

HISTORICIZING TERRORISM WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF NIGERIA'S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT

Insurgency and terrorism has become the greatest threat to the world peace, security and development, especially in the 21st century. The euphoria over the killing of Osama Bin Laden, founder and leader of the most dreaded terrorist group in the world, "the Al-Queda", was short-lived by the upsurge in terrorist activities in a world that is already ravaged by natural disasters. The Nigerian experience of insurgency and terrorism since the return to civil rule in 1999, has been quite alarming and devastating, thereby, posing great threat to the peace, security and development of the nation. This paper therefore, examines the historical overview of terrorism in Nigeria, the perceived causes of terrorism, its effects and suggests ways out of the menace.

Key words: Terrorism, Insurgency, Menace, Security, National Development.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has shared from the evils of insurgency, terrorism and other violent conflicts in recent time. This development found expression in widespread bomb blast, Kidnapping, pipeline, vandalization, terrorism and other forms of criminalities carried out in various parts of the country. Sequel to the emerging security threats, occasioned by insurgency and terrorist attacks across the country, the Australian government on September 12, 2007 issued a travel advisory to its citizens to reconsider their needs in



travelling to Nigeria at this time due to the high threat of terrorist attacks, high risk of Kidnapping, unprecedented security situation and heightened risk of violent civil unrest (Ashara, 2013). This was sequel to an earlier warning issued on September 2007 by the US Mission in Lagos to her citizens against traveling to Nigeria due to high risk of terrorist threat and attack against the West (Ojiabor, 2007).

Between 2007 till date the trend of insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria has continued unabated. Thus, the country has witnessed civil disturbances in the north with Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram terrorist insurgency, in the east with MASSOB uprising, in the West with the OPC unending agitation for national recognition, and in the South, particularly Niger Delta region with militant youths holding sway. All these organizational and group disturbances culminate in loss of lives and property as well as insecurity problems in Nigeria (Aziken and Ehimatie, 2013) it is in the light of the above that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) predicted that Nigeria will become a failed state by 2015. This paper attempts to holistically examine the background of insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria, the possible causes of insurgency/terrorism, its effect on Nigeria and finally, suggests panacea to the menace of insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Terrorism

The concept of terrorism or insurgency can only be viewed from the standpoint of the ideological school of thought to which the individual defining it belongs. The above summation stemmed from the fact that there exist a general disagreement among scholars as to what constitute a terrorist act. Garrison (2004) sees terrorism as a tool used to achieve a specific outcome by using force or violence on one segment of society with the primary goal of causing fear in the larger society to make change in the society.

Ashara D.U (2013) opined that terrorism involves the use of weapons of fear, threats and violence to make demands. This



definition seems to agree with the world Book focus which explains terrorism as the use of threats or violence to create fear and alarm, usually for political purposes. Both definitions points to the fact that threats and violence are the basic ingredients of any terrorist act.

In the same vein, Abimbola J.O. and Adesotes S.A. (2012), see terrorism as politically motivated violence by clandestine group or individuals against civilians or combatant personnel. They went further to say that terrorism is by nature political because it involves the acquisition and use of power for the purpose of forcing others to submit, or agree to terrorist demands.

From the above definitions, one can deduce a common characteristics of insurgency or terrorist activities, which is, that it does not only involve the use of threat, or violence to actualize its politically motivated aims, it has also been acknowledged to be inhuman, illegal and illegitimate strategies adopted by a group of presumably aggrieved people to cause untold suffering on their victims. However, the term terrorist has generated dispute of acceptable definition for the term. This is because the term terrorism means different things to different people. What terrorism means to the perpetrators of terrorist activities will not be seen or perceived in same way by the victims or those affected by activities of terrorist attack. This is against the backdrop of the fact that the terrorist themselves believe that they are freedom fighters, liberators and revolutionist who want to effect change, bring succor to the oppressed and change the course of event by force, while the target victims sees the terrorist as outlaws, inhuman, and wicked adventurers whose actions inflict suffering, or sorrow, anguish and death to the larger society. Thus, Adekanye (2004) opined that “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”. Terrorism evolves as an activity designed to be objective in the minds of the perpetrators. The civilian population that become causalities or victims of terrorist attacks, most often, are not usually direct targets. The target is majorly the people in government, agencies, parastatals and government departments including government established public infrastructures. The



concept of terrorism cannot be exhaustively discussed in isolation from politics because it is about power, deposit of power, the acquisition of power and the use of power to achieve a political change (Hoffman, 1998).

