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Chapter 14

Regional and National Government Efforts in Combating the Boko Haram Insurgency in Africa: Lessons from the Defeat of ISIS in the Middle East

By

Edun Abdulkareem Jimoh, PhD
Department of Political Science
University of Ilorin, Nigeria
edun.aj@unilorin.edu.ng
+2348030675617

Abstract

Boko Haram is an international terrorist organization that has continued to pose threats not only to Lake Chad region but the entire Sahel regions. This study therefore investigates the role of Political Leaders of Lake Chad Sahel regions in combating the Boko Haram insurgency with a view to bringing out the challenges and prospects of regional cooperation among the member nations, and juxtaposed with similar strategy adopted in the Middle East to technically defeat Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Literatures have emphasized the need for cooperation among the Sahel nations to combat the insurgency but none has been able to specifically identify major areas where such effort is required and how the Sahel regions can explore the Middle East strategy of defeating ISIS. This paper, combining both primary and secondary sources of data collection, examines the factors that have inhibited Regional effort to crush the terrorist group. Findings revealed that despite the demonstration of strong political will coupled with huge human and material resources committed in fighting the insurgency, the Region has not been able to adopt best strategies in her counter insurgency effort. Therefore, it is recommended among others, that successful decimation of this insurgency required multifaceted approach such as combining military and political approaches, aggressive developmental drive, greater and robust international synergy to tackle the menace of Boko Haram.

Keywords: Insurgency, Nigeria, Boko Haram, ISWAP, ISIS, Chad Region, Regional Cooperation

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Introduction

For almost a decade now, Governors in northeast Nigeria such as Adamawa, Yobe and most especially the Borno State Governors (Kashim Ibrahim 2011- 2019 and Zulum Umar Babagana 2019 – till date) have worn and been wearing depressing faces on their daily official activities. Traditionally, since 2009 when a reprisal attack by Boko Haram occurred which claimed over 800 lives mostly the sect members and their leader, Muhammed Yusuf, a returnee from self-exile in Saudi Arabia in 2005, presence of Boko Haram on international scene thus heralded and no news on national newspapers catches quick attention except Boko Haram attack. Insurgency and insecurity have been part and parcel of Nigerian citizens living in the northeast axis of the country and gradually spreading across other parts of the nation. *Agbiboal*, (2013) observes, in Nigeria today, any news daily without Boko Haram attack has not made any headline news, wide dispersion and increasing scale demonstrate the increasing vulnerability of the nation. Boko Haram insurgency started from a small group of Islamic sects, Jamaatu Ahlis Sunna Liddaawatiwal-Jihad, a jihadist group who distaste western civilization and ideologies. The group later accused the Federal Government of Nigeria of extra-judicial killing of its members and leaders. As a result, the group become a monster on Nigeria's drive to national cohesion, and metamorphosed into a dreaded terrorist organization which has strong ideological and logistic connections with the Islamic West African Province (ISWAP), and Al-Qaida in Islamic Magreb (AQIM).

Boko Haram is an international terrorist organization notorious for series of terrorist attack in the Sahel region and beyond. It is connected to the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIS), which is an internationally recognized terrorist group. Ona, (2020) alluded to this thus: 'the Nigerian government argued that the Boko Haram threat had mutated from the "rag tag Army of 2009 to highly sophisticated terrorists. Boko haram has defied, and technically overcome all military strategies put in place by successive Nigeria Government to combat the menace. Apart from the internal security apparatus championed by the Nigeria armed forces and hiring of South African mercenaries, multinational joint task forces, a military exercise jointly organized by Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Benin to combat the activities of the terrorist group, Boko Haram has remained a monster that has subdued all military efforts put in place to check mate its activities.

In another vein, the Sahel regions most especially the Lake Chad Basin part of West Africa which comprises of countries such as Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad, have continued to witness insurgencies or terrorist attacks. The entire Sahel region has been bedeviled and overwhelmed with complex socio- political emergency partly due to the 'rough' manner at which Qaddafi regime was toppled. Not only that, the leadership failure in virtually all the countries in the Sahel region has further made the region vulnerable to illegal arms dealings and free flow of terrorists in and out of the region. The aforementioned has not only made the region the hub nub of terrorist organizations but it has also become a fertile land for training of terrorist members and logistics acquisition by terrorist groups. Stephen (2014) contends:

That such inter-regional links and dependencies continue to be a factor in present crises is borne out by the fact that events associated with the Arab Spring in North

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Africa have had major spill over implications for West African countries like Mali. Numerous observers have commented that events stemming from the fall of the Qadaffi regime in Libya helped lead to the fall of Mali's democratically elected government in 2012

It is in this light, the paper interrogates the dynamics and activities of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria vis-à-vis the Sahel region connection with a view to proffer multilateral effort in combating the menace.

