Boko Haram and 21st century Nigeria

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For over three years Boko Haram, the deadly Islamic group has dominated the Nigerian polity notoriously because of their unprecedented suicide attacks and bombings on Nigerian citizens. This paper traces the origin of Boko Haram and their metamorphosis into a radical and terrorist group. It is found that ignorance and illiteracy is a major factor providing raw materials and the persons that are brainwashed to carry out the suicide attacks. It is difficult to convince a university professor to carry out a suicide attack. The leaders play on the ignorance of the followers. It is recommended that every hand should be on deck to promote education especially those of the amajiris just as the federal government and the governor of Kano state, kwankwaso are doing. The security agents should be more tactical in handling the manace of Boko Haram.

Keywords: Boko haram, Federal government, Terrorist group, Ignorance and Security Agents.

Book Haram and Nigeria

They are popularly called ‘Boko Haram’ but their actual name is ‘Jama’ atu, Ahlis sunna Lid da’ wati wal-jihad sect’ meaning people committed to the propagation of the prophets teachings and jihad (Omomiya, 2012). An online statement of the group on the killings in Plateau quoted in the Pilot of July, 12, 2012 explicated the mission of the dreaded group that is embedded in its name. The statement reads thus:

*This movement, the Jama’ atu Ahlis sunna Lid da’ wati wal-jihad, gratitude to Almighty Allah, wants to inform the world of its delight over the success of the attacks we launched on Barkin ladi and Riyom in Plateau state on Christians and security operatives, including members of the national assembly. As we announced earlier, Christians in this country should either accept Islam, which is the only true religion, or they will not know peace again.*

Another insight on the foundation, mission, and structure of Boko Haram sect’ was revealed by Ahmad Salkida, a journalist with huge access to Boko Haram intelligence and its former member before they metamorphosed into a deadly sect. Salkida told Financial times of London that the group which has since established links with al-Queda, based its doctrines on the works of Ibn Taymiyya, a 13th Century Islamic scholar, who also influenced other modern radical Islamist movements. Salkida stated further that Ibn Taymiyya believed in the strict adherence to Koran and principles of Prophet Mohammed, and was devoted to the concept of holy war (Ibrahim and Enyiocha, 2012).

Lateef Adegbite, Secretary, Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs spoke to Newswatch recently on the history and activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria. According to Adegbite, the group started as a socio-religious organization. They had a number of objectives which includes improving Islam. They have been existing for more than 10 years when suddenly they became very radical. At a stage they were hobnobbing with politicians. They became very forceful and made serious demands on the society because they felt aggrieved that they have been marginalized. They felt that Western education has brushed them aside and has not improved their lot, so they desire to go back to full scale Islam to regulate their affairs. They wanted Sharia to be more integrated and intensified in its operation. In order to achieve their aim, they picked a smart slogan, that “Western education is a sin, is an abomination” they felt western education is responsible for their backwardness. They see their colleagues who went to school in top positions, and attributed their woes, their failures to the political system operating in Nigeria.

Austin Agugu, a lecturer in the Dept of Sociology,
University of Lagos spoke to Newswatch on why Boko Haram made the church one of its prime targets. His argument is that from the point of view of the sects extreme philosophy that is against everything about western civilization, the church would be an easy prey having served as the purveyor of western civilization in the country. Their attack on Christian churches or Christianity can be said to be a fundamental of that hatred they have against western civilization.

To pour out their grievances on Nigeria and its citizens, the Boko Haram sect embarked on the destruction of lives and “properties” of innocent citizens of Nigeria. The nefarious actions of Boko Haram truncate between bombing, shooting, maiming and possible kidnapping. Apart from some pockets of bombings and shootings that claim lives of Nigerian citizens, the bomb blast of 26th December, 2011 at St. Theresa’s Catholic Church, Madalla, Niger state attracted the attention of all and sundry. The bomb was planted by members of the Boko Haram sect and not less than 40 persons died in the explosion. It was a big foundation for other Boko Haram attacks. Between 20th and 21st January, 2013, Kano metropolis saw hell. Twenty people were killed near State Security Service Quarters, Kano. Kwankwaso, the governor told Newswatch that ten places were attacked in Kano from the evening of Friday, 20th January, 2012 to the day after. Multiple bomb expositions rocked different parts of the city. Before the Kano’s incident, two other churches were attacked in Jos.

On 3rd March, 2012, three persons were killed at a political rally in Suleja. April, 8 saw the bombing of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Office in Suleja, Niger State. Boko Haram struck Bayero University Open Theatre being used as church by Christians on 29th April, 2012. About fifteen people including two university professors lost their lives in the attacks. Three peace officers were killed on May 23, 2012 at Dakwa village in Bwari Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja on 3rd June, 2012. Living Faith Church in Yelwe Area of Bauchi was attacked by Boko Haram. Shalom Church, Trikaniya, Kaduna was also attacked on 17th June 2012 while 9.00 am service was going on. At the same time, Christ the King Catholic Church and ECWA Church were also hit by bomb dispatched by the group. Three persons were killed on July, 10, 2012 at the All Christian Fellowship Church, Suleja.

