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The Boko Haram Insurgency and The Hardships Faced by Its Victims
Jocelynn Ramiah

In the face of the evolving Boko Haram insurgency, instability has continued to manifest itself in Nigeria, as more and more civilians fall victim to terror-related violence. The militant Islamic group's activities have forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes and communities into neighboring areas. In 2013, such activities placed Boko Haram "on the map" as a US-designated terror organization. The following year, Boko Haram managed to abduct over 270 Chibok schoolgirls, garnering international recognition and prompting public outcry.¹ Since the transfer of power from former President Goodluck Jonathan to Muhammadu Buhari in late May 2015, attacks against the Nigerian population have intensified. Correspondingly, the number of individuals fleeing violence has surged.

It has become increasingly apparent that the Nigerian government's concerted efforts to thwart militant attacks have continuously been undermined by the group's strengthening capacity and radical warfare tactics. While the Nigerian government has most certainly scored victories against them, a harsh reality yet remains. Boko Haram is the greatest threat to Nigeria's human security. It consistently jeopardizes the welfare of Nigeria's citizenry. This article will therefore seek to examine Boko Haram's terrorist activities and its correlation with the struggles that refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) face.

Historical Background of Boko Haram

Mohammed Yusuf, a well-versed Islamic cleric, founded Boko Haram in 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital city of the Borno State. The group's name is a figurative translation of the phrase, "Western education is forbidden".² Yusuf formed the organization out of a feeling of disdain and animosity towards British imperialism in West Africa. Radicals viewed the introduction and gradual adoption of norms and values associated with Western civilization by Nigerians as shameful and perverse. This frame of reference afforded Boko Haram the necessary momentum to thrive as a revolutionary movement, which fundamentally rejected the "nefarious" grips of Western culture and influence. To this day, the group's manifesto seeks to purify Islam in Nigeria from ostensibly heretical influences and so-called Muslim imposters. Primarily, they did so by rejecting Western *bid'ah* (innovation) and *shirk* (polytheism), as reflected by the group's salafi-jihadi orientation. Ultimately, any civilian who does not follow Boko Haram's salafi version of Islam or rule by their militant interpretation of *Sharia* law is a *halal* (permissible) target. As a result, the ongoing armed conflict continues to leave many dead or homeless within Nigeria.

Surge in Fleeing Civilians

In 2009, the Nigerian government finally captured and killed Mohammed Yusuf. However, Boko Haram's 2010 virulent re-emergence underscored the inability of the government to completely defeat its insurgents and their ideology.³ The group continued to grow stronger and more radical under its new ringleader, Abubakar Shekau. It has since expanded its base of support and network, swearing allegiance to the Islamic State in early 2015. Boko Haram is able to sustain its prestige through engaging in criminal activities such as bank robberies, ransoms, territory grabs, and allegedly stealing crude oil. It also receives income and weaponry from black markets and various benefactors.⁴ With Boko Haram's 'do or die' conscription tactics coupled with its well-armed and well-equipped factions in the North and South, it has become a force to be reckoned with militarily. Its savagery has gained international relevance as the group defies economic, political, and human security through challenging the authority of the Nigerian government with a barrage of suicide attacks, raidings, kidnappings and abductions, bombings, and merciless slaughterings. As a consequence, Boko Haram's insurgency has triggered a humanitarian disaster.

Since its declaration of a caliphate in August 2014, Boko Haram's indiscriminate attacks have escalated, which has created an uptick in new refugees and IDPs.⁵ Their barbarous attacks and *takfiri* tactics have significantly contributed to Nigeria's reputation of having the highest number of IDPs in Africa. As of February 2014, over 3.3 million people have been displaced within its borders; of that figure, 1.5 million are natives of the northern region.⁶ As of September 2015, the figure is estimated to have increased to 2.1 million IDPs.⁷ Familial clashes and environmental factors aside, the Boko Haram insurrection and the government's severe crackdown and counter-militancy campaign has left countless civilians - mainly in the Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states - entangled in violence and destruction.

