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## Terrorism in West Africa: Boko Haram, Adding Some Few Recommendations to the Yamoussoukro Declaration

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### **Abstract:**

*Countries in West Africa are already going through several challenges that most governments are trying hard to address. The current Nigerian experience with Boko Haram shows the severity of the negative impact that terrorism can have on a country. In view of this, this paper takes a critical look at certain aspects of the proposed ECOWAS counterterrorism architecture, and makes recommendations that will help in its implementation. It strongly contends that, the fight against this threat in West Africa, should be seen as a serious collective national responsibility which must include individuals, households and State agencies.*

**Key words:** *Terrorism, Boko Haram, Yamoussoukro Declaration*

### **1. Introduction**

Most scholars suggest that the current Boko Haram crisis (Shehu, 2007) had its genesis from the Maitatsine uprisings that took place in Nigeria between 1980 and 1985. Such scholars argue that the period saw the planting of the needed fertile seeds of early Islamic fundamentalism in the country and later sprouting out of these seeds were personalities like Mohammed Yusuf, who later became the leader of Boko Haram. Others also place the roots of the current situation in the complex 1960s Nigerian political arena (Laitin, 1982). Having achieved independence from Britain in 1960, the country saw a lot of political activism created by the departure of the British and the already existing fault lines due mainly to ethnic and religious suspicions and tensions. Most Nigerian scholars contend that, the different systems of governance pursued by the colonial administration in the northern and southern parts of the country did set the stage for most of the post independence issues.

During the period of colonization, the country was initially divided into the Northern and Southern protectorates and the British directly governed the southern protectorate, leaving the predominantly Muslim north to be controlled by the traditional Emirs through a system of indirect rule. This created a country with a northern half that was predominantly Muslim and a southern section that ended up becoming predominantly Christian because of the immense activities of Christian missionaries (Laitin, 1982). As already mentioned, this development took place within a very complex social setting, which saw people subscribing to political parties and social movements on the basis of ethnicity and religion. This complicated amalgamation of social forces resulted in several political riots in the 1960s leading to the death of hundreds of people in places like Tiv in the North Central part of the country and other places in the Nile Delta regions. Some also locate the genesis as far back as the early colonial times (Anifowose, 1982) and argue that the seeds of revolts and general communal violence were sown between 1918 and 1945. These they contend manifested in forms like the Egba Uprising in 1918, the Aba Women Riots in 1929, the Enugu Colliery Strike in 1949 and others like the riots in Kano in 1953 (Anifowose, 1982). It can be conclusively stated, however, that all these conflagration of factors and other several others, which may fall outside the scope of this paper, contributed in one way or the other to the realization of the utility of violence and social disobedience in the political claim making process. However, writers on the subject unanimously agree that, the current Boko Haram episode is rooted more in an extreme form of religious radicalization which is well galvanized by a gamut of socio-political factors. The events that took place immediately before and after the months of June and July 2009 (Schulze, 2009) across the Northern states of Bauchi, Kano, Yobe, and Borno sealed the fate and direction of the group pushing it to metamorphose into its current state. 'Boko Haram' literally translates 'Western education is evil' or 'forbidden' in the Hausa language which happens to be the predominant dialect used in the Northern part of Nigeria. The group is believed to have started in the mid 1990s with Mohammed Yusuf becoming the leader to who ushered the group into its final stage of violent extremism. The name of the group changed from Ahlulsunna wai'jama'ah hijra and later to the 'Nigerian Taliban' and 'Yusufiyah'. Ideologically, members detested western education and

labeled it as sinful and ungodly and encouraged adherents to totally reject all forms of western education and values (Akanji, 2009). According to Falola (Falola, 1998), the group's philosophy was based more on the Maitatsine movement that evolved in the early 80s led by Muhammadu Marwa, who saw it as a messianic responsibility to purify Islam. Consequently, they encouraged enrolment in the Islamic schools and had members made up the unemployed youth, Islamic clerics students from institutions of higher learning in Borno and Yobe states such as the University of Maiduguri, the Polytechnics, Maiduguri and Federal Polytechnic, who upon joining the group left formal education and enrolled for Islamic education (Okanji, 2009).

