

# **Insurgency and National Security Challenges in Nigeria: Looking Back, Looking Ahead**

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## **Abstract**

The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia designed a state system on the twin-principle of territoriality and sovereignty. Sovereignty accords the state unquestionable but legitimate control over the nation and polity, and gives it the latitude to preserve and protect its territorial domain from both internal and external threats. However, aside the fact that globalisation and the internationalisation of the globe have reduced the primacy of these dual principles, there have also been the problem of ideological and terrorist networks that have taken advantage of the instruments of globalization to emerge and threaten state sovereignty and its preservation. The security and sovereignty of the Nigerian State have been under threat as a result of the emergence and activities of insurgent groups, such as Boko Haram in the Northeast and other militant groups in other parts of the country. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, this paper examines the security challenges Nigeria faces from insurgency and the impact of this on national peace, security and sovereignty. The study shows that the frequency of insurgent attacks has resulted in collateral damage on the peace, stability, development and sovereignty of the state. It finds also that the federal government has not been decisive enough. These place urgent and decisive demand on the government to adopt new management strategy that will address and contain the insurgent and terrorist groups. It is recommended that government at all levels should awake to its responsibilities, ensure adequate funding and training of the security agencies, as well as fortification of the armed forces with sophisticated weapons that will effectively outmatch the firepower of the terrorists'; and tightening of the borders to checking of the influx of people into its territory.

**Keywords:** Nigerian State, National Security, Insurgency, Boko Haram

## **Introduction**

The return to democracy in Nigeria in May, 1999 brought hopes of development and political stability to Nigeria. The last decade in Nigeria has experienced an increase in violent conflicts and criminality, which tended to undermine those expectations. The violence and criminality have come in the form of armed robbery, kidnapping, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking and militancy, among other acts of criminality that undermine national security. Internal security has been significantly undercut by violent activities of civilian-in-arms against the Nigerian State. These have included radicalized religious and

regional youth groups, prominent among which are the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), O’Odua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), the Arewa People’s Congress (APC), Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and more recently, Boko Haram, Ansaru, ‘Kala-Kato’, and Ombatse, among others (Onuoha, 2012: 134-151).

The rise of these groups has had significant influence on the numbers of ethnic and religious conflicts Nigeria has witnessed. The exact number of ethno-religious conflicts that have occurred in the country is not known due to lack of adequate statistics and records on this subject-matter. However, Onuoha (2012:134-151) has averred that about 40% of ethno-religious crisis has occurred in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. There has particularly been an increase between 2012 and 2014 in the occurrences of terrorist attacks in the country with government’s insignificant success in curbing the menace. By this, the focus and scope of the discourse in this paper therefore, give the discourse contemporary relevance. It is against this background that the paper explores the phenomenon of terrorism/insurgency in Nigeria, its adverse impact on nationhood and security, and recommends new management strategies that the Nigerian government can make use of in tackling the problem.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis**

In this section, concepts central to the discourse, such as insurgency, terrorism, security and the state are briefly discussed.

#### **i. Insurgency**

Insurgency is an ambiguous concept. The United States Department of Defence (2007) defines it as organized movement that has the aim of overthrowing a constituted government through subversive means and armed conflict (Cited in Hellesen, 2008:14). This definition suggests that insurgent groups employ unlawful means towards achieving an end, which could be political, religious, social or even ideological. The goal of insurgency is to confront and overthrow an existing government for the control of power, resources or for power sharing (Siegel, 2007:328).

#### **ii. Terrorism**

According to Ekaterina (2008), terrorism is a sort of violence that uses one-sided violent approach against civilians. It also engages uneven violent confrontation against a stronger

adversary, which could be a state or a group of states. Chomsky (2001:19) defines terrorism as “the use of coercive means aimed at populations in an effort to achieve political, religious or even other aims”. The US State Department defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (cited in Isyaku, 2013: 17-18). The United Nations (1992) defines terrorism as “an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by semi- clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets” (Cited in Siegel, 2007:385).

