The current challenge posed by the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria is not only about the viciousness of its terrorist campaigns, nor the sect’s avowed mission to impose Islamic law on the country, it is also about confusion regarding the exact cause(s) of the violence. Several theories have emerged to explain the problem, broadly revolving around socio-economic, political, and religious themes, all of which are treated in detail in this study. This paper argues that while none of the perspectives may exclusively explain the problem, analyses that consider the political context deserve particular attention, especially in relation to President Jonathan’s contestation of the 2011 presidential election and the coming election in 2015.

Introduction

One of the outcomes of the security challenge posed by the Boko Haram insurgency on Nigerian society has been the emergent preponderance of theories that attempt to explain the motive of the Islamic group. Unlike the Niger Delta militancy which preceded it, and which precipitated its desire for a separate state from Nigeria on decades of conspiratorial neglect by the Nigerian state and multinational oil prospecting companies in the Niger Delta region, Boko Haram has refrained from articulating and formally presenting its grievances, apart from its declared desire for the strict interpretation of Islamic law in Nigeria. The confusion also grows out of the changing dynamics in the operations of the sect. For instance, its terrorist campaign, which initially targeted security formations and personnel, has expanded to include civilians and non-government targets, and the Nigerian public generally.

The theories are divided into two broad spectrums. One views the problem essentially as internal. The other blames external forces. The former looks at socio-economic factors, as well as deep-seated political, religious differences in the Nigerian society. It also includes vengeance over the death of the sect’s leader, Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf. The external forces argument has two planks: one characterizes the problem as part of global Islamic jihad and focuses on the sect’s links with international terrorist groups such as al Qaeda or its affiliates as al Shabaab or the al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, (AQIM); the other views it as conspiratorial – a grand strategy to achieve the predicted disintegration of Nigeria by 2015, (See “Africa in 2020 Panel” Report). Within the conspiratorial thesis is the sub-theme that Nigeria is being targeted by envious and troublesome neighbors. This aspect also links it to the now “unemployed” war-hardened returnees from the Libyan crisis and the assumed arms stream and the from that turmoil.

How relevant these theories are to the explanation of the current crisis is the question to which this paper addresses itself. Is Nigeria merely convulsing from her many internal contradictions that successive leadership has been unable to manage or resolve, or are external forces actually at work to undermine Nigeria; if so, how and for what purpose? While each of the competing perspectives indeed may offer some valid approximation of the real cause(s) of Nigeria’s security challenge, the multiplicity has tended to frustrate a clear understanding of the problem and articulation of appropriate response to it. This paper set out to examine the entire gamut of the theories with a view to clearing, rather than adding to the confusion. But we can expect that, as the Boko Haram challenge persists, more theories will continue to emerge.

An Explanatory Note on the Origin and Activities of Boko Haram

The apparent confusion generated by the plethora of theories attempting to explain the Boko Haram challenge also characterizes the origin of the sect. The confusion not only reflects in the narratives about the exact date, and who the actual founder was, but also to the true source of these expositions. For instance, Adibe (2012), has observed that while the popular belief is that it was founded, c1970 or 2001, Maddie, he notes, traces the date as far back as 1995; and argued that, one Lawan Abubakar, who later left for further studies at the University of Maiduguri, Saudi Arabia, actually founded the Boko Haram sect. Under Abubakar, the sect was known as Sahaba, (Maddie 2011 cited in Adibe, 2012: 50). Elsewhere, these expositions are credited to Shehu Sani, a civil right activist in northern Nigeria, who helped broker the first peace deal with the sect in October 2012, (see Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012: 100). They also acknowledge the name version which traced the origin to an evangelical group formed by Muslim students at the University of Maiduguri, Borno state, who reportedly felt dissatisfied with Western education (Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012: 100).

Muhammad Yusuf, to whom the formation of the sect is now generally accredited, according to the competing narratives only assumed leadership after Abubakar’s departure and “indoclimated the sect with his own teachings, which he claimed were based on purity” (Adibe, 2012: 50). Yusuf’s notion of “purity” and teachings were inspired by the works of Ibn Taymiyya, a fourteenth century legal scholar who taught Islamic fundamentalism and is considered a “major theorist” for radical groups in the Middle East (Johnson, 2011), after whom Yusuf named his mosque in Maiduguri (The Nation, May 23, 2012). But just as the sect itself may be less concerned about whom to credit for its formation than waging its war against the Nigerian state, the state too may be less concerned with the origin than it is with the threat that the group now poses to society.

The obscurity surrounding its true origin perhaps informs why initially, the sect “had no specific name as its members attracted several descriptions where they operated based on the perception of the local population” (Okereke, 2011: 450). Such names include Talibban and the Yussufiyah. The sect soon became formally identified as Ahlulanna wud jade ab Hirja – ‘Congregation of Followers of the Prophet Involved in the Call to Islam and Religious Struggle.’ The name Boko Haram, to which it is now commonly referred derives from the sect’s anti-Western posturing, literally meaning “Western education (book) civilization is sin.”

In the early stages, the Boko Haram sect was widely acknowledged to have mobilized its membership from women and children, school drop-outs and unemployed university and polytechnic graduates, most of whom tore up their certificates; student members withdrew from school. Okereke posits that “these recruits were indoctrinated by Yusuf to believe that their state of hopelessness was caused by government which imposed Western education on them and failed to manage the resources of the country to their benefits” (ibid). Although from the outset, the sect’s leadership was peaceful, but not without attracting attention among other Islamic preachers who saw the preaching and interpretation of the Quran as a recipe for violence and an affront to constituted authority (ibid:457). Although incidents of violence have earlier been recorded against the sect, (Uzodike and Maiangwa, 2012: 102), serious concerns over its violent tendencies grew only after the open confrontation between the sect and the government in July 2009 following the death of Yusuf while in police custody, as well as his father-in-law and sect financier, Ustaz Buiji Foi, and the incarceration of members by state authorities.

One of the outcomes of the security challenge imposed by the Boko Haram insurgency on Nigerian society has been the emergent preponderance of theories that attempt to explain the motive of the Islamic group. Unlike the Niger Delta militancy which preceded it, and which precipitated its desire for a separate state from Nigeria on decades of conspiratorial neglect by the Nigerian state and multinational oil prospecting companies in the Niger Delta region, Boko Haram has refrained from articulating and formally presenting its grievances, apart from its declared desire for the strict interpretation of Islamic Law in Nigeria.
clients in the *cursus honorum* that is the race for preferment – ‘the image of personal rule’” (see Jackson and Rosberg, 1998:17).

The inherent complexities in the states forged by European imperialism made less feasible the prospects of the new states modelled after the Western types (Roth, cited in Jackson and Rosberg, p. 36). Although the African states have come a long way down the road of nation-building process, with many heterogeneous or multinational states having to resort to varying ways of resolving their inter-group relations (Elias, 1997:58), many of the states still constance from one shock after another resulting from those sociological and political divergences; so much so because “the African state is hardly ever coexistent with a common society” (Ekeh, 1989:5) and “the society in which it [the African state] exist is typically segmented into small rural political communities, often with strong localized identities, competing to capture and extract power or at least prevent it from oppressing them” (Ake, 1999:42).

