

## Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) as Iran's Silhouette in Nigeria: An Examination of the Security and Diplomatic Contours and their Implications.

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**Abstract:** This paper argues that the Shi'a inspired Islamic religious group known as Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) has suffered wrong diagnosis. For instance, researches on IMN have always investigated IMN in the context of Iranian Shi'a ideology and theology only. This alone is not sufficient, therefore very misleading. The reason is that the same Iranian Shi'a inspired groups in Nigeria such as the Ahlul Bait Institute (ABI), located in Kano, has always disagreed with IMN over its incurable political commitment and total disregard for the Nigerian state. Furthermore, Isa and Sani (2017) have argued that another Iranian inspired Shi'a group, Ransulul A'zam Foundation (RAAF) does not support the popular processions (mu āharāt) which have become the hallmark of the IMN and which often turn into political demonstrations. Unlike the IMN, the RAAF recognizes the supremacy of the Nigerian government and abides by the laws of the state. This paper, therefore, posits that Iran is only using IMN in the context of religious soft power. The term 'soft power' refers to the ability of a state to shape the preferences of another state's aggressive ways, policy conduct, including the use of proxies for hidden agenda. In this case, Iran is using IMN to fight Western interests particularly that of Israel and USA that is mounting pressure for it to be continually sanctioned for a number of reasons that pose a threat to global peace. This paper concludes with the view that Iran is only perfecting her strategy of using proxies for its interest.

**Keywords:** Islamic Movement of Nigeria, Shi'a, radicalisation, religious soft power, Islam

### Introduction

From time immemorial, religion has continued to influence the socio-political activities of man. Evidences abound from different researches indicating that religion will continue to dominate worldly affairs. It is against this background that religion becomes a space for expressing conventional geopolitical rivalries among religious groups such as IMN, Boko Haram etc in Nigeria. As it is, such groups take on the state authorities as IMN is doing. An example is Hezbollah in Lebanon that has become nuisance to that state. Furthermore, Iran is known to be sponsoring Houthi, which rebelled against the Yemeni state. Another worry is that if Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood can gain political influence through the ballot box, then more non-state actors and transnational networks will be encouraged to advocate for more Islamic form of politics or seek to undermine existing state structures as IMN is doing in Nigeria. This has forced analyst to consider Islam as statecraft. According to Mandaville and Shandi (2018) Islam as statecraft refers to efforts by the state to harness the power of religious symbols and authority in the service of geopolitical objectives. Once Islam is inserted into public debates, how citizens interpret their religion becomes, in effect, a matter of national security. Therefore, if government does not directly involve in the debates around the nature and purpose of Islam and religion in general, it would be leaving an ideological vacuum that domestic challengers such as Boko Haram and IMN are taking advantage of.

It is important to make some basic clarification from the onset. First, this paper refutes the position of earlier researches that give the impression that IMN is the entire gamut of Shi'a in Nigeria. However, the paper concedes that some members of Shi'a are also members of IMN. Second, literature is replete with different spelling of Shi'a. The most common remain Shi'a and Shiites. Nevertheless, in this work, we shall be sticking to Shi'a. However, other quoted works that use Shiites or other spelling forms will be allowed to remain.

This research adopts a longitudinal case study method approach in studying the phenomenon of IMN. Anjide and Chukwuma (2017) say this would help in proffering an in-depth understanding of IMN. It also allows for both theoretical and empirical studies to be applied. Although the background of the authors as Nigerians may be seen as prejudiced; it nonetheless strengthens the study with empirical knowledge of the religious history and dynamics in Nigeria which researchers outside Nigeria may not boast of. This knowledge also helps to interpret and analyse available sources on the phenomenon. In addition, framing theory is adopted as parameter fence for this study.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

This paper earlier observed that IMN has not been properly understood. This is either as a consequence of how the group has framed itself or is been framed. In addition, the tact deployed by IMN to the extent of commanding a large followership in manner in which the group appears today is a pointer to framing. It is based on the foregoing that this paper makes use of framing theory to substantiate and argue its claims. In addition, Smith B. L. *et al* (2016) have identified framing theory as both a precursor activity and radicalisation process. Meanwhile, IMN is accused of these two critical elements of radicalisation: provocative preaching and hate speech (The Nation, 2019). This therefore makes framing theory to be apt for this paper.

