Mass Media, Terrorism and National Security: Defining the Threats

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Abstract

The menace of terrorism has been a source of worry to communication specialists. This is more so due to the centrality of communication, particularly the mass media, to the challenge posed by different security concerns, especially national security and terrorism. Violence is escalating rapidly, impacting on local communities, sparking dissensions and eventually, further tensions. Despite being a potent instrument to fighting terrorism and insecurity, this research explores the interface of mass media with security issues, as well as the challenges the media pose to national security, given that the mass media themselves sometimes are a form of threat to the security of nations and their peoples. This study discusses the role mass media play in the business of human security versus national security. It identifies espionage, propaganda, cultural imperialism, regulatory concerns, editorial manipulations, as well as the Internet as some of the threats that the mass media industry poses to national security. Terrorist groups including Hezbollah, Hamas and al-Qaeda use computerized gadgets, e-mails and encryptions to support their operations. It is therefore recommended that media professionals must always adhere to their codes of ethics to ensure that they carry out their responsibilities for the ultimate good of society; systems protection and adequate regulation should be given topmost priority by both government and non-governmental bodies; and that citizens should be made to be more aware of the dangers of cyber terrorism as it enables terrorists to operate with a decreased need for government protection. It is also recommended that security operatives should work with media practitioners as watchdogs of the society.

Key words: Mass media; Terrorism; National security; Information technology; Interdependence

INTRODUCTION

The threats of terror and terrorism have changed over time, although disagreement about their direction and scope persists. The threats are now more diverse and complex, and from both local and international perspectives, they are still as challenging as they are dangerous. Many countries of the world including Nigeria are battling with *faces* and *phases* of terror, as billions of dollars are spent on counter-terrorism measures. Regional and sub-regional military and diplomatic alliances are being formed. Marshal Plans are being worked and implemented with little or no tangible success. Violence is spreading to new regions, impacting on local communities, sparking radicalization and eventually, further violence (Jenkins, Liepman and Willis 2014). This paper seeks to underline different types of security threats posed to national security, particularly by activities of the mass media. The paper also treats the concept of terrorism as it pertains to human security cum national security. This work is guided by the assumption that despite being a potent instrument to fighting terrorism and insecurity, the mass media themselves appear to be a form of threat to the security of nations and their peoples. It also claims that terrorist organizations themselves appear to be experts in the use of media technology towards the planning and execution of their activities.

In examining the topic for this paper, four concepts come out uniquely. These are mass media, terrorism, national security, and the threats to national security. It is therefore significant to first discuss these concepts as they will be used in this work.

MASS MEDIA

Mass media, according to Danladi (2013) are channels of communication that involve transmitting information in some way, shaped or formed to address a large number of people (although the question of exactly how many is a large number has to be to qualified, as a 'mass' is something that is generally left undefined) - it is one of those things that we know when we see it .... A mass medium (such as television) is generally classified as one-to-many communication-'one' person (such as the author of a book, the creators of a television programme or a film director) communicates to many people (the audience) at the same time, in a way that is largely impersonal; that is, the communication is one-way, in the sense that those communicating a message to an audience do not receive simultaneous feedback from that audience. It also refers to newspapers, magazines, newsletters, just to mention a few.

TERRORISM

Terrorism, as used in this paper, refers to the threatening of the viability of a nation-state, bringing about economic crises and social instability. It includes threats to tourism, energy-sector, civil aviation, maritime, and transportation, generally. The problem of terrorism has refused to go away; instead, it has kept people in perpetual fear, robbing them of their freedom and security. Thus, the world as a whole is voicing concern over the menace of terrorism, extremism and radicalism. No country goes unaffected by international terrorism. For these reasons, the global community can no longer turn a blind eye on terrorism (Merari, 1993).

Merari (1993) also found out that there are three common elements that exist in the legal definitions of terrorism of those countries: (1) the use of violence, (2) political objectives, and (3) the aim of propagating fear in a target population. Terrorism began to make headlines again in the 1970s and reached a pinnacle in the mid- 1980s. From 1975 to 1984, the average number of reported terrorist, attacks increased from ten per week to nearly ten every day (Hoffman, 2006). In 1985, Jenkins observed that 10% of the world's countries accounted for 60% of the world's terrorist attacks.