According to Professor Peter Ekeh, “The political history of Africa has become a tale of drift and instability…. Standing above, and set aside and apart from society, the African state has turned out to be a failure, because its redistributive power is perceived to be counterproductive, and that its role is rather to perpetuate state failure” (Ekeh, 1989:5). The arbitrariness of the African state as conferred on African political culture, attributes of negativity, so that “African political culture has become characterized by a vast array of negative elements such as corruption, violence and mistrust” (ibid).

With the tendency to blame every of the continent’s woes on the incidence of colonialism, it remains debatable, however, whether it was the nature of the state inherited at the end of formal colonialism or the neo-patrimonial and particularistic orientation of the competing power elites who inherited the post-colonial state that is the problem. Whichever, the African state remains characterized by a disconnect with the social fabric.

Those negative elements identified by Ekeh, and much more, have all combined to make the African state irrelevant to the citizenry, thus eroding its legitimacy. Additionally, the state becomes prone to economic dislocation and political instability – all which are indices of state failure (Rotberg 2002: 86 cited in Uzodike and Maingwa). Here, Rotberg’s articulation of the characteristics of a failed state in economic and political terms is illuminating. According to him, the economic sphere is characterized by deteriorated standards of living, a lack of public goods and services, the flourishing of corruption and rent-seeking, and a pervasive economic stagnation (ibid. p.96). In the political sphere, some leaders and their allies readily work to subvert the democratic norms by combining judicial instability, stifling the emergence of civil society or space, and abusing security and defence forces for parochial ends. Moreover, the political sphere is dotted with ethnic discrimination and resultant discord. Governments that once operated to for the benefit of all the nation’s citizens are perceived to have become partisan. Corrupt ruling elites invest their ill-gotten gains overseas, building lavish residences and palaces with state funds (ibid. pp.96-97).

Rotberg further argues that in the last phase of failure, the state’s legitimacy will collapse:

Once the state’s capacity to secure itself or to perform in an expected manner requires, there is no reason to expect disloyalty to the state on the part of the disenchanted and aggrieved citizens. Logically, many transfer their allegiances to their clan and group leaders, some of whom gravitate towards terrorism as they strive to secure communal mandate. Mobilizing support from both external and local supporters, the terrorists seek out havens in the more remote and marginalized corners of failed states where they blend in, more comfortably in the prevailing chaos associated with state failure (ibid).

The various theoretical constructs that attempt to mirror the Nigerian state point to a deep gulf between state and society or in Ekeh’s (op.cit) term “the difficult differences between state and society” – from Wole Olatun’s ‘Hanging State’, Hamza Alavi’s ‘Over-developed State’, to Teresa Turner’s ‘Entrepost State’, Gunnar Myrdal’s ‘Soft State’ and Claude Ake’s ‘Irrelevant State’. In the realm of theory, such disconnect is not only incapable of eroding legitimacy but also inducing state failure and the subsequent repercussions that emanate from it such as violent conflicts or terrorism as Rotberg’s postulate suggests. Empirically, Uzodike and Maingwa have articulated the various conditions and features of a failed state as pertaining to Nigeria, ranging from the Failed States index in which the country ranked 14 in 2011, Terrorism and Political Mapping (2010-2011), which ranked her fifth and the Human Development Index Trend (2011), where Nigeria emerged 156 out of 186 countries. On these basis they assert that the chaotic and anarchic situation in the Nigeria of 2012 exemplifies the characteristics of a failing or weak state that is degenerating into full failure (Uzodike and Maingwa, op.cit. p. 97).

The Boko Haram challenge in the final analysis seeks to reflect the deepening crisis the Nigerian state, the various state theories, to which we shall presently focus on attempt to explain. Adibe (2012) captures the depth of the challenge when he argues that:

> “the Nigerian state, contrary to the media hype, is regarded as the enemy, not just by Boko Haram, but by several Nigerians and groups, each attacking it with as much ferocity as Boko Haram’s bombs, using whatever means they have at their disposal: politicians entrusted to protect our common patrimony steal the country blind, law enforcement officers see or hear no evil at a slight inducement, government workers drag their feet and refuse to give their best while reveling in moonlighting, organized labour, inducing university lecturers in public institutions go on indefinite strikes on a whim while journalists accept ‘brown envelopes’ to turn their head on its head or become uncritically impressed with propaganda and selected anti-Nigerian state images. What all these groups have in common with Boko Haram is that they believe that the premise on which they act is justifiable and that the Nigerian state is unfair to them, if not an outright enemy (cited in Uzodike and Maingwa, op.cit. p. 98).”

**Methodology**

In examining the various perspectives that have attempted to capture the causes of the Boko Haram insurgency since the outset of the problem, we looked at general theoretical frameworks that have been employed universally to explain similar crisis. In this regard, we made reference to foreign and local (Nigerian) sources. At the same time, we paid critical attention to the diverse views provided by the broad spectrum of the Nigerian society. In doing so, adequate consideration was given to all the shades of opinions representative of the various divides of the Nigerian society. This was in view of the complexity of the Nigerian society, the tenacious relationship of its disparate groups and the implication of the Boko Haram insurgency on the continuing existence of Nigeria as a single corporate entity. The idea is that resolving the Boko Haram challenge and forestalling a resurgence of the sort in the future may to a large extent depend on a national consensus on what the problem really is and how it will be tackled as was the challenge posed by the Niger Delta militancy. Apart from the dangers it constitutes to Nigeria’s immediate neighbours, Nigeria’s position as a strategic country in global consideration also warrants that even non-Nigerians share concerns over what may have gone wrong. The paper accommodated such views. We also considered perspectives provided by persons with security backgrounds. Indeed the contemporariness of the problem is such that “African political culture has become characterized by a vast array of negative elements such as corruption, violence and mistrust” (ibid).

According to Professor Peter Ekeh, “The political history of Africa has become a tale of drift and instability…. Standing above, and set aside and apart from society, the African state has turned out to be a failure, because its redistributive power is perceived to be counterproductive, and that its role is rather to perpetuate state failure” (Ekeh, 1989:5). The arbitrariness of the African state as conferred on African political culture, attributes of negativity, so that “African political culture has become characterized by a vast array of negative elements such as corruption, violence and mistrust” (ibid).

The Boko Haram challenge in the final analysis seeks to reflect the deepening crisis the Nigerian state, the various state theories, to which we shall presently focus on attempt to explain. Adibe (2012) captures the depth of the challenge when he argues that:

> “the Nigerian state, contrary to the media hype, is regarded as the enemy, not just by Boko Haram, but by several Nigerians and groups, each attacking it with as much ferocity as Boko Haram’s bombs, using whatever means they have at their disposal: politicians entrusted to protect our common patrimony steal the country blind, law enforcement officers see or hear no evil at a slight inducement, government workers drag their feet and refuse to give their best while reveling in moonlighting, organized labour, inducing university lecturers in public institutions go on indefinite strikes on a whim while journalists accept ‘brown envelopes’ to turn their head on its head or become uncritically impressed with propaganda and selected anti-Nigerian state images. What all these groups have in common with Boko Haram is that they believe that the premise on which they act is justifiable and that the Nigerian state is unfair to them, if not an outright enemy (cited in Uzodike and Maingwa, op.cit. p. 98).”

