



BOKO HARAM, THE BLOODIEST TERRORIST GROUP OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract: *THE AUTHORS GIVE A GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE TERRORIST GROUP BOKO HARAM, KNOWN WORLDWIDE AS ONE OF THE BLOODIEST TERRORIST GROUPS DUE TO THE PECULIARITIES OF THE MODES OF OPERATION AND THE ABOMINABLE ATTACKS ORCHESTRATED AGAINST THE CIVILIAN POPULATION.*

IT HIGHLIGHTS THE OPERATIONAL PECULIARITIES AND THE WAY OF TRANSFORMING THE GROUP FROM A LOCAL INSURGENCY, INTO A REAL FIGHTING FORCE, WHICH TOOK POWER OVER SIGNIFICANT TERRITORIES AND SOWED TERROR IN NIGERIA. THE GROUP PROVED TO BE PARTICULARLY TENACIOUS AND ADAPTIVE, OFTEN CHANGING ITS HOSTILE TACTICS AND STRATEGIES TO WITHSTAND COUNTERMEASURES FROM THE NIGERIAN AUTHORITIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN GLOBAL SECURITY ISSUES, CAUSED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, HAVE NOT LED TO A SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTION IN THE GROUP'S ACTIVITIES, AS IT SEEKS TO SPECULATE ON THE UNDERFUNDING OF SECURITY BY THE NIGERIAN AUTHORITIES, FURTHER ENGAGING IN THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF TERRORIST ATTACKS ON THE TERRITORY OF NIGERIA.

Keywords: *BOKO HARAM, TERRORISM, TERRORIST ATTACK, SECURITY, ISLAM.*

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INTRODUCTION

Boko Haram, the Sunni People's Group for Holy Sermon and War or Djama'at Ahl as-Sunna lid-Da'wah Wa-l-Jihad, in Arabic, is one of the Islamist terrorist groups of the 21st century that has gained notoriety through its cruelty and the perfect ferocity it showed in its actions.

The terrorist group Boko Haram was founded in 2002, under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf, and was relatively harmless until 2009, when the new leader, Abubakar Shekau, started a local insurgency, a real violent campaign, on Nigerian territory (Adibe, 2013, pp. 11-12). Since 2015, the



group has declared its affiliation with ISIS, becoming known as the Islamic State of the West African Province, being led by Abu Musab al Barnawi.

This terrorist group is currently active and continues to surprise all of humanity with its bloody attacks (Mărcău and Ciorei, 2013, pp.1-11). Boko Haram can be considered the benchmark for terrorism on the African continent, thus claiming a place in the unfortunate history of mankind.

The name Boko Haram comes from the Hausa language and translates to the phrase: "Western education is a sin." This name is descriptive of the group's militancy, the rejection of everything related to the Western world, the secular state, and the implementation of the "pure" Sharia law to address the problems facing Muslims in northern Nigeria. While sharia is already applied in the 12 northern states of Nigeria, the organization believes that politicians have used it for their own gain (Did You Know ... Boko Haram in Nigeria, n.d.). Boko Haram has been shaped by the Nigerian socio-political context, with the group reflecting very well the current regional situation characterized by extreme poverty and a history of poor governance. In fact, a report by Al Jazeera highlights that Boko Haram has emerged in the poorest region of Nigeria, where "71.5% of the population lives in absolute poverty and more than half of them are malnourished" (Weate, 2014).

BOKO HARAM'S EVOLUTION

After the end of the postcolonial era, the territory of the Nigerian state, a former British colony, was plagued by numerous civil wars, coups and a deep division of the population, burdened by a worrying socio-economic situation, factors that amplified the country's instability. In this context, ethnic and religious conflicts escalated and the framework was set for the establishment of the Islamist organization Boko Haram in Maiduguri, Nigeria, in 2002, "with a deeply fundamentalist orientation, which seeks to apply the Salafist interpretation of Sharia law in the whole country, simultaneously with the removal of Western values" (Peptan C., Peptan A. & Sîrbu, 2020, p. 337).

In 2009, tensions between Boko Haram members and local authorities peaked, escalating into clashes caused by allegations by the group's leader denouncing local authorities and members of the Nigerian government through a sermon entitled "Open Letter to the Federal Government of Nigeria", which was heavily publicized. Thus, in July 2009, Boko Haram launched a large-scale uprising that sparked reactions in five northern states, a government-suppressed uprising that killed a significant number of members of the group, including Yusuf Mohammed. After the death of the group's leader, the leadership was taken over by Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram becoming an underground military organization that promotes violence against the Nigerian state, Muslim and Christian civilians, but also Nigeria's neighbors.

