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Special Report

Nigeria's Buhari Government Massively Upgrades the Fight ... to Protect Itself; But *Boko Haram* Still Dominates the Battlefield

Analysis. From GIS/Defense & Foreign Affairs, Abuja. A sense of desperation has now enveloped the Nigerian Armed Forces leadership as the insurgencies from Islamist groups — loosely referred to as *Boko Haram* (BH) — continue to gain dominance over the battlefields of north-eastern Nigeria.

The present situation is that the Nigerian Government has completely and comprehensively lost control of the engagement with *Boko Haram* and can show no instance when the Government presently has tactical, theater, strategic, or information dominance of any aspect of the conflict. Moreover, the insurgent groups grow stronger, and the Government forces grow weaker and more beset by morale collapse.

It is fair to say that the Nigerian intelligence community itself is no longer sure what groups even comprise "*Boko Haram*", nor has it addressed the international logistical, ideological, and support aspects contributing to the ongoing viability of the groups.

The conflict will almost certainly prove the undoing of the present Government of Pres. Muhammadu Buhari at the February 16, 2019, Presidential elections. Despite this, the only significant engagement which the Nigerian military leadership — up to and including the National Security Advisor, Maj.-Gen. (rtd.) Mohammed Babagana Monguno — seems to prioritize is the fight to stop the leakage of information about massive corruption, running into the equivalent of many billions of dollars, in the purchase by senior military officers of major military capital goods and military consumables, including the troops' own food.

And now details of even more extensive corruption in the non-military sector are touching directly on the family and close acquaintances of Pres. Muhammadu Buhari.¹

Significant military setbacks hit the Government's forces almost daily. On December 27, 2018, for instance, two military bases in north-eastern Nigeria were attacked, and mobile *Boko Haram* fighters briefly seized the outpost of the Multinational (Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon) Joint Task Force (MJTF) in the fishing town of Baga, less than 10km from the border with Chad. Baga was overrun, with several hundred civilian casualties, and thousands of residents forced to flee to the Borno state capital, Maiduguri.

Boko Haram completely sacked a naval base at Mile 3, some 5km from Baga, killing one naval rating. Nigerian troops were forced to withdraw and, according to the official statement, “the terrorists carted away gun trucks, ammunition and multiple rocket launchers from the base”. Troops from the two bases withdrew to another naval base at Fish Dam on the shores of Lake Chad, the military source said, adding that they decided not to pursue them to avoid running into an ambush, a strategy *Boko Haram* often employs against the military.

Two days earlier, on December 25, 2018, 14 Nigerian Army and police personnel were killed in an ambush by *Boko Haram*. And whereas Nigerian military use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) has failed to give the Nigerian Government forces any advantage thus far, now the *Boko Haram* insurgents are themselves using UAVs. The supply lines and general logistical support from abroad — nominally from DI’ISH (Islamic State), but actually often engaging assets of the intelligence service of Turkey, MIT (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*) — have grown stronger.

The pending 2019 election of a new Government seems set to prove the undoing of a significant number of generals, admirals, and air marshals who lost the war because they concentrated solely on using the conflict as a way to boost defense budgets, which they then, to an overwhelming extent, stole. The level of panic among the senior leadership has now reached the point where senior government, military, and national security staff have been attempting to suppress — through assassination and intimidation — the members of the official commission of enquiry established by Pres. Buhari, when he first took office, to investigate defense procurement corruption.

But then, on December 18, 2018, the level of desperation took yet another turn.

Former Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and onetime Chief of Air Staff (CAS) Air Chief Marshal (rtd.) Alex Badeh, 61, was shot dead while returning to his farm along the Abuja-Keffi Road. This time, however, it was not one of the commission members searching for the details of the corruption who was the target. It was one of the suspects. His driver was injured in the attack, and a friend kidnapped.

ACM Badeh was facing prosecution for allegedly misappropriating N3.9-billion (some \$10.7-million at official rates) while in office during the Goodluck Jonathan Administration which had preceded the current Buhari Administration.

On December 26, 2018, two “local highway bandits” were arrested and charged with the attack. Indeed, the abducted friend of the Air Chief Marshal was released a few days earlier after a ransom payment, believed to have been in the millions of *naira*. However, given the upsurge in momentum by “the highest levels of government” to stop the findings becoming public from the corruption commission on defense procurement, it is plausible that the attribution of a criminal “kidnapping-attempt-gone-wrong” against the Air Chief Marshal was a convenient excuse to ensure that the victim — Badeh — could not divulge in court the pattern and details of corruption which has grown even more rampant in the current generation of defense leadership.

