
Population-Centric Counterinsurgency: The Conduit for Ending Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria's North

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ABSTRACT

This concept paper analyzed the existing counterinsurgency approaches of Nigeria government in combating an Islamist insurgent Boko Haram in Nigeria. Boko Haram violent armed uprising for the Islamization of Nigeria state in 2009 have cooled bloodily murdered thousands of people and displaced millions of others from their settlements. This has resulted in serious humanitarian situations. To combat the insurgency Nigeria government in collaboration and support of foreign government have adopted numerous counterinsurgency measures. However, despite the consistent counterinsurgency measures, prevailing evidence suggests that the insurgency is far away from being defeated. In contrast, the group sustained its violence attacks unabatedly. Therefore, this paper explored that the sustenance of Boko Haram insurgency in spite of the successive counterinsurgency measures eventuated from the adoption of enemy-centric approach in the combating activities. The paper revealed the repressive military action coupled with draconian laws and policies by the state created public dissension toward the counterinsurgency campaign, therefore, undermine the successes of the campaign. In conclusion, the paper recommends that to effectively tackle the Boko Haram insurgency, Nigeria government need to deviate from the enemy-centric approach and to the population-centric paradigm that should focus on addressing the socioeconomic factors fuelling the insurgent recruitment and support.

Introduction

Since 2009 Nigeria's security landscape was dampened by the violent uprising by an Islamic fundamentalist colloquially described as Boko Haram literally 'Western Education is Sacrilege.' The violent campaign of the group to overthrow the secular political system and replaced with an Islamic state that should be governed through strict compliance of the divine injunction of Qur'an and Hadith [the holy books of Islam] has caused unprecedented loss of lives and valuable resource.

Boko Haram was allegedly formed by Muhammad Yusuf, a Salafist scholar indoctrinated to the teaching of Ibn Taymiyyah (a radical Syrian theology). Arising from its portentous attacks, Boko Haram has carved a niche for itself as the most vicious and violent religious group ever witnessed by the country (Ike, 2018). This evidence is glaring with rapid escalations of the insurgency. Although, the uprising started in Maiduguri, a city of about 2 million populations, but witnessed an interrupted spreads into many cities and town of the Nigeria state including the administrative city of Abuja. Presently, there is growing evidence of the spreading of the insurgency in the countries of Cameroun, Chad and Niger republics bordering the Nigeria State. In fact, the frequented attacks, escalation and mass murder have led many to describe the Boko Haram as one of the most serious threats to the political existence of Nigeria, especially after the end of the country's civil war in 1970. Disturbingly, the escalation and murderous activities of the group was justified in spite of the concerted efforts taken by the Nigeria government, regional military bloc, and supports from foreign powers such as the United States and Britain. The counterinsurgency [COIN] campaign ranges from the application of hard military power and adoption of quasi-military actions of counterterrorism law and marshal laws. In either, however, the emphasis is accorded more on the use of the military force to combat the Boko Haram than the latter approach. Importantly, whereas accurate statistic is skewed, there one study shows there are over 100,000 members of the Nigeria armed force fighting the insurgent group in the north (Folade, 2016). However this figure may seem conservative, but signified the highest military engagement in civil conflict in the history of Nigeria's political existence. The use of these measures is much aggressive and was exploited by the insurgent earn the support of the aggrieved population thus influence its recruitment. One study cited by Ike (2018) shows 60% of ex-fighters of Boko Haram specifically emphasized revenge on the Nigerian military as a major reason that influences their decision to join Boko Haram. Interesting, the prioritization of military force in combating the Boko Haram was based on the assumption of the enemy-centric school of the COIN that equated insurgency to conventional war. According to the enemy-centric scholars, since insurgents are traitors that conspired to undermine the sovereignty of the state, the best approach of combating is to use repressive measures on the insurgent and intimidating the population supporting the group. Although to date, the enemy-centric approach has been the main priority of Nigeria government in combating the insurgency, this paper contends that it is culpable for the lackadaisical performance of the state in combating the insurgency. Besides instigating revenge base attacks on the state, the approach wanes the support of the public on the state and bolstered support for the insurgency. In retrospect, the paper hypothesized that the easiest way to combat the insurgency is for Nigeria government to adapt to the population-centric [P-COIN] paradigms that will be premised on the principles of winning the hearts and minds of the local population. The significance of the paper is to contribute to the literature due to the overconcentration of previous works on the analysis of the factors that induced the eruption of the insurgency in the north. It can also benefit the Nigeria government and other countries facing similar insurgency rebellion for future policy options. Therefore, in achieving its objective, the paper proceeds in five sections. Section one explained the methodological approach of the study, section two highlighted the background literature on the genesis of Boko Haram, section three explained the principles of P-COIN, section four analyzed the causes of Boko Haram, and section five is the conclusion and recommendations.

Methodology

This is a concept paper so the information used in the analysis were obtained largely from secondary sources including but not limited to journal articles, thesis, and other government publications. The reliability of the study is based on critical analysis, comparing of difference sources documents and evaluating with an observation recently conducted by the author in North-eastern Nigeria for an on-going research work.

