

Nigeria: The Bolstering of Boko Haram versus the State's Response

Charles NYUYKONGE and Osai OJIGHO

Abstract. *As asymmetric warfare perpetuates in Nigeria, the resultant loss of life and destruction of public and private infrastructure attributed to Boko Haram has put Nigeria in the international spotlight. Although international support is being deployed to bolster Nigeria's efforts to repress Boko Haram's insurgency, mostly in the Northern part, attacks in other cities in Central Nigeria compel the need for more in-depth analyses to understand what fuels Boko Haram's growth, and determine the best approach to ensure Nigerians' safety in curbing the insurgency. This paper is premised on the assumption that factors sustaining Boko Haram have yet to be fully understood by policymakers and until that is done, restoring order in Northern Nigeria will remain elusive. The paper further argues that should Boko Haram be responsible for all attacks outside of their key areas in core North of Nigeria then their capability to destabilize Nigeria is yet to be contained. Lastly, that these attacks are, possibly, the emergence of unknown insurgent groups capitalizing on the fragile security situation to showcase the weaknesses of the Nigerian security forces and government as a whole. What needs to be done by the government is in part what this paper posits in its recommendations.*

Keywords: *Boko Haram, Nigeria, insurgency, security.*

Emergence and bolstering of Boko Haram

With much critical ink being spilt on civilian-targeted attacks in Nigeria and little or nothing on the genesis, evolution and multiple factions within the extremist *Jama'atu Ahlus Sunnah lidda'awati wal Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) known by its Hausa name "Boko Haram", it is impor-

Charles NYUYKONGE
Senior Researcher, Knowledge
Production Department, ACCORD,
Mount Edgecombe, South Africa

Osai OJIGHO
Deputy Executive Director,
Alliances for Africa (AfA), Ikeja,
Lagos State, Nigeria
E-mail: osai_o@yahoo.com

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tant to situate the strength of Boko Haram to its origins and events which have fuelled its growth over the years. Mohammed Yusuf founded Boko Haram in 2002 against the alleged belief that a campaign of 'ethnic cleansing' was being waged by the then Plateau State governor, Jonah Jang, against the Hausa and Fulani people in the state (Walker, 2012). Muhammed Yusuf's (mis)perception that politics in northern Nigeria is a corrupt enterprise administered by false Muslims, spurred in him the desire to proselytize and reunite the greater Islamic Sahelian Kingdom, which includes parts of Niger, Mali, Chad and northern Cameroon. This became the signpost of the pre-2009 Boko Haram.

There had been other crisis prior to Boko Haram arising from societal dissent with ethnic, religious and/or discriminatory undercurrents in parts of the country. For instance, Kaduna and Jos-Plateau experienced violence that divided communities along Muslim and Christian lines or the more draconian 'indigene' and 'settler' classifications to differentiate original inhabitants from later settlers that determine access to social, economic resources discriminately (Oyeniyi, 2011). Thus, the government's initial dismissal of Boko Haram as an insignificant splinter has had costly implications. The deeply entrenched religious separatist movement which the federal government missed offers to negotiate is now struggling to contain. However, it is safe to say, the configuration of Boko Haram has changed post-2009. Pre-2009 was an era marked by very few violent targeted attacks and exclusively focused upon state institutions as against civilian hotspots as is the case today.

From 2009, Boko Haram metamorphosed into an enemy of the state. Its fights with the government led to the death of Mohammed Yusuf in controversial circumstances while in police custody and over 800 Boko Haram supporters. Symbolically, a mosque (Markaz Ibn Taimiyyah Mosque) that Mohammed Yusuf had built in 2002 and served as Boko Haram's headquarters was also burnt down during the offensive by government forces in July 2009. These events created a factional break within the movement. One faction became more closely interlinked with Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) whose radical *modus operandi* ideologies and practices recommended the use of all means necessary to Islamize Nigeria.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the media and other non-state actors equally did very little to raise awareness about the threat of Boko Haram from its inception. This can be due to the 'religious' character of Boko Haram, which disguised its risk. By standing by as Boko Haram tactics and configuration transformed from non-violence to destruction of state symbols and now systematic killing of civilians in hotspots, the CSO and media response has been reactionary (Muhammad, 2014). *#BringBackOurGirls*, a CSO-led campaign, is one of such initiatives that began after the worsening of the security landscape and, in particular, triggered by the shocking abduction of school girls while they slept. Indeed, the initial proponents against Boko Haram were Imams (i.e. Muslim clerics) who expelled Boko Haram's late leader Mohammed Yusuf from their mosques

