

Using Muslims Mannerism and Habits (UMMAH): An Early Warning Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism

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Abstract

The fight against terrorism has long relied on military intervention and hard power strategy to curb terror threats. Current reality and the spade at which youths who are radicalized under the banner of religion to carry out terrorist activities has called for more attention paid on alternative counterterrorism (CT) measures and policies. CT initiatives should be broadened to accommodate soft power approach that interrupts the radicalization and recruitment of civilians into violent extremism and terrorism. It is revealed that more terrorist actions and violent extremism had been undertaken by youths that professed the Islamic faith more than any in the 21st century. The worrisome trend has called the development of UMMAH as a CT strategy to understand the narratives and messaging exploited by recruiters and facilitators of violent extremism as a religious obligation. The strategy demands a counter narrative and messages that would replace the message of hate, violence and bigotry, with love, peace, tolerance and coexistence.

Keywords: Islam, Counterterrorism, Narratives and Messages, Radicalization, Boko Haram

Introduction

The horrific threat of terrorism from Non-State Actors (NSAs) is on the rise in both sophistications and magnitude. Unfortunately, the security challenges created by the NSAs have overwhelmed conventional system of warfare which relied on hard power or other traditional security approach to overcome the threats. Over the years, observable and concrete evidence has shown that relying on hard power strategy alone cannot be adequate or

effective in curbing violent extremism (CVE). This created the need for alternative counterterrorism (CT) policies and strategies.¹⁸ Several governments are in different stages of articulating various initiatives in their respective bid to CT. One common characteristics of the emerging CT initiatives is the attention towards interruption of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism and terrorism.¹⁹ It is this initiative that is now called Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) or Countering Violent Extremism (CVE).

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) refers to preventive strategies for CT, i.e. identifying the push/pull factors that lead to radicalization and recruitment, and also designing measures to counter these factors. Recent discussion on CVE has incorporated PVE, to include other applicable measures which are long-term strategy that accommodates multidimensional issues such as employment and education.²⁰ Incidentally, both CVE and or PVE are preventive strategies. They are both intervention strategy in arresting a violent attack from occurring or before an individual actively support terrorism. The strategy for CT is mainly non-coercive which usually begins with understanding the background particularly the narratives or messages of the terrorists while developing a counter-narrative and -messages of the terrorist group. The strategy extends to educating the people, broad-based community engagement, de-radicalization, disengagement and rehabilitation programs, communities resilience programs among others. The assumption is that a well-articulated PVE or CVE program will curb and eventually put an end to violent extremism and by extension terrorism.

However, PVE or CVE programs are frameworks that cannot be obtained from speculations and conjectures. They are supposed to be derived by evidence-based research. For instance, a good understanding of the mannerism, attitude and habits among others, of Islamic teachings on peace and coexistence could be used against Boko Haram narrative and messages to formulate the counter-narrative and -messaging against the incentive that sustains radicalization and other nefarious actions. Knowledge about extremist groups and insurgents that takes up religion as a weapon of influence in building their narratives/messages, as much as developing the counter-narrative is research prone. It is this level of research that prompted

¹⁸Crelinsten R “Counterterrorism as Global Governance: A Research Inventory”, in M Ranstorp (ed), *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps, and Future Direction*, (Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2007), p.210.

¹⁹ Sara Zeiger and Anne Aly, “Introduction: The Need for Research in Countering Violent Extremism Policy and Practice”, in Sara Zeiger & Anne Aly (eds), *Countering Violent Extremism: Developing an evidence-base for policy and practices*, (Hedayah and Curtin University), 2015, p.1

²⁰*Ibid.*

the articulation of “UMMAH” for CVE in Nigeria and the Sahel region. UMMAH is an acronym for “Using Muslims Mannerism and Habits” in order to engage, prevent and de-escalate violent extremism. It is a framework designed to create counter-narrative and messaging for violent extremism in Nigeria and the Sahel region. It is expected that the UMMAH for CVE framework will reduce the incentive and cut-off recruitment chain of extremist groups like Boko Haram. This is drawn on the assumption that terrorism in the 21st century and the narrative which sustains it, could be eradicated or brought into effective control, where the factors that nourishes violent extremism is understood and addressed.

In the conceptual development of UMMAH for CVE framework, cognizance was given to how groups use socio-religious rhetoric to entice young people in developing interest in their terrorist activities. This may cover among other factors, how they are radicalized and eventually recruited before being commissioned to embark on a hit. Therefore, the motivation and resource for this framework was obtained through face-to-face interview with Boko Haram inmates in some detention facilities in Abuja, and interview with some victims in Internally Displaced People’s (IDPs) Camps in Abuja and Maiduguri.²¹ The observations and comments of some military officers of the Nigerian Army (NA) who have served in the theatre of operation in Maiduguri were also considered in the formulation of the framework on UMMAH for CVE. All the foregoing is aimed at addressing extremist groups based on their motivation, especially where the motivations seem to come from religion influenced narrative and messages.

