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## Rethinking Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Strategy

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### ABSTRACT

The emergence of Boko Haram as a terrorist group in Nigeria significantly changed the country's security landscape. From a quiet religious study group in the early 2000s, the group rose to become the world's deadliest terrorist group in 2015. Terrorism is currently Nigeria's greatest security challenge. However, the government's strategy to counter the threat appears ineffective. This article reveals flaws in the responses adopted by the government, noting that the counterterrorism efforts of the Government of Nigeria were mainly military-centric and not guided by a documented national strategy until the release of the NACTEST in 2014. Even at this, the NACTEST is observed to be fraught with gaps that question its suitability as a policy document for countering terrorism in Nigeria. The study surmised that of absolute necessity for countering terrorism in Nigeria is the emplacement of a people-centered strategy that employs whole-of-government and non-governmental approaches.

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## Introduction

Nigeria currently attracts significant global attention with headline news of a complex terrorism situation that has greatly undermined the country's national integrity and the wellbeing of its citizens. The activity of an Islamic sect popularly known as Boko Haram assumed such unprecedented dimensions that shot Nigeria's ranking in the 2015 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) to the third most terrorized country in the world and the sect as the world's deadliest.<sup>1</sup> This ranking is against Nigeria's position of fourth in 2014, seventh in 2012, eleventh in 2010, and sixteenth in 2008. The astronomical rise of the sect does stir some interests for interrogation, considering that it was a relatively quiet and small religious study group in the early 2000s. Some probable questions that may arouse the minds of many are why the Nigerian government failed to counter the threat posed by the sect at its inception and why has it been difficult to defeat the sect? The situation is more so puzzling considering that Nigeria is supposedly "Africa's giant" and avowedly a major player in the enforcement of peace and security globally.<sup>2</sup>

It is in light of the above that this article considers counterterrorism in Nigeria. The article, from a social constructivist approach, reflects on issues and challenges of countering terrorism in Nigeria and, by way of synthesis of these, proffers some possible measures for the shaping of an effective national counterterrorism strategy for Nigeria. In order to ensure a better understanding of the issues involved, I will begin with an overview that conceptualizes and provides a historical perspective of terrorism in Nigeria. This is in line with the view of Ganor (2002) that a conceptualization or objective definition of terrorism is indispensable to any serious attempt to combat terrorism. The essence of a historical perspective is captured in Staniforth's argument that, "to tackle new and emerging terrorist threats we need first to reflect upon previous terrorist attacks. . . (as) lessons from history will assist in providing solutions to develop counterterrorism measures for the future" (2011, p. 17). Furthermore, the import and context of the review of counterterrorism strategies will be highlighted before dovetailing to the central theme of rethinking Nigeria's current counterterrorism strategy.

### **Conceptual and historical overview of terrorism in Nigeria**

It is the general consensus that terrorism is a subjective and multifaceted phenomenon that defies a universally accepted definition (Hoffman, 2006; Gibbs, 2012). In light of this, Schmid and Jongman (2005) observed that researchers from various fields "have spilled almost as much ink as the actors of terrorism have spilled blood" (p. 6) and yet have reached no consensus on what terrorism is. The reasons as to why there is no consensus definition of terrorism are both subjective and objective (Stepanova, 2010). On the subjective side is the highly politicized nature of terrorism which allows for different interpretations to suit the purpose of the interpreter while the diversity and multiplicity of its forms, types and manifestations form the objective reasons for the disagreement (2010). Hoffman (2006) on his part contended that the difficulties of a generally agreed definition arise from the fact that terrorism is characteristically stigmatizing and the term politically and emotionally charged. Further to these observations is the point that the threat of terrorism differs from country to country and regions to regions, occurring in many guises and locations with the acts justified by a plethora of different ideologies and grievances (QCEA, 2007). This brings to fore the need to view terrorism in the context of the affected country or region.

In ascribing to the "no one cap fits all" view of conceptualizing terrorism, Botha (2008) opined that terrorism is not a new threat or concept in Africa but that what is worrying is the application of Western models to the situation in Africa, which results in double standards and consequently impacts negatively on the understanding of terrorism in Africa. Equally worthy of note is the point that domestic terrorism presents a more

immediate challenge in Africa and indeed the third world than transnational terrorism, which is experienced more in the developed world (2008). Domestic terrorism in this sense comprises of terrorist acts usually conducted by local groups within the state for the purpose of overthrowing a government or achieving local political advantage (Okumu, 2009). It also takes the form of repressive regimes and brutal subjugation of political opposition. On the other hand, international terrorism refers to violent acts that transcend national borders and are usually carried out by individual(s), non-state or state actors external to the affected nation but with intentions of achieving global or regional security impact.

Terrorism may also be classified according to the dominant motivation categories of socio-political (or secular ideological) terrorism, nationalistic terrorism, and religious terrorism (Stephanova, 2010). Suffice it to say that the classifications of terrorism are legion and as varied as its definitions. To this end, a definition of terrorism that encompasses the African situation is advised here. In broad terms, therefore, terrorism is a tactic involving the use or threat of the use of violence by individual(s), groups, sub-state, or state actors to register their grievances against existing political, economic, or social situations perceived as not favorable to them. Terrorists carry out their acts mainly against civilian targets with the aim of intimidating or instilling fear, thereby influencing the government to take or not to take a particular course of action.<sup>3</sup>

In Nigeria, the activities of some ethnic and religious groups, as well as by the state that qualify to be categorized as terrorism, have been evident in the country's political history. Terrorism in Nigeria could be said to have manifested itself in various forms and particularly as part of wider conflict situations. During the colonial period, the colonialists employed terrorist tactics of violence, intimidation, and fear to coerce or persuade the local population into accepting regime policies (Oyeniyi, 2010). On the other hand, the same tactic of violence and fear was used by some indigenous societies to resist colonial rule. Indeed some scholars believe that colonialism sowed the seed of terrorism in Nigeria and other post-colonial societies (Okumu, 2009).

