

Combating Violent Conflicts and Terrorism in Nigeria: Some Considered Measures

U.K. Emoefe EKIUGBO (Ph.D)

College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Phone No: 08137230258 ; E-mail: ekiugbouche@gmail. com

Abstract

There is no disputing fact that terrorism has increasingly become widespread criminal violence as actors in different countries across the globe have their own unique ways of perpetrating the act. In Nigeria which holds a strategic place in the African continent and the global community, democratization process and stability of the country are visibly jeopardized by the high level violence resulting from political, ethnic and religious conflicts as well as organized violent crimes in almost all states of the federation. There are different facilitations of insecurity in Nigeria, among which are porous borders, social inequality, poverty, joblessness and widespread availability of illegal arms and light weapons. This paper tries to highlight some measures to be put in place to combat violent conflicts and terrorism in Nigeria. An understanding of all these issues and other complex dimensions of the Nigerian security environment is imperative for all of us as stakeholders in Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict, Terrorism, Violence, Measures and Security.

Introduction

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with enormous potential for economic and social development. However violence has reached unprecedented level and thousands have been killed with much more wounded or displaced from their homes on account of violence. Schools are disrupted, businesses have lost 1 billions of naira and property worth millions of naira are vandalized. Nigeria is usually characterized as a deeply divided state in which major political issues are vigorously contested along the lines of complex ethnic, religious and regional division. Okene (2010) put it this way “the prevalence of political gangsterism, ethnic military, illegal drug dealings and alms trafficking, human kidnapping rapacious corruption and financial mismanagement are manifestation of failure of national security. All the indices basically meant insecurity and is a threat to peaceful coexistence, mitigation of democratic governance and a high barrier to economic and socio-political integration which are prerequisite to growth and development of a state.

It is pertinent here to clarify some key concepts used this paper in order to make the discussion comprehensive and understandable. A violent act involves threat to actual execution of acts which have actual or potential capacity to inflict physical emotional and psychological injury on a person or a group of persons (Strouse, 2009). Erickson (1985) felt

that violence or a violent act may also be collective (perpetrated by a group) or individual (perpetrated by an individual). It therefore means that when social and political space is contested or economic resource are allocated, the potential for conflict is also there. Violence is inevitable when the accommodation structures breakdown. Conflict on the other hand can be described as a situation or condition of disharmony in an interaction process. Conflict erupts when interest of various groups clashes. Imobigbe (1992) points out that conflict is not limited to any particular level of interaction. In other words it could occur at any level of human interaction and it often manifest violent activities.

Terrorism has haunted the political landscape of Nigeria for decades. It has imposed a new strategic climate on the present day Nigeria by making every human being a potential victim of its various forms. The terrorism framework sees terrorist as unrepresentative and abnormal outliers in society. Terrorism isolates terrorists from negotiation or constructive engagement. Terrorists methods and objective are condemned. Terrorists are seen as psychological defective – seeking violence for its own sake. Terrorism is seen as either a law enforcement or military problem which simply means rooting out a few bad apples. All acts of terrorism are marked with the following features (1) the use of violence or force in the manner of threats to action (2) the primary objective is a political one (3) thriving in the use of fear or terror to elicit the desired reaction (4) the expectation that the perpetrated actions will induce psychological and political effects and response (Cunnington 2003).

Every act of terrorism utilizes methods of violence to get their message across. They can be anything from assault, weapons or explosive devices to toxic chemicals that are released into the air. These attacks may occur at any time or place which makes them an extremely effective method of instilling terror and uncertainty into the general public. Kydd and Walter (2006) succinctly analyse five principal strategic logic at work in terrorist campaigns. These are (1) attrition when terrorist seek to persuade the enemy that they are strong enough to impose consideration costs if their enemy continues a particular policy (2) intimidation – using intimidation to convince the population that they are strong to punish disobedience and government is weak to stop their (3) Provocation strategy is an attempt to induce the enemy to respond to terrorism with indiscriminate violence, which radicalizes the population and make them to support the terrorists (4) spoilers strategy is an effort to persuade the enemy that moderates on the terrorists side are weak and untrustworthy, thus undermining attempts to reach a peace settlement and (5) outbidding strategy – when groups engage violence to convince the public that the terrorists have greater resolve to fight the enemy than rival groups and therefore are worthy of support.

