

Media and National Security: An Appraisal of Counter Insurgency Operations in North East Nigeria

Charles Akale¹, Kingsley Chigozie Udegunam²

¹Research Fellow at the Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, National Defence College, Abuja

²National Defence College, Abuja Kingsley Chigozie W. Udegbunam University of Nigeria, Nsukka

*Corresponding author

Kingsley Chigozie
Udegunam

Article History

Received: 22.03.2018

Accepted: 10.04.2018

Published: 17.04.2018



Abstract: A key responsibility of the state that cannot be devolved to non-state actors is the protection of the lives and properties of the elements of the state such as population and territory. In fulfilling this tasking responsibility, the state explores all necessary tools especially when groups such as BHT challenge its monopoly to the use of force and threatens to erode national security. The FG in response to this set up a National Information Centre to communicate its efforts in the COIN operation in NE Nigeria, which includes using the media as tools to counter violent narratives, enhanced conflict sensitive reportage, denying access to, and effectively containing the deployment of media platform by BHT to weaken national security in the NE Nigeria. However, these efforts have been hampered by several challenges and have prolonged the COIN in the NE. The current practice that subsumes media for national security under the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) through the Behavioural Analysis and the Strategic Communication Unit is not capable of anchoring and exploring the full utilization of the media in COIN for enhanced national security in the NE Nigeria.

Keywords: National Security, media, counter insurgency operations, Northeast, Nigeria .

INTRODUCTION

Media organizations have, over the years, influenced strategic decisions in the world in general and more specifically on outcomes of conflicts.

During internal crisis, nations have used the media, in some instances, as strong weapon to determine outcomes of Counter Insurgency (COIN). Conversely, insurgents groups also use the media among other tools to effectively tilt public opinion. As a tool of insurgency and COIN, the media is an important element in opinion building, creating heroes and villains, and creating monsters and enemies. When effectively deployed by insurgents, the media becomes a threat to National Security (NS) and when properly used by the agents of the state such as the military, the media serves the purpose of enhancing national security.

The media is a mixture of institutions and technology used for propagation of information to the public. The media is one of the effective tools for shaping public opinion and winning the hearts and minds of the populace. It is a pillar on which the success or failure of COIN operations depend upon. Media outlets are categorized as electronic media involving television and radio, or print media such as newspapers and magazines or social media such as YouTube, Face Book, and Twitter among others. In an authoritarian system, the media supports and advances

government policies. In a Libertarian political environment, the media informs, discovers the truth and hold government accountable while in the social responsibility system, the media serves as a means for anyone who has something to say, including propagating ideas and entertainment, to disseminate such views [1]. It is within this last political environment that insurgents or the military use media tools for propaganda, detraction, or affiliation purposes or to put out of order critical transmission points of structures or processes related to national security. Seeks to contain or eliminate in order to enhance national security. Globally about 6.9 billion people have access to the media and 3.7 billion use the internet with 2.80 billion using the social media. This has made the media a highly coveted tool for warfare.

In Nigeria, the Boko Haram Terrorists (BHT) leverage on media, particularly the social media such as Youtube, Facebook and Twitter to advance their goals and objectives as they engage the state in years of bloody violence that have seen more than 50,000 deaths, displacement of about 2.2. Million people and destroyed socio-economic infrastructure in the NE[2]. The BHT deployed the media in announcing

successful attacks, recruitments, communication and strategic planning. Media coverage of their activities was inaccurate due to poor investigative journalism thereby creating public panic and making the BHT win a psychological warfare. Their effective use of the media continued to undermine national security in the NE.

The FG through the military initiated some tactical actions such as the deployed various operations in its COIN to reverse the above situation. Such operations included Operation Restore Order, I-III, Operation Boyona which was later renamed Operation *Zaman Lafiya*, which gave way to the ongoing Operation *Lafiya Dole*. Other responses included the creation of legal framework that would help contain the deployment of the media by the BHT. These include the Terrorism Prevention Act of 2011 and amended in 2013, the Cybercrime Act of 2015, and the creation of the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) and the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policy which has Strategic Communication as the third stream [3]. These efforts, in addition to others, were to help in containing and decimating the BHT as the COIN strategic communication through the media effectively provided counter narratives to radical views, thus enhancing the national security in the NE.

