

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Boko Haram Insurgency and the Imperative of Promoting a Culture of Peace in Nigeria

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Abstract:

The state exists fundamentally for the protection of lives and properties and to ensure the wellbeing of the citizens. However, events in recent times have revealed that the Nigerian state has failed to protect her citizens. The Nigerian state currently struggles to maintain its sovereignty and unity in the face of growing, and commonplace, insecurity. This precarious situation, a seemingly helpless condition has called into question all past efforts to entrench peace and security. Although Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nation resolution on the 'Culture of Peace' (in 1999), the perverse state of insecurity and violence in the country, especially the mindless killings by the Boko Haram sect, has continued to undermine the efforts to promote the tenets of the resolution. The intensity of violent activities and cheapness of human lives and properties caused by the activities of the sect has further underscore the obvious fact that a 'culture of peace' is yet to be cultivated in the country. Hence, our preoccupation in this work is with exploring the relationship between the absence of a 'culture of peace' building plan, the emergence of the Boko Haram sect and the implication of the activities of the sect on national security. The essence of our preoccupation is to contribute to the widening discourse on Nigerian security and peace roadmap as well as to underscore the role of peace education in our quest for a united and secured Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is plagued by religious, ethnic, communal and resource conflicts, all of which have posed serious doubt on security within its borders. Benefits from oil wealth have not impacted positively on the lives of the people as a result of commonplace corrupt activities of the leaders that should rather be called homolooters¹.

Resource control agitations in the Niger Delta have given rise to bloody insurgence by various militia groups (Ojo 2010:7), who, despite being granted amnesty, are yet to totally stop suffocating the public space with threats of violence (The News, 2015; Sahara Reporters, 2015). The rise of vigilante groups, separatist groups, and of recent, the dreaded sect, Boko Haram, has continued to threaten the country's hard earned democracy, the quest for growth and development and; above all, have dealt serious blow to national security. Unfortunately, democracy that seems to be a dream come true is fast turning into a nightmare; indeed, many are quick to suggest that Nigeria is not 'democratic yet but only under a civil rule' (Erubami 2013: 4). 'Civil' in the sense that civilians are the managers of governance; the system is not totally democratic because the ethics and tenets of democracy have not been robustly respected since 1999. Of the challenges that have earned Nigeria the sobriquet, 'civil government' (such as human rights violations, corruption, among others), the greatest threat to the current civilian dispensation is insecurity.

Nigeria in recent times has witnessed an unprecedented level of conflicts and insecurity which according to Okpaga (2012: 12) are products of many factors. According to him, there are four manifestations of insecurity in the country, namely: ethno religious conflict, politically-based violence, economic based violence and organized violent groups.

- a. Ethno-religious Conflicts - Communal and societal conflicts that emerged as a result of new and particularistic forms of political consciousness and identity/identities which are often structured around ethno-religious conditions and climes.
- b. Politically-based Violence - Politics in the current civil dispensation, as in the previous republics, is that of 'Gana must Go' (bribery and corruption), 'Do or die' (rigging to win elections at all cost), and others that have dismally affected dialogue, negotiation and consensus. The anxiety that is commonplace in the polity is therefore a result of perceived or real loss of power by an elite stratum.
- c. Economic-based Violence - In a popular parlance, this thesis is also known as "political economy of violence". Recent op-eds and opinions in the mass media across the globe and across political divide have laid much emphasis on the role of resources and attempts at controlling resources in generating conflict which is a major cornerstone of economic-based violence. Cries

¹ Leaders who plan and strategize more on how to siphon public funds than developmental issues; leaders who would rather undertake projects that will increase their bank accounts rather than those that will put smiles on the masses' faces.

of resource control and revenue sharing regularly rent the air between proponents and opponents. In Nigeria, it is often between those who think own the goose that is “laying the golden egg” and those who want to have access to the “egg” as “national cake”.

- d. Organized Violent Groups - Organized violent groups take varying dimensions and forms. These include: ethnic militia, vigilantes, secret cults in tertiary institutions and political thugs. Various reasons and circumstances account for their emergence. The causes of their manifestations include the culture of militarism that has its antecedents in military rule, the failure of the state and its institutions, economic disempowerment, the structure of the state and Nigeria’s federalism, non-separation of state and religion, politics of exclusion, culture of patriarchy and gerontocracy, and ignorance and poor political consciousness.

Of these four, that have characterised the Nigerian political space since 1999, the most worrisome is the deadly attacks by the Boko Haram sect. Indeed some scholars (like Abimbola and Adesote 2012: 1) have opined that the sect and its destructive attacks are nothing but glaring evidence of domestic terrorism or catastrophic terrorism (Bamidele 2012: 3).

