TRACKING THE TREND OF RELIGIOUS TERRORISM AROUND THE WORLD, VIS-À-VIS THE NIGERIAN CASE

Peter Alawa & Onyinyechi P.C. Wariboko♦

University of Port Harcourt – Nigeria

Abstract

Religious terrorism around the world mostly perpetrated by Islamic fundamentalists appears to follow a particular pattern — from powerful organized attacks to attacks by lone maniacs as the organized group weakens. This study, a qualitative inquiry into the situation of religious terrorism elsewhere around the world, vis-à-vis Nigeria, aims to decipher the likelihood of a replication of the same trend in Nigeria. The study demonstrates that religious terror groups are mostly fractious and have devised means of selling their ideologies and cause to individuals and small groups who carry on attacks in furtherance of their cause. Hence the study also suggests that the same trend could play out in Nigeria in no distant time. There is the need, therefore, to be forearmed in preparation for such a development. Theologically, Christianity on the other hand, stands for nonviolence even though

♦**Dr Peter Alawa** had his Doctorate in (Metaphysics) Philosophy from the University of Port Harcourt-Nigeria. He has been teaching Metaphysics and Philosophy of Religion for more than 20 years. He served as the Chairman, Ethics and Grievances Committee, Academic Staff Union of Universities, University of Port Harcourt Chapter from 2015-2018. His recent important publications are *The Mysteries of Life* (2016) and *Dumebenata (Life After Death)* (2015). Email: peteralawa@yahoo.com

Dr Onyinyechi Priscilla Christian Wariboko had her doctorate in Religion and Society from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. She has been teaching in the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Port Harcourt–Nigeria since 2013. Her works include: *Armament and Disarmament in Nigeria: Juxtaposing Niger-Delta Militancy and Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria* (2014), *The Prospects and Dangers of Islamophobia in Nigeria* (2015), *A Gendered Dimension of Terrorism in Nigeria: A Case of the Chibok Girls* (2016), *Religion and International Terrorism: A Case of Islam* (2011) and *Information Technology and the Propagation of Terror: A Case of Boko Haram* (2018). Email: onyinyechi.wariboko@uniport.edu.ng; fortuneaniago@yahoo.com

there are scriptures in the Old Testament, practically defunct in present times, that literally commands violence that can be equated to terrorism. However, to contend with such a situation if and when it happens in Nigeria, some cautious steps are called for, such as increased intelligence gathering, the dismantling of Islamophobia, arms control and disarmament, media censorship, intensive sensitization of the public, rekindled and reinforced message of peace and pacifism by Islamic and Christian clerics alike, sanitization of military agencies, arrest and scrutiny of individuals with terrorist tendency and good governance.

Keywords: Christianity, Islam, Nigeria, Religious Terrorism

Introduction

Terrorism, a major world disorder, like many other forms of crime, continues to evolve. Dealing with national as well as transnational terrorism has continued to prove onerous to nations and the international community. Rather, these terrorists, be they political, domestic, or religious, continue to spread in novel ways, birthing similarly passionate or even worse groups. This scourging world disorder, particularly religious terrorism, seems to have an inevitable trend and pattern it takes.

Apparently, because of the peculiarity of religious terrorism, military strikes and offensives against them is not enough deterrent to stop them. The more it appears the military close in on them, the more they metastasize. They inspire new groups and individuals in different parts of the country to carry on their evilly course usually clad in beautiful and persuasive rhetoric and peddled via the internet and other media. This trend frustrates military efforts against terrorism and sees to the exponential growth of terrorists and terrorist acts. As they are being decimated, there is apparent increase in the number of single terrorist actors. Terrorists no longer necessarily have to operate as a large group. Individuals and small groups are beginning to hijack religious terrorism. On May 2016, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani (now late), the then Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Islamic State Organization (ISO as they now claim) spokesperson released a video in the group's twitter account exhorting their European and American inspired 'lone wolves' with several Quranic verses to stop coming to join the caliphate but that they should launch attacks in their respective stations against unbelievers. Al-Adnani said this after a "seeming admission of recent defeats."[1]

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[1]Paul Kamolnick, "Abu Muhammad al-Adnani's May 21, 2016 speech," in *Small Wars Journal*, 2016. Accessed June 25, 2017. http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/abu-mohammad-al-adnani%E2%80%99s-may-21-2016-speech.

Since June 2014, ISIS alone, have conducted or inspired 140 terrorist attacks in 29 countries other than Iraq and Syria.[2] Thousands of people have been killed and thousands others injured from those attacks. On June 13, 2016, Larossi Abele killed a police officer and his romantic partner in Magnanville, west of Paris. While attacking them, he pledged his allegiance to ISIS via Facebook. It is therefore believed that ISIS inspired that attack. Again, on June 7, 2016, ISIS issued a statement claiming that a Hindu monk in western Bangladesh was murdered by one of its followers. This attack is also believed to have been inspired by ISIS.

