THE ARAB CONNECTION & THE UPSURGE OF INSURGENCY IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF BOKO HARAM IN NIGERIA

A Paper Presented By:
ESSIEN UKPE UKOYO UKPE
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, AKWA IBOM STATE UNIVERSITY, OBIO AKPA CAMPUS, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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By Essien Ukpe Ukoyo Ukpe, Ph.D. student, Political Science Department, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State and Assistant Lecturer, Political Science Department, Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus. E-Mail: essienukpe@yahoo.com. Phone: 08023515344; 08167960417; 08153145877

ABSTRACT

There has been a dramatic increase in intra-state conflicts in Africa. Many countries in Africa have experienced an upsurge of insurgency within their territories. This paper begins with the history of insurgency in Africa and delves into the causes of the upsurge of insurgency in the continent in recent times with particular reference to the Boko Haram menace in Nigeria. The paper traces the origin of Boko Haram and probes into its links with international terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Shabaab in Somalia. The methodology used is descriptive analysis. Using religious imperialism as the framework, the paper concludes that the Boko Haram insurgency is inspired by jihadi-Salafi ideology espoused by Saudi Arabia and is the last stage of the long drawn attempt to Islamize Nigeria except the Nigerian government takes proactive steps to end the menace and also stem the rise of other Islamic fundamentalist insurgency in the future.

Keywords: Insurgency, Arab Connection and Boko Haram

INTRODUCTION:

The history of insurgent uprising in Africa started with the Mau Mau peasant revolt in Kenya in 1952. The Mau Mau revolt was a result "of economic and social disaffection in rural areas combined with the political radicalism of Nairobi" (Heather, 1999:1). Since then insurgent confrontations have been on the increase on the continent especially in recent times.

Some of these wars have had negative reverberating impact on the continent that transcends national boundaries. Every year, thousands of lives are lost in Africa because of armed conflict. Council on Foreign Relations (2012:1) estimates the death toll due to armed conflict at about 250,000 per year.

Perry (2011:1-2) has chronicled a list of terrorist activities in the continent in recent times to include the kidnap of a Swede, a Dutchman and a South African from a restaurant in Timbuktu, the killing of a German and the abduction of two French geologists in Mali, al-Shabab's war against the official government in Somalia and its protectors: African Union soldiers from Uganda and Burundi. Several grenade attacks in Kenya and the killing of 76 people in the Ugandan capital, Kampala in July 2010 by al-Shabab suicide bombers.

According to Irele (1999:100):

The visual image that is beamed on television across the world about Africa is that of a continent embroiled in fratricidal wars that are ethnically motivated. This image has become the predominant signifier of the continent's woes presented by the Western media for their viewer's consumption. Again and again, in newscasts about Africa, one encounters this image in their monotonous regularity and the image has become so pervasive and fixed in people's subconsciousness to the extent that it has become the generative source of all ideas about the entire continent.

Although most authors have attributed these recurrent spates of violence on the continent to ethnicity and the failure of African governments, this paper believes that the major cause of frequent uprisings in Africa must be sought for outside the continent. It cannot however be denied that in most countries of Africa, the state has reneged on its responsibility in the social contract which is the basis upon which patriotism is founded (Achebe (1984:15). This is just a part of the explanation for insurgent violence against the governments of such states because in such states, including Nigeria, such violence is traceable to one section that has some connection with the Arab world while other sections not having close affinities with the Arab world and whose people are living under the same

conditions occasioned by failed government remain peaceful devoid of insurgent uprisings.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Twenty first century Africa has been rebranded as a continent ridden with insurgency and a breeding ground for terrorists and suicide bombers. This unfortunate appellation is due to the ubiquity of insurgent uprisings in the continent in recent times. This has led to a redefinition of the continent and conjured a negative image for Africa as a continent that is perpetually at war – a land of "…'evil', 'danger', 'criminality', 'disease', 'disorder', 'anarchy', and 'mindless violence' (Omeje, 2007:101). As such, Africa's unique history as the cradle of civilization has been obliterated today by these internecine wars in various parts of the continent.

