
Boko Haram Insurgency in West African Sub-Region: A View from the Lense of the Domino Theory of International Relations

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Abstract

The Menace of Boko Haram Insurgency has plagued the Nigerian state since 2002. Originating from the northeastern part of the country, the terrorist group has devastated the economic, social and political fabrics of Nigeria. That its debilitating activities inhibit the growth of the already ailing nation is worrisome, and that its activities and wild terrorist acts are fast spreading into nearby and contiguous West African countries whose resources are unable to resist intense destructive strings is more worrisome. This paper, using available secondary and primary sources and employing historical methods of analysis brings to fore the “domino effect” implications of Boko Haram insurgency in West Africa. To attain this goal, it adopts the domino theory of International Relations as a model for analysis and established that the spread of insurgency and terrorism in the Lake Chad region is taking a domino effect pattern. It calls for more proactive measures by the affected nations to curb the far-reaching effects of this epidemic.

Keywords: Boko Haram, insurgency, Domino effect, Lake Chad,

Introduction

Boko Haram terrorism has bedeviled Nigeria for almost two decades. Its effect on the already socially and economically ailing country is far reaching. The social, political and economic facets of the country’s life are in uncertain situations. The military, with orders from the government has improved tactics, strategies and resources in the efforts to eliminate Boko Haram whose activities seem to have defied military approach.

Nigeria’s intensified military efforts to tame the Boko Haram insurgency, though with remarkable effects, seem not to be yielding the desired results. This can be explained by demonstrating the increase in both strategy and strength of the organization manifested in their ongoing and seeming tendency to spread to countries contiguous to Nigeria. The recent contagious spread of Boko Haram into Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Central African Republic etc can be explained using the domino theory of International Relations. Relating terrorism to the above theory would suppose that, terrorism, if not checked, suppressed and eliminated will spread to neighboring countries in speedy proportions until the whole region or entire globe is engulfed by terrorism.

Aroused by Concerns arising from this rapid spread of Boko Haram from Nigeria to other West African countries and the proclamation by the IS Islamic group that Boko Haram represents its African section, called the Islamic States West African Province, ISWAP, this paper highlights the implications of Boko Haram activities for West Africa. This it achieves

using the domino theory as a model for explanation. In so doing, it hopes to further explain why terrorism should be fought where it is and disallowed to spread into contiguous states.

Origin of Boko Haram

The Ahl al Sunnali al alDaawawa al Jihad otherwise called Boko Haram began operation in Nigeria since the early 2000 (Imasuen, 2015). Its name Boko Haram is derived from a combination of Hausa words, which are Boko (Book) and Haram (Forbidden) both of which are combined to connote “Western education is forbidden”. Cook asserts that Boko Haram is also called Jama’ tuAhlissunnalidda’ awatiwal Jihad which, if translated to English, would mean people dedicated to the spread and propagation of the prophets teachings and Jihad (Cook, 2016).

Boko Haram was founded in Maiduguri, northern Nigeria by Mohammed Yusuf who was born in 1970. Shuibu is of the opinion that the Jama’ ah-ahlu al- sunnah li al-Da’awa waal al-jihad emerged in 2002 as a peaceful local salafist movement whose original goals were to organize lectures to educate on Islamic doctrines and extending Charity to the needy, (Shuaibu, Salleh and Shehu, 2016). Mohammed Yusuf established a religious complex called Markaz as a result of his expulsion from mosques in Maiduguri by clerics who found him guilty of preaching radical views. According to Shuaibu and Saleh, among the complexes established by Yusuf were schools and mosques whose agenda ran not far from the desire to establish Islamic states and imposition on it, the Sharia laws (Shuaibu and Salleh,2015). The schools and mosques established by Yusuf became a ready alternative for poor inhabitants of the neighborhoods and nearby countries. The schools and mosques later became the initial grounds for indoctrination of prospective Boko Haram members.

Boko Haram’s public image could be attributed to a certain dispute between its adherents and the police in 2003. This led to a shootout between the group and the police in which it was alleged that the group over powered a squad of officers and took their weapons. This led to an invasion of its mosques by the army who blockaded members from using the said mosque. The blockade also ended in a reprisal and a shootout between the angered Boko Haram members and the army. The shootouts and disturbances earned the organization some press attention and international recognition. Walker is of the opinion that its fame and attention was not unconnected to the membership in the organization of sons of wealthy Northerners as well as the name given to it by the news media who preferred to tag them “The Nigerian Taliban”.(Walker, 2012)

Boko Haram according to Campbell is shaped by Nigerian context and reflects Nigeria’s history of poor governance and extreme poverty in the north. The movement is unique in that it combines a sectarian, radical Islamic agenda with violence. Its stated goal is the establishment of Sharia state (Campbell, 2014).Unfortunately, many non northerners from within and outside Nigeria view Boko Haram as a purely northern affair. This may not be completely true as the sects doctrine is based on the fundamentalist Wahhabi theological system which opposes the Islam of the traditional northern Nigerian establishment, which on itself is more tolerant.