The group's activities leading to the events of 1997 were informed more by a straight forward ideological position and inspired mostly by their disenchantment with the formal educational system, western values and the perceived 'illegality' of the Nigerian State. This ideological position gave the group the needed impetus to embark on what can best be described as their 'messianic' objective, which involved various activities aimed at 'purifying' the whole country starting from the north. The already existing tensions between the predominantly northern Muslims and southern Christians also played to their advantage in their recruitment drive. The high rate of unemployment, lack of opportunities and disillusionment of the youth in majority of the northern States, served as a pull factor and by 1997 the group had close to 300,000 members. Fearing that they were becoming too radical and their way of preaching could offend other Muslims and non Muslims, the Buachi state administration tried to clamp down on their activities, but this act culminated into what become known as the four day riot or revolt that lasted from the 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2009 (Onuoha, 2010). Several lives were lost and properties were destroyed during this period, leading to the arrest of some of the key figures in the group and the killing of Yusuf, the group leader. From a fatalistic point of view, I think it was at this stage that the 'Philosophy' and modus operandi of Boko Haram changed into the current covert and 'terrorist' posture.

## 2. Analysis of causal factors

A cursory look at the situation in Northern Nigeria shows that youth radicalization is at the centre of the current crisis. Radicalization by definition is a process that leads to a situation in which a person or group of persons imbibe and adopt extreme social, religious and political views. At the stage of final or complete radicalization, such individuals totally reject the status quo and seek to undermine any other expression contrary to theirs (Emmerson, 2004). According to Alao (Alao, 2013), Islam in Nigeria dates as far back as the twelfth century when scholars and traders from Northern Africa made contact with settlers in the northern part of current Nigeria. The complete Islamization of the whole region took place between 1804 and 1808 when Osman Dan Fodio, an Islamic scholar, formed an army and embarked on a successful Fulani Jihad against the Hausa Kingdoms. His successful campaign led to the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate, which became one of the largest and powerful states in West Africa (Alao, 2013). During that period, the concept of Jihad, which in Arabic translates 'struggle' and means "the Islamic religious duty of a Muslim", pushed the caliphate to engage in series of forced conversions to Islam. The piety ingrained in this concept of 'Jihad' in northern Nigeria, to some extent explains the ease with which radicalized youth in that part of the country derive support from ordinary members of that society.

Available literature on radicalized Islamic groups and violent Islamic extremist groups show that they are two different things. According to Emmerson (Emmerson, 2004), the radical group operates in a way that does not advocate or place premium on violence, but, as part of their modus operandi, show significantly lower levels of tolerance in matters pertaining to their faith. This position also lowers their reluctance to take part in and or employ violence in achieving their goals. Violent extremism on the other hand readily employs the inherent utility of the 'fear factor' in violence to achieve its ends. Practically, the line between the two is very thin and it takes very little for it to be breached (Emmerson, 2004). Perhaps, this explains how Boko Haram was able to easily metamorphose from a simple 'radicalized' Islamic group into the violent and extreme after the events of July 1997, which merely served as a catalyst. Radicalization, therefore, becomes the first step and gateway to violent extremism. In order to comprehensively address the issue of violent Islamic extremism, as being witnessed in the case of Boko Haram, the 'agents' of the first phase of radicalization can be analyzed as follows:

## 3. Factors that led to the successful radicalization

- One of the major factors that led to the successful radicalization of the group was the way in which certain sections and doctrinal concepts of the Quran were religiously and socially interpreted. The main concept that was highly abused and over stretched to justify most of the violent actions was the concepts of Jihad as instituted in the Quran and the preference and abuse of the 'Wahhabism' forceful preaching method.
- The rather sharp Islam and Christian divide in the country served as a contributory factor in the radicalization process. Although just like Islam, Christianity is a Middle Eastern religion, but in Nigeria, it is associated with Europeans and seen as the main source of the European 'western' culture in that country. Preachers of the two religions also use very aggressive and charismatic means to win converts, creating a feeling of rivalry and putting them in a state of perpetual condescension for each other.
- The extent of poverty and marginalization in the northern part of Nigeria also helped in the radicalization process. Comparatively, that part of the country offers very few opportunities for the teeming youth as compared to the southern part. Majority of them were also out of the formal school system and most enrolled in the traditional Islamic educational stream that fundamentally provided them with no employable skills. Most ended up as street children "almajiri" and became easy targets for recruitment and indoctrination.

