Terrorism, Media and Hype, 2002 - 2020: A Commensalism

Regina Acholonu
Department of Mass Communication, Evangel University,
Akaeze, Ebonyi State,

Charles Okeke Okoko
Department of History and International Studies, Evange University,
Akaeze, Ebonyi State,

Kalu Ojiaku
Department of Mass Communication, Evangel University,
Akaeze, Ebonyi State,

Abstract: The relationship that existed between terrorism and the media, and which the later inadvertently subscribed to, was unfortunately described as symbiotic. This paper surveyed the interrelationships and found out that it was rather commensalist since the terrorists evidentially benefitted more. The emphasis was not on elaborate theorizations on terrorism but on the role of the media in either impacting negatively on terrorism or exacerbating it, especially through hype and misinformation. The paper concluded that members of the media (electronic, paper and below-the-line services) ought to undergo more training in the investigation and reporting of events, especially from the field.

Keywords: Terrorism, media, hype.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, media reportages on terrorism have largely tilted towards the sensational. There have been no systematic frontline, but speculative, information which give the impression that terrorism is persistent, therefore, an anticipated source of revenue for media platforms. The media hype on the motives of terrorism which in the short- and long-run accounts, or has accounted, for its persistence. This is so since terrorists have surreptitiously become adept at communicating their messages on the television and radio, newspapers and internet platforms. The adroitness of terrorist propaganda has inadvertently been blown out of proportion by the media. Consequently, with sustained reportages, fear and stampede have become rife even in the absence of real danger.

The effect of media hype on terrorist activities can be likened to the deceptive effect of loudspeakers mounted outside a Church or Mosque. The sound effect emanating from these organizations has often given the false impression of a multitude of worship-pers when, in fact, there are just a few. Media hypes have created more fears than the mayhem actually inflicted by insurgent groups, such as Boko Haram, whose numbers are often not up to 25,000, in the whole of Nigeria and in the North, in particular. In essence, fears have been created more than the actual mayhem inflicted. If the actualities are reported by the press and with a lesser degree of sensationalism, the public would come to grips with the real, and not imagined, operations of the insurgents. The terrorists seemingly have adapted the Abraham Lincoln theory via the media agencies which states that “public sentiment is everything. You can achieve everything with it while doing nothing (Lincoln, 1860s; Pelosi, 2020). Rehearsing John Tierny, Nicholas Fotion, Boris Kashnikov and Joanne K. Lekea (2007: 112), they observed that:

News is even better for terrorists …. Enemies of terrorism are more vulnerable not just because their bodies and buildings are more vulnerable. They are more vulnerable psychologically as well. In the past, the psychological effects of terrorism were generally local. Those who actually saw the results of a terrorist attack or who heard about it by word of mouth were very likely terrorized. In the days of old, the terror associated with acts of terror...
spread slowly and dissipated rather quickly. But today, with the aid of the mass media, terrorists get free advertising concerning the quality and quantity of their work. People can view the attacks and the results on television over and over again. Using the mass media, terrorists can today create massive psychological ripple effects with their well-advertised acts of terror. It is difficult to imagine a more welcome gift to their cause.

**Terrorism**

The definition of terrorism has defied a consensus. Therefore, myriad of them have been proffered to include the political, legal and military dimensions. According to Sun Tzu, terrorism is “kill one, frighten one thousand” (add source). The definition of terrorism, in spite of the numerous that exist in modern times, has been slow to evolve. This contention is against the background that perpetrators of terrorism often strike at symbolic targets in very horrific manners; and the psychological impact of a terrorist attack has always also exceeded the physical damage. It is often a mixture of drama and dread. Weimann mentioned in the *Theater of Terror* (retrieved 2020) that terrorists use the media to promote the theatrical-like nature of the premeditated terror. Political terrorism, for instance, is not senseless violence but a premeditated strategy of extortion, especially psychologically, which presents people with a terrorism danger that seems ubiquitous, unavoidable and unpredictable; and as a valve to make revenue by the media (Combs, 1997: 6).