in 2002 and those Imams, who were assassinated for speaking out against Boko Haram. And as government repression became even more virulent, Amnesty International's finger pointing at the Nigerian government for the summary execution of about 950 Boko Haram militants and/or their sympathizers in 2013 further bolstered the support of Boko Haram by some Muslims in Northern Nigeria and in neighboring countries. The Nigerian government's ability to protect civilians has suffered great castration in the face of several successful attacks on churches, schools and police stations (Lobel, 2012). Furthermore, it should be noted that the Nigerian government's resort not to bring its war criminals to justice or guarantee a free and fair hearing for them is abating sympathy for Boko Haram, particularly in the North, where the fear of the merciless wrath of Boko Haram has coerced some into submitting to sharia. Amnesty International reported deaths including amongst others the death of Mohamed Yusuf in 2009 while in Police custody and depicts flaws in the Nigerian justice system and its inability to dispense with offenders of international humanitarian law in line with the Geneva Conventions and other standing international protocols.

The universal demonization of Boko Haram, following its April 14, 2014, abduction of nearly 300 girls in their school in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, culminated in the elevation of the group to being officially named as a Terrorist Organization under sanctions by the United Nations Security Council (Rogin, 2014). This means that in principle, Boko Haram or its representatives can no longer participate in any mediated settlements or dialogues intended to resolve the stand-off between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government or/and with the latter's international partners. Evidence of the fact that non-involvement in dialogue from the onset of the creation of Boko Haram to the failed military response of the Nigerian government is not the right solution to Boko Haram is being felt daily. Perhaps, it should be acknowledged that hesitant attempts to dialogue with Boko Haram by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, came a little too late after the former's fractionalization accentuated by the death of some of its members and the government's divisiveness which broke its epicenter. This staged some of its dissidents against each other in a squabble on whether to negotiate with the government which had desecrated Islamic principles maimed some of theirs and arbitrarily killed others (Alli, 2011).

Such attempts at brokering a peace accord or negotiate a ceasefire of some sorts with Boko Haram by the government, with the leadership of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, were not successful and in at least one case led to the killing of a man alleged to be an uncle to Mohammed Yusuf by suspected members of the Boko Haram sect. In recent times, there have been discussions of amnesty programs, but the major problem is the invisibility of Boko Haram and existing splinter groups or cells giving conflicting information about their willingness to dialogue and in many cases refusing to negotiate with a non-Muslim government. For instance, despite international atten-

tion and civil society action with the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign, more attacks in rapid succession have occurred in the country and suicide bombings have increased exponentially in other places outside of their main zones. One of these zones was Jos, Plateau State, where Agence France-Presse reported that 2 bombs exploded concurrently in the busy central district killing an estimated 148 people (cited in *The New Age*, 2014). Another was Nyanya, a suburb in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal capital territory which became the target of two attacks on two different dates in the same crowded bus terminal (Onuoha, 2014). This shows that the 2014 demeanor of Boko Haram belittles the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign in the same way that its successes underrate the efficacy of the government's or international response.

