



FOREIGN POLICY LECTURE SERIES AT THE NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

THEME: Nuclear Weapons: from *Instrumentis Belli* to *Causas Bellorum*

By

PROFESSOR FEMI OTUBANJO

The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs held another edition of its Foreign Policy Lecture Series on Tuesday, June 9, 2026. Professor Femi Otubanjo delivered the lecture on the topic: “Nuclear Weapons: from *Instrumentis Belli* to *Causas Bellorum*”. The lecture was an in-depth examination of the role of nuclear weapons in contemporary warfare and politics, and a response to the question: Should Africa, or Nigeria, have nuclear weapons?



L-R: Prof Femi Otubanjo, Prof Eghosa Osaghae and Amb Laseinde Layiwola

The Director-General of the Institute, Professor Eghosa Osaghae, in his opening remarks, emphasized how Africans get excluded from discussions on Africa possessing nuclear weapons, and how the West tend to make decisions for Africa on very crucial topics. He noted that before South Africa returned to Black majority rule in 1994, the country had begun a nuclear weapons programme, which was dismantled upon its transition from apartheid to Black majority rule, highlighting the West's belief that a Black-led government

is not fit to handle nuclear weapons. Commenting on President Yoweri Museveni's view, he took a stance that the North, referring to Western Powers, does not have the capacity to tell Africans what they want, have, or should not have.

Professor Femi Otubanjo proceeded by explaining the level of exponential threat nuclear weapons pose to the existence of man and the universe itself. He described the two types of nuclear weapons: fission and fusion bombs, carefully traced the historical evolution of nuclear weapons, and explained how it moved from an instrument of war to a cause of war and deterrence. He traced the development of nuclear weapons from Germany in the 20th century to the United States (US). He noted that when Germany halted its nuclear weapon programme, Albert Einstein approached the United States under President Roosevelt's leadership, resulting in the Manhattan Project that saw the establishment of nuclear weapons in the United States. He further noted that the first nuclear explosion, known as the Trinity Test, took place in New Mexico in 1945 and shortly after, fission bombs were dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6, 1945 and August 9, 1945, putting an end to the Second World War, and shifting global power from Western Europe to the United States.

The lecturer noted that nuclear weapons moved from being an instrument of war to deterrence to a cause of war following the end of the Second World War. It was noted that the devastating effects of the dropping of fission bombs in Japan resulted in a nuclear arms race and eventually the Cold War, in which the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a mass buildup of nuclear weapons, missiles and defence systems, including fission and fusion bombs, multiple independently targetable (MIRVs), and anti-ballistic missiles respectively. When it was ascertained that both the US and the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons capable of destroying themselves (Mutual Assured Destruction-MAD), nuclear weapons became a deterrent while resulting in conflict in the international system when newcomers intend to acquire nuclear capabilities.

Another major focus of the lecture was that while the arms race is no longer popular, with the advancement of technology, the arms race cannot be said to have ended. However, with the rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and a new world order, nuclear weapons have been instrumentalised in contemporary warfare for the following reasons:

1. Deterrence- mutual assured destruction (MAD) and second-strike capability.
2. Hierarchy of national interest- the core interest of nations is not to get themselves vapourised.
3. The catastrophic calculus- nuclear war is an irrational war.

The lecture was a robust and extensive one as it generated debates and reactions from the audience on questions of sovereignty, international interest, issue of development, and other related topics.



The Foreign Policy Lecturer being presented an award by Dr Marie Beauty Dirisu, the Director, Library and Information Services

In closing, an appreciation award was presented to the lecturer with a rousing applause.



Group photograph of some participants with the Lecturer, Prof Femi Otubanjo