

“Buhari Is A Good Man” *President Barack Obama*



War on Terror in Nigeria: Beyond U. S Military Support

Since the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria in mid-2009, the Government of Nigeria has sought several ways of tackling insurgency and bringing a permanent end to the existence of the group and insurgency in Nigeria. Lately, there has been agitation for U.S support to Nigeria by way of arms supply and military training. There have been various informal allegations about Washington’s refusal to provide arms to Nigeria in tackling Boko Haram. In November 2014, the then Ambassador of Nigeria to the United States, Late Prof. Ade Adefuye , while addressing the U.S Council on Foreign Relations asserted that the U.S government “has refused to grant Nigeria’s request to purchase lethal equipment that would have brought down the terrorists within a short time...” In response to the allegations, the U.S government cited Human Rights Violations within the Nigerian Security forces as one of the factors limiting U.S military support to Nigeria. The preceding reason is most probably

premised on the Leahy amendment, a law which prohibits the U.S from providing military equipment and training support to countries whose security forces are found to have committed a “**gross violation of human rights.**”

At a hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 2014, Ms. Serah Sewall, the Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights also cited corruption as a limiting factor to Nigeria’s fight against Boko Haram stating that “Nigeria will need to seriously tackle corruption if it is to succeed in stamping out Boko Haram”. Likewise, Defense Analysts believe that the U.S may be limiting its support to Nigeria for fear that its highly sensitive Military equipment might fall into the hands of the insurgents who are reputed to have seized arms from Nigerian soldiers in the past.

There have been commendable efforts by the current government of Nigeria to address these issues which have resulted in limited support to Nigeria for reasons of Leahy violations. New officers have been appointed to head the arms of the military to usher in much needed reforms. President Muhammadu Buhari has also expressed his commitment to investigating an end to alleged human rights violations by the military. These corrective steps, further discussed later in this paper, have been acknowledged by the U.S. President who has indicated efforts towards additional military support for Nigeria. During my [discussion](#) with President Obama in 2014, he stated, for instance, that he would like to see many African nations form a coalition to address the Boko Haram problem.¹ Furthermore, these steps are likely to suffice in obtaining an exemption for the Nigerian Military as far as the application of the Leahy law is concerned.

¹ Tanya Young Williams, October 21, 2014. “Exclusive: A Private Meeting with President Obama to Discuss ISIS and Boko Haram,” The Huffington Post [online]. Accessed on September 9, 2015 at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tanya-young-williams/a-private-meeting-with-pr_b_5987290.html

While U.S military support and training is invaluable to the fight against terrorism in Nigeria, it is also important to consider whether the Nigerian Military forces have established the basic structures required to fight insurgency. The recent shake up in the Nigerian Military leading to the exit of top Military leaders, exposed some lapses in Nigeria's efforts to wage a war on terror. In late 2014 during an interview, Nigeria's immediate past Chief of Defense Staff, Rtd. Air Chief Marshall Alex Badeh stated that soldiers had rifles and therefore could not complain about lack equipment for the fight against Boko Haram. This statement was made during a time where some members of the Nigerian army had complained about a lack of sufficient equipment to fight Boko Haram. However, the outgoing Chief of Defense Staff departed from this point of view during the handover ceremony to the new Chief of Defense Staff in July 2015, and again during a subsequent television interview. Rtd. Air Chief Marshall Alex Badeh now admits that obsolete equipment; insufficient training of soldiers in handling military equipment; activities of saboteurs leaking sensitive insider information to insurgents; as well as understaffing were problems he had to deal with during his tenure as CDS. Furthermore, the outgoing Chief of Army Staff Rtd. Lt. Gen. Kenneth Minimah, also stated during his hand over speech that one of the challenges in the fight against Boko Haram was that the elites used the insurgency to further their sectional, political and religious interests instead of pursuing an active collaboration with the military to confront them.

With statements such as the above coming from leaders in Nigeria's war against terror, it appears that the Military continues to grapple with understanding and mapping out the important strategies required to fight insurgency. The emphasis on rifles and arms though important is not an isolated solution to

counter-insurgency. Perhaps Nigeria should adopt the approach of countries like Israel that have successfully dealt with similar problems of insurgency and sectional violence in its territory.

