

		
https://iphopen.org/index.php/ss		original article https://iphopen.org/ editor@iphopen.org
Online ISSN: 3050-8940		Print ISSN: 3050-9319

SECURITY AGENCIES RESPONSE TO THE BOKO HARAM UPRISING IN NIGERIA: PERCEPTION AND CHALLENGES

MORDAKAI SULE DANSONKA*

**Department of History and Diplomatic Studies Faculty of Humanities Federal University Wukari-Nigeria*

***Corresponding Author: Pallab Haldar**

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the security agencies responses to the July 2009 deadly outbreak of Boko Haram Islamic uprising in Maiduguri, Northeastern region of Nigeria. Objective is to interrogate the manner in which the security agencies handled the incidents. To achieve the objective, the paper delves into the origin, ideology and activities of the groups over the years in Maiduguri and its environs. The paper adopted historical descriptive approach in analyzing the issues involved. It reveals that the security agencies responses were timely and decisive however, the incidents following the arrest and the death of the leader and some of the financiers as well as some top members of the group beclouded any lucid assessment of professionalism of the security agencies. In another clime, such incidents could happened unnoticed and in a professional manner. The paper further argues that the escalation of the Boko Haram activities under a new leader Abubakar Shekau was not a revenge mission as claim but propelled by an ideology that upheld violent as the only means to attain objectives. It concludes that to correct any violent uprising, it is expedient to understand its underlying ideology.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Security Agencies, Uprising, Ideology and Government

DOI:-10.5281/zenodo.18323529

Manu script # 398

INTRODUCTION

Boko Haram phenomenon had been studied by scholars from divers' fields including Humanities and Social Sciences. It has also attracted the attention of organizations such as civil society, journalist, security experts, Developmental agencies among others and they have written books, communiqués, media reports, lectures and other engagements on the matter. Most of the extant literatures on Boko Haram focus on its origin, ideology, method of operation and others. (Kyari, 2014, Abdulkakeem, 2010, David Cook, 2011, James O, David, 2013) among other and this paper does not intend to upturn the views and the conclusions of the existing literatures.

The task in this paper is to provide a narrative that reflects the responses of the security agencies toward quelling the Boko Haram deadly uprising of July 2009. In the history of the activities of the Boko Haram, the attacks which took place in Maiduguri on from 26th July, 2009 and continued for six straight days were among the most deadly and significant because of role the security agencies played in handling the incidents. The objectives therefore are to analyze and answer the following questions. One, during the July 2009 uprising did the security agencies exhibit professionalism in handling the incident? Second, was the killing of Mohammed Yusuf the leader of the Boko Haram by the security agencies amount to extra judicial killing? Third, to what extent was the virulence that characterized the activities of Boko Haram a mission to avenge Mohammed Yusuf killing? The paper focuses on providing answers to these questions, however, it would be useful to begin the discourse with the brief origin of Boko Haram, and this shall afford us a clear view of the background events necessary for a broader understanding of the vents leading to the ugly incident of July 2009 that necessitated response by the security agencies.

Origin of Boko Haram

The discourse on the emergence of the movement which became known as Boko Haram is shrouded in controversies and this is because there are plethora views by scholars on the root of the movement. For instance according to Gwadabe (2014) the group has its root from the introduction of Izala Islamic sect in Nigeria. Williams W. Hansen (2016) on his part trace the root of the movement to the Maitatsine uprising in Kano in the 1980s. in another vein Ladan (2014) and Onuoha (2014) strongly associated the emergence of the movement to what was known as 'Sahaba' movement in 1995.

