

**Sustainability Of Military Internal Security Operations: A Comparative Study Of
Operation Crocodile Smile And Operation Safe Haven**

by

**Oluwadamilare OLAWOLE, Bolaji OMITOLA, Adebowale ADEYEYE, Olumide
OMODUNBI**

Department of Political Science, Osun State University

Olawoleoluwadamilare4@gmail.com; bolaji.omitola@uniosun.edu.ng,

adebowale.adeyeye@uniosun.edu.ng, Olumide.omudunbi@uniosun.edu.ng

Abstract

This study evaluates Nigerian military internal security operations by comparing Operation Crocodile Smile and Operation Safe Haven for sustainability. This research examines both operations by assessing their targets and approaches alongside their results and prospective enduring effects for treating internal security problems. These military actions produced two successful short-term operational results, but their long-term effectiveness is hampered by operational challenges, as well as political and societal reasons. The study demonstrates that sustainable internal security missions need enhanced cooperation with political entities alongside investments towards community policing alongside socio-economic development plans for long-term success. The study uses a qualitative method and exploratory design for comprehensive examination of the study subject. The use of secondary data from scholarly articles and official documents alongside policy material and archival records as well as news reports and predefined databases.

Keywords: Internal security, sustainability, military operations, Operation Crocodile Smile, Operation Safe Haven

Introduction

The largest African nation remains burdened by permanent evolving domestic security hazards which severely affect its political stability together with governance and national development. Nigeria experiences multiple internal threats that stem from Boko Haram insurgencies in the North-East alongside activities of militants and oil thieves in the Niger Delta region and banditry in the North-West and continuous strife between herders and farmers in the Middle Belt area (International Crisis Group, 2018; Campbell, 2020). The internal security capabilities of the Nigerian Police Force have reached their limits requiring routine military interventions for civil security tasks due to the Constitution.

Nigeria now identifies military action in domestic security matters as the primary characteristic of its national security policy. The military's operations within domestic security space through specially tailored missions reveal both the breakdown of civil security systems and the need for immediate violence reduction. The extensive nature along with sustained duration and strategic

significance distinguishes both Operation Crocodile Smile and Operation Safe Haven among military-led security arrangements.

Operation Crocodile Smile introduced during 2016 established its mission to demonstrate military power across the Niger Delta region to suppress militancy and piracy and oil theft activities and state control of valuable economic zones (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). The operation transformed into a digital security platform integrating cyber surveillance and misinformation control measures primarily during "Crocodile Smile VI" operations (Nigerian Army, 2020). Operational achievements lowering criminal activities in the Niger Delta have not stopped critics from criticizing military abuse of human rights and both civilian treatment and inadequate collaboration with local peace institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Operation Safe Haven emerged to handle the long-standing ethno-religious and communal tensions affecting the North-Central region including Plateau State and its neighboring areas. Operation Safe Haven has established a different approach from Crocodile Smile that integrates various security organizations including law enforcement agencies with the Department of State Services and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps. Aliyu (2021) highlights that this operation uses dialogue while focusing on peacebuilding in addition to non-kinetic strategies. This security approach has received more acceptance from local residents because it uses residents as part of its mechanisms to solve conflicts.

The investigation performs a comprehensive comparison of security operations FCSC and Operation Safewhole to evaluate military engagements in Nigeria for long-term security stability. These operations demonstrate sustainability when they produce enduring peace and decrease military interventions while fostering better cooperation among institutions within democratic institutions according to Onuoha (2020). The stability of emergency response-based military operations remains uncertain because they must transition toward becoming core components of a democratic framework that protects civil rights while maintaining security objectives.

The analysis concentrates on the operational goals with corresponding strategies in addition to evaluation results and public interactions during Operation Crocodile Smile and Operation Safe Haven in order to demonstrate both short-term effects and long-term sustainability. The study finds that military deployments risk developing into endless missions which weaken civil security forces while leading to public distrust because exit blueprints are absent and civil

authority links and economic improvement plans fail to exist. This research proposes transition to security methods that emphasize enduring people-driven solutions by bolstering community police departments and civil-military actions with institutional improvements.