The Maitatsine religious uprising led by Muhammed Marwa, an Islamic immigrant scholar from Marwa town area in Northern Cameroon, is often regarded as the first major incidence of terrorism in Nigeria (Danladi, 1992). The uprising, which started in Kano in December 1980, spread to Bauchi, Gombe, Maiduguri, and Yola in North Central and North Eastern Nigeria resulting in the death of about 10,000 persons (Isichei, 1987). The military regime of General Muhammadu Buhari contained the activities of Maitatsine in 1985 through the use of military force, which is the traditional and hard counterterrorism approach. The regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, and later Sani Abacha, by their authoritarian style of government, stifled at their

various stages of infancy groups whose activities would have probably resulted in terrorism related threats. Ironically, Nigeria witnessed the first bomb attack under a military regime. This was in form of a letter bomb that killed the Newswatch Magazine Chief Executive Officer, Dele Giwa, on October 19, 1986 (Osanugor, 2004). Subsequently, a series of bomb explosions occurred, with both the military government and pro-democracy groups (agitating for a return to democratic rule) trading blame as to the responsibility for the bomb attacks.

The military handed over power to a civilian democratic government in 1999 (Gberevbie, 2005). However, the return of democratic rule witnessed an upsurge of militant groups along ethnic, socio-economic, and religious lines (2005). In the Niger Delta area, low-level violent protests against environmental degradation and agitations for resource control as well as socio-economic development deteriorated into militancy that employed the tactics of terrorism. Hostage-taking, kidnapping, oil pipelines vandalism, and armed assault on oil workers and security personnel heightened to such levels that warranted Nigeria being listed as a security risk country (Douglas, Kemedi, Okonta, & Watts, 2004). In the northeastern part of Nigeria, religious fundamentalism assumed a greater level of violence. In December 2003 and January 2004, an Islamic sect known by the names Nigerian Taliban and Al-Sunna Wa'al Jamma staged an uprising with the aim of establishing an Afghanistan Taliban-styled Muslim state (Comolli, 2015). From July 2009, the same sect, now under the name Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram, launched an unprecedented armed assault on the local population and security forces across Nigeria's northeastern states (Onuoha, 2010b). The ideological mission of the group is to overthrow the Nigerian state, abolish all Western values, and impose strict Islamic Sharia law throughout the entire country (Egiegba, 2013). Beyond this is the sect's quest to turn Nigeria into a base for operations in West Africa.<sup>4</sup> The activities of the sect are currently the focus of the Nigerian government's counterterrorism effort, hence the need to examine the nature of the threat posed by its activities.

### **The nature of Boko Haram terrorist activities**

Boko Haram started as a religious study group between 1995 and 2002 under the leadership of Abubakar Lawan, who later left Nigeria for studies at the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia (Madike, 2011). The leadership of the group was then transferred to Mohammed Yusuf, who abandoned Lawan's style of conservative teachings for more radical ones. The sect kept attracting adherents based on its ideology that appealed to the unemployed and poor who felt that their condition was caused by governance failure, corruption, and moral decadence. By mid-2009, the sect had become emboldened by its

size, the motivation derived from its initial successful attacks on police stations and the weapons it acquired from such attacks and across the Nigerian borders. On July 26, 2009, Boko Haram staged an armed assault in Bauchi where they attacked and destroyed a police station at Dutsen Tanshi (Onuoha, 2010a). Subsequently, the violence spread to Borno, Yobe, and Kano states. A combined military and police operation resulted in the killing of many of the sect's members and the arrest of others, including Mohammed Yusuf, who was later killed while in police custody (Onuoha, 2010b). Pérouse De Montclos (2014) summed up the situation by arguing that this action of the Nigerian security forces was a significant determinant in the trajectory of the Boko Haram crisis. He observed that the repression of the sect in July 2009 was followed by repeated massacres, extra-judicial killings, and arrests without trial, actions that widened the gap between communities and the security forces (2014).

The death of Mohammed Yusuf was only a temporary setback for the sect as it became more devastating under a new leader, Abubakar Shekau. The sect conducted a series of attacks across northern Nigeria, particularly in the North East Zone. The sect under Shekau graduated from armed assault and the use of roadside improvised explosive devices to vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings. Similarly, the sect's use of the media (particularly the Internet) for propaganda purposes became more pronounced. It equally graduated from attacks on relatively low profile to high profile targets such as the Nigerian police headquarters and the United Nations building in Abuja. The complexity and level of sophistication which the sect attained challenged the capacity of security agencies and other institutions involved in the Nigerian government's counterterrorism effort, particularly as coordination and the needed synergy among them proved inadequate. An equally worrying development was that the sect graduated from serial attacks in public places to sieges of towns and villages, thereby threatening the territorial integrity of Nigeria. The size of the area held by the terrorists as at January 2015 equaled the size of Belgium (Comolli, 2015).

Furthermore, Boko Haram's activities transcended Nigeria's borders, particularly in terms of training, financing, recruitment, kidnappings, and arms acquisition, thereby raising concerns over border management and Nigeria's relations with her immediate neighbors. Equally significant is the sect's links with international terrorist organizations like the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al Shabaab, and lately its pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to the extent of renaming itself as the Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP).<sup>5</sup>

The situation was made worse with the sect's embrace of the ISIS tactics of beheadings of victims. It abducted women, including schoolgirls and engaged females (including girls as young as 10 years), for suicide terrorism (Akbar, 2015). On April 14, 2014, for instance, the sect abducted about 276 girls from

Government Girls' School Chibok (Nti, 2014). About 218 of them are believed to still be held by their abductors in yet-to-be-identified locations.<sup>6</sup> This incident brought terrorism in Nigeria to such prominence that notable persons such as UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and the wife of U.S. President, Michelle Obama have actively condemned it while Nobel Peace Prize winner, Malala Yousafzai, has paid a visit to Nigeria solely for reason of seeking the possible rescue of the Chibok girls.