The controversy over the root of the group notwithstanding, the movement became noticeable in December 2003 when its members withdrew from Maiduguri the Boeno State capital to a rural area called Kanama in Yobe State to live a puritanical Muslim life in a secluded camp. Barely six Months afterward, they launched attacks on police stations and wreaking havoc in town in Borno and Yobe States (Ladan, 2014: Douglas ,2014). In fact, Douglas (2014) grouped the emergence of Boko Haram in three important phases. The first phase in the evolution of the sect was the Kanama phase mentioned above which he assigned the period 2003 – 2005 during which Boko Haram waged war on Nigerian State but were repelled. The second phase began with the collapse of the Kanama groups. this period was called the *Dawah* which members devoted for intensive proselytization, recruitment, indoctrination and radicalization. The phase involved extensive criticism of the secular system, debates and opposing *Ulama* (cleric) on the propriety or otherwise of Western education, westernization, democracy and secularism and criticism of the corruption and what they term bad governance under Governor Ali Modu Sherif (2003 - 2011) of Borno State, as well as the conspicuous opulence of the elite in the midst of poverty. While this was going on the residents of Maiduguri referred to the group as Boko Haram literally meaning Western education is forbidden. However, the group refers to itself as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (The Group of the People of Sunnah call and Jihad). Its characteristic during this period include laying low and spreading its message silently. However, this did not last long as in an attempt to propagate its religious ideals it collided with the security agencies of the state (March-Antoine, 2014). The third phase of the evolution of the Islamic movement was pegged on the event of 2009 which was met with serious repressive attacks from the security agencies resulted in the killing of the leader of the group Mohammed Yusuf in a controversial manner.

The killing of Mohammed Yusuf and others members of the Boko Haram was seen a catalyst for the escalation of the Boko Haram uprising in Nigeria (Ladan, 2014). While it is not the focus of this paper to dabble into that perception, however, for better understanding of the response of the security to the threat pose to the unity of the nation by the group which is the thesis of the paper, to afford us a clearer understanding a brief reconstruction of the activities of the Boko Haram that warrant the security response is important and necessary.

Chronology of Boko Haram Activities

As noted earlier, the emergence of Boko Haram uprising was in three phases namely the Kanaman phase when they assembled in a small village in Yobe State, waged war in some towns and were swiftly repelled by the security agencies. The second phase known as the *dawah* was a period of Massive recruitment of members in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States. During this phase the group established a base in Bauchi where its members

erected compound, constructed Mosque and built armoury in which they stockpiled arms and ammunitions. Soon, their heinous activities alerted the police who anticipated eminent attacks and planned how to cordon the armoury. On Saturday, 25th July, 2009 the police made the first move by arresting some members of the group suspecting them of planning to attack a police station. Other restive members of the group resolved to free their colleagues at all cost. On Sunday 26th July, 2009, around 4:00am seventy members of the Islamic sect attacked the Dutsen Tashi police station in Bauchi, killing several people and forty two others wounded.(Leadership Newspaper,29/7/2009). The police swiftly responded by cordoning the armoury, the sect fought hard to break through to access it but could not and in the process many of them were killed and hundreds were arrested. At the end of the skirmishes it was reported that thirty nine people died, one hundred and seventy nine were arrested (Vanguard, 31/7/2009).

Like whirl fire and as common with terrorism act, other members of Boko Haram launched attacks against the police in other cities of Northern Nigeria. In Kano State, the group attacked a police station in Wudil on Monday 27/7/2009 at about 3:30am, two police officers paid the supreme price including CSP Sagir Idris (Guardians, 27/7/2009). Still, on the same day about fifty members of Boko Haram burnt down the Divisional Police Headquarters and offices of the Federal Road Safety Commission, National Population Commission, Calvary Baptist Church and a number of Public buildings in Potiskum Yobe State. The attack left the resident of the town helter-skelter and resulted in the dead of four persons including two policemen and others wounded (Ladan, 2014). In Katsina State, Boko Haram raided the Divisional Police office in Danja, however, the police successfully repelled the attack. The planned attack in Yola, the Adamawa State capital was averted when the police arrested seventeen members of the sect (Daily Trust, 28/7/2009).

Maiduguri the capital of Borno State was the epicenter of the deadly attacks. In fact, the town was the hub of the operation of the sect movement in Nigeria and therefore, the fiercest of the attacks was carried out here. The attacks began on Sunday 26th July, 2009 as reported by Vanguard (4th September, 2009), Boko Haram burnt down Churches and police station in an attack which went on for days at a stretch without hindrance. According to Ladan (2014) Mobile Police College, Police Barracks and National Directorate of Employment office were attacked. Boko Haram claimed authority over the area they conquered and their flags were hoisted in the areas. Some part of Maiduguri town came under their control and they posted patrol teams in such places to maintain 'law and order' (Abdullahi, 2010).