The authors acknowledged that the sample population of 5 inmates was used for this study. This is not enough to draw a holistic conclusion that will result in UMMAH for CVE. However, the research should be seen as a feasibility study and as such a preliminary for a more elaborate study. Further research into developing the paper has to augment with resources from other available sample population because of the high level restrictions in having access to target groups like Boko Haram inmates and more importantly, most of the military officers would only want to comment under anonymous conditions. For a proper understanding of this paper, the introduction is followed by a background that highlights the main issues relating to terrorism, radicalization, narratives, messages and the need for UMMAH as a strategy for CVE programs. This is followed by a brief definition of the terms; for instance, the narrative and overview of target

²¹Interview of some victims of Boko Haram at the IDPs from Mafa along Dikwa/Ngala Road, Maiduguri, 6 December 2015.

groups like Boko Haram violence and messages. The forth segment dwelled on the UMMAH strategy, implementation framework and the conclusion

Background

Over the past decade, terrorist activities has been unfolding in many parts of the world like Nigeria, Mali, Kenya, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, France, to mention a few. The terrorist acts and the narrative that influence such actions have made perception about Islam to occupy an interest in global discourse. The Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) continues to claim responsibility for most of the attacks around the world, using religious narratives as justification. Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Mahgreb (AQIM) claims responsibility for terror attacks in Nigeria and Mali respectively. Boko Haram and AQIM have terrorized local communities, destroyed lives, properties and continually spread fear in areas they thrived, and which has continued to raise crucial concerns over their rising appeal. To look into motivation for such appeal based on increasing number of adherent who buy into their narratives and messages that culminate in violent extremism and threatens domestic and international security is vital. It has made the issue of CVE being propagated by several experts like Schmid²², Aly and Lucas²³ among others to be in the centre stage of global agenda on CT. Some more optimists²⁴ are even advocating for PVE instead of CVE. Whatever nomenclature that is put forward or adopted, the ultimate objective is to ensure that the world is able to overcome the threats of violent extremism by putting measures that could reduce or stop the ability of the target group's narrative and messages from appealing to hitherto normal people from being radicalized or to carry out terrorist acts of disturbing proportion.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) just like any other responsible government across the globe²⁵ is also part of the global efforts to CT. Specifically; Nigeria is seeking solutions to overcome the threats of

²² Alex P Schmid, "Challenging the narrative of the Islamic State", in Sara Zeiger & Anne Aly (eds), *Ibid*, p.67.

²³ Anne Aly and Kosta Lucas Countering Online Violent Extremism in Australia: Research and Preliminary Finding", Sara Zeiger & Anne Aly (eds), *Ibid*, p.81.

²⁴ From 9-11 December 2014, Hedayah and the Global Counter Terrorism Forum held the Global CVE Communication EXPO 2014 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates where it was emphasized that preventing violent extremism which seem proactive would be more effective than countering violent extremism which seem reactive. The event was attended by representatives of governments, industry partners, technology specialists, academic experts and civil society actors.

²⁵ Rachel Briggs and Sebastien Feve, "Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism: What Works and What are the Implications for Government"? Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2013, accessed from the internet,

Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram. It is a notorious terrorist group flying the narrative of establishing an Islamic Caliphate.²⁶ Since the start of the fight against Boko Haram in early 2000, the FGN has always relied on military action for CT. Analysis of the FGN military action so far, shows that the FGN has adopted the strategy of resisting through military actions and containment of Boko Haram to a certain extent. The reactivated Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) comprising military units from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin with headquarters in Bega, Borno State Nigeria, was the approach the government of Nigeria adopted to resist, curtail and eventually defeat Boko Haram. Defeating the terrorist group formed part of the campaign promises of President Muhammadu Buhari²⁷ during his elections in early 2015. The military resistance produced some commendable results being seen as winning the war but not necessarily the battle against Boko Haram. The question to ask is whether the military campaign on Boko Haram alone can stop tendency of insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria?

The Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) which comprise of the Nigerian Army (NA), Nigerian Navy (NN) and the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) on their part believe that they have done what is expected of them having destabilized the group and recaptured all the territories that were under Boko Haram control.²⁸ In celebrating the successes from military action by the AFN, the Air Officer Commanding the Tactical Air Command Makurdi, Adeniyi Ojuawo noted:

All the terrorists could do at the moment was suicide bombing, we have degraded them to a level that for the past three weeks, we have not heard anything like suicide bombing.²⁹

Indeed, the AFN alongside other security agencies in Nigeria could be adjudged to have successfully brought down the main structures of the terrorist acts in northeast Nigeria when compared with the sporadic firepower of Boko Haram some years back. Precisely in June 2014, Boko Haram attacked and captured Nigeria Police Mobile Training Camp in Gwoza, Maiduguri and hoisted its flag.³⁰ The flag hoisting was a powerful message and a symbol of 'heroism'-a trait that is very appealing to contemporary youths. It was found that every four days interval, between

²⁶Muhammed Isa Kabir, xxxxxxxx

²⁷ President Muhammadu Buhari, is the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. He worn the March 2015 Presidential Polls and was sworn in on 29 May 2015.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ AVM Adeniyi Ojuawo, speech made during the Base Socio-cultural Activity (BASA) Week, in *Daily Trust* Newspaper, Tuesday, January 12 2016, p.8.

³⁰ Channels Television News Track, 24 January 2015

June and November 2015, Boko Haram detonated bombs in different locations in the northeast.³¹ This was quite frightening and a very instructive message challenging the legitimacy of the Nigerian government. The frequency of bomb blasts may have reduced marginally. Even at that, we are still experiencing patches of successful cases of bomb blasts and attacks in different location in the northeast. In fact, in January 2016, Boko Haram was able to launch attacks on five villages simultaneously even though they were repelled by a resolute AFN which was not the case in the past.³² Therefore the argument over being able to meet a certain deadline by the Nigerian government to curb terrorism is not the crux of this paper. It is the ability to initiate a holistic component of resistance; resilience and diminishing influence terrorist groups have on a giving population and environment and develop counter-messages that matter to this research.

