

Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: Beyond the Issue of Unity and National Integration

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Abstract

The problem of insurgency facing Nigeria at this point in time draws the attention of anyone who cares to the urgency of a solution. However, to successfully seek out a solution, one needs to identify the very root of the problem. In this paper, an attempt is made to identify the very major problem with Nigeria: why there are unrests almost on steady basis. One thing that comes to mind as an answer is the disparity in culture, way of life, understanding and so on. Nevertheless, these are not really much of a problem since any group of people with the same disparate system can still coexist when there is a subtle meeting point of interest. In the Nigerian system, the situation is bad. The various groups do not understand each other and are not willing to do so owing to the unclear sort of social contract entered into at the inception of the nation by the compatriots. This breeds mistrust and unrest for all time like the civil war and the present *boko haram* insurgency. This work argues that if the social contract situation is revisited and made better and fair the situation can be better managed.

Keywords

Boko Haram, Insurgency, Social Contract, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Insurgency is a form of revolt. This revolt usually involves total disregard of law and destruction of common property and lives. “Insurgency is an armed rebellion against a constituted authority¹; an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through subversion and armed conflict²”.

The above definitions of insurgency demonstrate two facts. The first fact is the issue

¹This definition is adopted from Peter Parct’s *French Revolution any Warfare from Indochinato Algeria: The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine*, (London Pall Mall Press), 1964.

²PrNorth, Chris (January-February 2008), “Redefining Insurgency” *Military Review*, US Army Combined Arms Center 2. <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/JanFeb08/NorthINSIGHTSJanFeb08.pdf>

of rebellion. The second aspect is that it is aimed at overthrowing a constituted authority or set structure. In the first aspect of insurgency, one observes some level of boldness in seeking redress over certain issues. Revolt in itself is not bad in itself since it becomes, in most cases, a last means of solving nagging problems which bothered on human right or even sect welfare. Indeed revolt is indeed not bad when it is carried out in good fate. It can be peaceful as the current rebellion of the Indigenous people of Biafra in Nigeria, against the government marginalization and injustice meted out on them or violent as in the case of French revolution.

Insurgency as distinct from any common revolt has a specific aim which is to topple a constituted authority through destructive acts not solely directed to the authority as in the case of coup but also through acts of terrorism directed against the populace making the territory ungovernable for the government. The negative foundation of insurgency is exactly what makes it very bad. Nigeria in the recent times has been caught in the excruciating when of insurgency by a certain *Bokoharam* sect. This opens Nigeria up to various terrible experiences like incessant bombings most gruesome murders and inhuman kidnaps. This insurgency brings the Nigerian system under serious tension by raising the level of insecurity and uncertainty. The effect is shown in the economic waste which Nigeria finds herself, and the inter-political party conflicts which leave the Nigerian populace disillusioned and disenchanted.

The events of history in Nigeria betray the possible root of the current Nigerian experience of insurgency. From her origin, Nigerian finds herself in a rather vague or (as many people in Nigeria argue) forced agreement to coexistence, which brings together various groups of people with different ideologies and norms. This seemingly imposed agreement explained as social contract in the context of this work, sees to the amalgamation of various groups into one nation without much regards to their cultural differences. Thus, as the national history unfolds, one sees that the desire for ethnic assertiveness and cultural superiority which religious activism and quest for political dominance drives home. In the presence of these, various facades of violence arise. While some come under religious covers, others come as outright political clashes and battle for self-determination. It is within these instances of unrest that *Boko haram* insurgency springs up.

This work studies Boko Haram insurgency with a view to identifying the implications of such insurgency to national integration and development.

2. *Bokoharam* Insurgency in Nigeria

The *Bokoharam* sect has its origin dates back to the early colonial era when several Muslims resist and refuse to follow the white man's way of life (BBC analysis, 2009). The first activity of *Bokoharam* in Nigeria is between 1980 and 1985 led by one Marwa Maitatsine (BBC, 2009). He is a Kotoko born Muslim from Cameroon. Following Maitatsine's foundation, *Bokoharam* teaching shows forth as *Ahlulsunna Wal'jama'ah Hijra and Yusufiyah* sect. This is an emergence from the little left of the Taliban, which operated in the state at that time. The headquarters of this *Bokoharam* sect is situated at

Maiduguri, the Bornu state capital. From here, it spread to some North-eastern states like Adamawa and Bauchi states. The effects of these are not limited to these areas but are felt also in Jos, the Plateau State capital.

