



Strengthening Nigeria-India Intelligence Cooperation: Much To Do In Fighting Boko Haram

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Article History:

Received: 29-11-2019

Accepted: 07-02-2020

Publication: 23-03-2020

Cite this article as:

Abubakar, G. (2020). Strengthening Nigeria-India Intelligence Cooperation: Much To Do In Fighting Boko Haram. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Economic Review*, 2(1), 1-06. doi.org/10.36923/ijsser. V2i1.41

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Abstract: This paper examines the span of time since the terrorist group Boko Haram, also known as Jama'at ahlus-Sunnah lid-Da'awat wal-Jihad, began its campaign of violence against civilians in northeast Nigeria, aiming to implement Shari'ah law. The purpose of the study is to analyze the socio-economic and political factors that have fueled the insurgency and to explore how Indo-Nigerian collaboration can help combat this threat. Using qualitative data analysis, the research draws on books, journals, and research reports on Boko Haram's activities, as well as the economic and intelligence ties between India and Nigeria. The findings reveal that the ongoing crisis is significantly driven by rampant poverty, wealth disparity, and high illiteracy rates. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of alleged connections between Boko Haram and some political elites and high-ranking security officers. On the other hand, India's extensive experience with terrorist activities within its borders provides valuable insights and strategies that could be adapted to the Nigerian context. The conclusion emphasizes that addressing domestic pressures such as poverty, illiteracy, religious tribalism, and regional sentiments is crucial to weakening the insurgency's influence. Additionally, it suggests that leveraging India's counter-terrorism expertise can support Nigeria in developing effective strategies to mitigate Boko Haram's impact. This research is particularly valuable for students and scholars in African Studies, International Relations, and Conflict Resolution, offering a comprehensive understanding of the Boko Haram insurgency and potential collaborative solutions.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Cooperation, Insurgency, Intelligence, India-Nigeria, Jihad, Indian Mujahedeen

1. Introduction

As multicultural environments, both India and Nigeria have, since independence, undergone several severe tribal, semi-tribal, and religious conflicts in many regions, such as Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Assam, and Punjab in India, and Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, Taraba, and elsewhere in Nigeria. Ethno-religious differences have instigated outbreaks of violence in Nigeria for decades. Government efforts to overcome such atrocities, particularly the ongoing strife that started during the late President Yar' Adua's administration and continued through President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's term, seem inadequate and ineffective compared to the scale of the insurgencies witnessed so far. The situation during Buhari's first tenure (2015-2019) appeared weak, with much still to be invested, compared to previous times.

With the inauguration of the new government under the leadership of former military head of state Major-General Muhammad Buhari (rtd.), the approach to fighting insurgencies in Nigeria has taken another turn. The structural context of Boko Haram has completely enthralled many analysts, causing them to wonder whether the roots and causes of the violent attacks carried out by the Islamist militants are religious or political. Some evidence indicates that the genesis of the conflicts is more political than religious. Boko Haram attracted broader concerns from the international community, especially after the 2011 bombing at the United Nations building in Abuja, Nigeria's center of administration. Since then, a sequence of catastrophic bombardments has been carried out by the sect on a semi-daily basis.

Following the outbreak of this strife, thousands of Christians are said to have lost their lives, despite the incidence dominating the northeast, which is predominantly occupied by a Muslim majority. During this ongoing chaotic anarchism, tens of thousands of people – Muslims and Christians alike – were seemingly butchered, buried alive, tortured, misplaced, or kidnapped. The 2011 elections nearly divided the country into two sides, with northerners protesting against the victory of then-President Jonathan, who hails from the Niger-Delta region of the southern part of the country. Their protests were not because of his victory alone, but because they believed the elections were full of rigging and fraudulence.

On one side, many investigations concluded by domestic and foreign entities suggested that regional politicians might have had a hand in sponsoring the sect's atrocities. On the other side, even though the sect uses religious rhetoric to justify its abhorrent crimes, there is no clear link between the sect and prominent Muslim scholars in Nigeria who advocate its ideology. In fact, many scholars like Sheikh

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Ja'afar have condemned Boko Haram's operations with solid facts, stating that the sect engages in activities contrary to Islamic teachings.

