

EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM IN NIGERIA SINCE 2009: FORWARD MARCH OR ABOUT FACE-TURN?

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Abstract

This study collected data from both in-depth interviews and secondary sources. It applies the framework of variations in terrorists' trajectories and capabilities to determine the effectiveness of Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts. Capturing three Nigerian administrations since 2009, the central arguments of the study is that Nigeria's counterterrorism strategies and programmes have been complicated and inadequate for the achievement of desirable counterterrorism outcomes. Specifically, Nigeria's counterterrorism measures have not decisively eroded the growth in Boko Haram's trajectory and capabilities such as the group's operational prowess, organisational basing, political relationship and armed hostilities. Despite the official pronouncement that the terrorists have been technically defeated, the counterterrorism scenarios in Nigeria appear to be making about face-turn instead of forward march. To this end, this study concludes that counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria needs strategic awakening.

Keywords: Boko Haram, counterterrorism, Nigeria, terrorism, terrorist capability and trajectory, countering violent extremism

Introduction

This article examines the dynamics of Nigeria's countering violent extremism and counterterrorism efforts since 2009, spanning three administrations, to unravel whether there is forward movement or retrogression in the entire counterterrorism scenarios. However, counterterrorism is largely the focus of this article because countering violent extremism and counterterrorism are not mutually exclusive in Nigeria's practice but mutually constituted. This is in sync with the position taken by Anne-Aly, Anne-Marie Balbi and Carmen Jacques (2015) that countering violent extremism is itself soft counterterrorism which encompasses such measures as "de-radicalisation programmes, education, development programmes, conflict management, community empowerment and counter-narratives" (Aly, A., Balbi, Anne-Marie & Jacques C., 2015: 3-5).

The Boko Haram sect (with its splinter faction called Islamic State West Africa Province -ISWAP) is the major terror group in Nigeria but gains inspiration, ideologies, training and funding from Islamic State (ISIS), al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab (Zenn, 2016; Zenn, 2018a). Boko Haram was regarded as the fourth deadliest terror group according to 2018 Global Terrorism Index, and the group's attacks have directly caused 17,740 civilian deaths, while its confrontations with the security forces had led to 21,053 deaths of civilians, security forces and the group's members between May 2011 and October 2020 (Campbell, 2020). However, it is important to investigate what the three different administrations have done since the outbreak of terrorism in 2009. This becomes imperative given that Nigeria has

moved from a relatively peaceful country pre-2009 to one of the most terrorised countries in the world by 2019, and from a modicum of terrorism-related deaths in 2009 to tens of thousand fatalities by 2019 (Campbell, 2020). Accordingly, this study adopts Asfandyar Mir's (2018) framework of variation in the targeted armed group's trajectory and organisational capability to evaluate counterterrorism effectiveness in Nigeria.

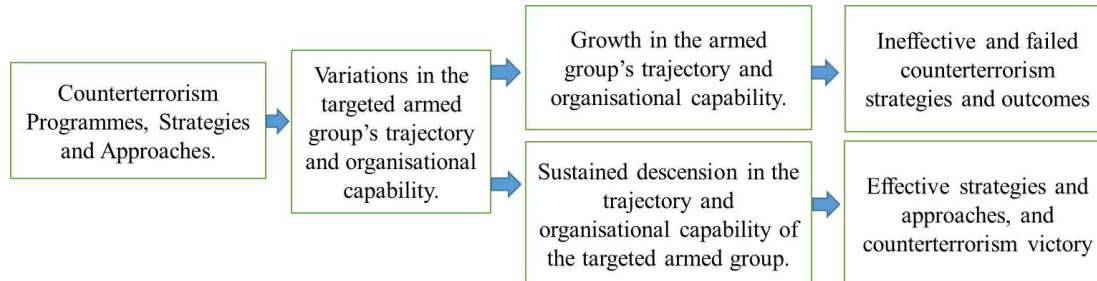


Figure 1: Variation in the Targeted Armed Group's Trajectory Framework (Mir, 2018)

The discussions in the article are divided into four parts. The first is the introduction section. The second focuses on conceptual analysis and clarification. The third examines the dynamics of Nigeria's counterterrorism measures during 2009 and 2019 cutting across three administrations. The fourth part evaluates the variations in the Boko Haram trajectory and organisational capability to determine the effectiveness of counterterrorism in Nigeria. The administrations' specific approaches are provided in the third and fourth sections for analytical convenience, and to make it easier to grasp the issues instead of having to wade through the entire article before knowing what is done by any particular administration or under which administration any particular event happened. Lastly, the study concludes with the observation on Nigeria's counterterrorism pitfalls and the need for a paradigm shift in countering extremism and terrorism in Nigeria.