The *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign is arguably too-little-too-late to curb Boko Haram's attacks and is more designed to put pressure on the Nigerian government to expand its response to the violence and insecurity, especially as it affects women and girls rather than to illicit any change from Boko Haram. And if any window of opportunity was lost by the government of Nigeria, it was between 2009 and 2012 when it should have rooted out the insurgency. On 1 January 2012, it declared a state of emergency in the three northern states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, but failed to use that as an opportunity to inspire civilians and garner support against the re-strategizing and weakened and divided Boko Haram. It seems the government slept on its laurels and today suffers the effects of such a missed opportunity which would have been used to foster inclusive national dialogue or pursue a negotiated settlement with Boko Haram factions desiring the same.

Today, football, which before now united Nigerians especially when its national team (the Super Eagles) played in continental or world stage, is the bedrock of renewed attacks. Gathering to watch football matches in public places, in spite of the risks and threats of Boko Haram, cannot but be read as intrepid patriotism or addiction for the love of the sport. It is more likely today that damages ensuing from a bomb blast linked to Boko Haram would be reported at a public viewing site than it was in 2009. When a bomb went off in Jos at a viewing center during the finals of the European Champions League match between Real Madrid and Atletico on May 24, 2014 (City Press, 2014), it was a sign that other attacks would come. While bomb attacks occurred in Mubi, Adamawa on June 1st (Ola & Ande, 2014), and in Damaturu, Yobe (Hemba, 2014), the government decided to declare states of emergency, the risk of heightened attacks led to many state governments banning commercial viewing centers during the period of the FIFA World Cup in Brazil in June/July 2014. This led to reduced patronage of viewing sites, thereby reducing potential attacks.

As the international pressure builds on the federal government to strengthen its intelligence and find a lasting solution to the insurgency, the focus shifted to what the government is, in fact, doing to prevent more attacks and find the perpetrators. The

insecurity faced in the North, particularly the North-eastern part, means more attacks are less recorded and are beginning to be normalized as a feature of the crisis.

On June 8, 2014, Nigeria reported its first female suicide bomber who was intercepted on her way to a military barracks in Gombe but detonated the bomb at the checkpoint, killing herself and a soldier (Laccino, 2014). Four successive bombings took place in Kano State, between 27 and 30 July 2014 involving teenage female suicide bombers. While relatively small casualties have been recorded in these attacks, it showed a new strategy of Boko Haram to escape suspicion and detection of intending attacks since women in Northern Nigeria are likely to be dressed in full hijab and women have been perceived as victims rather than perpetrators. Then a 10-year old girl was found with a bomb vest strapped with explosives in Kano on 30 July 2014 (Pflanz, 2004) during a routine check, further raising alarms about Boko Haram's recruitment strategies. Boko Haram may be using female family members, including vulnerable girls married off early since child marriage is common in many Islamic communities in the North. It has also led to speculation that the female suicide bombers could be 'brainwashed' girls abducted by Boko Haram in Chibok, Borno State in April 2014 and who are still missing. Needless to say, the suicide bombings led to a ban on all public worship and celebrations marking the end of Ramadan fast, a notable feast in the Muslim calendar in Kano and some other states in the country, in an attempt to prevent more targeted attacks in crowded areas.

Concern for the abducted girls of April 14 and other women and girls that have been captured by Boko Haram in raids since the insurgency were heightened with the threat of Abubakar Sheu in a widely circulated video to sell and marry off the abducted girls. The United Nations human rights experts recognize that this exposes these women and girls to "sexual exploitation, forced marriage and sexual slavery" (OHCHR, 2014). Additionally, there is a risk that girls forcibly married off to Boko Haram members can be used for procreation, thereby creating the possibility of a future army of children dedicated to the insurgency cause. This is not to say that Boko Haram does not already have a breeding ground for potential recruits (CLEEN Foundation, 2014). It has capitalized on the situation of jobless youth and the *almajiri* in Northern Nigeria to have access to children and youth who join the group daily (Onuoha, 2014). The *almajiris* are children, mostly boys, who are sent by their families to learn the Quran under an Islamic scholar, but who beg on the street for alms. They are often hungry, destitute, unkempt and treated with disdain which makes them vulnerable to abuse. They are therefore susceptible to manipulation by those able and willing to meet their basic needs. As harmless as they may seem, many have become useful for gathering information for their 'masters'. The unequal and bureaucratic implementation of the federal government's policy on *Almajiri* education at the state level, aimed at building schools that integrated Qur'anic learning with modern teaching, means that few of the schools

have taken off with some states e.g. Zamfara having enrolled pupils and others yet to start enrollment (Awofeso, Ritchie & Degeling, 2003). Therefore, a majority of 9.5 million *almajiris* (Adetayo & Alechenu, 2014) in Nigeria are still left roaming the streets susceptible to radicalization and more exploitation.

