

## **TROOP DISOBEDIENCE WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY**

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### **Abstract**

The military institution is structured in a manner that is meant to promote smooth flow of orders and instructions for implementation. Perhaps this is premised on the fact that time and disciplines are two critical variables that drive the military culture. Thus, this paper finds that in the theatre of operations, poor supply of equipment and lack of basic force projection and protection indices for soldiers could result in open or 'passive obedience' where troops' morale are either dampened or become an endless test on their patriotism and an albatross in their quest to defend the territorial integrity and citizens of their nation. This paper argues that for the best possible outcomes of combat efficiency to be gotten from field combatants, there must be an availability of the basic requirements that would aid the field combatants in attaining their strategic objectives. Furthermore, the paper drives the position that failure in the preceding areas will only portend extensive threats to the country's national security. The paper relied mostly on secondary sources available in extant literature.

**Keywords;** Mutiny, Armed Forces, Military, National Security

## **Introduction**

*Woe to him that claims obedience when it is not due; Woe to him that  
refuses it when it is.*  
----Thomas Carlyle

The issue of disobedience in the armed forces is hardly new and has remained a recurring decimal in the course of history. Whether they are acts of mutiny, coups or outright insubordination, theatre commanders and by extension military leadership have had to experience opposition from either soldiers or officers under their chain of command. Interestingly, these calculated or random acts of sedition do not exist without drivers. They are usually a collection of discontent, poor welfare, prolonged wars, lack of effective weapons to engage belligerents, and the likes. The effects of these have always taken a heavy toll on the state as it opens it up to various levels of threat and insecurity. The soldier is a unique part of the state, trained to pay the supreme sacrifice, when necessary. This position could sometimes be referred to as patriotism. However, patriotism, as self-less as it may sound, can either be 'starved' or 'fed'. It could be called 'starved', when the conditions provided by the state are poor, unfit, inefficient and ill-equipped to boost the morale of the field combatants. On the other hand, it could be 'fed' when the conditions under which they defend the state are adequate, viable, sustainable, and professional in nature.

Indeed, the effects of sedition in the armed forces cannot be downplayed as it impacts negatively on an existing war, leading to heavy casualties. Sedition in the armed forces can also hamper the smooth synergy between Military Leadership and Command and Control (C2). When there is disconnect between these two variables, its direct impact is evident in the outcome of war in combat theatres. Perhaps, the most critical effect of sedition in the armed forces is the overall implication it could have on national security as the military holds the legitimate instrument of violence to protect the country from both external aggression and internal insurrection.

Given the multifaceted approaches through which sedition could be studied, this paper limits its scope to mutinies in the armed forces, animating it with factors responsible for its occurrence as already submitted above, the conceptual cleavages when placed alongside coups and of course the implications it could portend for national security.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

For a clearer comprehension of the subject, it is necessary to demonstrate a proper delineation between coups and mutiny, though the two have often times been used interchangeably.

### **Mutiny**

Mutinies are well calculated and sometimes random acts conducted by soldiers mostly with the clear intention of demonstrating indiscipline and lack of satisfaction, with the objective of causing a change in military leadership. This definition appears to take a departure from the orthodox definition ascribed to mutiny and the reason seems not far-fetched. The traditional approach to defining what a mutiny is appears to preclude the fact that mutiny widens its scope to include desertions, outright refusal to take orders from superiors and even defections. For instance, Afghanistan's military has witnessed soldiers regularly defect to the Taliban. Similarly, mutinies in Yemen have contributed to the rise of the Houthi rebellion. In many of these instances, mutinies involve state-trained and equipped soldiers defecting to violent non-state actors (Johnson, 2018:2). As regarding the number of soldiers that can actually take part in a mutiny, Johnson maintains that for action to be called a mutiny, there has to be a minimum presence of 12 soldiers, although he factors in the variance that may occur from one clime to the other (Johnson, 2018:2).

