

Peace Talks Initiatives between the Boko Haram and Nigerian Government

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Abstract

This paper discusses the Boko Haram as well as the peace talk initiatives between the Nigerian government and the group. Even though it appears difficult to see a meaningful dialogue between the government and the Boko Haram, it is argued here that several previous attempts have been made to resolve the issue through dialogue, and that such moves could have been made more productive; yet, unfortunately, they came to a breakdown either because the initiators were afraid that they would benefit from the crisis no more if the peace talks succeeded, or because some attempted to derail these processes for various reasons. Given the danger the group poses to the country, a more focused, pragmatic, and dynamic approach to resolving the challenge is required on the part of the government and the group. That is, a more comprehensive initiative alongside other civic actions should be employed.

Keywords: The Boko Haram, Nigerian government, Northern Nigeria, peace talks, dialogue, negotiation, initiative

1. Introduction

Analysis of the Boko Haram, often, focuses on their attacks, history and ideology in Nigeria. According to Toni (2011) “The Boko Haram is the popular name for the Nigerian terrorist organisation ‘Jama’atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda’wati wal Jihad’, or people committed to the propagation of the prophet’s teachings and jihad” (Toni 2011). Though not an official moniker, the term “Boko Haram” is a revealing window into the ideology that drives the organization. The title has also been interpreted as “Western Education is forbidden”, but according to many experts, the term goes beyond simply secular schooling and that it means a rejection of Western civilization and institutions.

Likely founded in the mid-1990s as a religious study group, the Boko Haram did not begin to transform into the insurgent group it is today, until a young and charismatic Nigerian Islamic cleric named Mohammed Yusuf assumed control. Calling it “the Nigerian Taliban”, Boko Haram adopted a “live-off-the-land” lifestyle and established a camp in a remote area of the northeast Nigeria, which the group dubbed “Afghanistan” (Shehu 2011).

From the early 2000s to 2009, the Boko Haram engaged in low-level conflict with local police forces and non-compliant villagers. In 2009, a crackdown on the Boko Haram members from the Nigerian police forces in the Borno state erupted into fighting. On July 26, 2009, sect members launched an attack against a police station in Bauchi state, resulting in the death of 39 Boko Haram members, two police officers, and one soldier (Shehu 2011). This ignited a five-day stand-off between the group and security personnel that saw violent attacks and battles spread across the three northern Nigerian states of Bauchi, Kano, and Yobe, and culminated in a final battle in the city of Maiduguri in the Borno state.

On 30 July 2009, the battle of Maiduguri ended when the Nigerian security forces captured and killed the Boko Haram’s leader, Mohammed Yusuf, in what human rights groups have deemed an extrajudicial killing. Yusuf’s execution was videotaped by soldiers and later broadcast on television (Toni 2011). In total, nearly 700 people were killed in the uprising.

The death of Yusuf marked a turning point for the Boko Haram and forced the group underground. Many of its leaders reportedly fled to other parts of Nigeria, including Bauchi state, as well as countries throughout Africa (Nigeria Conflict Assessment 2011: 39).

1.1. Literature Review

A review of the literature on the Boko Haram indicates the significance of a continued examination of Islamic fundamentalist history. Islamic fundamentalist theory is that a complete islamisation of Nigeria under the sharia law has always been the motive behind various religious riots in Northern Nigeria. This motive even dates back to the era of the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio. Indeed, Adetoro (1982) had alluded to the fact that islamisation of Nigeria had been the motive behind the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio in 1804 (Adetoro 1982). This was evidential from the submission of Hodgkin (1975) who claimed that the jihad of Usman Dan Fodio was “to make upon the heathen king who...makes no profession of Islam, is obligatory by assent” (Hodgkin 1982: 247). Adetoro (1982) further reported that it was only the Ibadan warriors (south western Nigeria warriors) that stopped the rampaging Fodio’s Jihad conquest under the Jalumi war in 1878 around Ikirun-a south western Nigeria town (Adetoro 1982). Recently, Farouk (2012) reported that the Boko Haram insurgency only believed in the Quranic verse, which states that “Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors” (Quran 649), even though, it is the same Quran that says “ To you be your religion and to me my religion” (Quran 1096) (Farouk 2012).

