



## Saudi-Iran Tensions Seen in Nigerian Crackdown on Shia Group

**OE Watch Commentary:** In December 2015, the Nigerian army clashed with the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), Nigeria's largest Shia group in northern Nigeria, killing hundreds of the Shia group's members. On the two-year anniversary of this incident, the excerpted article from Nigeria's *newtelegraphonline.com* offered perspectives on the reasons for the clash and subsequent killings. According to one perspective, Nigeria's crackdown on the group was due to the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran; and eliminating the Shia group was intended to please Saudi Arabia. According to this perspective Nigeria is loyal to Saudi Arabia.

The article claims that, after the incident, Nigerian president Mohammed Buhari spoke with Iranian president Rouhani and said he would safeguard all Muslim lives. While some in the Nigerian government saw that call as Iranian interference in Nigeria's internal affairs, the article suggests otherwise. It notes that despite a court order demanding the release of Ibrahim al-Zakzaky (the group's leader, who disappeared following the incident but recently resurfaced) from a hospital where has been receiving treatment for injuries sustained in the clashes, the Nigerian government has still not let him go free. The article points to this as evidence that the Nigerian government is not intending to assuage any of Iran's concerns about the incident. As such, the article claims that the crushing of the group's members may be connected to "an expression of Nigeria's loyalty to Saudi Arabia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

**Source:** "El-Zakzaky: Hurting memories of a massacre (II)," *Newtelegraphonline.com*, 28 December 2017. <https://newtelegraphonline.com/2017/12/el-zakzaky-hurting-memories-massacre-ii/>

*The diplomatic row between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a possible factor fueling the IMN [Islamic Movement of Nigeria] massacre in Nigeria. The standoff between the Sunni populated Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite populated Iran is already impacting the country, saying the crushing of the members by the military might not be unconnected with an expression of Nigeria's loyalty to Saudi Arabia. This view may have been affirmed by the reported phone call to Nigeria's President Mohammadu Buhari by the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani who was quoted by the IRNA, just two days after the incident, telling Buhari to ensure that "minor disputes must not be allowed to turn into deep differences." However, investigations by New Telegraph revealed that the Federal Government had seen the phone call as interference in its local affairs. This belief may be reinforced by the government's decision not to obey its own court order as regards the release El-Zakzaky..."*

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