According to Orowolo (2017), the concept of framing was first posited by Gregory Bateson in 1972. He defined framing as a spatial and temporary bounding of set of interactive messages (Bateson, 1972) that operates as a form of meta-communication (Hallahan, 2008). For Chong and Druckman (2007), framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue. Generally, framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called "the frame") influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Far from being exclusively located in the sender of the message, the frame is located both in the sender and the receiver, the (informative) text and culture.

Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure message meaning. In this connection, Chong and Druckman (2016) argue that the term "frame" from which framing is derived is used in two ways and both applies to this discourse. First, a frame in communication or a media frame refers to the words, images, phrases, and presentation styles that a speaker (e.g., a politician, a media outlet) uses when relaying information about an issue or event to an audience. Second, a frame in thought or an individual frame refers to an individual's cognitive understanding of a given situation. As organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent, frames are part of the symbolic universe and allow us to meaningfully structure the social world (Reese 2001). Goffman (1974), put forth that people interpret what is going on around their world through their primary framework. This framework is regarded as primary as it is taken for granted by the user. Its usefulness as a framework does not depend on other frameworks.

On the development of framing, Scheufele and Tewksbury (2009) point out that framing is often traced to psychology and sociology (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). The psychological origins of framing lie in experimental work by Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984). The sociological foundations of framing were laid by Goffman (1974) and others who assumed that individuals cannot understand the world fully and constantly struggle to interpret their life experiences and to make sense of the world around them. In order to efficiently process new information, Goffman (1974) argues that individuals apply interpretive schemas or primary frameworks to classify information and interpret it meaningfully.

Framing is both a macro-level and a micro-level construct (Scheufele, 1999). As a macro-construct, the term "framing" refers to modes of presentation that communicators use to

present information in a way that resonates with existing underlying schemas among their audience (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). As a micro-construct, framing describes how people use information and presentation features regarding issues as they form impressions. Closely related to the concept of framing are the concepts of agenda setting and priming. Agenda setting refers to the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis that mass media place on certain issues (e.g., based on relative placement or amount of coverage) and the importance attributed to these issues by mass audiences (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). As defined in the political communication literature, Priming refers to changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations' (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Priming occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments.

Society is typically competitive, fought between parties or ideological factions and issues that are debated are framed in opposing terms. Individuals receive multiple frames with varying frequencies. However, individuals favour the frame that is consistent with their values. Therefore, the clarion call for the revival of *Darul' Islam* (land/territory of Islam), where *sharia* (Islamic law) will be the canon of conduct resonated well with most Muslims in Northern Nigeria. As such, the framing of El-Zakzaky and his trajectory for IMN was well received. Another framing that has helped in attracting followership to IMN is tag on Nigeria as *Daral Harp* (territory of war and chaos) because it is not ruled by Islamic law. This is a fundamental underpinning for religious radicalisation and reason for which Nigerian state authority is being undermined by member of IMN.

### **Understanding IMN Background and its Shi'a Connection**

There is cause and effect relationship between IMN and its founder, Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky who was born in Zaria on May 5, 1953. He attended a provincial Arabic school, where the then Native Authority (NA) used to train Arabic teachers for its primary schools. After which he went to the School for Arabic Studies (SAS) in Kano (1971-1975) and subsequently to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, from 1976 to 1979. He was a student in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FASS). It is instructive to say that while in the university, El-Zakzaky was a charismatic leader of the Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN). Admiring the activism of the leftist students on campus, he tried to 'wake' the Muslim students up from what he believed was an excessive quietism and to develop a more politically active wing of the organization.

For the purpose of keeping the records right, Paden (1973) says that the MSSN was founded in 1954 in Lagos and from 1956 it was based at the University of Ibadan. The society, which was initially dominated by Yoruba Muslim students from the south-west of Nigeria, opened branches in the north, at Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria) and Abdullahi Bayero College (Kano), in 1963. Although his original models were the Egyptians Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949) and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), in 1980 El-Zakzaky visited Iran for the first time and gradually became enmeshed in the religio-political system of the country. Upon his return to Nigeria, he started to advocate for the transformation of Nigeria into a 'purely Islamic' form of government. At a point in time he declared that Nigeria must become wholly Islamic and Allah proclaimed Lord of the entire nation.

