Nigeria’s Threatened Federation

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Boko Haram’s bomb and gun attacks and its order that Christians leave predominantly muslim states in the north, creates tension capable of undermining the existence of Nigeria as one country

Tobias Michael Idika a native of Abam, Arochukwu local government area of Abia State, got to Kano, the commercial nerve centre of Northern Nigeria, at a tender age. He has lived in the city for 35 years now. Within this period, he served the state in various capacities - board member in History and Culture Bureau and worked in the security committee in local governments. But today, he is convinced he has overstayed his welcome in Kano. “I have no reason to be here any longer. The only option is to leave. That’s what a wise man does when there is a problem in the land he lives,” he told Newswatch on Monday, January 23, 2012. As he spoke, Idika was weary, exhausted and disillusioned. As the president of Ohaneze Ndigbo, Kano State chapter, the umbrella socio-political organisation of the Igbo people, he had been saddled with looking after the welfare of his kinsmen who number some three million in the state. The task has become more daunting since Friday, January 20, 2012, when members of the dreaded Boko Haram sect who had unleashed terror on most cities in the North-East, North- Central and Abuja in the past four years, turned Kano into a battle theatre. That day and in quick successions, bombs and guns boomed in nine locations in the ancient city. The sect members scored a bull’s eye when they hit such targets as Police Zone 1 headquarters, residence of the Assistant Inspector General of Police, AIGP, Immigration Office, State headquarters of the State Security Services, SSS, St Louis Secondary School and the State Police Command. When the smoke cleared four days later, the nation lost 186 persons – 150 civilians, 29 policemen, three SSS men, two of Immigration, one Customs officer and a journalist – in the well co-ordinated bombings. Since then, guns have been booming in the ancient city. On Saturday, January 21, despite a 24-hour curfew, members of the sect dressed in Mobile Police uniforms raided police barracks and slaughtered officers like chickens. The Friday attack, according to Idika, was not a surprise. Information had leaked that the sect members would strike. The security agencies did nothing even when the terrorists mounted road blocks on some major roads just after jumat service. For example, along Independence Road, Boko Haram men stood sentry at a road block on the ill-fated day. They asked passers-by for their names before they were shot dead. They killed several people under such circumstances. Non-indigenes in Kano are perturbed that not too long ago, their hosts who carried sticks, clubs and machetes to attack them now brandish AK47 assault rifles, sub-machine guns and bombs. Kano, and indeed, many other cities in the North are no longer safe. “It is no longer healthy and safe for our people to live in the North,” Idika told this magazine. Just as Idika was voicing out his frustration, security agents drafted to the troubled city found 10 vehicles filled with bombs and assorted improvised explosive devices, IEDs, in soft drink cans in some parts of the city. The type of cars indicated that rich and powerful men must be behind the organisation. They included a Honda CRV, Toyota Camry of different models, Honda Brahma, a Volkswagen Golf, a Toyota Corolla and two brand new Hilux open pick-up vans. A Hilux van costs about N5 million. On Tuesday, January 24, the sect members engaged soldiers in an eight- hour gun duel, thereby heightening fears that all was still not well in Kano Already, the Igbo in Kano State, numbering some three million, are moving down south. Southerners of other ethnic extractions are also fleeing. To them, Nigeria’s continued existence is a farce. They doubt whether Nigeria can survive for long, given the Boko Haram assault and government’s lacklustre handling of the terrorists. But many of them are handicapped financially. Luxury bus operators are not helping matters. They charge as high as N5,000 per person to the South East. Many of them lack money. They are thus appealing to the South-East governors to help them before it is too late lest a pogrom begins as happened between 1966 and 1967. Their fears are justified. Anywhere Boko Haram men started their onslaught they hardly stopped. It has happened in Borno, Bauchi, Yobe and Niger states. The sect has killed about 935 people since 2009 when it reared its ugly head. The January 20 gun and bomb attacks in Kano – the sect’s deadliest ever – in which 186 persons died, have brought to the fore, the stark reality that the killings could be done anywhere in the North. Early January, there were gruesome killings of Igbo people in Mubi. Over 16 people were shot dead, in two instances. All the victims were from Adazi Nnukwu, a sleepy community in Anambra State. Following the killings in Mubi, an