

## **Nomadic Fulani Herdsmen Turn Terrorists? Exploring The Situation And The Security Implications For Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper presents an analysis of the Fulani herdsmen attacks on farming communities and their activities generally across Nigeria. Essentially, the paper is a theoretical discourse and adopts a theoretic analytical method to assess and validate the proposition under focus. It explores the nature of the Fulani herdsmen activities to answer the question of whether or not they have turned terrorist group as public opinion suggests. In furtherance of this task, the meaning of terrorism and the features of terrorist groups were examined and compared with the features of the Fulani herdsmen activities, based on which arguments were generated that confirm that the Fulani herdsmen activities are not anyway different from terrorist activities. The paper concludes that in the circumstance, there is need for more serious attention on the situation. The recommendations range from legislative measures to increase surveillance and strict policing by state security agencies and operatives.

**Keywords:** Fulani Herdsmen, Terrorists, Attacks, Security Implications, Nigeria

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The activities of the contemporary Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria in recent times have become worrisome and a source of great concern to many Nigerians both within and in diaspora. To many Nigerians their activities are beyond what can be termed as mere crimes or pockets of killings by unidentified individuals. Consequent upon their activities, many people now live in fear and under great psychological trauma. This reality has raised the question among larger proportion of the Nigerian population as to whether these herdsmen are truly herdsmen or terrorists. Many have asserted that, the act of causing people to live in fear is a phenomenon that is associated with terrorism (Hayden, 2007). It is against this background that this paper explores the situation and the security implications for Nigerian society and as a nation. The paper examines the meaning of terrorism in juxtaposition with the activities of the Fulani herdsmen to answer the question and to place in proper perspective the Fulani nomadic herdsmen whether or not they are truly herdsmen or terrorists, in order for the nation to be well guided in its security decisions regarding their activities.

This author noted in the course of reviewing the literature on the Fulani tribe and her traditional livestock rearing occupation that a number of people have given accounts of the Fulani background and history, and what characterize their nomadic activities in recent times. But however, the outcomes from the analyses in this article would reveal what has been over looked, or add to what has been widely proven and put in the domain of government officials, and national and international security operatives particularly those with concerns for terrorism. Essentially, therefore, the objective of this paper is to echo the sounding voice by making further clarifications to sensitize and alert Nigerian government and security agencies on the potential danger and possible national security risk that the activities of the nomadic herdsmen pose to Nigeria as a nation, as well as the great implications for sustainable national development.

Essentially, the paper is a theoretical discourse of the commonality between the herdsmen activities and the characteristics of terrorism. It adopts a theoretic analytical method to assess and validate the proposition under focus. In order to appreciate the perspective of this paper on the situation, the first task is to understand the meaning of terrorism and its major characteristics. In this attempt, a brief review of the literature on terrorism is undertaken as follows.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Historical Background of Fulani Herdsmen

The history of Fulani herdsmen or pastoralists has been given extensively in the literature by a number of writers (e.g. Omilusi, 2016; Burton, 2016; Ibrahim, 2012; Rass, 2006; Blench, 1994; de St Croix, 1945) with no much difference in their accounts. Bulk of the historical perspectives suggest that the Fulani herdsmen are a part of the Peul or Fula ethnic group in Nigeria and other parts of Africa which has existed in some form, for thousands of years. They are called “Fulani herdsmen” because of their engagement in animal rearing as their major occupation and a source of livelihood. While the Fula tribe is found in the whole Africa except Liberia, their herdsmen are mainly in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Sudan, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina-Faso, Benin, Cote d’Ivoire and Cameroun.

The Fulani herdsmen are all Muslim (99.9%), with pure nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, and Islamic jihadist fundamental orientation by which they have lived since the period of the early Islamic jihads. Historically the Fula ethnic group from which Fulani herdsmen originate has a culture of warfare and conquest approach to livelihood and survival. Although this may be seen as a characteristic of all early African societies as a means of territorial expansion, protection and survival, but this tradition and culture have been dropped ages back by virtually all African societies and replaced with civilized and cooperative way of life and living within the boundaries of their territory. But the Fula people have found it difficult to change from this old tradition to the new way of life as a modern society devoid of the early African tradition of conquest. This makes them a radical departure from other African societies and a special case for African transitional history particularly considering that the Fula people are found in all African countries except Liberia (Odufowokan, 2014). Their transnational spread and occupation makes their desire for conquest a challenge to coexistence between them and other African societies of today.

