

Foreign Influence on the Nigerian Terror Group

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Abstract

The months of July and August 2009 recorded the unleashing of terrorist mayhem on the Northern parts of Nigeria by the Nigerian Taliban, popularly called the Boko Haram sect. The sect killed Christians and Muslims in their numbers. The fact that the sect was killing Christians and Muslims that refused to accept their brand of Islam made them a major threat to the fundamental rights of Nigerians towards freedom of worship. Since then their killing spree has progressively increased. This paper studied the place of foreign influence on the terror activities of the sect. It showed that many of the members of the sect were from neighboring states to Nigeria. While factoring hybridized research method and the theory of anarchism, it revealed that there is an international dimension to terrorism in Nigeria and some of the Boko Haram members were sent to Afghanistan to train in the authentic act of bomb-making from the parent 'kingdom' of the Taliban terrorists. Finally, the paper recommended that all and sundry in Nigerians and beyond should contribute in controlling the influence of the international environment on the destabilization of Nigerian national peace and security.

Introduction

"The ties between national and international affairs are so close that many social scientists now use the term *intermestic* to symbolize the merger of international and domestic concerns" (Rourke, 2003:4). Across all nations on the globe, the determinants of national and international affairs have become very *intermestic* in nature that groups of men and women as well as events, are increasingly influencing the drama of national and international relations. This international influence is violently faced in the new era of globalization. The actions of terrorists across different states of the globe are always dramatic and often tragic. Evans and Newnham (1997:530) showed that terrorism is "the use or threatened use of violence on a systematic basis to achieve political objectives". It is in this line that one can explain the rise of a Taliban sect in Nigeria. Today, the reality that the sect is increasingly being a strong actor in the Nigerian national life has remained a historic fact. Enders and Sandler (1999: 145-167) showed that international terrorism has become a regular occurrence. It is spreading on the global arena like wild fire.

Nigerians, especially those living in the North-Eastern part of the country would not forget the two horrible weeks of terror meted on them by the Nigerian Taliban members. From July to August, 2009; the combined team of all Nigerian security forces battled with the Boko Haram sect, herein referred to as the Nigerian Taliban. When the members of the Nigerian Taliban struck, many of the citizenry found that they were not safe in their offices, that they were not safe travelling around the country, especially the Northeastern parts, and it became crystal clear that Nigeria was not protected from the menace of global web of terrorism that has been unleashed at one time or the other by the Taliban movement in other countries of the world. The history of the sect's mayhem on the society started when they attacked a Police Station in Bauchi metropolis. Gradually, the terror actors shifted their theatre of mayhem to Maiduguri, in Borno, Yobe, Kano, Gombe and other states in the Northern Nigeria, from Adamawa to Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) Niger, Kaduna, Kogi etc.

Many people have identified the sect with the name, Nigerian Taliban. Omipidan (2009:5) wrote that Yobe State "became the first state in Nigeria where Nigerian Muslim youths publicly acknowledged that they were "Taliban" even though they were Nigerians". The Nigerian Taliban is a name, synonymous to the group called *Boko Haram*, which literary means 'western education is sin'. Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua equally acknowledged that the group was called Taliban, when he told journalists in Abuja that the only place where the violence has not been brought under control was Borno State, "where the leader of the so-called Taliban is residing" (Shobiye, 2009:2). Kukah (2010: 20) wrote that "by calling themselves the Talibans or naming their hideouts and strong holds Afghanistan, these fanatics try to create an international image for themselves". They were known to be vehemently against western education and forbid members from working in government institutions. The sect were antagonistic to Western education as the source of societal corruption, in line with the traditional Hausa believe that western education was *boko* (fake) education, while the *Islamiyya* (Islamic) schools are the 'sound' school for the masses. Kukah (2010:2) wrote that "in the mind of the Muslim, every act is either *halal*, permissible or *haram*, impermissible. So, from within this context, while *Ilimin Islamiyya* (Islamic schools) was considered *halal*, permissible; *Ilimin Boko* (Western education) was *haram*, impermissible. Against this backdrop, anyone getting Western education was therefore a sinner, carrying out an impermissible act".

Mgborh (2009:6) wrote that the Nigerian Taliban emerged in 2004, when it set up a base, dubbed

Afghanistan in Kanamma village of Yobe State, on the border with Niger Republic. On his own side, Malogo (2009:14) wrote that the Nigerian Taliban which originated in Yobe State started in 1994. Malogo reiterated that “this is not the first time; Taliban-styled Islamic militants are visiting the country with deadly violence. On January 29, 1994, an Islamic fundamentalist group that went by the name of Afil ul Sunnah Wal ja ma’ah (Yobe Taliban for short) unleashed terror on parts of Yobe State. In a 12-day reign of terror, the group led by Yusuf Ahmed, sacked police stations in the state. By the time troops from the 241 RECCE Battalion of the Nigerian Army stationed at Nguru came to dislodge the marauding militants, about 17 persons, including policemen had been killed”.

