

The Responses of the Nigerian Defense and Intelligence Establishments to the Boko Haram Security Challenge

Written by Osumah Oarhe

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Since the end of the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), the Boko Haram (BH) insurgency in the northern part of the country represents, perhaps, the gravest security threat and challenge to Nigeria. The insurgency has attracted the substantial deployment of the nation's defense and intelligence establishments, as the Joint Task Force (JTF), which is comprised of the police and army, has been deployed in ten states in the north. Also, at border points, there has been tightened security, strict searches, and the deportation of illegal aliens. In spite of the presence and strategies of the defense and intelligence communities, the violent activities of the sect have remained frequent, causing heavy carnage and loss of property. The nature of the bombing seems to increase the stakes over previous actions and inclines towards the dangerous grounds of reprisal. There is a mass exodus of non-indigenes from the affected areas, which tends to create a new hegemony and spatial control by the sect. Thus, a number of people who seem overwhelmed with the BH insurgency have contended that Nigeria is cascading into another civil war.[1]

This article attempts to address the following questions: is the BH sect clearly ahead of the Nigerian defense and intelligence establishments in intelligence and the deployment of tactics and weapons? What are the dilemmas of the defense and intelligence establishments in responding effectively to the BH security challenge? What steps can be taken to ensure the effectiveness of the defense and intelligence establishments in response to the BH security challenge? Before proceeding with these central issues, for pedagogic purposes, an overview of the BH phenomenon is provided.

Boko Haram's Construction

The BH sect, officially known as *Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad*, or 'People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad', evolved from a small religious sect formed in 2002. In the Hausa language, it translates literally to mean 'Western education is unlawful'. Mohammed Yusuf is believed to be the founder of BH. Yusuf was killed along with some other prominent members of the sect such as Baba Mohammed (Yusuf's father-in-law), and Alhaji Buji Foyi, the former Commissioner of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Borno state, who was brought into police custody in 2009. Since the demise of Yusuf and others, BH operations, which started in Borno, spread later to other parts of the north.[2]

BH is a composite of actors including Islamic extremists, the frustrated poor and idle, as well as marginalized youths, who have been incited, mobilized and supported by some politicians to destabilize the Nigerian polity. The members of BH are recruited from within and from neighbouring African countries including Benin, Chad, Niger, Sudan, Somalia and Mauritania.[3] It has been claimed that BH has commenced the recruitment of women into its fold as couriers for arms and ammunition, and for intelligence gathering and operational information purposes. Allegedly, the sect planned to use women to get the addresses and locations of some prominent politicians who are considered enemies.[4] Also, the sect reportedly uses street-traders and hawkers for gathering operational information and launching attacks on targets.

The Nigerian defense and intelligence establishments contend that the sect has links to international terrorist

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organizations such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which operates principally in the Sahel region.[5] The sect reportedly derives financial support from loot from bank robberies, and sympathetic groups in the Middle East and North Africa.[6] This support, perhaps, helps the sect become more complex and acquire sophisticated weapons.

The sect opposes the secularity of the Nigerian state, repudiates western education, democracy, and seeks to fight for justice.[7] The operational base and activities of BH have been in major cities in states in the Northeast geopolitical zone, such as Maiduguri. Its operations have been extended to other cities such as Kaduna, Kano and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. One fundamental feature of the operational base of BH is that the level of unemployment, poverty, and economic destitution is higher than in other geopolitical zones.[8] Like the Niger Delta militias, the sect has been highly adaptable. Its members operate independently from different locations and claim responsibility through press releases using central email facilities in the wake of every attack. With the use of motorcycles in launching attacks, they are able to meander away afterward.