For Lesser (1999:6), international terrorism can be referred to as an act in which terrorists cross national borders to perpetrate attacks within the territory of other states. The targets of attacks could be embassies, individuals, schools, government parastatals, security institutions, international organisations, et cetera. Terrorists could also hijack ships on the high sea and planes in the air. Therefore, terrorism is an act that aims at achieving social, political, religious, economic and even psychological goals through the use of coercive and intimidating acts outside the context of legitimate warfare activities that conveys some forms of messages to an audience.

### **iii. Security**

According to Francis (2005: 22), security is a state of being safe and the absence of fear, anxiety, danger, poverty and oppression. It is the preservation of core values and the absence of threats to these values (Cited in Alli, 2010:73). Imobighe (1990:224) opines that security is the freedom from threats to a nation’s capability to defend and develop itself, promote its values and lawful interest. For Zabadi (2005:3), security is a state in which people or things are not exposed to danger of physical or moral aggression, accident, theft or decline. This view is associated with the survival of the state and the preservation of its citizens. In other words, the state has the responsibility of the use of force and power for the safety of its territory and its people.

Furthermore, there is the crucial need to define national security. Held (1998:226) gives a traditional meaning of national security. He describes national security as “the acquisition, deployment and use of military force to achieve national goals”. Romm (1993) describes it as the lack of danger or risk to held standards, values and ideals and the absence of fear that such values will be attacked now or in the future. Thus, national security is the preservation

of the values a nation holds as relates to the defence of its territory from human as well as non-human threats and guides in the pursuit of its national interest in the international system.

#### **iv. State**

The term state is derived from the Italian word "*lo stato*", a term coined by Niccolò Machiavelli to depict the social order that oversees and rules over a political entity or a country. According to Ekanem (2001:55) the "state is a permanent specialized organization of men armed with rules and means of coercion for maintaining order over a population in a defined territory over which this organization exercises power." For Max Weber, the state is an essential political union that has a centralized government that maintains a monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a certain territory (Cited in Shaw, 2003). Evident in these definitions are the characteristics of the state such as territorial authority, sovereignty, government, population, independence, the right to relate with other states and very importantly, the monopoly of use of instruments of force.

#### **The Character and Identity of the Nigerian State**

Nigeria is a union of separate ethno-cultural units that occupied land terrains that were former British colonies. The Nigerian State is pluralistic in nature, that is, it is a multi-ethnic state or nation-state with over 300 groups, of diverse ethnic and religious identity. Every group is dissimilar to another based on the uniqueness of cultures, languages, religions and value systems (Ojo, 2006: 368-378; Aluko, 1998: 78-84). These differences amongst the various social groupings have remained a major determinant of social relationships.

It is worthy of note to state that social relations between and amongst the various groups have been characterised by cooperation, aggression, discrimination, conflicts, mistrust and prejudice. Even though Nigeria's motto is unity in diversity, yet from the beginning, the country has not been able to successfully accommodate the interest of all the divergent groups within its territory. There have been various insurgencies, rebellions and public revolts that seem to have been entrenched in the multicultural nature of the Nigerian State. Examples of public uprisings include the Tiv-Jukun/Fulani Conflict (2003), Gwantu crisis (2001), political violence and unrest in Yorubaland in western Nigeria between 1960 and 1966, the Nigerian Civil War, the census crisis, the post presidential election crisis of 2011, the Maitatsine uprising in Kano in the 1980s, and the Yan Tatsine riots in the early 1980s. Other theatres of conflict included, Zango Kataf in Kaduna State in 1992, Zaria Shiites

outbreak, Jos Mayhem, Kaduna religious riots, Maiduguri onslaughts, Kano violence of 1953, ethno-religious massacre in Kano, Kaduna and Plateau in the wake of sharia judicial system, Nupe –Yoruba conflict in Kwara and the Boko Haram insurgency (Badru, 1998:4, cited in Tijani, 2010:187-220; Ojie and Ewhrudjakpor, 2009: 7-14).

