THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNANCE AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Religious extremism affects Nigerians in many diverse ways. The effect on national development can be viewed at the level of the individual, the family, the community and the nation. The frequency and destruction of human and natural resources has become so rampant in Nigeria, such that, people often run for their lives, while the economic life of the society suffers. Religious extremism has great consequences on Nigerian society. Due to harmful effects of this malady in Nigeria, certain norms of cultural discrimination and civil disabilities have been imposed on some citizens, because of their religious affiliations. Some zealous Muslims for instance have corrupted the original koranic meaning of the Jihad and introduced the principle of holy war in order to spread Islam by the sword and forced conversion. Furthermore religious extremism with its divisive and destructive nature is the greatest danger to political stability. This is particularly so in Nigeria, a secular polity with a religiously pluralistic setting which can only be sustained in a healthy atmosphere of religious freedom and respect for human rights and the principle of the political secularity of the Nigerian nation and polity. A remarkable consequence of all religious extremism including religious conflict, is the hostile environment unfavorable for investment. Apart from the fact that the society is declared a security risk nation, the socioeconomic infrastructure that create enabling environment for investments and developments are destroyed during the violent conflicts. Thus, growth and development would be regarded as growth and development can only take place under a peaceful atmosphere.

Introduction

Globally, there is hardly any country that is entirely devoid of religious influences. Historical accounts of how dissimilar groups in race, religion, ethnicity, social class, etc, can live in harmony has remained a concern of humanity, thus making countries involved to work out formulae for peaceful co-existence. Nigeria is one of the most religiously diversified with the people practicing three main religions: Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion. However, the two most dominant religions are Islam and Christianity and with their arrival asserted themselves by dislodging the traditional religions of the various tribes and communities.

Religion has to do with belief and pattern of worship by certain groups of people. In all societies religion tends to serve as an instrument of cohesion, unity and progress. Since the inception of the Nigerian nation state, Nigerian governments in the past, seem to have made concerted efforts to propagate policies and programs that are geared towards ensuring Religious freedom. This follows the constitutional stipulations of freedom of religion and worship enveloped in the religious secularity of Nigeria.

Religious freedom has to do with the unhindered opportunity that individuals have or ought to have in order to exercise their religious beliefs and worship of whatever they believe in. Freedom of religion is considered by many people and most nations to be a fundamental human right.

Religious freedom conditions in Nigeria remain poor, with both state and societal perpetrated violations. This however prompted former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to designate.

Nigeria as a "Country of Particular Concern "for religious freedom.

On the other hand, extremism is when a person Christian or Muslim displays tendencies of intolerance towards people of the same or other religious beliefs and acts towards them in ways that threaten the peace and stability of the individual, group or society.

Undoubtedly, Nigeria maintains a delicate balance between Muslims and Christians. The apparent religious sentiments and sectarianism manifest in religious loyalties and intolerance seem. Thus, the inability of the various religious groups to understand and tolerate each other has resulted to devastating conflicts leading to loss of lives and property in Nigeria (Ezeh, 1999). The worrisome is the importation of foreign concerns to the local relationship as seen in the Kano clash between Muslims and Christians over denial of Ahmed Deed at, opportunity to preach in South Africa and acceptance of Bonke in Kano.

The introduction of Islamic Legal Code (Popularly known as the Sharia Law)by the then governor Ahmed Yerima, of Zamfara state in 1999 resulted to violent protests (Abimboye, 2009).

This escalated in 2000 when the then Governor Ahmed Makarfi initiated the process of introducing the same law in Kaduna State. Evidently, Nigerians have waited too long for the violence orchestrated by Religious intolerance to stop, rather it has been escalating. Religious freedom conditions in Nigeria deteriorated over the past decade. In fact, the ongoing attacks against Christian communities, Muslim congregations, and houses of worship in most parts of the North

East and North Central geopolitical zones of Nigeria is very worrisome. There are reports that more than 600 students have been abducted from schools in northwest Nigeria since December, 2020 till date. These abductions, perpetrated by armed criminal gangs, resemble tactics commonly employed by Boko Haram and other militant Islamist groups in northern Nigeria.