This does not imply that the paper had not recognized the success so far recorded by the AFN. Part of the current success achieved is that personnel of the AFN are more determined to engage the Boko Haram with a new type of incentive and support by both the government and the local communities. The local vigilantes and citizens now cooperate than previously with the AFN to identify members of terrorist group in their domain, and this has provided positive outcome. It is instructive therefore, to expand the civilian component for CVE. The AFN have captured all the territories previously occupied by Boko Haram. While Nigerians are grateful to the AFN, the Nigerian people (citizens) should be equipped with understanding of factors that promotes tolerance, coexistence and particularly rejecting narratives and messages that could disturb individual and collective peace. The increased collaboration between the military and civilians to CT in the North-east region of Nigeria indicates that people still yearn for the usual peaceful era where they go about improving their livelihood without fear of being stalked or being raided in their farmland. The collaboration shows that the people want a total end to Boko Haram in their socio-cultural and economic life.³³

It is however surprising that even the massive presence of the Nigerian soldiers including the civilian vigilantes in most communities of the

³¹ Nigerian Newspaper compilation from June 2015 to December 2015, thenewsnigeria.com, premiumtimesng.com, saharareporters.com

³² Channels Television, News Track, 24 January 2016

³³ Random sampling of opinion of 50 persons from Borno, Yobe, Kano, Bauchi and Nasarawa, The selected states are the states that have experienced different magnitude of Boko Haram attacks. Attacks include bomb blast, firearm assault, occupation or any other terrorist activity that would bring fear and uneasiness to the local communities. The opinion poll dwelled on what they think about Boko Haram. Over 96 per cent of them wished the FGN could totally overrun the group so that they can go back to their normal life. The remaining 4 percent declined commenting on the issue.

northeast, have not deterred violent attacks from Boko Haram. Instead, Boko Haram have become more elusive, sneaking through rugged and difficult terrains within the village routes, traversing stony paths and shrubs to attack innocent villagers, abduct women and children and sack traditional authorities. Some of the victims in these communities who escaped into IDPs Camps narrated the pathetic ordeal they had to go through in the hands of these terrorists. The severity of the situation could be better appreciated with the over 2.3 million peoples³⁴ scattered in different IDPs Camps in different parts of the country including the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. The immediate concern of the FGN at this critical stage is therefore the way forward. One of the ways forward will depend on our understanding of the narrative and messages of Boko Haram and being able to develop counter-narrative and messages to defeat such trend. The subsequent paragraphs will define the terms narrative and messages in order to enhance the understanding of this paper.

The Meaning of Narrative and Message

The words narratives and messages have been used in different studies as the same. Available literature specifically the works of Jacobson³⁵, Briggs and Feve³⁶, Chowdhury Fink and Jack Barclay³⁷ are not definite on what the narrative of a terrorist organization is all about. As a result, it has been difficult to differentiate between narrative and messaging. However, it is established that every terrorist organization flaunts around with brand of narrative(s) and message(s) fed into the public psyche. Corman defines narrative as “a system of stories that share themes, forms and archetypes.”³⁸ Similarly, Dimitriu notes that narratives are a resource for political actors to construct a shared meaning to shape perceptions, beliefs and behavior of the public”, they offer a structure through which a shared sense is achieved,

³⁴ UNHCR-Nigeria Situation Report, High-Level Side Event on the Lake Chad Basin, 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, UN Headquarters, New York, 25 September 2015.

³⁵ Michael Jacobson, “Countering Violent Extremism Narratives”, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (NCTb)

January 2010, accessed from the internet, 13 January 2016, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/opeds/4b7aaf56ca52e.pdf>

³⁶ Rachel Briggs SebastienFeve, “Review of Programs to Counter Narratives of Violent Extremism: What Works and What are the Implications? Institute for Strategic Dialogue, accessed from the internet, 10 January 2016, <http://www.strategicdialogue.org/CounterNarrativesFN2011.pdf>

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸ Steven R Corman, “Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communication”, in Laurie Fenstermacher and Todd Leventhal (eds), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*, (Washington DC: NSI Inc, September 2011), p.36.

representing a past, present and future, an obstacle and a desired end point.³⁹Corman and Dimitriu's definitions represented the kind of knowledge that this paper expects from having a composite understanding of narrative. However, it is loosely defined with no particular focus to the subject under discourse. Even the workshop of Experts on narratives and counter-narratives, hosted by Hedayah in November 2014 failed to provide an agreeable definition of the term. The experts (Hedayah in November 2014) focused on the narrative of victims of terrorism which again does not explicitly explain what narrative is about.⁴⁰

However, it must be clear from the foregoing that every terrorist organization has a narrative that it flaunts to the public. Fink and Barclay posited that the long-term survival and success of terrorist organizations depend on their ability to project a legitimizing narrative.⁴¹ This again speaks volume of the critical nature of a narrative to a terrorist organization. This is why a clear understanding of the narratives of terrorist groups can help to develop the requisite counter narratives. It is the narrative that terrorists use to continuously maintain, justify and sustain their terrorist actions. The narrative in this paper therefore is the baseline story of a shared belief and destiny to establish legitimacy and authority among those they wish to radicalize and eventual recruit to commit hits. It is usually a long term story with powerful content to achieve a certain objective. Fink and Barclay aptly highlighted the power of narrative and the need for counter narrative when they said:

A growing consensus emerged among practitioners and policymakers that the ideologies, support structures, conditions, and legitimizing narratives of groups such as al-Qaida needed to be effectively challenged in order for their recruiting and operating capacities to be diminished. Recognizing that terrorist groups can leverage grievances related to social and economic issues, governments have made efforts to work more closely with

³⁹ George Dimitriu, Strategic Narratives, Counternarratives and Public Support for War: The Dutch Government's Explanation of the Uruzgan Mission and Influence on the Dutch Public (Leiden University: Master Thesis, Campus The Hague, 2 February 2013), p.13.

