

Contexts and Proximation Features in President Muhammadu Buhari's Speech on Regional Security in West Africa

by

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Abstract

This paper complements the pragmatic attempts in its adoption of Auer's contextual model and Cap's proximation theory in carrying out a context-driven and discourse space pragmatic analysis to track the speaker-imposed construal distance and proximity in political discourse on security. President Buhari's speech at the 2nd regional security summit delivered on the 14th May, 2016 has been purposively selected for this exploration. The study identified three contexts namely securitisation, rehabilitation and solidarity within which President Buhari seeks legitimization by using spatial, temporal and axiological proximation features in the representation of the actors involved. The study identified pragmatic usage of verb phrases as category accommodating markers and the symbolic movement between the discourse space centre inside-the-deictic centre noun phrases and discourse space periphery outside-the-deictic centre noun phrases is used by the speaker to achieve his vantage intentions. The study also found out that the President deployed lexico-grammatical expressions to label *Boko Haram* against the ideologies of extremist, terrorist, and killer. The study concludes that President Buhari's orientation to shared situational knowledge and mutual contextual belief within the social context of securitisation, solidarity and rehabilitation imply that African politicians' use of language on war on terror promotes solidarity, galvanise support of the general public by legitimising actions against insurgency or terrorism with a view to curbing the menace.

Keywords: Discourse space centre, category accommodation markers, legitimisation, symbolic movement

Background to the Study

The pragmatics of political discourse is significantly essential in tracking the speaker imposed intention, status and role by the audience. Interestingly, political language is a specialised means of communication employed by politicians in order to maximally appeal, convince and impact their audience with a view to changing their mind on an issue. It is a distinctive form of language that entails the deployment of rhetoric, double speaks, gobbledygook and propaganda to achieve its aim. Through an adroit instrumentation of language, politicians do not only succeed in garnering the support of the public, but also legitimise their actions (Weintraub, 2007). As a point of fact, language possesses an intrinsic force that affords the user the opportunity to manipulate, as well as influence even the rationality of the audience's scrutiny of truth claims; it enables politicians to impose their aims on the audience. For instance, the pragmatics of political discourse on security is highly important as physical and psychological threats are captured as well as the symbolic representations of the actors in the politicians' use of language.

In Nigeria, as well as other parts of Africa, the existence of threat to societal peace, caused by insurgency (terrorism) cannot be overstated. The havoc this has caused the Nigerian society, especially the North-east cannot be overemphasised. Ipso facto, the insurgent acts necessitate a regional collaborative effort in order to raze current and impending threats. So, the pragmatics of these efforts is the focus of this study, especially as projected by President Buhari in his welcome address at regional security summit in West Africa. This study adopts pragmatic approach to provide a sustainable framework to investigate the strategic use of language of President Buhari in distance construction of social actors in his speech on security as he launches crusade against terror in Nigeria and West Africa sub region. Precisely, it examines the contexts the president orients to and proximation features in his speech with a view at tracking symbolic distance crossing in political discourse on war on terror.

Political Discourse and Language

The definition of politics is dependent on the context of use, and consequently it has various and varying denotations. For instance, Chilton (2004) defines politics within the purview of discourse as the struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it and on the other as cooperation, as the practices and institutions that a society has for resolving clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty, and the like. Relatedly, Hopf (2002) argues that politics entails the activities of institutions such as political parties, government and parliaments, in the fulfilment of political obligations. Incrementally, he affirms that politics is a struggle to gain and retain power among members of political institutions.

Political discourse can therefore be defined as a wide and varied set of discourses covering policy papers, ministerial speeches, government press releases or press conferences, parliamentary discourse, party manifestos, electoral speeches and other communications that are politically inclined (Bayley, 2004). In sum, political discourse captures every activity that takes place within the context of politics, which includes campaigns, legislative debates, political interviews, writing, and speeches that are politically related.