Dynamics of Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria

An act of intimidation, threats, and indiscriminate killings of innocent and unarmed citizens has become a daily occurrence not only in Nigeria but in the world at large. Terrorism is a worldwide phenomenon, although, there are variations on the targets, weapons, tactics, levels and strategies adopted by these terrorist organizations. Zealots was predominant in Israel, Hezbollah were in Lebanon, Tsarist in Russia and Basques in Spain. Gerald and Arnaud (2007), history records one of the first manifestations of organized terrorism in the Middle East in first-century Palestine. The Zealot sect was one of the very first groups to practice systematic terror. However, in the recent times, terrorists have hid on the guise of Islamic religious ideology and propaganda thus the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Al-Qaeda in the Middle East, the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIS), Islamic in West Africa Province (ISWAP), the Al Shabaab in the horn of Africa and Boko Haram in Nigeria.

Boko Haram of Nigeria which started as an Islamic sect that opposed the indoctrination of western education, rejection of secularism and democracy was an uproot of dysfunctional leadership system in the country which overtly promoted injustice, poverty and uneven distribution of state economic and political resources between the elites and the poor masses thus made the country and more especially, the northeast a breeding ground for insurgency and terrorism. Alexander, (2018) observes 'Nigeria's contentious politics, economic inequality, endemic corruption, and counter-productive conflict management strategies as part of the factors that contributed to Boko Haram's rise'. In the same vein, Stephen (2014) notes 'the near-failed state in Nigeria, along with the porous borders and un-policed spaces of the Saharan reaches of Mali and Niger, has become an environment conducive to radical Islam and terrorism'. The history of terrorism in the country dates back to the 1980's during the era of *Maitatsine*, headed by Mohammed Marwa, a controversial Islamic preacher. He seized the opportunity of socio-economic situation prevalent in the northwest of the country, and unleashed terror that claimed thousands of lives before he was eventually crushed and defeated through military fiat. Scholars averred that the Jihadist legend, Usmanu Dan Fodiyio originated Boko haram ideology with his Islamic propaganda of 16th century which Islamized the northern region of the country.

Cook, (2011) succinctly captures this:

The roots of Boko Haram lie in the Islamic history of northern Nigeria, in which for some 800 years powerful sultanates centred on the Hausa cities close to Kano and the sultanate of Borno (roughly the region of the states of Borno and Yobe together with parts of Chad) constituted high Muslim civilizations. These sultanates were challenged by the jihad of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio (that lasted from 1802-1812), who created a unified caliphate stretching across northern Nigeria into the neighbouring countries

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At the inception, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad, was busy with its dawah message, the propagation and teaching of Sunnah – that is, the preaching of content of Quran and hadith, and internally, it had collusion with fellow Islamic sects, the Salafis/ Izala group which was also based in Maiduguri and favored by the government against the group. Ona, (2020) notes: Since 2009, Nigeria has faced a determined and deadly Islamist fundamentalist insurgency. The Islamist group known as Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'AwatiWal Jihad, better known by its nickname “Boko Haram,” was founded in 1995 as a Sunni Salafist organization preaching Islam and providing services to the poor, widows and vagrant children (almajiris). However, due to internal contractions on ideology between the two groups in 2008 which culminated into the burning of Markahs Tijamiyyah mosque in Maiduguri by Izala sect and subsequent persecution of Ahlis Sunna group by the government, the remnants of the group metamorphosed into violent Islamic organization code named Boko Haram because of its resentment for the western political and social institutions. At this stage, the Boko haram was just a mere insurgent where protests though sometimes confrontations were employed as tactics of pressing for changes.

Kyari, (2014) opined:

The metamorphosis of Boko Haram from a dawahto an arms-bearing sect was part the making of security agencies, which approached the situation as one of 'law and order' and responded as such, with disastrous consequences. There was no attempt to perceive the issues raised by the movement in its broader multifaceted prism as political, social, and economic. The crisis in Borno State began over a contest for ownership of a place of worship with the Izala at Monguno in December 2008. Boko Haram members had been thrown out of Izala mosques as a result of a complete break with the Izala over the Izala's inability to dissuade Mohammed Yusuf from his firmly held convictions.