NATIONAL SECURITY

National security is a state or condition where our most cherished values and beliefs, our democratic way of life, our institutions of governance and our unity, welfare and well-being as a nation and people are permanently protected and continuously enhanced.

This paper seeks to underline different types of security and the threats that are posed to national security particularly, by activities of the mass media. The paper also treats the concept of terrorism as it pertains to human security cum national security, as well as the mass media and their threats to national security. This work is guided by the assumption that despite being a potent instrument to fighting terrorism and insecurity, the mass media themselves appear to be a form of threat to the security of nations and their peoples. It also claims that terrorist organizations themselves appear to be experts in the use of media technology towards the planning and execution of their activities.

Nigeria's national security borders on the protection of lives, rights, dignity and property of its citizen. It also means the protection of its resources, cultural integrity, territory, sovereignty and lawful institution of the country. The aim of national security therefore is to secure the just and equitable living conditions for all the citizens of the country (Wali, 2003).

HUMAN SECURITY THREATS

Human security threats manifest themselves in a number of ways. Economic: Persistent poverty and unemployment. Food security: Hunger and famine. Health security: Deadly infectious diseases, unsafe food, malnutrition, and lack of access to basic health care. Environmental security: Environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters and pollution. Personal security: Physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, child labour. Community security: Inter-ethnic, religious and other identity-based tensions. Political security: Political repression and human rights abuses.

MEDIA AND NATIONAL SECURITY

The media's outing whether in Iran, Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam or the Gulf war; and locally in Zaki Biam, Benue state; Ezilo in Ebonyi State or the sectarian crisis in Jos or the Bakassi-Cameroon saga to a very large extent, has been commended by Nigerians. This however, does not suggest that the media have performed perfectly. This, Ekpu (2010) identifies, is because of the myriad reported cases which in themselves are threats to national security such as espionage, propaganda, editorial manipulation, and regulatory issues.

Also, according to Edward (1994), mass media are the core influence of cultural imperialism on the Nigerian society. Nigerians especially the youth now imitate values of the western cultures aired by the media like trans-gender, sagging of trousers, drug addiction, rape, semi-nudity, gangsterism, etc. Such values have dangerous effects on the youths who accept the western values as a

normal way of life. Citizens of the country indulge in these acts with so much confidence because it has precariously contaminated the traditional values of our country. The content the media disseminate to the society is as vital as media themselves, because it serves as a mirror to the society and the citizen of Nigeria at large. Cultural imperialism through the use of the media is seen as a threat to national security because national identity of smaller nations (under-developed) is threatened or lost due to media content from the bigger (developed) countries. For example, it is disheartening that some Nigerians have not seen anything wrong with the trans-gender show aired on Chanel 124 in DSTV and 26 in GOTV, despite the corrosive negative influence it has on our culture. Because of how the media have attached so much significance to this programme, it will actually affect the youths and even adults when we know it is absolutely against our African culture. Other negative effects of cultural imperialism include gayism, violence, semi-nudity (Paul & Tom 2006).

Again apart from unprofessionalism; propaganda; non-adherence to code of ethics, international humanitarian laws and provisions of the Geneva Convention in the reportage of security matters by the media, the non-coverage of other critical components of development like tourism reporting, and infrastructure reporting, are all threats to national security.

Nwolise (2010) opines that the media can also plead national security when carrying out a moral crusade against corruption, election rigging or looting of the nation's treasury. This is because national security includes the security of the economic resources of the nation and security of the state power whose control must be determined by the popular votes of the masses in whom political sovereignty resides.

Therefore the proper understanding of national security is not something for the media or military alone as according to Yusuf (2010), national security can be a bottomless basket. This is because for a nation to be really secured, it does not only need a military might, an effective police and intelligence outfit, but most importantly, the economy and governance patterns must be in such a condition that the people will live a good life, happy and contented. Nwolise (2010) posits further that national security covers a wide range of issues such as: respect of fundamental human rights, national development, social justice, free press, human dignity, right to patriotic dissent, political equality, virile judiciary, responsible governance, adequate provision of basic amenities, adequate remuneration for media staff; and those should cover as social, political, economic, military and environmental security.

