Political Violence and Terrorism: Insight Into Niger Delta Militancy and Boko Haram

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the nexus between the following: 1) the political violence and terrorism practiced by Niger Delta militants and Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria, and 2) the governance of Nigeria. The article focuses on the historical trend of political violence since the amalgamation of the country and the impacts of terrorism. Before Nigerian independence, the country was organized by colonial powers under a protectorate system of both Northern and Southern regions, with people of different tribes and cultures living under different patterns of administrative governance. In 1914, colonial powers amalgamated the regions into one state, aiming for an easier administrative system. After amalgamation, a movement for self-governance emerged among the peoples of the newly united regions, though the only thing that both protectorates shared peacefully was the name of the country: Nigeria. The subsequent struggle for ethnic supremacy and the incidence of regional disparity, among other factors,

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have stymied chances for sustained and formidable national unity, even after independence in the 1960s. Hence, this article considers the political amalgamation of Nigeria, the impact of amalgamation on the country's various ethnic groups, and its impact on the violent movements in the Northern and Southern regions. This article aims to understand the roots of modern terrorism (in the forms of the Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram insurgency) in Nigeria and its impact on modern society, as well as provide possible recommendations for how to effectively address the country's myriad terrorist movements at the national and international levels.

Keywords: *Political Violence, Niger Delta, Boko Haram, Terrorism, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as an independent nation was formed out of separate Northern and Southern regions amalgamated in 1914 by colonial powers. After the formal amalgamation process, the peoples of the two regions united to embark on a struggle for independence. As Obasanjo (1981) stated, "The only point on which Nigerian political leaders spoke with one voice was for the granting of political independence by the British – and even then they did not agree on the timing". After Nigeria won its independence, however, the differences in regional identities were reawakened, fueling a struggle for political leadership in both regions and threatening the unity of the nation.

In retrospect, it can be said that this long-standing struggle for political leadership has transformed in the last decade into a national act of terrorism in the forms of militancy in the Niger Delta and the Boko Haram insurgency. This article aims to examine the roots and impacts of the Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram insurgency through the context of historical developments in Nigeria, focusing on socio-economic, religious, cultural, and ethnic factors.

THE SEEDS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

Like many other African nations, Nigeria was divided into provinces by former colonial powers. Numerous independent and sometimes hostile regional protectorates exhibiting considerable linguistic and cultural diversity existed until 1900, when Frederick Lugard, the high commissioner administering the British colony, initiated a movement to unite the regions for ease of administration. By 1914, the Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated into the single unit of Nigeria. Since the amalgamation and even after independence from the British in the 1960s, the only thing that both protectorates have ever truly shared is the country's name. Both protectorates have maintained their previous ethnic, cultural, and administrative attributes, a fact that presents one of the many serious challenges to Nigeria's national unity.

Following amalgamation, Sir Hugh Clifford – who served as Governor General between 1920 and 1931 – described Nigeria at the 1920 Nigeria Council debates in Lagos as "a collection of independent Native States,

separated from one another by great distances, by differences of history and traditions and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers" (Atofarati, 1992, p. 3).

Even at that time, it was recognized that though colonial powers had succeeded in uniting the regions, the predominant ethnic divisions within the regions remained the same. To this day, the relatively unchanged ethnic makeup of the amalgamated regions continues to dominate daily life, hindering the regions' abilities to live as a unified state within which the tolerance of ethnic diversity is essential. The predominant ethnic groups are the following: the Igbo, which form approximately 60 or 70 per cent of the population in the southeast; the Hausa-Fulani, which form approximately 65 per cent of the population in the northern region; and the Yoruba, which form approximately 75 per cent of the population in the southwest. Recognizing this ethnic diversity is essential in order to understand both the challenges to and necessity of consolidating the national unity (Frainc, 2014, p. 2).

Sir Huge Clifford's observation in 1920 aimed to increase political awareness of remaining divisions so as to help consolidate Nigerian unity. In recognition of this development, a constitution was enacted in 1922 that allowed elected members from different regions to sit on a Nigerian legislative council, even though the constitution did not endow them with full legislative powers in the Northern region. Being the first constitution to sensitize the people politically, it embodied the principle of governance of the country until 1940. In 1940, Nigeria was divided

into four administrative units. Under this system, the Lagos colony was granted the right to exist in the Northern, Eastern, and Western provinces. This administrative division, which increased power for the colony and the provinces, deepened a sense of separateness among the provinces. Following this, "the constitution established an Executive Council to advise the governor until 1943 that the first two unofficial Africans where appointed into the Executive Council" (Okonkwo, 1962, p. 211).