2. Boko Haram Sect and Insecurity

Boko Haram (meaning “westernization is forbidden”), also known as “Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-jihad”, was a brainchild of Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf who was born in Girgir village, Yobe state, Nigeria. The name “Boko Haram” is itself derived from the combination of two words “book” (which means ‘book’ or “book-learning”) and “haram” (which means those things which are ungodly or abominable in the sight of Allah). However, “Boko Haram” is not just a name but also slogan to constantly remind members (of the sect) of their focus or target (Pham 2012: 18). Boko Haram did not gain national recognition until 2009 although it was founded long before then. The movement was an offshoot of a self-styled Islamic Fundamentalist group called “The Sahaba”, founded in 1995 by one Abubakar Lawan (Forest 2012: 3). When Lawan departed for further studies in Medina, “The Sahaba” metamorphosed into what is known today as Boko Haram. Boko Haram, as a new sect (from “Sahaba”), began in Yobe state before it spread to other parts of the North- Borno, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Adamawa, Bauchi Gombe among others. Later, the operational headquarters of the sect was relocated to Kanamma, Borno state.

By the year 2009, the group had recruited over 54,000 followers in different parts of Northern Nigeria, taking the undue advantage of the beleaguered structure of the Nigerian state (most especially the inter and intra ethnic cum religious mistrust of the past decades). Boko Haram leaders recruited mostly the uneducated, poverty-stricken youths between ages 11 and 40, under the guise of exposing them to Islamic teachings. Hoping to be better Muslims, the new initiates ended up being indoctrinated with the violent doctrine of the sect (garbed in “Jihadist” philosophy). The new Boko Haram recruits then became ready tools in the hands of those having diverse reasons to kill or discredit their political opponents. Although, compared to all other parts of the country, the North has been a flashpoint of religious conflicts in the past decades (violent religious crisis in Zaria (1982); Zango Katag ethno-religious violence of 1992 and 1993; the shari’a crises of February and May 2000, to mention but a few), none of these violent acts has acquired the complex nature of Boko Haram attacks not only in the North but also in any other parts the country (Ademowo 2011, 2012).

Unfortunately, the insecurity situation which the Boko Haram has engendered in the polity has defied strict classification into any of the four earlier listed manifestations. To many, it is religious, to others it is ethnic; some even think it is essentially economic-based while others simply believe the violent group only want a “voice”. The implication is that more than all other situations of insecurity, “Boko Haram” group has become a hydra-headed monster threatening to cage our sense of unity and purpose as a nation-state.

Given its propensity for violence and ambiguous sense of identity, the Boko Haram apologists have been rejected by the adherents of the religion they claim to propagate. Indeed, leading Islamic leaders such as the Sultan of Sokoto (Sa’adu Abubakar) and Secretary General of the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (Late Lateef Adegbite) among others have dissociated themselves and Islam from Boko Haram activities (Adegbite 2012). Again, given the continued intensity of crimes against humanity perpetrated by the sect, the sect has not only been projecting Nigeria’s image in bad light within the international community, it has also been posing a serious security challenge to the country. The comment of Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Mrs Fatou Bensouda in July, 2012 corroborated this assertion when she declared in Abuja that the court had put Nigeria under a “preliminary examination due to the Boko Haram insurgency in the country, especially in the North” (Daily Independent, 2012).

While the need to foster the Sharia injunctions formed part of the core objectives of Boko Haram, it could, however, be dangerously misleading to presume that religious factor per se informed the prevailing dimension the menace has assumed. In other words, a complex interplay of religious, socio-economic and political factors that had developed over the years informed the prevailing criminal dimension of the group. Poor policy formulation and implementation, expressed in poor responses to what is called EWI (Early Warning Indicators) of internal crises by successive regimes since independence, has contributory effects. Corroborating this view, Idada-Ikponumwen, (2012) opined that government’s insensitivity to the prevailing political and economic problems in the country was responsible for the insurgency of Boko Haram. In his words,

Boko Haram threat had been there as far back as 2004 because when we were sitting as the Security Thematic Group of the vision 20:2020, the origin and the threat of Boko Haram was already. It was brought before us. We analysed it, dissected it and also gave some ideas as to how to fight the scourge (Idada-Ikponumwen 2012: 4).

