The Role of Conflict Resolution in Counterterrorism in Nigeria: A Case Analysis of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Boko Haram (BH)

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This paper examines the role of conflict resolution approaches in combating terrorism in Nigeria. It suggests that the strategies that emphasize military force are not suitable for tackling the threat of terrorism because of the domestic context within which terrorism in Nigeria has emerged. It argues that the failure to take account of the conflicts within which terrorism has emerged in Nigeria will cripple efforts to deal with the threat. In recent years, the need for conflict resolution as an alternative response to terrorism has become necessary. Using a conflict analysis approach, the paper addresses the following question: to what extent does conflict resolution have a role to play as a counterterrorism strategy in Nigeria?

TERRORISM, COUNTERTERRORISM, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE DEBATES

The threat of terrorism is spreading in Africa with various groups exploiting the fragility of the continent. Although a universally accepted definition of terrorism is lacking, available literature suggests that there are identifiable and unique characteristics that distinguish terrorism from other forms of political violence in the region.[1] The vacuity of a straightforward theory to guide policy-making has produced a situation where actions and actors are framed, reframed, and labeled as terrorism/terrorists with significant implications for counterterrorism. This paper defines terrorism as "premeditated,

politically motivated, use, threatened use, of violence in order to induce a state of terror in its immediate victims, often to influence another less reachable audience such as a government."[2] The definition is apt because it emphasizes the rational choice and instrumentality of terrorism. Given that there is no one consistent model of terrorism, as terrorist organizations evolve and adapt, different structures of terrorism require different policies, and governments must think outside the box when considering the range of motivations, strategies, and tactics that terrorist groups adopt.[3] Based on these perceptions and descriptions of terrorism, several theories and perspectives of counterterrorism have been widely debated.

Traditionally, the international response to terrorism emphasizes a military approach, which ignores the rational instrumental dimension and is based on a law enforcement notion of terrorism as a crime.[4] The result is the proliferation of strategies that focus on preventing direct violence by hunting down and destroying terrorists, and all the people and structures that tend to support them,[5] while disregarding the conflicts within which most terrorism is firmly and deeply rooted. Despite massive traditional counterterrorism activities in the Middle East and Africa, terrorist attacks appear to have continued.[6]

Terrorism is both a domestic and a transnational issue and it is neither an isolated phenomenon nor exclusive to African states.[7] With many groups adopting transnational agendas and objectives, current efforts to deal with the threat of terrorism tend to be driven by a defensive global agenda that disregards the uniqueness of each group and the specific "domestic" conditions[8] within which terrorism thrives, especially in Africa. Recognizing these domestic contexts is crucial for developing viable counterterrorism strategies in a broader sense and for discovering better and far-reaching accommodation for legitimate and powerful conflicting interests and identities.[9] Terrorism, whether foreign or domestic, is a contextual phenomenon and requires a specific context-aware response.[10]

Against this background, this paper focuses on two different groups within Nigeria—Boko Haram (BH) and Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND)—to ascertain the extent to which terrorism can be seen as a form of mobilization around economic, religious, historical, or social justice issues. It asks, what multi-level responses are likely to be effective in addressing the sources of that mobilization in a way that will reduce the risks of escalating violence and restore peace and security? The

two cases were selected because, in the same domestic context, they represent terrorism within a religious conflict and terrorism within a resource-based conflict. Religious conflicts appear unresolvable and are regarded as deep value conflicts characterized by strong judgments about right and wrong,[11] while resource-based conflicts appear easier to resolve through cooperation and peace agreements.[12] Nigeria is Africa's most populous country; it reflects in a broad way the multidimensional nature of the region. The extreme underdevelopment of the Niger Delta in the South and in Northern Nigeria has generated the frustration that has created fertile ground for the outbreak of various forms of political and religious conflicts.[13] Hence, generalizations can be made from this study that may be representative of the rest of Africa where many states face similar challenges of dealing with terrorism. The case studies also reflect the limitations of the traditional counterterrorism approaches.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a conflict analysis approach that emphasizes the systematic study of the security, political, economic, and social factors underlying conflicts; the interests, relations, capacities, motivations, and incentives of actors; and the long term trends of the dynamics of conflict, including triggers for increased violence, capacities for managing the conflict, and likely future conflict scenarios.[14] Using this conflict analysis approach, this study examines the structure, dynamics, and complexities of the conflict within which the two case studies emerge and attempts to establish the role of conflict resolution. It argues that the unidirectional use of force is inappropriate for sustained success in dealing with the threat of terrorism in Nigeria given the socio-economic factors in both cases and the religious context involved in the case of BH. It suggests that conflict resolution approaches that deal with the long-term underlying causes of conflict, and which recognize the ideals of justice, equity,[15] and peacebuilding, could potentially limit the proliferation of terrorist groups and prevent further mobilization and radicalization.