In a statement issued by the Boko Haram group in Maiduguri on April 24, 2011, Suleiman (2011), reported that their objectives were to abolish democracy and institute sharia law as they claimed to be fighting for justice and islamisation of Nigeria. According to Suleiman, one of the group spokesmen Alzawahiri stated that the group was contented with preaching islamisation of Nigeria until 2009, when it took arms against the state because some unnamed Muslim clerics and ward heads in the North were conniving with the government to attack them following the Maiduguri crisis in July, 2009 (Suleiman 2011: 50) . For this reason, the spokesman submitted that: “we would continue to fight until Islam is well established and the Muslims regain their freedom all over Nigeria. We would never be ready to compromise and we don’t need amnesty. The only solution to what is happening is for the government to repent, jettison democracy, drop the constitution and adopt the laws in the Holy Qur’an” (Suleiman 2011: 50).

Earlier, the group had called on the government to prosecute the police officers involved in the extra-judicial killing of their leader Mohammed Yusuf and some members. They equally called for the arrest and trial of some former Northern Nigeria Governors for what they described as acts of “betrayal” because they had all along been their political thugs funded by them (the former Governors). To re-echo their interest in islamisation of Nigeria, Usigbe (2012) reported that President Jonathan was recently threatened by the Boko Haram to embrace Islam or resign. According to the report, a leader of the sect known as Abubakar Shekau submitted on Youtube (in Hausa language) that:

“I call on you President Goodluck Jonathan, you should abandon this ungodly power, you should repent and sake of Christianity, including Obama, who said I have business interests in the United States” (Usigbe 2012:1).

2. Radical Re-Emergence

In 2010, the Boko Haram re-emerged, radically more violent and determined to seek vengeance against the Nigerian state for the execution of Mohammed Yusuf. Under the leadership of Imam Abubakar Shekau, who assumed control of the sect following Yusuf’s death, Boko Haram militants carried out violent operations against government targets in the North. The most notable include the September 2010 assault on a Maiduguri prison that resulted in the release of 700 prisoners, including Boko Haram members, and a bombing in the city of Jos that killed more than 80 people. Significantly, the targeting of the Nigerian capital city of Abuja represented an evolving threat outside of the Boko Haram’s native northeastern Nigeria. In June 2011, the Boko Haram militants bombed the police headquarters in Abuja and, two months later, carried out a suicide attack against the United Nations (UN) headquarters in Abuja. Since then, and despite the international outcry following the UN bombing, the Boko Haram’s attacks have continued.

A number of factors have been attributed to the fueling of Boko Haram’s violence and fanaticism, including a feeling of rampant government corruption and the belief that relations with the West are a corrupting influence.

These grievances have led to sympathy for the Boko Haram among the local Muslim population and politicians in northern Nigeria (Brock 2011). Shettima Khalifa Dikwa, chairman of the Voters Forum at the University of Maiduguri, blamed the government for the growing public sympathy toward the Boko Haram (Brock 2011). The evolution of the Boko Haram—from a group of disaffected Muslim youths to a ruthless and operationally savvy international terrorist network—has also been fueled by radical Islamism and al Qaeda's guidance. The Boko Haram claim that their mission to implement *sharia law* and establish an Islamic state throughout all of Nigeria is a solution to the problems facing Nigeria's Muslims (Brock 2011). Yet, *sharia law* is currently observed in 12 out of the 36 Nigerian states as the result of a grassroots movement that coincided with Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999 (Johnson 2011). It is worth noting that several moves have been made to negotiate a peace deal between the government of Nigerian and the group, but to no avail.