The activities of Boko Haram have been so devastating that as of mid-2015, it has reportedly led to the death of about 17,000 persons (Amnesty International, 2015). The sect has to date continued to be a concern not only to the Nigerian government but to the international community as well. The situation is further compounded by recent clashes in some parts of Nigeria between pastoralists and crop farmers, with a perceived linkage of the former to the Boko Haram terrorists. Similarly, the resurgence of militant activities in the Niger Delta with the emergence of groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) that specialize in the bombing of oil installations have tended to re-open another terrorism front, thereby potentially straining government's counter-terrorism efforts against Boko Haram.

### **Counter-terrorism: Context and imperatives for review**

Clark observed the complexity of counter-terrorism, and of arriving at acceptable parameters for judging its success or otherwise. He contended that:

Defeating terrorism is more difficult and far-reaching than we have assumed... . We may be advancing the ball down the field at will, running over our opponent's defences, but winning the game is another matter altogether. (Clark, 2003, p. 5)

More significant to this study, drawing from Clark's assertion, is the question of appropriate and workable strategies for countering the threat of terrorism. In the Campbell Systematic Review, it was observed "that there is an almost complete absence of evaluation research on counter-terrorism strategies" (Lum, Kennedy, & Sherley, 2006, p. 3). It added that for the few studies available, some strategies do not appear to be effective as they "either didn't work or sometimes increased the likelihood of terrorism and terrorism-related harm" (2006, p. 3). This seems to reflect the Nigerian situation, as there is no existing evidence of a comprehensive review of Nigeria's responses or strategy to counter-terrorism either by policy makers or researchers. In his inaugural presidential speech, Buhari alluded to this fact when he submitted that his government intends, after defeating Boko Haram,

to commission a sociological study to determine the origin, remote and immediate causes of the movement, its sponsors, the international connections to ensure that measures are taken to prevent a recurrence of this evil.<sup>7</sup>

While considering the proposal worthy, I am of the opinion that the more appropriate thing for the government to do would be to conduct such an exercise, even as the terrorism perpetrated by the sect is ongoing. This could be in the form of a counter-terrorism review that would address the lapses inherent in the current strategy with the aim of effectively containing the activities of the group.

Following the lack of evaluation of strategies by past and current regimes, it could be said that the Nigerian government's counter-terrorism effort has continued to be largely ill defined, reactionary, and ad hoc. Some of the responses, particularly those involving the use of military force, have instead created unanticipated negative consequences. This is worrisome considering that huge sum of money, estimated at 4.62 trillion Naira (about 16.382 billion U.S. dollars), was expended on the fight against terrorism between 2011 and 2015 (Windsor, 2015). Arising from this background is the need for a cursory look at the current posture of Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy in theory or policy (as spelled out in the country's counter-terrorism policy documents and presidential directives) and in practice or what obtains on the ground.

### **Counter-terrorism in Nigeria: Policy versus practice**

The policy framework for counter-terrorism in Nigeria is primarily enshrined in the country's National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), which was endorsed for implementation by President Goodluck Jonathan on April 30, 2014, and the second edition released on August 23, 2016 under President Buhari's administration. It contains such aspects as the nature of the terrorist threat that Nigeria faces, the response guidelines and mechanism, and the roles of stakeholders, as well as institutions involved in countering terrorism. The NACTEST is organized into five work streams, each with its key objectives. The work streams are Forestall, Secure, Identify, Prepare, and Implement. Forestall aims to stop people from becoming terrorists, Secure strengthens protection capacity against terrorists, and Identify aims at pre-emption through detection and early warning. The Prepare work stream has the objective of mitigating the impact of terrorist attacks while Implement outlines the framework for the mobilization of a coordinated cross-governmental counter-terrorism effort. Although its formulation and release is a commendable achievement by the Government of Nigeria, there are identified gaps that need to be addressed for it to provide the necessary strategic framework for countering terrorism in Nigeria. Some of the gaps are outlined in [Table 1](#).

Among the gaps outlined in the table, and crucial to this article, is the ambiguity of the Nigerian government's overall strategic approach. A defined strategic approach to counter-terrorism is a prerequisite in the articulation and implementation of a counter-terrorism strategy. This is more so given

**Table 1.** Gaps in Nigeria's National Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Serial	Observed Gaps	Implications of Gap
1	Lacks a national definition of terrorism.	Poses a challenge to policy implementation as terrorist acts could be subjected to varying interpretations.
2	Placed its driving organ, the Counter Terrorism Centre (CTC), under the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA).	This could inhibit the effective implementation of the strategy because ONSA does not statutorily have executive functions but advisory roles (as an adviser to the president).
3	Tends to lay sole emphasis on the Boko Haram sect.	Its provisions/implementation may not readily apply to other categories of terrorism or terrorist-related threats that could arise.
4	Government's disposition to negotiation with terrorists not stated.	Raises doubts and suspicion on policy trust of government.
5	Silent on the protection of Nigeria's interests abroad and on responses to state-sponsored terrorism.	Necessary contingency plans may not be developed in this regard.
6	Discrepancies and lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities assigned to the ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) for implementation.	Erodes the command directive or authority NACTEST ought to command as a policy instrument.
7	No designated lead ministry or agency.	Makes the coordination of MDAs involved in counter-terrorism difficult.
8	Ambiguity on government's overall strategic approach.	Could result in disconnect between policymakers and implementation agencies/the public.

