

COVID -19 PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT: REVISITING THE NIGERIAN MILITARY EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Emerging infectious diseases like Covid -19 are a frequent cause of morbidity for the militaries and citizens alike. Significantly, when a pandemic occurs, there is often a lack of universally or centrally controlled mechanisms to detect or contain it especially at the early stage thus leaving every nation to fight for itself. In that case, it is extremely difficult for militaries to perform purely defensive roles being a major part of first responder in a pandemic situation. It is within this purview that this paper assesses Covid -19 pandemic that emanated from Wuhan city, China--in late December 2019 as it spread across countries. This piece examines the COVID -19 outbreak, and the concomitant roles of the military in Nigeria. As a life - threatening disease, the Nigerian Government declared lockdowns to halt its spread and mobilized the military personnel to enforce laws and order during the lockdown as part of the comprehensive pandemic response. Beyond this, the military offered commendable strategic health roles targeted at flattening the pandemic curve. This paper analyses the military's experiences in containing the COVID -19, the challenges and prospects. While, extant researchers gave general assessment of security forces, just a few had specifically looked at the military response as one of the first responders. Arising from this, the current piece extols the utilitarian value of the military given its timely and professional efforts during the pandemic outbreaks. It calls for improved civil/military relations and mutually reinforcing relations to seamlessly contain future pandemics. The paper calls for the need to build capacity, create awareness and re-orientate the military towards humanitarian services and a better pandemic-prepared society. It adopts a descriptive method of analysis, relying on secondary sources of data and qualitative analysis.

Key Words: Covid -19, Containment, Experience, Management, Military, Pandemic, Prospects

1. Introduction

Different countries across the globe have at one time or another witnessed several pandemics or epidemics infections outbreak from time immemorial till the present times. The widespread of diseases outbreak has overstepped any possible preparedness across countries affected and their healthcare systems (Lado, 2015). Thus, the growing trend of a pandemic outbreak has legitimated a role of national militaries in responding to public health crises. Accordingly, throughout history, war epidemics as infectious diseases have sapped and destroyed the ability of armies to fight, halted military operations and brought death and disaster to the civilian populations as well as the military(Educational Magazines, 2022). This is largely so as passive surveillance systems designed to detect and initiate a response to novel pathogens or pandemics as the case may be may not be effective enough to control the threat. According to Elbadry etal (2014),today roughly 75% of infectious diseases are zoonotic pathogens that spread between humans and other animals. Therefore, they require an integrated, interdisciplinary approach that involves human veterinary, and environmental health experts to contain (Elbadry etal, 2014). It is the recognition of the above that health issues have come to occupy an increasingly important position within the foreign policy and security discussions of nations (Watterson & Kamradt –Scott, 2015). According to Watterson & Kamradt –Scott with recent events such as the 2001 anthrax letter attacks, the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak, the 2008 melamine contamination of Chinese infant formula the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, and the 2014 outbreak of the Ebola virus disease (EVD) in West Africa and the recent outbreak of COVID -19, the issues are obvious as existential national, regional and international threatening health concerns that ultimately needs a collective approach.

Concurrently, on 31 December 2019, a novel Corona virus emerged from a city in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, and spread across the globe. By March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it to be a pandemic after which it generated tensions and upheavals across the globe, killing thousands and forcing millions into quarantine. The pandemic transformed the entire world to a level where people's lifestyles, working patterns, and movements were stalemated and regulated with new protocols that cut across home settings, relationships, institutions and governments, adjusting from the old normal to the new normal (James, 2021). With the ravaging effects among countries, there arose the compelling need to devise efficient means to building resilience against the different adverse effects of the pandemic as it has proved difficult to corresponding changes in terms of responses to containment and control since declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020). It is such rising Public Health Emergency of international Concerns that saw most states starting to mobilise some levels of military capacity (Gibson -Fall, 2021: 2) towards mitigating the tide of its spread and effects. This becomes imperative given the significance of the military national command structure and network

that constitutes such a pool of disciplined workforce readily available for deployment on relatively short notice in support of civilian components as frontline first responders in the event of national emergencies such as the COVID-19 (Graham, 2020).

