

## **BOKO HARAM: A RELIGIOUS SECT OR TERRORIST ORGANIZATION**

**MIKE ESHIOKE OKEMI**

Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Nigeria and University of Abuja, Nigeria

---

**Abstract:** *Terrorism is a globalized phenomenon confronting the international community. It has grown both in strength and trend and its impact felt in different parts of the world including Africa. This impact has lately been felt in northern Nigeria due to the activities of Boko Haram creating growing concern with the level of loss of lives recorded. In Nigeria, the group is usually referred to as a religious sect partly due to uncertainty as to its classification or designation or fear the group has created. When for example, President Obama referred to the group as a terrorist organization, President Jonathan countered his statement by saying its members are not terrorists. The media too refer to the group as a sect probably due to fear especially with the killing of a Television reporter and bombing of media houses. Boko Haram at inception was an Islamic group. With time, it became a sect due to its own beliefs or practices which has separated it from pure Islam. This paper believes that the group at birth in 2001 was a religious sect but has over time, graduated into a terrorist organization especially with its adoption and use of terror tactics. This paper examines the term terrorism and the various tactics employed by terrorist's organizations worldwide. It will consequently, do a comparative analysis between Boko Haram and well known terrorist organizations in terms of motivation, ideology, existence, grievances, tactics employed to address grievances etc. for proper classification as a terrorist organization, an international one or local terrorist organization. The paper will then attempt to suggest ways by which their activities can be curtailed and eliminated.*

**Keywords** - Boko Haram, Terrorism, Karijee Jihadists, Rogue Actors, Spherical Earth.

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to the most common definition of terrorism typically used by states, academics, counter terrorism experts and non-governmental organizations, terrorists are actors who do not belong to any recognized armed forces or who do not adhere to the laws of war and who are therefore, regarded as 'rogue actors'

Terrorism is a form of unconventional warfare used to attempts to force political change by: convincing a government or population to agree to demands to avoid future harm or fear of harm, destabilizing an existing government, motivating a disgruntled population to join an uprising, escalating a conflict in the hope of changing the status quo, expressing a grievance or drawing attention to a neglected cause.

A sect is a small group of people who belong to a particular group of religion but who have some beliefs or practices which separates them from the rest of the group. Boko Haram was a small group in 2001 in Maiduguri and originally Islamic. Today, it has expanded from the North West to the north east and parts of the north central with its own belief and norms.

This paper seeks to examine the concept of terrorism, the word sect and fundamentalism, ideology, motivation, tactics of terrorists as means of classifying the group. It will therefore look at the origin and modus operandi of Boko Haram and seek to answer the question as to whether we can rightly tag Boko Haram a terrorist group or a foreign terrorist organization using the U S standard for designation. It will at the end come up with possible ways on how we can curtail or put an end to their activities.

### ***HISTORY OF TERRORISM/ BOKO HARAM***

Terrorism has a long history and terrorists, goals. It has been related to the so-called 1793 reign of Terror during the Gordon Revolution. E.g. Al-Qaeda seeks a global radicalization of existing Islamic groups and the creation of radical Islamic groups where none exist. Its ultimate goal is to “unite all Muslims and establish a government which follows the rule of caliphs’ and since Bin Laden believes the only way to establish the Caliphate is by force, it is Al-Qaeda’s goal “to overthrow nearly all Muslim governments which are viewed as corrupt, drive western influence from those countries and eventually to abolish state boundaries by establishing a Pan-Islamic Caliphate throughout the World, working with allied Islamic extremist groups to overthrow regimes deem non-Islamic and expelling westerners.”

The congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad better known by its Hausa name Boko Haram ("Western education is forbidden") is a jihadist militant organization based in Maiduguri in the northeast of Nigeria.<sup>7</sup> It is an Islamist movement which strongly opposes man-made laws and westernization. Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2001, it seeks to establish sharia in the country. It is also known for attacking Muslims and Christians and bombing Mosques and churches.

Became known internationally following sectarian violence in Nigeria in July 2009, which left over 1000 people dead. They do not have a clear structure or evident chain of command. It is debatable whether it has links to terror outfits outside Nigeria though a US commander believe it is likely linked to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Paul Lubeck points out that no evidence is presented for any claims of material international support.

