National Security and Religious Tolerance in Nigeria:
Islamic Perspectives

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Nigeria, which is multi-ethnic and multi-religious in nature, is faced with religious violence. Religion that is supposed to be a unifying factor among several ethnic groups in Nigeria has turned out to be one of the catalysts that are causing destruction of lives and properties due to narrow-mindedness misunderstanding, fundamentalism and fanaticism and religious adherent. Islam as a religion of peace attaches premium attention to peace in all its ramifications to pave the way for peaceful co-existence among adherents of different faiths in any nation. This paper shall explore causes, consequences and provide remedies from Islamic perspectives. The method employed in this paper is historical and analytical. Historically, the paper tends to unravel the historical events that are pertinent to the topic while analytical methods are meant to analyze the findings from the historical events; it ends with conclusions and recommendations. In carrying out this paper, the author has relied on history books, journals, newspapers and recent research works on the major scholars of Arabic and Islamic studies. In the end, the reader would have been convinced that Islam is a religion of peace, calling for peace at any time, at any place.

Keywords: national security, religious, tolerance and Islam

Introduction

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed its share of conflicts, including the civil war in 1967-1970 when the southeast tried to secede as Biafra. The numerous coups and attempted coups have often had a regional/ethno-religious flavor. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999—the so-called Fourth Republic insurgencies have flared up in the south-south (Niger Delta) and the northeast (especially Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states), postelection violence was serious in Kaduna in 2011, and in the Middle Belt, herder-farmer violence continues. Another two great militant groups sprang up again which claimed more lines and properties than what the people of Nigeria had experienced before and the Niger Delta Militant Group known as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) are *Jama'at Ahl-Sunnah Li Da'awat wal Jihad* popularly known as the *Boko Haram.* All these crises led to what we can refer to as national insecurity that gave birth to national disintegration. Conflict and crises are associated with virtually all the sectors in the country, especially religious, educational and political sectors (Ibeanu, 2006). It is observed that some contemporary politicians hold the view that political position can only be attained through force.

Islam is a comprehensive and universal religion that encompasses all ways of life of mankind, such as economic, social, political, security. Security in Islam is considered as basic. The purpose of Islamic law (*Maqasidu-Shar'iah*) is security. Security of life, property progeny, religion, honour and Intellect is the primary

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function of Islamic law. (Oloyede). Islam prohibits any act that threatens the security of people. Security in Islam goes beyond protection of physique and wealth. It is therefore clear that in Islam, whatever is necessary to enhance peaceful coexistence of the community is considered a security measure for which every Muslim must work. National security should not be restricted to the security of government or Governor. It is an aggregate of the preservation of persons, communities and legitimate public and private institutions.

Causes of National Insecurity and Religious Intolerance in Nigeria

Conflict and crises are believed to be great obstacles to the progress and development of Nigeria as they become parts and parcel of the lifestyle of Nigerians directly or indirectly. The reasons for this indecorous situation have been the concern of researchers and intellectuals since the causes are so numerous and complex that they vary from a form of national insecurity and religious intolerance in a society to another. Thus, a United State government publication concludes, as quoted by Remi (2006), that:

> There is no single cause…. Which is more or less potent. In fact, usually, there are multiple causes and important contributing conditions rooted in historical relationships and brought to violence by a variety of catalyst … each conflict has been unique.

From the above quotation, it can be deducted that the cause of national insecurity and religious intolerance in Nigeria cannot be linked to a single factor; rather they are linked to many factors which are as follows:

Economic Causes

The role played by the nation's poor state of economy on occurrence of national insecurity and religious intolerance in Nigeria cannot be underrated. The fear of poverty has lured many youth into their involvement in crisis in order to earn a living. Poverty is widely spread due to unequal access to the control of natural resources which Khatari (1979) described as "the major source of conflict between individuals and groups within and between political systems". The mal-distribution of resources brings about unemployment for the majority who are being used for the act, i.e., crisis. The marginalization of the poor by the government is another economic cause of the crisis in Nigeria. Thus, the able-bodies youths, who have become handiwork of the devil, are recruited for causing national insecurity and religious intolerance. It has been observed that some of the crisis-makers are not religiously devoted to their faith but take advantage of crisis to boost their economic status either by collecting money from their "God father" or by looting the properties of others during violence. The wide gap between the "expected need" and "actual need" of the masses brings frustration and frustration normally leads to anger, aggression and violence. (Khatari, 1979)

