

Interrogating the Effectiveness of Nigeria's Counterterrorism Efforts and the Variation in Boko Haram Terrorism Trajectory¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the effectiveness of Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts since 2009 from the perspective of the variation in Boko Haram sect's trajectory and organisational capability. Given that the goal of counterterrorism is degradation of terrorists' operational capabilities and circumvention of their armed hostilities, this study argues that Nigeria's counterterrorism techniques, measures and campaigns have not been effective to the extent that the Boko Haram sect has remained resilient. By examining the group's operational capacity, organisational basing, political ties, and myriads of armed hostilities, the study concludes that Nigeria's counterterrorism approaches and efforts need to be holistic and more strategic to achieve desirable counterterrorism outcomes.

Keywords: Boko Haram, counterterrorism, insurgency, Nigeria, terrorism trajectory

Introduction

While Nigeria has devised various means to counter the Boko Haram terrorism, yet the trajectory has continued to grow. Thus, terrorism in Nigeria continues to raise serious concerns and has been extensively

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studied in the last ten years, in terms of its causes and the ensuing violent activities. Boko Haram's over a decade onslaught on Nigeria and the counter-violence of Nigeria's defence and security forces have reportedly cumulated in the deaths of 38,683 persons between May, 2011 and 1st June, 2020 (Campbell, 2020). Similarly, a report by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicated that Boko Haram violence has caused the displacement of more than 2.5 million people within Nigeria alone and constitutes a complex humanitarian emergency in the Lake Chad Basin (UNHCR, 2019). Thus, these decade long carnages necessarily warrant scholarly scrutiny of the effectiveness of the countermeasures put in place by Nigeria's administrations since 2009 that led to deadly confrontation between the terror group and Nigeria's security and defence forces.

This study interrogates the dynamics of Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts since 2009 with the intent to unravel the extent to which Nigeria has made progress or otherwise. There have been a good number of studies on terrorism and counterterrorism focusing on militaristic approaches (Mir, 2018; Garcia-Alonso *et. al.*, 2016; Dulin & Patino, 2019), while others have explored the non-military approaches to combating terrorism (Olojo, 2017; Hansen & Musa, 2013; Hansen, 2017; Tella, 2018). Largely, Nigeria has focused on the military approach for countering Boko Haram terrorism, but the country has also experimented with the soft approach. Thus, this article brings a new perspective to the debates on counterterrorism approaches in Nigeria by evaluating the outcomes of militaristic and soft power strategies. This way, the study evaluates Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts since 2009 by looking at the variation in the Boko Haram's trajectory, i.e. the group's operational capability, organisational basing, political ties, and capacity for armed hostilities. The study conceptualises counterterrorism to be degradation of the terrorists and reduction in the terrorist violence using mechanisms such as military operations, negotiation, transitional justice efforts and provision of development aid. Findings, however, reveal that while some impressive efforts have been made and some successes recorded, there is need for more holistic and strategic counterterrorism approaches in Nigeria.

Methodologically, the study is a qualitative research that relied on both primary and secondary data sources. The research evolved over September 2018 and April 2020 in different locations in Nigeria, where senior military officers, scholars at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and Universities, and defence and security experts in Nigeria were interviewed. Additionally, a former United State Department of State official was interviewed via online platforms. The study also drew from secondary data sources, including high impact peer-reviewed journal articles, newspapers, books and reliable internet sources.

Discussions in the study are divided into four sections starting with an assessment of the current state of the literature on terrorism and Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts, because it is useful to take a periodic stock given the unfolding nature of terrorism in Nigeria. The second section discusses the counterterrorism programmes of the successive Nigerian administrations. The third identifies counterterrorism pitfalls that have resulted in counter-productive outcomes in Nigeria, such as political issues, the corruption-laden defence sector and poorly modernised security and defence forces that unfortunately work at cross-purposes, and deficient external counterterrorism assistance. The fourth analyses how the growth in Boko Haram's trajectory and operational capabilities constitute evidences of shortcomings of Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts.

