The Culture of the “Unknown Soldier”

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Few things are more desirable to man than the safety of his life and his other valuable possessions. It is crucial to all people everywhere on the globe. Safety is the ultimate human desire. The feeling of safety gives true meaning to man’s struggles on earth. It is the reason for his endless search for peace. It is also the reason why, sometimes, he has to resort to war. He wants to keep danger far away from his invaluable possessions. An insecure environment breeds uncertainty which inevitably hinders human progress. Insecurity of lives and property is the greatest threat to humanity today. The world around us has become increasingly unsafe and cases of violent deaths and destruction to valuable human possessions caused to man through the action or inaction of his fellow man have become too rampant and frightening. As I thought of how dangerously insecure the global environment has increasingly become, I remembered the 911 Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Centre in which about 3000 people died within a space of two hours. It is one of the most devastating acts of terrorism in recent history. Since that monumental act of man’s savagery, the world has not been the same again. The obvious message from the incident is: if it happened to America which is, perhaps, the most security conscious nation in the world, then no country and nobody is safe. And, indeed, no country is safe today. The world has come under acute threat and human lives are being recklessly wasted by those on a mission to kill. Since the 2001 attacks, America has never gone to sleep. The illuminating light of the al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Centre, the symbol of American technological power, has remained aglow in the consciousness of the country’s security agencies. The emotional impact of the deaths it caused has not only kept its security agencies awake but toiling day and night to ensure that Americans are safe at home and wherever else they may be on the planet.

Their efforts recently paid off very handsomely. Their dragnet for al Qaeda members caught Mr Al Qaeda himself – Osama bin Laden. He was caught and killed at his hide-out in Pakistan. His death was a vital step forward in the quest for peace and safety of America and the entire world. Bin Laden was the mastermind of the 911 attacks and other such acts of terrorism in Europe. But bin Laden death, as important as it is to the anti-terrorism war, has not and will not end terrorism. That fact is not lost on America and its security agencies. And so, the war against terrorism must continue and it has, indeed, continued. America is never going to stop until the roots of al Qaeda, though gone far too deep into the soils of many countries before Osama paid the supreme price for his crimes, have been pulled out and destroyed. While America is making a huge success of the battle to keep terrorists out of America, the virus of terrorism is spreading fast to other countries. Nigeria is one such country now confronted by this deadly evil. The strategy of hacking innocent people to death as a way of expressing aggression, has become popular with Nigeria’s own junior al Qaeda, the BokoHaram. Our towns and cities are under the siege of these agents of death and destruction. Bombs planted by them explode frequently in Maiduguri, Bauchi, Abuja, Kaduna, Suleja and Katsina, all in the Northern parts of the country. There are also fears engendered by threats of the BokoHaram killer gangs to attack other parts of the country. A few days ago, one man suspected to be a BokoHaram agent was arrested in Ibadan, Oyo State. What this suggests is that the virus is spreading to other parts of the country. There is hardly any Nigerian city that has not experienced a bomb scare recently. The fear of BokoHaram has gripped virtually all Nigerian towns and cities. People have had to flee from the very volatile cities for fear of falling victim. Some state governments have had to evacuate their indigenes from the danger cities. The Federal Government has also sent soldiers to Maiduguri which serves as the operational base of BokoHaram. This step seems to be helping in ameliorating the problem. But the government and its agencies need to do a lot more to assure us that they are capable of protecting us. By now, the nation ought to have been told who these BokoHaram people are, who their sponsors are and whether the security agencies are getting close to their roots. These are the kind of information we need to be reasonably convinced that we can trust that the government can protect us in times like this. Rather, what we have are war songs from both sides of the divide and with more Boko Haram bombs exploding, killing more people and causing a lot more social disharmony and dislocation. But we must also look beyond the Boko Haram menace to admit the fact that there is something pathologically wrong with our attitude to human life that is nauseating. Life does not mean much to our government and its agencies. Which is the reason the security of the nation and the safety of the lives and properties of its citizens often take the backstage in the socio-political calculus of our leaders. Murder is still being treated by our security agencies as a mere slap on the wrist and often ignored. Resolute action is hardly ever taken against it. The result is that such criminals easily find the escape route. It is hardly so in other societies. There, human life enjoys far greater value and it is treated with sanctity. That explains why their citizens are always ready to put their lives on the line for their country. Nigerians can also do so. That is, make sacrifices in furtherance of the interest of their country. But their country must first demonstrate its ability and readiness to guarantee their safety in and outside of their homes. Government must come out in full force all the time to keep away those who threaten our lives and our properties. One life wrongly wasted must be avenged by the government and threats to lives and properties viewed with trepidation. Those responsible must be fished out and punished. The culture of the “unknown soldier” inherited from years of military dictatorship and under which criminals enjoy official cover and protection from punishment must end. That is the only way our government can earn our confidence and that of the entire world that it can make the country safe for all of us. SMS: 08055001959