Anyanwu (2010:30) pointed out that “in five days of absolute mayhem, that began on 26th July 2009, between 2,000 and 3,000 lives were cut down and properties worth billions of naira were demolished. In Maiduguri, the Borno State capital, more than 700 people were sent to their untimely graves”. The clash between the sect and security officers remained bloody until the sect leader; Mohammed Yusuf was captured by security forces drawn from all regions of the country. Unfortunately, he was unjustly killed by the security men, without passing through the ‘blind’ doors of justice and the masses lost the first-hand evidence concerning his national and international sponsors/ allies. After their assumed conquest in 2009, the sect went underground, regrouped after some months and made a guerilla come-back in 2010. Their recent come-back has been characterized by attacking international institutions and structures like the United Nations building in Abuja (aimed at attracting more international attention to their operations), killing of *Bulamas* (community leaders) in Maiduguri, onslaught of security officials, bombing of police stations, killing of notable Muslim and Christian leaders that criticized them in one way or the other as well as other people they ordinarily wish to cut their lives short early. Their terror activities therefore bring some questions to mind. Kukah (2009:3) articulated some of them, when he asked: “have we seen the end of these crises? Which and how will they surface (again)? Has the state learnt any lessons?... Why have the Northern States become so combustible? Akinyemi has attempted to answer the question when he stated that “to say you can defeat terrorism, I’m still waiting for somebody to come up with the strategy to defeat terrorism (Akinyemi, 2012:49). As pessimistic as Professor Bolaji Akinyemi may sound to his local and international audience, one would easily submit that militarism and security-based war does not give total solution when terrorism goes into the level of suicide bombing. However, this paper intends to show that the Nigerian Taliban’s economic base, their high bomb-making technology and increased number of ‘jihad’ terrorists that worked mayhem for them, were geometrically increased due to the impact of foreign influence on the sect’s activity.

Conceptual Framework

This work is centered on the theory of anarchism. Anarchism is the doctrine that opposes established socio-political and economic structures of the society, just as the Nigerian terror group is practically opposing all the historic socio-political and economic structures of the Nigeria State. Doougherty and Pfalzgraff (1997:198) wrote that “anarchists view life as a moral drama in which the individual is arrayed against the state and all the oppressive instruments of coercion that they associate with government... as well as the institutions of private property and religion”. Horowitz (1964: 22) wrote that the anarchist, in addition to being anti-political is also anti-technological and anti-economic. The Nigerian terror sect is anti-economy because they burn-down many institutions of government that promotes the economy, as well as rob banks regularly in Borno and Adamawa States. The desire of the Nigerian Taliban leaders to Islamize the Northern part of Nigeria through the unleashing of constant terror in his theological tapes could be compared to Verloc’s statement in Joseph Conrad’s novel, *The Secret Agent*, calling on his people “to an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable- in fact mad. In fact madness alone is truly terrifying, inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasions or bribes” (Bell, 1976:6).

The Nigerian Taliban has exhibited anti-political behavior when they declared war against the government of Borno State and other surrounding states in 2009. They burnt down federal government facilities as well as economic structures in the state, as an evidence of their anti-government posture. The sect claimed responsibility for the bomb blast at the United Nation’s house on 26th August, 2011, which left twenty three people dead (*The Nation*, 2011:4; Ani & Nwanaju, 2011:7). The Nigerian Taliban has engaged in the *propaganda by deed*, which remained the preferred strategy of anarchists, nihilists and terrorists. The Nigerian Taliban, like other contemporary terrorists select at random, typical members of the society, groups or classes of the societal social strata, whom they want to terrorize (See Hyams, 1974; Wilkinson, 1974; & Bell, 1977:476-488). The selective killing of police men, army, immigration, prison officers, and traditional rulers as well as any identified critic of their action gives credence to the fact that they behave like their mainstream terror networks on the globe. When one realizes that Boko Haram had massacred people during months of Ramadan in 2010 (Nwanaju, 2010) and during the period of *hajj*, as well as during the celebration of the Eid el-Kabir (*Sallah*) in 2011, it becomes obvious that it is rather killing the true meaning of pure Islam (Nwanaju, 2012:38).

