



## **Boko Haram's Persistent Campaign of Terror in Nigeria: Why no Outrage?**

*Dr. Nivedita Ray\**

The Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria launched one of its deadliest attacks ever in the north eastern town of Baga and the neighbouring villages in Nigeria in the first week of January. These attacks, which started on 3 January 2015, continued through the week. The local officials reportedly said that during the six day rampage, the human carnage perpetrated by the Boko Haram terrorists was enormous. Thousands of civilians were killed and hundreds of homes were burnt and bodies strewn on the streets. The Amnesty International said that it was Boko Haram's deadliest massacre in its six year insurgency. Subsequent attacks have killed more, including at least 19, who died in Borno's capital town of Maiduguri when a 10-year-old girl was used to detonate a bomb. These terror killings hardly made any headlines in the international media, while Paris terror attacks, which happened in the same week, where 17 people were killed, generated worldwide reactions.

Such disparity in global responses to both these attacks, carried out in the name of Islamist extremism, speaks volume about the kind of different value that is placed on the lives of people of different region, race and religion. Blatant acts of terror in the non-western world, particularly in African countries like Nigeria, are not given much priority by the international media, unless they serve a certain agenda, such as assault on freedom,

women, civilisation, or attack on Westerners. In the case of Nigeria, the recurring terror strikes by Boko Haram are treated as a way of life. It appears as though the people have become desensitised to the daily violence. May be for the routine nature of violence, the Western media does not find it newsworthy and, thus, tends to overlook it. Nevertheless, the blame cannot be put only on the global media and the international community for ignoring such ruthless terror killings in Nigeria.

This difference in outrage also relates to the way governments respond to the situation. Unlike France, the political leaders of Nigeria hardly spoke about the senseless killings by Boko Haram. While Jonathan Goodluck issued a statement condemning the attacks on Charlie Hebdo and expressed “solidarity” with the people of France, he failed to do so for the loss of lives in his own country. Even African leaders, while commiserating with Paris, did not express much concern towards the victims of terror in Nigeria.

It is understandable that President Jonathan would not like to discuss about Boko Haram at a time when he is campaigning for his re-election next month. But it is not the first time that Jonathan has remained silent about the Boko Haram attacks. When Boko Haram militants kidnapped more than 200 schoolgirls from the north-eastern village of Chibok in April 2014, President Jonathan made no public comment for almost three weeks. He preferred not to speak about it, as his acknowledgment of the scale of the violence, will be a kind of acceptance of his failure as a President.

At present, the Boko Haram threat is very significant to the political context of Nigeria. The country is heading for general election on 14 February, where the presidential race is between the incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan and former military ruler, Muhammadu Buhari. Analysts say that Boko Haram, which rejects democratic politics, would likely to increase its attacks to threaten and dissuade people from voting.

Since assuming the presidency in 2010, Jonathan Goodluck has not done enough to contain Boko Haram, which wants to establish Islamic caliphate in northern Nigeria. The

security situation has become very complex and the use of force so far has not yielded the desired results. His failure to contain the terror group is attributed to various factors including political and economic marginalisation of north-eastern region, corruption, lack of education, unemployment, human rights abuses by security forces and, most importantly, the linkages of Boko Haram with foreign extremist groups, such as the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Over the years, Boko Haram has steadily gained ground in its war against Nigeria. It has moved beyond asymmetric attacks to sophisticated military operations resulting in control over large swathes of territory in north-eastern Nigeria. It has also acquired a regional character by not only having linkages with foreign extremist groups, but also extending its operations to the neighbouring countries, such as Cameroon, Niger and Chad, possibly inspired by similar moves by Islamist militants in Iraq and Syria. It is feared that the attacks will continue to spread if left unchecked.

Given the severity of the Boko Haram problem, the Nigerian government can no longer afford to have only a military solution. Buhari or Jonathan, whoever comes to power after the elections, has to urgently address the issue in all its complexity, including the root causes of radicalisation. Any further delay may be catastrophic not only for the country, but also for the region.

The problem also needs to be addressed at the regional level. So far, the AU, the ECOWAS and the regional leaders have neglected the tragedies unfolding in Nigeria. As the problem no longer remains confined to the domestic space of Nigeria, the regional actors need to play a leading role and put up a concerted effort along with the Nigerian authorities against the Islamist terror. This evokes the urge for the creation of an effective counter-terror response mechanism under the aegis of the AU and ECOWAS, in keeping with the principle of “African solutions for African problems”.

While it is the primary responsibility of Nigeria and Africa to address the challenge

of Boko Haram terror in Nigeria and the adjoining region, the international community should not absolve of its obligation to help in tackling the growing threat. In the struggle against the Islamist extremism, the international community should treat the terror attacks on the African soil with equal sense of urgency.

On its part, as a victim of terrorism, India needs to proactively voice its concerns regarding the increasing atrocities carried out by Boko Haram. Nigeria is an important country for India, as it is India's largest trading partner and the largest market in Africa for Indian exports. It has a sizeable Indian community. In recent years, the country has become highly significant for India's energy security needs, as India imports around 8-12 per cent of its crude requirements from Nigeria. To deal with the security challenges faced by Nigeria, India could try and partner in the proposed multilateral and regional counter-terror initiatives in Africa.

\*\*\*\*

*\*Dr Nivedita Ray is a Research Fellow at Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.*

*Disclaimer: Views expressed are of author and do not reflect the views of the Council.*