Consequent to the virulent posture of the COVID-19 pandemic, several nations assembled and mobilized their armed forces towards combating its outbreak. For example, in places like the United States, the government activated the National Guard in New York, California and Washington, French and Moroccan armies set up field hospitals, and Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the army to carry out to increase its readiness (Carsten, 2020). More so, the Philippines or Indonesia, the military- led the entire response (Gibson-Fall, 2021: “1). More so, the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence stood up a covid – support force, placing 20,000 military personnel on higher drills readiness and putting reservists on standby (Graham, 2020). South Africa also deployed its army to enforce a 21-day lockdown. In a similar vein, in the aftermath of the rapid spread of the novel corona virus, the Nigerian government deployed military personnel and other security agencies to various parts of the country to enforce lockdown directives .More so, the Military Force's rights from the outbreak of the deadly disease have performed strategic health roles to support the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The active involvement of the military personnel at the heart of the pandemic crises exemplified the critical role the military could play in the case of national emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic when adequately mobilised. The military forces have brought to bear their operational capabilities and competence during the COVID- 19 that could be better enhanced if supported and strengthened by the government to build capacity and strength for pandemic control beyond ensuring public compliance with lockdown restrictions.

These efforts exhibited by the military are applauded and considered imperative to achieving personal safety, public support and trust, coordination and expertise, collaboration and logistic support for the benefit of the government and the general public. While the military has not taken on any prominent frontline roles in the past, the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled its personnel to be involved in strategic health roles as their services brought to bear capabilities and competencies, including crisis planning, command, and control, logistics and specialist medical support. When the military is allowed to harness its capabilities and competence, it could better weaken public health challenges such as COVID-19 in the future and boost the health system's capacity in the country.

In light of the above, the paper argues that the efforts of the military towards securing the

COVID-19 pandemic is anchored in a long pedigree of its participation in combating infectious diseases. Also, it is an indication of effective roles or contributions the military can make to public health concerns as well as independent efforts to maintain their personnel in the event of infectious outbreak. Therefore, this study assesses the containment role of the military bringing to the fore its managerial experiences of the COVID-19 outbreak. This becomes imperative given the fact that the pandemic is a reoccurring phenomenon that calls for the nation's preparedness and the military in particular as one of the major first responders. To achieve the objective above, the paper opens with an introduction. The second aspect of the paper gives a discursive literature review on the military experiences in the management of the pandemic. The third section assesses the military roles in the management of the COVID -19 outbreak in Nigeria. The fourth section discusses issues and challenges confronted by the military in performing such tasks. The section five makes a vivid overview of prospects of the military efforts in managing the outbreak of COVID-19. Section six concludes the work and profiles some recommendations.

2. Literature Review on Military Experiences in the Management of The Pandemic

According to Bailey (2013), there is along-standing and established relationship between military activities and infectious diseases. Mado (2015) alluded that since the 1990s, health issues have come to occupy an increasingly prominent position within foreign policy and security debates of nations. In his view, events such as the 2001 anthrax letter attacks, the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak, the 2008 melamine contamination of Chinese infant formula, the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, and the 2014 outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in West Africa (Mado, 2015) until the recent COVID -19. In other words, the unprecedented outbreak of infectious diseases requires a whole societal effort to contain. Consequently, the military has inevitable roles beyond physical defence to play as they are equally affected by such pandemic outbreaks. This fact is well emphasized in the work of Watterson and Kamradt – Scott (2016) titled “Fighting Flu: Securitization and the Military Role in Combating Influenza”. According to them the growing trend of infectious disease has legitimated a role for national militaries in responding to such public health crises. They affirmed that possibly the earliest documented instances of influenza adversely affecting military campaigns transpired in 1485 CE and allegedly served to temporarily postpone the coronation of England's Henry Tudor by preventing the troops from marching South to London (Watterson and Kamradt –Scott, 2016).