Igbo group christened Biafran Liberation Council, BLC, urged Igbo living in Northern Nigeria to return home and avoid the guns and bombs of the killer sect. Amaechi Nwaofia, the group’s spokesman, warned that the organisation could no longer tolerate more killings of the Igbo. “The callous murder of innocent Biafrans was carried out few days after the warning by Boko Haram urging all Christians and Southerners in the North to leave the North immediately within three days. This call further confirms our long held view that we can no longer co-habit with the Northerners and we should therefore, be allowed to secede as the sovereign state of Biafra. While thanking the Boko Haram group for waking up to this reality that the North and the South can no longer co-habit under the same country, we wish them well in their journey to have their own country where Sharia would be their governing principle.” While warning the Islamic fundamentalists group to refrain from harming Igbo people further, BLC urged all Ndigbo in the Northern parts of Nigeria to immediately begin to return home. “We also urge every serious minded government of the Biafran states to assist in the evacuation of our people home to save them from the guns and bombs of Boko Haram. We are taking steps to help our people in this historical journey to an independent and free Biafra. All well meaning Biafrans are hereby urged to support their kith and kin in this journey.” Newswatch investigation showed that Adazi Nnukwu has been thrown into mourning since the Mubi massacre. The psyche of Dennis Ekemezi, vice-president of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations and an indigene of the town, has been deeply affected by the Boko Haram senseless killings in the North. He lost his in-law, who is the twin brother of his wife to the Boko Haram insurgents. He said four people were first killed. As others were arranging for their

corpses to be taken home, the killers struck and killed 12 people more. The Ibekwe family in the town lost about four people while the Ayachi family lost three, according to a source who knows Adazi- Nnukwu very well. The wife of one of the victims who was not told of her husband’s death before she was brought home gave birth immediately on arrival from Mubi. To douse the tension, Peter Obi, governor of Anambra State, visited Adazi-Nnukwu penultimate week to appeal to the community to remain calm while government was trying to sort the security problem. Despite the governor’s visit, the sense of desolation is still very much in the air in the community and other places in the South-East which lost their sons and daughters in the killings by Boko Haram in the North. Ekemezi captured this succinctly. “There is trouble. My mother’s body is in the mortuary. He (his Brother-in-law) came home to discuss this. He went back because his wife was pregnant (she gave birth nine days ago). You know what it means to have your twin killed. We now have to face the burial,” he said. Commercial and social activities were grounded in Adazi Nnukwu in Anaocha LGA of Anambra State, throughout last week, following the arrival of 11 corpses from Mubi. The burial of the victims scheduled for January 25 was postponed due to the late arrival of the corpses. All the markets, shops and businesses in the community have remained closed as a mark of respect for the fallen indigenes. However, the ceremony will take place this week between Wednesday and Friday, February 1 and 3. According to Ben Anyikwa, administrative secretary of Adazi-Nnukwu Town Development Union, ATDU, a funeral mass will take place at St. Andrew’s Catholic Church because 90 percent of the indigenes are Catholics. Governor Murtala Nyako of Adamawa State would attend the burial ceremony. When Newswatch visited the community on January 25, all prominent indigenes of the place led by Ben Elemuo, president general of ATDU were said to be having a meeting with Governor Obi to work out modalities on how the dead would be interred and the appropriate compensation request tabled before the Adamawa State government. Indeed, for the people of Adazi Nnukwu, the corporate existence of Nigeria as one entity is questionable. They were emphatic on the need to make countries out of the present Nigeria if that would guarantee peace. They were at a loss why the Igbo should be used as guinea pigs each time there is problem in the Northern part of the country. Elsewhere, in Enugu State, some Igbo groups collectively and individually were planning to help bring their brothers who are trapped in Northern States home. For instance, a group is levying its members N30,000 each to raise enough money to send buses to bring back their brothers who are trapped at the Army Barracks in Sokoto State. So far they have managed to send only two buses which were not enough. In Zamfara State, the Igbo have been leaving the state in droves. Ekene Chikezie, president-general, Igbo Community Association, ICA, in the state, said more than 60 percent of his