The significance of this work lies in the fact that the urgency to place conflict resolution firmly on the agenda of counterterrorism practices has not been widely explored and little has been done with regards to context-specific analysis in relation to its role in dealing with terrorism. A study like this, which focuses on a specific case like Nigeria and the two terrorist groups

pulling at the State from opposite directions, fills this gap and contributes to developing better and more effective counterterrorism practices in Nigeria, Africa, and the world in general.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The traditional frameworks for analyzing counterterrorism campaigns structure debates around two models. The first is the revolutionary warfare[16] or military model that tends to frame the struggle against terrorism in terms of an enemy-centric war where the armed forces of a state are primarily in charge of developing the strategy. The war model was used by US President George W. Bush in his campaign against al-Qaida in Afghanistan and Iraq; it is further reinforced by terrorists who frequently characterize themselves as soldiers and warriors for their cause and engage in battle against their targets.[17]

A 2008 study of 648 terrorist groups between 1968 and 2006 found that military force had rarely been effective in defeating terrorism and the reliance on conventional military forces had often been counter-productive.[18] However, while it is true that a military solution will not solve a political problem,[19] a properly deployed army can, in the short term, deny a terrorist group or individual the space to operate. Afghanistan is an example where the American military operation was successful in denying al-Qaida freedom of movement by removing the regime that supported them. Thus, while long-term military campaigns have been beset with problems, a short-term well defined military mission can be effective in mitigating the threat of terrorism.[20]

Arguably, using effective policing and intelligence to tackle the threat is the ideal way to separate the terrorists from the communities from which they derive their support.[21] However, there may be times when a government has no choice but to engage terrorist groups with military force in defense of its state and population; to suggest otherwise is to argue in the face of reality.[22] Some scholars agree that targeting terrorists through proactive measures weakens the ability of the enemy to operate and reduces the incidence of terrorist attacks, while defensive measures aim to protect potential targets and seek to decrease the amount of damage done by an attack.[23] This argument is plausible but does not explain why many African terrorist groups, for instance, have been resilient. It also ignores the fact that proactive measures can promote radicalization by making local populations

sympathize with terrorists and accordingly support their actions.

The ultimate goal of government counterterrorism is grounded in the desire to eliminate the enemy by removing the incentives to commit terrorism.[24] As a matter of principle, government policy must incorporate the goals of minimizing damage caused, preventing escalation by containing conflicts, and preventing terrorist groups from achieving political aims or receiving support from other countries. However, as long as these groups are only perceived as enemies, those with genuine political aims will be suppressed when allowing their goals to be achieved could potentially end their terrorist activities.

The second model is the criminal justice model that sees terrorism as a criminal act and emphasizes the rule of law and democratic values that prevail in western democracies.[25] Many criminal justice systems have devoted their efforts to increasing the effectiveness of their terrorism prevention measures and have stretched their ability to cooperate at the international level with various counterterrorism initiatives.[26] Defining an act of terror strictly as a criminal act embraces the law enforcement paradigm for forming a response.[27] This entails an investigative process, necessity of evidence, constitutional provision and protection, a presumption of innocence, arrest, and punishment.[28] However, some legal systems are inherently inadequate. For instance, many African countries with weak judicial systems are inappropriately structured to deal with terrorism as a crime. While it is clear what this model entails, a review of existing literature reveals the complexity and challenges involved in applying the model to real situations, not just in liberal democracies but also in other systems. For instance, there are the problems of applying anti-terror legislation that empowers the police, adjusts judicial procedures to facilitate prosecution of terrorists, and sometimes entails the establishment of special courts, like the specialized criminal court in Saudi Arabia set up in 2008 to try terrorism cases.[29] Another major challenge is achieving a balance between effective counterterrorism and respect for the rule of law as evident in Africa, Afghanistan, and Iraq, where operations tend to deviate from the rule of law and democratic standards, and give rise to frequent human rights violations. The lack of a universally acceptable legal definition of terrorism is another dilemma. It is helpful to identify and convict those responsible for an act of terrorism, but the challenge of finding witnesses or credible evidence in such a scenario remains problematic.[30] Even where successful, the convicted do not often represent

all those responsible, especially where they are not the main leaders of the groups.[31]

In Africa and other systems where strong legal structures and respect for the rule of law are lacking, the criminal justice model is not really helpful. Scholars[32] have tried to define the utility of this model in the African context and argue that states cannot be expected to address all issues of socio-economic exclusion and marginalization, youth job creation, or other conditions in which the risk of terrorism might increase. However, they argue, states can effectively control whether their law enforcement and criminal justice systems adhere to principles that reduce the prospect of disenchanted groups going outside normal political forms of expression and engage in indiscriminate violence aimed at blackmailing the state. These arguments, however, ignore the dynamics of politics and social life in contexts like Africa where the people employed as law enforcement officers are also products of the excluded and marginalized regions and, in many cases, are part of these extremist groups who feel that the only way to get the state to listen is through violence.