Conceptual Review

The state employs internal security to develop mechanisms and institute policies and implement institutional responses which establish peace and law and order throughout the country under its jurisdiction. National security operations prevent and manage domestic threats of terrorism and insurgency as well as communal violence, electoral violence, political unrest along with organizational crime and preserve constitutional governance and protect human rights alongside critical national infrastructure (Omodunbi et al 2022; Alemika, 2013; Bueger & Glaeser, 2020). Nationwide stability and development require internal security since it maintains operational economic activities while supporting democratic institutions and protecting both rights and freedoms of citizens. The internal security issues in Nigeria and similar developing democracies continue to persist due to institutional weaknesses together with economic inequalities or youth joblessness and political underrepresentation and unmanaged border areas and ethnic-religious tensions. Security responses struggle to achieve effectiveness because of complex factors which drive the military to handle police force responsibilities traditionally (Olonisakin 2013; Okoli & Ugwu 2019).

The definition within this study implies that sustainability represents the military's ability to guide internal security operations towards durable beneficial peace outcomes through non-coercive methods. Responses under sustainable internal security approach must provide proactive prevention services to the community in addition to being development-focused and people-oriented interventions (Boege, Brown, & Clements, 2008; Williams, 2015). Internal security sustainability depends on developing resilient institutions while building security actor-community trust and building civil authority legitimacy and long-lasting peace procedures. The strategy requires effectiveness coupled with economical solutions along with local relevance to threats and the capacity to adjust as threats shift.

Sustainability takes a different approach by evaluating success through four fundamental aspects which include maintaining social unity and civil rights protection as well as institutional

longevity and military to civilian security transition (Bueger, 2020). The creation of sustainable security operations requires connecting security initiatives with various reforms including governance systems and economic development and justice institutions to solve the fundamental problems that lead to instability.

Objectives

When the Nigerian Army initiated Operation Crocodile Smile during 2016 its primary goal was to combat militancy while fighting oil bunkering activities and the threats of piracy and criminal activities in both the Niger Delta and coastal regions of Nigeria. Tackling cybercrimes alongside online radicalization activities became the new objectives for operation during its successive stages (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

Operation Safe Haven established itself to manage the conflict between various ethnic and religious groups along with sophisticated terrorism in Plateau State regional areas of the North Central region of Nigeria. The mission sought to preserve both peace and secure lives and properties while handling severe communal disputes and religious tensions that ran deep according to Aliyu (2021).

Strategies

The kinetic and technology-based aspects define the operational strategy for Operation Crocodile Smile. The operation utilizes big military forces alongside modern surveillance methods and boat-based patrols and now includes cyber warfare capabilities. During Operation Crocodile Smile the military maintains forceful deployments which require quick military reactions but lack meaningful interaction with neighborhood populations (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Operation Safe Haven adopts a multi-agency combination of different departments while using intelligence information to guide its operations. The operation necessitates joint participation of military forces with police as well as DSS and civil defense members. The strategy integrates conflict resolution methods with dialogue facilitation and intelligence-based interventions to bring down tension levels (Ajayi, 2020). The strategy consists of multiple components which involve dialogues with local communities and trust-building activities and both community outreach and warning system development.

Outcomes

The first phase of Operation Crocodile Smile achieved key operational targets when security forces destroyed militant camps along with capturing oil thieves and seizing their illegal weapons. Several groups have criticized Operation Crocodile Smile because of human rights violations along with poor civil-military relationships and minimal influence on regional insurgency and economic crime activities (Human Rights Watch, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

Operation Safe Haven has received recognition from security forces for its accomplishment of reducing major communal conflicts together with faster responses to new dangers. Relative security has been sustained while security forces simultaneously established better working ties with community leadership names. The military operation faces challenges due to occasional continued violence together with organizational and personnel limitations (Aliyu 2021, Idris 2017).

Long-Term Viability

Operation Crocodile Smile faces doubtful long-term survival because it depends too heavily on military forces while lacking effective connections with local communities and lacking a well-defined exit plan. The coastal region possesses an unsupportable long-term budget for military operations because the population in this area continues to oppose military presence (Obasanjo, 2013).

Operation Safe Haven establishes sustainable operations through its partnerships among different agencies and clarity in dialogue and involvement of local communities. Operation Safe Haven meets difficulties due to insufficient funding levels and limited availability of resources while having no established development plans that resolve conflict sources. The model demonstrates adaptability together with intelligence-centered operations and partnership-driven tactics which maximize its potential to become a combination of civil security and police-led systems during upcoming years (Ekhomu, 2019; Alemika, 2013).