**Methodology**

In examining the various perspectives that have attempted to capture the causes of the Boko Haram insurgency since the outset of the problem, we looked at general theoretical frameworks that have been employed universally to explain similar crisis. In this regard, we made reference to foreign and local (Nigerian) sources. At the same time, we paid critical attention to the diverse views provided by the broad spectrum of the Nigerian society. In doing so, adequate consideration was given to all the shades of opinions representative of the various divides of the Nigerian society. This was in view of the complexity of the Nigerian society, the tenacious relationship of its disparate groups and the implication of the Boko Haram insurgency on the continuing existence of Nigeria as a single corporate entity. The idea is that resolving the Boko Haram challenge and forestalling a resurgence of the sort in the future may to a large extent depend on a national consensus on what the problem really is and how it will be tackled as was the challenge posed by the Niger Delta militancy. Apart from the dangers it constitutes to Nigeria’s immediate neighbours, Nigeria’s position as a strategic country in global consideration also warrants that even non-Nigerians share concerns over what may have gone wrong. The paper accommodated such views. We also considered perspectives provided by persons with security backgrounds. Indeed the contemporariness of the problem is such that “African political culture has become characterized by a vast array of negative elements such as corruption, violence and mistrust” (ibid).
members’ widows by living members, all sustain the same threat. The reported killing of those who decline suicide missions on the orders of Shekau, the killing in September 2011 of Babakura Fugu, an in-law to Yussuf, for allegedly accepting blood money from the government (Thiday, September 19, 2011) which signifies existence of faction within the group, all widen the sect’s targets, blur the line between the “We” and “Others”, and so challenge this perspective.

Similarly, to the “Others,” the sect’s reference to the “prohibited name,” Boko Haram, (Western education is sin), whereas to the sect itself, the “We,” “our name is Jama’atu Ahlus Sunnah Liddati Awwadu Wal Jihad (Saharareporters, online, January 22, 2012). Beside its pejorative connotation, in the sect’s perspective, the name does not capture its objective and has been a motive that Southerners, including government spokesmen, Abu Musab offered this, in particular, as reason for the sect’s targetting of the Nigerian media (Saharareporters, online, May 1, 2012). Somalli’s Al-Shabaab also exhibits this tendency (BIC Somali, online, June 21, 2009).

The Human Needs/Socio-Economic Perspective

The socio-economic perspective of the Boko Haram challenge in Nigeria, essentially attempts to de-emphasise the interpretation of this being a particularly Muslim or northern crisis (Kukah, 2012). The perspective which blames social conditions for the violence is anchored on the human needs theory of social conflicts. Its central thesis is that all humans have basic needs which they seek to fulfill and failure caused by other individuals or groups to meet these needs could lead to conflict (Rosati et al, 1990 cited in Faleti, p. 51). The theory is similar to the frustration-aggression theory of violence, which posits that aggression is always a consequence of frustration caused by economic needs. (Dougherty and Pfaffgrate Jr, 1990: 266). According to the theory, relative deprivation and disparity between the expectation and value capabilities and that the lack of a need satisfaction – defined as a gap between aspirations and achievement generally – relies on the psychological state of frustration and aggressive attitudes emanating from it (Midlarsky, 1975:29).

Unlike the relational/vengeance theory, the perspective goes beyond the trigger to focus on the underlying factor(s) that could have bred such groups. It has its largest proponents from the intelligentsia, and is particularly viewed by some foreign governments such as those of the United States and Britain as explanations for the problem. Nigeria’s socio-economic indexes seem to validate the assumption of human needs theory. The Human Development Index Trend, for instance, ranked Nigeria 156 out of 186 in 2011. The socio-economic factors being adduced as the root causes of violence in Nigeria include unemployment, especially among the youth, poverty and a deteriorating standard of living, especially in the north. But perhaps its relevance in the context of the Boko Haram challenge is that many of the factors that contributed to the onset of violence are generalities of the story not just specific to Nigeria.

Hence for Professor Jean Herskovits of the State University of New York, to whom “it was clear in 2009 when the insurgency began that the root cause of violence and anger in both the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness,” the government must address socio-economic deprivation, which is most severe in the north (Herskovits, 2012).

Indeed the very high incidence of poverty in Nigeria is generally seen as a northern phenomenon. A study by Professor Charles Soludo, shows the three northern regions having an average poverty incidence of 70.1% compared to 34.9% of the south’s three. Ten states in Nigeria with the highest incidence of poverty also are all northern states, whereas the ten states with the lowest incidence of poverty are all southern states, (Luken, n.d.). Thus, “70% of the people living in the north live below $1 per day, which is equivalent to N129 per day,” (ibid). The high concentrated poverty where developing areas could indeed be a function of frustration caused by economic deprivation, (Dougherty and Pfaffgrate Jr, 1990: 266). Frustation-agression tendencies often also manifest misplaced aggression. This trend has featured in the series of violence inflicted upon the ordinary citizens of Nigeria, most of who have no direct connection to political and economic elites whose mismanagement of the country’s resources engenders the unemployment, poverty and deprivation that breed frustration and foster violence. As Dougherty and Pfaffgrate Jr. have rightly noted, hostilities in such instances, are directed “toward someone or something not responsible for the original frustration” (ibid).

A more profound explanation of the north’s socio-economic crisis lies in a perspective that sees a nexus between its depleting patrimonial economic system, which dis-empowers both the north and south, and the dysfunctional state system that places distribution above production (Aregbesola, 2012). The governor of the south-western state of Osun, Raul Aregbesola, a Muslim, who is credited with the idea, argues that while the economic disempowerment does not itself lead to violence, it means that about or less than one-third of the adult males sustain that society; much of the population, especially the elite, have been socialized into sustaining a lifestyle out of sync with economic productivity. He posits that the anomaly has been encouraged for a long time by the dysfunctional (state) system, which places distribution above production. Sustaining that lifestyle has increasingly become difficult, especially with the north having lost control of the centralized power structure. This means that the elites are no longer satisfied, not to talk of the crumbs that come to the masses. This, he strongly contends, is largely responsible for northern unrest (Aregbesola, 2012).

Perhaps of further interest about this perspective is its politicization by the northern elite, which tends to become the real issue. Rather than focus on its merit in relation to solving the problem, it has, for some time been used, as a tool to disassociate themselves from their activities, Boko Haram remains an Islamic movement. It is also occurring in a multi-religious political setting in which religion itself is a major factor in determining the distribution of political power (Kukah, 1993: x). Second, its emergence was preceded by intense political bickering between some, mainly Muslim political actors in the north and their counterparts in the south in the period leading to the electoral victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian and southerner. In a political environment in which the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness, the government must address socio-economic deprivation, which is most severe in the north (Herskovits, 2012).

The Political Feud Perspective

The crux of the problem is the over politicisation of social life […] We are intoxicated with politics: the premium on political power is so high that we are prone to take the most extreme measures to win and to maintain political power. Claude Ake

In political terms, the Boko Haram phenomenon is perhaps more interesting because of the specific historical context in which it is occurring. First, while other Muslims may want to disassociate themselves from its activities, Boko Haram remains an Islamic movement. It is also occurring in a multi-religious political setting in which religion itself is a major factor in determining the distribution of political power (Kukah, 1993: x). Second, its emergence was preceded by intense political bickering between some, mainly Muslim political actors in the north and their counterparts in the south in the period leading to the electoral victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian and southerner. In a political environment in which the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness, the government must address socio-economic deprivation, which is most severe in the north (Herskovits, 2012).

