, it appears some mistakes tend to overshadow their good intentions as asserted by Aboyomi Olonisakin that: “the deployment of the Armed Forces of Nigeria to quell uprisings ended in collateral damage due to conventional weapons and tactics employed which was dictated by the Armed Forces of Nigeria at the time”<sup>6</sup>. There are however documentary views by interested scholars of military History and political science about Nigerian military engagements both within and outside Nigeria. The present paper focuses on the Nigerian Military contributions and their impact on national unity and stability. Another objective is to highlight the effect military

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 274

<sup>5</sup> Obayomi Olonisakan. P.252

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 257

actions have brought to bear on the citizens in trying to take actions to preserve the territorial integrity of Nigeria.

### **How the Military Made Nigeria Proud in External Engagements**

The Nigerian military, over the years, has made Nigeria proud through peace-keeping missions. Since Nigerian independence, the military has participated in peacekeeping missions in Africa and the world at large. This is in the realization that a stable world means a stable Nigeria as Nigeria pushes for the promotion of world peace. At the early stage of Nigeria's independence, Tafewa Balewa made Africa Nigeria's primary interest. This presupposes that Nigeria supports every effort to bring stability into the troubled areas of the continent as well as other parts of the world. It was on that strength that Nigeria did not hesitate to consider the request of Mr. Dag Hammarskjold, the then United Nations Secretary-General to send in troops to contain the ensuing secession conflict in Congo in 1964. The Nigerian troops were deployed to the Kivu and Leopoldville provinces. The Congolese objected to the use of white commanders due largely to the evils of colonialism suffered and thus preferred Nigeria to lead the United Nations Peace Keeping Mission to Congo<sup>7</sup> even though the mission was changed to Peace Enforcement which did not go down well with the secessionist leader of Katanga. As further demonstration of Nigeria's commitment to world peace, the Nigerian military also participated in peace-keeping in Afghanistan and Pakistan under United Nations Observers Mission (UNGOMAP) 1988, Iran-Iraq (UNIIMOG) 1988-1991, UN Security in West New Guinea (UNSF) 1962-1963, UN India-Pakistani Observers Mission (UNIPOM) 1965-1966, UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) 1978-1983, UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM I&II) 1985-1997, UN Transition Assistance Group in Namibia (UNTAG) 1989-1990, UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNMIR) 1990-1995, UN Operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) 1992-1994, as well as ECOWAS and O.AU now African

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<sup>7</sup> Chuks Iloegbunam, *Ironsi: Nigeria, the Army, Power and Politics*, (Awka: Eminent Biographies, 2019), pp. 43-44.

Union (AU) ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) 2003, Peace Keeping in Tanzania (TAPKM) 1994 etc<sup>8</sup>.

In Africa, the Nigerian military has spearheaded the stability of African Nations that are engulfed in civil wars and other sundry political crises. United Nations estimates that Africa is currently embroiled in seventeen wars: Only one of them the Ethiopia-Eritrea War is classified as an inter-state war. The rest are civil wars that have displaced and rendered more than eight million people homeless. Most of these homeless people are found around the Great Lakes region: Congo, Kinshasa, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Congo Brazzaville, Angola, Sudan, Central African Republic, Guinea Bissau, Algeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone<sup>9</sup>. The Nigerian military has made every effort to ensure that peace returns to these troubled areas. It is on the strength of this that, Koffi Annan expressed appreciation to the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mr. Obasanjo, for Nigeria's effort towards maintaining peace in Africa and his renewed support to extend the presence of Nigerian troops that was part of ECOMOG in Sierra Leone, pending the full deployment of the expanded UNAMSIL.<sup>10</sup>

### **Threats to Nigeria's Internal Security and Military Responses**

#### **Political Threat and Military Action**

The Nigerian military since independence has been at the forefront of creating order and stabilizing the nation in the period of national crisis. Most of the crises are propelled by politicians whose major interests have been anchored on

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<sup>8</sup> Nuhu Bamalli, "Redefining Nigeria's Interest and Commitments in Peace Support Operations" in Bola Akinterinwa, *Nigeria's National Interests in a Globalized World: Further Reflections on the Constructive and Beneficial Concentricism: Nigeria National Interests Beyond Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Bolytag International Publishers, 2007), PP.84-85.