Lanham (1991) submits that rhetoric is germane to political discourse; the engagement of rhetoric enables politicians to manipulate and influence the thoughts and actions of their audience; hence it is described as the art of persuasive discourse. Subsequently, politicians are skilful in using language to manipulate an audience even with insincere motives and speaking claptrap. Atkinson (1984) defines claptrap as “a device of language designed to catch applause”. Taiwo (2009) equally claims that the field of politics is fast becoming a field that attracts the linguists attention because they subject the politicians’ use of language to object of investigation in order to track intention, power and others. Therefore, the present study attempts to track President Buhari’s imposed distance and proximity in his speech on security.

Situating the Study and Other Studies

Existing studies on political speeches delivered by presidents in US and Africa are sampled and reviewed. Weintraub (2007) in his study on the formative power of wartime rhetoric: a critical discourse analysis of presidential speeches, argues that in order to engage the country in a political and military conflict, leaders must inform the public about the nature of the threat to the quotidian (pg.1). He further claims that chief among presidents’ rhetorical strategies is their linguistic construction of space by establishing a polemic relationship between the United States and the ‘enemy’.

Precisely, Weintraub’s study explores the linguistic similarities between the Presidents J. F. Kennedy and G. W. Bush speeches as reflection of the commonality in the political climates of the two moments in American history: perceived threats to the idealised American way of life by a thoroughly unfamiliar outsider led the Presidents to launch attacks against the ideologies of ‘communism’ and ‘terrorism’.

Balzacq (2005) in his study on, *The Three Faces of Securitisation: Political Agency, Audience and Context*, argues that securitisation is better understood as a strategic (pragmatic) practice that occurs within and as part of, a configuration of circumstances, including the context, the psycho-cultural disposition of the audience, and the power that both speaker and listener bring to the interaction. Likewise, Balzacq establishes the significance of context in analysing political speeches, especially those on security. According to him, the concept of ‘security’ modifies, but aligns with an external context- independent from the use of language- to yield the deserved effect.

The study also focuses on the power of security utterances derives from the social position of the speaker. The present study aligns with the belief of Balzacq's study which argues that the audience, political agency and context are crucial to the linguistic analysis of political speeches, especially on securitisation. Additionally, this scholarly narrative will be extended further by investigating the ideological positions a speaker takes in legitimising certain actions against the construed enemy. In support of this van Dijk (1999:5) claims that the study of political discourse should not be limited to the structural properties of text or talk, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures.

Huysmans (2011) canvasses for studies on the language function of securitisation. In his study on *What's in an Act? On Security Speech Acts and Little Security Nothing*, he explores how to start framing a research agenda that asks what political acts can be in diffuse security processes that efface securitising speech acts. He defines securitising as processes of technologically driven surveillance, risk management, and precautionary governance. These processes are about dispersing techniques of administering uncertainty and 'mapping' dangers.

Alo (2012) examines how African leaders persuade the African people on the expediency of various political and socio-economic policies and plans that are capable of enhancing African economic recovery and development. The study closely analyses the rhetorical and persuasive strategies some African presidents employed in their speeches. The sampled speeches were delivered by Presidents Robert Mugabe, Thabo Mbeki, Mwai Kibaki, Joseph Kabila, Hosni Mubarak, John Atta Mills, Olusegun Obasanjo and Paul Biya. The study reveals that these political leaders rely on the spoken medium to influence and mobilise their followers and convince people of the benefits that can arise from their leadership.

From the foregoing, more research attempts have been made in the West on political speeches on security, especially on terrorism than in Africa. Attempts in Africa have largely concentrated on other forms of political speeches like inaugural, independence and media charts. All these studies have not given adequate attention to speaker-imposed construal distance and proximity in political discourse especially on security (on war on terror). This becomes significant because of the security threat occasioned by terrorism in some parts of Africa and the damaging effects.