Similarly, in the work of Elbadry et al (2014) titled “China's great wall, Israel's Lev Line, and Passive Infectious disease Surveillance”, the authors make a detailed reveal of the need for military preparedness towards the outbreak of infectious diseases both at home and outside perhaps for peacekeeping. According to these authors, the military forces may be

exposed to infectious diseases at higher risk than others as a result of their living conditions. It is on this premise that Huntington (1957) as cited in Adegbite (2019) captures the three forms of national security policy that define the military's role in any nation-state in modern times. According to him, military security policy and roles in modern time presupposes (i) the essential role of the military in defending a country's territorial integrity against external invasion; (ii) internal security policy that implies the utilisation of the military to suppress insurrection or revolution within the state and; (iii) situation security policy implies that the military contributes in a limited way in the maintenance of law and order through an integrated approach to conflict management in the state. This is why scholars like Boylan et al (2017) adduced that infectious diseases are not war but they occur more often than not and appear war-like as the preparation requires mobilization of both human and material efforts at unprecedented and emergency levels for their response, especially in a contemporary environment where traditional responses had often failed, and solving problems requires new ways of thinking (Boylan et al, 2017). Besides, James Okolie – Semene (2021) noted the COVID-19 outbreak as a watershed in twenty-first-century history, describing the extent of its manifestation resulting in situations like quarantine, contact tracing, social distancing, physical distancing, isolation, panic buying and others. Importantly, the author identified the demonstrable role of security providers with a legal mandate to safeguard society through agencies such as the police, military, gendarmerie, correctional officers, and others whose responsibilities focus on human cum national security. He identified how the military personnel deployed to many parts of the country to enforce lockdown directives generated concerns about excessive force in implementing restrictive measures to curb COVID-19 (James Okolie – Semene, 2021).

In tandem with the above, Graham (2020) succinctly identifies some basic factors that made the military roles unique and strategic in an attempt to contain a pandemic outbreak like the COVID-19 pandemic. He outlines that firstly the military possesses a national command network at the most basic level that constitutes a pool of disciplined workforce, including reserves that can be deployed at relatively short notice to supplement civilian frontline services during national emergencies (Graham, 2020). Furthermore, he makes an overview of various strategic roles played by the Army, Air Force and Navy. Despite the detailed analysis of Graham, his work centres on foreign military and not the Nigerian military. Furthermore, Ogbale et al. (2020) identified some of the strategic roles played by the Nigerian military forces in support of the Federal Government of Nigeria in flattening the curve. According to them, beyond the enforcement of the laws that pertain to COVID-19 guidelines and ensuring adherence to them, the active military participation in the production of relevant equipment and treatment processes can never be underestimated (Ogbale et al., 2020). These scholars noted the different roles the Army, Air Force, and Navy played in the containment efforts. However, the study centred on the knowledge, attitudes, and perception of the military population regarding the COVID -19 pandemic

rather than assessing the general roles of the military in the pandemic. Another work reviewed for the current study is Oserholm (2017) titled *Global Health Security – An Unfinished Journey*. This scholar discussed various deadly and severe acute respiratory syndromes that have defiled international vehicles of control just as the COVID -19. He further highlighted some of the challenges faced when planning for effective global public health control. In his submission, to detect, combat and respond to disease threats, all countries must build a laboratory, trained workforce, and surveillance and emergency operations capabilities only through this means a country could achieve the goal of global health security otherwise efforts towards combating security healthwise remains an unfinished journey (Osterholm, 2017).

Additionally, Adewumi (2020), in his work "COVID-19 and security management in Nigeria, assessing the changing nature of insecurity during pandemic lockdowns" discussed the range from a series of killings in the northern part of the country, kidnapping and armed robbery in the South, political assassinations as well as communal wars or crisis making which the security agencies appear incapable to curtail (Adewumi, 2020). He submitted by calling for the security agencies to undergo capacity building in advanced training, intelligence training, advanced technology, motivation, logistics and change of orientation to ensure adequate security provisioning during pandemic outbreaks as the COVID -19. Scholars like Adegbite (2019) buttressed in his work titled "a study of the civil-military relations in the fourth Nigerian republic" that while the military is an essential organisation of the modern state, it must operate based on professional training to serve the democratic state and subject itself under civilian control. The perception of the military as used in this study covers the scope of the Nigerian Army, Air Force and Navy (Ogbole et al. 2020). Oyediran (1996) reinforced this when he submitted that the military is the totality of the armed forces found the world over, including the army, navy, air force, and police. In modern society, the military no longer considered themselves a mere instrument of state defence but rather a part of the civil world. While describing some of the activities of the military during the COVID-19, authors like Azuogu et al. (2021), in their work, "Containing Covid-19 in Nigeria: An Appraisal of Lockdown and Surveillance at Inter-State Borders to Control Disease Spread" discuss various borders and security checkpoints. They noted further that some had multiple checkpoints with security personnel drawn from different agencies such as the military, the police, and others drafted to ensure orderliness; others had only one security agency operating their checkpoints (Azuogu, BN et al., 2021).