### 2.2 Activities of the Contemporary Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria

The chronicle of the inhuman activities of the contemporary Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria is presented in details in Omilusi (2016), Burton (2016) and Duruon (2016). Evidently, from the accounts, the Fulani herdsmen attacks on Nigerian people have been a horrible experience over the last 20 years and have created tension particularly in the north-central and north-eastern part of the country, with successive increased magnitude and spread of efforts and actions that they have displayed from 2010 till date. The scale of deaths attributable to Fulani herdsmen attacks across the country far outweigh the amount of deaths that had been caused by any terrorist group or militant group that currently exist or ever existed in Nigeria, including the notorious Boko-Haram insurgents (Kazeem, 2017). The global institute for economics and peace based in Australia, recognized the attacks by the Fulani herdsmen as terrorism and in her global terrorism index ranked these herdsmen from the north as one of the world’s most deadly terrorist groups in 2013 at below 5<sup>th</sup> position, but in 2014 the group was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> world’s most deadly terrorist groups having killed 1,229 people across Nigeria in that year. According to Dickson et.al (2016) by 2015 the amount of killings had doubled the amount in 2014. The profile of killings by the herdsmen has continued to rise by the year, despite the serious condemnations that their activities have received from all over the world. In these attacks about 90% of the deaths are civilians where over the last 20 years Kaduna and Plateau people are the worst affected with over 10,000 deaths since 2010 (HRW, 2013). However, in general, the series of attacks, killings and destruction of private properties by the herdsmen have been reported in 22 States out of the 36 States of the country besides the three original states of Kaduna, Plateau and Nasarawa where they have operated with greatest impact. These recent infiltrated states include, Adamawa, Niger, Ekiti, Ondo, Osun, Ogun, Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Ebonyi, Enugu, Abia, Anambra, Imo, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Edo and Rivers state (Duruon, 2016; Omilusi, 2016). Each of these states has suffered a number of human losses from the Fulani herdsmen attacks over time.

From January 2015 to June 2016, there were nearly 60 significant attacks by Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria and the number of attacks in the first half of 2016 was almost equal the total attacks in 2015. The Global Terrorist Index(GTI) report of 2015 showed that over 90% of the herdsmen attacks are on private citizens and this accounts for 81% of deaths caused by terrorist militia and militancy in Nigeria. This makes the Fulani herdsmen the deadliest militia ever in Nigeria. Dickson et.al (2016), report that before 2015 the largest attack was in 2014 when in a single attack, over 200 people in a meeting were slaughtered in cold blood in one village in Zamfara State. But since 2015 there have been greater attacks and the trend has not abated in 2017. Odufowokan (2014) had likened the widespread activities of the herdsmen in Nigeria to genocide on the indigenes of the states particularly in the North Central. As he noted, a major characteristic of the herdsmen attacks is that they have often been orchestrated when farmers are on their farms in isolation or when residents are in a funeral ceremony with heavy attendance, and at nights when villagers are fast asleep.

One revelation from the list of the states where the Fulani herdsmen attacks have taken place or are taking place is that the attacks have mainly been in the middle belt and southern states, which gives room for interpretation of the attacks with ethnic coloration. The herdsmen have also been engaged in waylaying

motorists on the highways and kidnapping, raping, robbing and inflicting serious injuries on their victims (Vanguard, April 28, 2016) which suggests the attacks are not on farmers alone. The Fulani herdsmen have also been found in armed troops. For instance, as reported by Duruon (2016), a batch of 36 heavily armed Fulani herdsmen was intercepted by security agents between FCT and Nasarawa State, and another batch of 56 armed herdsmen was intercepted near Gini flyover on Abuja Airport Road. Obi (2016) asserts that the infiltration of the southern Nigeria by the Fulani herdsmen is suggestive of insurgency. He expresses the fear that the group may well be Boko Haram in a different package to advance the objectives of the Islamic sect to infiltrate the south of the country which the conventional/regular troops have not been unable to penetrate.

In the face of the havocs being caused by the Fulani herdsmen across the length and breadth of Nigeria, there have been strong arguments and counter arguments to place the group in proper perspective. Particularly, many people and groups from the northern part of the country, especially among the elites and stakeholder groups of Fula origin and extraction, such as the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) represented by its president (Omitola, 2016), Alhaji Mohammed Nuru Abdullahi (The Punch, May 8, 2016), Alhaji Bello Abdullahi Bodejo (Leadership, April 25, 2014), and Miyetti Alhah KautalHore, a Fulani right protection group (Odemwingie, 2014), Gan Allah Fulani Association, an umbrella body of Fulani Associations in Nigeria, and the very well respected Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III, (Omilusi, 2016; Aminu, Mohammed & Shittu, 2016) among others have argued vehemently against the view that the herdsmen have turned another terrorist group in Nigeria. They argue that the Fulani herders have been wrongly characterized and labeled and what exists between them and host communities are mere occupational clashes over grazing lands, which have no resemblance with terrorist tendency. Now the question is what is terrorism? What are the features of terrorist groups and their attacks? What makes the Fulani herders' attacks on their victims terrorist attacks or not?

