

**THE IMPACT OF NON-KINETIC, SOFT-POWER WARFARE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST
INSURGENCY IN THE NORTH-EAST OF NIGERIA: A CASE OF OPERATION SAFE CORRIDOR
PROGRAMME, (DRR) 2015-2020**

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Abstract

This research paper explores the significant impact of non-kinetic, soft-power warfare strategies in the context of counterinsurgency efforts in the North-East region of Nigeria, with a specific focus on the Operation Safe Corridor Programme spanning from 2015 to 2020. The study delves into the multifaceted dimensions of counterinsurgency, with a primary emphasis on the Disarmament, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DRR) framework. Through a comprehensive analysis of both secondary and primary data sources, including historical records, interviews, and program evaluations, this research sheds light on the transformative potential of non-violent approaches in mitigating the insurgency crisis. The findings reveal that the Operation Safe Corridor Programme has played a pivotal role in reducing violence, promoting sustainable peace, and fostering community resilience in the North-Eastern region. This paper underscores the importance of nuanced, context-specific strategies that prioritize deradicalization and rehabilitation, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Furthermore, it highlights the necessity of long-term planning and the tailor-made design of deradicalization methods to address the root causes of insurgency effectively. In conclusion, this research offers valuable insights into the pragmatic application of soft-power warfare in countering insurgency, advocating for the integration of non-kinetic strategies as essential components of comprehensive security measures. It reinforces the notion that addressing the underlying drivers of radicalization through programs like Operation Safe Corridor is indispensable for lasting peace and stability in conflict-affected regions.

Introduction

The Boko Haram insurgency has created a bitter mix of insecurity, killings and destruction of public property across the North East and even the North West region of Nigeria for over a decade. It is quite disturbing that the activities of the sect have led to the death of thousands of Nigerians added to the wanton destruction of public property. The activities of the sect happened to have taken the Nigerian Security Agencies (who have been accustomed to conventional warfare) by surprise. It was therefore not surprising that the military employed total kinetic force in the early years against the sect without achieving the desired end.

This led to a change in approach by the government and the Security Agencies, the change was demonstrated through the non-kinetic options involving but not limited to winning the heart and minds of the people through Deradicalization Rehabilitation Reintegration (DRR) programmes, in concert with negotiating with the insurgents towards pursuing the course of peace. Accordingly, the flagship of the government's Deradicalization programme came in the form of Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC). The programme was launched in 2015 with the core objective of giving repentant insurgents in the North East the opportunity to be reintegrated into the larger society should they lay down their weapons and denounce the sect and embrace peace. the initiative is a holistic approach comprising a joint and multi-agency humanitarian operation involving the military, security and law enforcement agencies, Government Ministries Department and Agencies (MDAs) multi-national and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs). It is being conducted under the guidelines of International Humanitarian Laws with strict adherence to the rule of law, (Musa, 2016).

It is worthy to also state that when the programme was launched at the end of 2015, it was a highly classified interagency collaboration between the Nigerian Military, office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), Nigerian

Prisons Service, National Drug Enforcement Agency, National Orientation Agency, National Emergency Management Agency, and Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, e.t.c

Evidence has indicated that DRR programmes are not a new approach to fighting terrorism and violent extremism as various countries of the world have employed the same tool; such countries included Colombia, Cambodia, and Saudi Arabia to mention but few.

Definition of Terms

Non-Kinetic/Soft Power Warfare,

The non-kinetic/soft power warfare approach usually refers to the use of non-lethal force to deal with terrorism. This has become imperative when one look. Non-kinetic actions are logic, electromagnetic, behavioral, such as computer network attack on an enemy, system or psychological operation aimed at enemy troops, but in recent times scholars and researchers have contributed a great deal of literature on complex warfare. It has also been carried out with the development and creation of new weapon with a simple yet complex objective which is to reduce mortality figures at any given time. The nature of the weapons have been coded or marked “non-lethal”.

Some of these weapons are used in a variety of context, ranging from in international to local armed conflicts in peace operations, policy operations, prisons and mental institutions, riots and boarder control, but in the context of counter-terrorism, approaches as the case maybe appeals more to the mind and heart in order to meet humanitarian demands and standards, with emphasis on the North-East of Nigeria, the question of the use of kinetic means thee use of minimum force in the military’s operation or the use of minimum of force by non-kinetic means, which implies the application of physical effects such as explosives, impacts and tactical maneuver, it also implies the involvement of soft power which are built on the principle of psychological, economic, cyber, intelligence and deceptive warfare.