⁴⁰ Sara Zaiger, "Narrative and Counter-Narratives", CVE Research Brief, December 2014, Hedayah, Abu Dhabi

⁴¹NaureenChowdhury Fink and Jack Barclay, Mastering the Narrative: Counterterrorism Strategic Communication and the United Nations, Centre for Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands, 2013, accessed from the internet, 10 January 2016, http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Feb2013_CT_StratComm.pdf.

local partners and communities to address ongoing issues of concern and preempt efforts by extremists to develop a narrative that leverages these challenges.⁴²

The narrative of Boko Haram for instance is very apt and appealing to people of northern Nigeria origin (especially the Muslims) and perhaps people around the fringes of northern Nigeria in Chad, Cameroon and Niger. The Boko Haram narrative is simply ‘to establish an Islamic caliphate where people will be governed by Sharia’. This narrative was able to fly through the northern geopolitics because a lot of northern Nigeria Muslims have always been averse to Western value system. Additionally the internal dynamics prevalent in the northern Nigeria (extreme poverty, corruption and massive indigent youth population)⁴³ made the narrative potent as it created succor for the army of hopeless youths who felt the narrative could bring redemption to their hopelessness.

To justify the claim that the Boko Haram narrative is something that can easily be received with open hands in the north, we have to reexamine the perception of some northerners concerning Western values. For instance, Ibrahim a prominent northern Nigeria Muslim discourages his friends and associates from enrolling their children for vaccination against polio because he suspects that Western countries who provided these vaccines have injected some sterilizing agents that could make children impotent. He believes strongly that it is part of the larger Western agenda for population control.⁴⁴ So, when the Boko Haram narrative began to spread, most of the local Mullah especially those who never went through Western educational system discretely embraced it.

The ‘message’ on the other hand is different from narrative. The message is usually derived from the narrative. Message is usually flexible and changes in accordance with the unfolding socio-political scenes. Message is the combination of actions, activities to interpret the narrative. Message can also be understood as the implementation or enforcement of the narrative. So the message “Western Education is forbidden” only resonated an already existing stereotype against the Western values which is the narrative. The message of the Boko Haram in Nigeria is that “Western Education is forbidden”. This message is interpreted through commentaries

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, “Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism,” February 2009, http://transition.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/publications/docs/guide_to_drivers_of_ve.pdf.

⁴⁴ Interview with Mallam Ibrahim Abutalib, Abuja, 2014. Ibrahim is a very learned Muslim in both Islamic and Western Education. He is a Computer Engineer and built a successful private firm. He is highly respected in his community.

and broadcasts against structures that seem to represent Western values (attacks on schools, bombings of police outpost and Force headquarters in Abuja, attacks on United Nations headquarters and media houses in Abuja) and the government of Nigeria which they believe represent the interest of the West.

The message is usually expressed in public domain using symbols of heroism and fear to alter public perceptions and opinion. Usually, the Boko Haram group used internet platforms in order to attract a great many viewers and supporters. The YouTube videos uploaded revealed the extent of the group creativity. The message could be appreciated further with the “African Magic” kind of background created for each video and the fierce appearance of the leader sounding warning to the FGN which signify and project such action as a symbol of heroism. The video could be likened to some action Indian movies which are usually appealing to northern Nigerian youths.⁴⁵ So the Boko Haram sold its brand through effective messaging using social media and other Internet platforms. Having explained the meaning of narrative and messages within the context of this paper, it is then important to give an overview of the Boko Haram narrative and messages.

Overview of Boko Haram Narrative and Message

The Boko Haram narrative is simply the ambition of establishing an Islamic caliphate where Muslims will be ruled in accordance with Allah’s law. The messages plugged into this narrative are fashioned along religious divide, terror and heroism. The group claims that “Western Education is forbidden” was demonstrated with the abduction of Chibok school girls. The abduction of the Chibok girls caused a lot of public debates within Nigerian political space and the international community. About two years since the abduction of the girls, there is serious apprehension, in various quarters that many of the girls may have died of natural causes or killed by their captors.⁴⁶ No doubt, the thought that over 200 girls could be kidnapped in a school in Nigeria is a very powerful message to the public concerning Boko Haram’s resentment for Western Education. The FGN ought to have quickly countered the message given the fact that the region is the most educationally backward in Nigeria. Countering the messages also became necessary even for the unintended consequences such message may have generated.

Unfortunately, the issue of the abducted Chibok girls turned into a sensitive Muslim-Christian dichotomy in Nigeria. It took about eighteen days before the former President GoodluckEbele Jonathan responded to the

⁴⁵ See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ Ibrahim Sawab, “500 days after: Chibok parents seek reunion with daughters”, *Daily Trust*, 27 August 2015, p.15.

fact that some girls were abducted.⁴⁷ Again, the action of the FGN by not responding promptly to the issue of abduction of the girls was a demonstration that the state failed in its fundamental objective of providing security to the people. Instead, religious sentiments were wiped over the Chibok girls' abduction. This again resonated Boko Haram original narrative and placed them on the spotlight as the main actor. The action and inaction of the FGN became a major feeder of the Boko Haram narrative and helped to propagate the message of Boko Haram brand.