Adamawa chairman of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) was kidnapped and executed by Boko-Haram terrorist but the government in Nigeria did little or nothing to save the situation. Similarly, a Catholic Priest (late Rev. Fr. Alphonsus) of Sokoto Diocese was gruesomely murdered by bandits and nothing was done to punish the culprits. All these build up high level of mutual suspicion, rivalry, acrimony, discord and hostility amongst the religious adherents.

Religious intolerance is responsible for political instability in Nigeria. This is perhaps because; the political leaders have seen religion as veritable tools to manipulate the vulnerable masses of the society. In the light of the above, there is need to revive national consciousness, re-orientate the people and Nigerians should imbibe spirit of tolerance of each other's religious leanings and shift their loyalties to the national constitution government to engender national integration.

The early twenty-first century, Africa has experienced significant changes in the nature of the security threats it is facing. Since the 1960s and throughout the post-colonial period, the African landscape had been dominated by political irredentism and territorial disputes triggered by the legacy of colonial arbitrariness and perpetuated by autocratic regimes. By the 1990s, the scene had transformed, as non-state actors had become increasingly active across the continent. Later, this evolution grew to concern vectors of statehood, political violence and force projection (or a group's ability to broadcast power).

These changes are rooted in the synthesis of legitimacy crises, the disintegration of prevailing social systems and the rise of disruptive military innovation, and are vividly visible in Africa (Philips 34,2011).As a result, today, African regional conflict management capacity faces a challenge of updating its response matrix to generate a proper understanding of the ongoing transformation, whereby new actors are impacting the dominant conflict grammar in open-ended ways.

Specifically, a new generation of armed groups has emerged over the past quarter of a century.

Understanding this new generation of non- state armed groups presents novel analytical and practical challenges, as these entities differ substantially from those that are traditionally active in civil conflicts (UN System Staff College and Center for International Peace Operations 2015,7).Just as the state system itself is an evolving architecture(Engel and Porto 2010,159),the new groups have an equally deep historical anchoring.

Guerrillas, rebels and warlords have operated in fertile frontiers and marginalized zones, both real and abstract; they have represented. Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou in the vaguest of terms, a range of disenfranchised groups and have pursued many of the same goals, however, unpalatably as their nineteenth- century forebears (Reid 2012,148).The differences from earlier generations are twofold. On the one hand, the new groups have varied characteristics, which ultimately constitute groups that are predominately hybrid. These groups display religious extremism, performing terrorist actions that are at times concerned with territorial gains, and at other times focused mostly on transnational targets. Present-day armed groups in Africa are hybrid actors whose motivations and beliefs cannot be attributed to a single philosophical cause or act of violence. On the other hand, these new groups are increasingly spilling across borders, embracing transnationalism. None of the three main groups discussed in this chapter Al Shabaab,al- Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb(AQIM) and Boko Haram are confined to the countries in which they originated for example, AQIM has become a bigger issue in Mali than in Algeria where it originated. In this context, the global nature of militancy in Africa is characterized by the simultaneous manifestation of three aspects of violence: a resurgence and mutation, a dynamic of uncertain and unsettled form, and a trajectory of expansion.

Transformed Landscape and New Actors

Understanding the new armed groups in Africa and re-mapping the(in)security landscape of the continent accordingly, is the first critical step toward a redefinition of an effective policy response. The security environment of the twenty-first century is characterized by the influence and power of non-state armed groups, and because these groups are central to understanding regional and world politics, the analysis of the nature of these actors should be taken more seriously (Mulaj 2010,2).Without a clinical interpretation of the full picture of political violence across African states and how it has transformed over the past 25 years, institutions such as the African Union (AU),regional organizations and civil society actors will remain in a declamatory rather than a regulatory position. For a long time, the prevailing literature in social sciences and in policy making was that the search for durable peace in Africa was directly related to issues of governance and democratization (Adebajo 2002,38).Until recently, the international implications of insurgency on the continent had been neglected. This was due to the fact that the patterns of international politics revealed by insurgency often ran counter to the ideologies or mythologies of African statehood and unity. A revised and updated understanding of the subject is overdue (Clapham 1996, 209).