Aside inspired attacks by ISIS, many of its affiliates or those terrorist organizations that have publicly declared their allegiance to them launch attacks modelled after the mode of operation of ISIS and in furtherance of the ISIS course. Even the Talibans, a religious terrorist organization based in Afghanistan, have at one time or the other inspired lone maniacs to terrorize. There is a case that made the rounds in January 2017 about one Jamshid Piruz who decapitated a woman, his tenant, in the Netherland after being inspired by a Taliban execution video. He served a jail term of 12 years for the crime after which he crossed to the UK. Days after in the UK he attacked two policemen with a deadly claw hammer.[3]

Another case in point is the recent assassination of the Russian Ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov by Mevlut Mert Altintas, a police officer in Ankara's riot police squad in December 2016. Melvut was apparently inspired by an Islamic fundamentalist terrorist group. After shooting and killing the ambassador, Melvut shouted in Arabic, among other things he exclaimed that, "we are the one who pledged allegiance to Muhammad, to wage Jihad."[4] Further investigation shows that he has been studying Al-Qaeda materials.

Such lone terrorist attacks have been on the increase in recent times. The record of such attacks in Europe abound. On March 22, 2017, a 52-year-old Khalid Masood carried out a terrorist attack at the vicinity of the Palace of Westminster in London as he drove a car into pedestrians, killing two men and two women and injuring many others. Also four people were killed, with at least fifteen others

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[2]Tim Lister et al., "ISIS Goes Global: 143 Attacks in 29 Countries Have Killed 2,043," Updated February, 2017, http:www.cnn.com>2015/12/17>mapping-i…

[3]Jamie Micklethwaite, "Horrifying Moment Taliban-inspired Killer Launches Hammer Attack at Police," Updated January 14, 2017, http://www.dailystar. co.uk>News>LatestNews

[4]Shaun Walker, et al., "Russian Ambassador to Turkey Shot Dead by Police Officer in Ankara," *The Guardian,* December 20, 2016, http://www.theguardian. com>…>Russia.

wounded by 39-year-old Rakhmat Akilov in Stockholm on April 7, 2017 when he drove a truck down a shopping street that was busy. Akilov allegedly admitted being a member of ISIS. More so, on May 22, 2017, 22 persons were killed and 59 others injured as a lone suicide bomber identified as 22-year-old Salman Abedi detonated explosives among teenage fans leaving Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena. That was reputed to be the mostly deadly attack in Britain in a decade. On another occasion, three knifemen went on a killing spree on June 3, 2017 after they ran into pedestrians on the London Bridge with a van and when their van crashed, they ran into Borough market stabbing people with knives. It is alleged that they were inspired by Islamist terrorists.[5] On the aftermath of Manchester concert attack in May 2017, Ms Theresa May, the British Prime Minister is quoted on CNN as saying and correctly so, that the military decimation of ISIS has led to intense indoctrination of self-selecting individuals.

Nigeria is currently facing religious terrorism which is conspicuously and confessedly patterned after some foreign terrorist organizations and copy a lot from them. Lone attacks by apologists of these religious terrorists are not patent yet and have not been recorded in Nigeria like it is in Europe and the United States. One, however, worries about its probability and the prospects of truly winning the war against terrorism in Nigeria as the government claims. Judging by the trend of religious terrorism around the world and how recalcitrant the war against it has been, one wonders if the Nigerian case will be any different.

This study is qualitative in its method of inquiry, and draws perceptiveness from extant literature, interviews and observations in investigating the trend of religious terrorism around the world about the Nigerian case as well as a Christian theological reflection on the issue. Considering similar global trends, it is doubtful if the war against religious terrorism in Nigeria would end with the current military battle against it or will follow the inclination of inspiring individuals or group sympathizers who will continue their cause. To build a compound and holistic picture of the phenomenon under study, a brief conceptual analysis of religious terrorism will be done, followed by a painstaking trace of the trajectory of some cases of religious terrorism around the world, especially in contemporary times, to see how they have evolved. The above undertaking requires spotlighting the Nigerian situation in juxtaposition with the cases in

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[5]Alice Foster, "Terror Attack Timeline: From Paris and Brussels Terror to Most Recent Attacks in Europe," *Express*, June 23, 2017, www.express.co.uk.

other parts of the world. There is no doubt, following global trends, of the possibility of a replication of the trend elsewhere in Nigeria. Finally, recommendations will be made as a way of pre-empting the trend in Nigeria and then conclusion will be drawn.