Theoretical Orientations

The study is hinged on the frameworks of Auer's contextual model and Piotr Cap's proximation. These are discussed in turns; hence, Auer (2009) identifies five dimensions of context, which are linguistic context (sometimes called co-texts), physical context, social context, participants' background knowledge and channel of communication (medium). According to him, the linguistic context is the pointer to the intertextual relationship between texts.

The inter-textual links between focal events and their co-texts are accounted for by the linguistic context. He claims that “what represents a co-text for a given linguistic sign may also be located on a superordinate level of linguistic structure; however... utterance may be co-textually embedded as an ‘orientation’ to a ‘story’. The physical context comprises the physical surroundings of the speech situation, including the things and events in the co-participants’ sensual reach. Social context refers to the participants and their social roles and the social activity they are involved in. The participants’ common ground knowledge is particularly complex. Auer argues that “what has been mentioned before in a text may become an indexed feature of the co-text of a later utterance; at the same time, it is part of the situation-specific common background knowledge participants may rely on in the production and interpretation of future activities”. The fifth dimension of context is the channel or medium in which the interaction takes place (whether oral or written). The knowledge of these dimensions is employed in this study.

Proximation

Proximation is a theory of pragmatics which essentially focuses on symbolic distance crossing. The primary application of the theory is to analyse the language of state politicians and other prominent actors in the public discourse space. It deals with the speaker-imposed construal of distance and proximity in discourse. Proximation, according to Cap, is a discursive strategy of presenting physically and temporally distant events and states of affairs (including ‘distant’, that is, adversarial, ideological mind-sets) as directly, increasingly and negatively consequential to the speaker and addressee (Cap 2013:3). In his opinion, Chilton (2005) claims that proximation accounts for the symbolic construal of relations between entities within the Discourse Space (DS).

The theory applies a cognitive-pragmatic methodology (bottom-up, top-down perspectives) to investigate political phenomena (ideology- enactment/ enforcement, legitimisation, persuasion, mystification, manipulation etc). The theory has three dimensional mechanisms which are discussed below.

Mechanisms of Proximation: The Spatial, Temporal, and Axiological Proximation

The spatial dimension involves physical entities conceptualised in different and variable degrees of geographical and geopolitical distance from deictic centre. This is represented by lexicogrammatical markers of entities construed as “home” (inside-the-deictic-centre IDC), “distant/foreign= antagonistic” (outside- the –deictic- centre ODC).

Markers of “movement” of ODC in the direction of IDC. IDCs- speaker and the addressee, duly positioned in the deictic centre, facing an external threat entity construed as moving from the apparent periphery of the DS in the direction of the DS centre. The three kinds of the lexicogrammatical markers are respectively NPs (e.g. ‘we’, ‘our country’, ‘innocent people’), NPs (terrorists’), VPs (“have set their course to confront us”). The VPs represent the bi-directional movement between ODC and IDC elements.

For instance, central entities also known as IDC (NPs) are captured by examples as (I, we, our, us etc) while peripheral entities also as ODC are captured as (they, you your, them etc). In sum, spatial proximisation is ideally suited to solicit addressees’ legitimisation of speaker’s (pre-emptive) policies in the fastest way possible.

Temporal proximisation is a forced construal of ‘now’, the speaker’s present, as the central point and event frame on the time ‘axis’ (past and the future time). The centrality of ‘now’ means, rather the momentousness of the present defined, on the other hand, by know events of the past and the envisage events of the near future. Past-to-present shift (past events/actions and those instigated by the ODC entities informs the present speaker’s context in the interest of current action). This explains past actions by ODC entities which affect the speaker’s present. The information is validated by analogies holding between the past and the present context arrangements. Future-to-present shift is essentially characterised by how the activities of the ODC entities in the near future will impact on the speaker based on premises construed from past events. This feature is marked off by two constructs real time (RT) and construed time (CT). RT is the specified time of an event while CT is an indefinite time used to date an event in the past, present or future.

