

An interrogation of the conformity of the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) with the United Nations template

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Abstract

This study investigated the conformity of the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) with the United Nations template. It could be recalled that Nigeria adopted a standing strategy to combat terrorism and inaugurated it in 2015 under President Goodluck Jonathan. It was later modified by President Muhammadu Buhari in 2016. One would expect that since terrorism in Nigeria has taken on a new dimension by evolving into an international network, Nigeria's war on terrorism strategy should also conform with the globally formulated and implemented strategies of other countries in the world that are facing the same challenges of terrorism. Against this backdrop, this study used secondary data to investigate the strategy put in place by the Nigerian government to combat terrorism. The secondary data were sourced from library materials like books and journals. The Internet was also consulted for necessary information gathering. The research also adopted thematic analysis for data analysis. The paper likewise adopted the liberal theory of globalization to investigate NACTEST's conformity with the United Nations template. It was found that, to a large extent, the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) conforms with global practices. Though there are areas where NACTEST is lagging behind, especially in human rights and religion, it deserves recognition, as has been given by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Strategy. It is then recommended that Nigeria ensure total compliance with the UN template.

Introduction

The September 11, 2001, attacks could be identified as the beginning of the recent wave of terrorism in the 21st century (United Nations, 2018). These terrorist attacks have drastically changed the old slogan, “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” Meanwhile, terrorism is now seen as a menace by everyone, irrespective of socio-religious, economic, and political affiliations (United Nations, 2018). Terrorism has since become a subject of discourse among students, scholars of international relations, and international actors alike. The fast spread of insurgency and terrorism in both the Middle East and Africa, especially in Nigeria, calls for the attention of researchers to investigate terrorism and international responses.

In Nigeria, recent acts of terrorism could be partly traced to the remnants of the Maitatsine insurgency of the 1980s and partly to the aftermath of the American global war on terrorism in the Middle East and Horn of Africa (Adesoji, 2021). The Maitatsine insurgents, formed by Muhammad Marwa, had the intention of establishing an Islamic state in the northern part of the country (Adesoji, 2021). The violent approach of the group caused it to have incessant clashes with Nigerian security forces. The bloodiest armed clashes with the group — in fact, the last one — led to the deaths of around 5,000 people, including Marwa himself (Nwolise, 2005). The recent acts of terrorism in Nigeria are mostly found in the North-East, South-East, and South-South, which harbor Boko Haram, the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), and Niger Delta militant groups, respectively (Agara, Usamotu, & Akinrinde, 2022). Boko Haram is an Islamic group whose real name is *Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād*. The group started as an ordinary social and religious organisation but later became a radical and insurgent group (Walker, 2012).

The role of the transnational war on terrorism led by the USA in the Middle East and Horn of Africa cannot be overemphasized in contributing to the emergence of terrorism in Nigeria (Adesoji, 2021). It could be said that while Maitatsine provided fertile ground for the germination of Boko Haram, the global war on terrorism served as a catalyst for its global networking. This is because after the 2009 clampdown on Boko Haram by Nigerian security forces and the killing of Muhammad Yusuf, the remnants of the group ran for safety (Nwolise, 2005). Arguably, the clampdown opened a window for Boko Haram to connect with other terrorist groups from Kenya, Ethiopia, Algeria, Syria, Iraq, and other parts of the world. Since 2009, Boko Haram has proven to be deadlier than other militant groups in Nigeria and has shown the capacity to challenge the sovereign existence of Nigeria (Usamotu, 2014).

It could be noted that as terrorism becomes a challenge to everyone, national and international bodies equally initiated efforts to counter terrorism. At the global level, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1373 on September 28, 2001, establishing the basis of the Security Council’s response to countering the terrorist threat (UN, 2021). The resolution also established the Counter-Terrorism Center (CTC) as a subsidiary body of the Council to assess Member States’ compliance with the resolution’s provisions. One of the remarkable efforts was the global template for combating terrorism, which was adopted in 2006 at the United Nations General Assembly meeting (UN General Assembly, 2006). The strategy is being executed and coordinated by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCTC). The CTC works to bolster

the ability of United Nations member states to prevent terrorist acts both within their borders and across regions. The CTC is assisted by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), which carries out the policy decisions of the Committee, conducts expert assessments of each Member State, and facilitates counter-terrorism technical assistance to countries (UN, 2021). Several countries in the world have formulated policies for tackling the menace of terrorism based on their capabilities and the nature of the challenges posed to their national security by terrorism (Martin, 2019).

