



# **Mutiny, Desertion and State Response in the Nigeria Armed Forces and its Implications**

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## **Abstract**

There is a growing number of mutinies and desertions within the rank and file in the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN). While these acts have attendant implications on the military architecture and spiraling incidents of insecurity in the country, there is still a paucity of scholarship in this regard. This article examines the triggers of mutiny and desertion within the AFN, state response and implications on the AFN and national security. Using documentaries, media reports and self-made videos by some of the actors, the article finds that mutiny and desertions are ways of protests and that they are caused majorly by low morale, poor welfare, job dissatisfactions, and corruption and in spite of the state responses through disciplinary approach, the acts of mutinies and desertions have continued thereby having profound implication on the morale of the AFN, civil-military relations as well as the general insecurity across the country. The article concludes that desertions and mutiny have and will continue as a result of the response by the state which focusses on discipline and non-disclosure at the expense of the overall welfare, needs and satisfaction of the members of the AFN. The article recommends among other things the need to address the causes of mutiny and desertion.

*Key words:* Mutiny, Desertion, Armed Forces of Nigeria, Terrorism, Human Rights, Banditry

## **Introduction**

Nigeria has succeeded and received international recognitions for sending military expeditions for global peacekeeping efforts. (Akinboye 2013; Akinyeye 2014). Ironically, all is not well with Nigeria as she cannot protect her citizenry as enshrined in the Constitution (FRN 1999), as a result of numerous insecurity challenges bedeviling the State. These ranges from banditry, kidnapping, cultism to terrorism (Agbibo 2013; Thompson, Afolabi & Abdulkabi 2019). These have not only reached a frightening level but they

have led to wanton loss of lives, property, displacement and food insecurity. Some scholars have associated these spates of insecurity to Nigeria's distorted security architecture (Ball and Fayemi 2005), state fragility (Tonwe & Eke 2013), and politics of the elite (Iyekepolo 2018). While there has been some elicited interest on insecurity in Nigeria, a major weakness in the literature is that many efforts have not been spent from the prism of the military institutions, responsible for protection from external aggression.

This article examines the triggers of mutiny and desertion within the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN), state response and implications on the AFN and Nigeria's insecurity. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative approach was employed. The paper is divided into the following structures: the introduction, theoretical underpinnings, conceptualization and literature review, an understanding of the Nigerian State, its Armed Forces and its challenges, reasons for mutiny and desertions in the Nigerian Armed Forces, State Response, Implications of Mutiny, desertions and state response on national security and conclusion.

### *Theoretical Underpinnings*

The study adopts the Expectancy Theory of job satisfaction and the Relative deprivation theory of conflict. The Expectancy theory was proposed by Victor Vroom of Yale School of Management in 1964. Vroom (1964) stresses and focuses on outcomes, and not on needs unlike Abraham Maslow and Frederick Herzberg. The theory states the intensity of a tendency to perform in a particular manner is dependent on the intensity of an expectation that the performance will be followed by a definite outcome and on the appeal of the outcome of the individual. His theory primarily relates to motivation within a work environment (1964: 76-80). That is, if the employee is given the opportunity to make a job related choice, he would mostly choose what motivates him. And this will in turn increase his efforts at work when the reward has more personal value to him. The model assumes that motivation is a function of three components: an effort- performance expectation that increased effort will lead to good performance [expectancy], a performance outcome perception that good performance will lead to certain outcomes or rewards [instrumentality]; and the value or attractiveness of a given reward or outcome to an individual [valence] (Okojie 2001:143). One of the advantages of the theory is that it provides a framework for understanding how motivation operates.

The relative deprivation theory is often attributed to American sociologist, Robert K. Merton, whose study of American soldiers during the World War II revealed that soldiers in the

Military police were far less satisfied with their opportunities for promotion than regular Ground Infantries. The theory formally defined as an actual or perceived lack of resources required to maintain the quality of life such as food, activities, material possession etc. to various socioeconomic groups or individuals within those groups have grown accustomed, or are considered to be the accepted norm. It implies unequal distribution of political, social, and economic wealth. Put differently, people who feel that they are being deprived of something considered essential to them will organize or join social movements dedicated to obtaining the things of which they feel deprived.

In Runciman's (1966) analogy of a how deprivation works, he states that 'if a person does not have something, that person knows other people who have the thing; that person wants to have the thing; and that person believes they have a reasonable chance of getting the thing' Gurr (1970) argued that people would become dissatisfied if they have less than they should and could and that such dissatisfaction leads to frustrations and then rebellion against the real or perceived source of their deprivation, which are usually violent. And as Agbiboa (2013:76) points that such violent actions flourish within the context of grievances caused by relative deprivation. The theory is significant to this study because apart from explaining the rationale for conflict, it also sheds light on the reasons people including soldiers could mutiny or desert their groups.

### *Mutiny and Desertions: Conceptualization and Review*

All human beings have a way of communicating their grievances through different ways including protests. Protests are usually as a result of dissatisfactions with the state of being and humanity. Protests have not only gained local recognition, but also international law backing. Though, the United Nations Human Rights Commission substituted the word 'protest' for 'peaceful assembly' (Lanza 2019), most states including developed democracies abhor such assembly. It is even more objectionable within the military. Dwyer (2015) argues that while military mutiny is an act of collective

insubordination in which troops revolt against lawfully constituted authority, it is also a way of communicating unjust treatments and should be accepted rightly so. For Johnson (2018), military mutinies are observable acts committed by military actors with the intent to display indiscipline towards leadership in an effort to revise the status quo. Nonetheless, law enforcement agencies and the military are usually banned from any form of mutinies in Africa and most developing democracies. The implication is that soldiers must obey all commands, whether it is right or wrong. As Parsons (2003) puts it:

Mutiny is usually a capital offense because it represents a direct challenge to lawful civil authority over the armed forces. Without civil control, soldiers can easily devolve into a predatory threat to the very societies they are charged to protect (2003: 3).

