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**Website- [www.aarf.asia](http://www.aarf.asia), Email : [editoraarf@gmail.com](mailto:editoraarf@gmail.com)**

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## **COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF THE**

### **BOKO HARAM**

**By**

**Bashir Omolaja Bolarinwa, Tunde Oseni (Ph.D) and Sarumi Fausat Remilekun (Ph.D)**

**Lead City University, Ibadan**

**Email: [bolarinwaquazeem8@gmail.com](mailto:bolarinwaquazeem8@gmail.com)**

### **ABSTRACT**

With the recent challenges of terrorism in Nigeria and the formation of different terrorist groups, insurgency in the country has increased and made it one of the most terrorized countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This research paper examined the effects of the different strategies applied in the attempt to fight terrorism and how these strategies have affected the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The body of this study gives clear insight into the origination of terrorist groups in Nigeria, and their different strategies of operation, the effects on persons in the affected areas and the outcome of the effect on Nigerian politics and economy, as well as the operations of counter-terrorist strategies. The basic qualitative design was used to understand the implications of how the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist organization affected the people of the affected region. Critical theory and resourced dependency theory were applied, and data were obtained through face-to-face and telephone interviews with 15 stakeholders. Recommendations are made to enable counter-terrorist agencies in developing and applying additional and effective workable strategies in their fight against terrorism in Nigeria. Policies were also recommended that can

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discourage terrorism initiations and centre the focus of the youth towards building the nation. The economy and diverse social problems were also identified as crucial sources of intractable terrorism acts in Nigeria. The penetration of poverty into the minds of youth people as the primary cause of terrorism in Nigeria shows us that fighting poverty is a sure way to prevent terrorism. It is therefore recommended that government at all levels must provide real succour and empowerment for youth across Nigeria, especially the vulnerable ones in the northeast region. This economic strategy will prevent the conscription of youths into terrorism cells while engaging them positively in becoming knowledgeable and self-reliant citizens.

**Keywords-** *Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, Boko- Haram.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Terrorism has become a threat to global peace and security in the 21st century. It constitutes the highest contributor to humanitarian crises considering the high rate of human casualties, internally

displaced persons, refugee debacles, food insecurity and the spread of various diseases (Van Creveld, Martin, 1996). Stewart posited that People who join the fighting forces, who are killed or flee, can no longer work productively; schools, power stations and roads that are destroyed reduce the productive capacity of the economy (Stewart, 2004).

There are also more complex interactions between events associated directly with terrorism and developments in the macro and micro economy which mostly lead to adverse changes in individual entitlements, both social and economic. It has been noted that the costs of crime are tangible and intangible, economic or social, direct or indirect, physical or psychological, and individual or community. It is from the cost that Terrorism is characterized by the desire to attain its goals by frightening those it believes stand in its way. However, there is no absolute consensus as to the root causes of terrorism, whether they bear political, social or economic conditions (Oche&Dokubo, 2001). In terms of political terrorism, it can be defined as the threat or use of an extranormal form of political violence, in varying degrees, with the the objective of achieving certain political goals or objectives (Shultz & Sloan, 1980). This is to influence the behaviour and attitude of certain groups. It is important to know that it has political motives.

In addition to this Shultz & Sloan defined terrorism as the deliberate employment of violence or the use of violence by sovereign states as well as some national groups, assisted by sovereign states to attain strategic and political objectives through the violation of the law. They further identified three broad types of terrorism (ibid). They are revolutionary terrorism, aimed at political revolution, sub-revolutionary terrorism which has political motives other than revolution and repressive terrorism aimed at restraining certain groups, individuals or forms of behaviour deemed to be undesirable. Scholars have identified international, transnational, domestic and state terrorism as different types of political terrorism, they identified the broad types as non-state terrorism, state-sponsored terrorism and state-directed terrorism or establishment terrorism.

However, our interest is in domestic terrorism which is an action initiated by an individual or group of nationals within its borders (Young& Dobbs,2001). It was emphasized that the threats of terrorist attacks are not necessarily from indigenous extreme-left movements but from self-determination struggles and struggles against injustices which sometimes coincide with or are given moral justification through the use of religion. Terrorism is an act, that is a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of any state. The acts appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or affect the conduct of a government by assassination or kidnapping. The act of terrorism transcends national boundaries in terms of how they are accomplished, the persons they appear to intend to coerce or intimidate, or the locale in which the perpetuation operates or seek asylum. In the past, what we watched and read were the more newsworthy events that filled the media.