Violent Extremism, Terrorism and Counterterrorism: The Conceptual Discourses

Several researches have investigated thematic issues of radicalisation which breeds violent extremism and eventually manifests in acts of terrorism. Such studies have been helpful in that they provide significant entry points to how we can understand the challenges of counterterrorism, especially the Nigerian experience. Borum (2011) and Newman (2006) informed us that violent extremism is an end product of radicalization, where radicalization is the chosen process. Violent extremism refers to ideologies that oppose the core values and principles of a society and lead to terrorism, which is why Ogbozor (2016) associates violent extremism in Nigeria with the socio-economic conditions turning the aggrieved against their society as could be seen in Northeast Nigeria. As Lutz (2020) argued, terrorism is a tactic, while extremism is a belief system invariably involving ideological views.

A universally accepted definition of terrorism appears problematic and a comprehensive definition is impossible (Weingberg et al., 2012). Nevertheless, Hoffman (2017a:1-28, 33) describes terrorism as a threat to carry out violent behaviour or actual deployment of violence to achieve political or ideological goals. While cautioning about political and ideological biases, Gibbs (2012: 63-64) defines terrorism as illegal violence or threatened violence directed against human or nonhuman objects. However, terrorism might have confronted humankind for centuries (Rapoport, 2012: 34), but it became a monumental problem in Nigeria around 2009 (NACTEST, 2016; Solomon, 2015: 85). But this notwithstanding, terrorist violence in Nigeria has also been described as an indication of historical processes in the Lake Chad Basin over a few centuries (MacEachern, 2018: 180). Using the frustration-aggression and the state-failure theories, Maiangwa et al. (2012) traced the inevitability of terrorism in Nigeria to the deficiency in the national security architecture, official corruption, overwhelming use of military power, and socio-economic problems. Faluyi et al. (2019: 4) stated that terrorism in Nigeria personifies domestic socio-political, religious and economic challenges, which resonates with the arguments by Hansen and Musa (2013) and Hansen (2017) who examined terrorism within the context of social exclusionism that turn citizens into the dregs of humanity, the abused and socially marginalised until they take to violence to reclaim their denied humanity.

Conversely, counterterrorism in this study is conceptualised as measures taken by states in curtailing the violence of the armed groups over a specific period, especially using such strategies as military strikes against the

terror group and embarking on socio-political and economic measures that would hamper the drivers of radicalisation. More so, counterterrorism also could be understood within the context of how growth in terrorism trajectory is truncated (Mir, 2018: 48). However, as Dulin and Patino (2019) argued, counterterrorism could utilise coercive measures which may likely produce either backlash or deterrence, depending on the dynamics of the state's strategies.

Counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria have been previously examined by analysts such as Waldek & Jayasekara (2011); and Udounwa (2013) who faulted Nigeria's predominant reliance on the military approach. Loimeier (2012) argued that since terrorism was caused by the peculiar ethno-religious, socio-economic, political situations of Nigeria's northern region, counterterrorism should focus on solving such problems, which resonates with the advocacy of Higazi (2013) for counterterrorism based on the judicial process. While the militaristic approach is heavily criticised, some other analysts have also been critical of the amnesty approach to the Boko Haram crisis with the argument that strategies used for curtailing youth restiveness and militancy in the country's oil-rich Niger Delta region cannot work for tackling terrorism (Aghedo and Osumah, 2015). But Salaam (2012) and Bakare (2016) favour soft power approach by submitting that Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts should involve social and political reforms, capacity building, security enhancement, and conciliatory and peace education. However, Mir's (2018: 45) study on 'what explains counterterrorism effectiveness?' gives us a novel framework for understanding the dynamics of counterterrorism effectiveness in Nigeria. Effectively, this study fills a research gap by examining Nigeria's counterterrorism experiences for over a decade by looking at the outcomes in terms of the variations in the capabilities and trajectory of the terrorists. The next section of this article addresses the counterterrorism architecture, programmes and strategies of the successive Nigerian administrations from 2009.

The Trajectories and Dynamics of Nigeria's Counterterrorism Measures since 2009

Genesis of the Crisis and the Yar'Adua Administration's Counterterrorism Approach

A violent group of Nigerians that etymologically called themselves Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, which roughly translates to "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" (Onapajo and Uzodike, 2012: 24-39) reportedly began existing clandestinely around 2002 (Adesoji, 2019). The group became known as Boko Haram in the global security and political lexicons through the invention of local people and the broadcasting of the term by the mass media. The group's growth trajectory for its foot-soldiers recruitment was influenced by factors such as the decades-long abject poverty, governance failure, ethnic nationalism and ethno-religious power struggles (Onapajo et al., 2012). With its frequent confrontations with the security forces by mid-2009, the Yar'Adua administration clamped down on its members paving way for the launching of Operation Flush. But perhaps because of indifference or lack of understanding of the real problem, the administration's approach eventually proved counterproductive as the group's trajectory simply grew especially in its operational capability.