As the debate over what indices qualify an insurgence or violent group as terrorist rages, certain core ingredients remain typical of a terrorist act, it involves violence, threat of violence and as such, it inflicts untold hardship, suffering anguish sorrow and death on the larger society.

Historical Overview of Terrorism in Nigeria

Tracing the history of terrorism in Nigeria without understanding its origin from global perspective will amount to placing something upon nothing. And the fact that there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism does not foreclose the need for one to understand its evolution, since the basic indices or characteristics which involves violence, threat of violence, bombing, assassination, hijacking, hostage taking and other violent acts of intimidation to change government policies or to force the government to surrender parts of their territory are all evidences of major attributes of modern terrorist groups all over the world.

Available records show that terrorism has existed since 2,000 years ago with the first known acts being that which was perpetrated by a radical offshoot of the zealots, a Jewish sect active in Judea during the 1st century A.D. The zealots resisted the Roman Empire rule of what is today Israel through a determined campaign primarily involving assassination (Abimbola and Adesote, 2012). In the same vein, an Islamic movement known as the 'Assassins' used similar tactics in their struggle against the Christian crusaders who had invaded what is today part of Syria between 1090 and 1272. The 'Assassins' imbibed the same tactics and ideology of self-sacrifice and suicidal martyrdom of modern Islamic terrorist groups. They regarded violence as a sacramental or divine act that ensured it perpetrators would ascend to a



glorious heavens should they perish during the tasks (Rapport 1984).

The French Revolution of (1789-1799) was another act which was adjudged by some scholars as an act of terrorism, with the peasants taking up arms against the Monarch and nobility. The eventual overthrow of Louis XVI in 1798 marked the triumph of an organized terrorism against the state as it provided justification for the use of terrorism. It is evidence from the above that terrorism was initially anti-monarchical, embraced by rebels and constitutionalists.

However, modern terrorism especially right from the 1960s has taken different trends and dimensions. It is this new trend and dimension that characterize Nigerian experience of terrorism, as such, form the fulcrum of this study. Three main trends have been identified by Abimbola and Adesote (2012). They include firstly, the loosely organized, self financed and internationalized network of terrorists. Secondly, we have that which is religiously or ideologically motivated, like the radical and fundamentalists groups using religion as a platform to pose terrorist threats of varying kinds to many nations' interest. While the third trend is the apparent growth of cross national links among different terrorist organizations which may involve combination of military training or funding, technology transfer or political advice.

Suffice to say that the three modern trends of terrorism as explained above are all inherently replicated in the Nigerian context of terrorism. There is even a fourth dimension that borders on internal sabotage against the Nigerian State by government officials, officers of the military and para-military security agencies, and even traditional rulers.

If insurgency and terrorism is seen from the standpoint of a radical rebellion against the state, then, the first known case of it is the 1966 Isaac Adaka Boro led uprising in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. Subsequently, there were recorded cases of agitations against government's ineptitude in handling minority right groups in the same Niger Delta region which eventually culminated in the



recent militancy in the region. It may not be necessary spilling much ink here since the Amnesty programme of Federal government seems to have brought the situation under control, even though temporarily.

Nigeria has also experienced insurgencies by several ethnic militia groups like the Arewa People's Congress (APC), Oodua People's Congress (OPC) indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB) Boko Haram, and Fulani herdsmen insurgency or terrorism, all of which are threatening the very existence of the nation to its foundation. Again rapists, ritual killers and kidnapping gangs have all pose great security threats to citizens of Nigeria. All these are carried out with all characteristics and indices of terrorism.

Perceived Causes of Terrorism in Nigeria

A lot of perceived causes of insurgency and terrorism have been advanced by many scholars in an attempt to unravel the mystery behind the dastardly act of terrorism that has ravaged the world today. In Nigeria for instance, the following are major factors for the upsurge in terrorist activities in the country.