This position is corroborated by Dwyer (2015) who drives the idea that mutinies are identified basically by their collective nature. This suggests that an action taken by one rogue soldier is not strong enough to be identified as a mutiny. It is a game of numbers in its most basic sense. Be that as it may, for the purposes and intent of this study, mutinies shall be treated as those actions that are taken by troops which are not aimed at seizing power, ousting or overthrowing government leadership but challenging the status quo such as poor decisions, policies or wrong strategies that could eventually put troops in harm's way. Suffice to say that the act of mutiny has always been an evolving one subject to various definitions extending its radius to include both active and passive insubordination carried out with or without arms and again with or without the use of violence. Thus, for the purposes and intent of the study, the word mutiny is used interchangeably with disobedience.

## **Coup**

This is a sudden violent overthrow of an existing government by a small group within the military. The chief prerequisite for a coup is control of all or part of the armed forces, the police, and other military elements. A coup is quite different from a mutiny though there may be elements of similarity. One identical denominator is the fact that the two are driven by a perceived dissatisfaction with the status quo.

### **Factors that drive mutinies within the armed forces**

Significantly, Home made a case regarding the imperial German army as being comprised of men who will go the long haul in carrying out the orders they received from their commanding officers no matter how unthoughtful or suicidal it appeared (Home, 1993:109). Most times as military history has indicated, such orders practically resulted in the death of soldiers. Perhaps Peifer's position (2001:1013) presents a more surgical angle into the German Imperial army when he quipped thus;

Omer Bartov, Stephen Fritz, and Martin Van Creveld offer more nuanced and analytical studies of the Wehrmacht soldier, but concur that the Frontsoldat of World War II fought stubbornly and resourcefully long after any hope of victory had disappeared.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, orders and chain of command still remain the backbone for the success of any military. However, the professional military has evolved to comprise of thinking machines (informed soldiers) who can probe into what constitutes patriotism and the level to which their obedience can go. Thus, the idea as to what or who constitutes a good soldier remains subject to methodological debates. Can a soldier be called a bad soldier for refusing to carry out an order that seems unlawful but if taken can lead to strategic advantage in war? Can a soldier be termed a resister for going against the norms in a regime of poor welfare packages? These questions alongside similar ones continually beg for answers.

The succeeding part of this study assesses the basic factors that drive disobedience. These factors may not be exhaustive but do represent some of the key indicators that fuel disobedience by soldiers within the armed forces, although this does not by any means justify such actions.

### ***Poor Equipment***

The issue of poor equipment is one of the drivers of mutiny among soldiers in the armed forces. As Bonaparte once asserted, God fights on the side with the best artillery. As such, war in its most basic sense is midwived through weapons and equipment and quality weapons are requisite if the armed forces must secure an advantage in military operations, although there are exceptional cases where a David's sling can kill a well-armed Goliath. Weapons also have the capacity and tendency to boost the morale and confidence of soldiers in combat. Paret (1989:240) avers that military power demonstrates the range of power of a state in a myriad of ways and also doubles as one of the conduits through which political power showcases permanence. Thus, when political power travels from the seat of power into the combat zone, the evidence about the effectiveness of such power is demonstrated by the quality of weapons held by the soldiers. It follows that a deficit in this original value as provided by Paret could result to rebellion.

### ***Poor Welfare Security***

Perhaps, one of the known drivers of mutiny among soldiers in the armed forces is the issue of welfare security. Typically, it appears that the tenacity, combat readiness and loyalty of soldiers is highly incumbent on the basic welfare packages and security available to soldiers and by extension their families. Such welfare inventory could include but not limited to decent and affordable housing, timely and regular payment of salaries and allowances, decent uniform and/or military gear. These basic indicators, though often times neglected, have an extensive psychological bearing on soldier's loyalty while in service and has a tendency to 'sponsor' mutinies and disobedience to superiors. Edmund (2007) submits that it is necessary for democracies to align professionalism in the military alongside the soldier's economic welfare as this could help raise the patriotic spirit in them.