Religious Terrorism

Scholars acknowledge different kinds of terrorism — political, quasi, state, religious terrorism and so on. However, religious terrorism is referred to as "violent actions performed by groups or individuals for purposes of achieving faith based tenets."[6] Fundamentalist beliefs and practices are causative factors of religious terrorism. Therefore, religious terrorism could be taken to mean the employment of untold violence, capable of evoking terror by an individual or group of individuals who are often times, religious extremists. They are usually driven by religious ideologies and use indiscriminate force to coerce or force individuals and governments to kowtow to their demands which are usually coated in religious sentiments.

Terrorists acts in contemporary times are sometimes complicated and complex such that one cannot distinctively separate one kind of terrorism from the other. Often times, so-called political terrorism takes up a religious dimension and vice versa. "Often enough religion has served as a handmaiden to politics and imperialism."[7] However, any terrorist act that claims to derive its inspiration or motivation from religious tenets and sentiments or is carried out to expand the frontiers of a particular religion can be said to be religious terrorism. For some religious terrorists, especially martyr/suicide terrorist, terrorism "is religious redemption in the next life."[8] Religious terrorism is a product of "a so-called sacred ideology."[9] Religious terrorists usually claim that their activities are carried out at God's behest and one of their major characteristics is intractability. An example of religious terrorism is the terrorism carried out by Islamic fundamentalists who unleash ideological hatred by way of unlimited violence. The most popularly known form of terrorism that is associated with religion in contemporary times is the terrorism of Muslim fundamentalists.[10]

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[6]Eze Chukwuemeka, "The Concept of Terrorism," in *Transnational Terrorism: Great Powers and the Politics of Human Destruction,* ed. Eze Malachy Chukwuemeka and Joseph Oluchukwu Wogu, Germany: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2011, 51.

[7]Chitkara G. and Girdhari Sharma, *International Terrorism*, New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2002, 100.

[8]Nicholas Fotion, Boris Kashnikov and Joanne Lekea, *Terrorism, the New World Disorder*, Great Britain: MPG Books, 2007, 103.

[9]Chitkara and Sharma, *International Terrorism,* 97.

[10]Chitkara and Sharma, *International Terrorism,* 98.

The Trajectory of Some Cases of Religious Terrorism around the World

The following are confessedly Islamic terrorist groups with somewhat international character — Al Qaeda based in Afghanistan and established by Osama bin Laden; the armed Islamic group based in Algeria; Asbat Al-Ansar based in southern Lebanon; Hezbollah based in Palestine, etc. Others include the Taliban in Afghanistan, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and boko haram in Nigeria. These and other Islamic fundamental terrorist groups, have as their mission, to force Islam and the Islamic law (Shariah) on nation states, especially non Islamic states, 'purify' Islam of liberal or westernized Muslims, oust non-Islamic governments and perhaps conquer the whole world for Islam.[11]

The activities of some of the groups mentioned above are more pronounced than others especially in the contemporary. However, the crux of this study is not to investigate these groups as it were, to understand their aims, modes of operation and other nitty-gritty about their operations. This study is interested in understanding the path they have taken and how they are evolving in the contemporary amidst intense coalition of military actions against them in all the political spaces where they are located. Particularly, this study aims to investigate the source of their resilience and proliferation in relation to the boko haram terrorist group in Nigeria. Boko haram is a jihadist terrorist group founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2001 or 2002 and based in the Northeast of Nigeria. They refer to themselves as people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and jihad (Arabic: جماعة اهل السنة للدعوة والجهاد, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad*). They strongly oppose 'man-made' laws and seek to abolish the secular system of government and establish sharia law in Nigeria. Boko haram is Hausa language that translates — 'Western education is sacrilege' or 'a sin.' Their activities in Nigeria have heightened since 2009. They are responsible for innumerable loss of lives, properties and the spread of terror in Nigeria, especially her northern part and countries like Chad, Cameroon and Niger Republic. Their modus operandi includes bombing, suicide attacks, gun attacks, hostage taking and social media propaganda. They modelled themselves after the Talibans in the past and recently, ISIS.

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[11]Onyinyechi Aniago, "Religion and International Terrorism: A Case of Islam," in *Transnational Terrorism: Great Powers and the Politics of Human Destruction*, ed. Eze Malachy Chukwuemeka and Joseph Oluchukwu Wogu, Saarbrucken: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2011.

It must be noted that terrorist groups around the world have not been spared militarily. The United States of America has since declared war against terrorism and has, in synergy with some of its allies, been bombarding some of the groups with explosions, airstrikes, military combats and so on. All manner of harm has been meted out on Al-Qaeda, the Talibans and ISIS in recent times by the military — their economic sources destroyed, fighters killed, leaders captured in some cases, territories recaptured in some other cases and so on. In Nigeria, boko haram is a serious threat to national security and it is assumed that superior military force will obliterate them. It is however worth noting that the military have been on their feet launching offensives against boko haram or so they claim and from reports gotten from the media and the government, the Nigerian military is supposedly 'winning' the war against boko haram.