Organizational characteristics also explain why the effects of counterterrorism vary. Some studies[33] have shown that larger groups tend to last longer and groups with narrow goals are more likely to join the political process, often through negotiations. They also find that military force is most successful when terrorist groups have advanced to insurgency, and that policing is only effective on groups with fewer than one thousand members. In many settings, however, it is almost impossible to be certain of the number of members in a group. For instance, groups like BH and MEND operate in a loose cell structure and a coalition of different armed groups respectively. Other scholars[34] theorize that the effectiveness of counterterrorism policies will vary according to the goals and ideologies of the terrorist groups.

In practice, neither the war model nor the criminal justice model function according to academic theory in real situations.[35] Counterterrorism operations are not fixed but are subject to change and should either remain consistent or should adapt according to the nature of the terrorism threat. For instance, the accommodative measures adopted by some states in dealing with Hamas and Hezbollah are different from the enemy-centric approach adopted towards Al-Qaida.[36] Policy prescriptions for addressing terrorist threats differ mainly as a result of the political context, the threat environment, and the government conducting the operations. Terrorist

groups are, to a large extent, rational organizations with realistic political goals and engaging with them in dialogue could be useful for dealing with the threat. It is here that a conflict resolution approach can be considered valuable.

TERRORISM AND COUNTERTERRORISM: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

A predominant thread in the practice of conflict resolution involves a re-framing of the prospects for containing violence and building peace. This emphasizes the development of indigenous dispute prevention and resolution activities based on an understanding of those actions that facilitate and contribute to de-escalation.[37] The idea that terrorism often coexists with other forms of civil strife and internal conflicts, as the cases of Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Somalia have shown, properly locates it within the scope of conflict resolution. From this viewpoint, terrorism is perceived as behaviour geared towards dealing with a grievance unilaterally, where violence is inflicted on a population by a group or an individual to gain the attention of superiors who cannot be reached by nonviolent means, such as law or political debate.[38] Arguably, terrorism emerges as a result of perceived injustices, such as government repression, marginalization, and suppression, that drive groups to mobilize in retaliation.[39] Hence, the existence of terrorism is an indicator of political alienation. Also, people could be forced to terrorism by desperation, intolerable conditions, poverty, hopelessness, and political or social oppression.[40] This perspective indicates that the only way to tackle the threat is to deal with the injustices in the society that created it in the first place.

While many are wary of the tendency to draw an analogy between terrorism and conflict, especially civil strife and internal/ethnic conflicts, it is helpful to note that certain features of conflicts are relevant to terrorism, so we may locate the phenomenon within the purview of conflict resolution. Examples include the role of identity, the significance of a sense of injustice as a crucial point of mobilization, and structural rather than primordial sources of conflict.[41] These arguments suggest that terrorists are not irrational, as some may argue; rather, they sometimes feel they have no other choice than to use terrorism.[42] For them, their action is a reasonably informed choice from a range of failed alternatives. Within this debate, terrorism is a deliberate creation of specialized terror among civilians through

the use of violence in order to promote political ends; the ultimate goal of terrorism is to be heard while the immediate target is the manipulation of fear as a mechanism of combat in the context of wide publicity.[43]

When an individual or group is denied its fundamental and basic human needs for identity, security, recognition, or equal participation within the society, protracted conflict is inevitable. To resolve such conflicts, it is essential that needs which are threatened be identified, and that a fundamental restructuring of relationships or the social system takes place in a way that accommodates the needs of all individuals and groups, given that basic needs can influence our beliefs, the values we place on them, and the emotional impact of these highly viewed beliefs.[44] While some may critique this argument for oversimplifying and suggesting unanimous views of what constitutes basic human needs, this argument provides a basis for linking conflict analysis with conflict resolution since the latter requires a process that helps parties identify salient unsatisfied needs and consider methods of adapting social arrangements to the demands of individuals and groups.[45]

We can deduce so far from these positions that terrorism is rational and instrumental given that it is an intentional and predetermined strategy of violence. Terrorism is a form of political communication that can be seen as propaganda or rhetoric, just like public diplomacy, given that the targets of terrorist violence are not necessarily the victims but those who observe the events—the audience.[46] The fear and intimidation caused by terrorism is not an unintended consequence but actually a central purpose of the violence;[47] the implication is that, if more fear and intimidation are created by responses of the state, the terrorists have been helped to achieve their aim.

