# COMBATING BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY THROUGH A SUPERIOR IDEOLOGY: THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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**Abstract:**

Much has been written about Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Most of these studies investigated the causes and consequences of Boko Haram insurgency without looking at the use of superior ideology in the combat of Boko Haram insurgency. The inadequacy of literature on the use of superior ideology in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency makes this paper imperative. Hence, the paper examined the combat of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria through a superior ideology. Despite the federal government's military style fire for fire approach in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency, the group is still carrying further attacks and are hailed as heroes by the same people the government is fighting to protect. In view of the above observation, the study recommends the need for a serious sensitization of mind and re-orientation of community members about the danger of Boko Haram activities and the need for them to actively join in the fight against terrorism. Also, there is need to strengthen and enthrone good governance in Nigeria since Boko Haram members cut across people who were frustrated due to poverty, economic inequality and depravation caused by bad governance.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, insurgency, indiscriminate violence, superior ideology, terrorism, unemployment

## 1. Introduction

In the life of every society across the globe, one terrorist episode or a series of terrorist episodes shock the social system and brings to the fore long festering sores that need

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resolution. Boko Haram insurgency is one of the terrorist episodes that is shocking the foundational peace of Nigeria. Indeed, Nigeria has played host to the scoured of Boko Haram insurgency in recent years. In the words of Popoola (2012), Boko Haram is a militant Islamic sect based in Northern Nigeria. Otherwise known as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, this means "*people committed to the propagation of the Prophet Mohammed's teachings and jihad*". The group was formed around 2002.

Nwanze (2014) maintained that the militant group saw society, particularly the government of Mala Kachalla as irredeemably corrupt. So, in the middle of 2002, the group, under its founder, Mohammed Yusuf, embarked on a *hijra* to Kanama in Yobe state. In Islam, a *hijra* is a journey from the bad world to go and be closer to God. The Prophet undertook one, from Mecca to Medina. Usman dan Fodio also undertook his own *hijra*, to Gudu, when Yunfa wanted to kill him. Kanama is probably where they had their first foreign contact. While there, more members joined, some of these new members were the children of influential Northern leaders, such as the son of Yobe's governor at the time "Bukar Abba Ibrahim" (Nwanze, 2014).

Accordingly, Ekwueme (2011:42) rightly observed that Boko Haram is fast becoming Nigeria's version of Muslim extremists operating with impunity elsewhere, maiming and killing those they consider as infidels. The group's teachings resemble that of the Afghanistan Taliban. They believe that any teaching or education that does not conform to the tenets of Islam is sinful and should not be taught at all. They also believed that it was the influence of western education that is watering down Islamic teaching and weakening Islam itself.

Consequently, since the Boko Haram uprising began in 2009, thousands of people have been killed and property worth millions of dollars has been destroyed when Boko Haram first appeared (Okoro, 2014). In corroborating the above assertion, Adamu (2016) observed that Boko Haram insurgency has claimed more than 20,000 lives, with a further two million internally displaced persons and crippled the socio-economic life of the people of the Northeast geo-political zone.

Ironically, despite the claims of defeating Boko Haram by the government, the Islamist group is still perpetrating their evil. Could this be because of the inadequate superior ideology to intelligence on the part of the government? Since the strategy the government is adopting over the years is essentially military, a kind of fire-for-fire approach, and neither sufficiently ideology based. Indeed, this fire-for-fire approach does not adequately recognize that the fight against Boko Haram insurgency requires not simply military kind of fire-for-fire approach, but a new mode of ideology and orientation where peoples of the society, particularly the youths, have one mind with the government by believing that the fight against Boko Haram insurgency is for their own benefit and they have a stake in the fight. The near absence of one mind in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency makes this study imperative.

## 1.2 Conceptual Overview of Terrorism

The term terrorism is vast and its nature has made it difficult for scholars in various fields of sociology and criminology to agree on a particular definition for the concept. The term was first popularized during the French Revolution, in contrast to its contemporary usage (Hoffman, 1998). Terrorism according to Enders and Sandler (2012) is the premeditated use of or threat to use violence by individuals or subnational groups to obtain a political or social objective through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims.

Accordingly, The US State Department (2003) defined terrorism as the premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. For NATO (2005), terrorism is the unlawful use of or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives. while the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) (n.d.) defines terrorism as the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.

Similarly, the United Nations General Assembly (1994) refers to terrorism as *"Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons, for political purposes and unjustifiable circumstances, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them"*.

Consequently, Campbell (2014) defines terrorism as the placing of human beings in a situation in which they are without hope, space, adequate defence, means of escape and survival or means of overcoming actual or threatening danger, menace or oppressive force which has not only a physical but also a mental element. The effect of terrorism has turn into one of the most complex and complicated events of the current world. The current wave of terrorism now poses a superior danger than ever before. It has caused sufficient harm to the social order in areas of loss of lives and property, economic defeat by diverting foreign direct investment (FDI) from target countries to other non-target countries; crowd out government wealth meant for development purposes by government channeling a large part of its proceeds into security vote (Njoku & Nwachukwu, 2015).

