



BOKO HARAM AND TAKING A BET ON CONFRONTATION

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The first nucleus of Boko Haram was formed in 1995 in northern Nigeria as a religious and sensitization organization under the name of "Muslim Youth Organization" by a young man from Hausa called Malam Lawal. Several years later, the foregoing organization was formally re-established or rather revamped in January 2002 by Muhammad Yusuf, known as the Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad. It was based at the famous Ibn Taymiyyah Mosque in Maiduguri, capital of Borno State in northeastern Nigeria. However, the Movement physical presence began to take shape in 2004 after it moved to the state of Yobe on the border with Niger, where it began its armed operations. Ever since that time, the Movement has been nicknamed by the media BOKO HARAM.

The emergence of BOKO HARAM synchronized with the establishment of NIGERIAN MUSLIM YOUTH GROUP to organize an activist movement aimed at opposing the then increasingly growing orientation towards westernized secular education, claiming that it was responsible for the deteriorating situation across Nigeria. They draw on and cite the fact that all the leaders who held the administrative positions in the country are groomed to be a product of this type of schooling and education, and that those involved in cases of corruption, collusion, malpractice, malfeasance and fraud in the country of their various political, religious and tribal affiliations are all graduates of westernized secular schools. It also believes that crimes, thefts, bribes and criminal acts are exacerbated by the increasingly growing number of graduates of these schools and universities based on the westernized secular curricula. The Movement therefore called for action with full swing and through all means to prevent the spread of such westernized secular education and clamp down on any attempts to impose it otherwise on Muslim children. The Movement nicknamed itself the Taliban of Nigeria and chanted its slogan at the first organized appearance in 2002 to purposefully indicate a deeply ingrained moral communication, and that it is an extension of the radical religious ideas held by the Taliban Afghanistan.

Factual Background to Boko Haram Emergence

A set of motives led up to the emergence of this armed terrorist group, some of which relate to the situation prevailing in Nigeria, including but not limited to the following:

- The utter absence of an Islamic institution with a prestigious scientific reference that takes upon responsibility the formation of the scientific frameworks and cadres operating in the field of Islamic work efficiently and organizationally.
- The abject failure of the political Islam movement to offer a successful alternative to the problems of development after the religious factor came to prominence as an effective variable in the African political arena, especially the introduction of the application of Islamic Sharia to Nigeria, where – a decade after the adoption

of Islamic Sharia – several factions and groups of young Muslims in more than 12 northern states in Nigeria felt that it was simply a slogan taken as a lever for political, regional and personal gain, and there has been no dramatic positive change in many aspects and issues. Corruption, unemployment and poverty remain unsolved and are left rampant, if not increased. This development pushed some to consider finding another channel to empower Islamic rule through force and the use of weapons.

- The sectarian tension between Muslims because of the turbulent and strained relations that prevail in the African Islamic arena of the Sufi groups, on the one hand, and the Salafi scientific and jihadist groups, on the other hand; Nigeria has witnessed a bitter conflict between the parties that peaked up to fighting, aggression and the prohibition of eating sacrifices and inter-marriages as well as doing their Friday services and saying their daily congregational prayers with one another. The clashes between Sunnis and Shiites have also led to the assassination of symbols of power from both sides.
- The increasingly waning moderate official Islamic discourse or the utter absence thereof in subtle nuances and tones appropriate to the scenarios and attempts to undermine the currents of youth enthused with religion of official and foreign bodies, which generated extreme reactions to these institutions.
- The unstable and troubled political situation in the country, where the political arena is currently witnessing a state of turmoil and tension on the partisan, sectarian, tribal and other grounds, backgrounds, motives and reasons, making it such a fertile, favorable and conducive environment for the Group to grow and expand on the grounds of Islamic religious pretexts.
- Mismanagement of Nigeria's tribal, regional and ethnic pluralism, which has made it easier for leeches to exploit and employ in different circumstances and stages.
- The heated and frantic conflict between Muslims and Christians is another factor that is fueling vehemence and fervor of extremist elements of youth organizations toward armed violence. In this protracted conflict, Muslims in Africa's largest country, despite their population is greater in volume and intensity, suffer from a state of denial of education; Muslims in Africa have limited access to education, which is thus confined to Islamic culture and the Arabic language. The money of some Muslims is confiscated to purposefully enervate, weaken and paralyze them economically; this includes the destruction of mosques and the establishment of churches instead, claiming such practices are meant for urban and organizational purposes (redesigning and restructuring). More sadly, the Christian missionary activities are provided with maximum access to services, facilities, supplies and administrative support or otherwise expressed while total refusal and crackdown on Islamic charities, which Boko Haram found it a cogent justification for the practice of armed violence as a sacred religious duty.
- The glaringly poor economic and living conditions of the citizens, the state of crisis and frustration experienced by the people due to abject poverty and underdevelopment, and the wide gap between the classes, where one third of the population suffers from hunger. Nigeria's GDP per capita is only \$300. The World Bank reports estimate 80% of the population live on \$1 a day. That is, the number of the poor exceeds 100 million.