The genesis of Boko Haram in Nigeria

Credible sources show Boko Haram was founded by Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, a young Salafist scholar in the ancient city of Maiduguri around the year 2000 (Gana, Samsu and Ismail, 2018). Yusuf was opportune with formal school, therefore, enrolled to informal almajiri school [a traditional Qur'anic school] in Maiduguri where he got indoctrinated to the teaching of radical Islamic clergy Ibn Taymiyyah [a controversial thirteen-century Syrian clergy]. Like Taymiyyah who emphasized the supremacy of the Quran and Hadith [the holy books of Islam] over formal laws of the state, Yusuf condemned the existence of the Nigeria state, its constitution and labeled all the population supporting and working for the sustenance of the government infidels. He also criticizes moderate Muslims particularly the Izala sect [a reformist Islamic group in West Africa] describing them as collaborators. Surfacing on the literal interpretation of the Islamic scriptures, the terror leader insisted that any alteration and or misinterpretation to the ideal script of the holy books are infidelity.

Consequently, as a march on for violence, Boko Haram rejected the idea of formal education such as the teachings of subjects like geography, philosophy, and law. Others are the rejection of the court system, voting in an election and demographic principles such as birth control. Out of all, Bello (2013) opined attending formal education is the venomous hatred of the group. Therefore, to overthrow the system and replace with an Islamic State, the group erupted into violence in 2009. Boko Haram quickly won the support of the local population. Significant in this are the bunch of unemployed youth some of which possess degrees in technical courses, yet unemployed.

Interestingly, sources show Boko Haram in the earlier years of their campaign was spontaneously nonviolent. Until in the mid of 2009, Boko Haram mainly based its campaign on the civil disobedience tactics; strategies of which comprise of a sit-in, and deliberate violation of driving rules in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno state. However, discomfited by the mass support and recruitment trend, state authorities in Borno adopted several restrictive measures to undermine the spread of the ideology and to curtail the prevalence of the disobedience behavior. However, the fact that most of the measures taken by the government are repressive such as the arrest of key leaders and the enactment of legislation for mandatory use of a crash helmet by motorcycle riders. In fact, the crash helmet appeared as the most hated action by the insurgent. Numerous sources indicated the adoption of the crash helmet policy that gingered the violent interest of the Boko Haram group (Aghedo, 2015; Weeraratne, 2015 and Agbiboa, 2014). Importantly, spectators have opined that if not because of the crash helmet act Boko Haram could have grown in another dimension.

Worrisomely, amidst the administrative tactics to curtail the menace of the Boko Haram, the group erupted into violence in July 2009. Although the uprising coordinated in cities of Maiduguri, Bauchi, Damaturu and Potiskum has been contained by massive military action in that left about 1000 people murdered, the group temporary withdraws for silence while resurged in 2001 more violently. To date, amidst claims by the authorities of technically defeating the insurgent, media rhetoric and scholarly accounts continuously show Boko Haram is likely appearing as an

interminable threat of the Nigeria state. What accounted for the successive failure of the COIN measures is a concern for Nigeria, and indeed have dragged numerous scholarly interest, this article contends that the failure was rooted from the emphasis on the military combat by the government.

MILITARY APPROACH OF COMBATING BOKO HARAM

Evidentially, since the eruption of Boko Haram insurgency, military force remained the main priority of the Nigeria government in combating the insurgency. Besides the massive deployment of armed securities to the northeast which some estimates indicated to have reached 100,000 (Folade, 2016), since 2014, there are also 8700 Multinational Joint Task Force [MNJTF] troops formed by the member states of Lake Chad Basin [Cameroun, Chad, Nigeria and Niger Republics] to support the Nigeria army in cross-border operation in combating the insurgency. In addition, to boost the military campaign, Nigeria raised her military expenditure to the tune of \$2 billion (Perouse De Montclos, 2014) representing about 40% of the total country's annual budget. Alongside the military operation, numerous repressive actions were taken to strengthen the military as well as ensure the control of the population. These quasi-military measures provide stringent punishment for fighters, sponsors and collaborators of the Boko Haram. It also allowed the security operative to arrest suspects and confiscate properties owned by the insurgent group or their collaborators.

Consequently, the military approach came with several repercussions. Besides instigating retribution attacks by the insurgent both on the security operatives and population, arbitrary actions of the armies characterized by widespread intimidations, maiming, illegal arrest, detention without trial and disappearance caused resentments by the local population, therefore, provides fertile ground for insurgent support and recruitment. Therefore, inform by the successive failure of the COIN approach, some scholars insist that to combat Boko Haram group, Nigeria government is to adapt to the principle of P-COIN that emphasize the support and control of local population as a conduit for defeating the insurgent Boko Haram.

The Principles of Population-Centric Counterinsurgency

In most respect, the population-centric scholar advocates for the nonviolent approach in the counterinsurgency campaign. The contributors in this perspective suggest that to ensure total control of the population, counterinsurgent can desist from the use of coercive action. This approach has much reflected the British counterinsurgencies around the world. This strategy is in fierce contrast to the enemy-centric school that advocates the importance of repressive action in ending an insurgency. The contributors of the enemy-centric school equated insurgency to conventional war. In a practical approach, the enemy-centric strategy reflected Russia's counterinsurgency approach as well as that of the United States before the adoption of the FM 2-34 in 2006.

