



Military Strategy and Warfare in Borno, 1470-1603

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Abstract

Borno kingdom was one of the most dominant political entities in the Central Sudan balance of power which rose to the position of prominence and glory in the 16th century because of the policies of expansion and consolidation that were entrenched by Mai Idris Alooma, the most notable ruler of Borno who took the kingdom to its zenith. The might of Borno in Central Sudan was central to effective administration that provided an enabling environment and built a formidable army that ensured the security of the kingdom. The military was an embodiment of the effective administration and economic prowess and stability of the kingdom. This paper examined the military strategy and warfare in Borno from 1470 to 1603 with specific reference to the Saifawa dynasty under the leadership of Mai Idris Alooma. The methodology adopted in writing this paper was qualitative in nature. The focus of this paper is central to the organization of the army, the conduct of war and weapons used by the imperial armed forces of Borno, and the strategy and tactics that were used. In conclusion, this paper observed that there has been an element of continuity and changes in both the Saifawa and al-Kanemi dynasties in military strategies and warfare in Borno.

Keywords: Dynasty, Saifawa, Strategy, Warfare

Introduction

Borno kingdom established an effective military organization between the 15th and 19th centuries under the Saifawa dynasty. This enabled the polity to enjoy remarkable supremacy in the central Sudan balance of power throughout the pre-colonial period. What prompted the feudatories to keep an elaborate standing army were the prevailing circumstances of the period characterized by internecine wars. The kingdom was surrounded by its arch-rivals such as Bulala, Tuaregs, Baghirmi, Wadai, Mandara and Hausaland who used to cause a series of troubles (Cohen, 1966; 15; Brenner, 1973; 9; Smith, 1971; 177; Alkali, 1983; 157). Apart from the fact that the army was playing the role of protecting the citizenry and territorial integrity, it is also used in acquiring territorial outlets for the kingdom. The military was a factor during these periods of the kingdom for it helped in attaining its golden age between the 16th and 17th centuries A.D. Indeed, the Mais of the Saifawa dynasty especially Mai Ali Gaji (1470- 1503) and Mai Idris Alooma (1571-1603) pursued policies of expansion, consolidation and diversification. The military high command headed by the Kaigama under the Saifawa dynasty pursued aggressive expansionist policies where the kingdom had its physical size and influence increased (Alkali, 1983; 102 & 119).

The Kaigama was supported by subordinates such as Zarmas and Zannas in manning command positions in the military as well as carrying out mobilization, recruitment and training exercises (Alkali, 1983; 119). They also ensured maximum loyalty to the authority, discipline and *esprit de' corp* within the military establishment was maintained. The military was so structured that there was a sense of regimentation in which warriors were recognized particularly those who



excelled in combat situations by way of rewarding them with gifts such as fief, slaves, livestock and promotion. However, it has been observed that gift of physical cash was discouraged to insulate the military from unbridled materialism. Indeed, by so doing the system meant to ensure that the typical military lifestyle of austere life was maintained. This is by implication not to say that the military class was aloof to using cash in their day-to-day activities but rather it was intended to observe and adhere to the ethics of the military profession which opposed to an ostentatious lifestyle.

Military Strategy in Borno under the Saifawa

Every success and failure in the execution of war is predicated on the strategy enunciated by a given administration. When the administration determines a quest for enduring state-building in the regime, it results in a successful outcome in her warfighting. On the other hand, when there is a renege in the administration as regards to postulating an enduring strategy there is bound to be a failure. Some Borno rulers were determined and focused in administering the kingdom where far-reaching strategic policies have evolved for uplifting the society on one hand and tilting supremacy in their favor in the region on the other hand. It is largely for these reasons that Borno rulers pre-occupied themselves with not only containing internal threats to territorial integrity but also acquiring and protect new territories within the Central Bilad as-Sudan. Most of the wars fought by Borno under the Saifawa dynasty were for the purpose of economic control i.e., dominating the eastern trans-Saharan trade route (Alkali, 1983; 67).

