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14. ABSTRACT Nigeria is at an important point in its history. Able to initially prosper because of its oil wealth, numerous international ties and a large, diverse population, Nigeria is now troubled because of internal issues such as ethnic and religious tensions, social and economic inequities, high unemployment and severe poverty. Among these numerous internal issues plaguing Nigeria today, coupled with the government's inability to address them, are the main two different religious beliefs that separate the country. With their diverse Muslim and Christian communities and the growth of the radicalization of Islam creating religious strife, the Nigerian government must take extraordinary steps if not to solve, to at least address the problems to build a future for the country. This paper will show how the religious divisions within Nigeria, and their negative effect on stability within the nation, may be improved by 1) leveraging key religious leaders and mandating the use of already proven methods of engagement; 2) increasing governmental representation of the country's religious diversity at the Federal and state level; and 3) addressing the issues causing the religious strife and separating religion from violent acts.					
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“Religion in Nigeria – Hope or Despair”

by

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Colonel, US Army

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Secularism Will Solve the Religious Problem	2
Role of Religion	3
Roots of Islam	4
Origins of Christianity	7
African Tribal Beliefs	8
Leveraging Key Religious Leaders	9
Representation of Religious Diversity	11
Religion as a Means to an End	14
Conclusion and Final Remarks	17
Bibliography	18

Paper Abstract

Nigeria is at an important point in its history. Able to initially prosper because of its oil wealth, numerous international ties and a large, diverse population, Nigeria is now troubled because of internal issues such as ethnic and religious tensions, social and economic inequities, high unemployment and severe poverty. Among these numerous internal issues plaguing Nigeria today, coupled with the government's inability to address them, are the main two different religious beliefs that separate the country. With their diverse Muslim and Christian communities and the growth of the radicalization of Islam creating religious strife, the Nigerian government must take extraordinary steps if not to solve, to at least address the problems to build a future for the country. This paper will show how the religious divisions within Nigeria, and their negative effect on stability within the nation, may be improved by 1) leveraging key religious leaders and mandating the use of already proven methods of engagement; 2) increasing governmental representation of the country's religious diversity at the Federal and state level; and 3) addressing the issues causing the religious strife and separating religion from violent acts.

Introduction

Nigeria is at an important point in its history. Able to initially prosper because of its oil wealth, numerous international ties and a large, diverse population, Nigeria is now troubled because of internal issues such as ethnic and religious tensions, social and economic inequities, high unemployment and severe poverty. Due to its historical beginnings, particularly the divide and rule decisions made during its formative years by the British colonial ruling officials, and the affect on the competing ethnic and religious groups, Nigeria is potentially on the path of becoming a “failed state” according to a recent United States Air Force Air War College Case Study¹. Among the numerous internal issues plaguing Nigeria today, coupled with the government’s inability to address them, are the main two different religious beliefs that separate the country. With their diverse Muslim and Christian communities and the growth of the radicalization of Islam creating religious strife, the Nigerian government must take extraordinary steps if not to solve, to at least address the problems to build a future for the country. They must focus on inclusion, religious equality, representation of the numerous groups and work to separate the “violence is caused by religious differences” perception. Continuing to disregard the needs of each community by ignoring both the grievances of representation and power sharing will only continue to divide the country further.

This paper will show how the religious divisions within Nigeria, and their negative effect on stability within the nation, may be improved by 1) leveraging key religious leaders and mandating the use of already proven methods of engagement; 2) increasing governmental representation of the country’s religious diversity at the federal and state level;

¹ Robert McAllum, et al., *Failed State 2030, Nigeria – A Case Study*, Occasional Paper No. 67 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Center for Strategy and Technology, Air War College, February 2011)

and 3) addressing the issues causing the religious strife and separate religion from violent acts. Until the Nigerian government represents the religious diversity of the population through the engagement of religious leaders at the regional and federal level, the conflict between the religious groups, amongst themselves and with the government, will continue. The interaction of the religious groups in Nigeria among themselves, with each other and the government is a complex problem and understanding the role of religion, the origin of religions within Nigeria, the relevant sub groups and the current leadership is necessary.

