



Article

Historical Antecedents of Terrorism in Nigeria

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Introduction

Scholars have continued to investigate the causes of terrorism and political violence. The most fundamental conclusion in this regard is that terrorism originates from many sources. The final decision by an individual or a group to accept a fringe belief or to engage in terrorist behaviour is often a complex process. For example, the decision to engage in terrorism may be the result of any of the following: logical choice and political strategy; collective rationality; lack of opportunity for political participation and; disaffection within elite (Whittakers, 2001).

However, this article identifies broad causes of terrorism at the individual and group levels establishing that the causes of terrorism in Nigeria are usually at the group level. At the individual level, other scholars have distinguished rational, psychological, and cultural causes of terrorism. An important step toward understanding terrorism is to develop an understanding of the sources and causes of terrorism. To achieve this, this article X-rayed the important role of extremism as the primary feature underlying all terrorist behaviour.

Extremism is broadly defined as "radical in opinion, especially in political matters"; more specifically, political extremism refers to taking "a political idea to its limits, regardless of unfortunate repercussions, impracticalities, arguments, and feelings to the contrary and with intention not only to confront, but to eliminate oppositions ... intolerance toward all views other than one's own" (Seruton, 1982).

Extremism is a precursor to terrorism and political conflicts - it is an overarching belief system that is used by terrorists to justify their violent behaviour. Extremism is characterized by what a person's beliefs are as well as how a person expresses his or her beliefs. Thus, no matter how offensive or reprehensible one's thoughts or words are, they are not by themselves acts of terrorism. Only persons who violently act out their extremist beliefs are labeled as terrorists.

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Extremism is a Precursor to Terrorism and Political Conflicts

Scholars and other experts have identified common characteristics exhibited by violent extremists. These characteristics are expressed in different ways depending on a movement's particular belief system. The following communalities are summaries of traits identified:

- (i) **Intolerance:** Intolerance is the hallmark of extremist belief systems and terrorist behaviour. The cause is considered to be absolutely just and good and those who disagree with the cause or some aspects of the cause are cast into the category of the opposition. Terrorists affix their opponents with certain negative or derisive labels to set them apart from the extremists' movement. These characterizations are often highly personalized so that specific individuals are identified who symbolize the opposing belief system or cause.
- (ii) **Moral Bankruptcy:** Moral bankruptcy is adopted by terrorists, so that the distinction between good and evil is very clearly drawn, as are the lines between the terrorists and their opponents. The terrorists' belief or cause is a morally correct vision of the world and is used to establish moral superiority over others. Violent extremists thus, become morally and ethically pure elites who lead the oppressed masses to freedom. For example, religious terrorists often believe that their "one true faith" is superior to all others and that any behaviour committed in defense of the faith is perfectly justifiable.
- (iii) **Broad Conclusions:** Extremists' conclusions are made to simplify the goals of the cause and the nature of the extremists' opponents. These generalizations are desirable and allow for no exceptions. Evidence for these conclusions is rooted in one's belief system rather than based on objective data. Terrorists often believe these generalizations because in their minds, they simply must be true. For example, ethno-nationalists frequently categorize all members of their opponents as having certain broadly
- (iv) **New Language and Conspiratorial Beliefs:** Language and conspiracies are created to demonize the enemy and set the terrorists apart from those who are not part of their belief system. Extremists thus become special elite who have discovered a hidden agenda and who have become targets of that agenda. For example, Neo-Nazi rightists degrade members of non-European races by referring to them as "mud people" (Wilcox Laird, 1992).

Extremists have a very different and at times fantastic worldview compared to non-extremists. They set themselves apart as protectors of some truth or as the true heirs of some legacy. For instance, racial extremists within the American patriot movement have argued that non-whites are "Fourteenth Amendment Citizens" and that only whites are sovereign citizens whose rights are delineated, not by the government, but rather by a cobbled assortment of historical writings whose meaning is often subject to their fanciful interpretation (Kushner, 1998).

Likewise, extremists frequently believe that secret and quasi-mystical forces are arrayed against them and that these forces are the cause of worldwide calamities. For example, some bigoted conspiracy believers argue that the illuminator or international Judaism mysteriously control world banking and the media or run the governments of France and the United States. One conspiracy theory that was widely believed among Islamic extremists in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks was that the Israeli agents were behind the attacks; that 4,000 Jews received telephone calls to evacuate the World Trade Centre in New York; and thus, that no Jews were among the victim of the attack (Gus Martin, 2006).