Between 2009 and 2013, it was reported that at least 1,500 persons died in attacks linked to Boko Haram; the same number has already been reported by Human Rights Watch (2014) in the first quarter of 2014 alone, indicating more than anything that a rise in the intensity of the attacks and targets is to be expected. The only difference between the attacks pre-2013 and the post-2013 ones is the targets. While earlier attacks targeted religious building, such as churches, markets, state institutions' buildings e.g. police stations, the later attacks include schools, business complexes, bus stations and football matches viewing centers. Prior to the start of the FIFA World Cup in June 2014, there were bomb attacks or threats in viewing centers where football matches were to be shown live to the paying public.

It appears Boko Haram is changing and adapting its tactics, but there is also the possibility that 'copycat' groups are also using the current situation to push a political agenda. This is because, unlike in the past when Boko Haram took responsibility for attacks, there are many incidents that have occurred reported as 'likely Boko Haram attacks' to which the latter has neither confirmed nor denied its involvement. However, what is sure is that if the new and multiplied attacks are not Boko Haram's, the group would most definitely be celebrating that its attacks against the 'non-Islamic' governments are successfully multiplying. But if this is the case, who then is behind such attacks? And is the Nigerian government and international response systemically directed at Boko Haram effective or misdirected?

It is equally important to state that fewer efforts have been invested in investigating the global networks and means of communication used by Boko Haram to sustain itself. The flourishing trade in humans as bargaining chips has given credence not just to Boko Haram, but also to terrorist groups who believe hostage taking is a lucrative means of forcing states to negotiate and engage in trade-offs which are capable of sustaining them. As previously mentioned during the Mali insurgency, one faction of Boko Haram became more closely interlinked with Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) whose radical *modus operandi* ideologies and practices recommended the use of all means necessary to Islamize Nigeria. AQIM, being itself inspired by Al-Qaida principles, helped to share strategies being used by the parent body to wreck Somalia (through Al-Shabaab) and parts of the Middle East.

Thus indirectly, some states negotiation policies may fuel terrorism. Therefore, the fight against terrorism requires negotiation based on principles that do not equate humans in monetary terms as is being done through ransom payments. On April 26th, 2013, BBC

News reported that over two million British Pounds were paid to secure the release of a French family of seven. Such payments provide a viable potential for Boko Haram to conscript mercenaries to help spread their propaganda; and to the large pool of unemployed Northern Nigerian youths, employment by Boko Haram is better than the unemployment under the government whose presence is dwarfed by systematic sporadic attacks directed at parents who are resistant to the epistemology of Boko Haram.

The porous nature of Nigeria's and the Sahel region borders is a challenge which most states are unable to deal with. This has served as a safe haven to many rebellions on the continent. The vast land mass of either thick rainforests or scorching deserts in Eastern Congo and Northern Nigeria are examples of largely hazardous places where state control is absent. These vast lands serve as training bases for rebellions and it can be safely said that Boko Haram has been very active in the borders of Cameroon where neither the Cameroon nor the Nigerian forces have proper surveillance. This is evidenced by the many hostages taken from these borders and clearly impeaches not just Nigeria or Cameroon, or Niger or Chad whose borders are corridors for strengthening the firepower of Boko Haram, but African states in general for doing little to consolidate the inviolability of their sovereign borders.