After three days of the Boko Haram attacks unstopped and unchallenged, on Wednesday, 29th July, 2009, the soldiers under the command of Major General Saleh Maina the General Officer commanding the 3rd Armoured Division moved against the Boko Haram. The force consisted of six light armoured tanks, hundreds of armed soldiers, mobile police and regular police and they engaged the Boko Haram in a fierce battle in their quarters at Goni Damgari (Abdullahi, 2010). Many members of the Boko Haram were killed in the combat that ensued and their leader Mohammed Yusuf was arrested and taken to Giwa Military Barrack (Ladan, 2014).

In the history of Boko Haram, this particular incident was one of the most dreaded in which it was reported that about two hundred bodies were picked by the security personnel along the streets of Maiduguri. Generally, it has been estimated that more than seven hundred and eighty people lost their lives in the Boko Haram inferno including thirty senior police officers. According to the Red Cross as reported in the Nation Newspaper of 2nd August, 2009, the violence rendered one thousand two hundred and sixty four children orphans, three hundred and ninety two women widows and forty eight houses were destroyed in Borno State alone. It was indeed a devastating act against the State and threatened her survival. The ferocity which the sect operated with is best understood by the ideology that guides their operations.

Ideology of Boko Haram

The underlying issue in this section is to consider the ideology behind the activities or actions of Boko Haram which will help in understanding the motive behind their activities. Boko Haram pegged their belief on an Islamic philosophy on political authority propounded by Ibn Taymiyya known by scholars as Salafism because of his Salafi idea of Islam. An important tenet of Salafism is the purging of Islam of outside influence and to strive for a return to the Islam practiced by the pious ancestors and which they also believe can be achieved through violence. The salafist ideology is hinge on a belief in a return to the modest Islam of the period of the Prophets and the use of violence to achieve such change (Kyari, 2014).

It is this ideology that seems to motivate Boko Haram. It revolves around the concept of political authority in Islam. The ideology upheld the use of violence in the name of Islam. In a book "Good Muslim Bad Muslim" Mandani (2014) describes the terrorism in the name of Islam as political Islam (extremists) distinct from the mainstream Islam (moderates). In Nigeria Salafism was traced to the Izala Muslim sect, a virulently group based

in Kaduna and Jos that emerged from the post – colonial religious politics in the areas in the 1970s (Douglas, 2014).

Boko Haram beliefs in the restoration of pious Islam governance which is against the contemporary democracy practice in Nigeria which was considered anti Islam. They wanted a government run by Islamic cleric a sort of theocracy which is reflected in their name as translated to mean ‘people committed to the propagation of the Prophet teachings [Sunnah] and Jihad’. They believed in the teachings of the Prophet on governance which is against the principle of democracy. The philosophies they propagate upheld theocracy as against democracy practiced in most modern civilized nations including Nigeria. It was in the light of the above that Boko Haram opposed Nigerian government, constitution and western education. The appellation Boko Haram, literally translated to mean western education is forbidden was given to the sect for their dislike of western style education and civilization (Douglas, 2014).

Boko Haram envisaged the establishment of an Islamic society devoid of political corruption and other moral vices. The ideal behind Boko Haram represent a call to justice which to a large extent is not so radically different from the promise of the 19th century European socialism. Like Karl Marx’s dream of socialism, Boko Haram desire a return to an imagined pristine past, a past that has been perverted and diverted by decadent upper class, an appeal to the poor, the abused, the disposed to return to a previous glorious condition, a perfection characterized by the early Salafist Islam of Medinah (Hasen, 2016).