Therefore, the principle of population-centric theory emulated the fish and river analogy prophesied by classical Chinese strategist of Sun Tzu. The expert in his analogy equated insurgent to a fish and the population to a river. He pointed that once the river is drained, the fish is forced to die naturally. It is in this context, Tzu argues that to ensure the easiest defeat of an insurgency, the counterinsurgent must focus on a strategy that may expedite the withdrawal of the support of the population on the insurgent. Since insurgency and counterinsurgency is a battle of legitimacy and control of the population, the process of obtaining the support of the population according to French military General David Galula in his book 'Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice' in 1964 is by addressing the causes of the insurgency from the population. This involves enhancing governance factors such as the provision of basic amenities and tacking socioeconomic

issues. Therefore, to most P-COIN scholars, to combat an insurgency, counterinsurgent can first understand the factors that cause and fuel the insurgency from the population. In this respect, this article contends that to combat the Boko Haram group, the government should address the factors that instigated and fuel the Boko Haram from the population.

The Cause of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

Since the eruption of the Boko Haram insurgency, the mass of the evolving literature ascribed socioeconomic factors of poverty, employment, and illiteracy as the influential factor for the eruption and sustenance of the group violence.

Poverty and Unemployment

Perhaps, the size of the population living in poverty in Nigeria is worrisome. The disturbing aspect is the geometric rate in which the menace is growing despite the palliative measures taken perennially by the government to address the situation. Since 1980, the figure keeps growing. For instance, where some estimates show 22% of the Nigerian is in poverty line in 1980, it has nearly doubled in 1985 to over 40%. It was followed by a sharp increase to 67% in 1996, and by the year 1999, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics scored the poverty trend at 70% (NBS, 2010). Disturbingly, since then, the statistics are kept growing.

Regarding the unemployment, Nigeria's unemployment rate in 2011 is estimated 35% of the population. This was up by 15% in 2008 (Olotu, Salami, and Akeremale, 2015). Whereas the degree of unemployment is generous, but some sources indicated people aged 18 to 45 years are the most affected population. In respect to regional distribution, poverty trend is at the highest level among the population of the North-east states devastated by the Boko Haram group. Indices revealed by National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] (2011) shows poverty rate in the North-east at about 71%, higher than the cumulative rate of 35% and 27% obtained in the South-South and South-West region respectively. More so, in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, where the Boko Haram originated, the population living in poverty is estimated at 83%, 53% and 82% respectively (NBS, 2011). This is the highest figure among the 36 states of Nigeria's federation.

High Rate of Illiteracy

Another obvious factor that fuelled the emergence of Boko Haram is the exonerating rate of illiteracy in Nigeria's north. The population of Nigeria's North-east devastated by the Boko Haram, in particular, is the most educationally backward among in Nigeria's federation. In addition to maintenance of the perennial record of high rate of illiteracy, compelling statistics shows the northeast states has the lowest number of children school enrolment. This poor school enrolment rate in the northeast was partly caused by trending poverty rate of the region which necessitated parents to patronized the informal *almajiri* school [a pre-colonial education where parents send their wards away from their settlement and allow the child to pen for his needs] leaving the formal education enrolment at the lowest rate. In addition to the poor enrolment crisis, there are also performance issues. Evidence by NBS (2011) shows that the three of the most affected states has the lowest record of student performance in University entry examination since 2006. Therefore, as a consequence the region has the lowest number of university graduates, thereby constraining them in accessing many formal works in civil service, police, military, and the banking sectors. The overall effect, therefore, put the region in disadvantage in accessing vital national projects.

Conclusion

This paper has revealed that there is a correlation between the socioeconomic factors of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy and the emergence of Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria. The paper confirmed to the assertion of the United Nations vicious poverty cycle that pointed poverty as a social vices knit people to all other forms of social vices including the vulnerable of civilians

to engage in violent extremist activities. Beyond the Boko Haram violence, studies have ascribed gracious poverty and staggering unemployment rate culpable for the recurring security crisis in Nigeria (Okafor, 2011). It is a general belief that violent conflicts are intensive in societies devastated by poverty. Reflecting on this scenario, Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher shows social strife is not conspiratorial, but it is incited by poverty and other distributive injustice. The simple reason according to the philosopher is that if the majority of the poor population have no prospect of cushioning their difficulties, they are bound to be restless thus resort to violence. Therefore, to effectively combat the Boko Haram insurgency, there is a need for Nigeria government to address these social vices from the population. This will be helpful in undermining the insurgent support, discouraging recruitments and encouraging defections from the insurgent group. This can be done by adopting far-reaching measures to address the socioeconomic problem. Presently, there is growing evidence that the insurgent group offers material incentives as an enticement for recruitment, to break this chains, strategies to alleviate the poverty trend is crucial to suppressed the support for insurgent and hinders it's its recruitments.

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