In 1946, Sir Arthur Richardson's Constitution inaugurated Nigeria's regionalism, by which the North and the South were legislatively integrated. During the 1940s and 1950s, the Igbo and Yoruba parties, which represented the Southern region of the country, were at the forefront of the fight for independence from Britain.

By the time Macpherson's Constitution inaugurated a quasi-federal structure for the country in 1951, Nigeria was experiencing a robust struggle for self-governance. The leaders of the Northern part preferred the perpetuation of British rule because they thought that independence would bring more political and economic domination by the Westernized elites in the South. Therefore, for the first time, the North started to mention explicitly the possibility of secession rather than enduring what they perceived as humiliation and mistreatment by the rest of the country.

The 1951 constitution ushered in the formation of new political parties, but it was criticized for the following shortcomings: 1) the granting of an electoral franchise limited by economic status and sex; 2) the enactment of an electoral process into the Federal Legislative Council that was deemed to be unsatisfactory by some politicians; and 3) a further deepening of the ethnic gap in the country that the constitution was perceived to have caused. Hence, the political parties created under this constitution, such as the Action Group and Northern People Congress, were forged along ethnic lines, which eventually rendered strengthened and sustained national unity impossible.

In 1954, Lyttelton's Constitution provided greater representation and decision-making authority to the people of Nigeria, as the people were already strongly agitating for self-government following a 1953 movement for a motion of self-government that was led by a member of the House of Representatives, Chief Anthony Enahoro of the Action Group Party. By 1956, the movement had led to a crisis on the floor of the House as the Northern delegates opposed the movement on the grounds that the Northern delegates were unprepared for such sudden decision. Sir Ahmadu Bello, who was the leader of the NPC (Northern People's Congress) – which was a Northern regional party in the House –proposed a resolution on other challenges within the country before the motion for self-government, as the Northerners were worried that they would be marginalized by the more educated Southerners after independence. Based on this proposition, various demands were granted, such as the designation of Lagos as Federal Territory and the

creation of a national government recognizing Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as the Prime Minister. "The leader of the NPC…in the House, Sir Ahmadu Bello proposed that the date 1956 should be substituted with 'as practicable as possible'" (Olusanya, 1980, p. 536). Finally, the 1954 constitution confirmed and formalized the wishes of Nigerian leaders to move and remain as far apart as they possibly could by realizing the desire for self-government. Thereafter things developed quickly in the political arena, as there followed various constitutional conferences in 1957, 1958, 1959, and 1960, finally culminating in the granting of independence to Nigeria on October 1st, 1960.

Despite gaining independence, Nigeria remained like a state without unity, a society of 300 ethnic and cultural groups whose differences and grievances endured after independence. Although the Independence Constitution emphasized the civil and political rights of the people and adopted a federal structure with the intent to provide representation to each region, serious challenges to the unity of the nation started to emerge from the regional parties. The power struggles among the different ethnic groups inevitably transformed into ethnic-sponsored violence.

The growing violence led to the end of the first civilian rule (designated as the First Republic) by a military coup in 1966, which was followed by a counter-coup that resulted in a civil war between 1967 and 1970. Although the parties of the civil war reached a ceasefire in 1970, the psychological trauma among Nigerian society remained. By 1979, the

country returned to civilian rule and a new constitution was adopted. The 1979 Constitution reaffirmed civil and political rights through recognition of the rights to life, liberty, and human dignity. Despite recognition of these rights, the Second Republic held a poor record with regard to protection of them. Therefore, a power struggle among regional parties once again emerged between 1979 and 1983. Another military coup ushered in military rule lasting until 1999.

When the new civilian leader, President Olusegen Obasanjo, took power in 1999, he promised to reduce the military's influence and establish democracy. However, some marginalized regional groups that did not support the ruling administration became involved in criminal activities – such as promoting illicit flows of money, arms, and drugs – that later turned into terrorist activities. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that the seeds of the current political violence and terrorism in Nigeria lie in the country's political history. It seems that political violence and terrorism in Nigeria are a part of the political struggles of opposing ethnic groups, which intend to dominate each other rather than live together in a united society. However, there are other factors behind the current political violence and terrorism in Nigeria that also need to be understood.