Although for reasons of ill-health and eventual death of President Yar'Adua, much could not be said about the counterterrorism efforts of his administration. But then, the opportunities to nip the problem in the bud at its infancy were wasted during this period. This explains why, for instance, the 2009 counterterrorism approaches only had the effect of destroying lives and properties of the suspects, that led to the extra-judicial killing of the Boko Haram founder- Muhammed Yusuf, and effectively earned Nigeria a worldwide condemnation (Onuoha and Ugwueze, 2014: 24). However, it is to the credit of the Yar'Adua administration that a political solution was first featured in Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts, when the Presidential Committee of enquiry was set up to seek political negotiation which never really yielded desirable outcomes (Campbell, 2019). Therefore, the Yar'Adua administration inevitably bequeathed unenviable counterterrorism credentials to the subsequent administrations, following the backlash effect of the 2009 blunders.

Jonathan's Administration: Escalation of Terror, Counterterrorism Responses and Difficulties in Getting Out of the Wood

With the demise of president Yar'Adua, the leadership baton was handed to Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, under whose administration terrorism trajectory grew sporadically, when the Boko Haram group re-emerged in 2010. However, it should be noted that terrorist violence around 2010 was not limited to the Boko Haram alone, because the Movement

for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) equally engaged in violent attacks in 2010. MEND's attacks took place on 1st October 2010 during the country 50th independence anniversary (Agwu, 2013: 297). It was the combined threats from MEND and Boko Haram that led to the low-key celebration of the 51st Independence Day anniversary in 2011 (Agwu, 2013: 297-298). But unlike Boko Haram, MEND's activities quickly abated following its suppression and the prosecution of its leaders.

Jonathan's administration began counterterrorism efforts with the enactment of Terrorism (Prevention) Act 2011 (re-enacted as Amendment Act in 2013, and henceforth denoted as TPA in this study). The Act empowers the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) to coordinate all efforts of the defence and security agencies and stakeholders involved with counterterrorism in Nigeria. While the TPA 2013 serves as the legal framework for Nigeria's counterterrorism architecture, the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2014 (NACTEST), revised in 2016, became Nigeria's counterterrorism operational and policy framework (Eme 2018; Mentone, 2018). However, despite being tasked for coordinating the counterterrorism activities, ONSA lacks any statutory executive role apart from the advisory position granted it, which has made Nigeria's counterterrorism frameworks and procedures complicated and ineffective in implementation (Onapajo, 2017). This also explains why the Nigerian Armed Forces rather than the ONSA have been in charge of Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts.

For the dynamic operations, there was a declaration of an emergency rule in December 2011 in about fifteen local government areas (LGAs) spanning six states, and another elaborate emergency rule in May 2013 covering Adamawa, Yobe and Borno (Felter, 2018). The 2009 Operation Flush was replaced with the Special Military Joint Task Force (SMJTF) codenamed Operation Restore Order from December 2011 until August 2013 in Yobe State (Falode, 2016). SMJTF had about 100,000 personnel drafted from the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), the Nigeria Police, the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Department of State Security (DSS) (Falode, 2016). In May 2013, as the war extended from Borno to the neighbouring Adamawa and Yobe States, the administration did some force reconfiguration and launched Operation BOYONA (an abbreviation for Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states heavily affected by terrorism at the time), which was also replaced with an enlarged Operation Zamani Lafiya in August 2013 following further growth in Boko Haram trajectory and capability (Omenma et al., 2020).

However, with the growing concerns to foster community participation, the administration officially drafted and trained local volunteers to form the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) (Adesoji, 2019: 12). According to Dulin and Patino (2019: 4), incorporation of the CJTF had a deterrence effect on terrorist attacks in the Northeast, owing to internal communal mechanism in the group's engagement. The CJTF troops were drawn from among the residents: youths, hunters, vigilante groups, and farmers from the towns and villages who were badly affected by terrorism. For reasons of their good knowledge of the terrain and demographics, members of the CJTF became de-facto intelligence apparatus for SMJTF and served as the first line of defence against the terrorists in several instances. Among several contributions, CJTF members foiled an attempted bombing in Maiduguri which is an internally displaced persons' camp in March 2014, which made some of the member to be enlisted into Nigeria's defence and security forces (Kazir, 2017: 2).

