

RESURGENCE OF ISLAMIC STATE IN WEST AFRICAN PROVINCE (ISWAP) AND THE MENACE OF TERRORISM IN NIGERIA: SOCIO- ECONOMIC AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The resurgence of violent terrorist attacks in different parts of Nigeria has once again brought to the front burners of national discourse the precarious security challenges facing the country. Every day, the nation is faced with unprecedented wave of criminality and insecurity, especially those being perpetrated by terrorist groups operating in the northern part of Nigeria. Since the advent of some of these terrorist groups, like the Boko Haram and Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP), in the mid-2000s, the security and territorial integrity of Nigeria has been consistently threatened and undermined. In this vein, the major thrust of this paper, therefore, is to examine the menace of terrorism in Nigeria and its socio-economic and security implications for the nation. Using the rational choice theory as a theoretical framework, the paper argues that despite the plethora of factors that may trigger terrorism and insurgency in a state, the act itself remains a heinous crime in many countries of the world. Lastly, the paper adopts the descriptive and qualitative method of scientific inquiry, with a reliance on secondary data, and concludes by asserting that though terrorism is a relatively new phenomenon in Nigeria, but the level of violence, impunity and insecurity it has engendered in the polity lately is capable of destabilizing the Nigerian state if not adequately tackled now.

Keywords: Terrorism, Resurgence, ISWAP, Security, Implication.

Introduction

Since the attainment of political independence in the 1960s, many of the countries in Africa have been grappling with one form of socio-political and economic crisis or another. Indeed, over the years, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of some of these states have been seriously undermined by a myriad of existential threats; which includes intermittent military coup, violent religious crisis, ethnic militancy and, lately, international terrorism (Sobowale, 2018).

However, after almost sixty years of existence as a sovereign state, one major phenomenon that has become a political scourge to the Nigerian state, in recent times, is that of terrorism and general insecurity within the country. As noted by the International Crisis Group (2016), a single day or week hardly passed in Nigeria without fresh incidents of violent killings, kidnapping, banditry, rape or arson being reported in the various news media.

According to Amnesty International (2021), in the last decade or so, scores of thousands of persons have been killed and over two million families have become permanently displaced from their homes, farmlands and communities as a result of terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, the human right group emphatically blamed these catastrophic human and socio-economic losses on weak governance, systemic failure and gross incompetence on the part of the ruling elite and the security agencies in Nigeria.

Historically, the term “terrorist” was first used by the French philosopher Francois Noel Bafeut in 1794 to denounce Maximilian Robespierre Jacobin’s regime as a dictatorship during the reign of terror that characterized the political atmosphere in France at that period (Jones, 2013). Though prior to the French Revolution earlier writers have traced the origin of the modern tactics of terrorism to the Jewish

Sicari Zealots who used to attack Roman officials and moderate Jews in Palestine around the 1st century BC.

Generally, the term “terrorism” only began to gain worldwide attention and notoriety during the Northern Ireland, Basque and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts of the 1970s, respectively (Burleigh, 2009). Since that period, terrorism has become an emotionally-charged term with no universal agreement about its definition. Despite that, however, the term terrorism is often used with the connotation of something sinister, evil and morally wrong.

In the last couple of years, Nigeria has become a hotbed for terrorism due largely to the activities of Boko Haram, ISWAP and other extremist religious groups in different parts of the country. Since the early 2000s, these terrorist groups have not only created ungovernable territories within the north-east region and the Lake Chad Basin axis but have also instigated a climate of insecurity in the Nigerian state (Aliyu, 2021). However, though the Nigerian security forces have been fighting back relentlessly, but the onus still lies on the political leadership to devise appropriate military, political and diplomatic measures to checkmate the activities of these terrorists and win back the trust and loyalty of the populace.

Historically, the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), it is a Salafit jihadist militant group and an unrecognized proto-state under the administrative division of the Islamic State (IS). ISWAP is primarily active in the Lake Chad Basin region and has been fighting an extensive insurgency against the governments of Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria since 2016. According to Ojewale (2021), ISWAP was initially a splinter group from Boko Haram, but after parting ways with the latter, it has now become the umbrella organization for all ISIS factions in West Africa.