According to the National advisory committee on criminal justice standards and goals, there are six distinct types of terrorism all of them share the common trait of violence that destroy property, invoke fear and attempt to harm the lives of the civilians. They are:

- i. Civil disorder: this is held by a group of people who are unhappy and therefore send message to a political party to demand change;
- ii. Political terrorism: Used by one political faction to intimidate another;
- iii. Non political terrorism – a fermist act, most often of a religious nature with a goal distinct from a political goal;
- iv. Quasi terrorism- it is a violent act that utilize the same methods terrorist employ but does not have the same motivating factor;
- v. Limited Political terrorism: The goal here is not to overthrow the government but to protest a governmental policy or action.
- vi. State terrorism defines any violent act initiated by an existing government to achieve a particular goal.

In Nigeria, in recent years, the democratization process and the stability of the country are visibly jeopardized by the high level violence resulting from political ethnic and religious conflicts as well as by organized violent crimes in almost all states of the federation. Perhaps there is no other time since the civil war ended that Nigeria was seriously engulfed in perennial security challenges that threaten the very foundation of the country than in the last few years. It should be noted that there are different facilitators of insecurity in the country, among which are: porous borders, social inequality, poverty problems and widespread availability of illegal arms and light weapons. Therefore, an understanding of these issues and other complex dimensions of the Nigerian security environment becomes imperative for all of us as stakeholders.

All parts of Nigeria today are affected by the terrorists and their activities. In one region, crime is on the increase, while in another, inter-ethnic conflict and wars are being quelled, all of which are the making of militia groups in Nigeria. These militia groups are known for unconstitutional means they employ in expressing their grievances. They result to violence in drawing sympathy and attention to their plight. Thousands of diverse sophisticated assault rifles, seek propelled grenade explosive and bombs are smuggled into the country. The weapon inflow empowers the communities and militias for accelerated violence conflicts. Thousands of people lose their lives annually in such bloody clashes. Aside such mindless and needless killings of Nigerians, they also engage in wanton

destruction of public and private property all in a bid to vent their frustration about certain issue (Shittu, 2013).

Types of Militants and Separatist Groups in Nigeria

The search and quest to re-assert identities institution values and arms that make meaningful sense to the average Nigerian cannot be wished away, particularly amidst the decaying infrastructure and deteriorating social services in the country (Isa, 2010). Six decades after independence Nigeria has not been able to create societies that ensure human dignity and respect for all. Since gaining independence in 1960, military coups, ethnic and religious have characterized post independence Nigeria.

The end of the civil war (1967-1970) was believed to be an opportunity to unite Nigerians. Yet, in the post civil war era, Nigerians has been confronted with daunting security challenge including militancy, insurgencies and recurrent criminal violence that have pitted various communities against one another in the country. After many years of military rule, the re introduction of civilian rule in 1999 has coincided or seems to have spurred the intensification of the ethnic and religious militancy, characterized by acts of catastrophic terrorism, civil strife and mass protest (Bamidele, 2012).

Indeed, Nigerian internal security has been significantly undermined by violent activities of armed non state actors, largely made up of radicalized youths groups of foot soldiers prominent among these groups are the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MENDS) the Odua People's Congress (OPC) the Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, the movement for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) and more recently, Boko Haram, Ansaru Kala-Kalo and Ombatse among others (CKEEN Foundation, 2014).

These ethnic militias have contributed to the cycle of violence over the years. They have a political element to them and are often seen as self defense by particular ethnic – religious communities. The fact is that many of these ethnic militias and separatist group in Nigeria are proof that there are many grievances and injustices to the system (Firsing, 2012).

Causal Factors of the Conflict in the Niger Delta and North Eastern part of Nigeria

The roots of the Niger Delta conflict is the history of the struggles for self determination local autonomy and democracy of the ethnic minorities in the region, which goes as far back as the second decade of the 20th century. The creation of Nigeria by the British as their colony in 1914 consigned the people of the Niger Delta to the status of ethnic

minorities in relation to the numerically preponderant neighbouring ethnic groups which dominated life in what later became the western and eastern regions of the country. The successive institutionalization of revenue sharing and power distribution along regional lines tends to reinforce the politization of ethnic identity, and its mobilization in the struggle for access to power and resources. On these basis smaller groups defined as ethnic minorities tended to pose out while the dominant ethnic groups asserted power at the regional (North, Hausa-Fulani, East, Igbo and West, Yoruba) and the national level. The causes of the Niger Delta crisis has been located in the Frustration – aggression theory. A theory which posits that men are mostly inclined to aggression when subjected to unjustified frustration. Danjibe (2009) opined that people are motivated to act aggressively by a drive induced by frustration, The concept of frustration denotes condition that arises when goal attainment is blocked, while aggression constitutes actions aimed at harming perceived stumbling blocks. It implies that frustration will inevitably lead to some form of aggression.