Residents in Maiduguri dubbed it Boko Haram instead of Book Haram. The term "Boko Haram" comes from the Hausa word *boko* figuratively meaning "western education", literally from English word "book" and the Arabic word *haram* figuratively meaning "sin" or "forbidden"). When loosely translated from Hausa, the name means "western education is forbidden". The group earned this name due to its strong opposition to anything Western, which it sees as corrupting Muslims. Hussain Zakaria told BBC News that the controversial cleric had a graduate education, spoke proficient English, lived a lavish lifestyle and drove a Mercedes-Benz.

In 1995, the group operated under the name Shabaab, Muslim Youth Organisation with Mallam Lawal as the leader. When Lawal left to continue his education, Mohammed Yusuf took over its leadership. Yusuf's leadership allegedly opened the group to political influence and popularity. Yusuf officially founded the group in 2002i with the aim of establishing a Shari'a government in Borno State under former Governor Ali Modu Sheriff. He established a religious complex that included a mosque and a school where many poor families from across Nigeria and from neighboring countries enrolled their children.

The center had ulterior political goals and soon became a recruiting ground for future jihadist to fight the state. The group includes members who come from neighboring Chad and Niger and speak only Arabic. In 2004 the complex was relocated to Yusuf's home state of Yobe in the village Kanamma near the Niger border.

## **IDEOLOGY**

Terrorist organizations usually have an ideology for which they are identified. Boko Haram was founded as an indigenous Khawarij group, turning itself into a Kharijee Jihadist group in 2009. It proposes that interaction with the Western World is forbidden, and also supports opposition to the Muslim establishment and the government of Nigeria. Members of the group do not interact with the local Muslim population and have carried out assassinations of anyone who criticizes it, including Muslim clerics.

In a 2009 BBC interview, Muhammad Yusuf stated his belief that the concept of a spherical Earth is contrary to Islamic teaching and should be rejected, along with Darwinian evolution and the concept of rain originating from water evaporated by the sun. Before his death, he reiterated the group's objective of changing the current education system and rejecting democracy. In 2009 government cracked down on its members. Its subsequent reemergence, growing frequency and geographical range of its attacks is an indication that the group has now expanded beyond its original area of operation and religious composition to include not only Islamic militants, but criminal elements and disgruntled politicians. From the above, one can see that terrorist organizations and Boko Haram are similar in history, origin and canvass of ideology hence we can safely classify it as a terrorist organization.

## **MOTIVATION**

In an attempt to explain terrorist motivation and answer questions such as who becomes a terrorist, why and what kind of individuals join terrorist groups and commit public acts of shocking violence, most analyses are along the line of psychology. Using the socio-psychological approach, Knutson, the Executive Director of the International Society of Political Psychology until her death in 1982, observed that the basic premise of those she evaluated was "that their violent acts stem from feelings of rage and hopelessness engendered by the belief that society permits no other access to information-dissemination and policy-formulation process." This applies to Boko Haram especially its founder as the motives in its history and ideology are

in line with the above hence Boko Haram cannot be said to be different from known terrorist organizations.

## **EXISTENCE**

Another guide to classification of Boko Haram as a terrorist organization is factors of existence. For terrorism to exist there must be an aggrieved group, the group must have been denied most, if not all opportunities to be heard or listened to. There must be a supporting party or state and a suppressive state or organization that is opposed to the group. There must have been a fixed time lag during which feelings of frustration and deadly hate by the aggrieved group for the suppressive state grew so deep. There are therefore, at least three principal actors in the international terrorist stage; aggrieved group, supportive group and oppressive or suppressive group. Boko Haram is an aggrieved group, it has an unidentified/ identifiable supportive party and there is the suppressive state, Nigeria.

## **CAUSES OF EMERGENCE**

The economic situations in many countries lead many individuals to seek refuge and comfort within the confines of a terrorist organization due to high level unemployment or low employment. In order to provide a stable home, many people turn to terrorist organization as the only source of funding the food, shelter and consistent income for their families. This is in addition to inequality and bitter polarization between the haves and the have nots. This extreme poverty leads to vulnerability and insecurity and while poverty does not always lead to terrorism, terrorism does take advantage of misery, knowing that despair creates favorable conditions for terrorist projects and action.