The origin of ISWAP dates back to the emergence of Boko Haram, a Jihadist movement, founded in 2002 by Muhammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, Borno State of Nigeria. In 2009, following an unsuccessful uprising and the subsequent death of Mohammed Yusuf in police custody, the Movement launched an insurgency against the Nigeria government aimed at establishing an Islamic State or a Caliphate in north-eastern Nigeria and some parts of Cameroon, Chad and Niger republics (Gadzama, 2022).

However, following their subsequent defeat and the dispossession of their hitherto held territories by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) in 2015, discontent grew amongst the insurgents. Consequently, further disagreement between the two leading Field Commanders over operational tactics and allegiances to ISIL led to the removal of Abubakar Shekau and the birth of a splinter group (ISWAP) under the leadership of Abu Musab al Barnawi in 2016.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Terrorism: Is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons, properties or institutions in order to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, especially in furtherance of some political or social agenda. More often than not, no matter their goals or objectives, most terrorist acts are generally considered to be anti-social, criminal, unjustifiable and condemnable in modern societies around the world.

Resurgence: This is a sudden revival or increase in activity or interest in a particular subject, idea or phenomenon which have been forgotten or ignored for some time, especially after a period of popularity or occurrence. However, as used in this write-up, resurgence connotes the sudden surge in terrorist activity in Nigeria after a period of relative lull or docility.

ISWAP: Is an acronym for the Islamic State in West Africa Province. Originally, ISWAP came into being as a splinter group that separated from the dreaded Boko Haram terrorist sect in 2016, due to operational and ideological differences. ISWAP, like its international affiliate, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), believes in the creation of a purely Islamic Caliphate through jihad.

Security: This could be defined as the state or condition of being safe, free or secured from any real or potential fear, harm, anxiety, risk or danger. On a broader sense, security also connotes the protection of a person, community, institution, organization or country against internal or external threat or attack from local or foreign adversaries and non-state actors.

Implication: In plain English, it means an inference or implied thought which may be fairly understood though not expressly stated in words. But as used in this paper, implication represents a possible effect, result or consequence of an action or decision taken knowingly or unknowingly by an individual, group or society concerning a particular issue.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Though scholars like Haner and Sloan (2022) have adopted different theories to explain the concept of terrorism and all its abstract underpinnings, however, in this paper the author prefer to use the Rational Choice Theory as his theoretical framework. This theory was first used in the 18th century by Adam Smith and it refers to a set of guidelines that helps in the understanding of economic and social behavior. According to Elster (2007), the theory argues that individuals usually rely on rational calculations to make rational choices that result in outcomes aligning with their own best interests.

Consequently, rational choice theory explains that offender's motivations to involve in a criminal act, such as terrorism, are determined by the potential cost of action and the anticipated benefits. Thus, Crenshaw (1981) argues that because terrorism is a politically motivated act, most or all terrorists' campaign depends on rational political choice. Consequently, terrorist activities, as presently being experienced in Nigeria today, is a rational choice, and in that regard, terrorist organizations, like ISWAP, possess internally consistent sets of values, beliefs and images of the environment which they consider a rational means of promoting their cause or goal (Krueger, 2013).

Going by Khan's (2006) definition of terrorism as "the deliberate killing of innocent people, at random, to spread fear through the whole population and to force the hand of its political leader to act contrarily to convention"; one could, therefore, assume that terrorist acts perpetuated by individuals and groups are rational choices made by rational actors to browbeat the government into accepting their own agenda or acceding to their demand which could be either politically or religiously motivated.

Therefore, the rational choice theory is one amongst several theories that scholars have used to interrogate the concept, nature, motive and strategies of terrorism in international relations. As noted by Wisniewski (2008), ISWAP membership and leadership are collectively responsible for the terrorist acts they commit against innocent citizens, institutions and governments across the globe. This is because many of these ISWAP foot-soldiers, as rational human beings and non-state actors, often weigh the pros and the cons of their actions before embarking on violent killings, kidnapping, hijacking or suicide bombing.