### **III. TERRORISM**

There is no universally agreed definition of terrorism. As Morris (2005) puts it "neither academic nor government experts can agree on a suitable definition for terrorism." According to him, terrorism is a term used in broad sense to describe the use of intentionally indiscriminate violence as a means to create terror or, in order to achieve a political, religious or ideological aim. Primarily it refers to violence against civilians or non-combatants by armed person(s). Chomsky (2015) describe terrorism as simply 'the killing of innocent people' for any reason in such a way as to create a spectacle. Many of the definitions characterize terrorism as a lower form or scale of insurgency motivated by a political agenda. However, what is common agreement is the belief that terrorism is a crime in all its forms irrespective of whoever are the targets and the objectives intended. Hayden (2007) defines terrorism or terrorist activity as "an act of violence by criminals or crazies who want to strike out at anyone....." He states that terrorism can also be a subset of an insurgency. In his view, the only difference between insurgency and terrorism is that insurgents use ideology to attack their target but terrorists attack their target to advance ideology. Morris (2005) states that terrorist units are usually smaller than insurgent groups and comprising of isolated groups not organized into a formal military chain of command. In other words, terrorist organizations are clandestine, maintaining extreme secrecy and compartmented cells to ensure security. The United States department of defense (DoD) (2007) doctrinally defined terrorism as 'the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.' Besides these three motives the goal may also be economically motivated. Explaining the nature of terrorism in contrast to insurgency, the US DoD (2007) posit that the goals of terrorist are not specific to governments but rather involve broader ideological intentions. Besides, terrorists' targets may not necessarily be governments but they may choose to attack societies directly in the pursuit of their goals. The US DoD argues that terrorists by nature of their activities are not necessarily concerned with change in government, reallocation of power or challenging existing social orders.

Terrorism becomes insurgency when the activities are carried out by a group of individuals with a known or an unknown identity, and where the activities are coordinated with high level of sophistication with an aim to capture and take control of a target geographical location with a given population of people in a way that displaces them both politically, socially and economically, without any concrete goal. It is an uprising of dissident groups in protest against internally perceived unfavourable policies of government. Barash and Webel (2009) stated that terrorism means premeditated, politically motivated violence against the non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. While Burton (2016) maintains that "terrorism is the use of coercive means aimed at civilian populations to achieve political, religious or other aims" There are various strategies employed by terrorists to achieve their goals (Chomsky, 2015). In whatever form and level, terrorism is an organized crime perpetuated by a group of individuals within a given location or from different locations but bound by common objective. When terrorist activity involves people in two or more countries maintaining a system of operations and communication that is effective enough

to perform transactions to achieve their goals repeatedly, it is then a transnational terrorism (UNODC Report, 2005).

#### **IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND ARGUMENTS IN THE ACTIVITIES OF TERRORISTS AND FULANI HERDSMEN**

From the various definitions and explanations on terrorism and the features of a terrorist group provided above, the answer to the question of whether or not the Fulani herdsmen have become terrorists as many observers have asked and the validity of insinuations by many others that they are not different from terrorists groups will become clear if we juxtapose the nature of the herdsmen activities with the features of terrorism embedded in the definitions and explanations given in the literature on terrorism.

##### **4.1 Comparative features**

The literature revealed that the targets for terrorist attacks are usually non-combatant civilian society. Similarly, the herdsmen attacks are targeted at unarmed private citizens who are mainly farming communities. According to Omilusi (2016) and Burton (2016) civilian deaths represent 81% of the total deaths caused by the Fulani herdsmen attacks across the country.

Terrorist attackers and the attacks are carefully coordinated to ensure safety of their members. In a similar fashion, the herdsmen and their attacks are coordinated for their security and protection such that they are not identified, found nor caught during and after their operations/attacks. In other words, the Fulani herdsmen like known groups of terrorists have safe hide-outs and they go into hiding for their safety after attacking their victims. In all of the attacks reported, the herdsmen were able to escape being apprehended as there was no report of any occasion where anyone was caught.

The hide-outs or bases and abodes of terrorist groups are usually places or locations that are not easily accessible such as thick forests, deserts, high seas, undergrounds (tunnels) and caves. This is evident with the Fulani herdsmen who are now locating bases and hide-outs as grazing camps in the thick forests of other communities that are difficult to access even by the indigenes of the communities, in the name of searching for grazing lands.

Although terrorist attacks are more often on civilian communities but the message is for government and to draw government attention. This is apparently the case with the Fulani herdsmen actions. The Fulani herdsmen have aimed to get the attention of the government in order to achieve their goals (Burton, 2016). Evidently the herdsmen have succeeded more than any militia to draw government attention to the extent that the national assembly is considering a bill for grazing fields/routes. They have inspired government action. Although contentious, the proposed grazing bill is a sign of progress for the Fulani toward achieving their goals (Burton, 2016).

Terrorist attacks are usually perpetuated to enforce certain demands on government and to achieve certain objectives that are in their interest. This is also the case with the Fulani herdsmen. Their demand is for grazing land, that is, to be allowed freedom to graze wherever they find fields irrespective of who owns the land. They are demanding from government to have equal right of ownership and authority over lands/fields irrespective of location across the country. "The main goal of the Fulani attacks is to take control of land in order to provide the herdsmen's cattle with more grazing room, and their attacks are meant to drive away farmers and intimidate local landowners"(Burton, 2016). The demand is to achieve their business objectives/interest of meeting the grazing needs of their herds/Cattles.