Perhaps of further interest about this perspective is its politicization by the northern elite, which tends to become the real issue. Rather than focus on its merit in relation to solving the problem, it has, for some time been used, as a tool to disassociate themselves from their activities, Boko Haram remains an Islamic movement. It is also occurring in a multi-religious political setting in which religion itself is a major factor in determining the distribution of political power (Kukah, 1993: x). Second, its emergence was preceded by intense political bickering between some, mainly Muslim political actors in the north and their counterparts in the south in the period leading to the electoral victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian and southerner. In a political environment in which the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness, the government must address socio-economic deprivation, which is most severe in the north (Herskovits, 2012).

In political terms, the Boko Haram phenomenon is perhaps more interesting because of the specific historical context in which it is occurring. First, while other Muslims may want to disassociate themselves from its activities, Boko Haram remains an Islamic movement. It is also occurring in a multi-religious political setting in which religion itself is a major factor in determining the distribution of political power (Kukah, 1993: x). Second, its emergence was preceded by intense political bickering between some, mainly Muslim political actors in the north and their counterparts in the south in the period leading to the electoral victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian and southerner. In a political environment in which the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness, the government must address socio-economic deprivation, which is most severe in the north (Herskovits, 2012).

Perhaps of further interest about this perspective is its politicization by the northern elite, which tends to become the real issue. Rather than focus on its merit in relation to solving the problem, it has, for some time been used, as a tool to disassociate themselves from their activities, Boko Haram remains an Islamic movement. It is also occurring in a multi-religious political setting in which religion itself is a major factor in determining the distribution of political power (Kukah, 1993: x). Second, its emergence was preceded by intense political bickering between some, mainly Muslim political actors in the north and their counterparts in the south in the period leading to the electoral victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian and southerner. In a political environment in which the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness, the government must address socio-economic deprivation, which is most severe in the north (Herskovits, 2012).

Perhaps of further interest about this perspective is its politicization by the northern elite, which tends to become the real issue. Rather than focus on its merit in relation to solving the problem, it has, for some time been used, as a tool to disassociate themselves from their activities, Boko Haram remains an Islamic movement. It is also occurring in a multi-religious political setting in which religion itself is a major factor in determining the distribution of political power (Kukah, 1993: x). Second, its emergence was preceded by intense political bickering between some, mainly Muslim political actors in the north and their counterparts in the south in the period leading to the electoral victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian and southerner. In a political environment in which the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness, the government must address socio-economic deprivation, which is most severe in the north (Herskovits, 2012).

Perhaps of further interest about this perspective is its politicization by the northern elite, which tends to become the real issue. Rather than focus on its merit in relation to solving the problem, it has, for some time been used, as a tool to disassociate themselves from their activities, Boko Haram remains an Islamic movement. It is also occurring in a multi-religious political setting in which religion itself is a major factor in determining the distribution of political power (Kukah, 1993: x). Second, its emergence was preceded by intense political bickering between some, mainly Muslim political actors in the north and their counterparts in the south in the period leading to the electoral victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian and southerner. In a political environment in which the north and south of Nigeria is endemic poverty and hopelessness, the government must address socio-economic deprivation, which is most severe in the north (Herskovits, 2012).

[...]

[...] the ruling (Hausa-Fulani) ruling class was quick to sense the dangers that surrounded its interests, and it acted decisively and pragmatically. The northern ruling class may have beaten back that threat of southern domination, but could not have done all that only to surrender power to those it had ruled and used as political cannon fodder all these years. It worked behind the scenes, scheming and plotting its political interests on the canvass of northern interests. To strengthen their cause, a major move was made by bringing together three erastrophic political entities, representing the three power blocs in Northern Nigeria. They were brought together and made to tour the North as...
symbol of northern solidarity. Known as the Leaders of Thought, the group comprised of [sic] Alhaji Aliyu Makaman Bida (leader of the defunct NPC), Alhaji Aminu Kanu (NEPU) and Mr. Joseph Tambu (UMBC) (pp.39-40).

Gowon’s nine years in power (1966-1975) remains the longest any one ruler has occupied Nigeria’s presidency. Again, although General Ibrahim Babangida, a Gwari who ruled Nigeria from 1985 to 1993, hails from the Minority Middle-Belt as Gowon, his eight-year rule was marked by robust obsequies to the Sokoto Sultanate which symbolizes (Muslim) spiritual and (northern) political authority. Babangida’s choice of Sambo Dasuki, (Nigeria’s new NSA) as ‘hisade de camp after his successful coup against General Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani, could be seen not only in the light of forestalling a backlash from the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy, which installed the latter to power (Okohski, 1993) but also as an appeasement gesture towards it.

Beneath the façade of northern hegemony, however, the resentment against Hausa-Fulani hegemony over the rest of the north among other northern political blocs persists. Perhaps the boldest expression of this resentment was the expulsion of the five northerners and predominantly Hausa-Fulani Nigerian states from Nigeria by army major Gideon Orkar in the coup against General Buhari’s regime in 1990. The former minority group of political leaders in northern Nigeria, had accused the Hausa-Fulani of seeking to perpetuate their rule at the expense of the predominantly Christian peoples of Nigeria’s Middle-Belt. The age-old resentments of the old Kanem-Borno Empire towards the over-arch ing influence of the Sokoto Caliphate in the north also remains. When the late General Sani Abacha, a Kanuri, assumed the leadership of Nigeria in 1993, he retired several top military officers, many of whom were regarded as ‘IBB Boys’ and were mainly Hausa-Fulani. Abacha’s later deposition of the Sulatina of Sokoto, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, and concomitant prominence accorded the Shehu of Borno by his regime, was perhaps the climax of a revived age-old rivalry between old Kanem-Borno and Sokoto Caliphate. That interlude, however, did not redeem the peripherality of the Kanem-Borno axis in the northern domination of Nigeria’s political power trajectory. It is against this backdrop that the political fever theory has generated more interest than any of the perspectives that attempt to explain the Boko Haram phenomenon as it also further exposes the deep division among Nigeria’s disparate social groups. Professor Wole Soyinka view on the problem perhaps captures this scenario most succinctly:

Much play is given, and rightly so, to economic factors – unemployment, misgovernment, wasted resources, social marginalization, massive corruption – in the nurturing of the current political violence. Despite these, the consideration of differing political authorities’ interpretations of the concept of political violence in Nigeria with the general context of the theory of northern loss of power, for the Nigerian political system, necessitous for its prebendal and cronism, the stakes for the control of political power can be quite high, and loss of central power could prompt a “highly placed, highly disgruntled, and thus highly motivated individuals” or group towards bringing the country “under a specific kind of fundamentalist strain”, even if illegally (Joseph, 1991; Sklar, 1998).

Very significant in the campaign of violence by the Boko Haram is the corresponding intensity which marked the post-2011 election Nigeria. Apart from anger against Jonathan for violating his party’s power rotation arrangement, while international observers viewed the April 2011 general polls in which Jonathan emerged victorious as credible, “many Nigerians, especially in the north, did not” (Herskovits, 2012).

The terror attacks as orchestrated attempts to undermine Jonathan thus qualifies them as political violence intended for the “transformations either within structures of political authority or within economic and/or social system” (Midlarsky, 1975). With the ultimatum issued by the Boko Haram sect in early January 2012 to southern Nigerians residing in the north to return to their region, the contention that “Boko Haram [is out to end 1914 amalgamation],” (Saturday Sun, online, January 21, 2012) of the northern and southern protectorates, which formally created the political entity known as Nigeria, apart from Soyinka’s thesis that the perpetrators are indeed anarchists who, having lost power, are bent on dismembering Nigeria.