From the above review, it has been shown that strategic roles of the military forces are necessary for the containment of infectious diseases and such is beyond the maintenance of laws and orders. However, none of the above work has specifically addressed the military experience in the management of COVID-19 in Nigeria after the declaration of

lockdowns by the Federal Government. Therefore, the present work intends to fill the gap and makes a documentary of the activities of the military forces during COVID-19 as one of the first responders in event of infectious diseases like the COVID-19 Pandemic.

3. Covid-19 Management and the Nigerian Military Experience: An Overview

With the outbreak of COVID-19, the Nigerian military-drafted personnel to ensure the enforcement of laws and order. At the same time, they assisted the federal government in implementing some strategic roles in curtailing the health challenges of the pandemic by reducing its chances of spread and fatalities. To best capture the military roles towards ensuring efficient and effective COVID -19 management, the following points become crucial in the context of COVID-19 management:

Leadership and Expertise

According to Elbadry et al (2015) just as the Great Wall was built to defend in a time when man's chief military weapons were the sword and arrows, many existing public health strategies were created to defend against disease agents of the past. Hence, military leadership and coordinating expertise are one such defensive weapons that has not only proved efficacious in combating infectious disease but strategically infused as part and parcel of a web of national defence and security architecture designed to defend the territorial integrity and national interests of nations in the event of any threats. This is a sequel to the military way of operation, which is hierarchical and top-down, resulting in fast decision-making that may overcome delays by cutting red tape (Kalkman, 2020). At the most basic level, the military possesses a national command network. It constitutes a pool of disciplined workforce, including reserves that can be deployed at relatively short notice to supplement civilian frontline services in national emergencies like the Covid -19. Moreover, it has developed expertise in operating in stressful situations. Historically, in the fight against previous epidemics outbreaks, military personnel mobilised support with the other security agencies to ensure some remarkable records in the prevention, care and treatment of HIV, Ebola, and Lassafever in the past. Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic, such a feat was redoubled in the containment effort (Ayitogo, 2020). The military exhibited their leadership and operational expertise to discharge such national assignments toward flattening the pandemic curve. The deployment of the Military Forces, operational expertise, logistical capacity, and able-bodied personnel enhanced maintenance and operations of assets such as airlifts, sealifts, and heavy utility vehicles and deterrence factor that gave the military forces command authority and ability to flatten the curve. The defence media report alluded to the fact that over 300 medical personnel were dispatched to assist the government to combat the spread of the pandemic across the nation and ensure the additional provision of personnel in selected hospitals was made available to train and boost the capacity of medical personnel in the management of COVID -19 (Ogbole et al., 233).

Research Support and Production of Protective Equipment

Research is the cornerstone of innovation. Therefore, the utility of research to all human endeavours cannot be over emphasised. Thus, the military through the Defence Referral Laboratory, with state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment, enhanced the military personnel's capacity in research support in upscaling the prevention and management of prevention of the COVID -19 Pandemic at the peak (Aytogo, 2020). More so, there was massive mobilisation by the Defence Headquarters of staff to research and development, which in turn produced several COVID-19 essential and lifesaving equipment, which also led to the production of over 1500 dozens of DICSanz, a high-quality hand sanitiser produced under stringent environmental conditions (Ogbole et al,2020). However, a lot still need to be achieved in an attempt to tackle the pandemic threat.

Mobilization of Military Resources: Infectious disease is a war-like epidemic that requires huge resources for its containment especially in developing countries where governments hardly made a budget in preparation for it. Thus, militaries stand to make significant contributions to pandemic response measures, where their capacity to marshal resources and expertise can ameliorate civil efforts to contain outbreaks (Watterson and Kamradt –Scott, 2016). Consequently, apart from leadership and coordination, the military expedient its vast resources and activated the same to assist the overwhelmed hospitals and civilian medical personnel. In Nigeria, the Military Forces through the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) provided a local content-driven response to address the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) (Ogbole et al. 2020). More so, the Armed Forces of Nigeria made available an additional 220 medical personnel to support the government's effort in tackling the novel COVID-19 pandemic across the country (Punch, 2020). Furthermore, the government designated 17 medical facilities spread across the country to isolate and treat confirmed cases of COVID-19 (The impact, 2021). In addition, the military used the Big ship MS Aradu as makeshift hospitals to reduce the burden of hospital facilities across the country.