Nigeria, as one of the countries battling terrorism, also combats terrorism through its National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST). NACTEST is a document that contains the strategy put in place by the Nigerian government to combat terrorism. The strategy was drafted during the administration of President Jonathan and signed in 2015. It was modified and re-signed by President Buhari in 2016. Since then, the NACTEST document has become the official strategy for combating terrorism in Nigeria. Therefore, efforts need to be made to determine the effectiveness of this strategy and unearth other possible policy options to address the menace in Nigeria. This research work is relevant because it seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the level of conformity of Nigeria's strategy against terrorism. This paper is different from other scholars' efforts when the scope and focus of their studies are critically examined. For instance, Adeyeye's (2017) thesis was on a comparative study of Boko Haram and As-Sabab in Kenya and focused on their strategies, while Milan (2016) wrote on revisiting the psychology of terrorism by using an integrated model of radicalization and terrorism. In view of the fact that none of the previous researchers have captured the evaluation of Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), as described above, this paper aims to fill this gap.

Therefore, this paper will contribute to knowledge and add to the literature in the fields of international relations, conflict, and conflict management. The results of this study will benefit the Nigerian government, the Office of the National Security Adviser, the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Police, and other paramilitary forces or corps in Nigeria and beyond. The research will further show the extent to which Nigeria's strategy against terrorism can withstand the test of time and whether or not it can compete adequately with global best practices. Besides this introduction, this paper also discusses the research methods, the theoretical framework, and a comparative analysis of NACTEST and the United States' counter-terrorism template. The last segment of this paper consists of a conclusion and recommendations.

Research methodology

This paper adopts secondary methods of data collection. It accesses information from books, journals, documentaries, newspapers, and Internet sources. It also adopts content analysis to analyze and evaluate the conformity of NACTEST with the United Nations template. The content analysis is important to this study because it uses documents about Nigeria's security administration. This has enabled the researchers to draw important inferences from the messages contained in those texts.

Theoretical framework

Though there is no theory in social science that is capable of explaining all phenomena, we intend to adopt the liberal theory of globalization as a tool of analysis to evaluate the conformity of NACTEST with the United Nations counter-terrorism template. The liberal theory of globalization is a theory that asserts the reality of globalization and also equally views it as progressive, necessary, and benevolent (Agara, 2013). It views globalization as a process of continued integration of world components. The proponents of this theory hold this view tenaciously because they stand to gain certain advantages to derive from the globalizing world, such as advertisers, management consultants, governing elites, and academicians (Agara, 2013).

For the liberals, the trend of globalization is necessary and even long overdue. Liberals also see globalization as an extension of the interdependence of states in the international system (Money, 2021). They do not see the difference between the terms of internationalization and globalization but rather use them interchangeably, as if they are synonymous. Liberals argue further in support of globalization by claiming that globalization covers the prospect of modernity in the sense that it frees market forces, electoral practices of the democratic form, technology transfer, international cooperation, etc. (Agara, 2013). These dividends of globalization imply global peace in the absence of war and encourage national self-determination from the shackles of traditionalism and communism (Money, 2021). This theory was chosen for this research because of its emphasis on interconnectivity and the integration of states in the global system. Since this theory emphasizes the importance of globalization and exploits the trend of globalization, there is a need for Nigeria's strategy to also conform to global practices in its efforts to combat terrorism. It could be argued through this theory that total compliance with the United Nations template is a prerequisite a successful fight against terrorism in Nigeria.

The paper also uses constructivism to support the liberal theory of globalization. According to the constructivist theory of international relations, social behaviors shape international relations. This perspective runs counter to the tenets of popular international relations theories, which hold that the structure of the international system governs international relations. Constructivism's emphasis on the social aspect of international relations is one of its key characteristics. Constructivism studies how ideational variables, such as identity, norms, language, etc., impact developments in international relations, as opposed to concentrating on material issues like military might and financial resources. Constructivism provides an alternate interpretation of some of the major ideas in international relations, including what international anarchy means, and it also makes recommendations for future developments. The theory's area of emphasis, which is the social realm, is relevant in explaining why it is important for NACTEST to conform with the United Nations template on countering terrorism. It also serves to investigate the extent to which NACTEST has captured social variables to combat terrorism.

