

# Prolongation of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: The International Dimensions

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## Abstract

Boko Haram insurgency has constituted a nagging predicament to the Nigerian state since its resurgence in 2010. The dexterity, sophistication and fluidity of the terrorist group within the North East geopolitical zone coupled with its prolonged confrontation with the Nigerian state as the sole legitimate monopolist of the instruments of force and violence has apparently, conferred the toga of invincibility on Boko Haram. But is Boko Haram truly invincible? What is the critical factor responsible for the prolongation of Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria? Against this backdrop, this study based on grand narratives found in literature and analyzed through content analysis recognizes that there are international dimensions to the Boko Haram saga in Nigeria. However, it argues that one crucial international dimension responsible for the persistence of Boko Haram insurgency is the transformation of the imbroglio into a regional conflict traversing Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. With the use of the regional conflict formation analytical perspective, the paper posits that as a result of the geographic proximity of Nigeria to Cameroon, Chad and Niger, the linkage of people from the four countries and the permeability of Nigeria's borders in the North East geopolitical zone, Boko Haram insurgency has virtually developed into a system of conflict. Therefore it cannot be annihilated without a synergistic approach involving these four countries.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, Conflict, Insurgency, International, Prolongation

## 1. Introduction

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has witnessed various forms of instability. From the Tiv riots in 1962 to the 1964-65 post-election violence; the 1966 first military coup d'état to the Isaac Adaka Boro uprising in 1966; the counter coup d'état of 1966 to the Nigerian Civil war that commenced in 1966; the Agbekoya Parapo Revolt of 1968-69 to the anti-SAP riots of 1989; the 12 June 1993 post-annulment riots to the Odua People's Congress saga of 1994-2003; the Niger Delta militancy to the current Boko Haram insurgency (Gilbert, 2013; Gilbert, 2010). In fact, with the exception of the Biafran secessionist war that violently threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria, none of the aforementioned cases of instability has rattled and challenged the Nigerian state as the current Boko Haram insurgency. Hitherto, the Niger Delta militancy was considered the most virulent cause of instability since the Nigerian Civil war until the resurgence of Boko Haram in 2009.

The dexterity, sophistication and fluidity of Boko Haram within the North East geopolitical zone coupled with its prolonged confrontation with the Nigerian state as the sole legitimate monopolist of the instruments of force and violence has apparently, conferred the toga of invincibility on the group. In fact, the incumbent governor of Borno state, Kashim Shettima exasperatedly stated in February, 2014 that "Boko Haram is better armed and better motivated than our troops, given the present state of affairs, it is absolutely impossible for us to defeat Boko Haram" (Sergie & Johnson, 2014: <http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/boko-haram/p25739>). But is Boko Haram truly invincible? What are the critical factors responsible for the prolongation of Boko Haram's insurgency in North East Nigeria? Despite the state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states and the massive militarization of the North East geopolitical zone, the group has not yet capitulated to the Nigerian state. Why? This study based on grand narratives found in literature and analyzed through content analysis seeks to critically examine the international dimensions to the Boko Haram saga in Nigeria. Using the regional conflict formation (complex) theoretical perspective, the paper seeks to interrogate the transformation of the Boko Haram imbroglio into a regional conflict cutting across Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria and its implication for the prolongation of the insurgency in Nigeria.

The next subdivision of this paper deals with the historical beginnings and overview of the devastating activities of Boko Haram, while the third segment explores the various international dimensions of the saga. Section four is a detailed interrogation of the relevant theoretical framework for this research and attempts to demonstrate its application to the prolongation of the insurgency in Nigeria. And the last section concludes by recommending policy options for the way forward.

## 2. Historical Beginnings and Synopsis of Boko Haram's Activities

Boko Haram's origin is traceable to the 1990's when its pioneer leader Abu Yusuf Mohammed Yusuf, popularly known as Mohammed Yusuf led a radical Salafist Islamic youth group called Shababul Islam meaning Islamic

Youth Vanguard (ICG, 2014). Researchers generally hold the view that it was formally established in 2002 with the name Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal Jihad, meaning "people Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" (ibid). However, the name Boko Haram is derived from the Hausa language which means that "Western education is sin" and this name was given to them by the populace due to their rejection of western education, the teachings and criticism of their leaders against societal ills supposedly orchestrated by western education. According to them, since western education 'boko' has been a harbinger of corruption and the socio-economic cum political societal inequalities, it must be forbidden 'haram' by true Muslims (Sergie & Johnson, 2014; ICG, 2014). Therefore, it is based on this religious ideological stance that Boko Haram aspires to establish an Islamic state and Sharia laws in Northern Nigeria in particular and Nigeria in general.