Courson (2009) submits that Niger Delta conflict is the result of a complex mixture of grievances, greed, marginalization, deprivation, political, and the quest for equity and justice. Ibada (2011) itemized four inter – related factors that created condition for the conflict – first, the Niger Delta is the hub of Nigerians oil industry. Second, oil is the mainstay of the Nigerians economy and has generated huge revenues for the country, contributing 40% of GDP, about 90% of total earnings and about 80% of national gross income. Third, oil related environmental problems, such as oil spills and gas flares–have undermined environmental quality and the productivity of the local economies where oil is produced. Fourth, the Niger Delta is a strong paradox as it represents one of the extreme conditions of poverty and lack of development in the country, despite its oil and gas resource. These main factors have motivated conflicts against the Nigerians government, accused of developmental neglect and deprivation and against the oil companies for neglecting, cooperate social responsibility in the region. The socio economic hardship and inequity in the distribution of the nation’s oil wealth, al large proportion which comes from the Niger Delta occasioned by marginalization and deprivation is expressed in violent activities by militia groups in the region. The Niger Delta indigenes are ethnic minorities anchored their resistance in their exclusion from the benefits of the oil industry, resulting in the lack of social development, good governance, widespread poverty and high levels of unemployment in the region inspite of more than fifty years of oil production.

However, one of the most important religious social transformations of the last century has been the gradual rise of fundamentalism, the embrace of anti – modern religious

orthodoxies fundamentalism generally require unquestioning acceptance of transcendent religious precepts astrict adherence to compulsory rituals and a subjugation of the self to higher powers. One of such is the Boko Haram movement in Nigeria known for terrorism especially in the north eastern part of the country. Boko Haram ideology is embedded in a deep tradition of Islamism, and is but one of several variants of radical Islamism to have emerged in Northern Nigeria. Its followers are reportedly influenced by the koranic phrase which says:

“Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors”.

However, the groups’ ideology resonates for many reasons beyond religion. Socio economic grievances include the huge gap between aspirations of Nigeria’s youths and the opportunities provided by the system for achieving a better life (Forest, 2012).

A cursory look at the situation in Northern Nigeria shows that youth radicalization is the centre of the current crisis. Radicalization by definition is a process that leads to a situation in which a person or group of persons imbibe and adopt extreme social, religious and political views. At the stage of complete radicalization individuals totally reject the status quo and seek to undermines other expression contrary to theirs. The notion of the sect core ideology that western education is dogmatically wrong, is highlighted through the abductions and raids of private and public school. They reject globalization and colonization, a further criticism of western ideologies.

In many parts of the country, the government is unable to provide security, good roads, water, health, reliable power and education. The situation is particularly dire in the northern state of Borno where only 28% of the children attend schools, according to the Nigerian government statistics and the literacy rate in the north is 32% compared with the 68%, national average. Nigerians poverty rate grew from 55% in 2004 to 61% in 2010, largely because of the collapse of the northern economy. The pervasive poverty level especially among the youths is an avenue for tension generation, since the ground has been watered for disappointment and frustration. Infact, poverty has often led to intolerance, and intolerance leads to violence. In the north, the illiterate population is easily manipulated by the rich to cause chaos especially the almajiri institution which has produced an army of dysfunctional unemployed, unemployable, uneducated and confused population (Ata, 2011 cited in Ngele and Ukandu, 2014).

Suggested measures to combat Violent Conflicts and Terrorism in Nigeria

Conflict is an attendant feature of human interaction and cannot be eliminated, however its proper management and transformation are essential for peace and progress in human society (Samy, 2003). It must be stated, however, that every conflict situation is unique, and it is obviously not possible to develop an approach that covers every situation. This paper will look at combating violent conflicts and terrorism in Nigeria from the following dimensions.

