

A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT SERIES

How Chief of Defence Staff, General AG Olonisakin Has Actualized President Muhammadu Buhari's vision of a Combat-Ready Armed Forces of Nigeria

Not a few Nigerians today believe that the nation is reaping the gains of President Muhammadu Buhari's diligent selection of the present crop of highly patriotic, energetic, selfless and competent military service chiefs led by the Chief of Defence Staff, CDS, General Abayomi Gabriel Olonisakin.

The CDS has left none in doubt about how the Armed Forces of Nigeria has been strategically refocused and repositioned to carry out its constitutional duty of ensuring national security, stability and unity in the face of daunting challenges.

Gen. Olonisakin's vision of leading a well-motivated, professionally-trained and strategically-equipped Nigerian armed forces that is responsive to national security commitments has underpinned the synergy, intelligence and information-sharing mechanism of the Muhammadu Buhari Administration's counter-terrorism strategy.

Consequently, Boko Haram's stronghold in the North East has been decisively dislodged while militancy, crime and criminality in the Niger Delta and other security threats in other parts of the country are being successfully tackled.

Over 20 different military operations are being simultaneously conducted across the country in pursuit of the president's pledge to tackle every form of insecurity in the land while there have been unending calls for military presence in other parts of the country that are gripped by fears of banditry, a development that has incrementally validated the CDS-driven vision of inter-agency synergy among the service chiefs and heads of other security agencies in the country.

Since his appointment as the 16th Chief of Defence Staff by President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, Olonisakin has displayed a unique leadership style that has meaningfully promoted effective co-ordination of the Army, Navy and the Air Force while also forging workable strategic partnerships with other security agencies to achieve common national security goals. He has tirelessly piloted the affairs of the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) in a manner that has successfully driven and actualized the President's laudable vision of a professional and combat-ready Nigerian military.

Top on the list of his achievements is the pragmatic manner he has adequately mobilized the Armed Forces of Nigeria to galvanize the nation's internal and external security in combating terrorism and insurgency as well as pursuing a comprehensive purchase of military hardware and software.

In a determined effort to address the contemporary and emerging security

challenges in the country, the Muhammadu Buhari Administration moved to adequately equip the armed forces. The DHQ procured huge military hardware and other vital equipment including house boats, air boats, operational and non-operational vehicles, night vision goggles, communication equipment and accessories as well as composite rations for mobile operations.

Worthy of special commendation is the collaboration of DHQ with some indigenous maritime stakeholders to develop the Epenal gunboats which have proved to be very effective in the Niger Delta operations. This equipments have greatly enhanced the operational effectiveness of own troops and reduced the attacks on oil installations in the Niger Delta thus improving the economy of the nation.

The DHQ has also made concerted efforts to enhance the capacity of Defence Industrial Corporation of Nigeria in the production of Army ammunition locally as well as collaborate with indigenous companies to produce Mine Resistant Armoured Protected (MRAPs), other AFVs and ammunitions of different calibre to address the challenges currently experienced in acquiring equipment and platforms overseas.

There has been a vigorous pursuit of policies that have enhanced the general welfare and wellbeing of serving and retired personnel. It is worthy of note that gallant troops and deserved members of the Armed Forces have been promoted to the next higher rank as encouragement for their selfless services to the nation.

Recently, the Armed Forces Council headed by President Muhammadu Buhari approved the Harmonized Terms and Conditions of Service (HTACOS) for Officers, Soldiers, Ratings and Airmen across the three services. For the new allowances, a comprehensive Manual of Financial Administration for the Armed Forces of Nigeria was approved for armed forces on November 9, 2017 to take effect from January 2018.

Significantly, the activities of the President of the Defence and Police Officers' Wives Association, DEPOWA who is the wife of the CDS, Mrs. Omobolanle Olonisakin have given great effect to personnel welfare through the execution of projects and programmes with far-reaching gains across the services.

The apex welfare-oriented Association has built, furnished and fully-equipped the DEPOWA Skills Acquisition Centre at Asokoro, Abuja to enhance the training of personnel's families and members of the public in vocational and information technology. It has also conducted series of enlightenment campaigns within and outside the barracks on critical matters of health, social and family.

DEPOWA has also been foremost in humanitarian activities within the period under review through visits to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps as well as motherless babies' homes and widows of fallen personnel across the nation thereby sustaining, stabilizing and encouraging troops' families.

Tremendous efforts have been made by the Buhari Administration to reposition the

Armed Forces to confront emerging security challenges and criminalities in the country simultaneously manifesting as terrorism, farmer's clashes with pastoralists, killer-herdsmen, pipeline vandalism, crimes, armed banditry, cattle rustling, border clashes between communities, kidnapping, ethno-religious conflicts, trans-border criminal activities, amongst others. These security challenges undoubtedly pose grave threats to the social, economic and political stability of the country.