The fundamental role which the media play in the society at the national and international levels in developed and developing nations is globally acknowledged. They provide vital linkages between the government and the people (Adache, 2010). The media is a principal player in the arena of national security. They serve as a watchdog capable of blowing the whistle to call attention to serious national issues.

Despite the fact that the media have the above responsibility, this has not been effectively practised as the media in some cases have largely fallen under the influence of kingmakers, ethnic bias, pecuniary concerns, and religious bigotry (Danladi, 2013).

THE THREATS DEFINED

The media sometimes serve as a threat to security by way of **espionage**, by which a nation, organization or individual employs to procure information concerning the interest of another country to which they are not by law entitled. Journalists may be seeking for information that may pertain to the secret affairs of the target country in strategic areas including military, industries, politics, and technology. Other forms of threat to security may include propaganda, subversion, and sabotage (Wali, 2003).

Buttressing this fact, Danladi (2013) noted that in recent times, the Nigerian media tend to pose inherent dangers to national security in connection with political, religious, ethnic, and economic issues power which are crucial to a stable and enduring democracy. He said this could be obvious when the media collaborates with the political and bourgeois class to further marginalize and exploit citizenry.

PROPAGANDA

Propaganda according to Jowett and O'Donnell (1999, p. 6) is "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behavior to achieve a response that further the desired intent of the propagandist." Propaganda can come in a range of types; from black (deceptive, frightening and unscrupulous) to white (soft and with a selective use of the truth). It is always carried out to further the interest of the propagandist, and "under conditions of information monopoly or severe ethnic conflicts, control of the media has often been used to foster hatred and mobilize population to violence" (McQuail 2003, p. 530). However, the mass media are now regarded as essential to successful war propaganda since they are the only channels guaranteed to reach the whole public and have the advantage of being regarded as trustworthy.

A classical case of the use of propaganda as a threat to national security was during the civil war. The impact of the Biafran propaganda on the federal government was not only extensive but also had far-reaching consequences, not only on how the civil war was conducted, but also impacted enormously on how the world reacted to the situation in Nigeria then (Omede, 2010).

The media may create new issues and new trouble spots. The media may not tell us what to think, but they do tell us what to think about. The capacity to define what

is significant, what comprises a problem, what constitutes an issue, what poses a crisis, and what alternatives are available, resides with the media. The media lead in setting agenda, deciding news that is fit for print, of public interest, and information considered of 'common good'. The media function as gatekeepers, by filtering the news and shaping the way it is reported. Eventhough the agenda-setting role of the media is being challenged by the convergent media, orchestrated by the massive and overwhelming activities of the 'prosuming' audience: prosumption being Henry Jenkins's coinage referring to the capacity of audience to not only consume, but produce media contents as well; a situation galvanized by the rapidly increasing digitization of the mass media.

It is clear that in the international arena most especially, the major actors use the media as a source and tool of propaganda to promote some special and sometimes obscure interests in order to bring desired changes in the prevailing system. It is well known that the media have become a tool of American global agenda to influence the rest of the world for promoting its strategic interests in the post-9/11 age. According to Jenkins, Liepman, and Willis (2014), the camera and the computer have become weapons of war. This new and awesome technology enables journalists to bring the ugly reality of war to both the belligerents and others around the world, serving as a powerful influence on public opinion and governmental attitudes and actions.