In a systematic and mechanical manner, Boko Haram moved from mere insurgency where public preaching and violent protests against the state and the institutions of the state characterized the order of the day to a hybrid phenomenon where kidnapping for recruitment or ransom, guerrilla warfare, suicide bombing destructions of both lives and properties, indiscriminate killings irrespective of religion or ethnic group have become instruments of waging war against the state. Alexander, (2018) further observes, after the failure of its poorly planned 2009 uprising and the extrajudicial execution of Muhammad Yusuf, the days of Boko Haram's public preaching were over. A new phase began. It was characterized first, by clandestine regrouping, and then by terrorism and guerrilla warfare. The aftermath of the group confrontation with the Nigeria security outfits in July 2009 begot new trends in the struggle to Islamize the nation thus the external dimension of the crisis.

Recruitment and training was not only carried out within the nation but also externalized with funding and logistic from external bodies. Stephen, (2014) further observes beginning in 2010; Boko Haram began to adopt new tactics, some of them seemingly borrowed from al-Qa'ida and new sets of targets, including international targets within Nigeria. While Boko Haram remains essentially a national insurgency directed at the Nigerian government, there is at least some evidence of increasing links between it and Algeria's AQIM and its related Malian offshoots. These links have taken the form of the exchange of messages, ideas, tactics, and apparently at least some sharing of personnel and use of training facilities. These dynamics brought about a terrorist organization that not only begin to attack military bases within and

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outside Nigeria but sacking and occupying Nigeria territorial spaces albeit, temporary, and this trend portrait a period of wartime ideology. Sequel to this, Boko Haram on August 9 2009 declared thus:

We have started a Jihad in Nigeria which no force on earth can stop. The aim is to Islamise Nigeria and ensures the rule of the majority Muslims in the country. We will teach Nigeria a lesson, a very bitter one.... From the Month of August, we shall carry out series of bombing in Southern and Northern Nigerian cities, beginning with Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu and Port Harcourt.... We shall make the country ungovernable, kill and eliminate irresponsible political leaders of all leanings, hunt and gun down those who oppose the rule of Sharia in Nigeria and ensure that the infidel does not go unpunished (Vanguard, cited in Alexander 2018)

This declaration followed series of highly coordinated and sophisticated attacks which were not limited to the northeast axis but extended to the entire country, most especially Abuja, Bauchi, Kano, Plateau, and Kaduna. The United Nations office was also not spared from the phase of Boko Haram terrorism. Ab initio, security personnel, politicians and Islamic clerics were target of Boko Haram operations, thereafter, the Boko Haram menace extended to the bombings of churches within the northeast zone. However, the post 2013 Boko Haram witnessed a trend in which the terrorist organization prosecuted their course with renewed vigor, strategy, well developed networks within and outside Sahel region and undaunting seal to confront and crush any ‘enemy’ standing in the way of achieving their goals of creating perpetual fears, destruction and killings.

To a large extent, Boko Haram has succeeded in weakening and frustrating the activities of the Nigerian Armed forces in combating the wave of terrorism not only in the northeast axis but also in the entire nation. Nigeria Chief of Army Staff, General Buratai in an interview with THISDAY newspaper, avers to this position ‘Boko Haram is everywhere in Nigeria, there is nowhere you will not find Boko Haram in Nigeria- even in Lagos here, there are Boko Haram (members)’. Nigeria’s capability in dealing with this trend of terrorism has diminished and it seems the country’s security apparatus has been overstressed and overwhelmed.

Presently, insecurity is not only created by Boko Haram terrorism but also other serious security issues such as banditry, Kidnapping, and farmers- herders conflict has embattled the security environment of the country. In combating this trend, the internal security mechanism and isolating action is not sufficing but broader, larger and overarching security architecture is needed to tackle not only the root of inflow of logistic resources to this organization but also to bring about a greater synergy on intelligent gathering most especially among the countries of the Sahel region that has been labeled ‘terrorist region’. David, (2014) avers:

To be successful, any counter terrorism program must be developed as a regional effort. The countries of the region are too interlinked and their borders too porous to design a policy in isolation. The long history of tit-for-tat support of opposition groups by one country against its neighbors complicates an effective counterterrorism strategy and underscores the need to end this practice.

