

On critically analyse and examine in detail

Business, Accounting



On the 27th of December 2015, 50 people were killed in the North-Eastern state of Maiduguri In Nigeria by two women wielding rocket propelled grenades and suicide vests to.

It is estimated that at least 30 people were killed and more than 90 were wounded in overnight explosions and shootouts¹. These attacks were claimed by Boko Haram, an extremist group originating in the Northern region of Nigeria who from 2008 have been responsible for a series of coordinated attacks on civilians. This essay intends to use the Guardian article: "Boko Haram assault on Maiduguri leaves scores dead In Nigeria" as a platform to critically analyse and examine in detail the Boko Haram assault on Maiduguri with sustained emphasis on the group and its identity as a terrorist organisation. The aforementioned will be achieved by giving a brief overview of the article. An in-depth analysis of the Boko Haram sect will follow and consist of an exploration of the group's modus operandi, motives, causes, legitimacy and its achievements.

Furthermore, it is my intent to argue that Boko Haram is a religious terrorist group. As such, I will examine whether religion plays as central a role as is often portrayed by the media and Nigerian government and other international bodies. This will be followed by a detailed discussion of the term terrorism, the role the media plays in defining the term and how that influences the classification of Boko Haram under certain subsections of terrorism. Subsequently, government responses to the attacks carried out by Boko Haram will be explored with emphasis placed on what has been done and what can be improved upon. Lastly, I will make further reference to the article in question and examine its tone, content and quality to determine

how effective the article was in describing the incident. The article in question, written a day following the event, starts by reporting on the killing of 50 people in the city of Maiduguri by Boko Haram. It is very descriptive in its tone and focuses on the casualties inflicted by Boko Haram referring to them as “religious extremists.”² The author also provides little or no information on the group, paying more attention to the victims and the casualties involved.

Thus, the article employs an emotive writing style. Furthermore, the article does not delve into wider issues and fails to elucidate on the exact nature of the attack and the motives of the perpetrators. Depending on how one interprets the group, Boko Haram can be viewed as a terrorist organization, freedom fighters, religious fundamentalist or religious fanatics.

³ My intention is to assess them as a terrorist organisation. As such, it is pertinent to consider the tactics and methods used by these to achieve its motives. Their recruitment process per Blanquart, involves the targeting of disillusioned youths, university graduates without jobs and street children known locally as Almajiris.⁴ Their modus operandi revolves around the use of suicide vests and bombs which they usually detonate in public spaces to effect maximum damage. Onuoha seconds this argument by stating that the group carry out targeted killings, kidnappings and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) which are carried out almost exclusively in public spaces and targeted at civilians and politicians alike.

⁵ The description above fits the attacks carried out in Maiduguri as reported in the article. Identifying the methods of violence utilized by the group

distinguishes them from Moses Duruji's suggestion. Their use of violence to influence the government places them firmly in the category of a terrorist organisation, rather than a group of radicalised youths – venting frustrations at the government ineptitude on the Nigerian people.

6 However, the labelling of Boko Haram or any group carrying out political violence as a terrorist group is extremely difficult. This is because the term is highly contested and there exists no universally accepted definition of the term. Cronin argues that “terrorism is intended to be a matter of perception and is seen differently by different observers”.⁷ With this in mind, I intend to outline parameters in this essay which I believe constitute terrorism.

Terrorism refers to the deliberate use of violence by a group or individuals for the advancement of social, political and religious goals or for the purpose of spreading fear and influencing the government or civilians. James Lutz contends that for a group to be considered terrorist in nature, it must constitute the following: “The use of organized violence and threats designed to generate fear in a target audience that extends beyond the immediate victims and is designed to create power in situations where power was previously lacking.”⁸ Boko Haram certainly fit all the parameters offered by both myself and Lutz. Their use of suicide bombs, as was seen in the attacks in Maiduguri, were targeted primarily at civilians or ‘soft targets’, but were also carried out in defiance of the government they seek to abolish.

The age-old platitude that ‘one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter’⁹ cannot be applied to Boko Haram as they inflict casualties not on oppressive regimes but on civilians. Even though they perceive their

victims as infidels or Kufar, and justify their acts as the will of Allah, the use of weapons and tactics designed to inflict mass casualty on civilians is indefensible, irrespective of the cause that is being championed. ¹⁰ With that in mind it is impossible from this author's point of view to label Boko Haram as anything but a terrorist organization. Onuoha offers a different perspective towards the definitions of terrorism. He argues that a group becomes a terrorist group when the state labels as such.