The political fever perspective has acquired more dimensions as it also reveals emergent dynamics in Nigeria’s power relations. Jonathan’s Ijaw ethnic group claims Boko Haram is a northern attempt to undermine the president’s power. At the same time, there is an emergent school of thought that the specific focus of the terror campaign is the 2015 presidential election, an attempt to ensure that power returns to the north by 2015, especially amidst speculations that Jonathan may yet contest the presidency at that time. Senator Uche Chukwumerije, who has canvassed this view, links Jonathan’s accession to power from the vice-president in 2007 to the elected president in 2011, to the Niger Delta militancy spear-headed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, MEND from the late 1990s. Obasanjo’s emergence as Nigeria’s president in 1999 to him also owed to the militancy by the Yoruba ethnic militia, the Oodua People’s Congress, OPC as an aftermath of the 1993 presidential election annum. Thus his suggestion to his ethnic Igbo nationalism to mobilize its own militia, Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra, MASSOB, to “devis a means of constructive engagement with the youth” (Vanguard, online, 29 September 2011) towards 2015. Chukwumerije’s call for the mobilization of the Igbo militia should be seen within the context of ethnic militia for political influence in Nigeria, which forms the central thesis of our essay in a forthcoming volume[2].

Professor Bolaji Akinyemi’s conceptualization of the Nigerian military from July 1966 to 1999 as an ethnic militia is quite functional in understanding our argument in the essay under reference. In doing so, he has argued that referring to the Nigerian army as an on-classical and unusual case of ethnic militia does not mean that it was made up of only one nationality. Instead, while it is composed of representatives of many of the nationalities of Nigeria, it is only the northern Hausa-Fulani military representatives who have a sense of collective interests to advance and protect (Akinyemi, 2000:21). Since 1999, certain fundamental changes have taken place in the command structure of the Nigerian military-security institutions to the extent that certain offices, hitherto the exclusive preserve of the north or the Hausa-Fulani, are now occupied by personnel outside of these areas. For example, for the first time in post-civil war Nigeria, an Igbo became the chief of military staff in the person of Lt. General Azubuike Ihejirika. Similarly, a southerner became the national security adviser (NSA) in the person of General Andrew Azazi. The appropriation of the Nigerian military as northern and/or Hausa-Fulani militia by the north and/or Hausa-Fulani. Significantly, in 1999, retired army captain and former military intelligence operative, Sagir Mohammed, formed a northern militia, the Arewa People’s Congress, (APC) to “protect and safeguard the interest of the North wherever it is” (Obasi, 2002:43). Outside of the north, the APC is perceived by some as “the maintenance of [northern] hegemonic control in national politics” (ibid). As Akinyemi (2003:22) has argued: “Unlike the other ethnic militias who seek change, the Arewa People’s Congress seeks the maintenance of the status quo, irrespective of its crises of marginalization”. Although the APC appears to have now disappeared from the political scene of Northern Nigeria, Boko Haram may be conceived of as a resurgent Northern ethnic militia or in the specific context of the Kanuri sense of marginalization, an emergent militia for that ethnic group.

There remains a need, however, to examine the Boko Haram crisis in terms of its implications for the 2015 presidential election in specific historical and contemporary context, having changed the dynamics in northern politics. Beginning with the north-west and north-east blocs, after becoming president on May 5, 2010, following Yar’Adua’s death, Jonathan had chosen Namadi Sambo as his deputy, a Muslim and then governor of north-west Kaduna state. In the 2011 presidential poll, Jonathan also nominated Sambo as his running-mate, who went on to become the vice-president. By those choices, Jonathan was able to assuage to some extent the northern west and Hausa-Fulani over the loss of Yar’Adua.

We have earlier mentioned the Kanuri resentment of the Hausa-Fulani hegemony in that. Resentment grew from the historical rivalry between the North-West and the Fulani and the old Borno Emirate. That is, the fact that the northward migration notes that the areas covering the old Borno Empire “do not only take pride in this but also the fact that they contacted Islam much earlier than what is today’s North-West geo-political region on Nigeria” (Tribune, online, June 27, 2012). These areas are largely made up of Borno and Yobe States in Nigeria and the parts of Niger, Cameroon and Chad Republics. Interestingly, nationals of those neighboring countries account for foreigner elements among the Boko Haram operatives. We did also state that but for the General Abacha period 1993-1998, the Kanuri ethnic nationality had maintained, a marginal quotient in the Northern domination of central power in Nigeria.

While Southerners, therefore, may erroneously refer to all northerners as Hausas and Fulanis (Uche, 1989:9), to the Kanuri, both Atiku who contested against Jonathan in the January 2011 PDP presidential primary and General Muhammadu Buhari who contested against him in the subsequent presidential election under the Congress for Progressive Change, (CPC) are Fulanis. Their electoral victory would invariably perpetuate the Fulani hegemony. A closer examination of the Boko Haram terror movement thus reveals it clearly as a Kanuri revolt – it is “dominated by Kanuri boys, despite the recruitment of volunteers from areas outside Borno and Yobe States” (Tribune, online, June 27, 2012). Outside of its core old Borno versus Fulani
context, a statement by Ishiai Mohammed Bawahie Chief Whip of the House of Representatives of the Nigerian National Assembly and leader of the north-east caucus in the House, further underscores a general north-east angst. According to him, “We felt that over the years, the North-Eastern region has been marginalized in all aspects of life in this country, [and] marginalization is responsible for insecurity in North-East” (Sunday Trust, online, February 12, 2012).

In the context of the age-long rivalry between the Caliphate and old Borno Empire, a group has emerged, which is believed to be the Caliphate response to Boko Haram. Known as the Jama'at Ansarul Muslimina fi Biladin Sudan meaning the ‘group that dedicates itself to helping Muslims in Africa,’ and led by someone who goes by the pseudonym Abu Usamad Ansar, it states its mission as “to correct the concept, meaning and purpose of Jihad in Islam.” The group claims it will neither attack innocent persons, including security personnel nor non-Muslims because “Islam forbids killing of innocent people including non Muslims” (Desert Herald, online, June 2, 2012). The replacement of General Arazzi, Nigeria’s first ever non-national security adviser, with Col. Sambo Dasuki, a scion of the Caliphate, whatever purpose it supposes to serve, raises the question of the likelihood of the appointment worsening the old animosities between the Sokoto Caliphate and old Borno Empire, which may affect the war on terror itself. The sect’s rebuttal of Dasuki’s claims to have secured its telephones with the Islamic Republic of Iran (Xinhua online, July 10, 2012), does not project a disposition to Laikum or the Miski’s gestures.