Shuaibu and Saleh are of the view that the peaceful period of Boko Haram’s existence ended when a skirmish occurred between the sect and the police over arrest of its members by the police on the charge of not using cycle helmet. Yusuf who was the leader of the sect issued a forty days ultimatum to the government after which a jihad shall ensue and that only Allah

can stop same. Government's failure to respond to the demands of the sect marked the beginning of full blown violence by the sect in 2009 (Murtada, 2016). On July 28 2009, the Nigerian army launched an attack on the sect leaving many members killed and scores injured. The escalating crisis began to spread away from its areas of origin. From Maiduguri the Borno State capital, the crisis as well as other activities of the sect began to spread to Kano, Yobe, Jigawa and contiguous states.

Over the years, the spreading effects of the activities of the sect have ceased to be only a Nigerian problem but also with some regional implications. Boko Haram which began in Maiduguri has spread to Kano Yobe, Jigawa, Plateau, Abuja, Bauchi, and Niger States in Nigeria with its dreadful effects. More worrisome to this paper is that the sect's spread has permeated the national frontiers of some neighboring countries within the West African sub region. The domino effect of the spread attracts the attention of statesmen, strategists, analysts and ordinary citizens.

The Domino Theory Explained

The Domino theory has its origin derived from analogies drawn from the game of domino in which a loss of one card in the row of standing dominoes leads to the fall of others either depending on, or affected by the ripple effect of, the fall of the first. The assumption here is that as card A in a series of cards A to F falls, card B will follow then C whose effect will push D, E and F. The idea here follows that the fall of one card will affect others next to them in continuous and successive order.

In the international system, the Domino theory assumed that, especially during the cold war, small nations especially in the developing world were vulnerable to military, political and psychological pressures resulting from the fall of their neighbors to communism(William,2008). The Domino theory was first publicly propounded by an American President Dwight D Eisenhower in 1954 as a corollary of sorts to containment. The idea that communism was a contagious force that spread from country to country which is the basis of the domino theory was first proposed by General Marshall in 1947 (Bell, 2001).The assumptions that determined the application of the Domino principle in the US cold war era foreign policy option was that when one country fell to communism, other nations in the neighborhood followed. The fear in this direction was exacerbated by Vietnam whose position constituted a threat to Indochina. The recognition of the communist government in Vietnam by China and Soviet Union confirmed the domino effect postulations (Bradley, 2000).

The Domino theory in its most modern form has been applied to terrorism. In this case, it assumes that terrorism possesses the tendency to cross national boundaries as it increases in strength both in terms of membership, weapon and areas of influence. This supposition, as held in some quarters was partly a determinant of the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003 that saw to the death of Saddam Hussein whose terrorist influence spread and perhaps encouraged other terrorist groups who saw 9/11 as a weakness on the part of US security system. The American policy option and reason for engaging in war was therefore to destroy the rogue dominoes that were seen as the strength and inspiration for others who would equally collapse upon the destruction of the rogue (chief) dominoes. Therefore, the 2003 invasion of Iraq had the major objective of decisive elimination of linchpin dominoes, an action likely to cause the collapse of a myriad of terrorist entities on the world scene¹² whose continued existence should have served as strength and inspiration to intending or growing terrorist organizations (Marvin, 2010).

In its present context, the domino theory supposes that, especially in the Lake Chad Basin in particular and West African in general. Boko Haram activities, if not decisively checked will contaminate and spread into neighboring states. This will imply that the sect stands a chance of acquiring numerical strength, areas of influence and strategic advantage in terms of geographical distribution. Therefore, it is plausible to reason, as does this paper that, Boko Haram activities can spread from Nigeria to Chad, Niger, Cameroun, Senegal up to central African Republic and adjoining nations.

Boke Haram in West Africa from the Lense of the Domino Theory

Some similarities exist between the spread of communism and that of terrorism generally. All over the world and everywhere terrorism strives unchecked, the tendency usually is that it may have some ripple effects into adjoining areas. This is consistent with the fears expressed by the US during the cold war over the rapidity at which communism spread.

