

BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN NORTH-EASTERN NIGERIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SECURITY AND STABILITY IN WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION

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The spate of instability in the West African Sub-region has for long drawn attention not only from the academia but also in everyday discussion. The sub-region has a long history of conflict with evidence of not one but myriads of causes to those conflicts, which many studies have shed light on. Currently, the sub-regional power and the main peace keeper (Nigeria) is waging war against the Boko Haram terrorist group on its own soil with grave consequence for the West African region. The emergence of this terrorist group in North-Eastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa in Nigeria, brought new dimensions to insecurity in West African Sub-region and also has a wider impact on the international community owing to their main objective to wage war against western values. Now, there is the need to investigate and analyse the implication of this terrorist organisation in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria on security and stability in West Africa. This study investigates the implication of the Boko Haram uprising in Nigeria on security in West Africa. It discovers that the insurgents have links with some other international terrorist groups. It also discovers that there is a severe security implication for West Africa and it then calls for effective sub-regional framework to tackle its scourge

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1. Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and arguably one of its most important, has been in the news for quite some time, sadly for a somewhat negative reason. This is with the activities of the radical Islamic group, widely known as the Boko Haram. In the last decade, the group has been responsible for the death of more than a thousand people, many through the process that was considered unthinkable two decades previously – suicide operations. The objective of this paper is to look at the activities of the radical group and assess the implications for the West African sub-region. Although quite a lot of studies have been written on this subject, there is very little that has been written on the wider security implications for the region.

2. The Rise of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

Boko Haram is the unofficial name for the radical Islamic sect who began to terrorise Nigeria since 2009, although its origin can be traced to the formation of a group called Sahaba in 1995 headed by Abubakar Lawan. By 2009 however, it had grown to establish functioning branches and camps in Yobe, Katsina, Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi and Gombe states. Fawole (2013). Its official name is *Jama'atu Ahl as-Sunnah Lidda'awatihwa-Jihad* translated to mean people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teaching and Jihad. The group is opposed to western education and culture which they see as a threat to traditional values, beliefs and customs among Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria. Members of Boko Haram are drawn primarily from the Kanuri and Hausa-Fulani tribe constituting about 33% of the Nigeria's population, they are concentrated in the Northern part of the country. These tribes are also found in most countries along the northern part of most countries in the region, the Kanuris are found in the regions across the northern border into Niger (Forest, 2012)

From the onset, the agitation of the group has been against western education and all institutions and agencies that go with it, including government institutions. They are also agitating for Sharia law (an Islamic law) to be applied all over the country, and if not the whole country, a separate Islamic state where they can have Sharia law be seceded out of Nigeria. There are other grievances, such as extreme poverty, high corruption, and inequality with the more developed southern part of the country. In prosecuting their objectives, Boko Haram use the strategies of bombing Churches, Mosques, Police Stations, Schools; Universities inclusive and other Government owned Properties as well as privately owned properties without excluding innocent souls through the machinery of suicide bombers and slaughtering and kidnapping individuals who they deem to be engaged in un-Islamic activities (Olaide, 2013).

In the early stage of the Boko Haram insurgency, the Nigerian government treated it lightly, almost as a minor uprising that will disappear in no time. The police force was deployed there but the turn of events necessitated the deployment of combatant soldiers as if it was a full scaled war. According to Fawole (2013), government response to the Boko Haram menace has not been coordinated and focused, in fact, it has moved between the use of extreme force, appeasement, amnesty, and negotiation.

After a heavy military bombardment of the hideouts of the group, their leader Mohammed Yusuf was captured and later allegedly murdered in the police custody after which the leadership of the group fell on his deputy Abubakar Shekau. Because of the personality of Shekau, the Boko Haram group becomes more violent and their attacks became more destructive. In fact, under the leadership of Shekau, the group becomes the most feared terrorist group in the history of Nigeria today, having a transnational reach into neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and possibly, Mali (Fawole, 2013).

The August 2011 attack on the UN headquarters building in Abuja gave the group more publicity; it showed an increase in their attack capabilities and sophistication and introduced an international dimension. Moreover, the rate and trends of their attacks from December 2011 till date suggests a strategy of provocation, through which the group seeks to spark a large scale sectarian conflict that will destabilize the country (Forest, 2012).

3. Boko Haram: A Glance at its Connections with other Terrorist Groups

There are speculations by individual researchers, governments including Australian and United States' governments of possible linkages between Boko Haram terrorist group and other Islamist terrorist groups in the region. In West Africa, the rise of terrorism has become a major concern. There is increase in the number of terrorist attacks in some West African countries which has resulted in the destruction of lots lives and properties (FATF Report, 2013). It has been observed that most countries in West Africa are weak at exercising control and authority in regions that are far from the national capitals, likewise, the governments are judged to have low state capacity. Because of these states weakness and other overlapping conditions, there is the rise of terrorism and terrorist activities. West Africa's weak and failing states offer sanctuary and an enabling environment to terrorist movement from within Africa and elsewhere.