Terrorism and Counterterrorism in Nigeria: Review of Literature

No doubt, terrorism has become a global pandemic to contemporary human civilisation and poses grave existential threats to humanity, making citizens of several nations susceptible and forcing many to constantly live in anxiety and perpetual fear. Although there is no universally accepted definition of terrorism, but Hoffman (2017a) describes terrorism as a threat to carry out violent behaviour or actual deployment of violence to achieve political or ideological goals. Enders and Sandler (2012) describe terrorism as a premeditated threat or actual use of violence in which persons or non-state groups that have a socio-political objective express their positions by intimidating or outrightly victimising a large population that are not themselves the target but rather used as means to an end.

Hansen and Musa (2013) and Hansen (2017) contextualised terrorism in Nigeria within the above arguments by submitting that the emergence of terrorism in Nigeria is an uprising by the socially marginalised, the dreg of humanity and the abused against the parasitic and predator ruling elites. Faluyi *et. al.* (2019) put terrorism in Nigeria in perspective when they argued that Boko Haram is a personification of domestic socio-political and economic challenges with a degree of religious influences. As these above arguments imply, the violent individuals or groups resort to employing terrorism to attract attention to their political goal, having realised that they are never able to use the normal political process to achieve their goals. Using the frustration-aggression and the state-failure theories, Maiangwa *et. al.* (2012) also traced the inevitability of terrorism in Nigeria to the deficiency in the national security architecture, official corruption, and overwhelming use of military power, socio-economic problems and dilapidated infrastructures.

Although terrorism is a centuries-long problem for humanity as revealed by Rapoport's (2012) thesis on the activities of the Thugs, the Assassins and the Zealots Sicarii, the scourge is a relatively new national security challenge to Nigeria given that it only became a monumental problem from 2009 (NACTEST, 2016; Solomon, 2015:85). But notwithstanding the relative newness of Boko Haram carnages, MacEachern (2018:180) reminded us that terrorist violence in Nigeria is an outcome of historical processes in the Lake Chad Basin over a few centuries.

However, there are also an avalanche of studies on counterterrorism generally and the Nigerian experience in particular. Mir (2018) asserts that counterterrorism could be effective when a state uses its kinetic mechanism for either arresting or killing the terrorists' commanders and cadres, in addition to wreaking damages to the sect's infrastructure. Dulin and Patino (2019) on their part argued that coercive counterterrorism measures may likely produce either backlash or deterrence. With focus on Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts, Dulin and Patino (2019) observed that community inclusion in the counterterrorism operation leads to deterrence for terror attacks as in the case of inclusion of Civilian Joint Task Force, while unilateral operations by the defence forces has the

backlash effect in which terrorists continue reprisals. But while acknowledging the significance of community inclusion in counterterrorism efforts, Mir (2018) argued that such is necessary for the sake of civilian protection for normative issue but not for any strategic reason.

According to Solomon (2015), a major target of counterterrorism is the weakening of terrorist group and its political appeal, while seeking to deter attacks with the use of the military, intelligence and police apparatus, which is why counterterrorism tends to be a militarised policy. This scholar further observed that counterterrorism measure in Nigeria are counter-productive and exacerbating the existing tensions. And given the ineffectiveness of the militarised approach to end terrorism, a more holistic approach to assessing counterterrorism effectiveness in Nigeria is necessary (Solomon, 2015). Other studies have also been critical of counterterrorism strategies of Nigeria. For instance, Waldek and Shankara (2011) and Udounwa (2013) faulted Nigeria's predominant reliance on military approach, and Loimeier (2012) argued that since terrorism was caused by the peculiar ethnoreligious, socio-economic, political situations of Nigeria's northern hemisphere, only by addressing those challenges that allow youths to be radicalised can Nigeria get out of the wood.

According to Higazi (2013), Nigeria's counterterrorism approach is considered faulty *ab initio* because it started with the use of brute force instead of using the judicial process. Given the arguments against the reliance on excessively militarised counterterrorism approach, therefore, Bakare (2016); Tella (2017); Olojo (2017); and Aghedo and Osumah's (2012) suggestions of using Barry Buzan's soft power approach appear to justify the Nigerian government's Operation Safe Corridor. Leach (2016) and Umar (2013) are also in favour of using good governance and development to address the problems of terrorism in Nigeria.

