

Nigeria's Security: Insurgency, Elections and Coordinating Responses to Multiple Threats

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Introduction

Events in our recent history have thrust us into the glare of world attention in ways that have not always reflected us in our best light. The paradox of modern Nigeria is that while we have proudly emerged as the largest economy in Africa, and a viable investment and trade destination, a raging insurgency and perhaps our early management of it – as well as uncertainty in some circles over the possible outcome of the impending elections – have heightened interest in Nigeria. I therefore thank the organizers of this event for giving me an opportunity to address the triple issues of insurgency, corruption and the 2015 elections.

After a somewhat turbulent past, Nigerians on the whole have come to accept that the best hope for meeting our nation's aspirations is in continuing and deepening our democratic growth. This year marks for us an unprecedented decade-and-a-half of uninterrupted democracy. However, this has not come without challenges – a civil war, truncated attempts at democracy and multiple coups have weakened our institutions and severely affected our ability to respond to some of our current threats.

Today, a raging insurgency in the northeast, corruption and a hotly contested national election are fuelling anxiety both at home and abroad about the future of Nigeria.

I wish to use this opportunity to highlight our responses and preparedness.

Insurgency

The real and existential threat posed by Boko Haram is perhaps a millennial challenge; how we approach it will have immediate as well as generational consequences. It will determine how we reform our institutions, define our fundamental values, the capacities we develop and the tools we use to address and prevent future threats. When a nation's citizens take up arms against their fellow brothers and sisters, operate outside acceptable rules and norms of society, kill and maim 10,000 innocent civilians, including women and children, kidnap young children, and force pre-teen girls to blow themselves up in public spaces, it calls for deep introspection.

In the run-up to the elections, Boko Haram have escalated their campaign, seizing territory and hoisting their flag. They have burned down whole villages, ransacked communities, raped young girls and continued to kidnap both boys and girls. They have openly declared support for ISIS and expanded their campaign into neighbouring Cameroon.

Nations that have been directly affected by terrorism have shown us how difficult it is to eradicate. The terrorists utilize their abundant imagination for evil, to inflict the maximum horror on communities, conscious of the fact that states must be guided in their responses by rules, the law, their own values and respect for civilian lives and property.

It is my belief that any response to terrorism must be long-term, holistic and robust enough to address its root causes. It must be guided by a law-and-order approach that utilizes both hard and soft approaches. The tenacity, organizational capability, ability to attract illicit funds, motivation of Boko Haram fighters and the fact that they embed themselves within civilian populations has perhaps helped to prolong the conflict in the northeast.

Historical deficits in our military institutions – including the fact that the last major procurement of arms was almost two decades ago – the inability of the government to buy the weapons we needed in a timely manner, the need for a philosophical as well as operational shift from conventional warfare to fighting asymmetric war in towns and communities teeming with millions of civilians as well as human rights accusations have greatly affected the military campaign.

In the last year multiple changes have been made in our prosecution of the war against insurgency; this includes greater training for the military in the handling of sophisticated arms and the use of technology, greater capacity building in counter-insurgency training and wide-scale training throughout the armed forces on rules of engagement and respect for human rights. Additionally we are working on a new civil-military relations doctrine that will redefine how the military relates to the general public, especially in places where it carries out counter-insurgency operations. It will clearly spell out guidelines for civilian protection in all its operations.

To complement the military approach, in the last two years we have set up a National Counter Terrorism Centre which has brought all agencies involved in combating terrorism in Nigeria under one roof, thereby enhancing coordination and ensuring greater synergy. An intelligence Fusion Centre now serves as a key component of the National Counter Terrorism Centre which serves as a processing point for all-source intelligence.

Conscious of the regional threat posed by Boko Haram, we have been working on multiple fronts with our neighbours in Cameroon, Niger, Chad and Benin, sharing intelligence as well as personnel in joint border patrols as well as through a multinational task force.

Nigeria has developed a robust Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programme that focuses on the root causes of terrorism, addressing them through four main streams.

