The Nigerian State as an equilibrium of violence: An explanation of the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper argues that the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is a religious crisis that is flowing directly from the country's political system. It is the political system in Nigeria that has brought about the present realities of corruption, poverty, and underdevelopment throughout the country. Religion has only served, especially in northern Nigeria, to ignite these realities into a violent flame. Boko Haram is the latest in the long list of religiously inspired violence that has flared up in Nigeria on account of deficiencies in the political system. For as long as these systemic deficiencies exist, religious disturbances such as the Boko Haram violence will continue to be there. Such violence has served fundamentalist entrepreneurs or groups and other such champions to call attention to the plight of their people. However, such violence most often only provokes the government into counter-violence. The cycle of violence and counter-violence then enables the government to keep the people in check, even without addressing their demands, and, to dominate and exploit society without hindrance. What the state must do to sustainably tackle this systemic violence is to use a combination of poverty reduction strategies, anti-corruption drives, development efforts, law enforcement and military engagement (where necessary), and dialogue to try and bring about lasting peace, particularly in northern Nigeria, but also throughout the whole country.

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1. Introduction

Despite the state of emergency that has been in operation in three states of the northeastern part of Nigeria for almost a year, the violent campaign embarked upon by the Boko Haram Islamic sect has refused to die down. In fact, the violence seems to be escalating, especially in its toll on human lives and property. There are continuing reports of violent activities by Boko Haram, in which dozens of lives are usually lost. Overall, it is estimated that the conflict has consumed several thousands of lives, while properties worth millions of dollars have been lost. In 2012 alone, Boko Haram accounted for 1386 deaths in 546 attacks, and in 2013 the group was involved in 213 attacks with over 1000 deaths (START 2013). The Boko Haram conflict is the latest in the long list of such conflicts to afflict Nigeria in recent times. Until the period when this conflict arose, the country has witnessed the Niger Delta conflict, which pitted militants of the Niger Delta area against the government of the country over the poor and inequitable utilisation of the revenues accruing to the country from the oil produced in that region (Sklar and Whitaker Jr. 1995; Mudiaga-Odje 2008).

Oil production in the Niger Delta has brought significant wealth to the Nigerian government but this has only translated into little more than a degraded environment and large scale poverty for the people. In response, militants arose and have been taking up arms against the Nigerian government for many years, a conflict that has only now ebbed after an all-out onslaught by the country's security forces against the militants, and the subsequent granting of amnesty to erstwhile militants (Thom-Otuya and Eremie 2011). This ebbing of the Niger Delta crisis happened shortly after the assumption of the presidency by Goodluck Jonathan. Jonathan is an indigene of the Niger Delta region and the first from the region to become Nigeria's president in the country's history. But just as violence in the Niger Delta was dying down, the Boko Haram violence in the North was flaring up.

This also coincided with the loss of the presidency of the country by the north following the death in office of President Musa Yar' Adua in 2009. According to the existing arrangements at the time within the ruling party in Nigeria, another candidate of northern origin was stated to be selected as a replacement. But citing

the precarious situation of the country at the time, a 'doctrine of necessity' was formulated by the country's leaders to enable the then Vice-President Jonathan to take over as President (Adeniyi 2011). It is believed that dominant northern interests have not been comfortable with this arrangement ever since, fuelling suspicions that the Boko Haram phenomenon is an invention of the northern establishment for the pursuit of their political and sectional interests (Suleiman 2012:20-26). This, however, has never been substantiated. Meanwhile, the Boko Haram violence has continued to increase in intensity, and the country, especially the North, has continued to groan under the impact. It is this phenomenon that this paper seeks to study.

2. Explanatory perspective

In the face of the Boko Haram phenomenon, one question that has been asked is whether the crisis is actually religious or political. Many have argued that the crisis occasioned by the activities of the Boko Haram group is religious only to the point that the group is a religious sect, but that beyond this, the sect is only using religion as a cover to force the rest of Nigeria to return to the North the political power that had been 'unfairly' taken away from the region. The argument here is that the Boko Haram group is a cover used by the elite and politicians of the North to fight their political agenda. The thinking in this regard is that it was not a mere coincidence that the emergence of Boko Haram in 2002 occurred shortly after the Southwest took the presidency of Nigeria in 1999; just as it was not also a coincidence that Boko Haram violence increased significantly after the presidency of the country was moved from the North to the South South geopolitical zone in 2010 (Adeyemo 2012:48-55). Some have therefore argued that Boko Haram is a tool in the hands of the North for the purposes of the 2015 presidential contest in Nigeria. The view here is that either the North is using Boko Haram to distract President Jonathan so that by the end of his term the President would not have done enough to merit a second term in office in 2015, or, that Boko Haram is a bargaining tool in the hands of the North to force the President not to seek re-election in 2015 (Ogbonnaya 2011).