Arising from positions of the authors above, this study contributes to the body of knowledge and existing debates on the subject matter by providing a new perspective to the analysis of the counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria. Thus, this study fills a research gap on Nigeria's counterterrorism experiences over a decade by

looking at the outcomes from variations in the various strands of capabilities of the Boko Haram group. To start with, the next section of this article makes an overview of counterterrorism programmes and strategies of Nigeria since 2009.

Nigeria's Counterterrorism Approaches since 2009

The Boko Haram sect (together with its splinter faction known as Islamic State West Africa Province –ISWAP) began its violent campaigns in 2009 (Campbell, 2019), and are believed to have gained inspiration, ideologies, training and funding from Islamic State (ISIS), al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab (Zenn, 2016; Zenn, 2018a). A 2018 report claimed that the sect is the fourth deadliest terrorist group globally (Institute of Peace and Economics, 2018), while the sect's activities caused 1,254 deaths in 2017 alone (Dudley, 2018). By way of origin, the nomenclature “Boko Haram” is the pseudonym for *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (JAS) or People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012). The pseudonym was reportedly invented by the local population where the group started its activities, but assumed global popularity through the mass media and has found its way into the global security and political lexicons (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012). According to Adesoji (2019), the sect reportedly began operating clandestinely from around 2002, and capitalised on decades-long national challenges such as abject poverty, failure of the political elites, ethnic nationalism and ethnoreligious power struggles to recruit its foot-soldiers (Onapajo *et. al.*, 2012).

Efforts by the Yar'Adua administration to keep the group at bay led to the group's confrontations with security forces in 2009, which made some scholars to describe the initial state approach as “dispatching state security agencies without any strategy to address the root-cause of terrorism” (Faluyi *et. al.*, 2019: 4-5). Subsequently, the government launched and deployed troops for “Operation Flush” in 2009 (Falode, 2016a; Falode, 2016b). The administration's approach proved counterproductive, because the clampdown only resulted in arrests, extrajudicial deaths of some of the sect's members and eventual reprisal onslaughts on the Nigerian Police formations in Bauchi and its adjoining states (Adesoji, 2019). Although the group

suffered casualties in 2009, its surviving commanders went underground and resurfaced in 2010 with large-scale savagery (Gilbert, 2014).

As things escalated, Nigeria began legal, operational and strategic counterterrorism efforts by enacting the Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act (TPA), in 2011 and amended in 2013. While the TPA 2013 serves as the legal framework for Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts, the National Counter Terrorism Strategy of 2014 (NACTEST), which was amended in 2016 is in effect the counterterrorism operational and policy framework (Eme, 2018; Mentone, 2018). In 2017, Nigeria again enacted another counterterrorism policy known as Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) (Mentone, 2018).

In December 2011, the Jonathan administration responded to the brewing Boko Haram violence with the declaration of an emergency rule in six states affected by the scourge (Felter, 2018). As things further escalated, President Jonathan further declared an elaborate emergency rule in Yobe, Adamawa and Borno States around May 2013 (Felter, 2018). From the operational perspective, efforts to quell Boko Haram's violence made the government to launch the Special Military Joint Task Force (SMJTF) called Operation Restore Order between December 2011 and August 2013 (Falode, 2016a; Falode, 2016b). The Joint Operations involved about 100,000 personnel from the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), the Nigeria Police, the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the Department of State Security (DSS) (Falode, 2016a; Falode, 2016b). Operation Restore Order was replaced with "Operation BOYONA" in May 2013, to address the 'domino dynamics' of Boko Haram violence that had by then extended from Borno to the neighbouring Adamawa and Yobe States. There was a further restructuring of the operations in August 2013, which led to the launching of Operation Zamani Lafiya (Omanma *et. al.*, 2020). More so, force reconfiguration to combat terrorism led to the establishment of the Nigerian Army (NA) 7 Division in Maiduguri with the specific mission of containing and rooting out terrorists, while troops from the NA 7 Division eventually formed the nucleus of Operation Lafiya

Dole in 2015 (Interview with a Nigerian Air Force Commander, January 2019, Lagos). To address the shortcomings with the Nigerian Military capabilities in terms of materiel, the Jonathan administration sought to procure defence hardware (especially air platforms), but such efforts got stonewalled by the United States over the allegation of human rights violations (Interview with a Nigerian Army Colonel, October 2019).