To address the shortcomings of the lack of military modernisation, the government sought to procure military materials and equipment, especially air platforms for game-changing manoeuvre against the terrorists, but such efforts were largely frustrated by the United States over allegation of human rights violations (Iwuoha, 2019). More so, further force reconfiguration to combat terrorism led to the establishment of the Nigerian Army 7th Division in Maiduguri with the specific mission of containing and rooting out terrorists, while troops from the Nigerian Army 7th Division eventually formed the nucleus of Operation Lafiya Dole in 2015.¹ However, foreign actors were also brought into the dynamic counterterrorism efforts with the participation of the South African based Specialised Tasks, Trainings, Equipment and Protection (STTEP) force, which was largely instrumental in the dislodgement of Boko Haram in early 2015. The significant contribution of the STTEP was recognised by Matthew Page of Chatham House London, who remarked that:

The only significant and undeniable strategic achievement that can be pointed out about Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts is the liberation, by the Nigerian military in cooperation with international security consultants (STTEP mercenaries), of northern Adamawa State and some areas of Borno State in early 2015. Those actions seem to have blunted Boko Haram's efforts to capture and hold large swaths of territory anymore.²

As for the carrot approach, political solutions were also sought with the inauguration of the Galtimiri Presidential Committee on 2 August 2011 (Agwu, 2013: 309), and another 26 member Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North Committee (Dialogue Committee) headed by Mr Kabiru Taminu in April 2013 (Thurston 2013). Unfortunately, these efforts also did not yield any tangible results and Boko Haram continued to grow in its trajectory and resumed its violent hostilities (Agbibo, 2014). Further carrot approach led to the establishment of a de-radicalisation programme in 2014 inside the Kuje Correctional facility for rehabilitating convicted Boko Haram members (Bukarti et al, 2019: 10). A Presidential Initiative in the North East (PINE) was also inaugurated in 2015 to address the underlying socio-economic problems in the north-east region (Gado and Sanusi, 2019).

To conclude, as Nigeria was worst hit by terror during the Jonathan administration, the country also lacked sufficient global support, which had untoward impacts on its counterterrorism efforts. However, unlike the succeeding Buhari administration that enjoyed 'surplus' in trust and support at the point of coming to power, the Jonathan administration experienced 'deficit' in trust and support from the international community. Thus, while the Jonathan administration recorded some counterterrorism successes, at least in the form of territorial liberation in early 2015, the trajectory of Boko Haram had grown beyond control by the time the administration stepped down in May 2015.

Buhari Administration: Declaration of a Showdown/Counterterrorism Victory, and Intractability of the Problem

The Buhari administration came to power at a time the security situation in Nigeria was unenviable. Solutions to the security problem faced by the country was one of the cardinal campaign manifestoes of his All Progressives Congress party. As a retired Two-Star Army General and former Head of a Military Junta in the 80s, Buhari's coming into office was seen by many as a hope for normalising the national security situations. Thus, at his 2015 Presidential inauguration, the Nigerian Army was ordered to relocate its Headquarters to the theatres of conflict until Boko Haram terrorism ends. The administration redrafted the NACTEST in 2016 (Eme, 2018) and further strengthened counterterrorism architecture by developing Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in 2017 (Mentone, 2018).

Buhari's administration began its kinetic counterterrorism efforts in July 2015 with the replacement of Operation Zamani Lafiya with Operation Lafiya Dole (compulsory peace), establishment of a North East Theatre Command in August 2015 with the headquarters in Maiduguri. Military operations for decimating the materiel capacity of the terrorists codenamed Operation Crackdown was also launched in April 2016 and another aggressive military offensive codenamed Operation Rescue Finale was launched in December 2016 (Omanma et al., 2020). These offensives appear to have been the reasons for the counterterrorism victory statement of the administration, when it announced that the terrorists have been technically defeated in late 2015 (BBC, 2015). However, the Nigerian military has also carried out issue-specific military operations such as the 2018 Operations Deep Punch targeted at clearing the vestiges of terrorists from the Sambisa forest and restoration of order in the Northeast generally. Operations Last Hold carried out in 2018 was also instructive (Omenma et al., 2020).

Moreover, the "relentless pursuit" strategies of South Africa's STTEP, that helped Nigeria in dislodging the terrorists from the occupied territories in early 2015, was adopted by the Nigerian forces in 2016 leading to the establishment of a "combat motorbike battalion" (The Punch, 2016). Troops in the battalion were able to mobilise for faster and flexible operations with an element of surprise in responding to terrorist onslaughts, which brought some improvement and effectiveness to the kinetic manoeuvring of the Nigerian forces (The Punch, 2016). Similarly, in August 2017, the 3 Mobile Strike Teams (MST) under the Operation Lafiya Dole Command was created with operational responsibilities of conducting long-range patrols and carrying out deep hinterland ambushes against the terrorists (Nigerian Army, 2017). Moreover, President Buhari spearheaded the refocusing of the West and Central Africa's Multinational Joint Task Force - where Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon, and recently Benin are members, (MNJTF) for counterterrorism in 2015 (Falode, 2016). Although there are still challenges with this arrangement, but beginning in early 2017, efforts through the MNJTF led to some counterterrorism gains and security improvement in parts of the north-eastern Nigeria (Brenchenmacher, 2019).

