



TERRORISM

Nigeria's protracted battle with Boko Haram

Chiefs of defense staff from Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon and a senior military official from Benin have been meeting in Lagos to draw up strategies to defeat the militant Islamist group Boko Haram.



A market in Maiduguri after a suicide bomb attack in March 2015

Nigeria's new president Muhammadu Buhari has made ending the Boko Haram insurgency a priority.

Meanwhile Nigeria's military has begun moving its command from Abuja to Maiduguri, where Boko Haram was founded and where it has carried out scores of attacks.

DW spoke to Adeniyi Adekoya, security analyst with the AKE Group about the Boko Haram threat and efforts to counter it.

DW: Don't you think that the move to Maiduguri could infuriate Boko Haram and lead to an increase in attacks on outposts or barracks and the population at large?

I don't think so. Since the last administration when there was a concerted effort to deal with the issue of Boko Haram, there have been a lot of gains. The military have cleared a lot of the territory there. What happens then is that Boko Haram resorts to suicide bombers. They are harder to deal with. But 90 percent of the people who are involved with Boko Haram are people who don't even know what they are fighting for. They are children who have been kidnapped, put into a situation where they don't have any say as to what goes on. So we would need a double pronged attack here. The first would be a military action with the idea of completely eradicating Boko Haram from Nigeria. The second would be to form a committee to deal with the social issues in those areas. A lot of brainwashing has been going on and there would be a need to talk to people and help them understand. First, you have to demystify Boko Haram and that has to be a concerted military action to rid them from the land. When that's done you can then start to deal with the issues of potential suicide bombers, who are mostly acting after

having been brainwashed.

The Nigerian army has been accused of human rights violations while conducting the fight against Boko Haram. What impact will an even stronger presence of the military in the northeast have on the population?

I think it will have a positive impact. You must understand that this is a joint operation with two other countries at the barest minimum. You also know that the president has just returned from the G7 summit and one of the major issues he was discussing was Boko Haram and I expect that there will be a lot of cooperation with western countries, especially G7 members in terms of intelligence sharing so there will be a lot of oversight in the manner in which the next series of attacks against Boko Haram happen. The modes of engagement will be clearly defined - if they are not already clearly defined - I do not expect that we will continue with these rights violations.

Do you really see things changing under Muhammadu Buhari? Under Jonathan there were many reports of rights violations against the population or Boko Haram suspects by the military, but not much was done.

We can only go by what he has said. And he has said in his maiden address to the nation that he will look into the issues that have been raised, especially human rights violations. He is setting up committees to look at the modes of operation the Nigerian army is currently run by. With time we will see if that is the case. But all indications seem to be that we will see improvements in that regard.

Boko Haram has carried out a number of attacks since Buhari came to power. Are these attacks meant to be a message to President Buhari or are they just a continuation of their insurgency ?

I don't think it's a message to the president. They have lost a lot of territory. Now they only thing they have to peddle is fear and fear allows them to continue to operate in some capacity.

And you believe the presence of the military command in Maiduguri will counter that fear?

Most definitely. Though moving the command is not necessary in order to engage in psychological warfare with them. The essence of the command is to ensure that we have a coordinated effort to rid Nigeria of Boko Haram.

Adeniyi Adekoya is an AKE security analyst

Interview: Chrispin Mwakideu

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