¹¹ This state orientated and narrow definition doesn't consider the fact that states themselves, can be perpetrators of acts of terror. As such, it is perhaps more significant to analyse the Nigerian government's definition and determine as to whether the government considers Boko Haram as a terrorist group. The Nigerian government defines terrorism as: " Any deliberate act done with malice or forethought which may result in serious harm or damage to the country and is intended to unduly compel the government to perform or abstain from performing an act... Constitutes the use of violence to seriously intimidate a population, or destabilise the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of the country.

" ¹² This definition is a condensed version of the acts stipulated in the Terrorism prevention act which constitutes terrorism. Whilst the act is too voluminous to quote in this essay, the definition goes even further to include non-violent acts, knowing of a terrorist act and not reporting it and others. This, therefore, offers a very wide definition of the term, making it difficult to effectively determine which groups are terrorist and which aren't. Whilst the Nigerian government has officially recognized the group as a

terrorist organization, Isaac Sampson presupposes that any attempts made by the Nigerian government to classify Boko Haram violence as terrorism creates a “definitional quagmire”¹³ under Nigeria’s legal regime due to such a broad definition. The implications of this will be discussed further when examining government responses to Boko Haram.

Having established that Boko Haram is a terrorist organization, it is important to specify which category they fall under. Onuoha argues that “The main philosophy of the sect is grounded in their interpretation of orthodox Islam”.¹⁴ Further buttressing this point is the fact that Mallam Sanni Umaru, the acting leader of Boko Haram since 2009 after the death of Muhammad Yusuf, referred to the group as an Islamic revolution.¹⁵ He further states that Boko Haram is “opposed to all forms of western education”¹⁶ and strives for “Islamic sovereignty over Nigeria”.¹⁷ Boko Haram harbour a hybrid of religious and political aspirations and pose a threat to the Nigerian government. As such, they can be grouped as either dissident or religious terrorists. However, the fact that their actions are motivated first and foremost by their interpretation of religious doctrine suggests that they are a religious terrorist group. This certainly coincides with Gus Martin’s interpretation of religious terrorism.

Martin states that: “Religious terrorism is motivated by the absolute belief that an otherworldly power has sanctioned the use of violence for the achievement of glory of the faith”.¹⁸ Through an analysis of Boko Haram’s place on the terrorism spectrum, the overarching motive of the group becomes identifiable as a complete overthrow of the Nigerian government

and the imposition of Islamic sharia law. Freedom Onuoha, a commentator on Nigerian political affairs, argues that the group's motive is the removal of social vices which have corrupted the Nigerian people.

19 He further argues that they believe the onus lies on them to create a model Islamic society free from political corruption and moral corruption.

20 This is encapsulated in a statement issued by Boko Haram in 2011 which read: " We are carrying out these attacks in order to propagate the name of Allah and to liberate ourselves and our religion from the hands of infidels and the Nigerian government" 21 This essay contends, however, that Boko Haram's motives are much more layered than they appear to be. The suggestion that Boko Haram's main motive is the imposition of sharia law is indeed tenable. Nevertheless, there are sustained suggestions that the group acts in lieu with certain high ranking Northern politicians.

A prime example is that of Ali Modu Sheriff, former governor of Borno state (where Boko Haram was formed and developed), who was accused of not only funding but aiding and abetting Boko Haram activities. These allegations were levelled against him by the attorney general and chief justice of Borno state and as such can be said to be coming from a credible source. 22 Whilst Sheriff completely denied the allegations, it raises uncomfortable questions about Boko Haram and its relationship with the state. Furthermore, it brings to light the possibility that Boko Haram could be used as a private apparatus to assassinate political rivals. Whilst the assertion that Boko Haram is in bed with Northern politicians hasn't been officially verified, it adds another political dimension to the motives of the sect. The causes of Boko

Haram's Islamic insurgency are equally as contested as their motives.

Scholarsoffer a myriad of reasons as to why Boko Haram went from a non-violentreligious group to one of violence and insurgency in the space of a few years.

Ogunlesiidentifies the killing of Muhammad Yusuf in 2009 by Nigerian forces as awatershed moment with regards to the scale, proportion and methods of the BokoHaram sect. ²³ Raymond Okoro on theother hand, argues that violence perpetuated by Boko Haram in the North regionof Nigeria is due to deep-rooted socio economic depravity in the region. ²⁴He puts forward the notion that the lack of basic amenities, poor distribution ofwealth and the continued embezzlement of Nigerian wealth by state and federalpoliticians is the main reason for Boko Haram taking up arms and carrying thesort of violence which took place in Maiduguri. Perhaps a more telling argument is offered by Wisdom Oghosa who contendsthat the main cause for Boko Haram insurgency lies in pre-existing politicalconditions unique to the Northern region of Nigeria. ²⁵His argument is therefore that Boko Haram were able to take root due topolitical opportunity – or in otherwords a lack of political stability in the area. The insipid nature of governancerecreated an environment for political and religious forms of terrorism to grow. Heargues that the key to understanding Boko Haram and other terroristinsurgencies in Northern Nigeria lies in an understanding of the NigerianPolitical climate. ²⁶His argument is certainly valid as it supports the failed state theory whichsuggests that when a state loses monopoly over coercive violence there is oftena breakdown of authority and subsequently serves a s a breeding ground for actof terrorism.