The above arguments are reinforced by the government's attitude and even pronouncements concerning the Boko Haram phenomenon in the recent past.

Government has several times maintained that Boko Haram has 'sponsors' who are only out to intimidate or blackmail the government. Government however, has not been able to establish a conclusive link between Boko Haram and any individual(s) or political group(s) (Oladeji and Agbaji 2011; Olalekan 2014:7), nor has Boko Haram ever made an overtly political demand especially as regards northern Nigeria. In this light, it does seem that the above (southern) views and (government) position are counter-blackmail to force the North to accept the political realities of a southern, Jonathan presidency in Nigeria beyond 2015 (Babalola 2014:9). This may be why prominent Northerners, while denying their involvement with the Boko Haram sect, have maintained that government has deliberately not done enough to curb the Boko Haram menace as a way of punishing the region for its opposition to the Jonathan presidency (Odebode et al. 2014:3).

This paper holds that the Boko Haram conflict is a religious crisis that has arisen from the political process and has also been reinforced by it. The nature of politics in Nigeria is such that when religious (and other such) crises emerge, they soon dovetail into politics and both become mutually reinforcing. Religion, particularly, has proved divisive in the country, and the North has been the theatre of many religious crises. The reason for this can be found in the political system and goes back to the country's history. A combination of colonial and post-colonial policies in the North imbued Islam with the colouration of a state religion. In the pre-colonial time, Usman dan Fodio had conquered the area under the banner of Islam, which subsequently became the religion of state in the empire that he established (Dudley 1968). This was the situation when the colonialists came to the area. Although the British conquered the emirates, they largely left the emirs and their administrations intact in a system of indirect rule – which enabled the emirs to continue as religious and political leaders (Kirk-Greene 1965). Islam thus continued to be the basis of government throughout the colonial period. The British, at independence, again handed over power to the Northern feudalists, and politics and administration continued largely to be mixed with religion as before, with the Sharia still prominent in the scheme of things (Whitaker Jr. 1970).

In the years since independence, political leadership in the North has therefore continued to be closely associated with religious leadership. The result has been that the Muslim faithful have largely not been able to distinguish between corruption among the political leadership and religious corruption.

These faithful, especially those of a more fundamentalist bent, have therefore seen it as their duty to oppose all such corruption, including that in the political arena. In this light the various cases of religious violence that have gripped the country can be clearly understood more accurately as political violence. In fact, most episodes of political violence in Nigeria have presented themselves as religious violence. But in actual fact, these are instances of political violence. The nature of politics in Nigeria has enabled such variables as religion (and also ethnicity and communal issues) to intrude into political violence. This is true especially if we accept the arguments of Masoti and Bowren (1968) that the decisive denominator of incidents of violent political behaviour is that they arise because the perpetrators are for some reason dissatisfied, disenchanted or alienated from the civil order.

It is in the context of the political system that dissatisfaction, disenchantment or alienation can be understood. This is as LaPalombara (1974:378) points out – that political violence includes all existing injustice, deprivations, and other conditions harmful to a nation that its government created or could not prevent. When a political system is deficient in meeting the needs of the people, it is ultimately initiating or aggravating violence. As such, every unacceptable condition created or permitted by a political system amounts to political violence. And when a people feels short-changed by the political system, or disadvantaged within it or disappointed by it, they usually hit out either directly at the political system and its symbols, or indirectly at those they see as favoured by the system and hence, its representatives or beneficiaries. It can then be understood why outbursts of political violence usually target government officials, buildings and other infrastructure, or religious or ethnic or communal rivals.

3. Background to the Boko Haram phenomenon in Nigeria

The religiously inspired political violence that has arisen in the northern part of Nigeria in recent times started with the Maitatsine Riots of 1980-87

(Lubeck 1986). These riots, which broke out in Kano in 1980 before spreading to cities like Jimeta, Gombe, and Funtua between 1982 and 1987, were led by the fundamentalist cleric, Mohammed Marwa. The riots themselves derived their name from the curse which Marwa placed on corrupt leaders who would not listen to his preaching (Maitatsine – followers of him who curses). In the end, the Maitatsine movement was crushed, but it is significant that the disturbance reached its height in the early 1980s when there was widespread disillusionment over the corruption in the country's Second Republic. From 1996 to 1997, it was the turn of the Shiite attacks, led by Ibrahim El Zak-Zaky (Udoidem 1997:153). The Shiite movement also preached against political corruption. It is significant that this occurred during the period when political corruption under the military was at its height with General Abacha as Head of State.