- The continuous flow of funding was also another factor. The group had very reliable sources of funding and received support from very prominent personalities in the region who were aligned to major political parties. The group became an agency for mass covert political support through a patron - client relationship and members were insulated from civil control by very powerful personalities.
- The group courted legitimacy and sympathy by positioning itself to look like a parallel local government entity by providing basic social services like housing and water and basic social support to deprived persons and communities.
- The security services handling of the phenomenon from the beginning was very poor, leading to several operational blunders, which fed into the radicalization process. Tactical operations like intelligence gathering, arrests and riot control were all executed with inexcusable blunders.
- The already existing Nigerian problems associated with ethnicity and national identity also played to their advantage in the group radicalization process by pushing them into an alliances of 'brotherhood' with foreign Jihadist elements.

Terrorism is the use of violence to create fear (Barnett et al, 2009) for political, religious, or ideological reasons. Practically, the essence of the violence is intentionally aimed at noncombatant targets like civilians or iconic symbols. The key objective is usually to achieve the greatest attainable publicity for the group or individual cause. According Haider (Haider, 2004), social factors like exclusion from political participation, feeling of alienation or removal from the general political space can serve as a pull factor for terrorism

Haider also mentions prevailing socio-economic conditions such as the ease with which people can access education, employment and social services as contributory factors. Socio economic inequalities in a country and the prospects of economic growth are also factors that can give rise to terrorism. The nature of governance and the extent to which laws are equitably applied are also key factors that can lead to terrorism. Using an analysis based on psychology, Kruglanski (2009) has adequately demonstrated that a person's psychopathology and the way they react to conditions can predispose them to terrorism. This analysis is based on parameters such as age, education and social status among others. The psychopathology approach shows how only particular group of people could be collectively affected and influenced by certain triggers to commit the act of terrorism.

Studies by the United Nations, as captured in its Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, have also flagged majority of these factors among many others as the main drivers of terrorism in the world, and in order to ensure a well coordinated effort at addressing this global threat, have outlined key steps to be followed by its Member States. For the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the UN recommended the following:

ECOWAS member states working in conjunction with the ECOWAS Commission should finalize and adopt a sub regional strategy and plan of action for addressing threats from terrorism and extremism in West Africa that is driven by local and sub regional needs and priorities. Such strategies and plan of action should:

- Enumerate specific concrete steps that member states should take across the full range of measures and state achievable goals that would allow the measurement of collective progress.
- Establish a multidimensional counterterrorism office in the ECOWAS Commission to monitor and assist Member States in the implementation and to provide a platform that will facilitate counterterrorism cooperation and coordination among them and between the sub region and external partners.
- Operationalize the ECOWAS network of member state counterterrorism focal points network. Consideration should be given to using this network as a platform for developing further cross-border cooperation among security services, law enforcement, and prosecutors, including exist regional networks.
- Encourage the involvement of civil society in the implementation of counter-terrorism strategies.
- As a first step, ECOWAS should complete an assessment of the threat and vulnerabilities in West Africa in cooperation with a West African think tank to highlight the linkages between terrorism and a range of other security challenges confronting the sub region. That locally conducted threat assessment should help explain how a more coherent response is needed to protect West African communities from terrorism.
- Before adoption, ECOWAS should convene a multi-stakeholder meeting to solicit feedback on the draft counterterrorism strategy and action plan from relevant UN bodies, ECOWAS counterterrorism focal points, external partners, and civil society and to provide an opportunity for those stakeholders to think strategically about their counterterrorism programs and capacity-building efforts in the sub region and allow for the development of concrete assistance packages to support efforts to implement the sub regional framework.
- As part of its efforts to establish a multidimensional counterterrorism office in the Commission, ECOWAS should clarify the modalities of cooperation between the different bodies within the Commission dealing with issues related to counterterrorism, including any eventual counterterrorism mechanism within the Commission itself. To the extent possible, these efforts should seek to build on and be framed within the context of existing ECOWAS structures and programs wherever possible.
- Efforts should be made to include Sahel states, which are not members of ECOWAS, such as Mauritania, in ECOWAS activities to develop Western African capacity to combat and prevent terrorism through partnership status or other arrangements.