The security operatives were also caught up in the confusion as they were engrossed in rivalry, issuing conflicting information and publicly discrediting each other. The strategic lapse on the part of the FGN to counter the narrative and messages helped the Boko Haram brand to permeate into the national polity. The peak of the religious divide which was the main message of Boko Haram became obvious within government circles as political elites began to trade accusations over who was responsible for the failure to stop Boko Haram's violence.⁴⁸ When some Nigerian soldiers allegedly accused the FGN for laxity in handling the Boko Haram narratives, they were charged for mutiny. This further strengthened the Boko Haram narrative as it became obvious to the public that Nigeria was actually not winning the war.⁴⁹ The entire scene that evolved was a strategic blunder and an indictment on both the FGN and the AFN.

Boko Haram was able to spread the hate message to the entire northeast through indiscriminate bombing and attack on soft targets. The messages of hate and heroism have always been constant in its bid to spread its narrative. For instance, the Madalla church bombing was designed to pitch Christians and Muslims against each other in Nigeria. The bombing of the United Nations (UN) Building was meant to give its operations international outlook and claim a heroic credit. Similarly, hoisting of black flags in villages and communities were demonstration of its legitimacy and heroic attributes. One of such examples of seizing communities was when the Boko Haram made the Emir of Mubi to relocate to Yola town.⁵⁰ Any incident that can cause a traditional ruler to vacate his subjects and relocate to another city can be described as very instructive. These messages were sold to mostly youths who in their adventurous nature would love to key into

⁴⁷ <http://www.theparadigmng.com/2014/06/01/jonathan-believe-chibok-girls-abducted-18-days-obasanjo-video/>

⁴⁸ Francis Abayomi, "Politics and Religion in Boko Haram narrative", accessed from the internet, 8 January 2016, <http://dailyindependentnig.com/2014/10/politics-religion-boko-haram-narrative/>

⁴⁹ Clement Ejiofor, "Soldiers Mutiny in Borno: Nigeria Army to Start Investigation", accessed online, NAIJ, www.naij.com/66346.html.

⁵⁰ Kabir R Anwar, "Emir of Mubi, others move to Yola", Daily Trust newspaper, Wednesday 10 September 2014, p.4.

such fantasies. Aside from the heroic attributes in the act of challenging government authority, declaring territory and hoisting of flags within Nigeria's sovereignty, there was also the angle of being capable of providing alternative solutions to life. This is a support the FGN and states in the northeast seem to have failed totally.

The indiscriminate terror (killing of both Christians and Muslims) was a message of "you are either with us or against us"irrespective of religious affinity. A lot of Muslims were killed and Mosques destroyed thereby sustaining the message of terror for a while. The message of terror helped them to gather and recruit more members who in the face of hopelessness ofmaking a living, had to join Boko Haram as a survival or self-preservation tactics. The effectiveness of the message of fear and terror can be better appreciated when a scenario is simulated as thus:

Imagine Boko Haram raids your community and sack your local chief and the religious leaders. Held everyone under siege. For months the government forces was unable to repel them. As a result, the Boko Haram group enacted laws and enforced them accordingly to the later without any hindrance. What would you do as a young person within the age bracket of 17 and 25 seeing that some members of the Boko Haram torturing you and your family are about your age mates? Honestly, you will find a way to join without.⁵¹

The Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, YemiOsinbajo corroborated the scenario painted above when he said that many young people conscripted by Boko Haram to either kill or act as suicide bombers deserve the sympathy of the public because they were probably forced to become terrorists under circumstances beyond their control.⁵²The challenge for the FGN therefore is how to create and promote a comprehensive, credible counter-narrative to Boko Haram violent extremism. The FGN had made some efforts to create its framework for counter-narrative and messages. Details of the initiatives are given subsequently.

⁵¹Response from an inmate when recounting his experience as member of the group and how he joined, Abuja, December 2015.

⁵² <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/192243-most-young-boko-haram-terrorists-are-also-victims-osinbajo.html>

Nigeria's Counterterrorism Strategy and Framework

Since 2013 considerable efforts were made to develop a soft power framework for CT. The different activities/programs for an effective soft power CT strategy are discussed subsequently.

a. ***Articulation of a National Counterterrorism Strategy.*** When the fight against Boko Haram began in early 2000, the AFN acknowledged that it was not trained for this kind of warfare hence the need to develop new capabilities.⁵³ Consequently, efforts were put in place to develop a national CT strategy. Series of workshops, seminars and roundtable discussions were held at different defense and security policy levels consultations. A foreign consultant was engaged to put together the proceedings of series of workshops and seminars held in preparation for the compilation of strategies. These culminated in the launch of 3 documents titled: *The National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST)*, *National Security Strategy and Nigeria's Countering Violent Extremism Program* by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA).⁵⁴ These well-articulated documents received inputs from the academia, various Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and international organizations like the United States Embassy and the EU.

b. ***Establishment of a National Coordination Centre.*** In one of the series of workshops held in preparation for the drafting of NACTEST, the participants also highlighted the urgent need for a CT information coordination centre. The recommendation of the workshop was for the FGN to establish a National Information Centre (NAIC). The NAIC was eventually established in 2013 under the leadership of the Director General of the National Orientation Agency (NOA). The concept of the NAIC was to establish a research based centre that will help the FGN to coordinate the entire information framework concerning the activities of Boko Haram. This was found to be very timely as it was anticipated that it would help address the challenge of dissemination of conflicting information by the different security agencies. Unfortunately when the FGN under the GEJ regime constituted the membership of the Centre, it was again another cluster of people who had no clue on what strategic communications was all about. Unconsciously the NAIC which was supposed to be a think tank for the FGN was reduced to a press briefing centre before it finally folded up immediately the Buhari regime surfaced.