In these present days, terrorists have been going about their deadly business aided by the evolution in technology leading to the invention of new weapons of mass destruction increasing their destructive capability invariably increases the threat of terrorism. Terrorism is threatening the viability of a nation-state, bringing about the economic crisis, instability, and a threat to tourism, the energy sector, civil aviation, maritime, transportation and city transportation. The problem of terrorism has refused to go away instead; it has kept people in perpetual fear, robbing people of freedom and security. One of the major features of the current conjecture in

international politics and international security is the appearance of international terrorism in a more deadly and impersonal fashion.

The Boko Haram sect is alleged to have killed over 5,000 people in various attacks since 2009. In tracing the origins of the sect, Xan Rice wrote that “in northern Nigeria, Sharia law was already in place before Boko Haram launched in 2002. But it was applied mildly and failed to check the unbridled corruption, inequalities and unfairness. Poverty levels were high and growing, and

for most youthful people there were not many job prospects. Boko Haram was founded on beliefs, but poor governance was the catalyst for it to spread. If there had been appropriate governance and a functioning state, Yusuf would have found it very difficult to succeed”. It was further revealed that before Yusuf’s execution, Boko Haram had a microfinance system, operated a farm and its ruling councils and emirs, the followers stretched far beyond Maiduguri and Borno state, across northern Nigeria, as well as into neighbouring Niger, Cameroon and Chad. Ahmad Salkida, a journalist with close links to the sect reported in an interview days before the death of Yusuf, that he was growing increasingly militant and said “Democracy and the current system of education must be changed otherwise this war that is yet to start would continue for long”.<sup>12</sup> Analysts and scholars have come to the conclusions that the aims and ambitions of the terrorists are now unlimited. Albert Horsfall, a retired Director of Nigeria’s National Intelligence Agency (NIA) articulated that: “the terrorists intend to stay in this country, establish themselves and then pursue a political agenda. In the past we have dealt with such terrorist elements” (Bassey, 2013). Based on the following, this study examined the role of counter-terrorism strategy in the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This study is limited to counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria from the era of President Umar Yar’Adua (2007-2010), Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015) and MuhamaduBuhari (2015-2021). Geographically, the study covers North-eastern Nigeria in general and Borno State in particular.

## **2.0 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH**

The trend of domestic terrorism in West Africa as exemplified by the nefarious activities of the dreaded ideological sect popularly known as Boko Haram, Niger Delta Avengers and recently the Fulani herdsmen have become a major concern to the Nigerian government in particular and

the sub-regional states in general. The activities of the sects especially have constituted a major security threat to Nigeria in particular and the world at large. Internal insurrection or insurgency and terrorism scourge remain intractable to the government in the West African states which appears helpless in curtailing their activities.

Specifically, the research work examines the conditions necessitating the emergence and persistence of terrorist activities. The thrust of this research work also captures most of the circumstances that led to these terrorist activities which are not unconnected with the frustration caused by the high rate of poverty, unemployment, weak governance, and religious fanaticism among others. The study seeks to address the impacts of terrorism which among others include serious retrogression of national development, peace and security, internal population displacement, violation of fundamental human rights, and debilitating effects on the entrenchment of democratic principles in the Sub-region. Hence, the study becomes pertinent given the spate of damage done by the terrorist group coupled with its link with the socio-political underdevelopment in the country and the government's strategic reaction.

### **3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of this study are to:

- (1) Examine the dynamics of counterterrorism strategies in Nigeria
- (2) Investigate the effectiveness of counterterrorism in Nigeria
- (3) Examine the challenges of the counter-terrorism strategy to the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

### **4.0 LIMITATION**

One limitation that affected this study was the inherently subjective nature of qualitative studies (Willis, 2014). Most research has shown that most researchers are usually biased in the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation when adopting only qualitative study (Creswell, 2013; Nachmias&Nachmias, 2008; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2008). In other to main this bias, this study maintained a high level of self-awareness and also used strategies such as peer review, triangulation, reflexivity, and member checking to confirm that my interpretation aligns with

participants' perceptions and opinions (Creswell, 2013; Gasson, 2004; Goulding, 2002; Maxwell, 2013; Morrow, 2005; Nachmias&Nachmias, 2008; Patton, 2002).

The Findings of this study were generally limited to the perspectives of only 15 victims out of thousands that have been exposed to the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria. This presupposes that external validity or generalizability may be an issue (Ezeoha, 2016). The generalizability concern was mitigated in this study by the strategic selection of the participants (Seawright&Gerring, 2008), to ensure that it was adequately representative of Nigerians exposed to the Boko Haram insurgency.