This problem has portrayed Africa to the outside world as a continent pervaded with "… poverty, diseases, civil disturbances, revolt, insurgence, guerrilla warfare, domestic rebellion and in recent time terrorism…" (Ogundiya, 2010:1). This informs the post 9/11 re-securitization of Africa by the West as a zone of terror and anger (Omeje, 2007:93). According to him, (Omeje, 2007:102), "Africa is increasingly securitized as a zone of terror in the US…" Quoting Keenan

(2004b) and Diallo (2005), Omeje (2007:102) noted that "senior officials of US European Command (EUCOM), senior US government officials, CIA counter-intelligence reports and western media have played a big part in the redefinition of Africa as a potential breeding ground for Islamist militancy and a safe haven for terrorists…"

However such rebranding is a very wide generalization as there remain some parts of Africa that are not beleaguered by this blight. Unlike North Africa, sub-saharan Africa remain largely untouched by insurgent uprisings.

North Africa has witnessed greater occurrences of insurgent movements than Africa south of the Sahara. The greatest factor that has amplified the upsurge of insurgency in Africa is the Arab connection. The trade and most importantly, the religious relations of North Africa with the Arab world have contributed to the increasing manifestation of insurgency in this part of the continent and a consequent destabilization of the entire continent through agents from this section. For instance, the Arab Springs spilled over into North Africa and resulted in the Algerian students' protest against the government of Abdellaziz Bouteflika in April 2011. This reverberated into Egypt and other parts of Africa.

Extremism and terrorism in North Africa seems to have reached alarming proportions. Quoting Mazrui (2005:15) and Keenan (2004a), Omeje (2007;102) shows that "the new realization that there are large Muslim population in Africa

north of the equator (West Africa, Sahel-Arab Maghreb and the Horn of Africa) has suddenly fuelled disquieting discourses of anger and error in the West since the commencement of the global war on terror"

CSIS (2010:2) reported that North African terrorism which was largely directed at domestic governments in the 1990s has assumed international dimensions today. North African terrorist elements from Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya have been known to have sponsored or be directly involved in terrorist activities in Europe, Spain, etc.

Until the 2007 United States' expeditions against al Qaeda in Iraq, Iraq seemed to have been the center or breeding ground of North African terrorists groups. It projected some local insurgent groups like the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) into international terrorist limelight, it provided a stream of suicide bombers with logistics and became the rallying point and recruitment center for the training of jihadists to be dispatched to Europe and America. Iraq therefore provided the "fateful triangle" [ala Professor Jean-Pierre Filiu] between North Africa, Europe, and Iraq (CSIS, 2010:2).

The defeat of al Qaeda in Iraq witnessed the metamorphosis of the Algerian GPSC into the Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). According to Ambassador Robert Godec, principal deputy coordinator for counterterrorism at the U.S. State Department, as quoted by CSIS (2010:3), AQIM is "today, the

biggest terrorist challenge facing the Maghreb…and in terms of statements, strategy, and tactics, AQIM's behavior mimics that of al Qaeda generally." The report went further to show that "AQIM operates, recruits, and plans in ungoverned spaces, launches attacks against both civilians and military targets, and kidnaps Westerners. In approving the creation of AQIM, al Qaeda's central leadership hoped that Algeria would become another center of global jihad".

The desire of AQIM and other insurgent groups therefore is to internationalize terror. Unfortunately, the defeat of their global goal through United States military efforts has led these groups to shift the focus of their operations to regions and specific strategic countries through which they could ultimately achieve their long term goal of global coverage. This informs the rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this study is descriptive analysis. The study relied solely on secondary data. It drew inspiration from published and unpublished materials such as international, national, governmental, semi- governmental, private corporate bodies, expert committee and commission, newspaper and magazine reports, books as well as research reports. Some of the reports consulted

include annually, quarterly, monthly, fortnightly, weekly and daily published works by organizations like

(i)   Center for Strategic and International Studies

(ii)   United Nations Organization

(iii)   Local and International Dailies, etc.

Other sources consulted include published research work by scholars on the upsurge of insurgencies in Africa and the Boko Haram in Nigeria in particular. Some unpublished research works were also consulted in the course of the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

One of the major causes of problems in Africa is the imperialist exploits in the continent, especially religious imperialism. Some of the alien religions that have been brought to Africa have had negative swelling impact on the continent.