Taking over the leadership by the new leader is equivalent to unleashing a long series of events that can be classified as macabre, carried out in a chronic violence. Thus, since 2009, numerous attacks have been launched against government officials, Christians and other "unbelievers", but also Muslims, including clergy, traditional leaders and politicians who have criticized the ideology or tactics of the group.

On September 7, 2010, Boko Haram launched the first large-scale operations by entering Bauchi Prison, releasing 721 prisoners, including more than a hundred members suspected of being part of the organization (Smith, 2010).

Also, one of the first attacks consisted of the bombing of a Christian church on Christmas Eve, an incident that resulted in the death of 38 people (Radical Islamist sect says it carried out Nigeria church attacks, 2010). Boko Haram's attacks on Christians have been constant (Nigeria Christians 'to defend churches from Boko Haram', 2011), with Abubakar Shekau, the leader of the group, publicly stating that he is "fighting against Christians", saying in July 2010 through media platforms: "This is a message to President Goodluck Jonathan and all those who represent Christians. We declare a holy



war! We will fight against Christians, because everyone knows what they did to Muslims!”(Adibe, 2019).

Due to the intensification and virulence of Boko Haram attacks and Abubakar's public statements, in 2010-2015, President Goodluck Jonathan took action to combat the group, including declaring a state of emergency in the most affected states in northern Yobe, Borno and Adamawa. It also initiated a regional force of four nations that included Niger, Chad and Cameroon (Adibe, 2019).

Despite the measures taken, Boko Haram has survived and managed to evolve due to the organization's ability to reinvent itself, change tactics and adopt different strategies, so that in the period 2011-2015, the group managed to occupy and control significant territories in Nigeria, in an attempt to achieve a genuine Islamic state. Only through the intervention of the Nigerian army was it possible to limit the territorial expansion of the group and liberate the occupied territories (Blair, 2015). Against the background of the liberation of the territories occupied by Boko Haram, in 2015, the government claimed victory against the group, declaring that it had “technically defeated” the group. This so-called victory was analyzed only from a tactical point of view, without taking into account the fact that the fight against terrorism is different from conventional warfare (Adibe, 2019).

However, the group maintained its influence in the region and continued to carry out attacks in the targeted areas, namely the northeastern states of Nigeria, Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, as well as along the border with Cameroon and in the vicinity of Lake Chad.

Over time, due to internal rivalries that originated in the efforts to gain power undertaken by various leaders and factions that make up the main organization, Boko Haram has come to be divided. The group is currently divided between a faction led by Abubakar Shekau, which controls parts of Borno State around Gwoza and the Cameroon-Nigeria border, and another faction led by Abu Mus'ab al-Barnawi, which is active mainly in the islands of Lake Chad, west of Maiduguri and along the Niger border in the Diffa region (Prieto Curiel, Walther & O'Clery, 2020).

Also in 2012, the faction called Ansaru (Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa), led by Khalid al-Barnawi, broke away from Boko Haram. The group emerged as a split in Boko Haram because of ideological differences, as Ansaru leaders disagreed with Boko Haram's operational methods, which included killing Muslims. Despite this split, an alliance and even an operational collaboration has been maintained between the two groups (Gaffey, 2016).

In March 2015, Boko Haram asserted its loyalty to ISIS. As part of its commitment, Boko Haram started to use the title West African Province of the Islamic State, later becoming the Islamic State of the West African Province (ISWAP). In August 2016, the Islamic State announced that it had appointed Abu Mus' ab al-Barnawi as the new leader of ISWAP (Gaffey, 2016). ISIS has supported Boko Haram, encouraging Muslims to join the organization and other West African militant groups. Some analysts have claimed that the affiliation between Boko Haram and ISIS was a desperate move by Boko Haram "to boost the morale, image and local support of its members" after the African Union coalition force led the group in the Sambisa Forest (Standford University, nd). However, Boko Haram retained its original name, but also acted as the Islamic State's West African Province, publicly asserting the group's loyalty to ISIS.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Regarding the organization of the group, it was found that Boko Haram operates in the form of a decentralized structure. Unlike Al Qaeda, which had a strict organizational structure in which members' responsibilities were clearly demarcated, Boko Haram can be considered rather chaotic, consisting of a series of cells and gangs between which there is no close connection. In this regard, it was appreciated that Boko Haram is organized under a cell-free federation operating under the broad umbrella of the Islamic standard and the leadership of the Shura Advisory Council. This structure, in



which individual cells maintain little direct contact with central management, allows local and regional commanders to enjoy a significant level of autonomy in their operations against governmental and civilian targets. The number of decentralized cells that make up Boko Haram remains a matter of speculation (Prieto Curiel, Walther & O'Clery, 2020). Given this disparate form of organization, the group enjoys high mobility that allows it to carry out simultaneous attacks. This allows them to relocate quickly, in areas hard to reach by government forces.