Theoretical Framework: Security Sector Reform (SSR)

Military-led internal security operations in Nigeria benefit greatly from the Security Sector Reform (SSR) framework since it delivers an extensive method to transform security institutions. SSR puts forward a fundamental principle for security institution development because it requires functional institutions that uphold transparency while operating under civilian supervision. Through this framework security organizations receive a balanced system of

protection that unites military forces with law enforcement and civilian institutions to create enduring peace stability and protects human rights alongside following the law (Hendrix, 2011). The security challenges in Nigeria have prompted them to maintain Operation Crocodile Smile and Operation Safe Haven as short-term strategies against terrorism and other threats like militancy and communal violence.

Nigeria's internal security functions benefit from Security Sector Reform because it brings about citizen-led military oversight as well as decreases military power in national security institutions. Security operations managed by military forces deliver quickly but they must not determine the main approach for enduring internal security control. The SSR approach supports police force improvements as well as other civil security organizations to help them address more responsibilities for securing public order. Through these framework structures military forces must work together with local authorities to enhance security operation legitimacy as well as trust between security forces and affected communities (International Crisis Group, 2014).

SSR policies emphasize that operational security runs smoothly when human rights protection and rule of law principles both stay strong and military forces keep civilians' rights intact. The situation in Nigeria stands urgent because military operations across the Niger Delta and Plateau State receive criticism for human rights abuses which create hostility against local populations (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). When SSR incorporates human rights principles with transparent governance it generates a security space where the citizens trust the military because its operations demonstrate effectiveness along with regard for civilian oversight authorities.

SSR prioritizes capacity building as its fundamental principle because it aims to make local security organizations such as police forces and judiciary independent operators of security issues. The security sector becomes more sustainable thanks to this process which minimizes the military as the only available response to internal threats (Bueger & Glaeser, 2020). Nigeria's SSR approach attempts to resolve its security problems through combined social-economic enhancement together with justice system restructuring despite its governance faults and financial disparities. Such measures represent critical components for addressing insecurity at its base causes while supporting the prolonged success of military-led security initiatives.

Case Descriptions

Operation Crocodile Smile

The Nigerian Army initiated Operation Crocodile Smile in 2016 to control militancy alongside oil bunkering and piracy activities within the rebel-infested Niger Delta area. The main goal of the operation was to end militants' control over crucial strategic waterways and oil fields within the Niger Delta region in order to achieve regional peace. The criminal groups utilized Nigeria's oil reserves for an extended period while their illegal activities wounded national financial capabilities and local economic stability.

During its inaugural period the operation executed military methods and utilized extensive ground and aerial units to inspect surfaces together with maritime action. Operation Crocodile Smile became a complex security operation during 2018 after it added cyber warfare elements to counter the rising criminal organizations' usage of technological platforms for collaborating and obtaining intelligence and launching attacks. The advanced version of the operation demonstrated Nigerian Army's effort to overcome new security challenges stemming from modern insurgencies including cyber-terrorism and digital abuses by criminal groups (Nigerian Army, 2020).

The military operation succeeded in establishing control over vital oil areas along with militant disruption but received extensive criticism because of forceful strategies and uses of military force. The operation receives criticism from Human Rights Watch (2018) alongside other rights groups regarding how it affects townsfolk particularly through unlawful killings combined with population removals and civilian facilities destruction. Local people complained that military force was too aggressive and counter-productive to foster trust with the population. Due to insufficient contact with local populations for solving militant causes such as poverty and marginalization the military operation faced criticism for treating the region without respect for its socio-political needs (Adeyeye et. al 2024).