The terrorist groups around the world appear unrelenting in their course. They seemingly continue to reinforce and cause terror through their activities and especially motivate and inspire Muslims all over the world to join their course. This is evident in the growing number of 'lone wolf' attacks inspired by these mainstream terrorist groups as narrated in the introduction.

It therefore appears that the tactics of employing polemics and rhetoric with the highly needed support of the media for wide coverage and also via the internet is the real issue to deal with about religious terrorism in recent times and not necessarily the particular terrorist groups that have contour and location and can be invaded and engaged in a military combat with a probability of wiping them out, even though it is usually arduous. Boko haram is driven by a religious ideology and since an ideology cannot be killed with a gun, military actions against them alone will be grossly inadequate. There is more to the obdurate spread of religious terrorism that meets the eye — a mystery that only military actions may not be able to assuage. "If terrorists were coerced or simply paid to fight, they likely would lose heart in the face of serious military challenges. However, motivated as many of them are by a cause, especially by one associated with their religion … they will not fade away easily."[12]

It appears that religious terrorists around the world are well abreast with the art of tactically garnering support and inspiring apologists to continue in pursuit of their 'religious course,' — the killing of so-called unbelievers. One of the tactics they employ is by

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[12]Fotion, Kashnikov and Lekea, *Terrorism, the New World Disorder,* 107-108.

crying foul, that the Islamic religion is under threat of extinction and they have been ordained by Allah to liberate it. It is a known matter that issues of religion usually evoke strong emotions. Hence, they appeal to the conscience of gullible Muslims to join their course to 'save Islam.' More so, they do not require strongly knit organization to operate. "Most terrorist operations are not so complicated as to require extensive cooperation... So, individual and independent cells can both do their work and do it in the confines of a loosely linked organization, and survive."[13] This decentralization helps in the subtle spread of terrorism acts.

Furthermore, the conspicuous presence of Islamophobia especially in the West goes to convince even peaceful and harmless Muslims that their religion is under attack and compels them to pick up arms to defend their revered religion. Islamophobia is absurd and has the ability to generate reprisal belligerence from non-bellicose Muslims. It usually has "dreadful consequences."[14] Islamic religious terrorists capitalize on this anomaly (Islamophobia) in their clamour that Islam is under threat. "Islam as a whole does not plead for violence and on the contrary is compassionate and kind, yet the terrorist of this religion can always get sympathy of Muslims by shouting Jehad or 'Islam in danger.'"[15]

The availability and accessibility of arms, light weapons and materials for improvised explosive device legally and/or illegally in many countries around the world and in Nigeria particularly is a boost to the morale of radicalized individuals to carry out terrorist attacks individually and in cells. Armament therefore aids the spread and resilience of religious terrorism the world over. The place of uncontrolled armament as a prod for crime and terrorism cannot be overemphasized. Violence comes handy to unscrupulous people and groups because they have access to arms which is used to perpetrate it. Easy accessibility to arms makes it easy for religious terrorists to inspire maniacs and have them carry out terrorist activities irrespective of their location.[16]

The positive role of the media in the fight against terrorism cannot be overstated. They keep the populace informed, help in sensitizing people on terror plots and could stimulate well-meaning citizens to make efforts to fight religious violence. Nevertheless, the media

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[13]Fotion, Kashnikov and Lekea, *Terrorism, the New World Disorder,* 109-110.

[14]Onyinyechi Wariboko, "Prospects of Islamophobia in Nigeria and its Dangers," *International Journal of Religion and Human Relations* 7, 1 (2015) 60.

[15]Chitkara and Sharma, *International Terrorism,* 105.

[16]Onyinyechi Wariboko, "Armament and Disarmament in Nigeria: Juxtaposing Niger-Delta Militancy and Boko Haram Insurgency in Northern Nigeria," *The Creative Artist: A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies* 8, 3 (2014) 88-110.

seems to be the greatest 'culprit' as regards widely disseminating terror and recruiting terrorists albeit unintentionally. They help terrorists sell their agitation/motive that is usually concealed in a 'just cause' garb.[17]

With the aid of the mass media, terrorists get free advertising concerning the quality and quantity of their work. People can view the attacks and the results on television over and over again... It is difficult to imagine a more welcome gift to their cause.[18]

The free advertising also serves as lecture to be copied by 'inspired' lone wolf attackers/martyr terrorists. They learn how best to carry out their own terror escapade. Sometimes, the purpose of terror attacks may not necessarily be to terrorize, instead, knowing that the media works hand in gloves with them, "their main aim may be to inspire the friends and allies of the terrorists at home and abroad … and to inspire others to join or support the cause … the media act as terror multipliers."[19] "The media has really aided terrorist groups to actualize most of their goals. Such goals include creating public awareness, fear and anxiety in people, winning sympathizers and recruiting members."[20] Terrorism is actually "aided and abetted by a media increasingly voracious for sensation... In the name of a sacred right to know, competitive elements of the media act as an unwitting tout for terrorism."[21]