The context within which terrorist tactics are used is often in large-scale unresolved political conflicts e.g. socio-political and economic deprivation of a population, opposition to a domestic government or occupying army, secession of a territory to form a new sovereign state, dominance of territory or resources by various ethnic groups and importation of democracy, anarchy, theocracy etc. as forms of government. These factors are partly what led to the emergence of Boko Haram.

Generally, four primordial factors that could induce terrorism and other violent acts are injustice, hatred, oppression, deprivation and relegation, leading to frustration. All or any of these could be fuelled by economic, religious, psychological, ideological or political phenomena and lead to an exhibition of violence or terrorist acts by an aggrieved entity or suppressive entity. These factors are also the factors that are responsible for the emergence of Boko Haram.

## **TACTICS OF TERRORISM**

Terrorist groups employ various tactics to maximize fear and publicity and methodically plan attacks in advance. In the process, it may train agents, plant them and raise money from supporters or through organized crime.

## **TRAINING**

Terrorists usually have training camp where the range of training depends greatly on the level of support the terrorist organization receives from their supporters. The training generally includes physical fitness, combat or martial arts, firearms, explosives, intelligence/counter intelligence and field craft. More specialized training may include mission, specific subjects such as language, cultural familiarization, communications and surveillance techniques. E. g. the pilots for the September 11, 2001 attacks took flying course. There is no available information of Boko Haram system of training but we can assume from their mode of operation that it is limited to bomb making and shooting and thus operate like a terrorist group

## **FUNDING**

Funding is one of the major sources of strength of terrorist organization and funding can be raised legally and illegally. The sources include charities, well-funded organizations, non-violent organization with similar ideologies, state funds or organized crimes such as kidnapping, drug trafficking or robbery, identity theft and fraud.

A spokesman for the Boko Haram sect Ali Sanda Umar Konduga AKA Al- Zawahiri who said he was under suspension and in custody of the department of state security [DSS] identified former Nigerian ambassador and a serving senator as sponsor of the sect. He told reporters at the DSS headquarters in Abuja that former ambassador Binda was one of their benefactors and promised to pay him N10 million to work for his party but died in a car accident on his way to deliver N5million to them as part payment.

After his death, a serving senator, Ali Ndume took over the running of his activities as sponsor and that he Al- Zawahiri was behind the threat text messages sent to the Judges of the election petition tribunal in Maiduguri. His objective was to ensure that the tribunal sacks the present government in Borno state. The legislator was behind other text messages sent to Governor Sule Lamido, Governor Babangida Aliyu, Ambassador Dalhatu Sarki Tafida, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Justice Sabo Adamu and An ex- minister. Senator Ali Ndume told him to send a text message to the ex- minister to remind him of how he sabotaged the PDP in its attempt to win the last election in Borno state. Other confessional statements made by him were, 'that most of the threat messages he sent to Justice Sabo Adamu were scripted and relayed to him by the senator', that the threat text messages eventually led to the relocation of the election petition tribunal from Maiduguri to Abuja, that the telephone number and content of the text messages sent to the attorney general and minister of justice were also given to him by the legislator in order to compel him {AGF} to influence the judgment of the tribunal against the government in Borno state, he was recruited by a political party stalwart in Maiduguri and following the compulsory

registration of all SIM cards nationwide, he was asked to steal a SIM card which he used in sending threat text messages’

‘That the pseudo name Usman al- Zawahiri was given to him by the said politician to portray him as an extremist as well as conceal his true identity, that the threat text message sent to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sent to him because he supported Ali Modu Sheriff while he was governor of Borno state. Though they are not affiliated to the PDP, the sect does not want any All Nigerian Peoples party government in Borno state and that they will only accept CPC, APGA and PDP government because they believe that only the parties can reconcile them. ‘His arrest and confessional statements further confirm Boko Haram has political patronage and sponsorship and that their grievances have both political and religious connotations. In an interview with reporters, he said their grievance against the police was that the group did not like how the police killed their founder hence they have been attacking and killing policemen.