Northerners were protesting against the election of Jonathan, who hails from the Niger-Delta region of Southern Nigeria. Not because of his victory alone, but due to their conviction that the elections were rife with rigging and fraudulence. On one side, many investigations, both domestic and foreign, concluded that regional politicians seemed to have a hand in sponsoring the atrocities of the sect². On the other side, although the sect uses religious rhetoric to justify its abhorrent crimes, no clear link has been found between the sect and any prominent Muslim scholar in Nigeria who supports its ideology. In fact, many scholars, such as Sheikh Ja'afar³, condemned Boko Haram's operations with solid evidence that the sect engages in activities that are contrary to Islamic teachings.

Boko Haram's deadly operations began in earnest in late 2009 in response to what they perceived as ungodly aggression by the Nigerian Police in Bauchi. This event sparked the group's latent antagonism toward Nigeria's federation. They soon started launching attacks on police stations in different areas of Bauchi, which later spread to other nearby states before finally centralizing in Borno State. The first operation by the police led to the arrest of nine of their members and the confiscation of their bombing materials.

Over the course of a decade and a half, the sect has grown incrementally and has become the biggest security challenge ever faced by the Nigerian state and its neighboring countries: Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Nigeria's efforts to engage the sect have raised many questions among Nigerians, such as: were the Nigerian armed forces ordered not to launch attacks on the sect? Have they capitulated before the power of the sect? Why are Nigerian troops not well-equipped with modern machinery to confront insurgents? This project aims to answer these and other critically central questions.

'Boko Haram' is a combination of two words, Hausa and Arabic, respectively. Boko in the Hausa language is derived from the English word "book," and Haram is a classical Arabic word that connotes "forbidden" or "sinful." The phrase Boko Haram has connotations of "Western learning is sinful." The classical version of Boko Haram has essentially claimed to reject Western-style education that seems contrary to the basic teaching of Islam, such as the issue of cloud and rain, the theory of Darwinism, etc. (D. Pham & Karaboga, 2012). The group, however, aims to avoid all Western products and Western-oriented cultures and values.

Contrarily, the group sent a threatening message in an open letter to the supreme leader of the Nigerian Muslims, the Sultan of Sokoto Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III, in 2013, indicating that there could be possible attacks on Sokoto soil. Sokoto is considered the centre of Islamic activities, the seat of the Caliphate, and the only state with a 100 % Muslim population in Nigeria. In fact, the attack was indeed carried out by the sect at Marina police station, some five kilometres away from the Sokoto Sultan palace.

Toward the end of 2016, the Nigerian authorities declared that the Boko Haram atrocities were at their terminal point. The Sambisa forest, which has been the hideout of the sect throughout the confrontation, was captured by the Nigerian troops. Astonishingly, following the Sambisa captivity ensured by the Nigerian army, many attacks and bombardments were witnessed in some other areas in the region. Albeit, this could strengthen the skepticism that political motivations are behind the insurgency (D. Pham & Karaboga, 2012).

Since the last quarter of 2015, India has clearly offered to share a version of her experience and expertise in fighting insurgency with some African nations, including Nigeria, the power stronghold of West Africa. During the India-Africa Forum Summit, the Cameroonian Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Mbella, demonstrated the need for bilateral commitments between India and the most affected countries by the Boko Haram insurgency: Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. India is expected to help in capacity building in the defense sector. This negotiation looks into how to strengthen allied forces between India and Nigeria to combat the dreaded new brand type of ISIS in the zone. It was revealed that the Indian government was working on two state-of-the-art hospitals in Nigeria to assist victims of terror.

There is no doubt that many studies have been carried out in this area, yet there have been unsatisfied or inadequate attempts to address the rigorous causes of the prolonged Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. This research proposes to fill up the putative cleavage in the literature in order to expand the existing knowledge on the subject matter. Boko Haram terrorism and counterterrorism by the Nigerian government are ongoing processes. It's, therefore, very difficult to predict exactly or set a parameter that could guide outcomes flawlessly. Though some facts could be predicted to make the future direction of the conflict more discernible, this study examines to what extent India-Nigeria collaboration in fighting Boko Haram could be fruitful in terms of terminating the insurgency. Additionally, it explores what the remaining African countries, including those in the region, should

² The Australian negotiator, Mr. Stephen Davis named the former Chief of the Nigerian Army Staff, General Azubuike Ihejirika and former governor of Borno State, Ali Modu Sheriff some of the Boko Haram's sponsors. He also promises to name other sponsors, who according to him are bigger than Sheriff (The Tribune Newspaper, 28 September 2014).