Although the ultimate goals of individuals and groups that employ terrorism differ, they aim at similar intermediate objectives which on the short-run become veritable means of attaining their goals. To accomplish these objectives, terrorists employ a variety of tactics, such as bombing, assault, hijacking and the taking of hostages. Beyond these conventional tactics, terrorists also use weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear armaments, radiological, chemical and biological weapons; and pesticides and other toxic substances. Cyber-terrorism and Techno-terrorism which entails hacking, and introducing viruses, into opponents’ computer systems have been employed.

Rehearsing Goldstein and Pevehouse, the traditional purpose of terrorism has always been to demoralize a civilian population and use the ensuing civil discontents as *raison d’être* against national governments or other parties to a conflict. For this to be effective, insurgents have concertedly created some drama which, in turn, enhanced media attention and attracted the expected coverage for the insurgents. The primary effect of terrorism is psychological. It is intended to capture attention and whip up public sentiment. Although only a few persons are often killed or injured by a bomb that explodes in the market place, millions of people wake up to the thought that, “it could have been me” (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2011: 207-208). Deductively (Simonsen and Spindlove, 2000: 17):

i. Terrorism is ineluctably political in aim and objective/motive;
ii. It is cathartic;
iii. Terrorism is violent or threatens violence;
iv. It is intended to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target; and
v. It is usually conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure”.

Typologies of terrorism, some of which have not been classified, exist. These are the religious and political, and ideological terrorisms. The unclassified ones which are similar to the classified in modes of execution/operations are essentially perpetrated by individuals who underwent crises of generativity after taking stock of their lives’ activities and would, unarguably, have found themselves wanting to engage in redemption activities, such as terrorism and militancy. Their reactions are likened “to strike a blow and die”, and are often carried out without clear-cut programmes of action or set objectives to achieve. Yet, no matter the name and platforms of operation, all have been directed against the State or against the individuals who live in a State; while the State serves as the theatre of war.

**Media and Terrorism**

The advances in technology and innovations have made the media, which give wider reaches and latitudes, more convenient and affordable. Presently, in addition to existing platforms have been added recent ones referred to as the social media, such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Terrorist groups and individuals have increasingly used these new social media to greater advantage in furthering their goals, recruiting members, and spreading their
messages. Yet, terror has not been given total flexibility in its operations especially since several attempts have been made by governments and its agencies to counter the use of media platforms by terrorist organizations. Rehearsing Wainwright (2018):

Despite the risks of making statements, such as enabling governments to locate terror group leaders, terror leaders communicate regularly with video and audio messages which are posted on the website and disseminated on the internet. ISIS uses social media to their advantage when releasing threatening videos of beheadings. ISIS uses this tactic to scare normal people on social media. Similarly, Western domestic terrorists also use social media and technology to spread their ideas.

Other than being cheap, accessible and facilitating quick access to required audience, the social media platforms provide the valve through which terrorists engage clandestinely in coded networks. It was difficult in the past for terrorists to engage directly with the people they wanted except through the cumbersome relay of intended messages to intermediaries and cells often located in far-flung places. But presently (2020), with array platforms at their disposal (and in most cases almost for free), terrorist groups can easily connect and interact with their intended audience in real time; and at lesser costs. A careful consideration of terrorist misadventures has portrayed that communities and governments have been dealing with real human beings with real and ‘tangible’ ideas, although these have been boastful, hypocritical and violent (Wainwright, 2018; retrieved Google book). Although most terrorist organizations have used the media extensively, Al-Qaeda is the first to fully exploit the internet and excelled. This is reflective of its unique characteristics. In the words of Jenkins (Brian, retrieved October 25, 2020):

[al Qaeda] … regards itself as a global movement and therefore depends on a global communications network to reach its perceived constituents. It sees its mission as not simply creating terror among its foes but awakening the Muslim community. Its leaders view communications as 90 percent of the struggle. Despite the risks imposed by intense manhunts, its leaders communicate regularly with video and audio messages, which are posted on its websites and disseminated on the Internet. The number of websites devoted to the al Qaeda-inspired movement has grown from a handful to reportedly thousands, although many of these are ephemeral.