Gingered and gyrated by Iranian revolutionist and leader, the late Ayatollah's Khomeinism, he established a new movement, named 'Muslim Brothers' and popularly known in Kano and other parts of northern Nigeria as 'Yan Uwa Musulmi' (Muslim brothers) or 'Yan Brothers. Zenn (2013, p 6) defines Khomeinism as a form of Third world Political Populism—a radical but pragmatic middle-class movement that strives to enter, rather than reject, the modern age. [...] a militant, sometimes contradictory, political ideology that focuses not on issues of scripture and theology but on the immediate political, social, and economic grievances of workers and the middle-class [...]. It is often associated with Shi'ism and support for Iran, it has also been accepted without a Shia or Iranian connotation.

It is still a subject of debate whether to say El-Zakzaky was deceitful or tactful. For instance, he concealed his Shi'a identity till 1994. His disclosure of his Shi'a identity caused a crisis within the 'Yan Brothers. Those who were not satisfied with the leaning of El-Zakzaky towards Shiism, immediately broke away and founded a new association known as *Jama'at Tajdid al-Islam* (Movement for the Revival of Islam, JTI) under the leadership of Abubakar Mujahid, with its headquarters at Sabuwar Unguwa, Yakasai quarters, Kano (Gwarzo, 2006).

The crisis almost engulfed El-Zakzaky following his avowal of his Shi'a identity. For instance, Isa and Sani (2017) said in 1994, Malam Bashir andago, who was a member of JTI and one of the most popular and outspoken Hausa religious singers in Kano, composed a song titled "The secret has been unveiled: El-Zakzaky has become a Shiite" (*Asiriya bayyanaai Zakzakyy azama an Shi'a*). The tape of this song achieved wide popularity not only in Kano, but across the Hausa-speaking communities of northern Nigeria. A more humiliating bashing came his way from Malam Mukhtar Yusuf Magashi, another *sha'iri* who composed a mocking song against Shiism. According to Isa and Sani (2017), his most famous song was "I hold unto the four rightly-guided Caliphs of the Prophet! I won't allow anyone to abuse them" (*Yakhulafasahabu Muhammad, kunari a! Ni ban yarda a zagi ayankuba*). In one of the verses of the song he says: *Wanda duk yazagi Abubakari wannanma iyinannabi ne Kun ga iyayyar Annabiko babu tantama in Mai-Duka ne* (meaning: Whoever abuses AbūBakr is a foe to the Prophet and enmity to the Prophet without doubt, is enmity towards God).

The central theme of this song is showing that anyone who abuses the four rightly-guided Caliphs is an enemy of the Prophet. This song was composed because of the belief among the Sunni community that Shiites allegedly abuse the first three caliphs (successors) of the Prophet namely: AbūBakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān. Mukhtar Magashi was very virulent in his poetic criticism of Shiism and he composed another song to discredit followers of the sect entitled "O Prophet, here are those who (claim that they) love you but hate AbūBakr, 'Umar and your 'Uthmān" (*Yarasulallah, wasubayinekesonka, waikumaisaisukace Abubakar, Umar har Usmanunka*

*sun i*). Isa and Sani (2017) are of the view that the message of the song is centered on the allegation that Shiites abuse the companions of the Prophet. This song is meant to defend the integrity of the companions and at the same time to admonish those who joined El-Zakzaky without knowing the implication of his theological creed. Shiite '*ulamā*' use *taqiyya* (dissimulation) to lure their followers and that it is the responsibility of the *sha'irai* to enlighten the public through their songs. Songs, in fact, are the easiest way of communicating with the public.

One of the theological points of departure between IMN and by extension Shi'a from other Islamic sects is the polemical issue of Imamate. For Instance, Islam (2009, p. 12) argues that "with the growth of a Shi'i doctrine of the imamate, it became firstly established Shi'idogma that the imam, in whom ultimate religious authority is vested, is by his very nature divinely protected from sin and error (*ma'sum*), endowed with a virtually limitless knowledge and appointed by an explicit, personal designation, conveying God's will. The companions, on the other hand, even when no evil, anti-Alid motives are attributed to them, are fallible mortals, whose deficient knowledge and often faulty judgment deprive them of any claim to authority." However, it can be argued that such a designation of infallibility, knowledge and authority has not been granted to any mortal in the Quran, let alone unnamed individuals succeeding from the progeny of the Prophet's cousin.

Realising that he was losing grip of *Yan brothers*, and in order to face the crisis and rejuvenate his leadership position, El-Zakzaky decided to form a new organization, which he called the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), with the aim of spreading and coordinating the Shi'a ideology in Nigeria. Leaders of this movement, who were all faithful to El-Zakzaky, were

appointed in various Muslim states and sent to their places of primary assignment. El-Zakzaky himself went on “recruitment tours” to northern Nigerian universities to showcase the Iranian revolution.