It is believed that there is a splinter BH group, known as *Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladis Sudan* (JAMBS), which roughly translates as Vanguard for the Aids of Muslims in Black Africa. JAMBS, which emerged in January 2012, was said to have been created because of disenchantment with the leadership style of BH's commander and spiritual leader, Mohammad Shekau, especially the tendency to kill Muslims. The sect, an affiliate of AQIM, is led by Abu Usamatal Ansary. It has claimed to be motivated by an anti-Nigerian government and anti-western agenda. JAMBS has claimed responsibility for various acts of terrorism, targeting mostly police, military, and foreigners. Its first major attack was on the Special Anti-robbery Squad detention centre in Abuja on November 26, 2012. It also claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of a French engineer in Katsina, citing France's push for military intervention in Mali as justification. On January 19, 2013, Nigerian soldiers, on their way to Mali as part of an African peacekeeping mission, were ambushed by JAMBS in the Kogi state, killing two soldiers.[9]

It has been reported that while BH focuses on local targets, JAMBS concentrates on foreign targets. This new sect is believed to receive major financing and training from Mali.[10] JAMBS is believed to be more dangerous than BH. According to the President of the Northern Civil Society Coalition, Mr. Shehu Sani:

What makes this group very dangerous is their mobility. You cannot say this is where they are located. They operate a mobile command and no part of Nigeria is immune to their acts... It is difficult to estimate their actual number because they are not in a particular position, but I can tell you that they have high capacity to inflict lethal damage and to also carry out operations without being caught.[11]

In several respects, BH seems to represent a unique problem compared with earlier insurgent groups in the country such as the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) in the Western region; the Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the Eastern region, and the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) in the oil-rich Niger Delta. First, unlike past insurgent groups, BH's goals, demands, and grievances are controversial. They are not clearly articulated in any known document. BH's much touted Islamization mission in the country seems not to enjoy popular support even from its immediate constituency. A number of notable Muslim clerics in the North have openly denounced BH as extremists. Second, the group, unlike the earlier militia groups, uses suicide bombers in launching attacks on government establishments, churches and private enterprises, as well as innocent citizens, especially non-indigenes and Christians in the North. Third, it allegedly receives strong support from foreign actors in the areas of financing and training.[12]

The Security Challenge

The BH militia has been implicated in perpetrating egregious human rights abuses, particularly acts of violence against civilians and security operatives resulting in maximum damage. The sect has on various occasions launched attacks on churches, secondary and tertiary educational institutions, including Bayero University, Kano, and strategic government establishments such as police stations, including Force Headquarters in Abuja, Immigration Service Office in Kano, Prisons Service in Lokoja, the Army Defense College in Jaji, Kaduna and other high profile places, such as the United Nations Office in Abuja and media establishments.

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Though there are conflicting figures over the exact number of casualties so far recorded since the BH onslaught began, the United States based Human Rights Watch has declared that a total of 935 people have been killed in the 164 attacks suspected to have been masterminded by the sect since July 2009, when the group began its violent campaign. Out of this number the organization also reported that 550 people were killed in 2011 alone, in 115 separate attacks, and some 253 people killed in 21 separate attacks in early 2012.[13]

Overwhelmed by the operational strategies and daring activities of BH, President Goodluck Jonathan held that the sect's activities are worse than the Nigerian civil war in the late 1960s because of the difficulty in telling who its members are. In his words:

the situation we have in our hands is worse than the civil war we fought. During the civil war, we knew and we could predict where the enemy was coming from, you can even know the route they are coming from, can even know the caliber of weapon they will use and so on. But the challenge we have today is more complicated ...this is a particular time when the country has major security challenges. There are explosions everyday... people are killed daily without any reason .[14]

The economic activities in Nigeria, especially in the north, have nosedived on account of conflation of BH's violent campaigns with other social upheavals such as kidnapping and communal clashes in various parts of the country. According to the National Economic Summit Group (NESG) at its summit held in December 2012, Nigeria's Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has declined from 12.8 billion in 2011 to 10.4 billion in 2012.[15] BH inflicts deep psychological trauma on the society. By day, fear, anxiety, hopelessness, frustration, crippled altruistic instincts and jeremiads about the atmosphere of insecurity increase among many Nigerians.[16]