3. Peace Talks Initiatives

Several prominent Nigerians have attempted to initiate peace between the government of Nigeria and the Boko Haram. The former Nigerian leader, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, had called on the government to engage in dialogues with the group to end the insecurity in the northern regions. He was the second former leader to canvass for such dialogue. As the chairman of the Governing Council of the Institution for Peace and Sustainable Development Studies (GCIPSDS), he urged them to strive and excel in ensuring transparency and accountability toward sustainable peace and development (Abubakar 2013). Abubakar said that dialogue between the government and Boko Haram was the only way to tackle the current security challenges in the north.

Governor Gabriel Suswan of the Benue state had also called for dialogues between the Boko Haram and the Federal Government to resolve the security challenges in the country. For him, the crisis was the grinding to a halt of the economic activities in the region. He argued that both the political leaders and spiritual leaders in the north should work together to address the crisis to avert future catastrophe, further describing it as a serious crisis that requires the support of all northerners to tackle (Abubakar 2013). According to Dapo Falade, the ongoing dialogue process should be a concerted effort aimed at putting an end to the Boko Haram insurgency ravaging most of the northern parts of the country. Dapo Falade is a Nigerian and an assistant editor journalist from Nigerian Tribune.

As agreed upon by several prominent Nigerians from the north, this was with a view to see how the Boko Haram members can be persuaded to renounce their warring posture and allow peace to reign in the country. Of course, some others were opposed to the idea of dialogue, as they were of the opinion that doing such would only encourage more dissenting groups to take up arms in pressing home their demands and agitations.

Again, the Former President, Olusegun Obasanjo, had also made a similar call and advocated a carrot-and-stick approach, with the carrot being a call for talks. He embraced the peace initiative and took a bold step by taking the message to the lion's den. In his attempt to broker peace, the former president went to Maiduguri, Borno State, in 2011 where he met with an in-law of the late leader, Muhammed Yusuf, whom they thought could be of assistance in ensuring the success of the peace process. However, his visit turned out to be a misadventure as the group passed a death sentence on Obasanjo's host and executed it by killing the man and some members of his family. The ugly incident was a clear signal that the dreaded sect was not, in any way, prepared to enter into dialogue with the government of Nigeria.

However, the government appeared to be undeterred in its commitment to dialogue with the Boko Haram sect, a major instrument that would help to curtail the group's insurgency in the north. The National Security Adviser, Sambo Dasuki, at one time even pledged to seek ceasefire with the group. However, the pledge turned out to be a mere boast as the sect became more daring in its violence during the period, as its activities extended to attacking police formations and the residence of the vice President, Namadi Sambo.

Undeterred, the government, on 18 August, 2012, once more reiterated its readiness to listen to the complaints of the group, expressing hope that the process would lead to restoration of peace, security, and tranquility in the north. It also said that it was receptive to any initiative that would usher in peace to the currently most troubled region in the country, given the security challenges facing the nation. The minister of information, Labaran Maku, while expressing the government's position, was reported to have said:

“The Federal Government welcomes any initiative that will usher in peace, security and tranquility in the country...In this text, we welcome the statement by the group acknowledging that they have been in contact with the government through its representatives and have started negotiations with the objective of reaching a final solution on this crisis” (Abubakar 2013).

Another indication of the seriousness attached to the peace option via the instrument of dialogue was the peace initiative under the leadership of Ahmed Datti, who was appointed as the mediator between the government and members of the Boko Haram group. However, the Datti-led initiative, which was the first major move by the government to reach out to the sect, appeared destined to fail right from the onset. Some members of the group opposed the peace move as they perceived the committee to be a political tool that would be used against the wish of the sect. Lending his voice to the call for peace, the Shehu of Borno, Alhaji Abubakar ibn Garbai, whose domain had been savagely affected by the Boko Haram menace, renewed his appeal to the sect to embrace dialogue and end its violent campaign. Taking an exception to those who were against the dialogue option, the traditional ruler challenged the Borno elders to come up with suggestions on how to end the Boko Haram insurgency, which he noted had crippled both economic and social activities in the state. In the same vein, the Borno State governor, Alhaji Kashim Shettima, had called for dialogue and also appealed to the members of the Boko Haram to cease hostilities.