External Factors

In addition to the internal factors in Nigeria that led to the emergence of Boko Haram, external factors also contributed to the making of this group, including, the American and European expansion in African countries, based on the colonial external ambitions in their wealth and strategic position. In this regard, attempts were made to impose direct control over the region through the direct military presence of their bases on the territory of a number of African countries such as the United States Joint Military Command for Africa (known as AFRICOM), whose mandates and objectives include but not limited analyzing information and reports on the activity of Islamic fundamentalist groups in the African continent.

Ideology of Boko Haram

The ideological features of the Boko Haram are based on a number of assets and principles, the most important of which include: working towards the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria by armed force; calling for the immediate application of Islamic Sharia; prohibiting and forbidding work in the Government agencies and all security services, in addition to the prohibition of westernized education and manifestations of westernized culture, calling for the change of the existing system of public education in Nigeria into a system of education deeply imbued with the Arabic and Islamic culture. Boko Haram presents itself as a defender and prosecutor of Islam and Muslims, generating sympathy among simple-minded and naïve Muslim towards the Group.

African Extension of Boko Haram

Since inception, Boko Haram has been domestically oriented and managed. However, as events unfolded and followed and progress gained to prominence, it has become part of Al-Qaeda's international organization. Boko Haram Members have pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Countries and have joined the Sahara Emirate, which is a branch of Al-Qaeda's international organization operating in Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Libya, Mauritania and Chad. These areas have been nicknamed the "Great Desert of Islam." It is headed and led by Yahya Abu al-Hammam, Commander of Furqan Battalion.

Boko Haram has developed in the quality of its armed military operations following the coordination and training operations it received at the hands of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb Countries, which has been rendered favorable and conducive by the geographical nature of the areas where it is based: the arid and treeless desert makes it too difficult to be monitored, which facilitates the process of penetration and infiltration. In addition, the border is mostly open because of tribal overlap and ethnic extension that made it difficult to identify the number of Boko Haram militants in Nigeria, or the number of Al-Shabab Movement fighters in Somalia, as well as jihadist groups in Mali's Azawad Province, to which groups of some other organizations are flocking under the pretext of succor, rescue, support and salvation of those who share with them their thought and orientation. According to some reports, the elements of the three foregoing movements did not exceed 3,000 fighters before their emergence, and this number has surely doubled extremely. These elements joined together from Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, as well as elements from the five Arab Maghreb countries.