The administration also intensified efforts with the carrot approach by launching a counter-narrative initiative against insurgency ideology, which has been deemed necessary for stopping youths' radicalisation (Tella, 2018; Olojo, 2017). Implementation of the initiative is done with the involvement of vetted religious clerics, and had started from the internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps and extended to the hotbed of terrorism in Nigeria.³ Transitional justice

mechanism is another carrot approach embraced by the administration in the form of de-radicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes done in three forms. The first is inside the Kuje's correctional facility in Abuja, the second is done in different affected communities and designated temporary rehabilitation facilities, while the third is domiciled under Operation Lafiya Dole tagged "Operation Safe Corridor"- OPSC (Felbab-Brown, 2018: 86-98). The de-radicalisation programme inside the Kuje Correctional (Prison) facility continues to serve the purpose of de-radicalising and giving vocational training to the convicted terrorists. The second, Yellow Ribbon Initiative, is being anchored by the Neem Foundation since 2017 to rehabilitate women, children and other young people having an association with the terrorists to re-orientate them and help them reintegrate back into the society (Adibe, 2020). OPSC began in 2016 in Mallam Sidi community in Gombe State as a critical rehabilitation effort for captured or willingly surrendered terrorists with the ultimate aim of reintegrating them back into the society as better citizens (Young, 2020).

However, being the most critical of the three de-radicalisation and rehabilitation structures, the personnel for the OPSC were drawn from 13 Federal agencies some of which are the Armed Forces, Department of State Service, Office of the National Security Adviser, the Correctional Service, Drug Law Enforcement Agency, and Nigeria's National Orientation Agency (NOA, 2018). Effectively, over 2000 'repentant' terrorists have turned themselves in for OPSC and hundreds of them have passed through the de-radicalisation process of the OPSC, with the hope they would lead better lives as they return to their original communities (Alkassim, 2019). Unfortunately, there are reports that communities are having a challenge of accepting such people back to their folds (Oduah, 2019), in addition to controversies about the process being unreliable and ineffectual (Adibe, 2020).

In October 2017, Buhari administration established the North East Development Commission (NEDC) as a major agency saddled with the responsibility of reconstructing and developing the region (Kiegebe, 2018). The Commission is consolidating previous development efforts in the northeast and has replaced former programmes such as the Presidential Initiative on the North East (PINE) established in 2015 under the previous administration (Gado & Sanusi, 2019). NEDC has also replaced the 2016 Presidential Committee on the North-East Initiative (PCNI) inaugurated by the Buhari administration and chaired by retired Nigerian Army General Yakubu Danjuma (Tukur, 2019). Another important existing initiative which NEDC is consolidating is the Victims Support Fund (VSF), an initiative that had spent billions of naira for various humanitarian programmes in the terrorism ridden areas of Nigeria (Victim Support Fund, 2019).

However, despite all the above efforts, the problems are far from over. This is why the claims of counterterrorism victory appear to have been premature. Boko Haram terrorists continue to disrupt Nigeria's peace and development. However, the next section examines the variations in the Boko Haram trajectory and capability in determining whether there is a forward march or about face-turn in the entire counterterrorism trajectory and dynamics in Nigeria.

Nigeria's Counterterrorism 'Balance Sheet' Vis-À-Vis the Boko Haram Trajectories

As stated earlier, the central argument of this study is that the effectiveness of Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts can best be evaluated vis-à-vis variation in the trajectories and capabilities of the terrorists in the country. The trajectories and capabilities to examine are operational prowess, organisational basing, political relationships and armed hostilities. Boko Haram's operational prowess includes its resources and capacity: funds, tactics, training facilities, possession of explosive materials and its production facility, and a host of military hardware in the group's possession. Organisational basing refers to occupied territories, including the Sambisa forest used for residential and operational activities. Political relationship concerns its ties to global terrorist' networks such as al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab and the Islamic State. Armed hostilities include its recruitment and sustenance of battalions of foot soldiers and the group's organised attacks.

Boko Haram's Operational Prowess and Resources

Achievement of counterterrorism goals in Nigeria should be based on the extent of its ability in neutralising the group's sources of funding, operational tactics, training facilities, explosive materials and production facility, and possession of defence materiel. This is because the availability of funds, for instance, has provided Boko Haram the impetus for its terrorist enterprise, while possession of firepower has emboldened the sect for its numerous attacks on Nigerians and thereby leading to growth in its trajectory.

Yar'Adua's Administration

At its infancy under the Yar'Adua administration, Boko Haram demonstrated strong firepower with its confrontation with Nigerian forces leading to the death of 1,000 soldiers in 2009 (Umar, 2011: 1). During the confrontations, the group was found to have the capacity to make bombs and other dangerous weapons (Adesoji, 2019). Effectively, the group graduated from a "machete-wielding" mob to AK47 rifles wielding militants during this time. More so, from the funding point of view, the sect initially raised funds from among its recruits, in addition to funding and training received from al-Qaeda elements (Onapajo et al., 2012).