Despite these efforts, recent relationship between the media and security agencies involved Operation Lafiya Dole COIN operation against the BHT in North East Nigeria have not been amiable. The media remains a formidable tool in the hands of the BHT and the inherent weakness in the structure of the defunct NAIC which was meant to coordinate all information and communication in COIN became a mere press briefing center and hampered the full maximization of the full potential of the media in COIN for enhanced national security in the NE [4]. The absence of a very clear structure or center dedicated to national strategic communication and non-adoption of the Draft National Strategy for Strategic Communication (NSSC) that will help explore the state's capacities in the area of training media practitioners on conflict sensitive reporting, insurgents messaging analysis, online blocking of insurgents websites and communication tools, detection and jamming of media platforms of enemy press, publication and circulation of counter narratives and de-radicalization materials as part of media in COIN for enhanced national security in the NE. This paper appraises the Media and Counter insurgency operations in North East Nigeria. The paper will conceptualise the key variables, discuss an overview, contending challenges, implications and current government efforts of media and COIN operations in North East Nigeria before proffering way forward to overcome the observed challenges.

Definition of media and National Security

Media

Ali defines the media as that platform that comprises the means by which a society disseminates and receives information with traditional instruments being the newspapers, magazines, radio and television[1]. According to the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), Media refers to the technical devices employed in mass communication which professionals categorize into the print and the electronic media. They include broadcasting media such as newspapers, magazines, television, billboards, home video, cinema, telephone and internet [6]. Olayiwola defines the media as essentially a working group organized round some devices for circulating the same messages, at about the same time, to large numbers of people. He further explained that the term media is also used to refer to the institutions and techniques by which specialized groups employ technological devices to disseminate symbolic content to large, heterogeneous and widely dispersed audiences. It is that form of communication process which utilized mechanical electronic instruments and devices to create news and information, ideas and images and to transmit such messages simultaneously to a mass audience [7].

National Security

Lippmann conceptualises national security thus "A nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by war[8]." This definition exemplifies the traditionalist view of security which is narrowed towards state as the referent object of security. Jordan and Taylor define national security thus: "National security, however, has a more extensive meaning than protection from physical harm; it also implies protection, through a variety of means, of vital economic and political interests, the loss of which could threaten fundamental values and the vitality of the state[9]." This view of national security captures the various dimensions and the fact of exploring various means including the media in attaining national security.

Overview of Media and National Security in Nigeria

The media refers to the print and electronic modes of information dissemination to the members of the public. Usually, the ownership of the media is either by the state or by private individuals and investors. The division of ownership of media outfits or organization has remained a permanent feature of mass media in Nigeria. Right from the pre-colonial era, the privately owned media platforms such as the *Iwe Iroyin*, the first media outfit in Nigeria, established by the Reverend Henry Townsend in 1859 at Abeokuta, the *Nigerian Chronicle*, the *West African Pilot* and the *Tribune* were at the forefront for the campaign against colonialism and slave trade[10]. On the other hand, the colonial administration media organizations and their foreign partners were in tacit support of colonialism and slavery [10]. Similarly, both print and electronic media organizations deviated from the basic function of being

watchdog to being partisan and promoting ethnic, religious, political parochialism that adversely affected national security in Nigeria.

The ownership of these media houses reflected in the focus of their reportage, editorial policies and usage as instrument of partisan politics thus constituting threat to national security. As Nwabueze and Ebeze argued, media dedication to the articulation of particular ethnic interest heightened tension, which created suspicion among the citizenry and almost led to the disintegration of the corporate unity of Nigeria during the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970[1]. Partisan reportage that fuel crisis became the foundation of the frosty relationship that exists between the media and government and its agencies including the military. Hus dual allegiance due to ownership impacts negatively on media reportage of COIN operations for enhanced national security in Nigeria.

