

The Religious Extremism Of 'Boko Haram' Insurgents In Nigeria: A Philosophical Inquest

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined "Boko Haram" as an insurgent group which has unleashed terror, wrecked havoc and brought upheavals to the territorial integrity of Nigeria as a country. The Islamic sect popularly called "Boko Haram" has become a threat to Nigeria and her economy. It also examined the untold economic, social and political hardship this cankerworm had wrecked on the lives of the people. The paper gave an insight into the evolution of "Boko Haram" from the ethical, religious, political and psychological points of view. Various literatures and opinions of people were reviewed. The critical and analytical methods were employed in the course of writing this paper. However, some suggestions were made on how this ugly development could be curtailed by not allowing it to escalate to civil war among the various ethnic groups of Nigeria. The paper concluded by stressing and emphasizing on the revitalization and re-orientation of the mindsets of these insurgents in order to put a stop to their dastardly acts.

Keywords: Religious, Extremist, Boko Haram, Insurgent, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

As we have known, ethics is that discipline which examines the moral underpinnings and presuppositions on issues pertaining to human life. It is in this regard that the discipline is used as a tool to examine the moral justification of "Boko Haram" and the Amnesty offer initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The unprecedented resurgence of terrorism in the globe with special bias to Nigeria seems to be a fulfillment of the prophetic utterance of Paul in the Book of Timothy that: "in the end time shall come ugly developments".¹ This Pauline prophecy is in line with the word of Jesus in St. Matthew Chapter Twenty-Four Verses 1-2 that: "there shall be chaotic, turbulent, troublesome events in the end time".² Hence, the emergence of "Boko Haram" in the country, eventhough it is disgusting and devastating, is not about this insurgent group per se or its prediction in the Bible, but is about the moral presuppositions underlying its existence as a destructive phenomenon.

Evolution of "Boko Haram"

It is no longer news that the violent Islamic Sect popularly known as "Boko Haram" is the current threat to Nigeria and her economy. Their activities are so devastating that quite a number of lives and properties have been destroyed and annihilated by them.

Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, better known by its Hausa name, "Boko Haram", is a Jihadist terrorist organization based in the North-

Eastern part of Nigeria. It is an Islamist movement which strongly opposes man-made laws. The movement frowned at western education as the corruptor of man and it considers it (western education) as a sin initiated by the people. In the town of Maiduguri where the group was formed, the residents dubbed it "Boko Haram". The term "Boko Haram" comes from the Hausa Language. While "Boko" means "Book" and the Arabic word "Haram" figuratively means "sin" (literally "forbidden"). The name, loosely translated from Hausa, means "western education is forbidden". The group earned this name due to its strong opposition to anything Western, which it sees as corrupting muslims.³

Ideology of Boko Haram

Boko Haram is an indigenous salafist group which only turned itself into a salafist jihadist group in 2009. The group does not only state that the interaction with the western world is forbidden, but that, it also contaminates muslims' faith as if the said faith is not an imported one from the western world. The group publicly extols its ideology despite the fact that its founder and former leader Muhammed Yusuf was himself a highly educated man who lived an affluent life. In an interview with the leader in 2009 on a BBC⁴ programme, it was gathered that the leader rejected scientific explanation for natural phenomena such as evaporation of water being the cause of rain according to the Darwinian theory and that the earth is spherical in shape. His rejection was based on the fact that these scientific explanations run contrary to the teachings of Allah. Before his death, the man

reiterated the sect's objective of changing the current education system and rejecting democracy.

In the wake of 2009, the crackdown on its members and its subsequent re-emergence, the growing frequency and geographical range of attacks attributed to "Boko Haram" have led some political and religious leaders in the North to the conclusion that the group has now expanded beyond its original religious composition to include not only Islamic militants, but also criminal elements and disgruntled politicians as well. According to Governor Kashim Shettima of Borno State⁵, 'Boko Haram' has become a franchise group that anyone can identify with or possibly join. It is like a Bermuda Triangle.