When the terrorist is presented as a "frightening/foreign/barbaric/beast," as is common in Western liberal democracies, extraordinary measures that emphasize repressive measures short of military dictatorship are urged to fight terrorism. This makes the state innocent and potentially legitimizes military solutions to complex conflicts and pushes conflict resolution off the policy agenda.[48] However, if terrorism is just one of the tactics available to a challenger group engaged in a political struggle, then negotiation and possibility of conciliation may become an option within a wider political context of countering terrorism. Despite its limitations, conflict resolution broadens the range of responses when terrorism is viewed in the context of conflict rather than narrowly as a war or a crime.[49]

Placing conflict resolution within the agenda of counterterrorism has

been criticized from various angles. Some of the criticisms include the idea that there are times when engaging with terrorist groups makes sense and there are times when it makes more sense not to engage considering the risks and sensitivities involved.[50] Dialogue may have dangers that can reinforce violence, making it problematic to decide when it might be genuinely appropriate to seek a political alternative in dealing with terrorism.[51] This paper is not arguing for a total move away from traditional counterterrorism to conflict resolution practices, given that, on their own, neither counterterrorism nor conflict resolution is adequate to deal with the multidimensional context of conflict characterized by terrorism or the context of terrorism characterized by protracted conflict.[52] The argument is that democratic conflict resolution, underpinned by a firm but not excessive security policy, is by and large the most effective way of dealing with terrorism.[53] However, while this approach looks promising and may have worked for other countries like Northern Ireland, it may not have universal application, as little research has been done to examine its practical application in other settings like Africa. This further highlights the importance of this research that explores the role of conflict resolution in dealing with terrorism in Nigeria.

Beyond injustice, marginalization, and oppression as sources of conflict, a few scholars[54] have shown the salience of religion in the formation of political parties, political mobilization, political legitimacy, and voting behaviour in Nigeria. Religion has been central to the major political debates, conflicts, and collective violence in Nigeria's political history.[55] Religion has been used in justifying terrorist violence and is not only a cause of violence but serves as a framework that makes horrific bloodshed easier to vindicate.[56] While conflict is context-specific, multi-causal, and multi-dimensional, identifying and understanding the interactions between its various causes, dimensions, and dynamics in its specific context is essential in ascertaining potential areas of intervention and drawing up appropriate approaches relating to its resolution.

COUNTERTERRORISM RESPONSE OF THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT AGAINST MEND AND BH

From the perspective of the Nigerian government, the actions of MEND amounted to acts of subversion and terrorism that called for "decisive action."[57] Consequently, the response was militarily forceful. Seeking to protect the Multi-National Oil Companies (MNOCs), the government consistently

employed military campaigns, led by the Joint Task Force (JTF), to repress and crush legitimate protests and discourage the Delta minorities from obstructing the continuous flow of its rents from oil exploration, exploitation, and appropriation.[58] The JTF was set up in 2004 by the government in response to the frequent unrest in the Niger Delta and the proliferation of armed groups. It is made up of troops of the army, navy, air force, and mobile police with a mandate "to restore law and order, dislodge perpetrators of violence, and apprehend all murderers in the Niger Delta."[59] The JTF employed excessive force and carried out extrajudicial executions, torture, raiding, and destruction of villages in an attempt to counter the activities of the militants.

The government also perceived MEND as criminals. Given the presence of criminal elements within the group, this perception was not completely unfounded. The conflict economy in the region had created a breeding ground for organized crime, drug trade, illicit arms trafficking, and arms proliferation; this meant that armed groups had access to more sophisticated weapons than state security forces.[60] However, focusing narrowly on the crime dimension completely disregarded the socio-economic context of the conflict and the genuine political demands of MEND. Hence, the arrests and execution of the militants and their leaders escalated the situation.

Several nonviolent counterterrorism approaches have also been employed, represented by government development policies and programs whose implementation is continuously hindered and sabotaged by corrupt state officials who benefit from the conflict economy. Some regulatory bodies, like the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency and Department of Petroleum Resources, have also been stalled by lack of funds and absence of technical competence.

After several military campaigns to tackle the threat of MEND, in 2009, the government sought to end the conflict through an act of amnesty.[61] The Amnesty program involved a process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of the insurgents, along with a plan for regional development and transformation. [62] The program was intended to run in three phases. During the first phase of disarmament, about 26,000 males and 133 female militants surrendered their weapons and registered in the Amnesty program.[63] However, while the program recorded some success in paying off ex-militants with training and stipends, it was not able to provide them with jobs and so raised expectations that it was not able to meet.[64] Significantly,

for conflict resolution, the Amnesty deal for MEND was negotiated through community leaders. While it could be argued that the same strategy could be used to reach BH, the variations in the nature and ideology of the two groups raise other challenges. The Amnesty program recorded initial success but has been rightly criticized for the failure to address basic socio-economic and environmental needs of the region.[65] It has also been criticized for corruption and a lack of accountability in its drafting and implementation.[66]

