

Globalizing Nigeria's War On Terror: Matters Arising

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A couple of months ago, both local and international – regular and social – media were agog with the news of the recognition granted Boko Haram, the dreaded Islamist fundamentalist group operating in the Northern halve of Nigeria, as an international terrorist group, by the government of the United States of America. This move by the U.S government was seen by most pundits as a major shift from its initial reluctance to clearly define its position on this group since the onset of the insurgency in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. While this breaking news was applauded in some quarters as timely and long-awaited, it elicited deep reservations from objective observers of the security situation in the country.

While the pronouncement by the US might have its merits in security terms – especially when one considers the seeming inability of Nigeria's security establishment to satisfactorily arrest the activities of this sect – as the U.S, after its pronouncements, will be expected to fully lend its unalloyed financial, operational, technical and sundry other kinds of support to Nigeria's ongoing efforts at checking the activities of this group, the wider diplomatic and security implications of such a potential partnership for the country and the Western African sub-region as a whole, should be the prime concern of all. The chief questions that should be agitating the minds of Nigerians – especially its policymakers and security chiefs – in the light of America's latest declarations is: What does Nigeria stand to gain from the international recognition granted this group? What is America's goal in all these? What is going to be the nature of the possible future partnership between the US and Nigeria consequent to this pronouncement? What are the possible multiplier effects of this potential partnership on national security? Sundry other questions beg for answers as the battle against Boko Haram prepares to assume another dimension.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the U.S declared a World War on terrorist groups and those that support them, as captured by President George W Bush while launching America's war on terror sequel to the attacks on the World trade Center: "The US "will make no distinction between terrorists and the countries that harbour them" (emphasis mine). Towards achieving this goal of comprehensively defeating terrorist groups anywhere they operate in the world, the US subsequently mobilized a mighty global force consisting of countries having similar threat indicators; a massive paradigm shift in security thinking within U.S defense circles; a colossal move from national to global/collective security.

The U.S, in its declared war on extremist organizations across the globe, especially those that threaten its strategic concerns, has kept faith with its age-long realistic view of international power

politics, which puts its own national interests ahead of those of other states, friendly ones inclusive. That is why the American-led war on terror has been largely a winner takes all approach that is targeted at preventing, detecting, denying and responding to terrorist threats across the globe. The subsequent reprisal carpet-bombing of Afghanistan, which was targeted at Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network and the Taliban for aiding and abetting it in carrying out the 9/11 attacks, the unlicensed invasions of Iraq – Gulf War I & II – under the sassy pretexts of rooting out the supposed threat posed to global security by that country's alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction, the well targeted Drone strikes on suspected terrorists safe houses in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the well coordinated special operation that resulted in the killing of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan, in conjunction with other concerted global security initiatives, are practical demonstrations of the zero-sum strategy adopted by the U.S and its allies against extremist groups in the aftermath of 9/11.

Since the onset of the insurgency in some parts of Nigeria's North, the U.S has consistently offered some low level – mainly technical and tactical- support to Nigeria's security forces in the form of: organizing regular capacity building seminars, workshops and other talk shops for officers and men of the armed forces; putting together refresher training courses on anti-terrorism and counter-insurgency strategies for officers of the military and intelligence agencies; supply of high tech communications equipment and military hardware; provision of logistical and other kinds of overt and covert support. But these have been limited to purely strategic matters, with Nigeria remaining at the behest of all field operations, ensuring that its sovereign status remains intact.

However, in the event of a full-blown strategic partnership with the U.S in its war on terror, consequent to the internal recognition recently granted the organization, Nigeria will be expected to play second fiddle to the U.S in both the planning and execution of future operational strategies. Apart from opening up its security system to accommodate U.S strategic interests, Nigeria, on the diplomatic front, will be expected to give up some aspects of its sovereignty by opening up its borders – air, land, and sea – to America's mighty military machine by allowing the establishment of military bases, secret surveillance of individuals suspected of having links with extremist groups, coupled with other operational liberties. Pakistan and Afghanistan, two of the theatres of America's ongoing global anti-terror campaigns, are classic contemporary cases of strategic partnerships – between the U.S and its allies – in which the U.S plays omnipotent roles. In these theatres of conflict, the U.S has near-total authority to conduct its – overt and covert – anti-terror operations with limited interference from the home countries. Nigeria will be expected to tow the same line should it eventually enter into any comprehensive partnership with the U.S.

One baffling question that pops up at this stage of the discourse is: For a country like Nigeria, whose security has been seriously undermined over the years by the activities of violent groups, especially Boko Haram – a group with suspected links with foreign extremist groups – what is the guarantee that the civil liberties of Nigerians will not be violated at will by U.S forces as they seek

to gather intelligence for the use of their military, and that they will not use this as a pretext to engage in other clandestine activities that might breach the country's sovereignty and undermine her security, knowing the antecedents of its secret services in other theatres of conflict across the globe?