On September 3, 2018, the retired Chief of Administration of the Nigerian Army, Maj.-Gen. Idris Alkali, was also killed, ostensibly by a gang of youthful protestors who set up a roadblock near Jos, the capital of Plateau State. His body was discovered on October

31, 2018. And his death was blamed on “an irate mob”, who were protesting in the Du-ra-Du community against the September 2, 2018, killing of 11 members of their own community.

On October 19, 2018, *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, in a report entitled “Nigeria’s Tortuous Path to its Presidential Election, but With No Surprise Ending: Buhari Goes”, noted:

[T]he Buhari Administration’s very controlled (and largely unproven) campaign to address corruption still has not taken into account the report prepared by the commission established by Buhari himself to investigate corruption in military procurement, to the point where it has totally compromised the Nigerian Armed Forces’ ability to address the *Boko Haram* conflict. One rear admiral on the commission was threatened, and subsequently murdered². The secretary to the commission was attacked with gunfire in his car, but survived, and it is known that members of the President’s staff have made it clear that all of the commission’s members would, if possible, be killed in order to suppress the findings of the commission.

The conduct of the war in the north is tied to the corruption in the military, and Buhari — ringfenced by his own team — is unable to tackle the issue. His poor health does not help, but he had always (even as a military President, taking office on December 31, 1983) been indecisive and vindictive. This ongoing set of characteristics mean that the coming months will be dramatic, even more than the dying days of the preceding Administration of Pres. Goodluck Jonathan.

It is significant that Pres. Buhari, who received the findings of the commission as much as a year ago, has refused to allow it to be made public and he, through National Security Advisor Monguno, has attempted to have the commission disband. However, it is believed that Monguno and Pres. Buhari are aware that copies of the report are beyond their reach and could be released unofficially if further attempts are made to assassinate commission members.

The commission, investigating defense procurement from 2007 onwards, made significant strides which were initially accepted by the Buhari Government, until the scope of the inquiry went beyond the period relating to the former Government of Pres. Goodluck Jonathan, and began to show corruption patterns extending into officers still serving under Pres. Buhari. Former National Security Adviser Col. Sambo Dasuki (rtd.) was largely blamed for misapplying and overseeing the theft of funds. Former Chiefs of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal (rtd.) Alex Sabundu Badeh (who became Chief of Defence Staff), Air Marshal Mohammed D. Umar (rtd.), and Air Marshal Adesola Amosu (rtd.) were similarly indicted and were ostensibly being prosecuted by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Leadership newspaper reported on November 13, 2017: “Although more military and other government officials were indicted in subsequent reports of the Committee, yet little has been heard about the Committee or its reports as no action has been taken on the indicted persons for over a year now. It appears the Committee and its reports have silently been killed or, as Governor [Peter Ayodele] Fayose [former Governor of Ekiti State] puts it recently, ‘have been swept under the carpet by the APC Broom.’” APC, the

All Progressives Congress, is Pres. Buhari's party. Not insignificantly, Ayo Fayose, a member of the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP), had, by October 2018, become the target of political retaliation by the Buhari Government, which sought to charge him with financial crimes.

No significant economic or political progress can be achieved in Nigeria until the issue of the *Boko Haram* insurgency³ is resolved. Other insurgencies are also expected to emerge, or re-emerge, particularly in the Niger Delta. And while other pending internal security issues are important, it is on the BH issue that the prestige, credibility, and reliability of Nigeria is assessed by the international community. Thus, all questions of the viability of Nigeria as a candidate for inward foreign direct investment (FDI) and international cooperation are dependent on a resolution of the BH issues. Domestically, resolution of the BH issue is a pre-requisite to enabling issues of intra-Nigerian regional equity imbalances to be addressed. Moreover, the credibility of the Federal Government as an arbiter of justice is assessed by the domestic electorate and the world community.

Footnotes:

1. The opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP), on November 27, 2018, called on Pres. Buhari to drop his re-election bid because of his (and his associates' and family's) alleged involvement in the acquisition of shares in the telecom company, 9 Mobile, and in Keystone Bank. The campaign office for PDP candidate (and former Vice-President) Atiku Abubakar said: "The PDP Presidential Campaign challenges Pres. Buhari to explain how his family members came about the sum of N1.032-trillion (some \$2.75-billion) for this scandalous acquisition."
 2. Rear Admiral Daniel Ikoli, the Fleet Commander, Western Naval Command, Lagos, was assassinated on April 5, 2017, after being privately threatened to stop working on the commission probing corruption related to defense procurement deals.
 3. And other insurgencies or terrorist operations, some related to *Boko Haram*, such as Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and some possibly inspired by BH, and others reflecting other geosocial issues related to areas of Nigeria.
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