Source: Author's compilation, 2016.<sup>8</sup>

the fact that terrorism situations differ from nation to nation, therefore requiring that a nation's counter-terrorism approach captures the threat situation or the circumstances that are peculiar to it. The NACTEST is evidently not clear on the Nigerian government's strategic approach. Evidence on the ground indicates a hard traditional military approach to counter-terrorism. However, comments from the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) that supervises the NACTEST have often been that Nigeria was employing a soft approach to counter-terrorism (Sambo Dasuki, 2014). The picture presented to the public by the policymakers therefore appears different from what is obtained on the ground. It could be surmised that in practice, Nigeria's counter-terrorism posture could be said to be more military driven as opposed to law enforcement. The problem here is the attendant collateral damage and human rights abuses which, as noted earlier in the study, have not only tended to alienate the military from the public but also attracted condemnation particularly from civil societies and some members of the international community.<sup>9</sup>

Rosendorff and Sandler's dilemma of appropriate response to terrorism comes to play here. While too little response at some points has portrayed the Nigerian government as weak, too much response in terms of employment of the military strategy has on the other hand made it appear tyrannical with attendant opposition (Rosendorff and Sandler, 2004). In the northeast of

Nigeria, for instance, the local population have often complained of harsh security measures such as imposition of curfew following declaration of a state of emergency, conduct of searches especially of women wearing hijab dress, the establishment of check points, and restrictions on social activities. The resentment to the deployment of the military to the area is to such an extent that the northern elders and traditional rulers have sometimes called on the Nigerian government to withdraw military troops from the area (Sahara Reporters, 2011).

The resort of the Nigerian government to employ military force could be understood from some viewpoints. The military was the only institution and element of national power that the colonial government could be said to have fully developed and bequeathed to post-colonial Nigeria. Also, the use of military force became inevitable as the terrorists not only engaged in armed confrontation with security forces but also the seizure and occupation of Nigeria's territory.<sup>10</sup> The sophistication of the terrorists was such that the police were overwhelmed, and as the constitution of Nigeria provided, the military had to intervene in such circumstances. According to Clarke, "when military power is really required, nothing else will do."<sup>11</sup> General David Richards, while contesting the assertion that there is no military solution to a given crisis, posited that, "history is clear: there will sometimes be no alternative to standing up for oneself, for one's friends or for what is right... In times of crisis, military strength is comfortingly reassuring."<sup>12</sup> The point however is that while the dependence on the military by the Nigerian government in its counter-terrorism drive is considered sometimes expedient, concerns have been raised over the manner of its employment and the general conduct of troops in the theatre of operations.

The professional standard of the Nigerian military in counter-terrorism has been questionable. This is especially true in the areas of civil-military relations, human rights observance, and general rules of engagement of the military. Also, the terrorists have kept changing tactics in an asymmetrical warfare that has challenged the Nigerian military in terms of capacity. Onuoha noted that although the Nigerian military was able to use conventional tactics to recapture territories held by the terrorists, it has been unable to cope with the terrorists' unconventional tactics of suicide bombings, abductions, and guerrilla attacks.<sup>13</sup> All these suggests a re-strategizing of the Nigerian government counter-terrorism efforts and, to this end, the exploitation of other lines of counter-terrorism effort (non-military or soft) for their employment either alongside the military or essentially on their own as the situation dictates.

Rineheart made a distinction between "hard" and "soft" power responses to terrorism, noting that this requires restructuring the counter-terrorism debate around a direct and indirect approach (Rineheart, 2010). He sees the direct approach as an enemy-centric doctrine consisting of primarily

offensive hard power tactics. The indirect or soft power approach on the other hand consists of population-centric methods with features such as capacity building, economic development, counter-extremism, de-radicalization, and community integration that focus on the underlying causes that allow terrorism to thrive (2010). In religious, ideological, and socio-economic grievance-driven cases of terrorism such as Nigeria appears to have had and is currently experiencing, winning the hearts and minds of the citizens as well as those of the terrorists and their sympathizers are significant. Measures aimed at national orientation, winning the confidence of the populace, and social re-engineering including granting concessions to the terrorists could arguably in such situations better contain terrorism than the traditional hard approach.

As would be highlighted subsequently, the scope and possibilities of measures to counter terrorism as well as their application have continued to broaden. This is as scholars continue to research and make inroads into the field of counter-terrorism that could be described as living and dynamic. Of importance to this study is finding the balance or right combination between hard and soft approaches to counter-terrorism, as this is arguably the key to a sustainable counter-terrorism strategy. It is in this wise that Shettima views counter-terrorism from three “Ds” perspectives of defense, diplomacy, and dialogue. Defense here has to do with the military approach, diplomacy with international cooperation, and dialogue in terms of negotiation with or concessions to terrorists. The Lutzs, in their discourse on techniques of counter-terrorism, identified nine possible responses to terrorism, a combination of which could be said to form the counter-terrorism strategies of many governments (Lutz & Lutz, 2013). These are increased security, intelligence gathering (detection and prevention), disrupting finances, repression, retaliation or punishment, pre-emptive action, use of special counter-terrorism units, concessions and reforms, and diplomatic approaches. The employment of these techniques in Nigeria could be said to have either been deficient or lacking. **Increased security, intelligence gathering, and the use of special forces have been largely carried out with a traditional military approach devoid of appropriate technology and human rights observance.** The same applies to techniques such as disrupting finances that have not yielded much positive results due to lacking financial regulatory systems and the cash economy the country operates.

In terms of concessions and reforms, two different situations were observed in Nigeria. While negotiations with the Niger Delta militants proved relatively successful as evidenced in their acceptance of the Federal Government Amnesty Programme, it has so far been difficult with the Boko Haram sect. Unlike the Niger Delta militants whose grievances and demands could be said to be socio-economic at root, those of the Boko Haram sect appear to be ideological in their outward expression and equally hinge on the integrity of the Nigerian

state. The hard-line stance of the Boko Haram leadership makes matters worse. For instance, Shekau had, in one of his video messages, stated that it was the Nigerian government that needed an amnesty and not the sect. Negotiations have also failed because of what some regard as insincerity and politicization of the issue on the part of the Nigerian government (Comolli, 2015). The government had however stated that it was open to negotiations once Boko Haram make known its real leadership or sponsors. The exchange of detained suspected Boko Haram commanders for the 219 Chibok School girls held hostage by the members of the sect has been under consideration by the Government of Nigeria. Aside from negotiation, the inclusion of socio-economic reforms that facilitate counter-radicalization and counter-violent extremism could enhance a soft approach for Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy.