⁵³ Gen Azazi, National Security Adviser, 2011

⁵⁴ Nigeria's Official CT documents

c. ***Presidential Initiative on Northeast (PINE)***. The Presidential Initiative for Northeast (PINE) is a youth empowerment scheme launched by former president GoodluckEbele Jonathan to help curtail the rate of unemployment, forestall nonviolence, peaceful co-existence among youths in the Northeast. The youths being considered by PINE are those affected by the crisis caused by the Boko Haram sect. The initiative seeks to create economic rejuvenation and redevelopment of the Northeast states of Nigeria. It is expected to help to implement an emergency assistance and economic stabilization program in the north eastern states. PINE receives support from global development partners, international and local business organizations. Some programs of the PINE include provision of Special Mobile Classrooms (SMOCs) for IDP camps and provision of basic healthcare requirements. PINE works with local and international NGOs, officials of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), officials of Federal and state ministries, officials of the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) as well as officials of the United Nations.

d. ***Victims' Support Fund***. The Victims Support Fund was set up by the FGN to address the plight of victims of terrorism or insurgency who among them lost their lives and means of livelihood. The VSF is expected to source for funds from different sources in order to carry out its programs. The VSF has been in the forefront of providing medical care for victims, food and accommodation. In August 2015, the government released five billion naira, it pledged to the VSF. While the FGN is intensifying efforts to scale up support for the victims of these unfortunate incidents, the number of victims and the length of time that they require support continue to increase. It is for this reason that the VSF is diversifying its sources of funding support.

Issues with Nigeria's Counterterrorism Strategy and Framework

It is observed that there are different overlapping initiatives on CT in Nigeria and most of them are government driven. This is why regime change affects the continuity of each initiative. The objective of the different initiatives are not clearly defined hence the recurring cases of overlapping objectives as with PINE and VSF. The sudden decision by the ONSA to produce another strategic communication framework is a clear demonstration of inconsistent government policies. Since the FGN under the auspices of the ONSA was able to adopt a NACTEST, it will be obviously wasteful to start another exercise of articulation of a NACTEST. What have actually changed was the political regime and not the strategy in combating the threat. The

provision of food items and other essential items to the IDPs Camps by PINE and VSF is well-acknowledged but it must go beyond that. To move beyond current effort of providing basic essentials is a temporary measure in CT.

There is need for a comprehensive and holistic operational framework for the soft power strategy in the northeast. The framework shall first understand the narrative and messages of the terrorist groups, while developing a counter narrative and messages. The framework needs to link up all the different initiatives together under a common goal and create linkages on how to complement each other. This is bearing in mind the fact that the causes of violent extremism in northeast Nigeria are complex and multidimensional, however local. Having examined some of the local issues that causes violent extremism, it became obvious that developing a framework that hinged on a religious narrative with developmental messages will help to fill the gap. It is this perception that led to the articulation of the UMMAH for CVE framework.⁵⁵ It is a grand strategy meant to complement military action. The framework is designed to be driven by CSOs and local communities while the FGN alongside the AFN stand as the coordinator.

Using Muslims Mannerism and Habits (UMMAH)

UMMAH for CVE started with a deliberate attempt to understand the narrative and messages of the group. It is the assumption of the researchers that Boko Haram narrative is a flavor that has always been tasty to northern Nigeria in the past, and still has potency for present and future appeal. It is the same narrative that was used during the Maitasine saga in the 1980s which led to bloody religious crisis. Then, the FGN was able to use military action to crush the Maitasine Sect who was then active in Kano and Kaduna. Twenty years after the Maitasine Sect saga, the country is confronted by the Boko Haram threats. The recurrence of this threat made the researchers to draw conclusion that there are pull/push factors in northern Nigeria that makes its people susceptible to violent extremism.

As noted earlier, UMMAH is an acronym for “Using Muslim Manners and Habits” for CVE. It is a strategy with the sole objective of countering the Boko Haram narrative and messaging with equally appealing Islamic teaching of peace and tolerance. The findings and review of the activities of Boko Haram was that they have been able to sustain the group over the years, due to narrative of injustice, poverty, piety and discrimination

⁵⁵ John N.T. "Jack" Shanahan "Foreword", in Laurie Fenstermacher (ed) "Topical strategic multi-layer assessment and Air Force Research Laboratory Multi-disciplinary white paper in support of counter-terrorism and counter-WMD Countering Violent Extremism *Scientific Methods & Strategies*", internet accessed, 11 January 2016, http://nsiteam.com/scientist/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/U_Counter-Violent-Extremism-Final_Approved-for-Public-Release_28Oct11v3.pdf

which was very easy to understand by the poor, illiterate and uninformed population. The narrative was flexible, adaptable, and has a strong emotional and religious appeal which resonated with the large and often idle youth population. Above all, the Boko Haram utilized the rivalry in the Nigerian political stage to advance its course and perfect its narratives. Most of its messages were thought-provoking, which generated debate among Nigerians by keeping the people busy while the group withdrew and re-strategize. Having observed these features in the activities of the group, the way forward is to develop a counter narrative and messaging strategy with powerful contents that could address some of the psychological and socio-cultural issues the Boko Haram continually exploited in getting people radicalized.