Axiological proximisation is a forced construal of a gathering ideological conflict between the ‘home values’ of DS central entities, IDCs and the ‘alien’ antagonistic values of the ODCs, which occupy the conceptual periphery of the DS. (the materialisation of ODC’s ideological threat within the IDC space). There are two types of axiological proximisation: high probability and lower probability. The two types differ markedly regarding the linguistic underpinning, especially the forms that force a symbolic connection between ideology and the ideology enactment, which the latter may or not involve a physical manifestation.

Political speakers’ aim of legitimisation among others is to share a common view on what is good as against evil, right as against wrong, acceptable as against unacceptable, consequently, on how to secure the right, good, useful, acceptable, just against a possible intrusion, in the life of a society of the wrong, evil and harmful. (49).

Methodology

President Buhari's speech at the 2nd regional security summit delivered on the 14th May, 2014 was purposively selected as data for this study. Auer's contextual model and Cap's proximation theory were adopted in carrying out a context-driven and discourse space pragmatic analysis to track the speaker-imposed construal of distance and proximity in political discourse on security of President Buhari. Auer's contextual model was adopted to investigate contexts that characterise the speech while proximation crystallises the pragmatics of construal distance and proximity of social actors involved in the speech under investigation projected in by the President Buhari. Thus, the two foci, contexts and proximation features, are explored in President Buhari's speech to establish his strategic use of language as a politician and to track his linguistic construction of space against the construed enemy. These two are crucial in political speeches on security as suggested by scholars (van Dijk 1999, Balzacq 2005 and Weintraub 2007) if victory is aspired. Therefore, this section is devoted to pragmatically handle context and proximation in the speech selected for this study.

Contexts of President Buhari's Speech

The President strategically negotiates tripartite contexts in his speech as he linguistically constructs affiliative and disaffiliative grounds for actions and actors configured within the discourse space. These are contexts of securitisation, solidarity and rehabilitation. They are discussed below.

Context of Securitisation

Securitisation captures measures put in place to guard a place and its inhabitants against attacks, threat, crime, danger and other bad situations. Securitisation therefore entails processes about dispersing techniques of administering uncertainty against threats and mapping dangers. President Buhari's speech in the context of this study is hinged on securitisation, especially in the protection of Nigerian territory and West African region against the construed terrorism by Boko Haram. This picture is painted in the excerpts below.

Excerpt 1

Nigerians and the international community should know that in this fight, we kept faith humanitarian rules of engagement, in particular protection of civilians in theatres of conflict.
(Para. 6)

Excerpt 2

Boko Haram and its growing regional capabilities and international connections was threatening to overrun large territories of sovereign countries and putting to fight millions of people. (Para. 2)

The above pictures war situation as evidenced in the phrase “in this fight” which implies the fight against terrorism. As the chief security officer of the nation, he emphasises his administration’s commitment to security in order to protect the civilians in the fierce war which he tags “theatres of conflict”. The statement presupposes that government is not unconcerned with the activities of the terrorists because she has also put up fight against their activities. This suggests security measures to protect the civilians who are victims of such attacks. Justifying his administration’s actions, he asserts, “we kept faith humanitarian rules of engagement” which implies that he has not flouted the humanitarian rules of fighting. In sum, contextually unambiguous phrasing of his administration concerned commitments against the terrorists implies his power-based arrangement to provide security for the vulnerable civilians. He captures the actions and intention of the construal enemy in Excerpt 2 that relates how Boko Haram has been expanding their regional capacities through their international connections, creating huge threat to overrun sovereign countries by fighting millions of people. The President orients to shared situational knowledge (SSK) to establish the synergetic concern of Nigerians and members of international community war against terrorism; which necessitate the need to secure the territory that he expresses in Excerpt 1.

Context of Solidarity

Context of solidarity describes the shared-aim motivated support to fight against terrorism among member states of Lake Chad Basin Commission. President Buhari strategically negotiates collaborative tactics to overwhelm Boko Haram activities within the region.

