

# Convergent Interest: How Nigeria and the United States Partner on Tackling Challenges of Terrorism and Global Insecurity

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## ABSTRACT

*US foreign policy over the decades particularly after the cold war has primarily been to protect its interest and that of its allies. The occupation of the West Bank, the Golan Height, the Gaza strip and US open support through her policies is widely perceived by the Arabs as unjust, criminal and reprehensible fueling terror and terrorism all over the world. This untoward development resulted in the pockets of terrorist attacks on US and its allies in different parts of the Globe, culminating in the bombing of the World Trade Centre and the pentagon in 2001, making the US to redouble it efforts and the formation of regional security groups, (EUCOM, AFRICOM) and others in partnership toward fighting terrorism. Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaal, Hezebolla, Hamas, and other incidence of local, National and International acts of terrorism emanate from the Middle East and are directed at US and her allies.*

**Keywords:** *Convergent Interest, United State, Challenges of Terrorism, Global Insecurity*

## INTRODUCTION

America's vital interests in the Persian Gulf are constant and clear to help protect our friends in the region against aggression, to work with others in the fight against terrorism, to preserve the free flow of oil and to build support for comprehensive middle East peace. President Bill Clinton in an address to the American people on 17th October, 1996. The threat of terrorism today also comes from those with personal agenda which are not motivated by political goals but whose intentions and agenda include Mass destruction. According to the International Police Review (1998), terrorism can be commendable, and it can be reprehensible. The terrorism we practice is of the commendable kind, for it is directed at the tyrants, the aggressor and the enemies of Allah (Osama Bin Laden, to a Journalist, John Miler quoted in Times Magazine, 24th September 2001). From the above citations, one can discern clearly why the endemic conflictual situations continue to rear it ugly heads. Former American President, Bill Clinton was very lucid and unmistakably opines that the US is clearly out to articulate, formulate and execute a foreign policy thrust that will be pro-American and also in favour of US allied with the late Terrorist-in-chief, Osama Bin Laden enunciating the bitter fact that terrorism is both commendable and

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reprehensible depending on which side one wants to view it, to the extent that it is directed at “Tyrant” and perceived infidels by his interpretation and perception. From the foregoing, it is abundantly clear that the international community is at war with itself. The pockets of conflicts situation (inter and intra states) portend grave consequences and make mankind, states (core and periphery) face imminent self decimation as terrorism and threat of it have left mankind traumatized and very unsure of tomorrow. (The ongoing war situation in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan) the Israel – Palestinian conflicts and others lend credence to the fact that terrorism has been adopted by aggrieved persons, groups, organizations and states (nations) as a tool in their foreign policy arsenal to attain their objectives since it is perceived as a safer instrument that is more impelling than diplomacy. As expounded by Sample (1987), it involves the use of violence or the threat of violence to obtain an essentially pre-determined political demand (Okolie, 2004). US and her Europeans allied and adjuncts like Nigeria are the prime target of International terrorism.

The post cold war era which saw the balkanization of the former Soviet Union now Russia with it attendant de-decolonization of international political economy with the US remaining and becoming the only surviving super power with immense military might, strength and capabilities. The fall of communism enthroned International capitalism and the disappearance of structural bi-polarity of the cold war saw the emergence of unipolarity resulting in increasing globalization, of certain core values like free market economic, human rights and fundamental freedoms’ rule of law and democratization (Akindele, 1993). This scenario leaves the US as the only country with the military, diplomatic, political and economic assets to be a decisive player in any part of the world it chooses to involve herself (Krauthammer, cited in Ake, 1993).

According to the citation above given by US former president Bill Clinton, the US has been pursuing policies aimed at protecting the vital interest of Allied and adjuncts particularly Israel, and viewed by the Arabs as criminal, unjust, reprehensive and interpreted to mean the US imposing and implementing Skewed policies in the middle East which gives credibility to reprisals and terrorist actions orchestrated by the Arabs in pursuit of justice. It is axiomatic that all the incidences of international terrorism do in fact emanate from the Middle East and are directed at the US and her allies. Incidence of terrorist attack on US abounds and is in fact on the increase. On 3rd October, 1993, 18 Army Rangers were killed in a terrorist attack during US operation in Mogadishu Somalia; On 13th November, 1995, 5 Americans and 2 Indians were killed in a car bomb in Saudi Arabia; on 7th August 1998 a car bomb explosion outside US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania killed 224 people; on 12th October, 2000, at Yemen, a small boat pulled beside a destroyer, the USS Cole while it was refueling and exploded killing 17 sailors; the 1998 Lockerbie plane bombing leading to the death of over 280 people; and over 6000 people were reported missing or dead in the most horrendous terrorist attack (Akindele, 1993).

