

# Boko Haram

## Propaganda versus truth

Thousands have lost their lives in vicious violence allegedly carried out by an Islamic group called Boko Haram. But what is this Boko Haram and is truth becoming a casualty, asks **Muhammad Jameel Yusha'u**.

If you have not heard about Philip Knightley, I suggest you read his book titled *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker*. The book has documented how truth is suppressed in times of war by politicians, the military and journalists who are ready to mislead the public. *The First Casualty* provides an account of how such distortions occurred from the Crimea war, Vietnam, Falklands, Gulf wars, the war on Afghanistan to the war on Iraq.

While the focus of Knightley's book is more on the wars waged by the Western imperial powers, compromising truth is at the heart of other conflicts courtesy of the media. In the build-up to the war on Iraq, when the Bush administration was desperate for evidence that would be used to convince the American public about the alleged threat posed by Saddam Hussein over the existence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), or mass deception as Scott Ritter called it, some journalists were recruited to write fabricated stories about WMDs in Iraq.

Judith Miller, who was a correspondent for the *New York Times* and a friend of Ahmad Chalabi led that propaganda. As

explained by one of the leading media critics in the US, Robert W. McChesney, Judith Miller's stories in the *New York Times* were used by the Bush administration as evidence to attack Iraq.

After it appeared that there were no WMDs in Iraq, the *New York Times* had to publish an apology to its readers for failing in its watchdog responsibility. I look forward to the day when Nigerian newspapers will offer such an apology, especially looking at how the ongoing state of insecurity has been sectionalised, ethnicised or more aptly Jonathanised (derived from Nigerian president's name Goodluck Jonathan).

So when I read the article written by General Andrew Azazi in the *Washington Times* earlier in the year, calling for American support in Nigeria's Boko Haram crises, the first thing that came to mind was the Judith Miller *New York Times* propaganda strategy, and this time rather than coming from a journalist, it is from the heart of the Nigerian security services. What is more surprising is that the National Assembly does not see the imperative of inviting General Azazi to explain the motive behind writing such an article in the *Washington Times*.

Recent reports on how Nigerian security forces who are meant to restore peace and order in Kano, but ended up brutalising and dehumanising the residents, and then come out and publicly deny such atrocity is an example of how truth is the first casualty of conflict. An elderly friend from Maiduguri recently told us the story of how some security forces allegedly detonated explosions in the city, yet filed a report blaming the militants.

When you analyse the opinion piece written by Andrew Azazi in the *Washington Times*, and his recent statement that the state of insecurity in Nigeria is related to the zoning arrangement, you know that somewhere the truth has suffered a heavy blow. When Henry Okah blamed the president for the October 2010 Independence Day bombing in a South African court, and the media treated the story like the stealing of a village goat, where people shout for few hours and the following day move to their farms and forget about what happened, you know that somewhere the truth had been compromised. **LE**

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