Terrorist attacks are usually propelled by certain ideology i.e. to advance certain ideology (Hayden, 2007; US DoD, 2007). The Fulani herdsmen attacks on various communities across the country in demand for or to acquire grazing lands are also ideological. Their ideology is loosely anchored on the Boko-Haram ideology which suggestively by interpretation is that the traditional Islamic culture is superior to other cultures and the entire Nigeria must fall under the Islamic culture and economic system and therefore if Nigerians fail to accept and imbibe the Islamic culture and economic system they must be compelled to conform through violent attacks and intimidation. The Fulani herdsmen ideology is an extension of this ideology which itself derives from the so called Islamic-Jihadist conquest ideology. Following from this, the Fulani herdsmen ideology is that all lands in Nigeria must be used according to Islamic culture which prescribes open access to all lands with a right of usage to all members in an Islamic society which Nigerian Muslim fanatics (Islamic religion extremists in Nigeria)conceive Nigeria to be, and therefore they must accordingly, be given the right to all lands for grazing anywhere in the country. This is evident from the Fulani herdsmen declaration "No one can stop us from grazing in the south" (The Punch, May 1, 2016). One finds that the herdsmen attacks are on communities with little or no Islamic fanaticism/extremist view.

Terrorist groups are usually sponsored directly or indirectly by financial provision and other facilities. This is not different with the Fulani herdsmen. Apparently, the Fulani herdsmen are working on behalf of the cattle owners. Often the herdsmen are not the owners of the animals; they are only agents and caretakers on

behalf of the owners on commission. It implies that their principals would provide support to enable them actualize their struggle for grazing fields since it is in the business interest of the cattle owners. Such support and sponsorship have come in different forms whether through the provision of firearms and ammunitions to the herdsmen in the name of self-protection means against provocations from farming communities whose farms might be trespassed, and to fight against cattle rustlers; or the provision of safe-haven for herdsmen who have committed crimes; and the creation of structures to protect herdsmen from being sanctioned when they break the laws of the land. Sponsorship or support for the herdsmen have also come in form of public speeches in favour of the actions of the herdsmen, that are calculated to trivialize the negative impacts and danger of their activities so as convince the state and security agencies to look the other way.

Terrorist attacks are carried out repeatedly in different locations by the terrorist group. The Fulani herdsmen attacks are not different. The attacks are no more sporadic but rather systematic, and are carried out repeatedly in different locations of Nigeria. For instance, within a period of one and half years (January 2015 to June 2016), Fulani Herdsmen attacked about 60 times across Nigeria in different places, and the number of attacks in the first half of 2016 was nearly equal the total attacks in 2015 (Omilusi, 2016), indicative of a systematic progression.

The operative goal of terrorists' attacks is to inculcate fear in their target victims and create an atmosphere of fear and psychological trauma in the people to make them or government yield to their demands. There is no doubt that the herdsmen attacks are geared to achieve this goal in the first instance and evidently this is being achieved tremendously as farmers and farming communities now live in fear with experiences of unending attacks of the herdsmen, and Nigerians in general live in an environment of increased insecurity.

Terrorists attacks are usually unsuspected and often, but not necessarily, at locations and occasions/gatherings with large population of civilians, and at such periods as during ceremonies and nights when people are asleep. The herdsmen attacks have followed the same pattern as various accounts have indicated that attacks have been carried out in ceremonies such as funeral ceremonies, for example, the attack in plateau state at the funeral ceremony of the 60 victims of their previous attack in a Church premises (Oluwajuyitan, 2016). This unsuspected attack claimed the lives of Senator Gyang Dantong and Hon. Gyang Fulani of Plateau State House of Assembly. The evidences also show that the herdsmen attacks on victim communities are not only on entire communities (for instance, the communities of Agatu and Agwobi in Plateau State; Egba in Benue State; Amoji in Delta State; Ikole-Ekiti in Ekiti State; and Ukpabi Nimbo in Enugu State among others) but in almost all the time they take place at dead nights when the people are fast asleep. Besides, there are also cases of attacks and killings of isolated individuals particularly in farms e.g. the case of Thompson Ogege at Ofagbe in Isoko North and that of the young man who went to rescue his mother from the assault by herdsmen at her farm in Abraka, both in Delta State; and also attacks and killings of notable persons in society e.g. HRH, Akaeze Ofulue III of Ubulu-Uku, Delta State, Governor Gabriel Suswan who narrowly escaped death, and the kidnap of Chief Olu Falae, among other cases.

The methods and instruments or weapons of attacks by terrorist groups are usually gun shootings, grenades, bombings (including suicide bombing) and other explosives. The methods of the herdsmen attacks have not been different. There have also been gun shootings and physical confrontations. Although there is not yet any evidence of bombings, grenades and suicide bombings, there is nevertheless no assurance that these methods will not be employed in the future.

Terrorists groups have international network system through which they enjoy cooperation from sister groups and receive support for logistics, supplies and personnel recruitment. The Fulani herdsmen also have such network system for contact and association with other militia groups and individuals within and outside the country. For instance, within Nigeria, they have affinity with the Boko-Haram terrorist insurgent group and other Muslim fundamentalists with a common thread of Islamic brotherhood bringing them together under one ideological movement. Internationally, they have network with herdsmen from other countries in Africa and exchange resources and have received support from their counterparts in neighbouring countries such as Chad, Libya, Niger, Guinea, Cameroun, Senegal, Mali, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and others. The herdsmen network system is enhanced by the fact that their dominant tribe, Fula or Peul is spread across the continent of Africa and receive support on the basis of tribal brotherhood. This argument is corroborated by the claim by some Fulani herdsmen activities stakeholders that many of the herdsmen attacks in the country had been done by the Fulani herdsmen from other countries, particularly Libya and not Nigerian Fulani herdsmen.

