

TERRORISM: Imperative to Protect Soldiers, Military Institution

As the Nigerian Army conducts the 91 Regular Recruits Intake for tradesmen and women, the Federal Government, particularly the Defence Headquarters, must take strategic action that will drastically reduce, if not end, the vulnerability of military personnel to free attack and killing by terrorists and other hardened criminals, especially in the northern part of the country. This necessity has become crucial to prevent a situation where young and eligible Nigerians begin to perceive the military profession as a death sentence, and become scared or reluctant of joining the armed forces because of the regularity with which security personnel are killed in the ongoing war against terrorists.

There is no doubt that the military has been dealing decisive blows to the terrorists in pursuit of their (military's) resolve to terminate insurgency in the country. Yet, extermination of terrorists does not impact on the ordinary citizens, who detest them anyway, as the killing of courageous soldiers. While it is given that wars, particularly one against insurgency would normally occasion casualties on the two warring sides, the belief in many quarters is that the terrorists would not have succeeded in killing soldiers if certain steps had been taken, including the use of technology to track the movement of terrorists to uncover their ambush plans. It is believed too that there are moles in the army working for terrorists and undermining military's planned action. Some experts have said the easy way the country loses its security operatives from attack by terrorists and other hardened criminals signals weakness of the security architecture. It is distressing, and certainly not good for the image of the military; it portends possibility of many more Nigerians becoming vulnerable to the callous actions of terrorists groups. This unfortunate situation must be reversed quickly to encourage serving military men and new recruits.

Going by the army's advertisement, the current recruitment would run from March 30, 2026 to May 27, 2026 with the application being free and to be submitted online to the destinations advertised by the military authorities.

There were media reports recently of the killing of no fewer than 11 soldiers and a police officer in an ambush by terrorists in the Giro Musa community, Shanga Local Government Area of Kebbi State. The incident occurred when security operatives traced the terrorists to a construction company's yard following a tip off. The soldiers that were deployed to secure the site and the police officer were ambushed and killed by the terrorists. What Governor Nasir Idris who visited the Accident and Emergency Unit of the Federal Teaching Hospital, Birnin Kebbi, where the victims were admitted could only do was to describe the attack as unfortunate and barbaric. There was also a chilling and sad report that series of assaults on military formations and highways across Borno and Adamawa states left at least 56 soldiers dead and 28 others seriously injured between January and March this year.

A breakdown of the unpardonable killings indicates that on January 4, terrorists ambushed troops along the Damasak-Kareto road and killed six soldiers while five other security officers were seriously wounded. Barely two weeks after, on January 19, a suicide bomber hit the notorious Timbuktu Triangle, killing five soldiers. Also on January 23, eight soldiers were killed in Damasak town, and another five were sent to early grave in Wajirko village along the Maiduguri-Dambo-Biu

road on January 29. Report further indicated that six soldiers were killed on February 6 in Auno, near Jakana, and ten days later, terrorists attacked a military base in Cross Kauwa village, Baga Local Council during which they murdered eight soldiers and wounded 23 others. In Adamawa State, three soldiers were killed at Garaha military base in Hong Local Government Area on February 24, and four days later, four more soldiers were killed at Mayanti base in Bama Local Government Area of Borno State. On March 4, nine soldiers were killed in the Ngoshe community, Gwoza Local Government Area, and another soldier was killed in Konduga on March 6. Barely three days later, on March 9, terrorists struck Kukawa Local Council again, killing one soldier. These killings tend to overshadow the many battles that the army had fought and won against the insurgents. Being a soldier is very stressful and the military profession is replete with serious risks including some that are very extreme. A very common challenge is the physical danger that the security personnel face in combat zones, including injury and death from enemy fire, explosives and environmental hazards.

Soldiers are defenders of Nigeria against external aggression, and maintaining her territorial integrity, among other similar tasks. However, soldiers are also citizens with families and life ambitions. Like every other citizen, the constitution is against killing them unjustly. They deserve to live and it is possible to ensure that they live irrespective of the fact that they have chosen to be in a profession that exposes them to danger and death. That fact is the more reason they should be specially protected from the enemy. The country is not safe when the army is easily vulnerable. It is therefore not acceptable to hold, as some political leaders do, that the killings are politically motivated and that the madness would end after the coming elections. Such argument is unfortunate and amounts to callous disregard for human life, the same crime terrorists are perpetrating. The failure of the country's leaders to give effect to the constitutional declaration of security and welfare as the primary purpose of government is becoming more palpable. It is very disappointing. The Nigerian Army must never be allowed to be humiliated and overwhelmed. Killing of soldiers as a routine occurrence reduces the country's integrity and put soldiers' families in everlasting sorrow, apart from stoking the fear of anarchy that can put Nigeria in jeopardy. To prevent this, the government must wake up to its constitutional responsibility of ensuring safety of life and property in the country.

It is despicable that the country is at a point where every armed group is daring the government, launching savage attacks on troops and defenseless civilians, and getting away with the heinous crimes. This terrifying situation is capable of making young Nigerians to shun performance of crucial civic responsibilities, including recruitment into the military, no matter what juicy remuneration they are promised. Insurgency of any type must be fully addressed and criminals stopped. This is the way to protect soldiers from routine slaughtering, and this is what can guarantee a united and peaceful Nigeria in the future.

Culled from the Guardian Newspapers