The diplomatic approach involves international cooperation through agreements and joint actions against terrorists by countries. The notion that no state can fight terrorism alone has made the diplomatic approach even more significant. Nigeria has reached out to its immediate neighbors in the counter-terrorism effort against Boko Haram. This has been in the form of bilateral and multilateral actions against the sect and proposals for joint development of the Lake Chad Basin area where Boko Haram has found sanctuary. President Buhari, between June and August 2015, paid visits to all the immediate neighbors of Nigeria and to the United Kingdom, United States, and France in an effort to seek both military and diplomatic assistance in countering terrorism in Nigeria. However, diplomatic approaches are arguably complementary to other efforts, meaning that they can only be worthwhile when the nation involved has put other measures in place at the domestic level. In other words, the benefits from international cooperation can only be meaningful when national counter-terrorism efforts are appropriate and sustainable. The import of this is that Nigeria ought to put its house in order in terms of a sustainable and effective national counter-terrorism strategy that would guide its counter-terrorism efforts as well the efforts of nations and international partners supporting or interested in supporting it. It is therefore to the question of a counter-terrorism strategy for Nigeria that is both sustainable and effective to which I now turn my attention.

### **A sustainable and effective counter-terrorism strategy for Nigeria**

In couching or espousing counter-terrorism strategies, a major point pertinent to re-iterate is that counter-terrorism is as complex as the subject of terrorism itself. Wilkinson observed that there is "no universally applicable counter-terrorism policy for democracies. Every conflict involving terrorism has its own unique characteristics" (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 203). Consequently, counter-terrorism strategies will differ according to the country's socio-political context, the current threat environment, and the will of the government in power.

Furthermore, and flowing from the definition of counter-terrorism, it could be said that the prevention, deterrence, pre-emption, and responses to terrorism require bringing on board all aspects of a nation's power.<sup>14</sup> Thus, I would argue that counter-terrorism need to be seen as an all-inclusive line of effort, and whatever strategy is adopted should not only be dictated by the prevailing situation but equally ought to have the lines of effort mutually supportive of each other. That is to say economic, social, political, security, diplomatic, and such other lines of effort should necessarily complement each other.

This again brings to fore the imperative of having the right balance between hard and soft power approaches in counter-terrorism. In this wise, Ebulue opined that for a counter-terrorism strategy to have the right mix of hard and soft power, and to achieve sustainability and effectiveness, there must first be a right definition of the threat, understanding of the threat, and following this, the objectives of the strategy.<sup>15</sup> The ends, ways, and means that constitute such a strategy equally need to be balanced and unambiguous. The aforementioned is contingent upon an understanding of the problem and the employment of a comprehensive approach and plan, while simultaneously learning and adapting to the emerging threat scenario. It ought also to be feasible, suitable, and command acceptability among stakeholders for it to achieve its objective. In utilizing hard and soft approaches in a counter-terrorism strategy, Oyebade stressed the point that, "it must always be borne in mind that the main role of the military is the shaping or cushioning of the environment for other elements of national power to be employed in the counter-terrorism effort (Oyebade, 2014). In this vein, once an acceptable level of safety is achieved through the use of the hard approach in a terrorist-affected environment, the military and other instruments of the hard approach necessarily have to give way or play a secondary role to soft power.

From the foregoing, I am of the view that a workable counter-terrorism strategy for Nigeria needs to reflect the perspective that terrorism in Nigeria is multi-causal and multifaceted, thereby requiring a multipronged approach. The domestic nature of terrorism also requires a people-centered, counter-terrorism strategy that has at its heart socio-economic transformations, democracy, and human rights observance. It ought to be a holistic strategy that goes beyond kinetic response (as represented by the use of the military) to non-kinetic (or soft power), thereby utilizing all instruments of national power in the counter-terrorism effort. It is in the light of this that this study would suggest the development of a population-centric counter-terrorism strategy that integrates whole-of-government and non-governmental (or society) approaches.

The pertinent question arising from this is how can this whole-of-government and non-governmental approach be achieved? And flowing from this, what measures could be embarked upon to realize a sustainable and effective

counter-terrorism strategy? To begin with, the proposed strategy needs to interface between policy makers, implementation agencies, and the public. The strategy consequently has to be clear in formulation, effectively communicated, actively and relentlessly executed, and informed by best practices. This would entail rethinking some of the counter-terrorism responses or approaches and the crafting of new ones appropriate to the contemporary situation.

Considering the fact that the NACTEST ought to be the pivot of the decision making and implementation of the counter-terrorism effort of the Nigerian government, my focus would first be on addressing the gaps inherent in the NACTEST. This, as will be highlighted, could be in the form of a review aimed at restructuring the NACTEST. The counter-terrorism policy and programs of government are arguably driven by institutions. In view of this, I will also dwell on the ways and means of maximizing the performance of the counter-terrorism institutions to achieve the ends of containing terrorism. Additional emphasis would be made on building of the capacity of security agencies. Following this are the programs of government that would support and sustain the counter-terrorism strategy. One of the programs is the strengthening of good governance and democracy for socio-economic development, the deficit of which is believed to have contributed as both pull and push factors in the development of terrorism in Nigeria.

Further to the aforementioned are programs and measures to enhance international cooperation. This is in view of the need for better border management and relations with contiguous countries, as well as fostering the goodwill of international partners, both governmental and non-governmental. Finally is the imperative of participation of the public and private sectors, in other words, an all-stakeholders approach where the whole-of-government and society effort are harnessed in countering terrorism.

## **Review of the national counter-terrorism strategy**

A review of the Nigerian NACTEST is considered necessary, given the several gaps in it as outlined in [Table 1](#). The focus of such a review ought to be that of addressing the gaps for the NACTEST to meet its requirement of being the instrument that facilitates the interface between counter-terrorism policy-making and counter-terrorism implementation. In this regard, a national definition of terrorism would need to be included in the NACTEST to avoid varying interpretations given to terrorist acts. This is particularly so as armed banditry, electoral violence, communal clashes, abductions, human trafficking, cattle rustling, and other criminal activities with perceived links to terrorism are rife in Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> It could be argued that once a problem (such as terrorism) is defined, the pathways towards solutions to it could be more easily facilitated.