The proliferations of private media organizations that became a permanent feature of the media in Nigeria were occasioned by Act No 38 of 1992 that deregulated the ownership of media, particularly, the electronic media. Consequently, Nigeria has evolved the largest and most active press community in Africa with about 188 media organizations as against Kenya's 125 and South Africa's 143[13]. As Ali opined, the figures have consistently increased without adequate framework to ensure proper regulation of their activities and conducts in national security such as COIN operations [14]. Attempts at regulating media in Nigeria started during the colonial period with the promulgation of the Newspaper Ordinance No 10 of 1903. The essence of the ordinance, as observed by Udeze was to "regulate the publication of newspaper in Southern Protectorate" [15]. The ordinance, therefore, was not meant for the Northern protectorate since no newspaper was published in the North then. Following amalgamation in 1914, the newspaper ordinance of 1903 was amended to Newspaper Ordinance of August 9, 1914 to cover the whole of the nation [16].

Following independence in 1960, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has also been attempting to formulate various policy frameworks to regulate media outfits. They include section 39 of Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN), National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), and Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) among others. Others are the Defamatory and Offensive Publication Act No 44 of 1966 and Freedom of Information Act of 2011. Many media practitioners have viewed some of these regulatory frameworks as draconian and thus creating mutual distrust between government and the media [17]. As Aiyesimoju opined these frameworks have not effectively streamline the activities of media organizations in order to cut their excesses and thereby

contribute to curbing insurgencies in Nigeria. Consequently, the frameworks have not aided media reportage to enhance national security in Nigeria.

Nigeria is not new to insurgencies because as early as 1967, Isaac Adaka Boro led an insurgent that declared a Niger Delta republic. This was quickly followed by the Nigerian civil war fought along federalist and secessionist opinions. The media was divided in their reportage and actively participated on both sides with lots of energies and exaggerations that contributed in prolonging the war [18]. At the end of the war of unification in 1970, the Maitatsine crisis of the 1980s followed with the media actively playing partisan roles as a result of multiple interests on the part of the media practitioners [19]. Consequently, media conflicting reportage had adverse effect on national security in Nigeria.

In the ongoing BHTs activities and the COIN operations of the state, the media have aided to popularize the activities of the group and in many cases eulogized the sect thereby undermining national security. As a result, the activities of the sect displaced more than 2 million people killed about 20,000 persons and left property running into billions of naira damaged in the Northeast and elsewhere [20]. Thus media by over-reporting that tends to eulogize the activities of the BHTs sect have adverse effect on COIN operations thereby impacting national security adversely.

The combining of synergies by different state actors are necessary for enhancing national security. The media as a profession is certainly not against the improvement of national security nor cooperating with the military in COIN operations. However, poor media-military relationship orchestrated by media mistrust of military regimes since 1966 as well as intimidation and harassment of media practitioners in the hands of the military. Aiyesimoju further argued that the frosty relationship between the media and the military is because of the media lack of understanding of the complexities of military operations and how to adequately report military COIN for enhanced national security [21]. Thus media-military relationship constitutes an issue in COIN for enhanced national security in Nigeria.

Media activities are influenced by development in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). According to Nwodu ICT refer "to a number of communication hardware used for instantaneous dissemination of information and social values across the globe [22]." Nwodu further informed that ICTs are of two broad categories which are: a. telecommunication which developed from analog to digital telephony and later mobile cellular and GSM phones; fiber optics, micro wave technology, satellite technology, cable network etc. b. computer communications which are concerned with network of

computer that are linked together and which facilitate exchange of message, documents, images, motion pictures and other relevant information via internet, Facebook, YouTube and other forms of social media. Regardless of the form, ICTs have enhanced communication across the globe. Precisely, ICTs have made communication around the world faster, clearer, cheaper and easier. There is also limited control over the nature of information posted on the web. Oftentimes, news and information are distributed without verification and regards to fairness, objectivity and balance. This has raised the issue of ICT deployment in the media in COIN for improved national security.