The present *Bokoharam* activities in Jos make another originary account intelligible. This account has it that there are strong indications that *Bokoharam*, in its current state, is founded by Yusuf Mohammed. The motive for this is rather seen as being politico-tribal. Yusuf's emergence, according to Andrew (2014: p. 6) seems to be reactionary against the Plateau State governor—Jonah Jang's ethnic cleanse which Yusuf believes is directed against the Hausa and Fulani people. This battle however is taken up along the religious lines.

In dealing with the tenets of *Bokoharam* proper, one sees that this sect fights along the line of religious indoctrination. In this indoctrination, Islamic fundamentalism comes in form of religious intolerance. As a matter of fact, *Bokoharam* rejects any form of western education and civilization. In effect, such western practices and impact runs counter to their religious *ethos* which considers westernization as sinful and therefore must be rejected as sin and evil. Yusuf confirms this thus: "Rain we believe is the creation of God rather than an evaporation caused by the sun that condenses and becomes rain. Like saying the world is sphere if it runs contrary to the teaching of Allah we rejects it" (Ahmad, 2010: p. 12).

The above shows that this Islamic sect is in conflict with anything that, they believe, is against their norm. Their target is not just limited to the non-Islamic and civic centers; it extends even to those Islamic institutions believed to have opposing ideas to their doctrines. Little wonder the "sect identifies certain prominent individuals, including Islamic clerics, for elimination" (Malam, 2009: p. 64) and carries out assassinations of anyone who criticizes it including Muslim clerics.

According to (Ahmad, 2010: p. 13), the core principles of *Bokoharam* lie on the "*Hakimiyyah*" (sovereignty of God's law). The second principle upon which the sect operates is the self-righteous principle which makes them see themselves as a "saved sect". Further, is their claim to be "followers of the classical example of Ibn Taymiyyah in pressing down their religious superiority through rebellion and use of violence (Falola & Nigeria, 1998: p. 142)." Their affiliation and co-operation with some terrorist group in the world (like the Al-Qaeda) makes their operations more systematic and terrible.

During the earlier part of the sect's operation in Nigeria, a lot of people react variously to the movement. While some explain their actions away as the operations of misguided extremists who should have fought the immoralities within the system rather than condemning the system entirely (Fwatshak: p. 142), others react seriously against it insisting that if not checked, like the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Nigeria must prepare to wake-up to the dawn of severe terrorist activities. The latter is the case in Nigeria today. As part of the neglect of the Nigerian system over the *Bokoharam* insurgency, several arrests are made of those terrorist elements but are freed. The situation of those arrests, which includes an after violence arrest, leaves one asking whether this sect is fighting a religious course or has a separate agenda.

The moves and plans of these terrorists have variously been faulted in the bid to properly delineate what is so religious about them. In 2009, August, Governor Isa Yuguda of Bauchi is startled that 'no single copy of the Qur'an is found in their house in Bauchi when security agencies took control of the buildings (News watch, 2009) in some other instances, the members of this sect killed security agents in several places like Kastsina and hoisted their Arabic inscribed flag of sovereignty (Fwatshak: p. 142). Today these attacks grow from minor unrests to full scale insurgency aimed at warring against the nation's leadership through destruction of the lives and property.

3. Insurgency and National Unity

Boko haram insurgency has variously been condemned by many quarters internationally and in nationally. Nationally, this condemnation is championed by prominent individuals, religious groups, ethnic representatives and unions. While most of these groups speak objectively, some are suspicious of the Northern political elites who sometimes are fingered as sponsors of the insurgency. Indeed most of these suspecting parties argue that the insurgency is a ploy by the Northerners to "instill tension on the sitting government and by so doing take power back to the North" (Ejezue, 2013). A few Northern statesmen also condemn the insurgency as being monstrous. For them, "trading human life for fundamentalism is the worst thing to happen in the country's history" (Jimmoh, 2011: p. 12). Mu'azu Bubangida Aliyucondemns the insurgent's claims to religious affinity. He asserts that "it is not Islamic to carry out such insurgency... Islam is a religion of peace and does not accept violence and crime in any form.

Mu'azu's rejection of *Bokoharam* as a non-Islamic movement which fights Islamic course extremely questions the ethical grounds of *Bokoharam* insurgency. It is, therefore, divisive for one to claim as Abubakar Adamu does, that the sect is "fighting a moral battle for freedom and justice" (Nathan Okpoberi, 17). Any form of fight for justice and freedom must welcome a basic moral universalization which makes one judge one's action in terms of universal moral principle.