The deradicalization stream focuses on prison-based interventions. Although prisons are potential incubators of radicalization; they also offer the best option for rehabilitation. The deradicalization stream aims to reintegrate convicted violent extremist offenders back into society.

Strategic communications forms another pillar of the CVE programme. Through strategic communications, we are working to counter extremist ideology and narratives. We plan to undermine their credibility by presenting the true face of Islam. In the case of Boko Haram, narratives are founded on a set of core beliefs that are opposed to the state and aspects of education. Our response targets those that hold radical views, and the population at large aiming to further diminish tolerance for extremists' rhetoric.

The counter-radicalization strand focuses on the prevention of radicalization through building community resilience, education, engagement with the religious environment and economic empowerment. Through this stream, we will directly counter the drivers of radicalization. Community engagement is at the core of these efforts. We are in the process of creating systems and structures that will foster visible community cohesion and provide youths with alternative spaces to have their voices heard. Without the space for growth and self-actualization, youths are more easily led astray. Violent extremists prey on identity issues, offering a sense of belonging and a sense of worth. It is with this in mind that we are putting projects in place with the aim of reforming Nigeria's education landscape. Our objective is to create a generation of citizens with the capacity for critical thinking and logical reasoning,

who understand core national values and who are prepared for the global age we live in. We aim to improve inter-faith relations and encourage dialogue, while creating greater economic opportunity for Nigerians.

The fourth stream is a Presidential Initiative for the North East (PINE), which targets economic revitalization, infrastructure development, job creation, a programme to protect schools and the care of internally displaced refugees as well as victims of terrorism.

Finally we remain open to a negotiated settlement to end the insurgency should Boko Haram express willingness to dialogue.

Corruption

For Nigeria to address the underlying conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism leading to insurgency, the cancerous menace of corruption must be fought with all elements of its national power. In order to build badly needed infrastructure, put our children in schools, ignite economic activities and accelerate upward mobility for a majority of our people we must henceforth address elite greed and weak institutions that make it impossible for national resources to be applied appropriately. Corruption must also be seen by the international community as a threat to international security and [we must] take even stricter measures to make it difficult for corrupt people to enjoy the proceeds of illegitimate earnings. There is a link between terrorism financing and weak international financial systems that allow the movement of stolen resources.

Corruption is both a major cause and a result of poverty around the world. It occurs at all levels of society from local and national governments, civil society, judiciary functions, large and small businesses, to the military and other services.

In Nigeria, much attention has been paid to the issue of corruption, especially in government establishments. However, not much attention has been given to the efforts of successive governments to address the issue. It is to the credit of the successive administrations in Nigeria, since 1999, that many institutions have been established to deal with corruption, especially within government circles and private businesses.

The institutions include:

- I. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission – EFCC
- II. The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission – ICPC
- III. The Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit – NFIU

These institutions, since their establishment, have performed creditably as acknowledged by Nigeria's international collaborators. Many politicians, serving or retired, have been fingered based on petitions received, and investigated and prosecuted where concrete evidence of corruption has been established.

It has to be realized that changes concerning any socio-economic or psychosocial problem in any society will take time; it cannot come overnight, and it has to be gradual. Tackling issues of corruption in Nigeria must have the buy-in of the general populace; it is not only a problem for government alone to deal with without the active support of the citizens, who will be the beneficiaries of a corruption-free society.

2015 Elections

Anxiety over the peaceful conduct of the 2015 general elections has continued to grow both at home and abroad, fuelled by the memories of the pre- and post-election violence that occurred during our first republic elections in the 1960s and more recently after the 2011 elections. Boko Haram, who have repeatedly expressed their disdain for the democratic process, have also escalated their campaign over this period, further adding to the sense of instability.

In a country of 170 million people, elections have not been without their challenges, most especially pre- and post-election violence. Allegations of rigging, delayed delivery of ballot boxes, names left off ballot papers and desperation of some politicians to win at all costs are some examples. Experience, most especially after the 2011 general elections, has shown that some of the most serious challenges to election security could emerge spontaneously or due to perceptions of irregularities during the voting process, which then reflected in what some people concluded were unfavourable election results.

