

Updates on Nigeria 2012

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The state of affairs in Nigeria has been stormy and precarious since 2010 when Goodluck Jonathan ascended the throne as the president of the country. It would be recalled that on 1 October 2010, when Nigeria celebrated its Golden Jubilee of Independence, there were a series of bomb explosions purportedly planted by Members for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). The first indication of trouble was when there were violent protests about the election result of Jonathan's presidency in Kaduna and some northern parts of Nigeria in April 2011. It does appear that some northern elements were unhappy that Jonathan won the election which they expected a northerner to win. In January 2012, there were mass protests by Nigerians under the umbrella of the Nigerian Labour Congress following the removal of the petroleum subsidy by the Federal Government. The most disturbing issue which has trailed the Jonathan administration is the 'Boko Haram' menace. Boko Haram literally translates as "western education is evil" – and this group has appeared on the scene since 2009 in the northern parts of Nigeria. The main aim of this 'purportedly' Islamic group, just like the Maitatsines of the 1980s and 1990s, is to introduce an Islamic state with Sharia law in full force. However, their real demands are not as yet clearly stated.

The hallmark of the Boko Haram group is the violent nature of their approach to their demands – that is, a new and violent dimension hitherto unknown in Nigeria - bombings and the use of suicide bombers. Another significant point to note is that so far their operations are concentrated in the northern states and the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. In 2010, bombing cases by the group were reported in Bauchi, twice in Jos and Abuja. In 2011, a bombing incident was recorded in every month except February. In Maiduguri in Borno State, a Governorship candidate was killed in January and two bomb explosions killed some police officers in Kaduna and Damaturu in March. A pathetic scenario was seen in April when the group targeted and killed eight university graduates on National Youth Service at Suleja in Niger State. In the same month bombings were recorded in Maiduguri and Bauchi killing scores of people. This nefarious act was intensified in Maiduguri and Bauchi in May 2011 killing some policemen and soldiers alongside others.

Notwithstanding the few bomb attacks in Maiduguri in June 2011, the police and the military seem to be the main targets of this group. For example, when a suicide bomber rammed his car through the Nigerian Police Headquarters in Abuja, killing three people and damaging a sizeable number of vehicles, it became obvious to the police force that they were now under siege. Four days later, seven police officers were killed in Kankara, Katsina. It is to be noted that while these bombings were being carried out in other parts of the north, the main 'battlefield' seemed to be Maiduguri. In July 2011, there was an explosive confrontation between the military and the Boko Haram sect in Maiduguri which left casualties on both sides. In August of the same year, the group continued its attack on police and soldiers but also drew the world's attention to their demands by bombing the United Nations building in Abuja. This act was carried out by a suicide bomber who drove his car into the building killing 23 workers and injuring over 60. Even with the international condemnation of this singular bombing event, it did not deter the group from carrying out further attacks. Thus in September through December 2011, there were incidents of bomb attacks in various cities of the north such as Bauchi, Yobe, Jos and Damaturu.

The December 2011 bombing was directed toward a Christian Church, St Theresa's Catholic Church Madalla in Niger State, which is just a few kilometres from Abuja. In this attack, not less than 50 people were killed. At this stage, it became clear that the group was not just focusing on military and police operatives but on Christians living in the north. In addition to the bombings, they also demanded that all Christians should vacate the north, and gave them three days to do this. This was an impossible task to achieve because many of the Christians in the north are indigenes and would have had nowhere to go. But that did not make Boko Haram stop its push for an Islamic state through such violent means. From January 2012 until the time of sending this update (*Editor's Note - 23 March 2012*), the sect has now bombed a couple of churches, in Gombe, Bauchi, Maiduguri, Yola, Jos and Kano with the loss of many innocent lives, making it appear as a Christian-Islamic confrontation.

It must be noted that the activities of this group in Nigeria are causing a lot of tension in the polity. While their concentration is mostly in the north eastern and north western geo-political zones of Nigeria, the impact is being felt all over the country. The fact is that the bombing affects the lives of Nigerians from other geo-political zones. Many Nigerians are asking 'why is the country having this kind of insurgency?' Answers are not easy to come by especially when Boko Haram does not seem to have