THE ATTACK OF BOKO HARAM SECT THROUGH MEDIA AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

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Abstract: The provision of national security is one of the elemental aspects of good governance. In a country where national security is threatened, the leaders are always view with suspicion. Public diplomacy comes handy as a veritable tool for enhancing good rapport with the public as well as encouraging policy making process. The recent epidemic of violence in Nigeria often coordinated and executed by the Boko Haram movement has left the public with more questions than answers. What necessitated the insurgency? What are the demands of the group? What is the government doing to contain its excesses? What must be done to prevent such insurgency in the future? In the face of such looming questions, this paper tries to examine public diplomacy issues associated with Nigerian national security and to proffer solutions to the menace of the Boko Haram movement in Nigeria.

Keywords: Attack, Boko Haram, Sect through Media, Public Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

As an important feature of the national security strategy as well as the move to encourage policy making process, public diplomacy is often taken seriously. Depending on the issue, that threatens national security and other factors surrounding it, effort is always made to recognize, enlighten, and influence foreign audiences on the matter (McPhail, 2010). While public diplomacy conventionally comprises actors like governments' public affairs and public information officers, broadcasters as well as cultural mediators, new public diplomacy players cut across all challengers of prevailing assumptions of governments' international relations and foreign policies like indigenous or foreign terrorist organizations (McPhail, 2010). The spate of violence in Nigeria, often orchestrated and implemented by the *Boko Haram* movement, an Islamic militant group waging a campaign of violence in northern Nigeria, has left people speculating about the origin of the group, what the group wants, how to contain its excesses, and what must be done to forestall such insurgency in the future. This paper sets out to examine public diplomacy issues associated with Nigerian national security and to proffer solutions to the menace of the *Boko Haram* movement in Nigeria.

Boko Haram movement poses a serious challenge to the security and safety of people's lives and property in Nigeria; and this has led to a high level of anxiety and mistrust on the part of the citizens toward the federal government. *Boko Haram's* activities are seen in the cycle of violence perpetrated through the ongoing bomb attacks targeted on churches and their leaders, security personnel, public facilities (hospitals and schools), and other infrastructures like telecommunication facilities, with a huge concentration of destruction in Northern Nigeria (Onuoha, 2013). In other words, *Boko Haram* movement, since it started its rebellion, has undermined the Nigerian security by its aggravation of violence against innocent citizens (Adesoji, 2011). So far, the attempt to use military power to resolve the problem of *Boko Haram* in Nigeria has proved abortive. It is only fitting that other public diplomatic strategies be explored with a view to bringing a lasting peace to the regions facing this insurgency in Nigeria. At any rate, The Nigerian Defense Minister Bello Halliru Muhammed, while speaking on BBC concerning the attacks, argued that the *Boko Haram* saga is in some sense akin to the 9/11 attacks in the USA due to the unexpected, unusual, and sophisticated tactics employed by the group, tactics that distinguish the group as terrorists and their activities as terrorist attacks (Fisher, 2011). This statement by the Minister of Defense is suggestive of the fact that drastic situations call for drastic measures. However, what are the drastic public diplomatic measures used in quelling the 9/11 aftermath?

The method adopted by the then Mayor of New York City, Rudolph Giuliani, depicted a diplomatic move by a public official, which he began by visiting the site of the 9/11 attack, to ensure that rescue operations were underway, to establish contact with the publics and to accentuate the previous measures taken by the administration to resist such unforeseen disasters like building a "state-of-the-art command center for emergencies, and the efforts made at the present by arranging regular news conferences to update and clarify the public about the number of victims, and the role of government to intervene, the number of personnel currently working to rescue victims, and finally, to reassure American people that things would get better (Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger, 2011).In spite of the fact that people were slow in calming down over the incident, the administration's engagement with the publics, updating them every step of the way as events unfolded, helped in clearing people's doubts and getting them to trust the administration.