In the north-central, or Middle-Belt area generally, two developments have combined to change whatever cohesion which existed in the northern region. One, although religious extremism in Nigeria has been a northern phenomenon, re-occurring ethnoreligious conflicts in Jos, Plateau state which has pitted Hausa-Fulani Muslims particularly against the predominantly Christian indigenous population has helped to bolster common consciousness among the minority Christian ethnic groups in the region. This common consciousness is defined by shared Hausa-Fulani hegemonic burden, and re-enforces the resentment towards that hegemony. Two, Kukah (1993:xiii) has noted that “the Middle Belt, with its clusters of Christians and traditional religious worshipers, remain central to the geopolitical-political calculation of both the ruling class in the North, and those of the South, with each laying claims on a different basis. While the Muslims in the North lay claim to the area as the symbolic ‘home’ of the Islamic faith, the Christians of the Middle-Belt now lay claim to the area as the symbolic ‘home’ of the Western faith.” Towards the 2011 presidential election, the trend was exploited to mobilize support for Jonathan. The patronage accruing to this region emanating from that support towards Jonathan’s electoral success, and the increasingly Christian brotherhood consciousness fostered by the ethno-religious conflict in Jos, have combined to rally strong support for the Jonathan administration within the region. Although the Plateau has been a site of violence of late, Boko Haram’s terror campaign in the area has spiralled in recent times including those of July 7 and 8, 2012 in the Barkin Ladi area of the state, in which over 20 persons online, journalists and others were killed as the dance counted as one of the north-central states most likely to support Jonathan’s speculated 2015 presidential bid (People and Politics, June, 2012, p. 26), targeting the area may just be a strategy to discourage Jonathan’s support ahead of 2015.

Boko Haram’s refusal to reveal its identity and table its grievances actually erodes the relevance of the previous theories in the explanation of the crisis in favour of the political feud perspective, whether in terms of Herskovits suggestion that while the original core of the group remains active, criminal gangs have adopted the name Boko Haram to claim responsibility for attacks when it suits them (Herskovits, 2012), or Soyinka’s hijack thesis (Soyinka, op.cit). Indeed the importance of Islamic militant groups, especially those linked to al Qaeda or their affiliates, making known their leaders has lucidly been explained. According to the Nigerian essayist Ochore Onamma, “the suicide fighters need their ‘inspiration’; and the disclosure of their identity is a statement in courage and defiance” (Vanguard online, September 1, 2011). The following examples equally support the argument: the al-Qaeda Movement in the Islamic Maghreb, (AQIM) is founded/led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar in Algeria after a delink with Hassan Hattah, his Safalist Group for Call and Combat, (SGPC); The Somali Al Shabaab militia, an affiliate of al Qaeda, is led by Sheikh Muktar Robow and Hassan Dahir Aweys, with Mukhtar Abu Zubev, leading a faction of foreign fighters. Ayman Zawahiri, former al Qaeda number two, Osama bin Laden after the latter was killed on May 2, 2011 by the US Navy Seals. For the Nigeria’s Boko Haram, except for shadowy individuals making claims on its behalf, there has been formally identifiable leader/successor since the death of Yussuf. Leadership has only been ascribed to Shekau.

The Islamic Theocratic State Theory

The Boko Haram sect has hardly masked its intention to bring down the Nigerian government, the Kufur system, and ultimately Islamize Nigeria. Lengmang (2011: 101) notes the allegiance with the northern Muslim population may be unhappy with the compromise of state-level shari’a coexisting side by side with a secular federal system. Hence, although this segment may arguably be small, “they are increasingly becoming radicalized and more willing to periodically express themselves through violence (ibid).” Lengmang attributes resentment to the shari’a coexistence with secular federal system to the view by many a northerner that western education is incapable of stimulating meaningful development and prosperity in the region, and so shares the fallacy of western education being incompatible with Islam (ibid: 99).

However tangential its link with al Qaeda or its affiliates, the Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria holds the vision of global political Islam, which is the overthrow of the world government (Kufur system) and the enthronement of an Islamic theocratic state. Perhaps its reported rejection of President Jonathan’s invitation for dialogue and demand that he converts to Islam or be hanged is a clear demonstration that trends towards the Islamic faith in Nigeria. Mehrdad Mozayyan has traced the rise of the radical Islam to three variables. One was the 1979 Iran Revolution that ushered a widespread rejectionist philosophy, changing the Muslims’ view of themselves and their position in the world, as well as their approaches to daily life and politics. The second was the anti-western feelings in the Middle East traceable to the effect of European colonialism. The third and most recent is the American presence in the Middle East with claims that it brought a corrupting influence (Mozayyan, 2009: 241). In a related way, corrupt and ineffective local political leadership espousing Western ideologies and failing to prevent its people from being brainwashed by Islamic fundamentalists, eventually, the Islamists’ gaining and holding power in Iran produced the wake-up call throughout the Muslim world and led to widespread Islamic resurgence. Thus, New standards were now set and a new discourse gained currency that targeted the “enemies of Islam” through revolutionary, militant, and martyr-oriented strategies. Life became readily expendable, especially if it hindered the advancement of Islamic agendas. Islam thus became a means and an end for the frustrated masses, giving rise to leagues of Islamic committees and units of ideological combat under the command of the terrorist sect’s former position of power by removing the corrupting Western influences. New regimes were born, putting two and a new discourse charged currency that targeted the “enemies of Islam” through revolutionary, militant, and martyr-oriented strategies. Life became readily expendable, especially if it hindered the advancement of Islamic agendas. Islam thus became a means and an end for the frustrated masses, giving rise to leagues of Islamic committees and units of ideological combat under the command of the terrorist sect’s former position of power by removing the corrupting Western influences.

Despite its debt to the Islamist regime in Iran for the Islamic awakening, the current radical or jihadist Islamic movement, was founded by the late Osama bin Laden and has its origin in the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan. There, the “links among individual and different national groups were forged” (Crenshaw, 2009:403). It is most unlikely that any of the Boko Haram’s operatives in Nigeria ever fought in Afghanistan. But the triumph of the jihadists in Afghanistan has had a bolstering universal effect on jihadists across the globe, so that as Crenshaw rightly observes, “other men [and women] who were too young to have fought in Afghanistan […] emulated what they saw as the jihadist model,” (ibid: 404). Lengmang reports further that as a way of identifying with the Taliban, during one of its violent attacks on a police station in Kanamma, Yobe State, members of Boko Haram briefly flew the black Taliban flag, a gesture symbolizing commonality of cause (Lengmang, 2011: 98).

Professor Fernando Reinares has also argued that political influences such as events in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Middle East generally, Chechnya, Bosnia, etc. could motivate the jihadists (BBC, online, April 29, 2006). For the Boko Haram sect, the inspiration derived from Afghanistan, for instance, may not be limited only to the victory of the Mujahedeen over the Soviet, but rather symbolizes the triumph of Islam over secularity. It derives essentially from the fact that the victory was scored with the primitive and improvised armed forces (Morozyan, 2009: 242) as compared to the modern weapons of the Soviets. Boko Haram started its campaign of terror in Nigeria with comparatively primitive weapons, but it has moved to Improvised Explosive Devices, (IEDs) and the chaos in Libya has been of great value in terms of weapons and training, (Reuters, January 26, 2012). There is yet a sense in which the Nigerian Mujahedeen can feel up-beat. Mozayyan invokes a religious imagery: Presently, the war is cast in religious terms, where the likes of David and Goliat are evoked, and true believers are directed towards believing that the purpose of this lopsided confrontation. David had contributed his faith, devotion, courage and selflessness, just as Muslims are called to do. God did, and will do the rest. In such instances, it is critical that God be seen “as a personal participant in the fighting process.” It is God that grants victory so that “truth” may “nullify falsehood.” Similarly, when Muslims won […] it was not you who slew them, but Allah (Morozyan, 2009:244).

