

Combating Terrorism And Insurgency In The North-East, Nigeria: A Case Of Boko Haram

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Abstract

Terrorism and insurgency pose formidable challenges globally, with Nigeria grappling with Boko Haram's persistent threat in its northeastern region. Despite government efforts, the menace endures. This study examines Nigeria's counter- terrorism strategy to combat Boko Haram insurgency, analyzes the insurgency's root causes, and evaluates previous approaches effectiveness. Utilizing secondary sources and historical/analytical methodologies, this research argues that the government's military-centric approach has not resolved the issue and may have exacerbated it. An alternative strategy combining kinetic and non-kinetic methods is proposed, emphasizing collaboration with neighboring countries and international partners, notably powerful states. This paper contributes to the discourse on combating terrorism and insurgency, offering policy-relevant insights to address Boko Haram's persistence in Nigeria.

Keywords: Combating, Terrorism, Insurgency, Boko Haram, North-East, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has faced myriad security challenges since May 29, 1999. These include banditry, kidnapping, militancy, separatist agitation, pastoralist-farmer conflicts, transnational organized crime, piracy, armed robbery, and porous borders (Ebiede, Bassey, & Asuni, 2021). The Boko Haram insurgency stands out as a major security concern.

Despite extensive literature on Boko Haram's origins, ideology, and violent acts, there is a scarcity of studies on combating the menace. This research aims to address this gap by analyzing the Nigerian government's strategies against Boko Haram and assessing their effectiveness. It also proposes alternative approaches.

The consequences of Boko Haram's activities have been devastating. According to the United States Council on Foreign Relations, nearly 40,000 people have died, and over 2.6 million have been displaced since the insurgency began in 2009.

This study examines the strategies employed by the Nigerian government to counter Boko Haram and evaluates their effectiveness. It also proposes alternative strategies to address the ongoing conflict. The paper consists of five sections. The first section introduces the topic, and the second section provides conceptual clarity on terrorism and insurgency, defining these terms and exploring their relevance to the Boko Haram insurgency. The third section examines Boko Haram's emergence, discussing factors contributing to its rise and evolution as a violent extremist group. This includes Ideology, Recruitment methods and Operational tactics.

The fourth section analyzes strategies employed to address the Boko Haram conflict, evaluating: Military approaches, Political approaches, and Economic approaches. It assesses their strengths, weaknesses, and impact on mitigating the insurgency. The fifth section concludes the paper, summarizing main findings and proposing alternative strategies to counter Boko Haram. Recommendations draw from lessons learned and innovative solutions addressing root causes.

Conceptual Clarification: Terrorism and Insurgency

The concept of terrorism lacks a universally accepted definition, with varying perspectives from scholars and organizations. This section aims to clarify these concepts for a better understanding of the Boko Haram insurgency.

Terrorism

The concept of terrorism is highly contested and lacks a universally accepted definition. Different scholars and organizations have offered varying perspectives on what constitutes terrorism. The section aims to provide clarification on the concept of terrorism and insurgency for a better understanding of the Boko Haram insurgency. Here are some definitions and perspectives on terrorism provided in the paper:

1. **Official Definitions:** Government bodies and institutions often provide their own definitions of terrorism. For example, the United States State Department defines terrorism as premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.
2. **Scholarly Definitions:** Scholars have offered various definitions of terrorism. These definitions often highlight the use of violence or force, the political motivations behind the acts, the pursuit of publicity, and the targeting of civilians or specific institutions. Kilcullen, (2006) cited in Liolio (2013, p.34) “insurgency is a struggle to control a contested political space, between a state (or a group of states or occupying powers), and one or more popularly based, non-state challengers”. In a like manner, Inchi cited in Gwaza (2014) sees insurgency as a violent move by a person or group of persons to resist or oppose the enforcement of law or running of government or revolt against constituted authority of the State or of taking part in insurrection.