Jonathan's Administration

Sources of Boko Haram's financing range from membership fees, extortion, external funding and support from local sympathisers, kidnapping, illicit drug trafficking, robbery of banks and cash movement vehicles, and ransacking of markets for supplies (Rock 2016: 1-12). It has been confirmed by the Nigerian government that the group received funding from the Algerian based al Qaeda affiliate- AQIM, which on one occasion gave it 40 million Naira (Dearn, 2011). In February 2012, some arrested terrorists confirmed the foreign financial support, establishing the group's links to AQIM and evidence of more funding from Al Muntada Trust Fund and from an entity known as the Islamic World Society (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012: 347).

The group became a full-blown terrorists organisation post-2010, using military uniform, rocket launchers, explosives, armoured protected vehicles, Toyota Hilux Trucks, Sports Utility vehicles and sophisticated weapons systems, and capability to attack police and military formations (Gilbert, 2014). With the assistance of foreign terrorists, Boko Haram reportedly acquired surface-to-air missiles, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), anti-tank missiles, AK47 rifles, and vehicle-mounted machine guns with anti-aircraft visors (Adesoji, 2019:10; Gilbert 2014). The group's tactics evolved from drive-by shooting, to suicide bombing, as seen in the bombing in Jos, another at Mogadishu barracks, the Abuja Force Headquarters, UN facility, Nyanya and in several other places mostly between 2010 and 2014 (Adesoji, 2019: 9). The sect took to attacking public buildings and kidnapping, while it increasingly attacked soft targets and using women and children for suicide bombing (Ogbogu, 2015: 17). For instance, the sect horrendously kidnapped close to 300 schoolgirls in April 2014 in Chibok.

Buhari's Administration

Nigeria recorded counterterrorism success between 2015 and 2017 when the terrorists were dispossessed of rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), anti-aircraft guns, 213 General Purpose Machine Guns, Machines gun of 120 PKM shells vintage, 4 rocket-propelled guns and 1,255 anti-aircraft munitions (Banini, 2020: 145). Unfortunately, such counterterrorism feats appear to have been short-lived because as of 2020, Boko Haram continues to possess AK47 rifles, mortar bombs, shells, RPGs, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), gun trucks, armoured tanks and personnel carriers to the extent that Nigerian forces are usually outgunned, which points to growth in terrorism trajectory. The below lamentation of General Olusegun Adeniyi⁴ indicates the growth in terrorism trajectory and hopelessness in Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts:

Boko Haram has fired more than 100 mortar bombs at us. They have fired more than 80 to 100 RPGs at us, in addition to more than 8-10 Gun Trucks from every side since yesterday... That is one of our MRAPs tyres that has run flat, that bullet tore. We have used more than 20 MRAPs tyres here... We have changed close to 250 Hilux tyres due to the terrain. This is what we are facing... (Haruna, 2020).

Similarly, despite the technical defeat claims by the government, Boko Haram has continued bombing and kidnapping as seen in its audacious and unhindered 2018 kidnapping of over 100 students in Dapchi. Although, some of the bomb-making facilities have been located and destroyed (Channels Television, 2018), but the sect continues to produce explosives and train its foot soldiers without the Nigerian intelligence decisively getting the clear picture. More so, the group continues to have access to funds and supplies to date. To understand the import of this argument, it is important to look at how the US and a section of the international community circumvented global terrorist financing after the September 11 onslaughts, which to an extent altered the spate of terrorism and led to the forfeiture of about \$147.4 million in July 2005 (Rock, 2016: 1). Unfortunately, Boko Haram has successfully avoided detections of its funding sources, while Nigeria and its partners such as the US have largely failed in curtailing the sect's source of funding.

Organisation Basing of the Terrorists in Nigeria

According to Hoffman (2017b), terrorism is sustained and nourished by the availability of sanctuary and safe-haven for the terrorists, elimination of which would lead to counterterrorism success. Thus, if there is an area where Nigeria's poor intelligence gathering mechanism has failed, it is in the area of using the same for proactive counterterrorism measures that could destroy the terrorists' safe-havens. These dynamics are analysed below across the successive Nigerian administrations since 2009.

Yar'Adua's Administration

In 2003, Boko Haram created a camp in Jaijin Biri forest and later in Bama and Gwoza in 2004 for jihadi purposes (Adesoji, 2019: 4), and created 'Afghanistan' settlement in Yobe state in 2004 (Pate 2014: 12). By 2009, Boko Haram had inhabited another territory in Dutshen Tenshin in Bauchi state (Adesoji, 2019: 6), where its confrontations with security forces began the "big trouble" in 2009.