<sup>9</sup> Bassey Ate, "The State System and African Security" in Akindele A.R. and Bassey Ate, (ed.) *Beyond Conflict Resolution: Managing African Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Ibadan: Vintage Publishers, 20001), P.70

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, Secretary General says Sierra Leone Peace Process at a Crucial Stage in Message to Second Meeting of Joint Implementation Committee, press release SG/SM/7286/AFR/202. 24 January 2000. [WWW.press.un.org](http://WWW.press.un.org) (accessed and retrieved 3 May 2023).

political brinkmanship. Thus, the “rise and resilience of the tradition of political brinkmanship, involving threats and counter threats of the breakdown of rule-induced and system supportive behavior”<sup>11</sup> is what the political class is known for just to attain political powers. This class of people prefers “fission to fusion, coming apart rather than sticking together in the moment of National crisis”<sup>12</sup>. Thus, in the 1960s, there was a serious struggle for political power by the various ethnic leaders representing different political parties. This struggle prompted them to employ various tactics and strategies to bring down their opponents just to gain power through which they could access the national treasury. Regardless of how the unity and cohesiveness of the nation were threatened, that was not the primary concern of the competing political class. Their major interest was to grab power at the center for easy access to the national treasury. Access to power by the winning political class translates to unrestricted access to the resources of the state by the winning group. Seeing the political struggles by the politicians of the early days of Nigeria’s independence and its concomitant effect on the nation, Ola Balogun posits:

In Nigeria, the struggle for political power among the various leadership groups was primarily a struggle for direct economic benefit and survival, but it was a suicidal struggle for these groups in the long run as the inability of the political class to solve Nigeria’s fundamental problems only led them to intensify internal struggles and rivalry to the point of self-destruction as a class.

Corruption and fraud, abuse of power, sect rationalism, and nepotism were the basic features of the Independent Nigeria’s Leaders. The Western regional election of 1962 compounded the situation. This election was marred by fraud, violence, and arson between the Nigerian National Democratic Party supported by the Northern People’s Congress on one side against the Action Group. Nigeria was

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<sup>11</sup> Adigun Agbeje, “Historical Antecedent of the Phenomenon of Ethnic Militias in Nigeria” in Tunde Babawale (ed.), *Urban Violence, Ethnic Militias and the Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, (Lagos: 2007). P70

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

on the path of precipices. To salvage the situation, the military had to intervene to save Nigeria from the impending chaos. One of the military officers who led the military intervention in 1966, Ben Gbulie described the situation thus:

Indeed, the situation in the West was so desperate that any doubts about causing a nationwide crisis were, to my mind impossible. It was unsafe, to say the least, to move about in the West in the day without military or police escort. Here and there could be seen irate crowds of party supporters burning effigies of some political party leaders or other. Placard-carrying party loyalists often mounted roadblocks, stopping motorists, forcing them to declare their stand on the current crisis, and coercing them into chanting the demonstrators' party slogans. Many lives had been lost in the process. Hundreds of innocent lives and I had not the least doubt in my mind that, should the situation in the West be allowed to persist, it would spill over to Lagos. By Friday, December 10, 1965, I had reached the inevitable conclusion that I was far from alone in feeling the way I did. A bold red sign, a clear warning of an imminent national disaster had loomed large on the nation's horizon. The federation had floundered through a widely boycotted general election and the census crisis that preceded it. The annual Tiv operations (cleverly designed to hound out and eliminate politicians opposed to the Northern People's Congress (NPC) had folded up for the year, and hundreds of innocent lives had been lost more than the normal yearly casualty toll. Thousands of people had been rendered homeless, as town after town lay ravaged in the wake of security meant to restore order<sup>13</sup>.

At this point, the military had no option but to step in to restore law and order and avoid a national disaster. Stepping in to restore normalcy in the Western Regional Political crisis marked the beginning of military involvement in internal security operations in independent Nigeria.