Secularism will Solve the Religious Problem

The Nigerian government is mandated by its constitution to maintain secularism. The Nigerian constitution directs secularism in Section 10 stating, “The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion” and in Section 38, the constitution guarantees freedom of religion.² The Webster’s definition of secularism is “indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations.”³

Although secularism is the mandated position of the government of Nigeria, J. Shola Omotola, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Ibadan and instructor of Political Science at Redeemer’s University in Nigeria, sees the application of secularism in Nigeria as woefully inadequate due to the constant use of religion by politicians for personal gain.⁴ Mr. Omotola also argues that the government provides funding for the construction of various religious buildings as well as sponsors pilgrimages for citizens of the two major religions but fails to

² Nigeria Constitution, ch. 1, part 2, sec. 10, <http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicofNigeria> (accessed 12 October 2012).

³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary website, www.merriam-webster.com (accessed 12 October 2012).

⁴ J. Shola Omotola, “Beyond Secularism: The Shadow of Religion on Nigerian Democracy,” in *Religion in Politics: Secularism and National Integration in Modern Nigeria*, ed. Julius O. Adekune, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2009), 92.

appropriately recognize and fund the smaller, tribal animist religions.⁵ He concludes that the Nigerian government and its role as a secular state has been “severely compromised” and it should be redesigned without the current religious overtones and practice true secularism.⁶ This counter argument may not be the correct path to solve the current religious issues because of the central role that religion plays in Nigerian life.

Role of Religion in Nigeria

Throughout Nigerian history, religion has played a major role in the world’s seventh most populated nation.⁷ Dr. Julius Adekunle, editor of the book *Religion in Politics: Secularism and National Integration in Modern Nigeria* and a Professor of African History at Monmouth University in New Jersey states that religion is a distinct part of and plays an important role in nearly every aspect of Nigerian life, from public to social and especially in the political realm.⁸ He quotes a 2006 Pew Research Study that found that “91 percent of Muslim and 76 percent of Christian respondents claimed that religion was the most important issue to them.”⁹ The convergence of large numbers of people practicing both the Muslim and Christian faiths, the two major religions in the country that account for well over 90% of the population, and make it “a prototypical test case in accommodating religious balance.”¹⁰ According to a recent Congressional Research Service (CRS) report, the friction between the Muslims and Christian communities, as part of the larger north/south and regional ethnic

⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁶ Ibid., 93-94.

⁷ CIA *World Fact Book*, Nigeria Country Page, last updated October 16, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (accessed October 19, 2012)

⁸ Julius O. Adekunle, ed., Introduction to *Religion in Politics*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2009), 3.

⁹ Robert Rudy and Timothy Samuel Shah, “Nigeria’s Presidential Election: The Christian-Muslim Divide,” *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, March 21, 2007. Quoted in Julius O. Adekunle, ed., Introduction to *Religion in Politics*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2009), 11

¹⁰ John N. Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria: Nigeria as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008), 18.

issues “often stem from issues relating to access to land, jobs, and socioeconomic development” and that “by some estimates, 15,000 Nigerians have died over the last decade in localized clashes driven by such tensions.”¹¹ This is not to point that all of the deaths are solely due to religious violence. Ethnic and regional problems have played a part in the violence as well as clashes over recent elections. Because there is a religious aspect to the country’s outbreaks of violence, the two leading religious leaders in Nigeria, the Muslim Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Sa’adu Abubakar III and Archbishop of Abuja, John O. Onaiyekan have worked tirelessly with their communities to solve both intra-religious and inter Muslim/Christian conflicts. Their efforts have clearly made progress as both were mentioned as candidates for the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize. Yet, much work remains as relations between the groups continue to be strained by extremist groups from both sides. Extremists whose issues, Archbishop Onaiyekan recently stated when speaking about Boko Haram, “are not purely religious”, but are a result of the poor governance and as a way “to protest the north’s feeling of being excluded from power.”¹² The role of religion in Nigerian life is deeply embedded in the social fabric of the country and the historical origins of each religion provide a glimpse as to why they are so important.

Roots of Islam in Nigeria

Islam was brought into the northern areas of present day Nigeria as early as the eleventh century by way of the trans-Saharan trade routes through northern Africa. Early Islam was an important part of the government and political systems and included the

¹¹ Lauren Ploch, *Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 1.