The Nigerian government views BH as an al-Qaida linked terrorist movement and has adopted the use of brutal force to deal with its threat.[67] The JTF, established in 2004 to deal with the Niger Delta crisis, directed the first phase of the counterterrorism operations against BH.[68] The predominant use of force by the Nigerian government against religious extremism in the North is based on the view that the armed forces of any state is responsible, first and foremost, to defend its survival and, secondarily, the life and property of citizens.[69] This strategy is deeply problematic and can only be productive if there is a corresponding application of other approaches such as mediation, largely because of the dangerous mix of ideological, political, and economic issues involved.[70]

In addition to the JTF, a Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), made up of indigenous youths, was created in Borno State to support the efforts of the JTF. The rationale behind the CJTF is that they are more aware of the local context and would identify members of BH better than the JTF.[71] However, the CJTF strategy is problematic in that it represents a picture of state ineffectiveness and allows for criminals and thugs to take advantage of an already lawless environment.[72]

Since 1999, the governors of twelve of the nineteen states in Northern Nigeria have introduced the Islamic *Shari'ah* Law in their states with varying manifestations.[73] This was a strategy to pacify a section of Muslims who had consistently agitated against the secularity of the country, threatening the tenure of those governors as political office holders.[74] This was a problematic strategy in that it reinforced the utility of Islam as a vehicle to mobilize political support rather than address the problem of religious extremism at the root of the region's longstanding conflicts.

Other nonviolent approaches adopted to deal with the threat of BH include the introduction of the first model "Almajiri" School, commissioned by the government in 2012 in order to promote learning and provide education to children in the North, and a Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful

Resolution of Security Challenges in the North set up in 2013.[75] Recently, amnesty has also been considered an option. However, given the nature of BH's demands, as compared to MEND whose objectives were purely socio-economic, it remains to be seen how an amnesty deal can be brokered with a group whose religious ideology appears non-negotiable. The excessive militarization of some states in northern Nigeria has only resulted in a tense combat atmosphere and an attendant increase in cases of brutalization, intimidation, and human rights violations by members of the JTF.[76] While armed action has put pressure on several areas of hideouts for BH militants, it has inadvertently amplified the level of state directed grievance among affected communities and provoked local sympathies for BH's cause.[77] This has provided a convenient recruitment base for the group in many of these communities.

The transnational character of BH is another reason why the unidirectional use of force has been ineffective and counter-productive. The threat of BH is not limited to Nigeria alone but reaches far into the West African sub-region, the Sahel, and Africa as a whole. BH has a transnational outlook and has been linked to other terrorist groups in the region like Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb in Mali. The post-9/11 global context, particularly the 2001 and 2003 military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq respectively, has had a huge unifying impact on young Muslims around the world, including in northern Nigeria,[78] as the brutal use of force only serves to further validate the perception of many Muslims around the world of being targeted unjustly by the West.

THE ROLE OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN DEALING WITH TERRORISM IN NIGERIA: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BH AND MEND

The background, environment, setting, or situation within which terrorism occurs is critically linked to the degree of success that can be expected in dealing with the threat. When the context is ignored, counterterrorism measures are treated with a "one-size-fits-all" mindset that invariably produces varying degrees of success or failure. An understanding of the context of conflict and terrorism is therefore important and necessary to determine the most appropriate and workable approaches and mechanisms of conflict resolution.[79]

In exploring appropriate measures for dealing with the threat in Africa,

it is necessary to place terrorism within the broader framework of Africa's security challenges. These challenges include famine, drought, endemic poverty, diseases, and other natural and human-made disasters that undermine human security. The context of terrorism is affected by global geo-political forces, by domestic socio-economic forces, and by a variety of socio-economic and political conditions in Africa which produce grievances that have been used by militant groups to justify their recourse to violent actions.[80] While some may argue that these grievances, whether ethnic, socio-economic, or religious, may just be a way of mobilizing people to participate in the conflicts,[81] it is important for conflict resolution that these factors are treated as an integrated part of individual and group identity. For instance, while religion may play little or no role in shaping policy in western nations, this separation cannot be assumed for the Middle East or Africa where religion plays a significant role in shaping individual and group identity or in policy decision making,[82] though in varying degrees of intensity.