A consequent of the growth of ICT is the emergent and growth of the social media in Nigeria. The Nigerian mass media policies did not envisage the evolution of social media driven by the internet. Thus existing mass media policies did not make provisions for the regulations of the activities of social media users. Consequently, social media journalists and bloggers are freely deploying the platform to sometimes undermine national security. The effective use of the social media by insurgents to recruit and train members has not been contained. The FGJ relies on existing laws of libel, slander, and defamation to regulate activities of the social media. These have been grossly inadequate as a result of non-availability of specific policies on the use of social media. As Uwom and Alao asserted, while there are policies for the print and electronic media, there is no regulatory framework for social media [23]. Thus absence of such policies has only led to the abuse of social media thereby undermining national security in Nigerian.

Challenges with the Media in COIN Operations in North East Nigeria

Media Ownership

Following the deregulation of the media in Nigeria, private media organizations have sprung up such that only few media outfits remain in the control of the government. As investors, private media owners have different motives for the establishment of media outfit. These motives range from being purely economic to social, political, religious or multiple factors. Allegiance of staff members is usually primarily to their employers who dictate and influence the language, tone, and depth of news reportage whether directly or indirectly. As Adeniyi agreed, media houses tend to serve the interest of their owners and consequently pay secondary attention to national issues especially where there is a class of interests [24].

Institutional Framework

Section 39 of Chapter IV of the CFRN permits the establishment of media organizations by anybody or group of persons who meet the required conditions [25]. It equally provides a general framework for the

operation of the media. Similarly, the NBC was established by Act No 38 of 1992 and assigned full responsibility of broadcasting stations, allocating airwaves licenses, regulating broadcast contents in terms of ration of local to foreign contents[26]. This is to ensure some modicum of control of the broadcast media and maintain balance in traditional media functions and abuse that may undermine national security.

While the NBC regulates the electronic media, the NPC was established by Act No 85 of 1992 (and amended by Act 60 of 1999) to ensure the maintenance of high professional standard of the Nigerian Press. It is a regulatory agency concerned with issues of ethics and standard of print media in Nigeria. Finally, there is also the NGE as a non-government, non-partisan, non-profit making organization comprising editors of both print and electronic media outfits. It is aimed at securing the cooperation of journalist to strictly adhere to the code of ethics of the profession. However, as Adeniyi would contend, these frameworks have not been able to properly regulate the activities of the media in Nigeria [27].

Media-Military Relations

The foundation of the current frosty relationship between the media and the military can be traced to long period of military incursions into the Nigerian political landscape and the civilian quest for a return to civil rule which was championed by the media. This brought these two actors on national security issues into a conflictual relationship. Thus beginning from the Yakubu Gowon's regime, the media believe it has suffered maltreatment in the forms of intimidations, brutality, incarceration, vandalism, and harassment in the hands of military regimes in Nigeria. Prominent cases cited include the closure of a Lagos based *Newsbreed Magazine* in 1977 by the General Obasanjo military regime, enactment of the law of seditions, the abolished decree No 4 of 1984 under which two journalists, Tunde Thomson and Nduka Irabor of the *Guardian Newspaper* were jailed[28]. For a profession that does not joke with history, this memory is passed down from one generation of journalists to the other thereby perpetuating frosty relationship that adversely affects media reportage of COIN operations for improved national security in Nigeria.

Perhaps, the worst of this memory was the suppression of the media under the Abacha regime with anti-press laws that banned *The Guardian*, *Punch* while very critical newsmagazines such as *Tell*, and *The News* went underground with some of the finest minds in the media industry such as Dele Momodu, Alex Kabba, Nduka Obaigbena going on self-exile[29]. The likes of Senator Chris Anyawu, George Mbah, and Onome-Whisky Osifo were detained indefinitely. There were other numerous cases that time will fail us from mentioning. The consequence was a deep mistrust

between the media and the military has affected their relationship till date. As Adeniyi further explained, the post-military democratic environment has still not been able repair the damaged media-military relations [30]. Consequently, the media is always positioned as opposition to military operations including COIN for improved national security.

Information and Communication Technology

The advancement in technological development within a globalised world has also influenced the development of media in Nigeria thereby recording some improvement that also adversely affects the use of the media to undermine national security. The driving force behind the improvement is to a large extent, the effective adaptation of the ICT in the process of news and information gathering, processing, and dissemination. According to Nwodu, many newspapers and magazines are read on-line, while letters to the editor and opinion articles are now sent to audience choice medium via electronic mail[31]. Also, some radio and television signals can be accessed via the internet and reaction to the signals and other burning issues in the country can be sent to the editors via e-mail. This means that greater percentage of mass media contents in contemporary time are no longer local issues.