Evidently, the relationship between terrorism and the media has spanned some time; and many commentators have arrived at the consensus that the media hosting terrorist propaganda increases the perceptions of risk of fear of terrorism and crime, and relates to how much attention people or public pay to news created by these acts. Always hunting for cheap publicity, terrorist organizations have taken advantage of the obvious laxity obtainable in the “open media of democratic countries to further their goals, spread their messages and garner publicity for their cause; and in addition to deliberately resorting to acts of violence and aggression that target civilians” (Wilkinson, 1997: 51-64).

Unarguably, although media platforms have continuously played into the hands of terrorists, these have been inadvertent. Unless specially created by terrorism, government and independent media have not always, or known to have, supported terrorist goals. But the responsibility to report current events and issues underscores the helplessness of the media; and accounts for scrambles to cover terrorist attacks for their outlets in fiercely competitive media environment. The media have inadvertently furthered the propaganda and operations of terrorist organizations with fabrications and lies. A good example of the commensalist relationship between terror groups and the media was the release of the Osama bin Laden audio and video recordings directly to mainstream Arabic television networks, including Al-Jazeera, among others. Yet, on the other hand, the media platforms have also inadvertently portrayed the loopholes in insurgency operations thereby becoming sources through which terrorist objectives and group discontents within terrorist groups are, and have been, exposed. According to Khan (2013: 112-122):

It cannot be denied that although terrorism has proved remarkably ineffective as the major weapon for taking down governments and capturing political power, it has been a remarkably successful means of publicizing a political cause and relying the terrorist threat to a wider audience, particularly in the open and pluralistic countries of the West. When one says 'terrorism' in a democratic society, one also says 'media'.

What has been stated so far, vis-à-vis the apparent symbiotic nature of the relationship between terrorists and the media in recent histories is that terrorism in many democratic countries undeniably thrives on the oxygen of
publicity and the media. Yet, as mentioned earlier, this cannot be interpreted to imply that the media in established
democratic nations share the values of the terrorists. Wilkinson (1997), however, insists that the free media in
open or democratic societies are vulnerable to the ruthless exploitation and manipulation by terrorist
organizations. Additionally, terrorist groups are able to use both the traditional and social media but, presently,
cleverly bypass the traditional media and spread their propaganda through the highly patronized social media

The needs of the citizens and/or consumers (of information) to be regularly updated, creates unbridled
competition between media outlets. This is in order to supply their constituents or areas of influence with the
most up-to-date information on what is trending, in this case, terrorism. The rat-race network that has
consequently been created in order to satisfy the consumers with ‘news’ on terrorism, in turn, has imposed a cycle
of surveillance on the citizenry and the media. Concomitantly, consumers are constrained to believe that terrorism
is a threat to their safety, and constantly want information on this seemingly perpetual threat against them. Being
equally and constantly on surveillance as a result of the need to always supply information, the media outlets seek
out stories that will satisfy consumer needs; otherwise they would come under the peoples’ scrutiny as failures or
successful (Kohlnann, retrieved 26, 2020). The duo surveillance by the citizenry and the media has instanced a
pull factor on the later which imposes a greater impetus on economic gains rather than on the political and
sociological impact of terrorism on the society. In essence, the active audience and the terrorist organizations
constantly “seek to satisfy their various needs” and audience through media transmissions (Hoffman, 2006;
retrieved).