Imperialism has diverse strands including political imperialism, economic imperialism, religious imperialism, cultural imperialism, and assimilative imperialism, etc. Of all these forms of imperialism, religious imperialism seems to be more subtle than the other forms of imperialism because it reinforces the other forms, especially, cultural imperialism and assimilative imperialism.

Religion, it would be agreed, is part of the culture of its originators and therefore it carries in its spread the threads of such culture. Religious imperialism seeks to "civilize" the target population based on the claim of the superiority of the object of worship. Religious imperialists therefore disparage the object of worship of the target population and thereby brand them as "idol worshippers", "barbarians", "unbelievers" or at the extreme, "infidels". Being "barbarians", the target population is regarded as "semi-humans", inferior spiritually, morally and even intellectually and socially. Therefore, religious imperialists feel "compelled" to convert them to their religion in order to "civilize" them. Where they resist conversion, some religion, like Islam, encourages their termination as "infidels".

The process of conversion involves the transmission of the tenets of the particular faith to the prospective converts. Such transmission most of the time takes place in the language of the imperialists. With language which is a part of the culture of the imperialists, a wholesale transmission of the culture of the imperialists takes place. The end result is that, the convert is dispossessed, not only of his original object of worship but his personality and character is transformed in imitation of the imperialists. According to Maunier (1949:184), this results in assimilation or assimilative imperialism. The overall effect is that the people are disinherited. They begin to feel that they no longer belong to the nationality of their forebears, and so disparage their origins and believe they belong to, become

more loyal to and receive and act on the basis of the instructions of the imperialists.

This seems to validate Karl Marx assertion that religion is the opiate of the people and is also the explanation for the allegiance and sympathy Africans north of the Sahara manifest towards Arab cause.

ORIGIN OF BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram was founded in 2002 in Maiduguri by a radical Islamic cleric, Mohammad Yusuf with the Arabic name جماعة أهل السنة الدعوة لـ جهاد والـ translated *Jama'atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda'wati wal jihad*, meaning "people committed to the propagation of the prophet's teachings and jihad." (Johnson, 2011). But over the years, the name *Boko Haram*, meaning "Western education is sin" has become the official name of the group. This name, as reported in *Ngex* (2012), is believed to have been given to the group by the immediate community in Maiduguri, Bornu State where the group was founded as a result of Yusuf's abhorrence of anything western. The sect however has accepted this name in their official nomenclature.

However, the name Boko Haram is said to be just a cover name to confuse and mystify the main aim of the organization (Usman, 2011). The name Boko Haram by implication means that the group's major goal should be the eradication

of Western Education or its structures. However, the group's targets to date have proved the name to be misleading or a calculated attempt to deceive the public as to the group's main intention. *Ngex* (2012) corroborates this fact: "… Some of the group's recent attacks, e.g. the bombing of a UN building in Abuja, seem to suggest that the group's ambitions are broader than initially believed…" Johnson (2011) and *Ngex* (2012) affirm that the acknowledged goal of the Boko Haram is "to establish a fully Islamic state in Nigeria, including the implementation of criminal sharia courts across the country".

It would be agreed that such imposing goals and the magnitude of terrorist activities carried out by the group to date can neither be conceived nor achieved by a group that is largely without an organized structure. This fact suggests that there may be some form of invisible hand outside the group that is controlling its operations from behind the scenes.

BOKO HARAM AND THE ARAB CONNECTION

Omeje (2007:99) has attributed most of the insurgencies in Africa, like the Nigeria-Biafra civil war in the late 1960s, the Ugandan liberation war in the 1980s, the Eritrean separatist war against Ethiopia, and the civil wars in Liberia, Burundi,

Somalia, Angola, the DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone to outside sponsorship. This is true of Boko Haram.

Rating the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria therefore as a local Nigerian terrorist organization may be incorrect. Evidence reveals that the group has international connections with North Africa and the Arab world. Most of its suicide bombers have been known to be Islamic jihadists imported from North African states. Analysts have argued that the ingenuity of execution, the impact and the colossal nature of the suicide bombing of UN House on August 26, 2011 by Mohammed Abul Barra proves that Boko Haram suicide bombers are trained by expert terrorist organizations outside Nigeria.