To achieve these objectives of uplifting the society and maintaining supremacy in the balance of power in the Central Sudan system, the appointment and administration of capable military officers was not only important but inevitable. This corroborates with Chinese strategist and theoretician Sun Tzu (1988; xxiv) who said that:

The administration of military affairs means the administration of border affairs, or the administration and the affairs in outlying regions, in such a way as to relieve people from major disturbances. The administration is done by authority and military prowess, executing the violence and rebellious in order to preserve the country and keep the homeland secure.

Since such military organization possessed traits of structure and flexibility an officer whose function was to coordinate and provide skilful commandership was necessary. In view of this, the military organization was headed by Kaigama, charged with the responsibility of giving instructions, command and control to the imperial armed forces. This trend was institutionalized under the Saifawa administration of Mai Ali Gaji and reaching its zenith under Mai Idris Alooma. Other succeeding Mais maintained the status-quo. However, because of the exigency of the vastness of the kingdom, it was divided into four military commands thus, the commanders also carried out administrative responsibilities.

The four area commanders were the Galadima in charge of the west stationed at Nguru, Kaigama for the north at Gaidam, Yerima for the south and Mustrema for the eastern frontiers respectively. These officers were not only responsible for day-to-day coordination of military affairs but also served as provincial governors in Borno (Brenner, 1973; 13). They owed allegiance to the sovereign ruler i.e., "*Kema Lardema*" meaning owner of the land who was the supreme commander of the army. Although these commanders enjoyed same power, the Kaigama was the Commander in-Chief of the Borno imperial armed forces who appeared in military regalia, was responsible for



the general organization and command of troops the *Askerwa* (Alkali, 1983; 118). On the appointment of commanders each time, swearing-in and turbaning ceremonies were elaborately carried out in the court of the ruler before being posted out to their respective areas of jurisdiction. In the swearing-in and turbaning ceremonies all the military men were assembled, and “*asker*” was conducted reminding them of their professional background overtime (Alkali, 1983; 120). All the military men who assembled for the ceremony were traditionally ordained to pay tribute and allegiance to the newly crowned commanders.

It is interesting to note that there were subordinate commanders who assisted the Kaigama and other provincial governors to ensure efficiency in the defense system. These officers were Zarmas and Zannas who assisted the Kaigama in organizing military activities such as recruitment, training and conducted ceremonies such as “*barga*”; a kind of dance in which all soldiers participated (Alkali, 1983; 120). Another military dance known as “*asker*” was only limited to the military officers – the Kaigama, Zarmas and Zannas. Both the *barga* and *asker* were to raise the morale of the army and to make them acquainted to one other. War songs were sung, praises made to the Mai and the great soldiers of the past which gave the soldiers more courage, sense of unity of purpose and of common identity-*esprit de’ corp* (Alkali, 1983; 120).

Military recruitment and training in Borno was strictly handled by military officers (Alkali, 1983; 119-20). Progress of recruitment and training was usually reported to the Mai from time to time. Before troops left the capital for war, an elaborate rehearsal for the entire army was organized in a ceremony known as “*bata and tawur*”. It was at this stage that the Mai had the time to inspect the army, their organization and strength. It is through the *tawur* that the loyalty of the Kaigama was reaffirmed to the supreme ruler (Alkali, 1983; 118). Mobilization and recruitment in Borno were carried out from time to time. But more emphasis was given in times of emergency particularly between the 16th, 17th and the first half of the 19th centuries when Borno was in her time of emergency (Alkali, 1983; 119). During these periods general mobilization of warriors was carried out both in the capital and other parts of the state at the directive of the ruler at anytime. In the same vein, recruitment into the army was a continuous exercise. However, the task of recruitment outside the capital was the responsibility of the *Chima gana* who received orders from his senior lord - *Chima kura* (Alkali, 1983; 119). It is interesting to note that the task of recruitment in Borno has never been difficult for there were always willing volunteers who were prepared to serve in the army whenever they were called upon to do so (Alkali, 1983; 119).