As a top priority, emphasis should be placed on intelligence collection and gathering which is critical to the success of Israel's counter insurgency operations and indeed to any security operation geared towards fighting terrorism. Nigeria's intelligence agencies include: the Nigerian Defence Intelligence Agency ("DIA") whose mission statement is "to produce comprehensive, contextual and timely intelligence support to defense planners and decision makers in order to effectively enhance national security".

Likewise, the statutory role of the Department of State Security Service ("DSS") includes the prevention, detection and investigation of terrorist activities. The National Intelligence Agency ("NIA") is responsible for foreign intelligence but defers to the DIA on military related foreign intelligence. These roles and functions are laudable but will not effectively support the Nigerian Military in its fight against terror if it not properly coordinated. To sufficiently impact security operations in fighting terrorism, these agencies should gather and analyze pertinent intelligence through inter-agency partnership; and collaboration with local communities in the North East that are mostly affected by Boko Haram.

As to the DIA, DSS and NIA collaborating with locals, it is important to mention the Civilian Joint Task Force, a group of citizens in Northeast Nigeria who were prompted to self-action after the spate of Boko Haram activities in 2013. The Civilian JTF is an unofficial network of volunteer citizens performing vigilante and paramilitary functions in communities that are frequently attacked by Boko Haram. As community members, they are not only

able to identify and protect their communities from infiltration and attack by Boko Haram, they have also served the function of providing the army with useful information on the activities of members of the insurgent groups as well as capturing and delivering terrorists to the army. This collaboration contributed to the success of the security forces in combating terrorism in the Northeast until the beginning of cross allegations between the army and the civilian JTF of ranks being infiltrated by Boko Haram which has now strained the once thriving partnership. The civilian JTF has also been criticized for use of excessive force and extra-judicial killings. Those allegations are serious and should not be overlooked.

Members of the communities are important in assisting the Military gather intelligence as they are able to easily identify members of insurgent groups within their communities. They are able to serve as undercover informants in the terrorist groups gathering information that can be used to counter terrorist activities at source. These functions are key to the Military's effective use of arms support it may receive from the U.S as intelligence helps to ensure that arms are deployed against the right targets. Furthermore, the importance of this type of group especially for human intelligence gathering and deterring insurgency is indispensable. The U.S. achieved a critical success against al-Qaeda's insurgency in Iraq by employing the assistance of the Sunni tribal leaders to oppose al-Qaeda fighters and also by encouraging the mixed Sunni-Shiite neighborhoods to be more homogeneous in a means to curb sectarian violence.

In addressing the criticisms of the civilian JTF, some measure of control is required on the organization and operations of the network. For example, the Borno State Government in 2013 provided training for youth vigilantes,

kitted them with uniforms and provided a monthly stipend. The Nigerian government should consider drafting the vigilantes into an ad hoc paramilitary group where they are organized into ranks, compensated, trained and guided on how to properly execute their paramilitary functions without abusing or overstepping the bounds of their role as civilian forces. The functions of this group could be overseen by an arm of the Military which will, among other things, ensure proper coordination of human intelligence between the group, the intelligence agencies and the security forces as well serve as a check on the excesses of the group.

It is important to highlight the role of foreign intelligence especially as Boko Haram has spread its tentacles beyond the shores of Nigeria. The group recruits insurgents from Niger, Chad and Cameroon where they also carry out their deadly activities. Based on military analysis of videos obtained from former Boko Haram camps, it is also believed that there are Sudanese commanders within the group. All of these are in addition to speculations of allegiance to Al-Qaeda and most recently the openly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (“IS”).