¹² Fredrick Nzwili and Ibrahim Garb, “Nigeria’s Boko Haram a Holy War? Maybe Not Entirely,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (June 04, 2012), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1018440094?accountid=322> (accessed September 25, 2012).

practice of Shari'a law as early as the fifteenth century.¹³ The relative dominance of Islam in northern Africa continued with the establishment of the empire of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1804.¹⁴ The empire covered much of North Africa and not only provided a religion, but the cultural system and governmental foundations in law, justice, education, and social structures that are still in use today.¹⁵ With arrival of the colonizing forces of the United Kingdom, the Caliphate was conquered in 1903, although it was allowed to remain in place in order for the colonial leadership to retain control of the population by way of indirect rule. Ultimately, because of the British victory, "the political authority of the Caliphate to rule was transferred to the British" and the use of Shari'a law, specifically the severe punishments, was somewhat curtailed.¹⁶ The Caliphate endured with relative freedom so the British could maintain control of the Northern regions. The British also reinforced the ethnic and religious differences within Nigeria to maintain their control over the population and continue to cultivate the countries resources for their benefit.¹⁷ After Nigeria was granted independence in 1960, coupled with the initiation of a secular government and new constitution, political power and the responsibility of governing was transferred from the Sultans and emirs to elected officials; the role of the Sultans changed to largely ceremonial, religious leaders of Nigeria's Muslim population although they still retain significant influence.¹⁸ Over the next

¹³ Mukhtar Umar Bunza, "Shari'a in the History and Political Development of Nigeria" in *Religion in Politics*, ed. Julius O. Adekunle, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2009), 138.

¹⁴ Ibid., 138.

¹⁵ Paden, *Faith and Politics in Nigeria*, 27.

¹⁶ Mukhtar Umar Bunza, "Shari'a in the History and Political Development of Nigeria" in *Religion in Politics*, 140.

¹⁷ Philip Akpen, "Ethnic and Religious Conflicts: Challenges for Sustainable Democracy" in *Religion in Politics*, 72-73.

¹⁸ Jonathan N.C. Hill, "Sufism in Northern Nigeria: A Force for Counter-Radicalization?" (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), 15.

50 years, the Sultan of the Sokoto became “an important administrative influence in Nigerian religious life and the head of the Nigerian National Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs.”¹⁹

In 1999, the Muslim north, starting in Zamfara state, implemented a return to full Shari’a civil law. Eleven other states established Shari’a law as a response to requests by Muslim activists, Islamic scholars and the general Muslim public.²⁰ Islamic scholar Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, in discussing the implementation of Shari’a law, states the popular support for the reintroduction of full Shari’a was due to the Muslim community’s dissatisfaction with having relinquished control of the presidency to a southern Christian, their lack of security, poor living conditions and that they saw a return to religion as a way out of their dismal position.²¹ He concludes that the current realities, the need for improved governance, women’s rights, and awareness of religious leaders with bad intentions could potentially lead the Muslim debate away from Shari’a law and back to secular governance and ultimately reduce religious tensions, thus making it difficult for extremists to use religion as an argument for their cause.²²

The Muslim community in Nigeria is not a holistic body and it has its own share of inter-Muslim tensions. Nearly 99 percent are Sunni and only 1 percent is Shiite. The two main bodies of thought within the Islamic community in Nigeria are Sufism and the Salafism.²³ The Sufi orders in the northern part of the country consist of two main groups, the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya brotherhoods, where they practice a so called “African Islam”

¹⁹ The Muslim 500: The World’s Most Influential Muslims, <http://themuslim500.com/profile/saadu-abubakar-iii-sultan-sokoto> (accessed on October 15, 2012).

²⁰ Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, “Politics and Shari’a in Northern Nigeria,” in *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*, ed. Benjamin F. Soares and Rene Otayek (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, October 2007), 177.

²¹ Ibid., 185.

²² Ibid., 186.

²³ Julius O. Adekunle, ed., *Introduction to Religion in Politics*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2009), 6.

which has been described as more “tolerant” as it has incorporated other parts of ancient African beliefs such as “saint veneration, pilgrimages to tombs, elaborate rituals and the economic activities associated with African society and culture.”²⁴ Although their belief systems are similar, the different orders are separate and often compete for followers, this tends to lessen the effectiveness of their social programs and make them vulnerable to the hard line Islamists.²⁵

On the opposite spectrum of the Sufists are the Salafists. Their beliefs are based solely on the strict interpretation of the Qur’an and any deviation from these beliefs are considered borderline sacrilegious.²⁶ The goal of Salafists is to return to a true Islamic state where both the legal and political systems are based on the religious teachings of Islam. The Salafist groups, Izala, the Islamic Movement in Nigeria and the most militant of the groups, Boko Haram, are in direct confrontation with the Sufis in the north, the Christians in the south, and the secular government, albeit not in a truly coordinated fashion due to differing beliefs and agendas.²⁷

Origins of Christianity in Nigeria

Christianity is the second main religion in Nigeria. Accounting for the religious beliefs of over 40 percent of the population, the Christian population is found throughout the country, although mainly in the southern and middle states.²⁸ Christianity was brought to Nigeria by Catholic and Protestant missionaries who accompanied the British Colonial forces

²⁴ Benjamin F. Soares and Rene Otayek, *Introduction to Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, October 2007), 4.