For Birch (2007, p.69), terrorism is “the infliction of grievous harm on one or more members of an identifiable group or category of people with the aim of frightening other members of that group or category into changing their intended behaviour.” This definition is defective because it is not comprehensive and fails to account for non-human objects that are also the target of the terrorists. Similarly, Kydd and Walter (2006) define terrorism as actions focusing on harming some people to create fear in others by targeting civilians and facilities or systems on which civilians rely. By the same token, Weinberg, Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler (2004, p.786), defined terrorism as” a politically motivated tactic involving the threat or use of force or violence in which the pursuit of publicity plays a significant role.”

In a like manner, Alao, and Atere (2012, p. 1) see terrorism as violence perpetrated by individuals within or outside the government circle that is specifically directed against civilian or government institutions as a way of calling attention to perceived real or imaginary injustices in a clandestine manner. In the same vein, Nwolise (2013) sees terrorism as the method whereby an organized group seeks to achieve its sworn aims, chiefly by violence. Equally, Forest (2012), defines terrorism as the use of or threatened use of force designed to bring about a political change. Similarly, Adam (1995) cited in Solomon (2015, p. 6) sees terrorism as the “illegitimate use of covert violence by a group for political ends.

For Schmid and Jongman (1988), terrorism is:

.... an anxiety-inspired method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-)clandestine individuals, groups, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population and serve as message generators. Threat and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperilled) victims, and the main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought (p.28)

Based on the preceding definitions, terrorism can be defined as the use of violence by a sect or group targeting government institutions and defenseless or soft targets within the population, intending to cause harm and instill fear. The primary objective of terrorism is to alter perceptions regarding the effectiveness or legitimacy of the government.

Insurgency

Although often conflated, insurgency and terrorism differ. This study adopts the definition from the "Guide to the Analysis of Insurgency" (2012):

is a protracted political-military struggle directed toward subverting or displacing the legitimacy of a constituted government or occupying power and completely or partially controlling the resources of a territory through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations (p.1)

The activities of the insurgents groups such as Boko Haram, Ansar and ISWAP are all geared towards displacing the legitimacy of government and controlling the resources of the areas under their control.

Insurgency like terrorism is a form of political violence but differs from terrorism in terms of nature of political goal, nature of management body, level of popular support, organizational/administrative structure, the directness of challenge/fight, form (target status) and character of violence, among others (Ünal, 2016). These distinctions are crucial for understanding the complexities of insurgency

Emergence of Boko Haram

Scholars disagree on Boko Haram's origin and evolution. Various sources cite different years, ranging from 1995 to 2003 (Ajayi, 2012). However, most media accounts trace its origin to 2002, when Mohammed Yusuf became leader.

Nigerian security forces link Boko Haram's roots to 1995, when Abubakar Lawan founded the non-violent Ahlulsunna wal"jamaah hijra sect at the University of Maiduguri. After Lawan's departure for Saudi Arabia, Mohammed Yusuf took over in 2002, transforming the group.

Boko Haram has undergone transformations and name changes:

- Muhajirun
- Yusufiyyah
- Nigerian Taliban
- Boko Haram
- Jama"atu Ahlissunnah lidda"awati wal Jihad (Onuoha, 2012)

The Boko Haram uprising began in Bauchi, Nigeria, on July 25, 2009, sparked by the sect's refusal to wear crash helmets. The clash resulted in 17 Boko Haram members' deaths (United States Institute of Peace, 2012). The crisis spread to northeastern Nigerian states such as Borno, Yobe and Kano. Maiduguri, Boko Haram's headquarters, was particularly affected due to Mohammed Yusuf's residence there (Bamidele, 2013).

Causes of Boko Haram Insurgency

Scholars identify multiple factors contributing to the Boko Haram insurgency and these are:

1. State failure (Hill, 2012; Uadiale, 2012; Fund for Peace, 2012; Oyewole, 2013). State failure refers to government's inability to effectively provide security, governance, and basic service, creating a power vacuum exploited by the extremist groups.
2. Socio-Economic Factors (Aghedo, 2014; Aghedo & Osumah, 2012; Akpan, Ekanem & Adeoye, 2014). Poverty, corruption, unemployment, and social inequality create grievances, marginalization, and hopelessness, making individuals susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups.
3. Religious Factor: Boko Haram's Salafi-jihadist ideology seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria, rejecting Western values and education. There are two perspectives on religious causes: a. Muslims seeking to annihilate Christians represented by Archbishop Peter Akinola, Pastor Ayo Oristejafor, and Reverend Sam Kraakevik Kujiyat. b Grand design to discredit Islam represented by clerics such as Ibraheem El-Zakzaky, Aliyu Muhammad Bunza). They maintained that it was an American creation intended to subject Islam to ridicule.
4. Political Factors (Adibe, 2012; Alozieuwa, 2012). Boko Haram's insurgency was motivated by Northern Muslim political class seeking to frustrate President Jonathan's administration and sectarian interests, economic destabilization, and internal power struggles within the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). Notable opinions are Late National Security Adviser General Owoye Andrew Azazi who attributed the conflict to PDP's internal power struggles and former governors Aliyu Babangida, Murtala Nyako and Nasir El-Rufai, contended that Boko Haram aimed to destabilize the northern economy

The causes of Boko Haram insurgency are complex and multifaceted, involving political, religious, socio-economic, and cultural dynamics. It is important to note that these factors interplay, intersect and reinforcing. For example, the interplay between state failure, socio-economic and Boko haram shows that state failure creates power vacuum, enabling Boko Haram to exploit socio-economic grievances; poverty, unemployment, and inequality fuel discontent, making individuals susceptible to radicalization; Boko Haram's narrative of government neglect and corruption resonates with marginalized communities. Also, intersection of religious and political factors indicates that Boko Haram's Salafi-jihadist ideology taps into existing religious tensions and perceptions of Western influence; political manipulation by elites and sectarian interests exacerbates religious divisions; Government responses to Boko Haram often perpetuate religious stereotypes, further polarizing communities.

Moreover, the reinforcement factors show that state failure and socio-economic issues reinforce each other, creating a cycle of poverty and violence. Furthermore, religious and political factors intersect, fueling sectarian tensions and extremist narratives. Besides, Boko Haram's actions and government responses perpetuate a cycle of violence, reinforcing existing grievances.

Strategies for Combating Boko Haram Activities in Nigeria

The Nigerian government has adopted a combination of military and non-military approaches in its counter-insurgency strategy against Boko Haram. Successive administrations in Nigeria have implemented various strategies to address the Boko Haram insurgency, but the effectiveness and potency of these strategies have been subject to debate. The paragraph that followed examines the military strategy or approach of combating Boko Haram menace.

A. Military Strategy

A key component of Nigeria's counter-insurgency strategy involves military operations against Boko Haram. The important developments include:

1. Establishment of the Seventh Division of the Nigerian Army (8,000 troops) to address the insurgency in Borno and Yobe.
2. Joint Task Forces: "Operation Restored Order I & II" (2009) and "Operation Harbin Kunama III, IV" and "Operation Puff Adder." (Akinbi 2015; Campbell 2014; Omonobi 2013; Udounwa, 2013).
3. Relocation of the military high command center to Maiduguri.
4. "Operation Lafiya Dole" (2015): Countering Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria through airstrikes, ground operations, and regional collaboration.
5. Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF): Joint operations with Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Benin Republics (Ahmed, 2020).

Amnesty International (2015) reports extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances, and inhumane detention conditions. Notable incidents include:

1. Mass extrajudicial execution of 640 men and boys at Giwa barracks detention facility.
2. Killings of detainees at Presidential Lodge detention facility in Damaturu.
3. Baga "mop-up" operation.

Another report by the same organization (Amnesty International, 2018), documented instances of Nigerian soldiers coercing women fleeing Boko Haram into sexual activities in exchange for food, violating human rights and emphasizing the need for ethical conduct. Human Rights Watch's (2019), report raised concerns about the arbitrary arrest of thousands of children without ties to Boko Haram, highlighting the need for protection and well-being of children in conflict. The Institute for Security Studies' (2020), report alleged arbitrary arrests, detentions, and convictions without evidence, undermining due process and the rule of law.

Internal conflicts and corruption within the military ranks has hampered the effectiveness of this counter-insurgency strategy. Disagreements within military ranks, accusations of corruption, and embezzlement of counter-terrorism funds (\$2 billion) have hampered effectiveness (Alli, 2016; Daniel & Omonobi, 2015; Suleiman, 2016).

