

IEDs AND NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SECURITY
CHALLENGES: "THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE"

BEING A PAPER PRESENTATION

BY

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AT THE

A ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE ON IMPROVISED
EXPLOSIVE DEVICES AND INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY RESPONSES

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Mr. Chairman, thank you for giving me the floor.

Let me begin, first of all, by thanking the organizers of this conference for their thoughtfulness in choosing a topic such as this, at this time. Few scholars and diplomats, familiar with contemporary global issues, would doubt that, today, the subject of this roundtable conversation – ‘Improvised Explosives’, is one of the hottest issues of our time as far as the issues of peace, security and conflicts are concerned, particularly in relation to developing countries.

I would also like especially to thank someone here, if you would all please indulge me just a little, Ms. Kamelia Kemileva, who first broached with me, the idea of my participation at this conference. I first met this brilliant young woman in 2008, when she was my Special Assistant as President of Human Rights Council here in Geneva. At that time, during the hectic sessions of the Human Rights Council, she provided solid intellectual and professional support. Today, seven years on, that relationship has endured and I am happy that I can still very much count on her support and friendship. Thank you, Kamelia.

Now, to the main subject of my intervention: “IEDs and national and regional security challenges: the Nigerian experience”. I will begin my presentation by quoting, in extensor, from ThisDay, one of the leading newspapers in Nigeria, as published on 5th June 2015: I QUOTE,

“For the seventh time in as many days, suspected Boko Haram members struck in the Northeast when a female suicide bomber yesterday evening detonated an explosive device near a military checkpoint in Maiduguri, while another struck at a market in Yola. Confirming the Maiduguri attack, the Borno State Police Commissioner, Mr. Aderemi Opadokun, said a female suicide bomber detonated a bomb strapped on her at a military checkpoint in the troubled town. The police boss in text message to the news said: It is true there was a suicide attack near a military checkpoint”. He added that two persons died and three others were injured. He recalled that the attack was on Baga road, where another suicide bomber (had) detonated a bomb on Wednesday, resulting in the death of four persons. A resident of the town, Abba Shehu said on phone that the explosion happened just before 6 pm. He claimed that the loud bang made everyone to scamper for safety. In another

incident, a bomb blast suspected to be from a suicide bomber ripped through a market in Yola, the capital city of Adamawa State. According to online newspaper, Premium Times, a resident of the town, Salihu Aliyu, said the blast happened in front of the Jimeta market at about 7.45pm. "We just finished observing the Maghrib (evening) prayer when we heard a loud blast in the direction of the market", he said. He said the number of casualties was likely to be high because when the explosion occurred, many traders closed their shops and started rushing home. "You know many traders also come out of the market and display their wares outside the market to sell at night," he said. "There was even a traffic gridlock in the area with many Keke Napep (commercial tricycle) operators jostling for passengers when the bomb exploded". One witness said at least 10 people were killed and about 30 were injured. The police could not be reached immediately for comment."

The immediate past President of my country, The Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR, several times in his address to the United Nations and other international forums, always used to refer to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, including especially the indiscriminate use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), as the new weapons of mass destruction and destabilization in the African continent.

In my candid opinion, the President could not have been more accurate in his analysis and appreciation of the implications of this global scourge. In the more than five years since the terrorist group, Boko Haram, a term which means 'western education is forbidden', began its monstrous attacks in Nigeria, ravaging in particular, the north eastern part of the country, thousands of innocent people have been slaughtered at a spate that now ranks Nigeria as suffering the highest number of civilian casualties in African conflict zones. "Over the past five years, we have been, and are still confronting threats posed by Boko Haram to peace and stability," President Goodluck Jonathan told the UN Security Council in New York in October 2014. Overall, "The costs are high: over 13,000 people have been killed, whole communities razed, and hundreds of persons kidnapped". The dimension and scope of the scourge is underscored by the fact, as argued by the Nigeria Security Tracker, a project run by Africa programme of the Council on Foreign Relations, "three to five times more people are killed on each terrorist occasion than are actually reported". In the survey carried out by the Geneva based *Small Arms Survey*

group, between the period, 2011 and 2013, Nigeria actually ranked fifth among the list of countries. The other countries that rank higher than Nigeria are Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria, in that order.

Even at the risk of restating the obvious, it might just be pointed out here that Boko Haram atrocities and the devastating implications of the use of IEDs are best appreciated within the context of Nigeria's current conditions: It is Africa's most populous nation, largest economy and biggest oil producer- its huge population is also equally divided between the world's two most important religions – Islam and Christianity. This means that the disproportionate impact of the proliferation of the use of IEDs is felt heaviest in Nigeria by civilians, compared to other countries in Africa's conflict zones, in terms of lives lost and grave physical injuries to the population. As the nature and targets of IED attacks were usually also to disrupt access to services, transport routes, commercial and market spaces, the debilitating consequences of these Improvised Explosive Devices were also acutely more severe for long term security and socio economic development.

Mr. Chairman, Dear Colleagues,

Having in some detail commented on the nature and consequences of the proliferation of IEDs in the Nigerian context , I shall now elucidate on how best these consequences might be ameliorated or, in other words, what strategies might be best adopted to address the challenge posed by the proliferation of the use of IEDs. My focus shall be on the use of multilateral diplomacy, through global institutions and processes. Straightaway, let the point be made, that the use of multilateral institutions or strategies does not preclude the complementary use of other strategies. I should add that I am focusing on the multilateral process not because - we are in Geneva - the European seat of multilateral diplomacy - or because I am a diplomat - a multilateral diplomat for that matter; my preference for multilateral diplomacy derives from the fact that it has the greatest potential for success, given the nature, scope and character of the IED challenge.