Furthermore, the BH insurgency has heightened regional, ethnic and religious tensions in the country. There has been a mass exodus of Christian-non-idigenes from the north to their states of origin on account of BH's attacks and its call on southerners to leave the north, a situation reminiscent of the pogroms and mass migrations that preceded the Nigerian civil war. Between November 30 and December 5, 2012, according to a News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) report, the Nigerian Red Cross said some 1,042 refugees made up of 520 children and 306 women had arrived in the Diffa region of the Niger Republic fleeing BH violence. The refugees reportedly settled in the villages of Guessere and Massa, 25 kilometers away from the Nigerien town of Diffa. The worst-hit governments in the south-east of Nigeria often arrange transport to evacuate their indigenes from the troubled spots and also burials for victims of the attacks. The BH attacks sent murderous ripples through most states in the north-east such as Borno, Yobe, Gome, Adamawa and Bauchi.[17]

The Response of the Defense and Intelligence Establishments

The Nigerian police are statutorily charged with ensuring internal security and public order. In addition to the police, Nigeria's intelligence community, such as the State Security Service (SSS), which is responsible for domestic intelligence; National Intelligence Agency (NIA), which is responsible for foreign intelligence and counterintelligence operations, and Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), which is responsible for military intelligence, has reacted to the violent activities of BH.

Since 2009, when the federal government deployed the JTF, it has continued to maintain a substantial presence in strategic cities in the BH heartland, in places such as Bauchi, Yobe, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Adamawa, Niger, Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano states. The JTF, in a bid to combat the BH security challenges, has undertaken various operations such as house-to-house searches; stop and search operations, and raids of suspected hide-outs of BH militias.[18]

The violent or repressive mode of response is often reinforced by hefty military expenditures of purchasing military operational gadgets. For instance, the Borno State government donated 10 armoured vehicles to the police, apparently to enable the Force to effectively combat the sect. In the 2012 budget, the government allocated a staggering \$5.947 billion to defence and national security, translating to ₦921.91 billion. This figure represents 20 per

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cent of the total budget and the highest allocation ever for defence and security in the history of the country. This also makes Nigeria the biggest spender on defence and security in Africa. The 2012 allocation is also a marked difference from the ₦233 billion in 2009, ₦264 billion in 2010, and ₦348 billion in 2011.[19] The government has also ensured that Nigerian security agents receive up to the minute training in counter-terrorism, and every other capacity building initiative available in the world today for combating terrorism. This training has been continuous, taking place both in and outside the country. There has been speculation that some 300 Nigerian soldiers were sent to the United States to receive counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism and bomb-disposal training specifically aimed at fighting BH. However, Nigerian Army sources were reported as denying this. US officials would not comment on whether such activities were linked to BH.[20]

The operations of the defense and intelligence community to contain the violence and associated costs have resulted in destructive and devastating consequences. The JTF has been accused of gross human rights violations, mass murder, extra-judicial killings, physical abuse, secret detentions, extortion, burning houses, and stealing money during raids.[21] Despite allegations of widespread security force abuses, the Nigerian authorities have rarely held anyone accountable, which further reinforces the culture of impunity for violence.[22] In fact, the security community seems to rationalize their operations to retaliate for the deaths of some security operatives from the BH violence. As the JTF, through its spokesman Lt. Col. Sagir Musa, noted 'we should not forget that several security operatives have been killed or maimed by the terrorists, a lot of police stations and military installations have been destroyed'.[23] Though there is no exactitude in the number of BH militia fighters that may have been maimed and killed by the security operatives, the casualties may be reasonably substantial. Human Rights Watch estimated that over 2,800 persons have been killed by BH and the Nigerian security forces since 2009, when BH became the gravest security threat.[24]

