

A Comparative Study on Political Responses to Issues of Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies between the United States and Nigeria

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Abstract

The insurgency today is a global issue that has and is still stalling the socio-economic development of many nations all over the world. Many scholars would argue that the Nigerian experience in this regard is relatively new when compared to nations like the United States and most Middle Eastern countries. Still these Nations have adopted certain strategic approaches towards curbing or at least containing issues of insurgencies. The diverse ethnic and religious climate and unique political disposition of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria lends to the complexity of the country's failed attempt to address it. The analytical approach adopted in this research is deliberate and strategic; a comparative study with a well evaluated prognosis of the respective situations of the two countries in this study will increase the prospects of developing fresh erstwhile unconsidered insights towards the resolution of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Insurgencies, Counterinsurgencies, Terrorism.

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Introduction

The arrival of the twenty-first century has been greeted by surges of terrorist activities in different parts of the world. As such a great wave of insecurity has hounded many nations across the world. Wilson's (2010: 58-78) observation and assessment of the impact of terrorism on humanity in this age is particularly disturbing, when he states that:

According to UNICEF, 80% of victims of such oppression in the recent years have been civilians, mainly women and children. Looking back at the last century, despite all its valuable accomplishments, the 20th century has turned out the bloodiest century in human history. It is estimated that more than 60 million people were killed by fellow human, more than all the previous centuries of human history, the century ended with about 21 million refugees around the globe, including about 6 million internally displaced people and more than 300,000 child soldiers (under the age of 18, girls as well as boys engage in armed conflict).

One of the primary intent of insurgency is the use of force and violence for not only political purposes but also to compel the opponent or perceived enemy to carry out ones will. Steven Metz and Raymond Millen are of the view that:

Insurgency is a strategy adopted by groups which cannot attain their political objectives through conventional means or by a quick seizure of power. It is used by those too weak to do otherwise. Insurgency is characterized by protracted, asymmetric violence, ambiguity, the use of complex terrain (jungles, mountains, and urban areas), psychological warfare, and political mobilization all designed to protect the insurgents and eventually alter the balance of power in their favour. (Metz S., Millen R., 2014)

Although there are diverse reasons for the upsurge of insurgencies and other terrorist activities, its current rise has been enigmatic. Among some of the notable speculations about its instigation and propagation is religion. This particular perspective is mostly proffered by the West, especially since aftermath of the September 11 attack in 2001. However, liberal scholars consent to other possible causes like socio-political exigencies, the kind that encourages authoritarianism as seen in most radical Islamic sects. When the radical Islamic group, Al-Qaeda attacked the United States, specifically striking targets in New York City and Washington DC, they were attempting to establish a significant point. Both the twin towers of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon were not only the heartland of America; they were also the nation's symbol's of economic and military power. The casualty reports and estimated cost of damage were devastating, about three thousand people, mostly civilians were killed and properties running into billions of dollars were destroyed. Yet despite all this America, with George Bush as the then president, responded in a peculiar yet strategic way. Jermalavicius (n.d) aptly articulates it in this manner:

The scale and ambition of the U.S. response are equally formidable. President George W. Bush declared a war which came to be known as the "global war on terrorism": the enemy was identified, the allies were mobilized, hesitant parties were warned, ideological parameters were established, police, and surveillance functions of the state were strengthened, the defence budget was substantially increased and military action was launched.

In the aspect of reshaping the political and state structure, insofar as nation building in the modern context is concerned, much that has been benefited from insurgencies, as well as the use of guerilla and terrorist tactics, especially since the onset of political governance (Young et al, 2011). Of course, this does not come without its own downside. Despite the fact that many regions across the globe have and still take advantage of them, their rather crude and life threatening modus operandi has become a scourge to the international community.

The situations that have triggered the excuse for insurgency in Nigeria may seem like ones rooted in religion on the surface. This is evident in the fact that in recent attacks by the Boko haram sect, both Christian and Muslim deaths were recorded among the casualty reports. Even the Hausa term used by the insurgency group, Boko Haram, etymologically has a religious origin. It is a combination of two words *Boko* and *haram*. The former, *Boko*, means book, especially western books, while the latter *haram* refers to that which is sinful or ungodly. In essence, *Boko haram* literally means "western education is sinful" (Adesoji, 2010, p. 100). This implies that the sect advocates that western education is a sacrilege, ungodly and should be forbidden. It also highlights the quest of the sect, also known as *Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and Jihad) to make Nigeria an Islamic state by whatever means possible and at whatever human cost. The members of the Boko haram were trained by Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) group in combat, handling of weapons and handling of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDS). According to Dearn (2011), these trainings have enabled the Boko Haram members to effectively use weapons and even produce 'dirty bombs'.