The group was formed by Muhammed Yusuf in 2002 in the city of Maiduguri, Borno State of Nigeria with the aim of establishing a Shari'a Government in the state under the leadership of Governor Ali Modu Sheriff. He built a complex where there was a mosque and a school to enrol and train all interested people in his vision; and information had it that, many people especially the poor, across the nation with special bias to the North, enrolled.⁶

Before long, there was a strange development as the group seemed to derail from their set goal(s) in that the centre became the arena of recruitment of future jihadists to fight the state. The membership of the group, as later found out, included citizens from neighbouring countries namely Chad and some Arabic speaking nations. In 2004, their meeting arena was relocated to Yusuf's home state, Yobe in the village called 'Kanamma' near Niger Border.⁷

Human Right Watch Researcher, Eric Guttschuss⁸ told IRIN News that Yusuf successfully got members or followers from the unemployed youths "by speaking out against police and political corruption". In like manner, Abdulkarim Mohammed, a researcher on this violent so-called Islamic sect, opined that, violent uprisings in Nigeria are ultimately due to the fall out of frustration with corruption and the attendant social malaise of poverty cum unemployment.⁹ This is a great challenge and food for thought for the governments at all levels in the country as well as rich Nigerians. One good turn, they say, deserves another. So, one bad turn must equally deserve another and for every action, there must necessarily be corresponding reaction. This suggests that if unemployment continues to be on the increase in lieu of nipping it in the bud and corruption keeps escalating and spreading like harmattan fire in the country, then the 'Haramic' activities in multiple forms are inevitable.

Attack Profiles

The underlisted are some of the noted sect's activities that can be recalled at this auspicious time of writing

this paper, with special bias to the beginning of their violence cum the timeline of their incidents:

- 1.7th September, 2010-Bauchi Prison Break.
- 2.31st December, 2010-Abuja Attack.
- 3.22nd April, 2010-The sect freed 14 prisoners during a jail break in Yola, Adamawa State.
- 4.29th May, 2011 -Northern Nigeria bombings.
- 5.16th June, 2011 -The group claimed responsibility for the 2011 Abuja Police Headquarters bombing.
- 6.26th June, 2011 -Bomb attack on a Restaurant in Maiduguri.
- 7.10th July, 2011- Bomb attack on All Christians' Fellowship Church in Suleja, Niger State.
- 8.11th July, 2011 -The University of Maiduguri's closure due to a security Report on Boko Haram intending attack.
- 9.12th August, 2011- Prominent Muslim Cleric, Liman Bana was shot dead by the sect.
10. 26th August, 2011-Abuja bombing.
11. 4th November, 2011- Damaturu attack.
12. 25th December, 2011- Bombing of a Catholic Church in Mandala, Borno State.
13. 20th January, 2012- Kano bombing.
14. 8th February, 2012- The group claimed for bombing at the Army Headquarters in Kaduna. What a tragedy!When the camp of those to defend the country's territory against terror was bombed, what then is the fate of the bloody civilians?
15. 16th February, 2012- There was another jail break by the sect in Kogi State; 119 prisoners were released and 1 warder killed.
16. 8th March, 2012 -This was the day an Italian Engineer, Franco Lamlinara and a Briton, Christopher McManus The violent Islamic Sect were abducted in 2011and killed in an attempt to rescue them by people.
17. 29th April, 2012-Bayero University bombing.
18. 30th April, 2012- Jalingo bombing.
19. 1st May, 2012 -The sporadic shooting between Boko Haram and the military Joint Task Force. The incident claimed many lives.¹⁰
- 20.11th June, 2012-Twenty seven persons including 9 policemen, were killed by gunmen.¹¹ (12th June, 2012, The Nation Newspapers).
- 21.17th June, 2012-Suicide bombings of three Churches in Kaduna.¹² (19th June, 2012, The Nation Newspapers).
- 22.18th June, 2012 Damaturu (Yobe State Capital) Gun Battle¹³ 20th June, 2012 The Nation Newspaper).
- 23.24th June, 2012- Attack on a satellite prison by Boko Haram in Damaturu freeing 40 inmates.(25th June, 2012, The Nation Newspaper).¹⁴
- 24.26th June, 2012- Guns boomed in Kano, the North's commercial engine room, and Damaturu, the Yobe State Capital. The terror strike coincided with the resumption in Abuja of the newly appointed National Security Adviser (NSA) to the President of Nigeria, Col. Sambo Dasuki. 17 suspected Boko

Haram terrorists were killed in the gun battles.¹⁵ (27th and 28th June, 2012 – The Nation Newspaper).

25.2nd May, 2013 - Gunmen suspected to be Boko Haram members killed the Secretary of Dikwa Local Government Council, Alhaji Kachallah Umara at his residence at 8.35 p.m.¹⁶ (4th May, 2013, The Guardian Newspaper).