- 1. Poverty Related Causes:** High level of poverty has contributed immensely to the spike in terrorist activities in Nigeria. The link between poverty and terrorism can be explained by the level of violent conflicts and terrorists acts exhibited by angry youths in reaction to perceived injustice, inequality, and marginalization meted out against a group by government or agents of government. This is the case of Niger Delta militant groups who took up arms against government and its agents to attract their government attention. This is against the backdrop of neglect, abject poverty, lack of infrastructure and high level of unemployment in Nigeria today. As Udeh (2010) aptly puts it;

Unemployment increases the risk of being in poverty, the unemployed constitute the majority of the poor, and poverty itself could lead to crime and violent



behaviour; Nigerian youths from diverse region have been recruited into militias that have perpetrated violence, which is antithetical to national security.

The above summarizes to an extent the role poverty can play in criminal tendencies like terrorism. The Nigerian state continues to witness the rate of violent conflict and other forms of criminalities as a result of its failure to engage its teeming population and develop the youths. The result is high level of poverty and its effects because, criminal behaviours could be inducted by the need for money, food, shelter and other necessities (Udhe, 2010). This view was further re-echoed by Paul R. (2012) when he opined that, indeed, evidence actually suggests a greater concentration of wealth in fewer hands, at a time of a growing cohort of young people with minimal employment prospect, resulting in disempowerment, resentment and anger. The level of poverty in Nigeria can only be appreciated in the high rate of youth involvement in criminalities and violent crimes like kidnapping, terrorism, robbery, assassination and ritual killings.

2. Religious Related Terrorism: Religious conflicts have instigated terrorist activities in the world, and Nigeria is not an exception. This is due to the fact that religion has a great impact on the action and mind of man. Thus, Karl Marx noted that “religion is the opium of the people”. It therefore, remain a nexus around which the action and mindset of man is anchored. However, other scholars have argued that religion may not be the cause of most violent conflict and terrorism in the world. Thus, Juergensmeyer (2003) argue that religion could only be a means by which terrorists translate a local political struggle into a cosmic war. He went further to say that terrorists often frame their dispute in religious rather than political terms; they hide under the guise of religion to perpetrate their violent acts. The point here is that not all terrorists activities have religious motives or better still, not all



religiously acclaimed terrorists acts, really have anything to do with religion as the terrorists themselves only paint a picture of religious conflict to attract the participation of their religious devotees. This of course, is the case of the present Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria where a group of Islamic fundamentalists are hiding under the cloak of Islamic fanaticism to perpetrate violence of high magnitude in the country. A survey into the demand of the insurgent group reveal that they are asking for the abolition of western education (which to them, is evil), institutionalization of sharia in Nigeria, and the prosecution of those behind the killing of the leader, Muhammed Yusuf.

Much as the above demands have been made, the group has not been able to assemble a negotiation team to negotiate with the government as the Niger Delta militants did. This is to drive home the point that religion is only being used as a cover-up to perpetrate their dastardly act of terrorism on the nation. Nonetheless, it is apparent that religiously motivated terrorism is on the rise and it is alarmingly more lethal than other forms of terrorism. One possible explanation for the lethality of religious terrorism, is that it is more closely linked to suicide terrorism, which account for only 3% of all terrorist activities from 1980 through 2003, but 4% of the fatalities (Pape 2005).

The use of religion to propagate the idea of terrorism is due to the fact that it does not only persuade religious devotees to join the terrorist act, it also expedite the goals of terrorists through the provision of the moral justification or 'legitimacy' to the cause. Ashara (2002), posited that the history of religion is replete with examples in which in-group passion are aroused and out-group hatreds are dangerously ignited. Religion also affects terrorist acts through the spiritual and eternal rewards it promises its adherents, thereby implanting a 'psycho spiritual' fabrication in its adherents. It therefore becomes clearer why some suicide bombers like those of 9/11 in U.S., and similar bombers of Boko Haram extraction in Nigeria are



so engrossed in the deadly act of terrorism without blinking an eye. They are assured by Islamic injunction that they “would meet in the highest heaven” (Lincoln 2003). Their psyche become so much immersed in an illusion of deliberately sacrificing their lives in the course of fighting a ‘jihad’ (holy war) with the hope of not only having an automatic ticket to heaven but also to be entitled to a harem of specially made virgins in paradise.