NACTEST versus United Nations template

To handle this section, there shall be an analysis of the similarities and differences between NACTEST and the United Nations' Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Also, we shall look at the areas of strengths and weaknesses of NACTEST policy by comparing it with global practices.

If one takes a cursory look at the structure of Nigeria's strategy as contained in the NACTEST document, it appears a carbon copy of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Strategy. For instance, NACTEST is made up of pillars, just like the UN's template. However, NACTEST's strategic pillars are five, while those of the United Nations are four. Each NACTEST pillar is captioned with the word "to," as we have it in "(i) to forestall; (ii) to secure; (iii) to identify; (iv) to prepare; (v) to implement" (NACTEST, 2016). However, "measures to" is used in the UN strategic document, as it is written in "(i) measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; (ii) measures to prevent and combat terrorism; (iii) measures to build a state's capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in this regard; (iv) measures to respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis in the fight against terrorism" (UN, 2006). Looking at the structures of the duo, we can deduce that both are headed by phrasal expressions and are loaded with meaning.

Through contextual analysis, we find out that the first pillar of NACTEST ("to forestall") is about addressing conditions that make terrorism triumph in Nigeria. This pillar is the same as the first pillar of the UN strategy, as both address issues that engender terrorism. However, while the UN template recognizes the role of poverty in engendering terrorism by specifically mentioning it in Objective 5, NACTEST is silent on this. This is one of the gaps in the strategy. Identifying poverty and working towards its eradication should be at the forefront of Nigeria's strategy against terrorism. Though there are scholars who have argued that there is little or no relationship between poverty and terrorism, for instance, Alan and Jitke (2003) are of the opinion that neither poverty nor education has a direct link with terrorism. They built their position on their analysis of Hizbolah, Palestinians, and Israelis. None of these groups is poor or has low education. However, David (2016) has a moderate position, as he acknowledges the role of poverty in engendering terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Related to David's (2016) view is the position of Siddharta (2008), who used Latin America and India as his units of analysis. He (2008) was of the opinion that poverty could lead to terrorism, but poverty alone cannot generate terrorism; it needs necessary and facilitating factors. These other factors could also be called perpetuating factors. The argument here is that, in Nigeria, we cannot rule out the role of poverty in motivating youths to be violent. Thus, an important variable like this is not supposed to be left out of the strategy to combat terrorism in Nigeria.

Closely related to the above is the identification of "social exclusion." The UN's strategy specifically mentions the role of youth unemployment and marginalization (UN, 2006). The fact that the NACTEST document is silent on these two critical factors weakens Nigeria's efforts against terrorism and turns them into pseudo-efforts. Since Ted (1970), in his relative deprivation theory, identified the significant role of poverty in stimulating terrorism, poverty, unemployment, and marginalization are supposed to be captured by the NACTEST document. Our finding is

corroborated by a study conducted by Aniruddha and Jomon (2018), which focuses on terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). They make use of data from these countries for the period between 1998 and 2012, using negative binomial regression models. They argue that while youth unemployment tends to increase domestic terrorism, it does not have any significant effect on transnational terrorism. One would remember that Boko Haram started as a domestic terrorist group before graduating to international terrorism (Walker, 2012). Hence, unemployment should be taken into consideration by NACTEST.

Another area of departure from the UN template is the way NACTEST downplays the role of religion and the clash of civilizations (NACTEST, 2016). Unlike the UN's strategy, which recognizes the sensitive role of religion in engendering terrorism, NACTEST seems to look away from the role of religion and religious groups. The liberalist theory (Saiya, 2015) has made us understand the crucial role of religious groups in terrorism around the world. Certainly, the Nigerian situation cannot be different. One would expect NACTEST to give special recognition to the role of religion and how to counter its influence on terrorism, but what we saw was merely a mention of collaboration with faith-based organizations. This is a huge gap in Nigeria's strategy that needs to be addressed.

Similarly, the UN template specifies the role of collaboration with member states and building state capacity in the fight against terrorism. NACTEST, on the other hand, is silent about its relations and collaborations with international bodies and other states in the world (NACTEST, 2016). Neither a pillar nor an objective of NACTEST is dedicated to this goal. This is a serious issue, since Boko Haram is not a local terrorist group but rather an international network. It has strong connections with other terrorist group in sub-Saharan Africa. ISWA is a Boko Haram splinter group with ties to the Islamic State (IS) (John, 2020). Nigeria's strategy against terrorism needs to include cooperation with not only other states but also international organizations like the UN, regional organizations like the EU and AU, and sub-regional organizations like ECOWAS (Agara, Usamotu, and Irhue, 2022).