EDITORIAL MANIPULATIONS

Similarly, Obafemi (2008) observes that one of the most significant attitudes of the press is the power of its editorial comments in influencing socio-political development since the colonial day. Contemporaneously, the media introduced feature writing and special project ads to deepen their agenda-setting role. Several factors which were rooted in the core interests of the Nigerian elite tended to determine the trajectory of the editorial slant of the various press establishments. Whether in the colonial or post colonial era, the media are owned by the elite and deployed principally to advance their interests within the society (Nwozor, 2014). Apart from the profit motive which motorizes investments into the ownership of media houses, a major critical motive for media ownership is its use as a negotiating chip in inter-elite power game. And to a large extent, editorial decisions are manipulated to achieve parochial goals. This is exemplified by the lack of unanimity in the editorial policies of the media organizations as their disposition oscillated between radicalism and conservatism. The ideological leaning of the various media organizations is underpinned by their overall socio-economic and political interest (Obafemi, 2008).

Because of the medley of elite cadres that unite to form political parties and their contending interests, party politics in Nigeria is essentially characterized by

constant alignment and realignment of forces that tended to be centrifugal. The media, thus, serve as their joker to constantly manoeuvre their way into positions of influence and affluence. In all of these calculations; the masses are reduced to mere pawns in the chessboard of elite interests. Even the elite journalists have often converted their positions as a means to access. (Nwozor, 2014).

Within national boundaries, the state has, in a number of ways, dispensed terror on the citizenry notwithstanding the form of government. The seeming balance of the commercialistic interest of the media and their social responsibilities has led to such contraptions as a special projects or features. Under this guise, certain illegalities such as first lady syndrome and the celebration of hollow rituals such as hundred (100) days in office where all manner of uncensored political ads chronicling dubious progress are fed to the people. Notwithstanding the disclaimers by the media organisations, this propaganda serves only the ruling elite (Nwozor, 2014).

To compound issues, the foreign media are often employed for greater effects, especially to deepen the legitimacy of the propaganda. The CNN has often been chosen to fill this gap. Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule, it has aired several political adverts of state governments, often with trumped-up developmental projects. And the rationalisation for the waste of resources which these pockets of propaganda represent has been anchored on the need to showcase the developmental strides within the states as a strategy to attract foreign direct investment. The tenure elongation agenda of the Obasanjo regime offers a good example. Its proponents used the CNN to advance its cause for two reasons: one, to consolidate the domestic misinformation of the people and two to orchestrate international misinformation. (Nwozor, 2014).

THE INTERNET AS A THREAT

Terrorism through the Internet is a major concern for national security. However, it is difficult to assess the actuality of the threats and track the entire network of members involved.

The internet is a democratic institution where anyone is able to post absolutely anything they wish. This freedom the Internet offers creates quite the obstacle for an intelligence analyst, who must determine who they are - why they are saying this - is this person knowledgeable and credible - and do they have real motives (Lowenthal, 2012). However, the consequences of not regulating these threats are too high and dangerous to risk, which classifies this non-conventional terrorism as a low-risk/high-consequence threat (Shahar, 2005).

Modern terrorism has increasingly grown in importance through the Internet media, specifically following the events of 9/11 (Franceschetti, 2011 and Weimann, 2005). This growth has created the need for cyber-security.

In 2009, the US electric grid was penetrated by an unknown source. This grid covers three separate electric networks, covering the East, West, and Texas. These utilities are operated under Internet-based communication, causing it to be extremely vulnerable to hackers and spies. The intruder was never identified. Attacks such as these are after infrastructures, people, symbols, and information all driven by different motivations, making it extremely difficult to design specific countermeasures to address all of them (Franceschetti, 2011).

Today, with the growing importance of internet communication sand cyber-security technologies, "Weapons of Mass Disruption" Which can disrupt or destroy electronic equipment, are also considered in this non-conventional terrorism category. Overall, these non-conventional methods can be categorized under the definition of terrorizing "indirectly", making it even more difficult for responders to respond and attack the instigators (Shahar, 2005).

The terrorist organizations also use the Internet to "reach out" to their audience, without the need to use other media such as radio, television or holding various press conferences. Web pages are used as a way to highlight injustices and to seek support for so-called 'political prisoners' who are 'illegally captured' (Weimann, 2005).

REGULATORY ISSUES

Article Nineteen (19) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. (ICCPR) is explicit in its commitment to upholding the principle that the right to freedom of speech is guaranteed for all individuals regardless of ethnicity, religion, creed, gender or nationality. It is however important to stress that these freedoms come with responsibility (Salomon, n.d).