Some critical observers have also opined that the prevalence of Boko Haram insurgency in the country has political colouration especially within the context of its prevailing dimension. With specific emphasis on the 2011 general election, they suggested that closer attention should be paid to the activities of some politicians from the north, particularly members of the ruling Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) who clamoured for the return of power at the centre to the north after the demise of Alhaji Umaru Musa

Ya'Adua (Vanguard, 2011). Indeed certain stakeholders from the north who threatened to make the country ungovernable if a northerner did not emerge as PDP presidential flag bearer in 2011 have been asked to be arrested and thoroughly questioned by the security service. Specific mention was made of one Lawal Kaita, a PDP stalwart who on October 15, 2010 declared that, the north is determined to make the country ungovernable for president Jonathan or any other Southerner who finds his way to the seat of power on the platform of the PDP against the party's zoning arrangements (TELL, 21 May, 2012).

While there are no "concrete"² evidence(s) to link northern politicians with Boko Haram, insurgents in the country, the fact remains that such inflammatory statements as Kaita's are capable of encouraging groups such as Boko Haram to take to violence. To confirm this suspicion, when Goodluck Ebele Jonathan eventually won the 2011 presidential election on the platform of the PDP, the Boko Haram sect threatened to topple his government. In one of the statements by the sect's leader, Abubakar Shekau, he declared that: You, Jonathan, cannot stop us; instead we will devour you in the three months like you are boasting...we are proud soldiers of Allah; we will never give up as we fight the infidels. We will emerge as winners... we finish you and end your government. (Shekau said in Arabic & Hausa language) (Vanguard April, 2012).

Indeed the Islamic sect has remained the main source of security challenge confronting the regime of Goodluck Jonathan in recent times. At a point, the president raised an alarm that his cabinet had been infiltrated by Boko Haram sponsors and sympathizers (The Punch May, 2012). The problem became compounded with the lingering suspicion that Jonathan may be seeking a re-election come 2015, (although the insinuation has neither been officially confirmed nor debunked by the president and his party). Former National Security Adviser, Late Andrew Azazi, also blamed the inability of the security agencies to suppress the Boko Haram menace on undue influence from political quarters (The Punch, June, 2012). All these were indications that Boko Haram insurgency has political undercurrents.

3. Combating Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

Boko Haram insurgency poses a devastating threat to national security and the fundamental rights of the citizenry. With escalation of violence in so many parts of the country, including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), almost every other day, to which the Boko Haram sect has been "joyfully" claiming responsibility, there is tendency to say that Nigeria is besieged with instability and human insecurity. Hence, those at the helms of affairs must remember their pact with the people, who parted with their rights and sovereignty for the benefit of all (social contract), and therefore must not give up the territorial integrity of the nation and the protection of the citizenry to the sect. By virtue of its constitutional responsibility, the Federal Government must take a number of counter-terrorism measures, which many have suggested should include the following:

3.1. Military Action

Apparently, despite certain noticeable security challenges being faced within the country's security architecture, some concerted efforts have been made at combating the Boko Haram menace in the country through the application of legitimate violence. For instance, many arrests have been made, including the leader of the sect, Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf (its pioneer leader). Upon his arrest in 2009, Yusuf was killed in an atmosphere that was not very clear while in police custody. Yusuf was captured by a military expedition lunched against the sect in 2009, and was later killed in police custody in mysterious circumstances. In spite of the legitimate war on the sect, the attacks by the insurgents have continued to intensify. This should not be too surprising. As a sub-system in modern political system, the security outfit was not institutionalized to resolve social conflicts and political problems. Rather, military men and other Para-military officers are trained to apply force to secure compliance from reluctant behaviour and restoration of order. Since the Boko Haram insurgency is not fundamentally a military problem, the challenge, therefore, goes beyond the application of hard-hitting force. As the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) has resolved in its response to terrorist activities on the continent, terrorism could not be contained only by military approach. According to the summit in the Aso Rock declaration in 2003, 'the war against terror could not be won by military force but by comprehensive measures like building bridges across communities of diverse faiths and the redressing of the economic imbalance between developed and developing countries' (TELL, 2003). Therefore, a coercive measure is a mere reactionary approach, which cannot effectively contain the menace at the expense of proactive and responsive approaches.

3.2. Constitutional Response

Moreover, the presidency has signed into law 'Terrorism Prevention Act 2011' with a view to combating the menace through the instrumentality of law and enforcement. Among other things, the Act was designed to institutionalise measures for the prevention, prohibition and combating acts of terrorism and the financing of terrorism in Nigeria. Despite the existence of the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, since 2011, the activities of the sect has not diminished. Rather, it has significantly intensified, both in scope and in frequency. What this suggests is that the employment of legal measures at the expense of other political and socio-economic approaches could be counter-productive.