By 2003, the group had enlarged and started having brushes with security agencies due to their unlawful proclivities, which was accentuated by their varied linkages to the same political class they originally set out to criticize and condemn (ICG, 2014; Onuoha, 2012). This continued through 2004 and the refusal of the Nigerian state to nip their activities in the bud endeared them to several youths and thus, made their recruitment drive highly successful. However in 2009, cognizant of the subversive tendencies of the group, the Bauchi state government restricted them from public preaching and further recruitment of converts. Already enraged, they characteristically disobeyed the motorbike helmet law and in an attempt by Nigerian security forces to compel obedience from them, a major conflict crisscrossing four states (Bauchi, Borno, Kano and Yobe) ensued (Onuoha, 2012:58). The fight and riots lasted for five days until Boko Haram was eventually overpowered by the Nigerian military in Maiduguri, Yusuf was arrested, detained and he died in police custody. And it was recorded that between 700 and 800 of his members also died (Sergie & Johnson, 2014; Meehan & Speier, 2010).

Consequently, Boko Haram went underground and re-emerged in 2010 under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau as a more dynamic and vicious insurgent group fighting against the Nigerian state for the revenge of the death of its pioneer leader. The resurgence of the group since 2010 has constituted a nagging security predicament to the Nigerian state as they have brazenly and unjustifiably embarked on a systematic destruction of lives and property. An overview of their activities will suffice:

- On 07 September 2010, the group attacked Bauchi prisons, killed five security guards and freed over 750 of their members.
- 31 December 2010, Mammy market attack at Mogadishu Barracks in Abuja; eight persons were killed.
- 28 January 2011, killed six politicians and a gubernatorial aspirant of ANPP - Madu Fannami Gubio, Senator Modu Sheriffs Cousin.
- Bombed Shandawanka barracks in Bauchi state and killed eighteen people.
- 12 May 2011, kidnapped two engineers Chris McManus from Northwest, England and Franco Lamolinara, an Italian from Birnin Kebbi. They were killed on 08 March, 2012.
- 16 June 2011, bombing of Nigeria Police headquarters in Abuja, three people died and various cars were destroyed.
- 26 August 2011, bombing of the UN building in Abuja by a suicide bomber, 50 persons died.
- 25 December 2011, bombing a Church at Madalla on Christmas Day, 50 people died.
- 20 January 2012, Kano coordinated bomb attacks, 250 people were killed.
- On 02 December 2013, about 200 Boko Haram members dressed in military uniforms and armed with sophisticated weapons like rocket launchers attacked the air force base and military barracks in Maiduguri and destroyed property worth millions of naira
- In June 2013, the Yobe state government alleged that Boko Haram had burnt 209 schools in the state.
- 17 September 2013, Boko Haram insurgents burnt houses and killed 142 people at Benisheikh in Borno state.
- 28 September 2014, Boko Haram terrorists invaded College of Agriculture at Gujba in Yobe state at night and killed 65 students that were sleeping.
- 02 December 2013, about 200 Boko Haram insurgents deceitfully dressed in military uniforms and launched coordinated attacks on a military barracks and an airforce base in Maiduguri. At least five aircrafts and several other properties were burnt and unconfirmed number of civilians and soldiers were killed.
- 20 December 2013, the military barracks at Bama in Bornu state was viciously attacked.
- 27 January 2014, Kawuri village in Konduga local government area of Borno state was attacked by Boko Haram. Several houses were razed and 85 people killed.
- 11 February 2014, a group of Boko Haram insurgents invaded Konduga in Bornu state and burnt down about 2000 houses, killed 39 people and wounded several others.

- 15 February 2014, Boko Haram gunmen invaded Izge village in Gwoza local government area of Borno state, killed 9 soldiers and 90 civilians.
- 15 February 2014, Bama, the third largest town in Borno state was attacked. Boko Haram operated here unhindered between 3.30am and 12noon. At the end of their operation, 98 persons were killed, 400 vehicles were burnt and over 400 people were wounded.
- 14 April, 20, Nyanya motor park in Abuja was bombed and not less than 75 people were killed, 215 were wounded and several vehicles were burnt.
- On the night of April 14-15, 2014, Boko Haram insurgents invaded Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno state and kidnapped over 200 girls writing their Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) .
- On 05 May 2014, Boko Haram insurgents invaded Gamboru-Ngala Local Government Area in Borno state and killed 300 people (including 16 policemen).
- 22 May 2014, a twin bomb explosion at Jos Terminus market in Plateau state. At least 122 people were killed, several were critically injured and property worth millions of naira were brutally destroyed (**Source:** Compiled by the researcher from various Nigerian newspapers and television stations between 2009 and 2014).