The transformation of the landscape is only due in part to the result of the revolutionary rather than evolutionary actions of the new groups. The discontinuity of boundaries is one of the most important factors in the building of African states and the state system (Herbst 2000,252; Salehyan 2007;Checkel 2013).Present-day armed groups have created a myriad of transnational connections, laying the groundwork for a new generation to be more lethal and also be transformed as a result of the influence of a diverse network of forces. To be certain, this transformation, which gathered momentum in the early 2000s, was foreshadowed by key developments in earlier decades. As a number of states collapsed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, lines between various forces and their objectives, and between combatants and non-combatants, had begun to become blurred or at least highly fluid (Reid 2012, 169). It is, however, the impact of globalization in the mid- to-late 1990s, and more visibly in the 2000s that forcefully ushered in a new generation of self-directed actors in the continent. Put simply, globalization is by far the biggest driver of this transformation, which yielded new ungoverned spaces. It accentuated asymmetries in wealth and rates of development, accelerated demographic shifts and urbanization, empowered individuals and non-state actors through access to emerging.

Religious Extremism, Insurgent Violence and the Transformation of the New African Security Landscape· technologies and the dissemination of new norms and ideas,and shrank time and distance (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010,277;Raleigh and

Dowd 2013).It therefore also set the stage for the manifestation of various mutations of militant religious and terrorist movements in Africa.

An important pattern at the centre of this recent transformation has been the materialization of a sequence whereby a nexus is established among the armed groups, politics and religion. During the 1960s,1970s and most of the 1980s,groups across the continent that began as political entities (on the basis of ideological choices or separatist claims)would remain so. Trajectories away from the "political" would take the form of state collapse, co-optation or criminalization, but seldom religiosity. Starting in the late 1980s, insurgencies increasingly began to borrow from religious rhetoric and "cleansing" ideologies. Three main stages emerged in the evolution of the trajectory from

political to religious. First, groups would essentially be influenced by the increased presence of religion in world affairs and introduce a layer of religious terminology in their reoriented mandate.

Second, groups would seek alliances with religious groups, thereby retaining their original stance but boasting a forceful religious partnership often times with a view to gain external attention.

Third and finally, by the late 1990s armed groups began to make religion their primary basis (i.e., predication and combat).Overall, with the general intensity of religious-based conflicts increasing, the new armed groups came to inevitably echo this dynamic. A study from the Peace Research Institute in Oslo has measured the presence of identity-based religious cleavages in 241 intrastate conflicts during the period from 1946 to 2004.It shows that religious conflicts have become significantly more intense than non-religious ones (Lindberg 2008).

This takes place in an environment of renewed interface between religiosity and conflict, wherein religion has come to occupy a central place in new conflicts, with one-third of countries experiencing, in one form or another, a "religious conflict" today (Pew Research Center 2014).

Whereas Southern Africa and Central Africa were affected by other internecine identity markers (Lemarch and 2009; Prunier 2010), the religious and terrorist groups have dominated more intensely North Africa, West Africa, the Sahel and East Africa. Three constellations of key actors active in these four regions can be identified and are discussed in this chapter: Al Shabaab in East Africa, AQIM in the Maghreb and the Sahel,and Boko Haram in West Africa.

East Africa and Al Shabaab

As is often the case with faltering statehood, the path leading to the emergence of Al Shabaab in Somalia in 2006 started with the fall of the Mohamed Siad Barre regime in that country in 1991.Barre had led the country since October 1969 as a result of a coup conducted nine years after the country's independence. The rise of the religious dimension in Somalia is, however, relatively surprising, as cohesion, rather than fragmentation could have been initially expected.

The majority of the country's population is Sunni of the Shaf'i school and the country enjoys a religious and linguistic unity that is rare in Africa. However, the absence of a lasting political authority and the extremely strategic position of the country which garnered the colonial competition of Britain, France and Italy,

as well as Ethiopia in the Ogaden region led to the development of informal Islamist power patterns. Somalia only witnessed an Islamist revival movement late in the post-colonial period.

The movements that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s such as the Liberation Front of Western Somalia, the Democratic Front for the Safeguard of Somalia, the National Somali Movement, the Somali Patriotic Movement or the United Somali Congress did not harbour a religious identity.

During the 1970s in Mogadishu and under Saudi Wahhabi infuence, the first Somali Islamist movement, Al Jama'a al Islamiya (the Islamic Group), was born. This group then connected Mohammad-Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou with a local student movement known as Wihdat al Chabab al Islamiya (the Union of the Islamic Youth).Under the name Al Itihad al Islamic (the Islamic Union),the new organization displayed a Salafi orientation and played a key role in the opposition to the Siad Barre regime. In the chaos following the fall of Siad Barre in January 1991, the Islamic Union set up training camps and, with Saudi financial support, started preaching (da'wa) around the country. This did not meet with much success, as its list of prohibited activities alienated large segments of the Somali population.

