TERRORISM AND TRANSMUTATIONS OF STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA: BOKO HARAM IN RETROSPECT

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Abstract
Boko Haram is a terrorist group that has terrorized several communities in Northern Nigeria. The sect came into the limelight in 2009 as a result of its clash with security operatives in Maiduguri which result in the brutal suppression of the sect by the Nigerian Army. Since then the sect has evolved numerous strategies aimed at advancing its course and inflicting its atrocities on its victims and the Nigerian state. The objective of the paper is to examine the patterns and dynamics of the sect's activities as it keeps mutating over time viz-a-viz the Nigerian government's responses. It adopts a secondary source of data and content analysis as its methodology. It utilizes the strategic theory of terrorism as a theoretical framework of analysis. It argues that Boko Haram evolved numerous strategies in responding to the prevailing environment they find themselves. It recommends that security agencies should intensify intelligence gathering to intercept terrorist activities before they attack their victims. The communities should partner with the security operatives for vital information that could enhance the fight against terrorism in Nigeria.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Mutation, Strategy, Tactics, Terrorism

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Introduction

Terrorism is an issue of global concern to states in the international system, the attack on the United States of America on September 11, has globalized the fight against terrorism, with states collaborating to promote their collective security. There exist several terrorist groups across the globe. These include *Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab, Hezbollah, Taliban, Boko Haram,* and so forth. There is an intricate relationship among these terrorist groups as they are intrinsically linked and interdependent on one another (Shola, 2015). Nigeria cannot be said to be immune from the activities of terrorists, most especially after Nigeria's return to democratic rule has opened democratic space for people to vent their anger and frustrations about how things are going in the country. Nigeria has been struggling to contain the activities of *Boko Haram* for the past almost one decade in the Northern region arising from the activities of a sectarian group popularly referred to as *Boko Haram* (Olojo, 2015). The sect has unleashed terror on many of its primary targets such as the police, Army and other security operatives, individuals, mosques, churches, and communities in areas they held sway. This has led to the wanton destruction of lives and property with an attendant humanitarian catastrophe of unimaginable proportions. This was largely achieved through different strategies that keep changing in line with the sect's strategy of annihilating its victims with impunity. As the sect continue to evolve different means of advancing its nefarious act, the Nigerian government and security operatives introduced different measures aimed at containing the sect.

This paper seeks to unravel how *Boko Haram* as a terrorist group keeps mutating over time in reminiscence of other tactics employed by other terrorist groups across the globe viz a viz the Nigerian government response. To achieve this, the paper is structured into six sections. Section one contains this introduction. Section two operationalizes the concept of terrorism and strategy to set the tone of analysis. Section three focuses on the theoretical framework of analysis. Section four deals with the emergence and growth of *Boko Haram* in Nigeria. Section five assesses the patterns and dynamics of *Boko Haram*

attacks and government responses in Nigeria, while the final section concludes the paper and made some recommendations.

Conceptualizing Terrorism and Strategy

The concept of terrorism just like other social science concepts defies a universally acceptable definition. Scholars have preferred one definition over another which reflects the diversity of the concept. Terrorism as a word in its usage connotes evil, indiscriminate violence, or brutality. According to Richards (2014:230), ''terrorism is the use of violence or the threat of violence with the primary purpose of generating a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims or object of attack for a political motive''. To Adegbulu (2013), terrorism is a deliberate creation of a sense of fear, usually by the use of threat or symbolic act of physical violence, to influence the political behavior of a given target group. A careful review of some of the definitions of terrorism reveals some degree of agreement among scholars about what the concept entails. Thus, terrorism can be conceptualized as the threat or use of force to cause fear, coerce, intimidate, or the illegitimate use of force to commit violence to achieve a particular goal - economic, political, social, or religious. To say someone is terrorized simply implies that he was affected by an act of terror (Lutz & Lutz, 2004).