However, religious activism is not exactly a new concept in the Northern part of Nigeria. On the contrary, right from the exploits of uthman Dan Fodio's Jihad in the early 16th century till date, there have been historical manifestations of this. The crux of the matter is that for some apparent reasons obviously associated with the inability of the ruling elite to extricate religion from politics, religion has always been employed as a political weapon for self-preservation, mass mobilization, perpetuation in office and diversion of attention from their ineptitude, corruption and incompetence (Ajayi, 2012, pp. 103-107). Furthermore, the issue of segregating politics from religion is actually an issue that is plaguing both the Northern and Southern part of the country, albeit in different ways. Both employ religion as a way of manipulating the populace in order to achieve their respective selfish political ambitions (Ibid.). Even the just concluded national election that brought incumbent president Buhari to power was partly based on religion and tribal sentiments this, explains for the 68% votes cast for the president coming from the north

geo-political zones. In the same vain over 95% votes cast for former president Goodluck Jonathan came from south south and south east geo-political zones of Nigeria.

Diverse instances of violent regime change and concession capitulation have been exploited by insurgencies. Thus, it is imperative that a vivid understanding of insurgencies, as well as guerrilla tactics and the dynamics of terrorism will not only provide useful leads that will increase prospects of international cooperation and effective counterinsurgency response, it will also increase their effectiveness in political discourse. This study will attempt to examine the most effective ways through which the issues of insurgencies can be effectively addressed by reviewing and evaluating the political strategies country like the United States adopted in an attempt to successfully resolve such cases. A qualitative research design will be employed in this regard.

Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: A Contextual Delineation of Key Concepts

As earlier stated, insurgencies have been vital and a necessary evil in the aspect of nation building. To further buttress this, it is necessary to discuss some of the existing definitions and implications of the term.

Bard O'neill supports the advantages of insurgency when he notes that, "insurgency has probably been the most prevalent type of armed conflict since the creation of organized political communities" (O'Neill, 2005: 1). Bard O'Neill from his book *Insurgency and Terrorism*, defines it as: "a struggle between a non ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non ruling group consciously uses political resources (e.g., organizational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations) and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of one or more aspects of politics." (O'Neill, 1990, p.13).

He also describes it as a type of internal war, especially in terms of its association with politics as, stating that it is: "a general overarching concept that refers to a conflict between a government and an out group or opponent in which the latter uses both political resources and violence to change, reformulate, or uphold the legitimacy of one or more of four key aspects of politics" (O'Neill, 2002, as cited in Taber, 2002: viii). O'Neill explicitly identifies these aspect of politics as: "(1) the integrity of the borders and composition of the nation state, (2) the political system, (3), the authorities in power, and (4) the policies that determine who gets what in societies" (Ibid.).

Also, lending further insight to this perspective, another definition of insurgency activity describes it as a form of "movement - a political effort with a specific aim," (Terrorism Research, 2009). The political aim of insurgencies thrives in situations where "societal divisions were cumulative and were combined with economic and political disparities" (O'Neill, 2005: 4).

It is clear from the definitions provided thus far that religion is basically the least considered factor that instigating social unrest that develops into insurgent activities. The more identified exoteric appeals are usually associated with specifically political and economic disparages like "the unsatisfactory increase in unemployment, unequal distribution of wealth, inadequate distribution of essential goods, elitist control of the

political structure, and corrupt leadership all are highly involved factors leading to popular dissatisfaction, opening the door to insurgent action and guerilla warfare” (Ibid., 2011).

O’Neill (2005: 101), in addressing how these effect both the intelligentsia and the masses, explains that it leads to “unemployment which can lead not only to inadequate supply of material necessities, but also to psychological dissatisfaction”. However, Almond (1966) argues that it is the masses that are “are only capable of registering their grievances; they cannot grasp the shape and form of the historical process in which those grievances are merely incidents” (as cited in O’Neill, 2005: 101).