National Security

National security is the responsibility of any government as enshrined in the legal framework of the nation (constitution). Because the primary objective of any nation is to cater for the security and economic wellbeing of its people, the major purpose of national security is therefore to safeguard national values; and the fundamental value for the survival of a nation (both internal and external), is self preservation as well as self perpetuation. The concept of national security is a situation that provides national and international conditions favourable to the protection of a nation state and its citizens against existing and potential threat. National security is the acquisition, deployment and

use of military force to achieve national goals; it is viewed as falling within the domain of the military force (Held, 1998). National security emphasizes the coercive means for all aspects of the state on check; it is the ability of every nation to protect its national value from external threats. National security is the military capability of a nation and the struggle to overcome internal and external aggression. A nation is said to be secured when it is free from military threats or political coercion (Aliyu, 2012).National security is the survival of the state against military threats posed by other states (Buzan, 2003). National security threat differs amongst nations. For example, the major security threat to powerful nations like USA and its allies bothers on the defeat of international terrorists as well as to promote economic interest and democratic values (Aliyu, 2012). Buzan (1984) avers that national security cannot be isolated for treatment at any single level. As such the state employment of security does not justify a refusal to infringe on her citizens' civil liberties, making war and massive fiscal re-allocation of state resources in the last fifty years. The goal of every civilized society is to maintain law and order as well as to guarantee the security of lives and property of its citizens to ensure stability (Balogun, 2003).

According to Wehmeier and Ashby (2002), national security ensures protection of the country, persons, property, and the community against future threats, danger, mishaps and all forms of perils. Babangida (2011) asserts that national security is the physical protection and defense of our citizens and their territorial integrity, with a view to promoting the socio-economic wellbeing and prosperity of the nation as well as to ensure safe and secure environment for the promotion of national interests and the attraction of foreign partners. This may explain why Ukpere (2012) sees security as a means of protecting the state from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life in homes, offices or communities within its territory. National security therefore entails different levels of commitment – the presence of peace, safety, happiness, and protection of human and physical resources, and the absence of crisis, threats to human life, and other menaces that purport to disrupt the peace and serenity of the nation. According to Tadjbakhsh (2008), national security encapsulates economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, political security, among others (UNDP, 1994).

National security is upheld as sacrosanct phenomenon in human society, which iswhy every President or Governor in Nigeria when assuming position of authority is expected to take oath of office to protect lives and property of the citizens (Ukpere, 2012). At any rate, the Section 14(b) of the 1999 constitution states that "It is declared that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government;" and to discharge its function well, the executives like the President, Governors, and Local Government Chiefs have been allotted security votes and access to security authorities (IDEA, 1996). However, Mijah (2007) states that national security is neither traditional military activities (though may encompass it) nor military hardware but development; for without

development there will be no security. National security encompasses personal and communal state of well-being as well as being secure from the threats arising from all forms of violence, injustice, and violation of human rights (Fayeye, 2007). It is therefore the absence of conflict plus the institution of a lasting peace necessitated by broader visions encompassing areas like education, health, democracy, human rights, protection against environmental degradation and proliferation of weapons.

Perceived Origin of *Boko Haram* Sect in the North

The northern power elites created a thin layer of leaders from whom everyone else draws their protective existence. It was observed that unless one belonged to such elite group, there would be no appointment into position of authority in the upper echelons of government. This was done for fear of breeding critics who might rise to overthrow them. A member of the power elite group had to approve appointments at any level (Odu, 2012:18). In other words, only those who are nominated by the kingmakers could get top positions. Notably, a great number of young men who had no privilege of having the overlord influence existed side-by-side with the power elites. Sequel to this kind of discrimination against their kinsmen, the youths became aggrieved, having been restrained for over six decades (Odu, 2012:18). Why should they not be aggrieved when for instance, a General Manager of Federal Housing Authority (FHA), a nominee of Sokoto caliphate, who was expected to serve the housing needs of Nigerian populace, was in practical term, catering for the elite group residing in Lagos. This was when FHA had not moved to Abuja. His main concern was to ensure that positions were created for their members in Lagos and other places using his privileged position.