Strategy as a concept is not devoid of the lingering issue of a universally acceptable definition in the social sciences. The concept of strategy is derived from the Greek word ''strategos'', strategy means ''Generalship'' or the utilization of troops in battle (Nwolise, 2013). To Mba (2006) strategy is an integrated coherent pattern of thinking, decisions, actions, and resource allocation, which is effectively formulated, implanted, and controlled to achieve the objective of war. Strategy to Jones (2008:96) is the "synergy and symmetry of objectives, concepts, and resources to increase the probability of policy success and the favorable consequences that follow from that success". Thus, strategy can be conceptualized as the total of actions and counter-actions geared toward achieving an overall edge in a competitive environment.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts a strategic theory of terrorism as propounded by Jones (2008) as a theoretical framework of analysis. The strategic theory of terrorism is premised on the following assumptions; these are:

i.) political purpose dominates all strategies;
ii.) the primacy of the environment;
iii.) an adaptation that is, learning from experience and the key is who is adapting quicker-the government or the terrorists;
iv.) the strategy has a symbiotic relationship with time;
v.) efficiency is subordinated to effectiveness;
vi.) the strategy seeks a proper balance among the objectives wanted, the methods used to pursue objectives, and the resources available for the effects desired;
vii.) Terrorists understand the importance of strategic risks, the inherent existence of uncertainty, and chance and attempt to produce a favorable balance (Jones, 2008:96-98).

Further elucidating on the utility of strategic theory in explaining the changing dynamics of terrorist tactics and methods, Arce & Sandler (2009: 334) argues that terrorists and governments alike select different strategies and methods that minimize cost, maximize damage, effectively signal their intent, or hide their capabilities.

The tactics of terrorism as exemplified by *Boko Haram* are rooted in the means and resources available to the group, which are not limited to acts perpetrated by its foot soldiers, but through finances, weapons, and other materials utilized. These methods include assassination, arson, bombings, and kidnapping used by the group at one time or another in a bid to outwit the government. Similarities may exist in terrorist tactics worldwide, including the use of sophisticated techniques that are peculiar, to a terrorist organization or domestic. Hence, focusing on patterns and dynamics of *Boko Haram* transmutation of attacks from the year 2002 to date, the methodology adopted is to first trace the emergence of *Boko Haram* and its changing patterns and dynamics of attacks. Secondly, it assesses the level of national and

international response to *Boko Haram,* and finally, its recommendations on how *Boko Haram* activities can be mitigated.

Emergence and Growth of Boko Haram

Boko Haram's official name is *Jama'atuAhlus-SunnahLidda'Awati Wal Jihad*, which in Arabic means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". It is popularly referred to as *Boko Haram*, which means 'Western education is sinful'. The name was given to the movement in early 2000 by the local population in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State where the movement originated (Ray, 2016:5). The name *Boko Haram* was coined the group by the locals due to their vehement opposition against Western civilization. The group believes that moral decadence in societies is a manifestation of embracing the Western culture and the solution lies in the total overhaul of political, social, and economic institutions (Abubakar, 2015). The exact date for the emergence of *Boko Haram* remains controversial going by the different narratives adduced for its inception. Nigerian security circles trace the origin of the group as far back as 1995. The 1995 narrative cited one Abubakar Lawan as its founder who established the *Ahlulsunna waljamaahhijra* sect in the University of Maiduguri, Borno State. Local and foreign media give credence to 2002 when Mohammed Yusuf assumed leadership of the group after Lawan left to pursue further education in Saudi Arabia (Shola, 2015). Following the military confrontation and the subsequent extra-judicial killing of Yusuf, Shekau the second in command assumed the leadership role and become more fearsome and brutal than Yusuf.