Recently, on October 1, Nigeria’s independence anniversary 2012, gunmen suspected to be of Boko Haram killed 43 students. According to Daily Sun report, many people were injured fueling fears that the death toll might rise. Students killed were those of Federal Polytechnic, Mubi, Adamawa State University and the School of Health Technology, Mubi. The same day, three students of the University of Maiduguri were killed.

The above are some of the havoc caused by Boko Haram. One must admit that it is not easily identifiable the immediate and remote causes of Boko Haram inferno. One may hypothesize that the background of these actions and indeed all unreasonable violent actions by whatever group or person is ignorance and lack of good education. An “ignorant” person can make a hell of mistakes. A man or woman who lacks good education can easily be turned right or left by people that have negative intentions more especially when the person is a religious adherent. It is easy to play on people’s ignorance. In the case of Boko Haram, it is yet unknown whether they have been able to convince a university professor or a medical doctor to be one of their suicide bombers. Their leaders and financiers use the ignorant and uneducated who they can give an overdose of religious concoctions”. The physics/chemistry graduate that led the Madalla Christmas day bombing did not act as a suicide bomber. He desired his life, planted the bomb and escaped. The ignorant and uneducated among the adherents would be convinced to throw away their life even for an empty structure. Since they are unreasonable they receive condemnation from highly disciplined and knowledgeable human persons. Lombardo- the Vatican spokesman was quoted as saying that the latest terror attacks in Nigeria... during Christian religious celebrations are horrible and despicable acts to be condemned in the strongest possible way (Akaeze, 2012). Achufuna, a foreign based Nigeria lawyer in an interview with Newswatch blamed the present state of insecurity in Nigeria on the failure of government, past and present to positively impact on the lives of the people. (Akpan, 2012). Education should be at the head of such impact. The Amajiri education initiated and implemented by the present Federal Government is commendable. Kwankwaso, the governor of Kano State needs commendation for his extra ordinary battle against ignorance and illiteracy. If all state governors in Nigeria could emulate Governor Kwankwaso and embark on his exemplary radical, painstaking and aggressive educational policies, the issue of Boko Haram or those of such violent groups will be a thing of the past. Ajaero (2012), well captured the good works and intention and of this good governor when he wrote.

His is an astute administrator and water engineer who went into politics purely with the intention of providing purposeful leadership to the people. Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, governor of Kano State, is an achiever who is always prepared to offer selfless service to his people. Ajaero and Enyiocha captured Kwankwaso’s educational vision when they wrote that in pursuant of his vision for Kano State, Kwankwaso has identified education as a sector that should be accorded priority because he believes that no meaningful development can thrive in an illiterate society. He said that education should not only be accorded priority in Kano State but the entire North because without it, the region will continue to lag behind. According to Kwankwaso, if you are
educated, you can carter for yourself either in this country or elsewhere. For him education is very important and is for the collective interest of the country. He said that for a situation where you have two countries in which one is very educated while one uneducated portends danger. (Ajaero and Enyixha, 2012). One can see one of these dangers in the activities of Boko Haram in the North. It is no secret that Boko Haram rejects western education and influence.

“Remote” causes of boko haram actions

Human beings (Homo sapiens) have often been distinguished from the lower animals by the possession of the reasoning faculty. By the use of intellects and reasoning, man has been able to control and overcome strong and dangerous animals such as lions, snakes, elephants and deer etc. One can see a young boy of fifteen controlling a herd of cattle. One can witness the great inventions in science, arts, and communication in the World today. It stagger the imagination to reflect that these are product of intellect and reasoning power. The political structures that make man oversee a country of over 100 million people are still part of this product.

While hailing the reasoning ability in man, whether it is at work in all men at all times are a big question. We also ruminate whether some men are in the level of lower animals that posses low level reasoning power and violent. History teaches us that man in his primitive stage was barbaric because he came very close to the lower animals. There is no doubt that barbaric actions and permittivity are related.

For sometimes, we have tried to reflect on the activities of Boko Haram that have carried a “Siege” on the innocent citizens of Nigeria. We do not know whether to categories their actions as reasonable or barbaric. For one to be able to do this, it may be necessary to X-Ray some of the actions of the dreaded group and then try to find out their motives and what they hope to achieve by their actions. Since one cannot reach those behind the mask, one can only imaging the reason for their continued bombing and gunning “nitrage” on Nigerians.

I must admit that I am not an expert in criminoology or a renowned social critic. I am viewing the situation from a personal perspective. All I say is based on my feelings as a human being and the few things read and heard from the media. If it is poorly assessed, I accept the shortcomings. If on other hand the content can provoke rethink, I thank God.