The subordinate commanders had the responsibilities of assisting the Commander in Chief - the Kaigama. Zarmas were responsible for the organization of various regiments and serve as commanders. According to Koelle (1968; 259-60) these regimental commanders were 12 in number. The Zannas were unit commanders of the Borno armed forces. Makintas were charged with the responsibility of carrying out certain military functions such as organizing royal bodyguards and enforcement of laws and discipline of erring officials.

Establishment of Standing Army in Borno under the Saifawa system

Military is the pride of any nation either in the centralized system, city state or acephalous societies. It determines the survival or otherwise of any nation. Like any other human society, Borno rulers pursued the policy of establishing a formidable military organization which has been strong before moving southward from Kanem to Borno. The formation of standing army was informed by the desire to achieve maximum coercive measures against identified and unidentified foes. The



military in Borno for ease of command and control was divided into two categories. These include professional and amateur soldiers that formed the nucleus of Borno forces.

The professional category was largely attained through participation and experience from series of wars. There were also those who become professionals by virtue of their patrilineal antecedents, mostly of servile origin (Brenner, 1973; 13-14). This is to say that those who were born to the families of the military commanders automatically emerged as professional soldiers after receiving the rudimentary training. Promotion and recognitions by the authorities helped in elevating officers to high command positions. In the same vein, loyalty, courage, valor, steadfastness, and resilience were determining features for promotion and recognition. Other category of the military was the amateur group of soldiers. The amateur soldiers were largely group of volunteers who were mobilized during emergencies. This comprised those who were willingly recruited and those conscripted at different villages. It is interesting to note that Borno imperial armed forces comprised of infantry, cavalry and canoe soldiers as demonstrated in some wars.

The imperativeness of professionalism in the military of Borno was not farfetched given the background that the kingdom was surrounded by dreadful rivals such as Bulala, Gamargu, Baghirmi, Wadai, Bade, Mandara, Ngizim, Kare-Kare, Hausa among others. As Aja-Akpuru (2008; 14) observed:

Military professionalism promotes organization behaviour which is centred around military discipline and military action. The management of the military ensures adequate and regular learning, training, drilling and a situation of combat readiness. It assures the place of the military force as a permanent feature of defense and security.

To justify this assertion, it has been clear that Borno imperial army carried out constant military expeditions for either overrunning or total annihilation of contending forces particularly during the reign of Mai Idris Alooma and Ahmad Ibn Ali who was disturbed by the activities of the Fulani Jihadists in the first decade of the 19th century. However, this continued throughout the century as the period witnessed emergent imperial interests from outside which include that of Rabe and those of the European powers (Cohen, 1967: 18; Brenner, 1973: 14).

Evolution of Defensive Frontiers in Borno

Like most pre-colonial centralized societies in Africa the kingdom of Borno proceeded to establish defensive frontiers against invasion by hostile neighbors such as Tuaregs, Bulala, Wadai, Baghirmi, Mandara, Jukun and Hausa among others. Borno's strategic position in the Central Sudan made it necessary for her to be weary of security of the citizenry and of the territorial integrity of the state (Brenner, 1973; 12). Thus, for this reasons, defensive walls and ribats were erected in the capital and some provincial areas. This tradition started with the establishment of Birni Ngazargamo and continued up to the al-Kanemi dynasty though development has overtaken the existence of these walls, but the relics remain visible in some areas such as Birni Ngazargamo, Garumele, Gamboru, Kukawa, Dikwa and Maiduguri (Yerwa) (Mahdi, 1977; 9-26; Bivar & Shinnie, 1962; 1- 10). The frontier walls had entrance gates, and each was manned by officials mostly bodyguards.