The group genesis is sometimes attributed to the prevailing decay in the standard of living in Northern Nigeria and the North East most specifically due to widespread poverty and economic backwardness of the region. The group is a product of a large scale of socio-economic and religious insecurity and its ideology perfectly fits into historical narratives and modern grievances (Forest, 2012). Religious manipulation, manifest poverty, and political discontent are a factor that breeds terrorism which is seen as the struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed (Ajayi, 2012). The poverty thesis of *Boko*

Haram is often advanced alongside explanations of state failure in Nigeria, which recognizes the paradox of plenty – poverty amidst abundant human and material resources. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) absolute poverty is estimated to be 61.9 percent nationally and out of which over 70 percent is in Northern Nigeria. Similarly, the unemployment situation among the youth is 37.7 percent and is relatively higher compared to other regions of the federation (Akinola, 2015). This serves as a fertile ground for the conscription of many youths into the sect. The sect activity led to the wanton destruction of lives and properties, with many territories falling under their control. This has called to question the legitimacy of the Nigerian state. The recent counter-terrorism measures put in place by the Buhari administration have to a large extent incapacitated the sect activities as virtually all territories were reclaimed.

Patterns and Dynamics of Boko Haram Transmutation

The patterns and dynamics of *Boko Haram* mutation bore semblance to tactics and methods employed by emerging and older insurgent groups in dealing with problems or achieving their strategic objectives. Terrorist groups in the pursuit of their goals look out for two targets, primary and secondary targets. The primary targets are what the terrorist consider political opponents which could be the state, its institutions, and those at the helm of authority. Secondary targets are those who usually bear the cost of the insurgents who are mostly innocent civilians and non-combatants. They are used as a ploy to send a message of fear down the spine of their primary targets (Schmid, 2013).

Boko Haram has proved adaptive as it continuously evolves new tactics that are targeted at different targets (Walker, 2012:108). The group has carried out countless attacks on civilians, police, prisons, military formations, Schools, banks, Churches, and Mosques to drive home their nefarious agenda. *Boko Haram* like other terrorist groups has demonstrated its ability to monster a wide range of tactics. The sudden growth of *Boko Haram* is astonishing, given the fact that between 2003 and 2009 only a few incidents of attacks were recorded (Mantzikos,

2014). After its clampdown in 2009, incidents of attacks were of unimaginable proportion in the restive North and most particularly North Eastern Nigeria where the sect's activities are more pronounced. *Boko Haram's* methods and tactics first focused on small groups and individualized terror through the use of assassinations, drive-by shootings, and local terror (Cook, 2014). *Boko Haram* has successfully attacked security establishments and personnel, community and religious leaders, politicians, centers of worship, and other civilian targets. A second method focused on massive concerted attacks with the use of motorcycles and trucks to attack targets and then massacre the population and sometimes kidnap the populace. In this process, *Boko Haram* attacked markets, public schools, tertiary institutions, and other critical state infrastructure.

In its first phase (2002-2009), *Boko Haram* was under the leadership of Muhammad Yusuf. He mainly focused on withdrawal from society and establishing small camps and schools in the remote regions of Borno and Yobe states during the years 2002-2005. As police pressure began to mount on the group, it transformed into an urban phenomenon. The group directly confronted the Nigerian police and the military which culminated in the Nigerian military assault against Muhammad Yusuf's compound, mosque, and subsequently his extra-judicial killing; along with hundreds of his followers (Ray, 2016:9). Open armed confrontation is another key operational tactic that *Boko Haram* has evolved since the July 2009 revolt against the sect. This is at best a modification of its traditional tactics of hit and run, which requires an appreciable number of (40-100) selected operatives engaging security forces in a shoot-out (Onouha, 2013). The utility of this method as exemplified by *Boko Haram* is the degree of precision in timing, which gives it an edge over Nigerian security agencies.

Before 2010, *Boko Haram* had no apparent strategy on how to achieve its objectives in Northern Nigeria (Marc-Antoine, 2014:11). There are certain trends in the evolutionary tactics of *Boko Haram*. Since its inception, the group has mutated from one tactic to another. During the period between 2010 and 2011, it favored individual and small-group attacks (Cook, 2014). This strategy was first targeted against the