Before going into the objectives of the Boko Haram violence or what they hope to achieve by their killings, one may note that not all the members of Boko Haram are likely to have same objectives. Some members' motive may be political in a bid to run down political opponents, others may be economic, to be in major control of money which is related to politics. Some others motives may be religious. The religious dimension seems to be the least motive. Those having the political and economic motive merely use the religious fanatics to carry out their real motive. Apart from using the religious fanatics, the hunger stricken youths are also used with strong promise of changing their economic situation and those of their families. To show them it is not a vain promise, substantial amount is given them in advance to boast their eagerness of action. These three major areas of intentions are integrated in the following reasons?

Reasons for Boko Haram actions

i. To distract the Federal Government from its focus on economic and infrastructural development of the country so that the operators of government will be scored low mark at the end of their tenure. That will then mean considering other political alternatives.

ii. To make some states ungovernable in a bid to deal with the state government and paint the Federal Government in “dim light”.

iii. To turn the people’s heart against the government as weak and not able to give adequate protection.

iv. To paint the nation black before the international community so as to drive away investors and make Nigerians unfriendly and unacceptable to “outsiders”.

v. To inflict fear on patriotic Nigerians so that everyone will be afraid to express free and positive views about the nation.

vi. To promote lawlessness as much as possible by killing and inflicting injuries on defenseless people so as to provoke reprisal.

vii. To overthrow the government if possible and set up one that will operate according to their dictates.

viii. To use its operation as a test case for a possible Jihad.

CONCLUSION

Note that the religious basis of some of Boko Haram actions has been touched at the beginning of this paper. We also said that ignorance is a major aid in recruiting religious fundamentalists and most violent radical beings. The Federal government’s effort in educating the “Amajiris” is commendable. It will go a long way in solving the problem of ignorance and illiteracy. Knowledge they say is power. This power includes; power to discern good from evil, power to explore all options of peace, power to overcome emotions, power to look beyond the present, power not to be driven by the nose, power not to be used any how by people who want to achieve their selfish ambition, power to say no to arson and violence, power
to understand the sacredness of human life, power to secure peoples property, power to embrace dialogue, power to create, power to be objective and positive, power to place interest of society above that of self. Every aspect of the society should promote knowledge through education. The Federal Government, the State Governments, and the Local Governments should give priority to education especially in the volatile and violent areas of the North and in the volatile and violent areas of the South. Individuals, companies and entrepreneurs should all promote knowledge and education.

Train a child in the society and you would have prevented a whole lot of crimes and saved the nation of violence. All hands should be on deck. Let us together pursue our common destiny and build a nation bound in freedom, peace and unity. With God on our side and with universal, available and affordable education for all, violence, terrorism arson, rising, riots, bombing, killings etc will be reduced to the barest minimum whether it is that of Boko Haram in Borno, Hausa – Fulani in Jos, militants in Niger-Delta, Omor in Anambra State, Oruku in Enugu State, Ezzas in Ebonyi State, to mention but a few of the most notorious violent groups. Train a child today and you would have cured the disease of ignorance which breeds violence.

The Federal Government might have hit the Boko Haram on the forehead when it declared state of emergency in the three most vulnerable states of Boko Haram operations: Yobe, Bornu and Adamawa. There are indications following the declaration that the end of the terrorist group is in sight.

Mixed reactions followed this declaration of the state of emergency in those states by President Goodluck Jonathan. Inspire of the fact that the President left the political structure the way it is some still believe he should not have declared the state of emergency. Many other Nigerians however are happy and some said that it was even coming late. However, the good news is that the positive effect of the president’s action is being felt immediately as the deadly group has been dislodged from their occupied territory. It was alleged they even hoisted their own flags in place of the national flag. The Federal Government finally brought down its sledge hammer when it proscribed Boko Haram and other terrorist groups of the sort.

The existence of the Boko Haram and other terrorist groups in the country was a test on the integrity of the country’s security agencies. They have now lived up to expectation inspite of the initial challenges and setbacks.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The security agencies should now capitalize on the gains and achievements they recorded since the declaration of the state of emergency and chart a security course for Nigeria that will be preventive of crimes and terrorists activities. This may involve revising the curriculum of military training with emphasis on “intelligence and preventive security “Time has gone when a country is overtaken dramatically by a terrorist group or an enemy country only to wake up as from sleep. Suspected criminals and terrorists should be monitored trailed, and arrested before they unleash their mayhem.

The existing collaboration with the security agencies of other neighbouring countries should be intensified to close the porosity of the borders. Adequate and easy flowing plans should be made to take care of the families of security agents who lost their lives during national duties. This will enhance the morale of the operatives of always put in their best.

A joint security commission may be formed for the sole purpose of taking care of such matters to remove the bottleneck associated with insurance companies. Everything must be done to reduce the pain of the family. Compensations should not be allowed to take years. The commission should in addition make sure that whatever is given reaches the family directly.

A programme for the need of peace, tolerance, good neighborliness, religious freedom, patriotism, love of the country etc. should be designed to form part of the secondary and primary schools curriculum to enable Nigerian children acquire these virtues early enough to be part and parcel of their life. By that we are sure by the grace of God to build a nation where no man shall be oppressed.

**REFERENCES**