Moreover, the ungoverned remote areas of West Africa especially the border areas and vast empty land of the Sahel regions provide a safe havens for some international terrorist organization and efforts to establish links with local terrorists organizations in these countries are beginning to yield results. For example, there are speculations that the Touareg separatist organization i.e Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azaouad (MNLA) has links with Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb. When the nationalist MNLA declared the northern Touareg regions of Mali independent, the newly proclaimed Islamic Republic of Azawad presents Al-Qa'ida with increased potential for linking North Africa's Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghred (AQIM) with the Al-Qaeda and affiliated with Boko Haram in northern Nigeria (FATF Report, 2013).

In 2010, Nigeria bombarded the Boko Haram headquarters in Maiduguri, killed many of its members and captured the groups' leader Muhammad Yusuf who was allegedly killed while in custody of the Nigerian Police. The remaining members fled to Niger and Chad including AbubakarShekau who assumed the group's leadership later. The group received support from the AQIM leader, Malek Droukdel who publicly offered to train and arm the group to wage jihad against Christians in the country. AQIM provided resource assistant

to Boko Haram to rebuild the organization with better capabilities for more devastating attacks thus, the group assumed more similarities in operation with Al-Qaeda. There is a southward movement of terrorists especially that of members of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, through the Sahel towards Mali, Mauritania, and Niger and more importantly Nigeria and this will have severe implication on stability in West Africa.

Indeed, there are indications that AQIM has operational bases in some West African countries and has forged tactical alliances with terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), and AnsarEddine in Mali and Niger. (Tanchum, 2012). Because of these alliances, AQIM now provides training and logistical support to Boko Haram in Nigeria and other terrorist groups in the West African region and these groups now lend helping hand to one another in attacks against their governments. In fact, there are indications that Boko Haram now has links with Al' Shabaab terrorist group in Somalia and have intervened repeatedly in inter-religious conflicts in Mali on the side of the local Muslim populations against non-Fulani Christians. These are indications of the group's spread beyond its initial geographical base, Boko Haram militants now instruct segments of Mali's population in the Salafi practice of Islam (Tanchum, 2012).

4. The Boko Haram Insurgency: Implications on Security and Stability for West Africa

According to Adesoji (2011), Boko Haram insurgency has security implications within Nigeria, on its neighbours, in the sub-region, regional and even international environment. The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence also acknowledged the threat of the group to international interests based on their highlighted intent and capability to attack western interests. Moreover, Boko Haram has the potential to join transnational jihadist movement thus posing serious international security threat. The problem is even more potent since the group has infiltrated the wider security force, making efforts at eradication more difficult.

The reach and operational capabilities of the group is growing, connecting with like-minded terrorist groups within the region and in the Sahel. This increasing transnational dimension provides an avenue for it to improve its capacity for more deadly attacks on a large-scale that could pose a serious threat to security and stability within the West Africa sub-region. Even though, West Africa has been a region plagued with serious security crisis since the end of the Cold War, the possibility that the threat of Boko Haram can spread its tentacles to neighbouring countries and beyond into the sub-region poses a great threat to stability in the sub-region

The chain of collaboration among the different terrorists groups within the central and West Africa sub-region have severe implication on security and stability in the West Africa sub-regions. Advantageous to the terrorist organizations is the strategic base of Boko Haram and its effect on the sub-regional power i.e. Nigeria. The changing aim is to destabilize the provider of stability in the sub-region so as to reduce the overall response to terrorism in the sub-region. As Nigeria and other members of the Economic Community

of West African States (ECOWAS) are working towards peace and stability through integration in the sub-region the terrorists organizations most especially Boko Haram are also busy coordination pockets of crisis in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa in a bid to create a coordinated jihadist movement across West Africa. The strategic location of Nigeria in the West Africa sub-region and the challenges of Boko Haram insurgencies in Nigeria have severe consequences on peace and stability in the West Africa sub-region. The sophistication of the groups' attacks has raised concerns about the group's capacity to attack non-Nigerian targets in Nigeria and throughout Africa.

The term 'little Boko Haram' was used by Zenn in his analysis of the possible threat the Boko Haram actions could have on the sub-region. His analysis centres on the possibilities of a breakout of similar terrorist groups around West Africa countries especially in areas where we have similar social conditions like we have in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria. Characteristics such as a high number of unemployed youths like the al-majiri with no formal educations, Muslim-Christian rivalries, poverty as a result of government neglect, illicit arms trafficking, and also the infiltration of international terrorist groups like AQIM and MUJAO. The al'majiri system can be found throughout the Sahel region, it is most prominent in Nigeria and Senegal, also in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. These 'little Boko Harams' poses a lot of threat to regional security especially given the fact that they would advocate for Taliban style Islamic law, which would definitely be against the interest of the people of West Africa.

5. Conclusion: A Call for Effective Regional Counter Terrorism in West Africa

Though there is much attention given the spread of international jihadist movement especially the militant Salafist group in West Africa, both locally and internationally, there is yet to be a coordinated regional counter terrorism strategy against the menace. There is need for cooperation in the sub-region among other West African governments to join forces, share intelligence in the fight against terrorism, Nigeria alone cannot fight this threat and curtail its spread within and outside her borders. The war against terrorism is not single-handedly fought. The weapon to fight this war must not be military bombardments alone, there must be cooperation with the sub-region among its leaders otherwise, the sub-region stands the risk of being infiltrated by radical elements and then becoming a theatre for the global war on terror. Until this is done, the spread might as well continue with the security challenges it poses to peace and stability within the sub-region.

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