The word UMMAH is chosen as the framework for CVE in Nigeria and the Sahel region. The acronym UMMAH was chosen because it fits the Islamic word ‘Ummah’ which means the ‘Islamic Brotherhood’ and it functions as a nation for all Muslims⁵⁶ as proclaimed by scholars like Al Afghani and Sayyid Qutb.⁵⁷ UMMAH for CVE is however an entirely different concept from Ummah as brotherhood. The choice of UMMAH is to build a narrative that resonates the concept of brotherhood, oneness or community of faithful as a concept that is very key and central in Islam irrespective of sect. The UMMAH narrative therefore is the love for the brotherhood in which the messages are tailored to emphasize the features of the Ummah, roles, morals, expectations and ultimately unification with the creator. Therefore the choice for the term UMMAH was carefully selected to appeal to the emotional sentiments of Muslims, create a window for radicalized youths to reexamine, rethink and make rational decision about religious accommodation. It has no coercive instrument instead it is purely an appeal to conscience, faith and reason, through exploiting the messages of love, peace, neighborliness and goodwill the prophet SAW preached and enjoyed from Muslim and non-Muslim in his days.

Concept and motivation for UMMAH

Muslims generally pride themselves as having some of the best cultures (manners, habits, etiquette etc). The Islamic mannerism and habits can be subsumed in Islamic etiquette. These etiquettes are clearly stated in the Qur’an and most of the authentic Hadiths. Etiquette holds a very high esteem in Islam. In the Qur’an, Surah Taha, Allah instructed Prophet Musa to adopt the correct etiquette when he arrived at the blessed valley of Tuwa. Allah said: “Oh Musa remove your shoes, for you are in the blessed valley of

⁵⁶ Robert A Saunders, “The Ummah as Nation: A Reappraisal in the Wake of the ‘Cartoons Affair’, Nations and Nationalism”, 14 (2), 2008. Internet accessed, 9 January 2016, <http://www.nabilechchaibi.com/resources/Ummah%20as%20nation.pdf>

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.306

Tuwa”(Qur’an Surah Taha: 12). There are also several morals, values and everyday etiquette taught by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These covers different aspects of life (neighborliness, coexistence, peaceful resolution of dispute) and when examined they are in conformity with the ideals of modern day society. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) summed up his message by stating “I have been sent to perfect the best of manners”.⁵⁸ Muslims are therefore obliged to be aware of how to deal with each other in a way that promotes their positive image. It was narrated that Luqman once said to his son, “Oh my son: let your speech be good and your face be smiling; you will be more loved by the people than those who give them provisions.”⁵⁹ For instance, there are Islamic teachings that emphasizes on how to relate and live in peace with other people.

The UMMAH strategy therefore leverages on the framework that every Muslim is a brother to the other. Saunders noted that Muslims see their religion as a source of identity which is stronger than nationalism.⁶⁰ It is this strong identity built around Ummah that made the acronym UMMAH a suitable counter narrative against Boko Haram narrative or any other terrorist group within the Sahel region that uses the banner of Islamic caliphate to inflict terror. Terrorism is about perceptions, beliefs, expectations, legitimacy and will. Terrorism is not won by killing terrorists or won by seizing territory, it is won by altering the psychological factors that are most relevant, that makes them hardened towards holding such beliefs. These are the features that the UMMAH narrative will provide to the Ummah. Under UMMAH, different messages will be developed to counter whatever messages Boko Haram presents to the public.

The UMMAH for CVE is a composite counter narrative encompassing series of messages to counter Boko Haram messages in Nigeria. The main objective of the UMMAH strategy for CVE is to deny Boko Haram or any other would be terrorist group in Nigeria, the ability to impose its will on the youth through spreading of false doctrines and consolidating them through illegitimate violence on the society. The UMMAH for CVE will highlight through series of messages that the Boko Haram brand is not part of the brotherhood since they have chosen to go against humanity. The UMMAH for CVE will also create the environment for the brotherhood to devise a means of communicating with those who have gone astray (Boko Haram members) and give them the opportunity to retract their steps. The UMMAH for CVE ultimately mobilizes the will of the people, and build their capacity using Islamic tenets, principles and

⁵⁸ www.iqrasense.com/muslim-character/the-islamic-etiquette-of-dealing-wth-people.html, accessed 14 January 2016.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Robert A Saunders, Op.Ct.

culture (MESSAGES) to manage their differences peacefully. UMMAH for CVE means the whole community of Muslims bound together to combat Violent Extremism.

The target population of the UMMAH for CVE is actually the entire community encompassing the traditional rulers, market women, school principals, school headmasters, teachers, local medical dispensaries, mullahs who control madrasas etc. The brotherhood community will be coordinated by officials of government. The medium of communication in this brotherhood is through 'One-on-One' engagement, television and radio messages in local languages. Mobile cinemas could be activated in village square where UMMAH programs will be publicly aired. The programs to be aired are going to be programs designed to emphasize the essence of Ummah (the brotherhood). This will create the required community resilience and help to pitch the people against the Boko Haram brand.

Implementation of the UMMAH for CVE

The UMMAH for CVE is described in Figure 1. The figure presents the different actors of UMMAH for CVE, the levels of operations and their relationship with one another. It is a comprehensive framework for a typical local community in Nigeria where the people have five (5) major Contact Points. For example, Educational Institution (Schools), Occupational Institutions (Farm/Market Groups), Traditional Institution (Palace), Health Institution (Dispensary/Medical Centers, Religious Institution (Churches/Mosques). Each Contact Point articulates its own counter messages. From the diagram, it can be seen that the local community drives the program through the assistance of CSOs that interprets the different messages into actionable programs. The medium of communication is going to be divided into 2 main channels; through cinemas (presenting different dramas and announcements), radio programs and one-on-one programs in churches and mosques.