Government Response to Boko Haram

Official responses by the federal authorities in Nigeria to confront Boko Haram have not been sufficient as required from the outset; such government responses have relied solely on security treatment and military target operations against those elements and their sympathizers. With the passage of time, the Nigerian government realized the importance of adopting a holistic community-based approach, involving all parties from the official government agencies and grassroots and religious bodies and others, with a comprehensive national plan covering all intellectual, political, economic, military, intelligence aspects or otherwise expressed. The plan adopted the media response, which used the various media channels that communicated with and spoke to the conscience of the Nigerian citizens, whatever their philosophical and political beliefs are, calling for condemning, countering and combating terrorism, while exposing its scandalous methods, explicit, heinous and barbaric crimes, and arousing public discontent over terrorism and the sympathizers with it. In addition, there have been legal responses through legal legislation attempts to enact a special law that takes into account all types of terrorist operations and cooperates with various national bodies and entities to enforce such a law.

There is also a security intelligence response, as the Nigerian security service conducts numerous security operations against elements of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram. It works in tandem with international security and intelligence agencies to crack down on the Group's movements to neighboring countries in the immediate vicinity such as Chad, Niger and Cameroon. It also indicates a special cooperation with the US intelligence, the US government, and the AFRICOM Convention on Counter-Terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Perhaps the most prominent attempts made by the Nigerian authorities has been the adoption of the negotiating pathway or track as they responded to national calls to open another political pathway to counter the repercussions of terrorist groups by negotiating with the elements of these organizations in attempts to persuade them to abandon violence and the practice of terrorism. Indeed, a series of rounds of negotiations have been announced since 2010; some of which have yielded positive results through the retreat of some of its leaders from this violent path and terrorist behavior after a direct ideological dialogue with the intelligentsia, literati, scholars and educated and open-minded people. In the same vein, Islamic institutions have also undertaken a series of measures and arrangements to counter extremist thought through mosques, lectures and public lessons.

Bukhari's Response of Boko Haram's File

The Government response to counter the Boko Haram movement has seen some improvement and positive development of the counter-offensive by the Nigerian military, as well as the efforts of the multinational joint forces, as terrorist operations have declined compared to previous years, especially with President Mohammad Bukhari taking office since 2014. The Bukhari's Administration approach to the Boko Haram movement was serious and credible, and the military experience and closer investigation did help in this regard. For example, the Bukhari's Administration increased the number of soldiers; the number of troops assigned to counter-terrorism operations in the northeast of the country jumped from 3,000 in 2012 to 8,000 soldiers in 2013. Then, it reached 20,000 troops in 2014, and 20,000 in 2014, while 25,000 in 2015 and around 40,000 to 50,000 in 2017. Some successes were realized for the Nigerian army in its fight against the Group; the Nigerian army killed its members and destroyed the rebellion bases and disrupted its logistics networks, as well as the release of hostages.

The federal Government also entered into negotiation and paid ransoms for the release of 103 schoolgirls kidnapped from the Chibok School in 2017, and 104 other schoolgirls kidnapped from Dapchi School in 2018, and granted an amnesty for repentant Boko Haram elements. The Government's quest to negotiate with the rebels has drawn criticism, cynicism and skepticism.

Taking Bets on Confrontation

In spite of this qualitative decline in the extent of the terrorist operations of Boko Haram, the real bet for confronting extremism and radical ideas lies in the holistic approach and reliance on the basic formative approaches of the individual and identifying the revealing grounds and the real and telling reasons that feed this phenomenon.

While limiting the escalation of this phenomenon requires a holistic approach, the adoption of educational methods that allow the individual to be immunized against any extremist or violent thought, making him or her believe in dialogue, difference and tolerance, is a vital approach to countering this phenomenon. One of these stakes is to pay more attention to aspects of real investment in human development, especially in the north-east of the country, and address the most important problems and issues that formed the springboard for joining the extremist and violent movements, such as poverty, marginalization, isolation and other weaknesses exploited by ideological and other currents imbibed with extremism.

The confrontation process requires the authorities concerned, the Nigerian authorities and the security forces to put into action the principle of transparency, accountability and professionalism in the follow-up of their military operations, and to ensure the development of its capabilities in gathering intelligence information. In addition, Nigeria will increase the level of cooperation between Nigeria and neighboring countries in the immediate vicinity in the field of intelligence sharing, strengthening border controls, and continuously supporting the international community in such efforts.