²⁵ Jonathan N.C. Hill, “*Sufism in Northern Nigeria: A Force for Counter-Radicalization?*” 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁸ CIA *World Fact Book*, Nigeria Country Page, last updated October 16, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (accessed October 19, 2012)

in the late 1890's. In the early 1900's the expanding British rule into the Muslim held northern territories was somewhat successful and although the Sokoto Caliphate's influence decreased, the rapid expansion of Christianity in the south divided the country on religious lines.²⁹ The adoption of Christian beliefs in the south and middle lands, coupled with the already present ethnic divisions and the British "divide and rule" tactics continue to reinforce the differences between the people of Nigeria today.³⁰

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is an association of five different organizations; the Christian Council of Nigeria, the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria, the Organization of African Instituted Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of West Africa. These organizations are lead by the president of the CAN, Ayo Oritsejafor, who is also the Senior Pastor of Word of Life Bible Church. The Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, John Onaiyekan, also plays a leading role in the Christian community and is often the lead in discussions and conflict resolution with the Sultan of Sokoto.

African Tribal Beliefs

The last of the religious groups, also the smallest, are the Animists, those who share the indigenous beliefs of early African culture. In its earliest beginnings, the indigenous religions of Nigeria were based on worshipping gods associated with the land, rivers and the physical surroundings of the early tribes, commonly known as African Tribal Religion (ATR).³¹ It was these religious beliefs that governing bodies of the early Hausa people of the

²⁹ Robert McAllum, et al., *Failed State 2030, Nigeria – A Case Study*, 12.

³⁰ Ibid., 12.

³¹ J. Shola Omotola, "Beyond Secularism: The Shadow of Religion on Nigerian Democracy," in *Religion in Politics: Secularism and National Integration in Modern Nigeria*, 84.

north, and Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups, from the south and west, in pre-colonial Nigeria used to establish their political and legal authority.³² These beliefs are currently held by a very small part of Nigerian society, anywhere between two and ten percent. Their lack of size in terms of population has pushed them to the margins of Nigerian politics while the leaders of Islam and Christianity have assumed key roles with the government.³³

Leveraging Key Religious Leaders

The social and religious disputes, due to either intolerance or radicalization of a relatively small number of people and/or groups will continue to cause problems for the entire country. The Nigerian government can have a positive influence by way of engagement of the key religious leaders of both the Christian and Muslim faiths at the national level, but interaction is also necessary at the different branches and offices at the state and local level. The secular Nigerian government must continually reach out to the religious leaders and sponsor (and potentially mandate) meetings, councils and conferences to “continue the dialog” of peaceful coexistence between the groups.

In 1997, a two-day conference on the ethnic and religious conflict resolution reported several findings and proposals from 40 attendees that represented a “cross section of the country’s ethnic groups and religions, including scholars, student leaders, traditional rulers, priests, and other community leaders.”³⁴ Among the findings were that the government not only did not understand the importance of religion, but also did not seek the opinions of the

³² Julius O. Adekune, ed., Introduction to *Religion in Politics*, 4-5.

³³ J. Shola Omotola, “Beyond Secularism: The Shadow of Religion on Nigerian Democracy,” in *Religion in Politics: Secularism and National Integration in Modern Nigeria*, 85.

³⁴ Ernest E. Uwazie, Introduction to *Inter-Ethnic and Religious Conflict Resolution in Nigeria*, edited by Ernest E. Uwazie, Isaac O. Albert and Godfrey N. Uzoigwe (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 1.

religious groups when making decisions.³⁵ Knowing and understanding the needs and opinions of the population is an important aspect for effective rule. Until recently, the government would only react when violence took place, instead of being proactive and attempting to solve known differences beforehand. For instance in 2001, President Olusegun Obasanjo called a National Security Commission to address communal violence only after riots took place in Jos due to the reintroduction of Shari'a law.³⁶ Clearly a mechanism was needed where religious leaders representing the offended parties could gather to discuss the issues between the two groups.