kinsmen have fled for fear that their safety could not be guaranteed. Newswatch learnt that the Igbo are the second largest ethnic group, apart form the natives. According to Chikezie, “as a community leader and president of ICA in the state, nobody has contacted or assured me of our safety. That was why they seek my consent on whether to leave or stay. I do tell them that I cannot guarantee their safety since nobody assured me.” The exodus has called to question the future of Nigeria as one country. Four years ago, in 2008, Robert J. Mundt, Oladimeji Aborisade and A. Carl LeVan in ‘Politics in Nigeria,’ their contribution to the book Comparative Politics Today: A World View, had warned that of all 12 countries in the world they considered, Nigeria might be the only one whose continued existence is currently in doubt. They argued that Nigeria’s ethnic, regional and religious divisions have intensified in recent years, with important political actors suggesting a break up of the country into a weak federation or even completely independent states if political power cannot be distributed in a manner acceptable to everybody. “It may be easier to explain why Nigeria is likely to fall apart in the short term than it is to specify conditions for its long term stability,” they wrote. As the spate of bombings intensified last week, many Northerners, especially from the crisis prone states, expressed worries about the threat to the federation. “If the situation is not arrested quickly, it may lead to gradual disintegration of the nation,” warned Jonathan Vatsa, co-ordinator of the National Democratic Forum, Minna, Niger State, adding: “if we survive this challenge to 2015 and nothing happened, I believe nothing can destroy this nation again.” Wole Soyinka, Nobel laureate, said on Tuesday, January 24, that despite the fact that there is no formal break up of the country yet, the nation was already disintegrating due to the refusal of the government to embrace national dialogue. He maintained his stance on Sovereign National Conference as panacea to salvaging Nigeria from total collapse. “We can even remove the word sovereign. There is need for national dialogue because if we don’t have a national dialogue, we will have monologues. Boko Haram is a hyperactive secession by their expelling people in some states, purging it of the people who they believe don’t share their ideologies.” He noted that the Nigerian civil war as a clear case of quest for justice and equity on the part of Biafrans, pointing out that although he is not strictly pro-Biafra, he was against the injustice meted on Biafrans since it is morally right to want to secede. The South-East – South-South Professional Association has also deplored the killing of people in the North. “As professionals, we want to capture things missing out in the equation. There is something like elite conspiracy against the masses. Outside Abuja, you will virtually find no southern elite who is up North at this point in time. All the people killed are underdogs. Why is it so? It is because of elite conspiracy in not telling them that it is unsafe to live in the North outside Abuja. The reality is that the elite is not living there and are not investing. The masses are tired of their conspiracy,” said Emeka Ugwu-Oju, president of the association. “Let us call a spade a spade and stop pretending. The people’s safety is not guaranteed. The federal government is not policing the system and cannot guarantee safety of lives and properties of this set of people. Until there is a conference to restructure the country and address this matter, things will not be the same,” he said. With the casualty figure increasing daily, not a few Nigerians believe that the situation is getting out of control and unbearable. Soldiers have virtually taken over Kaduna due to fears of possible Boko Haram attacks in the political capital of Northern Nigeria. The town is just about 200 kilometres from Kano, where series of attacks by the dreaded sect since January 20 have thrown non-indigenes into panic. Checkpoints manned by soldiers are in all the nooks and crannies of Kaduna metropolis. Boko Haram men have thrice tried to establish bomb-making factories in the town. At Mando, a heap of bomb making substances were discovered recently after 13 explosions occurred in quick