Terrorist groups usually take responsibility for their attacks and even where such attacks may not have been carried out by them. The objective is to confirm their existence and re-affirm their commitment to their goal and resilience towards government counter attacks, and consequently sustain the state of trepidation and trauma which they have succeeded in creating in society. The Fulani herdsmen have also shown this trait. For instance, in the series of attacks on Buruku Local Government Area in Benue State, while it was government opinion that the attacks were carried out by Libyan herdsmen the Nigerian Fulani herdsmen in the area quickly

took responsibility and claimed that the attacks were carried out by them as a reprisal for the theft and killing of their cattle estimated to be over 800 herds in the area (Omilusi, 2016).

Chomsky (2015) summarized the features of terrorism into four characteristics as follows: (a) the threat or use of violence (b) motivated by a political/religious/ethnic/economic/ideological objectives; and the wish to change the status-quo (c) the aim is to breed fear by committing spectacular public acts (d) planned target of civilian.

#### **4.2 Arguments**

The analysis of the characteristics of terrorist groups and their activities vis-a-vis the activities and modus operandi of the herdsmen in Nigeria greatly support the argument by many people that their activities are terrorists in nature. The activities satisfy all of the twelve (12) features of terrorism examined in the analysis. In addition to the revelation from the comparative analysis above, the following supportive arguments to the contrary that the herdsmen are not terrorists are advanced in our discussion.

In the first place, traditional herdsmen in ages past had not been known to carry arms and coordinate themselves to sack communities and dispossess them of their farm lands and belongings as it is being experienced now. Herdsmen are usually some nomadic primitive, innocent and peaceful youths who go in group of two to four persons with their cattle grazing in non-farm areas. Traditional herdsmen are never known to carrying ammunitions as this new form of herdsmen appears to do. That they are able to sack communities/villages as evident from the widely spread reports, suggests that they are moving in far larger groups outside the tradition and with more sophisticated weapons than normal. This departure from the old tradition presents a room for suspicion about a possible hidden agenda. Now, if they are mere herdsmen, with incessant clashes with society in the scale being reported, why are their masters (the cattle merchants themselves) not calling them to order? Are they now out of the control of their masters who engaged them? It is also not convincing that ordinary herdsmen who are usually in two to four persons and strangers in their host communities for that matter would overrun a community of about 100,000 people in one night attack, rendering indigenes homeless, even if ten teams of these come together, except there is some massive re-enforcement from allies within or from outside, which is likely to have been the case in each of these attacks as reported. The argument here is that ordinary primitive herdsmen would not mobilize resources and coordinate in such manner to achieve this feat. Their capacities and capabilities in this regard suggest that these herdsmen are more than ordinary herdsmen. This is true considering also the fact that in all the attacks or so called clashes, the herdsmen never sustain losses of men; they are never killed or caught by the villagers they clash with. The villagers have always lost to these strangers in their lands under their superior firearms.

Furthermore, it is also not believable that herdsmen in their ordinary activities of grazing would go in troops and in possession of sophisticated weapons such as rifles, Mark 4 and AK47 as some reports revealed. Traditional herdsmen are not known to carry such weapons of attack/defence. At worst scenario they would only have been expected to be in possession of local guns and double barrel guns. However, the question is how are these supposed primitive and young nomadic cattle grazers who speak only their native language able to do market transactions in arms, negotiate and acquire the ammunitions without assistance from external parties? Our line of thought here is that, either their masters who are likely to be more enlightened must have equipped them with the ammunitions or the herdsmen themselves could have acquired them through other militia group affiliates within or outside the country, which already have channels for mass arms procurement.

There is also the claim that the herdsmen carrying out the criminal attacks are not Nigerian Fulani herdsmen but rather Fulani herdsmen from neighbouring countries who have migrated into the country across the borders through the forests. If truly the attackers are mainly infiltrators from other countries, why wouldn't the Nigerian Fulani herdsmen identify them and hand them to security agency if only to save them from the accusations and allegations of criminal acts leveled against them. Are the principal owners of the cattle and their associations suggesting that they do not know those working for them (tendering their cattle) in the field and that they are not able to distinguish between their own men and the foreigners in their midst that are causing trouble for them and the country? These claims are difficult to accept as true. There is need for security agencies to investigate thoroughly the identity of herdsmen wherever they are found by possibly asking for their proof of Nigerian Nationality, and also to call the attention of cattle owners through their associations to identify their herdsmen and certify and guarantee that they are Nigerians.

Furthermore, it is also claimed by some stakeholders that herdsmen as peaceful people, usually notify community heads of their presence in their communities and seek permission to graze in their lands to protect them from harassment from community members. This suggests that the herdsmen and their cattle are usually under the protection of the community rulers and can always turn their complaints to them, should they have any challenge from community members whether in the bush or inside the town, for resolution instead of taking laws into their hands to avenge their maltreatment or express their grievances against one or some community members who might have wrong them. After all, it is in the view of resolving possible challenges amicably with

their host communities and to ensure their safety that they report and document their presence with community leaders as the stakeholders claim they do. In other words, if their stay in their host communities is well meant and they are peace loving, the issue of reprisal attacks by the herdsmen and fighting to protect their cattle from rustling, causing them to kill people and wage wars against entire communities for every incidence, without recourse to the community leadership would not arise. The right thing would be to seek redress with the community leaders or better still report their ordeals to the police for them to handle. The principals or the cattle owners through their associations can also be involved to seek redress in civilized ways other than the uncivilized means they employ. Aside this approach, it is difficult to accept the claim that the herdsmen attacks are devoid of terrorist objectives or other underlying criminal motives.

