

## Paper Management of Conflicts and Preventing Terrorism: A Case Study of Islamic Movement in Nigeria

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**Abstract.** Proper management of conflict provide avenue for peaceful co-existence between parties such as religious groups and the state particularly in multi-ethnic/religious societies like Nigeria requires multi-faceted approaches with sincere political will from the state to tackle insecurity and terrorism. This study ‘Managing Conflicts and Preventing Terrorism: A case study of Islamic Movement in Nigeria’ was undertaken to provide insight on the conflicting situation characterising the relationship between Nigerian government and the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) with the view to proffer solution to the present standoff. The study adopts Content Analysis approach to explore data and used Frustration Aggression Theory for framework analysis. The study concludes that the phenomenon of the IMN will remain in the foreseeable future as the group’s rigidity may linger for a while and fundamental difference between IMN and other Shiites groups in Nigeria is also likely to deepen as these groups have now resolved to take the fight to the doorsteps of the IMN upon which it does not have the intellectual wherewithal to withstand. Therefore, in order to successfully manage the growing threats of the IMN, it’s imperative for the government to adopt a multi-pronged approach or carrot and stick policy by consciously encouraging the likes of RAF, ATF and SHIMA in their ideological rivalries with the IMN. The use of excessive force might be counter-productive because it risks given the IMN a pristine of martyrdom that could force some to go either underground or deploy terrorist measures.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Group, Islam, Religion, Shi’ism, Terrorism, Violence.

### 1. Introduction

The phenomena of conflict and terrorism have always been an integral part of human existence. As long as two or more people exist, conflicts and terrorism are bound to happen. Scholars of peace studies believe that conflict and crisis could only be managed while terrorism whether it emanates from the state or non-state actors is inevitable due to man’s desire for power and influence.

On the other hand, the resurgence of the Islamic movements worldwide began at the height of the cold war in 1979 when the Mullahs (Islamic clerics), led by Ayatullah Khomeini spear headed an Islamic revolution which led to the obliteration of the 1,500 year old monarchy under the King Shah Pahlavi (Abrahamian, 2008). The spectre of terrorism might be new to Nigeria but it has always been a trend known by man. The killing for political gains by man is as old as the nation-state itself, and causing terror to make a political point enjoys a similarly ancient if not always respectable pedigree. In the first century after the birth of Christ, Jewish radicals fought to free Palestine of Roman rule. According to Josephus, the Sicarii were brigands who took their name from a dagger carrying in their bosom. Their favourite trick was to mingle with crowds and through their plausibility entirely defied detection (Paul, June 7, 2004).

The Assassins a millennium later emerged from the same troublesome part of the World. They were members of the Ismaili sect of the Shi’a Islamic School of thought and were very active in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. Their contemporary notoriety in the West lay in their resoluteness to kill the leaders of the Crusades that were then pillaging the Holy land with Conrad of Montserrat being their most prominent victim (Daftary, 1998). At the peak of the cold-war, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) a

catholic militia in the Northern Ireland brazenly deployed terrorist means such as assassination and bomb attacks both in Ireland and the British mainland. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), Shinning Path in Peru, FAC guerrillas in Columbia. The popular front for the liberation of Palestine general command as well as the Black September groups were also active during the cold-war politics.

## 2. Literature Review

In an attempt to provide an analytical framework for a deep appreciation of the causes of violence and conflicts, it is pertinent to analyze the various forms in which conflicts and violence manifests. As noted by Wolff (2006:2), the term 'conflict' is used to describe "a situation in which two or more actors pursue incompatible, yet from their individual perspectives entirely just, goals". He further argues that sometimes, conflict is as a result of the struggle for power and material gain by leaders and followers alike. Conflict and violence can be categorized as either small or large-scale depending on the intensity. Large scale violence is difficult to control and its consequences are hard to predict (Coady, 1999).