In between periods of imprisonment in the mid-1980s, El-Zakzaky converted to Shi'a Islam and transformed the IMN from student activism to a mass movement that called for a second jihad to implement Shari'a in Nigeria. He also declared Nigeria's secular government unfit to rule and the traditional Sunni leadership of Nigeria, including the sultan of Sokoto and Sufi brotherhoods, guilty of siding with the government to protect their offices and worldly possessions. He was preaching Islam as an alternative model to socialism and capitalism and leading rallies where followers burned Nigeria's constitution to protest secularism and supported Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 (Isa and Sani, 2017).

Today, the IMN is Africa's largest Shi'a movement. It has reportedly mobilized more than one million people for Shi'a religious events and 50,000 people for political rallies where Khomeini and his successor, Ali Khamenei, and Hizb Allah leader Hassan Nasrallah are revered, while flags of the “Great Satan [the United States]” and Israel are burned. The IMN also has hundreds of paramilitary guards called *hurras*, in Hausa language (Gwarzo, 2006). As in previous years, El-Zakzaky visited Iranian centres of Shi'a scholarship in Qom and Mashhad in 2012 and met dozens of IMN members studying in Iran. He also visited Lebanon, where he received a red flag from Karbala, Iraq's Shi'a shrine of Imam Husayn, as a gift from Nasrallah, and Iraq, where he prayed at Najaf's Shi'a shrine of Imam Ali (Isa and Sani, 2017).

Due to the confrontation approach of his leadership, the Shiekh was at different times at logger heads with the state authority. This explains why at different times he was incarcerated. For instance, during the military rule of Babangida, he was imprisoned from (1985 to 1993) and Abacha kept him under bars from (1993 to 1998). Isa and Sani (2017) reveal that El-Zakzaky's total prison experiences spanned nine years in nine different prisons across the country, the most famous being his stay in Enugu prison (1981-1984); in the Interrogation Centre of the National Security Organization, Lagos (1984-1985); in Kiri-Kiri Maximum Security (1985); in Port Harcourt (1987-1989 and 1996-1997) and in Kaduna (1987 and 1997-1998).

From the background of IMN that has been present thus far, it is obvious that IMN did not have the support of all Shi'a Muslims. However, Anjide and Chukwuma (2017, p. 16) say that the IMN is an umbrella organisation of Shiites in Nigeria. This statement is an assumption, as it is either supported by empirical evidence or any theoretical discourse. If anything all, there are Shi'a members who have challenged not only the authority of leader of IMN, Sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, but have distanced themselves from the activities of IMN. For instance, in 1994, those who were not satisfied with the leaning of El-Zakzaky towards Shiism, immediately broke away and founded a new association known as *Jama'at Tajdid al-Islam* (Movement for the Revival of Islam, JTI) under the leadership of Abubakar Mujahid, with its headquarters at Sabuwar Unguwa, Yakasai quarters, Kano (Gwarzo, 2006).

Isa and Sani (2017) observe that this was the first break-away faction that emerged from the Shiism not only in Kano, but in the entire northern Nigeria. Another Shi'a group, RAAF, with a theological centre, *Baqirul Ulum* in Dambare, Kano do not recognise IMN and its leaders. They accused him of not holding any written permission from an Ayatollah and therefore, he is just running a “political Shia,” without having the credentials required to be considered a scholar. The members of RAAF also accuse El-Zakzaky of lacking in-depth knowledge of religious doctrine, due to his failure to study in any of the recognized Shia institutes (Isa and Sani, 2017). Some members of RAAF such Nur Das have *ijāzāt* (written permissions to teach and answer jurisprudential questions) collected from top Shia scholars (Ayatollahs) during his many years of study in Iran. The foregoing demonstrates that the assertion by Anjide and Chukwuma regarding IMN being the umbrella body of Shi'a in Nigeria is at best suspect.

### **IMN as an Iranian Proxy in Nigeria**

Zenn (2013, p. 8) says a former Iranian diplomat described the IMN as an Iranian proxy. Evidence shows the IMN serves as an extension of Iranian foreign policy in Nigeria. This is substantiated by the track record of IMN is akin to Hezbollah. For instance, a former career diplomat (who defected and is now living in Europe), who previously served as Iran's consul-general in Dubai and was an adviser to the Iranian foreign ministry, said the IMN was set up by and modelled on the Lebanese Hezbollah and that Iran provides the IMN with training "in guerrilla warfare: bomb-making, use of arms such as handguns, rifles and RPGs, and the manufacturing of bombs and hand grenades (Assadina, 2015).