Operational strength emerged from the operation through technological progress and logistical management but questions remain about sustainability because local community involvement was insufficient and the operation failed to merge socio-economic development objectives. The military strategy failed to resolve major complaints of the local Niger Delta residents and did not address ongoing structural problems affecting the region such as employment shortages and economic inequalities along with development deficiencies. Critics have judged Operation Delta Safe's military approach because it mainly targets violence suppression activities without

implementing vital political-economic reforms for establishing permanent peace in the area (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019)

Operation Safe Haven

Operation Safe Haven originated in 2010 for resolving the ethno-religious conflicts together with herder-farmer disputes and terrorism which threatened the Middle Belt region particularly Plateau State and its neighboring areas. These locations have become main battlegrounds where Christian farmers and Muslim herders fight violent conflicts because of historical disputes about land claims and cow grazing customs and cultural diversity. This operation started because violent conduct had severely affected local populations and forced substantial population displacements.

Operation Safe Haven distinguished itself from Operation Crocodile Smile by uniting representatives from every agency across the police and military and paramilitary and intelligence services. In addition to maintaining law and order the operation used peacebuilding strategies that combined discussion with community involvement to achieve its goals. Protection under the military section served as the main security element yet different agencies concentrated on obtaining intelligence reports together with civilian defense operations and conflict mediation responsibilities.

The key aspect of Operation Safe Haven focused on intelligence-led mission execution to earn the trust of people living in local areas. Both the military and civil authorities of Nigeria deployed their gathered intelligence through networks to locate threats and stop them from expanding into major violent incidents. Security officials commend the operation because it brings dialogue and negotiation to security work to solve the roots of communal disputes. The operation has received generally positive feedback from the community because it involved their participation in peace-building activities including compared to other military activities in Nigeria (Aliyu, 2021).

The balanced approach of Operation Safe Haven encountered critical obstacles which mainly stemmed from inadequate resource management and problematic logistics operations and enduring complaints from the local population. Operational funding shortages alongside insufficient logistical systems prevent the operation from expanding its operations in distant areas where military deployment remains unstable. The operation did not effectively solve

underlying social conflict causes such as land tensions and religious hatred together with economic poverty that persists between grazing and farming communities. The continuing violent conflicts in Nigeria remain unresolved because Operation Safe Haven never achieved the necessary development of civil security structures and authority transfer from military forces to civilian rule.

The expanded sustainability of Operation Safe Haven emerges from its process of community partnership alongside its diverse method for handling conflicts. The inability to reach lasting peace persists for both operations largely because of structural socioeconomic problems which continue causing insecurity including economic disparities together with political discrimination and ethnic tensions. The operations present a case for implementing an internal security method which combines military strategies and civilian approaches with social-economic components.

Comparative Analysis

Operation Crocodile Smile and Operation Safe Haven are evaluated comparatively using geographic areas of interest along with threat management approaches, strategies, community engagement, human rights implications and long-term effects between the two operations.

Geographic Focus

Operation Crocodile Smile specifically targets the Niger Delta area of the South-South region which continues to suffer from militant actions combined with oil theft and seawater piracy. Oil-rich Niger Delta has endured many years of militant control over oil earnings and waterway piracy because of its oil deposits (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Any security operation faces substantial difficulty when deployed to this location because its complicated social structures and economic fundamentals exist alongside long-standing community conflicts.

Operation Safe Haven executes its activities exclusively throughout Plateau State along with the North-Central part of Nigeria. The main objective in this region deals with clashes between herders and farmers and terrorism activities. The area has experienced severe conflicts involving religious and ethnic communities because of competing territorial demands and religious disagreements and pasture rights claims. Plateau together with the nearby states confront challenges because of ethnic and religious divisions instead of the traditional activities affecting the Niger Delta according to Olasupo (2023).

Threat Addressed

Operation Crocodile Smile confronts numerous security threats which extend beyond piracy to include both militancy along with the criminal activity of oil theft. Economic forces mainly propel these problems since oil resource control meets ideological demands that stem from public discontent with government inattention (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Operation Crocodile Smile had an objective to stop insurgent armed groups alongside criminal networks responsible for oil bunkering and other illegal activities (Nigerian Army, 2020).

Operation Safe Haven targets communal violence that includes the herder-farmer conflicts and terrorist activities associated with Boko Haram and other extremist groups. The violence in this sector results from ethnic and religious conflict as well as disputes about landholdings and resource conflicts alongside historical grievances. The operation works to sustain control of terrorist groups as newly radicalized insurgent movement continues to threaten the region (Aliyu, 2021).