Nwodu further observed that because of the healthy adaptation of ICTs in the Nigeria mass media, most of the mass media contents are read, listened to and viewed in virtually all corners of the world, thereby contributing to the phenomenal globalization of the world community [32]. Today, digital broadcasting and printing are fast taking over from analogous approach to broadcasting and printing. This has also been abused by dissident groups who deploy new media technology to subvert national security. The platform is also used by responsible media practitioners to support COIN operations for enhanced national security.

Social Media Policy

Social media policies entail guidelines that contain the procedures, processes, and conducts of users of social media platforms. These platforms rely on internet for rapid exchange of information many vehicles are distorted facts or outright falsehood. Nigeria is yet to enact social media regulatory frameworks. The aim of a policy on social media is to provide guidelines and regulations of the uses of social media platforms. Such regulations become imperative given the continuous increase in cybercrime and become threats to national security.

The attempts to regulate social media through legislative process have not yielded any result. There talks to regulate the platform and a bill to that effect has been at the National Assembly since 2012 thereby allowing critical information to be shared on social

media thus threatening COIN operations and national security.

Implications of the Media on COIN Operations in North East Nigeria Psychological Operations

The BHTS leverages on wide coverage of its activities to wage the “mind war” on the Nigerian state. A fundamental objective of terrorists is to create a fear in the people through exaggerated achievements thereby making the public believe in their false capability. According to Ali, the sensational reportage of the activities of BHTs in Northeast is a factor in the supposed successes of the group since 2009[33]. The media has given undue attention and publicity to attacks, abductions, and propaganda of the group of the BHTs. Many times, the media give wide circulation to footages from the BHTs thereby further projecting the group as formidable and capable of threatening peace and security in the NE and Nigeria. In addition, the media release figures of causality far beyond the real number and project the Northeast region as a place not habitable. This nature of reportage and coverage boost the morale of BHTs and weakens the morale of fighting troops and thereby adversely affecting COIN operations in the NE thereby undermining national security in Nigeria.

Force Multiplier

Notwithstanding the above effect, some media houses, particularly the government-owned have maintained a constructive reportage that has created public awareness of the ill intention of the BHTs thereby winning many minds for the government and denying the BHTS support from the local population. As Ali would agree, terrorists compete for the minds of the local population so that they can secure safe spaces to enable them launch sporadic attacks. The positive coverage of a section of the media has helped to secure the support of the local population in the NE such that many are no longer in sympathy with the BHTs to the degree that they now cooperate with the military to clear the BHTs from the area through COIN in the NE thereby enhancing national security.

In addition, the media positive reportage that informs the public about the victories of troops in the COIN Operations in the NE boost the morale of forces and further enhance their commitment to fighting to eradicate BHTs for improved national security in Nigeria. Such constructive reportage usually focuses on reporting troops’ successes and casualties of the enemies. This brings enormous joy and happiness to friends and families of the fighting troops and rekindles the confidence of the members of the general public in the fighting forces. As a result of the positive image created by constructive reportage of the COIN operations in the NE, the FGN has attracted more military and development support from international organizations and governments. For instance, the USA

is now willing to sell the Super Tucano 29 fighting jets hitherto refused Nigeria to the military. Nigeria and more international aid workers are living in the NE to help in post-conflict construction of the area. Thus media has positive effect on COIN operations in the NE for enhanced national security in Nigeria.

Human Rights

Human rights are inalienable rights of persons as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) and domesticated through section 33 of the Nigerian Constitution. Counter insurgency operations are conducted by human beings who sometimes make mistakes that have adverse consequences on human rights of the populace. At other times, some soldiers who are yet to properly integrate their training for warfare into internal security operations engage in deliberate violations of the rights of the people during COIN operations. For instance, the erroneous bombings of some IDP camps in Borno by the NAF, the killing of 185 civilians by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJF) in Baga in April 2013 and other numerous instances involving the civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). Amnesty International has authored a couple of reports where they chronicled the cases of human rights violations in COIN operations in the NE.

