

Enhancing Civilian and Military Relations to Prevent Insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to highlight on the need to enhance military and civilians relations for the purpose of peace in Borno State. The data for the paper were drawn from written literature. The findings show the desperate urgent need for military and the civilians to relate well in order to have symbiotic relationships that could yield peace in this time of insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria.

Introduction

We are at a time that the experiences of the ravages of terrorism need to be overcome not just through the use of the repressive apparatus of the Nigerian State, but also through enhancing the relationship between the military and all security agencies for law and order to be sustained and peace and security to endure. In life, certain experiences could turn out to offer opportunities in ways never envisaged towards building a more peaceful, more prosperous and more secure society. The Chinese have shown the world that moments of conflict offer opportunities for change in many ways. When the group that calls itself Jama'atul Ahlus Sunnah Liddawa'atiwal Jihad (People Committed to the Teachings of the Prophet and Jihad) popularly called Boko Haram transformed from teaching its brand of Islam and took up arms against the Nigerian State, it created the conditions that led to the deterioration in the security situation in a way and on a scale that was never envisaged.

Civilians were made to come into contact with military personnel in a way never imagined before. Mu'azu & Ibrahim (2016) The people expected that the security agencies would deal with the threat posed by Boko Haram and make them secure and safe. Prior to the Boko Haram security threat, there were cases of robberies, burglaries and political thuggery raising fears and public concerns. One of the immediate steps taken by the Borno State Government was to work with the security agencies to establish Operation Flush to deal with the rising crime wave. Yet the situation took on another dimension when an improvised explosive device (IED) blew up its makers in a household. It was a major sign of threat to security. At the time of the break out of hostilities between the Nigerian State and Boko Haram, most people hold the view that the authorities would deal with the situation by deploying the military. That was what happened when the security threat to the nation and to the safety of civilians became manifest, the Nigerian Army was deployed to flush out Boko Haram in 2009.

The civilians were grateful that the military was able to, within a few days, dislodge Boko Haram from its base Markas, near the railway station. It is important to note in all these that it was not enough to leave issues of security to the military and police alone; civilians also have a role to play to ensure their security and safety and sustenance of peace. So enhancing cooperation between the military and civilians is necessary to achieve the objective of keeping the society secure, safe and peaceful. Mu'azu & Ibrahim (2016) The presentation highlights the basis for enhancing military and civilian relations, defines some key concepts, recalls the deployment of the Joint Task Force and the challenging relations it had with the civilian population, the monitoring and amplification of the deviant roles of officers by NGOs and the media. All these helped to define the relationship between the military and civilians in Borno State, particularly in Maiduguri. In the discussion issues of hard tactics, respect for the rules of engagement, demand for the removal of the military, the disbandment of the JTF, youth volunteers popularly called the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), fatal curiosity of civilians, international NGOs and journalists are discussed in the context of that relationship. The paper also draws some key points arising from the discussion that are germane to enhancing the relationship between the military and civilians. Some suggestions were made on what could further enhance military and civilian relations. It concludes by building on the lessons already learnt for a more fruitful internal security engagement of the military for law and order to be restored and peace and security to be sustained. Alemika (1999)

Definition of Key Concepts

The Military – this refers largely to the Nigerian Army as the dominant force in the fight against terrorism. But in reality, the security personnel involved in the fight against terrorism included the Nigerian Air Force (NAF), Nigeria Police Force (NPF), National Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) and the intelligence services, playing roles in assigned capacities. So the concept military, in the context of this paper, takes on a generic character.

Civilians – this refers to the population that is not part of the military, the police and all related security agencies that are meant to be protected by the military in all its embracing meaning as defined above who are not engaged in combat against the State.

Military-Civilian Relations – is a concept with diverse meanings. But in this context it is used to mean communication and contact for building cooperation and support to realize the objective of restoring law and order for peace and security to be sustained. It requires commitment and action between the military and civilian population.