When terrorists adopt a religious belief system, their worldview becomes one of a struggle between supernatural forces of good and evil. They view themselves as living righteous life in a manner that fits with their interpretation of God's will. According to religious extremists, those who do not conform to their belief system are opposed to the one true faith. Those who live according to the accepted belief system are a chosen people, and those who do not are not chosen. These interpretations of how one should behave include elements of the social or political environment that underlies the belief system.

Extremists have a very clear sense of mission, purpose, and "righteousness". They create a worldview that sets them apart from the rest of society. Thus extremists' beliefs and terrorist behaviours are very logical from the perspective of those who accept the extremists belief system but illogical from the point of view of those who reject the system.

- (v) **Rational terrorists:** Terrorists think through their goals and options, making a cost-benefit analysis. Psychological motivation for resorting to terrorism is derived from the terrorists' personal dissatisfaction with their lives and accomplishments. A major cultural determinant of terrorism is the perception of "outsider" and anticipation of their threat to ethnic group survival (Simonsen, Clifford and Jeremy, 2000). These factors are only a few of many theoretical sources, but they illustrate the different types of motivations that shape the individual behaviours of terrorists.

Group Level

At the group level, terrorism can grow out of an environment of political activism when a group's goal is to redirect a government's or society's attention towards the grievances of an activist social movement. It can also grow out of dramatic events in the experience of a people or a nation. These two sources - social movements and dramatic events are general concepts.

(i) Social Movements: Social movements are campaigns that try either to promote a change or to preserve something that is perceived to be threatened. Movements involve mass action on behalf of a cause; they are not simply the actions of single individuals who promote their personal political beliefs. Proponents of this type of movement seek the "moral high ground" as a way to rally sympathy and support for their cause and to bring pressure on their opponents. In both of these causes, radicalized sentiment grew out of frustration with the slow pace of change and the violent reaction of some of their opponents. Boko Haram group in Nigeria is a good example of such group's patriotism

(ii) Traumatic Events: A synonym for this source of terrorism is traumatic events. They occur when an individual, a nation or an ethno-national group suffers from an event that has a traumatizing and lasting effect. At the personal level, children of victims of political violence may grow up to violently oppose their perceived oppressors. This occurs in regions of extended conflict. Presently, the children who survived or witnessed atrocities being committed against humanity by Boko Haram group are already victims of this type of behaviour in the future. Some of these children witnessed their parents being slaughtered or being tortured to death.

At the national level, nations may be victims of traumatic events, such as invasions or terrorist attacks that shape their behaviour and culture for an extended period of time. For example, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan destabilized the country dramatically leading to a breakdown in central authority, civil

war, and then the rule of Taliban regime. At the ethno-national groups, massacres, forced migrations or extended repression can affect them for generations. For instance, the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran have suffered from all these traumas, including being gassed by the Iraqis in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War (Gus Martin, 2006).

Classifications of Terrorism

Terrorism can be categorized on the basis of a number of factors which include motivation, objectives, size, constituency, and outside support. Various terrorist groups have long and short-range objectives and normally want to influence the behaviour of certain targeted groups than their immediate victims. In most cases; such attempts to influence behaviour are usually to get those in power to act in certain manner by satisfying the demands of a particular group or make them quit power. It is against this backdrop that most contemporary scholars in their writings on terrorism often want to view it from political standpoint (Frank, 2004).

Edward Mickolus (1977) in defining political terrorism divides it into four specific categories based on location and perpetrators. These are international, transnational, domestic and state terrorism. He holds that international terrorism is a violent action initiated by an individual or group controlled by a nation-state that occurs outside that state, while transnational terrorism is an action in the international arena initiated by an individual or group not controlled by a nation state. In other words, he describes domestic terrorism as a violent action by an individual or group of nationals within its own nation state while state terrorism consists of violent actions conducted by a nation state within its own borders.

Paul Wilkinson draws distinction between four types of terrorism namely: criminal, psychic, war and political terrorism. According to him, criminal terrorism is the systematic use of terror for material gain. Psychic terrorism has mystical, religious or magical ends. War terrorism on the other hand aims to paralyze the enemy, diminish his resistance and reduce his ability to fight with the ultimate purpose of destroying him. Political terrorism is seen as the systematic use of threat of violence to secure political goals.

Predicating political terrorism on revolutionary plank, Wilkinson distinguishes between three broad types of terrorism, namely, revolutionary terrorism, which aims at effecting complete revolutionary change within the political system. Sub-revolutionary terrorism is having political motive other than revolution which aims at effecting various changes in the structural-functional aspects of the particular political system. Repressive terrorism is aimed at restraining certain group, individuals or forms of behaviour deemed to be undesirable (Grant, W. 1974). Repressive terrorism relies heavily on the services of specialized agencies (secret security apparatus) whose members are trained to torture, murder, intimidate, and deceive.