Some scholars like Johnson (2012) and Perry (2011) have affirmed that Boko Haram has a link with al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Somalia's al-Shabaab. This, according to them has contributed to the "increasing level of sophistication and organization" of the group. It would not be out of place to therefore to say that the group is a subsidiary of AQIM, and a fulfillment of AQIM's long term goal of becoming a regional and global force through the integration of extremist groups from all of North Africa into a single organization (CSIS, 2010:3).

Perry (2011) has reported of Abu Qaqa, Boko Haram's spokesman boasting to journalists of sending hundreds of fighters to be trained by al-Shabaab in Somalia.

In an interview with Temple of Praise International Church, 11301 Rhode Island Avenue, Betsville, MD 20705, one of the former key leaders of Boko Haram, Evangelist Blessed Usman, formerly Sheik Sani Haliru, confessed that the training of Boko Haram members takes place in Sudan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Egypt as well as Niger Republic. He also confessed that he is from Republic of Niger (Usman, 2011).

Moreover, the avowed agenda of Boko Haram to Islamize Nigeria at all cost and the sophistication of its operations prove that the group has international connections with more formidable terrorists organizations outside Nigeria.

Johnson (2011) and Ngex (2012) affirm this international connection. For instance, Johnson (2011) reported that Boko Haram has entered an agreement with "…al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb to coordinate and synchronize their efforts". This proves why Usman (2011) in his confession claims that Osama Bin Laden was his mentor.

Although some scholars including Johnson (2011), Oluwajuyitan (2011) and Tande (2012:2), have argued that economic disparity between the north and the south, poverty, political marginalization, social inequality, injustice, corruption and

failed government, etc, are reasons for the rise of Boko Haram, the group itself has never accepted these reasons as the raison d'être for their actions.

This paper believes that the prevalence of these factors in Nigeria does not, in any way, justify the carnage occasioned by Boko Haram's terrorist attacks. It cannot solve the above problems, but instead is creating other problems which it would not be able to correct afterwards. It may be true to say that Boko Haram is inspired by a global jihadist ideology and is a continuation of a long drawn attempt by the Arab world to Islamize Nigeria and thereby use Nigeria as a launching pad for international terrorist activities against the West. Boko Haram appears to be the last stage of the Islamization project which is either going to succeed in changing the secular nature of the Nigerian state or the corporate existence of the country.

The effort to Islamize Nigeria started with the sharia debate during the Second Republic in the late 70s. The sharia debate which set off continued debates about the role of Islam in Nigeria's national life and the country's place in the Muslim world were sponsored by the northern leaders who have held the reins of power for the greater part of Nigeria's independent existence. These debates have inspired the emergence of extremist Islamic groups that held jihadist ideology. The first orchestrated attempt by Islamic fundamentalists to challenge the secular nature of the Nigerian state came also during the country's Second Republic. Since then, the country has witnessed an upsurge of Islamic radicalism (Tande, 2012:5).

Other Islamic fundamentalist groups that arose before Boko Haram include the Talakawas, the Maitatsine, the Isawa Movement, Islam in Africa Organization, Hezbollah Movement in Nigeria, the Tablib group, the Kala Kato, the Yan Izala, the Isalmic Movement of Nigeria, the Nigerian Taliban, Al Sunna Wal Jamma and the Shiite Organization, etc.

The activities of these groups were heightened during the Third Republic when the Islamic leaders in power at the time formerly registered Nigeria as a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (O.I.C.).

Before this time, the Murtala Mohammed's administration has initiated the Islamization project. Unfortunately, he was assassinated before the plan could come into fruition. Quoting Omo Omuruyi, Nairaland Forum (2012) shows that the cabinet of Olusegun Obasanjo that succeeded the government of Murtala Mohammed regrettably could not push through the Islamization plan due to the presence of some "… avid defenders of the secularism in the Supreme Military Council…"

Nairaland Forum (2012) further shows that although Ibrahim Babangida started the process of upgrading Nigeria to full membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) during his tenure as a military Head of State, it was Buhari who finally submitted the application for the upgrading of Nigeria to full membership as against the observer status it had enjoyed since the Gowon regime.

