Living Under Illusion (1)

Contributed by Mike Akpan
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The president should investigate thoroughly, the claims by Boko Haram and MEND, that their operatives have penetrated the ranks of the country’s security services because no nation can ever win a war against terror if some members of its security services have doubtful loyalty

Contrary to expectations, the federal government decided to make this year’s 51st national day celebration low-key and also shifted the venue of the traditional independence day parade from the Eagle Square, Abuja, to the courtyard of Aso Rock Presidential Villa. It said the decision was informed by the current mood of the nation and also to cut the cost of such celebration. That decision did not go down well with some opposition groups in the country. They argued that the federal government was not telling Nigerians the truth on what actually informed its sudden and unexpected decision. The Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN, through its national publicity secretary, Lai Mohammed, said by its decision, the federal government had bowed to threats from the Boko Haram fundamentalist sect and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, MEND, to disrupt the event with terrorist attacks. Mohammed said the federal government had missed a rare opportunity to show Nigerians that it cannot be intimidated by such threats from terrorist groups and that it was capable of tackling the security challenges facing the nation. Joe Okei Odumakin, president, Campaign for Democracy, CD, shared Mohammed’s standpoint. He said President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan had shown, by his action, that he is not on top of the security challenges of the country. Both critics have missed the point. They have failed to draw the line between politics and the president’s constitutional obligation to protect lives and property of Nigerians. Last year, the federal government ignored similar threats from the MEND, and the country paid dearly for it. Twenty persons were killed while several others received various degrees of injuries when MEND carried out its threat to bomb the Eagle Square, venue of the golden jubilee celebration of Nigeria’s independence. At the peak of that celebration when the president was reading his speech, MEND gave the foreign dignitaries, invited guests and other participants 30 minutes to leave the venue and warned that several explosive devices had been planted in and around the venue by its operatives “working inside the government security services.” Within a few minutes of that warning, three bombs exploded at short intervals a few metres away from the Eagle Square. It would have been foolhardy and an exhibition of sheer bravado if the president had repeated the same mistake he made last year by allowing the national day activities to hold at the Eagle Square this year. By so doing, he would have risked the lives and property of Nigerians. Common sense dictates that nobody walks into a known danger with his eyes wide open just to impress people with his courage. It was, therefore, proper for the president to move the national day parade to a more secure environment going by MEND’s revelation last year that its operatives had penetrated the ranks of the security services. There was nothing to suggest this year that the security services had been purged of MEND and Boko Haram sympathisers. If anything had happened, the same critics would have been in the forefront to attack Jonathan’s wrong sense of judgement for insisting to hold the national day event at the Eagle Square this year. Now that the federal government has started to do the right thing, it should not stop there. It should, from now on, resolve to take intelligence or security reports more seriously. The president should investigate thoroughly, the claims by Boko Haram and MEND, that their operatives have penetrated the ranks of the country’s security services because no nation can ever win a war against terror if some members of its security services have doubtful loyalty. Besides, there are also insinuations in some circles that the crises in some parts of the country are protracted because some elements in the security services are benefiting from them. There could be some elements of truth in the insinuations because there is no smoke without fire. Jonathan should investigate. Most of the problems Nigeria has had over the years are traceable to the dismissive attitude of our past leaders who failed to take intelligence reports seriously. Take for instance, the Niger Delta crisis which almost paralysed the economic life of Nigeria between 2007 and 2010 was predicted as far back as 1957 by the Henry Willink’s Minorities Commission. That Commission had identified the Niger Delta region as a potential trouble spot in Nigeria if its problem of underdevelopment was not handled with care. It went further to recommend what should be done by the then federal government to avert it. Although that prediction was ignored, it did not stop the crisis from happening when the time was ripe. That is why it is more worrisome that the federal government has adopted the same “it cannot happen” attitude towards America’s national intelligence report on Nigeria. According to the report issued in 2005, by the year 2020, that is, in 15 years’ time, Nigeria would be a failed state and its failure would drag down much of the West African sub-region with it. What a responsible government should have done after the publication of that report was to have beefed up its counter-intelligence department to enable it take pre-emptive measures that would stop the prediction from being fulfilled. But that was not the case. Instead, our political leaders resorted to their usual antics of blame and name-calling. Within the government circle, the NIC report was seen as an unfriendly act by the United States, US, to shoot down Nigeria’s aspiration to a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. This viewpoint was, probably, informed by the penchant of the US to oppose Nigeria’s leadership aspiration at various international arena. The most recent was the role of the US that year which made it difficult for Nigeria to be elected president of the African Development Bank, ADB, in 2005. The election held that year in Abuja to fill that position ended in a stalemate. Perhaps, this was why former President Olusegun Obasanjo did not take the NIC report seriously. According to presidency sources, he merely forwarded it to the National Assembly along with his own comments. To be continued. SMS: 08023880068