On the contrary, Wolfendale (2009) argues that if undeniably the military is professional, then it should be able to disobey certain commands based on professionalism—individual and institutional without necessarily usurping the civilian authority. Supporting this assertion, Carson (2019) asserts that the notion that soldiers must blindly follow orders is inaccurate, since obedience is fundamental in any democratic milieu. Powers (2019) opine that timing differentiates between desertion and absent without leave (AWOL). By this, he meant a military officer can be called a deserter if established that he/she has been AWOL after one month. Nonetheless, socio-psychological issues such as moral grievances and fear, disaffection, identifying with local protesters, government repressive tendencies, political influence, gender, and sexual orientation policies among others are some of the factors that lead to desertions in the military (Hollister 2011: 6-8; Koehler, Ohl & Holger 2016; Albrecht & Koehler 2018; Grewal 2019).

In Africa, literature shows that pay and racial discriminations led to desertions and mutiny among colonial soldiers (Baynham 1989). For instance, a report from the Archives of the Institute of Current World Affairs (1964) points to pay and racial discrimination as the major

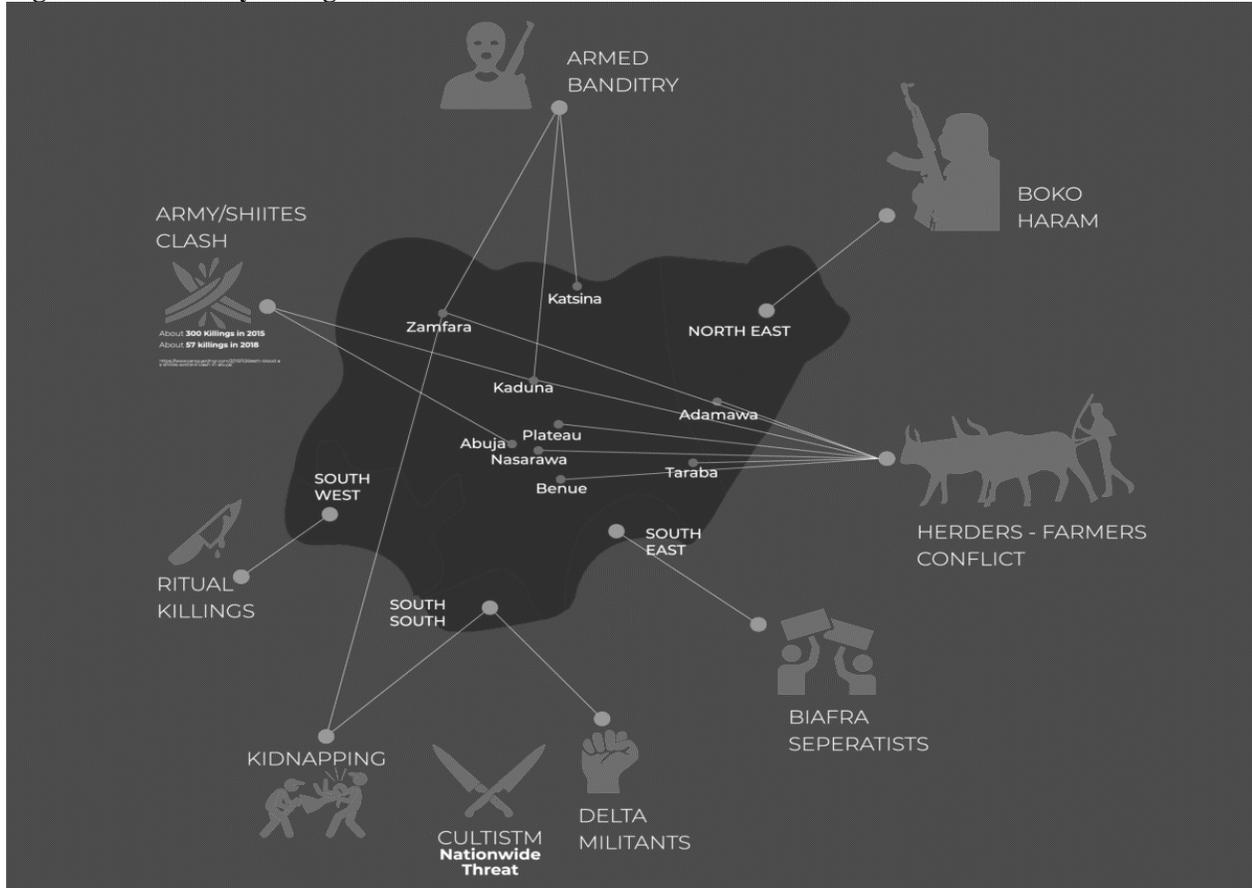
causes of the Tanganyika revolt between African soldiers against their European officers. However, these factors are not exclusive to the colonial era. Johnson (2018) gave a long list of causes of mutinies in colonial and post-colonial African states to include racial discrimination, low morale, sabotage, high handedness and failure of the state to listen to grievances, delay in electoral transition programmes, spiraling violence and deaths, poor wages and welfare/working conditions, refusal to pardon accused officers in human rights violation, shocking conditions in war front, poor leadership, conscription policy, sexual orientation, exhaustion in war front, pervasive corruption in the high command, pay dispute, ethnicity, government refusal to obey conscription agreement, demobilization, among others (2018:167-193). While researching on Nigeria, Johnson (2018) specifically identified issues such as the pay and allowances saga in Akure, Ondo State in 2009, soldiers being outnumbered by Boko Haram in February 2014, death of colleagues in May 2014 in Maiduguri, inadequate resources and poor strategy as some of the causes of mutiny and desertions within the Nigeria Armed Forces over the years (2018:194-195). Of importance is the effect of Information and communication technology (ICT). The ICT has further transformed the way people including deserting and mutinying soldiers' express their grievances. For example, they could easily use the social media including going live on air, and blogs. As Hosllister (2011) wrote, "electronic technologies such as e-mail, blogs and social networking sites have dramatically altered how we communicate. The proliferation and perceived indispensability of these technologies have further raised questions about whether limiting political dissent is feasible" (2011:12).