It is unfortunate to note that these young men were ignorantly brainwashed against any attempt to change the feudal system and inhuman treatment being inflicted on them by their feudal lords. Even today, majority of these young men do not have any meaningful source of livelihood. Even though these young people do not have bright and promising future, the northern lords are often praised for their magnanimity due to the daily meals served to these young people through their cronies. It is observed that a few number of northerners are self-employed with little basic western education. According to Odu (2012:18), some of the northern youths are versed in Arabic language and the Qu'ran. He observed that these northern leaders and power elites, who desire to feed young students of Qu'ranic schools, provide them with classes.

Another group known as "Almajiris" move from place to place begging for alms which they share all the time with their Qu'ranic masters. These groups of *Almajiris* have no doubt been subjected to ineptitude and impoverishment contrary to other settlers (and their peers)in the north such as Igbo and Yoruba people, who, for the most part, make progress in their own land. In other words, their leaders deceptively convinced them to rely only on Qu'ranic education without providing them with concomitant and/or tangible means of livelihood, which Igbo and Yoruba settlers are evidently enjoying while

in their own land. Against this backdrop, these groups of *Almajiris* became envious of the Igbo and Yoruba settlers instead of directing their acrimony against the elite group from the north who were the architects of this indubitable outcome of prolonged accumulation of grievances.

Comparatively, Islamic education cannot compete favourably with the western education and contemporary technological movement in Nigeria. How can the Moslem preachers or fanatics convince Nigerians that western education and its accompanied life styles were responsible for the plight of greater majority of the northerners, when their Moslem brothers in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and their neighbours with their huge oil resources are great beneficiaries of western technology today? These countries serve as models in Islamic culture, which other Moslem countries try to emulate. Therefore, the claim by the *Boko Haram* fundamentalist sect in Nigeria that "Western education is sinful" sounds asan unsustainable fallacy. Rather the sect arose as a result of long years of accumulated grievances against their northern elite groups, who have been exploiting their ignorance to their own advantage.

The official name of the *Boko Haram* movement is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal Jihad, meaning "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and Jihad (Okpaga, Ugwu and Eme, 2012:82). Some scholars are of the opinion that the group earned its nickname from the teachings of its founder, Mohammed Yusuf in the early 2000s, in the restive north eastern city of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. In his own argument, Yusuf believed that western education (Boko) was forbidden (Haram) in the region because of the fact that education had brought nothing good to the people but poverty and misery. He succeeded in brain-washing his already disenchanted and disgruntled adherents that western education was the cause of their plight.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The functional superiority of theories as guideposts in all fields of human endeavour lies in the fact that rather than base action on judgment derived from mere experience, guesswork or speculations, theories enable a chosen line of action to be anchored in and guided by evidence derived from scientific research, which makes the consequences of such an action fall as close in line with the intended direction as possible (Onah, 2003). It is in view of the above that conflict theory is selected as the viewpoint for the study. Conflict is a common phenomenon in all organizations where two or more persons come together to achieve certain objectives set by organizations. That is why conflict was defined by Ugwu (2000:147), as an act of striking together, mutual interference of opposing or incompatible forces, ideas, interest contest, and discord among different persons. He states that when there is conflict, it implies a dispute and struggle against something undesirable by persons expressing opposing views or claims. The conflict is believed to represent a condition of disharmony within an interaction process usually as a result of a clash of interests between or among the parties involved in some form of

relationship (Imobighe, 2003:20). While Nnoli (2003) refers to conflict as contradictions arising from perceptions, behaviours, phenomena and tendencies, Mialli (1992) captures it (conflict) as the emergence of clear contradictions existing or at least is perceived to prevail among the participants who view the outcomes as extremely important.