Law Enforcement, Public Order Support and Movement of Medical Needs, and Patient

In public compliance with lockdown restrictions, personal safety, and public support, the military, in collaboration with other agencies, ensure comprehensive enforcement of laws and orders. For example, the military deployed troops to ensure mandatory lockdowns by patrolling, constructing roadblocks and curbing movement (Kalkman, 2020) to reduce the spread of the virus. Military personnel from other functions equally assist in logistical support such as the transportation of medical needs and patients for testing and repatriation., the deployment of army medical logistics planners, the transportation of healthcare workers and the disinfection of hospitals and other public spaces (Kalkman, 2020).

Sensitisation, Humanitarian and Disinfection Service for the Public: In a bid to combat the spread of the COVID-19, the Nigerian military assisted in an awareness campaign vigorous sensitisation in military cantonments and barracks to enlighten personnel and their families on preventive sanitary and hygienic measures to halt the spread of corona virus. The military forces also performed humanitarian support services. The 48 Disaster Response Units of the armed forces were on notice to move in conjunction with National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) (The Impact, 2020). In addition, the Nigerian Air Force was involved in the humanitarian operation –building indigenous ventilators and distributing them while equally assisting in the setting up of field hospitals.

4. Covid -19 Management and The Military in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

Response to public health emergencies takes whole government approaches; however, there is also a need to ensure that such responses are integrated into operational policy and approaches undergirded public safety measures necessary for public health and security personnel deployment to contain the pandemic spread. Within the above context, this paper attempts to look at the challenges faced by the military forces in Nigeria while managing the COVID-19 pandemic outbreaks.

Pandemic Preparedness

The Armed Forces play a pivotal role in the entire delivery of mechanisms of the government in addressing major disasters. However, responding to a coronavirus threat is a whole lot of enormous responsibilities that come with its pressures and threats. Research has shown that the pre covid -19 preparedness was grossly inadequate (Adebayo, 2021, 118). For example, the US Armed Forces started corona virus response before the first cases were reported in the US simply because the Department of Defence (DOD) has spelt out the necessary priorities as concerned the organization. While ensuring physical distancing is a requirement of pandemic control, it is also a threat to the performance of duties during the pandemic. In addition, the COVID-19 outbreak exposed the deplorable state of the health system in Nigeria, which showed the unpreparedness of the health system sector to accommodate any emergency that threatens public health (James Okolie – Osemene, 2021). As part of pandemic preparedness, the military forces should fund every necessary reform, providing skills training as well as helping to develop and publish detailed guidelines for frontline officers.

Adequate Manpower for Pandemic and Emerging Security threats

The primary role of any military is to ensure sovereignty and defence of the territorial integrity of a nation. Besides, the military as the last bastion remains the ultimate responder in every major crisis. Consequently, military operational readiness came under significant pressure with the pandemic outbreak. The nature of the pandemic outbreak has made the

task of responses equally overwhelming. The military has continuously provided the enabling environment for training the Armed Forces' medical personnel to manage COVID-19 cases.

At the same time, maintaining a strike balance in the discharge of its traditional responsibility of protection against external threats remains essential to the military organisation (Burke et al., 2020). At the same time, the need for military personnel to fulfil their specific strategic priorities regarding where to deploy and balance personnel health risks against task implementation became imperative.

Tangentially, both tasks were overwhelming, thus making the workforce further weakening for the needed task to fight the pandemic. The pandemic aids conditions for new security risks or the reactivation of old ones. Due to the preoccupation of the military ranging from enforcing lockdown orders, Boko – Haram and its affiliates capitalising on the shift of the government's focus from counterinsurgency operations and public apathy to restrictive measures, had intensified the abduction of civilians and the recruitment and training of new fighters (Iweze, 2020). In addition, violence against women, girls and children increased rapidly during the pandemic.

Reallocation or Diversion of Budgetary allocation

The weak Health Care System with the low resources environment and the deficiency of experts in infectious diseases and infection prevention and control in the field are some of the factors earlier identified (Bailey, 2013). The implication of the above was that the outbreak of COVID–19 led to diversions or reallocation of budgetary allocation to fight the covid -19 pandemic. For example, the military spent a large chunk of its resources responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. From the inception of the pandemic, the military forces have invested in the purchase of sanitisers, production of protective equipment, sensitisations, awareness and logistic support to the public towards flattening the pandemic curve. These have taken a significant chunk of their resources, affecting their original constitutional mandate.