Terror Groups and the Social Media

Although al-Qaeda has used the social media platforms prevalently, others such as Islamic State of Iraq and
Levant (ISIS/ISIL), Daesh and al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), have, according to Rob Wainwright
in Fighting Crime and Terrorism in the Age of Technology (2018), utilized more than one hundred sites and to their
advantage. Rehearsing Thompson, among others, verbatim (2017):

Known terrorist group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, also translated to ISIS, uses the widespread of
news over social media to their advantage when releasing threatening videos of beheadings. As of November 16,
2014, following the beheading of former U.S. Army Ranger Peter Kassig, there have now been five recorded
executions of Westerners taken captive in Syria. James Foley, David Cawthorne Haines, Alan Henning, and Steven
Sotloff are also among the men kidnapped and executed by ISIS. The videos of the brutal beheadings are both
posted online by ISIS, where they can be viewed by anyone using their own discretion, and sent to government
officials as threats. Posting the executions online gives the terrorist groups the power to manipulate viewers and
cause havoc among the population viewing them, and the videos have the ability to instill fear within the Western
world. The videos are typically high production quality and generally show the entirety of the gruesome act, with
the hostage speaking a few words before they are killed on camera.

In the case of U.S. aid worker Peter Kassig, his video did not show the actual beheading act and he did not speak
any final words before the execution. His silence and the fact that the actual execution was not included in the
video raised question about his video was (sic) different than the rest. In response to Kassig's beheading, his
family expressed their wish that news media avoid doing what the group wants by refraining from publishing or
distributing the video. By refusing to circulate the video of the be-heading, it therefore loses the ability to
manipulate Ameri-cans or further the cause of the terrorist group.

In addition to beheading videos, ISIS has released videos of their members doing nonviolent acts. For example,
Imran Awan described one such instance in his article "Cyber-Extremism: Isis and the Power of Social Media"
where one video showed members of the Islamic State were seen helping people and visiting hospitals. These
videos gave a humanistic nature to the terrorist group members, therefore, contradicting what civilians think
terrorist groups should be.

Edgar Jones has mentioned in his article, "The Reception of Broadcast Terrorism: Recruitment and
Radicalization," that ISIS has utilized documentaries and even their own magazine, Dabiq, in order to recruit new
members and to get their message out to the public. This illustrates just a couple of the various mediums that ISIS
has used.
According to Wainwright, social media is also used by ISIS and other terror groups to recruit foreign people to join the terrorist cause. In some cases, these new recruits are sent back to their home country to carry out terrorist attacks. Others who can not physically move to the terrorist cause have been known to carry out acts of terrorism in their own countries due to the propaganda that they are exposed to online. This exhibits how ISIS can brainwash or expand on ideas that individuals may have.

The Taliban has been active on Twitter since May 2011, and has more than 7,000 followers. Tweeting under the handle @alemarahweb, the Taliban tweets frequently, on some days nearly hourly. This account is currently suspended.

In December 2011, it was discovered that the Somalia-based terror cell Al-Shabab was using a Twitter account under the name @HSMPress. Since opening on December 7, 2011, the account has amassed tens of thousands of followers and tweets frequently.

Shortly after a series of coordinated Christmas bombings in Kono, Nigeria, in 2011, the Nigerian-based terror group Boko Haram released a video statement defending their actions to YouTube. Boko Haram has also used Twitter to voice their opinions.

**Countering Terror Use of Social Media by National Governments**

National governments have, first, urged the managers of social media platforms to stop terror groups from the use of their online tools; and, second, stem hosting contents of terrorist propaganda. Joe Lieberman and the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs issued a report titled "Violent Islamist Extremism, the Internet, and the Homegrown Terrorist Threat" (2008), and stated that the internet is one of the "primary drivers" of the terrorist threat to the United States. When it became obvious, for instance, that Al-Shabab used the Twitter platform, the United States government called on the company to shut down its account. However, it is not evident that Twitter complied with the request (Friedman, 2011); but it rather announced in January 2012 of changes in its censorship policy, wherein is stated that they would onwards censor tweets in certain countries especially when it is perceived that such tweets will break the local laws of any country (Twitter, 2012). Gauging the reactions of consumers to Twitter censorship policy, El Akkad (2012) noted that:

The move drew criticism from many Twitter users who said the move was an affront to free speech. Many of the users threatened to quit tweeting if the policy was not rescinded, including Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei.