The DHQ under the leadership of General Olonisakin therefore launched specific military operations to address them. Consequently, the Armed Forces of Nigeria have been effectively engaged in various operations and exercises across the country. They are periodically reviewed from time to time to handle emerging challenges. They include Operations Lafiya Dole, Harbin Kunama, Gama Aiki 1&2, Iron Force, Sharan Daji, Ayem Akpatuma or Cat Race, Delta Safe, Safe Haven, Safe Conduct, Mesa, Last Hope, Dokaje 1 & 2, Crocodile Smile, Python Dance, Whirl Stroke, TsareTeku and Ruwan Ruwa, among others.

Operation LAFIYA DOLE is a counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operation against Boko Haram Terrorists, especially in the North East States of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. Operation SAFE HAVEN was conducted in Plateau, Bauchi and Kaduna States to address incessant ethno-religious and herders/farmers clashes. Operations AWATSE and DELTA SAFE were set up to combat illegal bunkering and theft of crude oil, cultism, armed banditry and kidnapping in the Ikorodu area of Lagos state and Niger Delta respectively while Operations DOKAJE I & II were mounted to combat kidnapping and armed banditry along Abuja- Kaduna Highway.

Operation SHARAN DAJ I, on the other hand, was established in response to cases of cattle rustling and armed banditry in the North Western part of the country. The DHQ continued to review the strategies of these operations, injected new equipment and specially trained troops to enhance their efficiency. These efforts have substantially improved security and restored peace and order in different parts of the country.

The DHQ has effectively sustained troops in these internal security operations spread across the country as well as the peace support operations under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS].

At the international level, the DHQ has played vital roles in many sub-regional and continental Peace Support Operations such as the ECOWAS Military intervention in Liberia (ECOMIL) and ECOWAS Military Intervention in Guinea Bissau (ECOMIG). Others are Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in MALI (MINUSMA) and United Nations, African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).

It is worthy of mention that the leading role by the Armed Forces of Nigeria in the

ECOMOG operations led to the restoration of democracy in the Gambia. The DHQ rapidly deployed 200 members of the National Mission Force, air and Naval platform as well as logistics to sustain the force in Gambia in collaboration with other ECOWAS member-States. These external operations have promoted democratic governance and regional stability within the ECOWAS sub-region and other African countries.

The activities of Boko Haram Terrorists (BHT) in 2015 had assumed a frightening dimension with series of Improvised Explosives Devices (IED) attacks across the North-Eastern part of the country and the other contiguous states. Boko Haram was also in control of 21 out of 27 Local government areas in Borno state as well as some communities such as Madagali, Uba and Mubi in Adamawa and Buni Yadi in Yobe States. The insurgent group also enjoyed freedom of action and were able to carry out attacks on military locations and soft targets within most parts of the affected areas.

The upsurge in the scale and frequency of the violent attacks in the North East necessitated the President Buhari-led administration to quickly initiate measures to revert the ugly trend. There was need to reclaim the lost territories as well as restore peace and civil authority. To achieve these, the CDS and top military chiefs took major actions such as strengthening Operation Zaman Lafiya and the entire counter terrorism and counter insurgency operations in the North East for greater efficiency.

Accordingly, the DHQ re-invigorated and reorganized the operations and injected new platforms. The operation was also renamed Operation Lafiya Dole to re-fire the zeal, resolve and commitment of troops to defeat the BHT. In addition, the command and control centre was moved from Abuja to Maiduguri.

A distinguishing feature of the Gen. Olonisakin dispensation in the DHQ is the new facelift which the DHQ is presently wearing. Located behind Radio House and overlooking the expansive International Conference Centre in the heart of the capital city of Abuja, the premises of the DHQ otherwise called the ARMED FORCES COMPLEX which houses the headquarters of the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Air Force now looks tasteful and magnificent in beauty, aesthetics and ambience, courtesy of the high sense of taste of the well-travelled CDS.

Personnel training and re-training under his charismatic leadership is outstanding and unprecedented. Through a robust regime of fiscal prudence and discipline, the Defence Headquarters has been able to implement a highly remarkable policy of aggressive capacity development of officers especially in the aspect of special warfare.

It has trained 469 Special Forces in Pakistan and additional two teams in Jordan and South Africa in 2017 to enhance the operational effectiveness of the formations involved in the campaign. These Special Forces have made tremendous impact on the war against BHT in the country.

The DHQ has continued to build the professional and intellectual capacity of its officers and soldiers. Several officers and soldiers have attended seminars, workshops, conferences and courses overseas to enhance their capacity in areas such as counter terrorism, counter insurgency, leadership, logistics management, media operations, special forces training as well as routine professional courses.