ISWAP AND ITS OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES

Over the years, in an attempt to win the loyalty and support of the local people, ISAWP has changed its operational tactics by building up a semblance of basic governance structure, service delivery and internal security in areas under its illegal control, unlike the senseless and indiscriminate violence that Boko Haram was known for. Unconfirmed local report has it that, right now, ISAWP currently have a sizeable number of loyalists and foot-soldiers in Sambisa Forest and around the Lake Chad region that are ever ready to do its bidding at the slightest opportunity and command.

Nevertheless, the death of Abubakar Shekau, the longtime leader of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lid-Da'wati Wa'l-Jihad (JAS), otherwise known as Boko Haram, in June 2021, opened the political and religious space for a reintegration of forces in the Lake Chad Basin. Inevitably, also, Shekau's death eventually allowed the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) to consolidate its position in the region through the ascendancy of its local affiliate (ISWAP) who now coordinate all terrorist activities within the axis (Malik, 2021).

According to Corrado and Evans (1998), terrorism is an asymmetric form of warfare and it is more common or applicable where and when conventional warfare is ineffective because opposing forces vary greatly in power, capability and terrain. Therefore, the type of people, places and institutions terrorist usually targets for attack or the techniques to be employed is dependent upon the political or religious agenda of the terrorists.

More often than not, terrorist attacks are often targeted towards a particular or multiple object or subject in order to maximize fear and publicity. In the case of ISWAP in Nigeria, their strategies and tactics have varied from place to place and from situation to situation. Over the years, ISWAP have used a combination of targeted assassination, kidnapping, suicide-bombing, gang-raping and other violence acts to terrorize the people and the governments of many states in northern Nigeria and beyond.

Consequently, following the heavy military losses suffered in the hands of the combine security forces of the MJTF, ISWAP in 2019 retreated tactically into the Sambisa Forest in Borno State and other mountainous areas within the Lake Chad Basin region (Oviasogie 2013). From this strategic position, ISWAP has adopted the guerrilla warfare tactics of “hit and run” against the security forces and sometimes other soft targets within their immediate reach.

But, in recent times, the most frequent and horrifying tactics that ISWAP terrorists have devised in the prosecution of their cause is, kidnapping and criminal abduction of minors, especially innocent school children. For instance, in early February 2018, ISWAP abducted about 118 school girls in Kakara Local Government Area of Katsina State which attracted worldwide outrage and condemnation (Premium Times, 2018). Since then, due to the heavy ransom that they usually collect from their victims and the government, the group have become emboldened to carry out other kidnap attacks against innocent civilians and some few high-profile politicians and businessmen.

Lastly, one other guerrilla warfare tactics that ISWAP terrorists have been using consistently against the Nigerian security forces, is the ambushing and bombing of military formations and checkpoints in Borno, Kaduna, Zamfara and Yobe States, respectively. Unfortunately, the group seems to be winning in this aspect of the war, as the morale of our military forces is abysmally low as a result of the incalculable losses they have suffered lately from ISWAP attacks due to lack of aerial coverage and support from the Air Force.

IMPACT OF ISWAP ATTACKS ON NIGERIA’S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND SECURITY SECTORS:

Since the emergence of ISWAP as the dominant terrorist organization in the Lake Chad Basin region in 2016, the security and territorial integrity of some West Africa states, and Nigeria in particular, have been seriously threatened and undermined (Ogundiya and Amzat, 2006). In terms of human security, the impact of terrorism in Nigeria, especially in the north, cannot be over emphasized, as hundreds of thousands of innocent lives, properties and farmlands have either been lost or destroyed as a result of incessant terrorist attacks.

Also, as noted by Isyaku (2013), the activities of the various terrorist groups operating in Nigeria since 2009 have demoralized and deflated the morale of our military forces, especially the elite Infantry Brigade of the Nigerian Army that used to be taunted as one of the best in Sub-Sahara Africa, going by their past exploits in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Furthermore, in the last few years, terrorism has greatly exposed the administrative decay, monumental corruption, and physical inadequacy of our military forces in terms of combat readiness.