Furthermore, the Former Head of State, Chief Ernest Shonekan, also joined the growing list of the pro-dialogue advocates as he called for talks with leaders of those responsible for the spate of insecurity. Shonekan was of the view that dialogue was necessary to ascertain why the Boko Haram engaged in violent acts, and to find ways to end the crisis. He noted that there could not be any sustainable socio-economic and political transformation in a country where there is no guarantee for life and property.

Unfazed by the apparent lackluster attitude of the members of the Boko Haram sect to the dialogue process, an optimistic Nigerian government, on 18 October 2012, again renewed its call on the members of the Boko Haram to stop the attacks and incessant killings of innocent Nigerians. The Minister of Interior, Comrade Abba Moro, who described the various attacks as horrendous and unacceptable, urged these members to embrace dialogue in resolving their grievances. However, and in spite of the repeated calls for dialogue, the belligerent activists of the Boko Haram group appeared to have stuck to the gun, namely as a violent means to express their grievances, whether justified or not.

A leader of the Boko Haram group, Abubakar Shekau, had denied statements from the government that the group is in any way involved in peace talks. While President Jonathan has once said that the authorities were in dialogue with Boko Haram via back channels, and that the approach was helping neutralise the threat the sect posed, Shekau insisted that no such talks were going on. “Let it be clear that we never sought dialogue or to sit down with government agents, or representatives of Nigerian leaders will never know peace while they attack our members” (Nigeria Seeking an Effective Response to the Boko Haram 2011).

It was in the light of the militant posture of the members of the group that many people argue that a dialogue between the government and the Boko Haram would be an exercise in futility. Advising the government to drop the process, an activist, Olawale Okunniyi, the spokesperson of the Pro National Conference Organisation (PRONACO), in August 2012, cautioned against wasting time and public funds on the intended dialogue with the sect, saying that it might never happen or yield any positive results. Noting that the demand that was put forward by the Boko Haram was purely based on faith and ideology, Okunniyi opined that the Jonathan government needed to know that any official interface and negotiation with the sect is futile. According to him, the sect would not have trust and belief in any negotiations not involving other aggrieved groups and regional interests on the political and constitutional restructuring of the country leading to an autonomous federation.

Okunniyi further warned the federal government that “the only deal that can resolve or isolate the Boko Haram suicide insurrections in Nigeria is not a negotiation with those that the sect believes are ‘infidels in government’ holding all other federating peoples in country hostage under an imposed constitution, but a popular collective negotiation and mutual agreement by all the natural federating nations and aggrieved groups in Nigeria on how they want to exist within Nigeria” (The Boko Haram Gives Terms for Talks with Government 2012).

The pessimism and doubt expressed in some quarters about the success of the dialogue process notwithstanding, some people are saying the process can still be pursued to a logical end, facilitating an end to the Boko Haram offensive in the north.

Sanusi Muhammed, a member of the disbanded National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), offered a solution to the menace. Muhammed, who claimed to be in the forefront to convincing the dreaded Islamic sect to accept a dialogue with the Federal Government, stated that getting across to the sect was not as difficult, but the problem is that the proper channel is not followed. According to him, “what blocks the government from reaching out to the Boko Haram, from my understanding, is the inability of the people to cooperate with the relevant security agencies to achieve that specific purpose” (Campbell 2011). Most of those trying to assist in reaching out to the sect are either insincere in the assignment or completely ignorant of the modus operandi of the sect. The sect itself has created artificial barriers between itself and a majority of the people through the loss of confidence in anything initiated by the government, based on what they say from past experience. According to Muhammed:

“There was a wrong approach to the Boko Haram issue right from the beginning through the application of force. The other point is that the international media contributed to the escalation of the problem, most especially Aljazeera and BBC television stations, by airing the killing of some arrested members without going through the legal process as if Nigeria is a banana country. And, most of government efforts are thwarted by the statements from some of its agents” (Gambari 2012).