Indeed, terrorism may affect individuals by increasing feelings of uncertainty, fear, and risk aversion (Becker & Rubinstein, 2011), which are widely known to affect behavior. Exposure to terrorism may lead to fear conditioning, in which repeated exposure to terrorist acts, for example through the media, may activate fear circuitry in the brain thus exacerbating negative emotions (Holman, Garfin & Cohen, 2014) and affecting economic behavior. Terrorism may also increase feelings of stress, with spillovers on both adult and child health (Pesko 2014; Pesko & Baum, 2016).

Accordingly, the humankind has recorded a lot of terrorist attacks. These incidents include; the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) assaults on hotels and resorts in

1980s in Spain; the Irish Republican Army (IRA) attacks on London's economic district at the Baltic Exchange (April 10, 1992) and Bishopsgate (April 24, 1993); attacks on London's transport scheme in July 7 2005; the al-qaida attack on the world trade center in September 11, 2001(9/11) (Gaibulloev & Sandler, 2009) and host of Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria.

## 1.3 The Danger of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

Much has been written about the danger of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria without any end in sight. Apparently, the increasing spread of nefarious activities of Boko Haram sect in Nigeria and the destruction of lives and property is a growing concern that could not be wished away with a wave of hand (Nkwede, Abah & Nwankwo, 2015). Indeed, Boko Haram has made a mockery of peace and security in Nigeria, and its threat to regional security is well-known. In the words of Ovaga (2012), the dangerous dimension and the security threat posed before the nation, has become a source of worry since there is belief in some quarters in Nigeria that the trend has even gone beyond religious or political colouration. The dangerous trend has led to the bombing of everything within the sect's reach with little or no provocation.

Accordingly, Njoku and Nwachukwu (2015) observed that the height of terrorism and violence in Nigeria by Boko Haram insurgency has heightened fears among the populace and the global society and has eaten deep hooked on our economy and as a subject of fact; the antagonism has gone beyond religious or political shadow. Several meetings, high point conferences etc have been held in a bid to curb the menace in the country but all to no benefit. Also, distant from the fact that meetings have been held, the Federal Government has spent millions of naira in ensuring that safety is brought back to the country but that has never worked.

In the same vein, Ovaga (2012) observed that the current activities of the Boko Haram insurgency are obviously threatening the corporate existence of Nigeria's sovereignty. The north and south of the country are in disharmony as a result of allegations and counter allegations against each other. There is established impression in the minds of the majority of the southerners that some northern leaders, disgruntled with the loss of leadership in the past, have decided to precipitate crises using religious and sectarian platforms. According to the southerners, these frustrated leaders from the north have the belief that rulership of this country is their birthright. For instance, political power rested in the north for 38 years out of 50 years of this country's existence (Obumneme, 2012:35).

Consequently, Moses (2016) observed that beyond the fact that insurgency is a major threat to local and global peace and security; it constitutes the highest contributor to humanitarian crises in the form of rise in human casualties, internally displaced persons, refugee debacles, food insecurity and the spread of various diseases. The above assertion was supported by a survey conducted by International Organisation for Migration (IOM) which identified, 1,822,541 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe, Nasarawa states and Abuja through

Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) as of October 2016. About 97% fled on account of Boko Haram violence since 2014 and 53% are mostly female while others have sought shelter in neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

They further reported that although Nigerian Military operations earlier in 2016 in the country's Northeast had pushed Boko Haram out of some major towns in Borno, such as Monguno, freeing tens of thousands of people from insurgents' rule, living conditions have remained difficult for them amidst lack of basic amenities/supplies (International Organisation for Migration, 2016).

Apparently, it becomes increasingly difficult for socioeconomic activities to thrive under the present security threats that have enveloped the north. This is evident in the continuous relocation of Igbo businessmen from the north to other more peaceful environment. Also, the Yoruba people are equally returning to Lagos and Ibadan (Egbemode, 2012:71). It is unfortunate to observe that parents of north origin do not think of the great old Ahmedu Bello University (ABU), Bayero University, Kano (BUK) or University of Jos (UNIJOS) when seeking admission for their children due to fear of the insecurity situation generally in the northern region. Hence, many parents from the area are sending their children to the southern areas of the country for their education

## 1.4 Fighting Boko Haram Insurgency through Superior Ideology

The government is yet to understand that the current fire for fire approach of fighting Boko Haram insurgency is not achieving the desired result. Indeed, the Boko Haram group has adopted ideological approach to justify their activities. Perhaps that is why they receive sympathy and support from some community members in the Northeastern part of Nigeria. Similarly, despite the government fire for fire approach, some community members still see Boko Haram as a legitimate group that is fighting holy and just war against infidels and infiltrators. The group adopted this ideological based approach to brainwash the community members and justifying jihad and martyrdom in the name of defending the Islamic community against immoral western values.

