

BOKO HARAM: A 21st CENTURY CHALLENGE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Though, Nigeria has ever faced series of security threatening challenges, the one caused by the activities of the Islamist sect, the Boko Haram remains quite unique in all ramifications. For instance, the Jos crises that claimed dozens of human lives were known to be limited to Plateau State and so also were the Niger Delta crises limited to the areas of the creeks of the River Niger. The sect claims responsibility for several bombings and snip activities in the northern and central Nigeria, thereby placing the nation at the threshold of disintegration. The central issue of this paper is to probe into the causes of the Boko Haram menace and why government has been unable to put an end to it. The author sees Boko Haram as an outcome of Nigeria's internal political, social, economic and to some extent, religious problems. It is therefore concluded with a position that the present happenings in Nigeria have undoubtedly made the call for a national conference very obvious. This will provide the platform for discussing grievances of groups for amicable solutions.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Insecurity, Democracy

Introduction

Thomas Hobbs (1958) once put forward an argument that the human society exists in conflict not by accident but by the very nature of man, which makes him pitch against his fellow. His generalization did not put to rest the search for why conflicts erupt in society. Thus, the need to unveil the specifics resulting to particular conflicts continues to be the basis for developing appropriate management paradigms. Politics therefore evolves as an organised way of bridging mutual relations between antagonistic interests. Consequently, the Liberal School of Thought considers democratic procedures to be the only effective ways of making

social adjustments (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). In Nigeria, it is ironical that democracy, which should be the channel for reducing the problem of competition for resources, through the provision of basic facilities, has instead created a situation of poverty. Out of hopelessness, the Nigerian masses have resorted to threatening the nation's security by killing innocent citizens.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing discussion, the Boko Haram has come to violently co-exist with the people as a consequence of the political confusion in the country that is caused by competition among the political class. It is obvious that antagonism between the big Whigs in the ranks of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) provides a potent source of insecurity in Nigeria, including the one posed by the activities of Boko Haram. The author sees the activities of Boko Haram as reaction in desperation, and being it, it is wrongly targeted at those who have no governmental security instrument to protect them. However, the group is making a case against the government it opposes; that the government is incapable of discharging its constitutional responsibility of protecting its citizenry. Arguably, the group raises the consciousness of Nigerians to the idea that this government is a failed one and should not continue in power. From a Marxist point of view, the solution to the exploitation of the common masses in Nigeria by the capitalist bourgeois politicians lies not with them but the common masses. Implicitly, democracy in Nigeria has produced an exploitative political class and it is no doubt that the masses shall one day rise to clear every of their vestiges in society. For the time, the author recommends a forum for dialogue between the ruling elite and the masses for the continued oneness of Nigeria.

Boko Haram: A Historical Study Of Causes And Impact

The appearance of the Boko Haram Islamist sect in Nigeria is not traceable to any single cause, rather is a result of the internal political, social, economic and to some extent, religious factors.

A careful study of the circumstances that led to the military hand-over in 1999 and the political terrain since then provides an idea, which makes one incline to suggest that the security threats in Nigeria today, including the one of Boko Haram Islamist sect are unconnected to the political happenings in Nigeria. The extent of the mal-administration of the Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida/Sani Abacha military dictatorship in Nigeria between 1985 and 1998 created zeal in the Nigerian masses for a democratic government. For instance, the taking of IMF loan and introduction of its harsh conditionalities, when every Nigerian

rejected it, was the administration's first case of subverting popular will (Nwachuku and Uzoigwe, 2004). The last was the annulment of MKO Abiola's presidential victory on June 12, 1993 due to what he described as "flagrant abuse of the electoral laws" (Mahmud, 1993). But the election has been adjudged by Nigerians as the freest and fairest in the political history of the country. Several other atrocities committed by Gen. SaniAbacha beginning with the overthrow of the Ernest Shonekon's Interim National Government and the imprisonment of MKO Abiola, dashed the hopes of the masses and worsened the already precarious society. Egwemi's (2010) observation about the issue tends to portray that, the period of Gen. SaniAbacha's rule to his death in 1998, was marked by political weakness in the country as political parties operated weakly, with visibly no serious intention because of his confused political agenda. On October 1, 1999, Gen. AdbulsalamAbubakar, having assumed the mantle of leadership, after the death of Gen. SaniAbacha, handed power to Gen. OlusegunObasanjo (rtd) as president of Nigeria. Giving the above circumstances, Chief OlusegunObasanjo(as President, he preferred to be addressed as chief) was welcomed as a messiah, a situation that made him a central figure, a rallying point and a power absolutist. Though qualified to be president of Nigeria, Obasanjo was an opportunist. He found easy access to the presidency due to the zoning arrangement adopted by PDP, to shift power to the south, somehow in compensation for the injury inflicted by the past military regime on the south, especially the south-west. Then, the man considered his election as really a compensation for the Yoruba and thus became tribalised; making sensitive appointments from his kith and kin.