Regarding the structure of the organization and its way of action, it is certain that the number of group members is very large, without being able to identify in concrete terms their number, compared to the divided structure of Boko Haram. However, Boko Haram is an organization built on the core values of Islam, which gives the group a governance based on strict rules and regulations. Loyalty or eccentricity are not tolerated by Boko Haram, regardless of position or authority (Antigha, 2018).

IDEOLOGY

Like other Salafist groups, Boko Haram seeks to represent a model of the Muslim community (Salafists or ancestors) who lived during the time of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

Starting with the name Boko Haram, this Sunni Islamist militant organization opposes Western education and influence in Nigeria. Its founder Mohammad Yusuf was strongly influenced by the views of Ibn Taymiyyah, a 14th-century scholar of Islamic fundamentalism. Yusuf initially followed and preached the Izala doctrine, which supports the establishment of a Muslim society that follows the lessons of his pious ancestors. After the initial radicalization in 2002, Yusuf's ideology evolved and radicalized into a philosophy that rejected all Western and secular aspects of Nigerian society (Thurston, 2016).

Thus, the spiritual father of Boko Haram, Mohammad Yusuf, instilled in the group the extremist ideology, in a version of Islam in which any interaction with Western society is considered a sin. Moreover, Boko Haram considers unfaithful Muslims belonging to Sufi and Shiite groups, but also believers, to the exclusion of any other form of religion outside of pure Islam. Boko Haram has constantly carried out attacks on Christians, real massacres, destroying churches and carrying out bloody actions around major Christian holidays. According to a study by Genocide Watch, 350 Nigerian Christians were massacred in the first two months of 2020, and more than 11,500 Christians were killed in June 2015. Four to five million Christians were also forced to flee their houses due to the attacks, and no less than 2000 churches were destroyed (Umeagbalasi, 2020).

Starting from the ideology of the group, Boko Haram militates for the establishment of the "pure Islamic State", ruled by sharia. According to the rhetoric of the movement, its purpose is to create the kingdom of God on earth, through justice for the poor, achieved through the rigid application of Islamic law or sharia. Thus, anything that hinders this goal must be destroyed. For Boko Haram, violence is not a way of expressing Islam, but is a justifiable means for a pure purpose (Campbell, 2014).

According to the vision of Boko Haram, the ideal state is represented only by the rule of sharia, and all the values of a secular state are wrong, the leaders and representatives of such a state being considered unfaithful. In this regard, Boko Haram's goals include the violent removal of the Nigerian state government and compromised Islamic institutions (Campbell, 2014).

MODUS OPERANDI

Given the need to train and prepare members of the group, Boko Haram has set up training camps around the Lake Chad basin. Such training camps were targeted by local authorities in the fight



against Boko Haram, with air raids in the Sambisa forest in northeastern Nigeria, which also involved neighboring Chad, Cameroon and Niger (Flynn & Ola, 2015).

In a summary of the group's operation, incidents of serious human rights violations can be identified, from abduction, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, to sexual and gender-based violence, violence against children and the use of children in hostilities, attacks on civilian targets, destruction and theft. All this confirms that “terrorism is an unconventional fighting tactic, a global contemporary societal threat”, which aims to achieve “psycho-affective” ruptures within communities through fear, frustration and emotions created (Peptan, 2019, pp. 126- 142).

As for Boko Haram, the title of the bloodiest terrorist group is also revealed by the fact that the group targeted civilian attacks, the collateral victims of the group totaling millions of people. Also specific to the group is the fact that both women and very young children are used in the attacks. For example, in May 2015, a 10-year-old girl was used to detonate a bomb at a bus station in Damaturu, Yobe State, killing seven people, and similar incidents were reported in Cameroon and Niger (Nigeria Boko Haram crisis: Child bomber hits Damaturu, 2015).

In Nigeria, Boko Haram intentionally killed and mutilated civilians in attacks in Borno State, but also in the Adamawa and Yobe regions. Many witnesses reported that Boko Haram members shot civilians who tried to escape during the attacks in Askira Uba, Baga, Bama, Damasak, Gombi, Gwoza, Kwajafa, Madagali, Maiduguri, Michika and Mubi. The killings were often preceded by death threats or an invitation from Boko Haram to men and boys to join "the work of Allah." Those who refused to join were killed, and their bodies were often left to rot on the streets, in wells or in riverbeds (Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, p. 6).

Boko Haram used blunt objects, machetes, knives, sophisticated weapons, improvised explosive devices, landmines, truck-mounted weapons, military helicopters, armored vehicles and motorcycles to commit crimes. Men and young people who refused to adopt the beliefs professed by Boko Haram were particularly targeted in such attacks, as were representatives of local authorities, teachers, health workers and members of civil defense groups. The kidnappings are one of the tactics constantly approached by Boko Haram. Men and boys were abducted mainly by Boko Haram for indoctrination and recruitment for fighting, while women and girls were abducted for sexual exploitation, forced marriage, labor and religious conversion to Islam (Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, p. 6).

