

The Untreated National Sore Called Boko Haram: The Way Out and Forward

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Abstract

Security threats such as militancy, armed robbery, vandalisation of government properties, kidnapping, and suicide bombing from terrorist groups are not uncommon phenomena in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999. But significant among them is the worrisome issue of the Boko Haram sect which has lead to loss of lives, properties and displacement of several innocent citizens in the country. Hence, this paper x-rays some of the murderous atrocities of the extremist Islamic sect from 2009 till date, and implication of their growing national menace on a democratic state like Nigeria. The study concludes that the Boko Haram insurgency is an untreated national injury that was sustained by the government and now grown into a national sore. The failure of the past government to treat this ‘national sore’ is still evident in the defective institutional mechanism adopted in managing the crisis today. Consequently, this paper prescribed the ‘drug of choice’ to cure the sore in other to prevent further crises in future from miscreant groups.

Key Words: Insecurity, Boko Haram, Islamic Sect, Islamic Fundamentalism, Insurgency.

1. Introduction

Security of life is a necessity that is crucial to every living thing including humans. It is one priceless necessity of life. Its importance to God -the creator, is revealed succinctly in the Holy Scriptures as it is written: “....the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground.....and He (the Lord God) planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed” (Genesis 2:7-8). The above scripture shows how God placed man in a well-tended garden in Eden (not the bush or in the wild); expressing the level of esteem the creator has for the security of man.

In line with the creator’s desire of securing the created; the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) specifically states that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government”. Unfortunately, the government has failed in its constitutional responsibility of ensuring a secure, habitable and peaceful environment for lives, and properties of citizens across the country. This is due to insecurity challenges such as: militancy, kidnapping, armed robbery, and insurgency among others. According to Okonkwo, Ndubuisi and Anagbogu (2015), the alarming level of insecurity in Nigeria has increased crime rate and terrorists attacks in different parts of the country, leaving unpalatable consequences for the nation’s economy. Odo (2015) further reiterated that “Nigeria today, faces the greatest security challenge ever since the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970. The tide of the menace of kidnapping has kept rising; armed robbers have had an undisturbed reign on Nigerian highways; while Boko Haram’s persistent terrorist and murderous attacks have destroyed several lives and property.” This undoubtedly has internally displaced several innocent citizens in the Northern part of Nigeria.

2. The Untreated National Sore called Boko Haram

‘Boko Haram’ is a term coined from Hausa and Arabic words- ‘*boko*’ (book) and ‘*Haram*’ (forbidden) which literally translates “book is forbidden”. It is a sect of Islamic misfit that were originally named *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad*’ in Arabic; which translates ‘the Group of Al-Sunna for Preaching and Jihad’ in English. The group was founded in 2001 by late Muhammad Yusuf, in the town of Maiduguri where the residents of Maiduguri adopted the term “Boko-Haram” for the sect (Alao, Ater & Alao, 2012).

Initially, this Islamic fundamentalist group was erroneously regarded as an ethno-religious militant group whose fighting, bombings and agitations were directed at the ‘politically high tall and mighty’ in government. However, this notion has recently changed in the minds of several Nigerians when incidences of bombings and attacks were equally directed at Muslims and even the poor.

The Boko Haram group which is now described by locals as ‘the Nigerian Talibans’, have now gained press attention in Nigeria, Africa and interest from the U.S. Embassy because many of the group’s members are the relatives and sons of ‘the high and mighty’ in the seat of power. Significant among them are the alleged case of the son of then Yobe governor -Bukar Abba Ibrahim and Abdulmutallab Umar Farouk; the son of a onetime boss in First Bank Nigeria (FBN) Plc. Eme and Onyishi (2014) accentuated that “observers say the group constructed a ‘state within a state’, with a cabinet, its own religious police, and a large farm. It attracted more and more people under its roof by offering welfare handouts, food, and shelter. Many of the people the group attracted were refugees from the wars over the border in Chad and jobless Nigerian youths. The source of the group’s money at this stage of its existence is not clear. Members of the Borno religious establishment say that Yusuf (the late founder of the Boko Haram sect) received funds from Salafist contacts in Saudi Arabia following two hajj trips that Yusuf made during this time. Another possible source of funding during this period was donations from wealthy northern Nigerians”.