Jonathan's Administration

Under Jonathan administration, the trajectory of the sect grew beyond its initially limited Yobe/Borno areas of operations. Inspired by ISIS operational tactics of territorial conquest, it captured large expanse of lands in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa and eventually declared Islamic caliphate headquartered in Gwoza around June 2014 (Ogbogu, 2015: 17). However, Nigeria recorded a strategic counterterrorism achievement when it liberated occupied territories in early 2015, supported by international security mercenaries (STTEP),⁵ and the group has been unable to capture such magnitude of territories ever since. But this notwithstanding, it significantly grew in its organisational basing trajectory until the early 2015 dislodgement of the sect from such conquered territories.

Buhari's Administration

Under Buhari administration, the Nigerian forces captured the 'Camp Zero' hideout of the terrorists in the Sambisa forest spanning roughly 6,000 square kilometres in 2016, a development that has further affected the territorial conquest prowess of Boko Haram (Banini, 2020:146). Unfortunately, while Nigerian forces' liberation of some territories appears to have diminished the group's ability to execute large-scale attacks between 2015 and 2018, but the unfolding events from late 2018 appear to suggest that the recorded counterterrorism victories in this regard had been short-lived. For instance, terrorists of ISWAP faction successfully made onslaughts on a military facility in Baga in November and December 2018 killing scores of Nigerian forces and temporarily capturing a base of the regional troops (Aljazeera, 2020). More so, Boko Haram continues to use Sambisa forest as safe-haven, and it has pushed into villages and towns from where it was previously dislodged by the security forces (Mbah, 2018).

The Political Relationship of the Boko Haram' Sect

The dynamic counterterrorism operations ought to ensure execution or arrest of terrorist commanders, while disrupting the terror group's infrastructure to delink it from external connections and ultimately dampen its operational capability (Mir, 2018: 54). Thus, Boko Haram trajectory from political relationship perspective should be evaluated.

Yar'Adua's Administration

At its infancy, Boko Haram under Muhammed Yusuf had an affiliation to the Afghanistan Taliban, which informed the group's name as 'Nigerian Taliban' at some point (Azumah, 2015: 40). It also identified with al Qaeda's Osama Bin Laden previously (Onapajo et al., 2012: 345-347). The implication of these dynamics could be seen in the upsurge in the group's trajectory before its 2009 confrontations with security forces.

Jonathan's Administration

Boko Haram generally maintained links with AQIM, Al-Shabaab and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula to obtain advanced training and financial assistance (Azumah, 2015: 12), which manifested in the group's sophisticated mode

of operations from 2010 (Gilbert, 2014; Loimeier, 2012: 151). Also, following Shekau's allegiance pledging in March 2015 and emulation of ISIS's use of technology and enslavement of Yazidi women, Boko Haram demonstrated what it learned by abducting Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 and using YouTube videos for propaganda (Ogbogu, 2015: 17). It also obtained operational experiences as 80-200 of its members reportedly fought for ISIS in Libya (Ogbogu, 2015: 18).

Buhari's Administration

The trajectory of Boko Haram in terms of its political relationship has not receded under Buhari's administration. For instance, post-March 2015, the group splintered and led to the emergence of Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) as an ISIS affiliate. Also, the factions grew in lethality collectively and became the deadliest terrorist group in the world (Afzal, 2020), which led to Nigeria being ranked third among the most terrorised countries globally. While Boko Haram has suffered in-fighting since 2016 following the ISIS rejection of Abubakar Shekau's leadership and the then appointment of Abu Musab Barnawi (Zeen, 2020), Nigeria could not capitalise on this to disrupt the external ties of the sect and allowing it to grow in this dimension of trajectory. It was worrisome that even amid in-fighting, Boko Haram and its breakaway faction have often conflated in carrying out operations against Nigeria such as the 2018 Dapchi abduction with either al-Qaeda or ISIS influence (Zenn, 2018b). Therefore, given that one of the indices for measuring counterterrorism effectiveness is the fracturing of terrorist group's political relationships (Mir, 2018: 50), where even in this key area Nigeria's efforts cannot be deemed to have made any meaningful progress in this direction.

Boko Haram's Armed Hostilities against Nigeria

Since 2010, Boko Haram's armed hostilities have been constant, as the group continues to perpetrate some of the most damaging and cruel outrages of the modern era (Kevany, 2016: 89). It is important to note that any countermeasures against terrorism could be deemed effective only if the terror group's collective-action drives (armed hostilities) break down (Mir, 2020: 50). But as evidences of counterterrorism efforts of the successive Nigerian administrations since 2009 reveal, Boko Haram's collective-action drives have continually grown in trajectory.