Social Causes

The social causes of national insecurity and religious intolerance in Nigeria can be traced to many societal values, such as religious belief, ethnic affiliation, ethnic issues, modernization, etc. Ethnicity has been one of the major causes of national insecurity and religious intolerance in the country with the country having over 200 ethno-linguistic groups who are adherents of either traditional or Christian or Islamic religion. Thus, people behave less as Nigerians than as religious bodies by this, an injury done to a member of an ethnic group or tribe is an injury to all.

Also, statements of some ethnic leaders ignite ethnic conflict or crisis leading to political instability in the country. This made Himmelstand (1969) to observe thus:

The Nigerian tribalism of recent year is mainly a political tribalism stemming not from primordial ethnic loyalties as such but from political exploited and reinforced reaction to contemporary African societies, conflict of an economic nature infested with tribalism as a result of the competitive strain of modern political and economic structure.

Another social cause is the misinformation from the media and misconception of information on the part of the masses. discrimination as identified by Ekpenyoung (2010).

Religious Causes

According to Imam (2004), ignorance of the religion is a major factor causing crisis especially religious conflict crisis in Nigeria. Majority of the adherents of each religion of others and this brings unnecessary hatred and rivalry among them. They act in contrary to the teachings and practices of the religion.

Another cause is the inability of the adherents of different religions to tolerate the religious teachings of one another as a result of their high level of religious bigotry.

Political Causes

The attainment of power in Nigerian society has been viewed as the only key to success irrespective of the means to get the position. Political power and position have become a do or die affair to earn livelihood and respect in the society. Thus, the politicians employ trouble-makers to cause crisis among the political parties in order to achieve their aims and objectives. On this, Sowemimo (1980) noted as quoted in Jakande (1971) that:

On the evidence before me, it would appear that politics generally in Nigeria has been conducted with a certain amount of bitterness. It appears that a person belonging to party becomes an enemy of another who belong to rival party. Political parties are equivalent to warring camps—elections are conducted with party thugs protecting the campaigners and this state of affairs has been described to have assumed a pitch that no method would be spared however vindictive or extreme by any rival political party as against another in order to score over one or the other.

Consequence of Religious Insecurity and Intolerance in Nigeria

In the view of the above discussion, the major effects and consequence security challenge are as follows:

Loss of Lives and Properties

Violence of various types has claimed the lives and properties of many Nigerians. The recent attack on Agatu people of Benue State by *Fulani herdsmen* left 40 people dead and over 7,000 displaced. Over two million Nigerians in northeast have been displaced by *Boko Haram* attacks, including over 800,000 children while thousands of lives have been lost, government, corporate and private properties lost in billions of Naira. This has come with the task of rebuilding the affected communities in the post *Boko Haram* era.

Socio-economic Stagnation

For states affected by *Boko Haram* attacks in northeast Nigeria, social and economic activities were paralyzed for several months; schools were shut down and pupils withdrawn, businesses were shut down and the economic movement in the region became extremely difficult. The violence has stagnated socio-economic activities; peace is paramount to economic growth.

Social Tension

Violence breeds tension in the society. For example, if an Igbo man is killed in northern Nigeria by a Hausa man, it creates immediate tension, not only for Igbos in northern Nigeria, but also Hausas in Eastern Nigeria due to reprisal attack. Often, a state of emergency/curfew is declared in violent ridden areas of the nation while the government is working to restore peace.

Unstable Peace

Unstable peace is a situation in which tension and suspicion among parties run high, but violence is either absent or only sporadic. A "negative peace" prevails because although armed force is not deployed [or employed], the parties perceive one another as enemies and maintain deterrent military capabilities… A balance of power may discourage aggression, but crises and war are still possible.

