From militancy to terrorism: Need for a fresh perspective to Nigeria’s national security

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Abstract: Many cases of ethnic and religious conflicts, armed robbery and other violent crimes, which over the years have exposed the vulnerability of Nigeria’s security agencies have been compounded with growing incidence of militancy and terrorism. The paper assesses Nigeria’s approach to national security, examines the ability of security agencies to meet emerging challenges and evaluates the capability of political leadership to pro-actively tackle threats to national security. The paper relied on secondary data comprising relevant published books, scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles, newspaper articles, and materials downloaded from the internet. It adopts frustration-aggression, political economy and game theories as major theoretical constructs. These theories are used as platform to build a treatise for a pro-active preventive approach to Nigeria’s national security. The paper argues that Nigeria’s approach to national security has been archaic, pedestrian and at variance with emerging trends across the globe; leading to the need for a new dimension that will be current, pro-active and preventive. The paper concludes that this new perspective must be anchored on delivery of good governance by political leadership across the country and the ability of government to provide deterrent measures towards breach of national security. Those who contravene national security either directly or through proxy must be made to face the full wrath of the law regardless of their social status.

Keywords: militancy, terrorism, perspective, national security, political leadership

I. Introduction

 Security of lives and property of citizens and other nationals within any given national jurisdiction is regarded as a major duty of government. Usually security is given a prominent position in national constitutions across the globe (Nwolise, 2006). Unfortunately, since independence in 1960, Nigeria has continuously experienced security challenges from time to time, under various governments, military as well as civilian administrations.

From 1970 onwards, the country’s political, economic, and policy elites have put in place an authoritarian and commandist power structure to enable them centralize control of strategic resources, including the not insubstantial oil receipts. This rent-seeking behaviour has not only banished the great majority of ordinary Nigerians from the policy-making process, it has also led the power elites to pursue social and economic strategies that are shortsighted and self-serving, strategies that are not driven by the needs of the people. The consequence has been material scarcity, deepening frustration, and social unrest, across the different geo-political divisions of the country (Oronto, Kenedi, Okonta & Watts, 2004).

The rise of ethnic militias and communal vigilante politics flourished during the Abacha years (1993-1998) when Nigerians experienced the most severe political repression and economic hardship in the country’s history. The O’odua Peoples Congress (OPC) was established in the Yoruba-speaking southwest in 1994 largely to protest the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections in which was believed to have been won by Moshood Abiola, a Yoruba Muslim. In the South East, two vigilante groups, the Bakassi Boys and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), emerged in the Igbo-speaking southeast two years later. MASSOB claimed that the Nigerian state and its functionaries had systematically oppressed the Igbo since the end of the civil war and sought to secure self determination by resuscitating the Republic of Biafra. In the North, Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) emerged in 1999 following the election of Obasanjo, from the South West as President as a reaction their perceived harassment of Northerners as well as protesting the killing of northern elements in Lagos and other Yoruba cities and towns by OPC cadres. Others include, Tiv Militia (2001), Jukun militia (2001), Egbesu Boys (1998), Itsekiri militia (1999), Ijaw militia (1999), as well as the militant arm of MOSOP (1992) (Oronto, Kenedi, Okonta & Watts, 2004; Onimadugwe, 2004).

However, militancy in the Niger Delta, took an enhanced violent nature from 2006, when the kidnapping of expatriate staff of the oil companies, car-bombing, and seizing of oil installations by different militant groups became a common feature in the polity. The militants put forward several reasons for their
agitations including, the marginalization of the peoples of the Niger delta, environmental degradation, bad governance and inconsistent policy framework, and the divide and rule policy of the oil companies (Nwogwuwgu, Alao & Egwuonwu, 2012).

II. Conceptual clarifications

Militancy

The term militancy refers to the violent activities of an individual or group holding an aggressive position in support of a given ideology or a cause. Such individuals or group of persons in a psychologically militant state is in a physically aggressive posture. (Nwaodi et al, 2010: 17). A common trend among militant groups is the justification of the use of force in their ideological rhetoric. The method adopted in enrolment of new members include, volunteering, enlistment and conscription (Nwaodi et al, 2010: 18).

