



CHATHAM HOUSE

Chatham House, 10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE
T: +44 (0)20 7957 5700 E: contact@chathamhouse.org
F: +44 (0)20 7957 5710 www.chathamhouse.org

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Transcript

Nigeria's Defence Priorities: Domestic Stability for Regional Security

Hon. Erelu Olusola Obada

Minister of State for Defence, Nigeria

Chair: Sandra Osborne MP

Member, Foreign Affairs Committee

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Erelu Olusola Obada:

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for attending this session. I look forward to interacting with you here and perhaps beyond.

Africa is now the frontier for socio-economic progress, one of the most important determinants of peace and inclusion is stability. Dr Ibrahim Gambari, a former UN under secretary-general and former joint special representative of the AU/UN hybrid mission in Darfur recognized this in 2001 when he said: 'In the post-Cold War era, perhaps the biggest challenge facing Africa is the need to reverse the marginalization of the continent in a rapidly globalizing world. And, in order to meet this broad challenge, the starting point should be how to address Africa's security questions.'

Today, Nigeria is a strong and stable democracy marching inexorably towards world economic and cultural leadership. However, the pace and inclusiveness of Nigeria's economic transformation will depend largely on the security of lives and property across the country and the stability of the West African sub-region and the Gulf of Guinea (GOG).

Nigeria's population is about 160 million, peopled by approximately 250 ethnic nationalities and is over 55 per cent of the entire population of West Africa, her geographical space is made up of a land area of about 923,000 square kilometres and a maritime space of about 84,000 square nautical miles. The country is naturally endowed with abundant mineral resources, rich culture, vast arable landscape and quality human resources both at home and in the diaspora. With over \$47.6 billion in external reserve, Nigeria is the largest economy in the sub-region in terms of resources and other economic potentials. In addition, the country is the fifth-largest oil producer in the world and heading towards becoming the largest economy in Africa by GDP. These two factors, demography and economics, make Nigeria a pivotal state, a key player and an investment haven for people of the sub-region. Any instability in the country could therefore adversely affect the socio-economic stability of the West African sub-region and indeed Africa.

It is a fact that the interrelation of these factors brings our own share of domestic, developmental and security challenges which require attention. Recently, we have had to tackle problems of militancy in the Niger Delta area and insurgency in the northeast of Nigeria. Equally challenging are the problems of oil theft and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta and piracy within our maritime territory as well as the larger Gulf of Guinea.

It therefore becomes vital that we achieve a desired level of domestic stability for us to effectively play our expected role towards the attainment of regional

and global security. It is from this standpoint that I shall be discussing the topic 'Nigeria Defence Priorities: Domestic Stability for Regional Security'.

Nigeria's National Interest

An understanding of Nigeria's national interest would put us in good stead towards understanding the policy direction which underpins our defence priorities. Nigeria's national defence policy document categorizes Nigeria's interest into vital, strategic and peripheral interests. The national policy also stipulates the roles of the armed forces as follows:

- a) Defend Nigeria from external aggression
- b) Maintain Nigeria's territorial integrity and secure its borders from violation on land, sea and air
- c) Aid civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the president
- d) Perform such other functions as may be prescribed by an act of the National Assembly

Our defence roles and priorities are therefore tailored to the degree accorded to these interests. The vital interests of Nigeria concern inviolability of her territory protection of democracy, economic resources and citizens wherever they may be as well as preservation of her culture.

Nigeria's strategic interests refer to those interests that are important to her but are less than vital. They are in keeping with the desire to conduct economic, political and diplomatic relations with other nations in consonance with national goals. Regional security, by way of combatting terrorism and other transnational crimes also fall into this category.

Peripheral interests relate to Nigeria's obligations to the international community as a member of the community of nations. In keeping with the demands of these peripheral interests, Nigeria shall participate in support of international peace and security under the auspices of the UN.

Nigeria's Threat Analysis and the Strategic Response

The threats confronting Nigeria can be summarized as internal and external. Some internal threats include internal fragilities, illegal trafficking, piracy, unreported and unregulated fishing, Islamic fundamentalism, oil theft and pipeline vandalism as well as terrorism. Worthy of note is the reality that many

of the crimes and illegalities are often transnational in nature, while most of the vessels involved in UUF, crude oil theft and illegal oil bunkering are often owned by foreigners. Let us consider some of these internal threats to Nigeria's security.

Islamic Fundamentalism

Al-Qaeda had directly identified Nigeria as ripe for a jihad and was already taking measures through their franchise in Nigeria, the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lida'awati wal Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram, to carry out an insurgency in the northeast and north central parts of the country. We have it on record that Al-Qaeda had turned Mali both to a safe haven and a training ground for Islamic insurgents, including the Boko Haram sect. As the Maghreb and Sahel countries continue to crack down on Islamic insurgents, the theatre of operation continues to move southward into sparsely populated areas and into Nigeria. This explains why we have taken a special interest in the ongoing operations in Mali.