- (1) ***The rule of law and human development dimension.*** It has been affirmed that governance and human rights are inextricably linked with peace and security, inefficient and weak governance and rights abuses can cause conflicts which can weaken governance and human right protection. In order to effectively contain violence in Nigeria and to fight Boko Haram, tactical counter insurgency, should be paired with economic development and increased support for the rule of law. The Nigerian government should realize that Boko Haram has emerged from the shortcomings of the governments own system and should start dealing with that fact. The government of Nigeria needs to address the development of the state by concentrating on reconciliation of the country, before it can start addressing the expansive issue of terrorism. Development, along with the education of human rights, can combat terrorism common rhetoric.

In Nigeria to regain its geostrategic importance as a regional power house that set the pace in Africa security governance, it must take development and human security deficits in Northern Nigeria seriously as a means of growing the seed of peace and diffusing insurgency. Also, the empowerment and meaningful participation of individuals and civil society in governance system are necessary to tackle inequality and promote social inclusion.

Isa (2010) opined that government can turn around this negative trend by strengthening its capacity to provide public good, proactively responding to the needs of its citizens and strengthening democracy as well as free and fair election to guarantee the rights and security of citizens. The state must distribute national resources equitably and transparently. The international community could assist Nigeria through the use of foreign aid earmarked to create economic opportunities in the country's northern regions.

- (2) ***Governance and Democratization Dimension.*** Governance is a central feature in the often internal or societally based threats Nigeria faces. Some of the underlying or triggering causes of conflict are illegitimate or weak institutions, corruption, insufficient respect for human rights, lack of good governance and the perception that the administrative and political channels are not adequate or that they are inaccessible.

At the grassroot level Ripe 2002 suggested a number of reforms that could be put in place to stem the cycle of violence in Nigeria:

- Resolve the settlers and indigenes distinction at a constitutional level
- Institute police reform so that police are accountable at the local level and must be well trained to proactively, prevent violence rather than react in the aftermath;
- Expand the role of local universities and non-governmental organizations to train communities in conflict prevention and resolution;
- Enact electoral reform that establishes a level playing field and provides a non-violent method for citizen to express their frustrations with corruption and abuse of power and vote for accountability and transparency;
- Empower traditional leaders who are currently underutilized to play a constructive role in inter faith dialogue and conflict mitigation.

(3) ***The Socio-Economic Dimension.*** In addition to ensuring that the general economic conditions are reasonably okay, governments at all level of Nigerians should endeavour to identify those who might be marginalized. Such persons could be taken care of through special programme to prevent them from slipping into potential terrorists groups or cells. The role of foreign based religious and non religious entities in community based social interventions should be critically looked at. Some of these organization prop radical groups using their social activities to conceal their true intentions. In Nigeria therefore, a roadmap for de-radicalization and reintegration of the ex militias and insurgents should also be part of the wider reconciliation process. The provision of further education and skills training which enable young people to earn a living should form a pivotal part. The Nigerian government needs to re engage the national orientation agency (NOA) to do its work with re-energized focus than it had been done before. NOA should put in place a national re-orientation programme through which they can regularly interact with the Nigerian youths.

(4) ***The security institution and international dimension.*** Given the huge security challenges facing the country, it is important that Nigerian as a nation devises effective public strategies that will stem the violence and creates conditions for the protection of human rights and the deepening of democracy. Government's brute force strategy and insufficient knowledge of the adversary have been counter productivity and have failed to reduce in the affected areas significantly (Amaregbe 2013) Nigerian needs novel techniques targeted at restructuring and evolving effective security strategies than have robust human intelligence element with sustainable

developmental components. Efforts to prevent violence should be more holistic and systematic and must address the human security dimension. In addition, the advance in technology have to be harnessed to produce new and novel means to deal with the internal security problem. Use of non lethal weapon should be explored. The intelligence group must be given greater impetus and more funding.

Above all, the country's borders must be tightly manned to hinder illegal influx and exit of insurgents through usage of over a thousand of unofficial routes. If Nigeria's borders are not properly secured, the war against violence will linger for an unforeseeable period because of challenges associated with their cross borders activities.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted measures to combat the violent conflicts and terrorism that has bedeviled the Nigerian state. As tension discontinues to mount in very region in this country, the government should decide either to uphold her secularity stand and strengthen it or accept the state as a failed state. The international community could assist Nigerian through the use of foreign aid earmarked to create economic opportunities in the northern part of this country. But for countries to give aid, they would have to be sure that the money would be used for its intended purpose.

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