The process was concluded during Babangida's tenure as a civilian Head of State. On his second ascension to power, Babangida silently acquiesced to the status quo by affirming Nigeria's full-fledged membership of the OIC. This further strengthened the Islamization project.

Inspired by global jihadist ideology coupled with internal backing by those in leadership position, more radical Islamic groups who were bent on ensuring the full implementation of the Sharia emerged in the country in the Fourth Republic. This move was further fueled by events outside the country which included the Arab awakening and the Iranian revolution (Tande, 2012:5,7).One of such groups was a Shiite organization, the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, which beheaded one Gideon Alakuta in 1994 for allegedly desecrating the Koran. Unfortunately, the perpetrators of such act in a democratic nation have not been brought to book to date. This was followed by the adoption of the Sharia by Zamfara state in October 1999. In swift response, eleven other northern states also spontaneously adopted the Sharia (Tande, 2011:11,12).

Tande (2011:16) believes that the economic and political factors that favour the rise of Islamic fundamentalists are the prevalence of a conducive environment that facilitates the growth and "… entrenchment of extremism in northern Nigeria".

Existing literature on insurgency in Africa in general, and Boko Haram in particular seems to ignore the part religion plays in terrorism and thereby obscure the role of Saudi Arabia in sponsoring terrorism through the spread of Salafi ideology promoted by the Saudi state. This puritanical religious ideology disseminated during the annual hajjes creates an explosive sentiment for violence and extremism in pilgrims to the Holy land.

The Salafi ideology "…espouses violence against state authority" (CSIS, 2010:5). The inspiration for Boko Haram derives from the Salafi ideology. Mohammed Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram studied in Saudi Arabia. On his return to Nigeria, he set up a camp called Afghanistan to train volunteers for a revolution (Perry, 2011:2). Yusuf was therefore trained to raise and lead an international terrorist jihad in Nigeria on his return. This has manifested as Boko Haram. This, coupled with its sponsorship of the establishment of an Islamic bank in Nigeria makes the Saudi state culpable.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The birth, survival and success of Boko Haram to date, unlike past Islamic fundamentalist groups in northern Nigeria, have proved beyond reasonable doubt

that it has international links and support outside Nigeria. It is also regrettably, an indication that global jihadist terrorism is spreading into sub-Saharan Africa.

Boko Haram could be said to be an Arab inspired organization, upholding Salafi-jihad ideology and committed to the global jihad ideology of al-Qaeda. According to Geoff Porter, director for the Middle East and North Africa at Eurasia Group, as quoted by CSIS (2010:5), "once someone embraces jihadi ideology and plots or commits terror attacks, regional governments have few tools beyond police action to neutralize them." Such extremists motivated solely by ideology are less likely to consider amnesty programs (CSIS, 2010:5). Boko Haram's refusal to negotiate with the Federal Government (Abdallah, 2012) and the rejection of amnesty by its members (Johnson, 2011) is a clear indication that the group espouses Salafi-jihad ideology.

While Boko Haram may, in the short term, be a security threat to Nigeria, the huge security gaps in many sub-Saharan African states heightens the vulnerability of other countries, especially in the West African sub-region to instability due to spillover effect in case of possible escalation and a possible increase in refugee crisis that may cost international community a fortune. This is a possibility as long as the bombings and terrorism continues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One way to control the Boko Haram insurgency is to determine its links with international terrorist organizations outside Nigeria and thereby deal with its source of financing with the aim of crippling its "lifewire".

Moreover, the Nigerian government should take proactive measures to control the spread of Salafi-jihad ideology by controlling the curricula of Islamic studies in the Almajiris schools and religious departments in universities in the hope of defining, controlling and enforcing an acceptable interpretation of Islam and the production of Islamic religious clerics. Where possible, the appointment and preaching of Moslem clerics should be regulated.

Since "conflict prevention, mitigation, and response", according to Council on Foreign Relations (2012:1) "are global concerns, because instability often spills across borders and triggers piracy, drug trafficking, small-arms sales, environmental exploitation, and terrorism" multilateral action by the international community is necessary to end the Boko Haram menace. This could be facilitated by the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Response to circumvent the principle of non-interference.

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