Boko Haram has invoked the name of Allah severally to explain why it carried out its terror campaigns to media sources. The sect’s operatives undoubtedly are imbued with the mind-set elucidated by Mozayyan: it believes it can defeat the Nigerian state notwithstanding the sophistication and quantity of weapons at the latter’s disposal. Successful attacks on security formations across the north tend to bolster this feeling. Reinares’ idea of political influence could also extend to the development in Sudan and could be an incentive to the Boko Haram sect. In July 2011, after prolonged bitter conflict that included over two decades of guerrilla warfare, Sudan was split into two countries, essentially along religious lines. Although the Shari’a is yet to be imposed in the Sudan, Islam remains the state religion, while the government run by the Arabic north presses on to institute the Islamic legal system. Sudan is predominantly Muslim, while South Sudan is a mixture of predominantly African Traditional religion and minority Christian populations. The Boko Haram sect may have focused on this model, just as its ambition may have been bolstered by the Islamist rebels declaration of northern Mali as the AZAWAD republic. But the Aristotelian counsel may suffice here. In his Politics, Aristotle warns that in framing our ideals, we may assume what we wish, but must avoid impossibilities. Nigeria’s geography does not make a clear-cut distinction between a Muslim north and Christian south. Apart from the fact that a great number of the indigenous population of the south-west region are Muslims, a large portion of the population of the north central and to a some extent, the north east areas of Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi and even Borno, are Christians. Former military President Ibrahim Babangida, a Muslim, puts this aspect in perspective thus: There are … no such phrases like Muslim North and Christian South. Where ever you go in this country, you will find out that there are Muslims and Christians living peacefully together. You will find out there are Christians in the North and it is the same in the South (Daily Trust, online, January 27, 2012).
The idea is also bewildering to Christians in the north. For instance, Bolarinwa Yussuf, a Christian from Kogi, a state in the north central wingers where the Boko Haram sect wants him to go. He stressed that he had been born a northerner, like his forefathers, and has no apologies to any one for being a Christian (interview, January 24, 2012). The sect’s position, therefore, raises the following questions: are the south-west Nigerian Muslims no longer part of the global Islamic family, are the northern Nigerian Christians no longer northerners simply for professing different religious beliefs, and are other ethnolinguistic communities as far apart from each other as Boko Haram and the Christians as they are from the Muslims? The Boko Haram sect remains a fringe group and antigone mainstream northern Nigerian Muslims. It must, therefore, evolve in its campaign, a broad coalition that will accommodate not only a large chunk of those mainstream northern Muslims but also its elite corps. Whereas the Mujahedeen are focused on Islam’s days of glory or great piety, which to them assure the true believer of spiritual salvation and an eternally joyful existence in the world beyond (Mozayyan, 2009:241), however, the average Nigerian Muslim political elite is most likely uninterested in Boko Haram’s version of Islam. He may, in the words of Mozayyan, be more interested in a “future that guarantees independent thought, social liberty, modernity and economic renunciation in this world” (ibid. p. 243) – progressive Islam. Nigeria’s oil wealth (upon which the Nigerian elites rely for primitive accumulation) is a major disincetive to the evolution of any broad coalition that will involve mainstream northern Muslims. For instance, an Estimated seventy-five per cent of oil reserves in former Sudan went to the South after July 2011 (cited in Haile, 2012). All of Nigeria’s oil reserves are located in the south. Despite talks about the north being capable of surviving without southern oil, efforts to find oil in the north have intensified over the years. The point here is that, while the Boko Haram Mujahedeen may not care about the earthly economy, the northern political elites do. Allegations of complicity in the rising northern Islamic fundamentalism in the Boko Haram attacks have been rife (Daily Sun, January 23, 2012), but governors of the North’s 19 states, out of which only four are Christians, denied the charge off any collusion with the sect or any plots to disintegrate Nigeria. Babangida words perhaps, sum up what could pass for the feelings of the Northern Muslim political elite on the threat to Nigeria’s corporate existence:

You see in this country we fought the war for almost three years for the benefit of living together. I have a bullet in my body, so nobody will talk to me about secession or breaking away. If you say I would always say yes, get my tailor to take my measurement, get on my khaki and I go back to fight a war to keep this country together (Daily Trust, January 27, 2012).

In the same report, Babangida named what he called the ’Doctrine of Nigeria’s Settled Issues,’ which according to him cannot be compromised. They include, the country’s unity, her republican constitution, the states as federating units and the capitalist orientation of the economy. Babangida was a veteran of the Nigeria civil war fought to keep Nigeria as one Order (Turner, 1980: 74).

Conspiracy Theories

The conspiracy theories attempting to explain the Boko Haram crisis can be marked into two broad categories: one focusing on machinations of internal actors, the other on external actors. Internal actors may include the disgruntled northern power elite who, having lost power, are bent on bringing down Nigeria under a southern leadership, as well as the Jonathan administration itself, who are so anxious to be sponsoring the crisis in order to legitimize their administration, and therefore, the idea that the Boko Haram is a creation of the south. They may be embittered by recent history—perhaps drawn from instances where attempts or actual attacks on Southern and Christian targets both in the north and south, were blamed on Boko Haram, but were traced to Christian southerners (Blueprint, Tuesday January 31, 2012). Similarly, in November 2011, the State Security Services (SSS), also paraded a syndicate that consisted of terrorized politicians, which prompted some foreign diplomatic missions to issue warnings that emptied Abuja’s high-brow hotels. The group was comprised southern Christians and not Muslims nor northerners. From a northern perspective, these cases “suggest that Boko Haram is now the new weapon used by various interest groups to cause violence, mislead and confuse Nigerians in order to achieve their selfish agenda” (ibid). It is difficult to comprehend how Christians who continue to fall victims of attacks on their places of worship and Southerners who are being asked to flee to part of the country, from where most have spent the greatest parts of their lives and built multi-million naira businesses, and who have asked Jonathan to quit if he cannot lead (Leadership online, May 1, 2102) will rally behind a government which has proved incapable of protecting them.

The United States continues to predict Nigeria’s disintegration by 2015 – pointing out that a private agency, not the US government carried out the survey upon which the report is predicated – those who emphasize this aspect of the external conspiracy theory point to a 2008 war game conducted by the US army which was designed to test its response ability to probable state failure in Nigeria in relation to US energy needs. The oil-rich Middle East has historically been unstable, and resurgent Islam has complicated the problem. Nigeria’s far north is contiguous to the troubled Sahel and Maghreb regions, which also are contiguous to the some Middle East states in the grip of Islamism. The US interest in Nigeria’s oil does not predispose it to be comfortable with such proximity to this potentially Islamist enclave. At a one-day symposium on ‘international conspiracy: towards Nigeria’s disintegration,’ in Kaduna, North-West Nigeria, the Association of Muslim Brotherhood of Nigeria (AMBON) noted that “there were reasons to believe that the peace and security of Nigeria were being threatened by the west and world powers for their economic gains; that the western world threatens the peace of the country in order to protect their economic interest in Nigeria’s oil region” (Daily Trust, February 3, 2012). In the opinion of one member of Nigeria’s National Intelligence Agency (NIA), the US might be aiming to severe the oil-rich Niger Delta or the south from the far north in order to insulate the former from the emerging Islamic activism in the north with the ultimate goal of securing the vital oil resources in the south (private discussion with source, January 4, 2012). It would be preposterous to assume, however, that the US military could guarantee America’s energy interest in Nigeria within the context of a failed Nigeria balkanized into several fiefdoms.