From one point of view, the obligations outlined in Article 20 to prohibit hate speech are, in themselves, obligations on states to prohibit such speech in the media. Another view is that restrictions pursue a legitimate aim to protect public order, and yet another suggests that such speech infringes the rights of individuals to live with dignity and non-discrimination and equality.

National legal systems should make it clear, either explicitly or through authoritative interpretation that; The term *hatred* refers to intense and irrational emotions of opprobrium, enmity and detestation towards the target group; the term *advocacy* is to be understood as requiring an intention to promote hatred publicly towards the target group; the term *incitement* refers to statements about national, racial or religious groups, which create an imminent risk of discrimination, hostility or violence against persons belonging to those groups; and the promotion by different communities, of a positive sense of group identity, does not constitute hate speech (UNDP, 2014).

CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

Imperialism occurs when a strong nation takes over a weaker nation and dominates its economic, political or cultural orientation. Man is essentially the product of his culture as it beats and moulds a person into a particular shape. Culture makes one think, speak, dance and behave in a particular manner. Africa as a continent and Nigeria as a country have their cultures which are unique in their own respect (Edward, 1994)

The Internet, Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) and satellite communication (Cable TV networks) are perhaps the most influential of all information and communication technologies (lCTs) in modern digital society. Even as it provides a podium for global societies and cultures to meet and interact, the digital age is not without inherent threats to the citizens of the country and incurring detrimental effects. African culture has been destroyed by Western civilization through the adoption of cultural imperialism by the media today. According to Edward (1994), mass media are the core influence of cultural imperialism on the Nigerian society. Nigerians especially the youth now imitate values of the western cultures aired by the media like trans-gender, sagging of trousers, drug addiction, rape, semi-nudity, and gangsterism. Such values have dangerous effects on the youths, who accept the Western values as a normal way of life. Citizens of the country indulge in these acts with so much confidence because it has precariously contaminated the traditional values of our country. Other negative effects of cultural imperialism include gayism, violence semi-nudity, and - wait for this - terrorism (Paul & Tom, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Enthroning a regime of peace, stability and sustainable development that will decimate the emergence of terrorism and violent attacks can be achieved when governments push for the emergence of a virile, free, dynamic and constructively critical media that is ready to hoist the flag for the sustenance of the country's democracy, and the elimination of corruption at all levels of government. This will eliminate the threats and disabuse the minds of the people that the notion created by leaders that the tarring of roads, building of bridges, provision of pipe borne water, and others which our present crop of politicians flaunt as dividends of democracy are at best, tokenistic. The real dividends of democracy are: security of human person, enjoyment of citizen's human dignity, protection of human liberty and the articulation of the people's real needs through good governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Governments should stop seeing as a threat to national security media reports about corrupt government officials

as there is a clear demarcation between regime security and national security.

Media professionals must devise engaging means of permanently shutting out quacks from infiltrating the profession to avoid the spate of insensitive media reportage that can negate national security concerns.

Nigerian security agencies and operations must desist from the use of brutality and executive lawlessness in addressing suspected cases constituting a breach to national security, as that in itself is a threat to security.

The national security question must be viewed as a function of all, including government, Armed Forces, Police, Intelligence Agencies, the media, Nigerian students, farmers and the general masses as a patriotic and sacred project.

Media professionals must always adhere to their codes of ethics to ensure that they carry out their responsibilities for the ultimate good of society

Governments as a matter of urgency must evolve a framework for the regulation of the new media as this has the capacity of checking the abuse it suffers especially in the hands of terrorists.

It is recommended that, as citizens are spoiled with the eases of technology, they should become more aware of the dangers it also holds, as it enables terrorists to operate with a decreased need for government protection.

All the systems that our society is composed of are made up of interconnected systems and the failure of one will affect the rest. In order to protect our lives, safety and productivity, we must protect the critical systems upon which our economies and societies depend (Franceschetti, 2011).

Human security is important and one of the ways to ensure this, is through youth empowerment and the creation of job opportunities that will engage their exuberance positively.

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