It can be deduced from the above contributions that conflict is a behavioural pattern involving two or more individual ties, which can be inter-personal, inter-groups, inter-organizations, and/or inter-states (Afegbua, 2010:12). Conflict as a concept has been well highlighted by Dhrendorf (1976) as a basic factor underlying societal dynamics. For Dhrendorf, an industry is a place where all participants are interested in self gain, resulting in inevitable conflict as participants in the industrialization process try to outsmart each other in the quest for self gains (Anugwom, 1997:99). Commenting on conflict theory, Anugwom (1997) argued that the rivalry between management and labour finds expression in the conflicting and contradicting interests that between them. The theory precisely sees management as possessing the profit consciousness while labour possesses the wage consciousness. Under this circumstance, each party tries to make its own consciousness or interest dominant as well as increase its sphere of domination, but this can only happen at the detriment of the other party (Anugwom, 1997). This conflict of interests between the two parties will create a situation where they are constantly fighting over whose interest or consciousness will have dominion over the other. In view of the above analysis, the quest for material rewards, power and the predisposition to rule by the few elites in Northern Nigeria against the interests of the people of the downtrodden, has made the conflict theory relevant to this study. It is within the above viewpoints that this study attempts to ascertain the extent to which the conflict theory will provide reasonable explanations to insecurity situation in Northern Nigeria.

Recommended Solutions to the Menace of *Boko Haram* Movement

There are some remarkable media and public diplomatic steps taken by the government of Nigeria to address the recurrent attacks from the *Boko Haram* movement. For example, following the massive attacks on churches by Boko Haram movement during the 2011 Christmas festivity, which left more than fifty people dead and over a hundred people injured, President Goodluck Jonathan immediately announced the formation of a "Special Presidential Committee" to unravel the present and the past grounds for such attacks, and equally declared a state of emergency in the three most affected states of Yobe, Borno, and Adamawa (Aka, 2012). These actions, directly or indirectly, assisted in assuaging the already rankling apprehension as well as in mitigating the uncertainties in people's mind concerning imminent threats (Aka, 2012). Just two weeks before the presidential election held on March 28, the Nigerian Army launched a major military onslaught against *Boko Haram* group and scored a huge victory that reduced the number of local governments being controlled by the insurgent group from 20 to 3, an action that amounted to destroying most of its enjoyed strongholds (Onuah, 2015). The

measures taken by the administration also helped to placate the victims and Christians in the affected regions. The declaration of the state of emergency gave them the impression that they have not been forgotten, after all.

However, there appears to be some loopholes in the media and public diplomacy strategies employed by the Nigerian government in dealing with *Boko Haram*. There was no effort at being on top of the situation through the media. There was also a notable lack of information update on the issue, allowing people to speculate whenever there were fresh attacks. These gave the oppositions to the government a big advantage in marking out its incapacity to deal with the situation. The apparent lack of detailed information with regard to the menace of the *Boko Haram* movement or the strategic plans by the government to fix the problem exacerbated the matter (Okpaga, Ugwu, and Eme, 2012). Nye (1990) emphasizes the roles of two types of power that are at play in public diplomacy" hard power" and "soft power." While hard power seeks to achieve its aims through coercion and intimidation, soft power exerts control over people's behaviors by means of the people's culture, political values, and policies. There are a chain of resources and tools used by American public diplomatic professionals, which might also be helpful in tackling issues of *Boko Haram's* magnitude.

First, public diplomacy has, in the past (and even presently), proved effective when tools like short-term "information" instruments are used. Some information tools used in public diplomacy are press releases and radio broadcast as well as education and cultural exchange programs (Rugh, 2006). On the one hand, Cultural Affairs Officer (who is well versed in the culture and religion of the northern Nigeria) should be appointed to champion the press releases and radio broadcasts with regard to the event of the *Boko Haram* and the efforts the government is making to resolve the issue. This will enable the government to be on top of the situation and to carry people along rather than creating a communication *lacuna* between the government and the Nigerian publics. The problem is further compounded by the fact that this rebellious group makes very prodigal use of the social media; and often times, what they post becomes the only source of information that the Nigerian public have on the problem. The government appears to be avoiding the problem or diverting people's attention to other matters instead of keeping them in loop with the developing, life threatening problem of *Boko Haram*.