Faulting the previous attempts at reaching out to the sect, Muhammed argued that the former President, Obasanjo, did not meet with any of the Boko Haram members, but only an in-law of the late leader, who was not mandated by the sect to speak for them or to even make any reference to them. According to him, that was what provoked the Boko Haram members as the in-law had, at the meeting with Obasanjo, forwarded some financial requests that include the payment of compensation as ruled by the Supreme Court and as the sect felt betrayed and insulted.

As regards the failure of the Datti committee to attain a truce with the sect, Muhammed stated that he had expected the committee to liaise with the sect leadership and bring them to the negotiating table to present their case instead of being represented. “Datti erred by agreeing to dialogue on behalf of the sect with the federal government if that was a correct information. With Muhammed, the Boko Haram should be encouraged to negotiate its problems by itself, rather than through representation once they accept to dialogue” (Brandler 2012).

3.1. A Possible Road Ahead

On the way out of the problem and to ensure a successful dialogue process, it has been suggested that the federal government show sincerity, determination and commitment towards a genuine dialogue. In this wise, the government should identify those that desired contact with the sect and enjoy their respect and confidence. These people should be secretly appointed as members of a secret committee with specific terms of reference and within a time-frame to accomplish the task of reaching the sect leadership to discuss the modalities of ending the problem.

As noted by Muhammed:

“One most important thing the government should know is that the sect is more than what it is rated to be. They have branches all over the federation as I was reliably informed with members even in government. The government should be ready to face the challenges associated with brokering truce because of the high risks involved and should be careful in appointing those to represent it for the dialogue if it eventually holds” (The Boko Haram: A Handshake Beyond Nigeria’s Elbow 2011).

Similarly, the governors of the affected states should come into the process by sincerely setting up reconciliatory committees in their respective states to reach out to the sect. This view is against the backdrop of the yet-to-be assuaged feeling among the members of the sect that, given the extra-judicial killing of their leader in 2009 and the demolishing of their houses and places of worship in some states in the north-east, as well as what they saw as the indiscriminate arrest of their members on the orders of some state governors, they may not want to agree to listen to any request from any of those state governments without an intermediary (Yar’Adua 2012).

Once again, Muhammed has stated that some of the belligerent Boko Haram leaders, including Shekau, may want to enter into dialogue with the government, but on the ground of the conviction of adequate security arrangement for Muhammed and his lieutenant at such peace meetings. To achieve this, he further remarks:

“Government should first appoint a contact committee to reach the sect and prepare them for the dialogue which should include suspension of all attacks as the arrangement goes on. Then, a dialogue committee should be appointed to meet with representatives of the sect for the final resolution” (Ajibola 2012).

The Oodua People's Congress (OPC) had also called for an immediate ceasefire by the extremist Boko Haram sect as a prelude to any meaningful dialogue between the federal government and the violent group that has claimed responsibility for spates of deadly attacks in northern Nigeria. At a news conference in Lagos, the OPC also faulted the ongoing constitution review by the National Assembly, insisting that "no amount of tinkering and panel-beating" could reform the 1999 constitution into a "people's document" (Adefaka 2013). The OPC founder, Frederick Faseun, also argued that the Boko Haram must unveil its identity for meaningful talks, which must take place within Nigeria—and this was in light of the group to have proposed a negotiation meeting in Saudi Arabia. According to Faseun, "any dialogue between government and the Boko Haram should be held within Nigeria" (Adefaka 2013). Faseun noted that since much of the Boko Haram's hostility was against Christians, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) must be represented at the proposed talks. He suggested that negotiations be open to accommodate other ethnic interests such as Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Afenifere, Middle-Belt Forum, Egbesu, the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and other nationality groups, whose indigenes have been wanted only slaughtered by the Boko Haram. He advised the government against paying any form of compensation to members of the sect as it would set a wrong precedence while also urging the federal government to equally consider amnesty for Henry Okah, the assumed Nigerian guerrilla leader of the Movement for the MEND, if such gesture was offered to the Boko Haram (Okah 2008).