In fact, it should be emphasized that the Salafist ideal means the imposition of perceived system of justice in the society. To that, victims of oppressed system, the downtrodden and less privileged are to find solace in religion and turn to it for the betterment of their conditions. As lofty and fantastic the idea may be it is not far from the concept of class struggle in the society. It should be pointed out that the methods of the operation of Boko Haram are not at all different from the arguments used by nationalists in their drive for national self-determination during the 19th and 20th centuries. The violence introduced by the Boko Haram in order to achieve their objectives cannot be condoned by any nation state which is determined to be reckoned with in the committee of nations. Guided by the millenarian and fantastic thought of pristine society which can only be possible or achieved through the use of violence, the Boko Haram unleashed horrible insurrections against the Nigerian state and the responses by the security agencies were decisive.

Security Responses to the Boko Haram Uprising

As earlier mentioned above, the activities of Boko Haram became noticeable to the security agencies in 2003 while its members lived in a secluded camp near Kanama in Yobe State where their activities were suspected to be inimical to the society. The police sieged their camp and in the confrontation that ensued, about seventy members of Boko Haram were killed (Ladan, 2014). Those that survived the confrontation left Kanama for Maiduguri where they rejoined other members of the group. Following the incidence that disrupted them at Kanama, they tactically retreated and lay low and silently spread their ideals in Maiduguri and other towns of the Northern Eastern part of Nigeria. In fact, the group appeared as a fringe group because of the way they carried out their activities. It was at this period that a fiery Islamic scholar named Mohammed Yusuf assumed leadership of the group. He encouraged the group and they built a Mosque and quietly continued to expand the sect’s tentacle in other States in Northern Nigeria.

Not long afterward, the religious ideals Boko Haram desired to propagate set them on collision with the security agencies as their activities were considered a threat to the peace and unity of the country. Consequently, Mohammed Yusuf was arrested in Maiduguri on the 13th August, 2008, interrogated and handed over to the police in Abuja for prosecution. He was arraigned before a Chief Magistrate Court on 17th January, 2009 on the allegation that he was planning to attack the police, State Security Service and other security agencies. (Ladan, 2014). The charges brought against him were weighty capable of being regarded as treasonable felony, however he was released on bail on 20th January, 2009. Mohammed Yusuf afterward claimed he was maltreated by the police when he was in their custody and sworn to retaliate (Punch Newspaper, Thursday, 13/8.2009, Nation newspaper of 5th August, 2009, Ladan, 2014). He returned to Maiduguri and continued spreading the ideals of the Boko Haram.

Barely six months after he was released on bail about twenty one security reports on the imminent danger posed by Boko Haram under Mohammed Yusuf were forwarded to the Governor of Borno State. The copies of the reports were sent to the National Security adviser, Chief of Defence and Inspector General of the Police in their Headquarters offices in Abuja. According to Ladan (2014) citing Vanguard (2009) ‘No notable action was taken on any of the reports’. In several instances, the security agencies exhibited lackadaisical attitude toward

dangerous security threat. Their actions could be either in compliance or they were naïve in the discharge of the constitutional duties.

The nerviness of the security agencies was proved when Boko Haram attacked Maiduguri for days without hindrance and they hoisted their flags on conquered section of the town. It was when this happened that the various reports they ignored been real to them. The security agencies responded with force that match the threat requires for in internal insurgence. The force consisted of six light armoured tanks backed by hundreds of armed soldiers, mobile police and the fight was described by Ladan (2014) as fierce resulting in the death of many members of the group. The energy deployed in response to the outbreak of the uprising would have been avoided should the security agencies listen to wisdom and responded to early warning. In fact, the number of the death recorded would have been avoided too.

During the shot out with the security agencies, the leader of the group Mohammed Yusuf was arrested. The incidents following his arrest clearly showed the lack of professionalism on the part of the security agencies in handling sensitive issues that has to do with the image and security of the country. The first report by the police after his arrest was that he was killed in a shot out while trying to escape from police custody. The second report was that he tried to evade arrest and “died as a result of gun wounds he sustained when his followers engaged the police in a shout out.” The Nigerian Army reported that he was killed during a shot out with the police while trying to escape (Ladan, 2014, Punch, Wednesday, 5/8/2009). These reports by security agencies involved in the efforts to quell the uprising was counter by a military officer that participated the onslaught that led to the arrest of Mohammed Yusuf who informed the public via broadcast media that he was not killed during gun battle as claimed by designated spoke persons of the security agencies. The contradictory reports on the way and manner Mohammed Yusuf dead from authorized and unauthorized reporters by security agencies and personnel dent the efforts of the security agencies in handling the conflict.