The division of Borno into provinces was done for both administrative and defensive purpose. Galadima was the governor of west, stationed at Nguru; Kaigama for the North at Gaidam, Yerima for the South; stationed within the capital and Mustrema for the east were appointed to coordinate military and administrative activities and provide maximum security in their respective



domains. Consequent upon the attack of Nguru by the Fulani jihadists, the office of the Galadima was relocated to Dapchi before it was later moved to Munio (Cohen & Brenner, 1974). Each of these governors had subordinate administrators at the village level that helped in the administration of the state. This is in line with the view of Aja-Akpuru (2008: 14) who said that:

As a chain of command-and-control structure issuing and reviewing orders follow a hierarchical design, orders flow from the top (superior or superordinate officers) to down (subordinate officers). Every professional military personnel understands the place of discipline or the absence of it in a command-and-control structure.

This clearly shows that there was synergy between the centre, provisional and village levels in terms of command, control and enforcement that makes the system of defense centralized. However, at the village level there was no standing army, but the system operated was more or less “unitary”. Therefore, it is plausible to argue that the village heads conducted expeditions with volunteer armies who were largely their followers in their respective villages. It was very easy to mobilize and get volunteers thus, because to them is a service to the lords of the land and had semblance of pride and recognition by the imperial throne. It is not out of place to say here that not all the village heads were authorized to carry out battles in terms of incursion or threats for there were titled among them with a nomenclature of “*Mai*” or “*Shettima*”. This group of officials carried out wars on behalf of the supreme ruler *Kema Lardema* through the provincial governors in places like Auyo, Muniyo, Dawura, Marte, Mofiyo, Kulli etc. The non-titled village heads could only report incidences of attacks or potential threats against their areas of jurisdictions to the provincial governors (Brenner, 1973; 13). Because of Borno’s vastness as a result of expansionist policies pursued vigorously during the reign of Mai Idris Alooma, the concept of defensive frontier was introduced and practiced which later became institutionalized by his dynamic predecessors such as Mai Ahmad Ibn Idris (1603-1619), Mai Ibrahim Ibn Idris (1619-1626) and Mai Umar Ibn Idris (al-Mukaddas) 1626-1636). The defensive frontiers that were established during their era were to the east Kulli, Mofiyo, Marte and Dikwa against the rivaling states of Mandara and Baghirmi. To the west were such tributaries like Dapchi and Dawura. An important Landmark was the creation of the office of the Khalifa of Kanem who was charged with the responsibility of providing defense in the east especially against Wadai, Bulala and Baghirmi (Alkali, 1983; 103).

Warfare and Military Alliances in Borno

Borno occupied a strategic position in the Bilad al-Sudan generally which is why many kingdoms were envious of her position. Throughout the history of Borno the kingdom engaged in warfare with her rival neighbors over economic and military supremacy in the region i.e. the control of trade routes, expansion of territory and outlet etc (Brenner, 1973; 24; Benisheikh, 1983; 95). Even from within, a lot of endogenous conflicts which the kingdom had to contain with arising from succession disputes, non-recognition of Borno’s authority by some vassal states such as Ahir, Kano, Wadai, Baghirmi etc and Jihad movement. Because of the complexity of periods and situations most rulers of Borno pursued a policy akin to contemporary America’s “...no permanent friend and no permanent enemy but permanent interest”. In line with this there had been changes in relations with her neighboring kingdoms and semi-autonomous states. Relation with one another determines the nature of war the kingdom executes.



Generally, in Borno execution of wars had different patterns; religious wars (Jihad) were executed directly by the forces of the kingdom. In some instances, the ruler himself led the expedition against infidel states. A case in point were the wars waged by Mai Idris Alooma against the 'So' people on the shore of the Lake Chad, the attacks on Marghi, Ngizim, Bade, Kare-Kare, Gamargu, Michika and Kopchi (Furtua, 1970; 10-12; Benisheikh, 1983; 141). When such states were subdued, they were either asked to embrace Islam or vanished. Their properties automatically became war booty. The booty concerned of the rulers were specifically weapons, slaves, foodstuffs etc. (Benisheikh, 1983; 93-4). However, if some proved to be recalcitrant, mop-up attacks were carried out against them until they succumb or accept Islam.