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<sup>13</sup> Ben Gbulie, *Nigeria's Five Majors: Coup D' Etat of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1966: First Inside Account*, (Onitsha: African Educational Publisher, 2007), P.7.

Moreso, in 1964, a riot broke out in Tiv land that led to wonton loss of lives and destruction of property. Miffed by the amount of unnecessary carnage, the then-prime minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa ordered the military to take all necessary steps to ensure that law and order were restored. The military did not waste time as they responded immediately to suppress the uprising<sup>14</sup>. The genesis of the crisis stemmed from the emergence of party politics in the Tiv land. The party politics birthed the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), a party the Tivs believed would drive them to prosperity and development through the creation of the Middle Belt state. The emergence of UMBC was not without other political parties. There was the Northern Peoples Party (NPC) in the North but UMBC was not comfortable because of fear of Muslim dominance. Their fear was reinforced by the Hausa-Fulani domination of Native Authority structures. Remi Anifowose observed that in Makurdi, home to the Tiv, Audu Afoda, a Yoruba Muslim was appointed and served as the administration's contact person to the Tivs, and more Hausa-Fulani were approved into strategic offices. A decision that didn't augur well with the Tivs<sup>15</sup>.

With the ensuing resentment harboured by the Tivs against Hausa-Fulani, was a natural occurrence that they would rather form an allegiance with another political party when it comes to party politics than go with the party which they believed did not have their interest. Thus, the Tiv political UMBC formed an allegiance with the Action Group (AG) and won a majority of the votes in the middle belt. They continued on the road of the AG into the NPC-dominated region which did not go down well with the then NPC federal government at the centre. To dominate the region, the NPC resorted to various tactics both democratic and undemocratic which in turn bred distrust and anger that finally culminated in the Tiv Riots<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Aboyomi Olonisakin, 256

<sup>15</sup> Remi Anifowose, *Violence and Politics Nigeria: The Tiv, Yoruba, and Niger Delta Experience*, (Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publication, 2011), P.84.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid,85-124



### **Militancy Threat in the Niger Delta**

By the twentieth century, oil was discovered in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta of Nigeria and huge revenue was generated from its sales by the Nigerian government. Even though this money was generated from the natural resources found in the Niger Delta, the Niger Delta people were excluded from enjoying the proceeds accrued from the oil. Boiled anger from exclusion prompted the people to declare an independent nation and thus, secede from Nigeria. The seceding nation was known as the “Niger Delta Republic” led by Isaac Adaka Boro in 1966<sup>17</sup>. This declaration was a total affront to the federal military government’s avowed position not to allow an inch of Nigeria to break away. Determined not to accept any part of Nigeria to break away, the federal military government ordered military action against the secessionists. The military actions lasted for twelve days and the Niger Delta Republic surrendered to the superior military might of the federal force thus signaling the death of the republic.

Another issue that has caught the attention of the Nigerian military is the militancy in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Militancy arose from neglect and environmental pollution of the region without commensurate compensation in terms of infrastructural development and financial return to the inhabitants of the region even though huge revenue has been generated from the area daily. The implication of this was the emergence of violent groups who felt neglected in sharing the oil benefit. To them, it was important for them to take laws into their hands to have access to the proceeds of the oil revenue. Unfortunately, petroleum wealth has become the mainstay of the Nigerian economy and disruption is considered a threat to national security. Thus, the violent activities of the indigenous people owing to the bombing of oil pipelines and hostage and kidnapping of oil workers attracted the attention of the federal government of Nigeria which drafted a security force into the area to protect oil installations.

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<sup>17</sup> Adaka Isaac Boro, *The Twelve Day Revolution*, (Benin City: Idodo Umeh Publishers, 1982), pp.114-1146.