On the other hand, opting to train children from these regions abroad in an exchange arrangement might be a way of changing the mental pattern of the youth in those areas. This is because ignorance appears to be at the heart of the *Boko Haram* uprising, and Socrates in his *Sophie's World* once established a correlation between knowledge and right conduct when he averred that "to know the good is to do the good," suggesting that "the right insight leads to the right action." Education, to this extent, becomes a potential diplomatic tool for quelling the crisis of insurgency in Nigeria. Second, coalition building is another public diplomatic tool that holds promises of a successful outcome. This is

regarded as commitment to new foreign policy thinking and structure. Peterson (2002) suggests that since terrorism poses a considerable risk to national security, it is in the national interest for a country to frame and manage its foreign policies in such a way as to obtain requisite assistance of foreign countries while combating terrorism. If Nigeria had done this at the beginning of the *Boko Haram* insurrection, there could have been no safe havens for the insurgent groups when they were pushed out of Nigerian borders. Handling of an insurgency of such magnitude with a single strategy(military might) is not a viable option. After all, Loney (2009) has warned that a diplomatic plan is destined to fail in its sustainability if it fails to recognize two crucial audiences – the public and the partners (traditional friends, coalition partners, and allies). Can one be wrong to suggest that the federal government's fight against *Boko Haram* has hitherto failed mainly because of government's inattentiveness to these two audiences?

Douglas and Neal (2013) contend that "there is no one path to success," meaning that for professionals of public diplomacy to achieve their goals, they must be "consistent, multifaceted, and localized." That notwithstanding, one major quest that continues to resonate among media and public diplomacy scholars has to do with where power resides. The demand as to where power in international politics actually resides is the inquiry that Peter Van Ham (2013) brings to bear in his article "Social Power in Public Diplomacy." Considering the landscape of media and public diplomacy nowadays with the emerging intricacy of national and global policy processes, answering the question as to where power resides proves to be problematic. Apart from the nation state, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as well as celebrities are now known to be wielding enormous power as far as the shaping of agendas and influencing of decisions are concerned. The publics (both domestic and foreign) are today known to influence policies through technological platforms by sharing their views on social media.

Snow (2010) underscores three layers of engagement in public diplomacy as monologue or one-way communication, dialogue or two-way symmetric and multi-dimensional exchange oriented communication, and collaborative or group ventures or joint projects. It appears that the Nigerian government has not explored the possibility of capitalizing on these layers of public diplomacy in an attempt to battle *Boko Haram* movement to a standstill. According to these layers, monologue communication would amount to deploying all resources to get the foreign public to declare war on *Boko Haram* through one effective international media (Snow, 2010). As public diplomacy aims to expand exchange of information and ideologies beyond cultural and social limitations, dialogic or two-way communication becomes elemental to international political engagement (Snow, 2010). The Nigerian government should therefore be ready to go into dialogue with foreign publics to search for a viable way of degrading and ultimately destroying the insurgent movement. The collaboration with the third layer of engagement in public diplomacy proves to be effective in global communication landscape precisely because of its involvement in tangible and effortlessly recognizable goals and outcomes that provide

a convenient foundations and structure to anchor enduring relationships which is akin to "superordinate goals in conflict resolutions" (Snow, 2010). The Nigerian government seemed not to have considered collaborative communication as a strategic weapon that could be used to quell insurgency in Nigeria.

The federal government of Nigeria, from what has been seen, appear clueless in the face of the looming *Boko Haram* activities and from its diplomatic activities has proved to be incapable of withstanding the force of the lingering threats. Speed and concentration are significant elements of public diplomacy and are of essence (Cooper, 2002). Regrettably, the government of Nigeria did not show any sense of urgency in responding to the *Boko Haram*atrocities, dismissing them as any of those predicaments that seemed inevitable in a nascent democratic government the result of which enabled the insurgency to escalate beyond control (Agbiboa, 2013). Perhaps the mistake of the government was the inability to give a quick response to the attacks, allowing it to escalate to an uncontrollable degree. The dismissive statement by the Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan that*Boko Haram* is simply a 'ghost' group in March 2013 is definitely a denial of the reality on ground and a clue to the incapacity of the federal government to curb the menace of the *Boko Haram* movement (Onapajo, 2013). Yet, this group continues to wreak havoc week after week and month after month. Again, the President in January 2012 announced that *Boko Haram* agents have infiltrated his administration through the military, the paramilitary, and the politicians (Onapajo, 2013; Atwan, 2012). Although some people agree with the President that his administration has been intruded by the *Boko Haram* agents, some are uncomfortable with the President's seemingly clueless plans to single out those involved and prosecute them or at least negotiate with the insurgent group through those agents (Onapajo, 2013).