Many terrorist groups in Nigeria have emerged under different historical circumstances but are all bound by a common factor, namely dissatisfaction with the State.[83] The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has experienced ethnic, communal, and political unrest since the 1990s as a result of years of anguish, deprivation, poverty, and environmental degradation occasioned by the activities of MNOCs and neglect by governments. The region has witnessed incessant attacks on oil installations, hostage taking, and general insecurity at both communal and organizational levels as youths in the region have tried to get local and international attention through their restiveness.[84] MEND is an armed militant group whose struggle is motivated by the demand for resource control and equitable wealth distribution, and by protest against the damaging ecological activities of oil multinationals.[85] BH is a radical Islamist group that combines a sectarian radical Islamic agenda with violence and reflects Nigeria's history of poor governance and extreme poverty in the north. It calls itself the Sunni Community for the Propagation of the Prophet's Teaching and Jihad and employs extreme forms of violence to achieve its objectives.[86]

BH and MEND emerged against a similar background of socio-economic hardship and political instability but represent two distinct types of conflicts. While MEND is a separatist/nationalist group that seeks resource control and is sustained by an economic drive, BH is a Sunni Jihadist group with a religious ideology seeking to create a strict Islamist *Shari'ah* system

in Nigeria sustained by a religious drive. Earlier conflicts in both cases may not have been characterized by organized terrorism but, in response to government's military campaigns, have become violent and more organized. These distinct drivers of the two conflicts have significant implications for successful counterterrorism.

The direct economic motivation of MEND makes the issues underlying the conflict clear and almost presents in itself the solution to the conflict. Conflicts with secular motivations for increased autonomy or control of resources within a political community offer promise for a conciliatory strategy of transformation.[87] Religious conflicts appear more unresolvable because they are deep value conflicts where the actors involved are passionate and have strong, non-negotiable persuasions. Groups with religious motivations, like BH, are more likely to perceive their struggle in totalistic terms and so they resist utilitarian calculations in the political decision-making.[88] Religion polarizes a situation into such extreme absolutes that compromises and concessions are no longer easy or even possible.[89] The implication for conflict resolution is that, while amnesty or other approaches such as negotiation and dialogue have helped reduce violent conflict in the Niger Delta and contained the activities of MEND to an extent, it is unlikely that a similar strategy will work in the case of BH given its absolutist religious stance. However, while BH's demands to transform the Nigerian state into an Islamic nation may prove irreconcilable, the socio-economic grievances that drove it to this stance, including the group's perceptions of social exclusion, discrimination, failed governance, frustrated expectations, and government repression,[90] are areas that could be addressed through conflict resolution to prevent further radicalization in the region and in the country as a whole.

The leadership and organizational structure is another point where the groups differ with significant counterterrorism implications. The organizational structure of a group determines its membership, resources, security, strengths, and weaknesses, all of which determine its capabilities and reach.[91] Previous research points to four broad types of organizational structures—conventional hierarchy, cellular, network, and leaderless resistance[92]—but groups can adopt a blend of several structures at different levels of organization, making neat classification almost impossible. MEND, as a result of its coalition, operates a loose structure with several factions. This fits within the network structure where many interconnected groups or cells work together within a decentralized decision making framework. This

type of structure can be both "acephalous" (headless) and "polycephalous" (multi-headed).[93] MEND's structure makes it inefficient as a group given the decentralized decision-making system and its "polycephalous" nature, which limits its strategic coherence. The implication is that it is possible to identify a leader but there could be many other leaders with the same degree of control over their different factions. It was possible, though not easy, for the government to identify leaders of different factions and negotiate an amnesty deal with MEND in the Niger Delta. BH, on the hand, presents a blend of the hierarchical structure and the cellular structure. The hierarchical structure mimics the modern day military pyramid structure where the bottom is populated by foot soldiers, managed by various officers, and the top represents the High Command.[94] The cellular structure incorporates a network within the hierarchy, with each cell having little or no knowledge of other cells but each working through leaders who, singularly, have contact with the Central Command. The efficient and effective operation of a cell system depends on central direction, which means impressive organization, funding from the top, and external support.[95] Thus, if the central command loses control of the cells, the cells could act alone and jeopardize the entire organization. However, the advantage of the cell structure is that, even if one cell is discovered, it has limited information about the organization and does not threaten its entire existence. With a central authority and specialized units, BH's blend of the hierarchical and cellular structure makes it efficient in terms of intelligence, recruitment, finance and support, ease of communication, ideological unity, and a coherent enforcement of a long-term strategy.[96] In terms of access to the leadership with whom negotiations can begin with the hope of addressing the group's grievances, conflict resolution is easier with groups like MEND than with groups like BH.

Furthermore, the hierarchical/cell structure of BH and the network/ coalition formation of MEND make it difficult to expect a total eradication of the group through military operations. Groups that are highly factionalized are more difficult to destroy through military action without addressing the broader community issues. It is also practically impossible to completely isolate an armed terrorist group of a particular ethnic or religious group from its broader constituency.[97] It is here that conflict resolution approaches involving the community can help in reaching the groups and preventing further radicalization.