This sort of justice and freedom falls short of fairness. At the same time one does not see any justice in destruction of life and property for the purpose of either forcing others to one's religion. Hence one cannot immediately see any moral grounds for this insurgency. What is apparent, rather, is lawlessness cheered by the current endemically politicized nature of the Nigerian structural system which destroys the moral foundation upon which the "conscience" of the state is built.

This group singles out their individual conscience against the absolute conscience of the state by declaring that they are fighting a just war. This just war, according to them, is a blessing. Ahmed Mohammed pronounces their insurgence as the handwork of Allah arguing that "this work of blessing was executed by members of the *Jama'atu Allahissunnahlidda'awatiwal* Jihad, which means, people struggling to restore the implementation of the Islamic system and Muslim independence from Christians and this wicked government This holy work was made possible by 'Allah's grace" (Sunday Trust, 2010).

The pronouncement by Ahmed clearly places their will against the will of the state and majority. From the time of the pronouncement, Nigeria experiences several bombings. The above equally shows that the group is against the government of the day at all cost. In this sense, the Islamic group rejects any sort of Christian leadership as a taboo and as such must be rejected. Still using Ahmed's postulation as a benchmark, the statement "Muslim independence from Christians and this wicked government", does not hide the political bend to this insurgency which spells danger for national unity. Gumi (2014) condemns the *Bokoharam* assault and wished it was powerfully exterminated. He laments that

.... Nigeria is catalytically deteriorating *Bokoharam* respects no law, the Quran or *Hadith* or scholarly *fatowa*. They have their own interpretation, anything short of that is part of the enemy that should be killed It is a creed that must be crushed; it is a creed the prophet—Alaihis Salam—wished he is alive to exterminate (Waziri, 2013).

He decries the political bend of this insurgency and worst still that Nigeria lacks the moral will to combat such a movement. He concludes that the future of Nigeria is "bleak and frightening."

The last observation of Gumi is a real fear that engulfs Nigeria especially at this moment when certain issues about these attacks are politicized. Most Nigerian politicians instead of joining forces to fight this common enemy, use it as a medium to promote sectional interests by identifying the *Bokoharam* movement as that which is fighting against social injustice. Mallam Isa Yuguda conceives *Bokoharam* as a social problem that requires dialogue to handle. He claims that these people should be pacified and pleased in every way. He even sets the pace: "I apologies to the members of the *Jama'alu Ahlussunnal Lidda'awati* Jihad for perceived injustice caused them as they have the full rights to be protected by the law ... I hope this will further the healing of the trauma on *Jama'atu Ahlussunnah...*"(Orient, 2013).

This does not represent an honest bid for peace but a masked way of supporting impunity. Indeed Gumi's fear is genuine. The future of Nigeria is unclear as the ship of the state sinks in this violence. Apparently the hope of the future is unsure since there is an apparent repulsion of the national unity.

4. Actualizing National Unity in the Midst of Insurgency

Nigeria as a nation since its independence has witnessed several unrest and violent situations. Most of these emanate from the seeming incompatibility of the various ethnic groups which often see each other as "the devil's cousins" coexisting in the same nation. These violent situations often caused by minor misunderstanding between two people of different origin grow to become a full blown massacre around the various states of the country. The highest bad blood is felt more between the Southern area (which until date identifies itself with the State of Biafra) and especially the Northern part. Each of these violent clashes greets the nation with so much unnecessary bloodletting and often waste of resources to fix. In the face of this a lot people become disillusioned and lose

faith in the nation since there is little progress and more hatred which advances deepens by the day. In the face of these one wonders if the unity of the country can ever help it achieve any development.

The Boko Haram insurgency builds on this hatred which bedevils the country from the time of its self-consciousness as a multi-ethnic nation. The insurgence gains grounds and keeps inflicting its gory attacks on the dominated areas without any effort to collective fighting. An international analyst Larry O'Brien (2014, 10) observes that the only reason why such insurgency continues in Nigeria is that "there is no collective will to fight Boko Haram... the people in power struggle to sack the insurgents... the political opponents see it as an avenue to discredit the incumbent, whip up sympathy and get into power... there is rather a concrete politicization of the lives instead of a positive will to resolve an impending problem."