### ***Protracted War***

In the course of military history, prolonged war has had the tradition of weighing in on soldiers negatively and prompting reluctance from them. Put differently, the longer the war, the higher the toll on soldiers' motivation especially when there is the prevalence of heavy casualty rate. As rightly noted by Sahel (2009:24), Clausewitz appeared to have captured this position properly when he sustained that some attacks lose steam when they continue for too long, thus getting to a critical changing point where the force of attack becomes overwhelmed by the force put up by the defence. This is premised as the hallmark of the attack, which he averred was usually, but not in all circumstances, followed by an overwhelming capable enemy counter attack. Drew and Snow (1988:155) shares somewhat similar position when they assert thus;

If successful, rebel operations using guerrilla tactics can achieve several favorable results. Support for the insurgents increases or the people take a neutral stance because the government is unable to protect itself for the people. Fatigue and war weariness set in as the struggle becomes more protracted, particularly if the government seems to be making little if any headway against the guerrilla forces. Desertions from the government ranks increase and the underground infrastructure continues to expand, thus compounding the government's problem almost geometrically. Eventually, the correlation of forces changes in favor of the insurgents. Insurgent forces mass into large units, using conventional tactics and administer the coup de grace in rapid order.

Interestingly, whenever the military has an unambiguous set of goals, such as seen in Panama, the Philippine coup, or even the Desert Storm, the end result has most often been a success. On the other hand, as aptly captured by Soderberg, (2005:23) when the objectives seem somewhat unclear or hazy, such as the Bay of Pigs, or the US war with Vietnam which created a Marine presence in Lebanon, or even the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the outcome has most often been atrophied. It should be understood that the concept of a prolonged war thrives in a regime with

lack of proper policy and strategic development before the onset of war. A faulty policy and war strategy cannot but result in unavoidable fog and friction, heavy casualty, extended war, or outright defeat. Such scenarios do not come off well for the field combatants as it could lead to dampened morale and confidence deficits in soldiers.

Indeed, it should be understood that the inability to quickly replace soldiers that are trained to replace those Killed in Action (KIA) has a direct effect on the outcome of war, given that ill-trained soldiers do not deliver the needed strategic objectives needed to secure the desired end state. In other words, when soldiers suffer heavy casualties due to incompetence and ill-equipped training, the morale is affected, triggering negative response of rebellion, reluctance and resistance to authorities.

### ***Corruption within the armed forces***

Corruption happens to be one variable that connects majority of the reasons why soldiers conduct mutinies against authorities in the armed forces. This factor appears to be more dominant in African militaries where there is the preponderance of mediocrity over quality on the basis of factors such as nepotism. Under such regimes, superiors or commanders with faulty strategic systems employ same in the battlefield - the result being counterproductive. And since errors in the military most often are paid for in blood, such strategic blunders severally repeated could stir up acts of mutiny, rebellion and disobedience.

Significantly, Paltier (2017) advocate for 'Military Keynesianism', a concept which posits that the increase of military budget may have a direct bearing with improving the country's economic growth, as being a critical factor when assessing the place of corruption as a catalyst for mutiny in the armed forces. Here, Keynes stressed that, war is good for the economy of the state. However, for Keynes assertion to hold a lasting value, it should be understood that Military Keynesianism also requires a democratic civil government free of corruption, collusion and nepotism. As Muradi (2017:155) has noted, an ideal government must display the basic tenets of accountability and competence. To that effect, Udeagbala and Ituen (2019:70) have stressed the level to which corruption can influence the outcomes of military operations especially in an insurgency war. They averred that available evidence suggests that one of the greatest impediments to credible intelligence in the North-east of Nigeria (where a

war on terror has been raging for over a decade) is the issue of corruption within the Military and the country, Nigeria at large.

Similarly, it should be noted that the intelligence process demands an expensive budget owing to the diverse logistics and motions needed to acquire and refine massive amounts of information into actionable intelligence. When intelligence is poorly funded, there is bound to be a costly boomerang effect in war prosecution. Quick Impact Projects (QIP) such as basic infrastructural developments and basic social security services like health, housing, portable water, etc. would go the long haul in securing the ‘hearts and minds’ of the locals in the event of an ongoing insurgency. This constitutes a game changing factor in the insurgency as troops can consolidate on these to gain advantage over the enemy. Conversely, when adequate resources are not readily available to build these basic infrastructures, loss of support from communities to troops holds sway and the resultant effect is suffered by the soldiers.

