The Evolution of Electronic Warfare and its impact on the African Battlefield?

Africa Political Map

Introduction

Electronic Warfare (EW) that began in earnest during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and more firmly in First World War following the radio invention by Marconi in 1896 has continued to make strides, even in less developed Africa. A continent that is behind the curve in the business of state formation, democratization, industrialisation as well as sophistication in the economic sphere.

Today, Africa's experience in EW is in the forefront of global challenges on what innovative groups have achieved and the prospects of finding solutions are daunting.

The objectives of the groups resorting to EW range from political objectives to justice seeking, religious zealotry, secessionists and cultural gangs. The name: Boko Haram for instance—is illustrative. It is also true that some groups seek to protect benefits from drugs smuggling, human trafficking as well as diamonds and other minerals in operations that have seen the ancient Timbuktu Sahelian trade being revived.

The tools for the trade include the current black-berry mobile phone and its intricate technological capacities, cameras, some radar capacity amongst the pirates, computers, timing devices, and explosives-gas cylinders and in the case of Boko Haram in Nigeria, the use of bladeless ceiling fans and refrigerators, linked to the oppressive heat common to that West African region.

Objective

This is the primary purpose of this discussion, to case study the African EW Battlefield experience and draw lessons to inform counter-measures, either as early warning or combating the intentions of conflict perpetrators.

Organisation

In this discussion, the focus on *The Evolution of Electronic Warfare and its impact on the African Battlefield,* shall begin by defining the dimension that characterise EW on the African Battlefield before examining what effective counter measures have been or can be adopted for effective counter-measures or early warning before we make recommendations in the conclusion. This is a short argument, given the half an hour of presentation that must also take into account questions and answers.

Discussion

The typical African Battlefield is variously located in at least five areas. The first is that theatre framed by Peace Treaties that result in the deployment of Peacekeeping, Peace Enforcement or Observer Forces to manage ceasefires, on-going conflicts Somalia, Sudan, Libya (UNSC 1973) and Ivory Coast (UNSC 1975). Based on the UNSC Resolutions, Africa has witnessed the full conventional might of European (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) Forces and the United States land (limited insertions of Special Forces), sea and air forces, unleashed, mainly on Abidjan and Tripoli.

The second is around disputed elections Ivory Coast, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Madagascar where the battle is located in determining electoral results, regional and ethnic group representation.

Third, is on what has become popularly known as the reaction to *War On Terror* in contest that has witnessed elements of the crusades and jihadist return.

Fourth are responses to Fundamentalist contexts in which we have witnessed representative groups such as Al-Shabbab and Boko Haram "Western Education is Sinful" (Nigeria), as distinct from Emancipation of Egoniland (MEND). This also includes the Salafists popularly known as the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AIQM) affecting stability in the SAHEL, as-Sahil "shore of SAHARA "sea" in the lower regions of North Africa including the countries of Niger, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad. Responses to these dimensions is sometimes made more complex by the intersecting regional conflicts where actors and leaders tend to take advantage of perceived weaknesses and create proxy force alliances. The case in point is the series of

interlocking conflicts and groups in the Sudan, in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Finally, African Battlefield is also located off-shore, around its maritime security off the coastlines of Somalia and in the West African Bight of Benin.

Recommendations

The first recommendation that can be made is that of awareness, motivating us to begin to better understand what EW challenges exist on the African Battlefield. The second is to determine the interconnectedness of these practices with other regional and international dynamics? Armed with this knowledge then we can be able to conclude whether or not these are unique to Africa or simply something that is also germaine to other regions? Third, is to find out the ability and capacity of the African actors in responding to the challenges? The above case study reveals that Africa does not have the capacity to challenge aviation threats nor mount a serious maritime security strategy. Consequently, external players need to find common cause with African political actors in order to find legitimacy in linking responses to local efforts. Finally, the radical groups of Al-Shabbab, Boko Haram and Salafists in the Sahel, have capacity to threaten the fragile regimes in their neighbourhood, making the case for urgent international intervention in order to make a difference.

Conclusion

Africa's political and socio-economic stability is unlikely to be assured if the challenge of EW is not addressed. Because there is lack of capacity on the continent, the answer then lies in the invitation and intervention of external players, in a process that has mutual win-win benefits. The sophistication of gadgets and equipment employment is manufactured outside the shores of the continent and only the participation of industrialised states in combating EW locally, can we reach a point of neutralizing the capacity that is currently threatening fragile states and administrations based on the rule of law and human rights.

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