The ripple effect on this is actually what provides the opportunity, especially in the Nigerian context, for manipulation and extensive exploitation to incite popular support by various movements like the Sharia indoctrination in many regions in the Northern part of the country towards the ills of the Christianity and all that is supposedly associated with it, and creating the unstable atmosphere for possible insurgent action against political leadership of the country. In fact, in recent times insurgencies have evolved from early political failures (Young, 2011).

However, the influences and impacts of popular insurrections, which have been involved in movements since the early political forms, have been negligible. This is because, according to Taber (2002:13), they have “failed, or in any case have produced only limited victories, because the techniques they can exploit today were then irrelevant to the historical situation” (Taber, 2002: 13). When compared to the political climate of the middle ages, one would observe that its diminished existence was birthed by not only the inability of the affected majority to gain weaponry, but also from their ability to influence the economic or political conditions in which they labored. Taber supports this when he reports that “Economically, they were manageable because they lived too close to the level of bare subsistence to be otherwise” (Ibid., p.14).

This to a large extent reduced the impact of the proletariat movement on the entire system, since their removal from the system and “and their ability to diminish their labors were directly responsible for exacerbating their meager existence” (Young, 2011). The consequence of this was deplorable. Taber (2002:14) articulates it this way: “If they starved, or rebelled and were slaughtered, there was no one to care, no economically or politically potent class to whom it would make the slightest difference”. The resultant effect was that such societies turned against itself with nonchalance to the loss of life and instead favoring political elitism and economic centrality. It is also important to note here that most of the successful insurgent action came not from the proletariat, but from the bourgeois class as internal elitist struggles forced the change of regime in favor of the victors. It was however, events such as the rapid expansion of colonialism and the race for world economic and territorial superiority by Western Europe that instigated a domino effect of insurgent actions, and acted as a precursor for the violent exchange as witnessed in many regions of the world today.

Validating the Adoption of a Comparative Political Analysis with Regards to Counterinsurgency Approaches

The great French interpreter of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, believed that the only way one can fully comprehend their own political system is by comparing it with others.

When such comparisons are affected, the possibility of a deeper understanding of ones politics as well as a conscious investigation of a wider range of options and alternatives is invariably affected. Also, there is an illumination of the virtues and short comings of that particular country's political disposition. This is because comparative analysis expands our awareness of both the advantages and disadvantages of politics, enabling us to perceive beyond familiar arrangements and perceptions. This agrees with Tocqueville that "Without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed." (Ibid.). In other words, Tocqueville was stating that comparison is fundamental to all human thought. Methodologically, it is the core to the humanistic and scientific methods, including the scientific study of politics.

Secondly, Comparative analysis ensures the development and test explanations and theories of how political processes work or when political change occurs. This is because the political scientists and physicist somewhat share the same goals in terms of the comparative methods they both share, although political scientists cannot design experiments like physicist, which is very crucial to arriving at viable results in the natural sciences. This is because they (that is, the political scientist), cannot always control and manipulate political arrangements and observe the consequences. As such, the political scientist is limited to addressing the large-scale events that drastically affect many people. It would be absurd, for example, to initiate a war or an insurrection simply because one as a political scientist wants to embark on a study to determine its effects.

A Brief Overview of the Political Structures of Nigeria and the United States

Different governments are usually involved in many things. Most of these include establishing and operating school systems, to maintaining public order, to fighting wars. In the bid to accomplish these, it is necessary for these governments to have specialized structures or institutions such as parliaments, bureaucracies, administrative agencies, and courts. The purpose of these structures is to perform functions, which in turn enable the government to formulate, implement, and enforce its policies. In effect the policies reflect the goals; while the agencies provide the means to achieve them. There are basically types of political structures—political parties, interest groups, legislatures, executives, bureaucracies, and courts—within the political system.

An appropriate place to begin when initiating a comparative analysis of the political responses to insurgency between the United States and Nigeria is to discuss the nature of their respective political structures. Political structure is study of institutions or groups in terms of their relationships with each other. It also refers to their patterns of interaction within political systems, as well as political regulations, laws and the forms present in political systems in such a way that they constitute the political landscape of the political

entity (“political structure”, 2014). In other words, it basically refers to the way in which government is being run.