26. 3rd May, 2013 -Four gunmen suspected to be Boko Haram members kidnapped Elder Statesman, Alhaji Shettima Ali Monguno, at the Mafoni Central Mosque in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria.¹⁷ (4th May, 2013, The Guardian Newspaper).

27. 3rd May, 2013 -Eruption of a fierce sectarian violence in Wukari, Taraba State – Religious clash which attended the burial procession of high ranking Jukun Chief –Locked in the bloody battle were the Jukun (Christians) and the muslim Fulani. 39 people were reportedly said to have lost their lives while 30 others got injured.¹⁸ (5th May, 2013, The Nation Newspaper).

28.7th May, 2013- Boko Haram gunmen killed Policemen and Prisons officials In Bama, Borno State.¹⁹ (11th May, 2013, The Guardian Newspaper).

To this end, if we are to continue the revelation of these systematic and consistent operations of this violent Islamic sect, it may pose much threat to us as one can guess that some people may be thinking that they can even blast right now since it seems their operation is on daily basis. It is noteworthy that the group conducted its operations more or less peacefully during the first seven years of its existence but this changed in 2009 when the Nigerian government launched an investigation into the group's activities following reports that its members were arming themselves. Prior to that, the government reportedly ignored warnings about the increasingly military officers. When the government came into action, several members of the group were arrested in Bauchi, sparking deadly clashes with Nigerian security agents which led to the deaths of an estimated 700 people.²⁰ Also, after the killing of M. Yusuf, the group carried out its first terrorist attack in Borno State in January, 2010 and this resulted in the killing of four people. Since then, the violence has been escalating in terms of both frequency and intensity.

The Cause(s) of Boko Haram Insurgency/Terrorism–Psychological and Political Causes

Various scholars had given insights into what could have brought about this ugly phenomenon. Boko Haram, to them, is a manifestation of and bad leadership that resulted from corruption in Nigeria. Security is a serious business. Buhari opines that “if a nation wants to tackle the problem created by this insurgent group, we must ask ourselves why we have arrived at this state of insecurity. We must discuss and identify what are the causes so as to find

solutions to it. The fight against extremism should not be construed to mean a fight against Islam and Islamic tenets. It is not what the extremists are doing by their action that is our concern. It is the action that we take individually and collectively as people and leaders”.²¹ The major cause of this menace is political and it is tied to the apron of bad leadership problem bewildering Nigeria as a state. However, the poor state of the nation cannot be ruled out as part of the cause of the emergence of Boko Haram in the country. Also, the gap between the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria in terms of infrastructural and educational development is one of the causes identified. More so, the 2011 Presidential Elections is also seen in some quarters as the major primary cause of the Boko Haram upheaval in the country. The expectation of the North was to have won the presidential elections. Immediately the results of the election were announced by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), Boko Haram insurgents commenced their dastardly operations by attacking the southern indigenes residing in the Northern part of the country, unleashing terror on their lives by killing, hanging and destroying their properties. This singular act of these terrorists made people to believe that the cause of the mayhem orchestrated by the insurgents was political. However, the secondary cause, to us, is psychological; psychological, in the sense that, it bothers on the mindsets of the insurgents. When we talk about these people (insurgents) they are people with ideology and can die or kill in the process. To us, the secondary cause is based on the human anatomy of the insurgents.

To this end, the secondary cause remains innate and is dependent on the mindset of every member of the group. The insurgent group is not faceless; those that are in government know them and they do protect them from being arrested and prosecuted. Government is not faithful in arresting these people. Also, ahead of the 2015 General Elections, the political atmosphere is already tense as intrigues, permutations and scheming appear to have taken the centre stage instead of good governance. Politicians have started running for their dear lives as some of these insurgents have started unleashing terror on them and their cohorts/lieutenants. Moreover, some politicians in the country are the financiers of this group paying them monthly ransom, for their dastardly acts.

Religious Overview of Boko Haram

Boko Haram group are people who are committed to the propagation of prophet Mohammed's teaching and jihad. They were originally known as jihadist terrorists or orthodox Muslims based in the North-East of Nigeria. The group strongly opposed man-made laws and would want to abolish the secular

system of government and establish Sharia in the country.²²

At this juncture, if Boko Haram, as explained above, is formed purposely to propagate the gospel of Prophet Mohammed, how come has the Islamic group turned out to become social miscreants and nuisances? These and other questions are begging for answers in the views of Nigerians and international observers. Religion, as conceived, is a tool for entrenching peace and development in the world. How come has it turned to become a weapon of destruction in the hands of these disgruntled and unscrupulous insurgents in Nigeria and other countries of the world? The most fundamental question is that why are insurgents/fanatics always coming from the Muslim camps in the world? Is Islamic religion a tool for serving God or for destruction? Scholars from the Islamic world have sharply reacted to this and many other questions by emphasizing the supremacy of God in what they do. They have antithetical posture towards the destructions being carried out by various insurgent groups in the world; claiming that God abhors killing in all its ramifications.