Apart from post election violence, there were other challenges, such as the provision of escorts/protection for electoral officials and sensitive election materials, prevention of violence between supporters of different political parties, the presence and use of thugs and militia groups in certain parts of the country, as well as physical attacks on electoral personnel. These are outstanding issues that security agencies and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have learnt lessons from and are taking adequate precautions to address and prevent or avoid in the 2015 general election.

Among the steps being taken is the setting up of an Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES). The ICCES consists of top INEC officials, commissioners, directors and heads of departments, with representation from all the security agencies, including my office. For the first time in the history of election security in Nigeria, the country has a platform responsible for the coordination of security matters and pooling resources, particularly personnel, in dealing with security challenges. Security services have promptly intervened and prevented potential crisis situations that could have got out of hand across the country. The ICCES has continuously taken measures to upgrade its activities and ensure its effectiveness at both the state and, especially, the local government levels.

In addition, the electoral commission is retraining security personnel on their roles and functions at polling units. Sensitization workshops such as the one currently embarked upon by the Presidential Committee on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PRESCOM) in the six geopolitical zones of the country, with the theme 'Ballots Without Bullets', raise the awareness of Nigerian citizens across the country to the destructiveness of electoral violence and the need for youths to avoid being used by ill-meaning politicians. The National Orientation Agency and other civil society organizations, including a group led by eminent well-respected elders, are also involved in similar sensitization programmes across the country. Given the importance of how the conduct of the election is communicated, including the accurate and timely reporting of results, INEC staff are being trained on strategic communication.

However, election security matters cannot be left solely to security agencies and INEC to manage. All other stakeholders, such as the media, community leaders and political parties have a significant role to play in the task of ensuring a peaceful atmosphere during the conduct of elections. Recently all the presidential candidates and their parties agreed to curb the use of hate speech and work towards violence-free, fair and credible elections by signing the Abuja Accord. This we consider to be major progress in our fight against election violence.

Given the above, the 2015 elections are expected to be relatively peaceful and violence-free. The Federal Government has taken all necessary measures to ensure this by making adequate provisions for INEC, security agencies and by supporting numerous sensitization programmes.

We are conscious that there is some anxiety about whether elections will hold in the northeast and the ability of the government to ensure that the internally displaced (IDPs) will be able to vote.

Our answer to both of those is yes. As far as is possible, we are determined that adequate security will be in place to enable elections in all the areas in the northeast that are safe, and that the IDPs will be provided with the opportunity to exercise their votes.

The emergence of a strong viable opposition, as well as the closeness of the race, is a clear demonstration of our maturing democracy. Greater voter awareness also means that people are more engaged in the electoral process and determined to protect their rights to vote. We on our part are doing all we can to ensure that every Nigerian who wants to vote is able to, and that their vote will count.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have in the last minutes presented Nigeria's most pressing security threats and demonstrated that these threats are both local and global. The question is whether the world will show the same and commensurate concern to the rising terrorism in parts of Nigeria as it does in other parts of the world. I have also shown that while we continue to face the debilitating effects of corruption, we have taken steps to build strong institutions and strengthen our laws in addressing it. As we continue to do this, we call on the global community to further address the corrupting influence of big companies and rich countries. I finally submitted that successive elections in Nigeria have improved and lessons learnt in 2011 are now being practised in preparation towards the 2015 elections. The INEC has a strong team, and government has ensured adequate funding and capacity enhancement while putting in place strong coordination mechanisms between the electoral body and other stakeholders.

It is my firm belief that Nigeria will emerge stronger, manage her threats better and improve on governance. We are taking these careful but sure steps at the moment. The terrorist threat has focused us on the right path. We have developed a new national security strategy that puts our people at the heart of our efforts, a national counterterrorism strategy that employs both hard and soft power, and an economic revitalization plan that will bring succour to those most vulnerable and those affected by violence. We continue to reach out to members of the international community to stand with us as we strive to build a united and prosperous country.

Thank you for listening.