Deradicalization:

Deradicalization is an attitudinal shift away from supporting violence as a means for achieving political and ideological goals. The process entails exposing the clients to psycho-social and psychological therapies, psycho-spiritual counseling, recreational activities, art therapies, drug use intervention and introduction to western education.

Rehabilitation:

The action and process of restoring ex-combatant health or normal life through a series of activities in the rehabilitation camp through vocational training and psche-therapies after admission into the camp.

Demobilization:

Demobilization is the action or process of releasing troops from active source, typically at the end of the war, the president offered the demobilization of the entire army.

Oxford dictionary describes it as the processing of removing weapons from the hands of the members of armed groups, taking these combatants out of their groups and helping them to reintegrate into the society, hence the processing of standing down the Boko Haram insurgency group from combat-ready status.

Reintegration:

On the 27th May 2022 in the Criminal Justice System, reintegration refers to the process of re-entry into society by people that have been in prison. It is a process of restoring elements regarded as disparate to unity and to everyday life. It is also seen as restoration to a unified state after it has been deranged by psychosis. Reintegration occurred when the targeted parties /groups agreed to change their practices and were then publicly commended for doing so.

Approaches Employed by the Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC)

Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) is a multi-agency non-kinetic scheme as earlier said established by the Federal Government (FG) in September 2015 under the strategic guidance of a National Committee headed by the Chief of Defence Staff [CDS]. Here the OPSC employed so many tactics in order to achieve their set goals, one of this is Non-Kinetic warfare Approach. The weapons used for non-kinetic/soft power warfare is called ‘non-lethal’ weapons. It could be further elaborated with these principal fields

- Psychological (Psch ops) it is aimed at undermining the enemy’s confidence morale and decision-making capabilities

- Economic warfare is aimed at degrading the enemy's productivity and prosperity
- Cyber warfare is aimed at penetrating, damaging or subverting enemy's I.T system.
- Cryptographic warfare, includes cryptanalysis (code breaking), it is aimed at intercepting enemy's communications while defeating any attempts to intercept your own.
- Intelligence operations, principally signals intelligence (sign) and human intelligence (HumInt) aimed at uncovering secret enemy capabilities or operations
- Deception by physical means using camouflage or dummies, or non-physical means i.e., bogus communication e.t.c this is aimed at misleading enemy's intelligence or getting into the decision-making loop.

Furthermore, it should be noted that while the kinetic warfare describes the physical nature or capability or weapons, the non-kinetic warfare describes how and where those weapons will be used.

Operation Safe Corridor [OPSC] is streamlined into two categories: "high-risk" and "low-risk" defectors, while the "high-risk" is to undergo prosecution, the "low-risk" are exposed to the de radicalization and demobilization and deintegration exercises [Felbeb-Brown 2018]. The OPSC programme is to expose the "ex-combatants or "repentant insurgents" to a 52 – week intensive exercise based on deracalization therapies, buy-in sessions, basic western education, citizen and civic education, counter narrative, religious education, vocational training for reintegration into the society. The reintegration exercise is usually carried out by the state of origin of the ex-combatants.

The objective of OPSC is to de-radicalize, demobilized/ rehabilitate and reintegrate willingly surrendered and repentant members of Boko Haram Terrorists and Islamic State of West African Province. [BHT/SWAP]. About four hundred sixty eight [468] staff were drawn by the National Steering Committee from the Armed Forces, Security and Law Enforcement Agencies as well as 13 other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to execute the programme. Activities of OPSC are guided by the rules and regulations spelt out. Since inception of the scheme, a total of Nine Hundred and Fourteen (914) ex-combatants otherwise referred to as clients have been admitted for the Deradicalization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DRR).

Members:

- ❖ Executive Governors of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states
- ❖ Honourable Attorney General of the Federation and the Minister of Justice
- ❖ Honourable Ministers of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development. (Gen. Shafa. 2015)

The DDR process are conducted are conducted by experts in various field from Nigerian Army [NA], Nigerian Correctional Service [NCoS], National Orientation Agency [NOA], National Drug Law Enforcement Agency [NDLEA], and social workers from Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development and counter ministries from Borno and Gombe States Clustered into a group referred to as Local Treatment Team [L.T.T], (DHQs)

The process entails exposing the clients to psycho-social and psychological therapies, psycho-spiritual counseling, recreational activities, art therapies, drug use intervention and introduction to western education as earlier mentioned in the text.