## **5.0 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

The concepts of Terrorism, Insurgency, Counter-Terrorism and Boko Haram are discussed in this section.

### **5.1 CONCEPT OF TERRORISM**

Several definitions have been given by different people, scholars and even organizations based on the way they perceived or experienced terrorism. For instance, the US Department of Defence defined it as the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear intended to coerce, subjugate or intimidate either citizens, societies, or even the government in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) conceptualize terrorism as the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.

The US Department of State defined it to be a premeditated politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents usually intended to influence an audience. In 1992, the United Nations defined terrorism as anxiety-inspiring methods of repeated violent action employed by (semi) clandestine individual, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, and where-in contrast to assassination where the direct targets of the violence are not the main target. In the United Kingdom (UK) in 1974 had a different notion to it. They defined terrorism as the use of violence for political ends and includes any use of violence to put the public or any section of the public in fear. He opines that the situation can be likened to genocide and defined it as the deliberate

and systematic destruction in whole or in part, of an ethnic, religious, racial or national group. He opined that terrorism may range from socio-economic and political theories based on personality and environment (Human Right Watch, Nigeria 2016). It could also be motivated by inner drives to revenge or for financial benefits and gains. It also could be from fundamentalism to deprivation, political frustration, religious disparities, and resentment against the existing regime, or intervention into personal freedom, oppression, and inequality as well as weak government.

The essential elements of terrorism from the foregoing definitions involve the calculated (intentional) use of unlawful violence to put or produce fear in the public and these acts could be committed by a person, or group, and does not exclude the state. It is an adversary act that influences an audience beyond the immediate victim. The reason and strategy of the terrorists are to draw the attention of the populace, organizations and states either local or international. They want to obtain the greatest publicity, and most times choose targets that symbolize what they opposed (Onuoha, 2014)”.

Sometimes the confusion and difficulties in defining terrorism by some persons are because of the assumption that terrorist activities are conducted only by dissidents, rebels or fanatical groups who are dissatisfied with government policies and programmes and are in contestation with the state for power or to impose their own ideological belief thereby overlooking the fact that the state could equally be involved in terrorist activities against its citizens either directly or through unpopular policies.

Terrorism is a psychological weapon hidden behind an ideological objective either economic, political or religious demands such as that made by Boko Haram which wants to impose and practice Islamic law in northern Nigeria (Oche&Dokubo, 2001). It could also be the type conducted by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) whose activities were aimed at preventing the exploitation and degradation of their land and environment and having a fair share in the oil revenues. It could also be the (negative) attitudinal conduct carried out by government agents or senior officials to deprive the subordinates of their legitimate rights to gain an advantage. Terrorism is by nature political because it involves the acquisition and use of power to advance own interests by forcing others to submit or agree, to certain demands.

For keen observers and discerning minds, terrorism is predominant and is not a new trend in Nigeria, and is conducted by those that wield the power either legitimate or illegitimate at one

time or the other and in different places. Acts of terrorism are being carried out at homes, in government and private offices, and on the roads either by government officials or private individuals. Many terrorist acts go unnoticed and the victims suffer and endure in silence without the power to react. The prevalence of terrorist activities in recent times especially in the northern part of the country does not mean that it is limited to that section of the country alone. Terrorism in Nigeria has come a long way and has been carried out by different individuals, groups, locations and at different times.

## 5.2 COUNTER-TERRORISM

Counter-Terrorism means all the tactical and strategic methods used by a government to combat terrorism against its citizens in general. It includes COIN and the Egg Breakers or intelligence gathering in general. Counter-terrorism is never in isolation but always a multi-level approach and quite complex. It also includes black propaganda and counter-espionage (Ibid). According to Miller (2019), Anything done or used to hunt a terrorist down or prevent him from doing his dastardly deeds is counterterrorism.

Counter-terrorism (also spelt counterterrorism), also known as antiterrorism, incorporates the practice, military tactics, techniques, and strategies that government, military, law enforcement, business, and intelligence agencies use to combat or prevent terrorism. Counter-terrorism strategies include attempts to counter the financing of terrorism (Omodia&Aliu, 2013). If terrorism is part of a broader insurgency, counter-terrorism may employ counter-insurgency measures.