government and its security agencies which are seen as the real enemy. Civilian targets were avoided to show that the group is after the state and its apparatus. The Sect's weapons in these phases were mainly rudimentary such as machetes, Molotov cocktails, knives, swords, and locally made guns (Falode, 2016). On September 5, 2010, the group members riding on motorcycles killed a retired ASP cop, Zannah Kyari, and also shot another *Bulama* a village warden in Konduga, in the leg, leaving their victims dead (**Mantzikos, 2014). M**ounting pressure on the group by security agencies made the sect attempt to provoke a sectarian war, by resorting to attacking churches as a strategy. This is because religion is a fault line between the predominantly Muslim North and the predominantly Christian South. During this same period, the group embarked on the use of bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on strategic locations and targets. *Boko Haram* claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb blast on the UN compound in Abuja that killed 23 people (*The Nation, 2015*). *Boko Haram* continued to advance its sophistication through the utilization of high-technology weapons such as AK-47 rifles, grenades, rocket-propelled grenades, automatic rifles, surface-to-air- missiles, vehicle-mounted machine guns with anti-aircraft visors, T-55 tanks, Panhard ERC-90 'Sagaie' and explosives such as Semtex (Falode, 2016:44). The targeting of civilians in their indiscriminate war, instilled fear in the minds of the people, and communities or persons perceived as moles that are collaborating with the security agencies were maimed or killed. Through this strategy, many communities and persons were unable to pass vital information necessary for the routing of the insurgents to security.

The group continued with its strategies and methods that it has earlier mastered and also improved upon that between 2012 to 2013. *Boko Haram* began to attack communities and towns beyond its comfort zones including the states of Bauchi, Yobe, Kano, Kaduna, Kogi, Gombe, Plateau, Taraba, and Abuja. The spate of attacks on other parts of the country is a strategy of getting hold of the territories they have captured and further diverting the attention of security agencies. Kidnapping for ransom began to be used on **November 13, 2013, when** gunmen riding on motorcycles kidnapped a French Catholic priest from

his parish in the Cameroonian village of Nguetchewe, 10km from the Nigerian border (**Mantzikos, 2014).** The movement began to turn to vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs). Cars were typically stocked with several propane cylinders or explosives-filled oil drums. To disseminate its ideology and to reach a wider audience, *Boko Haram* began to make effective use of cyber or the Internet. YouTube has been particularly effective in showcasing *Boko Haram's* exploits and confrontations with the Nigerian Army (Falode, 2015:43-4). Though they detest modern innovations and technology the sect began to use the internet and most especially social media sites to propagate their messages and showcase their activities. This is an important weapon in group psychological warfare, with scenes of confrontations and brandishing of weapons regularly shown on YouTube. 2013 marked a significant milestone in the evolution of *Boko Haram's* tactics, with a series of kidnappings, in which one of the main features was the instrumental use of women (Zenn & Pearson, 2014).

Boko Haram from 2014 onwards changed its tactics into attacking communities and kidnapping mostly women and children. In 2014, *Boko Haram* began a campaign of kidnappings, and the rise of female suicide bombers (Cook, 2014). A leap was taken when on 8 June 2014; *Boko Haram* dispatched the first female suicide attacker to the 301 Battalion barracks of the Nigerian Army in Gombe, Gombe State. The girl detonated the explosive concealed in her *hijab*, killing herself and a soldier. Similarly, on 20 January 2015, there have been a total of 15 female suicide bombings in Nigeria (Onuoha, 2015:4). The recent change of tactics in the use of female suicide bombers by *Boko Haram* is rooted in the environment they operate and the crackdown on its operations by security agencies. The use of female suicide bombers, who conceal bombs under their *Hijab*, is to avoid security agencies and hide under the guise of Islamic culture that forbids a man to frisk a woman to gain wider publicity and sensation.

It switched its tactics later in 2014 towards capturing territories, by holding on to territories rather than retreating after an attack. In July 2014, *Boko Haram* was reported for the first time to have taken control over a city, Damboa in Borno state. In August 2014, the leader Abubaker

Shekau declared a Caliphate in areas under *Boko Haram's* control, with the town of Gwoza as its seat of power. Shekau also publicly pledged allegiance to Islamic State (IS) (Ray, 2016:10). Given the successes the group has recorded in controlling territories they captured, the group has thus, changed its tactics from that of hit and run, to that of annexing and administering territories. Horses later became part of the strategy in attacking communities in an attempt to evade security agencies and cope with the rainy season. A gang of horse-riding *Boko Haram* terrorists attacked Damboa communities on September 3, 2015 (*Leadership*, 2015). *Boko Haram* has gone back to guerrilla tactics, eschewing open and conventional confrontations with the military. Since January 2016, it has been hitting counter-value targets in the conflict zone, making heavy use of underage suicide bombers in its bid to further destabilize Nigeria's Northern states (Falode, 2016:45).

