

# Boko Haram: Changing Dynamics of an Insurgency

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This piece analyses the burgeoning intensity of violence in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria, consequent to the apocalyptic campaigns of Boko Haram – a fundamentalist Islamist group that has been engaging the country’s security forces in an internecine war of attrition since 2010, when it officially declared an all-out war on the Nigerian State and its citizens; a zero-sum affair in which both parties have been committed to mutually annihilating each other several times over, using the most forceful means available to them.

The new face of BH, which has seen it transform from a local religious pressure group into an insurgent group – with suspected links with foreign extremist groups – has attracted the attention of a once docile international community and stimulated a multinational campaign to check its violent activities; a development that is based on the conviction among security watchers across the globe that the activities of BH do not constitute threats to the Nigerian State alone, but has wider regional and global security implications. This conviction is based on the alarming acceleration of the group’s campaigns of calumny which has witnessed the execution of attacks on both local and multinational targets – soft and hard. The well coordinated car bombings of the Nigerian Police Forces Headquarters and the United Nations Building, the recent Iyanya bus terminal blasts; abductions of both Nigerian and foreign nationals – especially the recent kidnapping of over 200 girls from a school in Chibok, Borno State; shootings; arsons; are just a sprinkling of the extreme tactics this group has adopted in its contest for power with the Nigerian State.

That the activities of BH have increased in scale and intensity – since its re-emergence in 2010 – is there for all discerning observers of the macabre trail of blood and iron in the country’s North-East to see. Gradually, what started as isolated attacks in pockets of towns in Borno State – its home base – and its environs, has metamorphosed into a full scale war that has gradually spread beyond the North-East into once peaceful sections of the North, and even threatening to engulf the rest of the country, if care is not taken; a campaign of mind-bending terror that has left thousands dead in its wake.

From 2010, the group’s activities appeared to be spreading across the North-East, but in 2013, after President Jonathan’s imposition of martial rule in the hotbeds of the group’s activities – Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states – the group’s activities seemed to be retreating towards this geopolitical zone. However violence has since intensified in the group’s stronghold and action has spilled over the border into neighboring Cameroon. Despite claims to the contrary by the authorities, the B.H insurgency is light years away from being “crushed”, especially in the light of the increasing scale and frequency of its attacks on specially selected targets in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States over the past year – a classic case in point being the recent vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device

(VBIED) attacks targeting the outskirts of Abuja, the country's capital, as it prepared to host the World Economic Forum.”

Between January and February, 2014, alone, the searing violence has claimed over 650 lives in Borno and Adamawa States alone. Lately, Gwoza, Bama, Konduga and Damboa towns and all the neighboring villages around them have become ghost towns; lands hunted by the phantoms of fear and uncertainty. The activities of BH have obviously left deep imprints of death, destruction, confusion and terror on their paths. The sad truth is that death has become such a natural phenomenon in Nigeria's North-East to the extent that people no longer shudder at screaming headlines churning out gory details of the group's deadly campaigns of death; a war that has become a traditional hallmark of life in the North-East and its environs

The increasing scale of violence in the country's North-East is obviously a demonstration of B.H's resolve to continue undermining the capabilities of the country's security forces by randomly striking at targets located within their core areas of operation – FCT and the states under marshal rule; a strategy that is geared towards calling the bluff of Jonathan's administration, increasing the state of insecurity in the country, and telling the rest of the world to go to “Hell”! For instance, Borno State, the group's spiritual home where the “struggle” is said to have began, has remained a major theater of the group's activities. This is based on the thinking by the eggheads of the group that losing the war to government forces on this front will effectively signal the end of their uprising; a worst case scenario they would prefer not to imagine. That is why the scale of violence in the state has been more ferocious – attacks that are, most times, random, but well coordinated; a curious development for a state under martial rule. Adamawa and Yobe – the two other states under emergency rule – have not been spared the fatal scars of BH's violent dispositions.

It is hard to believe that in states under martial rule, insurgents can boldly launch coordinated attacks on targets in villages and towns for hours, without any kind of intervention by the country's security forces. The truth is that in the midst of the tears, sweat and blood that have defined the evolution of this war, one undeniable fact that stands out like a festering sour is the fact that the Nigerian military has been overstretched, overawed and roundly embarrassed by the rising intensity and frequency of Boko Haram activities. Despite all the relentless efforts the country's security forces have put into buffering the activities of this group, BH has continued to up the ante in its engagement with the state's security forces. Not even the strategic partnership Nigeria has purportedly brokered with other international stakeholders – United States of America, France, China et al – seems capable of diffusing tensions in this troubled part of the country.

However – in fairness to the country's security forces – from a purely strategic standpoint, the major stumbling block that has limited the country's security forces in their anti-terror campaigns, is the asymmetric tilt of the ongoing war which affords the insurgents a strategic advantage as they can easily blend in with the civilian population, making it difficult for their easy identification, extrication and elimination. For the insurgents, their virtual invincibility gives them the advantage

of easily identifying and striking at the vulnerable security forces. That is why it would be quite out of order for anyone to expect so much from the country's security operatives who, apart from being ill-equipped, are facing this kind of enemy for the first time.

The current security challenges in the country's North-East are surmountable. What is urgently required is a multifaceted home-grown approach, involving all stakeholders; concerted efforts that should involve both hard and soft measures. The soft measures should be a simulacrum of non-violent peacemaking initiatives that are geared towards addressing the issues raised by the insurgents. It will involve some form of bargaining between the authorities and the insurgents. Whether anybody accepts the need for dialogue or not, it remains an option that cannot just be wished away. Confronting the insurgents through the use of military force, with intent to annihilate them, is a strategy that has obviously failed; a fact clearly demonstrated by the upward escalation of the crisis despite the amount of force that have been directed towards this end, *ab initio*, which necessitates a new approach.

On the other hand, the country's national security framework should be comprehen

sively overhauled and updated to face modern security challenges. The current system – despite all the noise that is being made about “reforms” – is no longer adequate. From: providing adequate training on fighting modern guerrilla warfare – an inadequacy that has tilted the scale of the conflict to the advantage of the insurgents; raising the morale of security personnel, through improved remuneration; providing advanced training on modern intelligence gathering and processing procedures; providing training on the effective use of information and other relevant technology; to other significant skills that are required to wage successful anti-insurgency campaigns, the country's security setup must be brought up to date. The lopsided manner the counterterrorism campaign has been executed by the country's security units has exposed the weak underbelly of its security system. BH is better armed, better informed and better motivated than the country's security personnel. That is the truth of the matter!

In all, a coordinated approach to resolving the ongoing insurgency in the country's North-East, remains the only way out of the present quagmire. No single solution can, in any way, suffice as an iron cast panacea to a crisis that has become Nigeria's Albatross. In the same manner that two heads are said to be better than one, a synchronized approach towards checking the ongoing security challenges in the North-East, remains the only plausible solution to this asseverating and emasculating national embarrassment. God save Nigeria!