In the area of placement of the CTC under ONSA, there is a need for a review of the NACTEST in order to provide definite supporting structures that reduces bureaucracy and in which far-reaching political decisions could be taken. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the National Security Council chaired by the prime minister has oversight of the country's counter-terrorism strategy (popularly known as CONTEST) and takes regular reports on its progress (HM Government, 2011). The NACTEST could be reviewed to reflect a similar arrangement.

In laying sole emphasis on Boko Haram, the NACTEST has failed to recognize the fact that not all acts of terrorism are religious or ideologically motivated, as is ostensibly the case with Boko Haram, and therefore has not taken into account future terrorism or terrorist-related threats that could emerge. The problem is compounded by the fact that Nigeria does not have a national security strategy from which the NACTEST ought to have drawn its source of guidance. In this regard, it could be averred that the NACTEST needs to be sufficiently broad-based in order to cover all possible contingencies of terrorism.

It is also considered necessary that the NACTEST provides an overview of the Nigerian government disposition to negotiation with terrorists. This is because, while negotiation is one of the key tools used by some governments in dealing with terrorists, the same practice is opposed by others (Neumann, 2007). The review could therefore include conditions that may warrant negotiation (if the government is disposed to it) or succinctly state that the government is adopting a "no negotiation" stance with terrorists. Equally important is the need to state in the NACTEST how the government intends to protect Nigeria's interests abroad and possible responses to state terrorism which potentially could either be internally generated or externally sponsored, perhaps by Nigeria's neighbors.<sup>17</sup> All these are arguably necessary for public awareness and for planning, as well as the development of contingencies by implementation agencies. The review of the NACTEST is therefore considered imperative to block gaps upon which terrorists could capitalize and to facilitate the much-needed policymaking, implementation agencies, and citizen's interface that is needed for an effective counter-terrorism effort.

### **Effective coordination of counter-terrorism institutions**

A recent report on the federal government institutions, including those that comprise counter-terrorism institutions, revealed that they are poorly managed with an inherent lack of accountability and transparency, ailing infrastructure, and poor staffing and funding.<sup>18</sup> All of these arguably impact negatively on their performance. Data obtained from the National Bureau of Statistics also suggest poor performance by the institutions.<sup>19</sup> It is also

observed that none of the government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) was designated as lead-ministry or agency for coordinating counter-terrorism in Nigeria as applies in countries such as the United Kingdom. There have been ongoing debates for the designation of such an agency, but the choice between the Nigerian police and the Department of State Services have often resulted in heated debates at the National Assembly without a decision.<sup>20</sup> There is equally unhealthy rivalry among some of these institutions which erodes the synergy that could have been derived from cooperation in terms of pulling resources together (Abdulsalami, 2013).

The above necessitates that measures aimed at fostering interagency cooperation and facilitating the synergy required in the national counter-terrorism effort are put in place. Nigeria could adopt the United States' model where the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) leads the "nation's effort to combat terrorism at home and abroad by analyzing the threat, sharing information with partners, and integrating all instruments of national power to ensure unity of effort."<sup>21</sup> **The designation of a lead ministry and agency for counter-terrorism to coordinate and foster synergy among the institutions involved is also advised.** In the United Kingdom, the Home Office is designated by Her Majesty's Government as the lead ministry for coordinating the counter-terrorism effort of the government within the country and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office outside the country. For a lead agency, the Metropolitan Police Service leads the day-to-day counter-terrorism operations in the United Kingdom as the Federal Bureau of Investigation does in the United States. In Nigeria, where such arrangements are lacking, the designation of a similar lead ministry and agency is considered worthwhile for effective counter-terrorism strategy implementation.

### **Capacity building of security agencies**

In line with the coordination of counter-terrorism institutions is the requirement for capacity building. **There is the need for building the capacity of the security agencies in terms of requisite training, acquisition of modern equipment, and respect for human rights, as well as democratic values.** In line with this is the necessity for top-down reforms to boost the poor morale of troops and end corruption that has plagued military procurement.<sup>22</sup> The government of President Buhari had from June 2015 taken steps to build the capacity of the security agencies. He announced the relocation of the Military Command Centre to Maiduguri where Boko Haram has its strongest foothold. The president has also changed the leadership of the armed forces. While these efforts are laudable, it is expected that further measures, including the fostering of civil-military relations and confidence building measures, are undertaken. This is pertinent as the domestic nature of the terrorism that Nigeria is witnessing requires that the locals are on the side of the military.<sup>23</sup>

More in terms of capacity building is perhaps the establishment, training, and equipping of special forces capable of focused targeting that could avoid the collateral damage the Nigerian military has often been accused of. The leveraging of modern precision armaments, including locating artillery and strike aircrafts, could dislodge the terrorists in their safe havens, disorganize their lines of supply, and disrupt their regroupings. I believe that although the military strategy cannot on its own win the fight against terrorism, the military would continue to play a significant role in the Nigerian government's counter-terrorism effort. This is so as the implementation of other counter-terrorism lines of effort—political, economic, and social—would depend on a safe environment, which the military provides. The role of the military to cushion the ground for other elements of national power to be employed in the counter-terrorism effort is therefore fundamental and, hence, the need to ensure its professional and combat efficiency.