Violence has also been categorized as physical and psychological. Psychological violence is an act of violence in the absence of a violent act. The destructive effects are gradual and cumulative. It involves brainwashing, indoctrination and threats. On the other hand, physical violence is an act that involves physical means such as bombardment, whipping, stabbing to death, overpowering, poisoning, forceful intrusion, malevolent intrusion among others. Its destructive effects are swift and direct (Turpin and Kurtz, 1999).

The micro and macro approach to violence and conflict is one of the several approaches. This approach draws a web of casual links between the personal biological impulse and psychological disposition on the one hand, and global structures, processes, and behaviour on the other. At the micro level the propellant of violence is identified as individual psychological factors and biological impulse, while at the macro perspective socio-cultural factors are adduced for violence (Turpin and Kurtz, 1999).

Studies have also shown that conflict and violence has been perceived as an instrument of survival under difficult circumstance. In this perspective, the frustration-aggression theory is the most explored. The exponents of the theory identified major

conditions in which the individual or group deploy violence. To them, the obstruction or blockade of efforts by the individual intended to achieve desired ends such as power, wealth, social status, security, equality and freedom leads to frustration that breeds violence.

Furthermore, a relationship has been drawn between relative deprivation and violence. In this sense, the objective material condition is believed not to nurture violence but rather the sense of deprivation in relation to others around them, or their own past condition is believed to be responsible for violence with the intent to redress the situation (Dowse and Hughes, 1982)

The greed and grievance analytical framework ascribes violent conflicts to grievances arising from limited economic opportunities, poverty and inequalities. There are two strands of contentions in this analytical framework. The first perceive violent conflicts as under-girded by irrationality originating essentially from hatred. In the second perspective, violent conflict is hinged on a number of grievances such as systematic discrimination and gross human rights violation, inequality in economic and political power, or dearth of resources especially in multiethnic state. In this regard, violence is perceived as instrumental like any means for seeking redress (Jega, 2002).

Violent conflict has also been explained from the industry perspective. It is believed that the dominant propellant of violence is economic benefits and commercial interest rather than grievance. This presupposes that the preoccupation of the belligerents and insurgents is the economic spoils and booty that they appropriate from the protracted violence (Jega, 2002).

Another theoretical explanation for violent conflicts is systemic pathologies arising from the dialectical changes in the structures and processes of society. According to Deeka (2002) when a system does not deliver what its leaders had promised and the political elites continue to ask the masses to make sacrifices that the elites themselves are unwilling to make much of the aura of legitimacy gained during the decolonization period will be dissipated. In another theoretical prism, eruption of violent conflicts is linked with group pluralism and interactions to achieve their diverse objectives (Deeka, 2002). In seeking relevance or retention of political power, the elites manipulate and massage religious and ethnic sentiments. Many of the ethnic

clashes and sectarian conflagrations are rooted in the context of the group conflict theoretical assumption.

Violence has also been perceived as structural and institutional (Coady, 1999). Structural violence is the form of violence rationalized on the basis of a great range of social injustice and inequalities prevailing in a state. In this perspective, reformers, leftists and even terrorists rationalize their violence and opposition against the state on the basis of seeking to correct the prevailing social injustice and inequalities in the state. The form of violence in this context often involves a direct physical attack in response to and defense against acts perceived as unjust and inequitable in the society.

On the other hand, institutional violence is a quiet violence that arises due to systematic deprivation in the way of transactions within a state (Abah, 2009). Several other factors such as over population, impotence, loss of power, displacement, the quest for social values, as well as natural phenomena such as natural disasters, earthquake, environmental scarcities, disease outbreak, drought, and famine can be identified as contributory to violence of which many scholars contributed in understanding conflicts.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

To further investigate the activities of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), the Frustration Aggression Theory is also adopted in this paper. Proponents of the theory are John Dollard, Neal E. Miller, Roger Barker and Leonard Berkowitz, Yate A. and others.