There are also five major political systems in the world, and they include; democracy, republic, monarchy, communism and dictatorship. Although it is safe to state that the political systems adopted by any nation is dynamic and not static. Also the political system in use is associated with the nature of the nation-state. In discussing both terminologies “nation” and “state”, Harcourt(n.d.),states thus:

The political system in use depends upon the nation-state. A nation is a people with common customs, origin, history, or language. A state, on the other hand, is a political entity with legitimate claim to monopolize use of force through police, military, and so forth. The term nation-state refers to a political entity with the legitimate claim to monopolize use of force over a people with common customs, origin, history, or language. Sociologists and political scientists prefer the term nation-state to “country” because it is more precise

Nevertheless, Harcourt identified three major political structures that stand out from the different types in the world, and they include: totalitarianism, authoritarianism, and democracy (Ibid.).

When the political development of nations is considered from the historical perspective, one would discover that most of them have embraced one or two or most times all of these systems. Nigeria and America share a common trait in that regard. Both the United States and Nigeria are Federal republics, a type of republican political structure that is somewhat similar to the Representative Democratic political system, in that the government is subject to the people and leaders can be recalled. In a representative democracy, citizens are responsible for electing the leaders of their choice who will make the laws for them. The only difference between the two nations is the approach they embrace in electing their leaders, in the sense that America adopts the electoral college system, especially when it comes to electing major officials in significant positions like the presidency, which Nigeria does not.

The challenges that confront political development in the United States and Nigeria differ and mostly depend on different factor. While the American political system is predominantly confronted with challenges such as racism, gender and sexual orientation, that of Nigeria, on the other hand, is confronted with issues such as ethnicity, gender and religion. The reason for this is that while America is a federation with citizens that ail form different national and racial backgrounds, Nigeria is basically made up of persons from divergent ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Examining insurgency resolution attempts between the United States and Nigeria: Challenges

Nigeria has been pioneering international peacekeeping campaigns by single handedly initiating (the ECOWAS Monitoring Group) in places like Liberia and Sierra Leone in the past, only surpassed by countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. However, in recent times such operations are now deteriorating, In fact the military itself is now a shadow of what it used to be. Probably because the military government has had a reputation of overthrowing civilian governments, it is not surprising that the civilian government in turn is reluctant to properly fund it since it came into power in 1999. Even the number of men in the army has dropped, from the 350,000 man army to roughly 78000 malnourished men, although during the Jonathan administration they have had a relatively beefed up budget.

The fact remains that this is a war 'terrorism' that is quite alien to them, one that requires unique principle, new sets of skills, tactic and equipment. Right now the Nigerian military is losing its best officers because of internal sabotage.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, America was able to embark on a successful counterattack on terrorism because they were able to arouse the sympathy of the international community. Nigeria so far has been able to achieve that, especially after the abduction of close to 300 hundred school girls in Chibok a community in Borno states by the insurgents. However, the reason why we were unable to take advantage of that was based on a number of factors not unrelated to the complicated nature of the Nigerian Army, which had sympathizers of the Insurgent groups among them. Other issues also came into foreplay; some of which include the fact that western countries like the United States were reluctant to provide or sell their sophisticated weapons to the Nigerian Army based on the previously stated fact. Their involvement in the issue was conditional and not whole hearted as they proclaimed, politicization of the Nigerian Army. There were a lot of factors to be considered.

Towards initiating an effective national counterinsurgency response

One of the major dilemmas of the Boko Haram crisis is in terms of determining whether or not they are a terrorist or insurgent groups until recently when it was designated a terrorist group . It is obvious that even before its current status (terrorist group) its methods are basically terrorist in nature, no thanks to the fact that both their arsenal and training are strongly linked to major terrorist organisations like the Al-Qaeda. Furthermore, their source of funding has been associated with dictators like the late Muammar Gaddafi, who was of the view that Nigeria should be divided into a Christian South and a Muslim North, that is before he was killed by the United states and its Western allies. Of course the consequence of this is the unleashing of radical Islamic groups in North Africa, including the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, now armed with Gaddafi's cache of sophisticated weapons. These groups moved down the Sahel from Libya through Algeria into Mali and Nigeria, where they have found kindred spirits in Nigeria's inchoate Boko Haram (Aribisala, 2014).