Femi Falana reasoned along this line of exploration in his input towards the resolution of ethnic militia and communal crises in Nigeria when he submitted that: "no legislation can successfully ban ethnic militias as long as the Nigerian state is not prepared to

² "Concrete" in the sense that even though many are suspicious that the north politicians are funding the insurgent group, the security agents are claiming to still be combing for incriminating evidences that the skeptical public believe abounds but not used against the respective political gladiators

address the fundamental led to the formation of these groups” (TELL, 2012). What this suggests is that the Boko Haram insurgency and all other forms internal violence in Nigeria may not be tackled through legislative means at the expense of good governance anchored on effective political structure. The argument is that Boko Haram is susceptible to management, and a united Nigerian nation state of heterogeneous disposition could be sustained if an atmosphere of social justice is allowed to thrive by the managers of state power. As Finnis (1996:23) has rightly observed, justice removes obstacles to peace. Therefore, if the political helmsmen could create an enabling atmosphere for social justice by committing available natural and human resources towards the enhancement of the quality of life of the citizenry, peace would be sustained within the body polity. It is pertinent, therefore, to say that beyond the immediate problem of containing the onslaughts of Boko Haram, there are sufficient grounds to believe that a bigger challenge confronting the body polity is to address headlong the lingering questions over the political future of the country. In other words, the most promising approach to fighting Boko Haram insurgency and any other insurgencies in the country is by addressing the injustices inherent in the management and administration of our political system.

3.3. Dialogue and Amnesty

Various stakeholders have at one time or the other suggested dialogue as a workable, non-violent strategy for stemming the tide of Boko Haram menace in the country. For instance, Senate President, David Mark, has on several occasions officially declared that government is ready to negotiate with the group the same way it dialogued with the Niger Delta militants (The Punch, August 2012). However, while the Niger Delta militant groups took up arms over perceived economic deprivation, social injustice, political marginalisation and environmental degradation, the demands of the Boko Haram sect are not relatively and practically negotiable with such a democratic and pluralist society as Nigeria. Moreover, unlike the Niger Delta militias whose identity is not hidden, the Boko Haram sect is faceless and operates under an undisclosed political, ethnic or religious identity. What is more, the adoption of dialogue for resolving sectarian terrorist insurgency has not yielded the desired result in some African countries where it has been employed. For instance, the Algerian government made a failed attempt to tackle, through dialogue and amnesty, the insurgency of Al-Qaeda Organisation in the Islamic Maghreb, (AQIM), known in the local parlance of the country as “Sahafist Group for Preaching and Combat”. In dealing with AQIM, the dominant Islamic militia organisation in Algeria since 1998, government adopted a carrot and stick strategy through amnesty and employment of legitimate force. Nevertheless, the high intensity of the activities of the sect since 2009 was an indication that the amnesty approach had failed. Hence, amnesty strategy may be counter-productive in Nigeria unless there is dispassionate and sincere political commitment to the management of the “ignored conflicts” troubling Nigeria’s integration since independence. This ‘sincere political commitment’ cannot however be said to be available or possible on the present national socio-political space because of the observable mistrust among the governed and their leaders.

4. The Imperatives of Culture of Peace

There is no universal definition of peace, although peace has been accepted to mean the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence. But this conception has been criticized by many scholars for being inadequate for understanding the meaning and nature of peace. So, two dimensions of peace that can help in clarifying the concept have been distinguished. The first is negative peace which is the absence of direct violence, war, fear and conflict at individual, national, regional and international levels; and positive peace which describes the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice and inner peace at individual level. A more useful conceptualisation of peace must therefore see beyond the narrow conception of absence of war, fear, anxiety, suffering and violence (Okpaga, Ugwu & Eme 2012: 5).

The concept of a Culture of Peace arose at the end of the Cold War. The United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, UNESCO, had engaged in a series of activity to promote a Culture of Peace from its beginnings, when it was founded in the aftermath of the Second World War, to construct the defences of peace in the minds of men and women. The concept of a Culture of Peace was formulated by the International Congress on Peace in the Minds of Men that was held in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, in 1989. In its declaration, the Congress recommended UNESCO to “help construct a new vision of peace by developing a peace culture based on the universal values of respect for life, liberty, justice, solidarity, tolerance, human rights and equality between men and women.” (Igbuzor 2011:18).