Needless to emphasize that *Boko Haram*'s attacks in northern Nigeria have dealt ruthless blow to some innocent Nigerian citizens, rendering them missing, homeless, traumatized, miserable, and orphaned/widowed (Olodo, 2014). As a media and public diplomacy student, it will be probably necessary to make some recommendations to the government with a view to finding viable means of stemming the tide of the *Boko Haram* carnage in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, the government should explore the use of good diplomatic strategies in dealing with the issue of *Boko Haram*. Considering the outward misalliance between the government and the Nigerian publics with regard to information, effort should made by the government to reexamine its strategic standpoint with a view to adopting a more proactive but diplomatic stance. With millions of people now using social networks and/or the internet, it is now easier to communicate instantly to the public on a burning issue through media and other communication technologies (Coombs and Holladay, 2012).Nigerian government and stakeholders should constantly keep in touch with the public, updating them with real and necessary information on the threats of *Boko Haram* so as to avoid loopholes and deception from opposition groups. They should also make the public part of the overall plan of rooting out the terrorists by

ensuring the citizens in the remotest parts of the country have access to some form of communication technologies, and consequently use them in combating crimes by way of reporting any suspicious activity around them. The public should be made to adopt the slogan "if you see something, say something," since keeping a community safe is a collective endeavor. If the government becomes trustworthy and credible in the minds of Nigerian publics, *Boko Haram* would become a thing of the past. With such trust, the people in the areas that witness these incessant attacks would be willing to send information to government, non-governmental organizations, or other allies fighting the insurgency, highlighting them about what they know about the group.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The media should be utilized by the government in reaching the citizens at the grassroots level; it should also be used in placating the victims of these successive attacks as well as giving hope to all Nigerians. The government and its stakeholders should always speak to the public in unison. The use of specific public diplomacy or public relations professionals might be necessary instead of allowing opposing groups from the government or even the insurgent groups themselves to confuse the people. Whatever be the case, the government must show some concern to those traumatized by the assaults and demonstrate its willingness to provide them with some kind of professional intervention.

The government should tap into the power of the new media in bringing to fur the views of individuals and other non-state actors that might help to tackle the problem of insurgency in Nigeria. What should be necessary here is government's preparedness to listen to foreign publics. Being a significant feature of effective communication, Nigerian government should endeavor to pay attention to and comprehend the helpful input of foreign publics. The envisaged strategy that may help to bring this about is by controlling the information gained through social media. This can be done by exploring foreign governments' online responses to domestic events within their own countries. Because public diplomacy is fundamentally the attempt to get foreign publics to take certain actions, effort should be made to counteract the social messages arising from the insurgent group and push other media messages aimed at sensitizing the foreign publics to act in favor of Nigerian government or those combating the insurgency. As Nigeria is usually seen as a country where corruption prevails, the government should find a way to use soft power in engaging foreign journalists and publics, by way of highlighting the positive aspects of the Nigerian society so as to attract significant help from foreign publics. Gaining influence is not restricted to traditional public diplomacy, especially as Chen (2012) proposes the need to explore other diplomatic interventions like media diplomacy, informal diplomacy, and digital diplomacy as potential tools for exerting influence over behavior. These tools are sometimes highly effective in addressing internal conflict so long as there is no disconnect between the domestic image of the government and what is projected to the international audiences.

Finally, working with allies is another important diplomatic strategy that this paper recommends. Both national and transnational advocacy agencies should be called upon to help. For the same reason, the northern traditional rulers and other northern oligarchs should also be coopted in the pursuit for peace in the regions concerned. The paper recommends that the government ought to work with the northern elites in brokering peace in the areas affected. If all these are observed, there is tendency that the problem of insurgency in Nigeria would be greatly minimized.

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