Shehu Garba, Nigeria government spokesman in interview with emergency digest on 17th February, 2020 corroborates this position, ‘Our Armed Forces are doing an enormously good

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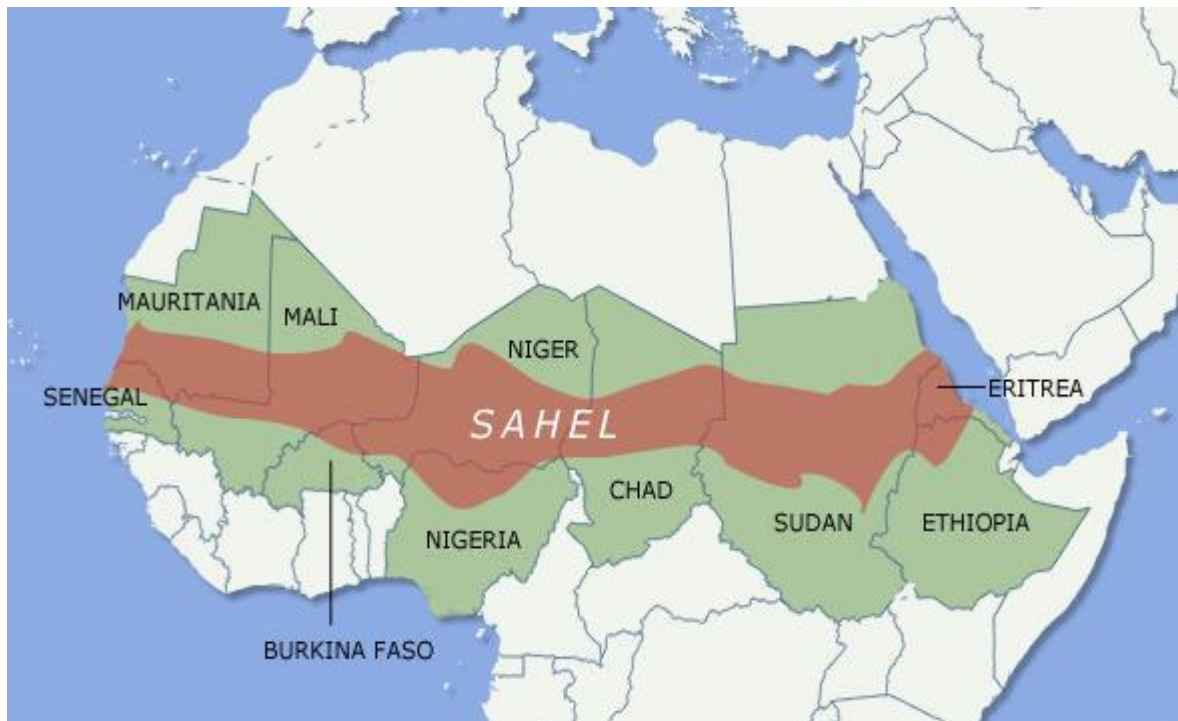
job, they are not sitting on their laurels but the challenges have mounted because of factors extraneous to the region.

Combating Wave of Terrorism Sahel Region: Lessons from ISIS Defeat

Sahel region is a mega-region, geographically defined and extended beyond North Africa and West Africa. It crosses the red sea to part of Yemen and Syria. It is defined by economic, political, religious, and geostrategic factors. It joins parts of the North and West Africa in ways that defy older models. The Sahara-Sahel zone bridges two major recognized regions, the Mediterranean world and sub-Saharan Africa. The similarities index among these countries of the region is very high. Economically, almost all of the countries occupied bottom lines using the parameters of economic development. Politically, these countries are bed of the same fellows with attendant political problems, such as leadership failure and lack of transparency in governance. In virtually every state of the region, more than 50% of the population is predominantly Muslims, with Hausa- Fulani and Arabs as dominant tribes. In a more concrete term, each of these countries is experiencing insurgency, terrorism or intermediate war. The region is labeled ‘anguish’ zone or ‘safe haven ‘of terrorism. Roberts, (2005) observes:

For geostrategic reasons, especially in an era of terror, Yemen belongs naturally to this greater Horn of Africa region, adding another 20 million people, virtually all Muslims. Although not necessarily cohesive physically, despite the unifying Rift Valley theme (from the Sudan and Djibouti south through Ethiopia and into Kenya), in the global battles for freedom and democracy and against terrorism these seven nation-states (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, the Sudan, and Yemen) astride the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean share a common enemy. They also roughly share a paucity of resources and unfulfilled desires for rapid economic advancement.

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Source: <https://www.bing.com/images/search>

Map of Sahel region, showing the interlinks among the countries in the region

The Sahel part of Africa includes from parts of northern Senegal, Southern Mauritania, central Mali, Northern Burkina Faso, the extreme south of Algeria, Niger, and the extreme north of Nigeria, parts of Cameroon and Central African Republic, central Chad, central and southern Sudan, and the extreme north of South Sudan, Eritrea, and the extreme North of Ethiopia. These countries were sharing common enemy – the terrorists who moved freely within and among these countries sometimes unhindered and continued to wreak havoc in these countries. For instance, the Boko Haram will recluse in Nigeria and continue to receive training in Algeria, Sudan, Chad for preparation for attack in Nigeria and elsewhere in the region. Boko Haram is a regional cancer therefore it must be treated as such for any meaning decapitation to take place.