A total of about eight hundred and eight One [881] of repentant Boko Haram were admitted into the exercise / programme of which sixteen (16) were foreign nationals from Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republic(source) with the help of OPSC supporters, implementation partners and stakeholders such as Borno State Government, North East Development Commission [NEDC], Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], International Organization for Migration [IOM] and United Nations International Children Emergency Fund [UNICEF] made provision for immediate requirement for the DRR programme to commence as schedule subsequent positive responses and requirement were as follows.

Initial Documentation and Advanced Profiling

Entailed screening/ categorization, medical test / DNA sampling, capturing of biometric and obtaining background information from the clients, as would be seen in the discourse below.

Screening / Categorization

Exercise is carried out by psychologists, de radicalization, drug intervention experts and intelligence staff. At this stage, nationality and states of origin of the clients is determined. They are also categorized according to their risk levels.

Medical Test / DNA Sampling

During this exercise, the clients are subjects to a comprehensive physical and medical test by combined team from Federal Teaching Hospital [FTH] Gombe and DDR Camp Clinic. The objective of the medical test was to ascertain the health status of the clients with this series of discoveries were made which was very useful to the DRR, for example one of the clients was referred to Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital for further treatment (DHQs) more still, and their DNA samples were also collected and stored in DHQ DNA Laboratory.

Capturing of Biometrics

The biometrics of the clients were captured on National Data Bank Using the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) facility and also stored at DRR Camp Data Management Centre for future references. The clients were also issued with National Identity Card. NIMC also submitted a comprehensive list of all clients captured on national identity card data since the inception of the DRR programme.

Under De-Radicalization, the Advanced Profiling, include the getting of background information of how the clients get involved in the sects, family details and likely future intents were extracted from the clients. These were vital information necessary for effective management planning and reintegration process.

Psycho-Social Therapies

In this exercise, the clients were taken through various counseling sessions by social workers and counselors from the National Orientation Agency (NOA). During this session the clients are counseled on attitudinal change, national values, nationalism and national consciousness, they were also counseled on patriotism, good parenting peaceful co-existence and tolerance. The objective of Psycho-social therapies is to cultivate in them in the idea of positive thinking in them.



Psychological Therapies:

This exercise exposed the clients to various psychological therapies to ensure their mental and psychological stability that would be fit for a sound reintegration. Of course, the exercise is carried out by sound psychologists who are staff of OPSC

Psycho – Spiritual Counseling

Imams were hired from Gombe to engage the clients on true religious tenets in order to change the negative narratives they imbibed while in the bush. In order to reinforce the package, the clients underwent a rigorous 4 week counter-narrative package conducted by a consortium of clerics from across the North East under the supervision of the chief Imam as well as the Directors of Roman Catholic and Protestant Chaplain Services of the National Assembly.

Recreational Activities

OPSC sport therapists from the NA and NCOS engaged the clients on various sporting activities ranging from indoor to athletics in order to develop their mental and physical well-being. The clients also engaged in unique sporting activities such as football, volleyball, table tennis and jogging. Novelty matches are usually organized between the client's camp officials and some teams from Gombe State. All those are done in order to give them service belonging and to build up their self-confidence.

Art therapies: -

This is another interesting out-fit that the clients were engaged in the art therapists from NOA trained them in singing, drawing, acting drama and reciting poems in order to identify and develop their talents; have boost their morale and inculcate positive virtues in them.

Drug use intervention:-

Drug counselors from NDLEA engaged the clients on the danger of substance abuse and actually worked on those with the history of drug abuse

Introduction of Western Education:-

Majority of them could not read nor write in English language. It was observed that most of them could speak Kanuri, while few understand and speak Hausa Language hence Educationists from Nigerian Army Education Corps [NAEC], NCOS engaged the clients in simple spoken English and Arithmetic to counter Boko Haram Terrorists / ISWAP narrative against western education. At the end of the programme, the clients could read simple alphabets, numbers and solve simple arithmetic problems, can also construct simple sentences in English, more still could also recite the National Anthem and Pledge

Reintegration Process:-

Reintegration of the clients is long-term and systematic in nature. It is entirely the responsibility of the State Government as well as the traditional and religious institutions. However, OPSC ensures certain critical activities including stakeholders' visit to DRR camp, she ensures that family members and some prominent persons visits the camp in order to sensitize the clients this serves as community service.



