Boko Haram and the African Union's Response

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Boko Haram is wreaking havoc in the West African nation of Nigeria and the sub-region at large. The terror has seen Nigeria shaken to its core and stretched to its limits, socially, politically, and economically, with the abduction of the Chibok school girls serving as an epitome of the country's powerlessness to contain the Islamic militants. The homegrown insurgency is now a fully-fledged terrorist organization adopting a transnational posture, which has kept Nigeria decentralized and vulnerable and is endangering neighboring countries in the region. The Nigerian government has the onus task of regaining stability, restoring peace and general well-being of the citizens. Responses from these governments have been varied but mainly militaristic. The article assesses the response of the continental body—the African Union (AU). I observe that the AU has not directional or positional approach to the Nigerian conundrum. There has been, however, a potent coalition—multinational task force to contain the violent; the only effective response from Nigeria's neighbors and this is because of geopolitical proximity. I suggest as long term solutions, non-militaristic approaches to the Nigerian dilemma and addressing corruption.

Keywords: human security, terrorism, violence, African Union (AU)

Introduction

Nigeria, once the leader and security buffer in the West African sub-region, is now grappling with its own security problems. Boko Haram, an Islamic sect, has brought untold hardships and loss of human lives to the country. This has made life unbearable for inhabitants of the northern parts of the country as well as Nigeria's neighbors. The activities and networks of these terrorists transcend national borders and are on the rise. The harrowing impact of the virulent insurgency of Boko Haram cuts across political, religious, social, economic, and cultural spheres of life. Nigeria has been under a constant threat of insecurity since the 2009 anti-government uprising. It must be underscored that the country has experienced inter-communal violence, corruption, religious, and political unrest in recent years. This paper examines the genesis of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, its human security impact, the nature and impact of the African Union (AU)'s response, and the way forward. The paper argues that the AU, as a continental body, has adopted a lame duck attitude towards the Nigerian predicament and that the ramifications will continue to be grave on Nigeria while the rest of the region will suffer the contagious effect of terrorism.

Genesis of the Boko Haram Insurgency

The sect, which startes as a non-violent group, dates to the late 1990s. The exact date of the emergence of the Boko Haram sect is mired in controversy, especially if one relies on media accounts. Onuoha (2012) maintains that most local and foreign media trace its origin to 2002, when Mohammed Yusuf emerged as the

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leader of the sect. However, Nigerian security forces date the origin of the sect back to 1995, when Abubakar Lawan established the Ahlulsunnawal "jama" ahhijra sect at the University of Maduigiri, Borno State. It flourished as a non-violent movement until Mohammed Yusuf assumed leadership of the sect in 2002, shortly after Abubakar Lawan left to pursue further studies in Saudi Arabia. Since then, the sect has metamorphosed through various names like the Muhajirun, Yusufiyyah, Nigerian Taliban, Boko Haram and Jama "atuAhlissunnahlidda" awatiwal Jihad. The principal aim of the sect is to make Nigeria, which is a secular state, a caliphate—an area under the jurisdiction of a Muslim leader called the caliph. They reject Western civilization, arguing that it is non-Islamic and should be forbidden.

The name Boko Haram in the Hausa language literally means "western education sinful or forbidden". They believe that their fight is purely jihadism and not a sheer hate for western education. Onuoha (2012) claims, "the sect frowns at Medias' description of it as the Boko Haram". Instead it prefers to be addressed as the Jama "atuAhlissunnahlidda" awatiwal Jihad, meaning a "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad". Although the sect's name has changed over the years, its ideological mission is quite clear, "namely to overthrow the Nigerian state and impose strict Sharia law in the country". The almost decade old sect started as a peaceful group but digressed along the line. There are many factors such as economic inequality, political marginalization, corruption, among other reasons that accounted for the change in their *modus operandi* but mal-governance and ideology are the salient sticking points. Silke (2014) posits that ideology is the primary motivator of terrorism. He states that: "ideology sets the wider context for terrorist groups. It establishes who the enemy is and what the organization is fighting to achieve". This view is strongly supported by Mikhail Bakunin, the Russian revolutionary anarchist who maintains that "we must spread our principles, not by words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda" (Silke, 2014, p. 29). Most of the activities of terrorists are motivated by ethnic, religious, ideological, political, social, and other ulterior agendas. They may fight for independence or separation and the acceptance of their ideologies. Boko haram belongs mainly to the last group though it harbors other dreams.