The recommendations also suggested that member states and their external partners should liaise in order to effectively address the threat of terrorism that is currently emerging on the continent. Key stakeholders like the United Nations, the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT-AU), the European Union and civil society should work together to provide input and support ECOWAS to adopt a sub regional counterterrorism framework and also establish a multidimensional counter terrorism office within the Commission. As already mentioned, the plan called for the establishment of multidimensional counter terrorism units within each country to facilitate interdepartmental cooperation between international, regional, and sub regional focal points. It also encouraged donors to continue to assist Member States with the necessary technical and material support and practically help in the implementation of the counter strategy mechanisms. Donors were also encouraged to employ a two-level approach to assessing and funding strategy related activities in West Africa. One could be at the national level to identify local priorities and gaps that need immediate attention, and the other at the sub regional level, focusing on multilateral activities that strengthen and sustain cooperation. Collaborations that will engender the capacity of the police and the security services in community policing to help improve upon the patrolling of the vast and often unmanned borders was another key area that was well highlighted.

During the Forty-Second Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, that took place on the 27 to 28 of February 2013 at Yamoussoukro in Côte d'Ivoire, the Political Declaration on a Common Position against Terrorism, which included a Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan capturing most of the above-mentioned recommendations was unanimously adopted by Member States. The final ECOWAS-wide strategy now brings on board several actors in the implementation design and comprehensively outlines what should be done at the country and regional levels. This declaration comes at the right time and based on the analysis of the Boko Haram insurgency, this paper makes the following recommendations:

#### **4. Recommendations**

The analyses of the Boko Haram insurgency have shown that some of the contemporary challenges confronting most African States have their roots in the colonial narrative. Some of these issues are deeply rooted in perceptions that would have to be managed and ideals that will have to be changed through the conscious effort of state building. The very complex nature of ethnicity in Africa makes it very difficult for the building of that 'complex whole' called a nation or country. This reality makes it very necessary for all governments to ensure that, there is unhindered access and equitable participation in all the various layers and processes of governance. This ethos of equity should be well informed by the true realities that we live with. Events in recent history have shown that exclusionism and the feelings of disenfranchisement fuels the 'evils' that push African countries towards disintegration and chaos. Consequently, the comprehensive application of the tenets of good governance should be taken very serious as the region goes ahead to implement the counterterrorism agenda.

Boko Haram also shows that the process of radicalization in African societies are very noticeable and can be altered or reversed altogether through comprehensive intelligence gathering and its proper analysis by the state security apparatus. Ironically, key stages of the evolution of Boko Haram from the phase of fundamental radicalization to violent extremism took several years, but the security apparatus failed to track it. The history of the maitatsine movement was also quite fresh and should have served as a guide to the possible direction that the group was heading. In implementing the counterterrorism programme, Member States will have to depend on the collection and analysis of a wide range of intelligence materials. There is, therefore, the need for a critical review of this capacity in each Member State.

Boko Haram has also shown that poverty and socio-economic conditions are germane factors to be tracked in any counterterrorism strategy because they are very key conditions that can easily drive 'good' people to seek solace or refuge in radicalized groups. Apart from the fact that such groups will enable them survive, they also provide them with an identity. In this light, in addition to ensuring that the general economic conditions are reasonably okay, governments in the sub region should endeavor to identify those who might be marginalized. Such persons should be taken care of through special programmes to prevent them from slipping into potential terrorist groups or cells. The role of foreign religious and non religious entities in community based social interventions should also be critically looked at. Some of these organizations prop radical groups and use their social activities to conceal their true intentions, which is usually the spreading of socially unacceptable radical ideas.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The Citizens of West Africa are already faced with several challenges that most governments are trying hard to address. The current Nigerian experience with Boko Haram shows how terrorism can negatively impact a country. The fight against the threat of terrorism in West Africa should therefore be seen as a serious collective national responsibility, which must include individuals, households and State agencies. It is when this idea of 'collective' responsibility settles down very well with all these relevant stakeholders that the fight can be won.

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