Moreover, the last pillar of the UN template addresses human rights. The United Nations recognizes how sensitive the war on terror is and places emphasis on ensuring respect for human rights while fighting terrorism (UN, 2006). None of the NACTEST pillars is dedicated to human rights issues (NACTEST, 2016). This is a departure from what is obtainable in global practices. This could be identified as a serious issue since Boko Haram itself became a radical group after a clash between it and Nigerian security forces (Cameron, 2009). This clash has been characterized by analysts as a violation of human rights since members of the group, including their leader, Muhammad Yusuf, were extrajudicially killed (Cameron, 2009). One would have expected respect for human rights while fighting terrorism to be a matter of priority because of its role in stimulating terrorism in Nigeria. Human rights are equally expected to be included in the NACTEST document in order to forestall the creation of another menace while resolving the one at hand.

However, Nigeria's strategy is similar to that of the global template by adopting a nomenclature that does not attract more enemies. This mirrors the approach of the United States, which preferred to name its war on Al-Qaida and similar radical Islamic groups "a war on terror" (Robert, 2006).

Using this name prevents other Muslims from feeling threatened and concerned. It also makes everyone feel indebted to fighting evil, since everyone knows that terrorism is evil. Nigeria's strategic plans, as contained in the NACTEST document, similarly adopt the same strategy by calling it "terrorism," rather than the real name of the organization (Jamatu Ahlusuh li Dawah wal Jihad), which is Islamically inclined (Abolurin, 2015). It also avoids using its nickname, Boko Haram. For instance, Nigeria does not name its strategy the "National Counter Boko Haram Strategy," but the "National Counter-Terrorism Strategy." This disallows unnecessary religious and ethnic sentiments in the fight against terrorism. Similarly, the NACTEST document is as much a living document as the UN template (Mentone, 2018). It is also reviewed every two years to reflect the new dimensions of the war against terrorists in Nigeria, just as the UN template is also reviewed every two years (UN, 2006).

Based on the above discourse, we can argue strongly that, to some appreciable extent, Nigeria's strategy conforms to the Global War on Terror (GWT). However, the above-identified gaps and disparities need to be addressed. In particular, the area of human rights should be addressed. A military officer confessed that it was difficult for the military to ensure the protection of human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2018). He argued that their lives were in danger too, especially when civilians conspired with the terrorists. He also said they were conscious of protecting human rights when they (the military) felt safe or when terrorists had already been captured (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Conclusion and recommendations

As soon as terrorism emerged, counterterrorism strategies also emerged. The Global War on Terror started in recent years in the United States after the attacks on the World Trade Center. The United Nations provided a template for waging war against terrorists. This template has been adopted in several countries, both developed – such as Britain – and developing – such as Kenya (Muli, 2013). Nigeria also adopted the strategy, domesticated it, and named it NACTEST. NACTEST reflects the reality and basic ingredients of the global template for fighting terrorism, except that it gives little attention to human rights. The policy needs to be reviewed, and the challenges facing its application must be addressed. Thus, this paper has contributed to knowledge by discovering that Nigeria's strategy against terrorism, to a large extent, conforms to global practices.

This paper, therefore, recommends, based on the assumption of the liberalist theory of globalization, that Nigeria should become more global in its approach while combating terrorism. It is a truism that the world has become a global village (Aginam, 2000). This fact has been exploited by Boko Haram by networking with other terrorist groups around the world (Human Rights Watch, 2023). What then is disturbing for Nigeria is that it also forms alliances with other nation-states in the world to end this menace. Cooperation with foreign countries in terms of intelligence sharing, training, and strategy, and access to modern equipment should form the basis for the cooperation. Fighting terrorism is quite expensive; hence, there is a need to seek financial support from the United Nations and developed countries as well.

Finally, this paper recommends total compliance with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Since Nigeria does not exist in isolation, and happenings in the world will inevitably have an impact on Nigeria, the menace of terrorism is no exception; therefore, Nigeria must also exploit the congruent nature of the world to fast-track peace and security in its country. While doing this, there is a need for total compliance with the global template, especially in the area of human rights. This is because no one could have any justification for terrorist acts in the future if, in fact, the present ones were addressed legitimately.

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