Similarly, local military institutions such as the National Defence College, Armed Forces Command and Staff College and the Armed Forces Simulation Centre have been upgraded, equipped and appropriately staffed to enhance the quality of their output. Also, the DHQ is coordinating the curriculum of the war colleges recently established by the services to cater for operational level officers. These institutions have continued to produce quality graduates and have witnessed increased subscription from other nations.

As former Commandant, Army Corps of Signals who is conversant with contemporary space science and telecom technology, he initiated the establishment of the Defence Space Administration (DSA) to collaborate with NIGCOMSAT and NASDRA to develop satellite capabilities for use by the AFN. The DSA has successfully acquired and installed the VSAT equipment to provide top political and military leaders a platform for an on-the-spot assessment of troops' activities and conduct in the theatre of war. The DSA has also pioneered the training of cyber warriors to frustrate the DHT efforts at recruitment and subsequent radicalization of Nigerian youths via cyber space.

In the last 3 years, the Armed Forces of Nigeria Radio Station [AFNRS] has been substantially upgraded for higher efficiency. The station was refurbished with new state-of-the-art equipment to enhance wider reach equipped with mobile application and live-streaming capabilities thereby extending its signals to Europe and other parts of the world. With this development, the AFNRS has continued to serve as a veritable tool for promoting cordial civil-military relationship as well as for countering negative narratives against the AFN and the country.

The DHQ launched Operation Safe Corridor to de-radicalize, rehabilitate and re-integrate repentant ex-BHT fighters. The operation is a joint multi-agency humanitarian programme involving the Federal Government, security agencies, law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organizations. It has facilitated the release and reintegration of 750 men, women and children as well as aged men from Giwa Barracks Detention facility in conjunction with their various State governments after being cleared of any connection with terrorism. It has discharged and reintegrated 101 radicalized ex-Boko Haram Terrorists while another set of 159 are in camp due to graduate soon.

The DHQ also established a Joint Intelligence Fusion Centre (JIFC) to coordinate the intelligence cells of the three services and other security agencies operating in

the North East. This has enhanced the intelligence architecture of the operation and collaboration amongst security agencies as well as international partners.

In the same vein, there has been increased military collaboration amongst the Lake Chad Basin area in the onslaught against the BHT. The Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJ TF) has been re-organized and strengthened to effectively combat the BHT across the sub-region.

The Headquarters of the MNJ TF was relocated to Ndjamenana while more troops and equipment were injected into the force. This effort has continued to yield positive results and enhance cooperation among troop-contributing countries which has led to the significant degrading of the BHT within Nigerian territory and in the sub-region. Consequently, most of the areas previously held by BHT have been recaptured and are now held by own troops.

Under the leadership of General Olonisakin, the DHQ has embarked on infrastructure development projects across the country in the last three years. For example, it renovated many barracks and office accommodation in several barracks and formations across the country apart from building new accommodation for officers and men and providing amenities in the barracks such as the National Mission Force (NMF) barracks.





In 2017, it constructed 8 blocks of fully furnished flats for 156 soldiers and their families in Mambila Barracks, Abuja.



Similarly, a new Officer's Quarters comprising 7 blocks of fully furnished 108 apartments with Wi-Fi internet and intercom facilities were constructed in Mogadishu Cantonment Abuja.



The new quarters were named Muhammadu Buhari Quarters in recognition of the tremendous transformation which the Armed Forces of Nigeria has recorded in the last 3 years of President Buhari's Administration.

Essential amenities which have been provided in the barracks across the country in the period under review include roads, water supply, rehabilitation of schools and hospitals as well as power supply. Another landmark achievement of the DHQ in the area of infrastructure is the development of the National Mission Force Barracks at Bida, Niger State.



The first phase of the project comprises residential accommodation as well as NMF and Battalion headquarters, armoury and magazine as well as training facilities such as obstacle course and shooting range. It also includes the rehabilitation of the Officers' Mess, road construction as well as power and water supply. The first phase of the project is about 80 percent completed. The second phase is expected to commence soon.

The second phase comprises the construction of additional residential quarters,

roads, helipad and parade ground as well as the fencing of the barracks. These efforts have gone a long way in addressing the problem of acute shortage of accommodation for AFN across Nigeria thereby boosting personnel's morale for improved operational efficiency and effectiveness.

The Defence Headquarters under the dynamic leadership of General Olonisakin has effectively navigated the Armed Forces of Nigeria on a successful course in spite of the myriad of security challenges across the country. It is therefore fit and proper to conclude that the military has done its best to live up to expectation in the face of daunting challenges.



The months ahead suggest more challenging moments for national defence and security managers as the nation gears up for general elections next year.

Notwithstanding, the management of the nation's defence architecture being driven by the team led by the CDS, General Olonisakin has proved to be capable of effectively keeping the country safe, secure and stable.