The introduction of the Nigerian Interreligious Council, (NIREC) has provided the forum for the Christian and Muslim leaders to discuss their differences. Led by Archbishop Onaiyekan and Muslim Sultan Sa'ad Abubakar, the council consists of twenty five members of the Muslim and Christian communities who meet quarterly to discuss and solve issues between the two groups.³⁷ It has been through this council that both parties have increased their awareness of each other's positions and solved problems, usually at the lowest level, before they have become full blown crises. Despite the continual dialogue, the two leaders are "often forced to act as theological fireman, putting out the sparks of local conflict in Nigeria before they blaze."³⁸ Archbishop Onaiyekan recently stated that the NIREC was accepted and welcomed by both the Christian Association of Nigeria and the Muslim

³⁵ Iheanyi M. Enwerem, "An Assessment of Government's Formal Response to Ethnic/Religious Riots, 1980-1990s" in *Inter-Ethnic and Religious Conflict Resolution in Nigeria*, edited by Ernest E. Uwazie, Isaac O. Albert and Godfrey N. Uzoigwe (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), 130.

³⁶ GlobalSecurity.org, "Nigeria Christian / Muslim Conflict," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/nigeria-1.htm> (accessed on September 22, 2012)

³⁷ AllAfrica.com, "Islam and Peace Building in West Africa Challenges to Peace-Building," (October 16, 2011), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/898612324?accountid=322>, (accessed on September 25, 2012).

³⁸ Michael Gerson, "The Sultan and the Archbishop," *The Washington Post*, May 22, 2009, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/410321213?accountid=322> (accessed on September 25, 2012)

community as a way to increase their understanding of each other.³⁹ This council and its effect on positive relationship building, is also supported by the government. Because of the success at the federal level, similar councils should be used in a similar fashion at the state and local levels. This position has been mentioned by Archbishop Onaiyekan and supported by Sultan Abubakar. The Nigerian government should build upon the success of the religion dialogues by endorsing either regional or state level interreligious councils as a means for increasing education, cooperation and dispute resolution. Once the model is shown to work, implementing them in the Middle Belt states where the majority of Muslim and Christian conflicts are occurring is the next critical step. Although Salafist groups may not agree to meetings with Christian leaders, an increase of understanding amongst the wider religious audience could potentially reduce the pool of extremist recruits. As stated by the Archbishop when he was asked about increasing the spirit of cooperation, “if religion is hierarchical, the message can be dictated from higher echelons throughout the hierarchy.”⁴⁰ In addition to the religious dialogue, government support for regional and local NIREC-sponsored support organizations, such as the Nigeria Inter-Faith Action Association, which joins members of the two religious communities to combat malaria, could continue to further inter-religious understanding and bridge building.⁴¹

Representation of the Religious Diversity

Open support for religious groups and programs by government officials is a dangerous road, as some may use it for political gain or influence. Local populations may

³⁹ Christopher O’Connor, “A Discussion with Archbishop John Onaiyekan of Abuja,” (July 1, 2010), Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University, <http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu> (accessed on October 15, 2012).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Michael Gerson, “The Sultan and the Archbishop,” *The Washington Post*.

see the governmental decisions or funding favoring one religion over another as a reason for protest. Decisions on the application of government support must either be balanced towards both groups or only support events and positions where all religious groups are included in the relevant program. In this way, the secular government of Nigeria is able fully support the people and their religious beliefs, a failure to do so would further increase the religious tensions within the country.

The government must improve the representation of the different religious groups across the nation within the federal and state governments. The Sultan of Sokoto has called for improved governance at every level, improving benefits, reducing poverty and improving security.⁴² These are not religious issues; they are Nigerian issues and they must be equally addressed regardless of religious affiliation. Yet those with the control of the government have and will continue to belong to a certain religion. This should not be ignored but rather embraced as a part of the Nigerian culture. One way to improve representation and include religion in government is to return to the informal power sharing agreement, known as “zoning”, where the country’s presidency changes from Christian to Muslim every eight years. The presidency was held from 1999 to 2007 by a southern Christian and then it transferred to a Muslim northerner, President Yar’Adua in 2007. Because of his illness and ultimate death, Yar’Adua was only in office for two years. The rotation was disrupted as his southern Christian Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, became the new President. It was further complicated by the running and subsequent victory by Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian, in 2011 as he was expected to step aside to allow a Muslim to take control and thus preserve the “zoning” agreement. Although he gained support of some traditional Muslim