The frustration-aggression model is a theoretical framework developed by John Dollard and his associates in 1939 but was expanded and modified by Yate (1962) and Berkowitz (1963), drawing mainly from the psychological basis of motivation and behavior. The theoretical framework provides explanation for violent behavioral disposition resulting from the inability of a people to fulfill their human needs. It is based on the general premise that all humans have basic needs which they seek to fulfill and that any blockade to the fulfillment of these needs by individuals or groups elicit violent responses (Dollard et al, 1939).

Frustration-aggression theory emphasizes the difference between what people feel they want and the discrepancy however, marginal, between what is sought and what they get, the greater the violent reaction. In the face of these frustrated expectations, a group is most vulnerable to embark on violent

destructive behavior or be a ready army to be used to cause crisis (Feierabend and Feierabend, 1972).

Central to this explanation is that aggression is the natural outcome of frustration. In a situation where the legitimate desires of an individual or group is denied either directly or by the indirect consequence of the way a society is structured, the feeling of frustration can compel such persons or group to express their anger through violence that is directed at those perceived to be responsible for their misfortune or others who are indirectly related to those frustrating their expectations (Yate, 1962 and Berkowitz, 1963).

### 3.1 Criticism

Frustration Aggression theory has its shortcomings which may not be unconnected with lack of having single definition together with coherent agreement of divergent scholars' views on the theory. In addition, the theory suggests frustrated, prejudiced individuals or groups would end up acting more aggressively towards other groups or parties they have grudges with, but other proven scholarly outcomes have shown that they are more aggressive towards everyone that comes across them (Friedman & Schustack, 1999).

### 3.2 Relevance of the Theory to this Research

The Frustration Aggression theory is relevant to this study because it highlight the kind of relationship that exist between the divergent ethno-religious groups that make up Nigeria and the government on the other hand which is of struggle. Such is the case between IMN and the Nigerian state particularly with that of Kaduna state which at many times, transformed to violent encounter with the security agencies that often result to loss of lives and properties.

## 4. IMN: From Sunni Activism to Shi'a Evangelism.

The metamorphosis of the Islamic movement of Nigeria from Sunni activism under the guidance of Muslim Brotherhood philosophy to Shi'a evangelism began to gather momentum after the polarisation of the movement in 1994. There was a state of ambivalence and prevarication on the part of the IMN on whether the movement should embrace shi'ism as a vehicle for the realisation of the movement's cherished dream that is Islamic revolution (Ibrahim, 2015).

The emergence of Shaikh Ibrahim Ya'aqub Zakzaky as the leader of the IMN was a watershed in the history of the movement. The Zaria born activist was one time Vice President of the Muslim Students Society (MSS). He was an undergraduate student of economics until his expulsion in 1979. The IMN or Muslim Brothers have been greatly influenced by the ideals of Muslim Brotherhood and the works of great ideologue of the Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb. His famous book, the Milestone was the 'Green book' of the IMN until 1994 (Okoli, 2019).

Although series of efforts had been made to dissuade the IMN from opting for Shi'ism, but to no avail. Sheikh Abubakar Abdullahi Tureta as the guest speaker of the IMN at ABU Zaria, Central Mosque in June 1994 took time to show Zakzaky and his followers about the challenges and complexities of their planned ideological volte-face. He cited a number of empirical examples in Northern Nigeria, Iraq and Iran but without success. This development has led to numerous repercussion especially in the movement's relationship with the majority of the Sunni Muslim whether the Salafist or Wahhabi, oriented such as the powerful Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ahWa'ikamatissunna and to some extent the Sufi orders such as Tijjaniyyah order led to by Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi and Late Sheikh Nasiru Kabara of the Qadiriyyah order.

Although the IMN did not have any historical animosity with the Sufis largely because both groups have been at the receiving end of the Izala and other Salafy groups in Northern Nigeria (Zakzaky, 1999). They (IMN) have been largely accepted and permitted to carry out their activities in Sufi or Tariqa Mosques until recently when Dariqa members began to refuse them permission to use their mosques in some states such as Kaduna and few Northern states (Ibrahim, 2015).