Slogan cited by Juliet Lodge (1981) describes repressive terrorism as an "establishment terrorism" which he argues may be applied externally by a government against other nation states or internally to repress various forms of domestic opposition or unrest to move the populace to comply with the programmes of the state. This, in other words, is state terrorism and state terrorism according to Grant Wardlaw usually involves a bureaucracy (that is, police, armed services, intelligence agencies, secret police, immigration service, information control and the like) which in essence is the administration (either directly or indirectly) by, large number of citizens. In Nigeria, Abacha used his killer squared to intimidate the citizens.

Thornton as cited by Wardlaw views terrorism from two perspectives, namely, the enforcement terror and agitational terror. Enforcement terror to him is used by those in power who wish to suppress challenges to their authority while agitation terror describes the terrorist activities of those who wish to disrupt the existing order and ascend to political power themselves. A similar distinction is made by other scholars who divide terrorism into two kinds, namely, the regime of terror and the siege of terror. The regime of terror refers to established order while the siege of terror refers to terrorism in the service of revolutionary movements.

It is ironical that, although terrorists are engaged in "total war" with much of humanity, the prevailing attitude towards them in many countries is still one of tolerance or open support. In international relations, the tolerance and support of terrorism by some states stem from the belief that terrorist groups often work in their own national interests. Issues of morality are overshadowed by the presumption that terrorists, however inadvertently, are useful surrogates in the struggle for international power and influence. The predictable end of such narrow minded notions of this struggle has been presaged during earlier periods of human history in which global society has lost its centre of values by periods of frightful barbarism (Gus, Martin, 2006).

Support of international terrorism has increased to the extent that terrorists influence the foreign policies of host states. For example, the host states sometimes in combination with allied countries may act as advocates of the terrorist groups before the tribunal of the state system itself. Such advocacy further legitimizes terrorists as actors in world politics, extending their arena of acceptance and influence. For instance, the Government and Intelligent Agencies in Pakistan cannot convince the world that they did not know that Osama bin Laden was living in their mist even close to their military base prior to his killing by the US troops.

Patterns and Trends of Terrorism in Nigeria

No nation is free of security challenges. These challenges also vary from one country to another. Thus, Nigeria's security challenges would definitely differ from those of Egypt, USA, or Russia. For instance, in USA today, the dangers posed by weapon possession are perhaps the greatest security challenges confronting the country. Challenges to a country's security may range from low level civil disorder, large scale violence, to armed insurgency or terrorism. These threats may be directed against citizens or organs and infrastructure of the state itself. Foreign powers may also act as a threat to a country's security by either committing or sponsoring terrorism or rebellion without actually declaring war.

Nigeria with an estimated population of over 150 million is the largest country in Africa and one sixth of the black population in the world. Nigeria's polity is circumscribed by the complex nature of its domestic politics and the tense domestic environment of the nation, ranging from the high level of corruption in society to the chaotic and volatile security situation in the country. There are also widespread problems of communal and political violence in the country, all of which signified a shaky and unstable domestic polity which do not augur well for Nigeria's international image (Pogoso, 2009). Nigeria's large population and landmass, its porous borders, cultural homogeneity with her neighbours have made the country vulnerable to one form of terrorism or the other. Indeed, since 1999, the number and intensity of violent conflicts have tended to increase rather than decrease (Pogoso, 2011).

Terrorism is a concept that is fluid and subject of contestation. It is also a concept that can generate hot emotional exchanges because of differing perspectives and different understanding of its causes. One

way of provoking emotional response is to suggest that terrorism exists across Nigeria, at various times, but became more forceful after the return to civil rule in 1999. This is buttressed in the activities of ethnic militia groups that unleashed terror and attacks against the security forces particularly the Police and Police Stations (Muazu, 2011).

After years of military rule characterized by regimentation, Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999. But democracy as Asamu in Bamgbose (2013) has rightly pointed out is an ideology which sets a high premium on the basic freedom of fundamental rights of the citizens, the rule of law, right to property ownership, free flow of information and the right of choice between alternative political positions. Thus, the transition to civilian rule has created its own challenges for national security and socio-political development, as demonstrated by diverse conflicts, upheavals and anti-government agitations.