Funding is another point of deviation. MEND tends to generate funds

largely from ransoms, oil bunkering, and hijacking of oil vessels. Although community leaders in the Niger Delta felt aggrieved by the injustices suffered, they did not support the violence of MEND and have been involved in brokering peace deals in the region. On the other hand, BH funds its activities both from extortion and, significantly, from within the region through notable and "supportive" northern elites. While well-known politicians from the North may not agree with BH's tactics, a look at the history of religious extremism in the North shows a pattern of community based support for BH's Islamic agenda. Many critics point to the Northern Nigerian lobbyists' stiff resistance to the US Congress's move to designate the BH Sect a terrorist group as evidence of quiet support for BH.[98] Others point to the threats made during the 2011 presidential elections by one Northern elite, a former Finance Minister, to make the country "ungovernable" if the then President Goodluck Jonathan, a Southerner, won the elections.[99] The increased intensity of BH's killing spree after the elections demonstrates that they made good their threat. In another instance, in 2009, shortly after the late President Yar'Adua won the presidential election, Muslim scholars in the north begged for the release of suspected BH members who had been arrested and had disclosed their links with al-Qaida and the training they had received in Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Pakistan.[100] These Northern Muslim scholars claimed that the suspects were merely Islamic evangelists and the suspects were granted pardon and released. Secret intelligence reports have linked a notable politician to the funding of BH and this piece of information has been corroborated by inside sources in interviews that cannot be disclosed here for security reasons. It is not unusual for politicians in Africa to use armed groups for political benefits or to gain access to power and resources,[101] and BH is described as "an unintended cost of elite predation."[102] Again, Northern elites, vehemently denouncing the declaration of emergency in the North despite the spate of violence, have been known to ask for an extension of amnesty to BH members as has been done for MEND.[103] This could explain why it has been so difficult to effectively reach the "angry" youth through community leaders.

While some argue that communication with terrorists grants them legitimacy, this paper agrees with scholars who argue that the effects of this legitimacy could be limited by involving low level or non-governmental personnel in initial contacts.[104] The idea that regimes should never bargain with terrorists favours coercive and repressive responses and is based largely

on rhetorical rather than analytical characterizations of the problems of terrorism.[105] Labeling groups "terrorists" while ignoring the environment within which they have evolved delegitimizes them and gives the government limited options to deal with threats.[106] On the other hand, engaging with these groups reverses the delegitimization process and creates more options for resolving the conflict issues that enable terrorism.[107] However, in cases like BH where demands appear ambitious and run contrary to the legitimate constitution of a country, one can argue that conciliatory responses alone are inadequate. As a last resort, the goal of military efforts must be to get the other side to communicate peacefully, not killing or beating them into submission.[108]

Dealing with terrorism is a process of attacking the premise of terrorism itself and so an approach that is comprehensive in addressing the root causes, the enablers, and the operations may be more effective than military responses alone. Conflict Resolution offers analysis of the conflict as more than its symptoms and outbreaks. Paying attention to issues arising in the context of exploitation or perceived occupation can help to reduce the prevalence of terrorism in the long run. Due to its characteristics, conflict involving religious terrorism presents specific difficulties for a conflict resolution process. There are two essential benefits to exploring a relationship between religion and conflict resolution. First, religion has a dual legacy in human history regarding peace and violence. While it may be a major contributor to war, bloodshed, hatred, and intolerance, it has developed laws and ideas that provide civilizations with a cultural commitment to critical peace-related values, as well as vast information in its sacred texts on peacemaking and prosocial and antisocial values that affect conflict. Second, religion plays a central role in the inner life and social behaviour of millions of human beings, many of whom are engaged in some struggle. While the goals, ideology, and loose cell structure of terrorist groups present problems regarding localization, intelligence gathering, and the range of effects of counterterrorism responses, diplomats and mediators could benefit from an in-depth understanding of the motives for either violence or coexistence. With this understanding there might be more productive interaction between religious communities and conflict resolution strategies.[109] There is considerable reverence for spiritual leadership in Nigeria, whether Christian or Muslim, and, since religion has been a major issue underlining sectarian consciousness, tensions, and radicalization,[110] engaging these leaders can be

used to alter the situation. Also, radical Islamic terrorism shares many characteristics with ethnic, economic, and political violence and is not always a movement simply based on religious foundations, so resolving underlying socio-economic conflicts also prevents further radicalization.

The cases of MEND and BH both underscore the rational and instrumental role of terrorism as an intentional and predetermined strategy of violence. Terrorist groups may emerge within similar contexts but can also have different motivations and ideologies within different environments with significant implications for counterterrorism and conflict resolution. Thus the effectiveness of counterterrorism policies will vary according to the goals and ideologies of the terrorist groups.[111] While the government's use of force against BH could have been temporary and a means to an end,[112] the security forces were repeatedly unable to remain neutral enough to bring the parties to the negotiating table. The use of force has only heightened insecurity as the inability of military forces to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, terrorists and bystanders, has led to the erosion of trust between the military and residents.[113] This is not to suggest that military force should be totally abhorred because, without security pressure,[114] terrorist groups will find secure havens.