The Fourth Republic took off in 1999 with high expectations and hopes. It was not long, however, before it became apparent that corruption in the country had not only continued to be business as usual, but that it was becoming intractable. In fact, notwithstanding the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria was still placed last among the 90 countries surveyed by Transparency International in their Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in 2000. Even when the number of countries surveyed increased to well over 100, Nigeria moved up by only one spot to second last just before Bangladesh in the CPI for 2001, 2002 and 2003 (Transparency International 2013). For the Muslim faithful, the situation was only possible because thieving officials could not be held accountable in any meaningful way by the existing common laws of the land. When several state governments in the North introduced the Sharia laws between 2000 and 2002, they were actually only pre-empting the widespread disappointment of the people with the corrupt practices of the emergent civilian dispensation. But despite the immense popularity of these laws, it could not stem the tide of corruption in government. The riots that followed the 2002 Sharia laws, therefore reflected the misplaced hopes of a majority of the people that politics would finally be run according to divine injunctions (Harunah 2002).

The Boko Haram phenomenon was the direct result of these misplaced hopes. The group known as Boko Haram was formed in 2002 in Maiduguri, capital of Borno State in northern Nigeria by Mohammed Yusuf, a Muslim cleric who had been associated with radical Islamic youth movements in the 1990s (Sergie

and Johnson 2013). The group took as its official name, the Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad or Jamaat Ahl as-sunnah lid-da'wa wal-Jihad, but it is generally known by the Hausa nickname of Boko Haram, which literally means 'Western education is sin'. The average pious Northern Muslim views Christianity and its Western education with suspicion and sees both as purveyors of corruption or sinfulness. The group's base at the time of founding was a religious complex in Maiduguri that housed a mosque and a koranic school, to which many underprivileged families sent their children for instruction (Chothia 2012). The aims of the group included the establishment of the Sharia as the supreme law of the society; putting an end to political and religious corruption, and abolishing all Western cultural influences, including those of the Western educational system.

In 2004, the group's headquarters complex was relocated to Yusuf's home town of Kanamma in Yobe State. It was around this time also that Yusuf started speaking out against government highhandedness and political corruption, which served to attract numerous unemployed youth to his fold (Guttschuss 2012). Increasingly, Yusuf's preaching attacked the northern Muslim establishment and government officials for their un-Islamic corrupt practices. This was even more so after the widespread rigging of the 2007 general elections in the country (Herskovitz 2007). Then in 2009, a new law was brought into effect by the Bauchi State government compelling all users of motorbikes in the state to wear helmets for their safety. This law was rejected by the Boko Haram group. Attempts by the state government in July of that year to enforce the law finally brought members of the group face to face with the police. The disturbance was quickly suppressed by the police, but the highhandedness of the police in handling this matter soon led to an armed uprising by the group (Sergie and Johnson 2013). The uprising quickly spread to the neighbouring states of Borno, Yobe and Kano. The uprising was finally quelled by the army, but not before more than 800 people (by official account) had died. Hundreds of Boko Haram members, including several leaders of the sect, were arrested and detained at police headquarters in Maiduguri. About 17 of these leaders, including Yusuf himself and his father-in-law, were subsequently killed by the police in the full glare of television cameras (Katsina 2011).

4. Boko Haram: Violence as protest

It was in the aftermath of the 2009 uprising that the Boko Haram sect blossomed into a full-fledged armed insurrection in the country. Following Yusuf's death, Abubakar Shekau took over as leader. In the face of a continuing crackdown by government, the group eventually reassessed its position and apparently adopted violence as a means of pursuing its objectives. Boko Haram violence was thus the culmination of the group's grievances against the Nigerian state and its organs and officials (Sergie and Johnson 2013). These grievances included poor governance and increasing corruption of government officials (as reflected in their preaching), as well as the group's harsh treatment in the hands of government agencies, particularly the police. This reality tallies with our theoretical position that violence is derived from the political system. According to Anifowose (1982), people engage in political violence either as a way to demand or attain a preferred political condition or as a way to shift attention to their political demands, especially when other means of achieving these goals have either been closed to them or have proved ineffective.