successions. The one with the greatest impact destroyed seven houses within the radius. Balarabe Musa, former governor of old Kaduna State, told Newswatch that the Kano bombings have heightened the level of insecurity in Nigeria and the fear that Boko Haram bombings would spread throughout the country. He suspected that the dangerous sect may not be an Islamic movement but an agent provocateur for one of three reasons: to destabilise Nigeria, to use it to deal with political opposition and to divert attention from fundamental problems of governance in the country. Musa said that initially, Boko Haram stood for Sharia and rejected western culture, which Mohammed Yusuf, its leader, said was vulgar, exploitative and secular. However, he believes that the organisation has been hijacked by political forces leading to a situation where the whole country is threatened. “We should not deceive ourselves that Boko Haram will concentrate only in Muslim areas. If it is an agent provocateur for one of the reasons mentioned above, then it will affect the whole country eventually, just as the Niger Delta militants started in the South-South and later brought bombing to Abuja.” The ultimatum given by the Boko Haram sect that non Muslims in the North should leave has brought to the fore the division in Kaduna State. Many Christians from the southern part of the state are still scared of venturing into the Muslim dominated northern part to do business. It is the same for people from the northern part. The heightened level of mutual suspicion and fear even with the presence of military personnel and other security agencies has paralysed economic and social activities in Kaduna State. The South-East Governors’ Forum met on January 22, in Enugu, and deliberated on the fresh threat to the federation, especially the killing of Igbo in the north. Obi, chairman of the Forum, said the security problem in the country had assumed a dimension such that the governors must meet with Igbo leaders across the five states of the zone to take a definite stand on the matter. “We deliberated on only one thing - the security situation in the country and as it affects us in this zone and we have decided to call a meeting of Igbo political leaders to discuss the issue, and at that time our position will be made known to the public,” he said. The larger meeting was slated for January 29 in Enugu, the political capital of the geopolical zone. Political, traditional and religious leaders across the five states of the geo-political zone were expected at the gathering. Ralph Uwazuruike, leader of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra, MASSOB, told Newswatch that Ndigbo will no longer sit by and allow their people resident in the North to be killed by Boko Haram. “The Igbo nation shall no longer sit by and allow the killing of Igbo sons and daughters who trade or transit through Northern Nigeria or indeed anywhere, nor shall we permit our sons and daughters to be in any way disturbed by threats and ultimatums to leave their places of business,” he said. Uwazuruike explained that his group was working in conjunction with the leadership of the Igbo nation to take proactive steps that would safeguard the lives and properties of Ndigbo in the North. He said it was regrettable that the attack on the Igbo was coming at a time both Ndigbo at home and in the diaspora were still mourning and preparing for the burial of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, former Biafran leader. “Even as we mourn and grieve, Nigeria is brewing in crisis, whilst the insensitivity and callousness visited on the Igbo have continued unabated, even with the lopsided socio-political structure of the country,” the MASSOB leader said. Uwazuruike was alarmed that Kabiru Umar, the Boko Haram kingpin who was suspected to have masterminded the Christmas Day bombing of St. Theresa’s Catholic Church, Madalla, where 48 person died and 200 were hospitalised, was allowed to escape under a very suspicious circumstance. He demanded that the federal government should investigate thoroughly the escape scandal and bring to book those involved and also fortify the nation’s security to apprehend all those who spearheaded the senseless killing of innocent people. “We insist that the murderers of our innocent men and women be unmasked and be made to face the full wrath of the law or if this cannot be guaranteed, then they be handed over to us. In the event that the security agencies are not able to fulfill this responsibility within a reasonable time, we shall have no other option but to find them ourselves and appropriate punishment meted out to them. Enough is enough,” he said. He advised the Igbo living in the North to remain calm, vigilant and be ready to defend themselves against possible threats to their lives and properties. The South – North migration of non-indigenes has also begun even though there are no cases of killings in the south yet. In the South-East, thousands of Northern Muslims have been moving since the beginning of this year. In Onitsha, trucks carrying Northerners cross the River Niger daily en route to the North. Others head towards the 9th Mile near Enugu and then cross into Kogi State. However, there have not been reprisal attacks on those who chose to flee. The Hausa are fleeing from the South-West in panic despite assurances by state governments. On January 15, six trucks that brought cows to the Lagos Abattoir in Oko Oba on the outskirts of Lagos were seen loaded with women and children and heading for the north. At major points along Iju Road, Agege, they waved gleefully at onlookers who are mainly Yoruba. Investigations revealed that the mass movement of