⁴² AllAfrica.com, “Islam and Peace Building in West Africa Challenges to Peace-Building.”

leaders, many in the Muslim north feel that the election was rigged in Jonathan's favor.⁴³ This has given the Christians in the south control of the presidency for an unequal number of years, thus inflaming the Muslim population. This perceived disenfranchisement of the north is one of the problems touted by the northern Muslims and the associated extremist groups as justification for attacking both government institutions and Christian groups. A solution is to enforce the power sharing between Muslims and Christians, but instead of an informal agreement, the Nigerian government should formalize this rule thus ensuring that both major groups are represented and maintain a voice in government, albeit from a subordinate position at times. Similar to the Federal Character Commission which oversees and ensures the ethnic diversity of government positions, further study should be taken to explore whether religion should be included as an identifier for position selection at the cabinet level and below within the government. The importance of having cabinet members who understand the local issues and have potential ties, both formal and informal, to the local religious leaders will further the government's abilities to leverage those who can understand and solve problems. The Jonathan Administration has shown signs of moving forward in this area with his recent appointment of a northern Muslim, a retired military officer with ties to the Sultan of Sokoto and northern politicians, as the National Security Advisor.⁴⁴ This clearly underscores the necessity of having national level leaders who understand and can recommend actions to solve regional problems.

The previous proposals assume that the elected and appointed officials will put aside their personal ambitions and religious differences to work towards the betterment of Nigeria

⁴³ John Campbell, "Nigeria's Battle for Security," *The National Interest* 118 (March/April 2012), 33, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/924162827?accountid=322> (accessed on 25 September 2012).

⁴⁴ Lauren Ploch, *Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, 12.

and that the affected population will accept it. Dr. Julius Adekunle, professor of African history at Monmouth University, sees this as a two-way street in discussing religion, politics and violence by stating “political leaders are saddled with the responsibility of protecting the people and the citizens of Nigeria are to operate on and abide by the institutional framework of law, justice and respect for one another.”⁴⁵ Historically this had not happened as the corruption within the country is nearly an official function of the state and the state police and security forces are often seen as part of the larger problem, at times fomenting the divide between the Christian south and Muslim north and failing to manage the problems in the Middle Belt states.⁴⁶

Religion as a Means to an End

Numerous authors have written about the re-introduction of Shari’a law in the northern Muslim states. The recurring theme is a lack of governance, rule of law and general lack of support by the federal government. Shari’a was “seen by the population as a way to fight the corruption and bad government, immorality, and ostentatious wealth” that was accumulated by only those in power.”⁴⁷ Others have proposed that the religious violence, especially in Nigeria is inevitable as Islam asserts itself within the world vis-à-vis Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” debate.⁴⁸ Much of the instability, especially in the northern and middle regions, can be traced to inter-religious or “Muslim on Muslim” violence due to ideological differences, as mentioned earlier, and competition for economic

⁴⁵ Julius O. Adekunle, ed., *Religion in Politics*, 181.

⁴⁶ John Campbell, “Nigeria’s Battle for Security,” 31.

⁴⁷ Roman Loimeier, “Nigeria: The Quest for a Viable Religious Option,” in *Political Islam in West Africa: State-Society Relations Transformed*, ed. William F. S. Miles (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2007), 65.

⁴⁸ Sakah Mahmud, “Nigeria – Islamist Activism and Religious Conflicts,” in *The Borders of Islam: Exploring Huntington’s Faultlines, from Al-Andalus to the Virtual Ummah*, ed. Stig Jarle Hansen, Atlr Mesoy and Tuncay Kardas (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 115.