Disgruntled by what the sect believes to be political corruption, and powered greatly by their Islamist ideology, they started an anti-government revolt in 2009. The Nigerian security forces contained them successfully. Extra judicial killings led to the death of the group's charismatic leader, Mohammed Yusuf. The group lulled and resurged in 2010 under the notorious leadership of Abubakar Shekau. Since then, there have been countless high and low profile sporadic attacks on civilians. Analysts believe that the brutal killing of Yusuf exacerbated their extremism. Silke (2014) agrees with Sean MacStiofain, the Professional Irish Republican Army (IRA) chief of staff when he said: "most revolutions are not caused by revolutionaries in the first place, but by the stupidity and brutality of governments" (p. 43). Nigeria remains the coordination center with spills out of the insurgency in neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The militants work in highly coordinated cells as it is the operational tactics used by terrorists all over the world. The BBC (2015) reports that "the group has a highly decentralized structure—the unifying force appears to be ideology, though many believe that they are now more interested on vengeance than on ideology".

The Nature and Impact of the African Union's Response

The terrorist stronghold of the northeastern part of Nigeria and its neighbors are yet to receive a concerted and palpable response to the more than five-year old insurgency. The AU is suffering from the principle of the collective action problem with no leader to direct it in security matters.

We have observed that the AU has not taken a lead role in combating the seditious group. Actions taken so far are retroactive in nature rather than proactive. Allison (2015) is of the view that, "despite the slow start, the African Union has implemented a fairly progressive counter-terrorism framework, pushing states to coordinate their responses to close loopholes and shut down potential safe havens".

The Organization of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), was founded as an anti-colonist movement with the aim of eradicating all forms of colonialism on the African continent. As a political organization, combating terrorism was later added to its core objectives. Continental efforts in preventing and combating terrorism have a long history. In 1992, the OAU, meeting at its 28th Ordinary Session, held in Dakar, Senegal, adopted a resolution on the Strengthening of Cooperation and Coordination among African States [AHG/Res.213 (XXVIII)] in which the Union pledged to fight the phenomena of extremism and terrorism. At its 30th Ordinary Session held in Tunis, Tunisia, in June 1994, the OAU adopted the declaration on the Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations [AHG/Del.2 (XXX)], in which it rejected all forms of extremism and terrorism, whether under the pretext of sectarianism, tribalism, ethnicity or religion. The declaration also condemned, as criminal, all terrorist acts, methods and practices, and expressed its resolve to enhance cooperation to combat such acts (Dakar Resolution, 29 June-1 July, 1992).

The intervention of the AU seems to be the normative approach to dealing with terror on the continent. Members of the Union lack the political will to fight to liberate Nigeria, and more recently, the affected countries in the region. Damme (2015) argues that: "the failure of the Nigerian army to curb the insurgency, coupled with an apparent lack of interest from regional neighbors, has allowed Boko Haram to prosper and extend its sphere of influence". The assertion that the African Union is not on top of the insurgents' threat is reechoed by the Chadian President Idriss Deby: "we have seen too many meetings and no concrete action", Deby said, "Today, there are four countries affected by Boko Haram, but tomorrow it may be a continental problem" (Al Jazeera news, 2015). The statement of President Deby shows the politics of rhetoric that characterizes the AU's politics and its lame posture in combating terrorism on the continent and the Nigerian problem. Onapajo, Uzodike and Whetho (2012) validate this opinion when they observe that help from other quarters, specifically within Africa, is surprisingly sparse. Concrete efforts on the security challenges of Boko Haram are yet to be substantially advanced by African regional organizations, for instance. Indeed, analysts have argued that it is still encumbered by capacity issues, possessing neither the required manpower nor the financial resources to address terrorism… the Peace and Security Council of the African Union has plans to develop an African Arrest Warrant for persons (including Boko Haram members) charged with terrorist acts.

It is argued that the AU's tardive response cannot be blamed entirely on the continental body. Nigeria's previous stance on the subject was not embracing. Nigeria, at the initial stages of the insurgency, ruled out international military intervention saying that it was purely a domestic affair. Damme (2015) reveals that: "after years of reluctance, Nigeria has decided to welcome help from surrounding countries, which seem determined to take quick action". Even though President Jonathan later beckoned to the international community, his words were incongruent to his deeds towards the solution of the insurgency. The attitude of the president has facilitated the cause of the militants. The reactive approach by President Jonathan is also noted by Olusegun Obasanjo, one of Nigeria's former presidents, when he succinctly put it: "Terrorism is hard to defeat, but a leader like Goodluck Jonathan, probably made it harder. He was in denial for three years and by the time he understood how bad it was, it was too late for his presidency" (Jacobs, 2015).