Terrorism

Terrorism is not a modern day phenomenon. Its history goes as far as the first century AD. Abimbola & Adesote (2012) write that terrorism has existed for at least 2,000 years. The scholars trace the history of what is referred to as terrorism in modern day. Historically, the first known acts of what we now call terrorism were perpetrated by a radical offshoot of the Zealots, a Jewish sect active in Judea during the 1st century AD.

During the 1920s and 1930s, terrorism became associated more with the repressive practices employed by dictatorial states than with the violence of non-state groups like the anarchists. The word terrorism was used to describe the wanton violence and intimidation inflicted by the Nazi, fascist, and totalitarian regimes that respectively came to power in Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. The repressive means these governments employed against their citizens involved beatings, unlawful detentions, torture, so-called death squads (often consisting of off-duty or plain-clothes security or police officers), and other forms of intimidation (Abimbola & Adesote, 2012).

Terrorism like most concepts in social science defies any single universally accepted definition. Bellamy (2007:13) defines it as “a method of employing organized armed force with unusually little regard for humanitarian considerations to achieve, normally, political cum religious warlike ends, and which relies for its effectiveness on creating a pressing fearfulness in the minds of target persons for their lives or the lives of those close to them, or their property.” The US State Department defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets but sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (Whittaker 2007, p. 3; Kaarbo & Ray, 2011, p. 240). The definition however raises the question of what amounts to non-combatant targets. Could the September 11, attack on the pentagon be classified as non-combatant or the 1983 terrorist attack that killed 241 U.S. Marines in Beirut be classified as such? Birch (2007, p. 69), ignores the question of non-combatant nature of the targets, in defining terrorism as “the infliction of grievous harm on one or more members of an identifiable group or category of people with the aim of frightening other members of that group or category into changing their intended behaviour”. Whether pursued for political or religious reasons, most civilized people regard it as being morally repugnant because “it involves the infliction of grievous harm on innocent and defenceless people, irrespective of whether the observer happens to approve or disapprove of the policy objectives of the terrorists” (Birch 2007, p. 68).

Terrorism generally involves clandestine activity which is carefully planned as to goals, means, targets and access (for example the bombing of several police stations and locations in Kano city simultaneously in January 2012). The goals of the terrorists “may be understood generally as political, social, ideological, or religious, otherwise terrorists would be thought of as delinquent criminals” (Whittaker 2004).

As a result of the fact that terrorists most of the time, have to operate in a hostile environment, security is their primary concern. This is why terrorist groups operate through the use of small cells, in which each member knows and is known by a few of their colleagues, in case of defection or capture. Defectors are usually killed by the terrorist groups, though defections are usually rare. In the absence of a charismatic leader, the terrorists are affected by group dynamics that could be source of both problem and opportunities for security agencies. Opportunities are provided when dissenters provide security leaks, while problems arise as a result of changes in operational methods as a different faction prevails in leadership (Whittaker, 2007).

Counter terrorism

The prime need of counter-terrorism is to work out policies and put programmes into operation, to pinpoint the originators of violence, to deter them from further outrages, and to deal as best we can with a traumatized public” (Whittaker 2004: 129).
National security

Idowu (2013) views security from a political perspective as meaning all forms of precautions taken by governments and their agencies to guide against crime, violence, accidents, attacks, conspiracy, sabotage, and espionage. It is a protection or precaution taken to ward off any action of individuals or groups likely to endanger the peace and harmony of a section or the whole nation. Security can equally be regarded as a device for ensuring proper custody and prevent escape or losses of anything of value.

Kronenberg (1973, p. 36 cited in Asamu 2006, p.126) defines national security as “that part of government policy having as its objective the creation of national and international political conditions favourable to the protection or extension of vital national values against existing and potential adversaries.”