## **TERRORISM AND BOKO HARAM HISTORY IN NIGERIA**

Terrorism has no legally binding definition, but is referred to as only those violent act that are intended to create fear, terror and are perpetrated for a religious, political or ideological

goals and deliberately target or disregard the safety of non-Combatant Record. The word terrorism is politically loaded and emotionally charges and this compound the difficulty of providing a precise definition. Studies have found out more than 100 definition of terrorism. In some cases, these groups are defined and described as “freedom fighter” by its supporter and considered to be terrorist by its opponent. The concept may be controversial as it is often used by state authorities and individuals with access to state support to delegitimize political or other opponent potentially legitimize the State own use of armed force against opponent. Such use of force may be described as terrorism by opponent of the state. At the same time, reverse may also take place when states perpetrate or are accused of perpetrating state terrorism. The usage of the term has a controversial history with individual such as former ANC and South African Leader Dr. Nelson Mandela at a point was also branded a terrorist (Record, 2003). President Barrack Obama commenting on the Boston Marathon Bombing of April 2013 declared “Anytime Bombs are used to target innocent civilian, it is an act of terror.

Boko Haram (A Hausa term for “Western Education is forbidden”) officially called itself “Yamautul Athul Sunnah Lidda Wati Wal Jihad” which means “people committed to the propagation of the prophets teaching and Jihad”. As its name suggest, the group is adamantly opposed to what it sees as a western based incursion that threaten their core traditional values, beliefs, and customs among Muslim communities in the predominantly Northern Nigeria. This is an eloquent testimony to what the late Premier of the defunct Northern Region and Sarnana of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello had declared in October 1960. “The New Nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great grand father Uthman Dan Fadio, we must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We must use the minority of the north as a willing tool and the south as a conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us and never allow them to have control over their future” (Parrot Newspaper, 12th October 1960) republished by the Daily Tribune Newspaper of 13th, November, 2002).

In an audio tape posted on the internet in January 2012, a spokesman for the group and present leader, Abubakar Shekau, even accused the US of waging war on Islam. Members of Boko Haram are drawn primarily from the Kanuri tribe who are concentrated in the North eastern States of Nigeria. Since 2009 when its pioneer commander was killed, the sect has been on the prowl attacking those they perceived to be engaging in un-Islamic activities. The dreaded group has expanded its terrorist attack in Nigeria to include International places such as the UN building, the Force Headquarters, the Emba Plaza and the Nyaya Motor Park bombing all in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in which scores were feared death and the mother of it all, the Abduction of more than 200 school girls in Chibok, Borno State. The US department of State issued an alert for all US and Western citizens to avoid major hotels in Abuja based on intelligence report that Boko Haram was going to attack (Adesoji, 2010). The overwhelming majority reports of the group attack have been local targets which make sense given the local orientation of their ideology. The attack on churches is seen by many as an attempt to provoke Christians into retaliatory attack against Muslim in order to spark widespread sectarian conflict so as to

destabilize the country. It is important to note that Boko Haram is not a unified, monolithic entity; there are separate factions within the movement who disagree about tactics and strategic direction. In some cases, they compete against each other for attention and followers. A recent US House of Representative report suggests that one faction of the group may be focused on domestic issues and another on violent international extremism. In July 2011, a group calling itself the Yusufiyya Islamic Movement distributed leaflets widely in Maiduguri denouncing other Boko Haram factions as “evil”. The author of the leaflet asserts that the legacy of its founder Mohammed Yusuf distance itself from attacks on civilian and on places of worship.