Boko Haram, which has its roots in Borno State North East Nigeria has made inroads into countries around the Lake Chad Basin and extending up to the Central African Republic (Gaffey, 2015). This defies the heavy military efforts mounted by the Regional Task Force mobilized to curb the activities of the group. The Multinational Task Force made up of soldiers from Nigeria, Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Benin has redoubled efforts in the vested aspiration of eliminating Boko Haram activities within the region. Despite these efforts, Najat Rochdi, the UN Resident Coordinator in Cameroon said that Boko Haram had intensified its daily suicide bombing attacks in the region. Rochdi further expressed fears that the organization still makes inroads eastwards towards the conflict ridden Central African Republic where it is quite agreeable that their presence would exacerbate the already bad humanitarian crisis. The murder of the 70 persons in Fotokol in Cameroon is part of the crusade by the group to take over Cameroun as it did in parts of Niger. Its attacks on Ngouboua and its neighboring towns in Niger prove the fast spreading activities of the militant group. It has been reported that about 1000 Boko Haram members are crossing West to North into Libya to fight for the IS group there. This they do by way of a special smuggling route from Nigeria to Libya and attributable to the same efforts to take over Africa (Adam, 2015). This perhaps is to fulfill its avowed role to represent the IS as its West African province.

In November 2005, a Senegalese national, Makhtar Diokhane was arrested in Niger on his way to release four Senegalese who were detained on the charges of possessing counterfeit money and fighting for Boko Haram. Diokhane's capture led to further arrest in Senegal including an Imam who propagates the doctrine of Boko Haram in Senegal (Mahmood, 2016). The arrest incriminated dozens of persons who have been fighting for Boko Haram. Similarly, in early 2016, Malian authorities detained two persons from Guinea Bissau, one from The Gambia and another from Guinea who were reportedly passing through Mali on their way to join Boko Haram. Another suspect arrested in Niger affirmed that Mauritians have for long joined Boko Haram's fight.

It seems that with the exception of Nigeria, Niger and Cameroun where more numbers are manifestly involved in the terrorist attacks of Boko Haram, other areas within the region are still experiencing minor attacks with many intending members undergoing the process of indoctrination and radicalization. The arrests in Senegal and Mali support this assumption. The radicalization process when completed enhances the chances of intense and precise attacks in the areas of concentration which can diffuse to areas of less concentration. This therefore suggests that places like Senegal, CAR, Mali and Benin Republic may be catchments for

prospective intensified attacks. Also, considering the intensified military efforts by the Nigerian government and the massive concentration on Sambisa and Gwoza areas that housed large numbers of insurgents, there may be a northwards movement of the embattled terrorists who may intensify indoctrination and radicalization processes in the new areas of concentration. The newly radicalized may pose increased prospects of insurgency for the security of the Lake Chad region. This may imply a recoil of insurgency in the northern borders of Nigeria as well as in parts of Chad, Cameroun and Niger there by making real the fears of the domino effects which at the moment is partly but not completely allayed by the combined efforts of the African Union and the Lake Chad Military Joint Task Force against Boko Haram.

Implications of the Domino Effects of Boko Haram Activities in the Lake Chad Region and West Africa

The rapid spread of Boko Haram insurgency within Nigeria, across the Lake Chad region and other countries in the West African sub region has implication for the areas. These implications cut across different facets which include social economic and political dimensions. This part is devoted to discussing some of these implications.

Socio Economic and Political Implications

According to Global Terrorism Database (GTD), Boko Haram carried out about 800 attacks in 2009 which have resulted in nearly 4,000 fatalities, making Boko Haram one of the most active terrorist groups in the world (Pate, 2014). Similarly, the Global Terrorism Index has indicated that Boko Haram was responsible for 6,664 deaths in 2014 (GTI, 2015). These deaths obviously imply dissipation of labor and manpower within the affected areas. The increasing and constant terrorist activities of the sect in North East Nigeria have since 2009 created ugly consequences for the region. Survivals in the various communities in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa and neighboring states in Nigeria have been in threat just as those of communities in Cameroon Chad and Niger bordering Nigeria. These areas have for long been deprived of civil peace, and are regularly exposed to displacements, human rights abuses, refugee problems, loss of means of survival, food insecurity, limited medical facilities and other social amenities. The current upsurge in the number of IDPS which according to some sources have hit a domestically unprecedented height of about 2,151,959 by December 2015 has implications for national demographic considerations including census taking as well as elections in the affected states in Nigeria. Similarly, some more population related problems are experienced in the southern parts of Nigeria where some people of southern origin run for refuge as a result of terrorists activities or counter terrorist activities. Among these are, increased criminality, prospects of epidemic resulting from population explosion, low standards of living, including poor hygiene, and poverty.

Migiro had lamented the increasing rate of child bombings within and across the border of Nigeria which he said does not just have humanitarian implications but also the effect of turning these indoctrinated children against their various communities. He further quoted Amnesty International's position that Boko Haram in 2014 kidnapped 2,000 women whom they convert to sex slaves, cooks, fighters and suicide bombers (Migiro, 2016). These obviously have emotional implications for the victims and more adverse consequences for the societies at large.