Remedies to Religious Insecurity and Intolerance in Nigeria

The security challenges in Nigeria and its consequences as analyzed by Elesin can therefore be adequately addressed by following teachings in Islam according to:

God-Consciousness

In addition to the above enunciation, Islam lays great emphasis on creating Allah's-consciousness in people's minds. Allah's-consciousness (*Taqwallah*) breeds the fear of Allah and righteousness. One who is Allah's-conscious and righteous will, both in public and in private, act rightly even in the absence of law enforcement agents. Such a person will not do anything that could undermine the peace and security of other individuals and the nation at large. This is another secret of countries, like Saudi Arabia and the Vatican City, where peace and security reign supreme. In such countries, children are given the right and proper upbringing. They are trained in the path of Allah and brought up to be Allah's-conscious. Qur'an says:

> O' Mankind! Be dutiful to your lord, who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife [Hawwa (Eve)], and from them both He created many men and women, and fear Allah Through whom you demand (your mutual rights) and (do not cut the relations of) the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allah is Ever an All-Watchers over you. (Q4:1)

Qur'an also says:

> Verity, those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds, no fear need they have and neither shall they grieve. (Q5:69)

In another verse, it says:

> Verily, as for those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ) and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians (on the one hand) and those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught but God (on the other hand). Verily, God will decide between them on the Resurrection Day: For, behold, God is witness unto everything. (Q22:17)

Justice

Islam, recognizing the fact that security will be elusive in a society where there is injustice, lays great emphasis on justice and fair play. It enjoins those in authority to deal justly with every individual and every section of the State. Islam frowns against discrimination and not giving a person their right on account of being a minority. So long they are citizens of a place. Islam stipulates that whatever rights and privileges those who belong to the majority tribes enjoy must equally be enjoyed by the minority. The implication of this is that no section should be marginalized or treated as second class citizens. In this regard, the Glorious Qur'an Chapter 5 Verse 88 admonishes thus:

> O' you who believe! Stand our firmly for Allah as just witness: and let not the enmity are hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just that is nearer to piety; and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is well-Acquainted with what you do. (Q5: 88)

It is instructive therefore, for any nation that wishes to stem the tide of insecurity to know that peace and security will remain elusive as long as there is injustice. Allah has categorically stated in the Glorious Qur'an Chapter 6 Verse 82 that peace and security will not be attainable with faith alone but in conjunction with justice. It is quite indisputable that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Therefore, all efforts must be made to subdue injustice anywhere and establish justice everywhere. To show Allah's abhorrence of injustice, Allah, according to a prophetic *hadīth*, declares that He has made injustice forbidden unto Himself, and that He has equally forbidden it among people.

Welfare

Islam, in order that the human society might attain peace and security, enjoins those in authority to provide for the overall well-being of the individuals within the society. This welfare lies in complete justice, mercy and provision of at least, basic amenities, such as housing, good roads, potable water, healthcare delivery, light, education, etc. Both Imam Ghazāli and Ibn Taimiyyah have submitted that promoting the welfare of the people which lies in safeguarding their faith, their life, their intellect, their posterity and their property are the objectives of *Ash-Sharī'ah*; and that therefore whatever ensures the safeguard of these five serves public interest and is desirable. The reigns of Umar I and Umar II were vivid examples in the Islamic history of how Muslim leaders exemplified the teachings of Islam regarding welfare. Everyone in the Muslim community during the caliphate of Umar II was comfortable such that *Zakāt* (alms) was collected and there was no one single needy to receive it.

Campaign Through Admonition and Guidance Counseling (*Da'wah*)

Most Nigerians are religious. Those who perpetrate criminal acts thereby constituting security threat to the society are either mosque or church goers. The truth also is that religious scholars, both Muslims and Christians are closer to the people. Apart from the emphasis on the worship of Allah, campaigns through admonition and guidance counseling could also be mounted to address social problems, such as murder, hire-killing, robbery, kidnapping, etc. Through such an effort, criminals might turn a new leaf and eschew criminal acts.

