

Sunnah Approaches to Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria

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Abstract

One of the greatest security challenges that can face any society is terrorism. Terrorist attacks can have devastating effects on the development and progress of a country that experience them. The innocent citizens are victims while public and private facilities become targets. Once a country experiences security challenges, its economy will be drastically affected and its image will be tarnished because foreigners will be less willing to invest in the economy of such a country and it will be avoided as it will be tagged as a red zone for tourism. Combating terrorism creates a setback because the country will lose both human and capital resources in the course. The purpose of this study is to examine the various theories of terrorism in relationship with the nefarious activities of various terrorist groups in Nigeria and factors that led to their emergence. The study focuses on how the Sunnah approaches can be applied to proffer solution to curb the menace of these terrorist groups.

Keywords: Sunnah, Approaches, Terrorism, Counterterrorism, Nigeria

1. Introduction

It is often observed that the term “terrorism” is difficult to pin down to a particular definition because of the assertion that “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter. However, Waziri (2017) conceptualizes the definition of terrorism based on the operation adopted by various terrorist groups in Nigeria as;

“The use of politically motivated violence by clandestine groups that are aggrieved with the state on political, ideological, or religious differences with intent to subdue the state or compromise the unity of the Nigerian federation (Waziri, 2017;42).”

It is incontestable that Nigeria has been bedeviled by security challenges as a result of nefarious activities of various terrorist groups since the inception of democracy in Nigeria. The Obasanjo Administration contended with the Niger Delta militancy and kidnapping. Similarly, the Yaradua and Jonathan administrations tackled insurgency in addition to the Niger Delta militancy and kidnapping. The situation becomes compounded as the Buhari Administration is currently battling with insurgency, Fulani herdsmen, banditry and kidnapping. The northern part of the country is the worst affected because of the cases of students being kidnapped from their schools and the attacks on the rural areas keep increasing unabated. This is justifiable by the statement made by Tanko Yunusa, former presidential candidate of the National Conscience Party (NCP) who averred that north suffers in silence under Buhari Administration (Thomas, 2021). It is worrisome to see bandits occasionally in their hundreds moving freely in the streets of some northern states on motorbikes brandishing A-K 47s without being challenged by security agents.

Apparently, Nigeria is socially, educationally, and economically affected by this damning insecurity. For instance, people in rural areas whose major occupation is farming currently take refuge in the internally displaced people’s camps. It is going to be very difficult for parents to send their children to school when their security is not guaranteed. Similarly, it will require a greater effort to convince the children, who experienced a psychological trauma in the den of kidnappers, to go back to schools. The handwriting on the wall shows that the government is helpless. Bello Masari, governor of Kastina State and Samuel Ortom of Benue State have consistently advocated self-defense. In addition to this was the organization of prayers

seeking divine intervention over security issues (Nigerian Tribune, 2021). The seeming failure of the national security agents is an impetus for creating civilian security personnel called *Amotekun* sponsored by the South-West governors as a proactive measure in tackling insecurity in the South-West (Badmus, 2021).

The worsening security situation currently experienced by the Buhari-led administration has been attributed to different reasons by various people. However, this study will examine the true and exact reasons for the current situation of security challenges that have bedeviled Nigeria.

2. Examining Various Theories on Terrorism and Counterterrorism

To understand the ideology and agitation of terrorists there is a need to examine the available theories propounded by experts in that regard. Waziri (2017) listed 14 different theories propounded by various scholars from several perspectives. The following theories are relevant to the activities of Niger-Delta Militancy, Boko Haram insurgency and Fulani herdsmen and bandits menace because they capture their ideologies and agitations.

a. Relative Deprivation Theory of Terrorism

This theory looks at terrorism as a product of human psychology because it believes that people will revolt as a result of frustration when one group of people in the same society is treated better than another.

b. Oppression and Humiliation Theory of Terrorism

This theory states that in a society where people suffer oppression and humiliation from the hand of government without any just cause, the propensity is very high that such oppressed and humiliated people will engage in terrorist acts to prevent or limit the oppression.

c. Conspiracy Theory of Terrorism

This theory assumes that political elites may have a hand in fueling political unrest in the society for the purpose of achieving their own political goals.

d. Psychopathological Theory of Terrorism

This is a psychiatric theory of terrorism because it believes that the act of violence carried out by terrorists results from the fact that they suffer from mental disorder.