The activities of the Boko Haram sect constitute serious security challenges in the state. Their destructive operations as a group have raised critical questions among prospective investors on the safety of the environment for investments especially in the Northern part of the country. These operations ranges from the killing of innocent Nigerians, raping of women, bombing of major cities and police stations in the northern part of Nigeria, particularly, Borno, Kano, Bauchi, Niger, Yobe, Adamawa, Abuja, among others (Nwagboso 2012). Nwagboso (2012) chronologically listed the various atrocities dastardly carried by the group in Nigeria since 2009:

In 2009, the Boko Haram sect stormed a Police station at Maiduguri and this resulted to death of hundreds of Nigerians.

In September 2010, the group freed hundreds of prisoners in Maiduguri jail.

In December 2010, the Boko Haram bombed the city of Jos and this led to death of 80 Nigerians.

From 2007 to 2011, dozens of Nigerians have been killed largely due to sporadic shootings in Maiduguri, the Borno State Capital by Boko Haram group.

May 2011, after the inauguration of President Good luck Jonathan, the group bombed several states in the north.

In June, 2011, the sect bombed the Police Headquarters, Abuja.

In 2011, bombing of churches occurred in Kano, Kaduna, Niger, Bauchi, Adamawa and Abuja (Nwagboso, 2012 p.253).

Various places of attack, number of injured persons and properties damaged by the extremist Islamic group from 2009 to 2012 are shown below in the Table below

DATE	PLACE OF ATTACK	CIVILIANS	SECURITY AGENTS	BOKO HARAM	INJURED PERSON(S)	PROPERTY DAMAGED
26/7/2009	Dutsen-Jashi Police Station Bauchi State	39	2 policemen & 1 soldier	Police	-	Station
27/7/2009	Divisional police Headquarters Potiskum, Yobe State	Unknown	3 policemen & one fire service officer	39	-	Police station
8/9/2010	Jos North Plateau State.	300 killed	-	-	-	Worth millions
31/12/2010	Miogadishu Mammy Market, Abuja	10 killed	-	-	-	Worth millions destroyed
4/11/2011	Yobe State	150 killed	-	-	Many	Many
25/12/2011	Madalla, Niger State	50 killed	-	-	Many injured	Worth millions destroyed
20/1/2012	Kano State	250 killed	-	-	-	-
11/3/2012	Jos	11	-	4	More than 30	Church building & cars

Source: Selected from the Findings Table in Wosu and Agwanwo (2014)

The list, table above and the April 2014 kidnapping of 276 school girls in Chibok, Borno State, all summarises the sect's drive towards pursuing a murderous terrorist agenda of chaos, 'hullabaloo', division, bloodshed, massacre, mass murder, mayhem and separatism among other; which conflicts with the government's duty and obligation of ensuring the well-being of citizens in the country. In spite of the various security reports prior to 2009, the dehumanizing operations of this murderous Islamic sect, was not given any serious attention by the Federal Government.

The reason was believed to have been premised on the assumption that the Boko-Haram group initially started as an Islamic organization whose teachings were the purification of Islam and it was not the only one with the same objective in the Northern axis of Nigeria. In May 2011, when the group bombed several states in the north, the sect was increasingly becoming a source of concern to the government and efforts of the then administration (under President Good luck Jonathan) to softly address the menace was governed by the need not to turn the issue into an ethnic- religious conflict, or division of the sovereign Nigeria into 'hot North' and 'cool south'. Consequently, several efforts and measures were adopted to bring a resolve and cure this 'bleeding sore'.