Boko Haram, the Nigerian Terror Group: Background Note on its International Dimension

The fact that the Boko Haram sect has gone international remains an international relations reality. “Boko Haram has been associated with segregate ideology and violence to humanity because of its philosophy of hate and discrimination against other cultures that are basically non-Islamic” (Nwanaju, 2012:35). “This group is known by various names such as Taliban because of their identification with and adoption of Afghan Taliban way of life” (Fwatshak, 2012: 153). The Boko Haram crisis has raised questions on the presence of al Qaeda network (AQN) in Nigeria. The sect’s leader, Mohammed Yusuf, in 2006 was charged with receiving money from al Qaeda linked organization in Sudan through *Alhaji* (the title for a man that has gone to Mecca) Bello Damagun to recruit young men to his organization (BBC, 2009). Although the Nigerian government brought the charges against Mohammed Yusuf and Bello Damagun, the case was never tried in a court. The suspicion of al Qaeda connection with Boko Haram was fuelled by the presence of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operating across the Sahara Desert in Mauritania, Morocco, Mali and Niger” (Okereke, 2012:184). “*The Guardian* of London just revealed that there was some form of regular communication between Osama bin Laden and Nigeria’s Islamic Boko Haram terrorist group. The newspaper claimed that the correspondences are found among the documents recovered from the Pakistani residence of the former head of al Qaeda network” (Ebiem 2012:32).

Mallam Aliyu Umar, an Arewa Chieftain and Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) National Legal Adviser has stated that “the Boko Haram factor has since been hijacked by foreign desperate neo-colonial forces and their hired domestic agents who are determined to ensure the breakup of Nigeria by the year 2015 as the Americans have shamelessly predicted” (Akhaine, 2012: 2). While some apologists have argued that the neo-colonial hands of some foreign imperialists are behind the terror drums in Nigeria, others are quick to point out that the numerous failures and challenges inherent in the Nigerian nation building process have given birth to progressive terrorism, while maintaining it over time. However, the reality of the present time should convince the government as well as the global citizenry that Boko Haram as well as its sponsors in Nigeria and beyond are part of the global community that is striving to live in an increasingly united world where “boundaries that once existed between people are steadily dissolving” (Pagden, 2009:ix).

Foreign Influence on the Nigerian Taliban

International terrorism deals with the posture assumed by terrorists to present terror on foreign individuals, governments and foreign institutions. It is the demonstration of terror within and across a sovereign state, with the goal of reaching foreign concession and attaining specific goals. Such terror could be organized within a country, it could be unleashed against neighboring state(s) and it could be targeted at the gathering or institutions of multinational states. Terrorism has been progressively internationalized due to the rise of global technology and media. There is a growing interconnectedness among the terrorist groups of heterogeneous ethno-political and geographic locations in the global village. Such heterogeneous terrorists of different states tend to cooperate with terrorists who share relatively similar cause of action or use similar operational strategy. History has shown reliable evidence amongst terrorists in the process of training, procurement of arms and the documentation of passports, visas, identity cards, identification air lines; terrorist traveling routes and targets. This does not in any way affect the other concrete supportive contact between terrorist groups (Lacqueur, 1977:112-115).

When Sterling (1981) wrote her book, *The Terror Network*, she attempted to link extensive terrorist activity on the globe to Soviet Union. The work asserted that Soviet Union was fully involved in the training, financing and provision of arms, either directly or indirectly through proxy states like Libya, North Korea and Cuba. There has been increasing opinions which vary from that of Sterling. Such opinion sees the terror networks in the globe as multilaterally projected, instead of the unilateral interpretation of Sterling. This is sequel to the multi-dimensional forms of international terrorism. The emerging trend is that some state and non-state actors in the global village have in one way or the other enhanced the terror networks and their acts of international terrorism. The growth of foreign influence on terrorism is due to the fact that they could be used to achieve certain ends. Jenkins (1975:31) wrote that “terrorists could be employed to provoke international incidents, create alarm in an adversary’s country and compel it to divert valuable resources to protect itself, destroy its morale and carry out specific forms of sabotage. Governments could employ existing terrorist groups to attack their opponents or they could create their own terrorists. Terrorism only requires a small investment; certainly far less than what it costs to wage conventional war”