#### 4.1 Structure of the IMN

Since the break-up of the IMN in 1994, the movement has borrowed a number of models and structures from dominant Sunni groups in Nigeria and to some extent the Hizbullah and other Iranian allied Shiite organisations. Apart from the position of sheikh Zakzaky as the undisputed leader of the movement, IMN has several branches or units that at times operate in dependently. These are:

**Academics Forum:** the academic forum consists mainly of academics from the nation's tertiary institution and provides the necessary intellectual guidance. This branch or unit is not too conspicuous

because of the current composition by the movement (IMN).

**Resource forum:** this forum sometimes its function over laps with the academic forum. However, its main pre-occupation is to ensure that needed resources are obtained and utilized.

**IM Production:** This is mainly involves with the IMN's forays into film making.

**Sister's Forum:** This forum is basically concerned with Da'awah (preaching) and mobilisation as well as advocacy work among women in the IMN and the larger Muslim society in the North.

**Shuhada Foundation:** This foundation is charged with the responsibility of catering for the needs of the families of deceased members, who are considered by the IMN as Martyrs. They sponsor the education of the children of these members in addition to the provision of small capital to the widows. This scheme has ensured the continued loyalty of their families especially the children to the ideals of the IMN.

**Madrasah (Islamic schools):** The IMN has hundreds of Islamiyya schools across the Northern state, especially Bauchi, Katsina, Nasarawa, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kano and Zamfara states. These schools offer both Islamic (based on Shi'ite jurisprudence) and western education.

**IMN Publication:** IMN publication publishes newspapers in English and Hausa (Almizan and Pointer Express). In 2017, the Kaduna state chapter of the Nigerian Union of Journalist deregistered both papers.

**The Poets:** there are talented artists who are involved in both Hausa, English and Arabic poetry. They also have in their midst singers and even drummers who galvanises the IMN Youths especially during the Shura Marches, Quds Day and the Arba'een trekking. The most prominent among them is Mustapha Gadon Kaya.

**ISMA Medical Care Initiatives:** This group consists mostly of medical doctors and other paramedics sympathetic to the IMN cause. They offer medical service to members during the IMN activities such as the Arba'een or Quds-day. They also embark on medical outreach around Zaria and its environs (Ibrahim, 2015).

**The Guards (Horras):** The guards or horas are considered as the vigilante of the IMN. They were

responsible for the security of sheikh Zakzaky during his sojourn at Gyellesu. They sometimes synergize with the local vigilante that earned them the accolades and respects of some of the local residents. There are different assumptions and apprehensions about the guards as few of them were alleged to have received training from the Hizbullah. As a result of the naivety and shallow knowledge of the IMN members about international politics, they (guards) were somehow equating themselves with the armed wings of the Hizbullah in Lebanon or Ezzeldeen-Alqassan Brigade (the armed) wing of Hamas).

**Sources of IMN funding:** Although IMN's sources to some extent are surrounded in mystery, there are obvious sources as confirmed by a prominent IMN member. There was no doubt that the IMN had once enjoyed some level of funding from abroad such as Iran and other organisations based in Europe and North America. However, since the September 11, 2001, world trade centre bombing the West led by the United States have tightened their noose on the sources of funding for Islamic organisations and other charity bodies. The crippling economic sanctions imposed on Iran have further blocked potential sources of funding and assistance. In my interaction with the IMN activist and few sympathizers, three sources of funding of the IMN have been established (Interview with IMN members):

The IMN gets its finances from individual members, who willingly contribute 100 naira per month equivalent to ₦1,200 per annum. Other sources come from the Resource Forum, which mobilised resources from wealthy individual members and civil servants and even security personnel.

This group consists of Ahlil Sukh that is businessmen and other traders within the IMN.

According to my source, the main reason behind the dispersal of these sources of funds is to avoid a situation where only one group controls the finances of the movement. Another reason according to my source was to avoid infiltration by government (Interview with IMN members).