### **The Biafran Civil War**

Another instance in the military proved it was a capable instrument of putting off a threat to Nigeria's stability and restoring law and order in the country was the containment of the Nigerian civil war. In 1967-1970, the Nigerian military fought a brutal civil war with the Biafran secessionists. The military proved to the world that it was capable of wading off both internal and external threats to Nigeria's corporate existence and that no inch of Nigeria's territorial integrity could be compromised without tasting their resolve. On May 26, 1967, the Eastern Region Consultative Assembly mandated Col. Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu to declare the Republic of Biafra thereby ceding the Eastern Region which formed part of Nigeria's three regions namely; western, eastern, and northern regions owing to what he called the annihilation of the Igbos living in the north in May 1966 and the counter-coup of July 1966, that led to the death of the first military head of state of Igbo's extraction<sup>18</sup>. Following the declaration of the Biafra Republic, General Gowon declared a state of emergency and divided Nigeria into three regions into twelve states to whittle down the power of Ojukwu from other minority groups that were part of the eastern region. The creation of the 12 states also blocked Col. Ojukwu from having access to the oil-rich Niger Delta Region. The declaration of state emergency thus set the pace for the invasion of the acclaimed Biafra Republic with the federal troops<sup>19</sup>. The military and Biafran soldiers fought for thirty months with serious casualties on both sides. But Nigeria in the end defeated Biafra because of the superior firepower and motivation. The Biafra defeat resulted in the unconditional surrender in January 1970 followed by General Yakubu Gowon's declaration of "NO VICTOR NO VANQUISHED, and thus set the pace for reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation"<sup>20</sup>. The Nigerian-Biafran war was

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<sup>18</sup> Annalisa Zinn, "Theory Versus Reality: Civil War Onset and Avoidance in Nigeria Since 1960" in Paul Collier and Nicholans Sambanis (eds). *Understanding Civil War: Evidence and Analysis Vol.1.*( Washington DC: World Bank, 2005) P.98-99.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

seen as a war “to keep Nigeria one”<sup>1 21</sup> on the part of the federal military government as attested by some of the wounded Nigerian soldiers to their superior: “Oga, na you and me go end this war and capture Ojukwu”<sup>22</sup>. But Biafrans saw it as a war to free themselves from the oppressive and marginalized government of General Yakubu Gowon.

### **Religious Instability**

The end of the Nigerian civil war ushered in a deadly Islamic uprising that threatened the internal peace and stability of the country. If there is anything else that has threatened Nigeria’s unity and internal security, it is the religious uprisings. One such is the Maitatsine sect uprising in the northern part of Nigeria. This sect’s leadership in its early stage, began to question the legitimacy of the revered Prophet Mohammed as the last prophet of Allah even as his teaching brought him into conflict with other Islamic scholars<sup>23</sup> To entrench his deeply divided teaching and to gain more followers, the leader of the sect, Alhaji Mohammed Marwa began to recruit and indoctrinate his followers who were young people, homeless, Almajiri, poverty-stricken male who were refugees that went to Kano in search of employment. He hypnotized them made them swear and pledge lifelong allegiance and forced them to undergo military training<sup>24</sup>. The military training, he gave his followers spurred him to start using them to challenge the legitimate authorities as he told them to get rid of the infidels who opposed him and his nefarious activities.

On this basis, in 1980 and 1985 riots engineered by this sect ensued. The sect began to unleash terror on the cities of Kano, Bulumkutu-Maiduguri, and Jimeta-Yola as they battled the civilians, the police, and the federal troops in an 11-day conflict<sup>25</sup>. The riot claimed 4200 lives, mostly Muslims and some Christians, and

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<sup>21</sup> Alabi-Isama Godwin, *The Tragedy of Victory: ON-the Spot Account of the Nigerian-Biafran War in the Atlantic Theatre*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2013), P. viii.

<sup>22</sup> Al. Venter, *Biafra’s War 1967-1970: A Tribal Conflict in Nigeria that Left Millions a Dead*, (England: Helion and Company Limited, 2015), P.2010.

<sup>23</sup> Annalisa Zinn, p.102.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

many church buildings were destroyed in the ensuing melee<sup>26</sup>. They aimed to rid Islam of its non-Muslim believers. The sect's action affected public peace such that it took the intervention of the military to quell the uprising. In 1982, the Maitatsin rioted again and disturbed the public peace through their actions which culminated in the death of 400 people and the destruction of property in Maiduguri<sup>27</sup>.