3. Implication of Boko Haram Activities on Nigeria and Nigerians

National security challenges among which the Boko Haram insurgency is part, has multi-dimensional implication on the nation both domestically and internationally. From the international level, the deadly operations of this miscreant group could negatively popularize the giant of Africa- Nigeria as a breeding ground for terrorists. The United States almost achieved this fit in 2012, when Hilary Clinton (the then U.S. Secretary of State) described Nigerians as terrorists. But considering the deleterious effect this label would cost Nigeria's international image, the government pleaded against it as this would not only hinder foreign investors from investing in our domestic economy, but it would also discourage tourist from coming for tour. That would drastically affect gross domestic product (GDP) and national development since no foreigner would want to sojourn in a crisis ridden nation. The importance of internal security in capitalist nation like Nigeria has been carefully articulated by Gbanite (2001) as cited in Nwagbosio (2012):

"....when our citizens' right to safety from all kinds of man-made threats are reduced considerably, the government will inherit an increase in foreign investments..... Most countries would like a likely trading partner to secure the lives and property of their citizens first before they themselves allow theirs to move into such territories...." (p.245)

At the domestic level, food scarcity, internal displacement of citizens, price hike of food produce and mass geographical relocation of skilled and unskilled labour in affected regions are among others, the effect of this on the country. Alao, Atere & Alao (2012) described this scenario properly when he asserted that:

"the dangerous aspect that has not caught the attention of the government is the nature of migration that is currently experienced in Nigeria for the first time. In this instance, it is not the southerners alone that are migrating from the north but also the northerners on account of insecurity. Most of the migrants from the north are in their productive age and farmer and trades men by profession. This explains why most of the Okada riders in the Western States are of northern extraction. The danger is that they have abandoned their profession (farming) as this will reduce food production and compound the problem of food importation." (p.9)

For several decades now, efforts have been made without success to rebrand the national image of the country to correct the defective impression of the international community on Nigeria and Nigerians. This impression is built from the news report of money laundering scandals, corrupt practices of Nigerian leaders, and insecurity problems that hit daily headlines on satellite televisions like Aljazeera, CNN and BBC News and so on. Correcting this menace has consequently cost the government huge portion of the nation's resources in the purchase of arms and ammunitions to equip security forces for counter-insurgency with these local misfits; in their secret hide-outs in Sambisa forest.

4. The Way Out and Forward

Usually, the way out of a problem situation, is not necessarily the way forward. This is a true fact because the key from the bunch that opens the door; does not need to be bright, it only needs to be right.' The 'million dollar question' on this Boko Haram menace is: How do you fight an enemy who is not an enemy but a fellow-citizen? How do you pacify a warring group when you do not know what they are actually agitating for?

On the one hand, it is the position of this paper that the way out of the Boko Haram insurgency (on the short-run) is actually military intelligence in collaboration with international support. The need for international support with the local military intelligence is premised on the fact that Nigeria's security expertise is limited on insurgency and counter-insurgency. This is because domestic-terrorism and insurgency is relatively new. Consequently, there is dearth of training and resources for building an intelligence-information gathering capability. On the other hand, the way forward to maintaining peace and tranquility on the long-run, in the sovereign state of Nigeria, is to promote good governance at all levels. This position is shared by President, Good luck Jonathan, quoted in Wakili (2013) thus: "I agree totally that until we create jobs; until Nigerians can wake up and find food to eat; until Nigerians sick can walk to the hospital and get treatment; the economic indices may not mean much to us".

Odo (2014) further accentuated that security agencies are doing what they have to do; however, the solution to the security challenges in the country ultimately requires the reign of good governance in which opportunities are created for everyone who wants to work to have a source of living and poverty is reduced to the barest minimum; where there is social justice and equity. This is underscored by the recent global perspective on security as a struggle to secure the most basic necessities of life such as food, health-care, shelter, education, among others. The absence of these basic human securities generates social unrests, which are often exploited by miscreant groups such as Boko Haram. Thus, the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is a direct consequence of a failed government over the years and their lack of sensitivity in catering for the basic needs of well meaning Nigerians. The indicators of this failure include the prevalence of abject and dehumanizing poverty; bad governance; high rate of unemployment; hunger and disease; which have created the breeding ground for the rise and escalation of social unrest among Islamic misfits in what we now call the Boko Haram insurgency.

5. Conclusion

Most of the insecurity problems in Nigeria today such as kidnapping, armed robbery, suicide bombing among members of the miscreant groups -Boko Haram are traceable to poor governance. If these long 'untreated sore' would be cured leaving little or no injury scares on innocent Nigerian's, the government of the day must insist on good governance as the 'drug of choice' for prescription at all level.

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