In December 2010, in response to growing demands that YouTube pull video content from terrorist groups from its servers, the company added a "promotes terrorism" option under the "violent or repulsive content" category that viewers can select to "flag" offensive content.

By limiting the terrorists access to conventional mass media and censoring news coverage of terrorist acts and their perpetrators and also minimizing the terrorists allowance to manipulate mass media, the mass fear impact that is usually created will decrease.

Governments worldwide have enhanced surveillance and censorship of known terrorist social media sites. Rehearsing Jeff Lewis, if social media platform managers close down accounts of terror groups, the dissemination of unwanted information to the public and to terror cells would be stemmed. Yet, terrorist groups and their supporters have continuously created new IDs with which they thwarted government efforts and resurfaced back with propaganda. In the case study of an al Shabaab Twitter account (Stern, 2015; retrieved) and from a George Washington University white paper (Berger, 2016; retrieved) it was found out that:

Accounts that resurfaced did not regain the high number of followers they had had originally. However this picture is complicated as a May 2016 article in the Journal of Terrorism Research found that resurgent accounts acquire an average (median) of 43.8 followers per day, while regular jihadist accounts accrue only 8.37 followers on average per day.
Generally, there has been the tendency for citizens of developing nations, terrorist groups and other malcontents to abuse the democratic tenets of freedom of speech and action. Consequently, especially as it concerned terrorism, highly developed and democratized nations, such as the United States of America, France and Germany, have placed restrictions on certain types of tweeted contents globally. However, the onerous job of finding al-Qaeda online supporters and arresting them before they could hurt anyone has not curbed terror usage of the media. Equally, online supporters of al-Qaeda, have successfully detected and avoided “the smoke trails of tracking them and putting out fires before they are caught” (McCants, 2012).

The Dapchi Abduction in Northeast Nigeria

The apparent lack of interest in studying and understanding insurgency by members of the media - journalists and public intellectuals - has become apparent. The media either through blundering ignorance or deliberate mischief or both, have contributed immensely in sending the conspiracy mill into overdrive or hyped terrorist events or situations into retributions or retaliations on communities. To avoid these situations, the media have to understand the internal politics of governments and/or of the operations of terrorists in order to report accurately or unambiguously. For instance, it is always needful for government to maintain official ambiguity when it comes to making deals with insurgents, such as in the payment of ransoms and exchanges/swaps of prisoners.

The Dapchi girls’ abduction and the reportages in the media have further confused and misinformed the innocent or unsuspecting public. The public is innocent in the sense that most of them depend on the media, both paper and electronic, for information on daily happenstances in Nigeria and elsewhere. It could be exasperating when misleading information emanate from publicly acclaimed responsible medium. Moreover, in a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious State that is typified by Nigeria, misinformation has often been reinterpreted to suit ethnic particularities.

The Dapchi abduction aptly portrays media goof. As a given, there is always a need to “maintain official ambiguity over deals of release of captives and the payment of ransom because it is the standard practice in international conflict resolution. In a polity with citizens who are laden with mistrusts and, to the extreme, hate, many versions and commentaries of whether government paid ransom or not for the release of the abducted girls from Dapchi remain rife. It was quickly concluded that the Buhari-led government paid ransom and conducted prisoners swap with Boko Haram before the Dapchi girls were released. In as much as the Federal government had in the past paid ransoms and conducted prisoners swap with the Shekau-led Boko Haram side, the media ought to have, first, conducted some researches into the reasons that informed the quick release of the Dapchi girls; and, second, verify the government’s claim of not having paid ransom or exchanged them with captured insurgents. It will be stating the obvious that the output of the media regarding terrorist activities overtime, and in the case of the Dapchi abduction, opened up a floodgate of conspiracy theories and rumours.