While writing on the genesis of foreign support to terrorism in Nigeria, Odey (2000:25-26) stated that “on April 23, 1985 Major-General Tunde Idiagbon, the then Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, was delivering his quarterly address to media executives. In the address, he drew the nation’s attention to the existence of a clandestine religious group believed to be armed with Iranian and Lebanese backing, whose objective was to corrupt the Nigerian Islamic culture by brainwashing as many people as they could lay their

grips on, with fundamentalist and revolutionary tenets to disrupt Nigerian religious values, modes of worship, peace and stability”. Furthermore, while writing on the Kano group of the Nigerian Taliban, Mgborh (2009:7) documented that “members of the sect are from Maiduguri, Kano, Chad... to serve as reinforcement in Wudil.” The evidence of foreign elements in the Nigerian Taliban was extended when the Nigerian Police, Plateau State Command arrested eighteen members of the Nigerian Taliban in Jos in 2009. The Plateau State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Gregory Anyangting said that the “police also arrested 16 people in one house with one Ghananian, a Nigerian and other youths from Funtua, Katsina State” (Agboola, 2009:6). Malogo (2009:13) documented that it was believed that Yusuf Mohammed has strong backing from outside countries like Lebanon and Sudan”. “Many wealthy Arab States and individuals continue to sponsor men and women with different ideological convictions. This is why at times, Nigeria tends to become a battle ground for proxies inter and intra sect wars within Islam and that has made the terror preachers to pose a serious threat to internal harmony even within Islam. These sponsoring countries, especially Iran, Libya and Saudi Arabia therefore import their ideological bitterness through their countries into Nigeria” (Kukah, 2010: 21).

However, Omipidan (2009:5) showed that Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf terror network was been sponsored to Mauritania for training. Omipidan (2009:5) presented it thus, that “he has links with Bello Damagu, the man allegedly accused of ferrying young Muslim lads to Mauritania for the purpose of receiving combat training in terrorism.” Bruce Malogo, while comparing the foreign influence on Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf and Yusuf Ahmed, the leader of the Nigerian Taliban in 2004; wrote that “like the present Yusuf Mohammed-led Boko Haram Sect, the 2004 Yusuf Ahmed group also was suspected to have links with the Islamic countries. When the heat was too much for him during the Yobe onslaught, he was said to have ran to Saudi Arabia. Born of Nigerian parents, he was reportedly raised in Saudi kingdom where he was schooled in Taliban principles and philosophy. There are speculations that Yusuf Mohammed may have had something to do with Ahmed. Although they may not have had the same mission, their vision is one and the same; the imposition of the rabid brand of Islamic principles as propagated and practiced by the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban groups” (Malogo, 2009:14).

Nwankwo (2009:21) stated that the Nigerian Taliban is “purportedly linked with Osama Bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda terrorist group.” Again, according to some security sources, some of the members of the group were from Tchad and Niger Republic, both states bordering Borno and Yobe States respectively, (*The Spectator*, 2009:15). It is noteworthy that the then assistant leader of the Nigerian Taliban was not a Nigerian. Kilete (2009:7) wrote that “between February and April, 2009, Yusufs’ second in command named Kilakam, a Nigerian, was on two occasions arrested and repatriated to his country”. However, Fafowora (2009:48) presented his argument over the foreign influence on the Nigerian Taliban thus:

It was claimed by the security agencies that Boko Haram was linked to the Taliban in both Pakistan and Afghanistan where the Western powers, led by the United States, are locking in a bloody conflict with the extremist Islamic groups. It may seem farfetched but the possible connection between Boko Haram and the Taliban cannot be ruled out completely. The Sect may have also been influenced by images seen on the global media of the fighting in Pakistan and Afghanistan and drew their own conclusions, that it is an onslaught by the Western powers on Islam. This may not be the case but these images represent the reality to the extremist Islamic sects now been radicalized. In any case, Nigeria is a soft state that is highly vulnerable, not only to foreign ideas but one in which the security forces do not have the capability to deal decisive with local and foreign threats to its security.

Nwankwo (2009:20) wrote that Col. Ben Ahanotu, the Commander of Operation Flush II, in charge of joint military operation in Borno State, pointed out that the pieces of papers and personal items discovered on the bodies of the corpses showed that many of them are not Nigerians. “Many appear to come from the neighboring countries of Chad and Niger”. Musa (2009:5) wrote that Borno State Controller of Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Alhaji Mohammed Sambo Gwandu has “noted that before the Boko Haram religious crisis, the NIS intercepted and arrested three aliens with arms and ammunition at the borders with Niger Republic and Chad”. History has shown that Chadians were among the actors in the Maitasine terror attacks in Nigeria (Ani, 2012B :157).