Borno wars concerning territorial expansion and defending her territorial integrity always accompanied by way of alliance with friendly kingdoms. Based on the principle of Borno's policy of "no permanent friend no permanent enemy". At times the kingdom established alliances with her foes such as Kano, Kebbi, Gobir, Wadai, Baghirmi and Fombina or Adamawa among others entered into military pact with Borno which sometimes thwarted due to state interest. The alliance policy went beyond the Sudanic region to Maghreb or the Arab world. Through the alliances in Borno's history men and weapons were attracted to strengthen her armed forces. It is on record that during the reign of Mai Idris Alooma in the 16th century Borno struck a deal with the Sultan of Murzuk where the latter supplied Borno with weapons (Al- Hajj, 1983; 160-70). So also, the same was carried out with the Sultan of Turkey where Turkish muskets and musketeers were deployed to Borno to re-enforce the imperial forces (Al-Hajj, 1983: 167-70). Thus, the importation of such weapons and training of soldiers gave Borno an unprecedented upper-hand against her enemies which by extension secured an exalted advantage in the river Shari-Logone balance of power.

The weapons deployed into warfare by the imperial forces of Borno were virtually the same with most of the pre-colonial African societies (Aja-Akpuru, 2008: 14; Alkali, 1983:120). The weapons used by the imperial army include 'Bellam' - harpoon, *Kazaa* - spears, *Kashegar* - sword, *Kafi* - Bow, *Kanyagu* - arrow, *Chonge* - battle axe, a carved sharp-edged weapon - *Ngarewu*, *Ngwaa* - shield usually used by the cavalry. Other weapons include guns, catapult, sticks, clubs cutlass, amulets, dagger, javelin and knives. These weapons were handled and administered by the three different military formations of the Borno armed forces i.e the foot soldiers or infantry, cavalry or horse soldiers and those on canoes mostly located around the shores of the Lake Chad. The canoe forces were purposely introduced to fight the Buduma, Sugurti, So, Kotoko who dwelled mainly on the shores of the Lake Chad. All the formations were commanded by specialized set of personnel. Each formation comprised of different brigades and battalions usually led by Zarmas and Zannas (Koele, 1968). However, unlike in the Oyo Alafinate system where the Are-Ona-Kakanfo was to vanish when he loses war, in Borno was not the case. Rather, the defeated commander could be replaced by someone who is brave, courageous and avowed capable.

The *modus operandi* of the Borno armed forces in warfare was relative depending on the situation and purpose to which the war was fought. Some wars were fought with the intent of only subduing the enemies while others for total annihilation (Furtua, 1926; 12). In the first place, the enemies when conquered were made to recognize the supremacy of the kingdom and consequently become a vassal state. On the other hand, those who proved vociferously stubborn were outrightly annihilated or completely forced to leave the vicinity of the kingdom; a particular case was the Jukun or Kwona who were forced to migrate to Kwararafa in the Upper Benue Valley (Palmer, 1939).

In Borno's war engagements, several tactics were evolved to find the enemies capitulated. For instance, Mai Idris Alooma had introduced Scotch-earth tactics to assault and subdues his enemies. On some occasions, trenches were dug and blockades or ribats were made against enemies'



encroachment (Furtua, 1970). To ease possible exhaustion of the “asker” camels and horses were introduced into the warfare (Brenner, 1973: 37). The horsemen and those fighting on the camels’ back were usually sent on a long-range raid. Archers and javelineers were used to reduce the fighting power of the enemies (Alkali, 1983:121). Such forces were usually commanded by the Kaigama later Kachalla and the senior Zarmas. To motivate warriors, those who excelled in wars were rewarded with gifts and elevated to the senior cadre. To commemorate victories in wars “*bata* and *barga*” were organized where the bravery of the fallen heroes was eulogized (Alkali, 1983: 120).