Strategy

The forceful technology-based approach serves as the primary operational method of Operation Crocodile Smile. Heavy military forces together with cyber warfare units operate within the Niger Delta region to battle complex criminal groups and militant activities according to the Nigerian Army (2020). Operation Crocodile Smile executes its tactical plan through conventional warfare that includes sending troops along with aerial monitoring activities and insurgent confrontations. The operation faces criticism because its heavy reliance on military force while technology provides crucial support mainly against cyber threats (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

On the other hand, Operation Safe Haven employs a more dialogue-driven and intelligence-led strategy. The collaboration exists between Nigerian Army together with police forces and intelligence agencies for this initiative. The military operation collects essential information for preventing violent acts as it promotes peaceful interactions between two opposing sides (Olasupo, 2023). Operation Crocodile Smile utilizes force as its primary operational method but Operation Safe Haven integrates peacebuilding together with conflict resolution and negotiations which result in favorable reception from the regional populations.

Community Relations

Family members and civilian groups in Nigeria have raised major issues with the structure of Operation Crocodile Smile. Public criticism has targeted Operation Crocodile Smile because its military tactics have frequently produced tensions regarding local resident relations. The military discharged heavy-handed approaches during its operations while failing to engage with local populations which resulted in population resistance alongside accusations of human rights violations including unlawful deaths and compulsory relocation of residents (Human Rights Watch, 2018). People within the Niger Delta region usually view military support as an authority-driven power structure instead of security protection.

The community interactions of Operation Safe Haven have produced generally positive results. Local leaders as well as communities that experience Operation effects show greater trust and acceptance thanks to intelligence gathering activities and dialogue emphasis (Aliyu, 2021). More effective conflict resolution methods have emerged because police departments and intelligence services and military personnel jointly participate in operations. Through these methods the operation strengthened its community support base thus avoiding widespread negative reactions from its target areas (Gazette Nigeria, 2024).

Human Rights Concerns

Many organizations have expressed multiple human rights violations during Operation Crocodile Smile. Human Rights Watch (2018) has documented numerous abuses that result from the operation's aggressive measures and the military strengthening of the area. The abusive practices of extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions and property destruction have negatively impacted the local communities to a severe degree. The security situation has worsened according to some observers because there are not enough oversight or accountability systems during this military operation.

The human rights violations under Operation Safe Haven remain fewer than Operation Crocodile Smile even though some minor incidents still occur. Upholders of human rights identify some issues with Operation Safe Haven regarding instances where soldiers might apply excessive force while conducting operations and with forced population displacements that have occurred in specific areas. The collaborative nature and intelligence-based approach of the mission has reduced the severe abuses that emerged from Operation Crocodile Smile (Olasupo, 2023).

Elements of peacebuilding within the mission framework produce fewer incidents of human rights violations.

Sustainability

Operation Crocodile Smile anticipates sustainability difficulties because of its expensive operations alongside community resistance against the operation. The continuous use of armed forces together with insufficient partnership with local leadership restricts the operation's ability to persist indefinitely. Numerous expenses from having large military forces in position along with possible extended resistance from local people indicate this operation may not supply enduring peace. The operation achieves minimal security progress because it fails to deal with the basic reasons behind militant and criminal conduct (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

Operation Safe Haven presents a more favorable strategy for long-term sustainability in security operations. The operation shows promise due to its combined strength through collaboration and conflict resolution initiatives and community engagement capabilities which make it better able to adapt and potentially endure. Peace stability becomes more probable through Operation Safe Haven since it effectively combines civilian and non-military defense organizations in security operations while overcoming primary obstacles connected to resource management and funding issues. Community relations remain positive and the operation follows a balanced approach which shows it has better capabilities to transfer security tasks to local law enforcement agencies that would lead to sustainable peace (Aliyu, 2021; Olasupo, 2023).

Summary of Comparative Analysis:

Criteria	Operation Crocodile Smile	Operation Safe Haven
Geographic Focus	Niger Delta (South-South)	Plateau & North Central
Threat Addressed	Militancy, oil theft, piracy	Communal conflict, terrorism
Strategy	Forceful, tech-based	Dialogue, intelligence-led
Community Relations	Tense, militarized	Relatively positive

HumanRights Concerns	Notable abuses reported	Less frequent violations
Sustainability	Questionable due to cost resistance	More promising due to collaboration

Discussion

The evaluation between Operation Crocodile Smile and Operation Safe Haven demonstrates how difficult it is for Nigerian military forces to carry out internal security operations. The strategic elements and lasting sustainability together with the community outreach approach distinguish Operation Crocodile Smile from Operation Safe Haven despite each operation reaching tactical targets.