On the economic front, the impact of terrorism in Nigeria could also be felt in the drastic reduction in economic and industrial activities in the northern part of the country since the advent of the Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency, especially in the livestock and textile sub-sectors (NBS, 2019). As stated by UNDP (2019), many of the firms and industries that used to operate in the north have either relocated to other parts of the country or have completely shut-down businesses because of the high level of insecurity in that region.

Another area that has been worse hit by the activities of ISWAP in Nigeria is the agricultural and food security sub-sector. In the last couple of years, due to the security challenges occasioned by terrorist attacks, there have been little or no farming activities in most villages, towns and communities in the Middle Belt, North West and North East regions which used to be the food basket zone of Nigeria (Okore & Nwadiubu, 2022). Indeed, majority of the farming communities in this part of the country have either

been driven out of their ancestral homes; or are currently hibernating at the various refugee and internally displaced persons (IDPS) camps across the federation (Adesoji, 2010).

Lastly, in Nigeria, terrorism has also impinged terribly on the fundamental human rights of the populace. Since their incursion into our political space, these terrorist groups have further heightened the existing extremist religious ideologies in our society which have little or no respect for the rule of law, fundamental human rights and constituted authority. For instance, as noted by Gadzama (2022), ISWAP, like its affiliate body, ISIL, believes in the use of jihad to create an Islamic Caliphate; and in pursuing that agenda, they consider anything and anyone standing on their way as expendable targets that can be sacrificed for that goal.

CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, terrorism in its present form is a relatively new phenomenon, even though sporadic terrorist acts have been witnessed in some regions of the country in the past and amongst the various ethno-religious groups claiming to be fighting for the socio-economic and political emancipation of its people. However, none of the earlier terrorist or militant groups that operated in Nigeria in 70s and 80s compares to these present crop of blood-thirsty actors, in terms of their violence, savagery, impunity and notoriety around the world (Ojewale, 2021).

Also, lately, these terrorists have become so emboldened that they operate almost freely in the northern part of Nigeria. Apart from their frequent attacks on strategic towns and military bases of the MJTF, they have graduated to targeting and attacking airports and railway lines; thus, creating a general atmosphere of insecurity in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the situation is even made worse by the lack of political will on the part of the government to frontally and decisively deal with the situation. Or how else can one explain a situation where terrorists can stage a jailbreak in the heart of a nation's capital city to rescue their members without any resistance from the security personnel station around the vicinity?

Consequently, the incursion of ISWAP into Nigeria, since 2016, has done incalculable security damage to the socio-political and economic development of the country. Right now, as articulated by Adele (2013), because of the precarious security challenges that these religious terrorists or insurgent's groups have caused in the Nigerian state, particularly the Boko Haram and ISWAP sect), the country's political stability and nascent democracy is currently hanging on a precipice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the continuous threat posed by terrorist groups, especially ISWAP, in the Nigerian federation, this paper therefore proffers the following recommendations:

Preventive Approach

The first major counter-terrorism measure to be taken by the government is to provide good governance that will ensure equity and social justice in the society. By so doing, factors that encourage terrorist recruitment like poverty, unemployment and political exclusion would be drastically reduced, and the people will respond with unalloyed loyalty to the state rather than any terrorist organizations.

Protective Approach

The government should also deploy all available civil security measures within its power, resources and capacity to protect and safeguard the rule of law, civil authority and the territorial integrity of the state. This will bring back peace, sanity, security, as well as law and order to the polity.

Diplomatic Approach

The government should also give adequate room for diplomatic overtures by extending an open olive branch to the terrorist, through trusted and respected intermediaries, to negotiate for peace. If the process is transparent and genuinely executed, many terrorists and insurgents may lay down their arms and embrace the amnesty and alternative dispute settlement being offered by the government.

Military Approach

Lastly, to be able to defeat the terrorists in their own turf, the government should demonstrate, in practical terms, military and political will for its armed forces to tactically engage and neutralize all forms of terrorist resistance within the state by providing them with modern and sophisticated weapons. This will send a strong warning signal to other potential terrorists about the government's zero tolerance to all forms of criminality in the state.

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