- 3. Individual Extremism:** The third reason which researchers have discovered to have contributed to an upsurge in terrorism is the individual extremism factor. It has been argued that the individuals involved in terrorist activities have a major role to play in the instigation and prosecution of violent conflict which ultimately result in terrorism. In other words, participation in terrorist acts is a question of choice. And the individual being a free moral agent is at liberty to decide whether or not to participate. Bell (1978) as quoted in Ashara (2013) opined that the ideological inspiration/motivation of an individual in participating in violence, or even self-destructive methods is quite valuable in the cause of trying to comprehend what actually leads to terrorism. He argues that the ideology of terrorists is encapsulated in “the dream” which is the ideological motivation that propels such an individual into going to the extent of actualizing such dream at all cost even though such venture will cost his life. According to Galtung (1996), emotions which are irrational judgmental feelings and cognitive, which are perpetual beliefs for construction of the violent attitude are the basic ingredience for ideological motivation. All of these are necessary in finding the cause of terrorism and extreme violence in Nigeria and the world at large.

Consequences of Terrorism in Nigeria

The relationship between insurgency and terrorism and peace, security and National Development can be better appreciated



when one examines the effects of terrorism and insurgency on the nation's body polity. The myriad of socio-economic and political challenges occasioned by the artificial configuration of Nigeria as one "indivisible" entity have become complicated by the new trend of terrorist attacks on the country. For a better appreciation of the gravity of problems associated with terrorist activities in Nigeria, its effects will be treated under the following headings:

- a. Social effects:** There is no doubt that one of the ultimate goals of terrorism is to use the weapon of fear which subject the victim to emotional trauma. This, to a great extent causes great damage to the psychological well-being of the victims of terrorist attack. Citizens of Nigeria, especially in the Northern part of the country live in constant fear of bomb blast and attacks by armed men. Kidnapping and hostage taking for ransom has become the order of the day. The high rate of insecurity has caused many to abandon their homes in search of safety. As Omonitan (2011) aptly puts it; "Nigerians now live at the mercies of the merchants of pain, terror and death because of the indefinable creed of a sect that has turned Nigeria into a hell hole". People in Northern Nigeria now sleep with one eye open. Following the Chibok girls' abduction by the Boko Haram terrorist group and series of attacks on other schools, the educational system in northern Nigeria has been adversely affected as most parents have the fear of sending their children to school for fear of possible terrorist attacks. This development has spelled doom for the already weak educational system of northern Nigeria as school enrolment continues to experience a dwindling fortune.
- b. Political Effects:** The political logjam occasioned by the faulty foundation of amalgamation that brought the country into being, couple with the problem of leadership failure in the face of ethnic, political and religious crises, the recent terrorist activities have come to aggravate the already bad political situation. As it stands, Nigeria's unity and continuous existence is hanging on the balance. The intermittent crises in the plateau, the 2011 post-election mayhem, the Niger Delta



Militancy, high level of kidnapping across the length and breadth of Nigeria, Boko Haram and other religious fundamentalism, as well as the unbearable effects of corruption, economic crime, armed Fulani herdsman activities, and civil unrests, are all current issues of grave consequences, and if the root causes are not resolved, then Nigeria may not remain a corporate entity for a long time.

Terrorism creates tension in the polity and can shake the very institutions and structures of the state (Ashara 2013). It can lead to the replacement of one government by another composed of new elites ruling by different constitutional principles (Crenshaw, 2003). When the issue of using terrorism to oust a seating government is mentioned, the Rwanda episode comes to mind, where the assassination of Habyamma led to political instability and the worst genocide ever recorded in Africa. In the case of Nigeria, the upsurge in terrorist activities is a warning signal that efforts should be made towards nipping the menace at the bud if the reality of the 2015 prediction by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) will be avoided.

- c. Economic Effects:** If insurgency and terrorism has adversely affected the socio-political landscape of the country, its effects is much more felt in the economic sector than any other sector. This is so, because there exist a great link between economic development and violent conflicts. It is to that extent that Economists have argued that economics of societies that have had to witness certain degrees if civil strife, wars and terrorism suffered negative effects. The Nigerian experience has shown that Niger Delta militancy, the upsurge in ethnic militias, the effects of kidnapping gangs, ritual killers, the recent Boko Haram menace cum herders farmers clash all, have had adverse consequences on the nation's economy. Violent conflicts disrupts the process of production, create conditions for spillage of the country's resources, and divert their application from development purposes to the servicing of the aftermath of violence (Adetula, 2004).