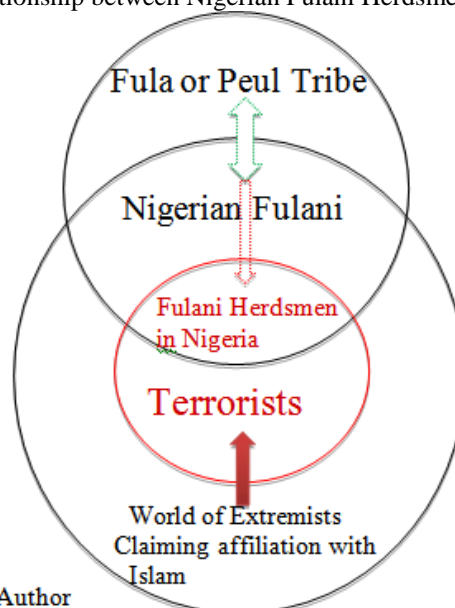
There is no gain saying that the theory of reprisal attacks being put forward and canvassed by the stakeholders does not anyway make sense of the actions and activities of the Fulani herdsmen being reported from across the country. If we argue that the attacks are simply fall-outs from occupational clashes between farmers and herdsmen in the fields, what about the killings that have happened outside the farmlands? For instance, what about the people who were murdered in the premises of a church in plateau state, and the killing of those who attended their funeral days later? What are the justifications for these killings?

Moreover, it has also been argued that the nomadic herdsmen traditionally move south ward in the dry season and go back north during wet season. This presupposes that the clashes should occur mainly in the dry seasons as herdsmen would have migrated back up north during the wet season when fields in the north will be green. But studies on the clashes have revealed conspicuously that the clashes are perennial, continuing all year round, both in rainy and dry seasons and not restricted to specific periods of the year, and in the same scale in the middle belt and southern part lately (Omilusi, 2016). Thus to argue that the attacks are occupational clashes is deceptive.

## V. THEORETICAL MODELS FOR THE ARGUMENTS ON THE PRECARIOUSNESS OF THE FULANI HERDSMEN

Figure 1 and 2 below are the theoretical models for the arguments on the precariousness of the identity status of the Fulani herdsmen, the current situation and the potential danger and security risk that Nigeria faces with the Fulani herdsmen Phenomenon. Figure 1 indicates that Fulani herdsmen activities have characteristics similar to those of terrorist groups and like most other terrorist groups, they are from the world of extremists claiming affiliation with Islam. The figure also presents the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria to include both Nigerian Fulani herdsmen and immigrant Fulani herdsmen from neighbouring countries, who may have probably entered into the country illegally. This situation has been argued strongly by the Fulani stakeholders. This free trans-border movement of criminal herders into the country is enhanced by the similarity intribal/cultural backgrounds among the herdsmen in the neighbourhood of Nigeria, which provides them with easy habitation opportunities in Nigeria. A major feature of the herdsmen is that they belong to the extremist family claiming affiliation with Islam and from which historically almost all internationally known terrorist groups have originated and harboured.

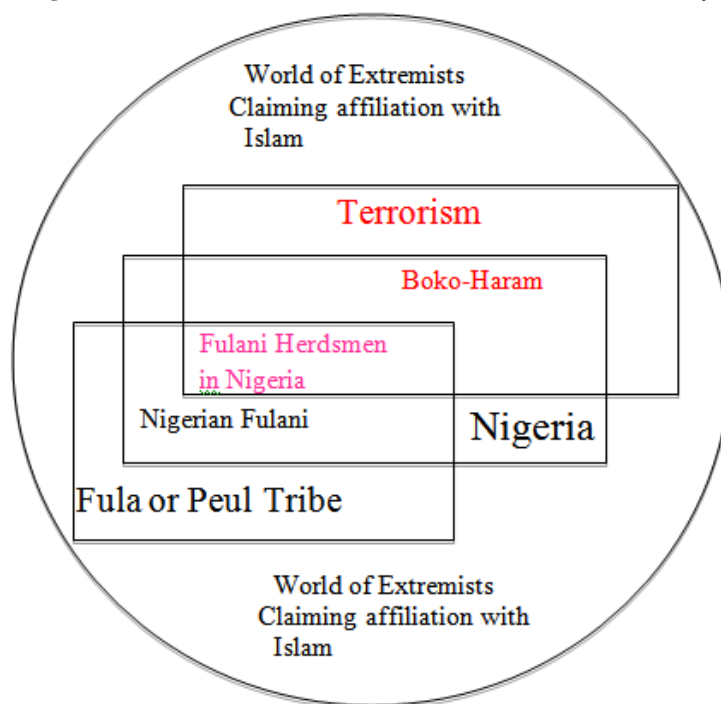
**Figure 1:** Cultural Relationship between Nigerian Fulani Herdsmen and Terrorist groups



Source: Author

Figure 2 presents the affinity of the Fulani herdsmen with other Fula kinsmen both outside Nigeria and within Nigeria, as well as their affinity with the Boko-haram terrorist group in the country and other terrorist groups in the world. The overlapping sections indicate that Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria share characteristics with Boko-haram and other groups of terrorists having the same operational objective – violence, fear and intimidation of public members. They also share cultural characteristics with other Peul members, and purportedly with predominantly the same religion- Islam.