Excerpt 3

We acknowledge the support of our friends in Europe, the United States and China in this fight, in the shape of shared intelligence and provision of needed war material. (Para.6)

Excerpt 4

These achievements would not have been possible without the steadfast support invaluable contributions and sacrifices of my brothers and Presidents of Cameroon, Chad and Niger as well as Republic of Benin. I am convinced that the great solidarity and good neighbourliness demonstrated by all countries in the region would be a model for other regions faced with similar challenges. (Para. 9)

Excerpt 5

As LCBC member states, we seek the cooperation and support of our partners to implement this plan. I would like to seize this opportunity to inform you that African Union Commission (AUC) and the LCBC joint force have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and Support Implementation Agreement (SIA). With this, the African Union will coordinate the collection of all international assistance towards the prosecution of the fight against terrorism and extremism in our region. (Para. 17)

Recognising that the war could not be fought alone and in isolation, President Buhari acknowledges the collaborative efforts of international communities in the areas of shared intelligence and provision of weapons as Nigeria and West African sub region fight against terrorism. By mentioning geographically nominal entities like “Europe”, “United States” and “China” is like claiming that the whole world is in support of the nation and the region in the fight. The President assents to this solidarity as contributing factor for achieving significant victory over the terrorists. He claims in Excerpt 3 that such solidarity is being coveted by other regions experiencing terrorism. He calls for shared view of the members on how to liberate and secure the region against terrorism. President Buhari in the above excerpts orients to mutual contextual belief (MCB) of members of the region and of Africa to support the fight against terrorism. This indexes African collectivist culture at getting problems solved. He also seeks the support of international bodies against this common enemy of security. Using informing act, he prioritises a collaborative ideology of members of West African sub region to solidify the unity of the member states against the onslaught of Boko Haram. The President prioritises solidarity among the member states because of the shared view and belief that terrorism is the enemy that must be collectively and corporately dealt with.

Context of Rehabilitation

Context of rehabilitation describes mechanisms put in place to restore hope and good condition to the victims of terrorist attacks; such as rehabilitation of infrastructural development, restoring the internally displaced persons to their homes. These are evident in the excerpts below.

Excerpt 6

Development of an Action plan by the LCBC for Nigeria, for the infrastructural development of the areas worst affected by the war on terror. The Action plan aims to rehabilitate towns and villages of internally displaced persons (IDPS), to enable them to return home. (Para. 8)

Another cardinal focus of the President’s speech is rehabilitation. In Excerpt 6, he stresses the plan by Lake Chad Basin Commission for Nigeria to rehabilitate the worst affected areas caused by terrorism. Specifically, the President assents to shared situational knowledge (SSK) of his audience who are aware of the havoc the terrorist attacks have caused on towns, villages and the inhabitants of the affected areas; and the need to restore hope and good condition for the victims.

Proximation Features of President Buhari's Speech

In his speech like other politicians, President Buhari deployed proximation tactics to legitimise his regime's actions against insurgency as the construal enemy of the society. The three aspects of proximation theory are deployed in the analysis of this section, which are spatial, temporal and axiological representations. These are discussed in turns.

Spatial Representations of Social Actors

As a legitimisation mechanism, President Buhari uses embodiments of ODC negative characterisation of Boko Haram as a forced construal of the Discourse space (DS) peripheral entities encroaching physically upon the IDC. He enforces the vision of a destructive character of ODC's impact through negative representation of the construal enemy.

The ODC negative representation of *Boko Haram*

In his speech, the president conceptualises and represents the enemy as outer deictic centre (ODC) negative features. "Boko Haram' was threatening large territories" The ODCs are captured in the following noun phrases (NPs): "Boko Haram", "Boko Haram forces", "Boko Haram terrorist activities", "menace of international terrorisms". With these nomenclatures, the construal periphery is mapped as a threat to the IDC entities. The negative representation of ODC shows the negative value which latter prompt the physical impact of ODCs upon IDCs. The speaker and the addressee (IDCs) are duly positioned in the deictic centre, facing an external threat entity construed as moving from the periphery of the DS in the direction of IDC.