In attempting to compare the nature of the counterinsurgency operations both countries have been engaged in, it is important to note that the nature of the insurgencies must be put into consideration and its proper perspective. While most of the cases America has tackled are basically terrorist organisations with clearly defined motives and operations, the case in Nigeria is quite complicated. Firstly, it is hard to fully comprehend the objectives of the Boko haram. Their principles and objectives are riddled with a lot of contradictions. For instance, one wonders why they are enamoured with western weaponry and bomb making techniques and even employ the Social Media to broadcast their activities when they claim to be opposed to western education. Again, if their quest is to initiate some sort of Jihad by driving away Christians from the North, then why equally attack both Christians and muslims? Even the fact that it is the poor that are killed negates the assumption that they are opposed to social inequalities in Nigeria. There has never been a case where the posh homes or business centres of the Northern elites were attacked. Rather places like markets and local schools, mosques and churches have been the major targets of their strike. It is in the face of all these inconsistencies that the suspicion of the political undertone of the insurgency in Nigeria becomes reinforced.

It is in this regard that the proper approach to address this situation becomes problematic, even though the fact that it is clearly defined places it is a more advantageous perspective. Addressing it from a purely democratic angle has its challenges which are basically focused on one fact: the presidency. The issue is that the Boko haram evolved to its terrorist capacity and inclinations right from the point when a president ensued from the south- south part of Nigeria. It also heightened when he was re-elected. The Northern leaders were grossly against the fact that he has governed the nation in six years and should drop the mantle so to speak. Former administration has not fared well in terms of contending the insurgents, he treaded on delicate grounds in an attempt to appease the interest of both the north and south in his efforts at resolving the issue.

A review of some of the reactions towards the former president's efforts so far will illustrate this. For instance, he was accused of genocide by his Northern opponents when he declared emergency rule and decided a more forceful action against the insurgents in the North. However, he was equally accused of incompetence and being too weak when he decided to embark on a diplomatic approach. It is noteworthy that the three states, Adamawa, Yobe and Borno, where these insurgency attacks are at their peaks are all governed by the former opposition party, APC.

Therefore, appropriate recommendations for an effective counterinsurgency response will entail first of all addressing it at its root. The Nigerian federal government has to fully reject any form of political strategy that encourages partisan politics or aims to appease religious and ethnic sentiments in order to be successful in any of counterinsurgency campaigns. Military officers to be allocated to such areas must be selected based on the level of their commitment to the army, without any political or ethnic consideration whatsoever. It is even more advantageous if majority of the soldiers, especially the major officers are from the Southern part of the country. Furthermore, Nigeria is yet to explore the prospect of adapting surveillance technology in its effort against insurgency. Since the issue of the Watergate scandal that prompted the resignation of President Nixon in the United States, America's fight against corruption among the highest office has been declining. A situation where we have that kind of technology or federal agency equipped

with it, many of the corrupt activities occurring in the government would have dropped considerably. By now those in the federal offices that have had any association with the insurgency groups would have been identified and executed.

Conclusion

In order to address the insurgency challenges and the failure of counterinsurgency attempts in the country, the paper employed a comparative analysis of the approaches adopted by Nigeria and the United States. In the course of this analysis it was observed that the basic aspects of the relative success of the United States in this regard is related to a number of factors, which include the nature of their counterinsurgent strategies, as well as the fact that theirs is not as complicated as that of Nigeria, which is politically motivated. However, there are basic principles in counterinsurgency that would at least contain and eventually eradicate the stigma in due time. Some of them include the presence of a legitimate government, a united effort between government and non-governmental bodies in confronting the issue. Also, ensuring that operations are carefully considered, and are based on viable intelligence gathering and analysis at the lowest possible levels and disseminated and distributed throughout the force, in addition to the government's initiation and commitment towards a long term counterinsurgency plan, It is also imperative that the military be equipped with an array of counter-insurgency units with world class equipment at their disposal.

In addition, a special unit, aside from the military and the Joint task Force, whose primary objective is to address insurgency and terrorism be initiated and given all the government and legal backing it requires. Also, these must be sent from time to time for training courses in by the US counterterrorist bureau. This unit should have a healthy collaboration with other federal units or parastatals in the federal government aside from the military.

Finally, the Nigerian government should device a long term plan that would restructure the nation's political system as well as change the orientation of the citizens towards it. An effective check system that would monitor the expenditures and earnings of government officials, as well as their investments before, during and after their tenure should be put in place. The current relocation of military command headquarters to Borno state may not provide the much desired result. Since the new government came on board few weeks ago, over thirty suicide bomb attacks have been recorded with several hundred deaths mainly innocent civilians as victims.

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