The United States Armed Forces use the term foreign internal defence for programs that support other countries in attempts to suppress insurgency, lawlessness, or subversion or to reduce the conditions under which these security threats may develop. Most counter-terrorism strategies involve an increase in standard police and domestic intelligence (Ibid). The central activities are traditional: interception of communications and the tracing of persons. New technology has, however, expanded the range of military and law enforcement operations.



### 5.3 THE BOKO HARAM TERRORIST GROUP

Boko Haram initially known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad is a radical Islamic fundamentalist organization which is the Nigeria Taliban similar to that of Afghanistan for their ideological stand against anything western and its members follow a strict interpretation of the Koran noted that Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad the terrorist group's original by-line in Arabic means 'People committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad'. When translated loosely into Arabic means western education is a sin (Sahara Reporters, April 22, 2016).

This group is fighting for Islamic rule to be imposed in the northern states of Nigeria where Sharia law has already been implemented and they believed that they can achieve their version of Islamic rule by overthrowing the government. Since then they have been engaged in deadly and well-organized assaults in northern Nigeria and attacking Christians and churches mostly. Since 2001, a new crop of young and daring Muslim faithful where most of them are from the semi-middle class and educated have aggressively embraced a stricter version of Islam, rejecting anything Christian and western education and culture, and have had undiluted resilience carrying high profile terrorist attacks, particularly in the northern states of Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe, Plateau, Kaduna, as well as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

They also have freed suspects from prisons, killed high-profile politicians, and carried out the first suicide bomb attack on the Abuja police force Headquarters. Professor Martins Crenshaw- a world-renowned terrorist expert noted that the activities of Boko Haram signal a fearless come-get-us attitude and some of the bombers as claimed by the Nigeria Vanguard Newspaper are of Somali origin which indicates that they have an active cell in Nigeria. He opined that the terrorist group operating in Nigeria is a franchise of Al-Qaeda, which has been involved in funding and providing logistics to them. That is why they are so vicious in wreaking havoc in the country with impunity (Ibid).

He also noted that when the Seal an elite branch of the American Marines stormed the residence of the late Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan last year several documents were retrieved from his residence. Among them were letters between Osama Bin Laden and terrorist groups in Nigeria seeking support. In return, he promised them financial support, training and other assistance. He particularly linked them with Al-Qaeda cells in North

Africa. Boko Haram's audacity in carrying out terrorist attacks in Nigeria was encouraged by the death of their leader, in the same manner, as the death of the leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) Ken Saro-Wiwa (. Ibid). The group emerged more bitter and aggressive, and daring. The death of their leader Yusuf Muhammad while in police detention in 2009 did not neutralize or dissolve the group but rather rejuvenated them.

#### 5.4 THE CHALLENGES OF THE COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY ON BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA

There have been different counterterrorism strategies by the government of Nigeria but with different challenges, The same way Boko Haram gained strength in the northeast, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta became formidable in the South, through the incapability of the Nigerian military to contain terrorism in the Delta region, as a result of corruption and unprofessional conducts. Both sects have a common source fueling their motive. Poverty has been the driving force and will continue to motivate Nigerian youths to engage in terrorism, irrespective of their geo-political origin until the government and military authorities take decisive and strategic steps to end the insurgency.

The tactics of Boko Haram and the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta were a little different until when the State Security began to keep arrested members of both sects together, between 2005 and 2010. The game changed afterwards and it became evident that the modern techniques used by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta in the South were replicated in the north. This made it more difficult for security agencies to contain Boko Haram, as the military was surprised by their new

tactics which included kidnap of students and expatriates. The similarities in operation between both terrorist groups, however, may imply that certain counterterrorism strategies that helped to reduce insurgency in the Niger Delta, may also help to reduce insurgency in the northeast if properly executed by morally sound professional handlers that are concerned with the interest of the nation, rather than their selfish concerns.

In looking at the national security challenges resulting from insurgency, one can clearly say that all the challenges were caused by those in political offices, as well as military commanders who diverted funds for their selfish interests, rather than providing training and the ideal equipment to curb terrorism at its infant stage, keeping it under control. The security challenges to citizens and

foreign nationals have been allowed to spread beyond total control and will need strategic planning and implementation, going forward (Folarin&Oviasogie, 2015).

Strategies to be applied in combating terrorism in Nigeria, according to Folarin and Oviasogie (2015), include suitable funding and training of the security agencies; strengthening of the armed forces with modern and efficient weapons that will effectively outmatch the weapons of the terrorists', and tightening of the Nigerian borders to check the inflow of terrorist's into the country. It is important to note that all the above recommendations had been in place all along.