Agi explained government's usual response to these religious crises has been to mobilize all cohesive apparatus at its disposal and to put a stop to the rioting which has become the hallmark of religious violence in Nigeria. Agi's view is in sync with the position of the government to use the military to disperse rioters as expressed by Colonel John N. Shagaya, "We have indeed had many nasty religious crises due largely to some activities of fanatics. But one thing one would say here is that the government has always stepped in very timely. The issue has always been resolved"<sup>28</sup>. On issues like the rioting, the federal government has never treated it with levity because they are seen as subversion as enunciated by Ibrahim Babangida:

... carefully planned and masterminded by evil men with sinister motives who saw the incident in Kafanchan as an opportunity to subvert the federal military government and the Nigerian nation. What we are dealing with therefore is not just a religious crisis, but the civil equivalent of attempted coup d'etat organization against the federal government and the nation<sup>29</sup>.

### **Boko Haram Crisis**

If there is any crisis that has tested the resolve of the Nigerian military and its capacity to nip and counter the threat posed to the Nigerian corporate entity, it is the Boko Haram crisis. The crisis began in 2009 with an uprising in Maiduguri but was quickly contained by the efforts of the Nigerian military. In 2012, the group resurfaced and attacked the United Nation's office in Abuja thereby giving the struggle a different coloration. The group called for a separation of the Nation where they will practice Sharia differently from the Nigerian state. Their activities

have threatened Nigeria's existence since after the Civil War. The dimension of the war adopted by the Boko Haram group in prosecuting war is something the Nigerian military has not been exposed to. Young men blowing themselves up in bomb-laden cars, burning drink cans packed with explosives, and gunning down officers with AK47s, all in the space of a few hours. The military has not experienced this kind of war before, they are used to physical combat. The Nigerian Civil War was waged by the Nigerian Military and Biafran soldiers. But here, it's a clandestine war fought with an unknown army. Without an iota of doubt, the military has taken the war to the terrorists by decimating their rank and file and degrading their potential to cause a threat to the Nigerian nation in recent times.

By the end of 2013, Boko Haram took control of Bawa, Dikwa, Ngala, Kala-Balge, and Gwoza in Borno State, Gujba and Gulani in Yobe State, and Muoagali, Michika, and Mubi in Adamawa State respectively. But with the military onslaught against them, they were driven and confined to the Sambisa Forest in Maiduguri<sup>30</sup>.

### **Cases of Military Disproportionate Use of Force**

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in section 217 (2) gave the military the leeway through the president to intervene in the internal security affairs of the country when there is a threat to internal peace and order<sup>31</sup>. This they have done over time. Sometimes their intervention is with mixed feelings as they deploy brutal force into internal operations as observed by Jude A. Momodu that; the

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<sup>30</sup> Ayuba, J.M. *Boko Haram and the Jihadi Tradition in the Northern Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited, 2019), pp.68-91.

<sup>31</sup> "1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Fundamental Right of Enforcement: Enforcement Procedure, Rules with Amendment", 2011. P. LL115.

“Nigerian military just like any other military that emerged from colonialism is by nature an institution of coercion and occupation which relies primarily on its brute force”. Their training, They are trained to defend Nigeria from “external aggression and maintain the country’s territorial integrity by securing its borders from violation on land, air and the sea, hence The training, doctrine and equipment” are fashioned to counter traditional threats.<sup>32</sup> It is this conventional mentality that the military deploys when called for internal security operations in the country. Typical examples are the Tiv Riots, Zaki Biam massacre, flagrant human rights abuses in the Niger Delta, and the raging Boko Haram conflict in North Eastern Nigeria, etc