The Nigeria government has since the wake of the constant terrorist attacks deployed military and paramilitary forces into the affected areas. Though with numerous security implications for the larger populace who need the services of these security personnel to

maintain civil order, the deployment of these troops have gulped resources that would have served alternative purposes of national growth and development. It is estimated that since 2009, Nigeria spends over 20percent of its annual budget on national security, even when she faces no external threat. It is obvious that most of these budgetary allocations on national security are channeled towards eliminating the Boko Haram and ameliorating its implications on the affected persons and communities.

Regional and cross border trade as well as labor mobility between Nigeria and her west Africa neighbors are not left out of the adverse effects of the insurgency just as these nations suffer mutuality in cross border effects of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). When in December 2014 the Prime Minister of Niger visited the Diffa Province of his country, he made known to spectators that the region which shares borders with Borno state in Nigeria inherits most for her displaced persons. It was noted on that occasion that an estimated 17,000 refugees surge to Gamari village 20km away from Diffa for safety. He further stated that his government spends about 17 billion CFA monthly on these displaced persons²⁴.

Most Nigerians who are non-Muslim conceive Boko Haram activity as a Muslim war against non Muslims, especially Christians. Considering the geographic distribution of religions among ethnic areas that make up Nigeria, where Christians dominate the south while Islam dominates the north, most southerners conceive Boko Haram as a purely northern affair. Their view is that it is a northern design to Islamize the Nigerian nation. This ill feeling is made worse by the constant and increasing attacks on churches and Christian institutions and formations in the north. This conception whether true or false, holds ominous consequences for national integration. Northern Nigerians, Chadians and Malians suffer similar fates when they visit Christian dominated areas within West Africa. Most of them who have almost same physiological appearance with the Hausa Fulani stock in the West African region are branded Boko Haram, thus inhibiting cross border interaction and regional cooperation between nationals of these nations and non northern Nigerians as well as non-Muslim West Africans.

The economy of West Africa, especially the Boko Haram prone areas have not fared better in the area of foreign investments. The bedrock of investments whether domestic or foreign is security. Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and other countries under the real or imagined threats of insecurity arising from Boko Haram activities have suffered setbacks in attracting investors in the viable sectors of these nations. This obviously impacts negatively on the national wealth of the nations involved. More so, considering that the heightening insecurity scare already existing foreign investors away, most of them transfer their business interests to more secure areas. National income, employment opportunities, technology, finance and product and services are the variables that are adversely affected by the flight or non establishment of foreign investments.

The economic and social aspects of the national affairs are not spared when it is considered that most of the people displaced from their homes in some of these areas are farmers who contribute to national income. The northern part of Nigeria is mainly an agrarian area considering the availability of arable, adequate and nutritious land for food produce. Often most the people displaced are the farmers whose flights for dear lives imply a halt in their contribution to national economy, communal growth and infrastructural development.

Most Nigerians and citizens of the affected nations have faced disenfranchisements in elections which have partly contributed to menace of bad governance and directly a reason for

inadequate response by government officials to the needs of the governed. With about 600,000 Nigerians displaced in neighboring countries, reasonable proportions of Nigerian population cannot express their franchise which implies that these displaced people are hardly factored in government infrastructural considerations as well as in social and economic policies, if to rely on number of votes cast.

Conclusion

Boko Haram insurgency has been noted and proven to have the tendency to spill over contiguous countries within the West African sub-region. Starting from Nigeria, likely-hoods are that, as was the fears of the West during the spread of communism, terrorist activities of Boko Haram will seek to lay strong foundation in one West African country from which they intensify action to capture another. The fall of the close neighbor will form a base for, and facilitate the capture of the next. This trend has the tendency to continue until the entire region falls to the political ambitions of the Islamic sect. The next stage will manifest in instituting Islamic based fundamentalist governments whose political agenda will seek to acquire contiguous states and territories.

National governments within the affected region can only rid their region of this rampaging threat through proactive anti terrorist legislations. National security agencies in these regions should form a committed joint operation comprising of combat and intelligence security personnel from the manifestly affected as well as potentially threatened areas. Arms control efforts should be intensified through sincere policy synergies that actively prohibit arms proliferation within the region. Similarly, governments should institute rapid de-radicalization processes in designated regions where identified new converts can be rehabilitated through rapid de-radicalization. Furthermore, governments within the region should avail its citizens with good socio-economic packages that render offers by terrorists unattractive. Legislations should be extended to establishing severe punishments through enabling laws required to aid the judiciary. Severe punishment prescriptions will to reasonable extents deter intending members and terrorists.

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