After, his eight-year rule, the PDP in continuation of the power shift agreement or understanding zoned the presidency to the north and Chief OlusegunObasanjo's choice was AlhajiUmaru Musa YarAdua, who the north rejected as too sick to rule, moreso that the man who had been lucky to transform from deputy Governor of Bayelsa State to Governor, Dr.Goodluck Jonathan was been placed closely in the name of vice-President to transform again to president. Truly, AlhajiUmaru Musa YarAdua died and Goodluck Jonathan became president promising to complete just his late boss' tenure. He never honoured his promise and under the argument that zoning was not a constitutional matter, but a gentleman's arrangement, he re-contested for what should have been the second term of a northern president. The dishonesty worries a top northern leader,AdamuCiroma:

"I was one of the four people who founded PDP, and when I was talking about PDP policy of zoning, of changing the leadership from North to South, I knew what I was talking

about...I didn't hide it, I told them in caucus, and I warned them that if they depart from that, it is going to have very serious consequences for the party. And it has happened, and they know this. That is why after the elections I have kept quiet because everything which is happening I have already indicated and warned against them" (Edafe, 2012)

People erroneously mix up military dictatorship with democracy and consequently have argued that the northerners have been ruling the country for a very long time. But the issue here is democracy and the pains of a play-off, which is been felt now by the northern elite. Additionally, one can count the years of democratic governance in Nigeria up to 2012, as amounting to about 22 years and the north has ruled for slightly more than 10 years, while the south that is still in power has ruled for slightly more than 11 years. The above analysis explains the confusion in the politics of Nigeria during the time under review and it presents a potent source of insecurity, whether Boko Haram or any other. This may well explain a security officer's suspicion of the circumstances surrounding the bombing of Force Headquarters in Abuja on June 16, 2011:

Before the April elections, some people promised to make Nigeria ungovernable. The threat was real. We are not ruling out the possibility that there is a political motive to this. Some politicians might have recruited some Boko Haram members to carry out their threat of making Nigeria ungovernable (Anonymous, 2011)

On October 1, 2011, the day of the inauguration of President Goodluck Jonathan, there was a bomb blast in Zuba area of Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory and place of the inauguration. Reacting to the recent bombing of media houses in Abuja and Kaduna on April 26, 2012, the National Security Adviser, Gen. OwoeyeAzazi blames Boko Haram insurgency on the Peoples Democratic Party. According to him, the PDP politics of fielding candidates against the wishes of its majority members contributes to the problem Nigerians are going through today (Osuni, 2012).

The issue of the play-off of northerners by OlusegunObasanjo might well be a remote cause of the Boko Haram insurgency. What majority of Nigerians deemed responsible for the situation is bad government. It is just one of the outcomes of incompetent administrations in Nigeria since the return to democracy in 1999. The governments have proved to be too corrupt; the citizens have become desperately and hopelessly poorer day after day. Available records indicate that Nigeria ranks sixth in world oil production, yet a greater population live below the poverty line of \$1 a day (Eregha, *et-al*, 2007). Statistically, poverty distribution in Nigeria shows that northern Nigeria is worst hit: North-Central records 67%, North-West

records 71.1% and North-East 72.2% (Danjibo, 2011). So, it is not out of fashion to suggest that poverty in Northern Nigeria arising from injustice, lack of fairness in the polity and imbalance in resource allocation is responsible for the insurrection. Unfortunately, this situation of poverty plays in the hands of a region that historically had a culture derived from well organised Islamic wars. As Is'haqModibboKawu (2012) says:

In Northern Nigeria, grievance and organisation of resistance to the state could only have been framed within the context of Islam given the history of the region. Here we have Borno's over 1000 year history as a Muslim state and the radical tradition which came out of the Jihad of Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio. To compound the situation, the Northeast part of Nigeria also suffers the worst indices of under-development in our country. This was the combustible mix that conditioned the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency.