In this connection, we must appreciate that IEDs are not just a military threat, but a complex and sophisticated one at that. The manufacture or fabrication of

the devices have gone beyond the simple, crude and improvised level at which they initially were, and so we can ill afford to be indolent, unscientific and incoherent in our approach to addressing the challenge that they pose. An IED expert, Peter Singer, captures this correctly when, in reference to the seriousness of the danger posed by IEDs, he warned “An enduring threat requires an enduring capability to counter ...”.

Equally important to note here is the fact that the threat posed by IEDs is not local but global, a reality which implies that no nation or peoples should consider themselves safe and secure from it. The global character of IEDs stems from the fact also that IEDs are increasingly evolving as an international criminal system with their own networks of suppliers, planners and trainers, cutting across the nations, regions and continents of the world. Porosity of borders, weak administrative capacities in some countries, and the absence of effective stockpile management skills: all of these factors combine to undermine existing regulations against the proliferation of IEDs.

National efforts

Against the background and the forgoing analysis, that the proliferation of IEDs are largely global, I will now elucidate the efforts so far exerted at national and regional levels in Nigeria and West Africa, to deal with the threat.

At the national level, recognizing the scope and implications of the IED threat, Nigeria was quick to mobilize appropriate response to tackle the military aspect of the threat. In this connection, just as it happened during the 1960s when the nation fought a civil war that threatened its unity and survival, military hardware support was denied Nigeria by its “traditional friends” from the West. As a result Nigeria, after much procrastination and delay had to scamper for its needed military hardware from Eastern European countries and China to fight the war against the terrorists.

With this support, it was possible to achieve considerable success especially within the last few months. Whilst some months ago the perpetrators of IEDs attacks grew and expanded and were in fact able to seize and occupy territories in the northeastern part of the country, the Nigerian military has

now reclaimed lost territories. As a result of these successes much of the land hitherto held by the terrorists and which was used massively to fabricate and deploy IEDs have been liberated.

Apart from the military approach, national response has also included promoting development in the conflict areas of the North Eastern part of Nigeria through a whole-of-Government policy. In this connection, hundreds of schools (the so called Almajiri schools), have been built to grow capacity and de-radicalize young people in the troubled region. This is in addition to the wealth creation programmes also introduced to provide jobs for the youths. Government argues that unless these measures are taken, peace will not be achieved and sustained in the region, in the long run.

Another component of the Government strategy to deal with the threat of *Boko Haram*, and by implication the proliferation of the use of IEDs is the Dialogue and Amnesty strategy. The committee of Government that handled this strategy was a presidential committee, headed by a Cabinet Minister which reported directly to the President of the country. Whereas the committee worked so hard to discharge its responsibility and mandate, it was soon realized that the ultimate goal to use this approach to bring peace to the troubled part of the region through dialogue was not going to happen in a hurry, and that in fact the ultimate goal of the insurgent group was to create a Caliphate and a Government of its own by claiming part of the territory of the sovereign state of Nigeria, just as ISIS is currently doing in the Middle east.

The Regional response

For a long time after the crisis began and despite recognizing the need to consider and deploy a regional strategy to deal with the threat, success in this regard was hampered by lack of political will by leaderships in some of the neighbouring countries of Nigeria. Some perhaps were slow to appreciate that danger posed by Boko Haram was not only to the country but to the whole region. This lack of political will was soon resolved, thanks largely to the persistence of Nigeria but also to the collaborative efforts of France who's President, H.E Mr. François Hollande, has convened a summit meeting in Paris in September 2013, to make regional cooperation possible. Within the context of this Paris process, the leaders of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Benin, Niger and

select interested countries are able to meet regularly to discuss ways to end the conflict. Till date, the summit has reconvened in Abuja, Nigeria, in Ndjemena, Chad, and in London, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

At least two major outcomes of the Paris process deserve mention: firstly, the establishment of a joint multinational force and, secondly, the establishment of a Joint Intelligence and fusion cell. Regarding the first, namely, the establishment of a joint multinational force, it was felt that countries surrounding the Lake CHAD waters should mobilize troops for military combat operations , as may be required, against Boko Haram. This was a major decision because it had been realized that Boko Haram was taking undue military advantage of the porous nature of the borders between Nigeria and the neighboring countries to escape military action from Nigeria. The headquarters of the Multinational Joint Task Force, is located in Chad, and has a Nigerian as Force Commander.

The Joint Intelligence Fusion Cell was created only last year with the primary responsibility of collating and coordinating intelligence for combating the Boko Haram menace. Headquartered in Abuja, the Fusion Cell is headed by a Cameroonian Intelligence chief. The robust intelligence gathering capacity of the Fusion cell has been invaluable in implementing the counter terrorism strategy of detecting, intercepting and deterring terrorist attacks even before they occur.

COCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

If the Nigerian and West African experience in addressing the challenge and threat posed by IEDs reveals anything, it is that even with all the efforts exerted and the successes so far achieved, there is a lot of work still to be done. Because the battle involving the indiscriminate use of IEDs is not conventional but asymmetric, insurgents only need to detonate one bomb to kill as many as they can to keep alive some impressions that they are winning and that the State is losing. It is all now apparent that the IED challenge in the region will not be resolved overnight, as indeed also is the case in many other parts of the world where such a phenomenon exists. What however is required is that the

current tempo of the efforts to combat the scourge of IEDs be sustained while exploring other options for increased pressure in other directions as well.

It is within this context that I earnestly urge that this workshop should not rise without considering and ultimately recommending a course of action to be taken to curb the use of EIDs, at the level of the United Nations. It is time to articulate a strong position at this global stage involving wider state participation, to counter their proliferation and use.