The lack of an international common position on defining who is a terrorist or a rebel is the birthplace for vigilante groups which, eventually, attempt to replace the states in providing security for the community. In recent cases like South Sudan, Riek Machar was labeled by major news outlets as a rebel leader and a couple of weeks later, he signed a peace agreement with South Sudan's elected president, Salva Kiir (Al Jazeera, 2014). More so, in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), a group that employs terrorist tactics against the government, was recognized as the legitimate representative of the aspirations of the Darfuri people (Xinhua, in People's Daily Online, 2010). Such controversial demonization of figures and their subsequent recognition depicts some form of double standards. It could well be said that if Boko Haram had been engaged by the government of Nigeria from the onset, its demonization today would have been averted. The fact remains that in many cases when dissident groups are born, they are not seen for what they are. Their concerns are often undermined and thwarted as political conspiracies against a seating government. This breeds a response which cannot but be qualified as short-term and ill-conceived to avert the long-term implications of the rise of such groups on peace and security of the country, or parts thereof.

Overall, states must, out of necessity, be more responsive to dissident groups and employ dialogue before the transformation of dissident groups to rebellions and subsequently terrorist groups. In Africa today, and the world at large, many states experiencing economic pressures have seen more and more people call them to do more to guarantee economic and social rights through the provision of essential services, jobs and payment of decent wages. This paper contends that such contestations are likely to increase and

states need to find means and strategies to mitigate these issues otherwise rebellions and terrorist groups would outnumber contemporary obsolete methods being used to quell insurgents.

The efficacy of the Nigerian Government's response

The government's response has not matched the rising sophistication and strategic attacks by Boko Haram, whose post-2009 nature and scope has evolved from exclusively targeting state and international institutions to greater religious dimensions and emphasis on hurting both Muslim and Christian civilians, for example the Christmas 2010 church attacks, (The Guardian, 2014) suicide bombings in marketplaces, as well as indiscriminate 'drive-ways'. That Boko Haram attacks have proportionally increased in response to the 'heavy handed' military response by the Nigerian government, fundamentally beckons on a change of strategy. The government needs to acknowledge that, historically, the differential method of administration adopted by the Colonial government led to structural imbalanced developments between northern and southern Nigeria, with fundamentally different experiences of Nigerian citizenship. Northern marginalization, perpetuated by a system of 'oligarchy' rule by Northern leaders, which did little to correct the unequal standards of living between the leaders and ordinary people, formed the foundation of dissent and is linked in part to the motivation of the late Mohammed Yusuf to start Boko Haram – arguably, to establish a state that is responsive to the needs of its people under Islam. The tribal sentiment for a Northern presidency was flamed by the decision of President Goodluck Jonathan to run for elections in 2011 after completing the term of his successor President Yar'adua, who died while in office. The North's contention was that the ruling party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) had an unwritten policy on rotational presidency that ensured the leadership to alternate between Northern and Southern candidates. The arrangement worked when President Obasanjo, who was from the South, contested and won the 1999 elections and after two terms handed over to President Yar'adua from the North, who was nominated to be the party's presidential candidate for 2005. However, in 2010, this arrangement failed as President Goodluck Jonathan's presidential bid succeeded and he was elected President in 2011. It is worthy to mention also that the PDP-led government also had rotational leadership arrangement at all levels and that in 2011, when the Federal House of Representatives were selecting a Speaker, the PDP-led House failed to elect a speaker from The South-West where the position was zoned to, but instead elected Tambuwal who is from the North-West (Nwaneri, 2011).