### **Insurgency and National Security Challenges in Nigeria**

As earlier mentioned, the phenomenon of ethnicity and religious intolerance have led to incessant recurrence of ethno-religious conflicts, which have birthed copious ethnic militias like the Bakassi Boys, O'dua People Congress (OPC), the Egbesu Boys; the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC); the Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Igbo People Congress (IPC) and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), amongst others (Salawu, 2010:345-353). The surfacing of these militia groups has made religious intolerance and fanaticism more violent and disturbing. The two most notorious terrorist groups that have challenged Nigeria's national security, territoriality, sovereignty and unity have been the Niger Delta militant group and Boko Haram.

#### **a. Insurgency in the Niger Delta**

The long years of abandonment, environmental degradation, coupled with the inconsiderateness of successive governments and exploitation by the oil companies, produced a capricious atmosphere in the 1990s, characterized by frustration, anger and aggression that manifested in constitutional and violent protests and conflicts in the region (Folarin and Okodua, 2010). According to Azigbo (2008:18), the agitation actually began as peaceful protests by community development committees of a range of host communities to multinational oil companies. Peaceful protests however degenerated into forceful agitations when the requests of the groups as regards the development of the region were slow in coming. The agitations were heightened by the massacre of the nine Ogoni leaders and Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 by the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha, who had ignored all international and local entreaties and appeals to commute the death sentence of the environmentalists. By 1998, anarchy overwhelmed most of the Niger Delta region (Folarin, 2007).

Well-known among the belligerent groups operational in the area were the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Alhaji Asari Dokubo, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) led by Henry Okah, the Martyrs Brigade, the Niger

Delta Vigilante force (NDVF) led by Ateke Tom, the Bush Boys, among others (Duru, 2012:162-170). The underlying issues of contention by the armed militant groups were the greater control of the oil resources in the Niger Delta region by the people, fair allocation of the revenue from oil exploitation, ending the oil spills and gas flaring, compensation for the decades of ecocide, as well as the physical and infrastructural development of the region. However, the Nigerian government saw their protests as acts of sabotage to the revenue generation of the nation (Cyril, 2008).

Aside the basic problems outlined above, other causes of militancy in the region included marginalization, abject poverty, massive unemployment, destruction of aquatic ecosystem, the alteration of the soil quality, air pollution, and socio-economic disorganization (Nwogwugwu, Alao and Egwuonwu, 2012: 23-37).

The activities of the groups in the Niger Delta manifested in diverse ways such as militancy, kidnapping, killings, bombing, hostage taking, demolition of oil and gas facilities, pipeline vandalisation, illegal oil bunkering (Duru, 2012: 162-170). The militants launched attacks on the Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC), Chevron and TotalFinal Elf (IFE) staff and facilities. MEND killed oil workers at Chevron, TotalFina Elf (IFE), damaged a rescue helicopter sent to rescue employees, killed naval officers, injured soldiers, attacked police stations like the Mini-Okoro Elenlewo and killed some officers on duty, attacked five-star hotels, and carried out a bomb attack on the Eagle Square, Abuja on October 1, 2010 during the fifty year anniversary of independence. Between 1999 and 2007 a total of 308 hostage incidents were recorded in the region (Ogbonnaya and Ehigiamusoe, 2013: 46-60).

The sophistication of the weapons plus the dexterousness of operation questioned the security of the Nigerian State. Despite the seeming prevailing calmness of the region at the moment, as regards the issues of terrorism, the outstanding issues of resource control and allocation, poverty alleviation and environmental security remain potential sources of explosive situations. Incidentally, while the amnesty for, and rehabilitation of the Niger Delta militants were beginning to mitigate the situation in the country, the Boko Haram uprising began.