In addition, the environment is considered as a motivational factor that breeds terrorism. An environment in which some people feel aggrieved because of artificial deprivation of social amenities and abject poverty is an environment which is volatile and may give rise to acts of terrorism. Based on this fact, Forest, Olatoke and Olatunba cited in Owolabi and Ojedokun (2017), submitted that the prevalence of grievances due to economic deprivation is one of major factors for the growth of terrorism in Nigeria. So, they attributed the Niger-Delta militancy to environmental degradation. However, the act of militancy would have been foiled or neutralized had there been corresponding compensation or provision of adequate social amenities in the region.

3. Niger-Delta Militancy and its Effects on Nigerian Economy and the loss of lives

The core Niger-Delta region covers three states, namely Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers. Unarguably, the nation's economy largely depends on oil and these three states are known to be the largest producers of oil in Nigeria. The major occupation of the people of Niger-Delta is farming and fishing but they were deprived of their traditional occupations due to the excavation of crude oil by transnational oil companies. Despite the environmental hazard suffered by the people of the Niger-Delta, their hue and cry were not listened to by the successive governments. The frustration of the people of the Niger-Delta eventually resulted in both organized and unorganized protests. In the 1980s, three different protests were carried out mainly by women

agitating against environmental degradation because in the region women were known to be active participants in agriculture. The first protest was carried out by Oghafe women in 1984, followed by Odidi women in 1985 and Ekpan women in 1986 (Aworawo, 2017).

Later, in the 1990s, the protests turned out to be organized ones which were more violent than those witnessed in the previous decade because they were championed by various groups of armed men. The tactics of terrorism were demonstrated by severely damaging oil facilities, kidnapping foreigners, and killing security agents. The first group to be known popularly was the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MASOP) founded by Kanule Saro-Wiwa in August 1990 (Aworawo, 2017).

Unfortunately, the leader of MASOP was sentenced to death by General Sanni Abacha's administration on the allegation of killing elderly Ogoni people. However, rather than subduing the agitation over the environmental degradation in the Niger-Delta Region, more agitators sprang up continuing to try to grasp the oil companies and the federal government by the jugular vein. The Ijaw Youth Council (IJC), Niger-Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Asari Dokubo, Niger Delta Vigilant, (NDVF) led by Atake Tom, the Movement of the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND) led by Tompolo among others (Aworawo, 2017) unleashed different degrees of terrorist acts which made the region a volatile area and almost paralyzed the nation's economy (Aworawo, 2017).

The available statistics show that Nigeria experiences acute shortage in the oil production due to the terrorist attacks on the oil installation. Reduction in the production of oil will have adverse effects on the nation's economy due to the fact that oil is the main source of the nation's economy. In this case, Nigeria lost a substantial amount of money because of the activities of Niger-Delta activists.

The ripple effects of this included the mass lay-off of workers by the oil companies which increased the poverty level in the region. In September 2007, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) sacked 3,500 workers. Similarly, 4,000 workers were also retrenched in 2008 in a bid to reduce operational costs (Abomaye, Emmanuel & Iyerikabo, 2018).

Nigeria not only lost resources to Niger-Delta militancy rather thousands of lives were lost which involved the militants, innocent citizens, and security agents. The statistics show that about 6,000 persons were killed and 2,000 taken for hostages, at an average of 1,000 lives per year during this period (Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, 2003). In the same vein, 11 soldiers lost their lives as a result of explosions at two stations belonging to the Agip gas company located in Forcados, while more than 100 people were killed during the attack carried out on the Bonga oil field by MEND on the 17th July, 2008 (Anayachukwu, 2008).

These various reports confirm that the Niger-Delta terrorist's attacks have inflicted untold hardship on the human and capital resources which is inimical to the growth of the nation's economy. Insecurity is antithetical to investment because it drives away foreign investors while the local ones will have to relocate to where the security of property and life is guaranteed.

4. Boko Haram Insurgency and Its Social and Economic Effects on Nigeria

The colossal loss of human and capital resources because of activities in the Niger-Delta region was a great disturbance to the government. The federal government under the administration of the late president Musa Yar'adua strategized by granting amnesty to the Niger-Delta militants so that they would sheathe their swords. While the strategy started yielding the desired results, the Boko Haram insurgency broke out in the northeast of Nigeria. Boko Haram, in Hausa language, means that western education is forbidden. The rationale behind this name is that the group was embittered by the prevalence of economic imbalances between the people in the government and the ordinary citizens which created abject poverty in the midst of plenty. The group then concluded that their state of hopelessness was caused by the government who imposed western education on them and that such education should be replaced with something more suitable. They envisaged that *Shari'ah* law would be a better alternative to democracy because it would be transparent and just (Pham, 2012).