It should be noted that at the wake of violent agitations by the youths in the Niger Delta region, multinational oil companies



and oil servicing companies fled the region, thereby, forcing output in oil and gas production to drop astronomically. Nigeria lost billions of naira to that drop in crude oil production. In the same vein, people have been forced to abandon their businesses and offices as a result of the activities of terrorist groups that have laid siege in parts of the country. Economic activities in all parts of Nigeria today are in a doldrum. This explains why in spite of the rich human and mineral resources that Nigeria is endowed with, the country still remains among the poor countries of the world. While the country is faced with many problems arising from insurgency and terrorism, the Somalia and Sudan experience in terms of food shortage and human suffering is already beginning to rear its ugly head in parts of Nigeria.

Again, Nigeria is already beginning to experience an impediment on trade globally and even locally as a result of the huge cost of quelling the Boko Haram and herdsmen menace. It is evident that the huge resources which would have been used for infrastructural development, provision of basic amenities and funding of critical sectors of the economy are now being diverted to curbing insurgency and terrorism and herdsmen attacks that are currently ravaging the nation.

CONCLUSION

The concept of insurgency and terrorism has generated heated argument among academia about what indices qualify an insurgency or violent conflict as a terrorist act. While the argument still rages, the historical evolution of the concept and its appearance on Nigeria's landscape has been examined in this work. The various causes of insurgency and terrorist activities were also x-rayed, while the effects of the disturbing phenomenon provide the link between the concept of terrorism and peace, security and National development with special emphasis on Nigeria. The panacea to the menace of insurgency and terrorism is aptly captured in the recommendations.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The fight against the menace of terrorism and other violent conflicts in Nigeria requires a synergy among the various stakeholders in the nation. It requires a concerted collaborative efforts of all and sundry, starting with the leadership. Good governance is absolutely imperative for social and economic progress. For the collective fight against the scourge of insurgency and terrorism to be successful, this paper recommends as follows:

- a. Good governance:** There is no gainsaying that a major obstacle to peace, security and national development in Nigeria is bad governance, exhibited by leadership myopia, corruption, religious bigotry which in turn has translated into poverty, unemployment, lack of infrastructure and high moral decadence in our society. All of these are the fuel that has fanned the embers of insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria. However, good governance built on the rule of law, equity, fairness, anchored on democratic principles will ensure peaceful co-existence in Nigeria where every citizen will feel free to associate with one another without ethno-religious sentiments.
- b. Policy Reforms:** It is quit imperative that Nigerian government should begin to adopt new policies and strategies in addressing developmental issues. Our socio-economic imperatives requires a proactive developmental agenda that will translate into job creation, poverty alleviation, provision of basic amenities and industries that will gainfully engage the youths and divert their attention from crimes, criminalities, insurgency and terrorist activities into meaningful ventures
- c. The amnesty antidote:** Judging from the success story recorded in the Amnesty programme for the Niger Delta militants, some scholars have also argued that a similar gesture for insurgency groups, terrorists and kidnappers could be the magic wand that would put an end to terrorism in Nigeria. However, in doing so, efforts must be made towards sincere and effective disarmament and



demobilization of the terrorist or insurgent groups. The insurgent groups should also be open-minded enough to embrace peace and accept government offer of Amnesty and total reconciliation and rehabilitation of affected people.

d. Proactive and Decisive Action against Terrorists:

Where negation and amnesty option fail, the government should take a definite and decisive action against insurgency and terrorist groups. This can be achieved through harmonization of security operatives. The various security agencies should complement one another in the area of intelligence gathering, dissemination, direction and control of needed information. Again, the security agencies should be properly trained in counter-terrorism and fully equipped with the capacity to analyze intelligence and take pro-active and preventive measures to combat the threat of terrorists attacks. Beside, anti-terrorism laws should be effectively enforced where culprit would be persecuted and sentenced where found guilty. This would serve as a deterrent to other terrorists.



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