the Hausa from Lagos takes place in the early hours or at night. The fleeing Hausas often leave with vehicles that ferry farm produce and animals to Lagos. These are more noticeable in Mile 12, Ibafo and Ketu areas of Lagos. Though the situation did not prevent Hausa traders from coming into Lagos with their wares, they do not stay for as long as they used to. They now leave immediately after offloading their farm products. Newswatch also learnt that the intelligence report picked up by the Lagos State government that the Boko Haram intended to bomb Lagos, last November, necessitated the increased security measures on Lagos roads during the Christmas season and in recent times. The alleged threat also prompted the O’dua Peoples’ Congress, OPC, to stage a rally on Ikorodu Road, Lagos, over a month ago in order to sound a note of warning to the terror group to drop its plan or meet force with force. Members of the group shot into the air as they marched on the high way. They declared that they were ready for revenge killings if Boko Haram should do anything untoward to the Yoruba in the North. Today, Hausa settlements in Ogun State, especially Ogere and Kara, a border community between Lagos and Ogun states; Ketu, Berger, Okokomaiko, Idi-Araba, Gbagada, Orile, Alaba Rago, and Iganmu are no longer as thickly populated as they were before the current onslaught of Boko Haram terrorists. Rauf Aregbesola, governor of Osun State, acknowledged the threat to Nigeria’s continued survival. He noted that the situation’s antecedent to the fuel subsidy protest and the aftermath have once again revealed the fragile nature of the country. He said that for sometime, the country has been in the throes of terrorists hiding under religion, to perpetrate mayhem. The indiscriminate

bombings and shootings in which the United Nations building in Abuja and worship centres were targeted have pushed the country towards the precipice. According to the governor, Nigerians are already agitated as to the future of the country considering the grim prospect of ethno-religious conflict. The Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, believes that the Boko Haram war is the real and present danger to the continued corporate existence of Nigeria. “Government policies, whether well intentioned or misconceived, are able to bring the nation to its knees but they are unlikely to lead to the breakup of the country,” it said, adding: “The campaign of targeted violence against the Christian community across Northern Nigeria is a direct threat to the continued existence of Nigeria as we know it and for that reason it requires urgent and immediate attention.” The threat to Nigeria’s corporate survival assumed a wider dimension last week with the revelation that Boko Haram members received training in explosives handling at al Qaeda camps in North Africa. Mohamed Bazoum, foreign minister of Niger Republic, disclosed at a summit on regional security in Mauritania that the group might have also received training from al Shabaab insurgents in Somalia. “There is no doubt that there is confirmed information that shows a link between Boko Haram and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, AQIM, and it consists primarily of the training given to elements of Boko Haram,” he reportedly said. Bazoum said that against this background, there is need for a unified regional security approach to combat the threat. “Some of the bombers in Nigeria received training here in the Sahel. That’s why it seems important that we are with Nigeria and act together and share information,” he said. How best can Nigeria handle its current problem? The South-South Elders who have backed President Jonathan have proposed a Sovereign National Conference, SNC, to offer the component units of the country an opportunity to find solutions to the country’s problems. Edwin Clark, foremost Ijaw leader, said Boko Haram and the threat posed by a cabal had necessitated the convening of a SNC for Nigerians to determine whether or not they wanted Nigeria to remain as a nation or break up. He believes that Nigeria, unlike Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Sudan and Angola, can avoid war but that the rest of Nigeria would no longer sit back to be made second class citizens in their country. “The South-South leaders wish to warn that no ethnic nationality is a sole repository of violence. The people of the South-South will not tolerate any untoward action or plan against our son, whose action though seemingly painful in the interim are geared towards repositioning this country for the ultimate good of its future.” General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, former military president, is also rooting for SNC. In the wake of the fuel subsidy removal war, he called on President Goodluck Jonathan to begin to plan how to restructure the nation. He called for the implementation of true federalism for the nation to move forward. ”In my retirement home here in Minna, Niger State, North Central