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

Political violence and acts of terrorism are not a new phenomenon in world history; however, the magnitude of terrorist attacks around the

world has increased recently. Moreover, there has been an increase in regional political consciousness among ethnic groups, leading to challenges against current nation states, especially those that were formally colonized. In the case of Nigeria, the quest for political supremacy by religious, cultural, and ethnic groups throughout the country, which has intensified after independence, is the major current challenge to the country's national security. Even though 'national security' is a contested term – asking questions like 'security for whom' and 'which values' – it is at least certain that it aims to protect the territorial integrity and national social values. Therefore, the Nigerian government is initially expected to protect its citizens' right to life and property and ensure a balance in socio-economic life in order to promote reconciliation and harmony within a heterogeneous country. However, these expectations have not been realized, and Nigeria has become the 7th most terrorized country in the world (Osundefender, 2013, p: 1-2).

Like the term 'national security,' the term 'terrorism' is also contested. Although it is commonly defined as a violent act carried out with the aim of realizing a political objective by creating terror in a society, different approaches have made the identification of terrorism and terrorists in the real world more complicated. This controversial point is observed in the Nigerian case.

The Niger Delta Militant Groups

The Niger Delta Militant groups are recognized terrorist groups in the southeastern part of Nigeria. Following the insensitivity of the government to their outcry after the crackdown on law and order in the late 1990s, their actions eventually escalated into a different dimension of violence, such as kidnapping national and international oil workers and destroying oil facilities and installations in the hope of gaining autonomy and self-control of the oil resources of the region. Since 1998, their violent actions have become known throughout the country, and their region has being labeled as "a lawless zone, where youths disrupt oil production activities in the region and the communities are frequently being engaged with conflicts and provocation, in destructive inter-and intra-community strife" (Niger-Delta Development Commission [NDDC], 2004).

Over time, the media has broadcast the deadly attacks of their terrorist actions in order to sensitize the general populace to the danger in the region. For instance, on July 16th, 2006, *The Punch* newspaper reported that combatants from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) had killed four naval personnel and injured three soldiers who were escorting a Chevron oil tanker along the Chomoni Creeks in the Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State in the Southern part of the Nigeria. From April 18th to the 24th in 2007, *The Midweek Telegraph* also reported an attack on the Mini-Okoro, Elelenwo Police Station that left many police officers dead. In addition, on January 1st, 2008, the Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF) led by

Ateke Tom was reported to have attacked a police station and a five star hotel in Port Harcourt in River State. It was also reported that the MEND group carried out an attack at Eagle Square in Abuja on October 1st, 2010 during the nation's celebration of 50 years of independence.

In addition to deadly attacks, hostage taking and kidnapping with the purpose to demand ransoms have also been identified as components of their terrorist activities. "Between 2006 and 2009, there have been records of over 700s kidnapping cases" (Francis et al., 2011, p. 65). All of the public broadcasts of their successful attacks by the media and the fear incited by them have led to the emergence of many other militant groups, like the "Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) led by Henry Okah, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Alhaji Asari Dokubo, the Niger Delta Vigilante force (NDVF) led by Ateke Tom, the Bush Boys, the Martyrs Brigade, among others" (Ogbonnaya et al., 2001, p. 6). All these new groups have spread across other parts of the Southern region, like Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom, and River State. The spread has led to the shut down of oil production in the area and an increase in violence, including the killing of oil workers and civil servants and the damaging of governmental and non-governmental properties alike.

Despite terrorizing the country, the Niger Delta Militant groups headed by the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) have termed their actions as a call to the government to recognize and address the injustice and deprivation in the region. According to Onduku (2002), the IYC is the peoples'

organization at the forefront of the struggle for resource control and environmental justice in the Niger Delta. It was formed on December 11th, 1998, with the issuance of the Kaiama Declaration, which emphasized the unabated environmental damage resulting from the uncontrolled exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas. The region has seen numerous oil spillages, uncontrolled gas flaring, the opening up of forests to loggers, indiscriminate canalization, flooding, land subsistence, coastal erosion, earth tremors, etc., due to this exploration and exploitation.