Corruption remains a metastasized cancer that gravely eats into the Armed Forces and the security institutions in Nigeria. When the 2015 index of corruption risk worldwide is brought to the fore, it is instructive to note that Nigeria’s defence and security sector falls within the radius of the highest risk categories (TI-DS, 2015). Another recent Transparency International (TI) report concluded that corruption has been particularly destructive in that sector, hollowing out the Army and compromising the integrity of the Navy (TI-DS/CISLAC, 2017). Seemingly, Østensen, Brady and Schütte (2018:12) have observed that corruption appears to be ‘endemic within the military branches and institutions and infests the entire military chain of command, as well as the political apparatus, including legislators and other government officials’.

### ***Poor Military Leadership (ML) and Command and Control (C2) Issues***

The factor of poor leadership as well as command and control has an impact on whether or not soldiers have the tendency to rebel or commit acts of disobedience within the armed forces. When there is a lack of convergence between leadership and command and control, there is the likelihood for ineffective results in combat operations. The commander should be able to demonstrate a blend of both inspiring and commanding leadership skills. Clearly, when the commander exhibits a high handed coercive appearance, the soldiers appear to technically withdraw their mental support even when their physical demeanor speaks to the contrary.



In the same vein, when the commander expresses too much of an inspiration without a blend of command as an essential part of the military, troops may tend to behave in an undisciplined or uncoordinated manner.

Abdullahi (2019:78-89) made efforts to narrow the conceptual cleavages between ML and C2, articulating the fact that military leadership cannot be taken to be a rank nor a unit of measurement for growth in the armed forces but rather, it should be viewed as an act. It is an initiative premised on character, ability and mental strength through which a commander influences, inspires and directs his subordinates to accomplish a mission (US Army Field Manual FM 22-100). Thus, the onus lies in the fact that when there is a disconnect between military leadership and command and control, the results may sometimes lead to heavy losses and/or casualty, which to a very large extent affects the morale of troops and lack of trust in the system, sometimes leading to coordinated and willful acts of disobedience to orders.

#### ***Pronounced discrimination within the Rank and File***

The military operates on hierarchy and chain of command, a tradition that has set it apart from other institutions. It could be argued that this arrangement is responsible for quick and decisive actions that if well informed results in gains. The tradition of seniority and respect for orders, however, has its shortages as there have been cases of unnecessary discrimination between officers and soldiers in the armed forces with crass disregard for empathy towards the subordinates. On dealing with this variable, mention must be made as regard loyalty. Loyalty is to the commissioned officer what it is to the soldier or the NCO as they are both under oath to pay the supreme sacrifice. For clarity sake, loyalty is measured in terms of commitments to a course and not by rank or seniority. There are no higher oaths when viewed through the prism of supreme sacrifice and as such cases of outright discrimination against soldiers by officers should be reduced to the barest minimum. The 21<sup>st</sup> century soldier is an 'entity' that should be inspired with a sense of belonging and not discriminated as an alien to the institution he is part and parcel of. He must be made to realize that he shares a significant part of something larger than himself.

More so, the rules of combat are evolving and the foot soldier is fast breaking free from the perceived position of 'non-importance' owing to the growing knowledge the 21<sup>st</sup> century has imparted in him, honing him into a

relevant and synergizing component of the force. David Betz (2007:221-243) supports the preceding assertion by referring to the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a 'system'. From a different angle, one may refer to the 21<sup>st</sup> century soldier as an 'engine' needed to be serviced consistently to maintain power, efficiency and productivity. A lack of these variables may portend a stark or relative loss in the preceding variables.

Scales (2003:85) avers that in future, regular infantry will be mandated to perform tasks which were once mostly the exclusive preserve of specialists, such as forward observation, providing medical aid, sapping, communications, and intelligence-gathering. In the same corollary, the US Army (2006:15) lists a series of crafts that the infantry man will need and that will prove relevant in the near future. They include good knowledge of governance, statesmanship and diplomacy and also an understanding of 'cultural context and how to work effectively across it'. Thus, Avant (2006:332-4) furthers that we should treat the loss through 'burnout' of every experienced infantry squad leader or 'ten-year corporal' with the same level of seriousness as we do the loss of military pilots to the civilian sector and take mutual measures as given to the officers to prevent their permanent loss. Such disposition towards the NCO will go a long way in minimizing the tendency for mutiny within the armed forces of the state. The disparity between the pay of the most experienced special forces soldiers on the government payroll and those working for private military companies is at least double or more.