In February 2012, arrested officials of Boko Haram revealed that "while the organization initially relied on donations from members, its links with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), opened it up to more funding from groups in Saudi Arabia and the UK." They went on to say that other sources of funding included the Al Muntada Trust Fund and the Islamic World Society. In addition, a spokesman of Boko Haram also claimed that Kano state governor Ibrahim Shekarau and Bauchi state governor Isa Yuguda had paid them monthly. This method of funding and their link with al- Qaeda is another good proof that Boko Haram is no longer a sect but a terrorist organization with network.

## **METHOD OF ATTACK**

Terrorists act according to different motivations and goals to achieve maximum publicity in order to intimidate and generate a message which serves as a means to attain its objectives. They as, Boko Haram does, employ violence on one part of society to instill fear in the larger part of it to effect a change, and propaganda to capture the attention of the public through the attention given it by the media. Improvised explosive devices have been used to cause damage. Others are Suicide attack, Car Bomb,

Fundamentalism is a movement with strict doctrine, a religious or political movement based on a literal interpretation of and strict adherence to doctrine, especially as a return to former principles. A fundamentalist therefore is one who simply canvases a strict adherence to doctrines or ideas but once he or she applies one or more of the tactics employed in terrorism to canvass the position or doctrine, that person or group of person graduates from being a fundamentalist to become a terrorist. Boko Haram, became a terrorist organization in 2011 when it began to apply the tactics of assassination, parcel and car bombs..

## **JOINING A TERRORIST GROUP**

Those who become terrorists are often the socially alienated persons who dropped out of society, the unemployed, those with little education especially youths. The youths may try to join a group

out of boredom and the desire for an action packed adventure, adventure in pursuit of a cause regarded as just but others may be motivated mainly by a desire to use their special skills e.g. bomb-making skill. Judging from those paraded by the State Security Service, those who join Boko Haram are similar. For example, Habibu Bama is a dismissed soldier from Borno State and Kabiru Abubaka Dikko AKA Kabiru Sokoto.

Kabiru was born on 9<sup>th</sup> may 1983 to the family of Umaru Jabbi of Gagi village in sokoto south local government area of sokoto state. Upon the death of his father, he was adopted by his paternal uncle Abubakar Dikko who renamed him. He had his primary education at model primary school Gagi. He enrolled for secondary education at Ahmadu Bello academy in 1996 but absconded shortly after. He re- applied for admission as a fresh Junior Secondary School 1 student in Sultan Bello secondary School in Sokoto from where he eventually graduated in 2009. In 2005, he gained admission to the college of Nursing and midwifery Sokoto where he exhibited high level of truancy and extremist tendencies which accounted for his poor academic performance. In mid-2007, he absconded again from the school after he refused to re-sit some papers he failed in examination.

However, violent encounters with security forces often serve as motivating factor for an already socially alienated person to join a terrorist group Boko Haram has also adopted this method. Human Rights Watch researcher Eric Gutschuss noted that Muhammad Yusuf successfully attracted followers from unemployed youth "by speaking out against police and political corruption."

Terrorist groups also brain wash their recruits. Boko Haram may have adopted this method following the discovery that a State Security Service undercover operative had to be recalled from trailing a prominent man in Borno suspected of being a sponsor of Boko Haram . This was because he appeared to have been brainwashed as he was found to have been acting aggressively and challenging his superiors at the top of his voice an act unheard of in defense, security and intelligence outfits.

## **IMPLICATION**

The implication of the above is that the conception of the government, media and academia as regards the group being a sect rather than a terrorist organization is altered. Consequently, we can now rightly classify the group and thus be included on the list of terrorist organizations either as a local or foreign one. Also the group would now be treated strictly as a terrorist organization and its members as terrorists. This will ensure proper application of the appropriate laws in dealing with the body locally and internationally.

This work also enhances our knowledge of the group in terms of funding, grievances, recruitment method and erases the misconception about its classification and also provides possible ways by which their activities can be curtailed.

## CONCLUSION

Can we rightly designate Boko Haram as a terrorist organization; the answer from the above is, YES because it is not in any way different from other terrorist organizations in terms of origin, ideology, motivation, funding, recruitment method etc.