President Goodluck Jonathan has deployed a long-term strategy meant to reduce opportunities for religious radicalization. An important component of this strategy is the establishment of 400 schools for almajiris, which provide Quranic studies with English, mathematics and science, etc. State governments and the national leadership of the Muslim Ummah in Nigeria are working hard to reduce radicalization. On the economic front our government is improving support to the agriculture and mining sectors to diversify the economy, as well as the rehabilitation of the railways among other transformation programmes to provide employment opportunities to the teeming youth population in Nigeria.

Oil theft and pipeline vandalism is one of the major security challenges in the Niger Delta region, which has impacted negatively on our revenue projections. This problem which is as old as the oil industry has recently increased. Through the establishment of a joint task force and the Nigerian Navy we have intensified our activities against oil theft. In the past few months alone we have destroyed hundreds of oil theft facilities and infrastructure and arrested many of these oil thieves.

Additionally, an inter-ministerial team has been tasked to work with the armed forces and the state governments of the Niger Delta region to come up with a strategy that will enhance success. I am confident the new strategies rooted in technology, community action and enhanced operational oversight will bring an end to this attack on our nation's strategic assets.

Nigeria's position is that the countries where such stolen crude ends up encourage the crime, as there would be no market for the oil thieves if some countries' refineries would patronize only genuine crude. Unfortunately, the situation Nigeria finds herself in today is no different from Liberia and Sierra Leone some years ago in the illegal trade of blood diamonds with the proceeds fuelling the civil wars in those countries. The illicit trade did not only finance armed conflict that overthrew legitimate governments but was also responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians including women and children. Many other horrendous crimes, including rape, amputation of limbs – including children – and other such despicable acts were common in these wars. The Kimberly Process, which was a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly, contributed to the reduction of the trade and the eventual conviction of former Liberian president Charles Taylor, who is currently serving jail term. Likewise the use of child labour in cocoa production attracted the condemnation of the international community and chocolate lovers around the world as the practice was viewed as child slavery.

Nigeria is hereby throwing a challenge to the international community to help curtail the incidence of oil theft and reject stolen Nigerian crude destined for their refineries. The UK, being one of our reliable partners, is encouraged to throw her weight behind Nigeria in fighting this scourge just as the international community fought the trade in blood diamonds and child labour on cocoa farms. Such support could be in sharing information obtained with sophisticated monitoring means with us on the activities of these criminals.

Terrorism

In response to the threats posed by terrorists, the government declared a state of emergency in three northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States. The armed forces and other security agencies are currently engaged in multi-agency counterterrorism operations in the three states mentioned with a view to bringing the security situation under control.

In realization that the security situation cannot be resolved by security agencies alone, the federal government as a political strategy established the Presidential Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in affected areas in the north to complement the efforts of these agencies and to coordinate the process of restoring peace to impacted areas through dialogue. The declaration of the Boko Haram sect as a terrorist group especially by the UK and US has also helped to draw international

condemnation on the atrocities of the group. For this we thank our friends from the UK, US and other international partners.

A counterterrorism strategy was recently developed by the armed forces to address long-term prevention and containment mechanisms. Robust capabilities for early warning, border surveillance and information sharing have been critical in this respect. We continue to sustain and intensify our operations against Boko Haram terrorists and these efforts are yielding outcomes as we degrade terrorist capability on a daily basis.

We are pleased to note that since a state of emergency was declared, and indeed prior to the declaration, the Nigerian Armed Forces have carried out their duties in strict compliance with very stringent rules of engagement designed to protect civilians and maintain respect for human rights and dignity. This has helped our government to win the battle for hearts and minds. As a result the armed forces have the full cooperation of the people in these three states who have even established civil neighbourhood watches that assist the armed forces in their duties. We are not declaring victory yet but it is very much in sight.

Nigeria's Contribution to Regional Security

Nigeria has been a driving force in establishing peace and security in the West African sub-region through its role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Her contribution to promoting regional peace and security, especially in the region, has been on several fronts. I will dwell on peacekeeping/peace support operations, mediation, counterterrorism and the fight against cross-border criminal activities, as well as maritime security.

Peacekeeping/peace support operations: Nigeria is one of the major troop contributing nations to the UN peacekeeping operations around the world and is globally recognized for its readiness and commitment. Nigeria has deployed troops for peace support operations (PSOs) at both bilateral and multilateral levels. It has participated in PSOs around the world including Lebanon, Chad, Angola, Namibia, Cambodia, Rwanda, Sudan (Darfur), Liberia and Sierra Leone. Presently, Nigeria has over 5,000 personnel deployed for peacekeeping operations in various troubled spots around the world. Nigeria remains the most active force in stabilization missions in Africa and will continue to play this role within the context of her own challenges.