In underscoring the importance of regional coalition in combating Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria, Ona (2020) contends:

The situ of the conflict was Nigeria. However, the ownership resided in four countries in the Lake Chad Basin – namely Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. So, the conflict was instantly regional and not national. Intelligence analysts apparently missed this important element of the conflict.

Therefore, to be successful in combating Boko Haram, counterterrorism program must be developed as a regional effort. The countries of the region are too interlinked and their borders are too porous to design a policy in isolation. Nigeria government is operating ‘artificial borders’ policy with porous borders bordering the entire nation. Nigeria has long, porous land borders

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with five volatile countries, several of whom harbor ongoing internal conflicts or— The Niger, Benin, Chad, Burkina Faso and Cameroon. Although there is nowhere in the world where terrorists have been defeated, peradventure, structurally and technically, terrorists might have been decimated. Al Qaida, Al Shahaab, AQIM, ISWAP and ISIS are still navigating in uneasy environment. African Union and ECOWAS have responded to the waves of terrorism in the continent and in particular, in the Sahel region through various declarations – the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and, Combating of Terrorism of 17th October 2001 and of 14 September 2002. These efforts notwithstanding, Nigeria’s counter terrorism exercise must be an all-encompassing strategy among the nations of Sahel region where political leaders of these countries will commit themselves in principle and in practice to the sharing of intelligent and resources in confronting a common enemy.

Ochoche, (2013) observes: counterterrorism generally implies a heavy reliance on the works of intelligence and counter- intelligence sectors. Its goals are always prevention, disruption and pre-emption of terrorist activities and networks. The successful incapacitation of both Al-Qaida and ISIS was as a result of collaboration among United States and allied nations. The fight against terrorism must go across borders because it tends to have inherent tendencies towards international connectional. Neutralizing those existing and potential pockets of Boko Haram demands concerted diplomatic, intelligence, and military initiatives. Nigeria’s efforts is not suffice counter Boko Haram terrorism and only cooperation among component states and security forces in the region, among available international security resources can substantially decimate Boko Haram and other terrorists organizations in the region.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is not disputable to assert that the Boko Haram menace has become a ‘monster’ in Nigeria but what is disputable is the continuous claim by the Nigerian government that Boko Haram has been defeated. Since the monster reared its ugly head on Nigerian soil in 2009, Boko Haram has continued to increase its attacks both on soft targets and hard targets. Thousands of both civilians and military lives have been lost and accompanied by inestimable loss of economic resources. No doubt, the Nigerian Government has invested huge amount of financial and human resources in combating the menace but it’s seems obvious that the ‘cancer’ is proving hard and complex for the government to manage unilaterally. Boko Haram has become an international terrorist organization with links within and outside the Sahel region. Thus, combating an international terrorist organization has never been a one-man show.

Drawing experience from ‘structural and technical’ defeat of both Al Qaida and ISIS where the United States of America formed alliances with both ‘enemies’ and friends to collaborate in the area of intelligence gathering and military attack on the terrorists’ bases. Nigeria is not alone on the terrorist invasion in the region; virtually every member of the region is either facing insurgence or terrorism, ranging from Al Shabaab in Ethiopia and Somalia, AQIM in Mali and Algeria to ISWAP in Nigeria, Chad and Niger.

Therefore, there is urgent need for the countries within and beyond the Sahel region to put their differences apart and form a formidable force in terms of intelligence sharing and broader joint military exercises to confront a common enemy. International community must as matter of responsibility, come to the rescue of Sahel region in every area the assignment required because a sleep over Sahel region troubles is a sleep over the consequences of their action on Europe and the rest of the world.

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Once Sahel region is subdued by the terrorists, Europe is also under great threat from the terrorists. Sahel region nightmare is a world nightmare therefore, there is need to move from being rhetoric to action mode. These terrorist organizations cannot be eliminated in so far as injustice, poverty, intolerance and leadership failure continue to ravage the Sahel region trajectory to development. While tackling the internal challenges mitigating the successful combat of terrorism within the Sahel region, there is also a vital need for the political leaders of these countries to consider the geopolitical location of their region, most especially as a mega-region which shares ‘ties’ with another safe haven of terrorists – Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

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