However, the military operations were at some point augmented with the local volunteers known as Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), who were residents such as youths, hunters, vigilante groups, and farmers that were themselves indigenous people from the terrorism ridden towns and villages (Adesoji, 2019). Given their good knowledge of the terrain and demographics, the CJTF operationally became the *de facto* intelligence apparatus for the main military operations, and in several instances acted as the first line of defence against the terrorists (Adesoji, 2019). In a particular instance, the CJTF in March 2014 foiled a planned bombing of an IDP camp in Maiduguri (Adesoji, 2019). The group's contributions to the counterterrorism efforts in the hot spots informed why some of its members got enlisted into the Nigeria's defence and security forces (Kazir, 2017).

Nigeria's government under Jonathan administration also contracted private military outfits to aid counterterrorism efforts in the northeast. In this regard, the South African based Specialised Tasks, Trainings, Equipment and Protection (STTEP), played prominent roles in the clearing of the Boko Haram sect from the occupied territories in early 2015 (Campbell, 2015). An expert recounted the significant contribution of the STTEP by submitting 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 (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 (Interview with Matthew Page, Chatham House, London, via online, October 2019).

However, Nigerian administration had similarly employed the carrot approach, especially with efforts to negotiate with the terrorists. For instance, in August 2011, the government inaugurated a Presidential Committee to dialogue with the sect, an effort that was previously championed by the nation's former Chief of State-Olusegun Obasanjo in the same year (Agwu, 2013). But if there is any counterterrorism effort that has hardly seen the light of the day in Nigeria, it is the aspect of negotiation with the Boko Haram sect. All such efforts broke down and the sect simply resumed armed hostilities against the country from 2011 (Agbibo, 2013). Even when the government made a further attempt with the inauguration of another Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North Committee- at the time called Dialogue Committee- in April 24, 2013 (IRIN, 2012), it also did not have any tangible results as Boko Haram only continued with its wanton destruction in the northeast (Thurston, 2013). But the failure of dialogue notwithstanding, the Nigerian government under Jonathan administration continued with the soft power counterterrorism approach. Such effort led to the creation of the Presidential Initiative in the North East (PINE) in 2015 as a platform for addressing the rampant socio-economic problems in the northeast. (Gado & Sanusi, 2019).

By May 2015, however, with a regime change in Nigeria, the kinetic aspect of counterterrorism efforts saw another force reconfiguration and replacement of Operation Zamani Lafiya with Operation Lafiya Dole (compulsory peace) in July 2015 and creation of a North East Theatre Command in August 2015 (Gado & Sanusi, 2019). Since the emergence of the Buhari administration in 2015, there have been several military operations for decimating the materiel capacity of the terrorists. Examples are Operation Crackdown (April 2016); Operation Rescue Finale (December 2016); Operation Deep Punch (July 2018); and Operations Last Hold (April 2018) (Omenma *et. al.*, 2020).

In 2016, Nigerian military improvised for its force reconfiguration by adopting the "relentless pursuit" strategies of the South Africa's STTEP that helped Nigeria in dislodging the terrorists

from the occupied territories in early 2015 for the creation of “combat motorbike battalion” (Osakwe & Audu, 2017). 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 (*The Punch*, 2016). From the international dimension, around late 2015, the Buhari administration championed the West and Central Africa’s Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which led to improvised joint multinational actions against the Boko Haram by Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria (Nigerian Army, 2017). Efforts of the MNJTF paid off with some military gains and security improvement in parts of the north-eastern Nigeria (Falode, 2016a; Falode, 2016b).