As it was the case with many African societies seeking fortunes for the army was inevitable (Aja-Akpuru, 2008). For this, there was a strong connection between the religious and the political institutions for peace, security and development to prevail in the kingdom (Brenner, 1973; 33; Smith, 1971; 177). Spiritualism played a significant role in the execution of wars Borno fought with her neighbors during the Saifawa dynasty. This could be traced to the pre-Borno era in that many sources had it that the fortunes enjoyed by the Saifawa Mais were attributed to the *Mune* talisman (Brenner, 1973; 9; Smith, 1971; 177), the destruction of which catastrophically was seen by different scholars as the major factor that led to series of calamities that befell on the kingdom. Mysticism was part of the tactics used for the military fortune in wars that ensued between Borno and her neighbors. It is generally observed that divinity in the execution of warfare is seen as an integral part of Borno system. This goes to explain that Bornoans had faith in the religion and Islam portray a belief which all human activities supported by prayer or supplication.

Mai Idris Alooma’s Wars and Military Alliance

As observed earlier, the rulers of Borno established military alliance with their neighbors to defend the territoriality of the empire, ensure expansion and consolidation of the fortunes of the polity. Mai Idris Alooma (1571-1603) was the most celebrated ruler of Borno who vigorously pursued the policy of expansion and consolidation. In order to realize these objectives, he entered into a number of alliances with local communities residing in the empire and foreign powers in the 16th century. On assuming power as the Mai of Borno, Alooma faced several challenges. Some of the major challenges faced at the beginning of his reign include the security threat posed by the So. The So were divided into two major groups namely the So Ngafata and the So Talala. The Ngafata lived around Damasak close to Birnin Ngazargamo, the capital of Borno and the Talala were established in the eastern frontiers of Borno in the Lake Chad area (Furtua, 1970:21).

It is observed that Alooma, by this period (1571), did not sign any treaty or alliance with his neighbors to deal with the So. His military alliance with foreign powers came later. This simply means that Alooma used the resources at his disposal to engage the So. One of his significant strategies was establishment of military garrisons closely located to the major So concentration areas. He built two garrisons; the first one was built near Damasak to the east of Birnin Ngazargamo under the leadership of a military officer, one Shettima Biri Getera and his son Ajimi Gasma Ibn Biri (Furtua, 1970; 21). The second garrison was established to the north of the Birni under the control of Chikama Buma (Furtua, 1970: 21). Alooma having established two garrisons employed the strategy of destruction of crops and the cutting down of trees thus rendering the So defenseless (Barth, 1965: 121) The first operation against the So started around 1571 and it was inconclusive. But in the second encounter still in 1571 at the battle of Maya, Borno forces were defeated by the So to the displeasure of Alooma. After merely three days, the Borno army attacked the So not physically but, instead, the army resorted to “scotched earth policy” in which trees were cut down and crops destroyed in the three major towns of So Ngafata namely Maya Badama and Charma



(Palmer, 1929: 34). Taking the operation further, Aloomo decided on a general countryside attack against the So Ngafata. This was after he had camped at Damasak and ensured the surrender of the So. Some sections of the Ngafata however, regrouped for a new attack. During this encounter in 1572, Aloomo entered alliance with the local Arabs residing in Borno (Cohen & Brenner, 1974: 98). After obtaining the support and cooperation of his Arab allies, he sent Kaigama Muhammad Kadai with the Arab contingents to the town of Dabushka, and in the same vein, other military officers were sent to different concentrations of the So Ngafata (Alkali, 2013; 163; Tijani, 2010; 154). It appeared that both the Saifawa and the Arab supporters of al-Kanemi were considered as immigrants by the So and it was therefore in their interest. According to Alkali (2013) both groups united and fought the common enemy to ensure the security of the Saifawa and their very existence in Borno (Tijani, 2010; 155). It took a period of eighteen months to annihilate the So Ngafata. The defeated and displaced Ngafata withdrew and joined their brethren; the So Talala to fight Aloomo. Traditions maintained that Aloomo himself led the expedition against the combined forces of the So and defeated them (Cohen, 1960; 131).