Civil Rights Protection

Ethical medical prioritisation, tracing, surveillance, and quarantine must balance human rights protection and inclusive public health promotion (Gibson – Fall, 2021). In Nigeria, the pandemic responses have increased violence against civilians by both the militants and state forces (Mustasilta,2020). Rioters demanding economic relief also fought against corona virus lockdown measures, resulting in clashes. In addition, there were several reports accusing the military forces of abuse during the lockdowns and containment efforts. It is not in doubt that the deployment of military personnel to various parts of the country to enforce lockdown directives has heightened concerns about the excessive use of

force in implementing restrictive measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Iweze, 2020). There were lots of criticisms accusing the military forces of human abuses in the course of maintaining public order and actions towards combating the pandemic threats.

Personal Safety and Risks

The improbable idea of the burden of a “new” or neglected disease made the response to this outbreak a real challenge as there were no experts or manuals available (Bailey, 2013). There is no gainsaying the fact that many military personnel, especially the frontline medical staff in the fight to curtail the pandemic were exposed to harmful infectious diseases like the Covid -19. In addition, the military force and other security agencies are often physically on the front line of the pandemic response and therefore unable to work from home, making them vulnerable to contracting the virus and potentially spreading it (Briefing Report, 2020. 3). This is worsened by the low level of expertise and knowledgeable personnel that may be commensurate with the number of personnel needed for mobilisation. Therefore, there is a need for well-trained military specialists, properly resourced 'reach-back' services and 'field' investigational teams' and military-specific programmes of teaching and reach remain essential in defence against infectious diseases (Bailey, 2013).

Civil-Military Corporation

There is also a genuine need to increase dialogue between the public health and military communities at both the national level and the international level (Watterson and Kamradt –Scott, 2016). The basis of deploying military forces in response to COVID-19 and other related pandemics is to leverage the specific capabilities that civilian health agencies may lack in sufficient quantity without necessarily taking away the civilian-specific role of military-civil control. However, when the crisis metamorphosed, the military possessed the attitudes of command and control principles, which some scholars argued could take away civilian control rights and cost them coordination and collaboration. According to Graham (2020), dependence on military interventions in response to COVID-19 may weaken civilian control or promote military rule.

Inter-Agency Cooperation or Collaboration

The trend toward the securitization of infectious disease in a place like developing countries is frost with lots of implications. In Nigeria, inter-agency effort towards addressing the situation of concern is a near mirage. Noticeably, the collaboration of security agencies is key to security governance during the pandemic. For example, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic witnessed an array of many actors, civil-military relations and others. However, some security agencies downplayed poor enforcement and monitoring of travel restrictions that would have prevented and curtailed the rapid spread

of the disease stemming from an array of complex participants operating on different procedures, mandates, capacities and cultures. Consequently, the involvement of the military forces in the lockdowns and restrictions was condemned by many. Nevertheless, the military authority must do everything in their power to forestall conflicts during pandemics so that government agencies can cooperate across conflict lines and redeploy military resources to respond.

5. Covid -19 and The Nigerian Military: Prospects towards future Pandemics

Undoubtedly, the military forces have contributed immensely to undermining the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic through some of the efforts discussed earlier. However, despite their strategic and timely roles, some challenges hinder the effective and efficient delivery of their services. It is gainsaid that the overall military organisation offers the best opportunity to fight emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. On this strength, this paper believes that if the contributory and strategic roles of the military are leveraged, mobilised and improved in future pandemic outbreaks, the organization possesses some fundamental prospects that can be of significant interest to achieving tall targets soon or shortly in the event of pandemic outbreaks given the capacity, structure and discipline of the military forces. These prospects are:

Investment in Research and Vaccine Development: One of the central issues that have dominated national and global discourse since the outbreak and attempt to combat COVID-19 is vaccine production and distribution. Many nations lack the requisite resources to implement sound public health measures, especially in places like developing countries mainly as a result of corruption and governance deficit. Over the years, some developed countries' forces such as the UK Military personnel are deployed across the globe to treat a wide variety of infectious diseases due to their medical expertise. Similarly, the US Military has also played a key role in the development, deployment and management of influenza vaccines for the entire nation (Sanchez and Cooper, 2016). All these above are achieved as a result of research. It is on this premise that it becomes needful for the Military Forces in Nigeria to leverage its command structure in initiating research and developing vaccines rather than the country waiting for vaccines from developed countries. This can be achieved through a robust investment in research to attract the best brains and create the enabling environment for the realization of such a magnificent task.