It might be difficult to establish who was the founder of Boko Haram insurgency because different researchers have provided conflicting accounts in this regard. However, one assertion that is likely to be acceptable is that Muhammad Yusuf became the leader in 1997 after the departure of Lawan Abubakar for further studies in Saudi Arabia (Omale, 2017). Unarguably, the name Boko Haram was popularized by Muhammad Yusuf who indoctrinated his followers with his own ideology. Aworawo (2017) and Omale (2017) explained that Muhammad Yusuf is alleged to have radicalized his followers through his sermons and to have disturbed peace and order and this led to his arrests in 1998 and 2005. In 2009, the group ran amok by burning down police stations and government offices in Maiduguri in retaliation for the police clampdown on some of their members for their failure to comply with the order of wearing helmets. Unfortunately, Muhammad Yusuf was arrested and killed in the custody of the police (Cook, 2018). Since then, the North-East has become a gory scene for nefarious activities by the group.

Boko Haram unleashed its terror attacks through abduction, wanton killings of innocent citizens and bombing of schools, mosques and churches which clearly refuted their claim to be Muslims. The nation was gripped with panic when 276 Chibok school girls were abducted from their dormitory on 14th April, 2014. Subsequently, cases of abduction have been going on unabated and the main target are young boys, women, and girls. According to the United Nations Human Right Commission, young boys were radicalized and enlisted into fighting forces while young girls were sexually abused and forced into marriage with members of Boko Haram. It was reported that no fewer than 20,000 civilians, including an undetermined number of women and children, have been killed by Boko Haram since 2009. They barbarically murdered civilians by amputating their limbs, beheading, or drowning them (United Nations, 2015).

The education authorities reported that 338 schools had been damaged or destroyed between 2012 and 2014 in the States of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe. This was buttressed by the statement made by the National President of Nigerian Union of Teachers, Michael Olukoya, during the celebration of teachers' day on the 5th October, 2015 that 600 teachers had lost their lives in the hand of Boko Haram insurgents (Nneka, 2015). It is to be noted that serial attacks on the school facilities scared away students from going to schools and thereby exacerbated the case of out of school children already existing in the northeast.

Continued Boko Haram attacks caused various degrees of health issues physically and psychologically. Those who survived the detonation of bombs may have to live the rest of their lives as physically disabled persons, while others will contend with the psychological trauma inflicted upon them by witnessing horrendous scenes perpetrated by Boko Haram insurgents. Poor sanitary of the environment led to the outbreak of communicable diseases. The condition was aggravated by inadequate health facilities and medical personnel. It was reported that on the 16th September, 2015 there was a cholera outbreak in various camps of internally displaced persons in Borno state where 172 people were affected and 16 people lost their lives (Nneka, 2015).

5. The Menace of Fulani Herdsmen and Bandits to the Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria

When President Muhammad Buhari took over the mantle of leadership on May 29th, 2015, the hope of every Nigerian was that the security challenges faced by the country would become a thing of the past; he was, after all, a former military officer, coupled with the campaign promises he had made. Unfortunately, their hopes were dashed when the security challenges became exacerbated rather than being abated as the menace of Fulani herdsmen and bandits added to the existing ones.

Historically, the Fulani herdsmen were reputed to be peace-loving and harmless people. Their major occupation is the rearing of cattle, and this gives them a nomadic rather than a sedentary lifestyle. Although skirmishes did break out between them and farmers from time to time these were customarily settled amicably by their host community. However, in recent times the Fulani herdsmen have been armed with sophisticated weapons and some have become militia, terrorizing, kidnapping and maiming innocent and law-abiding citizens. In an empirical study carried out by Ajibefun (2018), it was revealed that among the

terror acts perpetrated by Fulani herdsmen were killing, raping, kidnapping for ransom and destruction of properties. The peculiarity of the nefarious activities of Fulani herdsmen is that they cut across six geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

While the concerted effort was ongoing to contain the menace of Fulani herdsmen, Nigeria was hit by another wave of security threats which took the form of banditry, especially in the northwest. Banditry has been viewed by different people from different angles. One comprehensive approach is the perspective of Shalangwa (20), who describes banditry "... as the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offence or defense, especially in semi-organised groups for the purpose of overpowering the victim and obtaining loot or achieving some political goals." States like Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Niger, Kastina, and Kaduna have become infamous for banditry activities. The bandits engaged in cattle rustling, maiming of innocent citizens, raping, kidnapping, and torching of houses which led to the destruction of valuable items. It was reported that between 2018 and 2019, no fewer than 3,300 people have lost their lives in the six states from the northwest while over 160,000 people have been displaced (Rosenji and Adeniyi, 2021).