From the above, it is obvious that Boko Haram has metamorphosed from the low level of devising mere sectarian violence to a more sophisticated level of planners and sponsorship of well coordinated and sustainable insurgency geared towards the de-legitimization of the Nigerian state, the extraction of political concessions and perhaps, the dethronement of the current government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In 2012 alone, the group carried out over thirty suicide attacks in Nigeria. And it is on record that Boko Haram has killed over 2,000 persons in 2014 alone and is responsible for more than 12,000 deaths and over 8,000 maimed persons since it started its murderous campaign of insurgency (Andrews, Iroegbu, Somorin & Okolie, 2014).

Characteristically, the Nigerian state responded with heavy military tactics aimed at curbing the nefarious activities of Boko Haram. For example, in 2011 about 3,600 military men were deployed to Borno state as members of a Joint Task Force (JTF), the number was increased by 2,000 personnel in May 2013 and they are being supported by Civilian JTF (CJTF). A Terrorism (Prevention) Act was enacted in 2011, more personnel are being trained in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency, Usman Galtimari Committee was constituted by President Goodluck Jonathan to proffer solutions against the insurgency (ICG, 2014: 30). In a deliberate attempt geared towards the logistical cum strategic empowerment and equipment of the Nigerian armed forces to checkmate the insurgency, the defense budget has increased from 100 billion naira in 2010 to 927 billion naira in 2011 and upgraded to the 1 trillion threshold in 2012, 2013 and 2014 respectively (ICG, 2014: 30). In addition, a state of emergency, which was just extended for another six months, was declared in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states since 13 May, 2013. Despite all these proactive and multifaceted measures, the insurgency is still prolonged. Why?

### **3. Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: The International Dimensions**

From all appearances, Boko Haram insurgency could not be annihilated or even caged by the Nigerian state due to its obvious international dimensions. The transformation from a "machete-wielding mob" (Zenn, 2013: <http://beegeagle.wordpress.com/2013/01/15/>; retrieved 20/03/2013) to a more organized one with armored personnel carriers, fleet of SUVs, convoy of hilux jeeps and possession of an assortment of sophisticated weaponry is only an indication of the fact that Boko Haram has access to financial and logistical support outside the shores of Nigeria. Evidently, the group has established links with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian peninsula from where it has received advanced training and monetary support for its strategic insurgent activities in Nigeria (ICG, 2014; Sergie & Johnson, 2014; Zenn, 2013). Various categories of "arms and ammunition – surface-to-air missiles, anti-tank missiles, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), AK-47 assault rifles, etc., – looted by rebel forces and mercenaries during the uprising in Libya have been acquired by terrorist groups like Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and sold to Boko Haram and its splinter groups" (<http://businessdayonline.com/2014/04/nigerias-porous-borders/#.U3Q1GChzfjI>; retrieved 12/05/2014).

Furthermore, Boko Haram insurgents collaboratively fought with AQIM and Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in northern Mali in 2012 (Zenn, *ibid*). They thus have had access to the psychological motivation, ideological inspiration, technological exposure (handling of Improvised Explosive Devices - IEDs), military training, logistical facilities, financial empowerment and perhaps, personnel of these fundamentalist Islamic groups. The porosity of Nigeria's border also facilitates the fluidity and movement of members of the group from one neighboring country to another. Abubakar Shekau for example reportedly fled to Gao in northern

Mali with a thigh wound after he was almost caught by security forces on 24 September, 2012. Consequently, Nigerian troops were deployed to Mali in 2013 to collaboratively fight with French forces and flush out MUJAO and other jihadist Islamic groups, including Boko Haram in northern Mali (ICG, 2014).

Szrom & Harnisch (2011; cited by Gourley, 2012: 8-9) posited that for al-Qaeda to operate effectively in any environment, the following conditions must be prevalent: “underdevelopment, incompetent governance, and a citizenry disenfranchised by – or disillusioned with – the central government . . . an environment conducive to Al-Qaeda’s presence and operations must also have a history of radical Islamism that Al-Qaeda operatives can exploit”. Nigeria fulfils virtually all the aforementioned negative parameters necessary for the operation of a colossal and global terrorist outfit like al-Qaeda and this is made possible through the nexus it (Al-Qaeda) has established with Boko Haram. Shekau has not hidden his linkage to Al-Qaeda as he showers encomiums on Osama Bin Laden in most of his recent video clips (Zenn, 2013). Also, the use of suicide bombers was hitherto, alien to the group until after their training in Somalia by Al-Shabaab (an Al-Qaeda affiliated group) in 2011 (Zenn, *ibid*).