³ Ja'afar was a prominent scholar trained in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Islamic University (Medina). Ja'afar was from Kano, the largest city and center of commerce in northern Nigeria. He was also a prominent scholar and preacher, and well-recognized scholarship in the entire north.

learn from the Indian style and tactics, and how this collaboration could open a new door for further military training inside and outside Nigeria.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the socio-economic and political factors fueling the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and the potential for Indo-Nigerian collaboration in countering this threat. The methodology involves a comprehensive review and analysis of secondary data sources, including books, academic journals, and research reports on Boko Haram's activities. Additionally, official documents and statements related to Indo-Nigerian economic and intelligence ties were consulted to provide context and support for the proposed collaboration.

Secondary data were collected from a variety of sources such as academic literature, government publications, and credible media reports. The focus was on historical and contemporary accounts of Boko Haram's activities, socio-economic conditions in northeast Nigeria, and Indo-Nigerian bilateral relations. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns. Key themes included the root causes of the insurgency, the socio-economic impact on affected regions, the role of political elites, and the potential benefits of Indo-Nigerian collaboration. The study is grounded in theories of conflict resolution and international relations, particularly focusing on how international cooperation can address internal security challenges. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, the study cross-referenced information from multiple sources and sought input from experts in African Studies, International Relations, and Counter-Terrorism. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics at play and provides a robust foundation for recommending strategies to combat the Boko Haram insurgency through Indo-Nigerian cooperation.

3. Islamic Revivalism In Nigeria

Adesoji (2010) postulates that from 1980 down to 2009, Nigeria experienced significant challenges with groups like Maitatsine and Boko Haram. Both of these major groups were active in the predominantly Muslim northern regions of Nigeria. Besides these groups, various ethnoreligious clashes resulted in thousands of lives lost and extensive property damage, becoming a persistent issue in Nigeria. The country's multi-ethnic and multi-religious configuration largely accounts for the frequent ethnoreligious imbroglios experienced over three decades since the Second Republic in 1979.

The country had barely survived these crises when Boko Haram's violent insurgency erupted in 2008. With its destabilizing impacts, Boko Haram presented a serious challenge for which the Federal Government of Nigeria has yet to find a lasting solution. By the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a significant Muslim scholar named Usman Ibn Fodio emerged in the far northwest city of Sokoto, Nigeria. Ibn Fodio's efforts revived Islam in northern Nigeria, with his influence extending to Ilorin in modern Kwara State. His teachings provided a foundation upon which many Nigerian scholars continue to build their da'wah efforts.

4. Boko Haram's Ideology: The Islamic Values Versus Political Interests

Adeonipekun, Adeniyi, Akinsoji, and Eden (2016), Pham (2012), and Margolin (1978) stress that the root causes of the Boko Haram crisis align with frustrations arising from various political, economic, and personal needs or objectives. In Nigeria, criminal activities are often linked to the frustration-aggression of concerned citizens, ethnic groups, and political interests. The Niger Delta militancy, involving bombing, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, and destruction of oil installations, exemplifies frustration-aggression from local authorities.

Former President Goodluck Jonathan's 2012 declaration that Boko Haram had infiltrated his cabinet, especially the security apparatus, supports the conspiracy theory and the view of respondents who believe different forces aim to disintegrate Nigeria. Although the root cause of Boko Haram might be political, it was not directly related to Jonathan's emergence as President in 2011. Despite Nigeria's significance and the challenges it faces, the knowledge and reporting on Boko Haram are surprisingly limited. Some analyses are speculative, such as the unconfirmed divisions within Boko Haram between those who wanted a Shari'a-compliant state and those who sought to bring down the state first.

The Nigerian federal and state governments need to build stronger relationships with one another and local communities to gather actionable intelligence needed to prevent future attacks (Margolin, 1978). Preventing attacks by Boko Haram requires organized approaches similar to those used by the group. Boko Haram rejects Western-based warfare, accusing the West of waging war against Islam, which is the dominant religion in the region. The group's ideology traces back to the pre-colonial era in the early 20th century when the British enforced administration in northern Nigeria (Margolin, 1978).