#### 4.2 IMN Relationship with Christians

Before the IMN opted for Shi'ism in 1994, there were frosty relations between the Movement and the Christians especially in the campuses of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Kaduna Polytechnic as well as Bayero University. However, in the last two decades, there is a growing rapprochement between the IMN and the Christians especially in Kaduna and

Plateau States. The IMN members used to invite Christians to grace their activities especially Ashura mourning period as well as the Arba'een commemoration. Pastor Yohanna Buru a Kaduna based cleric once declared that although he was not a Shiite, Sheikh Zakzaky is his leader (AhlulBayt News Agency, April 30, 2018).

Many Christians including Pastors Buru and the likes of Rev. David Abeya, Pastor Joel Zego, Pastor Maxwell Sanda and Mr. Adua A. Adua had participated in the IMN organised Ashura Day mourning procession on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2015 which took off from the Maiduguri Juma'at Mosque Kaduna. The IMN members have been participating in Christian celebrations in a number of churches in Kaduna, Zaria and Jos (Abdullahi, 2015). At the last Christmas celebration, some IMN members led by a medical doctor and University lecturer had teamed up with the Christian worshippers at ECWA Church, Karji Kaduna on 25<sup>th</sup> December, 2018. They were received and ushered into the church by Rev. Istifanus Musa.

#### 4.3 IMN Relations with Other Muslims in Nigeria

The IMN record of relationship with Muslim organisation in Nigeria has been a mixed bag. While IMN has been locked in a prolonged ideological and doctrinal difference with the Izala groups (Kaduna and Jos factions) as well as other Salafite oriented groups as represented by some Charismatic scholars such as Late Sheikh Ja'afar Adam and Sheikh Albani. Other include Sheikh Bn Othman Sheikh Aminu Daurawa and Dr. Mansur Sokoto.

On the other hand, IMN had enjoyed relative peace with the Dariqa or Sufis in the Northern part of the country. They however have had some misunderstanding especially on the issue of the use of mosques (mostly or entirely owned by the Sufis). The other contentions issue is the Sufis objection to the castigation of some of the companions of the prophet by the IMN. The Post- December crisis in Zaria, has somehow strengthened the ties between the Sufis (Yan Darika) and the IMN as a result of the attacks that the IMN suffered from some Muslim youths allegedly Izala members during the Ashura mourning procession in Kaduna and Jos. Barely 24 hours after the attacks, two prominent Darika leaders Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi and Sheikh Halliru Maraya called on Tijjaniya followers not to participate in any anti-IMN riots. According to Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi, the crisis was just a prelude to the eventual actualisation of the Izala and other Salafist's dream to attack the Sufis and obliterate them from Nigeria, which according to

the sheikh was a well thought out plan by the Saudis in Cohort with the Nigerian Government.

#### **4.4 Internationalisation of the IMN and its Repercussions**

One of the biggest draw backs of the IMN is its warped comprehension of the internal dynamics of other Muslim nations and the complexities of international relations. The IMN under Sheikh Zakzaky has swallowed hook line and sinker a number of events and activities associated with some prominent groups in the Middle East such as Hamas and the Hizbullah. Hamas is recognised by many States such as Russia, Iran, Turkey, Qatar and Syria as a legitimate political organisation in Palestine, the West led by the United States and some Arab States like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Israel consider it a terrorist organisation. Hamas consists of both political wing and the armed wing (Ezzeldeen Alqassam Brigade) and had contested for election in the occupied territories of Gaza and West Bank in 2007 and defeated the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) a secular political organisation.

Similarly, Hizbullah is both a political and military organisation and has a number of its members elected into the Lebanese parliament. The Lebanese government also recognises the military wing of Hizbullah which almost single-handedly forced the Israelis to pull out of Southern Lebanon in 2000 after more than two decades of occupation. As earlier mentioned, IMN is either oblivious of these facts or are ignorant. They have somehow modelled their activities along the modus operandi of these organisations.