The JTF Era

The flushing out of Boko Haram unfortunately did not put to an end the security threats and killings that it unleashed on Maiduguri in particular. Instead it only became quiet for some time only to metamorphose into something wider and more dangerous. The foot soldiers of Boko Haram not only became just violent, they became more daring and launched attacks on police stations, police officers, warders, politicians, businessmen, ulama, and anyone that dared to speak out against them. Their ferocity was so strong that the military had to be quickly redeployed to take charge of the internal security situation since the Nigeria Police appeared to have been overwhelmed. The situation was so bad that the police officers had to move in mufti to avoid being direct targets of Boko Haram killers. The military came in with a hybrid security arrangement, with officers drawn from various security organizations, to form what was called the Joint Task Force (JTF). The deployment of the JTF is important to our discussion of civilian military relations, the need for cooperation, enhancing security and peace building in Borno State and beyond. Robert. M(1994) The redeployment of the military to deal with the security situation was welcomed following the experience of the earlier action of the military against Boko Haram. But by the time the JTF came to arrest the situation, the character of the security threat had changed. Boko Haram elements had embedded themselves within the civilian population and never identified themselves. When the JTF came in, it appeared to have been briefed not to trust anyone in the community. Its approach was one of single determination to deal with anyone, no matter who they may be in the community. The earlier feeling that the people would become protected turned to cries of despair and disbelief. It soon became uncertain whether the JTF was actually there to protect the people. This feeling led to creating a chasm between the officers of the JTF and the civilian population. The cooperation that the JTF expected to have did not seem to materialize. Instead, the JTF itself found itself in a difficult situation. First, the JTF had no means of identifying BH elements except for the daring ones that came out to attack their targets.

Second, contrary to the popular belief outside there was no intention to refuse to expose BH elements because even within homes families did not know that their wards were involved. Third, when members of the public started identifying some of the BH elements and reporting them to some security personnel, they ended up being killed. Terrorism had set fatal examples that induced forced community silence. In that context, the JTF had to face difficulties in getting community support. Kukah. M (2011) The community was so concerned about the difficult situation it found itself such that Borno Elders took up steps to demand for a review of the approach to fighting the insurgency. Their behind the scene efforts did not seem to be making headway and were forced to go public with their concerns on the way the JTF was handling the internal security situation. It reached a point that the Borno Elders called for the withdrawal of the JTF for the people to be left alone to face Boko Haram. Among the elders that made this demand were retired generals, superior police officers, civil servants etc. This speaks to the level of the frustration of the community and the gap existing between the military and the civilian population. It is important to state that for both the military and the civilians this was a new security threat never encountered anywhere in the country. The military had to take up that posture because its officers became the direct target of Boko Haram attacks. Since there was no way they could separate the Boko Haram elements from the innocent people in the community, the principle of self-preservation took over.

Military personnel are trained to be ever on their guard and ensure the elimination of obstacles to their objectives and deal expeditiously with any direct personal threat. The JTF operated in that difficult and uncertain situation at that time. Dlakwa (2010) It is necessary to point out some attitudinal inclinations that gave the military no option than to resort to the use of force in the form of physical assault and disciplinary actions. Some civilians with an incredible sense of personal curiosity, despite threats to their life, choose to defy the military and constitute some sort of destruction during military operations. In many areas where the military had to cordon off areas, as a way of cornering Boko Haram elements, you find civilians going close to the military to witness how they will deal with the insurgents. The military personnel get very concerned that stray bullets could harm the civilians. They demand of civilians to leave and take cover for their safety. But the strong headed civilians driven by a sense of fatal curiosity would not listen. I was a witness to this around customs area along Bama Road where the JTF had to resort to the use of force to drive away the civilians. One of the concerns any reasonable person would have is that such civilians were not only putting themselves in danger, but were also diverting the attention of soldiers from their target and also putting officers in danger too. The civilians with a sense of fatal curiosity are a problem in military-civilian relations. Sa'ad (1994) the military in modern times do not operate in an era when civil society was either weak or not so focused on the way the military carry out internal security duties. Following the campaign for the return to constitutionalism, democracy and rule of law in the 1990s, human rights NGOs have been emboldened and enhanced their capacity to hold government agencies to account.