At each Contact Point there is a Message Officer selected from the local community and trained by the Message Centre to deliver all UMMAH for CVE Messages, interpret them and give feedback to the Message Centre. From the foregoing, it implies that a Message Centre needed to be established to coordinate all the activities and programs for a maximum of 5 communities. The Message Centre will be staffed by strategic communication experts drawn from different CSOs. Their task is to continuously design the series of counter messages that bears on the brotherhood. CSOs that are focused on issues like conflict prevention, CVE, de-radicalization, education, inter-religious dialogue, as well as social and economic development will be most relevant because of their experiences. The Message Centre will train the Message Officers who must be individuals

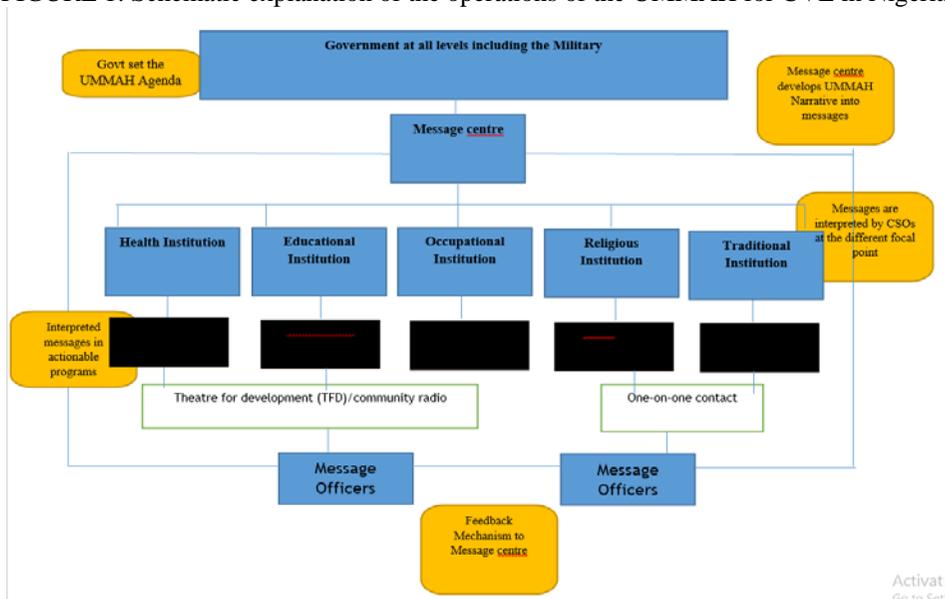
living within the communities and they are paid for the services. The Message Officers serve as interface between the Message Centre and the communities. They are the in-built feedback mechanism for the UMMAH for CVE in Nigeria. The essence is to ensure that at every level the people are able to make personal connection to the programs and strengthen their respective commitment to achieving the government objectives. A Guide Handbook for both the Message Centre and the Message Officers could be issued to all parties so that they will at all-time understand the direction of UMMAH for CVE.

The Messaging Centre must be able to produce messages that reflects or illuminates the essence of UMMAH for CVE. It could take the following formats:

- a. Projecting UMMAH in terms of government activities and programs to reestablish the society.
- b. Denouncing the activities of Boko Haram from the light of Ummah (Islamic Brotherhood).
- c. Rendering local services to the affected communities in the light of Ummah (Islamic Brotherhood).

The messages need to be communicated to build common purpose across the operational ground and at the end affected communities. This will guide everyone’s behavior involved in the UMMAH programs. There is also the need to make the message documents freely available for everyone involved in the fight against terrorism including military personnel.

FIGURE 1: Schematic explanation of the operations of the UMMAH for CVE in Nigeria



Source: Researchers data collected from different sources were articulated to make the model, 2016

The Message Centre need to publish a summary of the message on a range of materials for the whole society. For instance, buses, keke, sign posts, among others should bears contents that emphasizes Ummah and the need to support UMMAH for CVE. To get everyone fit into the framework of UMMAH, there is the need to organize a series of workshops for stakeholders to help build strategic communication capability that would help contribute to the series of messages.

Conclusion

If there is an absence of a comprehensive strategy to CVE, it is difficult to squash the narrative that sustains motivation for terrorism. There is a consensus that CVE is the holistic framework for CT across the globe. Most governments across the international community are increasingly adopting it as the way forward to CT. Nigeria, being part of the global community and a victim of terrorism by Boko Haram also seeks for an effective CVE program. In the bid to CT, it is agreed that the FGN alongside other key stakeholders has a critical role to play in enhancing community resilience to violent extremism in northeast Nigeria through coherent and consistent engagement with the local communities. One of the key pillars of this engagement relies on the development of effective counter-narrative and messaging system. Considering the extent of destruction caused by religious extremism and the recurring tendency of such group in northern Nigeria, one can conclude that there is urgent need to address the threats of Boko Haram in Nigeria.

This can be achieved through understanding the flow of the Boko Haram narrative and messages and providing alternatives to them. The FGN relied on military action to counter Boko Haram yet, this strategy alone cannot be entirely effective when factors that provide incentive to their narratives still exist. The option of CVE suggests countering the narrative and messages of extremism that could implode or explode into violence. The investigation into the underlying meaning of the Boko Haram narrative and messages, and its essence led to the formulation of the UMMAH for CVE framework. The UMMAH for CVE is a composite counter narrative encompassing series of messages from the Qu'ran and Hadith that can counter Boko Haram messages in Nigeria. The UMMAH for CVE required that a Messaging Centre is set up to coordinate all its activities and programs. It also required the inputs of the locals who are to drive the messages to the targeted population.

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