The northeast, a key part of the Kanem Borno Empire, facilitated the spread of Islam across West Africa through trade. Islam became the state religion during King Seif Umme ibn Abdul Jaleel's reign in the 11th century. Uthman ibn Fodio's Fulani revivalism challenged el-Kanemi's suzerainty in Borno, but the dispute was resolved for Islamic unity under a single leadership and Islamic law.

Boko Haram's presence in Borno aims to safeguard Islamic teachings and practices. According to Loimeier (2012), Boko Haram is not the first radical group advocating Jihad in the region through armed struggle. The group tries to emulate Uthman ibn Fodio's efforts to remove corrupt leadership and establish a theological ruling system,

with scholars, or ulama, seen as the most qualified to govern. Recourse to theological debate has since become essential for any political action among Muslims in northern Nigeria (Loimeier, 2012).

5. Indo-Nigeria Efforts Multiplication In Fighting Boko Haram

Regardless of contemporary economic, political, and diplomatic challenges, relations between India and Nigeria are friendly. Since ever before, the two countries have been in cordial connection for many decades. These connections have been for tens of years, concentrating on the economy, trade, and investments as well as diplomacy together with the Indian Diaspora in Nigeria and very limited focus on security. Now, with the expanding Indian quest for energy in Nigeria due to its nature of industrialization, it is, however, a timely engagement to concentrate much deeper on security and military-related dealings.

The Indian Prime Minister paid a state visit to Abuja in 2007 and met with his counterpart, Umar Musa Yar'Adua, the Nigerian President (between 2007 and 2009-2010), where an MoU on security and defense cooperation was ratified between the two countries. Consequently, the Indian government has so far "donated communication equipment worth millions of dollars to the Nigerian armed forces. Nevertheless, it set up equipped IT labs in both NDA and CSC" (Beri, 2013). These modern IT labs are used to provide and propose solutions to recent human and social crimes, including the insurgency type challenging the peace of countries like Nigeria.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) that consists of hardware, software, and media including the collection, storage as well as transmission of voice, text, and images, can be divided into Information and Communication Infrastructure (ICI) and Information Technology (IT) (Oludare, Omolara, et al., 2015). India is one of Asia's IT power-based nations. So, the bilateral defense agreement signed by both India and Nigeria, including IT capacity to the Nigerian military, is in line with terminating the Boko Haram insurgency in the country. A more secure Nigeria would give much courage to Indian companies to operate in Nigeria without security hesitation.

Defense and military collaboration between Nigeria and India is neither a new set of activities. During the 1960s and 1980s, India had been so much active in supporting Nigeria's defense sector. Many Nigerian army officers including some notable heads of state, such as Major-General Muhammad Buhari, General Babangida, Garba Duba, etc., received their military training in India. In the post-Independence Nigeria, India played unforgettable roles in Nigeria's defense institutions. During the 1960s, it was India that deeply helped in establishing the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) and Command Staff College at Jaji, all in Kaduna State (Loimeier, 2012).

Collaborative fighting against Boko Haram is one of the most precious points prioritized by the Nigerian authorities. Henceforth, both India and Nigeria have much to do in fighting the insurgency as it means a lot for their individual as well as mutual benefits. For so many decades, large numbers of Indians engaged in different professions settle in Nigerian six geo-political zones including in the northeast.

Nigeria is a home of many natural resources, most of which India quests for. Apart from oil and gas that vastly station in the Niger-Delta region of the country, and that also champion over other means of income in terms of annual GDP per capita, other tremendous resources that could determine prosperity for many countries including India yet exist in the northern part of Nigeria. The aforementioned details remain solid to concrete bilateral closeness so to propose new sets of visionary agendas which can be realized by both Nigeria and India including peace and security, which are the most important agendas not only to Nigeria but also to India as thousands of Indians settled in a different part of Nigeria including in the northeast, for multiple legitimate reasons.

Northeast, the Boko Haram hideout saddles on the huge amounts of coal stone. The coal attracts several foreign firms, including Jindal Power and Steel. Jindal, which is an Indian firm, moves ahead to engage the Nigerian government through what is seen as revitalizing the mining techniques in the country (Ezeamalu, 2014). Albeit, the deal, if ratified, could potentially bring about some environmental disturbances, regardless of the prospective omen for both nations, India might need to strengthen its intelligence cooperation with Nigeria to tackle a crisis that engulfs the region. The environmental challenges that are rated negatively as a result of mining have already been noticed in some parts of the country. In Enugu, for instance, the mining promotes a dirty atmosphere, which constantly affects local communities and their immediate needs (Ezeamalu, 2014).