Source: OPSC Album

Family Visitation

One of the critical requirements for reintegration as decided at the Stakeholders' meeting was the Family Visitation. Actually based on the background information provided during the Advanced Profiling, According to Administration, OPSC in conjunction with 10M traced clients' relations and organized them in groups to visit the camp along with community leaders in order to interact with their wards. The purpose of the family visitation is to give the clients sense of belonging and build their confidence while creating room for genuine reconciliation and eventual reintegration. The visits also afforded family members to appreciate the magnitude of the DRR programme. Notably, the objective of the visit was achieved as it was observed that the clients and their relations shared emotional moments, hence looking forward to a peaceful reunion after the programme.





Administrative of Oath of Allegiance

In line with the decisions of the Stakeholders’ meeting, a 12 man Quasi-Judicial Panel was constituted. The panel was headed by the Resident Judge, Federal High Court Gombe Division. Other members comprised of State government officials, traditional and religious leaders, a military lawyer and staff of the Federal Ministry of Department and Agencies. Here clients confessed their past, denounced their membership of the sect and swore oath of Allegiance to be loyal, obedient and responsible citizens



Issuance of Starter Packs

In line with the extant provisions of the stakeholders’ meeting, the NEDC provided the clients with starter packs containing various vocations they had learnt on the (DRR) camp. Due to the large sizes of the items, the starter packs were issued to the clients at the transition Centre in Maiduguri, though there was a symbolic presentation of the packs.

Graduation Process

As part of the line-up activities to the graduation, certain preparatory actions including oral examination final assessment, final medical test, documentation, provision of disposable items and arrangement for pick-up

Oral Examination and Final Assessment

In every study, there is always an evaluation. The DRR programme was not different hence the clients were made to face and Assessment Board Chaired by Heads of De-rad. Agencies. All these were to determine the level of comprehension and assimilating of the therapies trying to inculcate into them within a period of six months. However, at the end of the evaluation, the Board recommended about Six Hundred and One (601) clients for graduation of which 587 were Nigerians and 14 were foreign nationals see table below:

Serial	Nationality / State of Origin	Number of Clients	Remarks
Nigerians			
1	Adamawa	9	
2	Bauchi	2	
3	Borno	565	
4	Jigawa	1	
5	Kano	2	
6	Kebbi	2	
7	Plateau	1	
8	Sokoto	1	
9	Yobe	12	
10	Zamfara	1	
Foreign Nationals			
11	Cameroun	8	
12	Chad	5	
13	Niger	1	

Source: OPSC

Final Documentation:-

In order to ascertain the correctness of the details provided during the Advanced Profiling, the clients had to undergo another round of documentation prior to the graduation and issued the following documents:

- ✓ Copy of e-identity card
- ✓ Copy of signed Affidavit
- ✓ Certificate of Successful Completion of Vocational Trade
- ✓ Certificate of Successful Completion of the DRR Programme

Provision of Disposable Items and Take-off Grant:-

OPSC provides disposable items such as clothing, under wears, toiletries, bathroom slippers, sandals, and shoes why waiting for NEMA supplies. Each client was given a take-off grant of Twenty Thousand Naira (N20, 000.00) only.

Final Medical Test:-

The idea of conducting final medical test on the clients by the OPSC was quite recommendable as the findings displayed / showed / confirmed a remarkable improvement on the health status of each client.

The primary purpose any rehabilitation process is to prepare the clients for reintegration by engaging them in training in various vocations, Trainers or Experts from National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Nigeria Correctional Services (NCoS) engaged the clients in barbing, carpentry, cosmetology, laundry service, leather works and shoe making, tailoring, weaving and welding. The OPSC integrated into the Vocational Training Centre, farm housing poultry, fish pond and green house farm built by 10M for this purpose. Compulsorily, the clients tried their hands on crop planting and horticulture and they were also given a take-off grant at the end of the Deradicalization, Demobilization and Reintegration (DRR) programme.