Imobighe (1990) describes national security as freedom from danger, or from threats to a nation’s ability to protect and defend itself, promote its cherished values and legitimate interests, and enhance the well being of its people. Louwi (1978 cited in Asamu, 2006) argues that national security includes traditional defence policy and capacity to survive as a political entity in order to exert influence and to carry out its internal and international objectives.

National security entails a condition, in which citizens of a country enjoy a free, peaceful, and safe environment, and have access to resources which will enable them to enjoy the basic necessities of life. (Enahoro, 2004). The scholars above have provided two significant perspectives to the concept of national interest, protection of national interests against internal and external aggression, as well as the good life for the citizens. In the light of this, Aliyu (2009) provides a description of national interest that embraces both perspectives when he writes that that national security goes beyond military preparedness to defend the nation to the issue of provision of good life for the citizenry. It is the ability of a country to maintain its sovereignty, protect its political, economic, social and other interests in a sovereign manner and both internally and in relations with other states. It is not only about the security of national territory and infrastructure but also, about the good life, the basic values which keep the community together and advancement in the quality of life available to the individual regardless of their social status.

Theoretical framework

The paper adopts political economy, frustration-aggression and game theories as theoretical constructs.

Political economy

The Marxist political economy approach holds that the economy is the sub-structure on which all other super-structure such as the political, the legal and social are built. Ake (1981) argues that a proper understanding of the economic system will bring about an appreciation of the general character of other aspects of the social system. The position a person or group occupies in the production process determines the class which the person or group belongs. The interaction between the forces of production and the social relations of production is the determinant of the economic development and progress in human society (Otite, 2008). Karl Marx in his interpretation of the dialectical method postulated that there are two classes in the society, the class which controls the means of production and that which does not.

In the present context, the privileged bourgeoisie (ruling class, political elite and business men), control the means of production and utilize it to determine the fate of the less privileged. The majority of the population that fall within the less privileged are frustrated by lack of good governance and the exposure to poverty in the midst of enormous resources without tangible efforts to its alleviation by the government. The bourgeoisie use the less privileged especially the youths as tools to either rig elections or destabilize the government in power when they are denied direct access to control of government; through funding of violent activities by the youths. The purpose of the bourgeoisie is not provision of good life for the less privileged youths, but rather to provide the enabling environment for them to have direct access to state resources which provides for the maintenance of the bourgeoisie.

Frustration-Aggression

Dollard et al (1939) argue 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” (Jegede & Ajayi, 2008: 147). It is implied that frustration will inevitably lead to some form of aggression. When the aggrieved do not have easy access to the stumbling block, they take out their violent response on “symbolic representation of the imagined enemy and expressed in an indirect way” (Hewstone & Stroebe, 2001 cited in Jegede & Ajayi, 2008: 147). In this case, the stumbling block is the government which has failed to provide the means of self-actualization for majority of the population (over 70%) that is regarded as poor; living on less than $2 per day and with no access to basic social infrastructure. The symbolic representation include, innocent unprotected civilians, expatriates, government officials (including police & military officials) public property; perceived as agents of the state.

Game theory
Game theory is a branch of mathematics that has been applied to politics with increasing frequency since 1960 (Mbah, 2006: 316). Game theory is “a body of thought dealing with rational decision strategies in situations of conflict and competition, when each participant or player seeks to maximize gains and minimize losses” (Plano & Riggs 1973 cited in Varma, 2004: 286). Shubik (1968 cited in Varma, 2004: 287) defines game theory as “a mathematical model for the study of some aspects of conscious decision-making in situations involving the possibilities of conflict and or cooperation. It deals with processes in which the individual decision unit has only partial control over the strategic factors affecting its environment.”