The most singular historic evidence of the foreign influence on the Nigerian Taliban sect came when Abdulrasheed Abubakar confessed that Mohammed Yusuf sent him to Afghanistan for proper training in the terror technology of bomb making. He was motivated by the sect leaders’ promise of the sum of N5.5 million upon his return (Olugbode, 2009:1). Musa (2009) documented that “according to a BBC report, one of the sect members said he had been paid \$5,000 (£ 3,000) to do the training and was promised \$30,000 on his return”. Abdulrasheed Abubakar and his colleague were given the phone number of their trainee to ensure adequate

contact and communication both with the foreign facilitators of the training and himself in Nigeria. He confessed that:

The sect leader took me to the Abuja airport from Maiduguri in a Toyota sienna bus. I traveled with another man who identified himself as Ali Mohammed and underwent three-months training in Afghanistan...He said he took off from Nigeria to Afghanistan through South Africa, claiming that all the traveling documents were retrieved from him as soon as he came back from the trip in late July. He did not name the airline which he boarded from Nigeria to South Africa before connecting to Afghanistan. Narrating his journey, Abubakar said: "Mohammed Yusuf gave the two of us who went for the training some telephone numbers of our trainers. I can't recollect the town or place where the training took place because they covered our faces and led us to a house where we spent about three months" he explained (Olugbode, 2009:1-4).

Conclusion

This paper documented the foreign influence on the Nigerian terror group and how they have contributed as foot soldiers and members of the sect's leadership class. However, the influence of the members of the sect from other countries of the world remains the biggest security threat to the eradication of this terrorist group that has grown and flourished in Nigeria through their strategic, financial, human resource and technological assistance. It is therefore imperative that all peace loving Nigerians should contribute their quota and work collectively together to check the place of foreign influence in the destabilization of Nigerian national peace and security.

It is noteworthy that many of the members of the sect were not Nigerians. This made the Borno State Controller of Nigeria Immigration Service, Alhaji Mohammed Sambo Gwandu to state that the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) is "free of blame" over the alleged influx of the Nigerian Taliban by sect members from the neighboring Niger Republic, Chad and Cameroun because "most of the arrested suspects of the religious sect were Nigerian citizens" (Musa 2009:5). However, that most of them were not Nigerians did not deny the fact that their terror attack had much influence on the international environment. Rourke (2003:351) has shown that the changes in the world have expanded the number of terrorist groups that are organized to operate internationally. Terrorism is increasingly being globalized. It must also be said that this unsettling reality has long been felt more acutely in other parts of the world that for much longer, have been subject to or the scene of more frequent acts of international terrorism (Heymann, 2002: 24-38). The implication is that no matter how states and other actors in national and international relations wants to perceive it, every state is seated on the stage of global theatre, no matter how remote any action that threatens national peace and security in a country is, it would easily develop a multiplier effect on one nation or another. The world is stuck at each other in the issue of security threat and the way out of the crisis.

President Goodluck Jonathan has continuously called for foreign support in the war against the sect. He told a Joint News Conference with the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel in Berlin that Nigeria wants their support in the "areas of training, manpower and modern equipments. You need superior technology to fight terrorists and we think Germany and others can help us much'... In her response, Merkel said Germany stood ready to provide logistical and other support in the fight against Boko Haram. She also urged Jonathan to provide better business climate in Nigeria" (Anu, 2012:1). Similarly, the consistent call by the Nigerian Government on her border-neighbors to join her in checking the Boko Haram sect, "which receive fillip from the porous nature of the Nigerian border with their neighbors" (Ani, 2012:209), paid-off recently. On 30th April, Chad called on the six-nation members of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to set up a joint force tasked with containing the Nigerian Boko Haram sect. The appeal by the Chadian President, Idris Derby Itno at the opening of the regional grouping's summit in Libreville state that "I am demanding the creation of a Joint Deterrence Force. We have to make this decision here today. Our basin is exposed to insecurity because of the permanent threat posed by Boko Haram. Now is the time for action. We cannot save Lake Chad without eradicating this Boko Haram sect", Derby said (*Daily Sun*, 2012:13). Central African Republic (CAR) President, Francois Bozize concurred that "joint effort is needed to tackle insecurity in the region" and offered to contribute troops to the proposed force (*Daily Sun*, 2012:13).

This work therefore recommends this form of trans-national anti-terror network as something that needs to be progressively developed in the war against terrorism because terrorism anywhere today would lead to terrorism in other places tomorrow. There is need for increased national, bilateral, multi-lateral and other forms of international co-operation by both governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as inter-governmental agencies in the war against the Nigerian terror group and other terrorist networks in the world at large. Ani (2009:85) has re-emphasized that "the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Nigerian Defence

Academy, the National War College and the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs must understudy” the foreign terror dimension and come up with strategies of reducing ‘terror immigrant forces’, prevent ‘terror exportation’, promoting ‘terror suppression’ as well as ‘terror containment’, and ultimately pursue ‘terror elimination’ in our society.

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