Building Capacity and Establishment of Pandemic Task Force

As influenza in contemporary times has come to pose threat to the personal well-being of soldiers in greater magnitudes, there is likely a huge expectation from the militaries to be engaged in continuous activities that will confer a superior measure of protection to those that they have enlisted into service (Watterson and Kamradt–Scott, 2016). Therefore, there is an urgent need to build capacity for medical personnel given the overwhelming

pandemic challenges. Also, there is a need for the military to constitute Pandemic Task Force to douse public concerns and anxiety and render timely treatment to victims as mental health practitioners, just like how some countries solidly relied on the military efforts to prevent and control the pandemic scourge. Findings revealed that the pandemic spreads quickly among the military forces, especially when they do not have the capacity for its control. For instance, the pandemic influenza of 1918 mostly hit the armed forces brutally, spread through them and caused severe mortality among soldiers. Also, the Russian armed forces had recruitment difficulties as it rejected thousands of its draftees for being HIV positive (Kalkman, 2020). Thus, this explains why the military in Nigeria should be involved and needs to build capacity and establish a task force. Generally, it is necessary to train additional personnel in the military to boost the capacity of medical personnel both in the military and public hospitals in the management of future pandemic outbreaks. More so, the engagement of troops in multiple national tasks has also reduced the number of those available for deployment to the battlefield (Iweze, 2020) and, by extension, pandemic control. Hence, the need for a pandemic task force.

Fostering - Civil-Military Partnerships and Community Relations

Deployment of the military forces with other security agencies in large numbers in response to the pandemic may come with some skirmishes. Similarly, some scholars have also criticised the extensive deployment of the military in response to the pandemic control. While the deployment may undoubtedly affect civilian control and civil rights in the wake of pandemic crisis management, the military could not ignore its strategic roles in such deadly diseases. Therefore, to manage and mitigate the effects of corona virus and perhaps future pandemic outbreaks, there is an urgent need to build trust between the military forces and the citizens through effective communication spearheaded by the government. Additionally, there is a need for an established friendly community between the civilian and the military personnel working together to achieve a national objective, protect civilian control and civil rights, and collectively pursue goals identified by civilian authorities seamlessly in the nation's interest. To ignore such a monumental role of the military in pandemic control will be dangerous given its credit of timely intervention in situations.

Enlightenment and Training of Personnel

Many measures often implemented by security agencies are recommended mainly by different health organisations towards flattening the curve of pandemic outbreaks like the COVID -19 in which the military personnel are its major component. More so, many armed forces emphasise their subservience to civilian (health) organisations, and crisis response organisations often believe that they have unique capabilities that are of great immense and indispensable value (Kalkman, 2020). As a sequel to the above, there is a compelling need to train, retrain and organise enlightenment programmes for the military

personnel assigned for the containment and control of the pandemic before deployment with the requisite knowledge that the pandemic is a collective assault and requires collective efforts for the overall benefit of the entire populace. Therefore, they need to be trained and adequately equipped with protective uniforms, masks and equipment. Thus necessary to reduce pandemic threats and risks and avoid depleting agency capacity, which would undermine their service delivery role and adversely affect public security.

Mobilisation of Medical Support and education

There is a need for increased adherence to the health regulations as enshrined by the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and education among the military populace in preparation for unforeseen pandemic outbreaks in future. Government can only achieve effective collaboration towards curtailing pandemic outbreaks by understanding, cooperating with governance, and peaceful relations among the citizenry and military forces. Consequently, the government should provide the enabling environment for education in the knowledge of human rights from the military personnel, basic social amenities, and other essentials needed to make the directives towards pandemic control work seamlessly.