### **The Tiv Riots**

A typical example was in the Tiv Riots earlier mentioned, the military was accused of bias in handling the operation as adduced by Aboyomi Olonisakin, and the operation of the armed forces was heavily criticized by some members of the public, especially the opposition political parties. The army was particularly accused of highhandedness. It was also alleged that the army was used as a tool by the ruling party to further its political interests<sup>33</sup>. The further accusation was also meted out to the armed forces over how they handled the Maitasine uprising. This is not to say that the use of the armed forces of Nigeria to quell the uprisings did not record some collateral damage because of the use of conventional weapons and the tactics employed, which were dictated by the hierarchy of the armed forces of Nigeria at the time<sup>34</sup>. Recording collateral damages in internal military operations corroborates the submission of Samuel Adam’s proposition about the nature of military deployment to conflict, as it is always dangerous to the freedom of the people<sup>35</sup>.

### **The Zaki Biam Massacre**

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<sup>32</sup> Obayomi Olonisakin, p.261.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 256.

<sup>34</sup> Abyomi Olonisakin,p. 257.

<sup>35</sup> Cushing H. A. (ed.) *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, (New York:Putman. 1907), p.250.

This case is worth considering in the series of the military's excessive use of brutal force in the internal military engagements in the country. The Nigerian Army in 2001 killed more than two hundred unarmed civilians and destroyed shops, homes, and public buildings in brutal reprisal attacks in Zaki Biam and Gbeji, etc. to avenge the killing of 19 soldiers. Human Rights Watch termed it extra-judiciary killings. According to Human Rights Watch;

The military operation in which more than two hundred people were killed in various locations in Benue state in October 2001 took place within the context of the broader, longstanding intercommunal conflict in the area. In a sense, it could be seen as the culmination of a series of attacks and counter-attacks by Tiv and Jukun armed groups, primarily in Taraba state and the areas around the Taraba -Benue border. Against this backdrop of this conflict, the specific incident that provoked the violent response of the military in October was the abduction and killing of 19 soldiers two weeks earlier. The soldiers according to government authorities, were on a mission to restore peace in areas affected by the conflict between Tivs and Jukuns when they were abducted by a Tiv armed group in Vaase, in Benue state, on October 10. Their mutilated bodies were found two days later, on October 12, in a primary school in the town of Zaki-Biam, also in Benue state<sup>36</sup>.

The reprisal attack by the military saw them combing all the nooks and crannies of Vaase. Gbeji, Kyado, Anyiin, Sankera, and Tse-Adoor destroying properties, killing and raping women. Human Rights Watch notes that Gbeji had the highest casualties as it was the first place the military vented their anger to avenge the death of their colleagues who were on peacekeeping missions. There were about 150-160 people murdered including 4 women by the military in an extra-judiciary killing. In Vaase where the 19 soldiers were abducted, the military

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<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch, p.5.

killed about 17 people, 15 men and two women. Kyado was spared because of the timely intervention of the soldiers from Benue state. But men were beaten and properties destroyed. In Anyiin, the soldiers only destroyed things but no life was lost. Zaki-Biam was hit because of its location along the Taraba border. It is estimated that between 20 and 30 people were killed. The soldiers surrounded the yam market, which is one of the biggest markets in the country, and opened fire on market women and other people who went there to buy and sell. The home of Victor Malu, former chief of army staff was not lucky in Tse-Ador as the military destroyed his family house killed 5 persons in the compound, and destroyed buildings in Sankera. Two young men were also killed on the main road returning from the farm<sup>37</sup>.

### **Infringement of Human Rights at the Niger Delta**

The Nigerian military goofed in the Niger Delta when they were deployed to protect and safeguard oil installations and oil workers as well as maintain the internal peace of the Niger Delta states. There was widespread abuse of human rights as affirmed by the postulation of Machiavelli and Voltaire that “a military man cannot be a good man” and military is the “manifestation of brute force in rationalized form”<sup>38</sup>. There was no part of the Niger Delta where there was no complaint of one form of human rights abuse. As Samuel Oyowole, Damola Adegboye, and Emmanuel Durosini puts it, the Nigerian state has deployed security forces, which have records of a campaign of terror against the people of the Niger Delta, through a series of operations of military task force<sup>39</sup>.