Political Manifestation of 'Boko Haram' Insurgency

This paper had earlier posited that one of the secondary causes of Boko Haram in Nigeria is politics. What is very clear is that Nigeria is easing into a tyrannical leadership and gradually moving into a Civilian fascist with the attitude of our leadership.²³ In a number of ways, one of which is that it has disappointed Nigerians.

Second, it has weeped up and propagated regional sentiments. Under the secondary cause, Boko Haram is an arrangement that came out as a product of bad leadership and governance in Nigeria. There was no news of Boko Haram as a destructive organ when Nigeria evolved as a country. It is an aftermath effect of bad leadership. Most politicians heat up the polity by sponsoring this group thereby making the country not habitable to the people as well as wading off the would-be investors. To us, the President Jonathan's handling of the security challenges in the country has shown that his government lacks the capacity to deal with the crisis. The violence that Nigeria is witnessing today, if not checked, will push the country towards anarchy; hence, the need for well meaning Nigerians to step up immediately with a view to saving the country from going under. The nation is hopelessly a drift. But if we are to survive, this vicious circle of violence that has engulfed this nation, the act must be brought to an end; and we implore the National Assembly to take the lead in this quest for peace.²⁴ As we look round Nigeria, the signs we see are troubling, the situation on ground is worrisome, light and darkness have no meeting points,

poverty has crippled the country and high rate of unemployment, while the ruling party has plunged the masses into a high rate of insecurity. For 15 years, Nigeria has not known peace and we are not at war as innocent citizens are being killed day and night as justice has become a scarce commodity. Despite Nigeria's abundant resources, the people have remained poor. Promises are made and yet the same promises are broken, the situation has become worst. The government has proved unable to secure the nation's internal environment: there is widespread and rising poverty and unemployment across the length and breadth of the country. There is spiralling lawlessness all over the country. There is a complete and total decline in the quality of social services and an irremediable dilapidation in the nation's socio-economic infrastructure across board. The patience of Nigerians and the constituent parts have been severely tried and stretched to its limits and citizens now owe it a duty to salvage the situation.²⁵ However, based on the above characteristic posture of Nigeria, people indulge in various acts and commit offences that are inimical and detrimental to the progress of the country as a way of showing their annoyance on the bad leadership being witnessed in the country.

Corruption, embezzlement and a host of others, have become cankerworms that have eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigeria's life, while some people are becoming richer, others are becoming poorer; and for the poor to survive, they started unleashing terror on the lives of the richer; thereby making the country hot. Ethnic sentiments and regionalism are now being promoted as a result of these cankerworms. All these and many others have given rise to the various religions, social, and economic crisis being witnessed in the country now.

Philosophers' Position on 'Boko Haram'

As philosophers, what we think that is lacking in Nigeria and which has brought the country to this unfortunate circumstance is the absence of morality. If religion has failed in terms of entrenching peace in the country, why don't we embrace morality and see whether it will work or not even though Herclitus asserts that the human world hinges and thrives on war. That war is a necessary condition for progress and strife is a good tool for fostering harmonious relationship among the people of the world.²⁶ Karl Marx in his Marxism equally posits that any oppressive policies of the government must be rejected even if it requires bloody revolution.

He (Marx) said that man should not be exposed to alienation, exploitation, dehumanization of any sort. That the dignity of man must be protected and should not be undermined; and that any obnoxious policies which are detrimental to the lives of the people must be revolutionized against.²⁷ This position of Marx may be what informed the emergence of the various

ethnic militias in the country namely the Boko Haram group, Ebesu boys, Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force and a host of other groups just to mention a few, to react against how leaders are starching away money that belong to the entire country into their internal and foreign accounts. Immanuel Kant, one of the highly respected scholars, explains that man should not be used as a means to achieve an end. That man is an end in himself, contrary to the position of Nicollo Machiavelli.²⁸

Effects of the Menace of Boko Haram on the Lives of the People

Many lives have been lost and properties destroyed as shown earlier in this paper. The lives of the people have become brutal, nasty, and people, not only in the affected areas, but in the whole country, are now living with palpable fear and in solitary confinement. The situation can be likened to the Hobbesian state of Nature²⁹ where there was no government, no morality, no law, and the lives of the people were in disarray. There is survival of the fittest and the death of the unfit. This situation tells more on the qualities that our leaders are exemplifying. The effects of this menace are so enormous such that many potentials and resourceful persons are moving away from Nigeria to safer countries where their potentials could be harnessed. There have been untold hardship, economic, social, and political upheavals as a result of the activities of the insurgent group. People are more than before security conscious as their lives are more important than the country.