One instance among others when the Prophet employed admonition and guidance counseling as a means of reformation was when a young man came to him seeking permission to commit *zina*. The companions there present were astonished and condemned the young man. The Prophet, instead, drew him close to himself and asked the following questions: "How would you feel if you see someone fornicating with your sister?" The man replied that he would abhor it. The Prophet then went further: "What, if it is with your wife, or your mother or your daughter?" For each, the man showed his abhorrence. The Prophet then remarked:

> Do you not know that when you commit *zina*, the woman involved is either a sister, a daughter, a wife or a mother of someone and; why would you do to others what you would not like them to do to you.

The young man became sober and thereupon, the Prophet prayed for him that Allah should make *zina* hateful in his sight. Qur'an says:

> Say: O people of the scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you that we will not worship except Allah and sot associate anything with Him and not take another as lords instead of Allah. But if they turn away, then say, Bear witness that we are Muslims. (Q3:64)

The above verse is the basis of dialogue between Islam and Christianity. This is what was in operation during the time of the Prophet and his companions who made the Christians enjoyed full rights in the Muslim terrain. Rahim (2001) said:

In 6 A.H/628 A.D, the Prophet granted to the Christians a charter which is a monument of enlightened toleration. It accorded them the rights of religion, life and property and they were treated with fairness and justice ... no Christian was to be force to renounce his religion. There should be no demolition of the Christian churches.

Implementation of Capital Punishment

Another Islamic panacea is implementation of capital punishment called *Hadd* in *Ash-Sharī'ah*. Certain capital punishments are stipulated for some categories of heinous crimes in *Ash-Sharī'ah* chiefly to serve as a deterrent for potential criminals. Though, seriously criticized especially by human rights activists, the truth which cannot be controverted is that Islamic countries, such as Saudi-Arabia has been able to reduce crime and insecurity to the barest minimum largely as a result of the implementation of capital punishment. The punishment stipulated by *Ash-Sharī'ah* for criminals when considered in good faith are not only retributive but are also of deterrent and reformative value. They are also meant to restore the confidence of the victim in the ability of the state to defend and protect his rights. Through the implementation of *Hadd*, Islam is able to realize the fundamental objectives of *Ash-Sharī'ah* which include protection and preservation of life (*Hifzu An-Nafs*), intellect, progeny and property and that each and every one of these objectives has its own specific capital punishment (*hadd*). It should, however, be noted that *(hadd)* punishment is introduced and applied only after the government has adequately provided for the basic needs of its citizenry. Nigeria can benefit from them.

Recommendations

- Proper religious training/teaching should be given to the children at home.
- National security and religious tolerance should be included in school curriculum at all levels.
- Welfare of the masses should be prioritized.
- Religious leaders/scholars should avoid any issue(s) that may cause conflict and crisis in the society.

Conclusion

So far, this paper has established the fact that national insecurity and religious intolerance are natural phenomena in the life of man the development of life. It has been established that Islam affirmed and proffered solutions to conflicts and crises before occurrence. Measures are also put in place to address post conflicts and crises. A series of factors have been identified to be the cause of religious insecurity and intolerance, especially in a multi-religious country, such as Nigeria which is also multi-ethno and political in settings. The paper found causes to include economic, social, political and religious issues. It has been established that ethno-religious and economic reasons are in the forefront of other causes. The summary of crises that had happened in Nigeria before and after the independence was discussed.

The paper conclusively strongly recommends that people should first reform their characters in line with the sound and noble teachings of Islam so as to ease conflict management and crisis control in the society. The impact of this will be felt during the reconciliation and negotiation process as it will be easy to persuade and win their heart toward reconciliation of the warring parties. Indeed, application of the mentioned Islamic mechanism on conflict management; promotion of social justice, dialogue, reconciliation, negotiation, ground shifting and mutual consultation will go a long way in shaping the thinking of the leaders on how to avoid mismanagement of the national resources both human materials.

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