The IDC positive self representations

President Buhari captures elements of the inside deictic centre of the DS in the following noun phrases (NPs): "our administration", "our region", "our first task", "Chibok girls", "innocent", "the gallant Armed forces", "I", "we", "our", "our people". These show construal positive self representation to legitimise his position and orient to the shared geopolitical identity and to share a common view with his audience. The NPs indicating IDC also imply construal enactment of leadership resistant to crisis movement. President Buhari evokes and reinforces various dichotomous representations in accordance with his goal of legitimisation.

Both elements in a and b above are symbolically conflated to make up a clearly demarcated camps. The relative distance between ODCs and IDCs is collapsing as the ODC elements are carrying out their plans thereby physically invading the IDC home territory as evident in “was threatening”, “to overrun sovereign countries.

Interventionist Representative Discourse

The interventionist discourse according to Cap (2013) “can be considered a state governance discourse whose function is to sanction and enact policies aimed at neutralising, whether legislatively or by force, often military force, external threats to the society or a socio-political group (including the global international community) which the political actor/speaker represents (or aspires to prevent) and rules over or otherwise “leads” (or usurp) a moral right to do so” (Pg. 66). In the data for this study, President Buhari deploys preventive moves against the physical threat by the insurgent group in Nigeria and West Africa sub region. This is evident in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 8

Our hope, therefore, is that the meeting would be a training point for our collective efforts to achieve a conflict free, peaceful and stable region, where development and good governance thrive. Against this backdrop, our task is to review how well we have achieved our objectives since the Paris Summit.

The President assertively opinionates that the summit would be a training point for collective efforts to achieve a conflict free, peaceful and stable region, where development and good governance thrive. The word “achieve” here is an aspiration suggesting the intervening effort to be put in place by the government to get a “conflict free” environment. The IDCs “our hope”, “our collective efforts”, are positive self representation of the government with the intention to prevent the continuous terrorist attacks in the region. In sum, the President through negative representation of ODC and positive self representation of IDC, through fact-belief series, fear appeals has clearly shown linguistically the spatiality of how direct physical threats loom over the country and the region.

Temporal Representations of Actions

The temporal representations of actions project the timing of the actions within the discourse space. Specifically, attention is given to real time (RT) and construal time (CT) in tracing the symbolic compression of the time axis as a result of two conceptual shifts, past-to-present and future-to-present.

Excerpt 9

We must now articulate a plan for the critical post conflict development phase.

Excerpt 10

Boko Haram and its growing regional capabilities and international connections was threatening to overrun large territories of sovereign countries and putting to fight millions of people.

The ODC positively represented by the royal “we” through category accommodating marker VP “must now articulate” describes the compulsory action that has to be taken at this RT “now” projects into the CT that is in the future which is the post conflict phase as the case in Excerpt 9. The past tense verb to be “was” in excerpt which is a real time (RT) coupled with “threatening and to overrun” the past tense events but presupposes the threat of ODC to the IDC camp.

Axiological Representations of Social Actors

This captures a forced construal movement of ODC-IDC ideological conflict which, in time, may lead to physical to physical clash. In other words, axiological proximation works with values assigned to the opposing (centre versus periphery) physical entities of the DS.

President Buhari in his speech captures corresponding ideological opposition of the IDC and ODC to show the symbolic move from ideological premise to the physical act. He represented the construal enemy with ODC antagonistic values with the following “terrorism”, “extreme radicalism”, “conflict”, “high poverty rate”, “extremism”, and “abduction”. The IDC positive ideological values as represented by President Buhari in his speech are “peace”, “dignity”, “stability”, “good governance”, “liberation” and “development”. ODC antagonistic ideological values captured here is recognition of the existence of an antagonistic or evil ideological marker associated with ODC.