In the case of Boko Haram, the crackdown of 2009 apparently proved to the members that their concerns had fallen on deaf ears. Left with no other options then, the group embarked on violence. The first violent act by the group was carried out on 7 September 2010 when it staged a prison break in Bauchi in which over seven hundred inmates were freed. In December of that same year, a market in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, was bombed by the Boko Haram sect, killing several people. This violence has continued in several guises ever since. The violence has taken the forms of the bombing of churches, government buildings, police stations, and the United Nations building in Abuja; prison breaks, assassinations, shootings and hostage taking. Whole villages have been attacked and several people killed. Recently, the group has added attacks on schools, which have led to numerous killings and abductions of school children (Sergie and Johnson 2013).

Government reaction to the Boko Haram challenge has not been swift. At first, government adopted an attitude of dismissal. As the president asserted at the time, the Boko Haram phenomenon was a phase in the nation's life that will soon pass away. When the sect apparently refused to disappear, the government

promised to wipe them out in a short while. The government then made some feeble efforts to combat the violence, which ultimately did not produce much. Since then, government has tried other means, including attempts at dialogue, and hints at the granting of amnesty to members of the group, in the hope that they would give up arms. It was when all the above failed that government finally took the offensive. On 14 May 2013, the president declared a state of emergency in the three most affected states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, and government then assembled a Joint Task Force (JTF) of military personnel to engage the Boko Haram in full combat (Sergie and Johnson 2013). The JTF was very effective at first, and soon drove the sect out of the cities. The group however subsequently apparently entrenched themselves in the rural areas, from where they could not easily be dislodged by the government forces.

Both the government and Boko Haram have been claiming to have the upper hand ever since (Ross 2013; Abrak 2013). However, the audacity of recent violence carried out by the Boko Haram group seems to confirm that the insurgency is not anywhere near its end. In their attack on a federal government secondary school in Buni Yadi, Yobe State, the operatives of the group were reported to have come in eighteen buses and spent more than 7 hours, killing more than 50 persons and burning down the entire school without any challenge whatsoever from security forces (Zounmenou and Kane 2014). Presently, the over 200 school girls abducted from the Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, in Borno state on the night of 14-15 April 2014 by the same group have not been rescued more than seven months after their abduction. The girls were reportedly loaded into two trucks and transported away unchallenged, after the school buildings were burnt down (BBC 2014). Life in the parts of northern Nigeria where the group is most active has come to a standstill since then. In fact, the group is reputed now to move in convoys while conducting their operations. Furthermore on such occasions, members of security agencies who happened to be in their paths are reported to have scampered away for safety (Zounmenou and Kane 2014).

5. The State, Boko Haram and the equilibrium of violence in Nigeria

Observers seem to agree that the sect may prove impossible to overwhelm, based on the realities on the ground, which suggest that government does not hold

much advantage in terms of morale or strategy or even fire power (Zounmenou and Kane 2014). But beyond this, there are also doubts about government's capability to win the war on the field if the root causes of conflict are not effectively addressed. Analysts have pointed out that the real causes of the Boko Haram phenomenon are not to be located in religion or electoral politics, but in the socio-economic conditions of the North occasioned by the failure of governance in the country. It is the people's disenchantment with the lack of inclusive governance in the country, coupled with extreme poverty (particularly in the North), that is at the root of the Boko Haram menace (The Punch 2014). Grievances over this unacceptable situation have enabled Boko Haram and other extremists to promote the idea that Sharia law will enable a more just and equitable political order.

It was this idea, reinforced by pervasive police brutality against members of the sect, that actually drove the sect into taking up arms. Lack of inclusiveness, and violence, have reflected the very nature and character of the state in Nigeria, even from the very beginnings. The Nigerian state was founded on violence and maintained by colonialism through violent means (Afigbo 1966:539-559). Throughout colonial rule, the state was divorced from the people and violence was the major language the government used or heard. As Ake (1996:22-32) observed, this character of the Nigerian state, even after independence, remained much as it was in the colonial era. The state in Nigeria represented itself as an apparatus of violence, had a narrow social base, and relied for compliance on coercion rather than authority. In more recent times, the Nigerian state has become even more removed from the people. The state has become, literally, the property of only the small percentage of the population that controls its apparatuses, and the rest have wallowed in poverty, the levels of which have now risen astronomically.