The greatest challenge in the fight against terrorism therefore, is not the challenge of military battle against them in their clusters as organizations, but forestalling their ability to inspire, petrify, radicalize and recruit votaries using the internet and media. Such that supposedly good citizens and non terrorists are made terrorists overnight and pose serious danger to the society. This has been obvious in the United States of America and other western countries where weakened terrorist organizations as a result of military bombardments, still terrorize terribly through individuals they inspired and their other affiliates. This emerging trend of terrorism must be put into consideration in dealing with terrorism in

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[17]Chitkara and Sharma, *International Terrorism*; Fotion, Kashnikov and Lekea, *Terrorism, the New World Disorder*; Joseph Wogu, "The Role of Information in the Management of Terrorism," in *Transnational Terrorism: Great Powers and the Politics of Human Destruction,* ed. Eze Chukwuemeka and Joseph Wogu, Germany: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2011.

[18]Fotion, Kashnikov and Lekea, *Terrorism, the New World Disorder,* 112.

[19]Fotion, Kashnikov and Lekea, *Terrorism, the New World Disorder,* 113, 166.

[20]Wogu, "The Role of Information in the Management of Terrorism," 221.

[21]Chitkara and Sharma, *International Terrorism,* 276.

contemporary times. The military option cannot fully deliver the defeat of religious terrorists as the fight to cleanse Islam of Western influence is a global continuum. Terrorists are believed to possess an inherent drive to forge ahead, while military might has the potency to slow them down but not to annihilate them.

Relating the Case Elsewhere to the Nigerian Situation

Nigeria as a nation in the globalized world is facing her own share of religious terrorism. Boko haram seem to be learning the tactics and strategies of ISIS and other international terrorist groups that claim to be fighting a religious cause. For instance, following the decapitation of some ISIS hostages in 2015, which of course, was well advertised by the media, they began to behead some of their hostages too. More so, they also maximize the media in propagating their cause after the order of other international terrorist groups. They, just like ISIS and other religious terror groups are aware of the efficacy of and employ suicide bombers/martyrs in disseminating terror. Boko haram also seem to be learning the art of using the internet, social media, mobile telephones to coordinate terror attacks, spread their despicable activities and win sympathies/support or new members online.

Are There Prospects of a Replication of the Trend Elsewhere in Nigeria?

The trend elsewhere is unequivocal. As these terrorists are wearied as a result of military attacks, they get busy selling their ideology, propaganda through the internet, media and inciting people with persuasive rhetoric and propaganda. Their success is evident in the number of lone wolf attacks by individuals and inspired attacks by terrorist affiliate groups around the world. On January 3, 2017, CNN headline read: "Weakened ISIS Still has Power to Terrorize." CNN acknowledges the fact that ISIS has been made weak because of offensives against them but still has the ability to terrorize having succeeded in scrupulously gaining apologists and fighters from around the world and these apologists and fighters are ready and willing to carry on the fight.

It may not be wrong to say that there are perhaps, a few Nigerians that actually sympathize with boko haram and honestly think that their cause is worth the fight. There could also be some Muslims that succumb to the false alarm that Islam as a religion is in danger as a result of the activities of the Nigerian government and western influence on Nigeria. Nigerian porous borders and the influx of illegal arms, coupled with the dawning reality of Islamophobia in Nigeria where people are suspicious of and relate with Muslims

generally with contempt, the activities of the media that actually aid and abet terrorism and the copycat tendency of boko haram which is evident in the way they imitate ISIS and other religious terrorist groups around the world, all conspire to usher in the trend of inspiring individuals/fighters and garnering strong support in a loosely structured way in Nigeria. Ultimately, Quranic injunctions are often employed, sometimes in isolation, by fundamentalist to radicalize Muslims. Such injunctions that were used in al-Adnanai's speech for instance, include: "And when you find those who have disbelieved, then smite at their necks" (Quran 4:47).

More so, the members of boko haram group are also members of particular tribes, communities and families. Hence, tribal or brotherly sentiments could interfere with sound judgment and cause their family members to sympathize with them, conceal their nefarious activities from law enforcement agencies or even join them. A naval officer from the northern part of Nigeria who was dispatched to be part of the anti-terror troop to fight boko haram once said to the hearing of the researcher that he cannot in good conscience, fight and kill his own brothers who are simply fighting for a cause they believe in. Such are the kind of officers that sabotage the efforts of the military in the fight against boko haram. Sometimes, they in disguise, actually fight for them and would rather exterminate their own colleagues than kill their 'brothers.' The case of the military officer cited above is just one in many other military personnel that sabotage the fight against boko haram and in fact aid them based on sentiment. Boko haram also has sponsors who, even though they may not be able to fight, give their support financially. These sponsors also believe in their cause.