Indeed, the war against Boko Haram insurgency can only be won in dream by just adopting the current military fire-for-fire approach, and neither sufficient superior ideology. This underscores population-centric approaches to counter-terrorism in which community engagement is an important element (Kilcullen, 2010). Accordingly, through engaging communities, authorities will be able to build improved relations with citizens who can help pass on terror related information to police and help in the identification of violent extremists or youth at risk of radicalization (Lyons. 2002; Thacher, 2005; Huq, 2013). That is citizens can serve as 'tripwires' by helping to pre-empt possible acts of terrorism through assisting in the proactive disruption of emerging terrorist threats (Soufan Group 2015a).

The essence adopting superior ideology is to build trust with communities through methods of consultation that help to enhance the perceived legitimacy of counter-terrorism efforts. This logic dates back to a well-accepted adage that effective

crime control relies upon support and cooperation from the general public and that if members of the public do not regard authorities and laws as legitimate, they are less likely to defer to those authorities and laws (Cherney & Hartley, 2015).

## 1.5 Theoretical Framework

The functionalist perspective is an approach in sociology based largely on the works of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton. According to functionalism, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. Accordingly, functionalism views the society as a system and a set of interconnected parts which form a whole. The basic unit of analysis is society, and its various parts are understood primarily in terms of their relationship to the whole (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004). *"The earliest functionalists often drew analogy between society and an organism such as the human body. They argued that an understanding of any organ in the body, such as the heart or lungs, involves an understanding of its relationship to other organs and, in particular, its contribution towards the maintenance of the organism"* (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004). The functionalist perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of society by focusing on how each part influences and is influenced by other parts.

In this context, the fight against Boko Haram cannot be won by adopting only fire-for-fire approach without engaging community member by appreciating and recognizing the roles, they are expected to play in the combat of Boko Haram insurgency. Indeed, because of the government failure to adequately utilize superior ideology in combatting Boko Haram insurgency, insecurity in the country persists and is still high. Accordingly, the inability to orientate and enlighten community members about the danger posed by Boko Haram activities has delayed the war against terrorism in Northeastern part of Nigeria as well as running the risk of damaged reputations and relationships with community members. Apparently, lack of orientation and enlightenment of communities about the essence of the war against Boko Haram insurgency can have serious long-term negative impacts on the country's economic, environmental and social outcomes. A confirmation of this is the low ranking of Nigeria in the Global Peace Index. However, establishing dialogue and building strong and genuine relationships with local communities and other stakeholders is vitally important part of fighting Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria.

## 1.6 Methodology

Documentary research method was adopted in this study. In this research method, data are collected through reading existing documents such as: newspapers, textbooks, government publications, internet materials and pictorials of sources, among others.

## 2. Conclusion

The activities of Boko Haram insurgency have posed a great challenge in Nigeria. This challenge has led to serious infrastructural damage in the areas of education, health and social welfare facilities, poor economy particularly in affected areas, while millions are left homeless. In the words of Udama (2013), Boko Haram has disrupted and offset the normal social life and number of lives has been lost. Terrorists' activities have displaced people from their usual bases to different unintended locations. The mass movement of people creates refugee problems with substantial costs to the individual, host communities and the government. Also, extreme violence repels rather than attract business investors.

### 2.1 Recommendation

1. There is need for a serious sensitization of mind and re-orientation of community members through superior ideology about the danger of Boko Haram activities and the need for them to actively join in the fight against terrorism. To achieve this, dissident group within the community and government, who are ever ready to sabotage the efforts should be fished out, and prosecuted accordingly.

2. There is need for the government and stakeholders to provide adequate education with a view to enthroning intellectual and socio-economic development of the country. Particularly, the government should reform the Almajiri system in the North in order to make the children in the Northern part of the country to be useful to themselves and society.

3. Government should implement policies and programmes to adequately address the issue of poverty and create employment opportunities since poverty is one of the key factors that breed radicalism.

4. There should be a synergy between the government and international agencies in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

5. There should be genuine effort by the government to foster inter-religious dialogue among the people in Nigeria since other religious groups, particularly from the southern part of Nigeria are seen Boko Haram as an instrument established to forcefully Islamize Nigeria.

6. Similarly, the federal and state government should detach itself from interference with religious matters, particularly making any religion a state religion.

7. The government should also avoid corruption in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency and insecurity, since the Billions of Naira made available for the purpose are not adequately made available to combat terrorism.

8. Finally, there is need to strengthen and enthrone good governance in Nigeria since Boko Haram members cut across people who were frustrated due to poverty, economic inequality and depravation caused by bad governance.

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