Through the media, these violations are brought to the notice of the public and the military leadership for appropriate responses. Some of these responses might include punishment for offenders, further training for troops and the designing of better strategies to improve human rights records during COIN in the NE for enhanced national security in Nigeria.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the reputation impacting one's ability to be believed. A key major effect of the media on COIN operations in the NE for improved national security in Nigeria is that media reportage has improved the believability of the military COIN operations in the NE. Before 2015 the media reported successes of BHTs attacks influenced the public perception of military COIN operation credibility. However, the sustained victories of COIN operations in the NE are now confirmed by the media who have helped to widely report military credibility. As military claims of successes are confirmed by the media, military intentions to eradicate the BHTs are no longer in doubt due to media confirmation of the processes deployed in COIN operations in the NE for improved national security in Nigeria.

Current Government Efforts towards Improving the Media in COIN Operations in North East Nigeria National Orientation Agency

The establishment of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) as a federal agency with the mandate to

help Nigerians align their thought patterns to supporting the government policies is an appropriate tool to be used on media practitioners to aid their understanding of COIN operations for enhanced national security. The NOA has embarked on massive campaign to secure the understanding of the populace in the fight against terrorism in Nigeria. NOA's effort is to be taken to the media houses where a deep interaction on the effect of certain reportage on the Nigerian national security will constitute the focus. Media practitioners are responsible people who are very much likely to easily understand the passion and commitment of the military in eradication terrorism through COIN operations in the NE for enhanced national security in Nigeria.

National Information Centre

The establishment of the National Information Centre as a federal information agency to counter the negative reportage by certain media organizations will boost the efforts of NOA and add to positive media contents development. The NIC has a robust website that provided information on all aspect of the Nigerian people including COIN operations in the NE. The popularization of the site and the agency will help the public to always crosscheck information from private media sources with the public sources in order to have a balanced and holistic information on a given news item. The NIC timely and sincere release of information will deny media houses which are bent on distorting information to the public in order to undermine Nigeria's national security.

The Nigerian Army Media Centre

The Nigerian Army Media Centre (NAMC) was established in November 2015 at the directive of the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Buratai. It is the army media machinery based in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. The aim of the NAMC was to provide real time and accurate information and avenue for a better interaction with the media particularly on military operations in the NE[34]. The centre relates information to members of the media who are not in the scene of COIN especially in the battle front. It is a panacea to rumour as the centre related directly with media and communicate efforts at COIN operations in the NE for improved national security.

Way Forward

The federal government of Nigeria could review and amend legal framework on the media. This would ensure that reportage by the media through various forms of media outlet among others would be streamlined. It would also facilitate the unification of all the legal status of the various media regulatory institutions.

Furthermore, there so many regulatory institutions created to guide media practice; however they are outdated and therefore ineffective in limiting the excesses of journalists in Nigeria. Hence, revisiting

and reviewing existing regulatory media policies will go a long way to solving the problem. In addition, quarterly media briefing by security agencies whereby freelance journalist, defence correspondents and press men from the various security organs would be invited for media briefing. This would familiarise the media with the security agency press men and also bring the journalist closer to the various security agencies. Thus, the desired rapport could be created.

Finally, there is a need for the Information and Communication Technology Department (ICTD) of the Federal Ministry of Information and Communication to articulate a Bill on national social media policy for enactment by the National Assembly.

CONCLUSION

The media and security agencies are two of the most strategic institutions of the modern state. Therefore, securities agencies must ensure that the right information is put across to the right audiences towards maintain public and political support. Security agencies must come out first with a positive and proactive approach rather than adopting a defensive and reactive stance. Increasingly, COIN operations are conducted under the spotlight of the media, and the difference between the local and international media is just a click of the internet. Virtually all the media houses today operate in the World Wide Web (www), the situation is compounded by the fact that due to the prevalence of the mobile technology and the cheap availability of internet facilities, the general public can now access information easily not necessarily worrying about the credibility of the source. However, the Nigerian Government has created several centers to communicate information to the media in order to reduce the frictions that exist between security agencies and the media.

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