A stable and prosperous Nigeria therefore means a lot to regional stability. Agents of destabilization, where they encounter weaker states in the sub-

region, will always have to factor in the Nigerian presence. Our strength is a source of regional stability.

Until recently, terrorism was considered a distant concern for Nigeria. However, it has become the new frontier in security challenges facing Nigeria and other West African states. Terrorist groups, particularly Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) has continued to spread its influence in the poorly governed parts of the Sahara. In 2002, the Pan-Sahel Initiative was created, initially focusing on four countries – Mali, Mauritania, Chad and Niger – but later transformed to Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) in 2005, covering several other countries including Nigeria. In line with measures being taken by other stakeholders, and as a measure of Nigeria's security interests in the region, she maintains military attachés in the Republic of Benin, Chad, Ghana, Liberia, Niger and Mali.

Nigeria is also involved in the fight against cross-border criminal activities. Trans-border crimes and the involvement of citizens of other countries in criminal activities in Nigeria are reflections and repercussions of the spillover of the years of civil wars, droughts and economic decline in the sub-region. Nigeria plays a critical role in the fight against the scourge of transnational organized crime and is among those that have ratified the transnational organized crime convention. Nigeria has also assisted countries in the Sahel to combat the smuggling of small arms and light weapons (SALW), drug smuggling and human trafficking in the region.

Widespread availability and accessibility of SALW has been identified as a factor that intensifies the devastation and lethality of conflict in the sub-region. To check this cross-border act of banditry, the government of Niger, Chad and Nigeria in 1998 established a multi-national joint task force (MNJTF) to patrol areas prone to those attacks. Cameroon has indicated interest in joining the MNJTF.

Nigeria also plays a prominent role in regional security policy through the regular meetings of heads of the different security agencies of ECOWAS member states, including ministers of defence and foreign affairs, chiefs of defence staff, heads of police, immigration and customs. These regular meetings have brought member states much closer and they have been able to harmonize policies on a variety of issues including intelligence sharing and elaborate operational cooperation in combatting cross-border crimes towards achieving sub-regional peace and security.

Mediation is a major instrument of Nigeria's diplomacy and sub-regional security policy. The country's capacity for effective mediation is widely

recognized and cultivated and has remained a key factor in the diplomatic mechanism of ECOWAS. Mediation has therefore been an old instrument of Nigerian diplomacy since independence.

The Guinea-Bissau crisis became a major challenge for ECOWAS and represented one of the burdens of the sub-region considering the involvement of South American drug barons that have turned that country into a haven for drug trans-shipment to Europe and elsewhere. In light of this, Nigeria was a key player in proposing the defence and security sector reform as a solution to the lingering problem in the country. The reform was designed mainly to transform the military of Guinea-Bissau into an agent of socio-economic development and national cohesion.

President Goodluck Jonathan has adopted a principled approach in this crisis rocking the sub-region and continues to insist on constitutionalism and democracy in resolving other lingering and emerging political crisis in Niger, Mali and Guinea-Bissau. He is also a co-mediator in the Mali crisis. Generally, Nigeria's leadership has been very crucial in the conflict management architecture and security policy of ECOWAS.

Concerning maritime security: it would be recalled that, in response to increased incidents of piracy, Benin Republic and Nigeria entered a bilateral partnership involving their navies. This partnership, codenamed Operation Prosperity, involved combined naval patrols aimed at curbing activities of pirates in the area.

Nigeria played a leading role in the recently concluded maritime security conference held in Cameroon, which drew attention to the regions enormous blue economy potential. The conference agreed on joint strategies to address what is now seen as a common problem. Following upon the success recorded by Operation Prosperity, the UN Security Council Resolutions 2018 and 2039 urged member states of ECOWAS, ECAS and the GOG Commission to take urgent actions to develop collective and collaborative maritime strategies for the prevention and repression of illicit maritime activities in the GOG. The Nigerian government was very satisfied with the outcome of the conference and has issued fresh instructions to the Nigeria Navy in line with the new strategic framework for addressing the challenges of piracy and illegalities in the GOG. With a substantial percentage of global trade passing through it, the Gulf of Guinea has now become the new global route for the oil trade.

Seafarers and general maritime activities are now witnessing a very tough time as the Gulf of Guinea and the West African coastline over the years has

increasingly become a haven for criminality. The GOG countries include Nigeria, Cameroon, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe, Ghana, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Benin Republic. Statistics have shown that the GOG is home to precious hydrocarbons, rich fauna and flora, and it is projected that the region would double the production of its estimated 14 billion barrels of oil reserve from 4 million barrels per day to 8 million in the next decade.