and social influence, land and jobs. There are clear examples of Salafist Muslims attacking Sufi Muslims, and vice-versa, specifically during the Maitatsine riots in Kano in 1980 where more than 4000 people were killed.⁴⁹ Recent examples are the attacks by the Salafist extremist organization Boko Haram, which has killed over five hundred people, mostly Muslims, during the first six months of 2012, in addition to government police and military personnel.⁵⁰ There are also plenty of examples of violence between Christians and Muslims, specifically the riots over the establishment of Shari'a law, the Muslim reaction to the Danish cartoons and the Nigerian beauty pageant riots that may continue to plague the country.⁵¹ Intermixed with the religious violence are Boko Haram's attacks on the government functionaries and the associated, unnecessarily harsh, response by government security forces. These particular attacks could be motivated by more than religious differences such as regional under-development in the north and western areas, unequal distribution of the oil wealth, poverty, corruption, and unemployment. All of this violence is tinted with either religious or ethnic overtones, sometimes by the local or regional politicians, other times by the media, even though the original issues have little to do with either religion. To remove religion, as it may not be the root cause of the violent actions, the government must do two things; 1) "control the narrative" to separate religion from those situations where it is not part of the problem and 2) address the grievances of its people. Those within Nigeria who conduct these attacks and eschew violence are criminals. The extremist groups that are causing violence should be provided the option to settle their differences with the government peacefully through negotiation or else be identified as insurgents and have the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 117.

⁵⁰ Fredrick Nzwili and Ibrahim Garb, "Nigeria's Boko Haram a Holy War? Maybe Not Entirely," *The Christian Science Monitor*.

⁵¹ Sakah Mahmud, "Nigeria – Islamist Activism and Religious Conflicts," 118-119.

appropriate military or law enforcement solution applied against them. Religious and government leaders should strive to paint those causing violence as such and steer away from identifying them as associated with a particular religion. The extremist groups are clearly using their religious affiliation to increase the tension in an already volatile situation between Christians and Muslims. As Archbishop Onaiyekan points out, “If a Bishop arms young Christians to attack Muslims, this is not a religious act, it is an act of violence, an act of inciting public disorder.”⁵² Addressing the social and governance issues, increasing the government support and development in the north, and downplaying the religious association of the terrorist and extremist groups could lead to a separation of religion from the violence. As previously mentioned, Archbishop Onaiyekan has identified the Boko Haram’s attacks as “not purely religious” in nature and are due to “being excluded from power” and a response to bad governance.⁵³ Another Christian leader, the Reverend Ransom Bello of the Christian Association of Nigeria’s Kano Chapter, an area hard hit by the attacks, says “they are not religious attacks; they are aggrieved people, disguised under the aegis of religion to cause insecurity in the country.”⁵⁴ The 2011 violence in the Middle Belt city of Jos stemmed from issues over land disputes between “indigenes” or those who are original land owners and nomadic settlers, the two parties also happened to be from different, competing religions.⁵⁵ The Sultan of Sokoto echoed similar ideals in a speech in October 2011 when he commented on the confrontation in Jos stating “it was a conflict between Muslims and Christians, but it was not a conflict between Islam and Christianity.”⁵⁶ This interesting distinction supports the

⁵² Christopher O’Connor, “A Discussion with Archbishop John Onaiyekan of Abuja.”

⁵³ Fredrick Nzwili and Ibrahim Garb, “Nigeria’s Boko Haram a Holy War? Maybe Not Entirely,” *The Christian Science Monitor*.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Lauren Ploch, *Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, 10.

⁵⁶ AllAfrica.com, “Islam and Peace Building in West Africa Challenges to Peace-Building.”

idea that religion is brought into the conflict or conversation merely because it is the background of those in conflict, not because it is the root of their disagreement or grievances.

Conclusion and Final Remarks

The ongoing violence and instability occurring in Nigeria has its roots from early colonialism. As in many African and Middle Eastern countries, boundaries were drawn by those who did not understand the existing ethnic or religious differences or they were purposefully used as a means to conquer and rule. The violence based on religious tensions will continue to occur as long as the groups fail to understand each other and demonize others' religion. When violence does occur, those instigating it must be treated as criminals and prosecuted. Dialogue among religious leaders and the government's ability to leverage this interaction to solve issues before violence occurs is critical to Nigeria's future. Knowing that religion will remain firmly entrenched in the identity of all Nigerians, the government must take steps, through formal agreements or official mandates, to ensure that its people are fully represented at all levels of government potentially decreasing the dissatisfaction with the current leadership while providing leaders with alternate viewpoints. Additionally, the governments at the Federal and state levels must address the under-development and economic difficulties in the regions where it is needed most. Addressing the grievances of the people and providing the same level of support and service across the nation in all regions could potentially diminish popular support for extremist, anti-government groups. Additionally, the criminal aspect of the violence must be highlighted while the religious affiliations of the groups in conflict should be de-emphasized. Failure to address these issues will certainly continue the strife and violence and will threaten the future of the country.

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