The obvious nexus between Boko Haram and other international fundamentalist Islamic groups especially Al-Qaeda, has equally strengthened various countries within the international system to express solidarity with the Nigerian state and designate Boko Haram a terrorist group. For example, the United States of America (US) designated the group a foreign terrorist organization on November 13, 2013. Britain also proscribed the group and on 22 May, 2014, the United Nations Security Council Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee formally included Boko Haram as one of the groups subject to financial and arms sanctions globally. By virtue of this inclusion in the sanctions list, anyone or corporate organization that supports Boko Haram financially, through provision of arms and/or by the supply of personnel has committed an offence against the global community. Members of the group are also banned from international travels - they cannot freely travel from one country to another without being arrested.

Furthermore, the US has deployed eighty military personnel with drone military facilities to assist Nigeria in search of over two hundred girls kidnapped by Boko Haram on 14 April, 2014. In addition, the French President, Francois Hollande hosted an unprecedented regional security summit in Paris for leaders of Nigeria's neighboring countries and some international stakeholders to fashion out pragmatic collaborative strategies aimed at checkmating and possibly, annihilating the Boko Haram insurgency. Present at the summit were: President Paul Biya of Cameroon, President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger, Republic, President Boni Yayi of Benin and President Idriss Derby of Chad. Other stakeholders and friends of the Nigerian state present at the summit tagged "Paris Summit for Security in Nigeria" were, Britain, the European Union and the US. Britain has also deployed three teams of specialized advisers with a Royal Airforce (RAF) surveillance aircraft to help search, locate and rescue the over 200 school girls abducted by Boko Haram in Chibok, Nigeria. Similarly, China and Israel have indicated interest to assist in the search and rescue mission. Glaringly, the Boko Haram insurgency that started as a local Nigerian conflict has assumed international dimensions from various perspectives.

#### **4. Boko Haram Insurgency: A Regional Security Conflict?**

The discourse on regions and regional conflicts have always formed an integral part of political science, international relations and conflict studies. However, it gained momentum in the post-Cold War era when Barry Buzan propounded the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) for a better analysis of the dynamics of violence at the regional level (Buzan 1991, 2000; Buzan & Wæver 2003; Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde 1998). According to Buzan (1991: 190) a regional security complex can be defined as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another.” The understanding is that regional dynamics of security and violence are highly interconnected to the extent that conflicts can no longer be analyzed from the perspective of states only but must take into cognizance the regional perspective due to their geographical proximity.

According to Ansorg (2011: 176):

(Neo-)liberal institutionalism emphasizes the interdependencies between nation states. The regional level emerges through institutional and economic cooperation between different actors in the nation states. The point of departure for regional cooperation is the desire for increasing prosperity and solutions to common problems. The governments of nation states establish rules, procedures and institutions to regulate and control these trans- and interstate relations (Keohane and Nye 1977, 5; Nye 1971). Such arrangements are called international regimes.



These interdependences are of use for the establishment of regional peace, but also create strong interstate dependencies and increased risk of diffusion of conflict through contagion effects (Keohane and Nye 1977, 9). But even if the concept of region can contribute to explaining the behavior of nation states in the international system, the region is not the focus of analytical interest in these theoretical approaches. Rather, the nation states and governing elites in the international system remain the main interest of analysis. Regional dynamics of security and violence are therefore inadequately captured.

Therefore, regional conflict complexes are conflicts which involve "situations where neighboring countries experience internal or interstate conflicts, and with significant links between the conflicts" (Wallenstein & Sollenberg, 1998: 623). The complexities involved in such regional conflict situations due to geographical propinquity makes it imperative to analyze them through a regional instead of a state's perspective. A relevant example of regional conflict complex is the "Tormented triangle" of Central African Republic (CAR), Chad and Sudan (Giroux, Lanz and Sguaitamatti 2009: 1-2). In the same vein is the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa (ibid).

It is in the context of this analytical perspective that this research examines the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Bordered by Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republic in the North East geopolitical zone, Nigeria is geographically contiguous to these countries and the extent of permeability of her borders with these neighboring countries is alarming. The borderline between Nigeria and Cameroon is about 1,690 kilometers (km); it is 1,497 km with Republic of Niger and 87 km with the Republic of Chad. Unfortunately, the bulk of the border between both countries are not protected by security personnel - they are ungoverned. Like CAR, the porousness of Nigeria's boundaries renders her vulnerable to several security breaches. This has been basically responsible for the transformation of the Boko Haram insurgency into a regional conflict. With the declaration of state of emergency by the Nigerian state in May 2013, government forces launched massive military campaigns against Boko Haram settlements, camps, training facilities and members. Many of them were killed or arrested but some of their leaders, including Shekau fled to neighboring countries from where they cross into Nigeria through the multiple unmanned entry routes to execute their murderous acts and retreat to their camps in those countries.