The combination of these factors, historical, political and tribal, sprouted more visibly and gave rise to the current stalemate around how to dispense of the instability supposedly perpetrated by Boko Haram *notwithstanding suspicions that vigilante groups and political dissidents of the ruling elite have taken advantage of the security deterioration to craft for themselves a political space of operation.*

Secondly, it should not be forgotten that the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the faction that sought to receive compensation for the death of Mohammed Yusuf and followers in 2009 (Smith & Abubakar, 2012) was a strategic error on the part of the Nigerian government. This missed opportunity culminated a possible irrecoverable loss of an opportunity to neutralize, if not co-opt, a faction of Boko Haram. More critical is that, the post-2009-2013 era, the Nigerian government did not have an adequate response to counter the evolving nature and tactics of Boko Haram insurgency, as the movement began shifting the nature and severity of its targets from state institutions to civilian hotspots and religious safe havens. The state of emergency period saw no fundamental radical change in the approach of Federal Government, except for an increase in military repressiveness, which similarly led to civilian deaths and arguably inflamed further tensions of ordinary citizens in northern Nigeria against the federal government.

On 20 June 2014, The Presidential Fact Finding Committee, set up by the government of Nigeria on 2 May 2014 to investigate the Chibok girls' abduction of 14 April 2014, submitted its report to the President. While the report is yet to be made public on grounds of confidentiality and security concerns, the Committee's Chairperson, Brigadier General Ibrahim Sabo (rtd.), confirmed that of the 279 girls abducted, 57 girls escaped, while 219 girls are still missing. In April 2013, the government had also set up a Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North, that submitted its report in November 2013, with recommendations. This report has not also been released to the public.

There is no doubt that the Nigerian government has invested a lot in military intelligence and defense strategy to counter Boko Haram's incursions. The government and military commanders have boasted about arresting several followers of Boko Haram. This perhaps has been a strategic victory which hurts Boko Haram and, in turn, prompted the latter to request the release of some of their captured militants in exchange of the over 200 abducted girls. But how well this strategy is working in the face of widening insecurity across Nigeria where no state can claim to be safe from Boko Haram's systematic civilian attacks is a moot point. First, government critics argue that Nigeria spends less on its military defense than many other Sahel countries fighting terrorism and transitional criminal activity (Moran, 2014). Secondly, from 2009 until the State of Emergency in 2013, the Nigerian government's loss of an opportunity to engage in dialogue carved the way for indiscriminate warfare to counter Boko Haram by firing indiscriminately into suspected Boko Haram hideouts and killing many civilians with little to no accountability. Thirdly, during the year-long state of emergency, the government never developed a comprehensive top-down or bottom-up military strategy to counter Boko Haram, and only recently under the patronage of France did they formally engage neighboring countries on a regional strategy. The latter has been criticized by

African civil society organizations who argue that reflections on African peace and security are unjustifiable anywhere but in Africa. And so, President's Goodluck Jonathan's goodwill to facilitate a regional response was not well received and projected him as weak without external support.

The above has further been worsened by mixed-government signals which on the one hand are offering amnesty for Boko Haram members that put down their arms and, on the other hand, has said that it will not negotiate with terrorists. This has even further distanced those who would ordinarily contemplate a dialogue or truce, as there is no clarity on the steps government intends to take.

The continued armed offensive is also an option the government is exploring together with military and security intelligence from the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and France. But it is clear that the families of the girls would rather want the prisoners to be released and their children returned to them in the same way as the Nigerian populace is growing impatient with the government strategy which cannot prevent continued impromptu nationwide explosions.

Until now, Boko Haram was quick to claim responsibility for its attacks, but in the last couple of attacks, especially those occurring in states in the Central/Middle-belt region, it has not expressly done so. It may be argued that this is so because Boko Haram is now cornered and cannot freely communicate or upload videos on the internet. It may also be argued that Nigeria's insecure environment is incubating emerging insurgent groups which have capitalized on the Federal Government's exclusive focus on Boko Haram to demonstrate the weakness of the state and its inability to adequately protect civilians.

The government of Nigeria's decision to increase security checkpoints, cancel public events on key national dates such as Independence Day and to introduce metal detectors in public places, including churches and mosques, has had little impact on preventing these attacks. If at all, it has increased a heightened fear and intolerance among the public. This tense environment was also an early warning sign of the propensity for violence ahead of Nigeria's general elections in March 2015. The general sense of insecurity has led to more people resign to the fact that they would need to provide their own security and has also encouraged the growth of vigilante groups who can easily become oppressors rather than defenders of the people.