Culture of peace has been defined in a number of different UN resolutions, but the preferred definition which combines the approaches taken by two important UN resolutions (the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace adopted in 1999; and the 1998 UN resolution on the culture of peace) see a culture of peace as “an integral approach to preventing violence and violent conflicts, and an alternative to the culture of war and violence based on education for peace, the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, respect for human rights, equality between women and men, democratic participation, tolerance, the free flow of information and disarmament” (UNESCO, 2012).

A culture of peace is:

- a culture of social interaction and sharing, based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, tolerance and solidarity,
- a culture that rejects violence, endeavours to prevent conflicts by tackling their roots and to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation,
- a culture which guarantees everyone the full exercise of all rights and the means to participate fully in the endogenous development of their society (Adams, 2005).

The UN 1999 Programme of Action for Culture of Peace identified eight programme areas for a culture of peace which are: Culture of Peace through Education; Sustainable Economic and Social Development; Respect for all Human Rights; Equality between Women and Men; Democratic Participation; Understanding, Tolerance and Solidarity; Participatory Communication and Free Flow of Information and Knowledge; and International Peace and Security (Adams, 2005; UNESCO 2012).

Based on these eight programmes of action, the features of both the culture of peace and the culture of war can be enumerated as follows (Rivera 2004: 12; Anwarul 2010: 4):

Culture of War and Violence

Belief in power that is based on force
Having an enemy
Authoritarian governance
Secrecy and propaganda
Armament
Exploitation of people
Exploitation of nature
Male domination

Culture of Peace and Non-Violence

Education for a culture of peace
Understanding, tolerance and solidarity
Democratic participation
Free flow of information
Disarmament
Human rights
Sustainable development
Equality of women and men

From the above, one could suggest boldly that it is imperative that culture of peace be seen as the essence of a “new humanity, a new global civilization based on inner oneness and outer diversity” (Anwarul 2010: 3). Because the flourishing of a culture of peace will generate the mindset in us that is a prerequisite for the transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace; it will provide the foundation for a stable, progressive, and prosperous world for all.

A culture of peace, which many considered as an utopia, will be able to engender the above visions because its aim, from conception, was to transform values, attitudes and behaviours within each individual, leading to a culture shaped by peace, rather than by war and violence. A culture of peace is, therefore, one in which the definition of security will have changed from just national security to include human security. We will have redefined the value system from power as a reference point (combined with a “poverty of vision”) to community as a reference point, with the well-being of all citizens coming before the self-interest of the few. The concept of community will have expanded beyond people to include: animals, fish, birds, plants, air, water, earth and wind, all seen as interconnected, interdependent, cooperative and mutually supportive.

A culture of peace therefore represents an everyday attitude of non-violence, and fierce determination to defend human rights and human dignity, the absence of which affects national security. If promoted, peace will be a permanent feature of all social institutions, especially schools, the economy, and the political scene. The media, sports and relationships will all be premised on peace. Hope, persistence, solidarity, inclusiveness and morality will be the norm. Principles of tolerance, open mindedness, sustainability, participation and democracy are paramount. Responsibility and accountability, the sharing and free flow of information and notions of empowerment and emancipation are central tenets of a culture of peace (McGregor 2005, 2).

5. Conclusion

From our discussions thus far, it should be clearly deducible that despite the undesirable insecurity woes that has betide the entity called Nigeria, there is a way out: Institutionalization of a Culture of peace. The beauty of popularizing the culture of peace lies essentially in its ability to engender unity, which is imperative for internal security. In addition to this, it will also give a sense of purpose and a vivid picture of holistic development, all of which are vital in our quest for a secured Nigeria.

There are many ways to popularize a culture of peace within and outside of the classroom. In the classroom, the ideals of culture of peace should be included in the Citizenship Education curriculum for the primary schools. At the junior secondary level, the Social Studies curriculum can be developed further to incorporate the ideals. At the colleges of education and polytechnics level, the Citizenship Education curriculum can also be developed or enlarged to incorporate the tenets of culture of peace. At the university education level, efforts must be made to promote Peace Education as a General Studies (Compulsory) course. Outside of the classroom, the National Orientation Agency should be mandated to develop activities that will engage and educate the leaders and the led (the civil populace) on the ideals of a culture of peace. If and when these are done, then we can expect to effectively overcome such disgruntled elements as the Boko Haram group since the allegiance of Nigerians will be totally to the nation-state and not to any group, ethnic or nations, within the nation-state. The bottom-line is simply that without entrenching a culture of peace, or commencing the process of entrenching the tenets or the ideals of culture of peace, it would not only be impossible to solve the Boko Haram conundrum but our hope of a secured Nigeria would be merely a fantasyland ambition.

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