O'Brien's observation seems valid to any careful observer since the turn of things since the beginning of the insurgency suggests this. In this perspective, some periodicals in Nigeria report political stance of some major actors in Nigeria's current political dispensation especially those who vie for power with the president under whose regime the insurgency begins in full swing. Coleman Osagie (2014, 12), for instance, expresses disappointment in Gen. Muhammadu Buhari's attacks on Dr. Goodluck Jonathan's administration that "the problem of terrorism is not confined to the North alone. Insecurity generally should be blamed on the Federal Government. "Osagie argues that" a more honest expression of true statesmanship does not lie on blaming the government; rather on putting across suggestions and making honest and determined move within one's own capacity to exterminate this common enemy... It is not a sign of goodwill to the people and the nation to use the perilous circumstance for politicking (turning people against the government just to seek votes), it is rather more befitting to take positive steps; through suggestions to the government and making consultations with other statesmen to put an end to the problem. With this insurgency degenerating into fight for political relevance and ethnic rivalry, one sees that the rising level of national disunity calls for a viable and positively intended referendum.

The question of referendum, for the records, is not designed to propagate further disunity but to redefine the conditions for co-existence in the country to aid better development. The nature of federalism and current systemic structure breeds more underdevelopment than development. This is because there is little emphasis on collective development free from inter-ethnic hatred and suspicion. Boko Haram succeeds until date not because it cannot be halted but because there is no collaborative effort by all parties in the federation to put a stop. Hence, the nation wastes resources on this task without achieving any concrete result.

Several nations with diverse beliefs and culture have been able to coexist without significant threats of conflagration among the federating units. These nations in one way or another have set up a defined system for coexisting that works for them. Nigeria must look at such nations like Singapore which despite her gaining her independence after Nigeria has been able to most beautifully manage their coexistence. The Boko ha-

ram insurgency in Nigeria is clearly an ethnic and religious cataclysm which stems from the mutual intolerance of the “other” in the country. There is no gainsaying that the level of hatred which leads to this insurgency and other problems including the Niger delta agitation and the Biafran (South-East and South-South regions) recurrent quest for session in the nation’s history may never end and might lead Nigeria to an eventual total collapse.

The nation Nigeria must redefine its system of government where each region is self-subsistent and internally propelled in its ideologies. Kymlicka (1996: p. 46) suggests, at this point a practical multiculturalism where each group is properly represented at “the minority assisted as much as to survive to stability.” Since it is clear that the mode of unity of the country fostered by the current system of government creates more problem of distrust and with it loss of life and property, underdevelopment, hardship, marginalization and tension, instead of paying lip service to the resolve to development, it is rather necessary that the challenge of decentralization and constitutional remodeling be handled instead of risking the total collapse of the federation or another internal war which appears to be looming in the nation.

5. Conclusion

Boko haram insurgency in Nigeria has elicited several reactions and aroused several questions about the nature of Nigeria and the question of national integration. The current event that surrounds the insurgency suggests that the impact it has on the nation’s development is marginally cataclysmic. While few scholars like Shehu (2015: p. 47) argue that the insurgency is a mere accident of illiteracy, poverty and unemployment, and finds a solution in the provision of the basic societal needs as a means to curbing this insurgency and other forms of terrorism in the nation, many other scholars like Emeke (2014: p. 23), insists that it is a sponsored intrigue to register disapproval of the religious inclination and origin of the incumbent president. The question remains: in the midst of this varied guesses as to the origin of this insurgency, what does the future hold for Nigerian unity bearing in mind the gross inequality and mutual distrust and hatred among the various ethnic groups in the country?

Shehu (2015: p. 45) in his submission, concludes that the activities of the insurgents are anti Muslim “because Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) lived with non-Muslims (Jews, Christians and Mushriks) during his life time and never forced them to embrace Islam, he administered judgement on them based on their faith and scriptures.” He, equally points out the effect of the insurgency arguing that “Boko Haram jeopardized government policy and damaged government properties which impacted negatively on national development be it economic, political and social affairs.” Following these two points which Shehu raises, one can infer that the insurgency *could* be politically engineered in which case it spells doom for the national peace and creates cracks on the walls of the national unity.

The only reason why such inhumane political extremity, if it is assumed to be the major cause, will come in place draws on the irresponsible, selfish and ethnic inclina-

tion typical of the average Nigerian politician borne out of the highly parochial system which leads also to other terrible violent situations in Nigeria. Nigeria needs therefore to work hard in honesty to set right a basic co-existential strategy that can help keep the various groups under one Nation if possible.

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