The ignorance or naivety of the IMN manifest in a variety of ways. For instance Quds Day or Jerusalem popularly known as Quds Day has been an annual event in the last Friday of Ramadan that was declared by the Late Ayatullah Khomeini 1979 is observed in hundreds of countries peacefully. However, the story is always different in Nigeria since the IMN's internationalisation of its activities. The establishment of Horras (guards) with all the Military paraphernalia such as uniforms and parades has further exposed the group's shallow-mindedness. They see themselves as the Hizbullah of Nigeria. In the IMN's response to this criticism, they often cite other groups such as the Izala first aid ('Yan Agaji) and the Boys Brigade. The difference between these groups and the IMN's guards is that they ('Yan Agaji and Boys Brigade) are hardly seen marching on the major streets.

The arba'een trekking though quite permissible in Shi'ism, the arba'een (40<sup>th</sup> day) trekking embarks upon by the Shiites is only observed in kabala and Najaf where fourth caliph Ali (companion) and the prophet's grandson Hussein were buried. Countries with Shiite majority such as Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain hardly practice arba'een trekking. The IMN is also pathologically obsessed with the United States especially its support for Israel as well as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The IMN's leader had consistently berated successive heads of Muslim states as well as Nigerian leaders as imperialist's agents.

#### **4.5 IMN and the Islamic Republic of Iran**

Since the 1979 revolution in Iran, thousands of Muslim Youths have continued to identify themselves with the ideas of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Thousands had been offered scholarship in Iranian Schools and seminaries. The relationship naturally blossomed after the IMN embrace Shi'ism. Iran has established cordial relationship with many Muslim states and organisations in the last four decades Nigeria has also enjoyed similar relationship. While in many Arab States, Islamic movements and groups friendly to Iran such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad have maintained their sectarian identity as Sunnis, the IMN simply submitted the Shi'ism doctrine. This development has further cemented IMN-Iran ties. Many members of the IMN have studied in Iran and Iraq in different fields.

There are different competing political and ideological strands in Iran despite the monolithic outlook of the revolution. The IMN enjoys some support from some disparate organisation and institutions but the emergence of Rasul A'azam foundation (RAF) and Ath-thaqalain foundation has somehow reduced the IMN's standing in the country. The varying degree of sanctions on Iran and the emergence of President Hassan Rouhani (sees as a pragmatist leader) are other contributory factors to the limited access of IMN to Iran's patronage.

#### **4.6 Implications of the Emergence of ATF and RAF to IMN**

Many onlookers may be oblivious of the fact that an average IMN supporter sees Ath-thaqalain foundation led by sheikh Hamza Mohammed Lawal and the Sheikh Nura Dass as the biggest existential threats. While the IMN could boast of large followership, these foundations or factions of the Shiite, consists of the most knowledgeable and intellectually endowed members of the Shiite Muslims in Nigeria.

While almost all of them were at one time or the other Sheikh Zakzaky students, they had the opportunity of acquiring jurisprudential and the exegesis of the Holy Quran based on Shi'a scholarship. As soon as they returned to Nigeria from Iraq they began to question the academic and intellectual capacity of Sheikh Zakzaky. They have also rejected the idea of intense activism such as rallies, protests and outright rebellion against the constituted authority.

According to Sheikh Nura Dass leader of RAF there are four fundamental differences between IMN and the two foundations: The IMN and advocates for the overthrow of government, while on their own part its counter productive and anti-theatrical to the teaching of Shi'ism. The IMN have never built a single mosque, they sometimes try to 'colonise' other people's mosques. RAF and ATF have built their own mosques; thirdly, while IMN is against active participation in politics, these groups have been taking part in electioneering campaign and the general elections.