In spite of the military offensives of the JTF, BH has grown more sophisticated. The sect has executed reprisal attacks for the offensive operations of the security agencies against its members. Since the death of Yusuf Mohammad in police custody, the sect has executed a number of attacks on security formations. On December 24, 2003, when BH militias launched an attack on a police station and public buildings in the towns of Geiam and Kanamma in Yobe, a joint operation of soldiers and police was deployed to crack down on them. On 21 September 2004 the militants again launched attacks on the Bama and Gworza police stations in Borno State.[25]

In 2012, high profile military and police commands were targets of BH attacks. The Church facility at the Command and Staff College, Jaji in Kaduna State, was attacked on November 25. Also, on November 26, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), headquartered in Abuja, was attacked. These attacks, perhaps, underscore the impotence of the Nigerian State. Indeed, in the first nine months of 2012, not less than 815 people were killed in 275 attacks, according to Human Rights Watch. This number is more than half of the not less than 1,500 casualty figure for three years, 2010, 2011 and 2012.[26] A total of 185 policemen and residents were killed in the 20 January 2012 bomb blasts, which targeted mainly security formations in Kano – the deadliest single operation so far.[27]

Dilemmas of the Defense and Intelligence Establishments in Response to the Security Challenge

The main dilemma of the defense and intelligence establishments in responding effectively to the BH security challenge is the absence of mutual confidence amongst them. There is undue rivalry and suspicion among the sister organizations, and a quest for personal glory at the topmost levels of the agencies. For instance, it was reported that lack of teamwork was responsible for the failure of the security agencies to prevent the United Nations building attack. Though information about the plan was reportedly received about nine days before it was executed, it was denied by the then National Security Adviser.[28]

Also, a central challenge to the defense and intelligence establishments in effectively responding to the current security challenge of the BH insurgency is the porosity of Nigerian borders. Nigeria shares borders with the Niger Republic, Chad, the Benin Republic, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe. The Nigerian Immigration Service disclosed it has discovered along the borders about 1,487 illegal routes into Nigeria and 84 regular routes.[29] The sheer breadth of these numerous entry points can challenge even the best security plans. Thus, the porous borders are perhaps exploited by the BH for their insurgency, bringing arms and illegal immigrants

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into the country and escaping from the security agencies in the wake of attacks.

Former National Security Adviser, General Azazi Owoye, cited the exclusionary politics of the ruling-PDP as the cause for the resurgent, widespread BH attacks.[30] Some senators such as Mohammad Aliyu Ndume, representing the Borno South Senatorial District; Ahmed Khalifa Zannah, representing the Borno Central Senatorial District; and the former Governor of Borno State, Senator Ali Modu Sheriff, have been variously accused of having ties with the Islamic sect.[31] Also, some retired military generals and ex-heads of states before the General Sani Abacha administration, a former vice president in the first eight years of the current democratic dispensation, northern state governors (Isa Yaguda of Bauchi), and Muslim traditional rulers have been identified as sponsors and allies of BH.[32] More poignantly, President Goodluck Jonathan held that the activities of BH have become difficult to combat because the sect has infiltrated sensitive government institutions such as the legislature, presidency, executive, judiciary and even security apparatuses such as the police and armed forces.[33] In his words:

Some of them are in the executive arm of government, some of them are in the parliamentary/legislative arm of government while some of them are even in the judiciary. Some are also in the armed forces, the police and other security agencies. Some continue to dip their hands and eat with you and you won't even know the person who will point a gun at you or plant a bomb behind your house.[34]

In addition, the seeming intractability of the BH security threat has also been linked with cover provided by some communities. The authorities of the defense and intelligence establishments have accused residents of some communities of accommodating, shielding and allowing members of BH to use their houses as escape routes after attacks.[35] This may be for fear of retribution from the sect or the inability of the security agencies to provide them security.