In the series of campaigns of terror, Odi, and Gbaramatu towns in Bayelsa state readily come to mind. On November 20, 1999, Odi a town of about sixty thousand

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<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Military Revenge in Benue: A Population Under Attack”, Vol. 14, NO.2(A), 2002 [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) . 6-25 (accessed and retrieved 1, May 1, 2023).

<sup>38</sup> McAlister. L. Lyle, “Changing Concepts of the Role of the Military in Latin America”, *Journal of the American Academy of political Science*, vol.160.1965, p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Oyowole, Damola Adegboye and Emmanuel Durosini, “Militarization of Oil and Environmental Politics in Nigeria: Armed Resistance, State Responses and Peace Prospects in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria”, *Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs*. Vol 6. NO.1 June 2018, p. 65.



inhabitants came under attack, courtesy of the military. It is believed that 12 policemen who were on a security operation were ambushed and killed by the Egbesu Boys, one of the gang groups that terrorized the oil-rich region in search of oil justice. The death of the police officers angered President Olusegun Obasanjo who then dispatched military men to level the town of Odi as a warning sign for future occurrences. Nothing was left in sight after the assignment. Writing on the sad event, the Civil Liberties Organization explained that what happened in Odi is an illustration of the excesses inherent in the deployment of military force in the resolution of issues which falls within the ambit and professionalism of the Nigerian Police Force, and posit that it is nothing short of genocide<sup>40</sup>. Regardless, nothing however justified the killing of the police officers as they were on state assignment. Leveling the entire community was also against the rules of engagement of the military internal operations.

In the case of Gbaramatu, the military reported that 18 of its officers guarding oil facilities were killed by an armed group commanded by Governor Epemupolo. This angered the military and forced the military institution to deploy three battalions, four fighter jets, and twenty-four-gun boats to the troubled region<sup>41</sup>. The army took on the militants on the land, the navy in the water while the air force rained bombs on the communities from the air. The air force rained bombs on a community festival attended by indigenes and visitors in Oparaza, the headquarters of Gbaramatu and so many people were killed while others were wounded. The bombing campaign was extended to communities like Kunukunuma, Okerenkoko, Goba, Abiteye, etc. Elias Courson posits that “the military air, land, and sea attack on communities in the Niger Delta left several persons dead mainly children, women and elderly and several others missing. Oboko Bello, a community leader

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<sup>40</sup> Civil Liberties Organization, *Blood Trial, Repression and Resistance in the Niger Delta*, (Lagos: CLO, 2002), p.67.

<sup>41</sup> Elias Courson, *Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta: Political Marginalization, Repression and Petro-Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, Dordiska Afrikainstitute, Uppsala, 2009, p.23

in the kingdom situates the number of both missing and dead between 500 and 2000”<sup>42</sup>.

### **Military Highhandedness in the North Eastern Nigeria**

Another case of military highhandedness is exemplified in the Boko Haram war in the North Eastern part of the country. Boko Haram began its campaign of brutal killings after the death of its leader Mohammed Yusuf in 2009. Its clash with the military in 2009 led to the death of its leader and 1,000 members and thus radicalized the group. After the radicalization of the group and their deadly activities in the northeastern part of the country, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency to check the activities of the groups in 2013. In the emergency declaration, President Jonathan granted power to the military to be able to contain the violent group. Rather than the emergency containing the nefarious activities of the group, civilians became more vulnerable to military abuse whose main duty was to protect them against the Boko Haram onslaught<sup>43</sup>. Corroborating this, Amnesty International asserts that:

in the course of the security operation against Boko Haram in north-east Nigeria, Nigerian military forces have extrajudicially executed more than 1,000 people; they have arbitrarily arrested at least 20,00 people, mostly young men and boys; and have committed countless acts of torture. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Nigerians have become victims of enforced disappearance; and at least 7,000 have died in military detention as a result of starvation, extreme overcrowding, and denial of medical assistance...Data collected since March 2011, show more than 7,000 men and boys have died in detention, their deaths often unrecorded and rarely investigated. Amnesty International gathered the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Jude A. Momodu, 526.

data and details of individual cases through visits to mortuaries, internal military reports, statistics recorded by local human rights activists, and interviews with witnesses, victims, former detainees, hospital staff, mortuary personnel, and military sources. The highest death rates were recorded in Giwa barracks in May, June, and July 2013, where up to 180 deaths were recorded in some days. In June, more than 1,400 corps were delivered from the barracks to one of the mortuaries in Maiduguri<sup>44</sup>.

