

Written evidence submitted by the Ministry of Defence (IRN0042)

DEFENCE ACTIVITY IN NIGERIA AND FUTURE PLANS

Both the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper highlight Nigeria as a key strategic partner. Nigeria plays a crucial role in West Africa's regional security, stability and economic prosperity. Building access, influence and trade opportunities in Nigeria would contribute to the UK's post-Brexit, Global Britain agenda. However, Nigeria currently faces an array of security threats, including a spate of kidnappings for ransom in the North-West region, the long-standing conflict in the North-East region, and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. If VEO threats in Nigeria are not sufficiently contained, this would have a serious adverse impact on Nigeria and wider West Africa.

Previously, Defence activity in Nigeria focused on tackling individual security threats, however, our engagement had limited effect on addressing wider existing challenges. To better support the UK's strategic relationship with Nigeria, we have shifted towards a more demand-driven approach, focusing on constraining adversaries and deepening UK-Nigeria security cooperation. We have adjusted our engagement programme to better reflect our mutual interests and Nigerian requests, while also ensuring that we continue to promote compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law and that we are cognisant of risks. This strategic focus and more persistent defence engagement is building the necessary access and influence for us to effect impactful policy change, accelerate self-reliance and strengthen our ambition to be a leading defence partner. Under the new CSSF Lake Chad Basin programme, defence activity contributes to an integrated civilian and military approach to HMG activity in the Lake Chad Basin region.

The Armed Forces of Nigeria have requested assistance with transforming national and regional structures and processes. Working Groups have been established to assist with this transformation. We are supporting Nigeria's Command Staff and Leadership development with places at UK centres of excellence, such as the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and the Royal College for Defence Studies. We have increased engagement on intelligence, operational planning and logistics. On prosperity, UK Export Finance have offered a credit line of up to £1.5bn and Nigeria have made a formal request to purchase armoured vehicles from the UK.

We have also refreshed our approach towards training, shifting towards pre-deployment training for specialised 'Formed Units' rather than mass training of basic recruits. This more selective approach is delivering effect and will also provide an opportunity to better measure effect and manage risk. As we move forward, we are actively responding to Nigerian requests to explore opportunities to further enhance cooperation and support.

Defence's more strategic focus in Nigeria also includes deploying individual experts and teams based on demand, rather than a permanent military footprint in the North-East, to deliver greater impact. Specialist teams will be deployed to provide 'tailored' support to forces assigned to the Nigerian Army's reinvigorated operation in the North-East.¹

On Human Security, the Nigerian CDS is championing Women, Peace and Security and increasingly raising awareness of international human rights laws. We are working with Nigeria's Human Rights Advisor to develop a Human Security programme, focusing on

¹ In April 2021, former Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lieutenant General Ibrahim Attahiru, approved the renaming of the ongoing Counter-Insurgency Operation in the North-East from Operation Lafiya Dole (OPLD) to Operation Hadin Kai (OPHK). This was premised on the Nigerian Army's progress over the years and the need to re-align for better efficiency.

policy and training, and we are embedding international humanitarian law and gender training throughout all other programmes.

Countering IEDs is a key line of effort for defence activity. In the last two years, there have been measurable improvements in the utilisation of IEDs by Boko Haram/Islamic State of West Africa Province. As VEO's IED capabilities have increased, the capabilities of forces across the Lake Chad Basin region have not. Currently, 67% of all injuries or fatalities to MNJTF troops are caused by IEDs. Defence activity in this area has included awareness training, capability enhancements, upgrading training facilities and deploying experts in-country. These efforts have yielded good progress thus far.

In the maritime domain, we will maximise the benefits of our periodic naval deployments in the Gulf of Guinea based on our offshore patrol vessel, which will be forward based in the Mediterranean with a proportion of its episodic visits fulfilling objectives in West Africa. This deployment is also an excellent opportunity to work alongside the Nigerian Navy, in helping protect trade routes, building on the very successful visit to Nigeria of HMS Trent in October 2021.

We are supporting a more regional approach to the conflict in North-East Nigeria (including through the Multinational Joint Task Force) and conducting targeted capacity building to remain well positioned to push for a solution to the conflict should the political conditions change.

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