Joint intelligence between India and Nigeria to fight the Boko Haram insurgency would pave the way and open another window for trade and diplomatic understanding. This attempt contains a sort of probability that could turn Nigeria into a soft-landing trade partner to India and Indian firms as well as the Diaspora. Furthermore, India has huge interests in the ECOWAS West African countries and the Gulf of Guinea. These interests largely have to do with peace and a conducive environment reliable for businesses. On the other hand, Boko Haram's lethally dark operations hamper economic development as they also seize peace among the people and thwart day-to-day activities.

In the diplomatic phase, India's mission in Abuja and Lagos covers its diplomatic affairs with Chad, Cameroon, and the Benin Republic. However, fighting terrorism has links not only with security but also with trade and diplomacy. Vanguard newspaper reported the then Indian envoy to Nigeria as saying; that India is sentimentally ready to supply absolute support to the Nigerian government in its war against terror and other forms of security challenges that become severely and dangerously disastrous in recent times (Agbakwuru, 2015).

6. The Indian Stricken Experience

Similarly, according to Morgan (2015), New Delhi, on her side, has already shown commitment to combating the acts of insurgency through sharing her extensive experience in the group's kind of operations. It is quite understandable for a country like India to master fighting the insurgency. India, on more than one occasion, faced a range of attacks as well as threats from groups believed to have a similar ideology to Nigeria's home-grown militias such as Indian Mujahideen (IM).

Indian Mujahideen (IM), a 2007-born and home-branded group, claims to base its operation upon assent to incept a Caliphate that can regulate Islamic Affairs throughout the Indian Sub-continent or South Asia with its center of administration in India. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has in 2013, compiled a report indicating that the organization was first inspired by the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) (BBC, 2013). Like Boko Haram, IM has claimed several innocent lives of both Indians and foreigners since its establishment.

Yet another similar case facing New Delhi is a new phase of the Shari'ah implementation wave by the Levant in West Asia and the Mediterranean that comprises Syria and Iraq, popularly known as ISIS. India, the populous and the most robust economy across the South Asia sub-region is home to nearly 300 million Muslims. The lethal activities of the Islamist fighters in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere within the Arabian Peninsula are becoming a threat to the sovereign being of India in both economic and democratic aspects. Millions of skilled Indian workers are in the Gulf and other Arab countries. Islam is not a new ideology in the India Sub-continent. Trade and investments had been recorded between Arabs and Indians for many years, even before the arrival of Islam. Besides, for hundreds of years, Islam, soon after its arrival, became the religion of a large number of Indians (Morgan, 2015).

Perhaps, this might permit the expansionism of ISIS towards some areas of the Indian Territory in an advanced manner. Timsit (2019) reported that ISIS has recently claimed a zone in the Kashmir area and named it Wilayat al-Hindi or Indian province. This announcement was followed by a clash between Indian forces and ISIS fighters that resulted in the killing of Ishfaq Sofi, an Indian militant with a connection to ISIS.

7. Conclusion

Like many countries, India has joined the bloc of suffering states at the hands of terrorist groups. India's counterterrorism activities that have been in place for many years extend to determine its foreign policy towards different countries, especially the ones that fall victim to insurgent activities such as Nigeria. Combating terrorism and insurgency has become another strategy for building new friendships or maintaining the ones in place. India and Nigeria have been in diplomatic exchange for many decades, leading to economic, trade, and investments, cultural, and political closeness. Over time, Nigeria faced severe challenges from Islamists such as Maitatsine in the 1980s, Shi'ites, and Boko Haram in recent times. India, with its rich experience that has been developed over the years, could be in a position to provide operational calibre to wipe Boko Haram of the existence.

Acknowledgement Statement: The authors would like to thank all participants and the reviewers for providing comments in helping this manuscript to completion.

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding statements: This research has not received any funding.

Data availability statement: Data is available at request. Please contact the corresponding author for any additional information on data access or usage.

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