The deployment of the military to the South-South popularly called the Nigeria Delta against militancy raised concerns about the way the military related to the civilian population. The military was accused of resorting to hard tactics in restoring law and order in that part of Nigeria. It was similar accusations that were made in the North East. Human rights NGOs raised the critical issue of rules of engagement and the military came under attack for not respecting the rules of engagement and the use of hard tactics that allegedly played into the schemes of the terrorists. It was alleged that the resort to hard tactics was driving young people to the camp of the insurgents. Investigations were carried out and cases documented by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among international NGOs, that came out with verdicts that showed weak respect of the rules of engagement. They were able to interview victims of the high handedness of the JTF, particularly those who were detained and labeled Boko Haram and who were lucky to be freed. The issues of prolonged arrests and detentions; conditions in the detention centers; access to the detention centers; and, extra-judicial killings were raised. It was an indication of the relations between civilians and the military. The human rights NGOs served as a check against rogue officers who found it convenient to disregard the rules of engagement and invite community scorn against officers. Instead of helping the military to meet its objective of restoring law and order, it made it difficult to secure the cooperation of the community. But beyond the community, the presence of international NGOs and their verdicts on the prosecution of campaign against terror did have an effect on the reputation and professional standing of the military. Sa'ad (1994) Besides NGOs, journalists constitute an important segment of the civilian population that have the responsibility to make information on the situation to the public. Journalists were interested in the campaign against Boko Haram terrorists for the purpose of reporting to the public who are curious to know the state of security in a given area. One of the issues that emerged in the relation between the military and journalists was the tendency not to give information.

In the absence of information from the military, journalists had to make do with whatever information they have to the public. This st times annoys the military because the information is considered incorrect or it could jeopardize operations and put troops in danger. Important as this is to the military the civilian population is interested in knowing the military is undertaking a very difficult assignment, it is gaining victory as an assurance of safety from terrorists. This constant assurance is what the civilians need. Though this was a challenge in the past, it underlines the importance of flow of information to the civilian population to help in supporting the military. They also want to be assured that the military will not turn its guns against them. Robert. W (2003)

Post JTF Era

The issue of turning the gun against the citizen was what triggered the emergence of the Civilian Task Force (CJTF). The risk that the youth faced gingered them to take steps for self-preservation. So the youths decided to organize to escape the onslaught of Boko Haram terrorists and harassment of military officers after every incident of attack. It was a significant development that helped in defining the relationship between the military and the civilian population. At the time CJTF emerged the possibility of identifying Boko Haram foot soldiers had become more open, unlike in the past. Although the emergence was spontaneous some officers were able to quickly recognize the importance of this development and seized the initiative to organize them into a more coordinated civilian support. It was with the emergence of the CJTF that Boko Haram elements were chased out of Maiduguri, helping to make the city a relatively safer haven. Unfortunately, the terrorists changed tactics and started attacking towns and villages and later were taking over Nigerian territory on a scale that was demeaning to our committed military officers and making us a laughing stock around the world. The worldwide respect for the Nigerian military, known for its high sense of discipline, professionalism and valour began to wane. It took the voice of concerned Nigerians and international friends of Nigeria for the situation to change. Nigerian Armed Forces were reported to be poorly equipped to fight and officers' lives were being unnecessarily put in danger. Today, the military has reclaimed its pride of place among highly professional, disciplined and effective fighting forces of the world. The civilian population played an important role in raising its voice and demanding that the treatment of the military must change. The CJTF became useful to the military not just in intelligence gathering, but also in apprehending Boko Haram elements and fighting the insurgents alongside the military. CJTF has demonstrated what youth can do to help the military to keep us secure and safe. Francis. S (2006)

It is necessary to state that the war against Boko Haram terrorists succeeded as result of the electoral change of guards which led to changes in the strategy of the military. Prior to the change in strategy and the equipping of the military, no one in Maiduguri was certain of a secure environment. In fact many lived in fear of both Boko Haram and the military. Today the story is different. Not only have the military recovered Nigeria's territory, displaced persons living in camps are returning to their towns and villages. We have noted the change in the conduct of our soldiers. They talk to the civilians in friendly tones. They drive and respect traffic rules. People feel more secure in their presence. It is important to note having come far and having reclaimed the confidence and trust of the civilian population, the military has also taken measures to deepen and strengthen this relationship. The Nigerian army has set up *Radio Dole* to bring the people closer to the military and issues can be raised and discussed. The radio station is being operated by professional journalists and offers programmes that are attractive to a large number of the civilian population. The Chief of Army Staff and the Theatre Commander have some up with a programme on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Maiduguri titled *Towards a Safer Society* and supported the holding of workshop with the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) on ways the military and journalists can build stronger relationship and make access to information available in challenging security situations and in peace time. Ibrahim M. (2009)

Some Key Points

From the foregoing it can be seen that there was a time that the civilian population and the military were living in a state of mutual suspicion and distrust at the beginning of the insurgency. With time both the military and the civilians realized that they need to cooperate and support each other in order to conquer the terrorists and restore law and order. Even after the terrorists have been fully cleared by the military, the relationship between them should be further enhanced. The military may possess and operate the arsenals of violence to meet its objective in any challenging security situation. However in the case of terrorism, it requires more than the use of force to conquer and hinder it from surfacing again. The forces that work on the minds of principally the youths to divert them into violence will not relent as the history in other parts of the world continues to show.