This brings to mind the Arabs revolutionary up-rising in North Africa, which is caused by desperation in poverty resulting from bad governance. So the Boko Haram group takes a queue from others in Nigeria as MEND, MOSSOB, and OPC even though it is more violent. Its focus in the most recent time appears confusing as it kills innocent Nigerians instead of attacking the corrupt officials in government. But generally speaking, it is a resistance against bad government. For instance, when in September 11, 2001 an Al Qaeda terrorist gang stormed strategic locations in the USA, not the President was killed nor the vice President. But the American government knew it was a war against it, and with no acts of double standard, began to hunt for Al Qaeda leaders, killing their most prestigious one, Osama Bin Laden in 2011. In our case, the corrupt officials in government feel unconcerned because they have enough security apparatus that protects them.

The above analogy brings up another cause of the Boko Haram menace as government ineptitude and laxity in dealing with security challenges. The nation's borders are porous thereby making it easy for infiltration of mercenaries and arms proliferation into the country. The Nigeria Police Force is barren of the expected weaponry to combat such well armed insurrection like the Boko Haram. The state of the NPF is laughable and indeed people put such mockery questions as: do they have guns? do they have bullet-proof vests to confront armed robbers?. These basic things they don't have to confront armed robbers, not to talk of Boko Haram, so how can they discover bombs?Ganagana(2011).The inept and lax attitudes of government manifest in several others ways too. For instance, in November 2007, five Islamist militants with suspected links to Al-Qaeda were arrested by the State Security Service. Three of them were charged with receiving training in Algeria with the Salafist

Group for preaching and combatant between 2005 and 2007. These men were held for some months, then freed on bail and their case was never heard again in court. Again, a terrorist suspected to belong to the Al-Qaeda network Ibrahim Haman Ahmed, accused of trying to recruit young Nigerian Muslims for the terrorist organisation was arrested in Nigeria and later extradited to the U. S for trial. In spite of all these signals, the lax administration failed to put up security measures that could check the rise of or infiltration of Boko Haram members into the country. The failure results from the fact that Nigerian governments are often not popularly elected, which makes those in power, feel they owe the nation no obligation to protect the lives and properties of her citizenry.

The point of religion being another of the causes of Boko Haram cannot be ignored. The fact that the group comprised essentially Muslims puts forward the idea that it has religious connotation. The principle governing its emergence and activities relates to its rejection of Western education as evil, Islamising Nigeria and promoting Islamic ideologies in the country. To further illustrate the above point, it is necessary to reveal that eventhough the Northern leaders are talking about political and economic imbalance and looking forward to dialogue, the young boys do not appear to have any objective outside Islamising the country. This informs their decision to place a condition for accepting the president's call for dialogue; that he should first of all convert to Islam before they could talk with him (Edefe, 2012).

If one thinks deeply about the rejection of western education by this Islamist group, a sense will be deduced. Western education and Christianity were introduced forcefully in Nigeria through colonialism as instruments of economic exploitation and socio-cultural transformation. Since the exit of colonialism in Nigeria, we continue to suffer its legacies of economic exploitation and socio-cultural transformation through the existence of an indigenous exploiting class. This class continue to reproduce itself by means of birth and training. Today, they are the ones who constitute the political class that misgovern the country: they are seen laundering money, flying abroad, shopping in Dubai, and sending their children abroad to study in expensive Western schools. The resentment in Northern Nigeria against these corruptelite who are products of western education became the foundation of Boko Haram. For other parts of Nigeria that embraced Christianity, this bitter situation going on is being accommodated with great pains, but for the non-Christian parts of Nigeria, precisely Northern Nigeria, Islamic culture continue to oppose the western capitalist values.