#### **b. The Boko Haram Challenge**

The Boko Haram issue started as an insignificant agitation of an Islamic sect with a strange commitment to non-conformist standards of social organization in Muslim-dominated Bauchi and Borno states. It began in Bauchi State on July 26, 2009 and since that time, the group has

extended its activities to other Northern states as well as to other parts of Nigeria. Unlike the militants in the Niger Delta that were driven by purely economic goals, Boko Haram is driven by proclivity in religious conviction, political aspirations and social practice. Specifically, its ultimate goal is to make Nigeria an Islamic State and uphold only the laws of as set out in the Koran (Walker, 2012). This group believes Islam detests western civilisation and that western education is blasphemous. Literally, “Boko Haram” means ‘western education is a sin’ or “forbidden”.

Going by its alleged creation and sponsorship by a famous politician in Borno State in the early 2000s and its socio-religious outlook and agenda, Boko Haram is thus an Islamist insurgent group that arose from political, social and religious discontent within the Nigerian State (Adesoji, 2011:99-119). The recruits of the sect are mostly youths from the northern parts of Nigeria that are dissatisfied with the economic, political and social status quo. They include unemployed youth, stark illiterates, and refugees from neighbouring African countries. Thus, the sect explores the social-economic negativities of the country to recruit and radicalize its members (Nicoll, 2011:1-3).

Eso (2011) observes that the push factor to recourse to terrorism in the bid to influence public policy is beyond sectarianism. He buttresses this by arguing that most of the attacks of the sect have been focussed at the state and its institutions, plus the civilian populations. It has launched attacks on military institutions such as military barracks, police stations (including the Force Headquarters in Abuja); and have also swooped on educational institutions at all levels, government establishments, places of worship (both churches and mosques) and have assassinated key political figures, statesmen and religious leaders that oppose their philosophy. The strategies have included kidnapping, targeted killing, assassination, suicide bombing, bombing with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), VBIEDS, ambush, and drive-by shooting.

In their own analysis, Ogbonnaya and Ehigiamusoe (2013:46-60) aver that the attack launched on the United Nations Office in Abuja in 2011 gave the militant group a face similar to that of the Al-Qaeda's. Locally, the sect is referred to as the ‘Nigerian Taliban’ due to the gravity and tenacity of its operations. More importantly is the strong link the group has with other transnational extremist groups, including Al-Shabab and Al-Qaeda. Crucial aspects of their relations with other transnational militant groups include training, funding,

strategic knowledge on planning and tactical attacks and activities, ideological influence and human power resources (Ogbonnaya, Ufiem and Ehigiamusoe, 2013:46-60).

While the Niger Delta militancy was a struggle for equity, that of Boko Haram's has been a struggle for control of the state and superiority over the security forces. Ogbonnaya and Ehigiamusoe (2013:46-60) thus infer that what the two terrorist groups represent in terms of the global potential and feasibility for non-state actors as security challengers with destructive capabilities rivalling those of the state is alarming. The tenacity of events between 2011 and 2014 reveals that the Nigerian State has not effectively equipped its security institutions with 21<sup>st</sup> century equipment and that it has not given its military personnel the requisite training for the much needed capacity to defend the country from internal insurrections and external threats. Furthermore, the government has not lived up to its responsibility in handling these challenges and ensuring security. Militancy in the Niger Delta and the rise of Boko Haram have thus facilitated and aggravated the irony of sectional indifference. During the heightened militancy in the Niger Delta, the North did not care much about the fate of the victims and not until the increasing terror of the Boko Haram in Nigeria did the rest of the country begin to be worried about the amount of terror in the Northern part.