Originally developed in the 1920s by Emil Borel it was made popular by John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstein in 1944. R. Duncan Luce & Howard Raiffa, Martin Shubik & Anatol Rapoport are credited with the application of the theory to political science. The major concepts in game theory are players, rule of the game, outcome, pay-off, with strategy being the core concept (Varma, 288-289). The assumption behind the game theory, however is that each player is not only thoroughly rational, but completely self aware about the strategies available to him in pursuit of the pay-off, and is invariably engaged in the attempt to maximize his pay-off, in a manner consistent with his own pay-off formation or ranking preferences (Varma, 2004: 289).

There has been massive exploitation of the public resources and common wealth by the political class and those involved in rulership both military and civilian over the years, which has led to frustration of the largely unemployed youths across the country. When some members of the bourgeoisie class who control the means of production and by extension the economy, are deprived of direct access to political power or state resources, they provide the funding that is required for the frustrated aggressive youths to express their frustration in terms of violent actions meant to undermine the operations of government. Some of them are known to have armed the youths to use them to facilitate the rigging of elections, to enable them have access to state resources. The promises of “taking care” of the youths when not fulfilled lives them with the option of turning against the society since those who used them are outside their direct reach, protected by state security agencies. Others, who feel that they are denied access to state resources through their inability to “win elections” are also reported to have equipped some youth to destabilize the system and make it ungovernable. Adoption of Game theory provides the platform for adoption of viable counter-terrorism measures which multi prone that target several sectors that have direct connection with the needs of the citizenry and the security challenges that the nation faces. These strategies make the nation in-conducive for the militants and terrorists to operate in.

### III. Rise of militancy and terrorism in Nigeria

Edeogu (2008 cited in Egwemi, 2009: 19) writes that “the Niger Delta armed insurrection against the Nigerian state was formally launched after 1998 Kaiama declaration.” However, militancy in the Niger Delta could be traced to the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues in Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1994 by the Obasanjo junta. That experience led to the internationalization of the Niger delta crisis, as several militant groups such as movement for emancipation of the Niger Delta people (MEND), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) amongst others emerged to pursue the Niger Delta cause of resource control or outright self-determination through use of force, following the failure of peaceful attempts by people of the region (Isaac Adaka Boro and Saro Wiwa) (Egwemi, 2009).

The major grievance of the militants was the absence of good governance in the country, which has been reflected in the complicity of government officials and the oil producing multinational companies to subvert internationally accepted environmental standards for their operations. The claim the two parties engage in “systemic looting of their resources, damage to their environment and habitat, denial of appropriate revenue accruable from the mineral sales and absence of political control of their God given resources (Edeogu, 2008: 65 cited in Egwemi, 2009: 19).

A second dimension to the problem of absence of good governance is that some state governors from the region past and present contributed to the malaise through the funding of some groups to assist in rigging elections and their failure to deliver democracy dividends despite huge sums of money derived from the federation account (Nwosu, 2008).

A situation where Nigerian politicians only associated with barbaric acquisition of wealth and property through public corruption and to the chagrin of the impoverished Nigerians is now part of the violent reaction by the people. Undoubtedly, this flagrant and wanton display of this ill gotten wealth relatively induces some weak-minded citizens to take to criminality and violence as means of survival in a society that does not have any plan...
IV. Suggestions on new perspective for Nigeria’s national security:

**Good governance**

Governments at various levels (federal, state and local government) needs to address the root causes of agitations, militancy and terrorism through adherence to the characteristics of good governance, such as participatory decision-making, consensus orientedness, accountability, transparency, responsiveness to the needs of the citizenry, effectiveness and efficiency in administration, inclusive and equity in the allocation of resources and the rule of law (Nwelih & Ukaoha, 2010; Adelagan, 2009; Adeyemi, 2006; UNESCO, 2005; Hope, 2003).

The level of public sector corruption in Nigeria is alarming, as Nigeria has continued to be classified as one of the most corrupt countries in the world by transparency international, since the return to democratic governance in 1999. There is evidence from across the country that a large majority of public officials indulge in corrupt practices, instead of providing for the common good (HRW, 2007, Aluko, 2007). Elected public officials engage in flagrant display of their ill-gotten wealth to the chagrin and dismay of the populace who voted them into power (for those who were really voted into power). Following the principles of good governance, especially accountability and transparency, will eliminated corruption in the public sector which has been identified as a major cause of Nigeria’s state of under development in spite of enormous natural resources.