Fourthly unlike IMN, RAF and ATF have never disdained active participation in government and enrolment in the Nation's military and other paramilitary organisations. IMN has been known for the opposition to such participation until recently. Fifthly, IMN derives pleasure in castigating traditional rulers calling them all sort of derogatory names RAF and ATF abhors such acts. The IMN hard-core loyalists and Sheikh Zakzaky believers that those two groups are faint-hearted and are just acting out a script prepared by the government of Nigeria and some organisations in Iran.

#### **4.7 IMN and the Aftermaths of the December 12, 2015 Confrontation with the Army**

The fall-out of the killings of some IMN supporters in Zaria by the Army was a watershed in the history of the IMN. While the confrontation with the security agencies by the IMN was uncountable the repercussion of the incident has had a devastating impact on IMN and its supporters. In 2014 there was similar confrontation between the members and the army in Zaria which led to the death of three of Sheikh Zakzaky's sons.

There was a sense of victimhood and at the same time a sense of bewilderment about the Mythical invincibility of the IMN leader in the eyes of his followers. Many of the dim-witted supporters of the IMN never believed that their leader could be

subjected to the kind of treatment he had suffered in the hands of the Army. Some still believes that it was because of his spiritual powers that he survived the army onslaught on his residence.

Dozens of groups in both Nigeria and abroad began to express sympathy to the IMN and its leader. International human right organisation such Amnesty International, Human rights watch, Islamic Human Rights Commission and Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) – a Nigerian based Muslim right group. Christian leadership of different denominations also condemned the Army's action and warned the government of the possible consequences. Prominent anti-government individuals and groups such as Femi Kayode, Bring Back our Girls campaigners, Ren Omokri, IPOB, Dr. Ahmad Gummi (known for his anti-government stance) and some government in the South-South were also not left out.

Islamic Human Rights Commission with its headquarters in London has been at the forefront of internationalising the IMN problem especially the continued detention of its leader Sheikh Zakzaky. Rallies and protests have been organised in numerous Western and American cities as well as India, Kashmir Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan. There were allegations that the IMN had reached an understanding with the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) before the 2019 general election.

Many leaders and supporters of the IMN had actively campaigned for the opposition candidate Atiku Abubakar. The violent protests embarked by the IMN supporters for the release of their leader especially in the last five months have invariably affected negatively, the relative sympathy that the IMN had hitherto enjoyed. We should also remember that the IMN deliberately refused to make any submission at the commission of inquiry set up by Kaduna state Government in the wake of the December 12 crisis in Zaria. One of the major recommendations of the commission was the proscription of the IMN which the Kaduna State government accepted. The bungled medical trip of Sheikh Zakzaky has also somehow diminished the level of solidarity and support for the IMN.

#### **5. Government and the Need for a Delicate Balancing Act**

In order to confront the menace of the IMN, Nigerian governments especially the federal government needs to strike a delicate balancing act in its relations with the various Muslim organisations, sects and

governments around the world. Most Muslims especially the Sufis (Yan Darika) and the IMN are accusing the federal government under President Muhammad Buhari of hobnobbing with the Saudis and United Arab emirates in order to undermine them.

They also cite some indisputable facts about the role of Saudi Arabia and Wahabi ideology in the proliferation of many terrorist groups such as Alqa'ida ISIS, ISIL and Al-shabab. Not quite long ago Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi was emphatic in his criticism of Buhari's government of favouring the Izalas and other Salafi groups. No wonder, Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi openly campaigned for PDP especially in Bauchi state in the last general election.

Some IMN members are still aggrieved that despite the stance of the IMN leadership on elections in Nigeria, some members of the IMN actually voted for president Buhari in 2015 which is why it is necessary to handle government relations with all the religious groups carefully, we should be conscious of the fact that ninety nine percent of the IMN recruits are from the Sufis, who as earlier mentioned have a soft spot for the IMN. Nigeria should maintain its ties with Iran in order to leverage diplomatically and strengthen its monitoring of Nigerians that are in Iran.