Indeed since 1999, with the opening of democratic space, various militia groups clinging to religion, ethnicity or other special interests have sprung up in Nigeria and the horror they have unleashed on the people can only be comparable to the civil war years. In addition to their terrible humanitarian toll, the activities of these groups and their conflict-prone relationship with security officials have been a constant menace to peace, security, stability and territorial integrity of Nigeria. The Nigeria State on the other hand, demonstrates through its responses that its approach is to unleash force to maintain order and to politicize even genuine agitation to favour those in power.

It is the politicization of religion and ethnicity in Nigeria that has been responsible for the formation of groups such as Odua People's Congress (OPC), Egbesu, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Bakasi Boys, Igbo Youth Congress (IYC), Igbo People's Congress (PC), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), Niger Delta Resistant Movement (NORM), Movement for the Survival of the Izon Nationality of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), the Nigerian or Yobe Taliban, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Jama'at Ahlus al-Sunnab Liddawati Wai Jihad popularly known as Boko Haram and other violence wielding groups. Indeed, political theorem has been the most consistent, if not coherent explanation of the rise and fall of militias and catastrophic terrorist groups in Nigeria (Yahaya, 2013).

From the inception of these groups, their activities have the elements of terror in them. The issue is whether the use of terror by these groups qualifies all of them to be referred to as terrorists. All these groups emerged due to the failure of governance, a complacent security regime and absence of strong culture that enables citizens to make effective demands from their rulers.

Out of these militia groups listed above, all except the Boko Haram differ in many respects from any terrorist organization. They are not involved in any religious bigotry. Instead, they sought major restructuring of the federation, focus on collective grievances and were highly selective in their destructive tendencies. The basis of their struggle is self-determination. They often used traditional symbols and cultural solidarity for grass-roots mobilization. Their sense of unity was defined to a large extent by resentment against exploitation. For instance, the Niger Delta militants were motivated by deep-seated feelings of economic injustice and political marginalization. Almost the same logic drives the Odua People's Congress (OPC); the Yorubas feel a sense of political marginalization in the deliberate frustrations of their past attempt to capture federal power, the most recent being the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election claimed to be won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola.

However, the motivations and demand of the Boko Haram group are totally different from those of other groups and can easily lead to total disintegration of any political system. From the outset, the mission of Boko Haram is to stifle western culture and democracy. In order to actualize their objective, Boko Haram has committed acts of terrorism. They have intended to advance a religious and political cause by aiming to intimidate the Nigerian government to create Sharia law and intimidate the Christian public. Acts committed by this group have not been advocacy, protest, dissent or industrial action that is not intended to cause serious harm that is physical to a person. Boko Haram members are not freedom fighters or religious fanatics.

Boko Haram meets the entire requirements for it to be defined and proscribed as a terrorist organization. Usually, the adoption of Sharia law and the creation of an Islamic government are prominent motivations for religious terrorism within the current climate.

Conclusion

It should also be noted that since the advent of terrorism as it is known today, it has assumed much notoriety and international dimension. Shaw (1997) notes that "the use of terrorism as a means to achieve political ends is not a new phenomenon but it has recently acquired a new intensity. In many cases, terrorists deliberately choose an uninvolved third party states as a means of pressing the government of the state with which it is in conflict, it is real or potential or assumed allies. With the advent of science and technology and subsequent invention of the bomb, the activities of terrorists have become more sophisticated and deadly in contemporary times (Oshanugor, 2004).

Apart from war zones in some countries of the world, the bomb as an instrument of terrorism has continued to explode in nooks and crannies of even war-free countries. There have been bombers whose identities and even missions remain unestablished. In Nigeria, from the inception of the present democratic rule in 1999, some faceless bombers had reigned supreme. Within the last five years, there has been high degree of terrorist activities, characterized by the use of bombs in several parts of the country particularly the North East.

Modern trends in terrorism are loosely organized, self-financed, international networks of terrorists, and they tend be religiously or ideologically motivated. Another manifestation of contemporary terrorism is the apparent growth : cross-national links among different terrorist organizations, which may involve combinations of military training: funding, technology transfer, or political advice. Looming over the entire issue of terrorism is the fear of proliferatic of Weapons of Mass Destruction (Raphael Perl, 2003).

Stephen Sloan (1978) lamented that terrorism may be an ancient phenomenon, but contemporary terrorism is indeed a new and frightful innovation in terms of its destructive capacity. This statement made as far back as 1978, is even more apt today.

Moreover, throughout history, Nigeria has been exposed to ethno-religious violence and political discontent and has recently seen an escalation in associated violence threatening its sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and stability through the activities of Boko Haram. Thus, it is concluded that Boko Haram is the only real terrorist group out of the militia groups that presently exist in the country or have ever existed before now and all hands must be on deck to checkmate the activities of this deadly group.

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