In deed the security agencies’ response to the information was grossly inadequate. While the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) played the video type of Mohammed Yusuf when he was captured alive purportedly shared by an independent sympathizer of Boko Haram, the security agencies should have counter the report with convincing evidence to prove their claims. On this aspect the security agencies fall below expectation in their role as they exhibited lack of professionalism in the circumstances surrounding the death of Mohammed Yusuf. The failure of the security agencies exacerbated tension and sympathy to the Boko Haram even internationally.

The security agencies again responded albeit naively when Buji Fai a former Commissioner for Religious Matters in Borno State and father- law of Mohammed Yusuf and a staunch financier of Boko Haram was declared wanted by the Police for financing the activities of the group. In the morning of 30th July, 2009 when Mohammed Yusuf was arrested, he possibly out of fear submitted himself to the police. He was later reported to have been maltreated by the police finally his corpse was displayed to the public declaring that he was killed along with other fleeing Boko Haram members in an exchange of fire (Ladan, 2014). This report was immediately countered by Aljazeera news with video showing that he was killed by the police.

Yet another incident was that of Baba Fugu another alleged financier of Boko Haram arrested by the military and handed over to the police for prosecution. The police later declared him death along with other members of Boko Haram. However, an independent journalist that reported to Human Right Watch gave a report that contradicted the report given by the police. The report claim that Fugu was brought to the Police Headquarters where the Commissioner of Police ordered that he should be taken inside, but some of the mobile police officers refused and insisted he should be killed (Ladan, 2014). He concluded that the police maltreated him and later killed him. When the Human Right Watch relied on this information and brought out a report on the event surrounding the death of Baba Fugu, the police did not make any efforts explain further regarding the manner which Fugu met his death. This is not an attempt to justify the way and manner the police handled the incidents surrounding the death of Boko Haram leader and financiers, but it is saying that responses of the police in terms of information and professionalism in handling high profile security cases is one of the reason for the escalation and the tenacity the menace turn up.

Aftermath of the Security Agencies Responses

The responses of the security agencies that resulted in the death of the leader and some financiers of Boko Haram were construed as extra judicial killing. According to Ladan (2014) extra judicial killing does not mean the killing of armed combatants on the battlefield, but the murder of those captured and held in the custody of law enforcement agencies, whose duty is to prosecute them in a court of law for any offence they might have committed. Victims of extra judicial killing are murdered by, or with the consent of agents of state outside the

judicial process, without investigation or prosecution (Asad Jamal “Extra-Judicial Executions in Pakistan: Killing with impunity, “Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Lahore, Pakistan). Ladan unapologetically relied on unverified reports of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and without corroboration with other sources especially of the security agencies concluded that the responses of the security agencies amounted to extra judicial killings. He went further to state that the killings of Mohammed Yusuf and some financiers of Boko Haram was the factor for the outbreak and further escalation and the virulence that became part of the group; otherwise the violence the group exhibited would probably have been different (Ladan, 2014).

The point to stress is that the leader of Boko Haram Mohammed Yusuf was arrested at a period of gun confrontation with the security agencies and his death occurred when the battle was still on. It should be noted that after the arrest of Yusuf there were gun battle with the group which lasted six days straight.

The response of the security agencies attracted International condemnations especially Human Rights Watch. Perhaps, the strongest condemnation was from within Nigeria which was made by Abubakar Tsav a retired Commissioner of Police. In an open letter to the Inspector General of Police he described the incident of the death of Mohammed Yusuf and others in the hands of the police as unprofessional (Ladan, 2014). He queried the police for allowing the incidents to be recorded and noticed by independent person (Nations, 17/8/209). In fact, such incidents must have happened in several other areas unrecorded and unnoticed by independent person and in a professional manner.