Public information is very limited as to how the NIA and DIA coordinate their activities especially as regards foreign intelligence relating to terrorism. It is unclear how the NIA defers to the DIA on issues of foreign military intelligence. In particular does the NIA allow the DIA to gather its own foreign military intelligence? Or does the NIA gather all foreign intelligence and then pass on foreign military intelligence to the DIA? If the latter is the case, then what are the parameters employed in determining “military intelligence” to be transmitted to the DIA. In any case, it is important that relevant information is obtained from foreign countries especially those where Boko Haram maintains a

presence. The first step should be the establishment of a separate arm of the DIA to gather foreign intelligence on behalf of the military. This proposed arm should work with the relevant local intelligence agencies in the countries with Boko Haram activity to gather information. This can be achieved by placing intelligence officers in the Nigerian embassies and/or consulate offices in these countries to work directly with the local agencies. Information obtained can then be analyzed in collaboration with the DIA HQ for use by the Nigerian Army. A similar collaboration can also be employed to intercept Boko Haram-pertinent wireless communication.

Effective intelligence gathering and analysis will also be pivotal to disrupting insurgency operations at source. The collaboration with locals to obtain insider information on the plans and strategies of terrorist groups will help the military to identify and neutralize sources of funding and arms supplies; limit avenues for recruitment and training; and thwart general logistics.

Border security is another important structure that must be set in place to effectively tackle terrorism. Since mid-2014, Boko Haram has taken a transnational approach to its activities expanding its reach to border countries like Niger, Chad and Cameroon. The group has infiltrated these countries and established allies with militia in these countries whom they recruit and collaborate with in carrying out cross-border terrorist activities. Attacks on villages, abductions and suicide bombings characteristic of Boko Haram activities have become a frequent occurrence in these countries. Boko Haram also exploits the porous borders to transport new recruits, arms, food and other supplies to support their activities.

The cross-border expansion of the group increases the challenge in combating their activities and poses a major security and economic threat to the sub-Saharan region. The armed forces of Niger, Chad and Cameroon have joined the force in fighting Boko Haram however; Nigeria has the very important role of sealing the loop holes in its porous borders. This will effectively cut off supply of recruits, funds, food and other needs of Boko Haram that are transported across the borders. It will also isolate the group and halt its transnational expansion as a tight border will make it difficult to carry out its activities.

Attention must also be given to aviation security especially as Boko Haram recently pledged its allegiance to IS. It is not improbable that the IS may begin to provide training, recruits and logistics support to Boko Haram and vice versa. These activities can be discovered and checked at source if airport security officials are properly trained to identify suspects or react to suspicious activities. A security watch list based on intelligence information as well as a profiling system should be implemented to identify such suspects. There should be a detailed interview system in place to screen “high risk” passengers detected through the profiling system. Although the group has yet to carry out any suicide bombings in the country’s airspace, Nigeria should be proactive and extend these security measures even to the domestic airports.

While arms and training support from the U.S is invaluable towards the fight against Boko Haram, it remains just that - “support”. Nigeria needs to first look within its military force to ensure the appropriate structure and strategy is in place in order to make the most of the benefit which military support from the U.S will provide. Beyond the arms and training, Nigeria has yet to put in place the basic foundation required to fight insurgency within its territory without which the fight cannot be won. The U.S has continued to support Nigeria in

its fight against terrorism despite the limits posed by the Leahy amendment. Among the benefits of the recent visit of Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari to the U.S is the proposed \$2.1 billion fund from the World Bank for the re-development of the northeast battered by Boko Haram. This indicates the beginning of further support from the U.S in this war.

It is noteworthy to mention recent indications of progress on the government's resolve to fight Boko Haram as well as position the country to receive more foreign support. Following the publication of a documentary by Amnesty International depicting human rights violations in the army, the President immediately announced that there will be a thorough investigation of allegations of abuse and torture by the military. The Buhari-led administration has also created a multiregional taskforce made up of about 8,700 troops from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin to fight Boko Haram within the region. This step is reflective of the view President Obama shared with me during our 2014 [discussion](#) on Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram. These efforts by the government are a step in the right direction. In acknowledgement of these positive efforts by the Buhari Administration, during my recent chat with President Obama in August, 2015, on the provision of military aid to Nigeria, President Obama said that "Buhari is a good man, a very good man and we are working on it."

As a Nigerian-American lawyer, I have collaborated with several U.S congressmen and held meetings with the United States President on this issue. I will continue to push for U.S Military assistance to Nigeria in the fight against terrorism.

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