Community cooperation, not just that of individuals is necessary to defeat terrorism. It was so bad that the situation deteriorated to a level that made Borno Elders – some of them with the highest level of military and police training – to call for the removal of the military because the relationship with the civilian population was full of distrust and suspicion. No internal military operation should be allowed to reach this level in any part of Nigeria. No matter how much the military try to keep some of its operations from the civilian population, there are some civilians that are driven by a sense of fatal curiosity and unmindful of their safety will try to interfere with operations. In this type of situation, where both the civilian and the soldier's lives would be put in danger, such a civilian will have to pay for the consequences of his/her uncontrolled fatal curiosity. Is it a case of ignorance or irresponsibility? There is value in concerted community action and in working with the military to fight terrorism. The CJTF demonstrated what can be achieved with an honest participation in securing communities. In so doing, it is not only themselves that the youth saved, they also helped to preserve our soldiers who could have been killed by going into areas they never knew could be dangerous. The youths' intimate knowledge of the terrain helped in conquering the Boko Haram terrorists. By offering to secure their community and country, some of them have become professional soldiers.

A strong civil society – human rights activists and journalists – are important in any campaign against terrorists and there is the need to consider ways of relating with them. They are significant partners even if they could attack some of the practices they see on the part of the military. They are an important segment of society and could help strengthen the relationship between the military and the civilian population. It is necessary to point out that the military and civilians are citizens of this great country; none is superior to the other. It is good to enhance the relationship between the two towards building a more secure and safer society. Just remember that any time a soldier is killed, that soldier could be your relation: brother, sister, cousin, uncle, father, mother, etc. All soldiers too need to remember that they were civilians before becoming soldiers and at the end of their service to the country, they will return to civilian life. We all have a common stake in the safety, security and peace of our country. Without this we cannot develop and live a meaningful existence. So we need each other more than we imagine.

Suggestions for Enhancing Military Civilian Relations

The military and civilians having realized that they need each other more than they both imagine, it is necessary to take some pro-active steps towards further enhancing the relations between them. The military is one institution that has the largest core of experts in strategic studies. There is the need to draw a strategy of engagement with civilians on a regular basis so as to bridge gaps and pull down whatever walls of suspicion exists. One way of handling this is to enhance the culture of monitoring and responding to public opinion. This way the military would identify areas that it may need to make adjustments itself or identify areas for education or informing the public about the military without giving away sensitive information. The initiative of running media organisations starting with the Armed Forces Radio and Radio Dole need to be sustained and broadened. Through the media the military could gather important information – suggestions and ideas – that could help the military in protecting the territorial integrity and any internal threats that could be beyond the fire power of the police. There should be a mechanism for the review of the programmers of the stations with a view to strengthening them as credible sources of information to the public.

It needs to be factored into the activities of the military to hold town hall meetings as it provides opportunities for direct interaction with members of the public. The meeting needs to be thought through and specific themes discussed. It is another way of deepening the relationship with the civilian population. Such meeting because of the time and cost involved can be organized and rotated on zonal basis. There is the need to have some form of forum with opinion leaders – traditional rulers including ward heads, religious leaders, political leaders, journalists, NGOs, etc – to discuss some issues that could help strengthen relationship, but also give room for the assessment of the character of persons who want to join the military so that bad elements cannot get into the institution.

Conclusion

The relationship between the military and the civilian population has greatly improved as gone are the days that civilians are apprehensive of the citizens in uniform. This is no doubt the result of a conscious effort to bring the community close. The community has also shown that it can be trusted to play a positive role to enforce law and order and build a safe and secure society. Mutual respect is necessary to do this. Initiatives that will help this cause should never be allowed to cease. They need to be sustained. The country cannot develop in an atmosphere of terrorism and uncertainty. The relationship serves both positively and makes the country more stable and peaceful.

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