Good governance at all levels would ensure that the enormous resources available to the nation are utilized in the provision of the essential public infrastructure and social services which the large majority of the poor, estimated at 72.8% as at April 2012 (NBS, 2012) have been deprived of. Good governance would translate to creation of jobs through the creation of the right environment for industries which had hitherto closed down or relocated to other countries where basic public infrastructure such as electricity are available to operate and create needed employment to occupy the large army of unemployed youths who have been recruited into the terrorist groups as a result of unemployment, idleness and hopelessness in a nation with enormous resources. It is only good governance that translates to good life for the citizenry that would restore the hopes of these neglected and abandoned in the Nigerian project, thereby instilling a national consciousness in them as well as discouraging involvement in terrorist activities.

Elected and appointed public officials must be held accountable for their activities, and made to use the public resources that they are entrusted with to meet the needs of the populace. The situation whereby local councils in some states are only functional when federal allocations arrive and elected officials gather to share and disperse, while the local governments do not engage in any form of service delivery to the residents must stop.

The statutory agencies charged with curbing corruption, must ensure that corrupt officials at all levels, are prosecuted and those found culpable jailed. The present situation where only those who are not in good terms with the government at Abuja being the only ones that are prosecuted for corruption, will not in any way deter corrupt minded politicians. When corrupt officials are made to serve jail terms, and the ill gotten wealth confiscated, will make those in public office to sit up and be accountable in their activities.

Deterrent measures/including cutting of funding for terrorists

The government needs to adopt the game theoretical approach of utilizing deterrent measures that would discourage potential threats to the countries national security. This could include making the environment in-conducive for them to operate. To achieve this, there should be synergy between the military and all the security agencies, such that the sharing of intelligence information will facilitate their operations and they do not work at cross purposes. Large number of military and security personnel should be mobilized to the affected states. They should collaborate with local vigilante in the affected areas as they know the terrain better. The combined teams should engage in 24 hours patrol, such that there would not be any opportunity for any insurgent groups to operate.

The report that the Nigerian military has been compromised regarding its fight against terrorist insurgency is very unfortunate. However, there is a need to identify the reasons for the security breaches that are being experienced among the military, if the allegation is true and take care of it. The agitation that the military and security agencies are not proper motivated, is something that should be taken attended to. The nation must put in place a functional life and accident insurance scheme, which guarantees that wounded soldiers and their families, are well taken care of, while families of those who die in active service are well catered for without undue delay. It is only when the military and security agencies unite and work as a team that they will be able to make the environment in conducive for terror groups and other militia.

The kind of arsenal that the various groups that serve as threats to Nigeria’s security parade, reveal the fact that they have access to significant funds. The sponsors of the terrorist groups should be identified and the sources of funding for them should be cut off. The federal government must muster the political will to confront...
any sponsor of terror headlong regardless of the person’s social status. Once, the sponsors are dealt with, and the groups have so further access to funds their activities will weather down, and the military and security agencies will be able to contain them.

Re-training and adequate equipping of security agencies

The situation in Nigeria has degenerated as a result of several factor which has been highlighted by several scholars (Idowu, 2013; Nwolise, 2006; Ojo, 2006). The growth of militancy and terrorism since 2006 has however heightened focus on Nigeria’s security situation by the international community, especially with the reported linkage of the Boko Haram group to Al Qaeda. As a result, some countries have had to advice their citizens not to travel to some states in Nigeria, while prospective investors have been discouraged from coming to Nigeria (The Punch, 2011; The Nation, 2012; Vanguard, 2012). The security networks as presently constituted have proved ineffective in combating the menace even with the different Joint Task Forces that have been established.