Corruption is another factor which undermines the ability of the defense and intelligence establishments to combat the BH security challenge. For example, BH militias claimed that they offered bribes to navigate their way through the numerous checkpoints mounted by different security agencies to execute the attack on the UN office in Abuja.[36] Also, the defense and security establishment has little impact on the organization and campaigns of BH. This stems from its inability to keep pace with the indoctrination, recruitment and training of members to carry out suicide bombing at different locations. The terrorist organization preys on the unemployed, marginalized and disillusioned Muslim youths in the north, who are fed up with corruption and have limited economic opportunities. In the north, 72 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, compared to only 27 percent in the south.[37] As the spokesman of the sect noted 'there is a large number of our brothers, all eager to carry out suicide missions because of the abundant reward that awaits the person. So, we decided to introduce balloting to avoid disharmony among us'. [38]

Also, BH operates asymmetrically. When it is losing to security agencies it declares a cease-fire and readiness for dialogue while soliciting for unconditional amnesty and the release of its detained members in various locations. The situation is further complicated by the fact that intermediaries of the group refuse to disclose the identities of the members of the sect.[39] This asymmetric mode of operation contributes to the difficulty of the defense and intelligence establishments in effectively responding to the BH security challenge.

Conclusion

Nigeria is sliding into anarchy on account of the BH insurgency as the defense and intelligence establishments seem to be losing their grip on the security challenge. From observation and analysis, the responses to the BH security challenge have been inadequate. The ineffectiveness of the defense and intelligence establishments is attributable to a number of complex and interlocking dilemmas such as the disconcertion of the various security apparatuses, corruption, the prevailing poor economic condition, the crowded nature of the cities in the north, porosity of Nigerian borders, and the complicity and support of some political elite with the sect.

Thus, for the defense and intelligence establishments to have a greater impact in their responses to the BH security challenge, several steps must be taken.

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1. There is the need for the various apparatuses to share intelligence among one another and coordinate their responses to such intelligence.
2. There is the need for effective management of borders, which are routes for illegal arms, illegal immigrants, criminals and contrabands. The security establishment should deploy officers to patrol the illegal and regular routes to Nigeria. This cannot be done by one arm of the defense and intelligence establishments. The Nigerian Air Force should be tasked with air patrol; the Navy should handle the maritime sides of the border, and the Nigerian Immigration Service should work with the customs, police and other security agencies in policing the borders. These establishments should be provided with the necessary surveillance, logistical and operational facilities to effectively patrol and manage the borders. Also, there should be inter-service training among the defense and intelligence establishments aimed at coordinated patrol of the borders.
3. To respond effectively to the BH security challenge, the defense and intelligence establishments need to seek the cooperation of the security outfits of Nigeria's neighbouring countries. They also need to elicit the cooperation of local communities in the affected areas of their operations. To be able to elicit the cooperation of the local communities, the defense and intelligence establishments need to respect the fundamental rights of the residents.
4. The defense and intelligence establishments need to muster the courage to confront the political elites allegedly behind the sect.
5. BH capitalizes on widespread poverty and limited economic opportunities in the north. The poor economic condition and inequality, which conflate to create a climate of desperation, must be dealt with by the Nigerian government if the defense and intelligence establishments are to ensure sustainable counter-terrorism operations.
6. In view of the crowded nature of the houses in the BH areas of operation, there is the need for urban renewal. Tall fences should be lowered. Intelligence gathering and analysis, community policing, an operational and strategic approach to policing, vigilance and awareness by the public, renewed public campaigns and a joint integrated approach of all the security agencies are measures that should be employed against the BH security threats.
7. There is also a need for international assistance especially in the areas of intelligence sharing, counterinsurgency operations, the detection of improvised explosive devices, forensic analysis, intelligence gathering and analysis, and the mounting of a de-radicalization programme.
8. Experience from countries that have encountered so-called home grown terrorism and counter insurgency and have successfully dealt with it and minimized the risks and levels of terrorist attacks have done so with boots on the ground, soldiers and elite forces patrolling in groups in the terrorists' main areas of activities. Essentially, the combined operations of the Army and Police in the areas where BH operates will significantly limit and minimize their attacks and also help restore normalcy in the lives of citizens living in the areas.

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