Sentiments such as these have led to reservations over state efforts to collaborate with foreign powers to combat the Boko Haram. According to Professor Tam David West, Nigeria’s former minister of petroleum, “When they come ostensibly for security, they have their own agenda to penetrate our system and subjugate the sovereignty of the country; not only that, they become a powerful force within the country to dictate the political direction” (The Nation, online, January 29, 2012). A member of Nigeria’s security forces, Uche Nwogu, shares this concern. Without naming any particular, in particular, she notes that “by the time these people come in the name of helping us fight Boko Haram, they would have understood their modus operandi and would themselves start bombing us while we assume it is still Boko Haram” (Discussion with source on the subject, Monday January 30, 2012).

The scenario in the Arab states tends to validate these musings. According to Professor Michio Chossudovsky et al., in the Global Research Online Interactive Reader Series (GRIS), Western powers used “Political Islam” – including the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Qaeda-affiliated groups – to pursue their hegemonic objectives. Covert operations, they note, were launched to weaken the secular state, foment sectarian violence, and create social divisions throughout the Arab World. In Libya, they contend, “the pro-democracy rebels were led by Al Qaeda affiliated paramilitary brigades under the supervision of NATO Special Forces. The much-vaunted “Liberation” of Tripoli was carried out by former members of the Libya Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG).” “Destabilization of sovereign states,” the authors contend, “is closely coordinated with military planning” (GRIS Book no.1, online, November 2011).

The 2005 report was followed by a February 2011 version prepared by US military experts which stated as follows:

“Although inherited and chosen layers of identity will be as “authentic” as conventional categories of citizenship and nationality, one category possibly will continue to stand out: those who, for whatever reasons, remain disaffected in any sense, those of tension or worse. The challenge of Islamic activism could produce a more intense backlash of Christian activism. Nigeria, Ethiopia, and other places in Africa will remain battlegrounds in this sense as well until 2025, at least, in the sense of multi-ethnic integration and the value of “diversity” could face a combination of challenges from nationalists [and] religious zealots.

A pattern in Boko Haram’s insurgency – targeting religious and ethnic fault-lines – appears designed to enact the 2025 scenario described above. Hundreds of deaths of members of the Igbo ethnic minority who are targets for attacks in the north, the warning that no ethnic group in Nigeria has monopoly of violence. Amid escalating violence, Igbo leaders have warned that the violence inflicted on their people residing in the north approximate the sequence of events that culminated in the tragedy of the Nigeria civil war (Punch, online, January 24, 2012). On the one hand, there is a perspective that links the attacks on the Igbo by the group’s overwhelming electoral support for Jonathan in 2011, which amounted to over 96% of the votes cast in the eastern region (Daily Sun, online, February 6, 2012). On the other hand, leaders of Jonathan’s Igbo ethnic nationality disfranchise the Igbo’s movement to endure, to destroy the fabric of unity of this country, at a time the leadership of the country is entrusted to our son [and] that no ethnic nationality is a sole repository of violence” (The Nation, on line, January 29, 2012). From the North, the Arewa Youth Development Foundation, spoke about “recent remarks by South-East (Igbo) and South-South (Ijaw) leaders” and warned that should the tendencies continue, “We would be left with no option than to tell other regions that feel like disintegrating, that the North welcomes it too” (Blueprint, online, January 31, 2012). On the other hand, although the Nigerian Muslim leadership maintains that Islam and Christianity are not at war in Nigeria, (The Nation, on line, December 29, 2012), the Christian leadership urges adherents to defend themselves against attacks (ibid) while a leading Pentecostal cleric, Bishop David Oyedepo claims God has annointed him “to lead a revolution against the jihadists. [And that] If the church should arise, Nigeria will no more be a nation,” (The Nation, January 23, 2012).

Alllegations of conspiracy by envious neighbours to undermine Nigeria remain highly speculative, especially when considered in light of the military cooperation between Nigeria and its neighbouring countries in the war against transnational terrorism, and their common interest in regional stability.

Conclusion: Any Hope for Optimism?

Peace and Conflict Review · Volume 7 Issue 1 · Year 2012 · Page 6
This study has examined various theories attempting to explain the driving forces behind the Boko Haram phenomenon. Our position is that each of the perspectives offers some degree of insight into the problem, as well as the general patterns of political tension and social violence in Nigeria, which Boko Haram merely epitomizes. In any case, it is clear that Boko Haram has metamorphosed from a strictly religious movement to one espousing a political agenda. While acknowledging the difficulties in getting to the root cause of the problem, the government must at least address the issues related to Jonathan’s decision to contest the 2011 presidential elections against the power rotation principle designed by his political party, the PDP, and his speculated 2015 presidential ambition. Irrespective of the constitutional provisions on individual political rights and aspirations, solemn attention needs be paid to professor Ekeh’s postulate that, “The historical condition in which the Nigerian state emerged has precluded its integration into a composite society” (1989:8). Any efforts at effecting enduring stability in Nigeria, therefore, must recognize her complex plurality, respect the sensitivity of the component parts, and refrain from acts of political impunity.

References


Internet sources


Newspapers and Magazines

The Nation, Lagos, Wednesday May 23, 2012
The Nation, Lagos, Sunday January 29, 2012
Businessday, Lagos Wednesday February 1, 2012.
Thisday, Lagos, Monday September 19, 2011
Newsweek, London, January 16, 2012
Peoples Daily, Abuja, Tuesday June 26, 2012
Vanguard, Lagos, Thursday September 29, 2011
Vanguard, Lagos, Thursday, September 1, 2011
Tribune, Ibadan, Wednesday, June 27, 2012
Sunday Trust, Abuja, Sunday February 12, 2012
Saturday Sun, Lagos, Saturday, January 21, 2012
Peoples Daily, Abuja, Friday January 27, 2012
Punch, Lagos, Tuesday, June 19, 2012
Leadership, Abuja, Friday February 3, 2012
Daily Trust, Abuja. Friday, 03 February 2012
Punch, Lagos, January 29, 2012
People and Politics, Abuja, No. 35, June 2012.

Footnotes

[1] At a public function shortly before he was removed as National Security Adviser, General Andrew Aziza in reference to the acrimony over Jonathan’s decision to go against his party’s zoning policy that could have prevented him from contesting the 2011 presidential election, referred to Boko Haram was a creation of some disgruntled members of the President Jonathan ruling party, who angered by his emergence, appropriated the group to destabilize his government. Many believe Azizi owed his sack to that statement.


[3] The voting pattern in the 2011 presidential primary of the ruling PDP made certain significant statements: whereas the Hausa- Fulani appeared to have been appealed by choice of Sambo as Jonathan’s running mate, he lost Sokoto state, the seat of the Caliphate as well Zamfara and Kebbi states, which were carried out of former Sokoto state to former Vice-President, Atiku Abubakar, a Fulani. Atiku also won in Niger, the home state of former military president General Babangida, who not only like Atiku was a member of the Northern coalition that opposed Jonathan’s 2011 presidential ambition but is known to defer so much to the Hausa-Fulani. Atiku however lost Borno state, the home stead of the Kanuris to Jonathan.

About the Author

Simeon Alozieuwa, PhD, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja; Areas of research: peace and conflict studies, security studies, politics of resources and media studies.