For example, on 05 May 2014, a group of the insurgents invaded Gaboru-Ngala Local Government Area in Borno state and killed 300 people (including 16 policemen); after which they escaped to their base in Cameroon and destroyed the link bridge between Nigeria and Cameroon in that axis - so as to impede the ability of the Nigerian security forces to engage them in battle. Gwoza hills, Bama, Geidam, Yunusufari, Sambisa Forest Reserve, etc., are border territories that straddles Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon and it is in such vicinities that the insurgent attacks are mostly recorded because of their ability to retreat into neighboring countries. Herein lies the main reason for the prolongation of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. As long as those borders remain porous and far from the supervision of well motivated and well equipped security personnel, they will continually encourage the flowering of trans-border insurgents and the prolongation of conflicts and instability in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The militarization of the North East geopolitical zone has compelled the insurgents to relocate into these countries where they have established military bases and continually recruit citizens of the respective countries for their dastardly campaigns in Nigeria. And this is accentuated through shared ethno-religious character of the people resident at the fringes of these four countries.

The obvious implication is that due to the regionalized nature of the conflict, Boko Haram insurgency can only be annihilated through an active synergistic approach involving four countries namely: Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. With the existence of over 1,400 illegal routes into Nigeria, the insurgents will continually confront and embarrass the Nigerian state and sooner than later, the other three countries shall also be riddled with various insurgent activities, until when they (the aforementioned countries) shall pragmatically, seriously and simultaneously engage Boko Haram both militarily and diplomatically with the sole aim of neutralizing and possibly, annihilating the insurgency. Fortunately, the Paris summit was held in light of this realization. However, it is incumbent on the four countries directly involved to practically and urgently collaborate militarily for the purpose of checkmating and decimating the regional monster known as Boko Haram. Therefore, it is the transformation of the insurgency into a regional conflict that is the major international dimension responsible for its prolongation till date and notwithstanding how militarily powerful the Nigerian state may be, she can no longer defeat the transnational insurgency of Boko Haram without the sincere military involvement and synergy of other countries, especially, Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

## **5. Concluding Remarks and the Way Forward**

Clearly, there are practical governance issues precipitating underdevelopment in the Nigerian state. For example,

despite her status as the largest economy in Africa and the impressive Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 6.99 percent in 2012, life expectancy is 52 years only, over 68 percent of Nigerians are living below \$1.25 (N203.75) daily and the rate of illiteracy for adults is 61.3 percent (UNDP - HDR, 2013). In fact, Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) for 2012 was 0.471 and by all standards was appalling. Out of 187 countries measured, the country was positioned at 153, below countries like Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Tanzania (ibid). In light of the above, while this paper is not disputing the argument that the twin-related issues of poverty and unemployment have aided the sustainability of Boko Haram insurgency in the North East geopolitical zone, it argues that the transformation of the conflict into a regional one is the basic international dimension that has fostered the prolongation of the imbroglio. Obviously, Boko Haram insurgency has transcended the capability of the Nigerian state to handle and defeat single-handedly because of its regional conflict status.

In June 2013, it was alleged that Boko Haram attacked a prison in Niamey, Niger and freed their imprisoned members; some of the insurgents are reportedly present in Chad also (ICG, 2014). On 18 May 2014, a group of the insurgents killed a Chinese and kidnapped ten others in Cameroon. These few cases are pointers that buttress the development of Boko Haram into a regional conflict. Sooner than later, if not concertedly and decisively confronted and decapitated, the group could embark on more fatal campaigns in these neighboring states. It is therefore the position of this paper that:

- Nigeria should urgently follow-up on the resolutions reached at the Paris summit by diplomatically motivating her immediate neighbors' (including Benin Republic) to immediately commence the implementation of the synergistic security agreements aimed at checkmating and possibly, annihilating the insurgency.
- The Nigerian state should greatly equip her security forces and the Immigration Department with modern surveillance and patrol gadgets for effective border patrol.
- In addition, since it was recently reported that Nigeria has developed the technology for the production of drones, we recommend the deployment of drones for the effective monitoring of our over 4,000 km borders and perhaps, the war against insurgency.
- Of course, this should be done simultaneously with the creation of employment opportunities for our teaming youths who have become willing tools in the hands of Boko Haram insurgents due to pervasive unemployment and poverty in Nigeria.

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