A critical assessment of all these terror acts perpetrated by each group of these various terrorist organizations clearly shows that each one of them is a product of one or two theories of terrorism mentioned above.

6. The Sunnah Approach to Counterterrorism

Good understanding of various theories of terrorism indicates that terrorism is a product of injustice. It must be emphasized that injustices perpetrated by the government or people in positions of authority have ripple effects on the society. In view of this, injustice is vehemently condemned by the Sunnah and thereby puts in place three approaches as mechanism for suppressing it, which are discouraging and preventing injustice and always upholding justice.

6.1. The Sunnah Approach to Discouraging Injustice

Zulmu is an Arabic word which is translated as injustice. The Prophet (SAW) had employed different methods to discourage the act of injustice. One day, the Prophet (SAW) addressed his companions telling them that they should assist their brothers should one of them commit injustice or suffers from an injustice. The statement of the Prophet (SAW) seemed confusing to some companions. For proper clarification, they asked the Prophet (SAW) that, assisting our brother whom injustice was committed against is understood but how to assist him when he is the one committing injustice is what is unclear? The Prophet (SAW) replied to them that they should caution the person involved (Al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 6952). The obvious reason for this is that people who suffered the act of injustice would eventually react violently if the act of injustice continues without being redressed. Based on this reason the perpetrator of injustice must be cautioned to save the society from the backlash of injustice.

In one of the Hadiths Qudsi, the Prophet (SAW) informed his companions about the gravity of injustice that Allah informed him that He, Allah has made injustice forbidden for Himself, therefore you must not perpetrate injustice to one another (Muslim, Hadith no. 2577). To make people refrain from injustice completely, the Prophet (SAW) gives a stern warning against the repercussion of the curse of the oppressed because, nothing can prevent it from coming to pass (Al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 1496). The oppressed usually experience psychological trauma and in this condition the only weapon that person has available is curse. This will be continued days and nights with assurance that the curse will overtake the oppressor.

Furthermore, he equally promised that the unjust people no matter how long they have been perpetrating acts of injustice will never escape the punishment of Allah (Al-Bukhari, Hadith no.4686). The certainty of this punishment caused the Prophet (SAW) to quote the following verse of Qur'an; "And thus is the seizure

of your Lord when He seizes the cities while they are committing wrong. Indeed, His seizure is painful and severe (Q11:102).”

Defending and protecting the rights of individuals against injustice in society is the responsibility of rulers and judges. However, the injustices that they might perpetrate would be worse than the injustices perpetrated by individuals because theirs will also damage the fabric of society, and this is what brings about terrorism. In this regard, the Prophet (SAW) declared that those responsible will never have access to his intercession on the Day of Resurrection (At-Tabarani, Hadith no.8079)

The significance of abhorring injustice can be understood from the remarks made by the Prophet (SAW) about the Al-Fudūl Confederacy that was held by the Quraysh in the house of Abdullah son of Jad‘ān At-Taymi before the prophethood. The main objective of this confederacy was to suppress injustice and protect the rights of the weak and the poor. The Prophet (SAW) was passionate about it to the extent that it remained evergreen in his memory, as the following remarks suggest:

“I witnessed a confederacy in a house of Abdullah son of Jad‘ān At-Taymi. It was more appealing to me than herds of cattle. Even now in the period of Islam, I would respond positively to attending such a meeting if I were invited (Al-Mubarakpuri, 2011:103).”

6.2. Preventing Injustice as the Sunnah Approach to Counterterrorism

Another method applied by the Prophet (SAW) in tackling injustice, which can be a harbinger for the act of terror, is *al-amru bil-ma‘ruf wa nahyu ‘anil-munkar* which connotes enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. The Prophet (SAW) advises the Muslims that they should be enjoining people to do what is right and forbidding them from doing what is wrong. Failure to do this has severe consequences such that Allah will impose a callous leader over them, and the prayers of righteous people will not avail anything (At-Tirmidh, no.2169). This advice from the Prophet (SAW) indicates that preventing injustice is the responsibility of everybody in the society. People should not be quiet when some people are treading on the wrong path. Being indifferent will encourage the people to continue along that wrong path and eventually it would become the societal norm.