Some sympathizers and actual/prospective supporters of boko haram are those who look beyond the immediate cause of terrorism which has a religious tint, to the remote causes of belligerence in the northern part of Nigeria. They are of the opinion that the north, especially the north east has been neglected by government over the years. Hence, unemployment, abject poverty, illiteracy, stagnation and lack of development are the actual remote causes that prepared the ground for the activities of these disgruntled individuals susceptible to violence and terrorism. Disaffection or frustration about some political or social condition "is a necessary condition for explaining why individuals move in the direction of martyr terrorism."[22] Religious quagmires in Nigeria owes to several

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[22]Fotion, Kashnikov and Lekea, *Terrorism, the New World Disorder,* 102.

conspiring factors such as "poverty, illiteracy, greed and grievance, ethnicity, undue fundamentalism, political interference and foreign influence."[23] However, boko haram does not make reference to any of these wretched situations in the north as the reason for their dissatisfaction. The reason for their disgruntlement is apparently and confessedly religious.

There is therefore no gainsaying that the observed trend of religious terrorism around the world may be replicated in Nigeria in no distant time. Nigerians could be copycats. They could blindly copy the good, the bad and the ugly. More so, the war that has been declared by these misguided extremists who claim to be defending Islam is a global one. This global cause appears to take similar pattern around the globe. Boko haram is more of a part of a global ideology than a group of individuals. Hence, a military defeat of the sect in their base in Nigeria will unlikely end their ideology and its furtherance. Their cause could be carried on by Muslims who are pressed by the pangs of Islamophobia or those who have been radicalized. More so, their sympathizers or those that believe that their cause is legitimate could begin to carry out lone wolf attacks in their respective locations.

That-notwithstanding, there is also the possibility of the original members of boko haram group, travelling around the country, mingling with people and planning and executing attacks on the people. This kind of attack may not be easy but is possible in Nigeria, especially suicide bombing or martyr terrorism. In the United States of America and Europe, with their level of intelligence, meticulousness and impermeable borders, terrorists still sneak in or plan and execute miniature attacks with little or no assistance. Hence, the dispersal of boko haram members all over the country for unassisted or sparsely assisted attacks could happen. More so, because of globalization, there could also be the possibility of external/international terrorists, say ISIS inspiring a Nigerian or some Nigerians to launch a terrorist attack in defence and propagation of Islam.

A Christian Theological Reflection on Religious Terrorism

In Christian theology, religion is both connected to peace and violence simultaneously. A good number of scriptures, especially in the Old Testament bid untold violence. This, scholars have argued, is

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[23]Ohajanwa Sylvester Enyioma, *Basics of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, Owerri: CINORYZ World Services, 2013, 113.

tantamount to terrorism. Such scriptures include: Isaiah 13:15-18, Ezekiel 9:5-7, Numbers 16, 2 kings 1:9-12, 2 Kings 2:23-25 and Jeremiah 51:20-26 where the murder of men, women, children, babies and destruction of properties were wrathfully ordered. These scriptures have been used to justify violence. A more vivid picture of these violence are recorded in sundry Bible commentaries. These untold violence have been referred to as "horrific and indiscriminate."[24] These passages that command violence have been described as "toxic Christian theology."[25] Yet, some other scholars prefer to use the term — 'theological terrorism' or 'theocratic terrorism.'[26]

There are elements of Christian theology that serve as historical models for the justification of violence. Hence, "contemporary religious terrorists and extremists can find a storehouse of justifications for their use of violence in the teachings and history of their faith."[27] It is worthy to state here however, that unlike other forms of terrorism, acts of terror in the Bible are usually provoked and targeted. They are usually for judgment but never used to merely win converts or get attention.

However, terrorism or better put, theological terrorism among Christians is apparently waning but for mischievous 'Christians' that hide under the auspices of the Christian religion and perpetrate violence deriving their certitude from scriptures. The reason is because, the New Testament has tempered the violent tempo of the Old Testament and Jesus himself depicted love, mercy, compassion and lived a pacifistic life. Warfare for Christians in contemporary times therefore, is a spiritual affair other than a physical one (2 Cor 10:4). It is therefore contended that "the non-violence of Jesus reveals the true character of the God portrayed in the scriptures, and that we must read biblical passages about divine violence through this lens."[28] Therefore, Christian response to contemporary global terrorism is nonviolence.