Providing a clearer perspective on how Iran has perfected its tact of using proxies, Zenn (2013) argues that Iran's activities in Nigeria are consistent with Iran's actions throughout Africa. For example, in Kenya, two members of the Quds Force were found guilty in May 2013 of storing explosives and carrying out surveillance of Israeli, British, U.S. and Saudi targets in Kenya (Odula, 2013). Levitt (2013) explains further that the Nigeria and Kenya plots fit the pattern of Quds Force and Hizb Allah operations involving Iranians and dual Lebanese-European or Lebanese-Canadian nationals that targeted Israelis in India, Georgia and Thailand in February 2012; Azerbaijan in March 2012; and Cyprus and Bulgaria in July 2012. These incidences suggest that Iran has always used proxies on its target. The failures of all but the Bulgaria cell, as well as the ability of Israeli intelligence to help national governments track these cells, may have prompted Iran to search for new targets in Africa in 2013, such as Kenya and Nigeria, where Israelis often travel and conduct business (Zenn, 2013).

Africa is usually hoodwinked into some of these traps via aid. For instance while Iran has increased economic activities and aid to Africa in recent years, much of Iran's influence is won through ideology promotion, as seen with the IMN in Nigeria. For instance, Kamara (2004) is suspicious of the opening up of Iranian Cultural Centres (similar to Confucius Institutes or Alliance Francaise) in countries such as Sierra Leone and Tanzania. According to him, this is an attempt to convert villages from Khartoum to Kordofan in Sudan to Shi'ism, and invited Ivorian and Sudanese Shi'a imams to the Basij base in Ramshir, south-western Iran.

In a related development, Ridgeon (2012) argues that indigenous African Shi'a (as opposed to Lebanese-West African citizens) in Sierra Leone, Senegal and other countries receive funding to study Shi'ism in Lebanon or Iran and return home sympathizing with "Khomeinism"; the former president of Comoros from 2006 to 2010, for example, was even nicknamed "Ayatollah" because he studied in Qom under Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazidi, the mentor of former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (BBC, 2006). It is based on the foregoing that Zenn (2013) posits that just as in Nigeria, some African Shi'a have become militants, such as the Ivorian who in July 2013 became the "first African martyr" in Syria defending President Bashar al-Assad's forces and was later eulogized by Hizb Allah. Although the IMN does not promote violence, its imams preach that the West conspires to "dominate minds and resources" of Muslims by converting them to Christianity and secularizing them, Jews are the "lowest creatures on earth" and the "children of monkeys and pigs.

### **IMN and the Nigerian State**

On 12 December 2015, the Chief of Army Staff's (COAS) convoy clashed with the Shiite procession in Gyallesu at Zaria. The clash erupted into violence where the army fired several gunshots at the procession, and subsequently, the house of El-Zakzaky and Husainiyyah were invaded and destroyed by the army (Report Afrique 2015). More than 300 people were reported dead including the wife of El-Zazzaky and top Shiite leaders including the leader of the Kano branch, Sheikh Mahmud Turi (Leadership 2015). Doukham (2016) says that Iranian authorities accused Saudi Arabia's coalition with the U.S. and arrogant powers is a blatant example of friendship of blasphemers; the Saudi king's congratulations to the perpetrators of Nigeria's

crimes is shameful and disgraceful [...] in a country where Boko Haram kills innocent people and takes children and women as slaves and no effective measure is taken against it, they treat 15 million Muslims in a violent manner only for fulfilling their religious duties and staging protests against Israel.

Iranian authorities took severe measures and summoned Nigeria's chargé d'affaires to express its outrage at the Nigerian military's deadly crackdown on Shiite Muslims, including the arrest of Sheik El-Zakzaky the leader, in the north of the country. The chargé d'affaires informed the Nigerian Foreign Ministry that Iran demands that the Nigerian government "immediately sheds light on the incident, treats the injured, and compensate for damages. Additionally, Sweeney (2015) reveals that Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called for the immediate and serious action to prevent violence against Shiites in a telephone call to his Nigerian counterpart Geoffrey Onyeama.