Had Boko Haram been nipped in the bud, we would not have been experiencing their contagious effect today and worse still, the loss of human lives. President Muhammadu Buhari's position on the international intervention is not different from his predecessor. This is typified by the fact that the Cameroon's Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) is having a great challenge of coordinating and sharing intelligence with their Nigerian counterparts for the same cause. The *New African* (2015) reports that: "BIR is hopeful for change under Nigeria's new President Muhammadu Buhari but it isn't getting ahead of itself. Nourma notes that during the Nigerian election campaign, Buhari announced he would not accept [foreign troops on Nigerian soil]".

Multinational Joint Task Force's Intervention

The Nigerian position on foreign intervention is ambiguous as it is still not very clear about the nature of the operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) created by Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria and Niger who agreed to contribute troops to the task force. The BBC (2015) reports, with uncertainty, if the "MJTF would be deployed as a border force, protecting Nigeria's neighbors from Boko Haram incursions, or whether it would attack the militants inside Nigeria". This is a dilemma even though troops are being dispatched with the continental body's endorsement. The AU has a backed-up task force of 7,500 troops to fight Boko Haram militants, but would have to wait for the United Nations Security Council's approval. In addition to the approval of the multinational force, the AU has created the African Police Cooperation Mechanism and the Advisory Team to combat Boko Haram and other terrorists' organization on the continent. The AU in a communiqué said, mention was also made of the efforts being deployed by the member countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and Benin, as part of the MNJTF responsible for combating the Boko Haram terrorist group, and of the creation of the African Police Cooperation Mechanism (AFRIPOL), as well as of the establishment, by the Commission, of an Advisory Team responsible for supporting the AU in the monitoring and implementation of the relevant provisions of the communiqué of the 455th meeting of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) (Peace and Security Council of the AU Website, 2015a).

Mixed Reactions of Intervention

While there is praise at home and abroad about the AU's move to action, some critics believe that military invention will rather aggravate the already volatile situation. Observers opine that the multinational force will not address the underlying causes that gave birth to the group. They contend that intervening militarily will only regionalize the conflict, citing the AU's intervention in Somalia as a classic example. It is now evident that the intermittent attacks by the al-Shabaab Islamists group on Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda are because of these countries' contribution of troops to the AU mission in Somalia. It is therefore feared that same scenario could be replicated in Boko Haram's case.

The impact of these interventions is yet to be felt by the citizens of the affected countries even though recent assessment shows that the group has lost many territories and has adopted suicide bombings as a new strategy. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the AU has the will power, but lacks the mandate to take measures for implementation and it does not know when the fight against extremism will be won. This argument is supported by Allison (2015) when he said, "while the AU's legal instruments create a relatively comprehensive and progressive counter-terrorism framework, it has yet to have any noticeable impact in combating terrorism on the continent". The commission seems to be pessimistic on its combat against terrorism on the continent. The AU's desperation and impuissance to tackle the problem is summed up in this communiqué:

In Somalia, Mali, Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Central African Republic and in Libya, armed conflict and/or terrorism have resulted in a humanitarian crisis of grave proportions. There is an estimated 28 million people in need of humanitarian assistance across the Sahel. Moreover, it is likely that the conditions fuelling violent extremism will not subside in the immediate future, especially given the current dynamics in the Middle East and the increasing globalization evident throughout the world. (Peace and Security Department of AU Website, 2015b)

The Union's lackluster response is more alarming given that Boko Haram has connections with well-resourced terrorists' organizations around the world. They are, for example, linked to the omnipresent and radical Islamic State. The *New African magazine* (2015) reports that since pledging allegiance to Daesh (also known as the Islamic State) on 7 March 2015, the group has begun to be referred to, in its own and Daesh's propaganda, as the Islamic State's West Africa Province. This is rebranding meant to galvanize support and recruits.

Onapajo, Uzodike and Whetho (2012) add that as the group's goals became more militant, it realized the need to establish networks with other transnational groups. Following this, the group employed the tactic of publicly identifying itself with Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. Yet another harrowing report on the global position of Boko Haram by the *New York Times* is frightening. It indicates that: "as much of the world remains focused on the Islamic State and its horrific attacks in Paris, another radical band of extremists has, by one account, captured the infamous title of the world's deadliest terrorist group: Boko Haram" (Searcey & Santoranon, November 18, 2015). The *New York Times* adds that Boko Haram, the militant group that has tortured Nigeria and its neighbors for years, was responsible for 6,664 deaths last year, more than any other terrorist group in the world, including the Islamic State, which killed 6,073 people in 2014, according to a report released on Wednesday that tracks terrorist attacks globally.