Importantly, the Islamic Union attempted unsuccessfully to set up an Islamic Emirate, which was opposed by the National Somali Front.

Early transnational undercurrents manifested as an offshoot of the Islamic Union the Islamic Union of Western Somalia. It conducted, in 1990-1996, sporadic attacks in Ethiopia in the name of the liberation of the Ogaden region, triggering a military reaction by Ethiopia, which in turn brought an end to these activities.

The founding of the Islamic Union represented the matrix of contemporary political Islam in Somalia, limited by: a population that rallied to the project only temporarily and partially; powerful political groups and tribal actors actively opposed to the religious project; and an expansionist desire that ended the initial cohesion, often violently. Against this background in the 2000s, a second wave of religious-driven groups emerged in Somalia, that of the Union of

Islamic Courts (UIC) and, later, Al Shabaab. Whereas the Islamic Union movement was the result, ultimately, of an essentially local opposition to the arbitrariness of a fallen state, the second movement was primarily impacted by the post-September 11 international developments.

Hence, contemporary Somali Islamism was born in a context already militarized, criminalized and atomized. Itihad Mahakem al Islamiya (the Union of Islamic Tribunals) arose in 1999 amid an urgent need for order. Taking the form of a networked system of courts, the UIC rapidly took over the justice function of the state, as well as education groups (150,000 children were schooled during this period) and health services overseen by militias that were paid by the contributions of the different tribal. By 2004, a presidency was set up with the creation of a Supreme Council of the Islamic Courts of Somalia under the leadership of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. This, however, triggered opposition by the Somali warlords who launched an Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism. Armed engagements between the Alliance and the UIC took place in 2006.

The important aspect of the UIC story was its federation of diverse actors and the fact that three-fourths of the country (north, south and east) came under an Islamic jurisdiction over a period of about seven years. To be certain, the UIC benefitted from the then-popular perception that only under Islam could Somalia be united, and it did offer a potential response to tribal, clan and ethnic diversity. However, its appeal to most Somalis was primarily its ability to tackle insecurity in a conservative, although not radical, religious framework. The UIC had indeed developed a jurisprudence of south (reconciliation) and simah (pardon), which was temporarily transferred to local tradition(xeer) and the dominant role of traditional leaders.

The international community failed, however, to engage with the one entity that had been able to offer an alternative, however forceful, to the warlords since 1991.The United States, in particular, looked upon the UIC as a Taliban-like entity and painted it as a terrorist actor. Combined with rising internal dissensions between moderate and radicals, and the UIC's opposition to the AUs 2006 intervention in Somalia, the UIC drifted into radicalization, buttressed by accumulating military defeats. On December 27, 2006, the organization was dissolved. The materialization of a political centre of gravity would have singularly helped rebuild the Somali state, but the US-led process of reconciliation was opposed to the reconstitution of the UIC. Consequently, the UIC's implosion led to the emergence of several factions, in particular Religious Extremism, Insurgent Violence and the Transformation of the New African Security Landscape a short-lived moderate group led by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, with a national wing known as Hizbul Islam and a radical branch, Al Shabaab. Initially known as Hizb Al Shabaab (the Party of Youth) or Harakat Sbabaab al Mujahidin (Movement of the Fighters'Youth),Al Shabaab was constituted as a formal radical group entity in March 2007 (although their presence was noticeable as early as 2003 with the killing of four humanitarian workers in Somaliland attributed to the group).Led by Aden Hashi Farah Ayro (a militant from the UIC who had spent some time in Afghanistan in the 1990s).

Al Shabaab introduced an important shift in the development of Somali Islamism by explicitly attributing their actions to both a global jihad and a radical Salafist ideology. Hence, an urban youth movement, almost exclusively localized in Mogadishu, positioned itself from its inception by employing violence, targeting foreigners and using a transnational mode. A second historic and revealing split from the early Islamic Union or the UIC was also established at that time as a major influence on Al Shabaab,a foreign group called al Qaeda. In particular, Al Shabaab used al-Qaeda's modus operandi of suicide bombings, notably to target the African Union Mission in Somalia, and reaching Kampala, Uganda, with a lethal attack in July 2010.In February 2012, al-Qaedas new leader Ayman al Dhawahiri following Osama Bin Laden's death in May 2011 recognized A1 Shabaab as al-Qaeda's representative in Somalia. Over the next few years, Al Shabaab would continue to assert its presence throughout Somalia and the East African region,in particular leading a high-profile four-day attack on a mall in Nairobi, Kenya, from September 21-24,2013.