As mentioned earlier, commentators and the media, in order not to mislead the public, must study and understand the internal workings of insurgent groups, such as Boko Haram and ISIS. Certain questions, such as: Is there still one united Boko Haram sect? If not, which of the sects abducted the Dapchi girls? What were the religious perceptions or ideologies that underpinned the activities of the Boko Haram sects? Did the sects adopt indiscriminate or selective violence against persons and objects?

Until the abduction and return of the Dapchi girls, many Nigerians or members of the public were unaware of the existence of a balkanized Boko Haram terrorist group. Rehearsing Husaini (2018):

The Dapchi girls were abducted by the Abu Musab Albarnawi faction which is affiliated to ISIS. That's why there was no any Shekau video claiming responsibility. Chibok girls were abducted by the Shekau faction. At the heart of the Albamawi-Shekau split is the legitimacy of killing Muslims or taking them hostages. Shekau believes that every Muslim that refused to join or support Boko Haram has automatically apostatized and should be meted the same violence as non-Muslims. That's why Shekau's violence is indiscriminate, targeting mosques, market places and other Muslim gathering.

Albarnawi on the other hand believes Muslims under Nigerian rule should be liberated into his fake Islamist utopia and not killed. That's the soft jihad of the late Bin Laden years, winning hearts and minds through selective violence against select targets.
Therefore, the Dapchi abduction is at the heart of the fundamental difference between the two factions. It is in conflict with Albarnawi’s jihadi principles. Allowing Dapchi to stand is akin to condoning what he accused Shekau of doing and led to their splitting away. Not that there is any honor among terrorists, but since Muslims cannot be held captive according to the Albarnawi doctrine, then the basis for collecting ransom does not apply. The question is why did Albarnawi carry out the abduction in the first place. Here I adduce three major reasons. One is that the abduction was a mistake, an accident. Two is that they realized they have the wrong girls after finding all of them Muslims except one which they are still holding. Three is that Albarnawi carried out the abduction to prove a point, to punch a hole in FG’s claims of victory and show that the terrain is still contestable.

The fact that the lone Christian girl is still held confirms that no ransom was paid and Albarnawi’s Boko Haram released those girls on their own accord. Boko Haram respects ransom and hostage agreements. They released Christian Chibok girls and Christian University of Maiduguri lecturers as well as Christian police officers when ransom was paid. It is inconceivable that they will be holding one lone Christian girl if ransom was paid in this case.

Now to the issue of military withdrawal. The fact that Boko Haram struck Dapchi to abduct those girls in the first instance means Boko Haram are monitoring Nigerian troops’ movement and even taking advantage of it.

Reconstructing the events in Dapchi, Abu Musab Albarnawi’s abduction of the Dapchi girls was carried out in error of information. Probably, in Albarnawi’s bid to puncture the Federal government’s pride and claim of having technically defeated Boko Haram insurgency and prove that the North-East terrain was, and still is, open to contestations, the ethnic and religious membership of the Government Girls Science and Technical College, Dapchi, was not verified. He eventually discovered after the abduction that all the girls were Muslims excepting Liya Sharibu who is a Christian. This accounts for her still being held by the Albarnawi sect. In the words of Husaini (2018):

The fact also that the military withdrew temporarily when the girls are being returned is standard security practice of ceasing hostilities and confidence building in managing hostage situations. Even in civil, Evans - style hostage situations, the police stand down when hostages are to be handed over.

There are other issues regarding terrorism, militancy and banditry which the media, perhaps, out of lethargy, did not bother to research on or investigate before reporting the events in Dapchi. Specifically, there were the issues of:

i. The withdrawal of the military or, as some reported, running away from Dapchi during both the abduction and return of the girls;

ii. The appointment of Sambo Dasuki as the National Security Adviser (NSA) instead of Ali Mongunu who is a Kanuri; and

iii. The support usually given by local communities to insurgents in the Northeast, especially by the Dapchi community to Boko Haram.