## **6.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design is intended to provide an appropriate framework for the study. A very significant decision in the research design process is the choice to be made regarding the research approach since it determines how relevant information for a study will be obtained; however, the research design process involves many interrelated decisions (KassuJilchaSileyew, 2019). This study employs a descriptive research design to capture the dimensions of the government response to various cases of terrorist attacks in Nigeria. Descriptive research portrays an accurate profile of persons, events, or situations. This design offers to the researchers a profile of described relevant aspects of the phenomena of interest from an individual, organizational, and industry-oriented perspective (Aaker, Kumar &George, 2018). Therefore, this research design enabled the researchers to gather data from a wide range of online resources and experts in the field. The research design for this research includes the description of the study area, and an analysis of the problem with general and specific objectives.

## **7.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The main objective of this study determined and examine counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria using Boko Haram terrorist group as a case study. The study also recounts the significant and meaningful essences of issues that rely mainly on the rich textual data from participant responses (Giorgi, 2012). The findings of this study focused largely on the socioeconomic effects of terrorism in Nigeria, emphasizing its effect on education, culture, economy, and the social well-being of citizens. In terms of the research question and counterterrorism strategies applied in

curbing terrorism in Nigeria and their effects on insurgency, the findings of this study helped outspread knowledge on the roles of all stakeholders involved in the fight against terrorism and the development of effective strategies to be used in this process.

The two theories Horkheimer's (1937) critical theory and Pfeffer&Salancik's (1978) resource dependence theory served as a guide in the data collection process and revealed the information during data analysis. Reviewing the role of counterterrorism strategies involves a continuous process of periodic monitoring of operative performance, the use of functional interventions to support and strengthen the goals of operatives, and various blends of ideas developed in between. The routine of counterterrorist operatives entails daily activities that aid the advancement of working knowledge of a terrorism framework, as well as knowledge and experience in counterterrorism activities that in turn foster the development of effective measures against insurgents.

The paper's findings showed other researchers ways to understand the reasons behind the poor performances of counterterrorist agents, and their inability to end terrorism in Nigeria based on their first-hand experiences with the application of the strategies being used to engage terrorists. Before now, to understand counterterrorism in Nigeria it was only through military force to engage terrorists in combat. However, this paper provides a different approach to engaging terrorists to apply other tactics that are weighty with flaws; there are weak strategies in place, complementing combat engagement. The different respondent shared their option on the roles, experiences, and performances within the context of alleviating terrorism in Nigeria.

The main findings of this study made it easy to highlight the significance of the roles of all stakeholders involved in the war against terrorism and the recognition of necessities required to equip the actors in counterterrorism to aid efforts aimed at ending terrorism.

We are of the view that the combat personnel are well trained to fight terrorists but other vital roles must be added to their efforts by developing effective strategies ensuring stakeholders' intervention and genuine commitment to the fight against insurgency. The key players in the fight against terrorism require a sense of obligation and an understanding of their specific roles and the impact these will cause on the country.

## **8.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS/ RECOMMENDATION**

This study theoretically brings an understanding of counter-terrorism strategy and Boko Haram in Nigeria. The findings from this study are hoped to be a helpful tool for the Nigerian Federal Government thereby identifying problems related to the execution of counter-terrorism policies by developing appropriate policies that can solve such problems and assist in the implementation of these policies. The findings of the study showed the different strategies used in counterterrorism operations in Nigeria and the reasons they have failed to yield positive results, many years after the engagement of terrorists by operatives of the counterterrorist formations of Nigeria, as well as other supporting West African countries.

The outcome of this study has provided several recommendations that can be used in Nigeria or as a template for counterterrorism strategies in other countries experiencing terrorism. First, the welfare of operatives must become a priority in the fight against terrorism. The study recommends a proper welfare package for operatives in other to boost their morale and keep them active always. This welfare package should also include good weapons such as vehicles, and combat kitting to ensure that casualty level is reduced by a considerable percentage and that the firepower of the operatives far exceeds that of the terrorists.

The study also recommends that for Counterterrorism in Nigeria, the government needs to educate members of the community on how to detect signs of likely terror attacks, and the steps to take to report to authorities immediately. All this will help educate the people and give them enough understanding to have reasons to reject manipulation and attempts at recruiting them into terrorist sects. Islamic schools and other institutions should also have vocational training programs introduced to them and should have a monitoring system with government involvement.

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