The administration equally continued with the carrot approach by launching counter-narrative initiative against insurgency ideology (Brechenmacher, 2019), implementation of which 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 (Interview with a former GOC Nigerian Army 82 Division, December 2018, Lagos). There has also been the adoption of transitional justice mechanism approach to countering terrorism in Nigeria in the form of de-radicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, part of which is the famous Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) (Bukarti *et. al.*, 2019:9; Felb-Brown, 2018). Starting from late 2017, a North East Development Commission (NEDC) was created for reconstruction and development of the region to consolidate the mandate of the previous Presidential Initiative on the North East (PINE) established in 2015 under the Jonathan administration (Kieghe, 2019; Gado & Sanusi, 2019). NEDC has equally taken over the previous mandate of the 2016 Presidential Committee on the North-East Initiative (PCNI) and the activities of the Victims Support Fund (VSF) (Tukur, 2019; Victim Support Fund, 2019).

Lastly, whereas the successive Nigerian administrations have made laudable efforts to end terrorism, but the problems are far from being over and the counterterrorism victory claims by the incumbent administration seem unjustifiable with the unfolding dynamics of events. Even though the Boko Haram terrorists have been dislodged from the territories previously occupied and now operating mostly from remote areas, the sect's disruptive activities continue to hamper Nigeria's peace and development. However, the shortcomings in the counterterrorism efforts and factors militating against the generality of counterterrorism architecture of Nigeria are discussed in the next section.

Challenges Facing Nigeria's Counterterrorism Approaches

Terrorism has gravely impacted on Nigeria as a result of the flaws in the country's counterterrorism responses. This is why critics and observers have described the government's pronouncements about defeating the Boko Haram sect as premature claims, misplaced beliefs and exaggerations (Freeman, 2018). Top on the list of apparent challenges facing counterterrorism in Nigeria is the lack of political will, politicisation and 'ethnicization' of terrorism. For instance, when the problem started, there were a lot of back and forth accusations from the political elites and even within the religious circles (Interview with Dr Hakeem Onapajo, December 2018). At the infancy of terrorism in Nigeria, the opposition parties claimed it was the creation of the then ruling party, while the then ruling party also accused the opposition of creating Boko Haram as its foot soldiers to frustrate the then incumbent administration out of power (Jonathan, 2018). In a particular instance, the former President Jonathan openly declared that Boko Haram was the violent campaign by the opposition party against his government and that the group's sympathisers had even infiltrated his government (Jonathan, 2018). The problem also manifested in the debates among the religious groups in which the Muslims and Christians accused one another of being responsible for terrorism. These development deepened divisions, controversies and confusions within the Nigerian society, while the disunity simply allowed the terrorists to destabilise the country (Onapajo, 2016).

Another challenge that had militated against Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts is the menace of corruption, as seen in the reported misappropriation of funds meant for counterterrorism operations under Jonathan's administration (Banini, 2020). As alleged, it was either those responsible for arms procurement did not buy the critically needed weapons at all, or where they bought, they simply settled for substandard and outdated ones (Interview with a former GOC Nigerian Army 82 Division). This development, by implications, exposed the Nigerian forces to further incapacitation and eroded their confidence to the extent that Nigerian troops were running away from their formations or war front.

More disturbing shortcoming with Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts is the unhealthy bureaucratic rivalry among the defence and security services, creating failure and inefficiency in intelligence gathering and utilisation (Zenn, 2013; Zenn, 2017). Closely related to the lack of synergy is the existence of Trojan Horses in the country's defence and security set up, as is the case in which classified security information about the movement of a sitting President got leaked by a saboteur in 2014 (Agwu, 2013; Jonathan, 2018). The problem of Trojan Horses, the unpatriotic and incompetent elements, has been linked to how terrorists have sometimes gained access to armoured personnel carriers (APCs), Tanks and other equipment looted from the Nigerian forces (Agwu, 2016: 928-929). However, how these shortcomings have played out in helping Boko Haram grow in its trajectory is examined in the next section.