The conduct of intelligence-led counter-terrorism operations has been found to be a major enabler in the counter-terrorism efforts of many nations. Herman summed up intelligence from the perspective of knowledge obtained for planning (Herman, 1996). Applied to the conduct of operations, it could be said that with intelligence, counter-terrorism operations would not be ad hoc and reactionary (as evident in Nigeria) but planned, targeted, and preemptive. The employment of technology for intelligence on terrorists and their sponsors, movements, sources of finance, equipment, and other logistics becomes crucial. In this vein, it is the imperative for an integrated management of intelligence resources that would promote a joint approach to intelligence, build trust, and maximize resource utilization. Equally necessary is the development of net-centric capabilities by upgrading and integrating existing information technology platforms, databases, and fusion centers at strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

### **Good governance and democracy**

The link between governance deficit and the rate of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and political exclusion as factors that could fuel grievances and vulnerability to terrorist group appeal are arguably potent and ought not to be ignored. It raises the need to strengthen good governance and democratic values that could ensure broad socio-economic and political transformations. Good governance and democracy, it could be said, are keys to an effective counter-terrorism strategy as they tend to address the grievances that potentially created the threat group in the first place. They also provide a platform for the administration of justice and social order often manipulated by terrorists to portray government in a bad light. It is perhaps in line with this that Crenshaw, Wilkinson, and the Lutzs argued that the formulation

and execution of socio-economic reform programs that address root causes is the best antidote against terrorism.<sup>24</sup>

Specifically on the Nigerian situation, Emir Sanusi of Kano opined that

if government is fighting (terrorism) on the field like in Sambisa forest, it also must fight these root causes of poverty, lack of education, ignorance, corruption and injustice from the background . . . (otherwise) we just allow the tree to grow and we cut the branches without uprooting the roots, which also means that the tree will still grow again.<sup>25</sup> (Iroegbu et al., 2015)

Aligning with these thoughts, the Government of Nigeria could reposition its MDAs responsible for poverty alleviation, youth empowerment, education, and other human as well as capital resource development. It could further demonstrate strong commitment to fight corruption by strengthening the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Crimes Commission, which are the principal agencies vested with this responsibility. This may help to ensure that resources are judiciously used for developmental purposes and in the process deconstruct and neutralize the appeal to Boko Haram's ideology.

In a similar vein, the Nigerian government could establish a special intervention development fund where monies from government sources, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and the international community are channeled towards the reconstruction of infrastructures destroyed by the terrorists and for the general development of the areas affected by terrorism. The restoration of civil authority and the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons, as well as their reintegration to their original communities, would need to be given adequate attention in the process. The government could in the same manner source funds to sustain the Amnesty program granted to the militants in the Niger Delta as part of palliative measures to prevent a resurgence of terrorist activities in the area. Also, the agricultural sector could be developed in order to provide job opportunities and reduce dependence on federal government resources that has occasioned the struggle between the north and south for control of the central government.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore is the need for the central government to grant more autonomy to the six geopolitical zones and the 36 states of the federation in line with the practice of true federalism.

The good governance response could equally be directed at enhancing national cohesion and integration. This is particularly so as terrorists aim to create a divide between the government and the citizens as well as between ethno-religious, cultural, or political sections of the society, as evident in Nigeria. Accordingly, the government would need to tenaciously implement social enlightenment programs, an educational system that encourages integration, religious tolerance at all levels, equality of citizens, and the tenets of human rights. In a nutshell, it is considered that

the Nigerian government could demonstrate the political will to deploy all instruments of governance in countering terrorism.

### **International cooperation**

International cooperation in the fight against terrorism is the basic pillar of the United Nations Counter Terrorism Strategy, the tenets of which nations are expected to adhere to (United Nations, 2004). For Nigeria, this is vital as the activities of Boko Haram have evidently reaffirmed that no one country can fight terrorism alone. In terms of geostrategic interest, it brought to fore the fact that Nigeria and its immediate neighbors, and by extension, the West African sub-region are commonly influenced by events in their locality. Nigeria has been accused by its neighbors of a “bluff attitude of being giant of Africa” (Onimisi, 2014). In this wise, Nigeria would need to moderate and see all its neighbors as equals and partners in the fight against terrorism. Nigeria could improve relations with them on economic, political, and cultural areas, noting that countries that jointly harness their common interests would do all possible to fight threats common to them or that jeopardizes their common interests. The Government of Nigeria could, for instance, lobby Cameroon for more joint economic investments in each other’s territory and the joint exploitation of economic resources such as crude oil and others that are found along their common border. The bilateral and multilateral engagements could include the joint development of border communities in order to win the hearts and minds of the people towards government and, in the process, weaken their support for terrorists who use the border communities as safe havens.

Beyond its immediate neighbors, Nigeria ought to champion collective security mechanisms at regional levels while creating favorable conditions to leverage foreign support and other gains of diplomacy at the global level. The implementation of the ECOWAS Counter Terrorism Strategy, commitment to the U.S.-initiated Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership program, and pursuit for the firm establishment of the African Union Standby Force are imperatives. Comolli observed here that given the scale of the Nigerian economy, its strategic role in the African continent, and the large presence of foreign nationals in the country, the situation in Nigeria is being watched by non-African countries such as the United States and United Kingdom with concern (Comolli, 2015). This means that terrorism in Nigeria cannot be easily ignored by the international community, and in this wise, there is an opportunity that Nigeria could exploit diplomatically. However, Nigeria’s diplomatic counter-terrorism line of effort needs to transcend defense and soliciting for military assistance to development and lobbying for infrastructural as well as human development, particularly in the terrorism affected areas. In this regard, the role of the U.S. Agency for International Development, United Kingdom Department for International Development, and other international development partners could be factored

into the overall counter-terrorism effort. This could further ensure a balance between the kinetic and non-kinetic aspect of Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy.

### **All-stakeholders' approach**

An all-stakeholders' approach to counter-terrorism is proffered on the premise that government cannot do it all alone without the involvement of the citizens. This is saying that the government, its security agencies, and the society (which are equally the target of the terrorists) all need to be involved. The traditional rulers, religious leaders, youth groups, women groups, and other community-based organizations need to be resourced to actively participate in the counter-terrorism effort. The inclusion of the efforts of public-private co-operations, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, media, tourism, and hotels are all necessary (Yudintsev, 2012). Furthermore, the government could explore dialogue with a range of clerics to determine whether there could be some sort of mechanism for approving and accrediting imams who proffer messages of peace and conciliation rather than extremism.