The mind-set of united Nigeria and the need for unity in diversity are usually lost in the face of terror and oppression of a group. This attitude of sectarianism, coupled with the weak and slow response of the Nigerian government *ab initio*, was what probably gave an impetus to the insurgency and its metamorphosis into a mainstream terrorist organization. The rest of Nigeria has however, come to realise that the terror group is indeed a threat to the security, sovereignty and stability of the Nigerian State and not just the North. Adibe (2012) captures the profundity of the challenge the Nigerian State faces when he argues that, the state

is regarded as the enemy, not just by Boko Haram, but by several Nigerians and groups, each attacking it with as much ferocity as Boko Haram's bombs, using whatever means they have at their disposal: politicians entrusted to protect our common patrimony steal the country blind, law enforcement officers see or hear no evil at a slight inducement, government workers drag their feet and refuse to give their best while revelling in moonlighting, organized labour, inducing university lecturers in public institutions go on indefinite strikes on a whim while journalists accept 'brown envelopes' to turn truth on its head or become uncritical champions of a selected anti-Nigerian state identity. What all these groups have in common with Boko Haram is that they believe that the premise on which they act is justifiable and that the Nigerian state is unfair to them, if not an outright enemy (Cited in Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012:91-118).

The implications of Boko Haram's operation include the slowdown of the country's economic growth and development, worsened unemployment, food scarcity due to the



inability of traders to transport food from the North to the South due to insecurity reasons, dented Nigeria's public image, increased fear and a false sense of security, recourse to self-help by people and citizens on most occasions such as the emergence of "Civilian JTF in Borno", loss of life and damage to properties, and so forth (Alao, Atere and Alao, 2012:67-87).

In the bid to address the menace of terrorism, the Federal Government engaged development partners, including the United States (US), European Union (EU) and Israel, to step-up the war against terror. Nigeria also got proposals of assistance from Britain, Canada, China, France, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN, to assist locate the over 234 abducted Chibok secondary school girls in Borno State. The US, France, Pakistan, and Britain have also offered to assist with counter-terrorism training (Ajayi, Igbintade, Ukpong and Otokpa, 2014). Also, the US Department of Defence has recently provided funds to Nigeria for the development of a counterterrorism infantry unit (US Embassy in Nigeria, 2014).

### **Combating and Ending Insurgency/Terrorism in Nigeria**

The regularity and enormity of the terror unleashed by insurgents in various parts of the country make it expedient for strategies and solutions to the phenomena. First, there is the need to tow the path of countries in the industrialized world, particularly those who have gathered enough experience in the course of the fight against international terrorism, by building a potent Intelligence Gathering Infrastructure. In 2012, Nigeria had publicized plans for a new intelligence gathering centre that would be saddled with the responsibility of coordinating, improving and integrating intelligence gathering and sharing across security agencies and other aspects of government. Although this, if it eventually comes to fruition, will be helpful in curbing crime, but it has to be pursued side by side with sustainable infrastructure such as ICT and efficient power supply to back it. Lack of commitment, wrong prioritization of public policy and corruption may have slowed down the implementation of this promising plan. These have remained the major obstacles to the fight against terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria. However, Nigeria should endeavor to intensify its intelligence gathering technology.

Moreover, all insurgents and terrorists caught or who surrendered must be fully prosecuted and adequately punished, as a situation in which justice does not prevail and offenders are freed on ground of amnesty or pardon will send the wrong signals to the society; these could

even encourage more acts of terrorism or motivate more insurgent groups to emerge and strike at the state. The reason it has taking so long to break Boko Haram, is not only because of the known sponsors who are sometimes shielded and walking free; it is also because many detained Boko Haram fighters and commanders disappear from detention reportedly, by the aid of collaborators in government and the military. Such commanders return to the terrorist camps to fortify and lead their cells in the sustained fight against the state.

Training complements modern equipment. Once the intelligence infrastructure and military hardware are provided, training of military personnel in their effective and civilized or disciplined use is also required. Media reports have shown how low the morale of the troops has been in regard to the inferior weapons and poor training they go through. These have caused poor motivation and weak response up to the point of flight in the face of superior threat from the Boko Haram fighters (Folarin, 2014). In line with the above, the armed forces should be empowered and trained with the ability for swift response to attacks. There have been incidents of the armed forces not coming to the aid of the victims during assaults by militants. A vivid instance was when students of the Federal Government College in Buni-Yadi in Yobe State were killed in an operation that lasted for four hours and no security forces came to their rescue.