Terrorism is also seen as a violent product of an unequal distribution of power on local, national or global level. The unequal distribution of power feeds a perception of “Us versus Them” a perception found in all ideologies associated with political violent groups and movement. As Hoffman (2006) notes, terrorism is the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change and to create power where there is none or to consolidate power where there is little. Muslims in Northern Nigeria at one point in history enjoyed considerable power relative to others in West Africa, but they have witnessed the fall of the Sokoto caliphate, the rise of Western European colonization followed by successive military regimes, and now a secular democracy. Unemployment and illiteracy are highest in the Northern part of Nigeria, where Muslims are predominant. In essence, power or lack of it plays an important role in the activities of Boko Haram.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA – US PARTNERSHIP**

The end of the cold war in the late 1980s, the information technology revolution and globalization that followed, saw a paradigm shift in the concept of security. Apart from the irritant bilateral relations during apartheid and the Abacha regime, United States of America and Nigeria have had a long tradition of cooperation in economic development, governance and maintenance of regional peace and security Meredith (2006). While Nigeria recognizes US leadership role in global affairs, the US acknowledges Nigeria’s leadership position in Africa affairs and the importance of the country on the pursuit of America’s Africa policy. US policy toward Nigeria is anchored or driven on the core values of democracy free market enterprise, human rights, social justice, US economic and regional global strategic interest, peace and security, good governance and the rule of law which provides enabling environment for economic development.

Nigeria huge oil and gas reserve, ranking and position is central to US interest. In the face of increasing incidence of interactional terrorism driven by Islamic fundamentalist, Nigeria with its large Muslim population would be of great interest to the US, the leading country in the Global war against a perceived global peace and security. The US is Nigeria’s greatest trading partner and it undeniably its most important diplomatic partner. The nullification of Nigeria’s June 12, 1993 presidential elections, the substantial amount of human rights abuses and the failure to embark on a meaningfully democratic transition, the

US had imposed sanction on Nigeria. After a period of increasingly strained relations, the death of Abacha in June 1998, and his subsequent replacement by General Abdulsalemi Abubakar opened a new vista of improved bilateral relationship, as the transition to democracy progressed, the removal of visa restrictions, increased high level visit of US official, discussion of future assistance and the granting of vital national interest certificate on counter-narcotic, effective march in March 1999 pave the way for the re-establishment of closer ties between US and Nigeria as a key partner in the continent. Since the inauguration of Obasanjo's government the bilateral relationship has continued to improve and cooperation on many important foreign policy goals such as peacekeeping has been excellent.

Nigeria government on the other hand has lent strong diplomatic support to US government counter terrorism efforts in the aftermath, of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, Nigeria in its official statement has both condemned the terrorist attacks and support military actions against the TALIBAN and AL-QAEDA. Nigeria has also played a leading role in forging an anti terrorism consensus among states in the Sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated one million Nigerians, study and work in the US while over 25,000 Americans work and live in Nigeria.

US foreign assistance to Nigeria in combating public health menace contributes to good governance. The fact that Nigeria is currently the economic power house of Africa with the richest black man and woman in the world according to Forbes Magazine, Nigeria is equally a capitalist economy like the US proves the prospects of cooperation between both nations. The US is helping Nigeria to make exceptional effort to evolve an all inclusive transparent and effective democratic institution, to help re-build basic mechanisms of good governance, advance the rule of law, strengthen the capacity and transparency of law enforcement agencies and the Judiciary by promoting existing watchdog groups that have lobbied successfully to entrenched accountability pluralism in Nigeria's fiscal, electoral, conflict management, political and human right affairs.

On peace and security, early in 2007, the US announced it would create a single Africa combatant command to bring together all the security programme the US support on the continent. AFRICOM is fully operational to do all this. The US is building the capacity of ECOWAS to prevent and respond to regional instability, following the abduction of more than 200 school girls in Chibok, North Eastern Nigeria, the US and its allied is stopping at nothing to ensure that the girls are freed. The US has sent in troops, drones and recently blacklisted the organisation. No less personally than the first lady of the US, Mrs. Michelle Obama is in the fore front of the campaign to bring back our girls.

## **UNDERSTANDING US/WESTERN INTEREST IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria is Africa's largest oil exporter and has a mass of untouched natural gas reserves. It has a population of more than 180 million people and is the continent biggest consumer market. Despite the political instability, the Nigerian economy is growing surpassing that of South Africa. Though some reasonable measure of growth is seen in the economies of

Kenya, Tanzania, and Ghana, they cannot catch up with Nigeria. Setting aside an extra budget, Nigeria government has increased spending on defence by 130 billion naira, with 22 percent of the total budget assigned to the military because of the menace of Boko Haram, Nigeria is set to sign an arm deal with the UK, US, Israel, France, China. Israel has an important portion of Nigeria defence market, as her foreign minister, Avigador, Lieberman signed 12 defence deals. The UK not excluding the post independence years (1960 – 1969) been the main arm dealer to Nigeria (Fawole, 2009). The US has a military unit in Chad, while their drone air base is in Niger Republic. US, UK, France and NATO countries are strengthening their grips in the nearest future. These forces tend to command great influence over Africa and Nigeria: France invited regional nations to participate in a summit including Nigeria, Chad, Benin and Niger; France took an all important step helping the neighbours agree to work together to defeat the dreaded insurgent group Boko Haram. The summit resulted in the UN Security Council (UNSC), France, the UK, US and all registered nations, black listing and sanctioning the group. The decision was quite surprising because the UNSC only usually make such decision if a threat is considered regional or international.