CONCLUSION: BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION WITHIN AND BEYOND NIGERIA

Conflict resolution and counterterrorism aim to end or contain violence but, on their own, neither of them can adequately address the challenges of prolonged conflicts, especially where terrorist factions are involved. While counterterrorism should be conducted on a short-term basis as part of immediate efforts to respond to conflicts,[115] conflict resolution must be perceived as a broader process involving a long-term strategy to develop an all-inclusive platform that aims to resolve the underlying factors that have generated and are sustaining conflict. The failure to take account of the conflict situations within which BH and MEND have emerged led the Nigerian government to isolate the deep-seated value conflicts and the socio-economic grievances that created and sustained the violence in the different parts of the country.

Any policy or strategy, including the Amnesty program, which ignores the vile conditions that induced the armed revolt in the first instance, cannot provide a sustainable basis for peace.[116] While the MEND situation

culminated in the creation of an amnesty program, a result of having adopted conflict resolution strategies, the BH situation has presented greater challenges to the adoption of conflict resolution strategies.

The government's military approach cannot always match the hit and run guerrilla tactics of BH; consequently, the government and its security agencies need to win the trust of local communities[117] to provide the support needed to flush out terrorists. While it is almost impossible to imagine how domestic and international order can be maintained if military power were totally absent, unidirectional military responses of governments to religious violence is primarily responsible for the increase in violence over the years. That said, a total absence of military force might, in reality, have allowed the extremists to overrun several regions by now.[118] There may be times when a government has no choice but to engage terrorist groups with military force in the defense of the state and population.[119] However, the utility of force must be employed within the framework of the rule of law and the protection of fundamental human rights. Its use must be along with a broad-based approach that includes resolution of those genuine socio-economic grievances that provide a ready supply of daily recruits for terrorist groups. To prevent further radicalization, the government should focus on these issues in order to cut off the recruitment base and the community support on which terrorist groups depend. The enemy-centric perspective of states like Nigeria towards terrorist groups has produced very strong military responses in almost all instances. More accommodative and conciliatory measures should be adopted in dealing with these groups with an understanding that the type of conflict and the nature of the groups involved determine the extent to which accommodative measures can be possible.

Religion is at the core of life for billions of people globally and cannot be ignored or treated as irrational.[120] Although the demands of Islamic terrorist groups are often non-negotiable, given that they seek to change the political and religious status quo, the international community has to begin to collectively engage with conflict communities and provide counter-narratives that can prevent further radicalization rather than adopt unidirectional military options, for the use of force only confronts the symptoms rather than the root causes of these conflicts. It is clear that enemy-centric and criminal perceptions of armed resistance, especially in the face of genuine socio-economic grievances, narrows state response to military options that are largely counterproductive. There are no purely military solutions

to insurgencies, and if there are any political problems at the centre of a conflict, there must of necessity be a political solution.[121]

Terrorist groups need a narrative to explain their achievements and justify their actions, and so countries, and the international community as a whole, also need a coherent narrative to counter that of the terrorists. A framework of conflict resolution approaches can provide a counter-narrative that allows for interreligious dialogue and cooperation that can be used to demystify doctrines which terrorist groups often distort and use in propagating extremist ideologies and violence. Communication is vital and negotiations open up opportunities to resolve grievances. Nonviolent strategies should be fashioned to address the grievances that are providing a ready recruitment base for terrorists around the world.

The scope of this study has been limited to groups within Nigeria, but further research on the role of conflict resolution based on case studies in other regions could provide more knowledge, especially in regions dealing with Islamist extremist groups. This study argues that the strategies that emphasize military force alone are not suitable for tackling the threat of terrorism because of the domestic context within which terrorism has emerged. Counterterrorism strategies of force provoke more violence from terrorist groups, generate more conflicts, and worsen the situation rather than solve existing problems. Further, the failure to take account of and resolve the protracted conflicts from which terrorism has emerged has so far crippled efforts to deal with the threat. The solution lies in a conscientious effort to adopt a multidimensional approach that sees counterterrorism not as an end in itself, but only as a means to an end, and sees conflict resolution as the ultimate goal in order to achieve sustainable peace and security.

Conflict resolution processes are not easy and moving from counterterrorism into political negotiations is not a seamless linear process, but in the long run, the use of force cannot produce long-term security and stability; sustained use of force in these conflict situations risks escalating the situation. This calls for a careful appreciation of the uniqueness of the situation in order to best identify areas where dialogue can be introduced. Military deployment should only be conceived as a means towards an end and not an end in itself.[122]

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