Following these incidents, the surviving members of Boko Haram considered themselves victims of impunity unleashed on the citizens by the state. Their movement against the state was seen as a just course to get revenge over the killing of their leaders and members. Few years later after the death of Mohammed Yusuf, Boko Haram emerged under Abubakar Shekau more deadly and sophisticated claiming they were on a revenge mission. The policemen and their facilities were the major targets. The shot their target riding on motorcycle and graduated to using improvised explosive devices. The group increased in number to between five and six thousands persons.

Conclusion

In a simple and explicit manner, the aim of a terrorist is to undermine the political will, confidence and morale of liberal government and weakened the citizens so that they are made more vulnerable to political and social collapse (Paul Wilkinson, 1977, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, New York, Macmillan press). They make sure they muster sufficient force to discredit or bring down any government they dislike at all cost and to establish the kind of government suitable to them. Boko Haram guided by the Salafism ideology that advocated the restoration to the Islamic practice as practiced by pious adherers which could be achieved through violence change staged violence against the Nigerian state. Boko Haram inflicted severe social and economic damage on the society challenging the peaceful co-existence and unity of the country. The way the security agencies responded to the incidents of the outbreak of the Boko Haram uprising was unprofessional. In war situation people may die, but the incident, circumstances and the scenario should be handled professionally.

What this paper mainly argues is that the underlying factor for the escalation of the Boko Haram heinous activities is the ideological factor that propelled the group. The claim of a revenge mission was merely a smoke screen to win the sympathy of gullible public. Although the security agencies did not handle the incidents that led to the death of some prominent members of Boko Haram well, the ideology of Boko Haram guided their activities in Nigeria. The underlying assumption in this paper is that to correct any violent uprising, it is expedient to understand the ideology propelling the actions of the group. This is the modest achievement of this paper.

References

1. Abdullahi, M. (2010). *The Paradox of Boko Haram*, Moving Image Publishes
2. Asad Jamal, “Extra-Judicial Executions in Pakistan: Killing with Impunity,” Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Lahore, Pakistan
3. Daily Trust, 28/07/2009
4. Douglas, B. (2020). “The Origin and Spread of Boko Haram in Adamawa State” A paper presented at Post Graduate seminar series of Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
5. Guardian, 27/07/2009
6. Gwadabe, M.M. (2014). “Islam, Izala and Boko Haram Dispute in Northern Nigeria: A Historical Perspective” A Paper presented at Post-graduate Seminar series, Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

7. Hasen, W.W. (2016). "Poverty and Economic Deprivation Theory, Street Children, Quranic Schools/Almajirai and the Dispossessed as the Sources of Recruitment for Boko Haram and other Religious, Political and Criminal Groups in Northern Nigeria ", in *Perspective on Terrorism*, Vol.10, No.5
8. James, O.D. (2013). "The Root Cause of Terrorism: An Appraisal of Socio-Economic Determinants of Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria", Dissertation, Department of Politics, Philosophy and Economics, University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa
9. Kyari, M. (2014). "The Message and Methods of Boko Haram" in Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos (ed), *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, West African Politics and Society Series, Vol.2, African Studies Center and French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA), Ipskamp Duckers, Enscheda, Netherlands
10. Ladan, U. (2014). "Extra-Judicial Killings and Outbreak of the Second Boko Haram Islamic Uprising in Nigeria", Post-graduate seminar series, Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
11. Leadership Newspaper, 29/07/2009
12. Mandani, M. (2014). *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, Pantheon Books
13. Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos, (2014), "Boko Haram and Politics: From Insurgency to Terrorism", in Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos (ed), *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*,
14. Onuoha, F. (2014). "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria" in Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos (ed), *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, West African Politics and Society Series, Vol.2, African Studies Center and French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA), Ipskamp Duckers, Enscheda, Netherlands
15. Pius, I. (2016). "The Source and Method of Youth Recruitment into Boko Haram Terrorist Group: The North East Experience", Dissertation, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola
16. Punch, 13/08/2009
17. Umar, M.S. (201). "Education, Islamic Trends in Northern Nigeria: 1970s – 1990s" in *Africa Today*, Vol.48, No.2
18. Vanguard, 31/7/2009
19. Wilkinson, P. (1977). *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, Macmillan Press Ltd