The staggering revelation by Amnesty International in the Boko Haram war and how it is being waged call for sober reflections and a change of approach in terms of rules of engagement and rights violations.

### **Changes and Adaptations in line with the internal security operation**

There is no doubt about the fact that it is difficult for the military to change from the tradition it was formerly known to a more humane role but it's a gradual process. It's important to note that the military has started correcting the poor human rights records that portray them in a bad light to the citizens and international community. This is evident in the fact that the military institution goes the extra mile to punish erring members who failed to adhere to the rules of engagement as they now made the teaching of human rights compulsory in their training. They have a more established human rights desk at the theatre of internal security operation<sup>45</sup>. To reinforce this decision, Colonel Sani Usman reiterated this:

for the avoidance of doubt, the Rules of Engagement (ROE) and the Code of Conduct set out the circumstances and limitations, under which armed forces personnel may be applied to achieve military objectives in furtherance of

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<sup>44</sup> Amnesty International, *Stars on their Shoulders, Blood on their Hands: War Crimes Committed by the Nigerian Military*, (London: Amnesty International, 2015), p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Jude, A. Momodu, 527.

government policy within operation MESA and other internal security operations. Any officer or soldier found aiding or abetting any act, arson, vandalism, or unprofessional conduct, would be severely dealt with according to the extant laws...Once deployed on any internal security (IS) Operations the officer or soldiers must ensure the enforcement of law and order in conjunction with other security agencies. Troops on duty must intervene in any situation to avoid a breakdown in peace, stability, or law and order in any area where they are deployed. It is inexcusable for troops to stand aside and watch the security situation deteriorate leading to loss of lives or damage to property without intervening. Such intervention should, however, be based strictly on sound judgment and within the ambit of the code of conduct for ISO Operations while exhibiting good professional ethics. Troops have to use necessary force to quell crises resulting in deaths, injury, and damages to properties<sup>46</sup>.

However, to bring a facelift to the military institution, the military has been up in its effort to abreast members of the public of its activities and by openly sanctioning its erring members that have deviated from the rules of engagement in the theatre of operation in the northeast. Some of the offenses the officers committed bordered on cowardice, negligence, abduction, and discipline<sup>47</sup>. Those found guilty were punished according to the military code of conduct.

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<sup>46</sup> Sahara Reporters, "Internal Security: Army Clarifies Rules of Engagement", New York: November 12, 2015. [www.saharereporters.com](http://www.saharereporters.com) (accessed and retrieved 1 May, 2023).

<sup>47</sup> Texas Chukwu, "Army Sanction Erring Personnel for Misconduct", [www.army.mil.ng](http://www.army.mil.ng) October 04, 2018. (access and retrieved 1 May 2023).

## **Conclusion**

Regardless of the negative perception of the military institution in Nigeria, the organization stands out as a rallying and a unifier both in times of peace and in national crisis. The negative image could be worked on and their contributions to the national unity and oneness of the country far outweigh whatever mistake they might have made in the theatre of operations. Their support for the consolidation of the democratic process in the country cannot be quantified. However, it is good and important at this very moment for the military to do more in terms of respect for human rights in their internal security operations and their dealings with civilians. Doing so would inspire citizens' confidence in the institution which would enhance robust civil-military relations.

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<sup>26</sup> Jan Boer H., *Nigeria's Decades of Blood: Studies in Christian-Muslim Relations*, (Canada: Essence Publishing, 2003), p.39.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*

<sup>28</sup> S.P. I Agi, *Political History of Religious Violence in Nigeria*, (Calabar: Pigasiann and Grace International Publishers, 1998), P.205.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.207