#### *Understanding Nigeria, the Armed Forces and its Challenges*

Since 1999, Nigeria has enjoyed a seamless democratic transition, however, its processes have been marred with violence, apprehension and recriminations (Idada & Uhumwuango 2012; Fasakin 2015). Consequent upon which has led to incessant insecurity across the country, ranging from banditry, terrorism, cult violence to

ritual killing (Campbell 2014; Thurston 2016; Thompson, Afolabi & Abdulkadir 2019).

**Figure 1: Insecurity in Nigeria**



**Source: Hassan 2018**

Figure 1 shows the spiraling incidences of insecurity across the country. These challenges have led to sapping of the country’s treasury and international image, loss of property, food insecurity, malnutrition, livelihood, lives—including those of civilians and even the military. To be sure, the *Jama’tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad* (Boko Haram) has claimed about 40,000 lives; banditry has claimed about 9,000 lives, farmer-herders crises has claimed about 10,000 lives, campus and off-campus cult related killings have claimed more than 10,000 lives and other crimes such as kidnapping, communal clashes, pipeline vandalism and rituals have all claimed about 6,000 lives, while more than two million people have been displaced, about seven

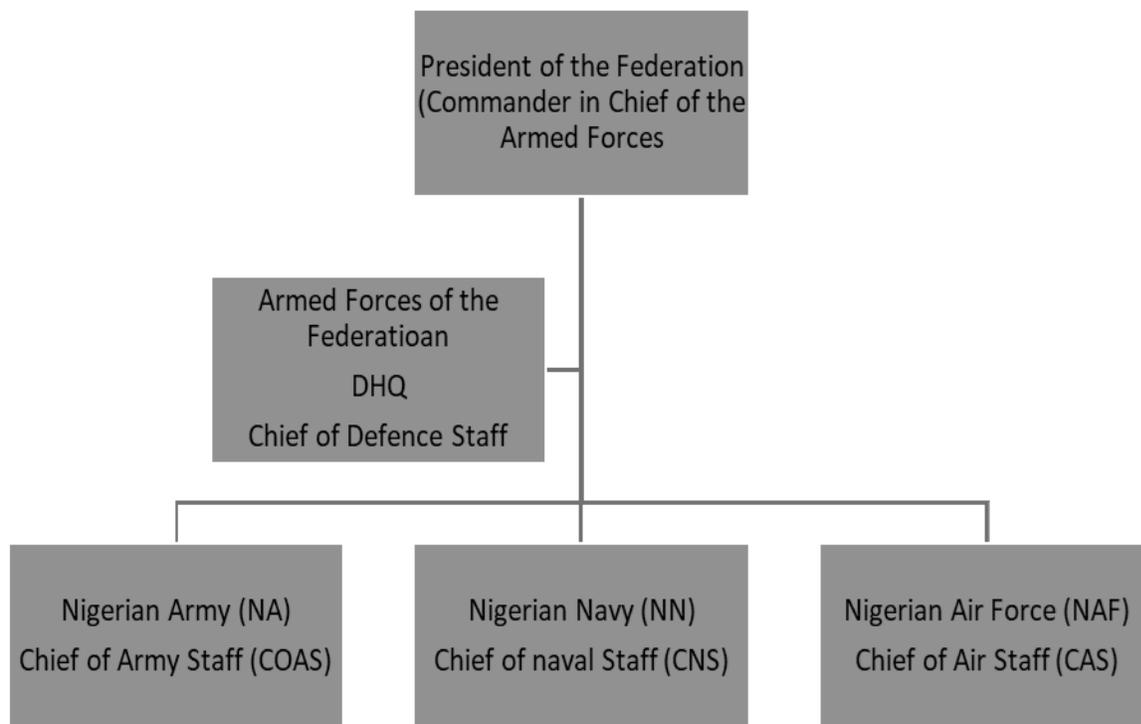
million people are in need of urgent life-saving assistance (ICRC 2016:14; Musa 2019; BBC 2020; Campbell 2020; Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2020). All these account for almost about 70,000 lives lost.