SOME SOLUTIONS- being that its activities have had grave implication for peace and security locally and internationally, the federal government should employ the following: first is adopting military justice system for the prosecution of offenders. This is more so as the military has assured that the Armed Forces are taking measure to ensure that courts martial enjoy the desired independence during proceedings. Nigerian must desist from justifying the activities of the group because “no matter and whatever the measure put in place we would not get the best result and fast enough unless the society as a whole reject terrorism without any justification.

There is also a need for international collaboration between Nigeria and other countries faced with terrorism to fight it just as there has been urgent need for international effort to solve the problems. In the tackling of terrorism, information sharing, intelligence and lessons learnt from the past are very crucial For example; the challenges posed by the Irish republican Army which operated in the eighties provided the U K with useful lessons.

Government should continue to apply force so as to keep them under pressure, on the run and on the defensive. This should be followed with ‘war on sources of finance’ so as to deny or limit their sources of funding. Though military and police pressure can drive terrorism into extinction, political problems could also require political solutions.

The political solution is in form of amnesty especially its success in resolving Niger Delta crisis and since countries or societies are known to adopt various strategies to solve their problems. It could be applied to the present security challenge only if the leaders would recant, lay down their arms, and come out to meet with government because you cannot grant amnesty to ghosts.

In doing this, the federal government must follow the standard set by the international community by not entering into any negotiation with Boko Haram in its attempt to end the menace and human toll of its bombings. This is because negotiation or dialogue is never an antidote to terrorism.

## REFERENCES

AL JAZEERA (2009) *Deadly Nigeria clashes spread*, available@ [www.Al Jazeera.com](http://www.Al Jazeera.com)

AL JAZEERA (2011) *Dozens Killed in Nigeria Clashed*, available@ [www.Al Jazera.com](http://www.Al Jazera.com).

AL ZAWARI, (2011) press conference organized by the state security service,

ALL AFRICA, (2012), *Nigeria: Boko Haram's Funding Sources Uncovered"*. [www. All Africa.com](http://www. All Africa.com).

An Inclusive World Report (2007)

ANONYMOUS (2011) Directorate of State Security operative



- BARTOLOTTA, C, (2011). "*Terrorism in Nigeria: the Rise of Boko Haram*". The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations, available @[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com).accessed 10-02-2013
- BBC NEW, (2019). *Dozens killed in Nigerian Clashes*, Available@ [www.BBCnews.co.uk/](http://www.BBCnews.co.uk/)
- CHOTHIA, F,(2012), *Who are Nigerian's Boko Haram Islamist*, [online] available @ [www.BBCNews.co.uk](http://www.BBCNews.co.uk), Accessed 10-02-2013
- COOK, D, (2011), *the rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria*, [online], available@ [www.Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com). accessed 12-01-2112
- FAROUK, C, (11 January 2012). "*Who are Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists?*" Available @[www.BBCNews.co.uk](http://www.BBCNews.co.uk)
- FAS, Al-Qaeda (The Base), Available@ [www.FAS Online](http://www.FASOnline)
- HARVEY, N, Nov 4, 2011, U K Minister of State for Armed Forces Speech at National Defense College, Abuja,  
[Http// www. Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com), Terrorism  
[Http// www. Wikipedia.com](http://www.Wikipedia.com). Boko Haram.
- HUDSON, R, (1999), *the Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why*, Washington D.C...
- IHEJIRIKA, A, (2012),Chief of Army Staff, opening of second seminar on National Security, National Defense College, Abuja,
- IRIN. (2011), *Analysis: Understanding Nigeria's Boko Haram radicals*".available@ [www.irinnews.org](http://www.irinnews.org).accessed 12-3-2013
- KONDUGA, A, (2011), spokesman for the Boko Haram held by the department of state security
- NWABUFO, E, (2005), *International and Stateless Terrorism*, Nigerian Defense College, Kaduna.
- OGAR, M, (2011), Press Conference, Directorate of State Security.
- PETINRIN O, (2012), Chief of Defense Staff Opening of four days seminar on Military Law, Abuja

Corresponding email [-okemimike@gmail.com](mailto:-okemimike@gmail.com), [mokemi@biu.edu.ng](mailto:mokemi@biu.edu.ng)