The trend of religious terrorism in Christian theology shows a paradigm shift from terror to nonviolence. Terrorists in

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[24]Collins, as cited in Patrick McCormick, "Violence: Religion, Terror, War," *Theological Studies* 67, 1 (2006) 149, http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/67/67.1/67.1.6.pdf

[25]Sami Zaatari, "Bible Commentary on Biblical Terrorism," accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.answering-christianity.com/sami_zaatri/bible_commentary_on_terrorism.htm; Morgan Guyton, "Can Christian Theology Promote Terrorism?," updated November 28, 2015, accessed September 17, 2017, http://www.patheos. com/blogs/mercynotsacrifice/2015/11/28/can-christian-theology-promote-terrorism/2015.

[26]Herb Silverman, "Theological Terrorism," updated December 1, 2016, http://www.m.huffpost.com.

[27]McCormick, "Violence: Religion, Terror, War," 144.

[28]Janzen as cited in McCormick, "Violence: Religion, Terror, War," 149-150.

contemporary times peddle belligerence and encourage apologists to further their course in diaspora, while the Christian theology try to undermine violence and imbibe nonviolence and love like Jesus did and also encourage votaries to do the same. However, unscrupulous Christians who are looking for scriptural certitude to unleash physical terror especially on the enemies or as a reprisal will find an inundation of them in the Old Testament.

Pre-empting this Ugly Trend in Nigeria

The place of utilizing early warning signals in forestalling conflict and violence has been well documented.[29] Early warning in conflict, "generally refers to the set of activities that aim to collect, collate and analyse data in order to detect and identify the signs of an emerging crisis before it explodes."[30] "An early warning capability provides for preparedness, response, and mitigation mechanism needed to deal with emergency needs."[31] Early warning helps to raise alert for probable conflict scenarios and how best to remedy the situation. Terrorism, the happening world disorder continues to take new shape and follow novel dimensions every day. The ability to forecast such dimensions and deal with them before it fully matures is imperative. Therefore, "security agencies should always proffer solutions for non-existing evil before it occurs."[32]

As we look to the future, we must anticipate even more complex and demanding situations … Prevention, and deterrence should be the task for the government and it must be prepared to meet the challenge of the terrorists firmly now and in the future.[33]

Employing simple syllogism, it is apparent that the trend terrorism, particularly religious terrorism around the world has taken

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[29]Ted Gurr, "Early Warning Systems: From Surveillance to Assessment of Action," in *Preventive Diplomacy: Stopping Wars Before They Start,* ed. Kevin Chill, London: Basic Books, 1996; Philip Hall. "Early Warning Systems: Reframing the Discussion," *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 22, 2 (2007); Musifiky Mwanasali. "African Conflict Prevention Strategies," in *Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A Reader,* ed. Miriam Ikejiani-Clark, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2009; Ken Ifesinachi, "Early Warning Systems and Conflict Management," in *Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A reader,* ed. Miriam Ikejiani-Clark, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2009.

[30]Mwanasali, "*African Conflict Prevention Strategies,*" 194.

[31]Ifesinachi, "*Early Warning Systems and Conflict Management,*" 105.

[32]Patrick Nmah, "Religious Fanaticism, a Threat to National Security: The Case of Boko Haram Sect," *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 13, 1 (2012) 126.

[33]Chitkara and Sharma, *International Terrorism,* 267.

might soon be replicated in Nigeria and the government as well as citizens should be fully prepared for this trend. Already, there is a strong rumour making the rounds that some of the extra-judicial torture and killings perpetrated by some military men, especially in the southern part of Nigeria is actually some kind of retaliation or attack by members of boko haram who have infiltrated the Nigerian army or soldiers who actually sympathize with and support them.

Be that as it may, measures have to be put in place in preparation for this probable development. Such measures should include, but not limited to the following; increased intelligence, dismantling of Islamophobia, arms control/disarmament, media censorship, intensive sensitization of the public, rekindled and reinforced message of peace and nonviolence by theologians and clerics, sanitization of military agencies, arrest and scrutiny of individuals with terrorist tendency and impactful governance.

If Nigeria must nip this impending dimension of terrorism in the bud, then intelligence gathering and prompt response must be taken seriously. Security agencies responsible for intelligence and surveillance should be proactive, better equipped and given legal authority to hack phones and computers if need be. This will enable them foil terrorist plots and make terrorists as well as their accomplices face the law. They should be able to arrest and scrutinize individuals with terrorist tendency. There is also the need to share intelligence with foreign agencies on effective strategies on impeding new forms and trends of religious terrorism.