Yar'Adua's Administration

As a retaliation to the security forces onslaughts in June and July 2009, Boko Haram invaded police formations in Bauchi, Kano, Yobe and Borno states (Higazi, 2013: 137-145). This was the situation when its leader, Muhammed Yusuf, was extra-judicially murdered, forcing the rest of the commanders to go underground in 2009.

Jonathan's Administration

Boko Haram resurfaced in 2010 and attacked a Nigerian Correctional Service facility setting free 150 prisoners, including its members (Adesoji, 2019: 9). It equally began killing of security forces in their formations in large numbers (Loimeier, 2012: 151), while also attacking traditional rulers and ordinary citizens (Gilbert 2014). As observers have hinted, the sect launched 53 onslaughts that resulted in 1,157 deaths between 27 July 2009 and 17 February 2012 (Adesoji, 2019: 9). It expanded the geographical scope of its attacks to Jos, Kano and Abuja by 2013, coordinated onslaughts on military formations in Maiduguri axis in 2013, in Bama by April 2014 and bombed public facilities in Nyanya in Abuja and abducted hundreds of schoolgirls in Chibok that same year (Gilbert, 2014). In effect, counterterrorism measures in Nigeria did not significantly prevent or effectively counter the group's trajectory concerning its armed hostilities under the Jonathan administration, when the highest number of terrorism-related deaths were recorded (Campbell, 2020).

Buhari's Administration

Since the beginning of the Buhari administration in May 2015, suicide attacks have become common following the post-2015 dislodgement of Boko Haram sect from occupied territories and locations of attacks such as Abuja. The sect has continued raiding and bombing towns and villages (Adesoji, 2019:13), and it audaciously repeated large scale kidnapping of female students in Dapchi in 2018 without any backlash from the security forces. Boko Haram elements have equally conflated with Fulani herdsmen and bandits for sporadic terror attacks in certain places in Nigeria (Zenn,

2019; Channels Television, 2020). In November and December, 2018, Boko Haram attacked Baga, captured a Naval Base in the Northeast in early 2019, and attacked Operation Lafiya Dole troops in March 2020 (Haruna, 2020), which increasingly call to question the claims of counterterrorism victory by the Federal Government.

Boko Haram and other violent non-state actors continue to impact negatively on Nigeria, as alluded to by the Nigerian Army Chief who announced that the sect is now present in faraway Lagos that had hitherto been terrorism free since 2009 (Opejobi, 2020). More so, Boko Haram still recruits and maintains a large pool of foot soldiers for its operations, and this will continue to pose stiff questions to the efficacy of Operation Safe Corridor and other soft power programmes in denying the sect of recruitments. But as some observers have persuasively argued, the actions of the parasitic elites in Nigeria in turning ordinary citizens into dregs of humanity still need to be addressed (Hansen and Musa, 2013; Hansen, 2017). This is because the disgruntled citizens continue to seek their collective goals using religious sentiments, while the ruling elites still manipulate this situation for perpetuating themselves in power creating a vicious cycle of terrorists' recruitment.

Conclusion

This article has examined the variations in Boko Haram trajectories and organisational capability to evaluate the effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts of Nigeria under three administrations since 2009. As the Nigerian counterterrorism experiences have proven, the huge defence budgetary allocations, myriads of military operations, soft-power counterterrorism programmes and even the foreign assisted programmes have not significantly led to the downward trajectory of terrorism. The only undeniable strategic counterterrorism achievement in Nigeria is the liberation of certain occupied territories in early 2015. Besides that, Boko Haram trajectory has continued to grow and counterterrorism outcomes generally remain negative, and purported advances faltering and are questionable, where the advances made are easily reversed. Additionally, there is a need for more coherent counterterrorism policies or strategies in Nigeria, rather than the current arrangement driven more by service-level decisions instead of national-level decision-makers counterterrorism strategies enshrined in NACTEST. Such complications have led to the ineffectiveness of the policies and strategies over the last several years, and instead of forward march, counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria appear to be making about face-turn. More so, Nigeria needs strategic awakening for its counterterrorism efforts and focus on degrading the terrorists in their safe-havens and disrupting their sources of funding and supplies, which can only be achieved with substantial political will, national development, defence and intelligence modernisation, and external collaboration built on active diplomacy.

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Notes

1. Interview with a Nigerian Air Force Group Captain and a former Commander in the Northeast Operations, 13 January 2019.
2. Interview with Matthew Page of Chatham House London via telephone, 22 October 2018.
3. Interview with a former General Officer Commanding Nigerian Army 82 Division, 6 January 2019.
4. Major-General Olusegun Adeniyi was the Theatre Commander of Nigeria's biggest domestic counterterrorism operations codenamed Operation Lafiya Dole (Peace at all cost) from August 2019 until March 2020.
5. Interview with Matthew Page of Chatham House London via telephone, 22 October 2018.

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