Selection into the security organizations should be entirely based on merit, mental and emotional strength of the individual applicants, and physical stability or strength, giving the vital role the armed forces play in securing the country from both external and internal hostility and threats. Due to the delicate nature of the armed forces, it is recommended that only proficient, zealous, enthusiastic, patriotic and dedicated applicants should be enlisted. According to Akande (2014), the insurgents have higher morale than the Nigerian troops because they are more organized and have more sophisticated weapons. One of the basic factors for high morale is moral and financial incentive. A situation in which soldiers are placed on half salary, are tried in a General Court Martial for every act and are allegedly buried in mass graves or the superiors give them wrong orders that end up in disastrous offensives that lead to their ambush, as have been widely reported in the ongoing war on terror in Nigeria, will kill the spirit of the armed forces and culminate in strings of losses. The welfare of military personnel should be considered so that they can be dedicated to their job and not be vulnerable to corrupt practises.

The Nigerian government should wake up to its socio-economic responsibilities. Nigeria is ravaged by underdevelopment, unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, lack of basic social amenities, corruption, increased cost of living, etcetera, all of which have instigated grievances against the system and created breeding ground for terrorism. If these issues are squarely addressed, there is the possibility that terrorism will not be attractive to the future generation. If it has performed socio-economic responsibilities, the government should embark on social welfare programmes and education, like the *Almajiri* education policy in the North, to de-radicalize the youth and counter their violent extremist ideology. Therefore, if Nigeria treads the path of industrialization as Malaysia, India and China and the wealth is gets to the different sections and strata of society and citizens, grievances against the system will likely reduce.

Tightening the security at the borders is quiet essential. Protecting the borders by ensuring a close monitoring of inflow and outflow of people will reduce the possibility of influx of foreigners with sinister motives. This will also help cut off of source of terrorists' supply of arms, as such weapons in the hands of terrorists are transported through the borders with neighboring countries.

Also, the government at all levels needs to be more prudent in its management of information on terrorist groups and security matters. For instance, the government in the media announced that the location where the abducted Chibok girls were kept was known without first strategizing on how to rescue the girls and rescuing them. The leakage of the information did not do Nigeria any good because the girls were relocated by the terrorists and since then have not been rescued, until a recent publicized truce between government and Boko Haram negotiators and promise by the latter to release the girls in exchange for Boko Haram prisoners. The discretion in the management of information will thus help in tackling insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

From the numerous cases of terrorist attacks in Nigeria, it is obvious that insecurity beclouds the Nigerian State. The principle and myth of the state's monopoly of the use of force have been shattered by the by desperate terrorist and insurgent groups pursuing parallel goals to that of the state. While the capability of the Boko Haram group was limited to shootings and

improvised explosives, the government did not realise the need to create order. Fortunately the intensification of terrorist attacks, the frequency of the attacks, the collateral damage to the country and the expanded scope of the activities of insurgents and terrorists have forced the government to understand the dilapidated state of security in Nigeria and the urgency in recent times, to restore order before Nigeria becomes a failed state.

Also, while insurgency and terrorism have been interchangeably used both in this paper and in the discourse of the security threats in Nigeria generally; it is pertinent to state that insurgency is struggle for self-determination, which is a more legal and acceptable kind of struggle in a sovereign state, while terrorism is unconventional, vicious, endless because there are no rooms for negotiations and no arrowheads to spearhead dialogue, with the sole intent to cause collateral damage to the sovereign state. Hence, if the Niger Delta militancy was a form of insurgency; Boko Haram insurgency in 2009 when its leaders and cells were known, transited to a terrorist campaign after the death of its linchpin, Muhammed Yusuf and when it started faceless attacks and advertised vacuous, incomprehensible as well as impossible demands on the Nigerian State.

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