The greater majority of the people are thus removed from the political system, and they cannot easily see any tangible benefit accruing to them by virtue of their being members of the state. This is even as the state is always making demands on the people – for taxes, fees, etc. Not being able to address the people's problems or satisfy their demands, yet demanding so much from the people, the state is then viewed with suspicion by the people, who also see it as a hostage of privileged groups. Those groups that are disadvantaged within the political system therefore

see the state as partial. They see it as sanctioning a system that guarantees privileges to others but denies the same to them. It is this feeling that has often made the relations of the state with the people very antagonistic, which antagonism then eventually leads to violence. When political violence in the country is conceived in this way, it is not difficult to understand why observers feel that violence is part and parcel of the Nigerian political system.

The Nigerian state is thus a system of violence. In this system, violence can emanate from either side – from the people when they feel that they are left out of the scheme of things and can only call attention to their plight by violence; or, from the state whenever it wants to assert control or project power. It is thus no wonder that incidents of violence pervade parts of the country. In the 1980s, the country witnessed the Maitatsine Riots in the North. In addition, a number of communal violence incidents also reared their ugly heads around the country within the period (Albert 2001). In the 1990s, the Niger Delta violence made its entry into the country's political firmament. Within this period also, a spate of religious riots gripped many cities in the North. The Shiite Riots also occurred in this decade. The 2000s can rightly be called the decade of violence for the sheer volume, magnitude and spread of violent activities in the country within the period. In the first few years of that decade, the city of Jos in the middle belt of the country suddenly exploded in violence. This hitherto serene city has not only remained in the grip of violence ever since, but this crisis has now spread to other parts of Plateau state and neighbouring states (Otumu 2010). It was also in the early years of the millennium that ethnic militias arose around the country and became involved in widespread violence (Anifowose 2004). This was also when the Tiv-Junkun crisis flared up once more (Anifowose 2003). The Niger Delta violence reached its height in this period, just as the Boko Haram group embarked on their own violence before the end of the decade.

It is noteworthy that all the above crises lasted their full course despite government assurances that they will be contained within a short time. In the end, government has had to marshal its full force before a crisis would come to its end. This only goes to prove our earlier contention that because the state is often seen as partial by the people, it is difficult for the state to successfully mediate conflicts in the country. Because the people see the state as favouring one side

or the other to a conflict, such conflict resolution strategies as dialogue or even ceasefires or amnesty hardly work. There is usually deep mistrust between the sides to the conflict. In the end, government has been left with few options other than force to resolve the issues. This is why residues of ill-feeling continue to linger within both sides to a conflict long after the conflict was supposed to have been resolved. Which is also why many of these conflicts have continued to flare up intermittently even after formal resolution. In fact, in the system of violence that exists in Nigeria, violence is an ever-present reality. Most existing violent situations remain so for a long time, while new ones emerge even before the old ones go away.

This situation of ever-present violence in Nigeria is due to the role that violence has played in the country's political system. Violence has served both the state and the people, as a tool for pursuing, or protecting, their interests. For the people, violence becomes the tool to force attention on their demands. But most often, the state is not ready to do anything about these demands that brought about the violence in the first place. Instead, the state matches the violence of the people with its own counter-violence. It is in this way that the Nigerian political system can be described as an equilibrium of violence. In this equilibrium, what the people want from the state is equal to what the state does not want to or cannot give to them. The violence the state is ready to marshal in defence of its position is therefore equal to the violence the people have unleashed in pursuit of their demands. This state of equilibrium will also hold if the violence were to be initiated by the state, in which case, the people will also counter with their own violence.

The history of violence in Nigeria shows clearly that this equilibrium of violence has been beneficial to all sides to conflict. For the people, it is often the only assurance that their demands will at least remain on the front burner even if they are not addressed. For the state (and its organs and officials), this equilibrium of violence enables it to keep the people in check even if it does not do anything else for these people. The equilibrium of violence in Nigeria has further incited the various groups and regions in the country to compete with each other in the use of violence as a means of protest and agitation. At the beginning of the present democratic dispensation in 1999, it was ethnic militia that took the centre stage

of violence in the country. The Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) was the first to start the orgy of violence in the Southwest of the country. In protest against the apparent sidelining of the Yoruba ethnic group from power in the country by the last military regime, elements of the OPC took up arms against other groups and the state in violence that lasted for the most part of the first four years of the Fourth Republic. Then, just as the OPC violence was waning, it became the turn of the Bakassi Boys to mount a violent demand for an end to the marginalisation of the Igbo in the Southeast from the commanding heights of the Nigerian state (Onah 2005). It was while this was going on that the Niger Delta militants also took up arms to demand a fair share of the oil wealth that was accruing to the country from their South South region.