That being stated, protecting the welfare of the victims of terror-related violence should be the highest priority for the Nigerian government; their situation is a dire humanitarian consequence of the insurgency. To put it in perspective, Boko Haram's insurgency has resulted in over 14,000 fatalities since 2009; the number of refugees is expected to reach almost 240,000 by 2016.⁸ These staggering figures are all the more reason why the government should make serious efforts towards ending Boko Haram's reign of terror. Undoubtedly, defeating Boko Haram will allow the Nigerian government to diligently focus on alleviating the various issues faced by refugees and IDPs.

Challenges Faced by IDPs and Refugees Fleeing Boko Haram

Today, the Nigerian government is still struggling to meet the basic needs of IDPs. Likewise, international aid organizations are limited in their reach as aid has often been hindered by the hostilities. Particularly, in the Borno and the Adamawa states, civilians' freedom of movement has been hampered by the threat of torture and execution. Those who manage to escape Boko Haram strongholds often flee into forested areas and do not survive the journey to safety. Additionally, those searching for shelter are forced to live on the streets, in the forests, and sometimes in old, rundown buildings as there is an insufficient amount of available governmental facilities or hosts families to provide shelter.⁹ Although, more

IDP and refugee camps have been constructed to facilitate the massive exodus, the conditions faced by displaced persons in those government camps are far from ideal. There is a lack of basic emergency resources and clean drinking water, sanitation issues, food shortages, and overcrowding. Deadly health risks are associated with these poor circumstances; people living in such close proximity in the camps have been exposed to periodic cholera outbreaks. From January to June 2015, over 26,000 individuals contracted the disease and hundreds died.¹⁰

The primary victims of the Boko Haram insurgency are women and children, because they make up the largest percentage of IDPs.¹¹ As the most vulnerable group, they are subject to high incidences of sexual and physical violence. Unfortunately, women in particular not only endure gender-based violence at the hands of Boko Haram militants but also in presumably “safe” spaces of refuge such as IDP camps and within host communities as well. This is largely due to poor management in providing security in the camps and within host communities. On that note, because of the lack of a foolproof vetting system, there is also a threat to the security of the camps; there have been documented cases of militants infiltrating some of them. Thus, the process of verifying that those entering refugee camps are IDPs is a necessity that will help ensure the safety of individuals already there.

As a result of these conditions, IDPs are not only faced with physical health disturbances but lack the proper mental health support in dealing with psychological and physical trauma associated with Boko Haram terror and their precarious status. The federal government must therefore properly fund refugee and IDP camps so that adequate social services are provided and the basic needs of its residents are met. So far, over 58 billion naira in donations and aid has been pledged for victims, but a majority of the pledges have yet to be redeemed.¹² Many people lack access to vocational training or higher education that could promote opportunities for improving their livelihood in these new locations. Thereby, they have very few means of gaining enough income to support themselves and their families. Thus, victims are continuing to live without the necessary funds and basic government services needed to survive.

Concluding Remarks

Under former President Goodluck Jonathan's administration, which was often criticized for its lack of presence on the ground, Boko Haram was able to grow into an even larger threat, which exposed the government's weakness and vulnerability in the process. During the past year's presidential campaign, President Buhari pledged to eradicate Boko Haram's threat to Nigeria's national security within the first month of his presidency.¹³ This has yet to occur. It is true that President Buhari inherited a monstrous challenge, but so far, his administration appears to be struggling to rise to the occasion. Despite appearances, Buhari has claimed to have made incredible strides towards defeating and "degrading" Boko Haram. President Buhari has been travelling all over the world to build strategic partnerships and secure global investors to fund anti-terrorism efforts. By the same token, the government should be just as proactive in planning on restoring war-devastated areas, providing the necessary humanitarian assistance to IDPs and refugees, and eventually reintegrating victims of Boko Haram violence back into Nigerian society.

Jocelynn Ramiah is a M.A student in the Middle Eastern and Northern African Studies Program at Tel Aviv University. Prior to beginning her studies at TAU, she graduated from Emory University with a B.A. in Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies. She currently works as a Research Assistant for the African Studies Department at TAU and is an intern at the Terem Clinic in South Tel Aviv.

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