Following the removal of threat posed by the So, Aloomo turned his attention to the western frontiers of the empire which extended from Bade territory to Fika in the south. In the late 16th century, the area was occupied by the Ngizim, a Chadic speaking people like the So. They were one of the principal reasons why Aloomo declared war on the Ngizim because of the fact that they made free mobility difficult for the nomadic Fulani who were by the sixteenth century settling in Borno (Furtua, 1970; 22). In addition, the Ngizim occupied a strategic position along the major trade routes that linked Borno with Hausaland and raided traders along the major trade routes which linked the two polities thus, rendering the route unsecured (Palmer, 1926; 34). There were two groups of the Ngizim. The first group was the Binawa who accepted Islam and offered their loyalty to Aloomo; but the second body of the Ngizim was recalcitrant to the central authority of Borno and was defeated by Aloomo in the Battle of Sade (Alkali;2013).

With regards to military alliance as mentioned earlier that Aloomo allied with the Arabs residing in Borno in 1571 and defeated the So Ngafata. In the case of the Ngizim, the most decisive factor responsible for collapse of their resistance against Aloomo was the firearms which the special corps of Turkish soldiers used against them. The Turkish element is central in the defeat and dispersal of the Ngizim thus suggests that Aloomo had struck a deal (a military pact) with the Ottoman Turks to supply him with Turkish Musketeers in his military encounter but also corps of Turkish soldiers/hired mercenaries to fight on the side of Borno. The Turkish soldiers were hired from the Maghreb which was a province of the Ottoman empire (except for Morocco) under the Turks. It must be pointed out that Borno had trade and cultural relations with the Turks since the days of the trans-Saharan trade. There were Turkish soldiers in the Ottoman garrisons in the Magheb which enabled Aloomo and his successors to hire some of them as mercenaries. Aloomo's army recorded easy victory over the Ngizim who were probably facing sophisticated imported Turkish guns for the first time in their lives. Several Ngizim towns such as Marwa, Ngajimbana, Gugai, Kataguno got news on the destructive effects of the Turkish firearms; Aloomo received a pledge of loyalty from the rest of the Ngizim people. Aloomo was aided by the power of his firearms and mercenary Turkish troops.

The next major military encounter of Aloomo with the enemies of the kingdom was the battle with the people of Amsaka. It was situated to the east of the present day Dikwa on one of the extensive firgi mounds of the Makari territory. It was a fortified settlement mainly of the Gamargu people who opposed Aloomo. There were two different attacks made against Amsaka. The first one in 1571/72 in which Aloomo was defeated and his troops withdrew for a while it could be speculated



that during the first encounter the Saifawa had not yet obtained firearms in that no means of it was mentioned. It was however, in the second expedition against Amsaka in c.1574 that Turkish firearms were used, and superior military strategy was demonstrated (Alkali, 2013; 174; Tijani, 2013; 172). In Amsaka, just as was in the Ngizim towns of Sade and Ngajimbana, the Saifawa army depended on the force of the Turkish firearms. To secure up Aloomo's military alliance for effective expansion, it could be said that he succeeded in building a formidable army which became one of the major factors in his conquest and suppression of rebellious groups within Borno. It took the Mai five years to carry out military campaigns against his enemies such as the So, the Ngizim and the Gamargu people of Amsaka.

After defeating the Gamargu people of Amsaka, Mai Idris Aloomo turned his attention on the Bulala located in the eastern frontiers of the empire. As against the Bulala, he started on a friendly platform as his mother was a Bulala princess. But after the initial honeymoon, he went to war with them over three border towns which the Bulala claimed to have acquired by conquest. In the ensuing conflict the Bulala were defeated on the northern frontier. Aloomo defeated the Tuaregs of Damargu and the Teda of Jawara. Through these successes, he secured Borno's commercial lifeline with the Maghreb and beyond (Cohen, 1967; 42; Eluwa, 1988; 29). To the west, he fought the Hausaland and after the collapse of Songhai Empire, he made Borno the dominant power in politics of the Hausa states (Eluwa, 1988; 29).