As demonstrated above, it has been very difficult to see how there can be meaningful dialogues between the government and the Boko Haram. It is possible that some elements within the federal and state governments have found themselves outside the federal patronage network and turned to be stronger supporters and sympathisers of the Boko Haram. In the following comes the evidence of widespread popular support for the sect.

4. Supporters and Sympathisers

Durable support of the group, Boko Haram, among members of the bottom economic rung is consistent with the resonance of holding elites accountable. Therefore, the Boko Haram's success against Nigeria's security apparatus has been a fundamental shift in the elites' way of thinking and manners, and its relations in Nigeria have been characterised by growing popular support in northern Nigeria.

In 2005, the federal military and police carried out "Operation Sawdust", which covered Borno, Bauchi, and Yobe, leading to the arrest of some of the members of the group whose activities posed a threat to the security of the central government. Those arrested were kept in prison custody until President Obasanjo left office in 2007. When late Musa Yar'Adua accessed to the Presidency, some Muslim scholars and elites lobbied for the release of those arrested fundamentalists. President Yar'Adua acted accordingly and ordered their release. It is obvious that if the President had refused to release those people, then it could be assumed that he had a soft spot for his fellow Muslim brothers who belong to the same Muslim brotherhood, *Umma*.

One can infer from these lines that the Boko Haram draws its domestic support largely from a population of northern Muslim Nigerians predisposed to tolerate the Boko Haram or perhaps even support the group as a challenge to the federal government of Nigeria, and not necessarily due to genuine popularity.

In this respect, Ahmad Salkida, an independent journalist, was able to establish a relationship with the Boko Haram operatives in Maiduguri and received information directly from them. According to him, the resulting accuracy of his reporting led the authorities to suspect he was a member of the Boko Haram, which he denies. In 2009, he was arrested with the Boko Haram members in the police crackdown that killed Mohammed Yusuf (African Security Issues 2012). In April 2012, he publicly confirmed the existence of al Qaeda cells *within* Nigeria. Given Salkida's eyewitness accounts of the Boko Haram, it is clear that the group uses media reporting to channel its message in Nigeria. In his own words, Salkida reiterates the problem with the Boko Haram's widespread public support.

In August 2012, the names of over sixty State Security Service (SSS) personnel were posted online along with addresses and financial information. However, the group or their sympathizers infiltrated the security services (Changing face of Nigeria's Boko Haram 2012). It is widely speculated this leak was posted by the Boko Haram, and might be a demonstration of the extent to which they or their sympathisers have infiltrated the security services. With this in mind, it becomes clear that these fans may extend beyond the average northern Nigerian, and into the upper-reaches of the whole society.

Late in 2012, Senator Mohammed Ali Ndume from Borno State, who had previously been appointed by President Jonathan to a committee to consider resuming talks with the Boko Haram, was arrested by the Nigerian police and accused of failing to report to the authorities the attacks the group was planning (Changing face of Nigeria's Boko Haram 2012). Still, it is not necessarily surprising that the northern Nigerian political leaders would cooperate with the Boko Haram. Given the multiple instances of the sect's targeting Muslim leaders for death and the ruthlessness with which they dispatch with internal dissent, these leaders are no doubt under threat from the Boko Haram. For example, the former governor of Kano State, Malam Ibrahim Shekarau, allegedly agreed in late 2004 to make monthly payments of 5 million Naira (approximately \$31,500), which was later increased to 10 million Naira (approximately \$63,000) in 2009, to Boko Haram in order to have his state left alone (Denies 2012). The agreement, according to the source, included provision of institutional infrastructural support through the Hisbah [Islam police] project which received a yearly budgetary allocation of N1.01 billion Naira. However, the gubernatorial election of April 2011 which introduced Rabiu Kwankwaso as the new governor changed the agreement. The Kwankwaso administration was quick to dismantle the Hisbah set-up and the said agreement to disburse N10 million Naira monthly. The governor proceeded to make arrests of known Boko Haram members, whose leadership had found comfort in Kano and did not appreciate the Kwankwaso administration's policies. Similarly, In Bauchi State, the Governor, Malam Isa Yuguda reached a similar agreement with the leadership of the group, and a monthly disbursement of N10 million Naira (approximately \$63,000) was reportedly set in 2008 (Denies 2012). That was agreed upon along with the provision of training grounds on the many mountains scattered in Bauchi State. The governor also promised to grant immunity from arrests by the federal government. The agreement was reached in June 2008, but in mid 2011 the governor stopped the regular disbursement of 10 million Nairas.