The Prophet (SAW) was not comfortable with keeping quiet when wrongdoing was perpetrated in the society. In view of this, he gave three steps to be taken when such occasion arises. The first is using the hand to prevent it, either through writing or by taking necessary action against the person involved. In case individuals lack the capacity to prevent the wrong with their hands because the person involved is in a position of authority, then people must speak against it in a polite manner. If the second step seems to be difficult to do, the last step to be taken is to be quiet. Keeping quiet is not so encouraged by the Prophet (SAW) that is why he refers to it as weak faith (Muslim, Hadith no. 49). No matter the situation, the Prophet (SAW) wants the truth to be said when wrongdoing is committed. Based on this, he considered saying the truth to the face of a tyrant ruler as the best jihad (At-Tirmidh, Hadith no. 2174 and Abu Dāwūd, Hadith no. 4344).

For proper understanding of significance of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, the Prophet (SAW) gave an interesting illustration of people who were travelling by the sea. The people in the lower part of the ship had to go up whenever they wanted to drink water. Later, they decided to drill a hole in the lower part of the ship so that they could get water directly from the sea instead of bothering the people who were in the upper part of the ship. Their co-travellers disagreed with their plan, knowing fully well that their action could lead to a shipwreck. The Prophet (SAW) remarked that assuming their co-travelers were indifferent to their action, the consequences would have been disastrous. (Al-Bukhari, Hadith no.2493)

6.3. Upholding Justice as Sunnah Approach to Counterterrorism

Upholding justice in the society is an effective antidote in preventing terrorism. Justice brings peace and harmony, and it prevents chaos and uprising. Al-‘Uthaymin (2010) opined that justice is mandatory in everything. However, in the case of people in the position of authority it is even more mandatory because their failure to uphold justice will lead to the breakdown of law and order. In view of this, the Prophet (SAW) demonstrated it in statements and in actions. The Prophet (SAW) mentioned that seven people will be shaded by Allah on the Day of Resurrection when there shall be no a shade except His shade. The person that tops the list is a just leader (Al-Bukhāri, Hadith no. 1423).

During the time of the Prophet (SAW) a Quraysh woman called Al-Makhazūmiyyah was convicted of theft. The companions wanted the punishment to be waived for her, perhaps because of her family background. Consequently, they pleaded with the Prophet (SAW) to temper justice with mercy over her case. The countenance of the Prophet (SAW) changed immediately and harangued them. He remarked that some people in the past erred on the basis that when the common people committed a crime, they punished them but when illustrious people committed the same crime, they ignored it. If my daughter Fātimah is convicted of theft, I will cut off her hand (Al-Bukhāri, Hadith no. 6788).

The abovementioned scenario justifies the concern that the Prophet (SAW) had for upholding justice because of his knowledge that injustice is a great destroyer of peace in the society. Those who are denied justice might recourse to violence to get it.

7. Conclusion

An attempt was made to examine the various theories on terrorism, and it was suggested that the act of terrorism stems from injustices that people have suffered over a period of time. It is not news that Nigeria is combating various forms of terrorist attacks nearly from all the six geo-political zones ranging from Niger Delta militancy, deadly Boko-Haram, Fulani herdsmen and banditry attacks. These various terror attacks have devastating effects on both human and capital resources. Thousands of lives have been lost while properties worth billions of naira¹ have been destroyed. Children have been denied access to education because they have become targets for kidnapping. Moreover, schools have come under serious attacks and many teachers have also lost their lives. The farmers cannot work on their farms because of fear of attack from the bandits and Fulani herdsmen. This brings untold hardship to citizens because it causes the prices of food commodities to increase steeply. Fighting against terrorists has cost the government billions of dollars yet the terror attacks still rare its ugly head.

It is argued that the Sunnah approach to counterterrorism is an effective way of fighting terrorism. The Prophet (SAW) believed in preventing any possible act that can lead to terrorism. He discouraged any form of injustice by seriously warning against it. He enjoined doing what is right and forbade what is wrong, which is the simplest form of preventing injustice if every member of society can follow it. He equally advocated upholding justice irrespective of the status of individuals. Based on this, rather than fighting terrorism, it is more advisable to block all avenues that can lead to the emergence of terrorism. It can be concluded that some countries in the world today enjoy a peaceful atmosphere due to the prevalence of justice in their society.

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¹ 1\$US = 459.3 Nigerian naira.

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