These environmental disasters have been the driving force behind the aggravated terrorist actions of the militant groups, which accuse the government and oil companies (such as Shell and Chevron) of benefiting from the oil resources of the region without responding to the demands of the people in the region. It has been claimed that the activities of the oil companies have reduced the productivity of the land; thus, the region's communities have demanded robust social and infrastructural support from the government. As a result of this exploitation and the resulting environmental conditions, it has been argued that the hopeless youth of the region are being forced to take part in asymmetric warfare against the state in order to gain their political, economic, and social demands.

Boko Haram

Boko Haram, as another terrorist group from the Northern part of the country, became stronger when the activities of the Niger Delta militant

groups decreased. The name 'Boko Haram,' "is derived from a combination of the Hausa word, boko (book), and the Arabic word, haram (forbidden). Put together, Boko Haram means 'Western education is forbidden'" (Agbiboa, 2014, p. 1). In that respect, the impact of globalization on Nigeria and the introduction of the Western type of education to Nigeria are seen by some as sufficient reason to pursue terrorist activities. The leader of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, criticized the process of globalization in an interview with BBC, stating "Western style education is mixed with issues that run contrary to our believe in Islam," and also argued that the country was an Islamic state before the colonial masters turned it into a "Kaffir" (infidel) land (Agbiboa, 2014).

Through the capture of the founder of the group, Mohammed Yusuf, the attacks temporarily stopped. When the attacks started again, a change in both the organizational structure and modus operandi of the group was observed. Boko Haram had divided into multiple cells that were ruled by different, anonymous leaders, and the cells started to use different strategies and tactics, including suicide bombings and the targeting of all institutions represented by the national government, as well as the UN offices. In 2011, Abu Kakah, a spokesman of the group, stated, "We are responsible for the bomb attack carried out on the U.N. building in Abuja," mentioning their standing view in opposition to Western education (CITATION NEEDED, and put it in the References section). They also started using highly sophisticated weapons, which raised suspicions of possible links with international terrorist groups

like Al-Qaeda. They began to conduct more provocative attacks, aiming to destabilize the unity of the nation. In addition, the group has been attempting to expand its influence into new areas such as Mubi in Yola, Baga in Borno, Potiskum in Yobe, and Malari and Sambisa in Maiduguri. They have also expanded operations in areas where they had already conducted attacks, namely Jos, Kaduna, Kano, Madalla (in Niger State), and Abuja. In these operations, thousands of policemen, soldiers, and civilians have lost their lives, and millions of people have been forced to flee their homes.

According to Agbiboa (2014), the group has split into three factions: one that remains moderate and welcomes an end to the violence; another that wants a peace agreement; and a third that refuses to negotiate and wants to implement strict Sharia law across Nigeria. The division into different cells has complicated the attempts of the government to solve this issue peacefully (Nigerian Crime News, 2011). The attacks of Boko Haram have become a direct threat to the whole political system, aiming to create an Islamic state under Sharia law and the leadership of Abubakar Shekarau.

Like the Niger Delta militant groups, Boko Haram has also explained their terrorist acts as an asymmetric action carried out in order to create public awareness of the unfair policies of the government, which have made the region the poorest and the least developed part of the country. According to Siegle (2013), "in fact, a key element of the narrative put forward by Boko Haram is that the government is corrupt, uncaring,

and unrepresentative of interests in the north" (p. 89). It has become widely accepted that government betrayal of trust, political corruption, poverty, and youth unemployment in northern Nigeria (among other factors) have fueled Boko Haram's activities and resulted in the pledge of loyalty by their supporters. Furthermore, Agbiboa (2014) argued that Boko Haram was symptomatic of what happens when the architecture of state are weighed down and destroyed by corruption.

In fact, it seems that terrorism in Nigeria has become a form of violent activism for the marginalized regional groups who have been demanding better political, economic, and social conditions – demands that have been ignored by the government over the years. In other words, one of the reasons behind the rise in political violence and terrorism in Nigeria has been the discontent of religious and ethnic groups vis-à-vis the policies of the government. It is also certain that economic factors have played an important role in the increase of political violence and terrorism in Nigeria. Oyeniyi (2010) mentions that these problems have hindered the government's ability to fund welfare projects. The impact of these policies ranges from job cuts, high inflation rates, and unemployment to a burgeoning informal sector.