More so, Islamophobia which is a menace that is gradually creeping into the Nigerian nation has to be attacked headlong. Islamophobia does not differentiate between terrorists that hide under the umbrella of the Islamic religion and true Muslims who often times, love peace and live peacefully with neighbours. In Nigeria, "so many non-Muslims seem not to know the difference between Muslim fanatics and the moderates because they both believe in the same Quran."[34] Islamophobia is like a two edged sword. It boosts the morale of actual terrorists because terrifying people is their mission, while it sends the impression that Islam is actually under attack to the non violent Muslims, thereby spurring them to fight to defend their religion. The Nigerian government as well as religious leaders must therefore take it upon themselves to deconstruct Islamophobia in Nigeria. Also, Islamic clerics have to

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[34]Philip Oluwole Ukanah, *In God's Name: The Story of Nigeria's Religious War and its Brutal Killings*, Nigeria: Divine Press, 2011, 376.

rekindle the message of peace and pacifism as contained in the Quran so as to counter the message of war and killing that has been propagated by terrorist groups that claim to be Muslims. Islamic sources have been misused, abused and misinterpreted. Hence, diluting the emphasis on justice, equality and freedom as a value system in Islam.[35] There is need for restoration of such values. More so, "Islamic clerics should keep sermons within the realms of balance and decency so as not to inadvertently incite bellicosity."[36]

Furthermore, availability of arms and ammunition to Nigerian civilians should be controlled by the government. This will go a long way to deter even potential terrorists from embarking on actual attacks. Furthermore, it has been established that terrorist groups use information technology "to organize and administer their networks, and to campaign for public sympathy with their course."[37] Therefore, what the media airs to the public as regards message from terrorist groups, gory attacks, and some other sensitive information should be expurgated by intelligence experts/psychologists so as to reduce the impact on the listeners/viewers and burst the bubbles of the terrorist group and then discourage potential recruits and if possible, reveal plans for terrorist attacks. This censorship must be enforced by the government to be effective. The issue of the interchange between the media and terrorism needs to be handled properly so that the war on terror will not fail.

The government should also intensify its efforts in sensitizing the public on how to be vigilant, what to look out for, the need to report suspicious people and activities around one's neighbourhood and so on. "There should be adequate compensation to an informant for any valuable information regarding security threat."[38] The government should also carry out a sanitization exercise to fish out the saboteurs in the military that constitute a threat to the country and actually abet boko haram. Sometimes, these unscrupulous soldiers carry out lone wolf attacks themselves. The case of Mevlut Mert Altintas, the police officer who assassinated the Russian Ambassador to Turkey, earlier mentioned in this study readily comes to mind.

The current effort by Facebook, their subsidiaries and Microsoft in using the state-of-the-art technology – artificial intelligence to fight

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[35]Amr Abdallah, "Principles of Islamic Conflict Intervention," in *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in Africa,* ed. Shedrack Gaya Best, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2009.

[36]Wariboko, "*Prospects of Islamophobia in Nigeria and its Dangers*," 61.

[37]Wogu, "*The Role of Information in the Management of Terrorism*," 206.

[38]Nmah, "Religious Fanaticism," 206.

terrorists' use of their platforms is a very welcome development. They claim that they thwart terrorism by expunging terrorist contents before they are seen by users and reporting to authorities when necessary. Facebook says that their main focuses for now are ISIS and Al Qaeda and will probably extend their efforts to other terrorist groups in future.[39] Facebook should however, expedite the inclusion of Boko haram and other international terrorist groups to the list of their major focuses so as to nip their social media activities in the bud.

Finally, as long as government and governance does not impact the people positively, there will continue to be a substantial number of people vulnerable to crime. Alongside the efforts to prevent deadly conflicts, "an equal amount of attention should be given to promoting conditions favourable to peace, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, tolerance of differences and the much needed culture of fairness and fair play in public affairs."[40] The government should therefore strive to impact Nigerians positively with quality and affordable education, employment opportunities and good conditions of living generally, so that their wretched state and illiteracy will not make them gullible and subscribe to wretched scheme of terrorism and violence in the name of religion.

Conclusion

There is a tendency that the observed trend of religious terrorism around the world will replicate itself in Nigeria owing to the obstinacy of fundamentalists and their global agenda that they are bent on delivering. It is therefore, not just about intense combat against religious terrorism in Nigeria any more, it is about preparedness to tackle the probable next level that is occasioned by the decentralization of terrorists.

To be fore warned they say, is to be fore armed. Plans and policies should therefore be on ground to obviate lone wolf attacks and religious terrorist inspired attacks in Nigeria. Nigeria's national security is of paramount importance. Concerning her shared experiences and realities with other parts of the world, Nigeria should be able to learn from the unfolding trajectory of the phenomenon of religious terrorism. The Christian theological stance of non-violence is seriously recommended.

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[39]*CBSNEWS*, "Facebook using artificial intelligence to fight terrorism," updated June 15, 2017, www.cbsnews.com>news>facebook-us...

[40]Mwanasali, "*African Conflict Prevention Strategies*," 194.