Excerpt 7

Our hope, therefore, is that the meeting would be a training point for our collective efforts to achieve a conflict free, peaceful and stable region, where development and good governance thrive. (Para. 13)

The NP, “our hope” representing ODC suggests the collective view of both the speaker and the audience in projecting positive ideological values “conflict free”, “peaceful and stable region”, “development” and “good governance”.

Conclusion

The study reveals that President Buhari's orientation to SSK and MCB within the social context of securitisation, solidarity and rehabilitation imply that African politicians' use of language on war on terror promotes solidarity, galvanise the support of the general public by legitimising actions against insurgency or terrorism. Concomitantly, this finding aligns with Balzacq (2005)'s position that context is significant in the analysis of political speeches on security and that politicians orient to the common view of their audience to address the threat. The investigation also evinced that like other politicians, President Buhari deploys proximation features to negatively distance the construal enemy (ODC) from the discourse space and by negatively positioning them with derogative ideological values as killers, terrorist and extremists. Through positive self representation and positive ideological values of peace, stability and societal development for the IDC, President Buhari calls for solidarity of member states to collectively wage war against Boko Haram. These significantly capture negative emotion for the ODC and positive public support for the IDC to subdue Boko Haram in Nigeria and West African region. Consequently, this position aligns with Weintraub (2007)'s submission that chief among presidents' rhetorical strategies is their linguistic construction of space.

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Appendix

President Muhammadu Buhari's Speech at the 2nd Regional Security Summit

Opening speech delivered by His Excellency Muhammadu Buhari, President, Federal Republic of Nigeria at the opening ceremony of the 2nd regional security summit on Saturday, 14th May, 2016.

May I welcome your Excellencies and other delegates to the Second Regional Security Summit for the Lake Chad Basin countries and communities. Allow me first of all to congratulate the Presidents of Niger, Chad and Equatorial Guinea for their successful re-election this year. May I also congratulate the President of Benin Republic for victory in the polls and also formally welcome him to this important gathering.

The first summit, we may recall was in an emergency situation. Boko Haram and its growing regional capabilities and international connections was threatening to overrun large territories of sovereign countries and putting to fight millions of people.

Now, let me welcome one of our August visitors, President Francois Hollande of France, a friend to Africa, leader of the nation that has been solid partner in our efforts to stabilize our regions and rid us of the menace of international terrorism. France's efforts in leading a coalition in checking, then expelling terrorist from Mali is recognised and appreciated by the rest of Africa and the wider international community.

With respect to our Lake Chad Basin region, the last summit took far-reaching decisions to:

- Strengthen cooperation among member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC)
- Ensure the safe release of Chibok School Girls
- Combat Boko Haram terrorist activities, and
- Protect victims of Boko Haram and the civilian population in theatres of combat.

When our Administration assumed office, our first task was to tackle and defeat Boko Haram. We restructured and re-equipped our Armed forces. We strengthened co-operation among Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) members and Benin. By December, the gallant Armed forces of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger had degraded Boko Haram and squeezed them into small enclave of Sambisa forest.

We acknowledge the support of our friends in Europe, the United States and China in this fight, in the shape of shared intelligence and provision of needed war material. Nigerians and the international community should know that in this fight, we kept faith humanitarian rules of engagement, in particular protection of civilians in theatres of conflict. What remains is to dislodge the terrorists from their hideout in Sambisa forest and safely liberate the Chibok girls and other victims of abduction.

Boko Haram now resort to hit and run tactics, cowardly attacking soft targets, hitting innocent and defenseless civilians and causing mindless damage to social infrastructure. Meanwhile, coordinated mop-up military operations are in progress supported by intelligence shaping and cooperation with local communities to clean the country and the region of Boko Haram.