One institution that has been called upon to intervene in most of these insecurities is the Armed Forces of Nigeria comprising of the Army, Navy and the Air Force. The Armed Forces of the Federation traces its history to the British Colonial era (Falola & Heaton 2008: xvi). The first objective of the Colonial Army was to protect British interests centred around the exploitation, suppression and absolute control of the colonial state. Before independence in 1960,

the Navy and Air force components were added. Though attempts were made before independence to also reform the Nigeria Armed Forces, these attempts were short-lived by the country's independence in 1960 and like many post-colonial institutions, the Armed Forces failed to disengage itself from the colonial mentality,

thereby marred with corruption, unprofessionalism and hysterical decadence (Quedraogo 2014: 14-31; Bailie 2018). Consequent upon which led to an array of coups and counter-coups (Dummar 2002: 85; Dibia 2005: 1110-1113; Siollum 2009; 2019).

**Figure 2: Organogram of the Armed Force of the Federation/ Security Chiefs**



**Source:** Author Compilation

Figure 2 is the component of the Armed Forces of Nigeria and their leadership, also known as service chiefs. The President of the Federation is the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. The Constitution of the country is clear on the workings of the Armed Forces of the Federation. It states that,

- The Federation shall, subject to an Act of the National Assembly made in that behalf, equip and maintain forces as may be considered adequate and effective for the purpose of;
- a) defending Nigeria from external aggression;
  - b) maintaining its territorial integrity and securing its borders from violators on land, sea or air;

c) suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the president, but subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly (FRN 1999:217[2]).

In spite of these laudable provisions, the Armed Forces is confronted with many challenges. These challenges have however snowballed into the recurring insecurities which many have linked to state fragility or failing-weak state syndrome (Tonwe & Eke 2013; Thompson, Afolabi & Abdulbaki 2019: 307-312). These have culminated into a spate of mutiny, desertions and involuntary resignation within the military in

recent times. Though the Act establishing the Armed Forces provides a window for voluntary resignations and channels of reporting grievances, these seem to have failed.

### **Method**

The article adopts a qualitative research methodology. Media reports, feedbacks from social media posts relating to the subject matter, verified videos of confessions made by military personnel were used. The use of video confession in social research has not only become commonplace but has also become germane in recent times as a result of the wide use of the new media by the public and in light of technological advances in producing, viewing and storing moving images ((Rosenstein & Sheva 2002; Erickson 2011; Haw & Hadfield 2011; Social Media Research Group 2016). These videos were subjected to content analysis. The adoption of the social media and video content also becomes imperative owing to the non-disclosure principle of the Armed Forces which might make getting data unrealizable. Additionally, comments of concerned Nigerians on social media seems to be devoid of bias as these users see the internet as an avenue to pour out their minds.

### **Results**

#### **Why Soldiers Rebel and Abscond?**

##### *a) Poor/Untimely Release of Funds*

The former Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Tukur Yusuf Buratai stated that the Nigeria military is not only hindered by non-timely and non-release of funds, but also overstretched as a result of its presence and operations in tackling various insecurity challenges such as terrorism, kidnapping, cattle rustling, pipeline vandalism, communal clashes and other forms of insecurity in 32 of Nigeria's 36 State (Oyedele 2017). The Minister of Defence, Bashir Magashi also identified manpower shortage and inadequate funding (Ailemen 2020). Meanwhile, the Senate Chairman on the Army, Ali Ndume, representing Borno-south senatorial district of Borno State, while appearing as a guest on Channels television 10pm news on 21 July 2020 stated that only 50 percent of the allocation of the Armed Forces for 2020 was released as at the time he made the

appearance. In spite of the overwhelming evidence that Nigeria's Military gets one of the largest chunks of the annual budget in the last decade, little improvement has been shown on the country's security (Eme, Ani & Oji 2019; Abiodun, Asaolu, & Ndubuisi 2020) as the issue of under-funding still resonates within its corridors.

##### *b) Ill Equipment and Loss of Morale*

In May 2014, troops of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, Maiduguri, Borno State angered by the loss of their colleagues as a result of inadequate and obsolete weapons and lack of intelligence which led to their ambush, mutinied against their General Officer Commanding (GOC), Major General Ahmadu Mohammed (BBC 2014a). Additionally, some of the accused soldiers who refused to retake the three towns of Delwa, Bulabulin, and Damboa during their court-martial, stated that their actions were necessitated by the failure of the Armed Forces to provide them with adequate and necessary support equipment. They further reported that owing to inadequate equipment, they lost three officers, 23 soldiers and 83 others suffered various injuries after their units were ambushed by Boko Haram fighters in an attempt to retake Bulabulin in July 2015 (*Premium Times* 2015). A former Chief of Defence Staff, Air Vice Marshall Alex Badeh, during his handover ceremony in 2015 stated that he supervised an Army which lacked morale and was ill-equipped to prosecute the war against Boko Haram insurgents. As he puts it, "...for the first time, I was head of a military that lacked the relevant equipment and motivation to fight an enemy that was invisible and embedded with local populace (George 2015).