U.S security agencies are known to throw all protocols to the winds in their quests to protect the foreign policy interests of their country, which is naturally an extension of its domestic policy. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), for instance, acts like a unit of the American military in its operations, and has been known to conduct its own foreign policy, different from that of the U.S government. Unlike the military, CIA operations differ in their planning and execution. The CIA can take impromptu life and death decisions once American interests are thought to be at stake, whether the said threats are valid or not, confirmed or speculative – the warped intelligence reports of Iraq's purported possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction which prompted Gulf War II, an unlicensed invasion and destruction of a sovereign state, being a classic case. For example, it can decide on its own whether a terrorist is going to be targeted, and in some circumstances can carry out strikes without further authorization from Washington. Pakistan and Afghanistan are two of the most graphic contemporary examples of war theatres where the CIA does not require presidential authorization to launch missions. So, what stops it from applying the same measures in Nigeria and its neighbours once it has a base in place to do so?

Again, due consideration must be given to the possibility of bringing U.S Drones into the whole calculation, as has been the case in countries – Pakistan and Afghanistan being practical cases – with which it has strategic pacts. In the event of establishing Drone bases on Nigerian soil, what stops U.S forces from launching clandestine strikes at specifically chosen targets within the country, or executing cross-border attacks into neighboring countries, if terrorist cells are suspected to be hibernating within those borders? Considering the devastating effects of Drone strikes, and the collateral damages that have been recorded over the years in some war theatres where it is the weapon of choice due to its versatility, stealth, and reach, the worst case scenarios of wrongly targeted strikes on innocent Nigerians, is better not imagined. The tragic cases of Drone strikes going sour in Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, et al, should be instructive here.

Due consideration should also be given to the likely fallouts of the US practically transferring its war on terrorism to Nigerian soil. What new dimensions will such a move add to an already searing conflict? Will U.S involvement in this war escalate or de-escalate this conflict? With a little bit of hindsight, it should be pointed out that America's much-trumpeted war on terror – despite its seeming effectiveness in checking the activities of extremist groups – has obviously created new terrorists. While Al-Qaeda may have been weakened, the radical Islamic movement worldwide seems to be strengthening with the formation of new groups and cells who are obviously inspired by Osama Bin Laden, whose legendary image while alive, and heroic death in a purported shootout with US security forces in Pakistan, have turned him into a martyr of sorts; a role model for

extremists the world over. Thus, several years after the commencement of the global war on terror, there seems to be no practical indicators to measure the progress of this war – no standard metrics to know whether the war on terror is being won or lost. The truth is that the Madrassas and radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying more foot soldiers across the globe than are being captured, killed or deterred every day by the armed forces of the U.S and its allies.

The extension of America's war on terror to Nigerian soil is most likely to not only widen the scope of the conflict, but also bring in more participants into the fray as groups such as Al- Qaeda, Al-shabbab and other groups the Bokites are suspected of having links with will now be motivated to fully move into Nigeria, using its territory as both an operational base or launch-pad for its attacks on both soft and hard – especially those of the U.S and its allies – targets within the country and beyond. The multiplier effects of such a development on the country's general security will be disastrous as the circle of violence will be widened, possibly spilling into other previously peaceful sections of the country – the South and some peaceful parts of the North – due to the entrance of more parties into the conflict.

Nigeria has always being of both economic and strategic importance to the U.S for quite some time – due to its super-power status on the African continent and in the Western African sub-region where it remains the undisputed regional champion – and has being making efforts to become more involved in the country's internal affairs to further its interests in these areas by having more control over what happens here. Just like it has done in certain parts of world – in Germany and Japan after the second world war, in South Korea after the Korean War, in the Middle East, to mention but a few – where it has strategic interests – economic and military – the U.S has been making disguised moves towards gaining a foothold in Nigeria. Nothing provides a better opportunity for this inroad than the guise of helping out a fellow country in need. Nigeria is seen as a priceless pearl to be courted and won by the U.S, especially with the threat posed to its interests by its closest competitor for world domination – China.

The U.S is the world's rent-a-thug; the sole policeman of the world and major avatar of peace. This country runs a protection racket that is available to countries in need of it. It has been playing this role since it became the world's first ever truly global power at the end of the II World War, but only to gain strategic concessions and profits from other countries. The conditions attached to America's partnerships with other countries on any front whatsoever are stringently configured to serve the overriding need of its government and people. Thus, countries that enter into any such relationships with the U.S are expected to kowtow to the whims and caprices of its policymakers. That is why Nigerian policy makers must be wary of America's recent interests – in not only its current war on terror, but also in other domestic issues.

Nigeria is an African superpower. It, therefore, behooves on its leaders to ensure that any proposed security pact with the U.S is exhaustively negotiated, with the country playing it strongest cards. It must strive to seek for clarifications on the operational modus, areas of coverage and the duration

of any partnership it eventually plans to enter into with the U.S. It must bargain from a position of strength and must be ready to throw its strongest cards. It must seek solid guarantees from the U.S that any proposal to practically help out in the war on terror will not compromise the country's national security and that of the whole sub-region.

The Nigerian government must begin to play its role as one of the continents major powers. It must be ready to constructively engage the U.S on any proposed alliance, obtaining sound assurances that its forces will not become another army of occupation that will turning Nigeria into another theater of war like it has done in other sections of the world. God save Nigeria!