Therefore, the Nigerian government's response to the Boko Haram insurgency should be directed at:

1. Preventing further attacks from taking place through facilitating a national inclusive dialogue which seeks to suggest ways of collectively responding to the challenge that Boko Haram poses to the Northern States and Nigeria as a whole.
2. Recognizing the role the community has taken in policing its environment and that they can be a source of information to the Nigerian security operatives. The locals

know their forests and villages and with some training can act as guides in mixed missions to stop repeat insurgency attacks. Recent responses by some vigilante groups have shown that when the communities took up arms and fought the insurgents, repeat attacks and intimidation ceased.

3. Borders Policing and Monitoring in collaboration with neighboring countries. With the exception of Cameroon, all the other countries bordering Nigeria are in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region. The existing frameworks in ECOWAS can provide the platform for training and coordination of a border police or other mechanism that covers the region with a separate agreement for Cameroon on sharing of information, intelligence reports and capacity building of security personnel on strengthening the borders and effective monitoring of movement of arms and people.
4. Exploring the role of peace mediators selected from the communities most affected by Boko Haram as intermediaries between the State and Boko Haram in an effort to broker peace and national reconciliation.

Points to Ponder and Conclusion

Nigeria now finds itself in a dangerous place where every attack and every threat is linked to Boko Haram. There are allegations that splinter groups have emerged and capitalizing on Boko Haram by shielding their attacks and reigning in invisibility. During the political campaigns leading to the 2015 general elections, supporters of then President Goodluck shared messages that the 'president's enemies' are using the latest Boko Haram inspired violence to score cheap political points and make the country ungovernable. President Goodluck Jonathan has had to bear the brunt of inflamed elites in the North who see his emergence as President following the sudden death of President Yar'Adua in 2010 and his subsequent election in 2011 as a flagrant disregard for the PDP-led government's party policy on rotational presidency between the North and the South. As a southerner, proponents of rotational presidency argue that he had breached this arrangement by occupying a 'second' term belonging to a northerner i.e. following his decision to contest in the 2011 elections and winning his first term in office. The possibility of him running for a second term in 2015 had raised more alarm and dissent in the North. This perhaps led to some sympathy for Boko Haram in certain areas and in others an opportunity to discredit him and champion Northern candidates for the presidency. More worrisome, some had echoed the call that the country risks losing its 15-year run of uninterrupted civilian rule by the threat of a military uprising leading to a coup if the Boko Haram attacks do not end. The 2015 elections and the emergence of President Buhari has cleared these concerns. However, as Nigeria navigates the current crisis, the price to pay in stability is already higher than it would have cost if effective dialogue with Boko Haram and affected groups had taken place sometime earlier.

Lastly, the situation is alarming, to say the least, and while many people living in the North of Nigeria, especially the North-Eastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa have been most affected, the initial resignation of the people to their fate is slowly but surely being replaced by a brutal survival strategy with the emergence of vigilante groups since security forces have failed to save them. However, this does not seem a viable or sustainable defensive against the instability Boko Haram has caused not only in Nigeria but around its borders. This further exposes countries in the West African and the Sahel region to transnational crimes, including slavery, which the supposed leader of Boko Haram had also alluded to. We must not forget that this region is still fragile as a result of the Malian crisis and the ever present fear of growing influence of AQMI and other Al Qaeda-related groups in the Sahel. A strong and effective response to addressing Boko Haram in Nigeria would also contribute to resolving ongoing conflicts elsewhere in the continent, including Central African Republic, Mali and Darfur-South Sudan, where transnational crime such as human trafficking and drug trade are principal threats to long-term peace and stability.

Until the federal government and its security agencies are able to secure the territory and effectively demobilize Boko Haram and its cells, the rising number of deaths and wanton destruction of property will only lead to an, even more, dangerous path to war, anarchy and disintegration. This will serve no one and cause untold suffering and damage to a country whose stance in Africa provides stability and support.

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