Some of the consequences of ill-equipment is mutiny and desertions. A report stated that "some units lament the delays in getting weapons and supplies when their detachments are under attack. Regrettably, these have been met with warnings by the authorities against soldiers accused of abandoning their duty posts when faced with insurgents" (Olojo 2018). Some political gladiators, scholars and insiders have associated the continued Boko Haram insurgency with the United States' refusal to sell Nigeria high caliber weapon (Thompson, Nwaorgu, & Boge 2016;

Jonathan 2018: 35-36). But even when these challenges have been identified, the authority did not act. Hence, the soldiers take an aggressive form of registering their resentments through the social media. In a video which purportedly went viral towards the end of December 2018, a soldier cladding an AK-47 rifle, among some soldiers walking in a remote location shared similar concern—inadequate weapon. As he stated in a mixture of English language and pidgin English:

Omo many men done fall o. So, we just gast to go house. If Army is ready, if Nigeria is ready to fight them, they should call us back. We will fight those idiots. But we don't have enough weapon, no adequate weapon to fight them. So we can't just be wasting our lives. We have families. But without weapon, we are not a soldier. Weapon makes us to be soldiers. Let them provide the weapon, and we shall fight the idiot out (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiTmjlnyXMk>).

In March 2021, it was also reported that 12 officers and 89 soldiers deserted their duty posts as a result of poor weapon. It was further reported that the soldiers absconded from duty in protests after insurgents attacked their camps in Marte and Dikwa Local Government Areas of Borno State, leaving scores of their colleagues dead (Ayitogo 2021).

Another issue is loss of interests/morale leading to mass resignations. In spite of the efforts of the Defence Headquarters to curtail the acts by suspending approvals for voluntary requests to resign in April 2020, the cases continued to surge (Ogundipe 2020). To be sure, it was reported that from 380 soldiers who applied for voluntary disengagements in July 2020, 356 cited loss of interests, while 24 stated that they wanted to take a traditional title (Aluko 2020). Some of the reasons given by the soldiers who applied for voluntary disengagements identified poor weapons, unimproved allowances and continuous loss of soldiers to Boko Haram as the main cause of their loss of interests and lack of empathy they keep seeing from their top commanders (Ogundipe 2020).

*c) Poor Welfare, Saboteurs and Poor Intelligence*

In September 2014, about 400 soldiers were reported to have fled to Cameroun following an attack by Boko Haram in Nigeria's territory which left their base and comrades dead. Even after the incident came to the limelight, the Nigeria Armed Forces denied such incident and stated that it was only a tactical maneuver (Kindzeka 2014). With such blatant denial, the families of affected families reacted angrily to the blatant denial of the Armed Forces which they assumed should take responsibility to address the issue. This resulted in a protest by wives of some soldiers who not only decried the poor welfare and saboteurs within army, but also queried what becomes of them if their husbands died in the war against terrorism. As one of the protesting women told a British Broadcasting Corporation correspondent:

Now [the army] want to send our husbands to Gwoza and we said 'no.' Our husbands have been fighting Boko Haram for six years now. If they get killed or injured, the [the army] will not take care of us (BBC, 2014a).

In 2016, it was reported that troops of the 21 Brigade in Bama, Borno State also mutinied against the General Commanding Officer (GOC), Major General Victor Ezegwu over poor welfare arrangements and alleged deceit by the GOC, after fighting for days without food (Ogundipe 2016). It was reported that food and water shortages was rampant in the military base. While a soldier was entitled to an operation of \$125 per month, the troops were regularly shortchanged through bogus deductions which entered private pockets, leading to low morale (Anyadike 2018). In 2019, 22 soldiers, including an Officer were reported to have deserted their post after intense attack by Boko Haram, which also led to the death of many of their troops (Ogundipe 2019a).

In an exclusive video obtained by an online newspaper in May 2020, some soldiers could be heard lamenting their near-death experiences and loss of their military vehicles and weapons during an ambush by Boko Haram terrorists. They accused the leadership of the Nigeria Army of abandoning them to die in the bush and only sending in jets to pick their corpse after the insurgents must have had a field day (*Sahara*

*Reporters* 2020;  
<https://t.co/Xc7KvRQPVT.pic.twitter.com/qANpYGSk6c>).

One Lance Corporal Martins Idakpein of the Nigerian Army in a viral video made on 22 June, 2020 also narrated how some clerks in the Nigerian Army corruptly siphon- and delay gratuity and pensions meant for late soldiers.

*d) Poor Logistics and Absence of Relief Plan*

The issue of logistics has to do with the deployment of soldiers based on the needs and threats in affected areas in order to get assistance such as ammunition, food supplies, personal effects etc. so that they can successfully persecute the war. It also involves relieving some soldiers who wished to get some rest or attend to some rites at home having overstayed in the battle front. However, failure or slowness to get these done by the Armed Forces have transcended into mutinies and desertions. For instance, when some soldiers were deployed to reclaim Marte, Borno State, under the control of Boko Haram in August 2018, they claimed that they had overstayed and were not trained to engage in ground battle, but rather to provide air defence (News Agency of Nigeria [NAN]] 2018). It was further revealed that the soldiers were afraid because they learnt that no fewer than 30 soldiers who were earlier sent to the town were killed within three days after arriving the town due to the heavy rainfall, fatigue, and obsolete equipment as compared to the terrorists who had a mastery of the area and who were better equipped (Daniel 2018).

In July 2020, a soldier from the 202 battalion in Bama, Borno State reportedly shot his commander, Lieutenant Shehu Ngorgi Babakaka multiple times because he did not grant him pass to enable him to see his family after more than three years of being on the battlefield and also to resolve his inability to access his salary account which had been frozen for about eight months. A source stated that though one could apply for a pass after three months, but the problem was that the superiors usually denied the subordinates from enjoying such privilege owing to shortage of manpower (Adepegba 2020). Though it was widely held that the culprit was suffering from

psychological trauma, no doubt that it must have been caused or/and aggravated by the sad conditions being experienced in the battlefield.