These countries' territorial waters have come under sudden transnational crime attacks such as hostage-taking and kidnapping, oil bunkering, robbery at sea, human and hard drugs trafficking, all perpetrated by sea pirates. In 2010, there were 45 cases, 2011 it rose to 65 while 37 vessels were attacked in 2012 when pirates carted away goods, money and other valuables. The consequence of all this is that the region loses over \$3 billion revenue to illegal bunkering annually, with Nigeria being the worst hit. What had been primarily a problem in Nigeria's Niger Delta has expanded with attacks or raids in neighbouring Benin, Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea since 2009.

Fortunately, these concerns have indeed got the attention of the UN which feels that the region must be assisted as the activities of pirates are taking their toll on the countries. Revenue loss which Sierra Leone suffers through illegal fishing is enough to fund three quarters of its annual budget.

In its individual effort, the Nigerian government has established a new naval base in Yenagoa, the capital of city of Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta region. This is in addition to the Western Naval Command in Lagos and the Eastern Naval Command in Calabar. The joint task force in the Niger Delta region has also continued to keep the activities of oil thieves in the region in check. In order to restore peace and tranquillity and make seafaring business safe in the region's territorial waters, individual countries need to follow the example of Nigeria in terms of maritime security.

Furthermore, in order to address these challenges, the Nigerian Navy in collaboration with the United States of America office of Security Cooperation is organizing a regional conference from 28–31 July in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria for the GOG countries that operate the Automatic Identification System (AIS). The chiefs of the Naval Staff and delegates from Ghana, Benin, Senegal, Togo, Gabon, Cameroon and São Tomé and Príncipe as well as the commanders, United States Command and the US naval forces have been invited to the conference to assist the GOG in tackling the security challenges in the region.

The strengthening of the capabilities of the security agents in Nigeria in order to improve their capacity in containing the crime will also be beneficial. Western countries could also be of immense assistance by tracking and confiscating the wealth of known criminals and oil thieves as this practice has an adverse effect on the economic lifeline of our country.

Defence Priorities

There is no doubt that the evolving security environment would have far-reaching implications on how we think and how we fight. Institutional mechanism plays a vital role in the attainment of security objectives. In order to continue to sustain and motivate the armed forces, the government is encouraging a transformation of the military in terms of training, doctrine, intelligence gathering and equipment provisioning. There are also ongoing efforts to encourage civil–military relations and enhance capacity of our defence industries towards self-reliance, among so many other initiatives.

Additionally, there is an emphasis on effective counterterrorism strategy in combating extremism through a transformation of the armed forces. The main objective of the transformation is to reform the essential constituents of the national defence management system and enhance operational efficiency to meet the challenges of the 21st century. These initiatives are essential to tackle both national and regional challenges.

The armed forces have also embraced the 'total domain awareness' concept. This entails the creation of an effective and efficient national command, control, communication, computer, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capability for better situational awareness.

As Nigeria transforms her armed forces through robust training programmes, the exchange of information and experience on defence and security matters with international partners such as the UK becomes imperative. It is pursuant to this that Nigeria signed an MOU in March 2013 on bilateral military cooperation with the UK. Among other things the cooperation includes assistance in relation to training, maritime security in the GOG and threats emerging from terrorism and/or insurgency. It is hoped that the MOU would be implemented soonest.

Above all, military effort alone cannot sustain peace. Hence, the government is exploring political, cultural and other means of resolving the conflicts in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by saying that the task of ensuring security now transcends borders. The Nigerian military has been involved in internal security operations owing to threats which are beyond the capacity of the Nigerian Police. In order to minimize these security challenges facing Nigeria, the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces as well as the police and the intelligence agencies have had over the past three years the most exceptional years of growth in the history of Nigeria.

We thank our friends, particularly the United Kingdom, the United States, Niger Republic, Chad and Cameroon for the cooperation we have received thus far. The United Kingdom has been particularly helpful though there is a lot more scope for cooperation particularly in intelligence sharing and access to high technology equipment and training. There is need for the continuous improvement of the Nigeria Armed Forces, not just for Nigeria but because of Nigeria's importance to regional security, and this task belongs to us all. Any growth in capability, equipment, training etc. will serve Nigeria and West Africa well in the years ahead.

Let me once again appreciate and thank the organizers of this programme. I am indeed grateful for the opportunity to share my thoughts with this distinguished audience. It is an occasion that will remain indelible in my memory for a long time to come. I therefore hope that my paper has stimulated your minds for a healthy discussion session during which I would expect your inputs to further consolidate on our collective efforts at enhancing peace and security in Nigeria and indeed the West African sub-region.

Thank you for listening and god bless.