The Amnesty Offer

There is no moral justification in the Amnesty offer meted out to the insurgents. To us, we have not seen a situation whereby terrorists are induced not to kill again. Why should killers be offered amnesty not to kill considering many lives that have been lost in their attacks? What would be the fate of the victims who lost their lives in their attacks? Amnesty, to us, is a ruse that will not solve the problem of insurgency in the country. These people are not after any inducement as they continue their attack even after being offered amnesty by the Federal Government. Boko Haram insurgency is not about granting amnesty is about human anatomy (i.e. human nature – the mindset of individual).

Any Moral Justification?

Anything that is done to destroy life is not morally justified. There is no justification whatsoever that can be given to Boko Haram. The position of this paper is that a reprisal attack and other measures considered as sacrosanct/powerful to suppress the insurgent group, must be adopted by the Federal Government in order to nip in the bud the activities of the group.

The Way Out

1. Re-orientation of the mindsets of Nigerians and other inhabitants by the various organs of the government so as to eschew bad conducts.
2. The Declaration of the State of Emergency by President Jonathan is a right peg in a round hole. But this method may not be enough to curtail the excesses of the insurgent group. Other measures considered fit to unravel the menaces perpetrated by this group must be adopted.
3. Government should create a programme through its organ that will bring about mass education of its citizens. This can be achieved through mass literacy programme. If it is not possible to educate the faceless insurgents, the citizens of the country must be educated so as not to continue indulging in wholesome acts capable of undermining the territorial integrity of Nigeria. This position was championed by Awolowo in his life time. He canvassed the bridging of the gap, in terms of education, between the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria.
4. **Infrastructural Development**
There must be an aggressive infrastructural development in Nigeria if this cankerworm and other problems are to be nipped in the bud. If electricity is given a pride of place in the policies of the government, for example, investors will come and invest thereby creating job opportunities for citizens. "An idle hand", they say, "is devil's workshop". If our youths are gainfully employed, they will not be thinking of unleashing terror on other people's lives.
5. **Creating Employment Opportunities**
When the youths are employed, the society will be better-off. Crisis will be reduced and there will be peace in the society.
6. There must be a stop to corruption and embezzlement if Nigeria is to witness peace and development. In a country whereby corrupt people dominate the scene of politics, and they are leaders, the youths will revolt and various insurgent organizations will evolve.
7. Leaders in both government and the society must lead by example for the followers to emulate their good deeds.
8. In like manner, the electorate must stop the habit of praising, celebrating and extolling these "official Boko Harm" (i.e. money looters) who use their pens and offices to perpetrate corruption and thereby crawling and destroying our national economy.
9. As part of the measure to mitigate official Boko Haram in the country, it will be plausible to state that arrest and prosecution of these people should no longer be to fulfil all righteousness. Rather, it should henceforth be thorough and result-oriented.
10. Nigeria must be placed, in everybody's mind above any personal or family life. Until then, the country can witness peace, tranquility and development.

11. Youths, generally, must be educated on how virtues are to be imbibed. It is not only these insurgents that need this but all the youths in our society.

12. Government and everybody must continue to intensify effort on how this ugly phenomenon could be wiped off from Nigeria. We must embark on in-house searching for possible solution to the menace.

CONCLUSION

The work has critically examined the activities of the Islamic violent sect as well as various manifestations of the insurgency. The work posits that the havoc that has been wrecked by the Boko Haram group has become an issue of concern in the country. The paper opines that the primary cause of the insurgency is psychological rather than being political; although political at the secondary level of consideration.

To this end, the entity called Nigeria, is in a state of helplessness, confusion and disarray over the incessant operations of the sect. It is on this note that the Federal Government should invite other powerful nations of the world to join it in fighting terrorism out of our land. Also, if the suggestions offered in this paper are adopted, they could serve as morale boosters by complementing the present efforts of the government being geared towards stamping out this ugly development.

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