To have stated that the Nigerian military in Dapchi withdrew at the onslaught of the Albarnawi-led Boko Haram sect was a statement made out of ignorance. It is not, however, being stated that the military detachment at Dapchi might not have been outgunned by the insurgents, but that the modus operandi of the terrorists, by being constantly on the move, and could strike at many territorial patches at the same time, even with skeletal force, could have informed equally the movements of the army. It were these “moves” which, first, might have been tactical; and second, as a result of the superior weaponry of the insurgents or out of fear that would have been related to becoming overwhelmed, that the media labelled “withdrawal”.

That moles exist within the military and local vigilante groups is street knowledge. Thus, it is not impossible that the Albarnawi-led sect had prior information that the Nigerian army would move when it did and conducted the abduction. This was termed “withdrawal”. The second time the military were accused of “withdrawing” from Dapchi, however, temporarily, was when the abducted girls were returned by the Albarnawi-led sect. It is “standard security practice of ceasing hostilities and confidence building in managing hostage situations. Even in
civil, Evans-style hostage situations, the police stand down when hostages are to be handed over” (Husaini, 2018).

On the issue of communities supporting insurgent groups, the Dapchi abduction is outstanding. In the words of Husaini (2018):

On the other issue of Dapchi residents hailing Boko Haram as they returned the girls, two things are involved. One is that some people are hailing Boko Haram out of self-preservation in order not to invite their wrath for appearing not supportive enough. Many people have learnt to adapt to situation like this to survive. And given Boko Haram draconian and arbitrary justice, those people have little or no choice.

The second reason is even more ominous, something that’s so far not adequately explored, that is of Boko Haram enjoying significant support among the rural population in Borno and Yobe States. Boko Haram was able to survive nearly 10 years of sustained Nigerian military offensive because of that. It owes its resilience and sophistication to its ability to blend with rural populations, buying or coercing their cooperation and acquiescence.

Two years ago, Boko Haram attacked Geidam and the military successfully repelled the attack, with its back against the wall, Boko Haram received reinforcement from unlikely quarters - the local population - who trooped out raining gunshots and takbir in support of Boko Haram, forcing our soldiers to temporarily withdraw from the town until reinforcement came.

The pattern of Boko Haram support is predominant in Kanuri speaking areas where it has succeeded in selling the insurgency as a Kanuri islamist liberation struggle. Anyone familiar with the Kanuri otherization of non-Kanuri Muslims will understand this.

On the ethnic contents of insurgency-harbouring communities in the Northeast; and in relations with communities’ support, is the fact that insurgency is predominant in Kanuri-speaking areas where Boko Haram insurgency is perceived as a Kanuri Islamist liberation struggle. This is explained by the Kanuri stigmatizing the non-Kanuri Muslims. Far from labeling the Boko Haram insurgency a Kanuri conspiracy or ascendance, it has a distinctly Kanuri flavor similar to the same way the Taliban drew support from the Pashun territory and the ISIS from its Iraqi Sunni minority. To quote Husaini (2018):

That's why Boko Haram is only active in Kanuri speaking northern and central Borno with the exception of Maiduguri which erupted against BH because of its urban nature. But BH sleeper cells still exist as explained by the ease with which Boko Haram infiltrates the city with suicide bombers. That's another reason why the civilian JTF experiment only succeeded in Maiduguri and struggled elsewhere in northern and central Borno.

On the non-prevalence of Boko Haram activities in non-Kanuri speaking areas, southern Borno has been largely immune from Boko Haram attacks (excepting the Chibok abduction) as a result of certain primordial factors. Among these factors was the age-old inter-ethnic feud between northern Kanuri-dominated Borno and the non-Kanuri-dominated south. The south has, therefore, been able with its communities’ militias to fend off Boko Haram attacks. The claimed narrative of underdevelopment and colonialism which have been heaped on Western imperialism bandied about as the raison d'etre for the Boko Haram insurgency pale into insignificance when it has become evident that areas of Jigawa and Zamfara in the south northeast have portrayed the same poor socio-economic indices with Borno and Yobe in the Northeast.