Dedicated Military Funding for Pandemic Control

This becomes necessary as it would facilitate effective means in identifying priorities for future Defence Medical Services training and research for both inpatient and outpatients victims of infectious disease such as COVID-19. Furthermore, the development of policies and clinical guidelines for the management of infectious diseases will ensure the management of patients and inform planning for future operations and exercises (Burns, et al, 2018). This is consequent upon the corona virus outbreak that has shown how the challenges of national emergencies of the pandemic outbreak could deplete or defray the focus of budgetary allocation to all sectors. In an attempt to combat the Covid -19 outbreak, budgetary allocation to all sectors, including the defence sector, experienced a slight diversion from the original mandate. While the ravaging effects of the pandemic continue, it may further aid the cut of budgetary allocation to many sectors, including the defence and health sectors, in the wake of economic depression. The government should resist the temptation to underfund the military because we cannot underestimate their strategic roles in pandemic control and general insecurity skirmishes. Instead, they should consider allocating special funds for pandemic preparedness and control to enhance military capabilities, mobility, and efficiency in the event of pandemic outbreaks in the future to sustain their national strategic roles as the first responders to societal insecurity threats pandemic remains its significant component. Thus, adequate defence funding should remain a priority (Billon - Galland,2020)

Building Surveillance and Strengthening the Health System

The health system in Nigeria before the COVID-19 pandemic was fragile and underfunded; therefore, it could not respond to such a ravaging disease. More so, prevailing weak disease surveillance systems and poor public health infrastructure in Nigeria, as in most West African countries, constituted part of the limitations encountered in the containment of disease outbreaks and increased morbidity. Moreover, before the Covid -19 pandemic, yearly health spending in Nigeria was low, at only USD 27.84 per capita, far below other ECOWAS economies such as Ghana or Cote d'Ivoire (Acaps, 2020). Consequently, with the increasing population and overwhelming risks of future pandemic threats to Nigeria's health system, there is a need for the government to support the military authorities to strengthen their health systems. Also, improve surveillance, build more laboratories, and train more workforce and knowledge of infectious diseases and pandemic and emergency operations capabilities to prevent, detect and respond to threats. In addition, the military could identify and improve on the gaps in the fight against the ongoing pandemic in the country.

Building Capacity for Gender-sensitive and balanced response

It is essential to understand how gender norms, roles and behaviours interact in situations like pandemics where security agencies like the military are to respond to gender-sensitive issues. There is a need for the military Forces to build capacity for gender-sensitive and balanced responses. Most people suffering from exclusion or oppression of their gender, race or other identities felt the impact of the pandemic. Conflict-affected populations are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19, with women and girls in those settings facing disproportionate impacts. Women, and children out of school, are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, domestic violence, and domestic abuse due to movement restrictions and quarantine measures (Acaps Thematic Report, 2020: 6). The government and public health systems often lack institutional resilience and have limited capacity to plan and deliver preventive, inclusive and responsive public –health interventions especially in the aspect that affect the women and girl affairs.

6. Conclusion

As the military forces, Nigeria Government and its agencies have put up timely interventions ranging from maintaining the order of lockdowns and restrictions of movements across the country from its declaration as a pandemic. Parts of the government's response to the pandemic were the constitution of the pandemic task force, the establishment of NCDC, and other multi-sectoral COVID-19 PTF tasks that ensure monitoring of lockdowns, particularly in some targeted areas. Above all, the military forces' strategic health roles, collaboration and support in the containment of COVID-19 with other stakeholders deserve an applaud. Despite the above, some scholars have argued

that the extensive deployment of military personnel in response to pandemic control comes with a threat to civil control and widespread abuse of human rights. While this paper did not discountenance the tendencies for using the military's principle of control and command that may breach civil authority, rights and control, the strategic roles and contributions of the military personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be ignored. Therefore, the military stood out as the most professional security agency during the pandemic, regardless of the cases of brutality. Significantly, fighting emerging infectious diseases needs more than military readiness. There is a need for modeling collaborative efforts for the management of infectious diseases to be effective because the lines of responsibility are becoming blurring among federal agencies. In the case of the military, there is need to build capacity, provide public support, train personnel, and ensure the protection of civilians to build a pandemic-prepared military force leveraging on the national command structure of the military shortly without necessarily brutalising civil control. For example, the enforcement of lockdown when citizens do not receive commensurate palliatives from the government could only come with negative peace. Additionally, there is a need for the government to constitute a robust mechanism to serve as a national body responsible for monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the military interventions or efforts in such a pandemic control.

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