Yet the situation would not have been what it is today if not for the extra-judicial killings carried out by government. Whilst Boko Haram started as a non-violent breakaway group, persecution and aggressive crack-downs from the security services brought about their violent response. Boko Haram was at first a small and controllable problem, but the issue escalated in 2009 after heavy crackdowns were ordered by President Yar'Adua. The crackdown was brutal and disproportionate; around 700 innocent people were killed, some of them publicly executed on suspicions that they were member of Boko Haram (Sani, 2012). The killing of their leader, Mohammed Yusuf actually made the group increase its rate of violent activities (Ajah, 2011). Following the killing of their leader the movement went underground but emerged a year later with renewed attacks. Even at this point the situation was controllable, yet the government response was again heavy-handed. Local people felt more intimidated by the soldiers deployed to fight Boko Haram than they did of Boko Haram. This sentiment was compounded by the violent and indiscriminate responses of the security forces, which frequently caused the destruction of property and the loss of innocent lives. It may be very difficult to scale exactly the destructions; in terms of lives and properties lost to the marauding members of Boko Haram as whatever that is put down simply represents a tentative figure. The first target of their onslaught was Borno State, where series of snip killings were being carried out. For instance, on January 28, 2008, Fannami Gubio, Goni Sheriff, the ANPP gubernatorial candidate and younger brother to Governor Sheriff of Borno State, and six others were killed by Boko Haram members just three months after the party's Chairman, Awana Ngala was murdered in his house (Ola, 2011). Borno State suffered the impact of Boko Haram murderous activities for quite some time, after which the sect extended its activities to other northern States and the Federal Capital Territory. The territorial scope of their destruction also keeps expanding and this time, it extends to the academic institutions as some Nigerian universities have been bombed causing heavy destructions and loss of human lives. The first casualty was the Gombe State University, where Akhoragbon (2012) reports the bombing and destruction of the building housing the University Senate. Next was the turn of Bayero University Kano where Muslim worshippers in the University's old campus were bombed on April 29, 2012 by the Boko Haram Islamist sect, which resulted in the death of two professors and seventeen others (Adamu, 2012). The following day, a time bomb was discovered in its new campus (Adamu, 2012). The Nigerian media also got their share of the Boko Haram insurgency when the Abuja office of This Day newspaper was bombed simultaneously with its office in Kaduna alongside that of The Sun

and Moments newspapers on April 26, 2012 killing eight persons and destroying several cars (Alliet-al, 2012).

It really of no gain mentioning every bit of the destructions caused by Boko Haram, suffice to add the attack on the Taraba State Commissioner of Police, MammanSule by three suicide bombers on motorbikes on April 30, 2012 resulting in the death of eight members of his convey and the three bombers (Igidi, 2012). As the situation is presently, the likelihood is that more and more killings and destructions of properties will be done by the sect as government appears overtly helpless

The Way Forward

It no doubt that government confrontational approach has failed to yield positive result. This explains the author's support of President Jonathan's dialogue option. *This position is also shared by Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), which insists that dialogue, rather than military option remains the only way to resolve the Boko Haram Islamist sect insurgency*(Nwaneri, 2012). However, this remains a short-term remedy to any of the crises in Nigeria as the one of long-term requires that a forum, in form of a national conference be created where representatives of ethnic groups and other stake-holders would meet to discuss the problems of Nigeria, for the nation to continue in oneness.

Any attempt to stop at the level of a dialogue with members of the rampaging Islamist sect will create more security burden for the nation. For it is not unthinkable that groups who feel their interests have not been met by government would resort to high-class violence, in attempt to compel government to come to terms. Some people insinuate that to engage Boko Haram in any dialogue will tantamount to inviting the Militias of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta back on stage. This is taking the issue to far sectional, and government should disregard such insinuations.

The issue of bad governance has been identified as one of the factors responsible the emergence of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria. This has created a situation of idleness of the youths, who are either unemployed or are not empowered to be self-reliant. The government at the Federal, State and Local levels should engage in people-oriented policies to create job opportunities for the youths. Albert (2003) laments the problem of unemployment and youth restiveness:

Different forms of governance crisis bedevil the Nigerian society...the origin and escalation of these conflicts is blamed on poverty of leadership in Nigeria...Most of the

youths that have served as cannon fodder of many of the conflicts have been unemployed for a long time and have lost hope of making any positive contribution to society

It is in realisation of the failure of government to provide employment to the teeming youth and its consequence on the Nigerian society that Governor of Borno State, KashimShettima engages in programmes that will employ 100,000 youths yearly and is optimistic that once this done, the madness called Boko Haram will become a thing of the past.

Members of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) in one of their meetings on the Boko Haram threat posit: “...Northern leaders are not naive to imagine 2015 will never come” (Nwaneri, 2012). This is a message of expectation by the northern elite that 2015 would bring a change in the power arrangement in Nigeria, hopefully that a northern president would emerge. This expectation re-introduces the case of zoning in the Peoples Democratic Party that had been a hard nut to crack, and which is felt to be a factor for the insurrection in northern Nigeria. Should PDP continue with its argument that zoning is not a constitutional matter, to enable President Goodluck Jonathan seek re-election, the situation might be so precarious than would be imagined. Consequently, the feeling that zoning should be the basis for rotation of the presidency, which explains the election of OlusegunObasanjo as President in the first place, must be tolerated as a way of resolving the impasse within the ranks of top PDP members in the north and south of Nigeria.

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