Indeed, this dichotomy extends even to retirement amongst the armed forces as retired officers seem to relate from a higher position from the retired NCO. As revealed by a reliable source and succinctly put:

The officers don't have regard for us. In fact some of them do not cross over here to see us. They still believe in the fact that they are superior to us and thus cannot associate with us. We are all one and we were together in fighting to keep Nigeria as one country. But you see, just as they used to marginalize us during service, they still do so now. How can we continue like this? There is no need for the segregation as we can unite together for the progress of the country. Imagine for instance, the officer needs the soldier to be called an officer. If

there are no soldiers, it means the place of the officer will be irrelevant. We have to understand that it is the soldiers that are really involved in war during military operations and they suffer the most casualties. It is therefore important for this dichotomy and discrimination to be erased from the armed forces.

This information was volunteered during a structured interview by the Chairman and members of The Legion in one of the Nigerian State branches, who choose to remain anonymous and further corroborated by a number of other veterans who have also chosen not to have their names in print. This of course is a reflection of the practice that had long been entrenched within the armed forces during active service and seems to transcend the service years back to the civilian life.

### **Implications for National Security**

National security remains an intrinsic variable of the state that must continuously be preserved by all means possible. The military has often been described as the institution tasked with the legitimate instrument of violence. It is her duty to protect the country from threats - external and internal. It behooves on the military leadership to pursue and execute policies that are not detrimental to the security of the country. The military in her effort to maintain national security must as a necessity attend to and/or cater for the needs of the average combat soldier. It is logical for their families to receive adequate support, with firearms commensurate or superior to the adversaries they engage. A deficit in any of these areas not only dampens the morale of soldiers but incubates seeds of mutiny and a negative resultant effect on national security.

As Willink and Babin (2015:5) noted, across the ranks of the military services, forgotten wartime lessons have always been rewritten in blood. Put differently, lessons not learnt from previous combat experiences become a catalyst for more deaths. It is incumbent on the military high command to enforce national security objectives by rewriting the errors that have occurred in combat and use such to chart a more result-oriented strategy for troops. For an effective operational art and a proper conversion of raw military power into valuable gains, the military has to be

professionally organized in order to provide adequate commitment to national security.

The average soldier, who has been referred to as a 'system' by Betz is a rapidly evolving entity influenced by environment and its evolving threats. When the 'system' is allowed to be redundant and non-evolving, its productivity is hampered upon causing a reduction in results. Poor results fuel low morale among troops leading to security gaps consequently creating issues bordering on national security. Theatre commanders must necessarily be avid readers and thinkers and when such luxury of time cannot be provided, a team of think-tanks consisting of serving officers, veterans, military historians, etc, should be adequately made available for informed decisions. Loyalty is priceless but troop loyalty can be further engineered through the provision of basic welfare security for soldiers and their families.

### **Conclusion**

This paper takes an incisive look into the issues and causes of mutiny in the armed forces around the globe. It gathers that more often than not, troops within the armed forces are driven by a myriad of factors to take to willful disobedience to orders, outright attack on field commanders and sometimes defection. Some of these causes as demonstrated in the paper have been seen to include poor welfare for soldiers and their families, wrong strategies and policies from executives at the top and zenith of power which usually results in a dysfunctional link between command and control.

Also addressed in the study is the issue of corruption which stifles the funds needed to prosecute war. Unfortunately, the field soldier bears the brunt of this since the weapons or firearm given to him by the state may not be sophisticated enough to battle the enemy and/or belligerent. Under these conditions, it is not unsurprising that discontent is fueled among troops within the armed forces and such might be vented through acts of mutiny. This paper also highlights the fact that national security is intrinsic to the preservation of the state and the armed forces are largely tasked with the responsibility of protecting this sovereignty. It follows that instability within the troops of the armed forces could ultimately result in threats against national security. To promote troop loyalty and patriotism to the course of keeping the state secure, militaries must be adept at implementing policies and strategies that would keep their troops out of harm's way.

Importantly, the issue of corruption was noted as sharing direct and indirect links to the operational realities in combat theaters. These basic indices, if addressed, could prove a changing denominator in making mutinies and sedition within the armed forces less attractive and less occurring.

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