The all-stakeholders' approach could be complemented by the establishment of information and security think tanks for crystallizing ideas on national security issues. The centers, institutes, and foundations could avail members of the public and private sectors particularly security experts, academia, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, trade unions, and traditional and religious institutions opportunity for public and collaborative discourse on security issues. Training sessions, seminars, and workshops on terrorism and other burning national security issues could be held in these places, thereby providing the forum for expression of grievances that could otherwise result in frustration and aggression. The Nigerian government could further use these centers to deepen its anti-terror campaign and public enlightenment, as well as inculcate security consciousness and situation awareness of the citizens.

The imperative of countering the ideology of Boko Haram, which runs contrary to the ideals of the Nigerian state, cannot be overemphasized. The inputs from the think tanks could be used to articulate the right strategic messages and explore the political approach to containing the threat posed by Boko Haram. This includes the possibility of reaching out to the terrorists to embrace peace and dialogue. Negotiations and platforms for demobilization, de-radicalization, and re-integration of those who denounce terrorism could be put in place. However, it could on the other hand formulate messages or plans to create rival factions within the terrorist ranks. The think tank centers could, by providing the opportunity for national security input from every citizen, broaden the scope of Nigeria's counter-terrorism effort currently limited to security agencies, a few government departments, and concerned individuals. The broadening of the scope of the counter-terrorism effort could consequently embrace the all-of-society and whole-of-government approach to counter-terrorism in Nigeria as canvassed in this article.

## Notes

1. The GTI is based on data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which is collected and collated by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.
2. Nigeria has been ranked the fourth largest Troops Contributing Country for UN Peace Support Operations.
3. Terrorism can also take the form of sabotage or attacks on infrastructure and equally be directed at military installations and formations in order to provoke an over-reactive target response or as a way to soften an otherwise hard target.
4. See Goodluck E. Jonathan, Presidential Address presented at the Regional Summit of Security in Nigeria at Paris, 12 May 2014. Also, Buhari M., "Prospects for Democratic Consolidation in Africa," paper delivered at Chatham House London, 26 February 2015.
5. Nigeria's Boko Haram pledges allegiance to Islamic State, *BBC News* 7 March 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-31784538>, and Ludovica Iaccino, "Nigeria: Boko Haram changes name to Islamic State's West African Province after Isis alliance." <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/nigeria-boko-haram-changes-name-islamic-states-west-african-province-after-isis-alliance-1498696> . . ., accessed 15 March 2015.
6. Of the initial number, 57 girls escaped following a breakdown of one of the trucks conveying them to the terrorists' hideout, while one named Amina was picked up by security forces on May 17, 2016.
7. Muhammadu Buhari, Inaugural Speech during Swearing-in Ceremony as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at Abuja on May 29, 2015.
8. Office of the National Security Adviser, *The National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST)*, 2014. Data obtained from interviews, National Defence College Abuja syndicate groups' presentations and publications were used in the compilation.
9. For example, Amnesty International allegations of extrajudicial killings in their report, *Rank on Their Shoulders, Blood in Their Hands* and the United States refusal to sell arms to Nigeria on claims of human right abuses by the Nigerian military.
10. The size of the area held by the terrorists as at January 2015 equaled the size of Belgium.
11. See Michael Clarke, cover note in Adrian Johnson, ed., *Wars in Peace: British Military Operations Since 1991* (London: RUSI, 2014).
12. See General David Richards (UK Chief of Defence Staff, 2009–2013), Foreword in Adrian Johnson, eds., 2014.
13. Interview of Freedom C. Onuoha, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for African Research Studies Abuja, on 2 June 2015.
14. Counter-terrorism is defined by the US Army Field Manual as "operations that include the offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, pre-empt and respond to terrorism."
15. Interview with Nonye Ebulue, International Counter-terrorism Fellow, National Defence University Washington D.C. on August 11, 2015.
16. These are thought to not only feed into the terrorism situation in Nigeria but also carried out by them to sustain themselves and fund their activities.
17. This is as there have been allegations that several Boko Haram leaders are from Chad and that the sect had surreptitiously enjoyed the support of the Chadian and Cameroonian government. These allegations have been refuted by both governments. See *Vanguard Newspaper*, December 4, 2014.
18. Report of Transition Committee set up by President Muhammadu Buhari to assess Federal Government Parastatals and Agencies, Abuja, June 2015.
19. See <http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/pages/NBS%20eLibrary>.

20. The debates have been spearheaded by the Nigerian Senate Committee on National Intelligence led by Senator Nuhu Aliyu. Also see United States Department of Defense Country Report on Terrorism 2011, available at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/195768.pdf>.
21. The United States National Counter Terrorism Center Mission Statement available at [www.nctc.gov/](http://www.nctc.gov/)...
22. "Four reasons why Nigeria's military can't contain Boko Haram" *CBC Radio-Canada*, January 15, 2015.
23. General Petraeus observed the need for this during his tour of duty in Afghanistan when he stated the need for U.S. troops to live and work with the locals for confidence building.
24. See Martha Crenshaw, "Thoughts on Relating Terrorism to Historical Contexts" in Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. 23. P. Wilkinson, "Politics, Diplomacy and Peace Processes: Pathways out of Terrorism" in M. Taylor and J. Horgan, eds., *The Future of Terrorism* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 82. Also J. M. Lutz and B. J. Lutz, *Global Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2004).
25. See also excerpt by Sylvester Ugwaunyi, "Emir Sanusi Explains Why Defeating Boko Haram May Be Difficult," *Daily Post*, October 19, 2015, available at <http://dailypost.ng/2015/10/29/emir-sanusi-explains-why-defeating-boko-haram-may-be-difficult/>
26. The states in the north particularly could be resourced to develop their dominantly agricultural based economies, which provides comparative advantage to the region against the south with oil.

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