

Addressing The Boko Haram Scourge Through Dialogue and Civic Education

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Is a military campaign alone winning the battle or is there a need to adopt an integrated approach that rigorously promotes civic education on a culture of peace, and dialogue?

Fundamentally, military campaigns and aerial bombardments alone will not help in curbing and ending the activities of insurgents in parts of North Eastern Nigeria. It is high time that policymakers and indeed all stakeholders should rethink the present approach with a view of adopting an integrated strategy that takes into full account reflective dialogue and civic education.

The conventional approach of militarization has not yielded the desired result as is evident in the present battle between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Boko Haram group. The defence and security budget has increased steadily since the intensification of this crisis. The defence budget has increased by approximately 15 percent between 2012 and 2014 while the budget for the office of the National Security Adviser has seen an increase of approximately 100 percent within the same period. Yet, the violence has not subsided but rather what we see and hear is that militants keep overrunning villages and taking over former security posts and barracks.

Young people are also being brainwashed to believe that insurgency, indiscriminate killings, maiming, violations of human rights and disruption of peace and order, and taking over parts of Nigerian territory is the order of the day. Rebel leaders have normalised and perfected this act by offering incentives to youth to take up arms and join in their activities not minding the consequences. This trend has long lasting effects in the psyche of

young people if not countered. A generation of radicals can be the resultant of not doing anything to stop this ugly movement and hence this article sets out to promote de-radicalization through civic education on a culture of peace.

Attempts at dialogue with Boko Haram in the past have failed. However, new attempts and strategies to bring them to the table should be explored. Perhaps, a third party high level negotiator that resonates with both Boko Haram and the Federal Government of Nigeria is likely to persuade both parties to embrace dialogue. Another scenario as has played out in the past is that a splinter of Boko Haram might accept to dialogue while the other will decline. The argument put forward here is for the government or appointed negotiator to go ahead and enter into dialogue with the faction that is ready at that moment. At the same time, efforts should be made to bring the other faction(s) to the negotiating table.

The increase in the security and defence budgets of the Nigerian government in the last two years is enormous. This calls for a reflection to see if investing only 10 percent of the security budget in alternatives to the use of force by the government will yield positive results in terms of sustainable peace and a culture of non-violence in the long term.

The International Dialogue for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS) and its New Deal for Engagement in Conflict Affected States is another area for the Nigerian government and stakeholders to address the challenges of violence and instability in Nigeria holistically. The IDPS principles recognize that conflict affected states like Nigeria confront particularly severe development challenges such as weak governance, limited

administrative capacity, chronic humanitarian crisis, persistent social tensions, violence or the legacy of civil war. Secondly, the principles accept that a sustainable transition from poverty and insecurity for the world's most conflict affected states will need to be driven by their own leadership and people. Thirdly, it acknowledges that international engagement will not by itself put an end to violent conflict. However, the adoption of the shared principles can help maximize the positive impact of engagement and minimize unintentional harm.

There is no substitute to dialogue as communities are formed and regulated through evolving dialogue patterns. The ability of stakeholders and especially the government to proactively articulate long term alternatives to the use of force in responding to the insurgency in some parts of Northern Nigeria will determine the level of sustainable peace that will be obtainable in that part of the country. The urgent need to engage the Nigerian public in civic education that is tailored towards rejecting violence and embracing a culture of peace is also critical for positive change of mindsets and de-radicalization in the long term. The Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program of the Federal Government of Nigeria should be revisited to incorporate civic education and reflective dialogue as a major component for multi-stakeholder engagement.

The opportunity presented by the IDPS and its New Deal for Engagement in Conflict Affected States must be harnessed positively by the Nigerian government and all stakeholders to address the drivers of conflict in North Eastern Nigeria and the Nation in general.