**Figure 2:** Cultural Contact of Fulani Herdsmen and Network system



Source: Author

## VI. FEARS AHEAD

There is no doubt that the current situation of the Fulani herdsmen unabated attack on individuals and communities is worrisome, particularly considering the sophistication of their weapons and the level of coordination of their activities. From the analysis of their activities it has been shown that the difference between them and terrorist groups is blurred. There is no much difference and if at all, the line of difference is becoming thinner by each passing day. The fear is that the group may assume more sophistication and become as daring as the Boko-haram terrorist insurgent group. Considering the present level of attacks on communities, it is not out of place to think that in future they may resort to bombing attacks particularly suicide bombing with their animals as agents, by tying explosives on them and releasing them to run into their target areas and communities. Considering their cultural background and belief system and taking cues from antecedence of groups with the same belief system and culture, they have the potential for suicide bombing and indeed there is high probability that they could engage this method as their desperation advances if left untamed. Furthermore, from the historical accounts of the transnational background of the fula tribe it is evident that the Fulani herdsmen have considerable source of potential personnel that can be mobilized for the purpose of mass attack on their victims, as well as sources of finance and strategic network across Africa. This provides them a high degree of sustainable existence.

It is also feared that with the outcries from various ethnic nations and ethno-socio groups across the country demanding government to call to order the Fulani herdsmen and to stop them from attacking their people, else they would have to protect their people by having their own security apparatus and using whatever means at their disposal, the situation is likely to breed multiple self defence counter security groups which may be uncontrollable by government and which may turn out to be bigger security threat to this nation that is already confronted with devastating insecurity experience.

There is also the fear that the violence is not likely to end and might lead to total national chaos because if the attacks are justified as reprisal attacks as some Fulani stakeholders have demonstrated openly, then the country is headed for a ripple of reprisal attacks as there is possibly going to be spiral attack experience.



Each reprisal attack will set off another reprisal attack and this “will be an endless cycle of violence” (Amaza, 2016), particularly when the violence takes on the sensitive issue of ethnicity with more potential for ripple effects which can result subsequently in total breach in national security across the nation. The point being made is that the herdsmen activities are capable of degenerating to a significant destabilizing security factor in Nigeria in the next few years.

## **VII. SECURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA**

The Fulani herdsmen behaviour and actions present a number of security challenges that portend even greater dangers to sustainable nationhood than the Boko-haram terrorist insurgency does. The forests and fields of Nigeria are becoming the dens of lion herdsmen, and no one dares enter them in any part of the country, for fear of being devoured by the lions. Even inside towns and villages in some northern parts of the country people cannot sleep without the fear of being attacked in dead of the night by herdsmen supposedly.

Evidently, there is a growing awareness by various socio-cultural groups and ethnic militias of the need to protect their people from the Fulani herdsmen attacks if government and its security operatives would not protect them. A few of such groups include, the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign States of Biafra (MASSOB), Ijaw Youths Council (IYC) worldwide, Agbekoya Socio-cultural group (alias South–West Warrior Association), and Oodua People’s Congress (OPC) (Umoru, et. al, 2016; Punch, May1, 2016) to mention a few. These groups have openly and without reservation echoed their dissatisfaction and displeasure about the lackadaisical attitude of the federal government and security agencies towards the attack by the Fulani herdsmen on various communities and the peoples of Nigeria.

The present awareness and need may lead to the formation of more ethnic or regional militia groups (soldiers) with definitely great security implications for Nigeria. The multiplication of self defence forces (ethnic or community soldiers) is capable of undermining national cohesiveness and unity with attendant uncontrollable effect on the already weakened internal security of the country, which eventually can give rooms for external aggressors to infiltrate the country. It is not out of place to think that some of such self defence groups might be hijacked by internal or international/foreign ideologist for their private agenda. A critical illustration of this scenario is the case with “Ombatse,” an Eggon ethnic militia in Nasarawa, formed to protect their people from the Fulani herdsmen attack but subsequently hijacked by unscrupulous individuals for political violence and criminal acts (Baca, 2015). This group, sometime in 2013, directly and openly confronted Nigerian security operatives at Abuja in attempt to engage the federal government (Baca, 2015; Omilusi, 2016).

Our point of argument is that, as Ashiru (2016) contended the desire by various communities to protect themselves against the herdsmen who are seemingly untamable by government, and to balance terror will cause ethnic groups and communities to form their own armies to protect themselves, and consequently increase significantly the prevalence and accumulation of illegal arms and without any doubt this will exacerbate the level of crime and insecurity in the country. These armies may eventually turn to be parallel forces to federal army.