See table below:

Serial	Vocational Training	Number of Clients	Remark
1	Barbing	101	
2	Carpentry / Furniture	20	
3	Cosmetology	70	
4	Laundry Services	30	
5	Leather Work / Shoemaking	95	
6	Tailoring	102	
7	Weaving (Zanna Cap)	30	
8	Welding	130	
9	Compulsory Farming	606	

Source: - OPSC



Source: OPSC Album





Source: OPSC Album



Source: OPSC Album

Impacts of the OPSC programmes in the North East

The idea of non-Kinetic warfare through OPSCs DRR programme is to offer low risk fighters a way out of extremist groups, but the programme was also criticized based on the high level of secrecy employed in the creation and implementation of the programme, hence gave birth to some short comings aside the paranoia the programme breeds to the community, are some of the notable challenges the OPSC in their DRR programme.

It is observed that there was no proper educational foundation orientation and communication of the philosophy of the programme to the general public in order to empower the civic spaces and voices so that they community (can) could be part of the conversation. This programme excluded the people and the affected communities from being part of the design of the philosophies that should be beneficial to them on a long term based on their peculiar needs.

Secondly clarifying the eligibility of who is to be radicalized seems to be a major grey area in the understanding of the DRR programme by the public. The terms and modalities for the selection of which the programme suites and the clear methodology for the implementation of the programme is often not understood. The general idea of amnesty and onward deradicalization seems to be an idea opposed by communities in the affected regions. This was properly due to lack of proper orientation to general public.

Thirdly, funding programme of this nature DRR, if it is to be carried out in a broader approach and in substantial period of time as the case may be, can pose a serious challenge towards achieving the primary purpose of it all. When one consider the time frame of 52 weeks allotted to the DRR exercise, it has appeared the programme was not designed to meet the individual needs of the ex-combatants that gives rise to implementing the “one fix it all approach”, method

applied in the camp. The programme duration of a maximum of 52 weeks is short for a therapeutic residency-based treatment, considering the dare experiences these ex-combatants were exposed to in the enclave of their sect, for a period of 5 -7 years. Ranging from ages 17, 22, 26, 32,40.55,60s some of them were victims of jungle law through amputation and other deadly punishments hence some of them may need longer period to recovery and some shorter-through the willingness to change can hardly be measured.

Fourthly, the reintegration of ex-combatants seems to be a stage which is yet to be clearly defined based on timelines, there are cases of delays of pickup by various state governments due to unpreparedness of welcoming them back into their communities by the locals. These can give room for redundancies and relapse tendencies which may set in, due to the gap and absence of activities during the period of anxiety and limbo. The account of wanting to stay back in camp by some of the ex-combatants can also be heard when they were asked on their expectation as they return home. These low risk detainees are released back into their communities without a clear follow-up mechanism. [Ibrahim Kofa 2014].

Conclusion

The paper has looked at the non-kinetic approach of the OPSC and its DRR programme. The country's decision to embrace the non-kinetic strategy seems to be a strategic step in the right direction. They are prospects as much as challenges. The purpose of the programme would be defeated if there is a perception problem from the larger society that is, if the DRR programme is seen as a reward for criminality or as a priority concern given to the ex-combatants. Thus, this move is actually looked at as a great oversight on the part of the government for not giving out a proper orientation on the OPSC programme to the public, civil society and community leaders. One may pause to ask, if the government is doing the right thing while are the victims of the insurgency attacks are still in the IDPs camp, why do we still have some as refugees in Niger Republic? There is the issue of transitional justice system especially to those that had been badly affected, Restoration Justice System should have been considered as people's farms, grains storage facilities were destroyed, livestock killed, thousands of people killed, about 93 Chibok's girls are unaccountable for, about 9 years now. Banditry which is an off-shoot of Boko Haram is on in the nation, some traditional rulers were dethroned and the ruling system scattered or destabilized, and many people are still in the IDPs camps as earlier mentioned, instead the terrorists were exposed to different vocational skills trainings.

However, the new initiative programmes – OPSC/DRR can record some successes in the near future. To a large extent, it has, one cannot completely de-emphasize the role of OPSC in the transformation of the insurgency in the North East of Nigeria. It is an approach counter of insurgency strives on 70% of non-kinetic warfare and 30% of kinetic approach. To a large extent there is evidence of surrenders, a total of about fifteen (15) thousands surrenders and have been undergoing DRR process, to some extent has helped but may not be hundred percent success since we still have people that are still on the ideology of the Boko Haram, Banditry is on the rampage presently in the country. Actually, there is evidence of mass surrender, there is also mass reduction of blast on soft targets and finally the Boko Haram recruitment has remarkably dropped.

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