The government should also be careful about taking side in the complex and murky politics of the Middle East. Northerners especially the Hausa speaking people are always glued to their radio sets and other sources of information. In 1991 at the height of the gulf-war the listeners of the Hausa service of BBC London unanimously voted for Saddam Hussein as their man of the year (BBC, 1991). Many markets and mosques have been named after some hot spots in the Muslim World. For instance, a temporary market in Kaduna was set-up after central market was gutted by fire in 1996. It was named Chechnya the restive caucuses region of Russia, a popular mosque in Kano was also named Qandahar. The erstwhile stronghold of the Taliban, a shanty settlement in Abuja removed by the FCT in 2006 was called Tora Borah, a cave where Osama bin laden and his lieutenants were believed to have hidden from the US bombardment in 2001.

Iranian government is faced with multitudes of challenges and will not risk its ties with Nigeria - an important OPEC member, more engagement is needed. In my conversation with one of the leaders of RAF he informed me of the concerted efforts they were making to influence the Iranian ambassador on

the IMN crisis. They have since made some breakthrough according to the source (Interview with leaders of RAF). Governments at all levels need to tacitly support the non IMN Shi'ites in order to effectively control and possibly weaken the movement. The IMN has since lost control of tertiary institutions though they still have some support among the lecturers but it's very negligible. The support base of the IMN is the disenchanting mostly uneducated youths and traders as well as nomadic Fulanis especially in Kaduna, Kano and Katsina states. They also utilise effectively social media and their local publication. The establishment of Shi'ite Muslim Association (SHIMA) should also be seen as a well-come development.

The government should encourage engagement with the association, thereby blighting the propaganda of the IMN and its supporters worldwide. While some members of the IMN might be tinkering with the idea of terrorism, a number of their leaders appear not at home with the idea of any armed campaign. Another constraining factor is the role of Iran which based on its foreign policy will not be amenable to such move. We might ask of Hutsis or Ansarullah and Hizbullah, these groups have virtually nothing in common with the IMN. They are a bye product of prolonged historical sectarian rivalry and animosity in the Middle East.

## 6. Conclusion

The phenomenon of the IMN will remain with us for the foreseeable future. IMN's rigidity may also linger for a while and the sense of victimhood will continue to be exhibited by the movement. The fundamental difference between IMN and other Shiites in Nigeria is also likely to deepen as these groups have now resolved to take the fight to the doorsteps of the IMN. According to Sheikh Hamza Lawal the era of hibernation is over. The IMN does not have the intellectual wherewithal to withstand this fight.

The ongoing flirtation between the federal government and the Saudi authorities and the apparent influence of some Salafists and Wahabi oriented groups will continue to hurt the mainstream Sufis thereby providing more breeding grounds for the Shiites, especially the IMN. Similarly many international organisations, human rights groups, opposition groups and individuals as well as other detractors of the Nigerian state will continue to capitalise on the IMN-government face-off to hurt the nation's interests or even encourage outright rebellion as many are not convinced that the

government's proscription of the movement may be the ultimate panacea.

## 7. Recommendations

In order to successfully manage the growing threats of the IMN, it's imperative for the government to adopt a multi-pronged approach or carrot and stick policy. Government should consciously encourage the likes of RAF, ATF and SHIMA in their ideological rivalries with the IMN. The use of excessive force might be counter-productive. It risks given the IMN a pristine of Martyrdom which could force some of them to go either underground or deploy terrorist measures. Government should reach out to some notable personalities such as Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi, Sheikh Abduljabbar Nasir Kabara and the Sultan for a possible dialogue with the movement.

Many radio stations in the North have kept the Rasul A'azam foundation and the Ath-thaqalain foundation away from their radio stations. These groups have to rely on social media only in order to counter the IMN. Government should prevail on these media outfit to allow the groups to counter the destructive narratives of the IMN. Government should also strengthen its ties with the Iranian government by trying to broker peace between Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE and other gulf states. This may go a long way in depriving IMN of any actual or potential support from Iran, Iraq and Lebanon.

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