of Nigeria, I have been watching with responsible interest the unfolding scenario about our dear nation. If my opinion will not be misconstrued again by government spin-doctors and naysayers, I would rather call on President Goodluck Jonathan to seize the moment by legitimately embarking on complete restructuring of the country in order to put into practice the real principles of a federation,” he said. According to him, the present arrangement has brought about series of role conflicts between the central government and the federating units. There is too much power concentration at the centre, thus weakening the comparative abilities of the federating units at generating wealth for their constituents. “History will be kind on Mr. President if he takes this bold step at ensuring the practice of true federalism,” he said in a release signed by Kasim Afegbua, his media aide. As the nation gropes for solution to terrorism, Abubakar Dangiwa Umar, a retired colonel, and former military governor of Kaduna State, said the current problem has been compounded by difficulties in pin-pointing where to reach out to Boko Haram as it has no fixed address. He urged the federal government to do everything possible including dialogue to reach members of the deadly sect. He, however, warned against ascribing every criminal act to Boko Haram and advised people to ignore calls that Christians should leave the North and Muslims should leave the South as that will help those bent on dividing Nigeria achieve their aim. “This is the time to face this problem united,” Umar said. Other analysts are worried that leaders from the North have not come out to condemn the terrorists. But Air Marshal Oluseyi Pentirin, chief of defence staff, said in Lagos, that the violent Islamic sect troubling Nigeria would soon run out of suicide bombers and by inference fizzle out. “Nobody should leave where they make their livelihood because of threats from Boko Haram. When a terrorist organisation gets desperate, they start using suicide bombers because you won’t kill members of your organisation if you can achieve the same purpose without doing otherwise,” he said. Sunday Ehindero, former inspector general of police, spoke in similar vein. According to him, the days of Boko Haram’s operations in the country were numbered. “In no distant time, the members would be overrun and the organisation would become history,” he said. He believes that the destruction the organisation caused in various parts of the country in the past couple of years could have been contained if appropriate strategies were employed to deal with the sect. “The days of Boko Haram are numbered. One thing is that when the public themselves see that the disturbing tendencies of an organisation know no religion , know no person, public opinion will go against it and more information will get to the security agencies. That is what is happening in Kano. You see all the recoveries they made. See how all the security agencies mobilised and they started fishing out the Boko Haram. Very shortly adequate information will come and they will smoke them out,” he said. Last week, the international community offered to help Nigeria out of its predicament. One of such countries was the US, which warned in 2007 that Nigeria would disintegrate in 2015. On Monday, January 23, US intelligence officers led by William Fitzgerald, deputy assistant secretary, held a collaborative meeting with their Nigerian counterparts including Gen. Andrew Owoye Azazi, national security adviser, NSA, to President Jonathan and Martins Uhomoibhi, permanent secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Abuja. “Today marks a new beginning. Security issues in the North have taken up new significance, so we have chosen to split the regional security co-operation and the Niger Delta. I bring on behalf of the US government the deepest condolences on the heinous attacks that have taken place during the past few days, first in Kano and then Bauchi State. We deplore swiftly the reign of terror that has existed in the North of the country for many months. And we stand with you to work together to find a way to bring peace to the north,” Fitzgerald said. Under the co-operation deal, the regional security co-operation will be divided into two parts - one

aspect focuses on terrorism in Northern Nigeria and the other on the Niger Delta crisis. Will this mend the obvious cracks on Nigeria’s wall? As the world waits, Tunde Bakare, the charismatic Pentecostal pastor and convener of the Save Nigeria Group, SNG, that spearheaded the fuel subsidy removal war early this year said emphatically: “Nigeria will not break up. We believe that God brought us together and will not endorse Nigeria breaking up. But we are insisting on proper restructuring along true federalism so that each region or state can determine its destiny within the federation.” Reported by Maureen Chigbo, Anzah Phillips, Modupe Ogunbayo-Tona, Dike Onwuama Victor Ugborgu, Chimezie Enyiocha and Haruna Salami