Some of our achievements, at both bilateral and multilateral levels, since the Paris Summit include:

- i. The recovery of all territories occupied by the Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria.
 - ii. Establishment of special military units by Nigeria, Niger, Chad, to prosecute the war on terror.
 - iii. Admission of the Republic of Benin to the group, to strengthen the regional coalition.
 - iv. Establishment of the regional intelligence fusion unit (RIFU) in Abuja and its operation list in, to pool intelligence resources,
 - v. Strengthening the security of boarder regions of member states
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1. Setting up the Inter-Regional Coordination Centre (ICC) based in Yaounde, Cameroon, under the aegis of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), to coordinate and disseminate intelligence and security information to all members of states
 2. Reactivation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) with 8,500 officers and men, drawn from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Benin with Headquarters in Ndjamena, Chade.
 3. Hosting of conference of the parties side event with Lake Chad in December 2015, in Paris, during which the Lake Chad Development and Climate Resilience Action plan, a systematic development plan for the Lake Region, was presented to donor nations and organisations, with a view to raising 916 million Euros; and
 4. Development of an Action plan by the LCBC for Nigeria, for the infrastructural development of the areas worst affected by the war on terror. The Action plan aims to rehabilitate towns and villages of internally displaced persons (IDPS), to enable them to return home.

These achievements would not have been possible without the steadfast support invaluable contributions and sacrifices of my brothers and Presidents of Cameroon, Chad and Niger as well as Republic of Benin. I am convinced that the great solidarity and good neighbourliness demonstrated by all countries in the region would be a model for other regions faced with similar challenges.

Let me also pay tribute to our gallant men and women of the (MNJTF), for their courage and commitment to service. No praise is too high for our soldiers and our men who are winning this war.

The African union commission, the European Union Commission, ECOWAS, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and Gulf of Guinea Commission have also contributed extensively to the success recorded in the implementation of our regional initiative against Boko Haram. As we commence the journey to the second phase of this project, I urge you to continue to be by our side.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, this summit is development-centred, which is why it is organised under the theme- Consolidating Collective Efforts for Regional Peace and Development.

Our hope, therefore, is that the meeting would be a training point for our collective efforts to achieve a conflict free, peaceful and stable region, where development and good governance thrive. Against this backdrop, our task is to review how well we have achieved our objectives since the Paris Summit.

Indeed, we must seize the opportunity that this summit presents to evaluate the successes we have achieved, consolidate the gains, identify any shortcomings we have experienced, and then draw important lessons in which to build further progress.

As part of our comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of terrorism and extreme radicalism in the region, we must now articulate a plan for the critical post conflict development phase. While we work to enhance the provision of humanitarian assistance to the victims of terrorism, we remain focused on efforts to create conditions for the voluntary return of the IDPS and refugees to their homes in peace and dignity.

The long term development of the Lake Chad Region is crucial to reducing the high poverty rate in the basin, a major factor in the recruitment of terrorists. Implementing the Lake Chad Development and Climate Resilience Action Plan (LCDCRAP), which was submitted to donor countries and organisations at the conference of parties (COP 21) side and on the Lake Chad, therefore, remains a vital challenge.

The total cost of the short and medium term development of the Lake Region is estimated to be in the region of 916 million Euros. As LCBC member states, we seek the cooperation and support of our partners to implement this plan. I would like to seize this opportunity to inform you that African Union Commission (AUC) and the LCBC joint force have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and Support Implementation Agreement (SIA). With this, the African Union will coordinate the collection of all international assistance towards the prosecution of the fight against terrorism and extremism in our region.

I must however, call on the AUC and the LCBC to faithfully implement these important agreements. In this regard, all assistance received from donor countries and organisations must be seen to have been fairly transparently and equitably disbursed.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let me reiterate our firm commitment to safely rescue and reunite the abducted Chibok girls, and indeed all other abductees with their families. Our government will not spare any effort toward achieving this important mission. It is my firm belief that this Summit will usher in a period of improved collaboration to address the menace of terrorism in the region. Inspired by the promise of sustainable peace and development, we must redouble our efforts to implement all agreements.

Finally, I assure you all that Nigeria remains committed to the global efforts against terrorism which knows no boundary as is evident from past and recent events. With these words, I wish all of us fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your attention.