The UNSC took Boko Haram from being a local threat to becoming a regional threat. This decision was made to justify Western operations in the region. If Boko Haram can carry out three separate attacks in Nigeria in one day, they can of course do same in Niger and Cameroon as evidenced in the abduction of the deputy Prime Minister's wife of Cameroon and the killing of several other people. The hunt for the innocent kidnapped Chibok school girls cannot be limited to Boko Haram's location here in Nigeria alone, hence the need to carry out more wide spread operations across the entire region. The UK has sent in a search plane with Israel providing intelligence. The greatest help from the US with words spread through social media with President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle leading a number of campaigns and protest across US for the girls to be released. Again, the US has sent in more than 80 military experts to the Chad border to fight the insurgent.

Beneath all the noble intentions of the US and its Western allied, they are all racing to capture and perpetuate their hegemonic interest on Nigeria's economy. US and China have divergent interest in Nigeria and Africa. Chinese nationals have been kidnapped and held for ransom in a number of African countries including South Sudan, Egypt and Cameroon where Nigeria militant believed to be members of Boko Haram held Chinese hostages. The establishment of African Command (AFRICOM) is logical and should provide a clearer focus on a more coordinated approach to security programme in Africa but not to the benefit of Africans. This is because critics viewed AFRICOM with utmost suspicion as a means of further perpetuating Neo-colonialism in Africa. AFRICOM is equally described as a way for the US to better organize and coordinate its security programme in Africa to the overall detriment of African interest. The stepping up of American counter terrorism efforts and growing attention to the security of oil production in the region portend a strong security oriented emphasis in US policy in Africa. The concern according to critics will outweigh priorities of promoting democracy, economic development, justices and human

right. It is also of serious concern that the US security programme in the region could result in strengthening of African militaries which have only recently withdrawn from politics and which continue to pose a threat to fragile democracies will also portend a more security oriented emphasis in US policy in Africa.

## CONCLUSION

Terrorism is the deliberate use of violence by persons or groups to attain certain goal through threatening a large audience, further than that of the immediate victim. The intentions of terrorist may contrast their activities; follow a regular pattern and occurring in a number of forms; Suicide attacks, airplane hijacking, assassination, kidnapping, bombing and threats, intentions of interest attacks are to put plenty pressures to a government so that it can give political principles (Delvin 2010). Throughout history and throughout the world, terrorism occurrences have been rampant, and the consequences are too immense. The September 11, 2001 twin attack on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre of Al-Qeada Network on the US, forced the US to re-order its foreign policy priorities as the cost of re-building the trade centre and the pentagon was enormous so it is in Africa and in other places.

Terrorist targets are economic interest that are figuratively important to the system as this can cut state income flow and dispirit foreign investment both of which deteriorate the government economic support base. In Africa, terrorism attacks have assumed a variety of forms with serious consequences. The Janjawee militias in Sudan, the Al-Shaabal militant in Kenya, Somalia and other troubled spots in East Africa, the Taureeq rebels in Mali, Niger, Chad, the Boko Haram insurgent in North East Nigeria, the Niger Delta militant, the rebels laying siege and claim to a part of Libya, the volatile Muslim brotherhood in Egypt and sundry others waiting in the wing to launch out.

In Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, drums of war is beaten everyday as scores are feared death, rendered homeless and property worth trillions of dollars have been lost to the heinous activities of terrorism. The challenge of combating terrorism in the world and Africa is simply to balance a legitimate programme of security improvement with a continuing and sustained attack on poor governance and deprivation of human rights, getting the balance right is particularly acute because the democracies in Africa are fragile and any crack down on terrorist activity has to be carried out with great sensitivity to the historic grievances of the marginalized groups, the incipient struggle for human right and the relatively weak civilian oversight of the military and security institution.

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