Consequently, in Jigawa and Zamfara, the poor socio-economic factor and the possibilities of survival of the people manifests as cattle rustling and rural banditry, while to the north (of northern Borno and Yobe), it manifests as Islamic terrorism. Thus, the dichotomy between the Kanuri-speaking and non-Kanuri-speaking territorial patches is rooted in the histories, politics and cultures of the Northeast Geopolitical Zone. Some commentators have ventured to mention that the rise of Boko Haram insurgency came about as a need to reborn the Old Kanem-Borno Empire which in pre-coloniality fought the Sokoto Caliphate to a standstill. It is historic that, first, the Sokoto Caliphate could not circumscribe the Kanuri-dominated Kanem-Borno Empire of the Northeast in pre-coloniality; and, second, that the communities of Kanem-Borno became Islamized before the communities of the Sokoto Caliphate.
The issues of being Kanuri and non-Kanuri; of not having been conquered and Islamized from the Sokoto Caliphate axis; and of cultural superiority claims by the Kanuri, would account for the failure of Sambo Dasuki as the National Security adviser who is a Fulani, instead of President Goodluck Jonathan appointing Ali Mongunu who is a Kanuri. The President’s move which was evidently taken in order to pacify the North and its age-old oligarchies alienated the Northeast which made its northern Borno and Yobe entities begin to perceive the Boko Haram sect as a symbol of their liberation from a probable Sokoto Caliphate resurgence.

The issues of media hype, misinformation, non-investigative reporting and lethargy, on the one hand, and the abuse of the media and its inefficiency by the terrorists, on the other, would be problems solved if professionalism is employed. Rehearsing Husaini (2018):

And unless we eliminate those underlying conditions that allow Boko Haram enjoy local support, the future will augur very badly. When our elites consider leaving our people in ignorance, poverty and disease as an official policy and elevate corruption to a status surpassing all good virtues, we ask for Boko Haram and Boko Haram we shall get.

For now, for any meaningful development or rehabilitation to thrive, we have to win the war to preserve the peace. We have to up our game. Our capabilities should keep pace with Boko Haram dynamism. Negotiating with terrorists may bring temporary lull and short –term political benefits but risk emboldening them in the long-run, setting a dangerous precedent.

Nations do not buy peace through appeasement but through sacrifice. Boko Haram’s jihadist utopia is incompatible with true Islam and the realities of our 21st century. They cannot be reconciled by any stretch of compromise. Boko Haram and its terror allies know only one language, defeat. We have to do whatever it takes to defeat Boko Haram and the murderous ideology that fuels it, even as its consequences will continue to echo long after it is militarily extinguished.

Concluding Remarks

The media, consequently, have the onerous task of re-educating and restructuring their institution vis-à-vis researching on the underlying factors that are characteristic of terrorist activities, such as ideologies, ethnicization and geographical areas. This would be in addition to understanding the modus operandi of both statutory security agencies of government and insurgents. Apportioning labels of withdrawals or the outright running away of the Nigerian military from Boko Haram insurgents, and without proper investigation of what would have transpired, is to say the least, misinforming. The public should have been informed that these were tactical moves underpinned by standard practices in the local and international arenas.

Of importance, again, is for the media to avoid the hyping of events out of proportion since the ultimate beneficiaries, overtime, have been terrorism and terrorists which and whose particular interest is to always generate fear. The citizenry has always cowered with fear and with the infinite thought, ‘it could have been me’. Abraham Lincoln seemingly forewarned the public and media when he observed in the 1860s that public sentiment entailed solving problems, indeed everything without actions. Consequent on this opinion, terrorists have achieved a lot while doing less through the media.

References

1. Stated by President Abraham Lincoln of the USA between 1861 and 1865 (2009); rehearsed by the Speaker of the American Senate, Nancy Pelosi CNN, Thursday, August 2020; see also, “Abraham Lincoln”, Microsoft Encarta, retrieved 20/10/-2020.
3. Sun Tzu, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx