

Boko-Haram insurgency in Borno State and its challenge to the Nigerian Army

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ABSTRACT: The paper describes Islam in the Sahel region, prior to the advent of Usman Dan Fodio, who through Jihad, upset the established Islam and replaced same with a new form of Islam, which was said to be purer. He believed that, the Islamic ideology which had been in place around the Sahel region had been syncretic and should therefore be replaced. It does appear that, this development had formed the foundation for the present puritan struggle, led by the insurgents in the North East of Nigeria, where Islam had initially started off in Nigeria. The paper traces the basic beliefs and teachings of members of the Boko-Haram and their splinter groups, which clearly contradict the known Islamic standards. To this end, members of Boko-Haram had thrown caution to the winds as regards western education. It totally abhors and condemns western education and all its attendant paraphernalia. This belief system has set the extremists in collusion with the law enforcement agencies of Nigeria. The war has dragged on for so long, despite the fact that the leadership of the insurgency had been decimated severally. The lesson learnt has been that it would be very difficult to defeat the insurgents, as they continue to metamorphose and develop into splinter groups. To make the situation worse, the researcher discovered that, the insurgents are now internationally affiliated.

Keywords: Boko-Haram, Borno, fundamentalists, insurgency, Islam, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a critical examination and separation of the various religious ideologies and fundamentalism as typified in *JamaatAhl al-Sunnah li-l-Daawahwa al-Jihad* movement, commonly called, Boko-Haram, while using dialectical theatrics to adequately project the activities of the fundamentalists in Nigeria. Boko-Haram is a fundamental religious sectarian group, which was founded by Mohammed Yusuf (Agbiboa, 2015). It had earlier taken off as a socio-religious and political pressure group, which was more interested in checkmating the excesses of government functionaries in Borno State, Nigeria. Essentially, it was a local Islamic religious preaching group, which was more interested in the spiritual development of the people, its welfare and the responsibility of the government functionaries to the citizens, as enunciated by Islamic injunctions.

However, as a result of the belligerent default on the part of the government in its expected duties to the down trodden, the group gradually transformed into a pressure group, and subsequently got involved in the local political operations of Borno State. Not until the official murder of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, by the police in Maiduguri before it drastically transformed and became what it is currently, religiously, and ideologically (Agbiboa, 2015). The transformation was brutal and unsympathetic to the government and the public, which were considered as pursuing anti insurgency programmes.

The urgency recorded in the transformation of the group left much to be desired, as people had thought that it was never going to survive. Presently, not only do we have to deal with Boko-haram, we also have its other splinter groups to deal with. In fact, the fundamentalists have

become invincible for law enforcement agents, as it has been affiliated with other international terrorist groups.

This research would therefore be interested in the salient reasons for the formation and survival of the group. The research also deals with the tenets of Boko-Haram and its strategy of assertion. The research would investigate the reasons attributable to the difficulties associated with the effective defeat of the insurgency. The paper would explain some fundamental issues which include the geography, history of the introduction of Islam in Borno State, and how it aided the emergence and spread of the Islamic fundamentalists. The paper would also interrogate what informed their religious ideology. Furthermore, the paper would examine Boko-Haram's source of funds, their activities, impacts, and the challenges facing the war against insurgency in Nigeria. In the end, the findings would serve as source material and relevant information for both scholars and policy makers, whose aim is to find solutions to the dreaded insurgency, restore peace and encourage the much needed development in Nigeria.

ISLAM IN THE SAHEL REGION-1

The first and initial contact the North East of Nigeria had with Islam was through Kanem-Borno Empire (Nmah and Amanambu, 2017). Kanem-Borno was perfectly located and situated in the present-day Borno State, Nigeria.

Islam had flourished in the region for centuries before the creation of Nigeria. That empire was strong politically and spiritually. It was a region well known for its might in warfare. Little wonder its generations are strong, determined and active as their forebears. The tribes that make up the region are the Kanuri, Shua Arabs, Hausa, Fulani, Bachama, among others. But the Kanuri has all along been the dominant tribe, and had called the political and spiritual shots in that region over many centuries (Nmah and Amanambu, 2017).

The incursion of Islam on Kanem-Bornu Empire

The earliest point of arrival of Islam in Nigeria was the North East and its entire space, at about 11 AD (Wikipedia, 2022). Islam had taken a proper root in this area and had speedily advanced to other arrears in the north through both coercion, trade and conquest. To that effect, Islam had since then been practiced both in the North East and North West of Nigeria. At that time, the *Mais* in Borno were the supreme political and spiritual leaders throughout the two regions. This trend continued with pockets of resistance from the neighbouring communities and was eventually matched by remarkable conquest by the Kanem-Bornu Empire.

Therefore, a syncretic version of Islam was believed to have been introduced at the initial stage, in order to make

it attractive to the local people, who were deeply involved in traditional religion. So, with time, this version of Islam became acceptable to the people over and above the prevalent traditional religion (Wikipedia, 2022). This situation was not to last long as the syncretic Islam later met strong opposition to the later version of Islam brought by the Fulani Jihadists. The jihadists were led by Usman Danfodio. These immigrants had come from the Fouta Djallon area of West Africa. They did not only insist on their form of governance, but they also insisted on their puritan version of Islam throughout the region.

Interactions between Kanem-Borno Islam and the Jihadist Islam

Their expansionist policies and warfare achievements were not limited to that region alone but were extended southwards of Nigeria, later reaching as far as Ilorin. With the practice of the basic but liberal and syncretic type of Islam in the region and its subsequent usurpation by the Jihadists' version of Islam, it is therefore not unlikely that the old rivalries are still playing out, even presently. The bitterness and animosity with which Boko-Haram has been pursuing its Islamic agenda and propagation, point to the unwritten but longstanding hidden rivalry and animosity which had been planted and had taken its roots many centuries ago. Therefore, it may not be out of place to reason that Boko-Haram's present activities and pursuant are technically driven by an urgency to redo what had been disrupted by the Fulani jihadists several years ago.

TENETS AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS OF BOKO-HARAM

Boko-Haram believes that their version of Islam is the purest and represents what the prophet Mohammed and the Quran preached (Mantzikos, 2013). So, their form of belief is a rebirth of the ancient form of Islam, which recognizes that Sharia law must be respected and enforced.

Boko-Haram's grouses with western education

According to them, western education has done society no good except victimization, oppression and intolerance (de Montclos, 2014). In their opinion, western education breeds corruption in all its ramifications. While it may be accepted that, the cultural and spiritual fabrics of Nigerian society have been altered by western education, yet, the gains of western education cannot be easily wished away by no means. Therefore, the position of the insurgents for a total rejection of western education and its influences may not be considered an objective or informed position.

Boko-Haram's guerilla campaign and territorial advancements

The militants started in a humble manner, first as a defensive force against the Federal Police. But with time, it gradually transformed into a fighting and aggressive force, which was ready to destroy everything and anything in sight. More so, that it had initially, although short-lived, enjoyed an unusual sympathy of a cross-section of Muslim *Umar*. This group of sympathizers had reasoned that the way and manner the earliest leader, who was also the founder of Boko-Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, and his supporters were killed, was unjust and indirectly, amounted to an attack on Islam (de Montclos, 2014).

At that point, they had thought Boko-Haram was preaching Islam and was trying to genuinely Islamize the entire country. It soon dawned on their supporters that, Boko-Haram was an extremist group, that neither had respect for Christianity nor for conventional Islam and its leadership hierarchy. It is of note that, with time, the battle lines were drawn, while the Nigerian military struggled to contain their movement and advancement.

NIGERIAN ARMY AND THE ELUSIVE VICTORY

The Nigeria Military, including the army, navy and Air force is considered one of the best-trained armed forces in Africa. Their military exploits are all recorded around the world. The Nigerian military had participated in Peace Keeping Operations/missions, both in Africa and in other parts of the universe, with commendations. It therefore becomes an astonishing matter for keen watchers to see it struggle against an untrained and non-professional insurgent group like Boko Haram, for over a decade without a decisive success or victory (Gilbert, 2014).

While the informed security experts would proffer a couple of tactical and professional explanations to the argument, the ordinary man on the street who had been familiar with the generally acknowledged invincibility and expressed exploits of the Nigeria Military finds it very hard to be convinced that, it is not deliberate that the war has dragged on for this long. The following points are germane to be considered for the long-drawn fight between the military and the insurgents.

Poor judgment and underrating of the insurgents by the military

The Nigerian army has often been accused of underrating and referring to the insurgents as ragtag, untrained and unprofessional. Thus, they had been treated with glove hands. Part of such poor judgment of the insurgents on the part of the Nigerian army is seen in their reactions in terms of the number of men and equipment deployed to the war

fronts. Nigerian soldiers are always in short supply against the insurgents. It should be noted that the insurgents are usually well prepared in terms of their numbers and equipment when launching against the national army. This is one of the reasons why the insurgents usually overrun the camps of the Nigerian army, including even their super camps (Falode, 2016). Of late, the insurgents had invaded the Nigeria Defense Academy (NDA), which hitherto had been thought to be invincible.

Inadequate basic training in guerrilla warfare

It is often alleged that the Nigerian army was caught unaware at the onset of the insurgency in Nigeria. The position posits that they had not been familiar with and trained in guerrilla warfare, but in conventional warfare skills. If this position is subjected to critical analysis, it may fail to hold water because insurgency has become a regular occurrence around the world for a good period of time. Therefore, this ought to have been included in their trainings, long before now, in view of the prevalent insurgency going on around the world and Africa in particular.

Moreover, with the appearance of insurgency in Nigeria, one would have thought that a serious national military force would have put in place counter insurgency training as soon as it reared its ugly head. Unfortunately, just as other national issues are treated with reluctance, the military also fell victim to this unenviable culture and disposition, thereby making the country, over time to lose many of her brilliant and gallant soldiers.

Sabotage and the case of fifth columnists

It is hard to believe that the assumed "very invincible Nigerian army" could be losing grounds, men and equipment to Boko-Haram fighters, without an internal collaboration with the insurgents. The prevailing impression is that there is a fifth columnist (saboteurs), within the Nigerian army who disclose tactical and logistical signals/information to the insurgents. To buttress this view point, it is on record that the Nigerian army had been court martialing some of its men for sabotage.

Antiquity equipment and shortage of equipment of precision

The information coming out from the military circles suggests that the Nigerian army is currently fighting on its back feet with the insurgents because they are not provided with current and modern equipment of precision to fight the insurgents. Therefore, they have majorly been defensive, rather than confrontational. It is noteworthy that,

even the little equipment provided is often lost to the insurgents through defeats and unimaginable captures.

This accusation is very hard to believe when it is always in the news that, money had been allocated to the force headquarters to purchase equipment. Many have identified corruption (Falode, 2016) and misappropriation of such funds by the top echelon of the military as reasons for not having modern equipment. The military has often denied this accusation, though. Furthermore, the general opinion of the people is that the military should properly equip its personnel in order to boost their morale (Campbell, 2014).

Commercialization and politicization of the warfare

As a direct follow up to the above point, it is widely speculated that the war has dragged on for too long because; some men and officers are financially exploiting the warfare. It is alleged that such men do not want an end to the war, having become a conduit pipe for them to siphon the resources of the country (Falode, 2016). This view point is again buttressed by the explanation that, there is a political angle to the war, where a particular political party has been fingered to be the major sponsor of the insurgents. This is controvertible though, as it has not been proven by the claimants.

Religious sentiments/sympathy for the terrorists

Initially, most people in the northern part of Nigeria had thought that the position and teachings of members of Boko Haram had Islamic roots (de Montclos, 2014). It was believed that it was an initialization of Sharia law in Nigeria. This attracted sympathy and recognition for the insurgents. Prior to the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria, the North had been popular for religious uprisings with its attendant killing and maiming of non-Muslims, especially the Southern and middle belt Christians who are generally referred to and regarded as infidels.

Local and international sponsors

The latest dimension to the asymmetric war is the international connection. Gradually, Boko-Haram became sectarian, as a splinter group known as the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWAP), emerged. This group was led by Al-Barnawi, before he was killed recently by a rebellious group within ISWAP. The group emerged after the defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in the Middle East. It is becoming apparent that ISIS has moved its frontiers to West Africa. The Al-Barnawi led faction ISWAP is believed to receive sponsorship from ISIS, while the other remaining group of Boko-Haram was led by Abubakar Shekau before he was assassinated by members of the ISWAP.

Tacit religious concerns and cultural desires of the region

A reasonable observer would be tempted to ask why the war against the fundamentalists has dragged on for several years, without any visible timeline of total defeat. To this extent, there have been various theories as to why. First is that, genuinely, the majority of the people of the region do sympathize with the insurgents, as it has been confirmed that, many citizens of the area leak sensitive military information to the insurgents (Gilbert, 2014). This is the reason why many times, the Nigerian army had lost men and equipment to the insurgents.

Secondly, the fact that it is all about Islam, whether or not fundamentalism, had initially sold the insurgents to the majority of the Muslim *Umar*, across the country. The mere fact that it did not first start by attacking soft targets of Muslims, made Muslim adherents feel indifferent about the whole saga. The Muslim community began to raise eyebrows when it became obvious that the insurgents were not discriminative concerning their targets. It was blind attacks on both Muslims and Christians, anyway.

Wrong impression as being a standby force against Christian opposition in Nigeria

Initially, there were speculations and beliefs by some Christians that the insurgents were forces meant to serve the purpose of decimating the Christian communities, especially in the northern part of Nigeria. To further compound the problems, at the onset of Boko-Haram in Nigeria, some Muslim fundamentalists, both in the northern and southern parts of Nigeria, also discreetly rejoiced and regaled in their devious belief that the insurgents were defenders of Islam against the Crusaders. With the first bombing of a Church in Suleja on July 10, 2011, only a few Muslims sincerely sympathized with the Christian community.