In sum, the short-lived UIC movement, of a relatively moderate Islamism earning societal legitimacy through a positive regulation effort (dispensing justice),was replaced in the mid- 2000s by radical Islamism, which for the next 10 years sought primarily to establish its imprimatur through force and terror. Since the US-supported Ethiopian intervention that lasted from December 2006 to January 2007, crisis dynamics have, in Somalia and throughout East Africa, shifted to the terrain of this mix of religion-cum-violence.

Yet, the influence of religious leaders has, in point of fact, diminished in favour of armed militant groups pursuing political or criminal goals. While Al Shabaab consolidated local support on the global scene, al-Qaeda could now use the jihad in Somalia to recruit internationally. In this boomerang narrative, a Christian nation, Ethiopia, backed by the United States, invaded Somalia in

1993 and slaughtered Muslims. Jihadis had risen up and repelled the invasion, making Somalia a frontline battleground against the crusade Bin Laden had long alleged the United States was waging (Scahill 2013, 228). North Africa, the Sahel and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Just as Al Shabaab traced an arc going from local to regional to international threat, an Algerian group would, from the late 1990s to the late 2000s, travel the same road, in time emerging as one of al-Qaedas most lethal franchises. In September 1998, as the civil war that had been waging in

Algeria since 1992 was slowing down, Al Jama'a al Salafiya lil Da'wa wal Qital (the Salafist Group for Predication and Combat [GSPC]) was formed. This group came into existence against the background of close to 20 years of Algerian radical Islamist militancy. Starting in the early 1980s, as disenchantment dominated the social and political purview of the Algerian generation born after the country's independence in 1962, al Haraka al Islamiya al Musalaha (the Armed Islamic Movement [MIA])had been set up under the leadership of two militants, Mustapha Bouyali and Said Makhloufi. Although the MIA was short-lived, it established a lasting form of violent outlaw Islamism with connections to the criminal underworld that will long dominate Algerian politics.

Conclusion and Summary

In the final analysis, for all their visibility, religious crises in these parts of Africa are fuelled less by religiosity per se than by a deteriorated environment, where de-statization enables the emergence and proliferation of groups with increasingly radicalized agendas. As power struggles, weak institutions and identity divisions remain key sources of conflict in Africa (Aall 2015), the impact of these groups and the sum total of the crises they generate affect equally the local domestic sphere, the regional one and the larger international environment. These three realms are interconnected and it is their fluid nature that enables these groups and allows for the manifestation of transnationalism and the responding statist extraterritoriality. For instance, the United States has established a system of triangulated aerial surveillance in which groups operating in East Africa, the Sahel, Libya and the Sinai are monitored, and sporadically targeted with strikes (notably in Somalia). The US military presence in East Africa (the Arba Minch base in Ethiopia, and those of Manda Bay and Camp Lemmonier in Djibouti) is supported by French forces in Mali, Niger, Chad and the CAR. (The United States also use a military base in Victoria, Seychelles, to conduct surveillance over Somalia.)

In such an expanded (Turse, 2015) and degraded context, the normalization of the religious terrorist threats should not mask a trajectory that, fundamentally, is about identity-driven actors instrumentalizing religion. Similarly, it must be noted that such trajectories are not irreversible. Demarcation through theatrical piety rather than socio-political or ethnic identity is not necessarily a formula that can last, notably in places where tribal and local identities are historically strong and necessitate balance and power-sharing among different groups. Engagement on the religious front - dialogues led by religious leaders, social platforms for de-radicalization, education campaigns - are important and legitimate ways through which both state actors and civil society can counter the narratives of the groups and reveal the theatrical nature of how they instrumentalize religion. However, the current empowerment of the new groups by way of religion seems set to continue as, quantitatively, more such actors have materialized and, qualitatively, their actions have gained in breadth and sophistication, as illustrated by the Islamic State and its influence on several key African groups.

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