For Anjide and Chukwuma (2017), the different opinion of Iran and Saudi-Arabia is not surprising because of the Shiites and Sunni divide in the Middle East. This paper finds this submission objectionable and misleading. The reason is that the theological polemics between Shiites and Sunnis alone is not enough to elicit the aforementioned contradictory reactions from Iran and Saudi-Arabia. After all, as Doukham (2016) posits Muslims are split into two main branches, the Sunnis and Shia. However, members of the two sects have co-existed for centuries worldwide, and share many fundamental beliefs and practices. In addition, the theological feud between Shi'a and Sunni is too cold due to long years of existence to warrant the kind of hurt steam that is coming from the duo of Iran and Saudi Arabia.

It is therefore curious to ask, why has such fierce disagreement not emerged between Iran and Saudi-Arabia in other places that similar incidence have happened? This, therefore, underscores the conviction of this paper that the conflicting reaction is due to existing competition between Iran and Saudi-Arabia as to who bears the flagship of global Islamic hegemony. The reactions should be understood in the context of socio-political interest. It is against this background that Doukham (2016) insists that Iran is seeking to create a 'Tropical Shia Zone' as part of the 'Shia Crescent' within its aspiration for regional hegemony and to become, a global super-power that is recognized in any geo-politics negotiations. The Iranian nuclear program; the subversion in foreign countries; and the support given to terrorist organizations should be regarded as tools utilized by Iran, to further its intermediate objectives of becoming a global super-power. Of course, the Nigerian state will logically come under vicious attack of Iran because it is hobnobbing with countries such as USA that Iran considers as foe rather than friend.

The continued undermining of the Nigerian state and her institutions by IMN came to its crescendo with protests in Abuja, the nation's capital, including in the Three-Armed Zone, where the legislature, judiciary and the executive (Presidency) are headquartered. The protests occasioned the death of many citizens including a deputy commissioner of police, Usman Umar and a 21-year old serving member of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), Precious Owolabi of Channels Television, both of whom were undertaking their lawful duties. The massive protest by the group informed why Justice Nkeonye Maha of the Federal High Court in Abuja issued an order, following an *ex parte* application. The court restrained any person or group of persons from any form of activities involving or concerning the IMN, under any name or platform in Nigeria.

The Federal government published the order proscribing IMN in the official gazette on July 29, 2019 (The Nation, 2019). Hitherto, in a short video that went viral, Governor Nasil El-Rufai of El-Zakzaky's home state of Kaduna accused the group of refusing to participate in any democratic process in Nigeria. According to him, members of IMN do not register for voter's card and thus do not vote. This seems to confirm the insinuation that the group is desperate to create an

Islamic state in Nigeria. In addition, members of IMN do not pay taxes and yet use government facilities such as schools and even the highways that are funded from taxes collected by government, yet used by IMN for demonstration. To further show that IMN is a government within the sovereign nation of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, El-Rufai has revealed that IMN have appointed their governors and Local Government Chairmen across the federation. It is to these appointees that members of IMN owe their allegiance; not to the government of Nigeria and all her arms. In addition, members of IMN don't subscribe to national anthem, have no recognition for the national flag, or public holidays. Rather, they have their flag and public holidays.

### **Security and Diplomatic Concerns**

Zenn (2013) reveals that Iran's Quds Force and Hizb Allah's global operations have involved Nigeria for more than a decade, but their activities were exposed in October 2010. Nigerian customs officials in Lagos seized 13 containers of weapons from a ship operated by the same French-Lebanese businessman's company that in March 2011 saw a ship bound for Sinai, Egypt, via Syria to supply weapons to Hamas in Gaza intercepted by Israeli naval commandos. Revealing the details of the arms, Tattersall (2010) says the containers included 107mm Katyusha artillery rockets used by Hizb Allah against Israel in 2006. They were shipped on behalf of a Tehran-based Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) "front company" and were picked up at Bandar Abbas in Iran, where the IRGC has a naval base (Adebowale, 2010).