Human Security Impact of Boko Haram

It is an unarguable fact that the foundation of human security has shaken since the formation of Boko haram. The killings are indiscriminate, transcending religious boundaries. Moderate Muslims are not spared in their quest to overthrow the secular Nigerian government. Supporting this fact is Okpaga, Chijioke and Innocent (2012) who held that the dangerous trend in insecurity came with Boko Haram, the Muslim fundamentalist sect, bombing everything within reach. It had no qualms bombing innocent people, even women and children who had inkling of what the fighting is about. The *New African* (2015) reports that over 40,000 Nigerians now live in the Minawao refugee camp in Cameroon. The influx of these refugees has its attending socioeconomic problems for the refugees themselves and the recipient community. This situation puts pressure on social amenities.

Onuoha (2012) observes that the sect's survival rests on a tripod. The first strand is rooted on large number of followers or recruits drawn from an expansive pool of Almajiris and other destitute children from neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger Republics who easily cross into Nigeria's porous borders. The second is rooted in the financial support from politicians and other wealthy members, which helps to sustain the sect's operation in the areas of arms and weapons procurement, training, and compensation for those wounded in battle or relatives of suicide bombers. The last leg rests on the influence of local experienced ideologues that frame the violent ideology of the sect and exploit their connections with established foreign terror groups such as Somali-based Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda in the Land of Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) to fanatically indoctrinate or radicalize recruits.

One of the dire consequences of the sect's activities is the infliction of psychological trauma on the Nigerian population. The people live in constant fear as the attacks are sporadic.

The Way Forward

We believe that the best solution is to address the root causes of insurgency by the Nigerian government with the support of the AU. The AU's intervention should be finance and strategy intelligence through its Peace and Security Council research unit.

The formation of the African High Command is long overdue. This was an idea of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, one of the founding fathers of the OAU. This command, when well-resourced, will serve as a deterrent not only to Boko Haram, but to other terrorists operating on the continent. The progress made by the year-old joint force indicates the potency of synergy in addressing the Nigerian problem and the continent at large.

Nigeria's willingness to cooperate with the multinational force is a step towards winning the fight against the Islamists group. It is noted that the sour relation between Nigeria and Cameroon is likely to affect their efforts at combating the terrorists. *New African* (July 2015) observes that the lack of cooperation between Nigeria and Cameroon is due to the political situation. Nouma, referring to the disputed Bakassi peninsula, says, "as a result, Cameroonian troops may not enter Nigeria, even in hot pursuit. Nigerian troops may not enter Cameroon either". Nigerien and Chadian forces operate in Nigeria, and Chadian troops operate in Cameroon. If the multinational force is to succeed, Nigeria has to rise beyond past squabbles and forge ahead with her neighbors.

Another problem worth tackling is the yawning poverty gap between the north and the south. Poverty and corruption have created dissatisfaction among youth groups and that is fueling these extremists. Poverty is one of the fertile grounds for breeding terrorism even though Silke (2014) argues that poverty is not the root cause of terrorism. The poverty theory argues that when people are economically marginalized, they resort to terrorism to vent their anger. When social inequality develops, many people become angry because they are unable to achieve what others are easily able to achieve, thus creating internal conflict within certain geographic areas, and making it more likely for terrorism to occur thus (Butler, 2015; Newman, 2006).

Onapajo, Uzodike and Whetho (2012) maintain that at the same time, many in the international community are proposing non-military approaches towards solving the problem of Boko Haram terrorism. Many support the efficacy of an economic recovery strategy to address the problem, given the belief that the outrage displayed by Boko Haram reflects the acute poverty in northern Nigeria. It is therefore an undeniable fact that poverty cannot be ruled out in the fight against Boko Haram.

Conclusions

This paper argues that AU has adopted a languorous attitude towards liberating Nigeria which is now home to the Boko Haram militant group with its increasing contagious effect. The atrocities committed by the group are peaking in recent years creating insecurity in the region. The situation calls for political will from all African leaders, and Nigeria to address the precarious and multifaceted problem. The long-term solution is to deal with the remote cause(s) of the insurgency through education, de-indoctrination and the provision of equal economic opportunities. The government should also adopt destitute children and give them proper education as they are vulnerable to Boko haram recruitment. Strict measures should also be taken to make financing Boko Haram a disincentive. We need a collective effort and comprehensive measures to bring Nigeria back to normalcy.

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