Suicide bombings, as a weapon in the fight against the government, were almost entirely absent before 2011. Boko Haram later adopted this mode of operation as an important tactic in its fight against government authorities. The group's confidence in this tactic reflects the general decline of its direct confrontation with the army and security services, after Nigerian forces managed to remove the group from the seized territories (Campbell & Harwood, 2018).

Raids on cities and villages are another method used by Boko Haram to spread terror and fear among the population. These raids occur spontaneously, and some attacks occur constantly in certain regions, which caused the population to leave their homes and relocate.

Occupying territories and gaining control of villages and towns is another tactic used by Boko Haram. The purpose of these actions is to obtain resources, but also to capture the population. Since 2014, Boko Haram has been carrying out occupation actions, managing to gain territorial control over more than 20 local government areas in the northeastern states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe by the end of the year (Ajakaye, 2015).

BOKO HARAM'S ACTIVITY IN RECENT TIMES

The activity of the terrorist organization continues to be particularly violent and frequent, in the last year Boko Haram being involved in countless terrorist attacks on both government authorities



and Christians, but also countless kidnappings, these being the main method of operation of the terrorist organization. The factual situation in Nigeria has led David Curry, director of Open Doors USA, to state that "the daily dangers to which Christians are subjected are caused by the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram and other Islamic organizations" (Nigeria-cel mai cumplit loc de pe pământ în care trăiesc creștini, 2016), certifying the seriousness of the security issue.

Recently, Nigeria has faced an increased wave of mass abductions, the most recent being in late February 2021, when the terrorist group Boko Haram abducted 317 girls from a school in Jangebe, Zamfara state, the girls being released a few days later (Kidnappers abduct 317 schoolgirls in Nigeria in armed night-time raid, 2021). Armed groups of bandits, led by Boko Haram, pose a real threat to Nigeria's security, as they are extremely active, violent and effective. They rejected the truce proposed by the Nigerian national authorities, considering the COVID-19 pandemic to be a punishment of divine power for the group's enemies. Even in a pandemic context, their activity was very dynamic, operating mainly in rural areas, where they sowed terror among the locals, through violent terrorist attacks, but also through kidnappings, thefts and executions. Rural areas are a relatively easy target for the terrorist group, due to the lack of presence of Nigerian armed forces in these areas, with the Nigerian government allocating a larger armed presence in Nigerian urban areas. The work in rural areas also allows the Boko Haram group to exploit all the resources in these areas, which contributes significantly to the financing of the terrorist organization.

The atrocities committed by the Boko Haram terrorist group have recently prompted officials of the International Criminal Court to declare that the group will be investigated for "crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, rape, sexual slavery, enslavement, torture and hostages" (Luca, 2020), which highlights the concern of the international community for the management of the issue in Nigeria.

On the other hand, the economic problems caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic have also affected the ability of the Nigerian authorities to continue the fight against the Boko Haram group. The fall in oil prices (in the context of more than 60% of Nigeria's revenues coming from oil reserves) and the channeling of a significant share of budget expenditures to the purchase of medical products and equipment have led to chronic underfunding of national security.

Nigeria, like other countries in the West African region, will continue to benefit from the support of the international community in the fight against terrorism. In this regard, the recent anti-terrorist operations known as "Lafiya Dole", carried out by Nigerian military forces in the north-eastern regions of the country, doubled by the missions of the Multinational Joint Force (MNJTF) near Lake Chad, or the efforts of some European countries to combat terrorism in the vicinity of Nigeria, on the territory of the state of Mali, through the presence of the special unit Takuba, under the command of Operation "Barkhane" which will complete the UN and EU missions (Butiri, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Boko Haram is one of the most violent terrorist organizations in the world, over time, carrying out countless virulent terrorist attacks, the main target being government authorities and civilians, mostly Christians. It should be noted that this group has been constantly changing, adapting its mode of operation according to the particularities of the times.

Boko Haram has remained strongly anchored, from an actional point of view, at the regional level, in countries such as Nigeria, Chad, Niger or Cameroon, the affiliation to ISIS representing an opportunity to strengthen the financial and logistical base, given the imagological potential of ISIS.

The Nigerian authorities have called for the initiation and conduct of measures to combat the terrorist group, in particular, and the terrorist phenomenon in general, without achieving notable results. There are many explanations for this situation, but we must not forget the phenomenon of



almost widespread corruption in Nigerian society, which has also taken over the field of national security.

Although Boko Haram has suffered significant losses in its capabilities in recent years, it is still involved in terrorist attacks targeting security forces and the headquarters of state institutions or foreign representations, kidnappings of people or crimes, especially against Christians.



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