## **VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, the author aligns with Omilusi (2016) that Nigerian government appears not to have the monitoring capabilities and parameters for measuring the intensity of the herdsmen’s actions, but however, the spiraling rise in fatalities and destruction of properties and the growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) should serve as informal benchmarks for assessing the extent of havoc that the Fulani herdsmen activities have caused Nigerian society, and to serve as early warning signs about the level of the danger ahead. The wind of apprehension blowing through the entire Nigerian society on account of the Fulani herdsmen activities is sufficient barometer to indicate the national security implications ahead; and the social, economic and political costs and effects. At present the weight is on the farmers or farming communities and rural dwellers but the ripple effects will be on everyone in no distant time, if all hands are not on deck to halt the Fulani herdsmen’s menace.

Now, farmers across the country cannot freely and safely go their farmlands without the fear of being molested and attacked by armed Fulani herdsmen. With farmers not able to farm their lands as a result of the incessant attacks by the Fulani herdsmen, there is likely soon to be food insecurity engulfing Nigerians. There is also the likely effect on unemployment and crime rate as unemployed youths who had turn to farming would now return from the farms to square up with unemployment by taking to criminal activities to survive. Moreover, there is no gain saying that the present situation has implications for food security in Nigeria. While the great role of cattle entrepreneurship in the Nigerian economy is acknowledged, it is nevertheless instructive to note that Nigerians cannot survive on livestock alone without food crops. The food requirement by Nigeria cannot be provided and satisfied by cattle owners and herdsmen alone. Food crops farmers are also very important if not more important in the economic scheme of the nation, and therefore must be protected against invasion and molestation in their farms.

Invariably, there is an urgent need in the circumstance for government to brace up to her responsibility to ensure security of lives and properties, and security of the farming communities across the country, particularly to see to it that the terrorist tendency of the Fulani herdsmen towards farming communities is checkmated and halted before it degenerates to a full blown insurgency as we now experience with the Boko-haram group.

An approach to finding an end to the terrorist behaviour of the so called herdsmen would include the following components:

- The characteristics of traditional herdsmen would have to be examined and juxtaposed with the new form of herdsmen to determine who they actually are, and unveil their true identity to the public. It is highly suspected that cattle rearing entrepreneurship is being used to provide a cover for these unidentified groups of persons whose activities apparently have the characteristics of terrorism.
- All cattle breeders and their agents should be invited by the relevant security agency and regulatory authority for identification and be registered/licensed with their particulars including their permanent home and office addresses officially documented.
- Each cattle breeder be issued a registration or licence number which his agents/herdsmen can carry about and be written on every of his animals to serve as a means of identification through which they can trace them or get back to their masters in the event of trespassing the law and being wanted by the authority.
- Beyond informing the leadership of their host communities of their presence in such communities as they claim they do, they should also report to the divisional police office nearest to their host communities upon arrival at the communities to register their presence with the police, using their licence number. The police will then issue them a grazing permit after verifying their status.
- Herdsmen who are accused of allowing their cattle to destroy farms and crops should be investigated by the police, tried appropriately and if found culpable should be sanctioned and made to pay compensation that may be estimated as the value of the farm or extent of destruction, to the farm owner(s) affected. While farmers who falsely and wrongly accuse herdsmen of farm destruction should be made to face the law upon confirmation of falsehood and be made to pay a fine.
- Any event of cattle rustling should be reported appropriately and timely by cattle owners and/or their herdsmen to the host community leadership and the police force for investigation and whoever is found to be involved is made to face the law and prosecuted in a competent appropriate court of law within the area of jurisdiction where the crime was committed, and whoever is found guilty by a court of law should face imprisonment of an appropriate term without an option of fine. While any cattle owner or herdsman who raises false alarm about his animals being stolen should be sanctioned and made to pay a fine once he fails to establish his case against the suspect(s) who he must identify to the police command or prosecuting authority.
- Security operatives must be at greater alert and security checks at Nigerian borders with her neighbouring countries must be beefed up to track all foreign herdsmen illegally migrating into the country. Nigerian immigration and forest guards must increase and intensify surveillance around the forests surrounding Nigerian boundaries with neighbouring countries to stop illegal immigrants generally and foreign herdsmen in particular, whom the cattle breeders associations and other stakeholders have claimed to be responsible for the terrorist attacks on farming communities and rural dwellers across Nigeria.
- Government must legislate against the handling and use of firearms and other dangerous weapons by herdsmen as means of protection while in the grazing fields, besides the subsisting laws against illegal possession of firearms. This implies that the police force must intensify her efforts to police the herdsmen against the possession of firearms and ammunitions. They must pay their camps and settlements constant policing visits to ensure they dispossess them of arms and dangerous weapons. The stop and search approach to policing must now be extended to them wherever they are found whether in trucks or on grazing treks and be prosecuted accordingly if found with firearms and ammunitions.

The adoption of this approach and its effectiveness however requires the will of government and cooperation of everybody. Government must wake up now to understand that individual citizens or group cannot use their private businesses to cause break down of law and order and cause disaffection to create a state of distrust and insecurity amongst the Nigerian citizenry.

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