Top security sources informed Zenn (2013) that the weapons were destined for a warehouse in Abuja, but shippers altered documents to send them to Gambia (presumably for anti-Senegalese rebels in Casamance). Nigerian security officials arrested four individuals: a senior Quds Force officer; a Nigerian who formerly studied in Iran and worked at Radio Tehran's Hausa language service; and two Nigerian customs officials. A fifth Iranian suspect, Sayyed Akbar Tabatabaei, who was the Quds Force Africa Corps commander, took refuge in the Iranian Embassy, flew back to Tehran with Iran's foreign minister and was reportedly reassigned to Venezuela to run Quds Force operations in Latin America (Vanguard, 2011). Demonstrating the deep involvement of Iran, Reuters (2013) reported that one month after these arrests, \$10 million worth of heroin hidden in auto engine parts suspected of being linked to the weapons shipment in October was seized in Lagos from a ship originating in Iran. However, this was only a late discovery. This is because as hinted by Mohammed (2013) Iran's role in weapons trafficking resurfaced in May 2013 when Nigerian security forces uncovered a weapons "armory" in a Kano home owned by the Lebanese consul to Sierra Leone.

The security forces arrested three individuals, all of whom admitted to receiving training from Hizb Allah, including: a Lebanese citizen, who owned a supermarket and amusement park in Abuja; a second Lebanese citizen, who was arrested at the airport in Kano before boarding a flight to Lebanon; and a dual Lebanese-Nigerian citizen. Although the weapons were rusted, Nigeria's director of the State Security Service said they were "serviceable," and a Nigerian brigadier general said they were intended for attacks on U.S. and Israeli targets in Nigeria (Point Blank News, 2013). According to Sahara Reporters (2012) some of the munitions, such as anti-tank mines, are more compatible with rebel groups than a terrorist group and may have been linked to the weapons and heroin shipments in Lagos in 2010.

Odo (2013) reveals that in February 2013, three months before uncovering the "armory," Nigeria announced it also uncovered an Iranian-funded cell whose leader admitted to plotting attacks on "prominent Nigerians" to "unsettle the West. Such leaders included Nigeria's former military leader, Ibrahim Babangida, and former sultan of Sokoto, Ibrahim Dasuki, as well as Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Nigeria (Vanguard, 2013). Furthermore, Adigwu (2013) says that the cell also conducted surveillance on USAID, the Peace Corps, an Israeli shipping company, a Jewish cultural centre and hotels frequented by Americans and Israelis in Lagos. Some of those involved were identified. For instance, Nwogu (2013) points out that the cell's leader, a Shi'a



imam in Ilorin, attended a course at Imam Khomeini University in Qom in 2006. In 2011, he trained in the use of AK-47 rifles and improvised explosive devices in Iran, and in 2012 he travelled to Dubai to receive funding to form the cell (Daniel, 2013).

The foregoing has grave implication for security in Nigeria. For instance, the proxies been used can become security threats to the country. As is often argued, the worst enemy is the person who presents himself/herself as friend. Therefore, Nigeria needs to appraise her diplomatic ties and change her policy direction with nations that are suing proxies to undermine her internal security. This is fundamental, especially considering that the nation is bedevilled with internal violent conflicts of varying magnitudes.

#### **Conclusion:**

The proscription of IMN is greeted with mix feelings from analyst. While some support the action, others are suspect about it. For instance, Adibe (2019) has advanced seven reasons why the group need not to be proscribed. The reasons included the fear of what Iran, through other means will do in its continued hunt of Nigeria because of its bilateral alliance with Iran's foes such as USA and Israel. However, the position of this paper differs from Adibe's view. The reason is that Nigeria as a sovereign state stands to lose more if it allows itself to be a pawn in the chess game of Iran in its quest to actualise its hegemonic quest.

#### **Recommendations:**

From the foregoing, there is no denying that Nigeria is facing serious external and internal security threats. Therefore, this paper recommends the following:

- a) Nigeria should as a matter of urgency train specialised police and joint security units to respond to sectarian violence and acts of terrorism, including in counter-terrorism, investigative techniques, community policing, non-lethal crowd control, and conflict prevention methods and capacities.
- b) Nigeria must conduct thorough investigations of and prosecute future incidents of sectarian violence and terrorism and suspected and/or accused perpetrators.
- c) It is becoming clearer more than ever that Nigeria must develop the capability to monitor patterns in the timing and location of sectarian violence and terrorism as it occurs, and to rapidly deploy specialised police and joint security units to prevent and combat such violence.
- d) Recent events are pointers to the need to develop effective conflict-prevention and early-warning mechanisms at the local, state and federal levels using practical and implementable criteria.
- e) The Nigerian government must redefine her foreign policy in a way that she will always demonstrate to friends and foe that it is not protégée nation of anybody, especially those who meddle in its domestic affairs.

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