Aloomo died in 1603 and left a large empire for his successors. After the reign of the three sons of Aloomo, the fortune of the empire took a turn which eventually led to the decadence of the empire (Adeleye, 1971; 78). The proceeding rulers could neither expand nor defend the territorial integrity of the empire they inherited. They spent their time in luxury and strove to maintain the status-quo. However, the policy of maintaining the status-quo was not a good venture as the enemies of Borno; the Tuaregs, Bulala, Jukun or Kwararrafa and Mandara among others were also striving to build themselves and challenge the military efficacy of the empire.

The military that Aloomo built over the years gradually and steadily lost its glory. The Mandara, one of the adversaries of Borno struck in 1781 and defeated the Borno army (Abubakar, 1980; 63). According to Adeleye (1971), Borno did not recover from this defeat and by the opening years of the 19th century, the Fulani Jihadists gave a dreadful blow on the empire. Mai Ahmed failed to defend the empire from the Fulani Jihadists who attacked and successfully destroyed Birni Ngazargamo, the capital of the empire. Perhaps, Borno needed a savior and Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi responded to the clarion call of Mai Ahmad. The combined forces of the Fulani according to Cohen & Brenner (1974) attacked and sacked Birni Ngazargamo, the capital of Borno in 1808. A substantial part of the territory of Borno in the west and in the south soon fell to the Fulani. Mai Ahmad aged blind and unfit abdicated his throne for his son Dunoma. But failed to deal with the Fulani and soon engaged the services of Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi, then living in Ngala south of the Lake Chad (Brenner, 1973; 26). The Fulani attacked the capital in 1808 but were repulsed by al-Kanemi's forces.

In 1811, the Fulani attacked for the second time. This time, they were dastardly death with by the combine forces of the Saifawa and al-Kanemi. However, al-Kanemi requested for and obtained a fief (Land) as a reward for rescuing Borno from the Fulani. The piece of land extended from Ngala to Ngurno; almost half of the entire empire (Falola et al, 1991; 30). Al-Kanemi became the head of Borno's defense force and a kingmaker. To buttress his new position, he deposed Mai Dunoma Ibn Ahmad and appointed Mai Muhammad Ngeleruma and later deposed Ngeleruma and re-instated Mai Dunoma in 1814 (Falola, et al, 1991; 35; Brenner, 1973; 36). In 1814 he built his capital at Kukawa thus becoming the most powerful man in Borno (Cohen & Brenner, 1974; 103).



Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that Borno under the Saifawa survived from the 15th century up to 1808 on account of her sophisticated military organization headed by the Kaigamas under the authorities of Borno rulers. It is notwithstanding that military alliance entered into by rulers of Borno with friendly neighbors; the Turks and other communities yielded positive results. The training of Borno troops by foreign experts in addition to sophisticated weapons that were imported and administered ensured victory in Borno's military encounters with the enemies of the empire. Foreign mercenary was also a factor to reckon with in the success of the imperial army. It could as well be added that the strategy employed by the rulers of Borno ensured success in her military encounters with the enemies of the empire. However, the application of spiritual means for the fortunes or success of the army in their various encounters contributed immensely to the execution of Borno's wars. The efficacy of the military machine nurtured and developed by the Saifawa Mais was adopted though with few modifications in terms of nomenclature and role of officers by the al-Kanemi dynasty found to be effective. Although, in the cause of time, the military might of the kingdom suffered catastrophic setbacks because of the emergence of weak rulers, succession disputes, dwindling economic conditions and foreign invasion. Finally, it was the superb military organization of the empire that actively guaranteed Borno's position as a dominant power in the Central Bilad al-Sudan in the period covered in this paper.

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