27 Whilst all these arguments offer legitimate causes for the rise of Boko Haram as a terrorist organization, the fact remains that without Muhammad Yusuf, Boko Haram may never have gone down the path of religious terrorism. Onuoha, seconds this line of argument. He contends that the emergence of Yusuf served as a major factor with regards to the transition of Boko Haram into a group with religious extremist ideals. 28 Yusuf, who took leadership of the group in 2003, sought complete disassociation with any form of western influence. Described as a charismatic individual, he sought to radicalize his followers and instil in them a deep antipathy for secularization in Nigeria. Isa argues that by dissociating his followers from society and by radicalizing them, Yusuf hoped this will ultimately lead to a violent uprising against the Nigerian government.

29 Thus it is clear that through the gradual alienation of the sect from society by Yusuf, Boko Haram gradually became more radicalized. Despite his untimely death, the violent legacy of Yusuf clearly still lives on, if anything it has served to further galvanize the group in its efforts as can be seen in the attacks in Maiduguri. The factors explored above offer up a varied analysis of the causes of Boko Haram's religious extremism. However, it remains unclear as to how central a role religion plays in Boko Haram's political violence. This is because most of the causes of Boko Haram extremism put forward by political commentators rarely have religion at its base. Most causes, if observed critically, can be traced back to either socio-economic, political or psychological roots.

Dan Isaacs for example, argues that the huge disparity in wealth between the oil rich Christian south and the poorer Muslim North led to increased scepticism especially among youth about the nature of western government in Nigeria as it served no benefit whatsoever to them. 30 Isaacs' article was written in 2003, around the time Muhammad Yusuf took over Boko Haram. Therefore, it is evident that Muhammad Yusuf would have found it easy to recruit disgruntled Muslim youths, coaxing them with the promise of a change of government and an introduction of sharia law. This example helps to further augment the argument that religion while important, is not the most central factor in relation to Boko Haram's evolution into a terrorist organization.

It is evident that socio-political factors not religion, contributed more to the sect's development. Aghedo argues that the northern region has the highest level of unemployment especially among youths in Nigeria. He further corroborates the argument made above by postulating that the low level of human development in the area provides a fertile breeding ground for Boko Haram and other such groups.³¹ However, it is important to note that Boko Haram has over the years morphed into a quasi-religious sect, using the disgruntlement in the northern region to propagate the use of sharia law for the whole country. Having analysed the causes, methods and motives of Boko Haram, it is germane to the overall analysis of Boko Haram to include a probe into the sect's achievements or lack thereof. Gauging the success of a terrorist organisation is a difficult if not morbid task. Exploring the death toll accrued through the exploits of terrorist groups for example is a rather crude way of accounting for a terrorist's success. Exacerbating this further, is the

fact that due to the nature of terrorist activities, media outlets of both Nigeria and western countries rarely write on the ' successes' of terrorist groups. A considered approach will be to explore what constitutes success in the eyes of the terrorists whilst also looking at to what extent they have made headway in achieving their goal which in Boko Haram's case, is the implementation of sharia law in the whole country.

Whilst the group has failed to implement sharia law across Nigeria, their increasing use of violence and the failure of the Nigerian government to properly handle the sect has led to attention from international bodies, thus allowing them to further recruit members and spread their motives. An apt example of this is the kidnapping of 50 girls from the village of Chibok. Whilst this did not get them any closer to implementing sharia law, they received international attention from this act and on social media the hashtag " Bring back our girls" trended for months, with internationally renowned figures such as Michelle Obama joining in on the movement. 32 Onuoha argues that the fact that Boko Haram have resorted to the use of violence in the name of Islam signals its " growing strategic and operational maturity and the possibility of a tactical nexus with other jihadist groups in the future". 33 Attacks such as the Maiduguri incident give testament to Onuoha's argument as the use of rocket propelled grenades and coordinated suicide bombings suggest that they are getting some form of training or sponsorship from abroad. However, there is no concrete evidence of established operational links with groups such as Al Qaeda or the Taliban. 34 Furthermore the extreme nature of the sect's demands, coupled with the fact that Boko Haram

have perpetuated attacks primarily on Muslims, means that the group has gotten very little support from Muslims in northern Nigeria.