The Effectiveness of Nigeria's Counterterrorism Efforts and the Variations in Boko Haram's Trajectory and Operational Capabilities

With huge defence and security spending of N4.62 trillion Naira (roughly USD 14 billion) between 2011 and 2015 alone (Olufemi, 2015), yet Nigeria has remained in the terrorism quagmire. At the peak of Boko Haram violence, the country allocated 13.5% and 20% of its annual budget for security and defence in 2013 and 2014 respectively (Banini, 2020: 142). There are also security votes of about N241.2 billion (USD 670 million) at the federal level and about USD 580 million at the state level annually (Page, 2018). For fiscal year 2020, Nigeria has budgeted USD 1.5 billion for defence spending

(Olanrewaju, 2019), whereas the defence sector continues to be plagued by corruption which has contributed to the counterterrorism ineffectiveness as Nigeria continuously remains the third most terrorised nation in the world (Institute for Peace and Economics, 2019). Therefore, this section situates counterterrorism effectiveness within the variation in Boko Haram's trajectories and capabilities, looking at how the group has grown in terms of operational prowess, organisational basing, political relationships and armed hostilities.

Dynamics of the Boko Haram's Operational Capability and Resources

The operational prowess and resources of the terrorists refer to the group's financing, tactics, training facilities, making of explosives and maintenance of explosives factor, and the use of military equipment. Since the goal of counterterrorism is to neutralise the terrorists, therefore, the major evidence of counterterrorism pitfall in Nigeria is the Boko Haram's continued access to funding that has served as oxygen for terrorists. Sources of Boko Haram's financing have ranged from membership fees, extortion from the local population, external funding and support from local sympathisers, kidnapping, illicit drug trafficking etc. (Rock, 2016). To understand how financing serves as oxygen for terrorist violence, we can look at how the United States and the international community circumvented global terrorist financing after the September 11 led to the interception of about USD 147.4 million in July 2005 and effectively altered the spate of terror attacks (Rock, 2016). Unfortunately, Nigeria's counter-Boko Haram measures have not detected and blocked the group's sources of funding, which also constitute a failure in the so call counterterrorism cooperation between Nigeria and its partners such as the US.

Another dimension of growth in the Boko Haram trajectory and operational capability could be seen in how the sect that began with hit-and-run guerrilla tactics has graduated to the use of knives, machetes, locally made guns, clubs, Molotov cocktails (petrol bomb) and swords, drive-by shootings, and now bombings (Adesoji, 2019). The sect effectively resorted to suicide terrorism using vehicle-borne explosive devices, and used the YouTube for propaganda (Falode, 2016b). Similarly, Boko Haram has continued to possess heavy

military equipment with which it has sometimes outgunned Nigerian forces. Nigeria, however, caused the group a setback around 2015 and 2017 following the recovery of some RPGs, anti-aircraft guns, 213 General Purpose Machine Guns, 120 PKM shells, 4 rocket-propelled guns and 1,255 anti-aircraft munitions from the sect (Banini, 2020). But if the events since late 2018 is anything to go by, it then appears that Boko Haram still enjoys growth in its operational prowess trajectory. For example, the Theatre Commander of Nigeria's largest domestic military expedition against Boko Haram recently lamented the shortfalls in the Nigeria's military capacity and the imminent superior firepower of the Boko Haram sect (Haruna, 2020). According to such recent reports, Boko Haram still has over 100 mortar bombs, about 100 RPGs (Haruna, 2020), several Gun Trucks etc., all of which are pointers to the resilience of the group and failure of counterterrorism efforts.

Organisation Basing of the Terrorists in Nigeria

As Bruce Hoffman (2017b), the famous Doyen of terrorism studies scholars has noted, terrorism is in modern times sustained and nourished by the availability of sanctuary and the safe-havens for the merchant of violence, which counterterrorism efforts should properly address. Boko Haram has consistently maintained organisational basing from the time of its emergence, which became more daring when the sect took to insurgency tactics and territorial acquisition leading to its infamous declaration of a jihadi Islamic Caliphate headquartered at Gwoza around 2013 (Weeraratne, 2017:617-618). However, Nigeria achieved a strategic counterterrorism success with the early 2015 liberation of north-eastern territories, ostensibly with the help of international security mercenaries know as Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection- STTEP (Campbell, 2015; Interview with Matthew Page, October 2019). After all, the sect appears to have been unable to capture and hold large expanse of territory till date. A further victory was the capturing of 'Camp Zero' hideout of the sect in the Sambisa forest (Banini, 2020:146).