National and International Responses to Boko Haram Insurgency in the North East

The response of the Nigerian government to the *Boko Haram* terrorism has, at the onset been through the use of force, followed by an intermittent offer of dialogue and amnesty. Terrorism as a new phenomenon to the Nigerian state was first treated in the way and manner the Nigerian government has suppressed the previous insurrection in the past. The realization that the group was hell-bent on destroying Nigeria and challenging the sovereign status of Nigeria as one corporate entity, necessitated the government to take different strategies at one point or another in response to the strategies adopted by *Boko Haram*.

Since 2004, the Nigerian government has deployed a Joint Task Force (JTF) of security forces for counter-terrorism efforts in the regions where the group has been active (Ray, 2016:13). Following the failure of the JTF to stem the tide, In May 2013 President Goodluck Jonathan declared a State of Emergency, in the states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe in North Eastern Nigeria for six months with the military taking over all security operations in those states and subsequently created a new 7th Army Division command (US DoS, 2013). In a bid to woo the

terrorist to lay their arms and allow peace to reign, President Goodluck Jonathan in 2013, set up the Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North to develop a framework for amnesty and disarmament of members of the group, this was, however, rebuked by the group because it did nothing wrong to demand an amnesty. Frustrated by the continued resilience of *Boko Haram* and its violent attacks, youths of Borno state formed a Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) aimed at routing *Boko Haram* members from their towns. The CJTF was formed in Maiduguri in June 2013 in a bid to draw from its numerical advantage and local knowledge of the area (Agbiboa, 2015).

At the regional level, borders were closed given the discovery that *Boko Haram* moves weapons and fighters in and out of Nigeria through Nigeria's porous international borders in the North, the Federal Government on 31 December 2011 closed down sections of its border with Chad, Niger, and Cameroun (Onouha, 2013:426). The once moribund Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) (made up of troops from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger) was reactivated to help fight *Boko Haram*. In March 2015, after the Multinational Joint Task Force started its operations, *Boko Haram* started losing towns under its control. The Federal Government of Nigeria with the help of the MNJTF can make giant strides in reclaiming lost territories (Ray 2016:11). The operations of the MNJTF helped member countries to coordinate and strategically attack the terrorist against the disjointed response which allowed the group to hit from one country and eventually escape into another for fear of reprisal attacks.

The UN did not take any major step till the mass abduction of the teenage girls in April 2014. After the incident, on May 22, 2014, the Security Council put *Boko Haram* in its Al-Qaeda Sanctions List on demand by the Nigerian Government, in paragraph 1 of the Security Council Resolution 2083 (2012), adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter 27 This led to travel ban, freezing of assets and other measures (Ray 2016).

On a global scale, Nigeria joined a coalition of states against terrorism. President Buhari while explaining the rationale behind joining the group of Muslim countries against terrorism stated "I have just told you it is the *Boko Haram* itself that declared loyalty to ISIS. Now, ISIS is based in Islamic countries. If there is a coalition to fight terrorism, why can't Nigeria be part of it" (*Premium Times*, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper examined the different strategies adopted by the dreaded sect *Boko Haram* in terrorizing communities in Nigeria, most especially in the Northern part of the country. It argues that *Boko Haram* utilized several tactics and strategies towards advancing its course and inflicting mayhem on its victims and sending fear down the spine of its victims. It further argues that the Nigerian government and other states have evolved numerous strategies and synergy to contain the spate of *Boko Haram* and other terrorist groups across the globe. It recommends that security agencies should intensify intelligence gathering to intercept terrorists before they attack their victims. The communities should partner with the security operatives for vital information that could enhance the fight against terrorism in Nigeria.

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