35 Thus for every follower gained, Boko Haram make a thousand more enemies. One of the main reasons why the Taliban has thrived to this day despite America's constant attacks is due to their ability to portray the Americans as the enemy and galvanize support from Afghani locals to fight a 'Holy war' against them. Boko Haram do not have that capacity as they have failed to garner support from locals as their goal of sharia rule across Nigeria is not popular among the Nigerian Muslim population. 36 As previously discussed, even though Boko Haram fits under Nigeria's definitional parameters of the term terrorism, the Nigerian government has struggled with the classification of extremist groups like Boko Haram. The significance of this is telling, as the Nigerian government has struggled to formulate a viable counterterrorism strategy and have over the years, been bogged down by an inability to formulate a response to the growing threat posed by Boko Haram. Laquer argues that the Nigerian state finds it difficult to classify violent extremist groups such as Boko Haram and as such struggle with methods to counter the sect. 37 The Nigerian government have primarily used a mix of police and military force to counter the sect. The use of military and police forces to counter Boko Haram was widely used from 2003 up until 2011 when the government created the Joint Task force, a unit created specifically to counter Boko Haram insurgency.

The task force has however been accused of indiscriminate violence and the use of excessive force by Borno state indigenes who are the primary victims

of Boko Haram violence. 38In a damning report, Senator Bakka Ibrahim accused the jointtask force of killing more civilians since its inception in 2011 than BokoHaram have done. 39Byno means do I claim to possess any form of superior knowledge to the Nigeriangovernment. However, their counter-terrorism strategy is clearly defective and needsto be improved. Botha argues that rather thanstrengthen the state apparatus in response to growing terrorist threats, governmentsshould look to the underlying causes of extremist insurgency. 40This a strategy which I believe should be championed by the Nigerian government. Rather than use excessive force to flush out the extremists at the cost ofinnocent civilian lives, a more nuanced approach needs to be considered. Sampson proposes that an increase in political participation, increased socialamenities, and a general effort to improve the welfare of the poorer NigerianNorth is the appropriate response to boko Haram insurgency.

41I concur with Sampson's reasoningbut also realise that there is a need for military action as it is unreasonable to suggest that the government should cease from trying to capture a group whohas killed thousands. This essay argues therefore, that while the use ofviolence is necessary to counteract the threat posed by Boko Haram, educational, economic and welfare schemes should be introduced to prevent thesect from further spreading in the long term. Having conducted an in-depthanalysis of the group and theorized on its motives, causes, tactics andachievements, it is apt to determine whether all the factors discussed aboverender their acts as legitimate. An important tool to use when determining thelegitimacy of a terrorist group is the just war theory, which comprises twodimensions- Jus Ad

Bellum which refers to “ the conditions under which a party may go to war” 42 and Jus In Bello which “ controls the behaviour of any parties involved in war.” 43 Mosley argues that the just war theory considers motives of war and physical aggression to be as legitimate if it is “ a last resort, being declared by a proper authority, possessing right intention, imminent threat, having a reasonable chance of success, and the end being proportional to the means used”. 44 As analysed above, Boko Haram’s motives are grounded in their interpretation of orthodox Islam, which in a nut-shell is the imposition of sharia law in Nigeria. they use as a basis to perpetuate violence “ in the name of Allah.” Given that Nigeria is a multi- religious state and allows for both Muslims and Christians, it is improbable to view Boko Haram’s acts as anything but illegitimate as the religious- tolerance of the Nigerian state implies that there is no immediate threat to Islam.

Furthermore, the end which they seek (imposition of sharia law) is not proportional to the means used. The kidnapping of 250 girls for example in no way constitutes a legitimate means to achieving sharia law as the girls aren’t policy makers and can do nothing with regards to achieving that aim.

However, Malosowe contends “ that it is easy to condemn acts of terrorism as illegitimate from the perspective of the condemner but is a different story altogether from the perspective of the condemned” 45 Malosowe argues further, that “ the concept of innocence is widely different to terrorist groups than that outlined in the just war theory”. 46 Therefore, from the perspective of Boko Haram, both civilians and the government are sinners and as such acts of violence carried out against them are perfectly legitimate. The lack of

insight into boko Haram in the guardian article suggests asto just how little is understood about the sect.

Their motives, causes and howthe government should respond remain contested by scholars, politicians andgovernment officials alike. This essay has merely attempted to fill the gapsregarding the what's and whys of the sect. One thingremains clear however, until answers are provided attacks such as those carriedout in Maiduguri aren't going to dissipate anytime soon.