The Niger Delta faced Operation Crocodile Smile with the main goal to suppress militancy alongside oil theft along with piracy. Under its operational strategy Operation Crocodile Smile depended on direct military force with the application of modern technology and digital warfare elements (Premium Times, 2020). The military emphasis singled out community grievances instead of social and environmental issues so civil relations with troops became increasingly tense. Human rights monitoring groups have produced evidence showing that military forces conduct unreasonable arrests and perform unlawful executions that diminish local faith in their fundamental goals (Ajayi, 2023). A framework which comprehensively manages environmental degeneration together with youth joblessness remains absent which produces uncertainties regarding the military operation's future success and stability (Omodunbi et al 2023).

Operation Safe Haven in Plateau State along with the North-Central region took a comprehensive method of operation as its foundation. The operation developed intelligence-based tactics and community outreach together with joint-agency cooperation to address the religious-ethnic conflicts in the region according to Dasam (2022). The farming season became the priority for preventive dialogue through stakeholder meetings between farmers and herders according to Viewpoint Nigeria (2025). Through its approach of trust-building and tension resolution the operation has generated mostly promising community relations along with addressing its ongoing force utilization concerns.

The operations suffer from both fundamental problems because they lack an established departure plan and insufficient coordination with civilian defense systems. The prolonged use of military solutions without clear plans for transitioning to civilian-based governance and security methods creates conditions for military domination that harms democratic operations (Ajayi, 2023). Accomplishing enduring peace and security needs coordinated action between armed forces and economic development together with restorative justice and social reconciliation measures.

Conclusion And Recommendation

The research evaluates the sustainability levels between Nigerian military security operations named Operation Crocodile Smile and Operation Safe Haven. The immediate security threats in their specific areas show reduction from both operations but their future effectiveness as well as sustainability remain unclear. The advanced technology deployed in Operation Crocodile Smile cannot overcome its dependence on military force and its breakdown of community trust as well as its unacceptable violation of human rights. The comprehensive combination of intelligence gathering and inter-agency alliances and dialogue within Operation Safe Haven makes it more effective for building trust with the community and establishing enduring peace. Nigeria faces substantial risks to sustainable internal security because both operations have insufficient partnerships with civil security institutions and do not establish clear exit plans.

The sustainable operation of internal security programs in Nigeria requires multiple essential recommendations as solutions for ongoing problems.

Nigeria needs to create an official framework which establishes the protocol for moving military forces out of internal security tasks to police-led controls. Such measures would stop security forces from adopting military tactics to handle civilian disturbances and maintain the democratic separation between military and civilians. Local police organizations should receive continuous training and equipment to perform internal security operations following the end of conflicts.

The Nigeria Police Force must advance its capabilities with better training methods and additional resources while adopting police models that support relationships with the community. Effective mission work in dangerous areas demands that law enforcers receive combat training as well as instruction on human rights procedures and data collection and conflict mediation methods.

The priority level for community engagement needs to be elevated. Peace committees that bring together traditional leaders with religious leaders and youth group members and civil society actors can function as early alert systems and peace resolution platforms. The grassroots structures build trust while ensuring local peace processes receive ownership which leads to stronger security intervention legitimacy.

The military needs to enhance transparency alongside operational accountability as its fourth essential step. Military institutions will gain public trust by implementing independent oversight bodies which perform prompt investigations of suspected misconduct to eliminate impunity. The military needs to promote better teamwork with human rights bodies and legal entities.

Security initiatives need to directly support the development strategies focused on socio-economic growth. Permanent security solutions can only emerge after eliminating the fundamental reasons people feel unsafe including poverty, joblessness of youth populations and social marginalization and service provision shortages. Lasting peace depends on combining post-conflict recovery strategies through development programs which deliver education alongside skills training and job openings and infrastructure building. The path to sustainable internal security in Nigeria requires a strategic plan that unites force and dialogue with rights protection as well as short-term stability to long-term peace objectives.

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