Even more evidence of the Boko Haram receiving payments from northern politicians appeared following the 2011 arrest of the spokesman for the group named Ali Sanda Umar Konduga (The Boko Haram: Detained Senator Admits Knowing Boko Haram Spokesperson 2011). Following the SSS interrogations, Konduga disclosed the names of numerous politicians who he claimed had financially supported the group, including former Nigerian Ambassador to Sao Tome and Principe Saidu Pindar. On November 21, 2011, Senator Ndume was arrested by the SSS for also supporting the Boko Haram (African Security Issues 2012). According to former General Carter F. Ham of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), although Boko Haram as a whole is not a new organization, it contains an evolving element that is far more extreme and growing in strength (African Security Issues 2012). Reports suggest that some northern politicians have used the Boko Haram as, in essence, political assassins to eliminate their competition. It goes without saying that this makes it difficult to identify reliable partners in northern Nigerian such as politicians to stand against the Boko Haram. This issue is a major roadblock to countering the threats the group poses in Nigeria. With the evidences and sources analyzed above, it appears rather unfortunate that many of the northern governors and elders have long-lasting as well as firm connections with the Boko Haram.

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to analyze the peace talk initiatives between the Boko Haram and the Nigerian Government. As demonstrated, prominent Nigerians and civil societies have tried to establish dialogues between this group and the government; yet, the initiatives broke down and did not yield any positive results because the group showed no signs of ending its campaign against the federal government. On the other side of the coin, these negotiations have been beset by problems, not least because the traditional northern leaders are, perhaps, reluctant to act as intermediaries between the authorities and the Boko Haram, but rather because they do not want to expose themselves any more than they should to accusations of religious fanaticism by speaking with the sect. There is increasing evidence that some northern states have counter-productive approaches and practices toward the issue, with cases of offering the Boko Haram money and other concessions to stop fighting. It is likely that others may have been following suit just as well. It shall not be disregarded that offering such payments may have short-term benefits. For not only does this practice incentivize taking up arms against the state, but whatever peace it achieves is only temporary and quickly ends once the flow of cash stops. What is more, and just as crucially, it delays the implementation of the vital reforms that are needed to address the grievances of the insurgents and their supporters. At present, it is not at all clear whether the Boko Haram's armed campaign can be brought to a negotiated end.

Certainly, buying the group off does not represent a long-term solution and there is absolutely no guarantee that the hard-core nature of the fighters would always allow them to be bought off in this way. In fact, the strength of their ideological fervor suggests that they are unlikely to be swayed by offers of money. This paper considers the relationships between the Boko Haram and some northern politicians as one of the major reasons why the peace talks have failed. It is further argued that other initiatives for dialogue should be encouraged and more comprehensive steps taken in order to protect lives and property in the society. At this time, the federal government and state governments in northern Nigeria should ask the sultan of Sokoto, the various emirs, and the heads of the Sufi Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya Brotherhoods to mediate. While these are undoubtedly establishment figures, their Islamic credentials, historical authority, and formal separation from the secular federal and states governments mean that they are in a unique position to act as intermediaries and honest brokers. It is here concluded that there is the need for the central government, as well as the states governments in northern Nigeria, to urgently address the issue of mistrust among themselves and the entire society for the sake of unity, peace, love and belongingness.

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