Equipment and arms challenges: Inadequate equipment and arms have hindered military operations, allowing Boko Haram to exploit this imbalance (Pate, 2015; Owojori, Azman & Sakariyau, 2021).

It is important to note that despite these challenges, the military has achieved some success in combating Boko Haram. The elimination or capture of key leaders, successful operations resulting in the rescue of hostages and civilians, and the neutralization of a significant number of sect members demonstrate positive outcomes. However, addressing the challenges and shortcomings within the military strategy remains crucial for sustained progress and the protection of human rights.

B. Political Strategy

The political strategy to address the Boko Haram conflict involves negotiations and addressing underlying grievances. This approach aims to tackle root causes, promote religious moderation, and establish oversight mechanisms for lasting peace and security. However, success hinges on stakeholders' willingness to engage in dialogue, the government's sincerity, and effective implementation. The key initiatives include:

- Fact-Finding Committee: Established by President Umar Musa Yar'adua to identify grievances and improve security in northeastern Nigeria ((Abbah, 2012; Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2014).
- Presidential Committee on Dialogue: Formed by President Goodluck Jonathan to engage with insurgent leaders and resolve the conflict (Onuorah & Anuforo, 2015).
- Private Initiatives: Led by figures like Olusegun Obasanjo and Dr. Datti Ahmad to broker peace. (Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2014).

However, an evaluation of the strategy indicates a lack of commitment from both the government and the insurgents to resolve the conflict through political means. The insurgents refused to engage in dialogue with the government, and the government itself did not demonstrate a strong commitment to exploring the dialogue option. The delayed release of a white paper on the Gultimari Committee, taking the government ten months to do so, can be seen as evidence of this lack of commitment.

C. Socio-Economic Strategy

Nigeria's socio-economic strategy to address the challenges in the northeast region is quite comprehensive. The government launched the Presidential Initiative for the North East (PINE) in 2014 to tackle poverty and illiteracy, with programs like boosting local rice and sugar production (\$2.3 billion) and rebuilding destroyed infrastructure (\$187.5 million). Additionally, the Obasanjo administration established the Presidential Committee on Northeast Initiatives (PCNI) to coordinate assistance and rebuilding efforts. The federal government also allocated 56 billion naira for the Northeast's development, with 3 billion naira going to PINE and 53 billion naira to the Victims Support Fund (VSF). (Pate, 2015, p.39).

The Northeast Development Commission, established in 2016, aims to resettle, rehabilitate, and reconstruct infrastructure for insurgency victims. Funding comes from the federation account and international donors' (Vanguard 26 October 2016).

It is worth noting that the success of these initiatives depends on effective implementation, coordination among various agencies, and sustained commitment from both the central government and state governments. Additionally, ongoing monitoring and evaluation are crucial to ensure that the allocated funds are utilized efficiently and effectively to achieve the desired developmental outcomes.

However, corruption remains a significant obstacle, undermining counter-terrorism efforts, and developmental initiatives. Reports highlight instances of corruption in IDP camps, where officials have misappropriated humanitarian aid.

Conclusion and Recommendation

To effectively combat terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria, a multifaceted approach is crucial. Below are some key recommendations:

Addressing Root Causes: Government should improve governance and leadership to address poverty, unemployment, and poor governance. Moreover, it should invest in economic development and social justice programs to tackle inequality and lack of opportunity.

Security Measures: It should prosecute corrupt military officers and increase budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Defense with proper monitoring. Besides, it should combine military and non-military approaches, focusing on intelligence gathering and community engagement.

Social Reforms: Government should monitor religious teachings and activities and amend terrorism prevention laws to allow for effective surveillance. In addition, it should promote dialogue and reconciliation between different religious and ethnic groups.

International Support: It should collaborate with the international community for financial, military, and intelligence assistance.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration: It should implement deradicalization and rehabilitation programs for former terrorists and support victims and communities through socio-economic reconstruction and psycho-social therapy.

Implementing these recommendations requires a commitment to addressing the underlying causes of terrorism and insurgency. A comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders and sectors of society is vital. By working together, Nigeria can become a safer and more prosperous nation.

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