*e) Corruption and Intimidation from Military Leadership*

Corruption is one of the major concerns of not just the military but the Nigerian State. Feldman (2008) posits that corruption has also affected Nigeria's role in international peacekeeping in the African Union. He continued that corruption is so rampant that any funds allocated to its military was significantly larger than what was usually required due to graft (2008:270). It is one of the major impediments to Nigeria's overall development (Okonjo-Iweala 2018; UNODC & NBC 2019). Corruption has also been identified as one of the major hindrances to countering Boko Haram insurgency and military effectiveness (Banini 2020). Consequently, it has been identified as one of the triggers of mutiny and desertions. In a video believed to have been shot in Matele, Borno State in November 2018, one could hear some soldiers lamenting on their conditions and level of corruption in the prosecution of the war against insurgency. From the hazy and amateur video, a soldier was heard saying:

They are using us to make money. Are we not human being? This is what Nigerian Army has been doing. If Boko Haram weapon could penetrate M-RAP, what of human being? We are 147 now, they want to come and waste us--It is a lie! Our blood is not here. Our people are using us to make money. Federal Government interfere in all this place. Interfere! Interfere!! Interfere!!! These people are killing us too much. Federal Government interfere on us (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wVIq3wmtBc>).

Additionally, five soldiers detailed from the Infantry Corps Centre Jaji deserted the Army after absconding with a large amount of cash amounting to about one billion naira corruptly acquired by an officer considered to be a very important personality (VIP). Detailing the

rationale behind such act, Ogundipe (2019a) stated that:

The soldiers acted in a breach of trust. However, this is the outcome of soldiers seeing huge financial transactions being carried out by their principal but were not taken care of financially themselves. The soldiers have decided to abandon military work in order to settle down with the money (Ibid).

The above reflects the fundamental question of disloyalty arising from corruption and neglect of soldiers by their commanders. The issue of loyalty has been well captured in the Nigerian Army Forces Act (2005), which states that those who are placed in the position of authority must be loyal to their subordinates, representing their interests, have faithful dealings with compliance thoroughly and developing the abilities through progressive training. It concluded that loyalty must however be mutual and earned. Contrarily, most of the Officers, in the Army do not keep to this creed. To be sure, Lance Corporal Martin Idakpein recalled how he, like many soldiers fighting the Boko Haram insurgency has lost hope in the country based on the way he is being intimidated by his superiors, including the service chiefs, minister of defence and the national security adviser, Mohammed Babagana Monguno (Ogun State Television 2020; <https://youtube.com/watch?v=nuANgLDzXB0>). Similarly, a naval rating, Seaman Haruna Goshit narrated what transpired between himself and his commander, Rear Admiral I.O. Mohammed in a video made on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2020. In the video, Mr Haruna recalled how he was being maltreated as a slave, denied promotion, humiliated and that these have reduced his morale. He further stated that in spite reporting the case to the Naval Headquarter, no action was taken against his superior (Oshoko 2020).

### **State Response**

The response of the Nigerian State and the Armed Forces to mutiny and desertions has mostly been through court-martialing and ultimately, death. In August 2014, Director of Defence Information, Major General Chris Olukolade warned soldiers that deserting the military was not just a crime but an act of terrorism. Even in spite the fact that he

understood the conditions under which the soldiers were fighting he said:

And for welfare and for equipment, there has been incremental development to ensure that issues involved are addressed and it should not be an excuse for anybody. It is an act of gross indiscipline and is not expected of any serious, good soldier' (*News Agency* 2014)

In May 2014, 12 of the 18 soldiers who mutinied against General Mohammed were sentenced to death in September 2014. The nine-man committee, headed by General Chukwuemeka Okonkwo stated that while the sentences were subject to confirmation by Nigeria's military authorities, there was no doubt about the seriousness of the offence. The panel affirmed that it considered the likely effect on such mutiny on the war against insurgency and its implications on national security (BBC 2014b). Similarly, 54 soldiers of the 7th Division, based in Maiduguri who were deployed to retake three towns (Delwa, Bulabulin and Damboa) held by Boko Haram in August 2014 and had refused were also sentenced to death in December 2014 (*VOA* 2014). The prosecuting counsel, Captain Nwosu argued:

My Lords, as very senior officers, you are aware that the (Nigerian Army) is not a conscript army. Joining the NA [Nigerian Army] is a voluntary act and if a service personnel feels he cannot cope, there is a procedure for discharge which these soldiers are familiar with. The NA is not an organisation with a trade union where members down tools to protest poor wages or poor working conditions (Tunji 2015).

