Counter-Terrorism: Lessons from Kenya

Policy Recommendations

1. Effective intelligence gathering remains a top priority in the war on terror.

2. The Nigerian security agencies and emergency services need to be more proactive in their operations.

3. Government troops must learn to win the hearts and minds of civilians and host communities by seeking their support and responding to their needs.

4. Hands-on disaster management should be prioritized and built into the operations of security and emergency services.

5. Nigeria should engage more foreign partners in its war on terrorism.

6. There should be constant public information educating people on mode of operation of terrorist groups.

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On January 15, 2019, five Al-Shabaab terrorists invaded the upscale Dusit Hotel in Nairobi. They bombed several vehicles at the car park before entering the lobby where one of the terrorists blew himself up, leaving 21 persons dead and 28 injured. Similar attacks by Al-Shabaab against the Garissa University in 2015 and Westgate mall in 2013 killed 150 and 67 persons respectively. Though the al-Qaida affiliate is based in Somalia, it operates in several countries in East Africa including Kenya. Like Nigeria's Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab violently agitates for the implementation of radical Islamic laws in secular states (Agbiboa, 2014). Even though the two terrorist groups share ideological and operational commonalities, yet state responses to them are markedly dissimilar. While Kenya is largely proactive in its counter-terrorism strategy, Nigeria adopts a reactive tactic leading to appalling consequences. Following these variations in counter-terrorism strategies and outcomes, this week's edition of Nextier SPD Weekly examines the implications of Nigeria's reactive strategy and makes recommendations for a more effective war on terror.

The January 15, 2019 terrorist attack on Dusit Hotel in Nairobi would have been far more disastrous if not for the proactive response of the Kenyan security services. Kenya's creation of a multi-agency counter terror strategies meant that the country's military, para-military and emergency agencies work in an inclusive manner during any counter-terror operations. For instance, nineteen hours after the terrorist invasion, five jihadists were eliminated; nine other suspects arrested and some 700 entrapped victims evacuated to safety. The Kenyan security services with the support of other law enforcement agencies and international partners had been on red alert since November 2018 when intelligence revealed that Dusit Hotel, a preferred facility for Western tourists was likely to be attacked. This preparedness and inter-agency cooperation among the various security agencies accounted for the upbeat and prompt response to the siege.

In contrast, Nigeria's struggle against the Boko Haram terrorists has been characterised by reactive responses (Osumah, 2013). On account of poor prioritization of intelligence gathering, Nigeria's counter-insurgents have not only been unable to anticipate terrorist attacks but have been vulnerable to incessant massacres by Boko Haram. Unlike Kenyan experience where the counter-insurgents were armed with sophisticated weapons, many Nigerian security operatives abscond when posted to confront Boko Haram terrorists because of inadequate weapons. Besides gallantry, the Kenyan counter-terrorists were applauded for their evacuation skills and civilian protection which are crucial in winning hearts and minds (Downes, 2006). Yet, Nigerian soldiers struggle to secure the support of host communities because of the scandalous cases of civilian victimisation (especially young men and women) and human rights violations in the war against terror.

In the last few years, Kenya has evolved effective intelligence gathering on the activities and strategies of Al-Shabaab. The Nigerian case is sadly different. Before 1986, Nigeria's National Security Organization (NSO) was charged with the responsibility of gathering both internal and external intelligence to improve security in the country. The NSO was re-organised into three outfits – Department of State Security which was charged with intelligence gathering regarding internal security; National intelligence Agency (NIA) which is responsible for gathering intelligence on external security; and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) which is in charge of intelligence gathering on military matters (Akinola, 2017). Besides, the Nigeria Police Force also has its own intelligence gathering units for specific assignments. But rather than inter-agency cooperation among these

intelligence units, [rivalry has been the norm](#). Various officials of these agencies work at cross purposes resulting in dismay performance, including collusion in crimes which has eroded the trust and confidence of Nigerians in them (Osumah and Aghedo, 2010). With a rapid rise in home grown violent extremism, there is an urgent need to create "metrics that can help law enforcement assess the danger represented by radicalizing individuals" (Klausen et al, 2015), in the case of Nigeria, an inter-agency metrics on radicalisation and terrorism will create a standard gauge for fighting terrorism in the country.

There are important lesson for Nigeria from Kenyan counter-insurgent experience.

1. A great deal of premium needs to be placed on effective intelligence gathering. The array of security agencies and intelligence services in Nigeria need to be retrained to imbibe the culture of using intelligence and technology in policing crime and de-escalating terrorism.

2. The Nigerian security agencies and emergency services need to be more proactive in their operations. Cases abound where distress calls and insurgent attacks were not responded to for several hours because of poor logistical planning and inadequate preparedness.

3. Government troops must learn to win the hearts and minds of civilians and host communities by seeking their support and responding to their needs. The practices of dragnet arrests, human rights violations, and even extra-judicial killings of suspected terrorists, insurgents and bandits need to stop.

4. Hands-on disaster management should be prioritized and built into the operations of security and emergency services such as the National Emergency and Management Agency to ensure prompt and safe rescue operations. Apart from bomb detecting devices which are found in many hotels and public places in major cities in Nigeria, there are no evidence that many of the private security outfits guarding such public places are well-trained in information gathering, observation of unusual behaviours and actions to take.

5. Nigeria should engage more foreign partners in its war on terrorism. Apart from the fact that the US has assisted Kenya in using drones to target the leadership of Al-Shabaab, some foreign security operatives were involved in the rescue mission during the Dusit Hotel saga. Thus, beyond the sale of equipment and training of soldiers, Nigeria should seek the assistance of its powerful allies in eliminating the Boko Haram terrorism and put an end to this national ignominy.

6. There should be constant public information educating people on mode of operation of terrorist groups. As a country suffering from terror activities, radio and TV announcements, bill boards and daily security situation reports should be made available to the general public. This should also include government supporting groups working on deradicalization programmes and counter-violent extremism programmes.

Though Nigeria and Kenya are confronted by similar religious terrorist threats, the responses of both states are varied as the Kenyan approach is more proactive and effective. Thus, Nigeria should learn from the growing success story of Kenya in the use of intelligence gathering, disaster management and foreign support for terrorism de-escalation.

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