The equilibrium of violence has also served another major purpose for the Nigerian state. The equilibrium of violence with its guarantee of ever-present violence in the country has enabled the Nigerian state to dominate and exploit society. A typical elaboration of this contention is the Niger Delta crisis. Although the people of the Niger Delta region complained of neglect for a very long time, the Nigerian state did practically nothing about it, which was why the people eventually took up arms. But instead of addressing the underlying problems squarely, the state only matched the violence of the militants with its own violence. For as long as this violence lasted, government had a free run on the country's resources earmarked for security. Large resources were budgeted to fight the Niger Delta violence, but the dire security situation made it literally impossible or even 'unnecessary' to account for these funds. Statutorily, funds that come under the heading of 'security vote' are not required by Nigerian laws to be accounted for. Even a number of administrative devices put in place to help ameliorate the plight of the people of the region, such as the setting up of a new development commission and even a new federal ministry concerned with Niger Delta affairs, soon became avenues for frittering away huge sums of monies into the pockets of government officials and contractors, under the cover of security votes.

It is the lack of developmental progress that has fostered the widespread feeling that government may not really be genuinely interested in ending some of these conflicts, especially if no new conflict is in the offing. Even now that the Niger

Delta crisis is supposed to have ended, the President of Nigeria was recently reported to have said that his government has earmarked several millions of dollars to 'fight' oil pipeline vandals in the Niger Delta region. This is in spite of large amounts of money already being spent as contract sums to erstwhile militants for the protection of the pipelines (Odivwri 2014). Continuing conflicts only provide justification for the government to continue to channel national resources into private coffers. This is substantiated by the recent seizure in South Africa of $9.3 million belonging to the Nigerian government. Officials of the South African government investigating the case have raised serious doubts concerning the Nigerian government's explanation that the money was meant for the procurement of arms to fight Boko Haram, saying that the agents of the Nigerian government 'might have been in the process of laundering the money before it was intercepted' (Ibekwe 2014). And as if to prove that government may not be disposed to letting the crisis end anytime soon, leaders of the northeast region of the country only recently accused the government JTF of actually using Nigerian Army helicopters to drop food and ammunition for Boko Haram in their hideout locations (Odebode et al. 2014).

6. Recommendations and conclusion

The situation on the ground definitely shows that the Boko Haram crisis is far from over. Both the government and the Boko Haram sect continue to claim victories in the field and neither side seems to be on the retreat. The recommendation for ending this crisis must therefore start by addressing the root causes of the violence. The first thing to be done is for government to embark on a massive poverty reduction drive in the North alongside a development agenda that will be seen to be transforming the development situation of the northern region of Nigeria. Although all these steps are also necessary for the rest of the country, it is important that for the purpose of ending the Boko Haram violence, people of the North will see that government is doing something tangible and fast, and that it is not business as usual.

In addition, there must be a new impetus to deal with government and public officials caught in corrupt practices. This is important, especially at the local

levels, where local government officials and councillors are known to become wealthy overnight without any repercussions whatsoever. All such officials, and others at state and federal levels must now be brought to book, as this is usually the major issue that provokes the emergence and sustenance of fiery Islamic preachers and movements. If political corruption is seen to be addressed, it will remove the major justification for the Boko Haram and similar other religious bodies to operate.

In the meantime, the Nigerian government must empower the JTF to continue to be able to engage Boko Haram militarily from a position of strength. In this regard, no expense should be spared in the procurement of arms and ammunitions meant to prosecute the counter rebellion. Government must take extra precaution to ensure that corruption does not permeate the JTF. All the weapons must always be accounted for in order to prevent ammunitions from getting into the hands of Boko Haram members. It is also important that all the remunerations of JTF personnel are paid promptly while generous allowances are regularly approved for them. Then, all personnel of the JTF must be regularly reposted so that no appreciable number of these personnel will stay for so long on a posting as to contemplate sabotage.

Lastly, the government of Nigeria must be ready to tap international competence in tackling the Boko Haram menace. The experience of France is very relevant here, especially considering the swiftness with which France has tackled recent similar situations, particularly in Mali. So, while continuing to consolidate on existing collaborations with the United States and other world powers like Britain on the matter, a collaboration between the Nigerian government and France will go a long way in giving the JTF a quick victory over Boko Haram. And while not relenting in their military engagement with Boko Haram, the government of Nigeria must continue to be open to dialogue and negotiation with the group. Ultimately, it must be a combination of poverty reduction strategies, development efforts, military engagement and dialogue that will bring about lasting peace, not only in northern Nigeria but also in the entire country.

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