While the above may be right about voluntary service, it would have been ideal if the soldiers were provided with the necessary tool to discharge their duties. Any wonder then that the defense counsel, Barrister Femi Falana protested that the charge as it was presented violated the soldiers' constitutional and human rights to fair trial and so should be quashed. Although the court-martial passed a death sentence on the accused, the chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai, after review and recommendations commuted the death sentences to 10years imprisonment for each of the soldiers

(Aluko 2020). The Armed Forces also inaugurated a panel headed by Brigadier General J.M. Chima to court-martial 24 soldiers on allegations of cowardice, running away from the operational areas in the North-East, and disobedience to instruction in February 2016 (Punch 2016). The soldiers who refused to be redeployed at the Maiduguri Airport were also arrested and court-martialed. One question that has elicited interests is how the Army continue to address these issues through disciplinary measures without providing adequate tools and environment for the soldiers to thrive. For instance, the COAS, Lt Tukur Buratai while addressing some journalists stressed that whoever was found guilty of mutiny or desertion would face military justice no matter how highly placed the person or persons were (Daniel 2018). Eight soldiers who were accused of abandoning their duty post during a Boko Haram insurgents attack on 157 Task Force Battalion, Metele village in the Guzamala Local Government Area of Borno State in November 2018 were also dismissed from service in July 2019. While the dismissed soldiers gave their reasons for deserting their duty posts to include inadequate weapon as against the enemy and inability to get timely air cover, the panel did not consider these (Adeniji & Aluko 2019). As a source contended that:

It was glaring that the soldiers are ready to continue to defend their fatherland with their remorseful manner during the trial. They should have been de-ranked, imprisoned or handed high labour. Their dismissal is too harsh. I urge the army authorities to look into the matter (Adeniji & Aluko 2019).

It must be noted that demotions, dismissals, among others have always been some of the punitive measures of the military, death sentence is still meted. The justification of the Armed Forces is that the death sentence had put a stop to the idea of desertions in the military. The Acting GOC 7<sup>th</sup> Division, Brigadier General Abdul Khalifa reiterated this at the inauguration of the court-martial for the trial of 70 soldiers in 2019, that, 'acts of cowardice, desertion, un-soldierly and other forms of indiscipline have no place in any army executing war' (*PM News* 2019). A former commander of Operation *Lafiya Dole* (restore peace), Brigadier-General Olusegun

Adeniyi whose viral video of March 2020 requesting the Defence Headquarters to change some of its obsolete and poor equipment was court-martialed in July 2020 and subsequently demoted for three years in December 2020. He was charged for violating a Military policy on the use of the social media, Section 15 (g) which prohibits personnel from 'posting any video, audio, materials pictures during exercises/operations' (Haruna 2020). While this may be justified as a result of the existing policy, the Army sometimes go beyond its lines. For instance, wife of Lance Corporal Martins Idakpein, Victoria Idakepin was arrested and detained for nine days because of the video her husband made. Such abuse carried out by the Nigerian Army has garnered condemnations from individuals, civil society organisation, the Diasporas, and even the legislative arm of government. To be sure, the national Assembly condemned the act, promised to investigate the causes of mass resignations and also begun the process to not only rescue Lance Corporal Martins Idakpein, but to also invite him to give his testimony before a special house committee (Baiyewu & Folarin (2020). However, the outcome of the committee has not been made public up till the time of writing this article.

On the other hand, while the military high command has stated that it would investigate the allegations made by Navy Seaman Haruna Goshit against his Commander (Oshoko 2020), nothing has been heard or made public as at the time of undertaking this study. These responses from the Nigerian Army also have implications on the fight against insurgency and insecurity in Nigeria.

### **Implications**

Mutinies, desertions and state responses have implications on national security including on the ongoing war against insurgency in the country. First, these have an implication on practice. Low morale and untoward dispositions of the military ranks towards one another has become rife leading to mass resignations of soldiers rank and file who once adore the profession. This has led to the publications of videos to show their displeasures with the military high command and the Nigerian State as a whole. In no time, such

mutiny may take the form of coups as even Lt General Buratai had warned on several occasions. But the potency of such warnings where there are ethnic divisions and distrust among the military elites and the soldiers may be put to tests as there are beliefs that some ethnic and religious groups are intentionally sent to fight the war in order to decimate their population, while some regions are spared from being posted to the theatre of the war (Obiezu 2020). Unchecked mutiny may be setting precedence for new and future recruits and conscripts. Since there is no clear channel of communication where grievances are aired, poor management may become the new vogue and this may have a lot of negative effect on prospective fighters. It has been established that there is a further divide among Nigerians online as a result of labelling certain ethnic and religious groups as breeders of terrorism, which has an overall implication on the fight against terror (Chiluwa & Odebunmi 2016). For example, when an ex-soldier allegedly stated in an unverified video that he was shot by some of his colleagues from northern extraction on purpose because he killed too many Boko Haram members, here are few reactions from Nigerians on a social media platform:

Nbote(m): We know na...Most of d soldiers in d frontline are just sacrificial lambs

Richiemcgold: Nigerian army and terrorists are like 5&6...If you know you know

HITdemUP: Yet we have some people still defending this government

Oz4real83(m): While our security men are being killed, demoralized and many are resigning from the forces, our govt is busy releasing captured terrorists back to the society, claiming they have been “deradicalised” Instead of investigating increasing allegations like this, the complainants are being court-martialed. We are not surprised why insecurity is increasing. Our government can stop terrorism if they desire but the profitability in it is what they don’t want to miss

Righteousness89(m): The Ex-Soldier is not far from the truth! The Military has definitely

been compromised in Boko battle. It’s unfortunate, because many young men have been wasted for this. They can fool and deceive men but no one can DECEIVE God

TANTUMERGO007: Nigeria is not worth dying for

Donyfrank: I was just looking at my elderly friend with pity for him to support his son to join Nigerian army. Whenever he come to work, I will be asking him, “have you heard about your son recently”? Every time, his son will be calling, telling him how they are fighting. Well, the son get mind, but I pity the man. *Mgbe obula, ochiri obi na aka---*he is always full of anxiety.