But Nigeria's territorial liberation noted above notwithstanding, the dynamics of the unfolding events from late 2018 points to resilience of the Boko Haram sect in terms of organisational

basing. For instance, a Boko Haram faction (ISWAP) made very deadly attacks on Nigeria's military facility in Baga in November and December 2018 and captured a base of the regional MJTF troops in which scores of troops were killed (Aljazeera, 2018). Therefore, while mention could be made of counterterrorism efforts stunting the organisational basing trajectory of the Boko Haram sect between 2015 and 2017 given the territorial liberation, Nigeria appears to be struggling with the control of such retaken territories and Boko Haram continues to maintain bases.

Boko Haram External Connections (Political Relationship)

The ineffectiveness of Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts and, by implication, the growth in the Boko Haram trajectory, has been well pronounced with the inability to meaningfully disrupt the group's external connections. According to Mir, to disrupt external links that reinforce the growth in terrorists' trajectory and organisational capability, the military operations against a terror group should ensure killing or arrest of terrorist commanders and disrupt the terror group's infrastructure. (Mir, 2018). However, lack of political will and politicisation of terrorism appears to have at some point made decimation of terrorist commanders impossible in Nigeria. For example, the Nigerian government has sometimes set free the arrested Boko Haram commanders (Adebayo, 2018). Also, the country failed to maximise the counterterrorism victory occasioned by its collaboration with Specialised Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP) that helped the country in the early 2015 liberation of the conquered territories. It was reported that STTEP's planned strategy to decisively decimate the terrorist commanders was jettisoned following the termination of their contract by the current Nigerian administration (Awojulgbe, 2018).

By implication, therefore, Boko Haram has grown in its trajectory and organisation capability through its relations with ISIS, al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab, pledging allegiance to ISIS in 2015 leading to the 2016 creation of Islamic State West African Province- ISWAP, a development that facilitated how the sect became the deadliest terror group (Zenn, 2020; Adesoji, 2019) For instance, Boko Haram has gained inspiration and tactics from ISIS, such as the 2014 and 2018

abductions of female students in Chibok and Dapchi, and the declaration of a Caliphate. While Nigeria has often relied on France and the US to disrupt the influence of international terrorists' connections in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, it is becoming unpredictable how these Western powers will play major roles in the face of the current Coronavirus epidemic (Zenn, 2020:8).

Trajectory of Boko Haram Attacks against Nigeria

It is equally 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, 2018). Boko Haram not only holds bases but has continued to wreak havoc, while Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts with huge defence budgets, myriads of military operations, soft-power counterterrorism programmes and foreign assisted programmes have not significantly halted the operational capability of the Boko Haram sect. Boko Haram and other violent non-state actors continue to disrupt Nigeria's stability and the large scale attacks in November and December 2018 in Baga; the capturing of Naval Base in the Northeast in early 2019 and the March, 2020 attacks on Operation Lafiya Dole troops are examples the group's growth in trajectory (Haruna, 2020; Aljazeera, 2018). More so, Boko Haram still recruits and maintains a large pool of foot soldiers for its operations, which is why experts have questioned the strategic relevance and effectiveness of the Operation Safe Corridor (Adibe, 2020).

Conclusion

Nigeria's counterterrorism policies or strategies cannot be deemed effective given the continued growth in the Boko Haram trajectory and organisational capability in the last ten years. Counterterrorism measures and outcomes remain negative as purported advances have been halting, of a questionable nature, and have been easily reversed. As observed in this study, the only undeniable strategic achievement has been the liberation of some occupied northeast territories in early 2015. Essentially, Boko Haram has continually grown in its operational capability, recently reclaimed bases including military formations, continues to carry out recruitment and attacks, keeps its

political relationships with global terror networks, while still in possession of firepower that is increasingly out-manoeuvring the Nigerian military. Therefore, this study recommends a more holistic and strategic counterterrorism efforts based on the effective implementation of the NACTEST and other legal and operational frameworks.

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