Their joy was disappointedly short-lived, as it turned out that a few days after the first bombing of the Catholic Church, a Mosque was also bombed in a mindless manner. This created some doubts in the minds of Muslim fanatics. That singular ugly run of bombing churches and mosques, Christians and Muslims alike, continued for a long time unabated. Interestingly, the carriers and detonators of such improvised explosives were young Muslim girls and boys, who had been brainwashed that, they would be rewarded with seven beautiful wives in heaven (*aljanah*). Many more suicide bombings were carried out in predominantly Muslim dominated communities, across Nigeria.

This served as a concern to those who had thought that the insurgents were majorly preoccupied with checkmating the rapid growth of Christianity in Nigeria.

The active international connections and fundamentalists' cells

Going down memory lane, it is imperative to mention that, in Nigeria, active insurgency dates back to the 1980s, when *Mallam Maitasene* launched a riotous religious war across the northern part of Nigeria. That episode marked the beginning of a bitter relationship between Muslims and Christians, especially in Northern Nigeria. Proceeding from that moment, there began to be religious riots recorded in Nigeria. Most often, such religious riots were marked by killings and maiming of Christians by Muslims. Unfortunately, on such occasions, perpetrators had been treated with glove hands, thereby failing to forestall future occurrences.

It had virtually become a tolerated cyclic incident before the emergence of a more coordinated terrorist organization which called itself Boko-Haram. As time went by, the insurgents sought assistance from other neighbouring terrorist bodies such as *Al-Shabaab*, *ISIS*, *Al-Qaida*, among other individuals and corporate sponsors, both internally and externally (Foyou *et al.*, 2018). The international connections, coupled with the fall of Gadhafi's regime in Libya, opened up a floodgate for small and light arms into the northern part of Nigeria. The international sponsorship ensures that arms and ammunition, as well as funds, keep coming in for the insurgents to prosecute the war against the Nigerian nation.

GLIMPSES OF THE FUTURE

It does not appear as if there are going to be reasonable respites in the nearest future, except if the military re-strategizes and shows more commitment to ending the war. The military campaigns have been a little above average so far. This is against all expectations! The insurgents are ready to drag on the battle for as long as it takes. A recent development in Nigeria where the military has taken possession of sophisticated Tucano war planes is highly commendable if the same would be truly used against the insurgents. We should be wary of such precision war jets falling into the hands of the insurgents, as had happened with the *Taliban* in Afghanistan, where it had captured more than 100 military helicopters, (Roth, 2021). There are instances to cite in Nigeria when our lethal weapons and well stocked armories had been captured by the insurgents, with such eventually being deployed against the Nigerian population, and against the army itself. Such related attacks had been recorded in Maiduguri on several occasions. In fact, it is believed that the insurgents largely survive on captured equipment from the Nigerian military (Daily Trust Newspaper, 2021).

Perhaps the recent possession of sophisticated weapons by the military informs the latest surrender of the

insurgents, being recorded in thousands to the Nigerian army/Federal Government. However, academic analysis of the rhetoric emanating from the surrendering insurgents as well as from the government corridors calls for caution.

Usually, religious wars are psychological and they involve a lot of indoctrination (Bredchenmacher, 2019), which may not be easy to jettison at a glance. To this extent, immediate and proper profiling of the repentant insurgents should be carried out. Their integration into society should be delayed until it has been proven beyond doubt that they are truly repentant.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, Boko Haram has done a lot of damage to the psyche of Nigerians. It would be an understatement to say that, the damage caused the Nigeria society would take decades and concerted efforts to repair. Whether or not some sections of Nigerian society want an end to the insurgency is another question altogether. However, one thing that is certain is that the burden of the impact of Boko-Haram activities is borne by all Nigerians. This is because it has deeply affected Nigeria's fiscal policy and economic position, especially at this time when the resources of the country have greatly dwindled. From the features examined in this paper, it appears that the continuation of the geographical entity called Nigeria is heavily dependent on bringing the war to an end as soon as possible. Anything short of that would amount to a gradual disintegration of the entity.

Recommendations

Having considered all the phases and stages of the rise and operations of Boko Haram in Nigeria in this paper, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Government and the relevant governmental bodies should ensure that all funds allocated to the welfare of the men at the war front are properly utilized.
2. Military should properly equip its personnel in order to boost their morale.
3. Families of the fallen heroes should be adequately taken care of.
4. Corruption within the military should be eliminated/reduced to the barest minimum level.
5. Citizens must be encouraged to offer information which should be professionally managed and subsequently transformed into military intelligence.
6. Constant and special promotions should be offered to all deserving serving military personnel on operation grounds with outstanding records of gallantry.
7. Carrot and stick should be applied to the insurgents, so that, those who genuinely surrendered and

repented should be granted amnesty, while the unrepentant should face the bullets, as well as other punishment within the law.

8. The military should stop being defensive and become offensive against the unrepentant insurgents.
9. More young, able, agile and well-trained personnel should be recruited into the Nigerian army to prosecute the war to a logical conclusion.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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