Kadas01(m): Unfortunately, there are “so many northern terrorists sympathisers” in the Armed Forces, police, Intelligence/Counter-intelligence Units as well as Paramilitary/Law enforcement Units of this country! Everywhere is compromised by these extremists posing as “Patriots”! Nigeria is sitting on a keg of gun power!! This is not a joke (*Nairaland 2020*)

The above responses from the social media attests to the fact that many youths who had the fervor of joining the Armed Forces having seen some of these videos, which has revealed the ongoing war in the north east are now reluctant not only to join the army but worried about some law enforcement agencies and the Nigerian question. This reflected in the campaign against police brutality (#EndSARS) and a better Nigeria which swept across the country in October 2020 (Uwazuruike 2020; Ojewale 2020). Secondly, State response to mutiny and desertion has implications for Nigeria’s foreign partners and even the international community. In other words, the issue of human rights abuses as a result of state response may determine how other countries relate with Nigeria. For example, the US has continued to deny Nigeria military hardware as a result of its allegation of abuses by its military despite successive reforms (Thompson, Nwaorgu and Boge, 2016). Third, mutiny can become a basis of propaganda for the insurgents. The response of the Nigerian Army to

mutineering soldiers through court-martial and harsh sentencing may also spur the insurgents. For instance, Abubakar Shekahu has been shown on various mediums mocking the Nigerian Armed Forces for sending ill-equipped soldiers against his group (Audu 2015). It must be noted that while the State does not want to encourage spill-over effect of mutiny and desertion from the point of weakness, harsh responses from the state also has negative implications. As Lance Corporal Martins stated that he was ready to die so long as his objectives of exposing the rot in the Nigerian Army were made known to the general public. Such zeal, knowing the consequences of his actions shows that when a man is pushed to the wall, they usually disregard any consequences of their actions.

Furthermore, mutiny, desertion and state response also have implications on youth unemployment, insecurity and loss of lives. Deserting soldiers, no doubt exposes their colleagues, posts and the country's already porous borders to attacks from the insurgents. Following state responses through dismissal, these soldiers leaving the Army most times do not have any other skills other than to kill. Hence, their joining the unemployment bulge further constitutes a lot of threat to the society. Also leaving with service weapons may end up in wrong hands and increase illegal weapon or small arms and light weapon in circulation. Any wonder then that some of these soldiers have been apprehended and fingered in kidnapping business and armed robbery operations (*Agency Report 2019*). Moreover, mutiny, desertions and state responses have implications on civil-military relations. At various for a, the military command has protested that the public have continued to hoard information needed to further decimate the insurgents, thereby leading to intelligence failure. In fact, Lt Buratai once stated that only Nigerians can end insurgents whenever they want to. But such accusation is justified because the civil society do not trust the military especially how it handles the Boko Haram insurgency. Be that as it may, some positives can be taken from the issue of mutiny and desertions as an in-depth understanding of the causes may assist policy makers, and stakeholders to identify, rectify and modify all loose ends in order to end insurgency and reduce the spate of insecurity in the country.

## **Conclusion**

The article finds that mutiny and desertions are ways of protests in the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN). It further revealed that they are triggered by ill-equipment, obsolete weapons, loss of interests/morale, poor welfare., saboteurs, poor intelligence, attack by enemies, poor logistics, absence of relief plan, corruption and intimidation from military commanders. The article showed that state response to mutiny and desertions through punishments by death, dismissals, reduction in ranks and imprisonment has not reduced the act as soldiers and even officers engaging in mutinous acts and desertions, particularly through the use of new technology—social media which are posted online as the new means to get their grievances known. The triggers of mutiny and desertions and the state responses have both negative and positive implications for practice, international image, propaganda and general insecurity. The article concludes that desertions and mutiny have and will continued as a result of the response by the state which focusses on discipline and non-disclosure at the expense of the overall welfare, needs and satisfaction of the members of the AFN.

Since mutiny and desertion are tied to expectancies from the job as well as relative deprivations of the needs of the deserters and mutineers, the article recommends among others, the following: First, government should make sure that it provides the necessary enabling environment for the members of the Armed Forces to thrive. This can be done by investing more on intelligence and crime prevention and early warnings as well as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) so that the Armed Forces can develop its weapons, rather than relying on foreign aid which can negatively affect its national security. Secondly, there must be a periodic feedback mechanism to address internal grievances. Third, there is need for genuine military reforms, implementation and evaluation that reflects the true nature and yearnings of recruits, and prospective candidates. Forth, there is need for the elite to exhibit the political will to address these triggers of mutiny and desertions. Fifth, recruitment into the military rank and file should strictly be on merit. The

chain and unity of command should be fine-tuned to allow a seamless flow of communication and there should be synergy among the security units to expedite swift responses. Sixth, modern technology and equipment should be deployed to tackle insecurity and Nigerians in Diasporas should be involved in the fight against insurgency. More so, funds should be released on time and a trust fund can be created so that the Armed Forces of Nigeria can have other sources of funding other than the national treasury. Seventh, the military should purge itself of saboteurs, especially those who are sympathisers with criminals and insurgents. Eight, all features of state fragility including unemployment, poor economy, human right abuses among others should be addressed and the fight against corruption should be holistic. Ninth, local and other law enforcement agencies should be duly funded to confront internal crises so that the Nigerian Army can effectively tackle insurgency. Finally, Nigeria should partner with other foreign countries including sub-regional forces to assist her in prosecuting the war against insurgency.

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