Besides the political and economic factors behind the political violence and terrorism, the alleged support of the government of Nigeria for some groups has been perceived as one of the main factors behind the increase in political violence and terrorism. The Nigerian government has been accused of financing, training, and providing safe havens to

terrorist organizations. For instance, regarding the controversial allegation of Nigerian government involvement in the illegal finance and purchase of armed weapons in 2014, *The Premium Times* published confirmed reports claiming that "[t]he Nigerian government had (…) admitted that it owned the $9.3 million cash smuggled into South Africa aboard a private jet and seized by the authorities of that country" (Usman, 2014). The acknowledgement of such reports identifies the government as one of the many actors driving violence and terrorism in the country.

IMPACTS ON THE NIGERIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

The ongoing terrorism in Nigeria, both from the Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram insurgency, has led to serious challenges in the country. Regarding security considerations, terrorism has been threatening the national unity of Nigeria, as noted by many elites, including the late Chief Gani Fawehinmi, who spoke on the matter in a speech titled "A Call for Genuine Sovereign National Conference: An Alternative to Chaos, Catastrophe and Disintegration" (2000, as cited in Nwaoga et al., 2014). The Boko Haram leader declared total jihad in 2009, stating, "We promise the West and Southern Nigeria, a horrible pastime. We shall focus on these areas which is the devil empire and has been the one encouraging and sponsoring Western civilisation into the shores of Nigeria" (as cited in Vanguard, 2009, p. 8).

With regard to the economy, the continuation of terrorism and violence will inevitably impede Nigeria's economic development, weakening

free trade and investment. Moreover, the biggest proportion of the national budget is being spent on security instead of developmental projects, which has invariably slowed down infrastructural development. For instance, in 2012, the Nigerian government planned to spend a considerable 20 per cent of its budget on security – equivalent to the share the U.S. spent on security following the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001. In 2013, this proportion was increased to 27.11 per cent, but in 2014, N845 billion (USD 5.29 billion) was provided for recurrent and service-wide votes for the security sector in Nigeria (Oladimeji et al., 2014, p. 250). The implication is that there will be less spending on power infrastructure, education, and healthcare – among other sectors – as the security sector is already taking up 25 per cent of the national economy.

Last but not least, the image of Nigeria at the international level has certainly been influenced by the increased terrorism and violence. Nigeria is perceived as unsafe by foreign investors and travelers. Nigerian tourism has been negatively affected by this reputation, irrespective of the government's efforts under the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2005 to kick start modern tourism in Nigeria. Under this program, potential tourism was "estimated to generate additional gross revenue of US$224m/N29b" (Francesco, 2006, p. 2).

Regarding reports, governments at both the federal and state levels have made significant efforts at developing the tourism sector unilaterally

and in certain cases partnering with the private sector in designing special resorts based on international standards for tourism. Since tourism was seen as an important potential source of revenue, tourist sites at the national parks in the old Oyo, Yankari, and Akamkpa games reserves saw investments, as did the Nike Lake Resort in Enugu, the Obudu Range Resort, and the Tinapa Resort in Cross River State. However, the high incidence of kidnapping and hostage taking in Nigeria has led people to avoid visiting to the country and has jeopardized plans to increase gross estimated revenue from tourism.

CONCLUSION

The political violence and terrorism in Nigeria, which is led by the Niger Delta militant groups and Boko Haram, cannot be understood without an understanding of Nigerian political history. The growing discontent of the people, including the aforementioned groups, regarding the regional inequalities and the government's policies has led them to become involved in terrorist activities. In other words, the inability of the government to address the political, cultural, and socio-economic demands of the people is a main factor driving discontented communities to terrorism against the state.

It is certain that the terrorism negatively impacts not only national security but also Nigeria's economy. Terrorism is a serious impediment to sustainable development in the country. Moreover, a gradual collapse of the economy due to political corruption has been deepening the gap between socio-economic classes, which will inevitably serve the

interests of terrorist groups and strengthen support for their activities. As such, the following structural reforms are recommended in order to stymie the increase in terrorism:

- The government should address the interests of the whole country equally and fairly, rather than those of particular regions to the detriment of others.
- The principles of rule of law should be applied adamantly and the checks and balances built into the political system should be ensured.

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