The Nigerian security agencies are reactionary, in their operations and not proactive. They are not trained to anticipate and avert militant or terrorist attacks, and that is a major shortcoming. The security agencies are usual docile with practically no ability to anticipate and counter potential breaches of security across the nation. Idowu, (2013, p. 139) writes that “security agencies and judicial institutions should be overhauled to enhance proper policing, control of weapons among the people and effective interpretation of security laws for justice, equity, and fair play”. There is need for Nigeria to bilateral and multilateral technical arrangements for capacity building for its security agencies with countries like USA, Israel, Germany and Britain, who have over the years distinguished themselves in being able to anticipate and to a reasonable extent prevent activities that could amount to breach of security.

Adoption of effective counter terrorism methods

It has been proven from earlier studies Benjamin, 2008; Cato Institute, n.d; that wholesale military activities to counter terrorism have in most cases been counterproductive. Military activities have led to increased sympathy for the terrorists and enhanced their ability to attract new recruits. Where the terrorist groups have religious inclinations, military action has most of the time been ineffective. Large-scale military efforts to deal with terrorists typically leads to other benefits for our opponents, as we have seen in Iraq and elsewhere. They gain critical experience in tactics, create new networks of support as well as the social bonds among disparate groups that will enable future collaboration. It also gives them opportunities to raise more funds, acquire weapons and the like. Finally, the use of military force against terrorists is frequently unwise because it is inevitably indiscriminate and often results in the alienation of exactly those individuals in a given community who we do not want radicalized. Military action against terrorist targets often causes the deaths of innocents, no matter how much care is taken. (Benjamin, 2008, p.9) Strategic Counter terrorism

The Cato Institute puts forward, measures that are beyond military actions which policy makers could adopt to achieve positive results in counter terrorism without the negative effects usually experienced while using military action.

Policymakers should aim to counter the strategic logic of terrorism. Specifically, they should take great care not to expend the nation’s blood and treasure, avoiding military action if at all possible. They should not give terrorists the gift of overreactions such as violence that injures innocents, as this will aid the terrorists by driving new recruits into their ranks (Cato Institute, nd, p. 491).

Suggested effective tactics for counter terrorism include infiltrating and disrupting terror groups, targeted lawful surveillance of terrorists and terror suspects. Other mechanisms include, controlling terrorist groups access to weapons of mass destruction and their precursors. Taking reasonable precautions to secure against likely vectors of attack on infrastructure are also important, as well as preparing for terrorist attacks and their aftermaths, cooperation with neighbouring countries for effective border controls, International collaboration efforts with countries that have made positive in-road in combating terrorism (Cato Institute, nd; Idowu, 2013).

V. Conclusion

Security challenges have continued to be-devil Nigeria’s fourth republic, with the military and security agencies lacking the ability to proactively tackle such threats or to combat them at the early stages of their emergence. This has led to the situation where the different militia and terror groups operate like governments of their own defying efforts of the government to combat them. A major reason for these threats both militancy and terrorism has been recurring issue of lack of good governance by elected governments at all level across the country. in some instances, political leaders have been fingered has having master-minded the emergence of the groups who they equipped to facilitate the rigging of elections.
The government before 2012 when a huge percentage of the federal budget was allocated to security related sectors, had neglected the effective funding of the military and security agencies, under the mistaken belief that the nation was not at war. Even when signals of possible involvement in terrorist activities emerged with the case of Abdul-Muttalab, the best the government could do was to engage in a campaign of buck passing and denial. The military and security agencies were not effective equipped to counter the threats that have emerged at home.

Military efforts alone, cannot effective tackle Nigeria’s current security challenges the best approach is to adopt a fresh perspective to the national security management which will involve ensuring good governance at all levels of government across the country, as well as adopting practical counter terrorism strategies including cutting of the funding sources to the different groups, as well as effectively crushing the terror threats as a deterrent to future splinter groups that may see militancy and terrorism as avenues of getting national recognition and settlement.

References